

# Book Report

## eNewsletters Enhance Communication During Pandemic

Johnson County Library had already launched its eNewsletter project just prior to the Coronavirus outbreak. But it has ended up being a particularly strategic means of communication with patrons while they are homebound or have limited access to traditional forms of printed or in-person communication.

“It worked out great to be able to have that channel open and available to us to communicate with our patrons in this way,” says Ben Oglesby, marketing specialist with Johnson County Library, who helps to oversee the eNewsletters emailed each month.

In the past, the Library often shared information with patrons via the website, social media, paid advertising, traditional media and printed material in the branches. Then in 2018, a survey



*Johnson County Library's four eNewsletters cover a variety of topics.*

yielded interesting feedback. “One of the top responses,” Oglesby said, “was that patrons wanted to receive email communication from the Library.”

So the communication staff and others spent about six months gearing up to provide that service to about 170,000 email addresses. The service offered patrons the chance to “opt out” of the initial publication, but few people did. The first eNewsletter went out in early March, right before everything shut down because of the pandemic.

The timing was fortunate. Email became an even more vital information source. With colorful graphics and attractive design, each eNewsletter headlines a few events and services in bite-sized chunks each month. “I would say people really love the Library and they want to hear from us,” Oglesby said. “We have a really high open rate on our eNewsletters.”

Currently, there are four products: The Open Book, which goes out the first Tuesday of the month and gives an overview of key events and resources to a broad audience; Kids & Family, which goes to about 650 “opt-in” subscribers; Career & Finance, which recently launched to about 175 subscribers; and Race Project KC, which highlights resources dealing with racism and racial justice to about 140 metro-area educators and supporters.

Kristen Reese, youth information specialist at Lenexa, and Tiffany Rinne, youth information specialist at Blue Valley, provide content for the Kids & Family product. They highlight book

recommendations, writing contests, workshops, family activities, virtual field trips and other enrichment.

“Especially during these times, it’s good to have a way to connect with the patrons,” said Reese, who specializes in content for younger children. “We notice that there’s fewer kids and families coming in (to the branches). That’s totally understandable. We wanted a more personal way to reach out to our families.”

Rinne, who specializes in material for tweens and teens, agreed. “I see it as another outlet for the library to make known some of the awesome programming and digital offerings,” she said.

For Marty Johannes, career and personal finance Librarian, having a newsletter geared to those interests is particularly timely. “During challenging economic times like we’re in right now, where more people are experiencing hardship as a result of the pandemic and layoffs,” she said, “it becomes an even greater role for the Library to step into.”

The response to all the products is encouraging, Oglesby said. Registrations grow after events are promoted in the eNewsletters, and patrons appreciate the information. “The Library is not trying to sell them anything,” he said. “Just making them aware of what’s available.”

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October 2020

# BRANCHING OUT

## All Hands on Deck to Support Leawood Branch

Leawood Pioneer Assistant Branch Manager Nancy Birmingham knew she was facing a big challenge in late August when she had a serious circulation staff shortage. “August was the perfect storm,” she recalls. “We lost half the staff in a week.”

Even more worrisome, late August/early September is one of the busiest times for book returns and other circulation needs. So she sent out an appeal throughout the Johnson County Library system: “Let’s Help Leawood.”

And boy, did JCL respond. “Everybody was really excellent about it,” Birmingham said.

She has been assistant branch manager at Leawood Pioneer, 4700 Town Center Drive, for about a year, and circulation is one of her responsibilities. So she didn’t panic, but she did get concerned in late August.

One page retired and another had National Guard duty. A full-time clerk was transferring to another branch. And several people had to quarantine for two weeks because of possible COVID-19 exposures. So instead of 13 circulation members she had seven, and she needed to cover shifts from late August through Sept 12.

She asked other assistant branch managers for help, but they were dealing with their own staffing issues. So she broadened the appeal on Friday, August 28. “And we got people,” she said. “We got



*Nancy Birmingham showcases just one day’s stack of quarantined returns to process at Leawood.*

everyone from Tricia (Suellentrop), Deputy County Librarian, who showed up on a Saturday morning (August 29).”

Managers, Librarians, clerks and information specialists also signed up for four-hour shifts on a spreadsheet that Birmingham had put together. She made sure other branches weren’t left in the lurch while these folks were helping Leawood.

