



2020 Annual Report

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A year primed to break records but instead - a successful pivot in service model, and a grateful patron base.

- In response to the pandemic, our library **pivoted its program and services online**. **Created and offered over 350 online programs** including online discussions, book clubs, performers, summer reading programs, knitting clubs and ESL discussion groups and everything in between.
- Introduced **Belhop Personalized Recommendation Service** for all ages. Belhop stands for “Belmont Holds, Personalized” and that is exactly what patrons get!
- **Expanded** online offerings with new services such as Acorn TV, Creativebug, while also expanding access to community favorites like Kanopy, Hoopla and Overdrive – Saw measurable increased in usage of downloadable ebooks, music, and the great courses as well as many of our other digital offerings.
- Offered additional programming on the **library YouTube channel** including tutorials for adults and middle schoolers on how to use the online services of the library. Expanded ways of **servicing the public** with the introduction of **Chat Help** online.
- Transformed the annual summer reading program, a collaboration between all library departments to a virtual model. **686 registered users** completed 1,900 activities and spent over 16,000 minutes reading!! The library is very grateful for **support** received from the **Belmont Center Business Association and the Friends of the Belmont Public Library**.
- **Created Parking Lot Pickup to enable the community access to materials**. Response was amazing with **over 6,000** pickups during the library shutdown.
- The Belmont Library was among the first 10% of libraries to **reopen our doors** to the public in the Commonwealth. **Restoring access to technology was essential**. With Plexiglass, walking guides, and PPE on hand, patrons could enter the building to **use computers, fax machines, copiers, printers**, and more with help from library staff when needed.
- Largest turn out of the year was a virtual evening with James Patterson and Hank Philippi Ryan, which had over 900 Library patrons in attendance.
- Continued with our **Food for Fines program**. Fines can be paid in the traditional way or can now be satisfied with a non-perishable food donation for the Belmont Food Pantry. **The Library is now the largest contributor to the Food Pantry town wide**.
- Reduced spending and budget cut to meet FY20 and FY21 town wide needs. Furloughed part time staff, delayed full time hires and reduced capital spend while reinventing the service model for the library.
- **Over 700 free care packages given to the citizens of Belmont**. These items, placed outdoors, provided to Belmontonians, all at no cost to patrons or taxpayers **courtesy of the Friends of the Library**.



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The year was filled with great quotes from patrons like this –

“What a great job you and your staff are doing keeping the Belmont citizenry sane, entertained, and educated during these crazy times! Thank you! Thank you! Belmont has been so very fortunate that you have kept curbside pickup going throughout, unlike some libraries in neighboring towns.”

Purpose and Duties

Summary of Activities and Accomplishments:

Circulation Services

The Belmont Public Library remains one of the top 10 circulating libraries in the Commonwealth. Our latest year’s circulation totals before the Coronavirus were the best total usage in our Library history. There are over 370 public libraries throughout Massachusetts. In addition to Belmont, the top 10 include the cities of Boston, Newton, Brookline, Cambridge, and Quincy. These cities are much larger than Belmont and include multiple branches. To be included on a list with these large and successful city libraries shows the dedication and talent of our amazing staff, and the love and support from a dedicated patron base. When taking these five off the list, the true picture of the Belmont Library is shown, a top five-town library in our state of Massachusetts.

We successfully completed another year of our homebound delivery program called “Books on Wheels,” a partnership with the Council on Aging circulating hundreds of items by delivery to homebound citizens in Belmont.

Staff in both the Circulation and Reference Departments select and curate a variety of displays throughout the Library, highlighting current events, holidays, trends and unique interests. These bimonthly displays drive very strong circulation statistics regularly.

The Circulation team handles all items delivered from and to other Minuteman libraries, typically over 110,000 items annually.

2020 was a year like no other for the Circulation Department. They completely remodeled the way that materials are provided to patrons, three separate times. During the summer months we ran a Parking Lot Pickup program offering items outside for citizens rain or shine. In the fall when other town buildings remained closed, we opened our doors and created a contact free pickup at the different circulation desks. As the Covid numbers worsened in the winter months, we refused to deny our patrons, and adapted our process to provide pickup of items through the windows. Each day hundreds of patrons came and waited outdoors in line for us to serve them, and this number only grew when other area libraries closed entirely, sending their patrons to Belmont.

