



September 2, 2026

Engaging Community • Expanding Minds • Enriching Lives

Report to the Board of Trustees

From the Director

In July and August we had a lot of fun hosting a variety of programs for all ages in support of our summer learning program.

I co-hosted the New Directors Roundtable at the Willington Public Library—we met directors from northern CT and had a lively discussion about challenges and opportunities facing new directors of smaller libraries.

We hosted two interns this summer. One was a graduate student from Southern (SCSU), and the other was a paid teen intern in the Youth Services department, sponsored by the Friends. The graduate student did the internship as part of her MLIS degree requirements.

At the end of July, Deb Trofatter celebrated 30 years of dedicated service at the Blackstone, a wonderful achievement. Congratulations, Deb!

I completed orientations of our two new trustees, Deb Riding and Helen Murphy. Welcome to the board!

The Friends Annual Book Sale Banners were placed on the library's lawn, thanking all of the Raise the Tent sponsors and helping get the word out that the book sale will take place September 17-20 at the Branford Train Station. We're looking forward to the Friends largest fundraiser of the year!

Christine and I attended the



The Community Dining Room held their Back to School session of the summer meal at the Blackstone in August. They offered free dinner and activities for everyone.

Shoreline Chamber of Commerce's Business After Hours event at the Guilford Yacht Club. This is an evening networking event for Chamber members.

Rhea and I attended the Shoreline Chamber's Women of Excellence luncheon, which honors local women who have been nominated for all they do for their communities. This year, Cheryl Kaiden, former library board member, was one of the honorees.

The development committee met and approved the fall library fundraiser—Laughs on Tap! Mark your calendars for Saturday, October 17, where we'll present a night of comedy for a cause! Three performers will bring the laughs, and there will be auction items and prize drawings, plus beer, wine, and light fare. All proceeds directly support the Blackstone Library.

We met with Lothrop to review the first draft of the Facilities

Assessment. The report is highly detailed, and they will now be working on multiple cost estimates and an executive summary, plus refinements to the report itself. A lot has been done, with still more yet to do.

Applications for the next Branford Poet Laureate are now available (due Oct. 16) and the selection committee has been confirmed. Visit our website for more info. The new PL term begins January 2027!

Blackstone hosted the first LION board meeting of the fiscal year. These meetings usually conflict with our storytimes, but the Youth Services were on a well-deserved storytime break that week, and we took advantage of the empty auditorium to host over 20 other LION staff and board members in person, plus more members virtually. We had a great discussion and look forward to a productive year serving patrons of our LION libraries.

— Katy McNicol



Friends Annual Fall Book Sale

Branford Train Station, 35 Maple Street, Branford.

September 17th - 20th

See hours of sale at blackstonelibrary.org/friends

Mark your calendars!
Same wonderful selection at the same great prices.



Cheryl Kaiden accepting her award as a Woman of Excellence.

Highlights from the Youth Services Department—June/July

We had so much fun in the Youth Services department this June! On the 13th, we had an amazing all-ages event on the library lawn to kick off our summer learning program. Featuring a live band, lawn games, face paint, and free Ashley's ice cream, the afternoon was a big success. To promote all of the engaging activities we have going on this summer, our department did lots of outreach this month. Nicolette, Rodcel, and I visited all of the elementary schools for their summer reading assemblies, and we also tabled at the Branford Festival, enjoying a sunny day outside promoting the library.

Our summer learning program is in full swing! Each week of summer, kids under five can collect a sticker, kids six and up can make a button, and teens can pick out an enamel pin. To earn their weekly reward, participants can read for 60 minutes, attend a library program, or do the activity of the week on their summer learning gameboards.

Even though school is officially out, there was still lots of learning happening at the library this month. For Science Saturday, Claudia from Cool-ology taught about the importance of pollinators. For our homeschool meetup this month, we learned about the architect Zaha Hadid and her unique buildings inspired by shapes found in nature. There were lots of other fun events this month, including a visit from local author Janaya Hernandez to celebrate her new book, *The Elle in the Room*. Teens enjoyed our monthly Dungeons and Dragons campaign and a pizza and board game meetup. In addition, we had a



Rodcel at the library's table at Branford Festival.

felt succulent craft kit for the teens to take home, which included all the supplies needed to make a cute plant out of fabric.

