



SPOTLIGHT ON THE WESTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

INTRODUCTION

Our small town of Weston has a Public Library that plays a very large role in our community. Under the leadership of Karen Tatarka, its highly regarded Director, the Weston Public Library is much more than just a source of information and resources. It is a gathering place for the community as well as a center for discovery and the exchange of ideas. The library's calendar is filled with programs and events every week — for both adults and children — all of which can be found on the library's website: www.westonpubliclibrary.org.

The library's recently renovated interior is an attractive place with small seating areas, individual workspaces, and tables and chairs clustered among the book shelves. It is all brightened by the natural light coming through the windows that offer views of the surrounding Weston landscape. A small coffee nook is tucked in off to one side.

During any typical day at the library, there is usually someone sitting at a computer, or perhaps a tutor and student are working together quietly in the back. Someone else is enjoying the newspaper — maybe with a cup of coffee — and another person may be focusing on fitting a single piece of a jigsaw puzzle into place. The large desk in the center space is occupied by at least one of the friendly staff members who will often personally greet visitors by name.

The Children's Room is a colorful and lively place, inviting young ones to engage with its many stories and treasures. The library's Community Room is often the location for art exhibits, performances, large town meetings, and special programs. Additional smaller meeting rooms are made available by reservation to clubs and organizations in town. There is also a Maker Space.

LIBRARY RESOURCES

The library contains a physical collection of slightly more than 49,000 items: including printed books, audio books, movie DVDs, and music CDs. Typically, the monthly circulation of those items is between 3,000 and 3,500. Even during the pandemic lockdown, when books and CDs had to be ordered ahead, picked up in bags from the library, and then quarantined upon their return, that circulation figure did not drop. Community members continued to borrow from the library at the same rate as before Covid, in spite of the inconveniences.

Attendance data confirm the library's popularity within the community. Statistics gathered during the year before the pandemic (2018-2019) showed that in our town of slightly over 10,000 residents, the library received almost 69,000 in-person visits. More than 8,200 were participants in 752 program sessions. During that same year, there were about 64,000 physical items borrowed and almost 8,400 digital items borrowed.

When visiting the library, patrons can take advantage of a multitude of resources. Among them:

- **Computers** - Members can sign in to use one of several computers made available for residents.
- **WiFi** - High speed wireless internet connection for your laptop or device available anytime throughout the library. Wireless printing is also available.
- **Scanner**- For public use.
- **Public access FAX machine** - For use with debit/credit card.
- **Interlibrary loan** - Items not available here may be borrowed from another library.
- **Ancestry Software** - Accessed on library computers.
- **Passes/ Discount cards for local attractions and museums** - Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum (Ridgefield), Beardsley Zoo (Bridgeport), Connecticut's Old State House (Hartford), Discovery Museum and Planetarium (Bridgeport), Florence Griswold Museum (Old Lyme), Maritime Aquarium (Norwalk), Mystic Aquarium (Mystic), New Britain Museum of American Art, Stamford Museum & Nature Center, Stepping Stones Museum for Children (Norwalk), State Parks and Forests Day Pass, USS Constitution Museum (Boston), Wadsworth Athenium Museum of Art (Hartford), Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History (New Haven)

ONLINE RESOURCES

Physical presence in the building is not required for library members to access books and other items. For example, visiting www.westonpubliclibrary.com allows patrons to do the following from home:

- Access the card catalog to see if a book is available.
- Place a hold on a book.
- Download one of many available e-books, e-audible books, movies, and music offerings through SimplyE, Hoopla, and Overdrive.

