

Merrymeeting Gleaners Partner with TPL

The Topsham Public Library's mission and vision statements are:

Mission: The Topsham Public Library connects resources, programs, and services to the community to stimulate personal growth and enrichment.

Vision: The Topsham Public Library is the access point for traditional and innovative resources to meet the informational, social, and cultural needs of an evolving community.

The library partners with many organizations and community groups to fulfill our mission. Many of you are aware of our successful partnerships with the Topsham Historical Society, Cathance River Education Alliance (CREA), Topsham Garden Club, and more. This year we wanted to highlight one of the other unsung heroes of Topsham and the surrounding area who partner with us to create and sustain community.

The Merrymeeting Gleaners are a 100+ person volunteer group that was formed in 2016 as part of the Merrymeeting Food Council's food security work. Gleaners harvest surplus food from local farms and redistribute it to over 30 organizations that support individuals who require help accessing food in our area.

In 2018, the Gleaners launched two pilot programs, both of which work to remove barriers to food access, be it stigma, or the time and knowledge or the space and tools needed to prepare healthy foods. The Sharing Table offers gleaned food in a community space, such as a library, and is available for anyone to take.

The Topsham Public Library was pleased to be asked to host the Sharing Table throughout the harvesting seasons. Late summer and early fall, each Wednesday, without fail, a table with the gleaned bounty from local farms appears in front of the library. Within two or three hours, all of the produce has disappeared. These items offer variety and healthy alternatives to those in our area who are food insecure. There are five sharing tables in the Midcoast area.

Merrymeeting Gleaners became a program of Mid Coast Hunger Prevention Program in July 2021. According to the Merrymeeting Food Council website, Harriet Van Vleck, MFC Coordinator says,

"This program would not have been possible without the generosity of farmers, volunteers, and funders. The relationships, trust, and community that have been nurtured over the past five years through the Merrymeeting Gleaners network are an essential piece of its success. Kelly Davis, our former Gleaning Coordinator, with a core group of committed individuals, did an amazing job building this from an all-volunteer pilot program. The Merrymeeting Gleaners program is the type of collaborative solution to community level challenges in our food system that MFC's network seeks to support. With MCHPP's support, we are confident the Gleaning program and its impact will be sustained."

Julia Nelson, the new Merrymeeting Gleaners Coordinator, says she is "blown away" by the dedication of the awesome volunteers who work with her on this program. We are also blown away by the reach of gleaners who are using the library



as a way to make sure that everyone in the community has access to not only books, education, technology, and resources, but also some very basic needs, like food. As we say, the Topsham Public Library is a community center for all. Thank you, Merrymeeting Gleaners, for making the Sharing Table a reality in Topsham.



Volunteers from Merrymeeting Gleaners pick fresh produce, box it up, and distribute to sites for pick up. Topsham Public Library is proud to participate in this way of meeting our community's needs

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Keith Spiro Media

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Adult Services: Surviving to Thrive

By Emma J. Gibbon, Adult Services Librarian

Library services have always been about being flexible, about responding to the communities wants and needs as they change and adapt day to day, week to week, and year to year. We often serve folks over their lifetimes, so our charge has always been to meet them where they are and help them get where they are going. This has never been as true as this year. Between changing Covid restrictions, Maine weather, changes in staff, and how we use our building, we have had to be very light on our feet. I'm happy to say that we were able to do so with aplomb and more!

We were able to pivot and provide passive programming and outdoor programming. What's passive programming, you ask? Passive programming is self-directed activities that are not tied down to a specific time or location. An example of this has been our extremely popular Grab Bags for Grown-Ups program. We started the grab bags when we first opened after lockdown, but they have proved so popular that we have continued to offer them, even as things have started to open up. Based on similar, popular programs in the teen and children's rooms, we thought it would be nice to offer adults something to try, something they could "grab and go," like a little gift from us every month. Our bags have featured a variety of activities, including jigsaws, origami, embroidery, 3D puzzles, and calligraphy. We offered an online artist talk, tai chi in the gardens, and book discussions

both through Zoom and outside.

