



2021 Annual Report

(Belmont Public Library):

Department Head: Peter J. Struzziero

Assistant Director: Position planned for FY24

Purpose and Duties:

The community's need for a strong Library program is as present today as it has ever been. With the worst days of a global pandemic hopefully behind us, in 2021 we began to restore the traditional services offered, knowing that in many ways, we'll never be the same, and that is okay as we work towards a new normal. In 2020, the patrons made the call for support, we answered it, and we are still answering it as we look towards 2022 and FY23 and hopefully a new library building. The Library provides physical and digital media including books, movies, vinyl records, reference materials, video games, newspapers, magazines, close to 100 databases, and an exciting Library of Things – which includes a diverse array of technology items to borrow. We also offer hundreds of in person, hybrid, and virtual programs for all ages. Our building is the Community Center for the Town of Belmont, and the only Department which truly has something for everyone.

Summary of Activities and Accomplishments:

In 2021, COVID has remained a large part of our lives, and the Library continues to respond, reinvent, and refine the way we offer programs, services, education, and enrichment in an unprecedented era. This year not only did we continue to reinvent the way we do things, but in many ways we realized that some of these changes are here to stay. More patrons have learned how to access our services remotely than ever before, and the expansion in electronic services has been something we have worked towards for over a decade. Patrons are learning more and more each day about the ways to use our free app, access information through our online databases, check out eBooks, and attend virtual programs and much more. We are very excited to welcome patrons back to indoor programs in 2022, but the successes we have experienced while trying new things, have showed us that this is the way forward. We will combine the best of the past processes and the best of the future. 2022 looks to be a great year at the Belmont Public Library. Let's take a look back at 2021 (and FY21) and highlight some of our greatest successes.

Library Administration

- Among the 1st 10% of Massachusetts Libraries to reopen. The 1st in our area to offer books to patrons, and the 1st to offer computer access.
- 423,170 total circulation in FY21 - in a year where there was no patrons in the Library for over 6 months, and 11 out of 12 months had no indoor browsing at all. It's hard to express how powerful of a number this is. Many other libraries were just closed.
- Confirmed to be the 10th busiest library in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. This is not per capita, but 10th overall from a field of close to 400 library buildings. Just a remarkable accomplishment.



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- We had our highest digital circulation count in history with 154,907 - a 10% increase from last year, and 36% of the total circulation for the year.
- Successfully captured over \$50,000 in COVID Grant Funding to provide: Plexiglass, door counters, air purifiers, cleaning equipment, cleaners, masks, sanitizers, and much more to protect staff and patrons from COVID.
- Completed Long Range Plan by Committee. Developed a plan for building a committee, sharing ideas, educating members on trends and national Library initiatives, and reviewing Belmont needs during COVID and beyond. Presented the plan to the Board of Library Trustees, gaining unanimous support. Built the committee of staff and community members, held 4 meetings, and took all the input into consideration. Then the Library Director wrote the plan, submitted it to the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners, and earned state approval.
- Completed a patron survey with hundreds of responses which helped to inform ideas for strengthening programs and services.
- Expanded One Book One Belmont for the first time in Library history. The 2021 program saw an expansion in committee size, the first ever dual topic program with 3 book choices, and spanned over 65 days rather than the traditional 1 month. Over 700 patrons participated, not counting untrackable viewership of live offerings broadcast on Belmont Media Center.
- The Board of Library Trustees chose this year to end the outdated practice of collecting late fines on materials. This is in line with a national trend that began within the last five years. Library late fines created a barrier to access, incorrectly targeted citizens of lesser means or on fixed incomes, and did not result in materials being brought back on time. All neighboring towns have also gone fine free. The collection of late fines was a cost negative process, so we are now able to utilize the time saved for more relevant processes.
- Over 500 virtual offerings completed during COVID.
- Saw the largest attendance for a single program in Belmont Library history as we presented an author talk with James Patterson. This was a partnership with other area libraries and saw over 900 in attendance.
- Managed a challenging era of staffing changes which saw 3 retirements and 7 other staffers leave Belmont for other professional opportunities. We promoted 6 employees in crowded searches, and hired 7 new employees. We took these changes as an opportunity to evaluate and modify key positions and to strengthen the way we onboard new staff in the future.



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- Commemorating courage and sacrifice, the Belmont Public Library, in partnership with Belmont Veterans Services, co-sponsored the annual Purple Heart Day Ceremony on August 7th. 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.
- This year we built off a strong base with Belmont Recreation to provide over a dozen programs ranging from movie nights, to poolside story times, to various programming in town parks. We worked together on joint efforts to get reservations made for various town properties and the permits needed to utilize them for more programs with more attendees, and a more efficient planning process.
- Launched the first Belmont Chat Reference service. This idea, borrowed from our friends at the Thomas Crane Public Library in Quincy has helped us to expand Reference services and communications with patrons. The chat service also acts as a 24 hour a day question ask function. During the day Librarians are standing by, but overnight patrons can leave questions to be answered when staff arrive the following morning.
- 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.
- Worked on several programs cosponsored by the Belmont Religious Council. These were the first library programs to ever involve the religious community, in Library history. It was important for the Library to create an important partnership with these folks, one we felt was long overdue. In particular they were a co-sponsor of our One Book One Belmont effort.
- We maximized the good weather of 2021 to do as many needed in person outdoor programs as possible. Below please note the highlights that speak to outdoor storytimes, storywalks, movie showings, book clubs, activities in the parks, and farmers markets.
- Launched new online offerings such as Assabet, Creative Bug, and digital access to residents lists highlighted on the Town Clerk's website.
- Launched outdoor browsing of materials, building off the success of outdoor programming and outdoor material pickups.
- Created new seating areas, both indoors with new carpet and high back chairs in our east wing and outdoors with Adirondack chairs along Wellington Brook and bistro sets on the patio.



