



Book Report

Foundation Gala will Tell Stories of Lives Transformed by the Library

Library Lets Loose is the Johnson County Library Foundation's signature fundraising event, and the 2021 gala on Sept. 18 will be especially significant.

This year marks the Foundation's 25th anniversary, and the virtual event will herald that milestone by telling stories of lives profoundly affected in positive ways by the Library.

"We have a lot to celebrate on this 25th anniversary," said Stephanie Stollsteimer, the Foundation's executive director. "We celebrate the years of dedication and support of the community. We celebrate another year of our Library thriving."

The Sept. 18 event will be held via Zoom, with a reception beginning at 6:30 p.m. and the program starting at 7 p.m. Registration is available at jocolibraryfoundation.org.

The program will feature videotaped interviews with amazing people:

- **Nagin Cox:** She grew up in Johnson County, attended Shawnee Mission East High and landed her first job as a Corinth Library page. Cox says that job helped launch her on an incredible life. She has gone on to become a top operations engineer with NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, currently working on the Perseverance rover making spectacular discoveries on Mars. She will talk about her journey from Johnson County to exploring the galaxy.
- **The Gallagher family:** A 9-year-old boy and his mother will talk about how the Library is a magical place for them.
- **The Gonzalez family:** Maria Tamayo Gonzalez, who came to Johnson County from Mexico in 2012, will share how she and her family were assisted with English Language Learner services. Latino Services Outreach Librarian Christine Peterson will also take part.

The interviews and digital storytelling are provided by Overland Park videographer Mike Varel.



Denise Mills has been a passionate Library advocate for years and appeared in 2006 with then-First Lady Laura Bush and then-County Librarian Mona Carmack to accept an award recognizing JCL as one of the nation's top Library systems. In an eloquent essay, Denise writes, "The Library says that it attracts life-long learners. However, I feel like the Library, for me, has been a life-long giver."

Johnson County Library provided vital resources and market research when Denise was an entrepreneur launching her successful business career. The Library was an enchanting place for her children, fueling their love of reading and writing. The Black & Veatch MakerSpace, for Denise, has been a place of wonder and discovery.

She and her husband are voracious readers, but Denise Mills wants people to realize the Library is more than books. She's committed to giving back to the Library because of the life-changing experiences she's received, and Library Lets Loose highlights those values.

The event registration is free, but donations are always welcome. Anyone giving \$100 will be eligible for gift basket drawings.

Last year, 44 sponsors also made contributions, and even more sponsors have signed up this year.

"People are being generous," Stollsteimer said. "It's hugely gratifying. They are digging deep and they know this is important."

Proceeds from the gala help Johnson County Library go above and beyond its taxpayer-funded budget, enhancing such initiatives as Race Project KC, early literacy offerings,

teen programs, incarcerated services, online programming and MakerSpace STEM education.

This year's official production partner is Park University, which has a satellite campus near Lenexa City Center Library.

"We're thrilled," Stollsteimer said. "They are well known for online education. They are providing technical assistance. They are so great to work with and we are really grateful."



*Library Lets Loose Honorary Hosts
Rick and Denise Mills.*

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BRANCHING OUT

Corinth Garden Grows a Love of Libraries

Where some might have seen a vacant space, Corinth librarians Meagan Condon and Diana Spencer saw potential. Several years ago, they started converting alcoves near the Library parking lot into what is now an herb garden. The garden serves as the basis for educational programs and provides natural beauty and inspiration for readers.

Their process is part of a growing trend. Libraries are increasingly incorporating green spaces: in new building projects, like Monticello's roof terrace, through partnerships, like at Oak Park's community garden, or in the case of Corinth, with some creative reuse. A Library Journal article noted that "the best libraries don't stop at the front door."

After noticing some old rusty flowerpots that were creating an eyesore, Spencer asked her branch manager at the time if she could make some improvements, and soon the garden began to take shape. Then Meagan joined the team. "She was super supportive of the idea. She took it to the next level to make it an educational garden," Diana said.

Meagan pulled together some research about green spaces and utilized her own gardening expertise. A local Girl Scout troop helped put their plan into action, sowing new plants in the spaces. While Library staff have



Herbs on display at Corinth Library.

largely kept up with maintenance over the years, a full-time volunteer is now on board to tend to it on a more regular basis.

"We have the rocks, the pots, the soil, and we're composting and regenerating," said Diana. "We're drying plants then planting the seeds so are recycling each year. We start everything from seeds, so kids can guess what's growing and watch the life cycle of the plants."

The events of the past year presented some new challenges for the garden when the pandemic meant that all Johnson County Libraries closed their doors.

