



Book Report

NOV 2019  VOLUME IX

Finding "Hidden Treasures" to Read This Fall and Winter

Autumn is the perfect time to curl up with a great book, or a whole stack of them. And Johnson County Library staff is busy searching out new releases that may not yet be on Top 10 lists but are definitely worth a read.

"I'm looking for those hidden treasures," says Gregg Winsor, Johnson County Readers' Advisory Librarian, who is always on the hunt for literary gems. "I really want to see those mid-list titles that maybe are overlooked by the best seller lists but really deserve that attention."

Winsor, a self-described "book concierge and word nerd" is based at Central Resource Library. He facilitates the Readers' Advisory Group, which includes nine other employees who work with the Library branch book clubs. Together they keep their fingers on the pulse of the community, learning about what people want to read and discovering

publications to appeal throughout the library system.

It's a wonderful, challenging job, Winsor says, because Johnson County Library users don't just gravitate to the next big blockbuster. They are smart, curious, and interested in all sorts of genres.

"Johnson County Library patrons are really savvy," he said. "They are extremely adventurous...we want to make sure to feed that love, that desire."

Summer may be a time for fluffy romances or beach mysteries. For the fall/winter season, Winsor says he's looking for fiction that's well-written, has compelling characters and is "dark and discussable."

Choices abound. Ever since Gillian Flynn's "Gone Girl" was published in 2012, a big trend in new releases is "noir" psychological thrillers and dramas.

Of course, with the 2020 presidential election season underway, many readers will be diving into non-fiction political tomes. But Winsor is drawn to fiction, as a welcome escape from current events.

"The Library needs to be a respite from a very busy, overwhelming world out there," said Winsor, who lives in Overland Park and is the father of two sons. "We want to be an oasis for people."

He also appreciates fiction as a portal for readers to experience the vast universe, both real and imagined.

"In my view," he said, "leisure reading is important because it teaches you how to be human."

So for fall/winter, Five Good Reads on the radar:

- "My Dark Vanessa," by Kate Elizabeth Russell, who has a creative writing PhD from KU. It's a type of "Lolita," told from the young woman's perspective,



Gregg Winsor, Johnson County
Readers' Advisory Librarian

particularly relevant in the #MeToo era. It's due out in January. Patrons can soon start to reserve it from the library catalog.

- "The Topeka School," by Ben Lerner, who grew up in Topeka. This family drama explores "the challenge of raising a good son in a culture of toxic masculinity." Available in late October.

- "The Starless Sea," by Erin Morgenstern. This fantasy/romance takes place in a secret underground world. Due out in November.

- "Nothing to See Here," by Kevin Wilson. Winsor says this is a delightfully quirky novel about a dysfunctional family that will appeal to readers who like David Sedaris or Augusten Burroughs. Due in October.

- "Dominicana," by Angie Cruz. Just released historical fiction about a woman from the Dominican Republic growing up in the fascinating world of New York City in the 1960s.

Other helpful staff reviews and suggestions are at <https://www.jocolibrary.org/we-recommend/reviews/>



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October 2019

BRANCHING OUT

Central's Branch Manager Loves the Challenges of the Job



Laura Hunt began her career as a children's librarian in the Chicago suburbs and as a teen services librarian in Atlantic City. She's also worked in recent years as a youth services librarian at Shawnee and Central Resource Libraries, as assistant branch manager in Leawood and as branch manager at Antioch.

When she became Central's branch manager in February 2018, she knew this was a job that would allow her to capitalize on her past work experiences, skill sets and leadership training in a very vibrant and busy setting.

"It's so fast and there's always so much to deal with. But I enjoy that," she said. "I kind of thrive off of that."

Hunt directly supervises 16 people, including the information services staffers who field all calls to Johnson County Library, averaging more than 4,000 per month. So good customer service and effective communication are among Hunt's top priorities.

Hunt directs two assistant managers, who supervise the clerks, and serves as a liaison to other key personnel in the building.

Central is one of Johnson County's busiest branches, with several hundred thousand user visits per year and a huge diversity of customers, including teens and children who love its welcoming spaces, plus small business owners who rely on its computers and meeting rooms.

