

Fiscal Year in Review, Part 1

The 2019/2020 fiscal year (October 1, 2019-September 30, 2020) was a challenging year for the Columbus Public Library, as I am sure it was for nearly everyone. We found that the year also provided many opportunities for the library to serve our community in new ways.

October 2019 through March 15, 2020 was the start of a typical fiscal year for the Columbus Public Library. As usual the library was a bustling place, hosting weekly programs for children and teens like StoryTime, StoryArt, Super Sensational Saturdays, Anime Club, and Crafternoons. The Adult Book Club met regularly and a wide range of topics were presented during the monthly adult programs. Speakers from Humanities Nebraska presented history in an engaging way during our "Paul Revere's Ride" and "Grit n Gumption" programs. The community had the opportunity to learn about essential oils and how to crochet, and heard stories from Columbus resident Jim Murphy from his days working at NASA on several of the Apollo missions. In January, we hosted our annual Winter Carnival to great success! The Children's Room was packed full of families enjoying games, snacks, and balloon creations.

Monthly, from October through February, meeting rooms were used by the community over 100 times and an average of 8,164 visitors came to the library. Public computers were used an average of 1,815 times for over 1,250 hours each of those five months. An average of 9,109 library materials were checked out from the building or bookmobile each month. Digital library resources, such as e-books, music downloads, or research databases were used an average of 3,175 times monthly.

On March 16, 2020 the library closed to the public following the example of local schools. We spent a few weeks assisting the community over the phone and online, helping patrons navigate our digital library resources and printing/ mailing needed documents. After establishing procedures and safety measures, we launched a curbside delivery service on April 9. Library cardholders placed requests for materials using their library account online (www.cplconnect.us) or called to request items directly from staff. A pickup time was scheduled once items were ready and items were placed outside when cardholders arrived. In May and June there were 662 uses of curbside service.

The City of Columbus offered a grocery order and delivery program through Columbus Hy-Vee during April, May, and June. Library staff assisted employees from other city departments with placing and delivering orders.

The library building reopened June 22 with limited hours and services, which continue to fluctuate based on local health guidelines and statewide directive health measures. Curbside service continued to be offered, although it was not utilized often after the building reopened.

We continued delivering quality programming as we were able throughout the fiscal year, with community members attending 391 programs throughout the year for children, teens, and adults, for a total attendance of over 10,400. During the summer, 132 children, 35 teens, and 130 adults registered and participated in the online Summer Reading Program. These numbers do not include participation in interactive and recorded programs that were offered online when the library building was closed, and continued through August. These programs were not utilized nearly as much as the typical summer programs so we learned the Columbus community prefers the social aspect of in-person programs. In-person programs, however, were offered on a very limited basis during the remainder of the fiscal year in an effort to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the community.

Countless library patrons expressed their gratitude when curbside service began and when the library building opened so they could once again access entertainment and educational materials. This year had its difficulties but we were glad to be a part of making it a little more bearable for our community!

Stay tuned in February 2021 for Fiscal Year in Review, Part 2.