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- Updated all signage in the hallways, program areas, and all public areas on the 2nd and 3rd floors. Signage is attractive, informative, and up to date.
- We replaced the carpet in the main hallway to create a safer, more attractive entry for patrons. Our previous carpet lasted 29 years. This was a good example of prudent decision making around expenditures only being made when necessary.
- Library Director Peter Struzziero was appointed to Age Friendly Advisory Committee. He worked to help develop a 5 year action plan to make the Town more age friendly. A new board has been appointed to carry out the action plan, and he's also been identified to sit on this group.
- Director Struzziero was also elected to a new three year term on the Minuteman Library Network Board of Directors, and appointed Executive Board Liaison to all Committees and working groups.
- Board of Library Trustees incumbents Elaine Alligood (Vice Chair) and Corinne McCue Olmsted won their seats back for a new three year term.
- Elaine Alligood became Chair of the Trustees for the first time in her long tenure which dates to 2006. Longtime Chair Kathy Keohane assumed the role of Vice Chair. We thank Kathy for her 6 years of service guiding the Board and our Library Director.
- We ask patrons who return materials late to leave behind a contribution to the food pantry, in lieu of late fines. Whether a monetary donation or a non-perishable food item, we believe that this is a more efficient way to contribute back to the community than the small amount of late fines that were collected each year. For the last three years we have been the #1 contributor in town to the Food Pantry, a partnership of which we are very proud.
- The Select Board has determined that there will be a town wide vote in 2022 to determine if a new Library will be built. This has been a discussion with town leadership for over 20 years and will be the 1st vote for the Library in nearly 60 years. Our building has been failing in critical ways each year for over two decades, and we are now at a critical point. Whatever the outcome and decision of the voters, we'll be proud to continue to offer the best service possible.

Circulation Department

- 10th busiest library in terms of overall collection use for the last several years straight.
- Navigated a difficult year of Books on Wheels home delivery service
- Among the 1st 10% of libraries to reopen fully
- Over 400,000 items circulated during a year with extremely limited building access
- Helped patrons with our new library app, mobile checkout options, and selfcheck out machines



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Jane Gray Dustan Children's Room

The Jane Gray Dustan Children's room, like the rest of the Belmont Library, continued to provide programs and services to patrons of all ages as the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continued to be felt locally and nationally. Children's program attendance totaled an estimated 3,500 attendees both from virtual programming and outdoor in person programming. The Children's Room continues to build connections, around the community and be an important part of the daily life of the families of Belmont as they worked to help their children through this difficult time.

Programs for All Ages

Access to our building may have been limited for a part of the year, but still offer literacy and educational programs for children of all ages. Regularly scheduled virtual programs included concerts with Matt Heaton, puppet storytimes with Leigh Baltzer, and local resident Rubi Lichauco brought her Music and Movement program to the Underwood Playground for the first time since 2020. The Powers Music School brought high quality children's concerts based on picture books to patron's homes on Saturday mornings. Children's Librarians offered a variety of virtual storytimes multiple times a week to help reach families at home including an evening Pajama Storytime for bedtime.

School aged children benefited as well with programs including Yoga with Roxana and Paulina, and a workshop on how to create their own magic tricks from Debbie O'Carroll. In person and virtual nature programs from Habitat, Belmont's local Mass Audubon Society site, were tremendously popular with families with children of all ages. Belmont resident Dr. Amitha Jaganath Knight did a storytime in the library yard of her first picture book, *Usha and the Big Digger*, and answered questions about what it was like to write a book that incorporated math and storytelling together. With the support of the Recreation Department, Children's staff lead an outdoor Fairy House making program using elements of the outdoors.

Services Beyond the Library Building

Before in building access was restored to the library, patrons were able to use either window or counter service to pick up holds, but that still did not come close to re-creating the browsing experience. Staff created book bundles so that families could come as close as they could to the browsing experience. The bundles consisted of five books grouped together by age, interest, and reading ability, and were often customized for patrons on the spot, as well as requested in advance of a visit. Staff assembled over 865 bundles, making a total of approximately 4,325 books borrowed through the bundles.

Patrons missed being able to do activities in the library but the Children's Room staff found a creative way to continue to bring fun home to families. Staff worked to assemble take home craft kits with all materials included in one bag for families to take when visiting the library and make at home, with staff leading demonstrations of the crafts, which included a 3D heart for Valentine's Day, a paper lantern for Mid-Autumn Festival, and many more, on Zoom. The Children's Room gave away over 200 craft kits in 2021.



Staffing

Our already strong Children's Room team became even more so with the addition of Bethany Campbell, our new full-time Children's Librarian. Bethany is a former middle school librarian, writing instructor, and a graduate of Simmons dual degree Master's in Library and Information Science and Master's in Children's Literature Program.