Adult / Reference Services

Our local oral history project, the Belmont Story Project (BSP) continued, collecting stories from the people of Belmont. In the past year, local resident Dr. Kwan Kew Lai discussed her humanitarian efforts around the world. BSP is presented in partnership with the Belmont Council on Aging, Belmont Historical Society, Belmont Media Center, and the Belmont Citizen-Herald.

Librarian Miriam MacNair started the Classics Book Group in October 2019 and the group has been meeting regularly ever since, including virtual meetings. The group has covered titles including *The*



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Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald and *Pride & Prejudice* by Jane Austen, linking these books to the themes of our modern day, and bringing together readers with a common interest in literature.

The regular Books & Bites program featured a fantastic collection of authors. Marjan Kamali discussed her novel *The Stationery Shop*, set in Tehran in 1953 against the backdrop of the Iranian Coup, about a young couple in love who are separated on the eve of their marriage. Librarian Miriam McNair also gave a book talk on *The Long Loneliness* by Dorothy Day. Author Nina Sankovitch adapted her Books & Bites presentation for a virtual audience, speaking on Zoom about her new book *American Rebels: How the Hancock, Adams, and Quincy Families Fanned the Flames of Revolution*. Nina explored the roots of rebellion in an entirely new way. The access to this information didn't end the day of the program; patrons can find a recording of the author's presentation on the library's YouTube channel!

The Belmont Public Library Cookbook Club continues to thrive. Working from a different cookbook each month, participants select a dish to make and brought it to the month's potluck at the library, where they discussed what they liked and disliked about the book. The club was consistently filled to its capacity each month and showcases one of the library's deepest collections. The club did meet via Zoom during the pandemic to share meals each participant was making during the challenging times at the height of the shutdown.

In response to patron interest, a Nonfiction Book Club was started for the first time this year. Each month, participants discuss a different title from the library's extensive nonfiction collection. The club reads titles across a wide range of subjects including true crime, history, science, food writing, and memoir. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the club has continued their meetings via Zoom.

The Belmont Book Discussion group continued to meet every other month. The group adapted quickly to an online format while the library building was closed, gathering in-person in January to discuss *The Widow's War* by Sally Gunning then transitioning online over the next few months for meetings about *Pachinko* by Min Jin Lee, *The Light Between Oceans* by M.L. Stedman and *News of the World* by Paulette Jiles.

The Friends Music on Saturday Series hosted concerts throughout the first quarter of 2020, prior to the shutdown. We traveled back in time with a special performance by Marc Black focused on the early sounds of the 1950s and 60s. Then, we enjoyed soulful and light Turkish tangos, waltzes, and Balkan sirtos in our East Dances with West concert by Volkan Efe & Co., funded in part by the Belmont Chapter of the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

The Friends Author Series supported additional author talks providing readers to explore additional areas of interests which included local author Len Abram who spoke on his third novel, *Empty Doorways*; award-winning journalist Maureen Boyle spoke on her work covering the New Bedford Highway Serial Killer in *Shallow Graves*; author and outdoorsman Sam "Sam I Am" Ducharme recounted his life changing backpacking journey in an online presentation and Q&A about his book *Sole Searching on the Appalachian Trail*; baker and author Lauren Ko's reflected on her baking and social media success as part of her *Pieometry* cookbook talk; and notable sports writer Jeff Benedict spoke on the history of the New England Patriots with his new bestselling work, *The Dynasty*.

The COVID-19 shutdown brought many challenges but also some unique collaborative programming opportunities. Due to the shift to virtual and collaborative programming, Belmont Public was able to host a number of notable authors including international bestseller James Patterson – **with over 900 attendees present for Patterson's conversation with Hank Phillippi Ryan!**



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A similar collaborative programming opportunity presented itself with the Pen Pal program, which was the brainchild of the Belmont Public Library Reference and Children's departments and the Belmont Council on Aging. Between the months of September and December 2020, over 140 community members participated in this intergenerational pen pal program, sending letters to each other and connecting even during these trying times.

