



## Connected Chromebook Program brings "critical access" to those in need

In September, RPL received a grant for \$619,000 to purchase Chromebooks with data connectivity as part of the Emergency Connectivity Fund Program from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Federal officials say the program helps close the digital divide.

According to Library Director Audrey Betcher, RPL purchased a total of 1,000 Chromebooks with built-in internet access. "These devices provide crucial internet service to families and individuals who need to connect with online educational resources."

For the first round of Chromebook distribution, RPL partnered with local organizations to identify those needing critical online access. "We launched this program first with non-profits, government agencies, and schools who helped identify individuals who need access," explains Betcher, "And in November, we started offering them more widely."

The devices are checked out to Olmsted County residents who qualify, with a due date of June 30, 2022.

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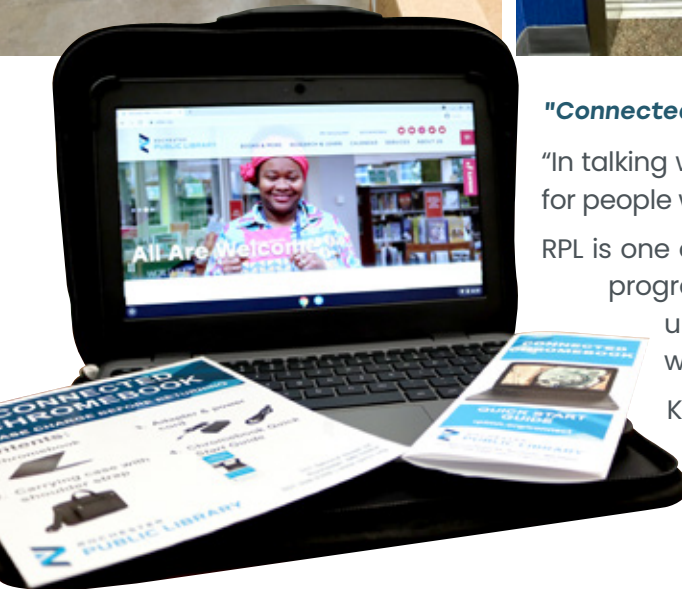
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"In talking with individuals, we realized longer-term checkouts are necessary for people who need the access for learning," explains Betcher.

RPL is one of a few hundred libraries throughout the U.S. to offer this type of program. To make it happen, dozens of library teammates pitched in to unpack, label, and package the devices. In all, the 1,000 Chromebooks were ordered, delivered, and processed in less than a month.

Keri Ostby, Head of Technical Services, says previous experience with other large-scale projects helped her team create an efficient assembly line before the devices arrived. "We started thinking about the processing part of the project during the grant application process," explains Ostby.

**"These devices provide crucial internet service to families and individuals who need to connect with online educational resources."**

*- Audrey Betcher, Library Director*

## Hours survey wraps up, research continues

Over 3,000 Rochester-area community members participated in the library's Hours Survey, surpassing previous numbers for library surveys.

"People really care about when the library or bookmobile offer services," says Library Director Audrey Betcher, adding, "We know that we are limited in how many hours of service we can offer, so we want to make sure we make the right decision."

To get to that decision, Betcher says staff will review the 3,000+ surveys and usage patterns for the past several months. In addition, RPL is partnering with the

Diversity Council to engage community members by conducting a series of individual interviews to hear from often under-represented voices.

"Listening to community voices that we don't often hear from will provide valuable insight on our service hours," explains Betcher.

As part of the Hours Research project, library staff is also reviewing bus schedules, school calendars, and other information.

Betcher says the goal is to make a recommendation to the Library Board in early 2022.



## Turning trash to treasure with Greater Rochester Rotary

The library's Connected Chromebook program is providing critical connections for individuals who otherwise lack consistent internet access, but adding 1,000 Chromebooks created a lot of trash.

"Usually when an individual buys a Chromebook or other device, there's typically a lot of packaging material," says Keri Ostby, Head of Technical Services, adding, "Just imagine what that's like when you have a thousand devices."

