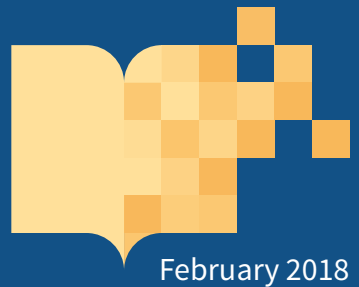


Johnson County Library Monthly Book Report



Creators Use Satire and Song to Speak to the Challenges and Beauty of Being Black

Two library programs in January served as opening acts for Black History Month. The satirical film “Destination: Planet Negro!” drew around 130 adults who casually ate popcorn while digesting director Kevin Willmott’s far from casual solution to Jim Crow segregation of the ‘30s.

Set in 1939, the film traces a group of African-American leaders who devise an ingenious and unlikely response to segregation. They build a rocket and send three people to Mars to enjoy equality only to arrive in present day America. Willmott’s irony and wit drew laughs while underscoring the stupidity of our racially biased society no matter the date or point in time.

Early into the film, the three passengers to Mars realize that their journey has gone terribly wrong and that they’ve landed in Kansas City in 2010. They are shocked to learn electing the country’s first black president hasn’t solved discrimination. Writer/director Kevin Willmott of “CSA: The Confederate States of America” fame, devises an ingenious way to view modern-day America. It’s the classic fish out of water template, and at times the execution is masterful.

Top Ten



Top Ten January Holds

The Woman in the Window | A.J. Finn

Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House | Michael Wolff

The Great Alone | Kristin Hannah

Little Fires Everywhere | Celeste Ng

Before We Were Yours | Lisa Wingate

The Wife Between Us | Greer Hendricks

The Immortalists | Chloe Benjamin

Still Me | Jojo Moyes

The Rooster Bar | John Grisham

Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine
| Gail Honeyman



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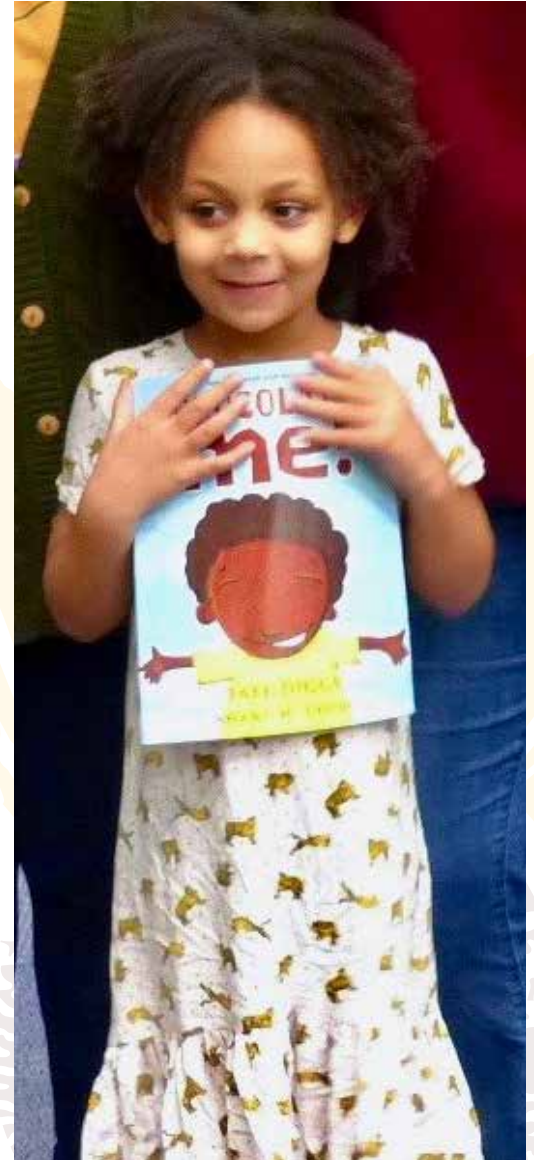
Catering to a much younger audience, author, musician and illustrator Shane W. Evans had 125 children and parents finger snapping to his song, “I’m a Rainbow,” on January 20. Evans’ quiet demeanor and musical talent registered with the audience as he sang, “A rainbow of colors is shining through my soul.”

Evans signed copies of the book he illustrated in collaboration with author Taye Diggs, “Chocolate Me!” Written for elementary school children, the book tells a story of a boy who thinks he’d rather have his classmates’ names, hair and skin color to fit in. The boy’s mother helps him see himself in a more positive light by comparing his skin to rich chocolate.

