



# Book Report

OCTOBER 2020  VOLUME XX

## In Crucial Election Year, Johnson County Library Promotes Civic Engagement

In an election year of historic significance, Johnson County Library is working to make sure patrons have the information they need to take part in the democratic process.

"The number one thing is we want people to go out and vote," says Ashley Fick, civic engagement librarian with Johnson County Library.

She said many people, especially young people, can find voting intimidating. So the Library is organizing presidential debate watch parties and other activities.

"Our goal, by throwing an event like this, is to make it feel accessible," Fick said. "And to make them know the Library is a resource for them if they have questions."

Fick has been a civic engagement librarian for seven years and helped organize debate watch parties in 2016. She wasn't sure anyone would show up, but the first debate event



*KS State Representative Rui Xu speaks at the January 2020 Legislative Coffee event.*

proved so popular that it led to a second one. Each event attracted more than 125 people of all ages, including many teenagers.

This year, with the Coronavirus pandemic, the events can't be held in person. But online watch parties are planned with the On24 platform during the presidential debates. More information will be available through the Library website and social media.

"Our hope is to make it very interactive and fun," Fick said. "We're going to have trivia, polls, bingo."

The On24 platform provides gathering rooms and allows for interactive participation. Fick says one of the most popular activities four years ago was bingo, where patrons listened for candidates to utter familiar words or phrases listed on the bingo cards. This year, for Joe Biden, it might include words like "malarkey," and for Donald Trump it might include "bigly" or "huge."

The civic engagement team will provide fact-checking sites and resources to research the candidates. The Library will also have Civics 101 programs before the election, on voting rights and the Electoral College. A post-election program will focus on citizen activism.

Melissa Horak-Hern, another civic engagement librarian, is also helping to organize a virtual discussion group for later this fall.

"It's like a book group for people who want to dive deeply into current topics," Horak-Hern said. People will be invited to listen to a podcast, watch a short video, explore a website and then discuss these media products.

The Library won't shy away from controversial subjects. In fact, the topic will be suburban impacts of policies and practices like red-lining and block busting.

"We know how it affected the cities but how did it affect the development of the suburbs?" Horak-Hern said. "We truly want people to experience the media and come to it with their take."

Horak-Hern said these virtual Library events will be a civil place to discuss issues that can be difficult to confront. "This is definitely meant to be thought-provoking and a safe place to share," she said.

In the past, the civic engagement team has offered very popular Legislative Coffees where people can meet their elected representatives. The team hopes to resume those when it is safe. But even online, Fick says the Library can bring people together.

"I love seeing people excited about engaging with their community and excited to be active citizens," she said. "It's important to me personally and important to make that path easier for others."

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# BRANCHING OUT

## Curbside Service a New Convenience at JCL

In the age of COVID, curbside customer service has become popular for restaurants and retail shops. Now, it's also come to Johnson County Library.

It's a convenience that Johnson County Library managers had actually been considering after they heard about it at a national conference some time ago.

But as with other innovations, the COVID-19 pandemic increased the urgency and made curbside a reality more quickly.

Like the drive-thrus at Monticello, Lenexa City Center and Blue Valley, curbside is a way for patrons to get their holds without having to enter the building. And curbside is easier to implement than adding a whole drive-thru lane and window. So Johnson County Library chose strategic geographic locations to make this available.

It began in early August at Leawood Pioneer, and is also now available at Cedar Roe and at Gardner Library. The Gardner branch, 137 E. Shawnee St., launched the program Aug. 24 and so far it's going well, according to assistant branch manager Nicole Schlagel.

"We've already seen a couple of repeat customers," Schlagel said. "They like the service."

In its first few weeks, Gardner had about four or five customers per day use the service. Schlagel predicts it will become even more used as word spreads. She said Leawood is already seeing pretty consistent use of the service.