Summer Reading

The Children's Room offered summer fun and a partial return of the Read and Bead program while still keeping the safety of patrons a priority. Our virtual summer reading program, a collaboration between all library departments, had 252 registered children's users. The program encouraged kids and their families to engage in activities of all sorts, as well as exploring the different books and sections in the Children's Room, in addition to new types of materials, whether audio / video / databases etc. When participants finished their challenges, they won a necklace full of fun and colorful beads and brag tags, combining elements of our tremendously popular Read and Bead summer program that we hosted before the pandemic. The Children's Room is tremendously grateful to the Friends of the Belmont Public Library for supporting the 2021 Summer Reading Program as well as the local businesses who helped provide gift cards for additional prizes.

Outreach and Bringing the Community Together

The pandemic did not stop the Children's Room from continuing to partner with the local residents, organizations, and town agencies throughout this year. The Watertown/Belmont Coordinated Family and Community Engagement (CFCE) grant program, along with the Belmont Youth Commission, offered virtual resources and provided outdoor storywalks throughout the year in the gardens of the library and other local parks, along with accompanying STEAM kits that families could take home. Belmont Recreation and the Library teamed up to do outdoor storytimes next to the Underwood Pool, providing us an opportunity to bring in person storytimes to the community for the first time in a year. We were delighted to be able to engage through stories, songs, felt boards, and puppets in person, not just through a screen. Staff also brought library books and materials with them to the park so that families who preferred not to go indoors could still browse and choose items to take home outside.

We were thrilled to welcome back in person the Belmont Fire Department to help support Fire Safety Week education. Fire Chief David DeStefano read stories outside and answered kids' questions, and arranged for two Touch a Truck visits so kids could see what a fire truck was like up close. They even got to see the ladder go all the way to the library roof!

Starting in July of 2021, the Library was happily able to return to in person storytimes at the Belmont Farmers' Market. Children's librarians came each day the Market was open to read books and perform songs promoting healthy eating and summer activities and encourage patrons to connect with the Market.



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For the first time since the summer of 2019, Children's Staff conducted regular visits to the Recreation Department's Summer Program to read to campers from ages 4 to 11 and read stories related to their themes at camp such as Fairy Tale Week.

During the spring of 2021, the library continued its Access for Every Student Outreach program to insure that all fifth graders at Chenery Middle School had the chance to create a library card of their own.

The Children's Room and the Belmont Wellness Coalition teamed up for the first time to present a program for parents on how to discuss difficult topics in the news with their children. Conversation strategies and an active question and answer period with the social worker and the director of the Wellness Coalition were able to provide a great deal of support to the adults who attended.

Reference Services

Though the COVID pandemic has proved to be challenging, it also presented new opportunities for successful collaborative programming, especially for author events. The library hosted independently and collaborated on a number of virtual author events including bestselling authors such as Robin Cook, Robert Reich and Babrabra Delinsky in February 2021; local authors such as Carol Orange and Joanna Schaffhausen in May 2021, Pam Jenoff in June 2021; Liv Constantine & Kate White in July 2021; James Patterson in September 2021 and more. In total, these author events garnered at least 1,649 attendees, showing that outside the box programming and collaboration really helped bridge divides in this hard year.

2021 was a groundbreaking year in many ways, but especially in terms of the library's hallmark event: the One Book, One Belmont community read, or as it came to be known in 2021, Better Through Books: Healing Community Together. Unlike previous iterations, this community read had an expansive focus on healing, both from racial trauma and from the COVID pandemic, and spanned two months instead of one. Better Through Books included a wide variety of virtual and safe in person offerings for a total of 23 events with over 700 attendees. It also strengthened some amazing partnerships with Belmont organizations such as Belmont Against Racism (BAR), Belmont Books, Belmont Chinese American Association, the Belmont Council on Aging, the Belmont Food Collaborative, the Belmont Gallery of Art, the Human Rights Commission, Belmont Public Schools, the Belmont Religious Council, the Belmont Wellness Coalition, the Belmont Woman's Club, and the League of Women Voters of Belmont. Our lead sponsor who contributed most of the cost was our own Friends of the Belmont Public Library. Without them, this effort, as well as all other adult programming, would not be possible.

The winter of 2021 saw our first ever Winter Reading program! A way to engage patrons with the library during the snowy months (January-March) of the COVID pandemic, the library offered activity ideas for all ages, with chances to earn gift cards to local businesses as a way to support them during this challenging economic time. 128 people (60 children, 10 teens, and 58 adults) participated, completing nearly 400 activities. The activities ranged from engaging with the library in various ways (attending a storywalk or program, sending us a bit of trivia, or interviewing a family member and adding it to the Belmont Story Project), to more solitary activities (do a puzzle, go screen-free for 24 hours, try your hand at something new), to reading-based activities (read a book published in the decade you were born, read out loud to someone).



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The Reference Department continued its successful virtual chat reference service, begun in September 2020, in order to help address the onslaught of questions about accessing library resources from home. Reference Librarians have answered 1,387 questions in 2021 alone without requiring patrons to come into the library building.