Reference librarians also worked together collaboratively in a number of ways, including the creation of a monthly Virtual Trivia Night. Since July 2020, reference librarians have run this fun, evening event that has consistently proven to be the most popular monthly program, **with a total of 1,235 participants in 2020.**

Continuing the theme of collaboration, the new Young Adult Librarian Hannah Lee, collaborating with the Outreach Librarian and Children's Services, was able to implement Homework Hotline, a free tutoring service staffed by teen volunteers. It started in Teen Advisory Board, obtained over 30 volunteer applications after advertising through our high school partners, and lasted for 8 weeks.

Young Adult services hosted 60 programs with 366 attendees, despite the challenges of a worldwide pandemic. We saw an increase of program attendee ratio by 25% as compared to last year's numbers. Programs of note were our virtual Escape Reality Week, monthly DIY Teen Takeaway crafts, a town-wide Augmented Reality Scavenger Hunt highlighting artwork from local comic artists, a Zine publication, and a new book club that explores historical moments through underrepresented perspectives.

While it looked very different from previous years, the summer reading was still a huge success. The Reference, Young Adult and Children's departments came together and transitioned quickly to using a virtual logging platform called Beanstack. 42 young adults registered for summer reading as well as 104 adults, the highest adult participation in summer reading ever.

In person and over Zoom, Tai Chi instructor Aisling O'Shea guided students through this beautiful and low impact form of martial art and meditation. She provided an overview of the basic concepts of Tai Chi and Qi Gong, and introduced patrons to the Tai Chi Long Form, open for all physical abilities since it can be adapted for standing, walking, or sitting. In between classes, students can continue to practice the Tai Chi movements by following along with recordings and tutorial videos on the library's YouTube channel.

The library continued to offer two different weekly conversation groups for adult English language learners from countries around the globe, with weekly sessions for multiple skill levels held throughout the year.

Personal chef Meryl MacCormack offered live cooking classes on Zoom. She showed us how to cook a fast, inexpensive, and flexible dinner from pantry essentials; ideas for kid-friendly snacks for busy Belmont parents; and tips for baking bread at home, with or without yeast. In addition, each session was recorded and shared on the library's YouTube channel for attendees to refer back to anytime.

What else can you find on the library's YouTube channel? Over a dozen tutorials showing patrons how to access library resources from home. We were proud to offer this new type of assistance to patrons. These how-to videos helped Belmont residents read the Boston Globe through the library, invest with Value Line, explore Wowbrary, and more! These tutorial videos received **990 views just between April and December 2020!**



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In addition to YouTube, librarians directed patrons to digital resources through the library's website, social media, and email newsletter to show how they could access the library from their living room. Patrons could discover eBooks, eAudiobooks, magazines, movies, music, and more from resources like hoopla and Libby by OverDrive.

In order to meet the needs of our patrons at home, the library **quickly expanded its digital offerings**. We increased our monthly credits for Kanopy from 5 to 10 to connect patrons with film festival favorites, award-winning documentaries, and films from the Criterion Collection. Selections also included Great Courses, PBS programming, Women Make Movies, Samuel Goldwyn, and more. We also added Acorn TV to our online offerings so residents could stream popular British comedies, dramas, mysteries, and documentaries. For artists and crafters in our community, we offered Creativebug, a collection of arts and crafts how-to videos that walk viewers through the creative process, step by step.

Even when the doors were closed in the spring of 2020, librarians remained available to connect patrons to library materials and answer reference questions. We provided personalized recommendations, created themed book lists, directed patrons to NoveList to discover new authors and titles, and shared daily staff picks on social media. Later on in the year, the Reference department added the Library help chat service in order to further meet patron needs for reference inquiries. Since its rollout in August 2020, reference librarians answered 464 questions via chat alone!

Staff curated resources from beyond the library with weekly "Explore the Web" posts on the library's website from March through June. We shared links to live theater and concerts, virtual tours from cultural institutions around the globe, online author talks and interviews, storytimes and podcasts for all ages, and more.