Members also have internet access to forty-six (46) valuable databases, electronic resources, and links via the library's website. Some of what is offered includes:

- Lists of books that are award winners and best sellers — both children's books and adult books;
- Courses about computers and computer software;
- Tools for matching skills and interests to careers, identifying schools and scholarships available, guidance on writing resumes and preparing for job interviews;
- Information about health and wellness, drugs and supplements, and a variety of health topics from the U.S. Library of Medicine;
- Reviews and ratings on products and services from Consumer Reports;
- do-it-yourself legal eBooks and law forms, focusing on: family law, financial planning, real estate, small business law, rights and disputes;
- Lessons on sign language;
- Lessons to learn over eighty different international languages;
- Information on substance use and mental health disorders, prevention and health topics;
- Sources to be used for academic research;
- Reading recommendations based on previously enjoyed books;

- The largest collection of popular full-text magazines, reference books and other highly-regarded sources from the world's leading publishers, also including an extensive collection of photos, maps, and flags;
- A full-text digital collection of the world's major news magazines, along with television and radio transcripts and ongoing daily updates from popular news sources;
- A variety of newspapers, including *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, as well as local newspapers;
- Local history resources, with stories (e.g. about the Weston meteorite that landed in 1807), oral histories, memories of Weston's past and many more;
- A listing of Job Search websites;
- U.S. government websites, IRS forms and publications, CT State agencies and departments, and Weston government and local organizations.

PROGRAMS & EVENTS

A wide range of programs and events for both adults and children take place in the building throughout the week, and most are provided free of charge. Many are sponsored by The Friends of the Weston Library. Occasionally, programs are co-sponsored with other community organizations such as The League of Women Voters, the Weston History and Culture Center, and the Weston Commission for the Arts.

The library website lists current programs and events. Residents can also sign up to receive a monthly newsletter telling about upcoming events for adults and children by going to this link: www.westonpubliclibrary.org/newsletters.

Special note: As of May, 2021 a number of programs normally held in the library continue to be provided via Zoom. Please check the library website for updates on when these programs return to being held in person.

PROGRAMS FOR ADULTS

Normally held in the library, these regularly scheduled programs have continued using Zoom:

- **New Yorker Roundtable group** - meets weekly on Tuesdays to discuss articles in recent issues of the magazine.
- **Book Discussion groups** led by paid moderators:
 - **A morning group** - meets monthly on Thursday, led by author, Shakespeare scholar, and Westport's Poet Laureate, Diane Lowman;
 - **An evening group** - meets monthly on Wednesday, led by award winning author, Meira Rosenberg;
 - **A classics group** - meets every other month on Friday, specializing in the classics, moderated by Sharon Sobel, author and Professor of English at Norwalk Community College, and writing instructor at University of Connecticut in Stamford.
- **A Cookbook group** - meets monthly, sharing cooking tips and recipes according to a selected theme; led by Karen Tatarka, the Library Director.
- **A Zoom Short Story Session** - meets on the first and third Wednesday of each month. Participants listen to - and read along with - an audible short story; a lively group

discussion follows. No preparation required. To be included, send name and email address: wplshortstories@gmail.com.

- **The Weston Library Photography Club** - Amateur photographers meet twice monthly from September to May. An annual photo exhibit by club members is held in the Library Community Room. www.westonlibraryphotoclub.com.

These occasional programs have also been offered throughout the year on Zoom:

- **Speakers on Topics of Interest** - themes can include topical subjects, art, history, and science.
- **Author Talks** - individual authors or panels of authors discuss their books and answer questions from the audience.

Examples of Adult Programs offered online in the past year are:

- **Queen of the Mountaineers: The Trailblazing Life of Fanny Bullock Workman:** talk by author Cathryn J. Prince about her research and book on Fanny Workman (1859-1925) and her barrier-breaking climbing escapades (in a skirt!) and her scientific contributions to the world of exploring;
- **Village of the Dammed:** a program of intense historic interest with James Lomuscio, author of the award-winning book, *Village of the Dammed: The Fight for Open Space and the Flooding of a Connecticut Town*;
- **Artscapades:** a series of lectures and discussions about different schools of art and a look at the works of artists who exemplify those schools. Led by Robin Hoffman and Jodi Stiffleman, long-time teachers of art appreciation;
- **Virtual Art Museum/Gallery Tours:** a look at what's currently happening in the art world with art historian and educator, Riva Blumenfeld;
- **Conversations: Truth, Myth & Democracy:** two evening discussions, the first with Dr. Jelani Cobb and Dr. Jason Stanley, moderated by Tina Rosenberg; the second with Historians Dr. Charles Dew and Dr. Ty Seidule, moderated by WCSU Psychology Professor Dr. Daniel Barrett. A co-sponsored event initiated by the Mark Twain Library;
- **Off the Rails with Jim Cameron:** a presentation and Q&A on Connecticut's transportation crisis by long-time commuter advocate and newspaper commentator, Jim Cameron;
- **In Honor of Black History Month: Two programs, Jacob Lawrence's Migration Series and African Americans in New England:** presented by Van Gosse, PhD, author and Professor of History and Chair of Africana Studies at Franklin and Marshall College; (His latest book, *The First Reconstruction: Black Politics in America, From the Revolution to the Civil War* was published in February.) Co-sponsored with the League of Women Voters of Weston;
- **In Honor of Women's History Month: The Work Must Be Done, Women of Color and the Right To Vote:** a special event showcasing several Connecticut women who worked for women's suffrage, presented by Brittny Yancy, Assistant Professor of Humanities at Goodwin University and Karen Li Miller, research historian at the Connecticut Historical Society. Co-sponsored by the Weston Historical Society, League of Women Voters of Weston, the Weston Public Library, and the Friends of the Weston Public Library;
- **State of Science:** a talk about what modern science is and how it works, including its politicization, phony science and questionable "health" products by Marc Zimmer,

Professor of Chemistry at Connecticut College, and author of many popular adult and children's science books, most recently *The State of Science: What the Future Holds and the Scientists Making It Happen*.

PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

An eye-opening range of services and programming for children is offered under the direction of Alessandra Petrino, current Head of Children & Teen Services at The Weston Public Library.

In the days before the pandemic, there was a full array of programs presented for children of all ages. 'Miss Alessandra' generally has children gathered at the library in similar-aged groups weekly from Monday through Friday, with an additional story time for all ages on Saturday at 11am. Projects are designed with the goal to promote children's skills for learning. Younger children are usually engaged with stories, songs, imagination, and social interactions; while with older students the emphasis is on creation, imagination, discussion and action.

The pre-pandemic in-person schedule for children was a busy one and typically included:

- Five weekly story time and craft programs for preschool aged children.
- Four weekly programs for children of all ages.
- Eight children's groups or clubs that met monthly.
- Monthly STEM activities for students in grades 3+.
- Regular series of games, parties, and activities celebrating holidays and special occasions throughout the year.

When restrictions from the pandemic required the library to close its doors, the children's librarian redesigned all the programs to be delivered virtually. The result was that a wide range of programs and services were continued to be made available by the library to Weston children and teens. The library website www.westonpubliclibrary.org will provide updates on which programs will remain virtual, which may be offered in a hybrid version, and which will have returned to being held in-person at the library.

These children's services are available in the Library every day throughout the year:

- **Crafts-to-go:** For all ages. Grab a craft-to-go bag at the entrance to the children's room. Each craft is labeled on the outside with the name and has directions if more than a simple coloring craft. Different crafts each day the Children's Library is open. Monday-Saturday 10am-4pm.
- **Children & Teen Binge Box:** The librarian selects books/movies for any child or teen based on a specific theme, genre, or author preference as expressed by the child on a completed questionnaire.
- **1000 Books before Kindergarten Program:** There are Links to downloadable PDFs on the Library website for parents on how the program works, suggested reading lists, book tracking, and tips for reading with their children. The Weston Public Library is a proud supporter of the 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten program.

Story Times continue to be available for different age groups:

- **Story Time with Miss Laura:** Weekly for ages birth-8. Recorded program of Miss Laura reading stories and singing songs posted on YouTube and Facebook. Children can watch at their own convenience.
- **Toddler Tinkergarten:** Once or twice monthly for ages 2-4. Tinker materials and activity sheets are picked up from the library, then children join Miss Alessandra on Facebook LIVE for a themed book, song and building activity.
- **Alphabet Soup: Stories and Learning:** Three or four times monthly for ages 3-6. Folder with book titles, song lyrics, and activity sheets are picked up from Library; children join Miss Alessandra on Facebook Live for themed stories, songs and activities.
- **Friday Firsts:** Twice to four times per month for ages 10+. Children listen to the first chapter of a new Junior Fiction or Young Adult Fiction book on Facebook Live.