Evans engaged his fans and students from Shawanoe Elem. with groovy lyrics, poems and a talk about his current work traveling the country drawing pictures of people of all colors. He is up to about 300 illustrations now.

The energy in the room that Saturday morning matched the high vibration message of accepting and respecting yourself, which was the core of Evans’ talk.

Both Planet Negro and Chocolate Me served as poignant programs to precede Black History Month.



Branching out

The Story of the Little Library that Could and Did: How Lackman Grew from a Shoebox Library into an Urban Destination

Once upon a time the Lackman branch resided in a tiny grade school with only 3,000 books to share with 800 residents. It was only open two-hours a day because it couldn't afford to hire a staff and depended on volunteers.

That was 1954, flash forward to today, the Lackman branch resides in 18,000 square feet, serving approximately 40,000 patrons served by 19 employees under the direction of Johnson County Library Branch Manager Leslie Nord.

Nord has served as branch manager for the past decade and has been instrumental in working with the City of Lenexa to solidify details of the branches new building at Lenexa City Center close to 87th and Renner Boulevard in 2019.



That's when the little branch that could becomes a destination branch. It will have an open connecting gallery space and a drive-up window with automated conveyance and more amenities than ever imagined.

The two-story mega library will weigh in at 40,000 square feet with a shared auditorium space with the Lenexa Park and Recreation department, an outdoor amphitheatre destined for open mike night and a two-story reading room fully decked out with a \$200,000 glass art installation by Stephen T. Johnson. Johnson is a nationally recognized artist and the author of "Alphabet City," which won the New York Times best illustrated book of the year.

Hollis + Miller Architects is designing the \$21.1 million library and they are sketching outside the lines of boxy libraries of the past. Hollis + Miller's rendering puts Johnson County Library system one step closer to landing on the Top 100 most beautiful libraries list for the first time (if the soon-to-open Monticello branch doesn't land the honor first).

Looks Plus Personality

Let's put looks aside for a minute. The true success of the Lackman branch's longevity stems from the culture of caring the staff has shown the community the past 40 years. Nord says that the Lackman branch attracts easy-going friendly patrons – 120 per hour in the summer – and that the library is known for being a noisy community hub of activity.

"The days of the hush-hush library are over," Nord says. "When you have 200 or more people at events, with most of them being children, it's not going to be a quiet affair."

Our patrons love to visit, laugh and participate loudly in events. "It's a joy to see the community interacting, making connections and just having fun in the library," Nord says.

Many Lackman library patrons are regulars who come in every day to get their community fix, according to Nord.

To take this sense of community to a new level her staff created Wacky Wednesday. Each summer her staff dresses in costume and holds scavenger hunts for the kids. “It’s the most popular event we do,” Nord says.

