

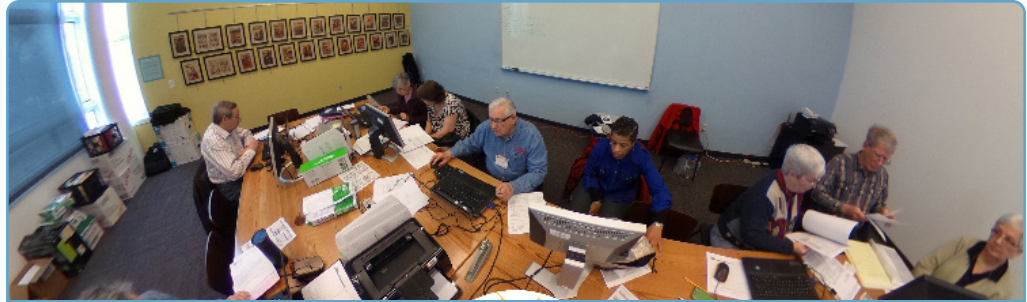
Book Report

Library Partnership Offers Tax Preparation Help

For many years, Johnson County Library has partnered with the AARP Foundation's Tax-Aide program, providing space and support for volunteers to assist older adults and low-to-moderate income individuals prepare their taxes.

In 2020, the service was suspended in March because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This year it resumes, in modified fashion. It's a much needed service and one that the Library and Kansas Tax-Aide (part of the AARP Foundation Tax-Aide program) were determined to offer in a safe way.

"I am thrilled that the Library offers this service because there's definitely a demand for it in the community," said Marty Johannes, Johnson County Career and Personal Finance Librarian. She said many people rely on the Library and AARP Tax-Aide to help get their taxes prepared, free of charge.



AARP Tax Help in pre-pandemic times.

This year, the service is offered from February 1 through April 15 at Oak Park Library, by appointment. People can make an appointment at www.kstaxaide.com. Those who don't have a computer can make an appointment by calling Johnson County Library or the KS Tax-Aide "call center." Gene Meiners, AARP KS Tax-Aide District Coordinator, expects they will be able to prepare about a third of the tax returns that they normally do.

"We want to emphasize, especially this year, that it's designed for people who can't afford to pay a tax preparer," Johannes said, adding that it's geared for lower income people, with a focus on those age 60 and older.

AARP Tax-Aide recruits and trains tax preparer volunteers. In 2019, patrons met in-person with volunteers in a Central Resource Library meeting room, and 1,380 returns were prepared.

This year, while Central is being renovated, the service will be provided Mondays through Thursdays in the large meeting room at Oak Park Library, 9500 Blue Jacket St. It can accommodate tax preparers and patrons, socially distanced.

"We wanted it to be as close to Central as possible and as close to being a central place in the county," Johannes said. Other branches were considered but they didn't have available meeting space.

It's a bit of a challenge to provide the service at Oak Park this year, but it's worth it.

"Our administration understood just how important this service is and that we might need to make some sacrifices to make it happen," Johannes said.

In past years, tax preparers met in-person for about an hour with patrons. This year, Johannes said, face-to-face time will be minimal and masks will be required. Some returns will be prepared off site, with the taxpayers returning later to pick them up. In other cases, the taxpayer will wait outside the Library until their return is ready. As always, stringent steps are taken to ensure document security.

Planning for how to provide this service during the pandemic began last summer. Johannes said Meiners worked with contacts at the national level to figure out the best approach.

"They wanted to, if at all possible, provide the assistance because people have come to rely on this service," Johannes said.

She added that available county locations have dwindled, so Johnson County Library was pleased to step up and help again this year, along with Olathe Library and several churches.

"It's our strategic plan in a nutshell," Johannes explained. "We're providing a service to the underserved and a service that few others are providing."

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BRANCHING OUT

Improvements Coming to Oak Park's Circulation Office

The Oak Park Library branch has vibrant, colorful, comfortable public spaces, but the back office circulation area hasn't been updated in years. That's about to change.

"I hope that the staff loves it," says Assistant Branch Manager Ashley Whitham, who supervises the circulation employees. "It's been awhile since the staff side of Oak Park has gotten some love."



Oak Park's new, more efficient book carts.

It's a long narrow room that has not been laid out in the most efficient way, so work stations will be rearranged to improve workflow.

"It's about working smarter, not harder," Whitham says. The room will also get a cosmetic upgrade, with carpet, ergonomic desks and chairs and new book carts.

"The carts we had were mismatched, dented and some were hand-me-downs from other branches," Whitham said.

The new carts are a lovely Persian blue color to complement the other colors in the Library. They are also smaller than the old beige ones, allowing staff to get items back into circulation faster, for even better service to patrons.