Now, as the world comes back to life, so has the garden. Over the years, Corinth has built programming to connect to the garden, incorporating the 6 by 6 skills for early literacy. Other programs have included an aromatherapy session that used fragrance from the herbs and "plantable" bookmarks made from recycled paper with wildflower seeds embedded. This year, the Summer Reading launch featured Corinth's garden as well as a Master Gardener giving tips and advice.

"With this year's Summer Reading being all about animals, we got onto the topic of wildlife and ecology, and the ways that we can help wildlife in our community," said Megan. "Rather than simply talk to people about how you can plant natives or bring native species into your space, we wanted to tell the story of the Library doing that."

Megan and Diana noted that the pandemic and events of the past year have also placed a new importance on outdoor spaces, shedding light on the value of the project that started as a labor of love.

"Revitalizing the garden and being able to open that space again . . . It feels really big to me, especially this year. People can go to the Library, sit on the patio and chat, or to enjoy the plants growing while they watch their kids," Megan said. "Communities look to their Library now in ways that they didn't before. Libraries are not just quiet buildings, but places where people live their lives and engage with their community. People need those connection points."



TOP HOLDS



AUGUST 2021

- **The Last Thing He Told Me** - Laura Dave
- **The Paper Palace** - Miranda Cowley Heller
- **Apples Never Fall** - Liane Moriarty
- **Golden Girl** - Elin Hilderbrand
- **People We Meet on Vacation** - Emily Henry
- **The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo** - Taylor Jenkins Reid
- **A Slow Fire Burning** - Paula Hawkins
- **The Madness of Crowds** - Louise Penny
- **It Ends with Us** - Colleen Hoover
- **Falling** - T.J. Newman

PATRON OF THE MONTH

Gardner Branch is Beloved Place for Mom and Kids

Gabe Marrs, age 9, articulately describes how he feels when he visits the Gardner Library.

“When you walk in, you feel cozy. There’s tables everywhere you can sit at and read,” he says. “It’s awesome.”

Gabe’s sister, 7-year-old Stella, agrees it feels familiar and relaxing. “I like how the Library smells,” she says. “It feels like we’re going home, kind of, because we’ve been to it so many times.”

Their mom, Jen Marrs, is on a first-name basis with many Gardner branch staffers and appreciates their suggestions for books and programs for her family to enjoy.

“They are so sweet. They’ve always been so dear,” she said. “It sparks so many interests.”

She says the staff is invaluable for busy moms, making her good days even better and giving her peace on her crazy days.

The Marrs family members have been branch regulars since they moved to Gardner in 2013. They have also patronized Leawood Pioneer and Central. Jen and her husband Ben also have fond memories of Cedar Roe from years ago, when they were first dating and living in Merriam.

“From date night movie pickups and after work hold pickups, to Storytimes with our young children and family game nights, JoCo Library has been with us,” Jen Marrs said.

Visiting the newest branches, Monticello and Lenexa City Center, also turned into “Library Adventure Days” for the family.

Jen is currently a stay-at-home mom who previously worked as a graphic design company office manager. Ben was a financial analyst with Sprint and has made the transition to T-Mobile. The kids attend Madison Elementary School.

Both kids have grown into avid readers.

Gabe and Stella have each enjoyed books by Kwame Alexander. Gabe has been reading “The Last Kids on Earth” series. Stella liked “101 Life Hacks” (a National Geographic book for kids) and “Penny the Pony Fairy,” by Daisy Meadows.

Jen is reading Ruth Ware mysteries and just finished “Child 44,” a thriller by British novelist Tom Rob Smith.

Ben uses the Library for DVDs of all sorts and also for new CDs by his favorite musicians.

Jen prefers physical Library books, but says that during the pandemic she began using the Axis 360 eBook service.

“That’s been a silver lining through these last 18 months,” she said. “I was able to do more and more online.”

Another pandemic discovery was the online book clubs in spring 2021. On the recommendation of librarians, Jen signed Stella up for the American Girl virtual book club and Gabe for the Kids book club. Over four months, Stella and Gabe discovered new books to cherish, and they praised the librarians for leading good discussions.

“Each month we got to look forward to something, and it was a good supplement as we were going through to the end of the school year,” Jen Marrs said of the books that families got to keep. “We felt so grateful for everything we got. It really added to their library.”

When they are not reading, Gabe likes video games and riding his bike. Stella likes soccer, cooking and video games.

For the whole family, Johnson County Library is a big part of their lives.

Gabe says succinctly, “It is really special.”

Stella adds, “Without books, I don’t know what I would do. If you take books from my life I will be bored.”

And Jen can only nod and agree with her kids. “They’ve said it very well.”



(L to R) Jen, Stella, Ben and Gabe Marrs are avid Gardner branch patrons.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Community Service a Calling for Christopher Leitch

For community relations coordinator Christopher Leitch, community service was a family calling that was foundational to his upbringing. Leitch grew up in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where his mother was a social worker and his father was a police officer.