In response to the protests following the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and countless others named and unnamed, the library encouraged those who want to learn more about the racial climate in the US and how we got here to explore our **Read Against Racism resources**. We selected books, documentaries, and articles that reflect the history of racial injustice in our country and illustrate the race-related issues still happening today. We also shared hopeful messages about the advocacy and antiracist activism to inspire in all members of our community. Our reading lists included books that can be read by children, teens, and adults of all ages.

The library also worked hard to get physical books into the hands of patrons during the pandemic shutdown. With the support of the Friends of the Belmont Public Library, the library distributed over 700 Care Packages to Belmont residents between March and June. These colorfully labeled bags, each containing a handful of books, movies, or music, were placed outside on the front walkways of the library. Anyone walking by the library could stop and grab a bag filled with surprise titles to keep forever. These Care Packages were made possible by the support of the Friends of the Belmont Public Library, as well as Trader Joe's and Star Market.

New opportunities present themselves in interesting ways during the COVID-19 pandemic. With the building closed, Reference and Technology & Technical Services departments were able to curate and roll out a number of new collections for patron use, including a brand **new vinyl/LP collection and an expanded Library of Things collection that features the addition of wifi hotspots and Disney+ Roku**.



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The library hosts several recurring adult events in addition to our author talks and music series. If you've never visited our groups like the Cookbook Club, Tai Chi, or Dial M for Movies film club (run by Library Director Peter Struzziero), try them in 2021!

Technology & Technical Services

It was a year of transition for this department, in terms of materials and technology infrastructure, but most especially in response to the unique challenges of COVID-19.

The technology department services both the internal needs of staff, as well as outward facing patron services. Both of these functions were impacted by COVID-19.

Internally, there were several different stages; from the initial shutdown with staff working remotely, to the transition to staff working in the library, to resumption of on-site services. Each stage required a re-imagining of how best to utilize existing technology, as well as identifying and implementing new tools to enable staff to work safely. New tools included Sierra Web, the online version of Minuteman's ILS, and the transition to Assabet from Library Insight - a major vendor change for the library's calendar, event and museum pass software, patrons are finding it much easier to utilize.

This department also found new ways of providing patron services. An online chat function was integrated into the library's website offering another point of contact for patrons. **Two online services were added to the library's offerings, Acorn TV and Creativebug**, while a third, Kanopy, was doubled from five to ten rentals per month. In addition, more timely Funds Expenditure reporting identified unused funds at the end of the fiscal year which could be transferred to Belmont's Overdrive Advantage titles. In addition to remote services, the library resumed in-library activities in September, including public access internet stations with free daily printing up to ten pages. Belmont was one of the few area libraries offering public internet access and served hundreds of patrons while this service was being offered from September thru early December.

Similarly, Technical Services staff responded to the Covid pandemic with a combination of in-library and remote work schedules. This was again unique among area libraries and enabled ordering of all materials to continue without interruption, ensuring that Belmont patrons would have access to the latest titles despite the disruption of delivery services within Minuteman.

Procedures continued to be analyzed and adjusted when appropriate, such as creating more standard labelling of AV materials, addressing inconsistencies in the Local Spotlight collection and Mystery series, and online ordering of processing supplies. A Technical Services manual is being produced to document both new and ongoing procedures. This manual helped to inform the onboarding materials created to train new staff members.

Children's Services

The Children's Department in Belmont is one of the busiest in the state, **currently ranking 11th overall for collection use statewide**. While our Jane Gray Children's Room is undersized and outdated, it is the destination of children and families town-wide. As the school age population continues to grow, we see our attendance at programs and usage of our collection doing the **same**. It was an unprecedented year in the Jane Gray Dustan Children's room. Program attendance at the library's virtual programs alone totaled over 2000!



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The Library has continued its 5th grade card initiative with a 3rd years effort. The new middle school principal generously agreed to keep this program alive, and we are enjoying building our relationship with her and her team greatly. The library enjoyed a visit from second graders from the Burbank School where students were able to learn about library materials and resources and get new library cards.