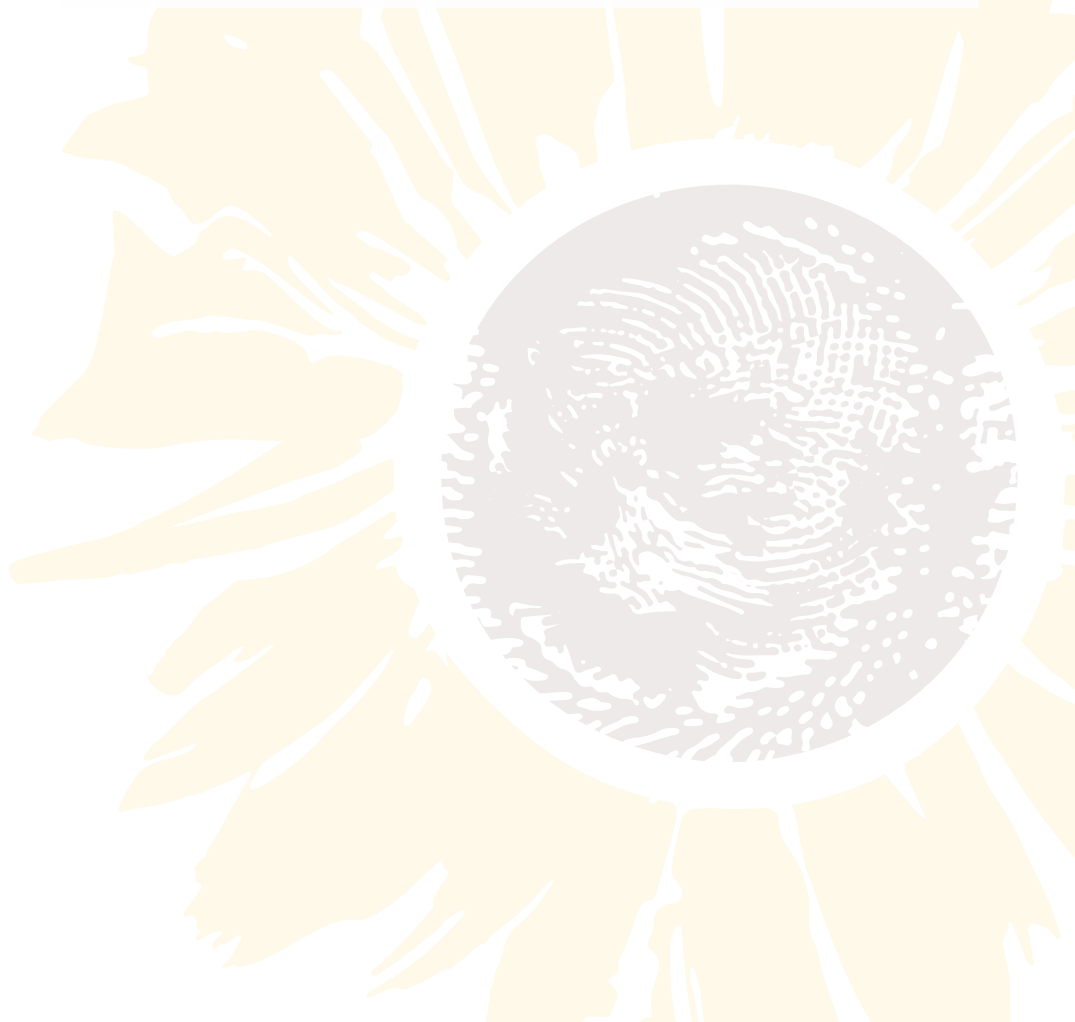
The most purposeful thing the library does is changing people’s lives, according to Nord. It sounds a bit over the top for a library, but it happens daily.

Nord shared a library experience when an aunt brought her two nephews in to check out some books. One of the boys found a bookmark inside waiting for him like a prize in a Cracker Jack box. It read, “Please have courage and know someone cares about you.”

The boy was taken aback finding the bookmark tried to give the bookmark back to Nord rather than keep it.

The boys’ aunt pulled Nord aside and in between her sobs told her that the boys’ mother had died that week. She said what a wonderful gift that the bookmark’s message was just what the boys needed to hear on that day.

Lives are touched in a deep way every day at Johnson County Library. That’s what makes working here such a privilege, Nord says.



Taking a closer look



January's "What are you reading this weekend, friends?" posts got **Over 200** responses on Facebook



Throwback Thursday post on Twitter had got great reach, over **20K**



More than **1500** people clicked from social media posts to our blog posts, during these first few weeks of the blog on our home page being live.

Our main blog page, also landed in the **top 10** pages of our site visited during its first week live.



With a reach on Twitter of over **115K**, our post about Outlaw the adoptable dog was a standout.



Our blog post and its social media shares got over **50** clicks - we're looking forward to seeing some new entries in our Writing Contests!



120
new net
Facebook fans



60
new net
Twitter followers

How the Library is Delivering on its 2014 Strategic Plan

Four years ago, library stakeholders spent 10 months researching needs and visioning how the library can expand, improve and provide value to people's lives.

It was an immense undertaking to data mine and to capture details from all generations, races and ages. More monumental yet, is the outcomes since the plan was adopted.

The plan guided the library into growing, modernizing, automating and diversifying programming. It's also elevated its customer service from being process to people driven. Enter any of the 13 branches today, and you'll receive concierge service similar to that of a Barnes and Noble instead of an old-school library.



Behind the scenes and on the front lines, executors of the plan are hitting it out of the park in three areas:

1. Education
2. Community building
3. Building in conveniences, customer service and technology typically only seen at companies on the leading edge.

Plan. Do. Act. Prepare for Growth.

Many strategic plans are written with the best intentions. However, we know too many get shelved when organizations get sidetracked with digital disruptions, economic downturns or lack of leadership. This hasn't been the case under the guidance of Executive Director Sean Casserley who was charged with putting a strong strategic plan in place from the day he joined the leadership team in 2012.

"The plan we developed wasn't just ink on paper. It was proactive and actionable from day one thanks to 94 percent of our nearly 400 employees having total buy-in, ensured we walked our talk," says Casserley.

One of the biggest results of the strategic plan was making the capital portion come to fruition, says Casserley. Breaking ground on two new buildings after decades of planning was our biggest coup. The addition of the Monticello branch in 2018 and the Lenexa City Center branch in 2019 will ensure Johnson County Library stays in front of the anticipated 30 percent population growth arriving by 2035.

