

Book Report

Library Successes, Highlights of 2021

Johnson County Library achieved much success in 2021 despite the pandemic – and in many cases, prodded by the pandemic.

Expanded online programming, digital board meetings, curbside pickup and new summer reading outreach were just a few innovations necessitated by COVID.

Johnson County Librarian Sean Casserley and Deputy Librarian Tricia Suellentrop praise staff for responding to this unprecedented challenge in amazing ways.

“The staff carried us through,” Casserley says. “Their innovation, their resilience, their flexibility and their commitment to the Public Library as an institution were just amplified....

There hasn’t been a problem that they haven’t found a creative solution.”

For Suellentrop, the word to describe colleagues is “unstoppable.” No matter the situation posed by a scary virus, she said, “I feel like our staff in the best way was able to figure it out.”

There are too many highlights to enumerate, but a few include:

Online programming, which improved since 2020. Casserley notes the 2021 Writers Conference and many other events brought in authors and presenters remotely at a lower cost than in-person would require. Renowned poet Kwame Alexander headlined summer reading’s start. Nagin Cox of NASA/JPL was a special guest for Library Lets Loose. PBS journalist Yamiche Alcindor appears in February 2022. Much of this programming lives on via Library OnDemand, dramatically increasing audience views.

Digital board meetings, which promotes transparency and is welcomed by people who can’t attend in person. “If the public wants to know the Library business or have oversight of where their money is being spent,” Casserley said, “they can connect and see us in real time.”

Curbside service. It’s a convenience for patrons, especially people with mobility issues or young children. It has also been a great solution when branches close for maintenance. “We found that in spades this summer at Cedar Roe,” Suellentrop said.

Innovative outreach. COVID compelled the Library to get summer reading books to families through partner agencies. Casserley says that approach reached children who might never visit a library and sets a new path for the future. Online book clubs filled up immediately with kids, parents and grandparents and was another model worth replicating.

Great partnerships. The Library had positive collaborations with County Government on facilities, fleet and security. “Crises can either divide or bring people together,” Casserley says, noting that county leaders “have really gone the extra mile” to work with the Library.

The same goes for working with Lenexa, Merriam, Shawnee, Overland Park and the county Election Office. Six Library locations had boxes for ballot returns.

Central’s renovation. Central has been transformed and reopens 2/22/22. Staff office upgrades greatly improve efficiency. The public benefits from a new drive-thru, better meeting spaces and a new children’s area.

“It’s exceeding my expectations,” Casserley said of the CBU2 project.

Some system-wide innovations have positively affected staff. At regular online meetings, more staffers could attend and ask questions, as administrators sought to improve communication. New moms could stay home with babies or sick children and still join in virtual meetings.

Other successes noted by Library managers: a new marketing campaign, new materials handling approaches and IT and security innovations. Staff is also starting to dream about an Early Literacy mobile learning project.



The Central Building Upgrade, Part 2 gives us a bright, colorful kids space.



Patrons were able to pick up a Summer Reading book at parks around Johnson County.

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Casserley says Johnson County Library has demonstrated that Libraries are more essential than ever, during a time of uncertainty and political upheaval. “We are the only neutral space in the community that doesn’t take a side and says to the American people, we provide information, and you get to make your own mind up on that topic.... Ultimately, it’s life enriching.”

BRANCHING OUT

Central's Renovation Offers Better Collection Layout

Everyone is eagerly awaiting Central Resource Library's renovation completion and reopening on Tuesday, Feb. 22, 2022.

Many improvements are to the staff spaces, delivery dock and other back-office areas to facilitate more efficient Library operations. But some major changes will directly benefit the public, including with the collection. The adult fiction section has been reconfigured for better access and flow. And the children's section has been relocated and beautifully transformed, with new shelving and collection spacing.



Elena McVicar, youth collection specialist

Elena McVicar, a youth collection specialist who is a key team member for the project, said that the renovation allowed staff to rethink the collection layout, while patrons weren't in the building.

"With an eye toward future projects, we decided to get ahead of those and reconfigure how fiction is shelved," she said.

After four days of rearranging – 24 solid hours of work – in November, Adult Fiction now starts toward the front of the branch, then flows into Mystery and Sci-Fi, and McVicar said this new configuration makes more sense. She is also very excited about the new children's section.

"There are giant windows," McVicar explained. "Really beautiful window seats. That's a lovely change. That'll be great. It'll be really welcoming and inviting for kids and their parents."

