Engaging Community • Expanding Minds • Enriching Lives

Report to the Board of Trustees

March 4, 2026

CT Secretary of State Stephanie Thomas delivers remarks to a packed auditorium on her work to secure voting rights in the state. Opening remarks were made by First Selectman Josh Brooks and State Representative Robin Comey was in attendance.

From the Director

February was a short month, made shorter by a closure due to a blizzard, but still packed with activities and happenings.

Janice, Larry, Jack, Christine and I met with Josh Brooks and Kathryn Labanca to review our proposed budget request to the Town. The request was well-received. We are reviewing some suggested adjustments from Josh Brooks. Once we have an approved revised budget, we will present it later in March to the Branford Board of Finance.

Above (L to R): Director Katy McNicol, First Selectman Josh Brooks, CT Secretary of State Stephanie Thomas, State Representative Robin Comey. Below, Stephanie Thomas.

Our new Associate Librarian for Access Services (Head of Circulation) started in February. Pasquale Festa comes to us from the North Haven Library and has great experience as a department head and in the Libraries Online (LION) consortium. Welcome, Pasquale!

The department heads and I met prior to Pasquale starting so we could plan his onboarding, and then met again as a group with him to review responsibilities and routines. We're planning a monthly department head meeting so we can easily stay on the same page and up to date with happenings in each department.

I met with Liza Petra of Branford Community Foundation (BCF) to discuss our ongoing partnership to administer BranfordVolunteers.org. BCF is taking much of the admin work in-house, and I will continue to assist with new organizations coming on to the platform.

We received approval from the CT State Library for our invitation to bid for the construction work on the balcony enclosure project and posted the bid notice. We hosted a pre-bid conference for potential bidders to see the space and ask questions. Questions and answers are being added to the invitation to bid posting as they come in. Bids are due by 4 PM on March 12. We also received State approval for a grant extension for the project.

We were thrilled to partner with the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr Heritage Foundation to host CT Secretary of State Stephanie Thomas. Secretary Thomas was a special guest in honor of Black History Month. As the first Black person elected to this State office, she has worked to secure voting rights and expand ballot access. Her remarks were inspiring and eye-opening. I was honored to offer welcoming remarks, letting the crowd know that libraries, by CT law, are required to have voter registration forms at service desks, and we ask each person who signs up for a new library card if they wish to register to vote! First Selectman Josh Brooks also delivered introductory remarks, speaking about the importance of voter participation in our society.

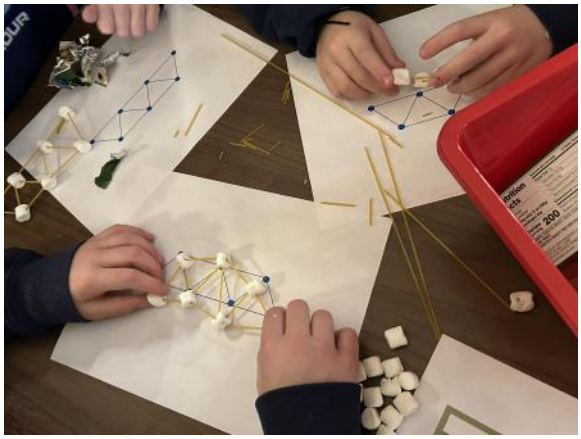
I also attended the LION Executive Committee meeting, the monthly FLAG meeting, where we heard from ALA President Sam Helmick. Christine and I met with Michael Krause to review the library's insurance coverage and met the Town's new Assistant Finance Director, Christina Sevigny-Smith, giving her a brief introduction to the library as well as a Town employee library card.

— Katy McNicol

Highlights from the Youth Services Department—January

January was a busy month in Youth Services! In addition to our regular weekly storytimes, we hosted several special programs for children under five.

An instructor from Music Together, a music education program, led an energetic class filled with songs, scarves, and shakers. We also welcomed practitioners from More to Say, a local pediatric speech and occupational therapy office, for an interactive storytime featuring scarf songs, animal-inspired movement, and kid-friendly yoga poses. Both events were wonderful opportunities to collaborate with community partners who support early childhood education.



Children participate in the Build-A-Bridge challenge.

Our Homeschool Meetup for January focused on penguins and the clever adaptations that help them survive in icy environments. Participants experimented with "blubber" by comparing how long they could keep their hands in ice water with and without a Crisco-insulated bag. They also explored how the oil on penguins' feathers repels water by coloring a penguin with crayons and then spraying the drawing with water to observe how liquid beads on the waxed surface. The session wrapped up with everyone getting the supplies to create their own cotton-ball penguin at home.

The STEM learning continued with a Build-a-Bridge challenge led by a local educator. After learning about different types of bridges and the shapes engineers rely on to construct them, kids were invited to build either a spaghetti-and-marshmallow bridge or a paper bridge strong enough to hold fifty pennies. Later in the month, we partnered with the CoderSchool for two hands-on coding workshops: a Minecraft coding class for elementary students and a Python class for middle schoolers. In the Minecraft class, kids experimented with code to create hundreds of monsters and then observed how their world changed. One parent shared that her child had been begging to attend classes at the CoderSchool, making this library program the perfect opportunity to try a class for free.