Children's program and service offerings are responsive to the needs of the community. As the pandemic has shifted the needs of our children and families, we have also adapted our Children's programming. We consolidated the ages of our virtual storytimes to accommodate demand of whole families and to be sensitive to the need to limit harmful screen time for small children. All of our program offerings became virtual and we are especially grateful to our regular performers for also adapting quickly and impressively to the new virtual format.

Reader's advisory and browsing requests also challenged us to think outside the box. Before library closures for weather and holidays, we also provided book bundles, which were five books in a reading range (picture books, early readers, and fiction/graphic novels). Over 5 days in December, we gave out 290 books this way. Through the library's new Belhop service, we made suggestions to 101 families, including offering to help place requests on the items. Children's Librarians answered a total of 1,666 reference questions in 2020, relying on phone, email, and Belhop. We also debuted a Virtual Library on the website, with book covers for easy browsing of new titles, hyperlinked to the catalog for requesting.

"The virtual browsing library is fantastic! Thank you."

While outreach this year was physically limited, general partnerships with community organizations and the schools started remain strong. Librarians visited Burbank Elementary School and local preschools Wonder School, Belmont Co-op, and Waverly Square. The Library offered many popular after-school activities for older children, including from local Belmont companies and organizations such as Mad Science, Habitat, and Music Together of Belmont. We were able to continue our Reading Dog program with the help of our former Coordinator of Public Services, and Elvis, her certified reading partner dog. Our Parent Child Book Club continued to bring multiple generations together to discuss and analyze books while enjoying snacks at home, picking up again virtually in the fall.

The Children's Librarians continued to partner with the local organizations and town agencies even throughout this unusual year. The Belmont Fire Department came with a cookie-making program, and Engine 2 Acting Chief Wayne Haley recorded himself reading stories about firefighters during Fire Safety Week. Belmont Youth Commission staff and volunteers set up and maintained a story walk in the memorial garden during December of Jan Brett's *The Mitten*, borrowed from the Watertown Family Network. The Library led bi-weekly virtual storytimes in conjunction with the Farmers' Market.

The Children's Department's partnership with the Watertown/Belmont Coordinated Family and Community Engagement (CFCE) grant program remains strong. During January, the grant program offered a weekly Literacy Playgroup and parent workshops at the library and provided additional programs and resources to library patrons. We plan to resume this partnership, including a weekly summer STEAM playgroup, once in-person programming can safely resume.



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The Children’s Department came together with the Reference and Young Adult Departments to create fun and successful programs. Summer reading programs looked a lot different this year as we transitioned quickly to using a virtual logging platform called Beanstack. 453 children ages 0-12 registered for summer reading, completing 993 badges, 133 rewards, 456 books, and 16,612 minutes of reading. Prizes? Along with Beech Street Senior Center, we launched our first ever intergenerational Pen Pal Program, in which children ages 7-12 made up a significant proportion, 37%. Our program was sponsored by many of area businesses including Rancatores, Belmont Books, and many other members of the Belmont Center Business Association. We look forward to building on this great new partnership in the coming years.

School vacation programs were also a huge draw. This included Imagination Craft Station, Playful Engineers with Jay Mankita, Ukulele with Julie Stepanek, and Habitat. We also hosted a Comics Crafternoon, Mad Science Winter Wonderland, and a take-and-make craft.

A large variety of storytimes and programs for our baby, toddler, and preschool aged patrons were offered, including two special Pajama Storytimes. Concerts from popular local musician Matt Heaton, Music and Movement with local resident Rubi Lichauco, musician Emily Hall, bilingual (English/Spanish) performer Marcos Valles with Rockabye Beats, a presentation of Peter and the Wolf by The Quintet, and musical storytimes from the Powers Music School helped round out our regular early literacy offerings.

Young Adult Services

In a year where making interpersonal connections has been harder than ever, the library has become a virtual focal point for young people in middle school and high school who want to develop working relationships with others while building real world skills. Our Young Adult Services Department brought in guest speakers for college essay writing webinars and psychology programs that reassured parents and teens as to where they needed to be for the next step in their life. Through cross-departmental partnerships, we increased intergenerational programs, allowing teens to claim their individuality even among different age groups and take on new leadership roles in their community. Where Belmont Public Library had previously just been a, “place,” for teens, we’ve now established our role as a key contributor to the personal growth of one of the most at-risk populations in Belmont.