*Gardner Clerk Grant Peters places a patron's items in their trunk for contactless holds pickup.*

"I think the benefits certainly are being able to expand that contactless service in the county," Schlagel said. "It helps to put people's minds at ease."

To use the service, patrons must place their book requests on hold, and they need a cell phone with texting capability. The Library will text or email the patron when the book is ready. The patron parks at one of two curbside spots designated on the building's west side.

Signs provide a phone number for the patron to text the staff, who receive a computer alert that someone is waiting. A staffer checks out the materials and gets the due-date receipt. Then, wearing a mask, the staff member takes the materials out to the car, placing them in a passenger-side seat or in the trunk.

"There's no limit to how many items somebody could pick up," Schlagel said, noting that one patron retrieved 18 or 20 children's books in three full bags.

She notes that the new curbside service will be desirable even when

people aren't worried about getting a contagious illness. It's wonderful for parents who have a bunch of kids in the car and not a lot of time. It's also helpful on bad-weather days, or for people who have mobility or medical issues that hinder their ability to get in and out of the car.

"This is something," Schlagel said, "that's going to be great going forward for people who don't want to come into the Library, for a multitude of reasons."

Schlagel worked for more than seven years in Missouri's Mid-Continent Library system before she became assistant branch manager for Gardner/Edgerton/Spring Hill in February. It's been a whirlwind job, dealing with the pandemic, but she lives in Gardner and really enjoys these three close-knit branches and working in her home community.

"People feel a really deep connection to the Library and that's something I've really enjoyed being a part of," she said.

### TOP HOLDS

#### OCTOBER 2020

- The Guest List **Lucy Foley**
- The Vanishing Half **Brit Bennett**
- Anxious People **Fredrik Backman**
- Rage **Bob Woodward**
- All the Devils are Here **Louise Penny**
- Untamed **Glennon Doyle**
- One by One **Ruth Ware**
- Too Much and Never Enough: How My Family Created the World's Most Dangerous Man **Mary L. Trump**
- Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents **Isabel Wilkerson**
- White Fragility: Why It's So Hard to Talk to White People About Racism **Robin J. DiAngelo**

# PATRON OF THE MONTH

## Olathe high school graduate finds inspiration through elementia

Like so many Johnson County high school seniors, Brett Seaton saw his world upended in 2020 by Coronavirus.

He had to finish his spring AP classes at Olathe West High while hunkered down at home. Prom was cancelled. His plans to attend the University of Connecticut on a tennis scholarship were torpedoed when U-Conn cut the tennis program due to COVID-19.

But Seaton continued to pursue his passion for writing poetry and that led him to elementia, Johnson County Library's award-winning literary arts magazine. He found it on Google and submitted a poem that was selected for publication in a highly competitive process. He was chosen to speak at elementia's online reception in August.

At the reception, Seaton got connected to Teen Librarian Kate McNair and was able to meet keynote speaker and National Poetry Slam champion Rudy Francisco. It was one of the highlights of his year.

"They do incredible work," Seaton said of the elementia editors. "Teen Services Coordinating Librarian Kate McNair is a force of nature and corralled all these students into a place where they could be on a par with Rudy Francisco."

Seaton also co-founded a literary magazine non-profit called Astra Magazine that will publish its first issue online in October. (See [astramagazine.org](http://astramagazine.org)) He says the elementia team was incredibly helpful with grant funding suggestions, recommendations for

contributors, and ideas to promote the project, and meeting Francisco, even virtually, provided further inspiration.

"That's where I got to talk to him about Astra Magazine," Seaton said. "He'll be publishing with us. The Library helped put me in touch."

Seaton, 19, is part of a generation born around the time of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. They had their formative years during the Great Recession and are now dealing with a global pandemic.

But he is incredibly resilient and conveyed a message of hope as his high school's commencement speaker. His key message: "Life is made up of memories, and memories are formed in extremes of times."