Belmont Book Discussion, a bimonthly fiction book group for adults, was revitalized this year to include more recent and diverse titles and authors. The program attracts a steady group of regular attendees and newcomers at each meeting.

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

The library's various community partnerships continue to thrive and expand. Reference librarians partnered with the Belmont Human Rights Commission and Belmont LGBTQ Alliance on a Pride Parade to celebrate Pride Month in June. On the parade day, the library provided a list of recommended books as well as a display of items that patrons could check out and take home at the parade's end point. We also worked with Belmont Against Racism and COS New England to promote their anti-racism book group and 30-day anti-racism challenge based on the book Waking Up White by Debby Irving. BAR and the Beech Street Center also co-sponsored our Juneteenth film screening and discussion event of Just Mercy with Library Director Peter Struzziero.

Program offerings helped encourage creativity and ingenuity while supporting local businesses. The Reference Department invited Belmont Wheelworks to provide a bicycle maintenance workshop in our parking lot, and Pinot's Palette hosted a Paint Night. Both events were well attended.

Our partnership with the Belmont Farmers' Market continued and was even stronger this year. We were invited to host our own table at the market on the first Thursday of each month from July to October, in addition to the weekly storytimes that the Children's Librarians led. We provided a wide selection of books for children and adults about food, farming, and community that patrons could check out right at the market. Residents could also sign up for a library card while shopping, and children could make a farm related craft. Local Haitian chef Blonde Beauchamp was hired to conduct a cooking demonstration via Zoom, also cosponsored by the Farmers' Market.

The library partnered with the local group Meadowscaping for Biodiversity to educate and encourage 36 enthusiastic registrants on the benefits of planting native species right in their own backyards. The presentation was invigorated by the inclusion of a speaker from BHS Climate Action Club.

70 adult readers participated in our Summer Reading Program, completing book and non-book related activities, both indoors and socially distance, and also at outdoor programs. Among the activities were two virtual events tying into the Tales and Tails theme: R-Rated Tales: Murder, Intrigue, and Colonialist Lies in the History of Cinderella in July, and R-Rated Tails: Vicious Animals in August. Attendees also interacted with the library by sharing photos of their activities on social media. Participants also earned entry into weekly raffle prizes that once again spotlighted local businesses and partners such as the Belmont Farmers' Market, Rancatore's Ice Cream, Moozy's Ice Cream, Belmont Books, and Bakehaus. The program culminated in an ice cream social celebration at Payson Park with 65 attendees.



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In order to bring library services to town residents without requiring them to come into the building, librarians brought items for children and adults to various Belmont locations throughout the summer. The first two pop up library events were held outside the library before it opened for browsing in June. Then we held ten additional pop up libraries at town parks, including for Belmont Recreation's outdoor movies series, the Farmers' Market, and at outdoor storytimes. These events yielded a total of 180 interactions, 53 people checking out items, and 5 new library cards made.

2021 marked the 20th anniversary of the September 11th terrorist attacks. Dr. Kate DeConinck spoke about her research with survivors and on societal traumas. The library also supported the Beech Street Center's 9/11 memorial event by providing a pop up library, which included a book list of fiction and nonfiction for all ages.

As part of the Library of Things expansion, our programming has included ways to highlight the items in our collection. We hosted the Amateur Telescope Makers of Boston for a night sky viewing at Rock Meadow, which was very popular with 30 attendees and resulted in many patrons checking out our telescopes.

In September 2021, the library introduced The Page of Enlightenment Book Club. The club reads a historical narrative each month and meets to discuss it. The club has found success with a small but dedicated and enthusiastic group of regular participants.

In 2021, the Town of Belmont changed its October observance from Columbus Day to Indigenous People's Day. To recognize the change, the library screened the documentary "We Still Live Here - Ās Nutayuneān" and invited a speaker from the Wampanoag Language Reclamation Project to address the importance of language and native identity. This program was well-attended by 65 people and featured in statewide publicity raising awareness of Indigenous People's Day.

The Reference, Young Adult, and Children's Departments came together to create fun and successful programs in spite of the COVID pandemic. With the Beech Street Center, we ran our second Pen Pal program, in summer 2021, connecting residents through mailing letters. Patrons appreciated a way to unplug and make new friends near and far, and across generational lines. In November up stations at the library and at the Beech Street Center with cards, stationery, markers, and decorating supplies for citizens to write cards to Veterans for Veterans. They were very grateful. Teachers at Butler Elementary School also provided cards to their students for this project. In all, we collected 180 cards and distributed them at the annual Veteran's Day Breakfast, monthly Veteran's Day Coffee Hour, and at the Bedford VA via our collaboration with Belmont's Veterans' Services Officer, Bob Upton.

In response to the loss of AcornTV as a much loved but short-lived streaming service, the decision was made to increase the number of monthly borrows through Hoopla, which also streams television shows and movies, as well as providing e-books and e-audio. This resulted in an increase of 448 new patrons using Hoopla in FY21 and an average circulation increase of 26% since 2019.

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. O'Shea provided an overview of the basic concepts of Tai Chi and Qi Gong, and introduced patrons to the Tai Chi Long Form, all of which is open for all physical abilities since it can be adapted for standing, walking, or sitting. In between classes, students can continue to



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practice the Tai Chi movements by following along with recordings and tutorial videos on the Library's YouTube channel.