July was full of creativity and discovery! Our Homeschool Meetup this month was an exploration of caves. We also had an amazing workshop with local author Kimberly Behre Kenna, called *Behind 47 Doors: A Castle Art and Story Workshop*. The kids learned about the different doors and latching mechanisms at Connecticut's own Gillette Castle, which inspired Kimberly's latest book, and then used their creativity to imagine what might wait behind different doors.

We had a few special programs this month that were funded by the Branford Community Foundation. One was a polymer clay workshop for kids, led by artist Deb Jaffe. Then the Food Explorers visited for a Peach Melba Crumble class, teaching kids how to make a peach and raspberry filling, a granola topping,

and homemade vanilla whipped cream.

Teens also enjoyed two special programs sponsored by the Branford Community Foundation as well. An instructor from the Pop-Up Art School hosted a needle-felting workshop, teaching us how to create a design featuring a cute panda munching on bamboo. In addition, we had a very popular ice cream and gelato making class led by Matt from My Productions CT. Teens also enjoyed more crafting with a marbled bag workshop, using shaving cream and fabric paint to create unique marbled designs on tote and pencil bags to take home. Finally, we had a great partnership between the kids and teens this month with a Reading Buddies program. Kids in grades K-3 were partnered with teen volunteers to practice their reading skills and gain confidence.

— Emily Yates



Felted panda workshop.



Behind 47 Doors Workshop.

Highlights from the Reference Department—June/July

Our drop-in tech help sessions continue to be very popular. Amy reported a wide array of topics that included helping with connecting to the Internet on a laptop, archiving emails, using podcasts on a phone, connecting a wi-fi thermostat, emails not sending, exporting emails and photos, laptop camera not working, iCloud help (with the comment “this is such a great service”) and recovering notes on an iPhone. Ryan was joined at our Senior Center Tech Help session by our SCSU intern, Michelle and by Bennie, who Ryan is mentoring this summer.

We have finished adding and cataloging new items to our Library of Things collection and we created a display near the Reference desk so that more patrons can see what kinds of items are available. Checkouts more than doubled this June (57) from last June (27).

Gilligan revamped our Community Services brochure, which includes local, state and federal contact information for assistance with housing, food, energy,

health and legal assistance, crisis support and counseling, and transportation options.

Jordan was excited to welcome Patricia McCormick, author of *Sold*, via Zoom, at June’s Banned Book Club. Another author (and artist), Ryan Estrada, who we had hosted virtually at our April 2025 Banned Book Club meeting to discuss the book *Banned Book Club* let us know that a new edition of his book is coming out in September that includes an afterward discussing all of the work he has been doing to help fight censorship against his book and the many in-person and virtual visits to schools and libraries. While we are not directly named in this new afterward, it is nice to be included as a part of this group of institutions that he has worked with. Ryan will be joining us virtually again on Tuesday, September 29th at 6 pm for a full author talk for all ages!

Our all ages Summer Learning kickoff event was very successful, with about 200 people in attendance. We had live music from the Keith Cooper Trio, face painting, free Ashley’s ice cream cups, lawn games, and take-n-make bags.

The responsibilities and tasks of the reference librarians at Blackstone can be quite varied month to month. Both Gilli-

gan and Ryan had an interesting mix in July.

In addition to regular tasks such as weeding, collection development and tech help, Gilligan created a display for Disability Pride month, attended two Social Media Committee meetings, began organizing and updating our nonfiction display binder (we update our nonfiction book displays several times a month to insure a broad range of topics), attended a National Library of Medicine webinar on rural health resources, put together 48 beeswax wraps Take & Make craft kits for adults and continued scanning scrapbook photos, based on the Town Historian’s recommendations.