“My whole professional life was influenced by their example of public service,” says Leitch, who has carried those same values throughout his life.

He spent his early career as a Kansas City Art Institute administrator and then as Director of the Kansas City Museum, before he joined Johnson County Library in 2014 as community relations coordinator.

Leitch’s work at the Library has evolved over the years, encompassing communication and public information roles for his first five years. Since February 2020, his primary focus has been on community engagement, relationship building and working diligently with the Friends of Johnson County Library board and staff.

As part of the development department, Leitch works closely with Stephanie Stollsteimer, director of the Library Foundation, and with Volunteer Services Coordinator Amber Bourek-Slater. The role allows Leitch to be an ambassador to potential patrons and donors, telling the Library’s story to the wider world and laying the groundwork for great partnerships.

“This is really the work I was hired to do,” Leitch says. “Because of my previous work in higher

education and community education with the museum, I had done tons of work with community relationship building. I feel like now I will be able to bring some of my best skills and abilities to the Library.”

One project close to his heart is working with the new Antioch Replacement Library design team to bring the voices of local residents into that conversation. As a longtime Merriam resident and community advocate, Leitch is particularly well positioned to get public feedback and patron perspectives for that project. It will replace the Antioch branch and be on the new Merriam Community Center campus.

Leitch is also working with the Friends of the Library on their strategic plan for growth. He is passionate about cheering on the Friends and helping them coordinate and communicate information on book sales, donations and membership.

“I love the Friends board,” Leitch says. “They are among the hardest working volunteers I’ve ever known.”

His involvement with libraries extends beyond his day job. Leitch is married to a Librarian, Stuart Hinds, who is curator of special collections and archives for the Libraries at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. In 2009, when Leitch was still with the Kansas City Museum, he teamed with Hinds and David Jackson, director of archives and education with the Jackson County Historical Society, to found GLAMA, the Gay and Lesbian Archive of Mid-America. The collection is housed

at UMKC’s Miller Nichols Library and has become a vital historical and cultural resource.

“It is an amazing project to be a part of, and it still proves to be very necessary, as we navigate trying to remain an open and inclusive society,” Leitch said.

Leitch’s Library outreach work has been challenging during the pandemic, but he says JCL staffers have learned a lot and have worked together proactively to overcome obstacles.

“The pandemic has given us an opportunity to think of ourselves as a community,” Leitch said. “We are facing this common foe. It has had a salutary, unifying effect in some ways.”

With the development office and communications team collaborating in harmony, Leitch said the Library is well positioned for the future.

“I think the Library is in the best shape I’ve ever seen it in,” he says. “Everyone is pulling together on the same oar, and things look good.”



Christopher Leitch, Community Relations Coordinator.

EVENTS SPOTLIGHT

Conversation Highlights Remarkable Film about Sumner High

Documentary filmmaker Kamiasha Moses-Tyner graduated in 2003 from the well-regarded Sumner Academy in Kansas City, Kansas. But she never knew the academy's origins as the segregated, all-Black Sumner High School, until she filmed the 40th class reunion for 1973 Sumner High graduate Gerri-Ann Hopkins.

Tyner was captivated by the alumni recollections of Sumner High's extraordinary achievements. Hopkins helped her track down 40 people to interview to bring that history to life. In 2014 Tyner released the documentary film, "Sumner High School: The Best Kept Secret."

On August 5, Johnson County Library highlighted the film with its Past is Prologue program, which seeks to raise public awareness about important stories too often forgotten in history books.

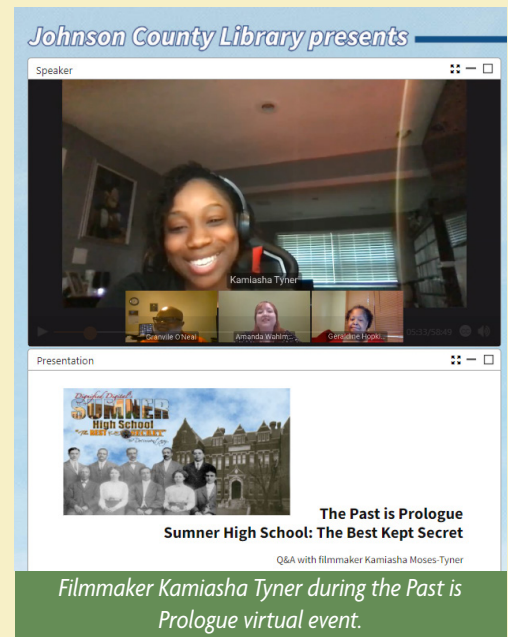
Local History Librarian Amanda Wahlmeier led a lively conversation

featuring Tyner, Hopkins and Granville O'Neal, 1970 Sumner High graduate and the school's archives curator.