The rearranging of work stations will line up tasks in a more logical fashion, with couriers able to drop materials next to the area where those items will be processed. Currently, items are dropped far enough away from work stations that staffers have to relocate materials before processing them because there is no room near the work stations.

"It's just putting everything in a more logical flow," Whitham explained, adding that staff had input on the layout and also on the new furnishings.

The timeline for the improvements is a bit uncertain but the upgrade should be finished in the first half of the year. There will be no interruption to patron services while these upgrades are done.

A few more changes will directly benefit patrons. Oak Park, 9500 Blue Jacket St., is adding curbside pickup and brought back a large exterior book drop box on Jan. 8. The previous box was removed last fall because it was rusted and not in an ideal location. The new box is in a parking space outside the staff entrance, which is more convenient and safer for both staff and patrons. The curbside pickup will have two parking spots, also near the staff entrance.

Curbside pickup has already proved to be very popular at Leawood, Gardner and Cedar Roe and will be a convenient new amenity at Oak Park.

"We have been talking with other branches and getting up to speed," Whitham said as she prepared to train staff to provide the service.

Recent improvements already completed at Oak Park include tree trimming and the restriping of the parking lot.

"We were able to widen our parking stalls because they were very, very tight," Whitham said.

The timing is right to improve the back office work space, Whitham said, because the employees have labored so hard and loyally during the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I just hope it brings a little breath of fresh air into what was a dark year last year," she said. "They came back and didn't ask any questions. They just reported back to work and got busy. They don't complain and they do such amazing, fantastic work. We wanted to give back a little to them and show our appreciation as well."

TOP HOLDS

DECEMBER 2020

- o **The Midnight Library** - Matt Haig
- o **The Four Winds** - Kristin Hannah
- o **A Time for Mercy** - John Grisham
- o **The Duke and I** - Julia Quinn
- o **The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue** - Victoria Schwab
- o **Anxious People** - Fredrik Backman
- o **Greenlights** - Matthew McConaughey
- o **A Promised Land** - Barack Obama
- o **Keep Sharp: Build a Better Brain at Any Age** - Sanjay Gupta
- o **The Wife Upstairs** - Rachel Hawkins

PATRON OF THE MONTH

Family Grateful for English Language Services

When Maria Tamayo Gonzalez and her two children moved to Johnson County from Mexico in 2012 they spoke almost no English. Her husband Adan already lived here and had a job in construction, and now the family was adjusting to life in the U.S.

“Soon after I arrived in Merriam I received help for my family because my two children didn’t speak English,” she recalled. Among the first pieces of advice she received was that Johnson County Library offered assistance, classes and resources for Spanish-speaking patrons needing to learn English.

“We received a lot of help,” Gonzalez said, “mostly with language and reading.”

In 2013, they were put in touch with Christine Peterson, who that year had been named Latino Services Outreach Librarian. Gonzalez says Peterson has been a huge help to her since 2013, with English classes on Saturdays at Oak Park Library and, more recently, with citizenship studies. Her children received help with reading and homework.

She discovered that Oak Park Library had a good selection of Spanish-language books, and the family enjoyed both the Oak Park and Antioch branches over the years.

Then Gonzalez had a third child, Isabella, now 3. Both mother and daughter have benefited from the Library’s early literacy program and storytimes to build their language skills.

“My little one is very happy to see Christine,” Gonzalez says. “She says, ‘I’m going to school for Christine, Mom.’”

Gonzalez and her children are among about 30 families with whom Peterson works closely.

“When we have patrons like that come to the Library, we try to give them as much information as possible,” Peterson said.



Gonzalez (far L) with daughters Gabriella, 12, Isabella, 3, and husband Adan.

Most recently, Peterson has helped Maria Gonzalez with information and classes to gain U.S. citizenship. Maria and Isabella were also in Peterson’s 6 by 6 early literacy program in Spanish.

“I encourage the language of the home,” Peterson said. “She (Isabella) will learn how to speak English very quickly because her parents have been reading to her in Spanish. It doesn’t confuse a child. I have many examples of children who have soared in English because their parents have read to them in their native language.”

Maria’s two older children are Adan, now 16 and a sophomore at Shawnee Mission North High, and Gabriella, 12, a seventh grader at Hocker Grove Middle School. They primarily became fluent in English through school, but said the Library was also a place to improve their reading skills. At Peterson’s urging, they have also both volunteered in past years

at Antioch Library and enjoyed giving back to the community.

Adan organized and shelved books and supervised younger kids during meetings of Latino families at Antioch Library. “I liked helping out,” he said.

Gabriella said after-school Library programs helped her become a voracious reader.

“They had books in Spanish that we read, and they made learning English a lot easier,” she said.

Before the pandemic, Gabriella also worked with younger children struggling to read and got feedback that it helped those students improve their grades.

