



Book Report

SEPTEMBER 2021  VOLUME XXX

Hybrid Meeting Connects Library Board to Public

For the first year of the COVID pandemic, the Johnson County Library board conducted its meetings virtually, with members on Zoom.

But in March 2021, County Librarian Sean Casserley requested that staff create a hybrid experience, one that would allow the board to meet in person and the public to tune in online.

He wanted it to go live with the May 2021 board meeting, so the staff shifted gears very quickly to make that happen.

"You're trying to make a live televised production in about a month," said Ryan Dolan, a Johnson County Library information technology analyst, one of the key people working on the project.

Dolan worked with the IT team, the communications team and other administrators to figure out the best path forward.

Johnson County government had different models to consider. The Parks and Recreation Commission has a one-camera shoot, but Johnson County Library board meetings needed more cameras to work well. The Johnson County Board of Commissioners has an elaborate setup with dedicated production personnel, more than the Library could justify.



Library board members meet at Monticello while the public can watch online.

Dolan discussed the best approach with Dave Carson, multimedia producer on the communications team.

"We had to determine first what our [in-house] skillset was: whether we would staff it and have our own people run the cameras," he explained.

They identified the Monticello branch as a good location, because it has a large meeting room with established audio-visual capability. It could accommodate the Library Board, as well as a presenter, two moderators and members of the public wishing to attend the second Thursday of every month. Board members and presenters could also participate via Zoom and the public could watch via Facebook Live.

Ultimately, Dolan and others decided the best approach was to bring in an experienced company. Two companies were interviewed, and the chosen vendor was Bluefox Production, a Lenexa-based event production company that can do live, virtual and hybrid events. Bluefox also had a good relationship with CCS Presentation Systems, the audio-visual vendor for Monticello.

The Monticello room initially had only six microphones, and 14 were needed, so eight microphones were added, plus an audio input-output feed to record.

Dolan recalls that April was a very intense month of preparation, but everything was in

place for the May 13 board meeting. There were initial glitches, with one bad cable affecting the audio quality, but that got fixed. The lighting also was improved.

"It progressed greatly in June and July," Dolan said. Staff held regular status reviews before and after the meetings, and Dolan says Bluefox was very responsive.

"We found a really good vendor that communicates well," he said. "They follow up on their own service and let us know what they could do technically different and improve upon every single meeting. There's always something that you can learn."

Casserley attends the meetings in person and Dolan monitors the meetings in an AV control room behind the large meeting room.

Feedback from board members and the public has been positive. Allowing board members to meet safely in person has enhanced their discussions.

It was initially stressful, but Dolan says it's been a worthwhile experience. It opened Library officials' eyes to the value of livestreamed and hybrid event programming.

Dolan says it also shows Johnson County Library is not a traditional organization but one that is dedicated to providing "the next level of Library service."

"We are not sitting on our laurels of the Library being just books and online materials but also doing community engagement," he said.



WHAT'S INSIDE



- 2 Branching Out:** Día de los Muertos Program Honors Loved Ones' Memories
- 2 Top 10 Holds:** September 2021
- 3 Patron Spotlight:** Library Writing Contests Inspire Essayist's Talents
- 4 Staff Spotlight:** Web Content Developer Brings Multimedia Talents to the Role
- 5 Event Spotlight:** "Library Lets Loose" Highlights Patron Testimonials; Boosting Resilience in Challenging Times
- 6 Taking a Closer Look:** Social Media Highlights
- 7 Month in Review:** September 2021

BRANCHING OUT

Dia de los Muertos Program Honors Loved Ones' Memories

For many years, Youth Information Specialist Mary Shortino displayed beautiful student artwork at her Library branches, celebrating el Dia de los Muertos (The Day of the Dead).

The program was inspired by the wonderful Mexican holiday in November to honor the dead and keep their spirits alive, and it had become increasingly popular in the United States. The ofrendas (altars or offerings) at Cedar Roe and then Central revealed incredible creativity, color and vibrancy and attracted enthusiastic patron response.

With the pandemic, these in-person displays were no longer possible. But Shortino is determined to persevere in a new way.