This reconfiguration was not an easy task. Central's renovation posed three key challenges for the Collection Development Team: first, "shadowing" the branch's collection so it wouldn't circulate during construction, and then preparing for the new kids' area and the re-imagined adult fiction section.

"Between those three projects, a lot of people were involved," said McVicar, who worked with Collection Development Manager Lacie Griffin, Circulation Manager Michelle Olsen, Bibliographic Services Manager Jason Barnes and System Administrator Pat Beers. Many other staffers helped with specific tasks.

While Central has been under construction, McVicar explained, staff pulled a "digital blanket" over its collection so patrons wouldn't see it on the website and create confusion by checking out those materials. Most of Central's collection stayed on the

shelves and was wrapped in plastic to protect it. Patrons could still pick up Holds transferred from other branches to "Little Central," the part of the building that stayed open to the public.

McVicar worked with Abby Giersch, project manager for Johnson County government, who communicated with architects on the kids' area design and layout. The number of books isn't changing, but shelving is increasing to better accommodate Juvenile fiction. The shelves were also upgraded to match new shelves throughout the system and make books on the top shelves easier to reach.

This project was a labor of love for McVicar, who has helped with opening both Monticello and Lenexa and enjoys the challenge of preparing for new and renovated buildings. She said it's wonderful to see years of planning finally come together so well.

"It's reaching its final state now," she said, "and we are seeing what I had in my head come into reality."



Elena McVicar works with staff to move the collection to its new shelves.

TOP HOLDS

DECEMBER 2021

-  **Wish You Were Here** - Jodi Picoult
-  **The Lincoln Highway** - Amor Towles
-  **Apples Never Fall** - Liane Moriarty
-  **Never** - Ken Follett
-  **The Judge's List** - John Grisham
-  **Atlas of the Heart: Mapping Meaningful Connection and the Language of Human Experience** - Brené Brown
-  **The Stranger in the Lifeboat** - Mitch Albom
-  **Verity** - Colleen Hoover
-  **The Family** - Naomi Krupitsky
-  **The Real Anthony Fauci: Bill Gates, Big Pharma, and the Global Way on Democracy and Public Health** - Robert Francis Kennedy

PATRON OF THE MONTH

JCL is Invaluable to Patron Writing Dissertation

Kristy Howell's life and career accomplishments exemplify the incredible value of community colleges and libraries.

As Sustainability Education and Engagement Coordinator at Johnson County Community College, she works with faculty and students to promote environmental sustainability, effective resource management and social equity and justice during this challenging era of climate change. She appreciates how the college makes sustainability a top priority.

But she also has the heart of a historian, and from 2017 to 2020 pursued her doctorate in higher education leadership from Northern Illinois University. Her dissertation was a comparative case study of two community colleges created in white flight towns, including JCCC. For that research, Johnson County Library was a vital source of information and support.

"The Resource Librarians at Central were amazing," Howell now says, praising them for guiding her to the Johnson County newspaper articles she needed, plus providing the equipment to read the microfilm. (She hopes someday those Johnson County newspapers can be digitized online).

Then, while writing her thesis in late 2019, she frequently camped out at the Lenexa City Center Library that had just opened. She found she was more productive there than at home.

"It is so welcoming," she said of Lenexa's atmosphere. "The chairs are absurdly comfortable. There are those windows. Lots of good sunlight. Lots of just lovely space."

She admits she had "dissertation brain" and was often distracted, forgetting keys, water bottles, even a research folder.

The Lenexa Librarians kindly helped her retrieve lost items.

"God love them," she says.

Her timing was lucky. She completed her research before the pandemic erupted. She defended her doctoral thesis via Zoom in March 2020 and graduated in May 2020.

"I thanked both Lenexa and Central Resource in my dissertation acknowledgements for the resources that they had, and [for] helping me," Howell now says. Her doctoral studies gave her greater insights into this area's history, plus practical tools for effective community college administration.

But her involvement with community colleges and Libraries did not start in Johnson County. She has been steeped in those institutions her entire life.

She grew up in Mississippi, where her mother was a grade school teacher, and her father was on the music faculty at Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College. She hung out at the Wiggins Public Library and fondly recalls Miss Simpson, the head Librarian who introduced her to Newbery and Caldecott winning books, which Howell devoured.

"Like Kurt Vonnegut says, 'Librarians are my favorite people,'" Howell says. "Librarians and archivists make my day."

