



# BROOKS MEMORIAL LIBRARY

[brookslibraryvt.org](http://brookslibraryvt.org)

224 Main Street, Brattleboro, VT 05301

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Dear Friend,

Back when the internet became omnipresent, many thought the age of books — and by definition, libraries — was over. Forbes even dared to hypothesize that public libraries were unnecessary. Why pay taxes to keep a bricks-and-mortar library going? they reasoned. Why not privatize? Why not buy books at Amazon, read them at Starbucks and watch movie choices on Netflix?

The article elicited so much outrage that Forbes immediately removed it from its website.

We could have told them. People are passionate about their libraries. Last year at this time, Brooks was so full it was hard to book a meeting space. Downstairs, you could browse the shelves, read magazines, play chess, check your email, listen to a lecture, make photocopies, have Jeanne help you with research, have Matt help you with a tech problem, peruse the latest display put together by Courtney, fill out a job application, trade book recommendations with Ellen, Klara, Lorena, and Sarah, search your family's ancestry or exchange gossip with a friend while getting checked out. Free yoga classes, writers' workshops, Scrabble games and serious lectures competed for space. The Children's Room was often filled with children playing, dancing, listening to stories with Lindsay or making art and checking in with their pals Jeni, John, Judy and Julia. Chloe enriched and honored the teen experience with her interactions in the Spicy Lime. You could take out snowshoes in the winter and enjoy hours of warmth catching up on the latest magazines processed by Maria. Jenn could get the most esoteric texts through interlibrary loan, and Leslie and Marybeth kept the new books flowing. Brooks was truly the center of our community.

"I've always said libraries are for the people, not for the books," said Starr LaTronica, Director of Brooks Memorial Library. "The books happen to be the tools we can reach people with, but we're really here for the people."

Fast forward to today. The library, after being closed for months, is open but empty. The tables and chairs are gone. So are the magazines. So are the people.

It's a brave new world, and our librarians are rethinking the library's place in it.

"I think there's a responsibility for the library to be open for community," Starr says. "Even though people can't come and hang out here, and spend all day working on their poetry or whatever they're working on, there's a chance for people to have a human interaction. We all know the research says you need a certain number of human interactions to maintain your mental health, and I think that's one of the reasons I really felt it was important to bring the library back open."

During the August 2019 – July 2020 season, the Friends were there to help. We spent \$2,220 on museum passes, \$2,900 on the First Wednesdays lecture series, \$9,995 on digital media including the grant-filled Foundation Center, new book alerts and a magazine about new books, and such home streaming services as Kanopy for independent films and Acorn for British and Australian television shows. We spent \$2,500 on chairs for the Young Adults room. We bought four new laptops and a host of other things.

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Some of these purchases have paid off splendidly during the pandemic. For example, we were able to keep the community's home entertainment going with ebooks, digital audio, Kanopy and Acorn. According to statistics from Jeanne, "Patrons watched a total of 8,813 videos in the first half of 2020, compared to 6,251 videos in 2019."

The Foundation Center has made it possible to access its vast grant and foundation data base at home for the use of nonprofits. Laptops purchased by the Friends were loaned indefinitely to several social service agencies to provide essential connectivity to their clientele, some of whom used the time to take online classes, such as keyboarding. And we found other innovative ways to help. Given all the sanitizing and hand-washing the librarians have had to do, we were happy to provide hand cream and gloves. We bought signs for the front windows that said "We miss you," and "Read!"

We earned the money to do this through the annual appeal, two hugely popular book sales, plus a dessert gala and a raffle.

This year? No book sales, no dessert gala, no raffle, no events. But that doesn't mean we need less money. In fact, we need more.

Some of the things the librarians are thinking about:

- Making a large amount of content — books on tape, audio books, magazines, lectures, etc. — available online.
- Upgrading the sound system and making it portable for outdoor concerts.
- Partnering with schools, senior groups and other organizations to advance literacy and provide services, materials and resources critical for the social, cultural and economic health of the community.

The mission of the Trustees and the Friends is to support the library — now more than ever.

"The library reaches a broad array of people on a common level of shared experience," Starr said. "And I think that's so important for community. What I love about a library program is that it reaches everybody in the room. And for children, it's so important as a social experience. First of all, for many kids it is the first introduction to the arts — a concert at the library, or a story time at the library. It teaches socialization, because they're in a group. They are absorbing the stimulation of hearing a story, the visual stimulation, and they're also surrounded by their peers. They learn different ways of how to act, how to react. So it's a very important developmental thing for kids. The library is the perfect place for kids to develop their decision-making skills. They can explore an interest at no cost, with only the investment of time. And as they get older, they have their own book clubs, and even zombie tag. It's cooperative and developmentally rich."

We have an important role to support Brooks in this time of challenge and transition.

"This upheaval offers has given us the opportunity to re-examine everything," Starr said. "We're a resolute bunch, and we're determined to maintain the traditional elements of the library but deliver them in innovative ways—a reset, if you will. We are still assessing ways to do that. We are looking forward to expanding our collaboration with our partners. We will be looking at a lot more virtual resources. I think as online programs become more available, they'll become even better. Of course, that value comes with a cost. We'll need money to support all of it. That's the big challenge. How do we keep our mission, connecting with people, engaging people, inspiring people and keeping those connections strong? It will be a communal effort, but that's where libraries excel. There is a reason Brooks is the heart of the community, it's because we keep the community at the heart of Brooks. That will not change."

Your gift is vital to the library's continued success. You have our grateful thanks.

Sincerely,



Joyce Marcel  
President of the Friends of Brooks Memorial Library



Leo Schiff  
President of the Board of Trustees