With national politics dominating the news, Legislative Coffees provide citizens an opportunity to engage at the local and community level, with discussions held in a safe and supportive environment. Ashley Fick, JCL’s Civic Engagement Librarian holds meetings at libraries around the JCL system in partnership with the League of Women Voters. The April 13 Legislative Coffee at Central Resource Library drew nearly 130 attendees.


Attendees wanted to know about Medicaid expansion, gun control legislation, improvements to the foster care system with a new DHS director, SB22, which would have reduced the food tax by 1¢ if passed, the education budget and more.

The panelists were asked how they worked to combat the gear-clogging partisanship in the Kansas House. As they explained their strategies, some common themes emerged.

Clayton emphasized the need to keep a cool head and communicate respectfully, even (or especially) when others do not.

“I spend a lot of energy trying to get everyone to get along,” she said. “Sort of like a middle-school teacher urging the kids to play nice. Putting out emotional fires so people can work together is important. The well-being of Kansas is at stake.”

Kessinger, a moderate Republican, said he works with both parties on many issues. “Some Republicans criticize me for it, but the passing of the Medicaid expansion demonstrated that both sides can work together.”

“I was asked to be the chairman of the weekly Prayer Breakfast, and I hesitated at first,” said Lusk, “but I’m glad I accepted because I’m building bridges across the aisle.”

When asked to recommend the best news sources for keeping up with what’s going on in Kansas government, Lusk said, “With newspapers either employing fewer reporters or shutting down, we get less and less coverage. You can go to livestreams from kansaslegislature.gov or subscribe to our newsletters for updates.”
In the heart of Johnson County, Oak Park Library serves a diverse community that includes speakers of Spanish, Chinese, Arabic and other languages from around the world. And many are eager to learn English. They can learn for free in ELL, or English Language Learning classes.

The weekly Saturday classes taught by community volunteers and retired teachers draw people from miles away. And for English speakers who want to learn Spanish, there's a twice-a-month class called Español a la Carta.

Roxanne Belcher, Oak Park Branch Manager since July 2018, says ELL is one of the branch's most popular programs; so popular that space for it is tight. “We're kind of outgrowing it now, with our two meeting rooms.”

Library staff may expand the program to Antioch Library, whose service area has similar demographics.

Oak Park offers many popular programs in addition to ELL, including storytimes for babies, toddlers and preschool-aged children. The branch also hosts other activities to spark children's interest in learning while having fun.

For example, Belcher says, “We hosted a Canine Courage program -- a young police officer brought his young German shepherd to visit with the kids. They looked very engaged -- anything with a dog is popular with the kids.”

What's new? In May, the Kansas City Arts Coalition will install original art at Oak Park and Blue Valley Libraries, transforming walls into creative visual landscapes.

For Belcher, library work is a family tradition that started with her grandmother, who was a librarian at the Topeka library and often took her along. As a child Belcher enjoyed exploring the shelves and choosing books to read.

“My first job in high school was working as a page at Corinth Library,” she says. “My two sisters and my brother became pages and it looked like a good gig to me, so I became a page, too. Then I worked in the Watson Library at KU during my undergrad years.”

Belcher especially enjoys recommending materials to patrons. She says, “When I’m helping patrons, I love to talk books.”

When she's not working, Belcher enjoys spending time with her three grown children. Her 25-year-old daughter is a full-time Youth Services Information Specialist at Monticello Library.
It takes many resources and committed individuals to offer the diverse range of services available at Johnson County Library. “While your tax dollars provide most of that money, the Johnson County Library Foundation helps to provide additional dollars to make that car really shine,” says Foundation president Rich Cook, a real estate lawyer with Stinson Leonard Street in Kansas City.

“The Foundation provides funding for crucial Library programming and services and has built an endowment to help support the Library collection. We do that with private dollars donated by corporations, foundations, individual Library lovers and patrons.”

“Knowledge requires access to information, and public libraries provide access to people from all walks of life.”

With those dollars, the Foundation supports collection enrichment, homework assistance for youth, art programs, early literacy initiatives, youth-at-risk programs, technology enhancements at the Library and more.