She attended the community college and got her bachelor's degree in history from Southern Mississippi, where she was immersed in civil rights studies. She met her husband, Thomas, who specialized in military and European history. The couple decided they shouldn't both be historians, so she got her master's degree in sustainability from Western Kentucky University.



Kristy Howell, a doctoral student who relied on great JCL resources.

While at Kentucky, she had become familiar with JCCC's nationally-recognized professional development webinars. So, when JCCC posted the sustainability coordinator position, she applied and got the job in June 2014.

The couple moved to Overland Park and Thomas began teaching history at Kansas City's Metropolitan Community College. Their home is within walking distance of Central Resource Library, and Howell eagerly awaits its reopening.

In her spare time, Howell is an avid knitter and long-distance runner. She enhances those activities by listening to e-audiobooks through Johnson County Library's Axis 360 app.

"The Library is always in my pocket," she said. "I know it's a different way to use the Library, but it's also one that truly keeps me sane, and I love it."

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Information Specialist Also A Singer-Songwriter

Adam Hummell enjoys his job as an adult information specialist at the Monticello and De Soto Library branches.

But Hummell also appreciates the fact that the Library job is part-time, which leaves him space for other creative pursuits. He writes poetry and composes and performs his own songs under the artist name Adam Astra (based on the Kansas state motto).



Adam Hummell, adult information specialist

“My earliest work was released under the name Adam of the Universe, but I transitioned away from this name when I released my last single in 2020,” he said. “I’m currently working on a collection of poetry and my second E.P. (extended play musical record), which I hope to release in the spring of 2022. I’m also working on a covers project highlighting the songs of Leonard Cohen.”

He’s a mostly self-taught musician. Libraries have played a big role in his education and creativity.

“I would always leave with just about as many books as I could carry,” he recalled. He grew up in Topeka and was a regular Topeka Public Library patron. He leaned towards literary fiction but over the years, through annual reading challenges, has branched out to many other genres.

His initial music forays consisted of writing lyrics in notebooks and singing into a tape recorder. After graduating from Topeka West High School, he learned to play the guitar.

Hummell moved to Emporia for a few years, where he lived in a house with other musicians, so became more comfortable performing for other people.

He eventually moved to Lawrence, where he has lived for about 13 years. He worked at Hastings Books Music & Video and also got a liberal arts associate’s degree from Johnson County Community College.

As a regular Lawrence Public Library patron, he found materials that fueled his musical development. “I was getting into jazz,” he said. “I would pick out their CDs.”

While at JCCC he met another student, who was working at the Lawrence Library and encouraged him to apply. His retail and supervisory experience helped him get the job. He worked at the Lawrence Library for five years, helping to transition the old branch to a newly renovated branch.

Then in September 2016, he was hired as a page at Johnson County Library’s Gardner branch. He was

promoted to clerk and helped open the Monticello branch in 2018. He became an information specialist in December 2020.

“It’s a nice branch and quite busy,” Hummell said. He relishes working the desk, assisting patrons and sharing reader advisory duties. He considers himself a “reference book geek,” and recently wrote a Library review of DK Publishing.

He also enjoys working Tuesday afternoons in the De Soto branch, where he’s gotten to know a lot of the kids using the computers.

He got married several years ago to Emily McDonald, who works at the Lawrence Public Library. They bought a house in October and are now creating shelving for their large book collection.

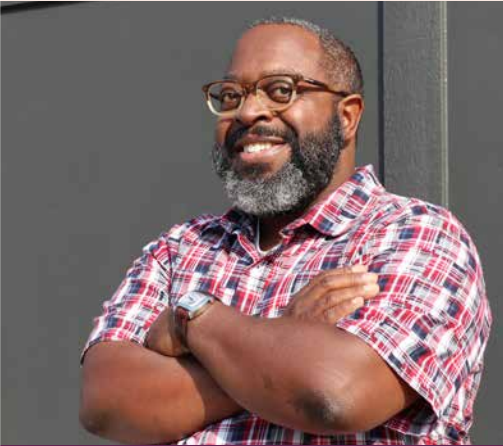
Hummell leaves his mornings free for writing, music and recording. His latest single was released on Spotify and Pandora and he has original songs and covers on YouTube. He’s also submitted poetry to various outlets and says Johnson County Library is a great resource for those opportunities.

