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Art at the Libraries Educates, Inspires and Delights

The bold, beautiful floral paintings that have graced the walls of Blue Valley Library for the past few months give information specialist Rachel Novotny a boost every time she looks at them.

"It's kind of like an enchanted forest, which is lovely," she observes.

Bryan Voell, Johnson County's Local Arts Librarian, feels the same way about the impressionistic landscape scenes on display in Leawood Library.

"You come in here and you know this space is really meant for art," he said of



Rachel Novotny, Information Specialist at Blue Valley Library

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Leawood's designated gallery setting, with its track lighting, special signage and comfortable furniture.

The artwork at Leawood, Blue Valley and other branches will be switched out at the beginning of January to make way for new exhibits. They continue Johnson County Library's commitment to bringing the vibrant visual arts scene to library patrons. It's a growing partnership with local arts groups that is mutually beneficial.

"We cultivate creative work. Books

on our shelves are the result of creative work. And the art on the walls is an extension of that," said Voell, who oversees the arts exhibitions program. "It's meant to educate. It's meant to inspire and to inform."

The displays rotate every trimester and take a lot of planning, but the collaborations

are incredibly rewarding. Voell says he's always working to expand the diversity of artists and types of works.

Most branches display art, but there are three key partnerships: Arts Asylum at Antioch; InterUrban ArtHouse at Leawood; and Kansas City Artists Coalition, at Blue Valley and Oak Park. The Library website features artist interviews and other information. Artists can sell

their works to people who contact them, but the Library doesn't get involved in those transactions.

At Leawood, the featured oil painter in recent months has been Melanie Nolker. Beginning in January 2020, the Library will feature Michael Schmaltz, a Native American artist and Vietnam veteran.

At Blue Valley, the featured painter has been Allison Bowman and the ceramics work is by Steph Kates. New exhibits will be from Blue Valley School District students until late April, when KCAC will again coordinate the display.

Voell reached out to the Artists' Coalition in 2019 because he knew it was relocating to a smaller Kansas City building and needed additional gallery space. KCAC Executive Director Marissa Starke says it was a welcome invitation.

"For us, it was a great opportunity for the KCAC to have a footprint in Johnson

County," Starke said, adding that libraries reach such a broad audience. "It's been really wonderful. We've had great feedback from the artists, the community, the Library."

The InterUrban ArtHouse space in Leawood has also been an excellent collaboration, says Executive Director Angi Hejduk.

"Johnson County Library has been incredibly

supportive of the work we do," she said. "Our programming really complements theirs and we try to help one another whenever we can."

At Blue Valley, Novotny says the artwork greatly enhances the Library. "The patrons really notice it and some people really take their time looking," she said. "We love it."



Painting by Michael Schmaltz, featured Artist at Leawood

BRANCHING OUT

Antioch Innovates

Plans are in the works for a new branch in Merriam, expected to open in several years.

Until then, Antioch Library, Merriam's longtime branch at 8700 Shawnee Mission Parkway, continues to innovate and provide popular services, particularly in children's programming and in technology help for adults.

Key points of pride for Antioch are "outstanding youth services, outstanding adult services and a very friendly and capable staff," says Tad Twidwell, branch manager



TOP 10 HOLDS



DECEMBER 2019

- Once Upon a Time in Hollywood
- **Angel Has Fallen**
- Hustlers
- Fast & Furious Presents: Hobbs & Shaw
- 395 Joker
- 375 Yesterday
- **348 Judy**
- **Spiderman: Far From Home**
- Game of Thrones (season 8)
- The Peanut Butter Falcon

since February 2018.

Twidwell praises his adult services staff, including Katherine Fuller, Dylan Reiter and Courtney Sammis, for launching the "What the Tech!?" program shortly after he became manager. This pilot project improved on an earlier Library initiative and became so successful that it's now used at Gardner. Corinth and Central Resource Libraries as well.

Antioch previously set aside one day per week for patron technology assistance. The adult services team refined that program, allowing patrons to reserve time with a staffer to address their individual tech questions. Antioch offers up to 24 appointments per month. In 2019 they'd filled about 250 appointments through November. It's all free of charge.