Monthly "Book Chats" meet on Zoom:

- **The 35 Kid Club:** Grades 3-5.
- **Genius Bookworms:** Grades 4-6.

Several craft programs are offered for varied ages. For some, kits are picked up from the library and the craft is completed at home; for others, items from home are used and parents help with the craft:

- **Crafts for Home Craft:** Weekly for ages 3+ (and parents). A video of Miss Laura posted on YouTube and Facebook guiding children through making a craft using household items. No materials are provided.
- **STEM Craft:** Offered two or three times each month for age 5+. STEM kits have included mini terrariums, recycled seed bombs, and more.
- **Kid Realm:** Once or twice monthly for Grades K-6. Crafts have included wind chimes, a foam mobile, and more.

Some crafts and games are designed for older children:

- **Meetup for 'Among Us' Game:** Fans of this game, ages 8-15 join Meetup to find friends to play with by first connecting via Zoom and getting the code for an 'Among Us' room.
- **Teen Scene:** Teens meet monthly to engage in crafts, or share preferred projects: Fandom.

There are also videos featuring food preparation projects:

- **Food Explorers:** Monthly, for ages 5+ and their parents. Miss Alessandra hosts a paid presenter on Zoom demonstrating the making of a recipe (e.g. Lemon Bars). Ingredients are not supplied.
- **Seasonal Recipes:** Weekly for one month during each of the four seasons. Video posted on YouTube and Facebook demonstrating the making of seasonal treats.

Examples of programs presented at different times of the year:

- **Springtime Story Walk:** A fun, educational activity that places a children's story (a deconstructed book, page by page) attached to posts along a walking route. StoryWalk® helps build children's interest in reading while encouraging healthy activity for both adults and children.

- **Growing Bookworm:** Children or their parents can pick up a colorful circle once the child has read a book. The child puts the title of the book on the circle, and adds a drawing and their name if they like. The circle is returned to the library and is used to create a bookworm around the children's room to illustrate all the books the children of Weston have read during **National Library Week**.
- **Poetry Tea Time:** In celebration of **National Poetry Month**, materials and instructions are provided for children to create their own tea cup and saucer to enjoy a favorite drink. As children decorate their tea cups, they are invited to share some of their favorite poems with the group - even poems they have created themselves. Miss Alessandra shares as well.
- **Holiday Events:** Typically, special activities are planned for **Halloween** and **Thanksgiving**; **December holidays** are also recognized and celebrated.
- **A Summer Program:** Has usually been offered for eight weeks between the third week in June and the third week in August. Includes Summer Library Adventures.

Examples of One-time Special Programs:

- **2D Animation Workshop:** Attendees and viewers learn how to do traditional animation using free open source software. This was a pre-recorded program, with Miss Alessandra leading the event on Zoom.
- **Nailed It!: Bunny House:** Nailed it Bunny House designed after Netflix's hit show gave participants a challenge to complete the design of an all-edible bunny house with materials provided in a restricted amount of time. Families registered for the program, and picked up kits during Library open hours.
- **A Music, Bubble and Comedy Dance Party (with prizes!):** This is a special inclusive, neuro-diverse event for children and teens of all abilities for **Autism Awareness Month**. Families dance, sing along, and hear stories and songs about autism advocates who have had incredible success in their lives and careers. The show is crafted to be inclusive for all children, including children on the Autism Spectrum, and a great time for parents and caregivers.
- **Mock Nutmeg Elementary Committee:** During the 5-week-long session for the Mock Nutmeg Book Award Elementary Committee, Hurlbutt Elementary Students have a chance to discuss all 15 nominees for the 2021 Nutmeg Elementary Book Award. Each student is assigned one of the books for which they become the "CAMPAIGN MANAGER" and create a poster urging students to vote for their title when the state votes in April. The posters are hung up at Hurlbutt Elementary School for all students to see during voting time. Students on this committee also get a free copy of their book from the Weston Library along with the poster creation material (picked up at the Weston Public Library or arranged to be picked up at Hurlbutt with Ms. Rodko). (This program is usually offered at the Schools, but during the pandemic when schools were not in session full time, the Library offered it instead.)

