



James Blackstone Memorial Library 2023—2024

Over the past year, we have seen a continued increase in foot traffic to the Blackstone Library, up 10% over last year. We circulated over 210,000 items, a 5% increase over the prior year. And we have seen a 34% increase in program attendance. We are so pleased that usage of the library's spaces and resources continues to climb.

We installed a new phone system, upgrading our 20+-year-old phones to new phones that come with system-wide paging capabilities. We added phones to the conference room and auditorium for safety and convenience.

A new sound system for the auditorium was installed, replacing the almost-30-year-old system. Funding came from a gift from the Friends of the Library, in memory of longtime friend Betsy Klarman. This new system offers assistive listening and allows for Bluetooth connectivity and additional live mic inputs.

A section of the reading room roof cornice was repaired after a crack in the stone was discovered. A new stone piece was fabricated and installed to match the existing stonework.

The roof of the Library's utility building was repaired and resealed, and the metal screen that protects the rooftop chiller unit was refurbished, rebuilt, and repainted. The chiller screen had been rusting and deteriorating, and the new screen looks wonderful and should last another 20+ years.

The Youth Services area had lighting improvements, thanks to funding from the Estate of Linda J. DeLaurentis. Lighting was added around the circular service desk, and later in the year, additional lights were installed in the Parent's Shelf nook.

A new custom train table was built and donated by Blackstone Trustee Dr. Michelle Blank and her husband, Fred Jackson. It was created to allow for free play, with plenty of trains and sets provided by the Friends of the Blackstone Library. A tunnel evocative of the Robin Williams Rainbow Tunnel in California was built underneath to allow children to crawl through, creating a fully interactive tablespace.

"I love bringing my kids to play and to library programs & the Quick Picks!"

— Akimi

We offered over 900 events, classes, and programs for all ages, with a total of over 18,000 people in attendance. Thanks to funding from the Friends of the Blackstone Library, the David J. Hughes Memorial Fund, the Loeb Lecture Fund, Branford Community Foundation, and the Allan Louis Loeb Foundation, we were able to offer a wonderful variety of events to the public. We also offered programs that were supported by partnerships with local organizations, such as the Branford Historical Society, Musical Arts Society, Branford Land Trust, and many others, as well as programs from local experts who volunteer their time to offer programs on topics that matter to the community. We also hosted a Community Volunteer Fair that brought local groups together with interested community volunteers.

We participated in the Holiday Wreath Extravaganza to benefit Feed Branford Kids, acted as a collection point for Community Dining Room food and diaper drives, and blanket drive for Snuggles for Seniors.

Our outreach efforts included tables being staffed at the Earth Day Fair, Branford Festival, Shoreline Chamber Wellness Fair at YMCA, the YMCA

Healthy Kids Day, Week of the Young Child at the Community House, and the BACA Fall Festival, and we hosted Shoreline Chamber's Legislative Forum in the Library's auditorium.

In cooperation with the Town of Branford, we established the office of Branford Poet Laureate. A Selection Committee was formed, comprised of representatives from various Branford organizations. After a careful review of applications and interviews with the finalists, the Committee

"I can learn a new language, try out a new hobby, view art, watch a movie and read any book I want ALL HERE – FOR FREE!!"

—Summer survey feedback

selected Dr. Judith K. Liebmann as the first to hold the position of Poet Laureate. Dr. Liebmann has offered a variety of workshops and programs for all ages throughout the community since taking office, and will continue to develop programs that promote and support poetry appreciation over her three-year term.

Thanks to legislation that reinstated state aid grants to principal public libraries who have current Collection Development policies, we received \$1,442 from the state in support of library operations.

Thanks to gifts from the Friends of the Blackstone, we were able to fund a wide variety of enrichment programs for all age groups, language learning software, professional development for staff, extra books for the collection – print and digital – plus other special purchases. With a generous gift made at the 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 greatly 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 \$72,000 in sales. That effort, combined with year-round online book sales, a spring warehouse sale, 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, the Friends gave a special gift of over \$22,000, which will be used to further enhance the Blackstone's offerings.

“There’s always stuff to do and I can also always count on the Blackstone Library for my books!”

—JT

The Board of Trustees Development committee held three fundraising events in support of the library’s operating budget: Evening with the Spirits raised over \$9,000 for the library; Mini Golf @ Blackstone Library raised over \$12,000; and a Shred-A-Thon raised almost \$2,000. The library also hosted private rental events, and its annual appeal and anytime

“Thank you for doing so much for the kids! The library has always been a positive, welcoming place for myself and my young children.

— *Summer Program Survey Response*

contributions totaled over \$75,000 for library operations. We also received a bequest from the Estate of Joan Berdick. Joan was a former trustee of the Blackstone and was instrumental in the library’s 1996 renovation project.

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 were approved for a State Library Construction Grant of over \$150,000 to enclose the balcony of the auditorium, creating two smaller meeting rooms. This was an add/alternate project from the 2018 renovation that was unable to be completed at the time. With our subsequent Strategic Plan research, the community let us know that they continue to have a strong need for smaller meeting space, and this project will address those needs. Thanks to Senator Christine Cohen and State Representative Robin Comey for their support of this project.

“Amazing gallery space, fast wifi, helpful staff and great book collection!”

— Vincent

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.



Katy McNicol, Library Director

Statistics

Registered Cardholders	8,100
Total Annual Visits to Library	122,982
Material Circulated (Physical/Online)	210,072
Number of Public Computer Sessions	8,971
Number of Wi-Fi Sessions	46,809
Reference Questions	12,856
Children's & Teen Program Attendance	9,748
Adult Program Attendance	8,269

Library Materials

Physical items, including: books, audiobooks, CDs, DVDs, newspapers, magazines, Library of Things, laptops, iPads	60,466
Overdrive Digital collection**	29,374
Licensed database collection	51
Total Collection	90,191

**Does not include Overdrive magazines/periodicals*

***Does not include access to over 200,000 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
Barbara Barrett, Access Services
Erin Byrne, Access Services
Carol Capezzone, Youth Services
Stephanie Carvin, Reference Librarian
Marcus Fort, Access Services
Laura Gunneson, Youth Services
Moirra Healey, Access Services
Christina Kondziela, Reference Librarian
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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HERITAGE CIRCLE

Estate of Joan Berdick

The 2024 Leadership Circle reflects donations made to the library from July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024.

**deceased*