It has a busy MakerSpace area, hosts countless community programs, and has Johnson County's largest collection, with nearly 230,000 books and other materials.

It's a vital community resource that residents greatly appreciate,

but staff also deals with challenging patron interactions that need to be handled diplomatically. Hunt has worked hard to provide the equipment, training and management support that employees need.

"That's really the thing I love the most about the job," she said, "being able to help guide the staff through some of those challenges, help them grow and make sure they know I'm there to back them up."

Hunt is also focusing on a major project to update and refresh the staff offices in the building, including relocating people and creating a larger interlibrary loan area.

Central was a large store before its conversion to a library branch in 1995. It was renovated in 2015 and is in generally good shape, but that staff is scattered throughout the building.

"We want to get all the people who should be working near each other together," Hunt said. "It'll be a huge change but I think it'll really make great strides toward getting those groups to really collaborate more." It may also involve moving the public computer area and a few other public spaces. The project shifts into high gear in 2020 and should be completed in 2021.

In her spare time, Hunt, 39, has joined other moms in an adult soccer moms' league. She also just took up taekwondo and loves to read.

But her work at Central is energizing and engrossing.

"I feel like Central is the heart of the library system, and if Central is running well and the relationships between the staff at Central are good, then the rest of the system also runs well," she said. "So I really enjoy being part of that."



TOP 10 HOLDS



OCTOBER 2019

- 779 Where the Crawdads Sing**
Delia Owens
- 400 The Dutch House**
Ann Patchett
- 365 The Testaments**
Margaret Atwood
- 350 Talking to Strangers: What We Should Know About the People We Don't Know**
Malcolm Gladwell
- 324 The Guardians**
John Grisham
- 323 The Turn of the Key**
Ruth Ware
- 314 Educated: A Memoir**
Tara Westover
- 302 The Water Dancer**
Ta-Nehisi Coates
- 296 The Giver of Stars**
Jojo Moyes
- 287 Ask Again, Yes**
Mary Beth Keane

PATRON SPOTLIGHT

Lenexa Teen Shines as Monticello Volunteer

Shawnee's Monticello Library had 20 talented teen volunteers this past summer, but one in particular stood out to the Library's youth information specialist, Julia Belcher.

Mahmood Hassan was "exemplary," according to Belcher, because of his work ethic and his joy on the job.

"He is so friendly and always willing to take on any task," Belcher said. "He's great with the patrons. He's always very friendly, very personable. He's so happy to help."

Belcher especially appreciated Hassan's interaction with young children in the Library, helping prepare craft materials for the kids. He also helped locate books placed on hold and shelved books on Saturday mornings, one of the Library's busiest times.

For Hassan, a precocious 14-year-old who has skipped two grades and is a junior at Olathe North High School, the Library was a great opportunity to give back to the community.

"It's just exciting to work at such a professional and interesting environment," he said.

Hassan moved with his parents to Lenexa from Wisconsin two years ago when his father got a job teaching microbiology at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

Hassan was home-schooled and taking online classes at the time. At age 12, he wanted more community interaction but there are few volunteer opportunities for young teens. So he and his mother were pleased to learn that Johnson County Library allows volunteers as young as 13.

"I wanted to start volunteering because it helps build character. It helps make new experiences," Hassan recalled. "I thought 13 years old would be a good age to start. You want to get as much volunteering as possible, especially because colleges look at that as well."

He volunteered at Lackman Library from June 2018 until it closed in April 2019. He sorted books on carts, helped shelve books and cleaned toys in the busy children's area. Then he joined other volunteer teens at Monticello for the summer 2019 season.

Hassan, who is aiming for a career in the medical field, also kept busy during



the summer shadowing a doctor and volunteering at a hospital daycare. Those were also valuable experiences but Hassan says he learned a lot at Monticello Library.

"It sharpens general skills like sorting and other cognitive skills," he said, adding that sorting and shelving require accuracy and precision. "Many practical skills can be honed through volunteering at the Library."

He also learned to follow instructions from his supervisors and appreciated the social engagement with the staff, patrons and other volunteers.