In early October, the library added 1,000 Chromebooks to the collection for the grant-funded Connected Chromebook program. Each device and carrying case came with wrappers and foam designed to protect the items.

Ostby estimates there were a total of 6 boxes of discarded packing material weighing almost 50 pounds, something she and others feared would end up in the landfill.

That's when the Greater Rochester Rotary club filled in.

Board Member Patricia McCleese says her club also worries about plastic filling the landfill, so they found a program that uses stretchy plastic to make decking and outdoor furniture. It is called Plastic to Benches.

"We collect plastic waste –number 2 and number 4– from businesses and sort and weigh it before giving it to a distribution partner that ships the waste to Trex," explains McCleese. After sending in 500 pounds, the club earns a bench for a local non-profit. "Trex makes decking and outdoor furniture that looks like wood but is recycled plastic."

McCleese invites others to accept this challenge. "Stop using one item of plastic for a month," she



challenges, saying that when she tried it, she thought it would be simple. "I don't use that much plastic. Then I looked around and was hit with plastic overload. It is everywhere and lasts forever," she explains, adding, "Programs like Plastic to Benches are a start. Greater Rochester Rotary is initiating the program and hopes more groups will do likewise."

With the Chromebook waste from the library, there was over 49 pounds of plastic collected and saved from the landfill.

McCleese says the Greater Rochester Rotary is grateful for the participating businesses and groups who support the project, including: Fresh Thyme, Rochester Pet and Country Store, Hiller's America Flooring, Viking Electric Supplies, Carpet One, Chuck and Don's Pet Store, Rochester Public Library, Collins Feed and Seed, Top Shop, Rotary Risers, Rotary Club of Rochester, RCTC Ecology Club.

Interested in donating plastic? Learn more at: [https://bit.ly/RPLnews\\_RotaryPlastic](https://bit.ly/RPLnews_RotaryPlastic)

## Friends' Winterfest Book Sale

Thursday, February 10 | 5-7PM (Members' Only Preview)

Friday, February 11 | 10AM-5:30PM

Saturday, February 12 | 10AM-5:30PM

Sunday, February 13 | 1-4PM

Memberships can be renewed or purchased at the door.

[www.rplmn.org/friends](http://www.rplmn.org/friends)

SAVE THE DATE



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## Celebrating 100+ years

When Margaret Nelson turned 100 years old last year, her friends wanted to do something special to celebrate.

Some know her as part of the congregation at Community Presbyterian Church. Other friends know her from her 25+ years of dedication to building a library at Madonna Towers. And staff at the library remember Margaret from her volunteer days at RPL.

No matter how they first met Margaret, everyone seems to agree that she has a passion for books and libraries. She spent many years working in the midwest at libraries in schools, churches and private libraries, and has volunteered her time to support reading and learning.

To honor her, Margaret's friends reached out to the Rochester Public Library Foundation and donated to the Rochester Reading Champions tutoring program and also made a financial contribution to purchase a book for every decade of Margaret's life, 1920 to the present:

1920s - ***Peter Pan*** by J.M. Barrie (beautifully annotated and illustrated)

1930s - ***The Boys in the Boat*** by Daniel James Brown

1940s - ***The Book Thief*** by Marcus Zusak

1950s - ***Hidden Figures*** by Margot Lee Shetterly

1960s - ***To Kill a Mockingbird*** by Harper Lee

1970s - ***The National Parks: America's Best Idea*** by Dayton Duncan

1980s - ***Libraries of Minnesota*** by Doug Ohman

1990s - ***The House that Love Built: the story of Millard and Linda Fuller, founders of Habitat for Humanity and the Fuller Center for Housing*** by Bettie B. Youngs

2000s - ***Ordinary Grace*** by William Kent Krueger

2010s - ***Being Mortal*** by Atul Gawande



## Donors from August 1, 2021 through November 15, 2021

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Jane & Mary Campion  
*in appreciation of all staff &  
volunteers at RPL*