They noted that Sumner High School (1905-1978) had highly-credentialed teachers from Ivy League schools, and was renowned nationally for science education in the 1950s. In 1972, legendary music teacher Leon Brady took the Sumner jazz band to Paris, where it excelled at an international music festival. The chess team and sports teams won countless trophies.

"The story is big," Hopkins said. "There are so many exciting stories about people and what they became because they went to Sumner High School."

The school closed in 1978 and became the integrated Sumner Academy magnet school. Hopkins lamented that something profound was lost then, because Sumner High had been the nucleus of Wyandotte County's Black community.



The film is available on Amazon Prime and also available from Tyner's company, Dignified Digital.

Author Brings Monarch Migration Alive for JCL Audience

The monarch butterfly has one of the most incredible migrations in the natural world.

In 2017, Kansas author Sara Dykman followed that migration route from Mexico to Canada and back on her bicycle, in a 10,201-mile journey that captured the beauty, fragility and resilience of these amazing creatures.

Her 2021 book, "Bicycling with Butterflies," brings that extraordinary adventure to life. On July 31, Dykman shared her story with a Johnson County Library audience via Zoom. It was the perfect Summer Reading season finale, with patrons captivated by Dykman's advocacy.

Monarch populations have declined alarmingly in recent years. Dykman's

book and presentations are raising awareness about their plight. The caterpillars desperately need milkweed as their only food source, and the butterflies need native pollinators to sustain them.

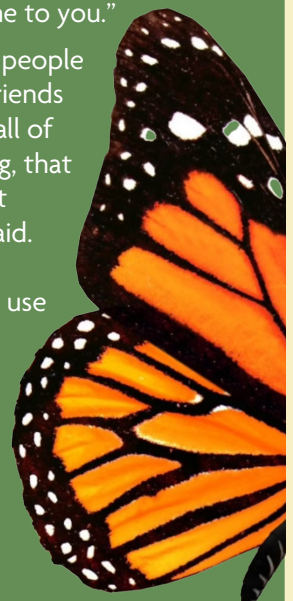
"What I bring to the monarch migration is that human perspective," she said. "I can help people recognize why it's so important that we have gardens, native habitat every single night for these creatures because they are travelers and that's what they need."

She was encouraged by the dedicated Midwestern gardeners she met, including in Johnson County, and said that gardening is what people can do to make an impact.

"Literally every garden counts," she said. "All you have to do is plant milkweed, and the true adventurers, the monarchs, will come to you."

She encouraged people to talk to family, friends and neighbors. "If all of us do a little talking, that is a noise that can't be ignored," She said. "That's a roar. We have the power to use our voice to bring change."

Her book is available at the Library. More information is at beyondabook.org.



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!**



JoCo families are excited to meet Rep. Sharice Davids at her September author event.



Our #BookLoversDay post reached over 7,000 people.



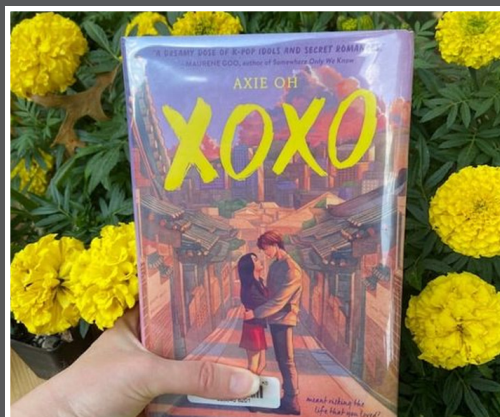
Our live #AskALibrarian events are always popular on Twitter!



We're getting the word out about Library newsletters via Instagram.



Month in Review August 2021



Teen Takeout, a new initiative where teens can receive a free, new-release book and receive volunteer hours for writing a review, launched in August.



Cedar Roe Library received a new sloped roof Aug. 9-13. Look for a fun timelapse video of the process on our website.



The Fall Library Guide hit branch shelves on Aug. 11. The adorable cover art is by local artist Sol Anzorena, who will be displaying additional works at Cedar Roe Library this fall.



Friends of Johnson County Library was featured in a Startland News profile Aug. 12 for their successful implementation of a COVID-related PPP loan.







*Walk and Read, featuring the books *The Koala Who Could* by Rachel Bright and *Mice Squeak, We Speak* by Tomie dePaola, ran in Merriam's Quail Creek Park through Aug. 29.*



As of Aug. 25, the community can drop off unwanted glass at Central Resource Library's new Ripple Glass Recycling container.

NEXT ISSUE



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-  **Branching Out:** Celebrating Dia de los Muertos at Branches
-  **Patron Of The Month:** Martha Gershun, Writing Contest Winner
-  **Staff Spotlight:** Dave Carson, Web Content Developer

JOHNSON COUNTY
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Library

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