Hassan did well with his online studies but craved a more organized, structured setting. So he enrolled this semester at Olathe North and so far he's loving it. With a heavy course load that includes anatomy, advanced biotechnology, AP statistics, French, English and history, he has halted his volunteering for the school year. He looks forward to volunteering again next summer, either at Monticello or possibly at the new Lenexa City Center Library.

"It really makes you feel a sense of community," he said, "and it helps you feel like you are doing something useful, and improving."



Mahmood Hassan at Shawnee's Monticello Library

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Children's Illustrator Thrives as Children's Librarian at Corinth

When Christina Larkins was young, she struggled to read, but illustrations drew her into books.

She had artistic talents that eventually led her to the Kansas City Art Institute and to a career as an illustrator for children's publications such as Highlights Magazine and Cricket Media. She loved the work but found it to be solitary and missed working with the very kids that inspired her to create picture books in the first place. So she began volunteering several years ago at a library where she was living at the time, in Georgia.

"It got to the point where I was more excited to go read to kids and host art programs there than I was to finish that next page of a picture book," she recalled.

That passion for children's literacy led her to serve as an AmeriCorps VISTA at the local early literacy nonprofit Reach Out and Read. She also worked nights and weekends as a Youth Associate at the Plaza Library in Kansas City, organizing family fun nights and other activities.

All this finally led to her being hired in September 2018 as a youth information specialist at Corinth Library in Prairie Village, where Larkins finds that her artistic abilities and connections in the publishing world enhance her library work, while her library job informs her art.

"Just being a children's illustrator, you get to know what is in the market, what kids are excited to read," she said. Meanwhile, as she has hosted baby and toddler story times at Corinth, she's seen what works in front of a crowd of kids and what works for one child on a lap.

"I didn't hone that as much until I had to do a Storytime every week," she said. "It means I'm thinking about what age an illustration is for, and whether the content is appropriate for that age."

Larkins says her own early-reading challenges have helped her empathize with children at Corinth who lag behind in reading. She works hard to identify books that will inspire and engage them.

"Those are the kids I really get to shine with, because I get to introduce them to books that they might not have picked out," she said. "If they're excited, they're practicing reading without realizing it."

Larkins also enjoyed working with a talented group of young volunteers at Corinth this past summer and plans to start a teen leadership committee in the spring to keep boosting the library's teen programming. She also has organized systemwide programming and serves on the summer reading committee.

Larkins' enthusiasm for the job was on display one recent morning when she hosted about a dozen babies and their caregivers for a lively story time. She also set out numerous books for the moms to check out for reading later to their children.



Christina Larkins, Children's Illustrator

Ann Coppage said she and her 20-month-old daughter Emerson thoroughly enjoy these gatherings, which feature time for singing, light exercises and just visiting among the moms and kids. Coppage also praised Larkins' leadership of the classes.

"She's adorable with the kids, and so patient," Coppage said. "She knows ways to keep them entertained."



EVENT SPOTLIGHT

Leawood Pioneer Library Brings Together Cops and Kids

The weather one recent Saturday was gray and gloomy, but the atmosphere at Leawood Pioneer Library was cheerful and festive as children and parents traded greetings and high-fives with Leawood police.



Officer Mark Chudik and Leawood Pioneer Library patrons

"This is awesome. It makes our morning exciting," said Debashree Tosh-Mitchell, whose three children spent quality time with the officers and even got to sit on a police motorcycle. "I love stuff like this."

The "Coffee with Cops" community engagement event brings together police officers and residents in the cities they serve. It's often geared toward adults, although the Leawood event Sept. 28 particularly appealed to families with young children.

Phil Goff, Leawood community outreach officer, said police resource officers are frequently in the schools but this was their first such visit to the Leawood library.

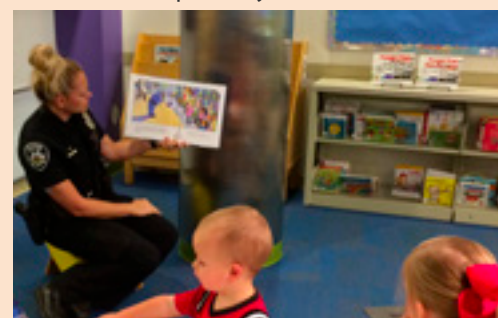
"We love it when officers have the opportunity to interact with the public, especially kids, especially on a positive basis," Goff said.