This year, she is inviting people of all ages to create an ofrenda in their home or to write a poem or memory or select a photo in honor of a loved one who has died. The submissions will be shared on Facebook, Instagram and the Library website for the whole community to enjoy.

"Personally, all that has happened in the last two years has made me think a lot about grief and about how we process grief and loss," Shortino said. "I love this beautiful custom that helps people experience the most profound of losses, not only with sadness but with joy. I love that this Mexican tradition takes the most tragic thing in



Colorful displays at prior years' events celebrate loved ones who have passed.

a person's life, losing someone that they love, and turns it into a celebration."

Shortino believes Library services can be a way to share those wonderful memories online. It's also a great way to honor the Library's many Spanish-speaking patrons. She is getting the word out to teachers throughout Johnson County. The information is also being disseminated in Spanish.

Shortino, who has an arts background, first created a Dia de los Muertos gallery space at Cedar Roe, when she was a part-time youth specialist working there in 2009. She reached out to teachers and was amazed at the students' artistry. Their families and friends would visit. It was especially meaningful for Hispanic patrons.

"I think there was a certain delight in seeing something that looked familiar. Everyone likes it when their own traditions and culture are recognized, especially in unlikely places," Shortino said. "The Library's philosophy is all about welcoming everyone."

She moved to Central as a full-time youth information specialist in 2016 and kept up the tradition there. Christine Peterson, Latino Outreach Librarian at Oak Park, helped spread the word. One teacher motivated students to create

incredible memorials to their deceased pets. Another had students decorate smooth river stones with distinctive skull imagery.

"I love the iconography. It's really beautiful," Shortino said. "The idea is that we are keeping the people who passed alive and present by welcoming their spirits."

Shortino covered a wall at Central with the art work and invited visitors to write the name of someone they'd lost on a paper butterfly to post on the display. She also had a guestbook where people wrote poignant reflections.

This year, the virtual program is not limited to students but open to everyone throughout Johnson County. A jpeg photo or word document of that creation can be submitted anytime between Oct. 15 and Nov. 15 to JCLEducators@jocogov.org, with "Dia de los Muertos" in the subject line.

Shortino has also created a book list of Library resource materials that directly relate to this, for all ages online.

At a time of great change and challenge, Shortino is pleased Johnson County Library can offer this virtual celebration to patrons, sharing delight and exuberance by keeping memories alive of cherished loved ones.



TOP HOLDS



SEPTEMBER 2021

- Apples Never Fall - Liane Moriarty
- Peril - Bob Woodward
- A Slow Fire Burning - Paula Hawkins
- Cloud Cuckoo Land - Anthony Doerr
- The Last Thing He Told Me - Laura Dave
- The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo - Taylor Jenkins Reid
- The Paper Palace - Miranda Cowley Heller
- The Lincoln Highway - Amor Towles
- The Judge's List - John Grisham
- It Ends with Us - Colleen Hoover

PATRON OF THE MONTH

Library Writing Contests Inspire Essayist's Talents

Martha Gershun is not your typical Library patron.

She doesn't check out books from the branches; she prefers to buy them. But she's a big fan of the Johnson County Library Writing Contests, which attract entries from all sorts of creative people.

"The library is not where I get my books," Gershun said. "It is where I meet people who write."

Gershun had a fulfilling professional career after graduating from Harvard Business School. She worked at Overland Park's Sprint Headquarters, where she met her husband, Don Goldman, and she was a corporate executive for many years. Then she worked in non-profit leadership, including nine years as executive director of Jackson County CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates).

When she retired from full-time work in 2017 she wasn't one to sit on the porch eating bonbons. She had been involved with Kansas City's Writers Place for a long time, and saw information on that organization's website about Johnson County Library's Writing Contests.

Every quarter the Library invites submissions in essay, poetry and short story categories, based on "prompts" or themes to get the writing juices flowing. The Library hosts a reading with the winners and their families and friends. Winning entries are on the Library website.