Middle schoolers in the Python class used the language to create a simple game where key presses moved a turtle around the screen, drawing as it went. I also led another 3D printing workshop this month, teaching teens about how 3D printers work and how they are used in fields like engineering, medicine, and food production. Teens had the opportunity to get creative as well with a collage-making session, using magazine cutouts to design personalized journal covers. In addition, I hosted another teen volunteer orientation and will continue offering monthly sessions throughout the spring so interested teens have plenty of chances to get involved.

We did a few outreach visits this month to local schools. I went to Walsh Middle School to meet more of the fifth-grade class and introduce them to the library's resources. Rodcel and I then attended Sliney Elementary's Literacy Night to promote our upcoming programs with parents and make buttons with the kids. We love sharing all the great resources and events the library has to offer!

— Emily Yates

Teens made journals with personalized collage covers.

Highlights from the Reference Department—January

Jordan has been busy planning our spring and summer programs, including America 250.

This last month, we had a couple of great events - a jigsaw puzzle tournament and a volunteer fair. For the tournament, we had 15 teams, about 60 people in attendance, 3 prizes (including a custom puzzle of the Blackstone Library), and first place finished in just 32 minutes and 4 seconds.

The volunteer fair had about 20 organizations participating and over 120 patrons in attendance. We receive inquiries about volunteer opportunities from patrons on a regular basis, so programs like this are really important.

Gilligan was able to use their ASL skills with a patron for the first and second time this month! One person signed to ask "what is happening at the library today?" as there were many people around and Gilligan was able to tell them that there was a concert going on. It was a very short interaction, but Gilligan was excited to finally be able to use what they are learning! The second interaction was with another patron who usually communicates via written notes. Gilligan was able to tell the patron that she could pick up her hold downstairs. She then returned to the Reference desk to check out her books, informing Gilligan that her card was old. Gilligan assured the patron that it could be renewed, but it ended up not being expired.

Amy regularly staffs the Tech Help Tuesdays and is planning some tech classes with Gilligan. Ryan continues his work as our primary nonfiction cataloger; he also assists other departments with more involved cataloging. He participates in Tech Help Tuesdays, Tech Help at the Senior Center, is on the Social Media committee and chairs a Sustainability Roundtable.

Debby and Ryan reorganized the Archives Room now that new shelving has been installed and in preparation for the balcony renovation project. All of the Historical Society and Blackstone Library archives are now located in the Archives Room, which will facilitate access for staff and patrons. Gilligan is working to create finding aids for any of these collections that do not currently have one.

— Deborah Trofatter

Additional custom shelving has been installed in the Archives Room and archival materials were added and organized.

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March 2026 Program Highlights

A Journey through the Roots of American Popular Music
Sunday, March 8 @ 2–3 pm

Join us for an afternoon of songs and stories about characters and events at the origins of blues, rock, and country music, presented by the Sultana duo! Sponsored by the David J. Hughes Memorial Fund.

Tackling the Depths: Boating Strategies, Finding Spots, and Bottom Bait Fishing in Long Island Sound
Thursday, March 12
@ 6–7:30 pm

Join experienced angler and educator, Mark Gostkiewicz, for an immersive deep-dive into bottom fishing in Long Island Sound. Whether you're a new boat owner, a head-boat voyager, or a shore angler looking to take your skills to deeper waters, this workshop is designed to turn "fishing trips" into "catching trips". Sponsored by the Friends of Blackstone Library.

iPhone & iPad Basics Tech Workshop
Saturday, March 14 @ 2–3 pm

Confused about how to use your new iPhone or iPad? Join us for a tech workshop to learn the basics of navigating iOS devices! Bringing your own device is recommended, but the library does have a limited number of iPads available to check out for those interested. Registration is required as space is limited.

Musical Arts Society Presents: Sean Duggan
Sunday, March 15
@ 2–3:30 pm

Join us for a musical afternoon with Sean Duggan! Presented by the Musical Arts Society of Branford.

Piano Men: A Tribute to Billy Joel & Elton John
Saturday, March 21 @ 2–3 pm

Celebrate the unforgettable hits of Billy Joel and Elton John in this lively tribute featuring pianist and vocalist Jay Daniels. With rich vocals and jazz-infused flair, Jay performs classics like "Piano Man," "Your Song," "Rocket Man," and more —bringing fresh life to the music of two pop legends in an evening of timeless tunes and nostalgic charm. Sponsored by the David J. Hughes Memorial Fund.

Check our website for more programs and registration details!

January 2026 Statistics—Circulation Department

Physical Items Circulation: 8,401
January 2025: 7,868

borrowIT: 3,236
January 2025: 1,921

Renewals: 4,595

Computer Sessions: 687
WIFI Logins: 3,507
Website visits: 10,748

MailChimp: 7,870 subscribers
Facebook: 3,035 followers
Instagram: 1,743 followers

Downloadable Circulation:

Libby ebooks: 1,502

Libby audiobooks: 1,546

Libby magazines: 1,071

Palace App: 38

HOOPLA: 1,088

Kanopy: 368

Transparent Languages: 7

Ancestry Library: 15

New Haven Register: 161

Branford History Scrapbooks: 6

Lucy Hammer & Conference Room Usage: 121

Children's Programs
28 programs/728 attendance

Teen Programs (12+)
9 programs/68 attendance

Adult/All Ages programs
42 programs/832 attendance

Average Daily Visitors: 455
Days open: 26