Last year, Cook became the Foundation’s President-Elect, and this year, he is President. Next year, he will serve as Past President. He appreciates the ability to help the Foundation because he believes libraries are vital to a functioning and vibrant democracy.

“The public should know how its government works and have an informed view of history,” says Cook. “Without that knowledge, it's hard to preserve democracy. Knowledge requires access to information, and public libraries provide access to people from all walks of life.”

Looking back on his time on the Foundation Board, Cook says, “It's a high-functioning Board that does a lot. I've learned a lot and have enjoyed serving.”

Cook, his wife, Morgan, and their children enjoy the great outdoors and have camped in national parks across the U.S. All are also avid sports fans.

“KU basketball and football, Sporting KC, Royals, Chiefs, whatever it is, we're into it,” he says. Henry, 10, Charlotte, 8, and George, 5, are active in scouting, soccer, basketball and baseball.
As Associate Director for Customer Experience, it’s his job to make patrons’ every experience at JCL as easy and pleasant as possible.

He says, “I enjoy seeing the result of helping people every day.”

Retired from the Army as a Colonel after 32 years, Sunds tried a few unsatisfying jobs in the private sector before he realized his true passion was back in public service. That’s what led him in 2018 to his position at Johnson County Library.

Retailers know a positive customer experience is vital. Today, so do libraries. A survey of more than 15,000 community members identified convenience and access as two things patrons valued about JCL. Sunds’s job involves initiating and helping to implement processes that improve them -- for instance, by streamlining holds and pickups.

With two new branches opening in two years, both JCL and Sunds have been busy. At the new Lenexa City Center Library, patrons can pick up and return materials after hours at the Holds Lobby. For access, they’ll swipe their Library card affixed with a special sticker. Patrons will also return and pick up books at a drive-thru in the parking garage. Sunds supervises operations teams coordinating these features and he planned the logistics for opening day on June 2.

Opening ceremonies began with a 1 p.m. ribbon cutting, assisted by Girl Scouts, and a flag-raising by Boy Scouts. Lenexa Mayor Michael Boehm, city council members and other public officials participated, followed by tours, a recitation of a work commissioned for the occasion by the emerita poet laureate of Kansas, Wyatt Townley, and an opportunity to see a new work of public art by children’s book illustrator Stephen T. Johnson.

Lenexa City Center’s development complex offers some advantages. By using the complex’s many meeting spaces, the library will be able to offer more events, and Sunds said shared maintenance will reduce operating costs, and the shared parking lot will accommodate more patrons.

At work, Sunds is infamous for telling dad jokes and recalling useless trivia. He appreciates the people he works with at JCL. “They’re intelligent, empathetic people. You’ll never make a fortune working in libraries, but the good working experience more than compensates.”
Event Spotlight

Veterans Reader’s Theater – War Stories

In April, Central Resource Library hosted Now Presenting: Veterans Reader’s Theater, featuring veterans and family members reading their stories about experiences in war and coming home. The Theater is a segment of the offerings for veterans and military family members by the Kansas City Veterans Writing Team.

The group began six years ago, the brainchild of H. C. Palmer, a United States Army battalion surgeon in Vietnam, and Cindy McDermott, a retired Commander in the United States Navy.

“I knew the positivity a person could get from writing their stories,” said McDermott. “It’s a way of healing through the arts.”

The program offers classes, writing workshops and critique groups. Since it began, veterans have had more than 1,400 opportunities to write and read their poetry and prose.

Before joining the group, Nick, an Iraq War Marine veteran, had only written in his journal. For Mel, a Vietnam War Army veteran, writing was post-war therapy. Will, a Vietnam War Army veteran and pastor, attends the critique groups to sharpen his writing.

The veterans shared writings about fear, loneliness, despair, loyalty to comrades and love for family, in stories that needed to be written -- and heard.

Reading with Miss Pickles

Miss Pickles holds court in the children’s area of Corinth Library. Tucked into a quiet corner, children read to her as she relaxes on her soft blanket. At the branch’s biweekly Read to a Dog events, she’s the star -- a laid-back Basset Hound who’s good at calming kids who are anxious about reading.

Miss Pickles is a therapy dog trained to be a Reading Education Assistant Dog by Heartland Therapy Animals. Other therapy dogs participate in the program, but most often it’s Miss Pickles who comes to the branch’s children’s area, and she’s the best-loved.