Birmingham appreciates how everyone was so supportive. “I learned what I knew,” she says, “which is the Library system is full of people that want to help.”

Leawood Pioneer survived that staffing crunch time, and things have returned to a more normal footing. The staffer on National Guard duty has returned and got a promotion to full-time clerk. Those in quarantine didn’t get sick and were able to get back to work. The branch has one opening for a part-time clerk, but it will be filled in the next hiring round.

Birmingham has been with Johnson County Library for about 12 years and previously served as an assistant branch manager at Blue

Valley and Central Resource. She’s always enjoyed the work, but is glad to be at Leawood now.

“Leawood Pioneer really is a gem,” she says. “It’s popular among citizens. It’s pretty. It’s got a great sledding hill in the back. It really is very much used by the patrons.”

It’s a branch that is well loved by residents of the surrounding neighborhoods, including those living in active retirement communities nearby. It’s adjacent to Leawood City Hall, with exterior architecture that is complementary to the government building. The Library normally features a vibrant art gallery, although that display is on hold during the pandemic.

The branch has a wonderful children’s book section and also a large travel section relative to its size, reflecting the widely-traveled, adventuresome nature of its patrons.

Leawood also piloted the curbside pickup service this summer, which went well and is also now offered at Cedar Roe and Gardner branches. In September, the three branches together handled 528 curbside hold pickups, including 339 at Leawood.

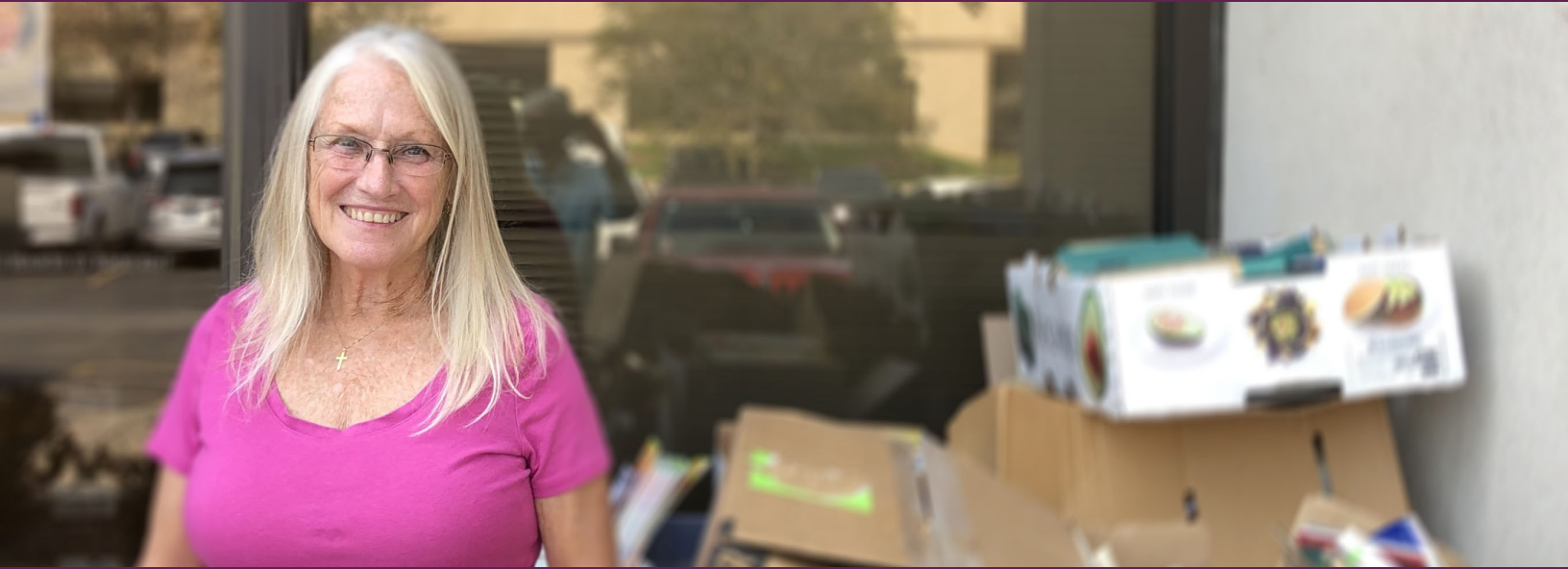
### TOP HOLDS

#### NOVEMBER 2020

- **Anxious People** - Fredrik Backman
- **The Guest List** - Lucy Folely
- **Leave the World Behind** - Rumaan Alam
- **One by One** - Ruth Ware
- **Rage** - Bob Woodward
- **The Book of Two Ways** - Jodi Picoult
- **A Time for Mercy** - John Grisham
- **The Vanishing Half** - Brit Bennett
- **All the Devils are Here** - Louise Penny
- **Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents** - Isabel Wilkerson