Gershun has won the essay contest three times. One entry was an eloquent tribute to her father and his pioneering work on Apollo spacecraft. Another was about her amber necklace that once belonged to revolutionary feminist Emma Goldman. She has thoroughly enjoyed the contest winner gatherings, both in person and virtually during the pandemic.

"Writing is such a solitary pursuit," Gershun observed. "One of the best things about this contest is the opportunity to meet other writers

in the Kansas City community."

She's been impressed with the diversity of the people she's met and the quality of their work. Networking in person was fun at Central Resource Library. But a recent virtual gathering also had its benefits.

"People could participate from all over the country," she said. "A number of my friends and relatives who don't live in Kansas City were able to participate."

Gershun praises Librarian Helen Hokanson, who champions local writers.

"Helen is fabulous," Gershun said. "What I appreciate about her is her extraordinary enthusiasm."

Libraries and love of books are in Gershun's blood. Her mother was a public school children's librarian. When Gershun's two children were little, the family frequented the Corinth branch. Those children, Nathan and Sarah, are now grown and are also writers.

One of Gershun's professional jobs was leading the national non-profit Reach Out and Read, which partners with pediatricians to provide books and literacy guidance to families living in poverty.

Gershun lives in Fairway with her husband, who is executive director of Jewish Family Services of Greater Kansas City. Since 2017, she has worked part-time as a leadership consultant to a variety of non-profits.



Martha Gershun, writing contest winner

She has also published two books. The most recent was "Kidney to Share," co-authored with doctor and bioethicist John Lantos and published this year by Cornell Press. It is based on her experience donating a kidney to a stranger and takes readers through that complex process. Gershun and Lantos are now on a virtual book tour, raising awareness about organ donation.

She's also planning more writing contest submissions and is thrilled to be connected to a vibrant writers' community.

"There are more writers than people realize," she said. "We have romance, mystery, science fiction, business writers."

And the writing contests, Gershun emphasizes, are an example of how Johnson County Library is about so much more than just books.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Web Content Developer Brings Multimedia Talents to the Role

Dave Carson, web content developer and multimedia producer for Johnson County Library, brings a passion for storytelling, public speaking, movies, researching and writing to all his communication roles, which helps him thrive in the demanding job.

He cultivated those skills throughout his education and early career, first on the Olathe South High School forensics team in the late 1980s. (He fondly remembers seeing actor Paul Rudd shine in tournament improvisations as a Shawnee Mission West student).

Carson's abilities in humorous and dramatic interpretation helped him earn a scholarship to Kansas State University, where he continued competing in forensics.

"By my senior year we took fourth in the nation," Carson recalls. "I'm pretty proud of that."

He got a master's degree in rhetoric from K-State and taught at a Wichita college and then at Longview Community College. He also worked part-time for several

years at Westport's beloved Tivoli independent movie theater, where he befriended owner Jerry Harrington and saw countless great movies.

In the late 1990s, Carson got a second master's degree in educational technology from the University of Missouri-Columbia, where he helped create multimedia products to assist literacy teachers with their instruction.

From there, he went to work for Iowa Public Television for six years.

"We produced educational multimedia products. They were aired on Iowa Public Television and on National PBS," Carson says. He also helped produce web content, plus educational products on CD-ROMS and DVDs that went to libraries and schools.

By then his own daughter, Hazel, was in elementary school and Carson wanted to return to Johnson County to be closer to family. He saw a Johnson County Library job posting that was a great fit for his skillset.

Carson has been with JCL since February 2007 and has had a big role in three website redesigns, including configuring Library web pages for smartphones. He and colleague Amy Field write a lot of the web content and he's also involved in podcast creation and other initiatives.

He believes strongly in the Library's mission, promoting literacy and lifelong learning and making a positive difference in the community.

"On a personal level," he added, "I enjoy variety and the challenge of learning new things and adapting." Keeping web content current and correct has been particularly urgent and important during the COVID pandemic.

"We are responsible for adding alerts to the website. We had to stay on top of that important messaging, for sure," Carson explained.

Carson produces the "Did You Hear?" monthly podcast, which he co-hosts with Charles Hower. The podcasts share compelling behind-the-scenes interviews and stories about Library staffers, patrons and services.