The family patriarch, Adan Gonzalez, said they are all grateful to Christine Peterson and the Library for wonderful services and programs that have helped the family build a good home and life in Johnson County.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Local History Librarian Highlights Social Justice Stories

For so many people, 2020 was a year of reckoning with our nation's history of racial inequality.

That was true for Johnson County Library's Local History Librarian Amanda Wahlmeier. She worked with her programming committee to tell impactful local and regional stories of struggle and triumph in the crusade for community progress.

With the 2020 pandemic and the Library's pivot to online programming, Wahlmeier and the Past is Prologue committee quickly focused on racial and social justice, especially after the George Floyd killing in Minneapolis.

"In May, we were already thinking about social justice, but the George Floyd incident really made us commit to it," Wahlmeier said. The Past is Prologue monthly programs highlight stories that are often glossed over or misrepresented in history books. They feature outstanding presenters, with help from the Humanities Kansas Speakers Bureau.



Amanda Wahlmeier, Local History Librarian

The first program in October featured baseball historian Phil Dixon speaking about the legendary Kansas City Monarchs. November highlighted inspirational teacher Corinthian Nutter and Johnson County's South Park School desegregation case, a precursor to the landmark Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education case. January focused on the Black pioneer community of Nicodemus, Kansas, presented by Nicodemus Historical Society Director Angela Bates.

Patrons have been enthusiastic about these hour-long online presentations.

"We're very pleased with the patron response," Wahlmeier said. "We've had great comments and a lot of requests. The public is very interested."

Future programs will explore the bi-state Dividing Lines tour, Native Americans and little-known stories of Kansas City.

The 2020 pandemic and social upheaval reinforced for Wahlmeier the importance of community members knowing their history, and illustrated the Library's crucial role in imparting that information. Online programming allows people to participate from home, and she's excited to provide resources for teachers and parents.

Wahlmeier has been Local History Librarian since August 2017 and brought a wealth of knowledge and experience to the role. She majored in history and international studies at Baker University before getting a master's in history from University College Dublin in Ireland. She was curator at the National Orphan Train Museum in Concordia, Kan. for several years before she obtained a library science master's degree from Emporia State and joined Johnson County Library.

"Having an opportunity to merge Library and archival work was very attractive," she said.

In 2020, she had just helped complete the Kansas Day and Genealogy Day activities before in-person events shut down for the pandemic. Besides organizing the Past is Prologue events, she kept busy updating the Library's local history resources, including digitizing newspapers such as the Shawnee Dispatch and Gardner News that people should soon be able to access from home.

She hopes that, even when in-person events resume, patrons will continue expanding their use of the Library's rich local history resources and materials.

EVENTS SPOTLIGHT

Author Finds the Fascinating in the Familiar

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we've been cooped up for months in our homes and neighborhoods, and life can feel monotonous. But a Johnson County Library writing workshop Jan. 16 reminded participants that good writers coax mystery from the mundane and reveal the extraordinary in the ordinary.

Kansas City-based writer Anne Kniggendorf led the interactive Zoom workshop on the topic "Writing About the Familiar." She gained particular insights when she authored "Secret Kansas City: A Guide to the Weird, Wonderful and Obscure," published last August by Reedy Press. She wrote vignettes about little-known but fascinating pieces of the Kansas City tapestry, like the Hereford Bull and the area's first fountains.

"It's not like the places themselves are secret, but it's just that the stories behind them are unknown a lot of the time," Kniggendorf explained. She invited

participants to see their surroundings through the fresh eyes of a visitor, and to bring those stories alive through poetry, fiction or non-fiction.

Participants suggested topics for discovery and exploration. Kniggendorf discussed research techniques and the value of memory and journaling.

Participant Sarah Donohoe shared that she was a Rocky Mountain National Park hiking guide for years. Her advice to hikers also applies to writers: "First, look around as if you have never seen what you are seeing...then look at it as if it's the very last time you are ever going to see it."

It's important, Kniggendorf advised, to find the most interesting hook to entice readers.

"Dig until you go, okay, there's something cool," she said.



Author Anne Kniggendorf

Connecting Community Event Highlights Mental Health

Johnson County Library has had great success with its Legislative coffees, allowing patrons to meet lawmakers. A new program for 2021, "Connect with Your Community," expands on that civic engagement mission. The program kicked off with a Zoom event Jan. 5.

"Every month, we'll host a different public servant whose work helps make Johnson County a great place to live," Civic Engagement Librarian Melissa Horak-Hern said.

The first presenter was Ashley Grill, Peer Engagement Specialist with the Johnson County Mental Health Center. At a time when mental health services are crucial, Grill shared

her own mental health journey and provided information on her department, which serves thousands of individuals annually.

Grill said her role is "elevating the client voice at all levels of the system." She has partnered with Johnson County Library to facilitate advocacy writing workshops and does outreach and community education, including working on a client handbook guide.

