

ANNUAL REPORT 2020



MONROE TOWNSHIP
LIBRARY



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From the Director

Like you, I am glad to have 2020 behind us.

2020 was a year filled with challenges and change. The Monroe Township Library celebrated 30 years of successfully serving the Township Residents and in 24 hours, everything changed. The pandemic dominated the year and drastically changed the way the Library served its public.

In 2020, the Monroe Township Library applied for and was awarded a matching grant as part of the New Jersey Construction Bond Act. The Library will receive \$248,640 from this grant that will be matched by the Township for upgrades and replacement of the HVAC system and upgrades to the building's fire protection system. The Library was one of 38 libraries awarded in New Jersey for the first round of the grant. These repairs and upgrades will continue to provide a comfortable and safe environment for our residents visiting the Library.

As with everyone, the effect of COVID-19 on the Library and its operations was dramatic and challenging. The Library staff are there to assist people, finding information, books to read, movies to watch -- and suddenly that all stopped. As with many other libraries, our staff quickly moved to online programming, virtual reference and finally when the staff returned to the building, curbside pick-up of library materials. These services will forever change the way the Library operates and serves our public.

Continued on the next page . . .

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Throughout the pandemic, the Library staffed phones, ran programs and tried to provide answers to your questions. Often times our staff were the only people our patrons had interactions with. We were there to help with downloading eBooks, movies and providing help with all of the technology we quickly became so dependent on.

On July 6th of this year, Governor Murphy allowed libraries to open and we did so successfully on July 13th with all the necessary precautions for staff and the public to safely use the Library again. While it was only for “Grab and Go” service, we were happy to see our residents return! Prior to being open for our “Grab & Go” service, the grounds of the Library became a meeting place for friends, book groups, clubs, students and more. The Library parking lot had so many cars parked there that we often received phone calls asking if the Library was open!

The President of the Library Board of Trustees, Lois Kane, retired from the Board on December 31st. Lois guided the Board and the Library through the unpredictable months of the pandemic, seeing the Library through its openings and closings and so much more. Prior to her time as President, Lois was an active member of the Board for several years. Many thanks to Lois for her hard work, time and commitment to the Library. The Library Board of Trustees is happy to welcome Benjamin Baum as the new Board President, we move forward to reopening and continuing to expand services to our residents.

Sadly, the Library needed to close again in November as the virus began to spread. As I write this letter the building remains closed to the public but service continues with an active curbside service, homebound delivery, and line up of virtual programs.

It is our hope that we will welcome you all back to the Library in the near future. Until then stay safe and be well!



Leah Wagner

DIRECTOR
FEBRUARY 2021

NJ Construction Bond Act

In 2020, the Monroe Township Library applied for and was awarded a matching grant as part of the New Jersey Construction Bond Act. The Library will receive \$248,640 from this grant that will be matched by the Township for upgrades and replacement of the HVAC system and upgrades to the building's fire protection system. The Library was one of 38 libraries awarded in New Jersey for the first round of the grant. These repairs and upgrades will continue to provide a comfortable and safe environment for our residents visiting the Library.

Before the pandemic, the Library annually hosted over 500 adult programs and over 700 youth programs, with over 24,000 people in attendance. Additionally, over 100 outside groups, meetings, and events were held. Across all outside events, hundreds of people visit the Library monthly, which does not account for visits community members make to conduct regular & daily Library business, such as borrowing and returning Library materials. All of these attendees and visitors are impacted when the Library is not at its optimal controlled climate.

A Clean Energy Audit, which was completed in December of 2019, recommended a new HVAC unit and boiler for the building. Our existing equipment has reached its twenty year expected lifespan. A new HVAC unit and boiler would not only provide comfort to our patrons, but safety as well, since the Monroe Township Library serves as a heating and cooling station in situations of extreme weather.

The Library is also in need of an updated fire panel system, a requirement for the safety of our patrons. The fire panel system summons emergency services and alerts patrons immediately to the presence of a fire. The new system would produce both audible and visual alerts, which is important for our senior community, to notify patrons and staff that an escape is necessary. These advances in technology will also reduce the possibility of our library collection being destroyed by fire.

The Library looks forward to installing these upgrades in 2021.

Curbside Service

After the Library closed on March 13, it would not be until June 22 that the Library would reopen, offering curbside-only service. Monroe residents immediately began to pick up books, DVDs and other Library materials via this service. When the Library reopened to the public on July 13, we were able to offer Grab & Go Service, and our curbside service was still popular to patrons who chose not to come into the building. The Library was completely closed from October 31 to November 17. When the Library reopened on November 18, we returned to curbside-only service.

