

## **Pawlet Public Library Report 2019**

As a municipal library of the Town of Pawlet, the Pawlet Public Library offers free services for the community, including many public programs for adults and children and access to materials not only from our collection, but from all Vermont libraries through Inter-library Loans. Library card holders also have free access to a wide range of digital resources like e-books, audiobooks and reference materials.

For recreational activities, card holders may check out snowshoes or snow saucers, and borrow passes to several parks, museums and nature centers. Along with free Wi-Fi, patrons have access to office services like copying and faxing at a nominal cost. The Library offers meeting space for community use, often for free or at a nominal cost when, for instance, the renter charges instructional fees.

These services are made possible by a combination of the Library's fundraising efforts, and tax dollars that provide the salaries of two part-time staff members and maintenance of our beautiful public building. With our thanks to the Town of Pawlet and our team of Library volunteers, we offer this year's summary of our activities.

### **Strategic Plan**

In May 2019, the Library finalized its Strategic Plan 2020-2024 following 15 months of development under the guidance of a nationally recognized library consultant. The community engagement process included interviews with 13 Town and community groups and several individuals to create a plan that is rooted in the needs and aspirations of the community, while developing relationships through partnerships and collaboration.

From this process, the Library established three priorities to guide its decisions about programming, funding, staffing and facility needs:

- provide a place for people to gather for social activities and community discussions;
- offer programs and activities that bring people together and bridge community divisions;
- and, facilitate Town and community organizations in working together and sharing information and resources with each other and the community.

Implementing the plan has already begun. In 2019, we offered monthly programs that brought community members of all ages together for potluck dinners, panel discussions with farmers and newcomers, a square dance, a block party and concert by the Washington County Band, a children's Halloween Parade, a Holiday Tea, and a Vermont-life skill share program series.

The Library obtained grant funding from the Vermont Community Foundation, the Lyman Orton Fund, and the Windham Foundation to add the part-time position of "Community Connector" to the library staff. In December, Sara Young of Middletown Springs was hired to assist Town and community organizations in collaborative efforts. Monthly gatherings of leaders from these organizations began in January.

For children and families, the Library received a grant from the Children's Literacy Foundation to form a partnership with the Mettawee Community School and local childcare providers to promote reading. The grant funded \$2,000 in new children's books for the Library and \$500 in new books for the school. The award includes two professional storytelling presentations for all students in grades K-6 and for preschoolers at Meadow Wee Day Care. The grant also launched the Library's book bag program, designed to help children at all reading levels. Volunteer Catherine Hunter, the Library's Literacy Coach, is available to help families with reading free of charge.

### **Building Improvements for Accessibility**

The strategic plan addresses facility needs, namely the improvement of access for people with physical disabilities. Currently, many people in wheelchairs and walkers find the ramp in the back of the building too steep and too long to navigate. The ramp is closed most of the winter due to ice and snow accumulation and falling ice and snow from the massive roof. In addition, many visitors with temporary or permanent mobility issues and parents with strollers and gear have difficulty negotiating the front exterior and interior stairs to reach the main floor.

In November 2019, the Library Board voted to support the lift expansion plan commissioned by the Select Board from architect Ralph Nimtz. The expansion would improve access to the main level of the Library for everyone year-round by creating a new enclosed entrance allowing visitors either to take the stairs or a lift to the main floor. It would also allow patrons to take the stairs or the lift down to use the Matt Waite Room for library events or for community functions open to the public. There is currently no access to this lower level room for people with physical disabilities, and so, by law, it cannot be booked for gatherings that are open to the public.

Community groups hold about 275 meetings or classes a year in the Library. Of these around 140 are held when the Library is closed, which presents significant security concerns. Also, the growing number of community meetings held on the main floor of the Library during library hours presents a dilemma in serving walk-in patrons since the room used for meetings also holds the non-fiction and reference collection. By making the Matt Waite Room fully accessible (including a new public restroom), the Library can securely close off the main floor when community groups need a meeting/function space during times when the library is closed; and we can offer an alternative space for meetings held during Library hours.

The Library building addition is a sizeable investment for our community. In January, the Library hosted an informational meeting for grant funders, organized by the Vermont Community Development Program. Five agencies that provide state, federal and private funding attended and invited the Town to apply for funding in the Spring. We are confident after this meeting that grant funding will cover one-third to one-half of the \$295,000 bond. Grant application guidelines require that the project be fully approved to be considered, in this case by ballot on March 3.

Through our strategic planning process, the Library has adopted the mission to provide a leadership role in unifying the community through shared resources and meaningful experiences for all generations. We are dedicated to serving the community, and we urge you to vote in favor of improving our public building to provide year-round community access for all. Thank you.

Submitted by Mary Lou Willits, Library Director