You can find over 60 videos on the Library's YouTube channel including recorded programs, instructional videos in support of life-long learning and tutorials showing patrons how to access Library resources from home. When patrons couldn't get in person help in the Library building, these videos helped Belmont residents read the Boston Globe through the Library, invest with Value Line, and connect with programming even if they missed the event itself! All told, the Library's YouTube videos received **1,615 views** in 2021 alone.

The library is committed to recognizing marginalized identities especially during specially recognized months or days. As such, we partnered with Belmont Against Racism to provide various programs and offerings, including our first annual Hispanic/Latinx Heritage Festival. The event featured two different musicians, a craft and storytime for children, and empanadas for all to enjoy. In all, 47 people attended. We also featured a book list and displays inside the library for Hispanic Heritage Month, which runs from September 15 - October 15. We also created book lists for Pride Month in June, Indigenous People's Day in October, and Transgender Awareness Week in November. For Transgender Awareness Week and Trans Day of Remembrance, the library cosponsored a film screening of *Tangerine* along with the Belmont LGBTQ+ Alliance, BAR, LexPride, the Arlington LGBTQ+ Rainbow Alliance, and others.

In addition to widely recognized days and months, the library is committed to raising awareness and understanding of marginalized voices throughout the year. In October, journalists Stephen Kendrick and Paul Kendrick presented an author talk on their book *Nine Days: The Race to Save Martin Luther King Jr.'s Life and Win the 1960 Election*. Throughout 2021 we strove to provide programming that enhances understanding of other cultures, particularly those of Asian countries. From August to December, we have held programs on the History of Asians in Hollywood, Korean Lotus Lantern craft making, an author panel of two short story authors from India, and the Japanese Experience During World War II.

The Library's Virtual Trivia Night was a continued success in its first full calendar year. Participants are asked about a wide range of topics and the questions grow more challenging as the game goes on. The questions are geared towards adults in difficulty level but are tame enough that the game is still accessible for families to play together. This monthly event has had consistently high attendance since it was first offered in July 2020, with over 336 participants in calendar year 2021 alone. The library also held its first one-off trivia event with an R-Rated Trivia Night in October 2021; unlike the monthly game, this event featured questions with mature content that would not be family friendly.

The library's monthly adult craft along program continues to be a hit with patrons. Participants of all skill levels sign up and receive a kit containing all the crafting materials they will need and then join a fun, relaxing, and social Zoom gathering to complete the craft.

The Belmont Public Library Cookbook Club had another great year. Working from a different cookbook each month, participants selected a dish to make and brought it to showcase over Zoom, where they discussed what they liked and disliked about the book. The club had consistently strong attendance numbers and showcased one of the Library's most diverse print collections.

Library book clubs not only thrived in 2021, but also expanded. The library continued to support the joint venture book club run by the Beech Street Center known as Page Turners, while in November of 2021, the



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library introduced a mystery book club for the first time ever.

The Belmont Story Project (BSP) has a new look thanks to a move from its previous platform to the more interactive (and attractive!) Biblioboard. It is now much easier for community members to find and listen to previously recorded oral histories and share their own on the same site. This new home also gives BSP the option of more seamlessly integrating patron sourced local history in forms other than audio, such as photos, videos, documents, and journal entries as it continues to grow. Recent collections include reflections on the 20th anniversary of September 11th and an ongoing collaboration with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the local Beth El Temple Center to capture and preserve the stories of Belmont residents impacted by the Holocaust.

The Friends of the Belmont Public Library author series returned in earnest in 2021, bringing fascinating, intimate conversations with exceptional authors to Belmont via Zoom. The return of the author series began with famed, best-selling author Joyce Maynard in October 2021, followed in December by Peabody Award-winner documentarian and author Bill Lichtenstein who spoke on his recent book, *WBCN and the American Revolution: How a Radio Station Defined Politics, Counterculture, and Rock and Roll*, the companion book to the WBCN documentary produced by Lichtenstein.

The Books & Bites program featured a fantastic collection of authors in 2021. In January 2021, the library welcomed Laurence D. Belfer Professor of International Affairs at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government Fredrik Logevall to discuss his new book *JFK: Coming of Age in the American Century, 1917-1956*. Author & historian Nina Sankovitch also adapted her Books & Bites presentation for a virtual audience, speaking on Zoom about her book *Signed, Sealed, Delivered: Celebrating the Joys of Letter Writing*.

In partnership with the Prison Book Program (PBP) in Quincy, MA, the library has redirected a portion of its generous patron book donations to help serve the needs of incarcerated populations across the country. Over 30 boxes of books have been delivered to PBP, which fields reading material requests from over 10,000 prisoners each year. Language dictionaries & thesauri, GED prep, business books, and books that offer legal information have been particularly valued.

Technology & Technical Services

It was a particularly interesting year for the Technology & Technical Services department. As a result of internal promotions, this department was understaffed for much of the year. In spite of these staffing challenges, this department kept everything behind the scenes running smoothly from all things computer and IT related; through materials ordering, receiving, cataloging and processing; to handling accounts payable for the materials, processing, and IT budgets. Along the way, department personnel have taken on responsibility for producing major reports for MBLC, including the ARIS and Annual Financial Reports, generated the Funds Expenditure report for the materials budget; expanded both library hardware and software; found the time to expand several entirely new collections as well as a repackaging of the Great Courses collection. The end of 2021 finds a fully staffed department of dedicated, creative professionals.