"It's worked really well, and it's well attended," Twidwell said. "The oneon-one builds a rapport between the patron and the librarian who's providing the assistance. Our patrons know this is a place they can come to receive assistance that's very valuable in their daily life."

Youth services staffers Dorian Assenmacher, Christine Haines and Sarah Mathews draw big crowds to their story times, including bilingual story time, and children's literacy activities. Youth programs in 2019 attracted more than 5,400 participants.

"Our youth librarians are incredible workers and they build a sense of community," Twidwell said.

The team works with Bradley Debrick, early literacy

coordinating librarian, to test activity kits and projects that are then used throughout the system.

"We call it the incubator," Debrick said of the Antioch efforts.

Antioch is Johnson County Library's oldest building and was at one time the system's headquarters, beginning in November 1956. After the current Central location opened in 1995, Antioch transitioned to a branch Library.

The spacious building has a cheerful children's section, a comfortable quiet room, an art gallery space and a big bank of computers and printers that are in constant use. It also houses Johnson County adult education classes serving nearly 200 students. The Library serves patrons from Merriam, Mission and even southern Wyandotte County.

Parking is limited and the aging structure has maintenance challenges. It shut down for a few days in October for sewer repairs.

Johnson County Library plans a new branch on the Merriam Community Center campus in Vavra Park. Anticipated total project cost for the Antioch replacement is \$13.68 million. An Architect is anticipated to be selected in Q4, 2020, with design completed in 2021. Officials anticipate moving from the existing Antioch location in 2023. Until then, enjoy Antioch Library.



PATRON SPOTLIGHT

Graphic Novels a Big Draw

When Jim Sharpnack was growing up in tiny Hominy, Oklahoma the town library and the librarian, "Mrs. Kellogg," were his windows on the wider world.

He loved reading library books but was especially fond of the 35-cent comic books that his mother would buy for him from the local grocery store. That launched an appreciation for graphic novels that continues to this day.

Sharpnack eventually married and got his doctorate in psychology with a goal of treating veterans. He moved his family in 2002 to Johnson County, Kansas where libraries continued to be an important part of his life.

His wife Donna was good friends with Tricia Suellentrop, now Deputy Johnson County Librarian, and the Sharpnacks quickly became enthusiastic patrons of the Johnson County Library system.

For years, visiting the Shawnee or

Lackman branches was a favorite Saturday ritual for the Sharpnack family.

"Every weekend, Saturday morning 9 a.m.," Sharpnack recalled. He said they would load up on books for the kids to read every night. Donna liked romances and suspense fiction and Sharpnack himself was drawn to the graphic novel sections, plus to fantasies and science fiction.

Lately he's been reading the fantasy novel "The Burning White," by Brent Weeks.

He now regularly consults the Johnson County Library website, especially for reviews of new graphic novel releases.

He's not an artist himself but appreciates the creative vision and elaborate drawings in graphic novels. He enjoys the imaginative mix of good and bad characters and the complex dramas.

He's a particular fan of the Suicide

Squad series and also gives high marks to "Scalped," by Kansas City, Kansas author Jason Aaron, who also wrote "Thor: God of Thunder" and created a female "Thor" character.

Sharpnack has relished the chance to meet Aaron and other graphic novelists at Kansas City's annual Comicon events. He's enjoyed meeting authors and artists at various Johnson County Library events.

In his professional life, Sharpnack has a rewarding career providing vital services to veterans, as manager of the Veterans Administration's PTSD outpatient clinic in Topeka. Even in his clinical work, Sharpnack has found Johnson County Library to be helpful sometimes with materials.

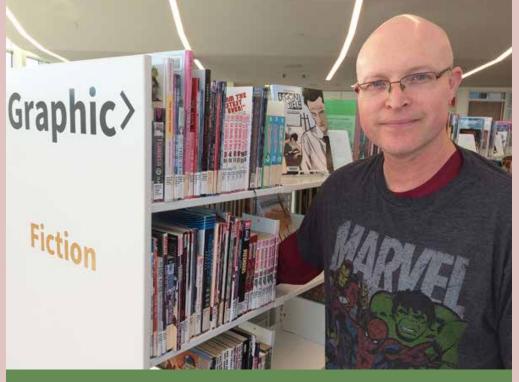
He has occasionally identified publications online that can help with the interpretation of various psychological tests and questionnaires, and has been able to obtain them through Johnson County's interlibrary loan service.