In the first half of the year, the focus of the Young Adult Department created a safe space where teens could gather and enjoy similar interests. In the second half of the year, we capitalized on this baseline by giving teens more responsibility. Our Teen Advisory Board oversaw the development of new service programs, including knitting hats and scarves for local shelters, making YouTube resource lists for students struggling with online learning, decorating, “kindness bookmarks,” for patrons, and the development of a book review blog to encourage the joy of reading among their peers. In every meeting, the young leaders on Teen Advisory Board seek to answer the questions, “What problems are our peers facing?” and, “How can we help?” Although the answers to those questions are ever-changing, the passion and diligence they bring to finding solutions has resulted in more creative programs for their age group.

Since August, all programs have been pre-screened through the Teen Advisory Board. By having TAB approve our proposed programs each month, the department is able to collect immediate feedback



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on interest levels and begin word-of-mouth advertising. Because virtual programs require much more lead time in advertising and preparation than in-person programs, this has allowed us to manage our time more effectively.

Programs that have received strong support from them included our fully-virtual Escape Reality Week, monthly DIY Teen Takeaway crafts, a town-wide Augmented Reality Scavenger Hunt highlighting artwork from local comic artists, a Zine publication, and a new book club that explores historical moments through underrepresented perspectives.

Partnering with the Outreach Librarian and Children's Services, we were able to implement Homework Hotline, a free tutoring service staffed by teen volunteers. It started in Teen Advisory Board, obtained over 30 volunteer applications after advertising through our high school partners, and lasted for 8 weeks.

In January-March, we hosted 27 in-person programs with 221 attendees. Our virtual summer reading program had 42 registrants. The planning that went into the March 2020 Belmont Comic Con was used in October with our Augmented Reality Scavenger Hunt and Art for Animation and Video Games panel with industry professionals. From August-December, we hosted 60 programs with 366 attendees. Despite the challenges of a worldwide pandemic, we again, have managed to increase our program: attendee ratio by 25% as compared to last year's numbers.

With the shift from satisfying popular demand to pursuing intentional growth among teens, we have not only created strong future advocates for the library, but also impressed the parents who see the effects our programs have on teens in real-time. The comments from parents speak for themselves:

"I cannot express my thanks enough for your expertise and skill at teaching D&D. A few weeks ago, I enrolled my son in another D&D class and he left frustrated and confused. Last week, I could hear his excitement through his bedroom door as he participated in your class. I heard him ask questions as he figured it all out. And, this morning, as soon as he woke up, he told me that he had it again today. It's the highlight of his week."

Belmont Public Library Foundation

The Belmont Library Foundation, a Massachusetts 501(c)(3) corporation, undertakes promotional and fundraising activities for the Belmont Public Library currently focused on the construction of a new library building. The Library Building Committee finalized a schematic design for a new building in 2019. In early 2020, the Foundation had begun conducting a major capital campaign to raise private donations for the new building project. Please visit www.belmontlibraryfoundation.org to learn more.

Friends of the Belmont Public Library

The Friends of the Belmont Public Library continues to provide strong support for the Belmont Public Library. This year they expanded community outreach to include board representation from our parent and Asian community groups as well as built a social media presence (on Instagram and Facebook) to reach a younger audience and those staying in their homes due to the pandemic.

11 new board directors joined 7 incumbents to face the challenges of funding during a state-wide Covid lockdown. The new board members represent a wide range of life stages, cultures, and



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professional experiences. You can meet them all and read their membership updates on the Friends webpage by clicking the GIVE button on the Belmont Public Library website.

The Friends increased communication efforts to create greater community engagement. Their board directors met with various town groups and communicated regular updates on Friends activities and accomplishments to raise awareness of the Friends organization and its demonstrated support of the Library. As a result of these efforts, the Friends received a \$25,000 bequest in November 2020 from a Belmont resident, the first large bequest in many years.

They increased membership by 5.7% by increasing new members and recapturing lapsed members, for a total number of 352 families. This was achieved primarily via a direct letter campaigns in November 2019 and March 2020, a “Giving Tuesday” email campaign, and direct outreach by the Board members before the pandemic.

