

# Online library events prove popular

## Events bring together people of all age groups

By Jill Fuller

Among other things, Abraham Lincoln had to learn how to use Zoom last year. As he peered into the camera, one youngster asked him how he was enjoying 2020. Lincoln, played by reenactor Kevin Wood, replied that he was making new friends but wasn't quite sure how he had gotten here!

"The questions from the kids were just golden," said librarian Jen Bremer of the Delafield Public Library's online "Abraham Lincoln" program.

The virtual presentation was just one of hundreds of free, online programs that public libraries in Waukesha and Jefferson counties have offered since the pandemic began, giving people of all ages ways to learn, connect, and have fun while staying home.

Within a week of library buildings closing last March, library staff were filming and sharing storytimes and craft programs to keep kids busy and learning during shutdown. Since then, libraries have added creative and engaging online programs for both kids and adults, from virtual cooking classes and genealogy meet-ups to presentations on dinosaurs and preschool sing-a-longs. The result has been better than library staff had hoped. Despite the challenges of the virtual format, online programs have

proven popular with every age group.

The online book club attendance at the Delafield Public Library has doubled since October. Interaction in the Menomonee Falls Public Library's genealogy Facebook group has tripled, according to librarian Ellen Rohr.

"The last year has felt isolating for people, and virtual, interactive programs are a wonderful way to feel like part of a community again," said Librarian Becca Werginz of the Pauline Haass Public Library in Sussex.

One benefit to online programming is that more people can attend, including young parents who work or students who can join in on their own time.

"I have had so many kids and parents say they're happy to participate now that it's virtual!" said Courtney Metko at the Muskego Public Library.

For people missing loved ones, the programs have also provided a way to connect with others and combat isolation.

"Neighbors sign up to attend together virtually. Grandparents will attend with their grandchildren who live out of state," said Bremer.

"People like discussing the books," Cathy Tuttrup



Fuller



Submitted photo

The Hartland Public Library's Youth Services Librarian Peter Blenski reads a book for online storytime.

of the Brookfield Public Library said of their virtual book clubs, "but it is the connection to other people that is the draw."

For kids, online programs offer essential learning opportunities and social interaction. "The videos have helped the kids cope and get through these tough times," said Peter Blenski, a librarian at Hartland Public Library. One parent told Blenski that the library's "Elephant and Piggie" videos helped their son, who has autism, whenever he needed a break.

The Muskego Public Library added new online preschool, baby, and elementary-aged programs this year at the request of parents and caregivers.

"Libraries are beneficial for kiddos' growth and development," said Abby Bussen, a librarian at the

Muskego library. "And how many high-quality, high-energy development options are absolutely free? Very, very few."

Join in the fun online by checking the website or Facebook pages of your favorite libraries to see what's coming up this spring. Some examples of upcoming online programs are "Well-Loved Wisconsin Garden Plants" on April 27 at Muskego Public Library and "How to Draw Cartoons" for kids on April 8 at Hartland Public Library. There's something happening every week at the libraries, and we'd love to have you there.

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