Grill has personal experience with mental illness, which enhances her advocacy. She has been in recovery for about 15 years, and wrote a book, "All in Her Head," based on her experience.

"The benefit of peer support is that it's a source of hope, to know that others are able to manage their illness and participate in the community," she said. "The future of peer engagement is getting people back into the community as engaged citizens."

She encouraged the Library audience to support the department's Legislative agenda for enhanced services and reminded them about upcoming events, including Mental Health Advocacy Day Feb. 17.

TAKING A CLOSER LOOK

Social Media Highlights

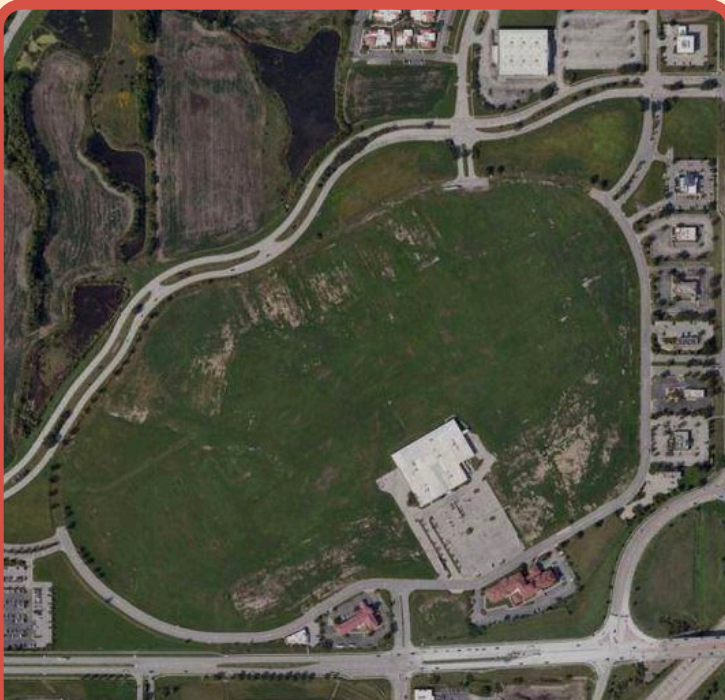
As you can see by the posts below, the Johnson County Library system continues to thrive even in these difficult times! Thank you for your support! *Click the captions to view full posts online!*



1,000 viewers saw this impressive stack of returned materials on Instagram




This Library-loving squirrel got a lot of attention on Twitter



Part seven of the story behind the Great Mall of Plains reached nearly 6,000 people on Facebook



the library haunter 
@SketchesbyBoze

We love Edgar Allen Poe because he portrays universal human emotions like loss, grief, unrequited love, burying your enemy alive in the cellar and being scared out of your mind by a bird.



Literary memes are always a hit on Facebook, especially this one about Edgar Allen Poe with over 120 likes



Month in Review January 2021



Beth Atwater, collection development specialist, was the 2020 recipient of the PLA Allie Beth Martin Award for her depth of knowledge about books and other library materials, as well as the distinguished ability to share that knowledge with others.



The Central Building Upgrade Moves Team, led by Assistant Branch Manager Nate Hohl, coordinated the moves of 134 support staff out of the Central Resource Library into temporary locations in preparation for construction, anticipated to run from February through late 2021. The former staff breakroom is pictured above.



As of Jan. 14, appointments are no longer required for Friends Bookstore shopping! The Friends of Johnson County Library Bookstores, located at Antioch and Blue Valley libraries, are open Mondays 9 am to 4:30 pm and Thursdays noon to 7:30 pm. A customer capacity limit of four is in place and face coverings are required.



Johnson County Library received national recognition for its timely virtual book display about Presidential Inaugurations. The project, helmed by Information Specialist Diane Haner – with an assist from Web Content Developer Dave Carson – was spotlighted in the Jan. 20 Urban Libraries Council newsletter.



Artist in Sight: Chico Sierra

January 26, 2021



The Library launched a new monthly programming series, Artists in Sight, on Jan. 26 with Chico Sierra, a Mexican-American visual artist, poet, musician and muralist. Sierra shared insights about his work, creative process and the things that inspire him, such as graffiti, pop art, Mexican folk art and political comics.



Curbside Holds Pickup service expanded to two new locations – Oak Park and Spring Hill – with a soft launch the week of Jan. 25. Dr. Wayne Burke (R), a Library Board member and Superintendent of Schools for the Spring Hill School District, joined County Librarian Sean Casserley (L) for a fun photo op at Spring Hill on Jan. 29.

NEXT ISSUE



- Cover Story:** Materials Handling moves to new office space
- Branching Out:** Corinth Library benefits from new equipment
- Patron Of The Month:** Melissa Cheatham, community advocate
- Staff Spotlight:** Lucas Kirkendoll's journey from clerk to trainer

JOHNSON COUNTY KANSAS

Library

BOOK REPORT

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