# PATRON OF THE MONTH

## Volunteer Devotes Time to JCL and Heart to Heart Intl.



*Friends of Johnson County Library Volunteer Sandy Turner*

**S**andy Turner has been a nurse for almost 50 years and had a very fulfilling career, including as a University of Kansas Health System operating room manager.

But after she retired in May 2017 she longed to contribute in new ways. She now brings her passion and skills to volunteering with Johnson County Library and with Heart to Heart International, the Lenexa-based global humanitarian organization. In sharing her time and talent, she's gained as much as she's given, cherishing "the friendships I've made and how it expands your world."

Retirement freed her up to read for pleasure and she frequented the Central Resource branch. Looking for volunteer opportunities, she found the Friends of Johnson County Library's Book Sorting Center at 8279 Melrose Drive, within walking distance from her house. The center accepts donated books and old Library books, reselling them to benefit Library services.

"I thought that would be fun to do," she said. So nearly every Monday, she's at the sorting center from noon to 3 p.m.

Just as she expected, it has been absorbing and interesting. "I just love seeing the books," Turner said, citing

discoveries of rare books from long ago and other treasures. Once she found a \$100 bill, which went to the Friends. All that sorting is good exercise, and she can borrow books to read and bring them back. Turner also loves the socializing.

"I'm probably the mouthiest of all the sorters," she confessed with a laugh. "I'll be yacking away."

She regales the other volunteers with stories of her other passion, disaster relief work and homeless outreach with Heart to Heart International.

Her nursing experience and organizational skills have been invaluable on disaster recovery trips following hurricanes in North Carolina, Florida and the Bahamas in 2018 and 2019. It's everything she hoped it would be. "It blessed my heart," she said. "It filled my cup and I needed that....I needed that interaction and to feel I was doing some good."

She's worked in mobile units for several weeks at a time, with other doctors and nurses. The teamwork is amazing and no one pulls rank. "They check titles at the door," she said.

The work is arduous, outdoors, often with no electricity in hot, humid

conditions. They treat patients with serious wounds, high blood pressure, other chronic conditions, and those needing medications and first aid. In North Carolina, they slept nights on church floors.

She was in Treasure Key and Abaco Island in the Bahamas on two separate tours in 2019 and it was so muggy "my hands were sticky the whole time." She saw dire poverty, but the patients were eternally grateful.

This year, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Turner has helped out three days a week with Heart to Heart's free clinic in downtown Kansas City, which provides care to those in need in partnership with Hope Faith Ministries. "It's given me a whole new perspective on the homeless population," she said. It's also heightened her awareness about how Libraries are places of respite for the homeless.

Johnson County Library gives Turner the flexibility to travel with Heart to Heart as needed. It's a great pairing of two volunteer commitments that make her retirement immensely productive and rewarding.

# STAFF SPOTLIGHT

## A Passion for Supporting Writers and Good Writing

Johnson County Reference Librarian Helen Hokanson specializes in local writers, and she gets high praise from those in the literary community.

Her friend and colleague, writer Lisa Allen, sums up Hokanson's contributions on LinkedIn: "She brings nationally acclaimed authors to the annual writers' conference; she helps writers share their work through the Library's writing contest and readings; and she connects people who need to be in each other's orbit."

But Hokanson has an interesting admission. "It took a while for me to figure out my thing," she now says. "I came into writing by total accident."

She was hired by Johnson County Library more than 20 years ago and was an information specialist and a branch manager before she became a Reference Librarian at Central. Library users at the time were clamoring for a writing group. She didn't know what she was doing, but realized, "Our patrons really want this."

So she organized the first meeting about a decade ago. About a dozen people showed up.

The group decided to work through the writing exercises from "The 3 A.M. Epiphany" guide by Brian Kiteley. When they returned a few weeks later, everyone else brought writing samples. And then, Hokanson remembers, "They all looked at me and said, 'Where's yours?'"