Curbside service during the summer months was performed in the parking lot with Library staff placing items in patron's cars and trunks. However when the weather started to get cooler and days shorter, curbside service was moved to the drive-thru window.

Between June 22 and December 31, the Library completed 5,895 curbside pick-up reservations. Almost half of those reservations were between November 18 and the end of the year.

While many of our Library patrons miss coming inside the Library to browse, many appreciate the ability to use our drive-thru window to pick up Library materials.



Library Staff providing Curbside Service during the Summer

Digital Media

Usage of the Library's digital download and streaming resources had been steadily increasing for the past few years. However, with the Library building closed, patrons turned to online resources in greater numbers. In the initial months of the pandemic some Library vendors extended free downloads and increases in borrowing limits at no charge to the Library. Once the Library was able to open for Grab and Go service, digital usage leveled out but overall usage for 2020 increased significantly.

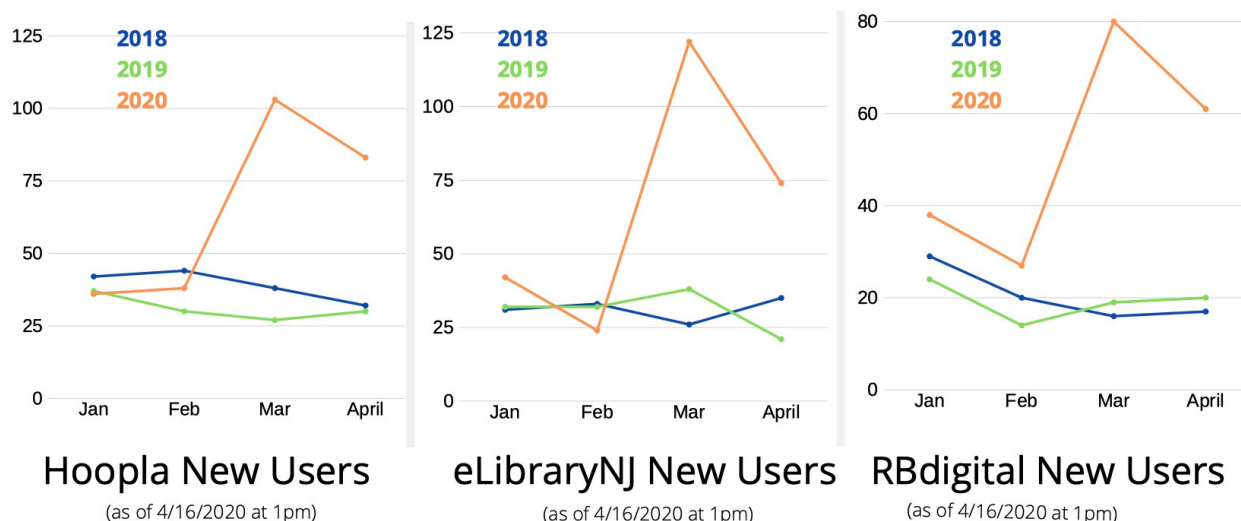
Overall, increases in digital borrowing from 2019 to 2020 were as follows:

- E-book borrowing increased by 60%.
- Digital audiobook borrowing increased by 27%.
- Hoopla borrowing increased by 57%.

Increases in Digital Media Usage

When comparing March 2020 to March 2019:

- Hoopla checkouts are up by **47%**
- eLibraryNJ checkouts are up by **29%**
- RBdigital checkouts are up by **36%**



Circulation

Circulation and use of Library materials unsurprisingly decreased in 2020. The Library had only 201 operating days with the building closed for almost 4 months due to the pandemic. Overall circulation was down by approximately 33%. The Libraries of Middlesex Automation Consortium reported that the consortium as a whole saw a 49% decrease in total circulation and an increase of 44% in electronic circulation.

COVID-Related Projects

The Library sought to document the COVID-19 pandemic by compiling an archival collection of memories and experiences created by Township residents during this unprecedented time in history called The COVID-19 Diaries. Residents had an opportunity to become a part of history by submitting their experiences in any way they felt expressed themselves best.

The Library made over 100 face shields using the 3D printer which were then donated to Saint Peter's Hospital, The Jersey City Medical Center and My InstaDoc in Marlboro Township.



Face Shields donated by the Library



Programs

Programs went online soon after the Library closed in mid-March. Staff from every department participated in Zoom storytimes, book discussions, chats about pets and television shows, and more.