Diversity Realized

Since he first joined Johnson County Library, Casserley sees more people of all walks of life visiting the branches. Thanks to our commitment to being welcoming to all and our wider range of programming, our clientele is now vastly diverse.

"I can see more people who represent the communities we serve coming to the library for meetings, programming or to study," Casserley says.

Because our staff is living the brand and creating an environment of acceptance, our clientele has broadened, says Casserley. Johnson County, Kan., is no longer white. It's a melting pot of life timers, transplants, immigrants and multi-language speaking patrons.

In turn our programming has widened to accommodate these new groups, including artists, parents, students, retirees, entrepreneurs, hobbyists, academics and the displaced. Casserley says his staff has

learned to commoditize its programming and offer it across the entire organization. Doing so allows the library to serve the community in a deeper way cost effectively.

Ears Wide Open

There's more work ahead to solidify the library's role of becoming the choice destination to quench one's hunger for information and entertainment.

That's why Johnson County Library is partnering with more and more organizations to provide what the community wants without always having to build the program from scratch. It partners with public radio to stream music; with Tutors.com to provide academic coaching, with artists to provide installations and talks and with the University of Kansas Public Management Center to provide an unbiased viewpoint on how the library's work is being received by the public.

Casserley and his staff accept the honesty and objectivity with open arms and minds.

Full Speed Ahead

The next steps of the capital plan include the addition of a Blue Valley location near 151st street in 2022. Public input was gathered fall 2017 that is directing ongoing meetings with the City of Overland Park.

Until then Johnson County Library is following the plan closely as well as the advice of the late inspirational author Catherine Pulsifer who once said, "You are the best author of your own future."

Jennifer Barnett Fox Hired to Bring Outside Perspective to Library

Like her last name, Jennifer is clever, intelligent and scrappy in her dedication to keep her skills sharp for the work she does for Johnson County Library and in the community.

She was hired nearly a year and half ago as brand manager because of her subject matter expertise in marketing.

Jennifer's experience includes a master's degree in Integrated Marketing Communications from the University of Kansas and is an alumni of Seth Godin's altMBA curriculum — an intense four-week collaborative course with entrepreneurs across the globe delivering 13 projects at the eleventh hour.

Her commitment to collaborate and deliver shines through on the Customer Experience team where she works with the team to problem solve and ensure library patrons leave the library having an outstanding experience.

After work, Jennifer teaches yoga classes at the Overland Park community center. She is married, has two cats and loves to travel. She is always looking forward to her next travel adventure.

Each year she sets a reach goal. Last summer it was walking The West Highland Way, a 96-mile walk from Milngavie to Fort William in Scotland. This year it is a 100 mile-century ride in Tahoe to raise money for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Foundation through Team in Training. Whatever it is, Jennifer will make sure it is milestone, meaningful and of service to people.



The Month in Review



Author, Musician and Illustrator Shane W. Evans shares excerpts from “Chocolate Me” which he illustrated in collaboration with author Taye Diggs. Approximately 130 children and parents left inspired to create and be their most authentic selves following the talk and book signing.



Provident Dickerson, 7, and her sister Zoe, 4, enjoyed a snack at Central Library prior to Shane W. Evans’s talk about his work and illustrations in the book “Chocolate Me.”



Caitlin Perkins and Ann Scida, owner of Joe’s Cellar, a restaurant inside the Mission Road Antique Mall, strike a pose before the Edible discussion and potluck t at Corinth branch on January 8.



Angel Tucker introduces author and Illustrator Shane W. Evans to a group of 130 admirers who came to his book signing and talk at the Central Library on January 20.



Jacob Meyer, videographer at Great Plains SPCA, teaches participants how to take better photos at the Antioch library branch on January 27.

The Month in Review



Renee Wasinger is an instructor at Accelerated School of Overland Park where she teaches high school students how to design products every Friday in the Black & Veatch MakerSpace.



Liam Griffiths, 10, reads to Monty, a six-year-old Shetland sheepdog, at the Leawood Branch as part of the read to a dog program, which occurs twice a month.



Young reader at Leawood branch strikes a pose.



More than 130 parents and kids enjoyed seeing the books, illustrations, shirts and hats created by author and illustrator Shane W. Evans at his book signing on January 20 at the Central Library.



One of Renee Wasinger's students shows a plaque he made as an assignment for Accelerated School of Overland Park.



Gretta Wasinger creates product artwork as part of her curriculum to learn to be an entrepreneur.