He's also creating short YouTube video tutorials, introducing young learners to what the Library has to offer. The first videos will soon be released in both English and Spanish, and more will be released over time.

A third initiative involves producing science videos and other educational materials for children living in a Johnson County domestic violence shelter.

Carson lives near downtown Overland Park and enjoys gardening and spending time with his wife, Staci Carson. His daughter Hazel is now 21 and in her senior year at Bard College in New York.

His father, Charles, lives in Gardner and is a loyal Gardner Library patron.

Carson says the work continues to be really engaging and fulfilling.

"The challenge is to reach more audiences as more and more content is available from so many sources," he said. "I enjoy that. It's a puzzle and I think we do a really good job of it."



Dave Carson, Web Content Developer

EVENTS SPOTLIGHT

"Library Lets Loose" Highlights Patron Testimonials

On Sept. 18, the Johnson County Library Foundation celebrated its 25th anniversary at its annual event, Library Lets Loose. The virtual program featured eloquent videotaped testimonials from patrons who have benefited greatly from Library services.

Nagin Cox, a special guest at the event, has been a Jet Propulsion Laboratory systems engineer on multiple planetary robotic missions, including the amazing Mars Rover explorations. The seeds for that incredible career were planted in Johnson County, where she grew up and got her first job as a Corinth Library page.

"When I walked through those doors I could be anyone I wanted to be in the future," she said of the welcoming Corinth Library environment. "It was a portal to possibilities."

She thanked the Foundation and all those who make Johnson County Library such a vibrant community asset.

"I cannot imagine my childhood or my adult life," she said, "without the influence and impact of Libraries."

Latino Outreach Librarian Christine Peterson shared the story of Maria Gonzalez and her family, who came to Overland Park from Mexico. The Library helped provide the language skills they needed to build a wonderful new life.

For Joey Gallagher, diagnosed with a rare brain disease, Johnson County Library has been a place of normalcy, comfort,



Nagin Cox in front of Corinth Library in the early 1980s

fun and knowledge. His mother Leila said programming supported by the Foundation has helped the entire family.

Honorary Hosts Rick and Denise Mills said they are Library Foundation supporters because Johnson County Library has been so important in their lives.

"You look at the value that the Library creates for the community and for the children of the community, our grandchildren, small businesses, people that need resources who can't afford it," Rick Mills said. "What other investment would we make that could have that kind of return to the overall community?"

Boosting Resilience in Challenging Times

This fall, Johnson County Library's Early Literacy Program is partnering with Johnson County Mental Health on a series of online workshops assisting children and their caregivers to persevere through challenging times.

The first workshop, recorded Sept. 1, gives parents and other caregivers tools to boost their emotional well-being, so they can be at their best for their little ones.

Speaker Katherine Melton, community prevention coordinator with Johnson County Mental Health, led a workshop entitled, "Building a Resilient You: Finding Peace in Times of Stress."

"Resilience is that ability to adapt and overcome adversity, stress, significant stress factors, trauma, tragedy," Melton

told the audience. "And throughout all those adversities that you are experiencing, you are able to achieve positive outcomes regardless of the events or the circumstances that you are facing."

She said research shows resilience is something that can be learned and cultivated. Coping strategies include mindfulness training, exercise, getting past unhelpful thoughts, identifying support networks, fostering self-compassion, making time for fun and relaxation, volunteering to help others and celebrating accomplishments.

"We often as a culture feel like we have to go, go, go," Melton said. "It's important that we allow ourselves that

time to stop, pause and be present in the moment. Let's find ways to do that."

For people wanting more information, Melton said Johnson County Mental Health is a great resource, reachable at 913-826-4200.

The October 6 workshop was devoted to understanding preschoolers' feelings. The November 2 program, at 7 p.m., will feature kids' cookbook author and blogger Amy Palanjian. The December 8 program, at 7 p.m., will focus on early literacy with Dr. Marnie Ginsberg, founder of Reading Simplified.