Instead of heading to college, Seaton moved to Washington D.C. in May to work for a technology company. He recently took a new job as an intern in U.S. Rep. Roger Marshall's congressional office. He's applying again to colleges for fall 2021. In Washington, he met Harvard student Nathan Zhao, who co-founded Astra Magazine with him. Their goal: "Building a sky of creators, one star at a time."

Seaton sees poetry and creative writing as a way to build community, nurture civic responsibility and heal the divisions tearing the country apart.

Seaton knows the art of poetry has lost its prominence with many mainstream audiences. But he loves the creative outlet and the supportive community of writers he has encountered. He

was also lucky to have an amazing Olathe West English teacher and mentor, Peter Mishler, who taught him to explore the power of words and to tap into his life experiences to craft intense, personal free-verse poems.

That led to Seaton's first book of poems, "Ode to a Rendered Chasm," published this spring through Amazon.



*elementia contributor Brett Seaton poses with his recently published book of poetry.*

"The people who love it, love it, and it's great to be around people who are passionate about what they do," Seaton said. That's also what appealed to him about the Johnson County Library team that publishes elementia every year.

"They really know how to do it right," he said.



## STAFF SPOTLIGHT

## For Veteran Clerk, Oak Park Library Has Been Her “Happy Place”

In today's world, most people change jobs every few years and often move from place to place.

But Elaine Bagley has achieved a major milestone with Johnson County Library. She is celebrating 30 years of service, nearly all of that time as a circulation clerk at Oak Park Library, 9500 Bluejacket St. in Overland Park.

She's an example of continuity, experience and loyalty throughout decades of change, and it's been a very rewarding career.

“I found my niche,” Bagley says. “I'm good at this and I like doing it. I like coming to work.”

She's seen Libraries move from card catalogs to computerized catalogs. She's experienced the transition from clerk checkouts to patron self-checkouts. She's seen Library Reference sections transition to the internet.

Through it all, she has enjoyed the sustained emphasis on free access to information as a foundation for a strong community and society.

Bagley is originally from Manhattan, Kan., and first worked in a college library there and then for the Manhattan Public Library.

She got married and moved to Olathe, and was first hired as a part-time clerk at Oak Park Library in June 1990. Six months later, she went full-time. Oak Park was busy, with families, teens and adults all using the popular neighborhood branch. Bagley worked 4-9 p.m. weeknights and every other Friday or Saturday.

“I remember the shock when I first started working here,” she said. “After school would let out, there would be this rush. I was thinking, this is like Walmart!”

Clerks scanned big piles of books and stamped each date due slip with a heavy due-date stamper. She helped with late fines, placed holds and assisted patrons to keep their accounts in order. “That's my claim to fame: I worked at Oak Park before the internet,” Bagley said with a chuckle.

Eventually Bagley got divorced and moved within walking distance of the branch. Through all of life's changes, she enjoyed the work, the patrons and her colleagues at Oak Park.

“This was my happy place,” she said.

Some years ago, the Library moved to self-check, which Bagley said patrons really enjoy. Fortunately, that didn't mean clerks were obsolete. Circulation increased and the Library still had a heavy customer service emphasis.

“Nobody lost their jobs to self-check,” Bagley said. “It freed us up to do some of the other things we couldn't keep up with before.”

She takes on tasks that some might find tedious but that are essential, including finding lost or misplaced items.

“I'm good at puzzling out those things, figuring out how things got the way they did and trying to track down the fix for it,” she said.

Bagley's 30th anniversary occurred while Oak Park was closed due to COVID-19. She was working at the time at Monticello, where she received flowers to mark the occasion. She treated her colleagues to ice cream sandwiches to celebrate on a hot day.

She has no plans to retire and says even if she did, she'd probably still volunteer.

For her, Oak Park Library will always have a fond place in her heart.

“I found my place,” she said. “I found my home.”



Oak Park clerk Elaine Bagley celebrates 30 years with Johnson County Library.