They exceeded our financial goal of contributing more than \$50,000 to the Library by meeting their membership revenue goals and by generating strong revenues from our 2019 annual book sale, “everyday” book sale, and several “flash” book sale before the pandemic started in 2020.

Annually they underwrite free and discounted museum passes. During the early days of Covid, the Friends supported the Library in pivoting from in-person to online programming, funding Zoom video conferencing for professionally led Thai Chi, workshops on getting organized, online author talks with Nita Sankovitch and Sam Ducharme, and live cooking classes. 60 online programs were offered with 900 attendees participating. To accompany online programs for teens and adults, librarians developed take home kits, funded by the Friends of the Library, for Creativebug crafting, knitting for teens and a Pen Pal program (in collaboration with the Beech Street Center) for 120 participants of all ages. The popular Summer Reading program was a highlight with 3,000 activities completed by kids, teens and adults.

The Board rediscovered the original Friends 1972 charter which has helped to broaden their message. They now strive to go beyond fundraising, to also communicate a greater awareness of the Friends, represent Belmont’s cultural diversity, interests and welfare through varied Library programs, collaborate with the Library Director, Trustees and Foundation to strengthen the Library’s public interface, and support library programs and services financially and through volunteer engagement.

They have begun to launch their 50th anniversary celebration activities already in early 2021 to bring this important milestone to the attention of the Belmont community

Library Administration and Board of Trustees

The library services has never been a more vital lifeline than it is right now. Our community has been so eager for all of our programs and materials. The Library has responded, and refined the way we offer programs, services, education, and enrichment in an unprecedented situation.

In the spring of 2020, when the shutdown of town buildings took place due to COVID-19, the town took steps to succeed financially in any way possible, especially with the close of FY20 nearing. When a hiring and spending freeze was put in place, the library chose to be involved in both these measures. We furloughed 25 part time employees, deferred hiring for key full time positions, and turned back significant funding to the town. From the beginning of this health crisis, we have been team players in Belmont’s effort to endure the financial hardships related to the Coronavirus. Given the fall 2019



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support for a new building, the Library Administration and Trustees prioritized building maintenance funding for most critical health and safety needs.

In the closing months of FY20, the Library pivoted program service to online, and offered online programs. Programs included online discussions, book clubs, performers, and everything in between. In many cases attendance increased, proving to us that online programming will have a permanent place in the future of our service. As you have read in the various sections of this report, the library team adjusted its efforts and quickly began to bring all programming online, and increased programming each month as the Coronavirus continued to change the way we bring services to the citizens of Belmont.

While the library was closed in the spring, we put out “Care packages” to citizens on the library walkways daily, made up of our stocked away supply of book donations (which usually generates between \$20,000 – \$25,000 dollars annually in our Every Day Book Sale). We chose to give these books away in order to offer the community education and enrichment while the regular library experience was not available. While staff worked to develop new ways for citizens to use the library from their homes, patrons came daily to the property to take home free books to keep. At the end of the shutdown, the tally was over 700 care packages created, placed outdoors, and received by Belmontians, all at no cost to patrons, or the taxpayers.

In person contact was still limited, but that didn’t stop the Children’s Room from offering Summer Reading fun! Our virtual summer reading program, a collaboration between all library departments, had 234 registered children’s users who completed 1,900 activities in total, and spent over 16,000 minutes reading. The program encouraged kids and their families to engage in outdoor and indoor activities of all sorts such as taking a family bike ride or building a pillow fort, as well as practicing their reading. Participants won a few levels of prizes including virtual badges and postcards, and gift cards to local Belmont businesses including Belmont Books, Rancatore’s, and Champions Sporting Goods. The library is very grateful for the help from the Belmont Center Business Association and the Friends of the Belmont Public Library.

As the online programming proved successful, and as the public health situation began to improve, we began a process to offer physical materials to patrons each day through our Parking Lot Pickup program. Patrons reserved the titles they wanted, and then selected the time that they could come and retrieve them so that social distancing could still be achieved. We began with 40 appointments per day, then grew it to 96, and by the end of the program, we had 130 appointments per day! The staff invented, refined, and adapted this service so that the library could serve as many people as possible.