The library also sponsors Parent-Centered programs once or twice per month. Some examples are:

- **5 Ways to prevent Summer Learning Loss and Prepare Your Student for Fall**, a free webinar for parents.
- **Navigating College Admissions during COVID-19**, a presentation to help families understand how COVID-19 is changing the college admissions landscape and how it will affect Freshmen, Sophomores, and Juniors. Hosted by Stand Out for College, LLC.

Online Resources for students for help with homework are available on the library's link:
www.westonpubliclibrary.org/children/homework

- Explora - for Elementary Schools and for Middle Schools
- Nutmegs
- Overdrive for Kids
- Primary Search

These New Collections are available in the Children's Library and currently available for in-person checkout:

- **S.H.E.L.F. Packs** - These Super Helpful Early Learning Fun Packs are great for ages birth to age 8 as a supplement and aid for distance Learning. Each backpack is themed and includes books, interactive learning elements, games and activities. Themes range from Musical Instruments to Emotions to Dinosaurs and everything in between. These packs can be checked out for 2 weeks.
- **PLAYAWAY Launchpads** - These tablets are pre-loaded with content for kids and families, designed with a simple, easy-to-use interface and are 100% secure. No download time. No need for Wi-Fi. Access to powerful content is as simple as turning on each device - anytime - anywhere. Launchpads are great for ages 3-12 and have various theme from S.T.E.M. to Early Literacy.

MAKER SPACE

The Library's website describes the Maker Space as follows: "*The Makerspace is a room in the library... and it is also the **idea** of a space dedicated solely for creation and problem-solving through interdisciplinary learning (such as technology and art). And it is for ALL ages.*"

The Library is proud to offer Weston residents a range of tools and machines, such as:

- Da Vinci 3D Printer
- Printbot Simple Metal 3D Printer
- Cricut
- iMac desktop computer
- Adobe Creative Cloud (including Photoshop, Illustrator, Animator, Lightroom, and many more!)
- Slides/Negative Scanner
- Photo scanner
- VHS to DVD converter
- Digital Microscope
- External DVD/Disc Drive
- Snap Circuits
- Makey-Makeys
- Ozobots
- Sphero mini
- Lego Mindstorm

MakerKits: Available for a two-week checkout period and must be returned in the book drop.

- **Digitize Your Negatives Kit:** Includes Picscanner Mobile Phone Scanner and Quick Guide; need to provide cell phone with high-resolution camera and ability to download free Picscanner App from Google or Apple
- **Explore AR/VR Holograms:** Includes: MERGE Cube; need to provide cell phone or tablet and ability to download apps
- **Learn Needle Felting Kit:** Includes Instruction book, felting needles (2), foam mat, thimbles (3), variety of wool colors
- **Movie Night Projector:** Includes: Portable projector with case and instruction sheet
- **Hot Glue Guns**

VOLUNTEERS SUPPORTING THE LIBRARY

The Weston Public Library is funded by the town of Weston. There are, however, many volunteers who contribute their expertise and their time to help the library continue to provide so many free services and programs for the Weston community.

The Weston Public Library Board is the policy and governing body for the Weston Library. They are a nine-member oversight organization of dedicated volunteers who review and implement policies regarding the Library collection, circulation, and acceptable use of the facility. This Board also manages any funds that are gifts to the Library, and occasionally sponsors programs at the Library.

The Executive Board of The Friends of the Weston Public Library consists of devoted supporters of this Library who volunteer their time and energies to enhance the Library's programming and offerings to the Weston community. Programs are underwritten by fundraisers and individual donations. Any resident who wants to offer support to our Library is invited to join the **Friends of the Weston Public Library**. (www.westonlibraryfriends.org)

CONCLUSION

With the support of these volunteers, and with the very capable library leadership, The Weston Public Library more than fulfills its stated mission "to provide a broad range of informational, educational, technological, social and recreational resources to meet the diverse needs of the community."

Everyone in town is invited to join the library and enjoy the benefits of its many fine offerings.

Susan W. Urbania