

The Library as Community Center and Historical Resource

Putnam County Libraries Are Alive and Thriving

By GLENN VALLACH

There was a concern for many years that the contemporary library was archaic and outdated. The advent of computerization and the Internet, it was considered, had rendered the library unnecessary and redundant. Why not simply access the informational resources you need in the comfort of your own home – on a desk in your office or on a screen on your phone?

Last year, Putnam County's eight libraries recorded 454,257 visits.

"We continue to grow and expand, as the contemporary library, here and elsewhere, has become more of a community center," said Gina Loprinza, President of the Putnam County Libraries Association and Director of the Brewster Public Library.

There are eight libraries in Putnam County, including the Mahopac Public Library, the Brewster Public Library, the Julia L. Butterfield Memorial Library (Cold Spring), the Reed Memorial Library (Carmel), the Alice Curtis Desmond and Hamilton Fish Library (Garrison), the Kent Public Library, the Patterson Library, and the Putnam Valley Free Library.

"Our friends and neighbors in Putnam County certainly see the value of our libraries," said Ms. Loprinza. "A few years ago, for instance, we completed a construction project at the Brewster library, expanding from 4,000 square feet to 9,000 square feet incorporating larger program spaces, private study rooms, more digital technology. These and other needs were identified to stay relevant and meet the demands of the people we serve. People voted to support that project enthusiastically. We're proud of the way we've adapted with a new environment preparing for what is important now and down the road."

Michelle Gaglio lives in Mahopac and was a regular visitor to the library when her children were younger. She was and continues to be astounded by the options available there.

"I don't think the library is top of mind for a lot of people," she said. "I don't visit nearly as much as I used to with my kids, but I know adults who do today to access audio books,



movies, and technology assistance. Certainly if you have children or grandchildren, you're more inclined to visit, I think. There were times my kids and I spent the whole day there. Many people don't have a clue what's available."

The numbers don't tell the whole story, but they are impressive regardless. In addition to the aforementioned

2024 visits, library users accumulated nearly 350,000 website visits while using public computers more than 37,000 times. Books were among the physical items checked out 373,000 times last year alone.

More than 7,000 programs were conducted, and 72,000 people attended and participated in them. Children and

adult programs range from homework help to technology assistance, from story time to adults in crafts, from mahjong to Friday movies.

"The programs are abundant, and response to them is terrific," said Loprinza. "For instance, we collaborated on county-wide summer reading programs, providing entertainment and educational experiences for patrons of all ages. We offered an online New Parents Support Group to all county residents. We even addressed food scarcity in the community, partnering with organizations like Cornell Cooperative Extension and Second Chance Foods, to bring free seed libraries, dry goods food pantries, and frozen prepared meals to families in need."

The purpose of the Putnam County Libraries Association is to encourage cooperation among all libraries serving the public in Putnam County. Ms. Loprinza is President of the Putnam County Library Association today, but her peer directors in the other libraries share this role in rotation. Association members are made up of library directors, library trustees, and three representatives to the Mid-Hudson Library System's Board.

The Mid-Hudson Library System is based in Poughkeepsie and serves Columbia, Dutchess, Greene, Putnam, and Ulster counties with 66 member libraries.

"Libraries are key to thriving communities in the future – they are perfectly po-

sitioned to help with some of the toughest issues we face today," recently wrote Rebekkah Smith Aldrich, Executive Director of the Mid-Hudson Library System in a letter to the editor. "Librarians are trusted, with 87% of Millennials and 74% of Baby Boomers agreeing that their library helps them find information that is trustworthy and reliable. Some 40 percent of Americans say they trust libraries and librarians a lot. Libraries are strongly valued, both for providing access to materials and resources and for pro-

moting literacy and improving the overall quality of life; 94% of Americans say that having a public library improves the quality of life in a community. They cultivate social capital in their communities, serving as community anchors that contribute to social cohesion and civic participation."

"We're every bit the community center of today and tomorrow," said Loprinza. "We have so many more spaces now where people can gather – to learn, to read, to watch, to participate. They are our treasures."

The Library

By Barbara A. Huff

It looks like any building
When you pass it on the street,
Made of stone and glass and marble,
Made of iron and concrete.

But once inside you can ride
A camel or a train,
Visit Rome, Siam, or Nome,
Feel a hurricane,
Meet a king, learn to sing,
How to bake a pie,
Go to sea, plant a tree,
Find how airplanes fly,
Train a horse, and of course
Have all the dogs you'd like,
See the moon, a sandy dune,
Or catch a whopping pike

Everything that books can bring
You'll find inside those walls.
A world is there for you to share
When adventure calls.

You cannot tell its magic
By the way the building looks,
But there's wonderment within it
The wonderment of books.



Ice Breakers Raise Funds for Special Olympics



Erin Scott of Lake Carmel led the Putnam contingent in the Polar Plunge.

Photos Courtesy of Erin Scott

By ERIC GROSS

A cold, windy and raw Saturday morning greeted dozens of brave souls wearing swim suits for the annual Polar Plunge. The group was there to raise money for Special Olympics New York.

Members of the New York State Police Dive Team removed a layer of ice that col-

lected on the reservoir surface before the first participants took the plunge into 30 degree water at Camp Mariah in Fishkill. The air temperature by the way was a bone chilling 28 degrees.

Event coordinator Teresa Gilli thanked participants: "I can't begin to tell you how much our athletes appreciate the outpouring of support that the Fishkill Polar Plunge pro-

vides year after year.

Once again Erin Scott, the Lake Carmel woman who teaches special education children in Dutchess County, joined others when participating in the Special Olympics 27th Polar Plunge at the Sharpe Reservation.

Funds raised help support the cost of Special Olympics athletes participating in training

and competitions throughout the year. The programs are offered free to the athletes, their families and caregivers.

Scott jumped into the frigid water in memory of a former student: "Steven was a resident of Putnam ARC Neal House who passed away in 2007. He was a very special and caring young man. I loved him like a brother."

Scott's team raised \$6,000 on Saturday, coming in 8th place among the more than 50 teams participating.

The Fishkill Polar Plunge is the most unique among the polar plunges the Special Olympics has across the state.

Gilli noted: "Our Fishkill Polar Plunge goes a long way in helping to pay for the athletes so there is no cost to them,

their families, or their caregivers, and we are looking for our Hudson Valley "plungers" to come through in a big way this year."

Through donations, the Special Olympics athletes and families incur no expenses for the training, transportation, lodging, and competition in the Special Olympics.