"ILL has been a great resource for me," he said.

For years, the family frequented Lackman Library and Sharpnack loved visiting with the clerks and other staff there. Now, his kids are teenagers and busy with their own activities, but Sharpnack still regularly visits Monticello, which is just minutes away from his home.

He misses Lackman and is nostalgic for the familiar, welcoming traditional branch. But he appreciates the convenience of Monticello and knows that western Shawnee greatly needed its own branch Library.

"I think it's beautiful. I'm really glad for it," he said. "Every time I drive by this place, the parking lot is full. It's well used. It's a great asset to the community."



Jim Sharpnack, comic book and graphic novel aficionado

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Ultimate "Fan Girl"

We buy things that people

need access to, not necessarily

just things that feel safe."

ohnson County Library is constantly updating its vast fiction and DVD collections, and the person responsible for meeting that demand says it's a dream job.

"The best part of the job is getting to be a professional fan girl. I'm a professional consumer," says Beth Atwater, the fiction and DVD buyer with Johnson County Library's collection development team. "I don't think it gets any better than that."

Atwater closely follows reader interests and is the person who decides whether to buy two or eight or even 100 copies. She's always loved reading, and spends her professional life tracking the best new books and movie releases to make sure Johnson County patrons have access to the finest collection available.

Atwater studied creative writing at the University of Missouri-Columbia. She started out in publishing but grew weary of writing rejection letters.

In high school, she had loved being a page at Kansas City Public Library's Waldo branch, so she returned to MU to get a master's in library science in 2007. She then worked 10 years for Mid-Continent Libraries, including as the Lee's Summit branch manager and then as the system's DVD buyer.

Atwater, who lives in Olathe, took on her Johnson County Library role in January 2017. While some libraries restrict what they will acquire, Atwater commends Johnson County's open-mindedness to consider even materials that might be considered controversial.

"I really appreciate Johnson County's commitment to intellectual freedom," she said. "We buy things that people need access to, not necessarily just things that feel safe."

She anticipates what people want, closely watching Good Reads and other grass roots reviews, including from bloggers who get advance copies. Wholesale vendors give insights into items with large print runs or lots of buzz. She knows Johnson County patrons like mysteries, thrillers, romances and historical fiction.

She tries to read 50 books a year and is a romance fan. She also serves on panels that judge books and audio books and goes to film festivals, keeping tabs on the best movies to acquire.

In 2019, she spent about \$375,000 on books; \$368,000 on DVDs; \$150,000 for e-books; \$140,000 for e-audio books, and \$50,000 for CDs.

She often buys five book copies, so they're available in a third of the branches, or eight copies for something popular.



Beth Atwater, Johnson County Library fiction and DVD buyer on the collection development team

Items are catalogued and can be put on hold before they arrive, so she can gauge demand.

"For every five people who put a book on hold we try to make sure we buy an additional copy," she said. With 21-day holds that means no wait should be more than four months.

For the smash hit "Where the Crawdads Sing," Atwater ultimately bought 192 copies, with 468 people on the wait list at November's end.

> Atwater isn't predicting 2020's chart topper but says there's already lots of buzz for "Opioid Indiana" and "The Reckless Oath We Made."

Atwater seriously considers patron suggestions for quality items that have missed her radar. Sometimes items aren't available, but she

accommodates about half the requests.

"The library belongs to the patrons," she said. "We are just stewards of it, so when somebody asks, if you can buy it you buy it."

EVENT SPOTLIGHT

Royal Winterfest

n Saturday Nov. 23, youngsters costumed as Elsa and other royalty flocked to Monticello Library, ready to enjoy fairy tale activities and a read-aloud with a local author.

The timing corresponded with the "Frozen 2" movie release, and children ages 4-10 enjoyed making fairy wands, decorating "Olaf" snowmen cutouts and doing other crafts.