# EVENTS SPOTLIGHT

## Library Lets Loose Virtual Fundraiser Attracts Hundreds

Johnson County Library Foundation President Vickie Trott summed up one craving in 2020 as she addressed attendees at this year's annual Library gala: "In these unusual times," Trott said, "we need to let loose however we can until we can let loose in person again."

And that's exactly what happened Sept. 12, with the "virtual" Library Lets Loose celebration and fund-raiser. Because of the Coronavirus pandemic, this year's event could not be held in-person and pivoted to online. Using the On24 platform, the Foundation hosted an event that still featured fun activities, capped off by a virtual dance club where people were encouraged to get their groove on from the comfort of their own homes.

"I am truly amazed at the ingenuity and willingness of so many people to look at the possibility to keep our Library Lets Loose event an ongoing tradition," Trott told participants.

Honorary co-chairs Cindy Wallis-Lage and Kent Lage greeted people from their home. "Even in this time where we are sheltered in place a lot and we don't get to go out to the places that we like to go, the Library is still there as a great resource," Wallis-Lage said. "We hope you have a fantastic night and really remember how much the Library means to all of us."

In past years, the gala has attracted 44 sponsors and about 500 participants. This year, the event still garnered 44 sponsors and more than 500 attendees. Feedback was very positive. The event was free to register but many people and companies still made generous donations. "As a Foundation, we are grateful for the brave Library Lovers who were willing to try an online

fundraising event," said Foundation Executive Director Stephanie Stollsteimer. "We are thrilled with the outpouring of financial support as well."

The event, moderated by DJ Stann Tate, began with a reception and music by local acoustic guitarist and singer/songwriter Sean McNown. Andrew Olsen, beverage director with the J. Rieger and Co., demonstrated how to mix the "Library Lets Loose" cocktail. Participants could choose from a variety of experiences including a behind-the-scenes introduction to Library staff, activities for kids, and Trivia games. Some people had trouble finding the breakout rooms at first but tech support was quickly available.

The MakerSpace staff demonstrated the fascinating process of creating a wood block relief print, using an industrial roller and design by artist Shawn Sanem. The celebrity reader room featured local notables reading from favorite books; former Chiefs Hall of Fame offensive lineman Will Shields

read from Nelson Mandela's "Long Walk to Freedom." "We love Libraries and believe every child should learn to read and have access to books," Shields' wife Senia said.

Author Candice Millard shared how, when she was about 10 years old, she got a free book from a small town Library, which she has treasured ever since. She chose the book because of its wonderful title: "I know Why the Caged Bird Sings," by Maya Angelou. "I had never experienced books that could be incredibly moving, that could take you somewhere you have never seen or imagined and are beautifully written," she said.

With fundraisers like Library Lets Loose, the Foundation continues to help provide Library resources to open people's eyes, as Millard's were, to the power of great books to transform lives. If you couldn't join us this year, LLL will be back in September 2021, or you can make a gift any time of year at [johnsoncountylibraryfoundation.org](http://johnsoncountylibraryfoundation.org).



*Honorary co-chairs Cindy Wallis-Lage and Kent Lage greeted attendees from their home.*



# TAKING A CLOSER LOOK

## Social Media Highlights

As you can see by the posts below, the Johnson County library system continues to thrive even in these difficult times! **Thank you for your support!** *Click the captions to view full posts online!*

 **Johnson County Library - KS**  
September 15 at 10:48 AM · 🌐

Freshly painted Curbside Holds Pickup spots at Gardner and Cedar Roe! This brand new service is available at Leawood, too. Read more about it here:  
<https://www.jocolibrary.org/our-stories/curbside-holds-faq>