We made sure you had something to read! As always, every month, we ordered books and movies to keep you entertained, occupied, and educated. We did have some problems with supply lines when it came to physical books, but we plowed through, found alternate ways to get items here and continued to add to our cloudLibrary collection. Speaking of our cloudLibrary collection, we found that last year 50% of the eBooks and eAudiobooks that we bought solely for our Topsham patrons were in use at any given time. That is an incredible number. The average for most libraries is around 11%. If you haven't tried cloudLibrary yet, all you have to do is download the app and you can access a huge collection of eBooks and eAudiobooks that we share with other libraries in the consortium. Think of it as digital interlibrary loan!

If reading magazines are more your thing, then try cloudLibrary NewsStand, another app that we added for our patrons this year. NewsStand is an eMagazine app to read magazines on your phone, tablet, or browser! NewsStand has currently over 6500 titles including Reader's Digest, This Old House, Taste of Home, Kiplinger's, Yoga Journal, and PC World.

I am of the opinion that a library is not just its materials or its programs or even its

buildings. It is the people. It is the staff and the volunteers and the trustees and all of you, who use our services or come through our doors. We have undoubtedly, collectively, had a rough year, but we're keeping going, and we're still here for you. Let us know what you need, then we can all survive to thrive!

Programs and Services Offered in FY21 in Spite of Covid

- Art Exhibits – online and in gallery
- Book Look Book Discussion
- CareerCenter Program
- Fishing Rally – outside
- Friends Book Sale – one day outside
- Grab & Go craft projects for all ages
- Joy of Art – online
- Joy of the Lens – online
- Joy of the Pen – submitted remotely
- Libraries Build Business
- Maine Humanities Book Discussion – via Zoom
- Markings Gallery Artist Talk – via Zoom
- Mystery Readers Roundtable – outside
- Storytimes – Zoom, videos, and outside
- Summer Reading Programs for all
- Tai Chi at the library – outside
- Tech Support – Via email and in person
- Teen art – outside
- Teen Zoom book discussions

From the Gallery

By Monique Marchilli-Barker, Gallery Coordinator

I had just two exhibits under my belt as the new gallery coordinator before the pandemic hit and forced closures. While working from home and considering how we could continue to provide art exhibits for our patrons and community, I created a slideshow of the current exhibit at the time, a celebration of Maine's Bicentennial and the role Topsham residents played in the development of our state. This was our first foray into the world of a virtual Crooker Gallery.

Next on the schedule was the M.S.A.D. No. 75 schools' student art exhibit. I felt strongly about carrying on with this show and decided to open it up to include artwork that children were creating at home, and received a great response. Continuing to use Google Slides, I played around with giving it more of a gallery appearance for our annual Joy of the Lens exhibit in July, which I thought would be a welcomed bright spot in trying times. With enthusiastic support from the participating photographers, the show carried on. The template I created served as an example for several groups that reached out wishing to stay connected with their community in this way.

Realizing we were in it for the long haul, I researched professional virtual gallery platforms and found one that met all our requirements. When the physical gallery space reopened in September of 2020, we offered exhibiting artists the option of a concurrent virtual exhibit in which more works could be shown. Natasha Kempers-Cullen and Libby Sipe were the first to help usher in this new format.

The arrival of 2021 brought the start of a new round of Joy of Art and Joy of the Lens exhibits and although the physical gallery space remained open, the number of pieces that could be hung, and therefore the

number of participants, was limited. By using our online gallery we were able to keep the registrations open and for each artist and photographer to enter multiple pieces. While there is no equal substitute for seeing art and each other in person, going virtual allowed us to maintain a valuable community resource.

The Topsham Public Library's virtual Crooker Gallery enabled local artists to continue exhibiting their works during a time when physical spaces were closed, for M.S.A.D. No. 75 students to share their creativity with loved ones near and far, for organizations like the College Guild to spread the word about their work, and for us all to remain connected through a shared appreciation of the arts. We are proud that art in all its forms was able to thrive in Topsham!

In FY21 there were 8 in-person & 5 virtual Gallery Exhibits in the Crooker Gallery and on our website



Because we were unable to celebrate the winners of our Joy programs during Covid, we had a garden party in their honor recently. Thanks to Keith Spiro for the photographs and to "Lil Jam Cookies" for the beautiful (and delicious) cookies