After five years with Johnson County Library, he’s especially grateful for wonderful colleagues who are smart, curious and engaging. “I feel like I have a friend at every branch,” he said. “I have co-workers that I love to talk about movies with, we talk about gardening, beer, anything. You always have something interesting to talk about.”

EVENTS SPOTLIGHT

Poets Discuss Power of Language, Quest for Radical Kindness

Michael Kleber-Diggs grew up in Kansas and now lives in St. Paul, Minn. His debut poetry collection “Worldly Things” was published by Milkweed Editions in June 2021 and won the prestigious Max Ritvo Poetry prize.



Author Michael Kleber-Diggs

Hadara Bar-Nadav teaches in the University of Missouri-Kansas City MFA program. Her award-winning books include *The New Nudity*, published in 2017. She helped copy-edit *Worldly Things* and came away mesmerized by its vitality.

On Dec. 7, Kleber-Diggs and Bar-Nadav held an online authors’ conversation hosted by Johnson County Library. They read from their works and treated their audience to eloquent insights about the power of poetry to summon forth a better humanity.

Kleber-Diggs was eight years old in 1976 when his father, a dentist, was killed in his dental office by a thief seeking drugs. Bar-Nadav’s father died in 2007 after years of battling Lyme disease. They shared how poetry helped them confront those profound losses to emerge more fearless and hopeful.

Kleber-Diggs said his father, and fatherhood in general, will be ongoing themes in his writing. Many of his poems seek a more empathetic world, a place of “radical kindness.”

He teaches poetry and creative non-fiction through the Minnesota Prison Writers Workshop, which has been an honor and an incredible learning experience. He is inspired by his students’ talent, dedication, hard work and willingness to write about their most difficult emotions and experiences.

Bar-Nadav said poets give voice to the overlooked and those who suffer in silence.

“My father still calls to me to write poems,” she said. “This is the gift of poetry. It makes me listen more and larger and better.”

Master Storyteller Captivates Library Audience

Sherry Norfolk of St. Louis is a master storyteller whose presentations capture the potency of the spoken word to educate and engage young children.



Storyteller Sherry Norfolk

“I believe that learning should and can be joyful, meaningful and active, and that the arts are the catalyst and engine of that experience,” she says on her website.

Norfolk brought her boundless enthusiasm to a Johnson County Library audience via a special online Storytime on Dec. 3. About 30 families tuned in for her energetic, fast-paced program that invited lots of audience participation.

Host Lisa Nason, a youth information specialist, welcomed children and parents. “It looks like we have a fun crowd this morning,” she said. “I think we’re in for a real treat.”

Nason was right.

Norfolk has performed all over the world but has learned to adapt her presentations online during the pandemic. Her theme Dec. 3 was HEAR THE BEAT, featuring rollicking tales filled with animals, rhythm, rhyme and songs that riveted her young audience.

Unlike many Storytimes, this one did not provide a presenter reading and turning pages of a book. Instead, Norfolk brought the stories to life. She acted out scenes with an amazing physicality, voicing a host of different characters and punctuating the action with singing and dancing.

She had the kids singing and grooving to the rhythms in their living rooms or kitchens.

It was a vivid example of how children’s stories and rhyming activities can cultivate early literacy skills. One commenter wrote in the chat, “Hooray for awesome storytelling.”

