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Engagement with libraries skyrockets despite pandemic

Take-home kits, virtual trivia popular among residents

By Derek Johnson Special to Conley Media

From craft kits to virtual story times, libraries all around Waukesha and Washington counties have started to offer non-bookrelated programs to help communities fend off the stay-at-home blues during the pandemic.

Librarians from around the two counties said these new programs, which include everything from virtual trivia that is hosted by the New Berlin Public Library to homeschooling lessons that are offered by the Mukwonago Community Library, have become immensely popular.

"You can't buy this kind of engagement," said Jennifer Einwalter, the director of operations at the Jack Russell Memorial Library in Hartford.

Specifically, many librarians said that any take-home craft kits that their libraries offer are almost always gone within an hour of them being put out, and that virtual speakers and online reading programs have been incredibly popular as well.

"We haven't had anything that hasn't been attended," said Terry Buchmann, a library assistant at the Mukwonago Community Library.



mage courtesy of the Jack Russell Memorial

The finished version of a craft offered by the Jack Russell Memorial Library in Hartford.

In addition, traditional library services are still being used despite the pandemic. Many librarians said that they frequently see people browsing their libraries in-person, and that teens are still making use of libraries as a place to study for exams.

E-book checkouts, too, have started to become more popular. At the New Berlin Public Library specifically, e-book usage has reportedly increased 20% in 2020 compared to 2019, and all across Washington and Waukesha counties, librarians said that they're seeing an increase in demand for these virtual books.

As a result of all these things, librarians said that their libraries are going to continue pursuing these assorted programs even if the pandemic ends, and that they're also actively looking for ways to expand the programs to better help their communities.

"We like to feel useful," said Hannah Kane, the youth services director at the West Bend Community Memorial Library. "And we want to help."



Image courtesy of the West Bend Community Memorial Library

An example of a STEAM kit offered by the West Bend Community Memorial Library. The kits focus on science, technology, engineering, art and/or math (STEAM).

Upcoming events from local libraries

Waukesha Public Library

- Feb. 1 Adult Color Yourself
 Calm kits available
 Feb. 10 Simple Science kits
- Feb. 10 Simple Science kits available

Kits can be picked up between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m. at 321 Wisconsin Ave. in Waukesha.

Mukwonago Community Library

■ Feb. 4 at 10 a.m. — Virtual Lapsit Storytime

■ Feb. 9 at 4 p.m. — Virtual Girls Who Code Class

Signup information for these classes can be found at http://mukwona-go.evanced.info/signup/calendar.

Jack Russell Memorial Library

- Feb. 1 at 6 p.m. Crafts for Grownups On The Go kits available
- Feb. 3 between 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. STEAM Club kits available Kits can be picked up at 100 Park Ave. in Hartford.

West Bend Community Memorial Library

- Feb. 2 Virtual Storytime on YouTube
- Feb. 6 between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m. Elementary-Age Craft kits available

Kits can be picked up at 630 Poplar St. in West Bend, and Virtual Storytime videos can be viewed at https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLCHOh7odU88MxuLAd53EGG0d Kpq6C9uJK.