School resource officer Emily Craighead had an attentive audience as she read a favorite Caldecott Medal winner, "Officer Buckle and Gloria," by Peggy Rathmann. Children and parents

also chatted with officers Sam Day, Mark Chudik, Curtis Rice and Tim Babalola.

Liz Wilson, information specialist at Leawood, said the community engagement committee strives to connect patrons with local leaders and officials, and this event was ideally suited to that goal.

Future "Coffee with Cops" events are anticipated next spring at Lenexa, Shawnee and possibly Gardner.



Emily Craighead reading "Officer Buckle and Gloria"

Women & Money Day Empowers Participants with Financial Literacy

Women in general earn less money, save less and live longer than men. So they need to be financially savvy throughout their lives and into retirement.

Providing information to enable women to gain financial knowledge, stability, and confidence was the goal of the Women & Money Day, held Oct. 12 at Central Resource Library. About 100 women of all ages took advantage of sessions on money management, investing, credit scores, and other key strategies to build financial security.

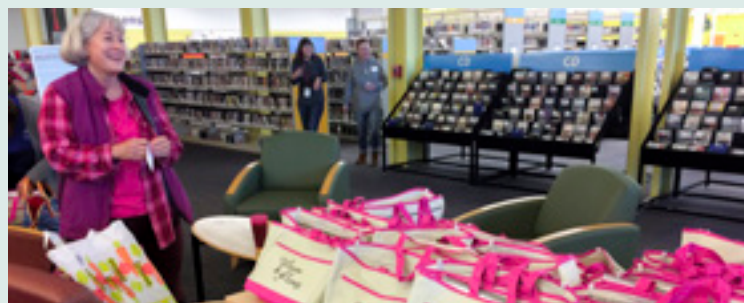
"If I could learn this stuff, so can you. This isn't hard," said keynote speaker Helaine Olen, who writes a nationally syndicated personal finance column and co-wrote the book "The Index Card: Why Personal Finance Doesn't Have to Be Complicated."

Olen strongly advised participants to have a monthly budget and closely monitor how much they earn and spend. "There's no control over your life if you don't control your money," she said.

Other tips: Try to save 10-20 percent of income annually; make savings automatic; and invest in index mutual funds, which have lower fees and mimic the market. She said she is not a fan of annuities.

Women and Money was developed by Housing and Credit Counseling Inc. Johnson County Library has partnered with HCCI to offer the program each fall for the last six years.

Debbie Graham, one of this year's attendees, shared that this was the fourth year that she had attended; that she learned something new every year; and that she had saved hundreds of dollar, maybe more, by following up on the information provided in the sessions.



This year, for the first time, 10 incarcerated women from Johnson County Corrections were able to attend Women & Money Day. All of them raved about the experience and agreed that they had gained some much-needed financial information.

Attendees were invited to schedule an appointment with HCCI to receive a free financial checkup or credit report review with a certified credit counselor.

Several participants, including Jennifer Degner, said they learned a lot. "We really need to be targeting younger women to have this awareness," Degner said.

TAKING A CLOSER LOOK

Social Media Highlights



JCL is ready for fall and winter with this Cozy Mysteries display at Gardner Library



Month in Review October 2019



Library Lets Loose 2019

Hundreds of guests let loose at Central Resource Library for a grand party and fundraiser. Guests enjoyed trivia, giant games, live music, performances, food and drinks from local eateries, and danced the night away in “Club Carmack.” Johnson County Library Foundation’s annual event supports summer reading and many of the Library’s activities.



NEXT ISSUE

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-  **Branching Out:** Cedar Roe
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-  **Staff Spotlight:** JCL Custodians
-  **Events:** Mind Full or Mindful; An Edible Discussion

JOHNSON COUNTY
KANSAS

Library

BOOK REPORT

A monthly publication for government officials and residents of Johnson County

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