The Belmont Library was among the first 10% of libraries to reopen its door to the public in the Commonwealth. We appreciate the challenges that our colleagues throughout Belmont face are real indeed, and we faced many of our own unique challenges. Throughout these challenges, the library staff managed to put a process in place for citizens to begin picking up their items inside the library again without an appointment, and leave the advanced scheduling of parking lot pick up behind.

With so many citizens struggling with employment issues, and many without computers at home, we knew that restoring access to technology was essential. With Plexiglass, walking guides, and PPE on hand, we began allowing patrons to request appointments to use computers, fax machines, copiers,



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printers, and more with help from library staff when needed. In no time at all, this service became very popular and we increased access to it so more patrons could be served.

The Library began a new personalized recommendation service – Belhop. The service, for all ages, is the latest way we can offer recommendations for patrons. Belhop stands for “Belmont Holds, Personalized” and that’s exactly what patrons get! They just fill out our Belhop form and one of our librarians will send a list of 5-6 recommendations from our physical and/or digital collections to fit patrons’ reading, viewing, or listening needs. Once they have decided what to read, watch, or listen to from the list, they can request the items from our catalog or one of our digital platforms. As soon as the items are ready for pickup, library staff reaches out and contacts patrons. Library staff has heard great feedback from many patrons already about this service, especially from our Belmont parents.

To eliminate barriers to service and to increase usership, many of our peer libraries have chosen to eliminate late fees. In reviewing our fee policy, we decided instead to implement the Food for Fines program as an alternative. Fines can be paid in the traditional way or can now be satisfied with a non-perishable food donation for the Belmont Food Pantry. In its first year, this service has been overwhelmingly well received by the community, resulting in the monthly donation of hundreds of food items to the Pantry, helping them to meet their increased needs. The Library is now the largest contributor to the Food Pantry town wide.

The Belmont Public Library Building Committee completed schematic and design process in early 2020. Now, with a completed and thoughtful plan in hand, the Belmont Library Foundation can now be most successful in its future major capital fundraising efforts.

We had a few staff transitions during the course of the year. When positions turn over, we take the opportunity to evaluate the role, the functions and services, and modify to meet today’s needs. As the needs of the community and the library change, it is important to take advantage of these transitions to enhance the library team.

Commemorating courage and sacrifice, the Belmont Public Library, in partnership with Belmont Veterans Services, hosted the annual Purple Heart Day Ceremony on August 7th. This summer, the ceremony was held at the new memorial overlooking Clay Pit Pond, which helped support social distancing while still acknowledging the incredible service of our local Purple Heart veterans.

Board of Library Trustees incumbents Kathy Keohane (Chair) and Gail Mann (past secretary) won their seats back for a new three year term.

Message from the Board Chair

In a year primed to break records, we instead implemented a dramatic change in our service model, and found a grateful patron base waiting on the other side. The Library team reinvented what it means to be a public library this year in response to COVID-19. With no road map or past experience to draw upon, our team saw the call, and answered it. At present, we are the most active building in town, currently offering virtual programming, physical materials in building, and digital materials from home, service via phone, email and chat, delivering a true value to our community. Our work here is not



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done though. As we enter 2021 we hope for the best but are prepared for any outcome or needed shift in focus.

The library is the most heavily used community wide resource. In times of economic downturn and strife, library services historically see strong increase in the use of their services. Our library continues to serve as a valued and valuable community resource. The Library team has done an amazing job reinventing and reimagining what the library means to the community during this pandemic and beyond.

The Belmont Public Library remains one of the top 10 circulating libraries in the Commonwealth. Our latest year's circulation totals before the Coronavirus were the best total usage in our Library history. There are over 370 public libraries throughout Massachusetts. In addition to Belmont, the top 10 include the cities of Boston, Newton, Brookline, Cambridge, and Quincy. These cities are much larger than Belmont and include multiple branches. To be included on a list with these large and successful city libraries shows the dedication and talent of our amazing staff, and the love and support from a dedicated patron base.

The Belmont Public Library, our community resource and so much more than books!