“My son has autism,” says Diana Spencer, Youth Information Specialist at Corinth. “Miss Pickles is kind of a local celebrity.”

The program promotes confidence in reading, building vocabulary and getting kids excited to read.”

Ten to 15 moms bring kids to each hour-long event. Most are ages five to seven, but some younger siblings are excited about getting into the act, too.

“The program is really designed for kids over age six,” says Spencer. “But if a younger child wants to sit with a dog and just point at the pictures, that’s okay.”

It’s clear that practicing reading skills with a gentle dog is less scary than reading to a mom or a teacher: A dog is endlessly patient and won’t interrupt you to correct a wrong word. And how could anyone be afraid looking into those soulful brown eyes?

“My seven-year-old son has been diagnosed with a learning disability, and he loves dogs, so Read to a Dog is the perfect combination for him,” said one mother. “He’s come several times, and the school librarian says he’s gaining a lot of confidence. It’s wonderful to see how he’s improving.”

When love for a dog translates into love of reading, Miss Pickles has done her job.
**Social Media Highlights**

**One Location: One Genre**

It can be overwhelming when there are so many great books to read. So, we’re helping you narrow down your choices. We’re rearranging our collection! Now, there will only be one genre at each location. Take note: if you are a regular patron at a particular branch, you may only check out books in that location’s genre.

Here’s what you’ll find at each location:

- **Bluff Valley**: Contemporary/paranormal
- **Glenwood**: Western/Romantic
- **East Bend**: Historical Fiction
- **Junction**: Western
- **Magnolia**: Western/Paranormal

**The Library celebrated April Fools’ Day with some fun website shenanigans.**

- **2400 reach**
- **183 engagements**
- **2 comments**
- **7 shares**

**Dragon Delivery Service Discontinued**

We regret to announce the discontinuation of our ever-popular *Dragon Delivery* Service. We launched the program to help deliver books to those in need to allow more time for leisurely reading. Although this service has proven to be excellent, it has not been financially sustainable.

**Sixty by Sixty: Ready to Retire**

"Sixty by Sixty: Ready to Retire" will no longer be available. We hope you enjoy the stories of these exceptional readers. If you have any questions, please contact us.

**New Checkout Limit!**

It seems to be our attention that sometimes you like to read all the books in the library at once. While we encourage reading, we must now introduce a new policy. The “One at a time” checkout limits.

Now you can check out up to 5 books at a time. But remember, return them before your due date!

**New Library All!**

Sir, make... Continue... You’ve got something on my virtual assistant. Morgan Freeman. That’s right, Morgan FREEMAN. Need to be a little careful, you know. Morgan Freeman, place a hold on Gone Girl for me!" Monte Perlman must be working hard keeping up with all the requests for Morgan Freeman’s book! Not sure if he even remembers what he’s doing.

***INTERNAL NOTE: (NOT FOR PUBLIC DISPLAY)***

- **4,300 reach**
- **113 engagements**
- **2 comments**
- **13 shares**

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**Outdoor Shelving Now at Central**

New outdoor reading areas are available at the Central Library. You can now enjoy the outdoors while you read your favorite books. Check out the new outdoor reading areas today!

**2400 reach**

**183 engagements**

**2 comments**

**7 shares**

**New page views**

**471 page views**

**1120 engagements**
Month in Review
April 2019

Congratulations to the winners of the Friends of Johnson County Library - KS bookmark contest!

“Readbox” book display at Oak Park Library.

Web content developer, Dave Carson, interviews collection selector, Elena McVicar, for a recent, Did you Hear? podcast.

Jacqueline Woodson, author of Brown Girl Dreaming, was the keynote speaker at elementia. elementia is Johnson County Library’s Teen Literary magazine.

A sewing repair program in full swing in the Black & Veatch MakerSpace.

NEXT ISSUE

- **Cover Story:** elementia Gala
- **Top 10 Holds:** June 2019
- **Staff Spotlight:** Kinsley Riggs, Johnson Co. Library Manager of Adult Services
- **Event:** Star Wars Takeover
- **Branching Out:** Gardner Library