



2021

Annual Report



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Founded in 1893, Montclair Public Library serves the citizens of Montclair, New Jersey through two facilities: the Main Library and the Bellevue Avenue Branch. The mission of Montclair Public Library is to change lives every day, through words, ideas, and community building. Our vision is to provide unlimited opportunities for lifelong learning, discovery, and community engagement.

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The Montclair Public Library Foundation, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that develops philanthropic support for the Montclair Public Library. Established in 2002, the MPL Foundation raises funds for library programs, collection enhancement, staff development, special projects, and other critical needs that exceed municipal funding. The Foundation has raised over \$4.5 million to support Library programs and services including technology improvements, museum passes, summer reading programs for children, and the signature Open Book / Open Mind series, which brings together high-profile authors and expert conversation partners for in-depth discussion about their work.

Dear Friends,

For the second year in a row, nothing was normal at the Montclair Public Library. For the first half of the year we continued curbside pickup and first-floor browsing and borrowing only. Once COVID vaccination rates increased and positive cases declined, we were able to reopen the remainder of the building, allowing mostly unfettered access to our other floors while following CDC guidelines. While our usage was not near our pre-pandemic levels, our customers responded enthusiastically, averaging over 1,000 more visitors per month than in previous months.

As we transitioned back to a new normal, requiring face masks for all users (and vaccinations for all staff), we found the enthusiasm of our users boosting our spirits. As customers added sticky notes about what they enjoyed about the Library the most, our staff delighted in seeing the additions. From the tentative, handwritten message of a child about all the “fun books” to the deliberative, exclamation-ridden “We love the library” of an adult, each message shared the same theme: our Library was, and is, for the public.

The year ended with my position vacant: I have taken a Director position at another library, and one of my last tasks was to write this foreword. Although this Annual Report was compiled and distributed after I had already departed, I wrote this introduction knowing one thing: in these pages are things I am proud of because they have been planned and carried out by the dedicated, hard-working staff of the Montclair Public Library.



Peter Coyl, MLIS

Peter Coyl served as the 16th Director of the Montclair Public Library from March 1, 2017 to December 17, 2021.



L to R: Assistant Director Selwa Shamy, former Director Peter Coyl, Interim Director Janet Torsney

In 2021, the Montclair community used the Library to...

EXPLORE



212,264
items checked out



92,402
electronic items borrowed, from eBooks to streaming movies



14,828
questions answered



73%
of Montclair residents have an active library card

CONNECT



100,992
visits made to the Library's website



8,100
on-site Wi-Fi sessions provided



318
Wi-Fi hotspots borrowed for home use

GROW



3,095
attendance at children's and teen programs



3,283
attendance at adult programs



1,794
registrations in Adult School classes



...and electronic content was in high demand.

LIBBY/ OVERDRIVE



72% increase
in borrows of eBooks, audiobooks, and digital magazines compared to pre-pandemic 2019

KANOPY



107% increase
in plays of streaming movies compared to pre-pandemic 2019

HOOPLA



119% increase
in borrows of digital movies, music, eBooks, and audiobooks compared to pre-pandemic 2019

Adult School

The Adult School adjusted its normal class load amid pandemic disruptions to offer approximately **173 classes with 1,794 total registrations** in 2021. It offered courses on virtual platforms throughout the year and gradually reintroduced in-person classes, starting with **Outdoor Golf** in the spring, **The Birds of Summer** and **Eco-Cruise: Excursions around Newark Bay** in the summer, and approximately 31 classes held between the Library branches and offsite locations in the fall.

Highlights among virtual classes include **The Transatlantic Slave Trade and the Making of the New World** (63 registrants), **Physics Answers for All** (40 registrants), **Freedom: The Long Struggle for Racial Equality** (41 registrants), and **Artemisia Gentileschi: The Spirit of Caesar with the Soul of a Woman** (40 registrants). Students also showed interest in returning to in-person classes such as **What's Really Going on in Cuba?** (32 registrants) and **John Singer Sargent: Romance, Drama, and the Visual World** (32 registrants).