"Royal Winterfest" was geared mainly as a celebration of the power of



children's literature to ignite imaginations and interest in reading.

"Fairy tales are a big part of literature," said Carrie Worth, Monticello's lead youth services librarian.

The "Frozen 2" party was a crowd pleaser and the main attraction was Kansas City author Alastair Heim. He had a rapt audience as he read his published works, filled with amusing characters and dialogue.

Heim said his book "No Tooting at Tea," came directly from something one of his daughters said during a children's tea party.

Katie Weil, mother to 5-year-old Landry, said they had just read "No Tooting at Tea," by happenstance a few weeks before. So she was delighted to meet the author and get an autographed copy.



children from his published works

"It covers all her favorite things," Weil said of her daughter's taste in books. "Potty humor and tea parties."

Annabella Lockrow, 10, was impressed.

"He was really cool," Lockrow said. "That was a good idea that he himself came to read the books to us."

Writers Conference Ignites Kids' Creativity

ohnson County Library welcomed several hundred adults to its annual Writers' Conference Nov. 14-16, providing expert advice and networking opportunities.

On Sunday, Nov. 17, the conference offered a rare opportunity for young writers, grades 4 through 8, to get that same coaching and encouragement.

Kids Day was the brainchild of Olathe author Mary-Lane Kamberg who hosts camps for young writers. She urged Johnson County Library several years ago to expand its writers' conference with an event tailored to nurturing young talent.

"I just felt like they were missing an important market," said Kamberg.



This was the second annual Kids Dayand included sessions by Kansas Poet Laureate Huascar Medina and author L.L. McKinney.

One vibrant workshop featured author-illustrator Polly McCann and

Alex Espy, Mesner Puppet Theater's Education Director. They guided a dozen young people through "Improv Writing" exercises to get their storytelling instincts flowing.

"The setting is really important," McCann advised. "Think about the setting as much as you do about the character."

Espy used puppets to help students craft story scenes. He reminded participants that in the best stories, characters want something and "there's always a problem or conflict."



Ava Staniszewski, 8, gave the workshop a big thumbs up. "It's fun," she said. "It inspired me to write stories someday."

McCann said she's proposed such an event all over town for years and Johnson County Library was the first to offer it. "It's a chance," she said, "to kindle that creative energy impulse."

Book Report

TAKING A CLOSER LOOK







Month in Review December 2019

Venture into Optics Panel Discussion



Venture into Optics was a collection of abstract, video, 2-D mixed media and 3-D printed art by well-known local artists Barry Anderson, Jose Faus and Cristina Albu. They exhibited at Central Resource Library this past fall. In this panel discussion moderated by local art guru Mo Dickens they provided perspectives on their current works, their journeys to this point in their careers plus new works on the horizon. Curated by Susana Bruhn from GuildIt, one of JCL's regular exhibit partnerships.

Make Art, Not Worries



Central – Mind, body, and spirit were engaged to help participants prepare for the emotionally energetic winter holidays. Make Art, Not Worries was an opportunity to express a creative side while sidestepping seasonal stresses. Presented by Sherri Jacobs of Heartland Art Therapy.

All These Flowers Screening

Corinth – Local filmmaker Kevin Bryce's film offered a bold look at a complex and widely misunderstood illness. All These Flowers is a victory story: of finding identity apart from a diagnosis of Bipolar Disorder; of hope where there was despair; of recovery from an incurable disease.

Finals Week Recharge

Gardner – Your student's mind might have got locked up studying for exams. Gardner Library provided teens with a space to study, snack and relax during finals week. The study rooms were reserved for needed quiet spaces. We helped young schoolrs access Brainfuse for last-minute help in any subject. Light refreshments were available to nibble on.

NEXT ISSUE Cover Story: Storytimes **Branching Out:** Edgerton Library Patron Spotlight: Boyer family at Antioch (Todd and Paige Boyer and their kids, Tess and Tylson) Staff Spotlight: Cassandra Gillig, Information specialist at **Events:** Celebrate Kansas: There's No Place Like Home

JOHNSON COUNTY

Library

BOOK REPORT

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