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!**



**SHARICE DAVIDS
YOUTH AUTHOR
EVENT & CONTEST**

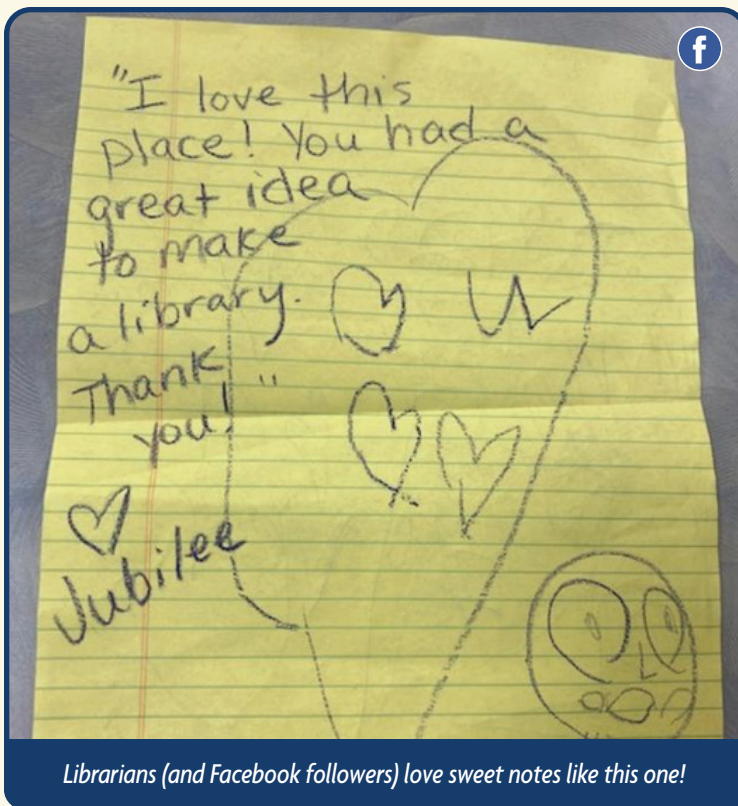
This Instagram post on where to find information on "tough topics" had the month's highest engagement rate.



Johnson County Library
@jocolibrary

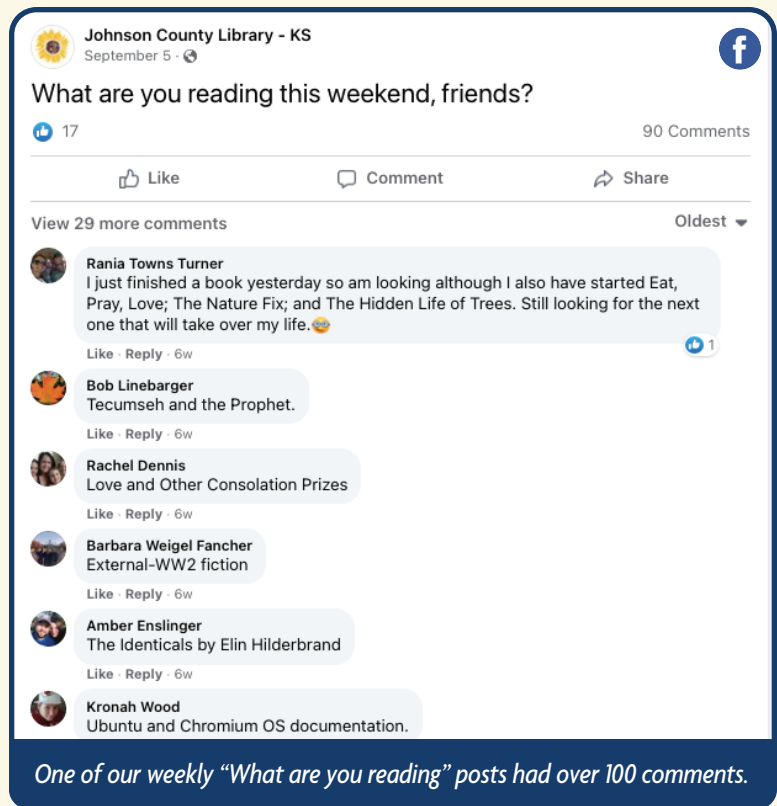
What book was your gateway to a whole new genre or non-fiction rabbit hole/deep dive? [#AskALibrarian](#)

Twitter users loved this post from the Library's weekly #AskALibrarian event.