She protested vehemently and insisted she wasn't a writer, just the facilitator. But the group dragged her into participating with them.

So every few weeks, Hokanson was terrified no one would show up.... and she was terrified that they would. Because then she'd have to share her own writing. It was grueling at first, but eventually she got better at it, along with the others. It was a time of risk, but also a personal journey of discovery.



*Reference Librarian Helen Hokanson*

Some short stories and essays shared in the meetings were fantastic. Some participants got published or went to graduate school to pursue writing careers. The group also fostered wonderful friendships. "It was just a fascinating experience," Hokanson recalls.

The group disbanded a few years ago, but that freed Hokanson up to begin hosting author visits, which are enormously popular with patrons. They have continued virtually this year amid the Coronavirus pandemic.

Hokanson has also kept busy organizing this year's 6th Annual Writers Conference, held virtually Nov. 12-15. Unlike many conferences nationally that focus on publishing, the Johnson County Library conference focuses on the writer's craft. It features seasoned writers, editors and teachers, both national and local.

"The thing people are most interested in," Hokanson said, "is community

building and meeting other writers, because writing can be very isolating and lonely."

Organizers knew no one wants to sit at a computer non-stop for three days, so the Library organized some events leading up to the conference, with well-attended lectures and workshops held since September to spread out the teachings.

Hokanson emphasizes that her work to nurture great writing involves a team effort. She praises the other local writers' committee members: Cassandra Gillig, Beth Mercer, Diane Haner, Lisa Allen, Katt Cooper, Jack Vandelevu and German Perilla. She also could not put on the writers conference without the core conference team: Gillig and Mercer, plus Joseph Keehn, Kate McNair and Chris Koppenhaver for Kids Day.

"I could not do this work," she says, "without my brilliant colleagues."

# EVENTS SPOTLIGHT

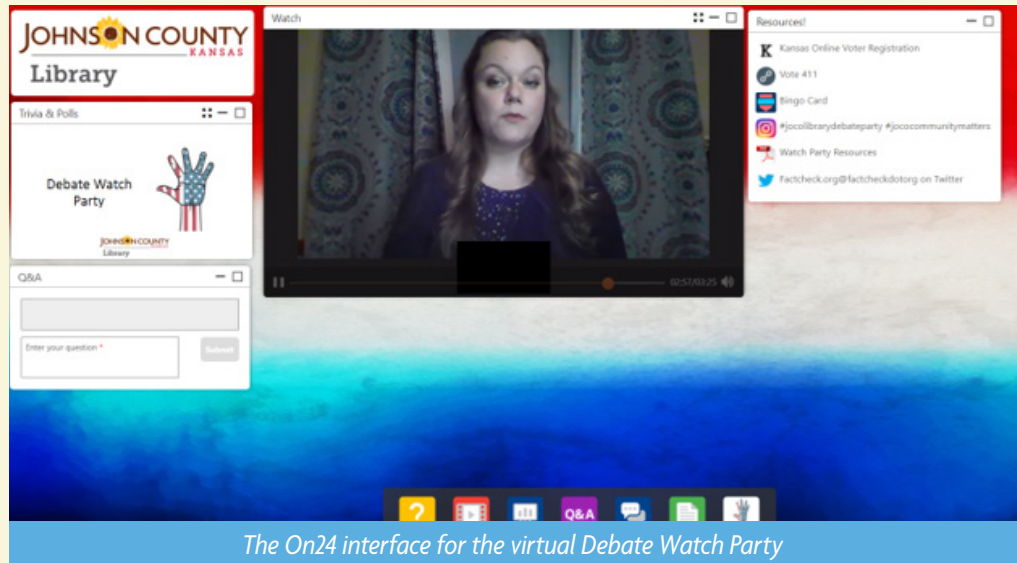
## Presidential Debate Watch Party Goes Virtual

Johnson County Library held its first “virtual” debate watch party Sept. 29, when President Donald Trump and challenger Joe Biden squared off for a raucous 90-minute verbal sparring match in Cleveland.

This was a big change from 2016, when Ashley Fick, Civic Engagement Librarian, helped organize two in-person debate watch parties that each attracted about 125 participants. With this year’s Coronavirus pandemic, the civic engagement team adjusted to the challenge and pivoted to an online event.

“I think people had fun, and that was the goal,” Fick said. About 40 participants watched the debate, and most stayed the whole time.