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Smitha Prasad was promoted from Circulation Assistant to Library Assistant II - Technical Services. Ryan Green was hired in June as the new Technology Librarian. He had previously worked as a part time reference librarian in Belmont.

Belmont was one of the few libraries offering in-library patron computer access, available whenever the library was open to the public. There were 3,793 individual sessions over the year, with the majority 3,413 logged from July through December. Patrons spent an average of 28 minutes per session. In response to this increased usage, the number of public internet computers in the Adult Services department was doubled, and online catalog computer stations were placed on all three floors of the library. These OPACs (online public access catalogs) had been removed during the initial phase of the pandemic over concerns for surface contaminant transfer, and are widely used as they allow patrons to independently search the library's collections.

This year saw an expansion of patron technology assistance, directly related to the hiring of Technology Librarian, Ryan Green, most notably the return of One on One technology appointments. This had been one of the services that was not possible to provide before Ryan's hiring with limited technology staff. Appointments were made through the library website, and referrals came through reference staff, as well as the COA newsletter. Since September, there have been over 20 appointments with the majority focusing on library digital resources, such as Hoopla & Overdrive, in addition to general computer assistance.

Another pandemic related technological upgrade was the acquisition of SenSource, a real time occupancy system which replaced older, more expensive and less reliable security gates. Traffic data is available remotely for department heads through an app, as well as visually for patrons at all three public entrances using 24" monitors and DIY raspberry pi in kiosk mode. This system also enables text message alerts to be sent to key personnel should occupancy approach unsafe, predefined levels. Its more robust historical data also provides the ability to assess traffic data with built-in reporting showing trends, averages, and overall totals.

The library acquired a large format printer for internal use. This will afford staff the ability to print poster sized projects in-house, resulting in greater control and flexibility, as well as saving time and money by reducing the need to outsource larger scale printing to outside vendors.

One item that had long been in the works, but became especially in demand during COVID times was the addition of Wifi hotspots to Belmont's circulating collection. These Coolpad Surf hotspots are free of charge to Belmont patrons and provide unlimited, high speed mobile internet access using the Sprint network through Mobile Beacon. Since their introduction in December 2020, the five hotspots have circulated over 150 times. An order was placed in September for five more hotspots, but unfortunately, they are out of stock at the vendor. Additionally, there is one staff-dedicated hotspot used for programs outside of the library requiring wifi access, including Pop Up Libraries, movie nights and outreach at the Pride Parade and the Belmont Farmers Market. None of the outreach opportunities provided while patrons were hesitant about entering into the library were possible without the staff hotspot.



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One of the other innovations that the Technology & Technical Services deployed as a network wide response to COVID-19 was the ability for self-checkout via the MLN Mobile App. With this option added to the library app, patrons are able to check out library materials they find on the shelf with the camera on their phones. This made for a relatively contactless checkout process when concerns about personal contact and social distancing were high, and made the library accessible more than ever, even during the challenges of coming out of a COVID winter.

Technical Services staff expanded several new collections, and reconfigured existing ones. The popular puzzle collection was doubled, as was the retro Vinyl collection. New collections include Binge Boxes (compilations of thematically connected DVDs such as “Don’t Travel with Tom Hanks), anime and Tween collections for the Young Adult Department and Juvenile Wonderbooks. This latest collection, Wonderbooks consists of print picture books with ready to play audiobooks, and was an especially effective collaboration between Technical and Children’s Services staff. These combination picture/audio books have proven to be a great success. The initial 40 Wonderbooks circulated over 300 times, prompting the purchase of an additional 30, bringing the collection up to a total of just over 70.

The library took advantage of new packaging options for Great Courses, a series of college-level audio and video courses. After a pilot project to retrofit 50 out of the 350 courses was successfully concluded, the process was later completed with the remaining items in the collection. Not only are the Great Courses more attractive in their new packaging, but they will better protect their contents.

The library successfully implemented SORA, a new reading app for students. SORA enables students to log into the library’s Overdrive and Advantage collections using their school credentials, rather than going through the regular library channel, which requires a library card authentication. The idea behind this project is to provide a more seamless gateway to facilitate access to Overdrive content for Belmont students. Since September 2021, there have been over 3642 checkouts in the SORA app from Belmont Public School accounts. Perhaps not surprisingly, the top checkouts were Belmont Advantage juvenile series (Diary of a Wimpy Kid, Big Nate, A-Z Mysteries, etc.) followed by BHS summer reading titles.

Technical Services staff have seen their roles expanded in several behind the scenes areas and we thank them for all the ways they help the Library remain successful in our network and town of Belmont.

Young Adult Services

The Young Adult Department drove engagement by finding teens who wanted to make a difference in Belmont, whether it was through online content creation, community projects, leadership training, or peer mentoring. Partnerships with teachers, student clubs, and community organizations led to the creation of groundbreaking services and outreach. The Friends of the Belmont Public Library sponsored many of our programs.



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The Library offered 165 programs for teens with 1,970 total attendees this year, with a 5-month gap when the YA Services Librarian was on parental leave. Program offerings shifted in focus from socializing activities to personal, social emotional, and academic growth.