"I love this place! You had a great idea to make a library. Thank you! Jubilee"

Librarians (and Facebook followers) love sweet notes like this one!



Johnson County Library - KS
September 5

What are you reading this weekend, friends?

17 likes 90 Comments

Like Comment Share

View 29 more comments Oldest

- Rania Towns Turner**
I just finished a book yesterday so am looking although I also have started Eat, Pray, Love; The Nature Fix; and The Hidden Life of Trees. Still looking for the next one that will take over my life.
- Bob Linebarger**
Tecumseh and the Prophet.
- Rachel Dennis**
Love and Other Consolation Prizes
- Barbara Weigel Fancher**
External-WW2 fiction
- Amber Enslinger**
The Identicals by Elin Hilderbrand
- Kronah Wood**
Ubuntu and Chromium OS documentation.

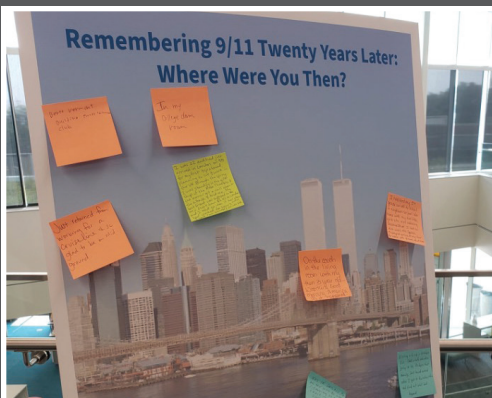
One of our weekly "What are you reading" posts had over 100 comments.



Month in Review September 2021



Commissioner Janeé Hanzlick, the Library's liaison from the Board of County Commissioners, toured Central Resource Library on Sept. 10, sharing her excitement about the new space's progress on Facebook.



Patrons and staff shared their memories of Sept. 11, 2001 through displays at several branches.



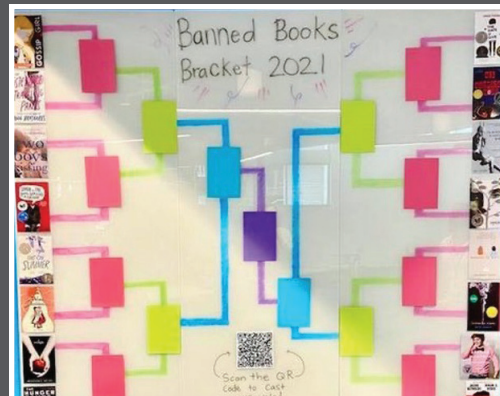
On Sept. 18, Kansas 3rd district congresswoman Sharice Davids joined co-author Nancy Mays and illustrator Joshua Mangeshig Pawis-Steckley for a conversation about the art and story in new book "Sharice's Big Voice."



Oak Park Library reopened Sept. 20 after a week-long closure for electrical safety upgrades and a refresh of staff workspaces.







Artist Nate Hofer was one of the five recipients of the Global Peace Photo Award's Alfred Fried Peace Medal on Sept. 21 in Vienna, Austria. Hofer's award-winning photo series "One and a Half Acres: Images from Missouri's 150 Decommissioned Missile Silos" is on display at Lenexa City Center Library until Dec. 21.



Teens at Lenexa City Center Library voted on their favorite Banned Books during the month of September for the branch's Banned Book Bracket Contest. The winner was crowned during Banned Books Week, Sept. 26 – Oct. 2.

NEXT ISSUE



-  **Cover Story:** Incarcerated Services Justice Cards
-  **Branching Out:** Beautiful Art Returns to Libraries
-  **Patron Of The Month:** Former Branch Manager Now Oversees Building Safety
-  **Staff Spotlight:** Larry Leighton, Extraordinary Library Volunteer

JOHNSON COUNTY
KANSAS
Library

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