Borrower Services

The Library introduced a new free resource for senior citizens called “**Senior Center in a Box.**” These thoughtfully curated kits are focused on specific activities and themes, which seniors can do on their own or with minimal assistance, and are available for borrowing with an MPL library card. Over 200 kits and counting are available, with themes such as **knitting/crocheting, coloring, puzzles, birdwatching, exercise, board games, and book-and-DVD combinations.** Each kit includes a complete set of materials needed for the activity. Kits can be picked up at the Main Library or delivered through the **Home Assisted Services program (H.A.S.)**, which continues to deliver and pick up library items for patrons who cannot easily leave their homes.

Senior Center in a Box was initially conceived to fill the void left by the temporary closure of senior centers due to the pandemic. This project was funded by the Township of Montclair through federal CARES Act (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security) funding provided by Essex County.



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Adult Services

In 2021, Adult Services continued to serve the MPL community by offering virtual reference assistance and a variety of online programs. The department offered 66 sessions of **“Learn English”** classes to fulfill an increasing demand. It also hosted a successful three-part virtual financial series with the **New Jersey Financial Planning Association**, and it continued to offer health literacy programs both virtually and in-person including free monthly health screenings conducted by a nurse from **Hackensack Meridian Mountainside Medical Center**.

In June, the new **“Coffee & Crime Mystery Book Club”** kicked off with both daytime and evening sessions. The **Summer Reading program for adults** continued to be popular with 118 participants who read 629 books. In July, in-person services resumed, including **Book-a-Librarian** appointments and Edgemont tech help.



Throughout the summer and fall, Adult Services staff participated in several outreach events. The Library’s bookmobile (aka “eTuk”) made an appearance at the **Walnut Street Farmer’s Market**, where staff interacted with over 60 adults and children, many of whom were new to Montclair and signing up for library cards for the first time. Staff also participated in the **Montclair Art Museum’s Fall Fest**, **Montclair Literary Festival**, and **Montclair Jazz Festival**.

In the fall, the Library was named a national **“Wi-Fi At Work” Award Winner** by WifiForward for its Senior Hotspot Program, which lends Wi-Fi hotspots to senior citizens without internet access at home. This project was funded by the Township of Montclair through federal CARES Act funding provided by Essex County. MPL was also selected to participate in the **NJ Library Association’s Access Navigator Program**, which provides individualized assistance to persons seeking employment, training in digital competence, and access to resources for other life needs. Additionally, MPL was awarded \$7,950 by the **Essex County Division of Cultural and Historic Affairs / Essex County Local Arts and History Grant program** to begin digitizing its collection of deed abstracts.

In December, Adult Services partnered with the **Mental Health Association of Essex and Morris** to offer a novel program, a book discussion of “The Storied Life of A.J. Fikry” by Gabrielle Zevin, with a supportive discussion afterward relating to the themes of resilience during the coronavirus pandemic.

Throughout the year, Library staff curated several **online book lists** to keep patrons informed on a variety of topics including African American Voices, Asian American Voices, Latinx Voices, Native American Voices, Environmentalism, LGBTQIA+, Social Justice, Graphic Novels & Comics, Humor, and Staff Picks.

MONTCLAIR PUBLIC LIBRARY

OPEN BOOK ONLINE OPEN MIND



Open Book / Open Mind is MPL's live conversation series featuring top authors discussing their new books and the important events of our time. The series, which went virtual in April 2020, remained online through 2021, drawing as many as 750 guests for Isabel Wilkerson and 400 for Ann Patchett, and including attendees from 35 states outside New Jersey as well as Canada, Europe, the UK, the Caribbean, Thailand, and New Zealand. Six of the featured books were New York Times bestsellers. Hosted authors included:

Ann Patchett in conversation with Jeanine Cummins
 Charles Blow in conversation with Jim Johnson
 Isabel Wilkerson in conversation with Rachel Swarns
 Gabrielle Glaser in conversation with Benilde Little
 Elizabeth Kolbert in conversation with
 Michelle Nijhuis
 Quiara Alegria Hudes in conversation with
 Elena Martinez
 Jhumpa Lahiri in conversation with Kate Tuttle
 Barry Meier in conversation with Michael Isikoff
 Lawrence Wright in conversation with
 Elisabeth Rosenthal
 Mary Roach in conversation with Lulu Miller
 Rob Reich and Mehran Sahami in conversation with
 Dale Russakoff
 Alice Hoffman in conversation with Elisabeth Egan
 Sandra Cisneros in conversation with
 Quiara Alegria Hudes
 Andrea Elliott in conversation with Lydia Polgreen
 Gayle Jessup White in conversation with
 Dionne Ford

