What were you doing last year prior to the pandemic shut down in late March of 2020? My last time in a crowd was at a packed KU basketball game in Allen Fieldhouse, which is considered to be the loudest college basketball arena in the country, with a seating capacity of 16,800. Things sure have been different since then. Sporting events of that scale will not resume anytime soon.

What’s changed about the way you work and about your library’s services? My list includes fewer face-to-face meetings, increased eBook circulation, virtual programs, book quarantine, pick up services, and extended Wi-Fi, among other changes.

Dr. Fauci, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, tells us things may return to “somewhat normal” as early as fall 2021. That’s hopeful and pragmatic. It’s likely that library services will also gradually return to “somewhat normal” throughout 2021. As you plan, remember that NCKLS grant opportunities are available to maximize local services, and staff are available to help you make the most of these grants.

Legally established public libraries in NCKLS taxing counties receive Extended Service Grants annually to support vibrant materials collections. These libraries are also eligible to apply for grants to support technology, service improvements, summer reading activities, and continuing education for staff and board members. Complete information about each grant, as well as other NCKLS grants, may be found at http://lib.nckls.org/grants/.

In addition, those libraries that meet the state requirement for maintenance of local effort, (or local funding support) are eligible for an additional grant in 2021 distributed based on population. I will have complete information to share with you by March.

NCKLS is a sub-grantee, receiving CARES Act funds remaining from the Kansas State Library’s 2020 direct distribution. All public libraries will be eligible to receive selected equipment or support for digital resources with these funds. A survey of interest was completed last year, and the options for selection will be sent soon, if not by the time you read this newsletter.

What are you looking forward to as things return to somewhat normal? I hope to hear the sound of kids in the library at programs, to see people meeting in the library at tables and study spaces and to meet with NCKLS librarians in person. We will get there!
“2020 is now your year ‘zero’. This is your starting point and your new baseline. These are the numbers you will try to improve on in 2021”. -Gail Santy, CKLS

By Dawn Krause

Public library annual reports were my first major duty as your new Assistant Director, and they have been a great way to get to know our member libraries. I thought a summary of our shared workload would make a good first article for my first newsletter.

We worked through math problems, delved into Verso reports and figured out averages of reference transactions together. We did our best to answer the new survey questions (surprise!), to input new data points, to meet the shortened deadline and still provide the most accurate data. But like many things during the COVID-19 year, it was a normal exercise under a very abnormal set of circumstances.

Some of us are seeing the vast difference between what was achieved in 2019 compared to that of 2020. Much of that is not good news, as even our wireless stats took a collective hit between 2019 and 2020 despite our efforts to extend service into parking lots. While it is disheartening to see the numbers decline in so many of our service areas, there were also bright spots and service innovations. We persevered and that’s an achievement.

To share just a few of those bright spots, here are some of the innovations you listed on your annual reports:

- Curbside and/or homebound deliveries in the majority of our system’s libraries
- Zoom book discussion groups
- Learned everything about virtual programming for all ages
- Summer Reading went virtual for everyone
- Increased individualized patron contact to determine patron needs and wants safely
- Extended WIFI
- Partnered with local charities to provide drive up summer food program
- Increased and better used social media
- Delivery of self-directed programs with instructions and often video instructions

During this time, our fellow library, Marion Public Library, even received a Five Star rating from Library Journal. They were one of only ten libraries in Kansas to receive that honor. Now, that’s the spirit! I’ll end with this quote from one annual report, “We did our best during difficult circumstances,” which sums up what public libraries in our region have been doing for decades. We will move beyond the COVID times, and even though it may take us a while to bounce back, the data will again show the power of our collective libraries in impacting our region. Thank you for all your hard work.
EVERYTHING GOES THIS SUMMER!

Summer library plans are underway and everything goes this summer. Last summer we were firmly caught between stop and go...this summer we are embracing new ideas and trying everything that sounds remotely possible. Libraries across the NCKLS system have been doing all sorts of different things to thrive, and all of it is welcomed after all the staying at home. Three more summer library programming sessions are scheduled for Thursdays in February. Registration is currently open on the NCKLS website. These sessions will give programmers time to share ideas with others around the system. Bring craft plans or links to share. The first two webinars are loaded on the staff tab of Niche Academy and can be accessed until May 1, 2021. We are all better together; join, listen, learn, share.

STATE LIBRARY NOTES

Fireside Chat with Eric Klinenberg
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6HjexOapFJo

Please visit the link to see the recording of New Jersey State Librarian Mary Chute’s Virtual Fireside Chat with Eric Klinenberg, author of Palaces for the People.

Congrats to Marion City Library!

Just in case you missed it, there are 10 star libraries in Kansas by the Library Journal Index.

It was tricky to find, look here for the list:
https://www.libraryjournal.com/?detail-Story=lx201214StarsByNumbers

19 Libraries will be getting socks or flying books masks! Libraries that submitted the Public Library Survey by Jan 25 will receive them. Please send us a picture of you in your new socks.