Patrons and other Monroe residents started using Library's parking lot and park-like setting to meet outside. Book groups, friends having coffee and the Friends of the Library took their meetings outside. The Friends of the Library also hosted two sidewalk book sales in front of the Library.



Friends of the Library meeting



Friends of the Library Book Sale

Youth Services

This year the Youth Services Department looked quite different from our normal year. In March of 2020 with the COVID-19 pandemic, the Library closed its physical doors and stayed closed to the public for far too long. The building blocks to our foundation - in person programming, visits from our young patrons, visits to local schools and outreach in serving our community- was taken away from us.

Although our world is quite different, the Monroe Township Library's Youth Services Department still serves the community each and every day. We connect young people to books, information, experiences, and services that enhance their quality of life so our community can learn and thrive. We've taken our program virtual and the Youth Services staff can often be seen hosting programs in their own home. Our popular programs, such as Music with Pat McKinley and hands-on events such as STEM programs are still well attended.

We cannot wait to connect with our young patrons again in 2021!

MTPL Year-end TEENS report 2020

Emily Mazzoni,
Teen Services Librarian

Programs Held: 42 Attendees: 511

A mix of crafts, in-person and online, student-led classes in stocks, roblox and python, college and career preparedness seminars, book chats, mental health seminars, trivia and game nights, in-person and online escape rooms!



1,182 Volunteer Hours



115 students volunteered their time virtually tutoring younger students, creating bookmarks and cards for seniors, and participating in literature and community-based online tasks like reading to a family member, creating social media posts, book reviews, youtube videos, and more.

Social Media Presence

Re-booted the instagram account @MTPL_teens and more than doubled followers - now at 217
Started a fresh YouTube page now with 136 subscribers



More than 12,000 items circulated *



***only includes YA Fiction and CD Audiobooks**

2019 Total of same: 18,600

emazzoni@monroetwplibrary.org x148

Outreach Services

Bookmobile

2020 was an exceedingly difficult year for our Bookmobile patrons. When COVID-19 hit, we were not able to service these wonderful people, so many of whom do not drive and rely on us to bring them the library materials that keep them going.

To make sure they knew they were not forgotten, we called them every week, food shopped for many of them and made them tissue flowers and cards. We explained that the library is a part of the community just as they are; that we are all important and we care about each other. They were so appreciative to hear these things and were so happy to know they were being thought of during these tough times. To this day, we still shop for some of our patrons who cannot get out because this is who we are, a library that cares.



Monroe Township Holiday Parade, December 2020



Outreach Services

At Home Services

This past year has been especially challenging for the senior and homebound population in our Township. While the library was closed during the spring, staff took time to offer services to our At Home Services patrons in various forms. Some made phone calls to say hello and lend an ear to those who were confined to their homes and rooms. Others delivered homemade meals, while others delivered hard to find essentials such as toilet paper, tissues, gloves, and masks sometimes out of their own supplies. Paper flowers were imprinted with inspirational sayings and delivered to Monroe Village which distributed them to the apartments. Both the staff and seniors were rewarded by these acts of kindness during the most devastating times in recent history. What a better way to bring a community together?



The At Home Services program continues to deliver library materials directly to the front door of the resident's home, or the lobbies of assistant living facilities. Currently the deliveries are made to twelve communities within the township, both adult and residential, as well as Parker at Monroe, The Chelsea, Brookdale, The Village at Stratford, Waterside Villas, and Monroe Village. Deliveries are made on a three-week rotating basis with the exception of Monroe Village which has a weekly delivery due to popularity. There are a total of 91 patrons who are participating with the At Home Services program. In addition, there are some residents who are not comfortable, or are unable to come to the library so "courtesy deliveries and pick-ups" are provided to anyone within the township. The At Home Services staff send birthday cards to the patrons to brighten up their special day, and provide services such as notary public, and audiobook and music downloads from the NJ State Library.

Staff Recognition

This past year saw the retirement of three staff members:

- Jean Aniano worked at the Library for 23 years. She began in the Circulation Department and later as a Reference Assistant where she scheduled the meeting room, display cases and Art Gallery.
- Jim Shearer worked as a part-time Reference Librarian for 14 years. He previously retired from his full-time career as a school media specialist.
- Elaine McQueen worked in the Circulation Department for 10 years.

Before the pandemic, two staff members left the Library to pursue other employment and when the Library reopened after the initial COVID-related closure, two staff members did not return as their personal situations had changed.

In October, three new part-time employees were hired to assist with the increase in curbside and outreach services.



Staff in February 2020



Socially-distanced and masked staff in October 2020