Our volunteer-based academic mentoring program, Study Buddies, ran for 114 days out of the past 8 months with a total attendance of 826 students. Its teen-only counterpart, Mentor Match, ran for 27 days out of the past 3 months with a total attendance of 88 teens. The programs match a high school student mentor with a younger student for weekly 1-hour sessions and has seen consistent growth since its inception. The YA Services Librarian facilitates all communication and scheduling between teen mentors and their matches. The Children's Department provides support in hosting virtual sessions.

Our 58 teen volunteers accrued a total of 1489.5 volunteer hours for the services they provided to the community. Several teens wrote over 150 pages of written content and lore for our statewide Dungeons & Dragons event series leading up to the summer 2021. Teen outreach partnerships interacted with over 900 people in October and December.

Our virtual summer reading challenge had a total of 63 participants who logged their reading 823 times and wrote reviews for 51 books. Our state-wide Super Dungeon and volunteer programs took the spotlight while virtual cooking classes, coding jams, craft programs, and book clubs maintained steady attendance. Our year-round reading challenge for grades 6-12, Secret Readers' Society, has 47 readers.

Readers found community and enjoyment in our year-round publication of Spoiler Alert, a blog that shares honest reviews from teens about soon-to-be published YA materials. These reviews have driven interest in new YA collection materials across the board.

This year we solidified partnerships with Chenery Middle School and Belmont High School, purchasing materials and creating displays for 21 different class assignments throughout the school year. We also established Department Library Cards for BHS and CMS English Departments. Pop-up libraries at the end of the school year ensured that students were able to access summer reading materials. In person class visits to Chenery and BHS increased enrollment of our new eLibrary service to schools, SORA.

Friends of the Belmont Public Library

The Friends of the Belmont Public Library remain deeply engaged in the work of supporting the Library. The continuation of the COVID pandemic required new strategies to accomplish this effort, but the Board and volunteers rose to the challenge. The arrival of vaccines allowed for the return of more in-person services, albeit with masks and social distancing.

The Friends leadership changed in September with the induction of new co-presidents Kristen Carte-Smith and Stephanie Cahoon and co-treasurers Cyndi Reitmeyer and Anne Lougee. Pamela Delalla continued as secretary. We continue to enjoy the support of 24 Board members. During the fall months, the Board met in person on the Library patio, a welcome change to the previous Zoom format. The Friends of The Library leadership is listed on the website under the give tab. The Board benefits from a wide range of skills, backgrounds and work experience.



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The Friends contribute to nearly 500 Library programs for patrons of all ages, including the popular summer reading program, online Tai Chi and Adult Crafts. The Friends also pay for free or discounted passes to 17 Massachusetts museums. In addition, the Friends provide hundreds of volunteer hours to the Library through the Everyday and annual book sales, grounds beautification and more.

The Friends enjoyed successful membership and Giving Tuesday campaigns in November and December 2021. Our direct-mail membership drive expanded to include the nearly 200 Town Meeting members who were not already Friends members. Our Giving Tuesday event generated \$2191 in donations (before the match), triple the amount from 2020. Success was due in part to the incentive of a match and also the broader reach of our ask. Overall giving increased 36% with total donations at \$45,977 for FY '21. Our membership is 344, which includes 16 first-time members. In 2022, we plan to offer a Director's Choice program to attract more new members.

Book sales remain an important revenue source for the Friends. The semi-annual book sales resumed with in-person, open air events held in the Library parking lot in May and September. In May the Friends held a Star Wars themed family event in conjunction with the sale, which created a lot of community engagement as both the Friends of the Library and the Library Foundation had tents set up and manned with members of their respective boards as well as Library Trustee. In September, we offered a wide range of excellent books and continued the collaboration with the Library Foundation and Library Trustees.

We continue to consider other methods of selling books, including targeted online sales. We also welcome opportunities for pop-up sales, one of which occurred this year at the December Holiday Market held in the Town Hall parking lot. Here, the Friends were able to offer many world language titles including several complete series, which was a significant component of our community outreach. We are committed to increasing world language offerings in the future as we recognize the diverse needs of our patrons. We also enjoy consistently strong sales from our Everyday Book sale, which generate an average of \$700-800 per month.

One Book One Belmont, one of the Friends' largest funding initiatives, was an important focus this year. The theme, Better Through Books: Healing Community Together, was thoughtfully planned by our librarians and served as an important inflection point for our community. We are proud of the rich and varied panelists, authors, video content and participant engagement. These important voices helped us to understand the lives and experiences of those who might be different from us.

The Friends Authors Series resumed in a virtual format with events reaching a wider audience, at times over 75 people. The discussions are recorded and available through the Library's Youtube channel where patrons continue to enjoy these conversations. Because COVID numbers continue to be unpredictable, the Authors Series will remain online for now.

The co-presidents joined a newly formed consortium of Friends presidents from neighboring libraries. Through this collaboration, they learn and share new ways to attract a broader membership base, add new programs and fundraise more effectively.

The Friends turns 50 in September, 2022. We look forward to celebrating this important milestone with the town of Belmont.