Special thanks to series founders Jennifer Dorr and David Jones and to the rest of the Advisory Board:

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Neal Carruth	Ivan Held	Dale Russakoff	Kate Tuttle
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We are grateful for the generous sponsors of Open Book / Open Mind:

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Youth & Teen Services



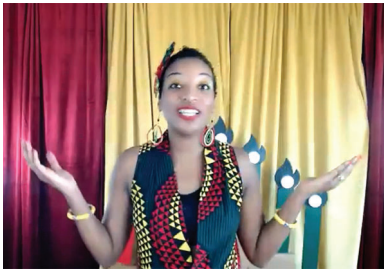
The Youth & Teen Services department offered a robust slate of virtual and in-person programs throughout the year. In February, families virtually celebrated **Lunar New Year** with children's author Tina Cho, who used her book "Korean Celebrations" to teach families about traditional clothes, blessings, special foods and gifts, and games. Also in February, kids met exotic animals from the comfort of their homes with a virtual visit from the **Helen Woodward Animal Center**. The presenter introduced a chinchilla, parrot, and hermit crab.

In the spring, the popular teen-led **Chesstronauts** returned in a virtual capacity with one-on-one chess instruction. Kids of all skill levels received accessible chess instruction for improved strategic thinking and sportsmanship. Meanwhile, the Montclair-based company **Boogie Woogie Babies** provided several outdoor dance programs for babies and toddlers at both branches. They were met with enthusiastic dancing from young and old alike.

As part of summer reading club programming, **Unique Creatures** brought their collection of critters such as armadillos, skunks, spiders, snakes, kookaburras, chinchillas, and kinkajous. This event was outdoors at Bellevue Avenue Branch. Also in the summer, the department hired a rising senior at Montclair High School as part of the **Public Library Association's Inclusive Internship Initiative**. With a goal to "create a project that spurs the young Latines of Montclair to cultivate a love for words, in addition to bringing them much-needed peer connections," the intern developed a book discussion group aimed at Latine middle school students, to read and discuss "Esperanza Rising" by Pam Muñoz Ryan.

In the fall, local storyteller Shirley Johnson told the stories of Frog and Centipede, Kulu, Brer Opossum, and other animal friends that teach life lessons to children. These **Sankofa Stories** were part of the Montclair Literary Festival in collaboration with Succeed2gether. Meanwhile, comic book artist and writer G.R. Lear held his engaging **Unlimited Wonder Comics Lab**. Kids enthusiastically learned the basics of comics and then took part in intensive creative exercises during this in-person workshop. Also in the fall, D'Italia Programs presented **Essex County Italian Heritage Celebration & Sister City Day**. Participants were treated to a history of Italian and Italian American contributions, folkloric music and dance, and a take-away craft for children.

Over 200 visitors came to the Library's inaugural **Ujamaa Outdoor Winter Market** on December 4. "Ujamaa" is one of the seven principles of Kwanzaa, highlighting cooperative economics. In this spirit, the Winter Market featured products from local artisans and entrepreneurs, as well as live kora music by Salieu Suso. In addition, over 111 attendees enjoyed



a series of free performances by magician Island Magic and musician Kassaye Selassie. The year capped off with Kwanzaa expert and Grammy nominee **Culture Queen**, who taught the seven principles of Kwanzaa through interactive music, movement, and storytelling in a virtual program. Participants danced from home and sang along with Culture Queen while learning about this important African-American holiday tradition.



Photo by: Dan Derrico



Photo by: Neil Gabrowsky



The 2021 edition of The Little Read brought together neighbors and families in our **annual celebration of literacy**. From October 6-8, a series of guest readers from the community climbed onto the iconic big red chair and read stories aloud to schoolchildren and families. Funds raised through this read-a-thon support children’s programming at the Library throughout the year. Special thanks to Gina Chung Fortt for coordinating the many volunteer readers from the community, and thank you to the Little Read sponsors:

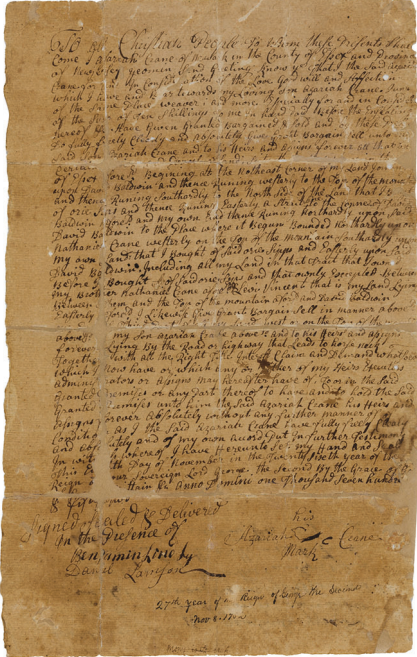
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A Piece of Montclair History, Preserved



In March, the Library announced the preservation of a 270-year-old document transferring land from Azariah Crane (said to be Montclair's first non-indigenous resident) to his son. **This land deed from 1752 is one of the earliest written records of what would become Montclair.** It has belonged to the Library since at least 1961 but was in poor condition.

The document was treated and preserved by the Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts, a group in Philadelphia that has treated other historic documents, including early copies of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Funding for the project was provided by the Montclair Public Library Foundation.

A digital version of the land deed can be viewed at montclairlibrary.org/deed.



The Montclair Public Library Foundation welcomed a new Executive Director, Mary Packer, in 2021, and continued to grow their Board of Directors. The support and advocacy of the Foundation, particularly through the challenges of the pandemic, have been crucial for the Library. With a huge increase in demand for eBooks, audiobooks, and other electronic resources, it was the Foundation who enabled the Library to retain and expand those collections. In addition, the Foundation secured support for Wi-Fi expansion at the Main Library and funding for quality children's programming, including the summer reading program. Grants from the Foundation also supported:

- Wi-Fi hotspots
- Laptop checkouts
- Museum passes
- Open Book / Open Mind
- The Adult School
- The Little Read
- Staff professional development
- Outreach and publicity efforts

Montclair Public Library Foundation



Thank you to all of our 2021 donors! Your generosity makes it possible to offer valuable programs and resources to everyone in our community.

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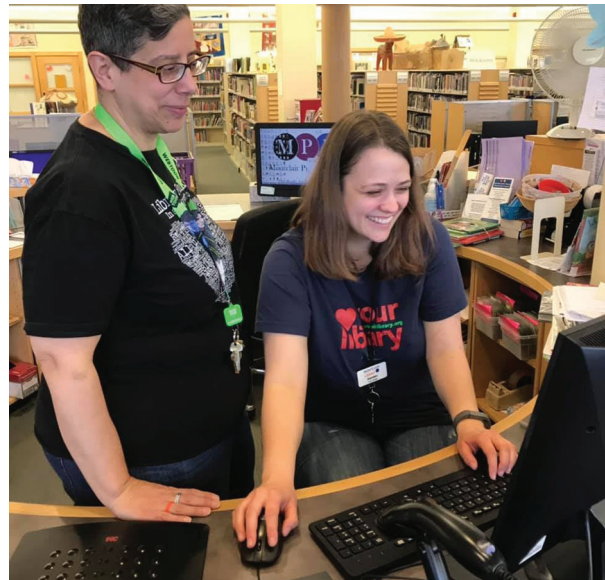
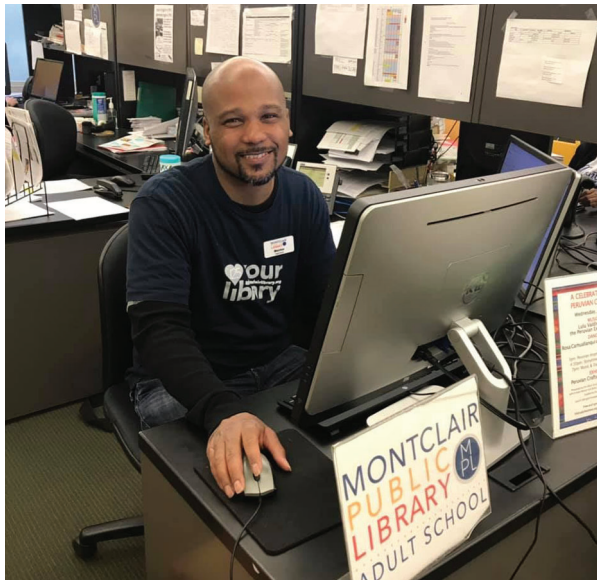
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