Books on display at Burnley Memorial Library

Books on display at Enterprise Public Library
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GRANT

ALA and ARSL have teamed up to offer their second round of funding for the Libraries Transforming Communities -Focus on Small and Rural Libraries Grant. Since we’ll still be largely virtual for programming in 2021, this is a good opportunity to get funding for online events that engage the community. At least 450 libraries will be selected to receive these funds, so this grant has quite a wide reach. Your legal service area population must be 25,000 or less and a rural community is defined as one that is more than, or equal to, five miles from an urbanized area. One staff member needs to complete an online facilitation course and act as the project manager. There are some wonderful grant examples such as a “Conversation Café” concept for youth and one book community initiatives. They include very specific project design examples for your reference. The list of requirements is here and includes the need to be a member of ALA or ARSL (the more economical option is ARSL at $30-$50 per year depending on income). Deadline for the online submission: Thursday, March 4, 2021 by 11:59 pm (CST).

HR UPDATES

The Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) released guidelines for employers who want to make the COVID testing and vaccines mandatory or voluntary. Resources can be found on the NCKLS website at: https://lib.nckls.org/for-librarians/hr/messages-from-nckls/


YA BOOKS TO CHECK OUT!

- YALSA released their 2021 Quick Picks for Reluctant Readers List. Here it is: http://www.ala.org/yalsa/quick-picks-reluctant-young-adult-readers
- YALSA’s Great Graphic Novels for 2021: http://www.ala.org/yalsa/great-graphic-novels
- The 2021 Best Fiction for Young Adults list: http://www.ala.org/yalsa/2021-best-fiction-young-adults
- Youth Media Awards: https://ala.unikron.com/
NCKLS has put some new safeguards in place regarding hazardous weather conditions.

Wind, snow, ice and high water will change the delivery schedule. Denise will be in contact with affected libraries to reschedule. It is expected that snow and ice will cause issues with driving, but high winds have been hazardous to the book van. If high water is something that your library and community struggles with as spring rolls around again, email or call Denise to alert her of a problem.

Denise needs your updated contact information. Often she calls from the van and needs a good contact number to reach you. Email Denise at: dcoon@nckls.org

How well do you know Universal Class?
(Can you answer these six questions?)
1. How many courses can be accessed at one time?
2. Is a certificate available upon completing a course for CEU’s?
3. How many courses are in Universal Class?
4. If I wanted to access a 6th course, how do I go about doing it?
5. Can I only access Universal Class during the day?
6. Can I see a Report Card of my test scores for CEU’s?

With your State of Kansas Library eCard, Universal Class is available anytime, for anyone. Most courses are written at an advanced high school or community college level (with the exception of some human-interest courses, like pet grooming, face painting, etc.)

In Universal Class, there are two modes in which to take a course:

CEU’s (continuing education units). These are units, lessons, exams, and assignments which are uploaded to a real accredited professor for grading. If a CEU course is taken, it is similar to a class where one chapter is completed before starting the next chapter. When a final score of 70% or higher is reached, a certificate is awarded.

Video audit mode. With this method, content is viewed on-demand. There is no certificate. This option can be upgraded to CEU.

Universal Class is accessed every day across not only Kansas, but the entire world. There are new courses added all of the time. Excel remains to be the most popular course taken.

Take a class yourself and promote it to your staff. To let patrons know about this free resource, add Universal Class to your website, or access it at https://kslib.info/UniversalClass

Answers: 1) 5; 2) Yes; 3) Over 500 courses, over 240 video courses; 4) Withdraw or complete one of the five to enter a 6th course; 5) You can access Universal Class any time, day or night, 24/7; 6) Yes.
The Thursday Murder Club by Richard Osman

Reviewed by Marcy Allen

Here’s a delightful British murder mystery of a different sort. Four elderly friends, who call themselves the Thursday Murder Club, meet every week at their retirement village to discuss unsolved murders. Elizabeth seems unusually talented at investigations. Ron is something of a firebrand. Joyce is a lonely widow hoping for companionship. And Ibrahim is a former therapist with serious insights into human nature. All is a fun distraction until the unthinkable happens: a local developer is found murdered with an unusual photograph placed near his body. Our four friends kick into high gear to do some sleuthing. Much to their surprise, the group now finds its talents needed for an actual new case.

And that’s not all. Soon there are other bodies popping up, and the foursome seeks out the aid of a young cop looking for her first big case. Fortunately, the murder club members are clearly capable of their work. In fact, they seem to have some secrets of their own that might bear closer scrutiny. And there are also elements of poignancy, as in the past of Elizabeth’s disabled friend, Penny. There is also the tragedy of Bernard’s wife’s ashes which he promised to scatter as per his child’s wishes. And there is the growing dementia of Elizabeth’s husband.

So we’ve really got two separate stories here. On the one hand, we have clever crime-solvers looking for a culprit, sometimes with hilarious results. On the other hand, we see compassionate friends doing their best to protect the secrets of vulnerable friends.

This title is currently available on Sunflower eLibrary, rotating book van collection and can be purchased through Baker and Taylor for your library collection.