

# ANNUAL REPORT



MONROE TOWNSHIP PUBLIC LIBRARY EXPANDED OUTREACH IN 2021



2021



MONROE TOWNSHIP  
**LIBRARY**

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# FROM THE DIRECTOR

Greetings!

It has been wonderful welcoming everyone back to the library this past year!

This time last year the library staff was preparing to close the Library due to a rise in COVID-19 cases. Happily, the Monroe Township Library reopened on March 17th with limited hours, limited services and remained open throughout the year.

Gradually as the weeks went by and the COVID-19 restrictions lifted, the Library began adding more hours, services and programs to the schedule. Some mitigation measures remain for the safety and comfort of Library users and staff but the Library continues to be open seven days a week and four evenings until 9:00 pm.

Online programming has remained popular and with the addition of two OWL Labs “Owls” the Library is able to provide in person and online programming through Zoom. Not only has this been a wonderful way to keep people connected during COVID-19, but now we can continue to see our friends who winter in warmer climates.

## Monroe Township Public Library Board of Trustees

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The Library began working on the 2022-2025 Strategic Plan. In May, the Library Board voted to accept a proposal for consulting services from Library Crossroads, LLC. The planning process has included a community survey, focus groups and other small group work with Library stakeholders.

In October, the Library became home to two new events:

- The Library hosted its first Community-Wide Yard Sale fundraiser for the Friends of the Library. There were 15 vendors and the Friends also enrolled a few new members during the event.
- The Library served as one of several Middlesex County Early Voting Locations. The Library saw the highest number of voters in the county, 2,600. Due to the Library's high numbers, the Library will be an Early Voting location for future elections.

The Library has been inventorying the collection and as always trying to make your Library experience more enjoyable. In June, the Library contracted with Bibliotheca to convert the collection to RFID (Radio Frequency Identification). This will make checking out library items easier, especially for self-service check outs. RFID will also assist the staff in maintaining the Library collection.

As we move towards a return to regular routines and activities the Library staff will happily assist you on your next visit to the Monroe Library.



# Leah Wagner

DIRECTOR

FEBRUARY 2022



# Circulation

Due to the ongoing pandemic and a focus on adapting to life with COVID-19, the Library saw a major drop in statistics in 2020 as the Library had to close its doors to in-person services in order to better serve and protect the community and staff. 2021 was a better year.

Although COVID-19 continues to be present, Library staff as a whole decided to focus on the positive; the big positive was having all staff working together after working in teams. The Library also resumed normal hours after about a year and five months of schedule changes. Staff were all very happy to once again be open to the public seven days a week. Circulation Supervisor Jaclyn Gryszka remembers working the circulation desk, looking around, and realizing for the first time in a long time that there were patrons browsing the stacks and using the public computers. Things looked "normal" again and she took pictures to document the joyous occasion. Even with the doors re-opened to our amazing patrons, the Library has continued and will continue to provide curbside services.



Photos from  
Friday, July 2, 2021



The statistics for 2021 unsurprisingly increased over the course of the year as Library hours were extended. The Library had 326 operating days in 2021 and saw a 34% increase in overall circulation of library materials. Even with the increase of in-library circulation, the circulation of electronic materials did not decrease. During our two busiest months of the year, July and August, 441 new Library cards were opened. The Library was able to begin offering its very popular museum pass program again in July as these facilities slowly began to reopen. We had over 220 museum pass reservations this year. Another positive change to better serve the growing community was going fine free on all printed library materials. 2021 was a year of hard work and perseverance for so many and the Library is no exception. We look forward to continuing to provide exceptional service in 2022!

# Youth Services

2021 was a year that tested our flexibility and creativity. The Youth Services Departments returned to seeing the children in our community but also needed to look for new ways to connect with the young patrons once again. Something our community values greatly, our in-person programs and face-to-face connections, were well attended throughout the year, despite the highs and lows of the pandemic.

## **Offering Programming to Children during a Pandemic:**

For much of the year we had limitations in place to ensure the safety of our staff and patrons. The Youth Services Department changed and adapted to the needs of the community to continue providing a high level of service and early literacy support. The Department once again offered our Summer Reading Club “Tails & Tales” and held annual events which were forced to be canceled the year prior. Our “Touch a Truck” event, held in July, was the most well-attended program of the year. We were able to bring back our Halloween Parade, puppet shows and in person theater events such as our Magic Show. Once the fall season began and kids went back to an in-person school setting, foot traffic in the Department went up and programs such as Storytime and Arts & Crafts were introduced on a monthly basis and were well attended.

Community Partnerships remained important. The Youth Services Department provided outreach with the Bookmobile at National Night Out, a Pop Up Library event at Thompson Park and visits to Veterans Spray Park.



# Teen Services

2021 was a good return to teen volunteering. Virtual volunteering was offered during the summer. In 2021, the total was 136 teens with 2,051 volunteer hours.

Over the year, seven college prep and SAT/ACT programs were offered with 92 attendees. Young Adult Librarian Emily Mazzoni reviewed and edited seven college application essays for students.

A few new programs:

- Anime Club began in the fall and is going strong.
- A group of STEM Academy Honors Students started tutoring math and science for 8th through 11th graders, and that is now in its third semester.
- The Puppet Show Players worked so well together as a team in the fall to write, decorate, and act in a play for kids.

Total programs for 2021 were 132. Total attendance was 3,820.

Circulation statistics are slightly higher than they were in 2019 (and of course 2020).