Melissa Horak-Hern, another Civic Engagement Librarian, had the night off so she tuned in as a patron. She says the Trivia and Bingo games helped break up the tension from the interruptions and yelling in the debate itself.



*The On24 interface for the virtual Debate Watch Party*

“It definitely made it more enjoyable,” she said. She had suggested using Biden’s catchphrase “My son Beau,” for the Bingo cards, and that indeed came up. She didn’t win at Bingo, but her husband did.

The new On24 technology worked well and Greeter Amanda Williams, an information specialist at Lenexa Library,

made sure participants knew how to access links for live fact-checking, and for gaining resources on voter registration and candidate information. Several participants reached out through the Audience Q&A button and were directed to the Johnson County Election office for help with their voter questions.

## Expert Takes Mystery Out of Buying Insurance

Johnson County Library has kicked off a series of online educational presentations as part of its WoMen & Money program. These presentations, held periodically on Mondays from 6-7 p.m., are designed to increase financial know-how for both women and men.

The series, all online and free of charge, lasts through May 2021. It is offered in partnership with Housing and Credit Counseling Inc., which lines up the presenters.

On Oct 19, Lee Modesitt, director of government affairs with the Kansas Department of Insurance, offered an Insurance 101 crash course, talking

about why insurance is a “must-have” expense and offering tips on researching the best home and auto insurance. More than 70 people registered for the program.

“Make sure you have adequate coverage,” he advised. “What’s the best coverage option you can reasonably afford within your budget?”

He provided strategies for finding the best insurance value, discussed the merits of flood and sewer backup coverage, and advised “shopping around is always a good idea,” even if someone has been with a particular agent for decades.

He explained the difference between cash value and replacement cost and outlined steps to follow after an auto accident. He also strongly advised renter’s insurance as a practical, cost-effective investment.

Modesitt reminded participants that the Kansas Insurance Department has a dedicated Consumer Assistance Division with experts to answer specific questions.

Future WoMen and Money Monday presentations will be about topics like budgeting and saving, and getting out of debt.

# 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!*



*116 likes of our Central Resource Ballot Box!*



*Great Twitter engagement.*



*A lot of comments and likes, including great pictures from patrons.*



*Over 1200 engagements, including 34 shares!*



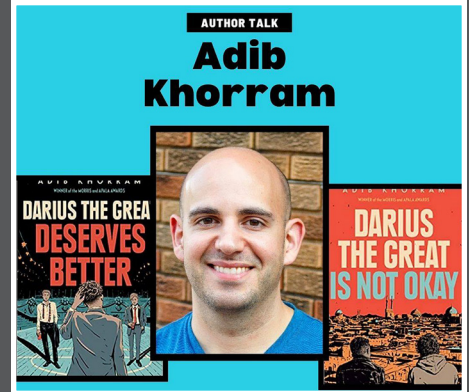
## Month in Review October 2020



The City of Prairie Village celebrated the one-year anniversary of their newest park, Wassmer Park, on Oct. 9 with one of our Walk and Read displays.



Before the Friends of the Library Bookstore at Central Resource Library closed on Oct. 10, the Friends held a huge blow-out sale with 50% off all books and AV equipment. The store closed permanently in preparation for Central's upcoming remodel, but the Blue Valley and Antioch bookstores remain open.



The Young Adult Literary Council hosted a virtual Q&A session with local writer Adib Khorram, author of the acclaimed *Darius the Great is Not Okay*, on Oct. 18.



Elementary-age kids were introduced to the concept and history of voting in the United States through Kids Vote Storytimes, a series of interactive programs held throughout October.



Thanks to feedback from recent patron surveys, Curbside Holds Pickup spots at Leawood Pioneer Library were relocated to the front of the parking lot on Oct. 17 to make the service more convenient for both patrons and staff.



Even a pandemic can't stop the Halloween spirit at the Library! Staff at Oak Park Library celebrated with mask-friendly costumes on Oct. 31.

### NEXT ISSUE

**Cover Story:** Unlimited Possibilities with New Library Card Designs

**Branching Out:** Spring Hill, a Neighborhood Library

**Patron Of The Month:** Danielle Hollrah, Podcast Listener

**Staff Spotlight:** Cindy Frazer and Jennifer Taylor, Communication Specialists



**JOHNSON COUNTY**  
KANSAS

## Library

### BOOK REPORT

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

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