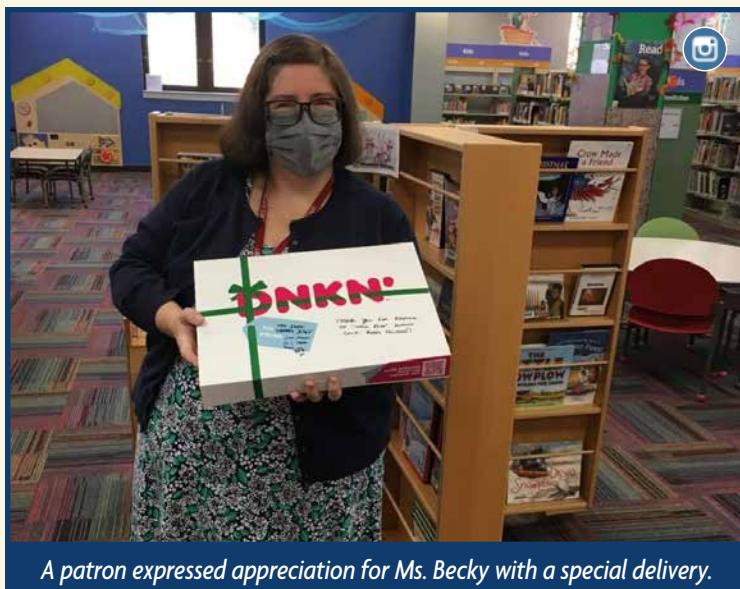
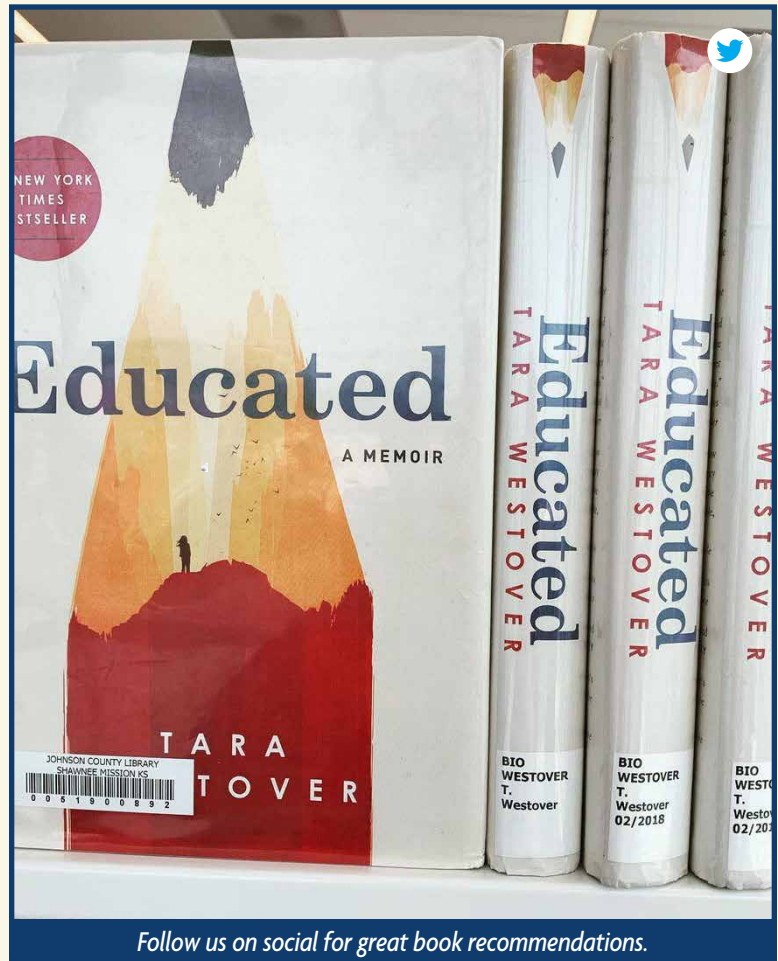
Norfolk concluded with appreciation for Libraries.

“There are so many more stories in books at the Library,” she said. “I hope that you get a chance to check out thousands of books and read.”

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!*





Month in Review December 2021

9:24

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JOHNSON COUNTY LIBRARY

Active Requests

The Sinatra Christmas album.
Sinatra, Frank

Details Actions

Transaction Number 1277089 Request Sent

Our Interlibrary Loan website, ILLiad, got a new look in December. New features include a mobile friendly interface and the ability to change a request before it's been submitted to the lending library.



The Friends of Johnson County Library is rolling out a plan to resume donation pickups at branches, beginning with a soft launch at the Blue Valley Library.

Spring 2022 Guide

Johnson County LIBRARY

The Spring 2022 Guide, featuring intriguing cover art by mixed-media artist Kathy Liao, arrived in branches.

The Operations group focuses on implementation Library strategy developed by Administration. In December, we welcomed seven new members to the team.

Join The **Movement**

2022 HONOREE

2022 HONOREE

Lift Her Up
Angel Jewel Tucker
Administrator & Manager
Johnson County Library

Youth Services Manager Angel Tucker was chosen as a LIFT HER UP honoree for 2022. LIFT HER UP recognizes women trailblazers and history makers in the Kansas City area.

The Merry Marmalade

Kronik's Special Swirls

This imaginative collection of Lego creations is now on display at our Leawood Pioneer location! Stop by to see all of the exciting constructions assembled by this sister-brother-mom team of builders.

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JOHNSON COUNTY KANSAS

Library

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