In addition to regular cataloging duties, Ryan created a specific Vegan (641.56362) cookbook section, added new Library of Things items to our collection, purchased Advantage Overdrive titles for both fiction and nonfiction (we purchase extra copies of popular ebooks and audiobooks to supplement the consortium collection) and worked with our intern and mentee to add additional magnetic subject labels to the nonfiction shelves. He also provides Tech Help at the Branford Senior Center every month, works on sustainability and civic projects and participates in the Social Media Committee.

— Deborah Trofatter



Summer Learning Kickoff on the library lawn.



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September 2026 Program Highlights

Nadia Bowers Book Launch Monday, September 14 @ 6–7 pm

Join us for a book launch and moderated discussion with local author Nadia Bowers for her upcoming memoir, *Dear Dealer!* Expanding on her viral 2018 *This American Life* essay of the same name—a letter to this imagined dealer—Bowers’ memoir is a love letter, a diary, and a quest in search of the dealer’s identity, as well as her own.

Who is she without her sister? Who is she because of her sister? And what now? Bowers reflects on her shifting roles as sister and mother, examining how this sudden loss has reshaped her sense of self. Her letters to the faceless dealer are interwoven with rage, reflection, and even moments of humor as she recounts their intertwined lives alongside memories of charismatic and complex Sasha. Presented by Gallery Books.

250th Anniversary of American Beer Wednesday, September 23 @ 6–7 pm

To mark America’s 250th anniversary, illustrator, author, and Advanced Cicerone Em Sauter will give an illustrated presentation discussing the role of beer and brewing in American history. Starting from the Pilgrims landing on Plymouth Rock (because they were out of beer!) to the modern craft brewery movement and the beers we love today, beer has been woven through the fabric of American history. Sponsored by the Friends of Blackstone Library.

Musical Arts Society Presents: Gilbert & Sullivan Sunday, September 27 @ 1:30–3 pm

Join the talented cast members from The Connecticut Gilbert & Sullivan Society as they perform music from their comic

operas, including *The Pirates of Penzance!* Sponsored by the Musical Arts Society of Branford.

Choose Your Own Adventure Author Talk with Ryan Estrada Tuesday, September 29 @ 6–7 pm

Join us for a virtual author talk with artist, author, and adventurer Ryan Estrada! This will be a fun, gamified author visit where everyone in the room rolls a die, draws cards, and chooses what happens next. Ryan is a Freeman Award-winning, Eisner-nominated artist, author, and adventurer.. His books include *Banned Book Club*, *No Rules Tonight*, *Good Old Fashioned Korean Spirit*, *Occulted*, and the *Student Ambassador* series. He has also made comics for *Star Trek*, *Popeye*, *Flash Gordon*, and *Garfield*.

Check our website for more programs and registration details!

June/July 2026 Statistics—Circulation Department

June / July Total Physical Circulation:

7,667 / 8,975

2025: 9,157 / 10,482

borrowIT:

2,227 / 2,672

2025: 2,664 / 3,317

Renewals:

3,865 / 4,887

Public Computer Sessions:

703 / 689

WIFI Logins:

3,733 / 4,421

Website visits:

10,782 / 10,199

Facebook: 3,174 followers

Instagram: 1,820 followers

MailChimp: 7,428 subscribers

June / July

Downloadable Circulation:

Libby ebooks: 1,348 / 1,410

Libby audiobooks: 1,547 / 1,534

Libby magazines: 899 / 871

Palace App: 30 / 35

HOOPLA: 1,172 / 1,216

Kanopy: 333 / 377

Transparent Language: 42 / 38

Ancestry Library: 92 / 216

New Haven Register: 47 / 22

Bford History Scrapbooks: 7 / 5

June / July

Lucy Hammer & Conference Room Usage: 136 / 161

Children’s Programs

23 / 33 programs

1,352 / 981 attendance

Teen Programs (12+)

8 / 9 programs

396 / 80 attendance

Adult/All Ages programs

39 / 32 programs

620 / 396 attendance

Average Daily Visitors: 458 / 504

Days open: 25 / 26