

# Librarians reflect on 2020

## *Facilities and staff stepped up to help the community*

By Jill Fuller

Outside my window, the snow is coming down. The garden sits empty and bare in my backyard. While working from home since March, I have watched the scene outside this window glide from spring to summer to fall. Now here we are at the end of the year, the world covered in white.

As 2020 draws to a close, most of us are reflecting on the year we've had — what has changed, what we've learned, and what we're hoping for in 2021. I reached out to some of the librarians at the libraries in Waukesha County to hear their own reflections on the year and the effect it had on our community libraries.

"When the world shut down, Bridges Library System's member libraries did not say 'See you when it's safe again,'" said Stephanie Ramirez, director of the Delafield Public Library, in answer to my email. "They answered the call with 'How can we meet our patrons' needs now, right here, in this moment.'"

Although the libraries were closed this spring, they reopened with safety measures, new services such as curbside pick-up, and plans to meet pandemic-related needs in their communities, such as increasing WiFi access to outdoor spaces, offering online programs and book bundles, and funding HelpNow, an online homework and tutoring tool.

As Bridges Library System director Karol Kennedy reflected, "One thing that has been clearly demonstrated throughout



Fuller

this past year is the ability of libraries to transform. Again and again, libraries identify

needs in their communities and find ways to respond to those needs."

Although libraries have had to adapt, library services "have emerged as one of the things that provide some semblance of normalcy in these turbulent times," said Edell Schaefer, director of the Brookfield Public Library.

The gratitude and support from residents prove the truth of that statement.

"When the Elm Grove Public Library reopened, the (socially distanced) flood of familiar and unexpected faces expressing just how much they missed us and their library was deeply felt," said Noah, a librarian there. "I think the three-month closure made a lot of folks realize what a valuable community resource the public library is, and it was wonderful to feel their support."

The Big Bend Public Library started an outdoor picnic-in-the-park program for preschoolers and their parents this summer. Karla Lang, director of the library, recalled that "One mother had tears in her eyes when she told me how much it meant to have somewhere to go with her kids."

Patrons at the Alice Baker Library in Eagle appreciated their virtual tour of the Pabst Mansion,

while the Delafield Public Library created Teen Self-Care Kits that were so popular, they had to make more after only one day. One teen told a library staff member how hard her year had been and how much she appreciated the gesture from the library.

There have been challenges as well. Engaging with patrons in a virtual space, enforcing safety measures, and the uncertainty of the days ahead have been stressful for library staffs. Yet multiple library directors praised their staff for their innovation, creativity, and dedication during this difficult time. The effects of the pandemic have proven that libraries are not irrelevant or obsolete, but essential to a thriving community.

As Noah at the Elm Grove Public Library stated, "In the face of closures and restricted services, I've realized fully that libraries are a lifeline for many. Some cannot go without a new book to read or film to watch. Some desperately need the computers, internet, WiFi, and technology services the library offers. Others deeply miss the social aspects and innate need to spend time in the library space."

Whether in-person or online, your library is here for you. In the new year, as in years past, this will continue to be true, no matter what we face.

*(Jill Fuller is the marketing and communications librarian or the Bridges Library System. She can be reached at [jfuller@bridges-librarysystem.org](mailto:jfuller@bridges-librarysystem.org).)*