Belmont Library Foundation

The Belmont Library Foundation (BLF) used 2021 to actively engage the community in support of the construction of a new building. Spring/Summer 2021 was spent preparing for an intensive six-week initiative coined the “Fall Flash. This effort was an educational/fundraising project including video, library tours, publications and lawn signs messaging the motto “Our Library Needs a New Home.” Apparently the community agreed, as over 500 donors contributed to BLF’s “Fall Flash” which was completed in early November 2021.

A month earlier, a key meeting on the future of the library was held with the Select Board. At that session, the board supported the Trustees’ request to put the vote on a debt override for a new library on the November 2022 ballot, further energizing BLF efforts. The foundation is engaged in a capital campaign seeking major gifts to be followed by a grass root effort to raise additional funds in the spring. While the pandemic has prevented execution of our plan for in-person visits and group programs with potential donors, we are heartened by the community’s receptivity to this cause. We have repeatedly experienced donor-initiated outreach from individuals who are interested in making a contribution to the project. Quite a few are potential donors seeking to make a “recognition” gift in honor of a particular individual or family; the BLF is working closely with the Library Trustees to ensure that gifts in that category are in keeping with the Trustees’ guidelines on named gifts.

The planned grass root fundraising will include opportunities for community members to donate smaller amounts by purchasing items such as inscribed bricks or tiles, make simple cash gifts or contribute to the furnishing of the building and surrounding landscape through the contribution of dedicated funds for particular items which could also involve donor recognition.

The BLF is also exploring the pursuit of grant funding for support, including an application to the Belmont Savings Bank Foundation.

In November 2021 the BLF installed a new set of officers for its board. David Stievater was succeeded by Marcie Schorr Hirsch as president; Ellen Schreiber assumed the role of Vice President, Christina Marsh continues as Clerk and Chad Onufrechuck succeeds Jeff Cronin as Treasurer.

A note from the Chair of the Board of Library Trustees – Elaine Alligood

This is the way. As highlighted in our accomplishments section.

These past two years, in response to COVID-19, the Belmont Public Library team re-invented what it means to be a public library. With no road map or experience to draw upon, the BPL team heard the call, and answered it. At present, the library remains the most active building in town, and the 10th busiest library in the Commonwealth! BPL offers a broad array of virtual programming, physical materials in the building, digital materials access from anywhere, service via phone, email, chat, and as always, BPL staff’s welcoming faces at the public service desks. This is the way public libraries run in the 21st century! The library’s innovation efforts going forward will continue to be influenced by users and all public libraries’ shared experiences and collective innovations here and across the USA. Belmont’s patrons know their library is open 8-12 hours a day in person with 24/7 access as the community’s center—serving everyone.



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In times of economic downturn and now a pandemic, library services historically sustain a strong increase in usage across all services. The FY21 statistical successes evidence that theory. Numbers don't tell the whole story though. The library team went over and above in their amazing work reinventing and reimagining what the library means to the community during this pandemic and beyond.

Opportunities: A new library for Belmont.

Community support for the BPL is ever greater, resulting from the continuous service, especially during the worst of COVID-19. The doors were closed yet library services persisted online with hundreds of ZOOM programs. At the beginning of school closures, library staff came up with a multi-week offering for students to pick up free books in bags by age/grade, 6-ft apart on the front sidewalk. Later, with drive-up and window pickup for books, and DVDs, checkouts.

The BPL continues to plan for a future without the current building's serious deficits and continuous repairs. While COVID-19 changed many things, what remains unchanged is the state of the current building. The current building does not meet the needs of the community; structurally nor programmatically. The building systems are obsolete, the building is not handicap accessible, with no quiet study spaces, few proper restrooms, or a safe ADA compliant elevator. Despite these barriers to service, the last statewide data released show BPL remains the 10th busiest library in Massachusetts. Our Select board has voiced their unanimous support, and committed to a town wide vote in November 2022, to give voters the chance to show their support for the project. Twenty years have passed since this discussion began in 2001; now is the time to decide once and for all. Three different studies over the last 20 years all reached the same conclusion, that a new library in Belmont is the most prudent path forward. The Belmont Library Foundation are managing a very successful fundraising campaign and the trustees are committed to locating all other funding sources possible to offset the financial burden on our taxpayers. With your help and support, we will build a new library for all, and we will see our library move closer to being a top five library in the Commonwealth.

As always, we want to share the requirements that must be met annually to be certified by the State.

STATE REQUIREMENTS:

To be a certified by the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners, the library must continue to meet the following five criteria:

1. Meet the Municipal Appropriation Requirement
2. Meet the minimum standards of free public library service
3. Remain open a minimum number of hours per week
4. Allow non-resident borrowing
5. Expend a specific percentage (based on population) of the municipal appropriation on materials
6. Have a Director with a Master's Degree in Library Science

By meeting these State requirements, the Town of Belmont receives the following benefits:



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1. The library is allowed continued membership to the Minuteman Library Network which in turn allows interlibrary loans, reciprocal borrowing privileges, group purchasing opportunities, centralized technology support, a network of librarian committees and working groups, and free use of other libraries for Belmont patrons.
2. The library is allowed access to grants and ensures yearly state funding. Belmont Library usually receives in the range of \$35,000 -\$40,000 per year.

Respectfully Submitted,

Peter Struzziero
Belmont Public Library Director