*Lots of reach and engagements | Curbside Pickup FAQs*

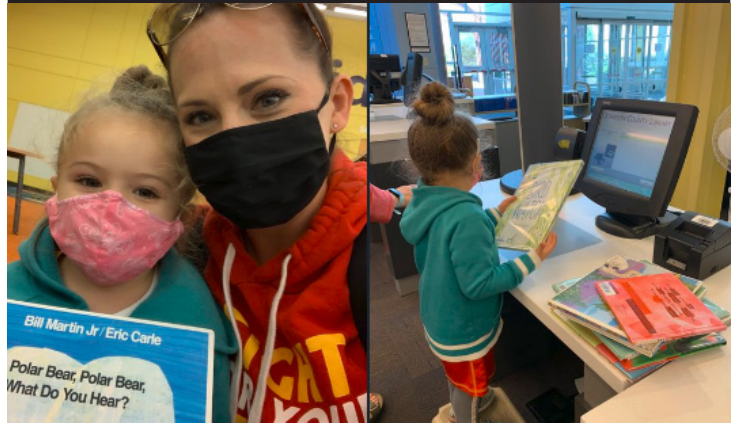
 **Johnson Co. Library**  
@jocolibrary

Someone left us a cute thank you note in the returns at Blue Valley Library! 🥰



*Cute note from Blue Valley*

My niece loves the @jocolibrary ❤️



*A patron's tweet we shared*

 **Johnson County Library - KS**  
September 24 at 8:30 PM · 🌐

Behind the Scenes: Johnson County patrons are avid readers! Processing the books in these photos is all in a day's work for the staff at the Blue Valley Branch. Upon return, books are quarantined for three full days, then discharged with the help of an automated sorter, and finally placed on carts for staff to organize on the browsable shelves or the hold shelves. Keep Calm and Read On!



*500+ interactions on Facebook*





## Month in Review September 2020



The Fall 2020 Guide, which features an overview of Library services along with programming highlights, was distributed to our 14 branches the first week of September.



Black & Veatch MakerSpace facilitators kicked off Project Block & Roll in early September, combining a new 3-D carving tool, the X-Carve, with a 36-inch steamroller to create large format art prints by local artist Shawn Sanem. Five prints from the project were donated to the Johnson County Library foundation as a fundraiser for Library Lets Loose.



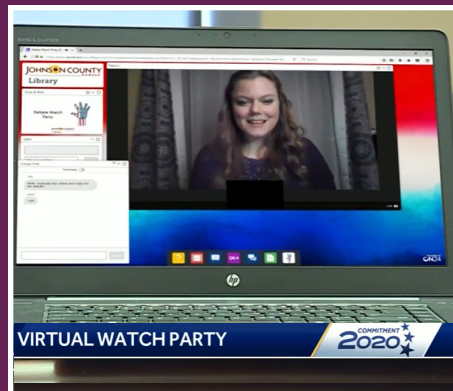
KSHB reporter Charlie Keegan interviews Librarian Marty Johannes about the Library's upcoming Career & Finance workshops. The segment aired September 14 as part of the station's Rebound KC initiative.



Curbside Holds Pickup spots at Cedar Roe and Gardner branches got a makeover on September 15, with fresh striping and "Pickup Here" painted on the blacktop to make the spots more visible.







After the success of their August staff-only blood drive at Central Resource Library, the American Red Cross held a second event for Library staff and volunteers on September 25. All appointments for both events were fully booked with waitlists.



Over 75 people registered for the Library's Virtual Debate Watch Party on September 29. The event was the first public event held on the Library's new events platform On24, and was featured on KMBC's evening news.

### NEXT ISSUE



-  **Cover Story:** Connecting with patrons through eNewsletters
-  **Branching Out:** All hands on deck at Leawood Pioneer
-  **Patron of the Month:**  
Sandy Turner, Friends Sorting Center Volunteer
-  **Staff Spotlight:**  
Librarian Helen Hokanson supports local writers

**JOHNSON COUNTY**  
KANSAS  
**Library**

### BOOK REPORT

*A monthly publication for government officials and residents of Johnson County*

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