



James Blackstone Memorial Library 2022—2023

In the fall of 2022, the Blackstone Library finalized its new Strategic Plan for the coming years. The plan contains eight strategic initiatives that emerged from community outreach:

- Inspire a love of learning, innovative thinking & creativity
- Provide access to expert minds
- Promote personal empowerment
- Support economic wellbeing
- Facilitate community connections around shared interests
- Be a community information hub
- Advance volunteerism
- Celebrate diversity & understanding one another

Following our Strategic Plan implementation plan that was approved last year, the Blackstone Library has been focused on a number of initiatives, from supporting staff in their professional development, improving the quality and diversity of program offerings, expanding our Library of Things, strengthening community partnerships, and improving communications and outreach. We also continued to strengthen our relationship to the

Town, maintaining open lines of communication.

“Thank your entire staff for their efforts to create and implement these special programs.”

—Post-program survey feedback

As a result of these combined efforts, the Blackstone Library saw an increase of 31% more people coming through our doors over last year. We are still not quite at pre-pandemic levels, but we are getting closer as foot traffic continues to increase.

Staffing has been a big challenge this year. When the fiscal year began, we had a number of unfilled positions due to retirement and restructuring, and throughout the year, with many open positions around the state, some staff members left to advance their careers by taking leadership positions at other libraries. About a quarter of our staff are newly hired as of this year, and finding the right people, onboarding them, and giving them ample opportunities get to know the library as well as other staff has been of utmost importance. Everyone has brought something different and new to the team, and their energy and ideas mean great things for the Branford community.

“Thank you to the Blackstone for providing so many services to the community. The Library is a gem among us.”
—Email comment from patron

With funds from a bequest from the Estate of Linda J. DeLaurentis, we purchased new outdoor furniture to enhance the park-like grounds of the library. Four Adirondack chairs and 3 sets of wrought iron tables and chairs have been in near constant use on days with good weather.

Adding to the beauty of the grounds, we received a donation for the addition of a stone bench in memory of Alan Barrett. We also received gifts to create a special restricted fund in memory of David J. Hughes. This fund helped plant a red maple on the grounds that will one day offer wonderful shade to the terrace, and it funds special programming and materials dedicated to music and nature. The Branford Garden Club and Friends of the Library also co-sponsored a spring planting for the Library’s two front steps planters.

Funds from the bequest of Linda DeLaurentis were also used to create a new mural in the Children’s Play Area. Seventeen artists submitted proposals for the mural, and staff and the board voted, choosing a design by local artists Brooke Sheldon and Lisa Fransioli. They painted the design on a canvas, which was then installed in the space. Patrons and staff are thrilled with how the design is welcoming and whimsical – just the thing to make a special play space for young children.

Thanks to gifts from the Friends of the Blackstone, we were able to fund a wide variety of enrichment programs for all age groups, professional development for staff, extra books for the collection – in print and digital formats, and other special purchases. With a generous gift made at end of the prior fiscal year, we were able to add book display furniture to better showcase our dynamic collection of materials. We also were able to expand our Library of Things collection, which features non-book items for loan, including sewing machines, a metal detector, Nintendo Switch, bird-watching kit, gardening kit, and more.

In the fall, the Friends held their annual Book Sale on the Branford Green, and had a record year, with over \$63,000 in sales.

“So glad I belong to the Friends and can support this fine programming for all to enjoy.”

—Post-program feedback from Carnaby Street Duo performance, sponsored by the Friends.

That effort, combined with year-round online book sales and their annual Holiday Gift Basket sale, enabled the Friends to continue to fund special enrichment programs and projects here at the library. At the end of

the year, they gave a special gift of over \$22,000, which will be used for additional furniture that will make using the library even easier.

In January, we unexpectedly lost our Board President, Adam Spilka. Adam was strong advocate for the library, an excellent leader on the Board, and helped rebuild open communication between the Blackstone and the Town. He was also a good listener and a good friend. Trustees on the Board have helped take on the roles that Adam played, but he continues to be deeply missed by us all.

In the spring, the Board of Trustees Development committee held its fourth annual Mini Golf @ Blackstone Library fundraiser, featuring 18 holes of mini golf across all three floors of the library, with two days of play for all ages. The adult event was a huge success, with another sellout crowd of about 200 tickets. The event raised over \$19,000 and will support the library’s operating budget. The library also hosted some private rental events, including a wedding and corporate party, and its annual appeal

and anytime contributions totaled almost \$62,000 for library operations.

Also in the spring, we started our very first seed library. With help and input from a local gardener, we partnered with local and national organizations and individuals to have seed packets donated to give away to the community. We gave out over 700 packets of seeds. We encourage our community to save their seeds from these and other plantings, and bring them back before next spring. We will then make those seeds available to continue the sustainable planting cycle.

We continued to offer the Artists Circle Galley, hosting artists and helping them showcase their work. The gallery hosts an artist for two months at a time, and often includes an opening reception and workshop led by the artist. Applications to join the Artists Circle are available on our website.

We received the \$100,000 grant funds from the State Historical Preservation Office for the final project of the renovation: major repair work done on the rear dome. We turned the funds over to the Town as reimbursement and have closed out that project.

Thank you to everyone who has supported the Blackstone this year: all of the individual donors, volunteers, event sponsors, local businesses and organizations, the Friends, and the Town of Branford. Your combined support means we can continue to offer the incredible programs and services that our community relies on for lifelong learning and enrichment.

“The Blackstone Library is a great resource for the community for not just books and movies, but for career and life advancement as well.”

—Post-program feedback from Careers in Healthcare Info Session, presented in partnership with Shoreline Adult Education and American Job Center.



Katy McNicol, Library Director

Statistics

Registered Cardholders	9,292
Total Annual Visits to Library	111,677
Material Circulated (Physical/Online)	199,446
Number of Public Computer Sessions	8,144
Number of Wi-Fi Sessions	44,012
Reference Questions	11,514
Children's & Teen Program Attendance	7,511
Adult Program Attendance	6,202

Library Materials

Books, CDs, Audiobooks, DVDs	72,046
Newspapers/Periodicals*	656
Overdrive Digital collection**	28,107
Licensed database collection	52
Total Collection	100,861

*Does not include Overdrive magazines/periodicals
**Does not include access to over 1.2 million HOOPLA titles

Library Staff

Katy McNicol, Library Director
Emily Yates, Associate Librarian, Youth Services
Kathy Oxsalida, Business Manager
Deirdre Santora, Associate Librarian,
Access Services
Deborah Trofatter, Associate Librarian, Technology
& Reference Services
Jenna Anthony, Programming & Reference Librarian
Barbara Barrett, Access Services
Erin Byrne, Access Services
Carol Capezzone, Youth Services
Stephanie Carvin, Reference Librarian
Moirra Healey, Access Services
Christina Kondziela, Reference Librarian
Mary Lockery, Youth Services
Alondra Lopez, Access Services
Kayla McInnis, Access Services
Angela Meikle, Access Services
Jordan Nolan, Reference Librarian
Nicolette Pavain, Children's Librarian
Tina Strell, Development Coordinator
Jared Torello, Access Services
Frank Zdunek, Maintenance

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*Mr. Spilka died unexpectedly in January 2023. Beth Law assumed the Presidency for the remainder of the year.

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Linda Milici, Secretary

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