# Studio M

Studio M continued to offer weekly virtual instructional STEM projects and on-request 3D printing services, in addition to welcoming back such offerings as outreach talks at local adult communities on 3D printing, making giant bubbles at National Night Out, and reinstating the Studio M volunteer program. Java and Scratch coding programs were also hosted at the library.

The library's 3D printer was used to craft prizes for last summer's Treasures of the Monroe Township Public Library scavenger hunt. 3D printed keys were hidden on the Library's grounds and when found were redeemed for the golden treasures.



# Adult Services

Reference Staff continued to provide excellent service both while the Library was offering curbside-only service and once patrons were welcomed back inside.

Print Release Stations were added to aid patrons in securing their documents when printing from Library computers. The Friends of the Library generously funded wireless printing.

Programs returned to in-person during the summer. However, the addition of two "Owls" has enabled staff to offer hybrid programs. The combination of in-person and Zoom has allowed patrons to participate where they felt most comfortable.

Library staff continued to facilitate many popular programs including Book Café, Coffee & A Book, Genealogy Club, International Book Club, Page Turners, and Sit-N-Stitch. The Friends of the Library also hosted numerous sidewalk book sales as well as book sales inside the Library.

## Outreach Services

### At Home Services

The At Home Services team received recipe submissions from their patrons to put together the "Taste of Monroe" recipe book. We received 11 recipe submissions and shared the books with the public in the month of October in conjunction with our library read, *The Fortune Cookie Chronicles*.



During deliveries, the staff from At Home Services are happy to assist with bringing mail, newspapers, and garbage cans in for the patrons. All in a day's work! At Home Services also provides other unique care for the residents they serve. Patrons receive birthday cards to help celebrate their special day, and several are 100 years old and better! Middle school and high school aged volunteers make decorated bookmarks to brighten the patron's day.



At Home Services assisted in distributing funds to Monroe Township's homebound flood victims, and kept in constant communication with the patrons during their time of displacement.

Donna Rogers started creating puzzle packets to distribute to the patrons on a monthly basis. The packets contain a variety of puzzles such as mind-teasers, sudoku, and crosswords as well as helpful handouts pertaining to healthy habits and scam alerts.

Donna also called all of the At Home Services patrons to be sure that they, and their home health aide, had received their COVID-19 booster and provided information about how to get one if they had not.

## Bookmobile



The Bookmobile joined in on many community events this year including National Night Out, Oktoberfest and the Christmas Car Parade! The Bookmobile was visited by 705 visitors at National Night Out. At Oktoberfest, we promoted the Library's digital resources by raffling off an Amazon Fire Tablet. Decked out in lights, the Bookmobile drove in the Christmas Car Parade from Veteran's Park to the Monroe Recreation Center alongside the Mayor, Fire Department, EMS, and Police.

Teddy bears took over this Library Card Sign Up Month! This year, we purchased 400 MTPL teddy bears to give out to patrons who signed up for new library cards or renewed existing cards. The Bookmobile also went on a "Tour of the Town" where we visited four different neighborhoods to sign up residents for library cards.





In June, the Bookmobile staff was excited to welcome patrons back on the truck for indoor browsing. Many stops were added to the regular schedule including the return of the popular evening stop in the parking lot of Mill Lake School. The addition of outdoor games and extended visits to neighborhoods were a hit among residents.

Over the summer, the Bookmobile attended several special events including "Touch a Truck", an animal scavenger hunt at Thompson Park, and a collaborative library card sign-up event with Jamesburg Public Library at Thompson Park.

**Summer Prize Giveaway:** This summer, the Bookmobile did a giveaway of three prizes for the patrons who visited us the most. Prizes included the "Big Back Yard" bundle with a large picnic mat and bento box, the "Staycation Bundle" with two travel-themed coloring books and a colored pencil set, and the "Choose Your Own Adventure" prize with a copy of the board game Choose Your Own Adventure: House of Danger. Patrons got a "passport" card that they would bring every time they visited the Bookmobile where they'd receive a stamp. At the end of the summer, the three patrons who visited most got to pick one of the three prizes.

**Community Yard Sale:** In October we held our first community yard sale, where patrons who wanted to sell their items made a thirty-dollar donation to the Friends of the Library in exchange for a space in our parking lot to display their items for sale. This raised over \$400 for the Friends between space reservations and money raised from the mini-book sale on site.



# Staff Recognition

In 2021, new faces appeared on staff and some current employees moved into new positions.

With the retirements of long time Bookmobile Manager Lisa Dipierro and Circulation Supervisor MaryAnn Reiner, we knew that there would be a number of staffing changes.

Jaclyn Gryszka, who served as a Circulation Assistant for 15 years, was promoted to Circulation Supervisor. She also serves on the Libraries of Middlesex Automation Consortium's Circulation Protocols Committee.

Kelly Palombit became the new Bookmobile Manager. She worked with the Outreach Department in the past and is looking forward to continuing and enhancing Bookmobile service to Monroe Township.

In July, the Library welcomed Natasha Mikulich the new Community Engagement Coordinator. Natasha oversees the Library's Outreach Department and Circulation Department.

Kristine Campanale, who has worked at the Library for many years, first at Circulation then in the Technical Services department, completed coursework to become the Library's Cataloger.



*To the AHS ladies of the  
Monroe Township Library...  
I'm sending my thanks to you  
For all the good work that you do.  
Bringing books right to my door  
Has never been appreciated more!  
When the bag shows up I can't wait to look,  
I'm so happy to see each and every book.  
Reading is something that I love to do  
And it's become so easy because of you.  
So, come what may, I read a little every day...  
And now, even though I have said it before,  
I'd like to say it at least once more  
THANK YOU!!!  
From a very grateful reader...  
Sheila Blumstein*