James & Darlene Vowels  
*in appreciation of Barbara  
Granquist*

Carolyn Wall  
*in appreciation of the  
Outstanding Bookmobile Staff!*

Kathe Yoss  
*in appreciation of Audrey  
Betcher for her years of service*

Wayne & Laurie Vlasak  
*in appreciation of Brad  
Christensen & Mary Madden*

*In appreciation of Carl &  
Verna Schmidt*

## In Honor

Dick & Joanne Rosener  
*in honor of Audrey Betcher*

James & Judith Sloan  
*in honor of Audrey Betcher*

Sandra Weissler  
*in honor of Audrey Betcher*

Mary Madden & Brad Christensen  
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Malea & Chad Schroeder  
*in honor of Audrey Betcher*

Sarah Keller  
*in honor of Doralee Dubin*

Laura Helle  
*in honor of Dorothy Stobaugh*

Bob & Phyllis Beery  
*in honor of Gail Harris*

Gerard & Carolyn Goulet  
*in honor of grandchildren,  
Austin & Leah Willis*

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in memory of Mothers, Berenice  
Von Fossen & Breta Sheridan

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in memory of Philip Henry Wray

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in memory of Tony Tschida, Sr.

Sandra Atkinson  
in memory of Walter  
& Joan Atkinson

## Digitization Dedication: Volunteer David Niedfeldt

Since 2019, the library has been working on a major scanning and digitalization project involving thousands of news clippings, photographs, and negatives from the Post Bulletin archives.

Librarian Susan Hansen says volunteers are making this project possible, including David Niedfeldt, who took on the role after being laid off from a previous job.

"I have an interest in archiving," explains Niedfeldt, who holds a degree in history. "This is something I am really good at and I understand that it's just one piece of something much larger."

Every week, Niedfeldt says he spends between 7-9 hours "doing my job" for the digitization project, which he says gives him the ability to use his knowledge and appreciation for archiving while also helping to build his resume.

"It's more than a volunteer position to me," says Niedfeldt.

His dedication is something Hansen appreciates, along with the support of the other volunteers working on the project. With over 465 boxes of items, Hansen says she could use more volunteers.

Prior to COVID, Hansen had ten regular volunteers helping with the project, and right now she's down to just three.

"We have thousands of articles and images dating as far back as the 1950s," explains Hansen. "It's a big project and we can really use a lot of volunteers to get it done."

While the library has hundreds of Post Bulletin newspapers available for viewing on rolls of microfilm, Hansen says it's not the easiest way to access information, nor do they produce high-quality images.



"When we wrap up this project, people will be able to easily search for information and images by using keywords," explains Hansen. "This will be a great addition to our local history digital collection."

To see the library's online digital collection, visit:  
[https://bit.ly/RPLnews\\_digital](https://bit.ly/RPLnews_digital)

Have skills to share at the library?  
Apply to be a volunteer!  
[www.rplmn.org](http://www.rplmn.org)

## Friends' Annual Meeting

Well, it's been another strange year for the Friends. Once again we are not having our January annual meeting due to Covid, masking and social distancing.

We would like to recognize 2021 major donors to the Friends: Rochester Commercial Banks Association, Rochester Area Foundation, and an anonymous, long-time Friend.

I would like to thank Phillip Nordquist and Lou Wagner for their service as retiring Board officers, and the rest of the Friends Board for their time and commitment to helping the library. I would also like to thank Pat Stephenson for her years of service as the bookstore manager and the phenomenal profits the store made under her watch.

We have a slate of new and returning officers for the upcoming year, 2022: president Val Kaliszewski, vice-president Phyllis Berman, co-treasurers Dee Voldal and Ann Griese, and returning secretary Joyce Wenz. Like last year, Friends members will be asked to vote on the proposed slate of officers by email or by phone. Voting details and the annual financial report will be sent in early January.

We invite any Friends member to consider joining the board. We have one at-large seat open. It would be wonderful to add more diversity to the board to ensure a spectrum of voices are represented. It's a great opportunity to help support the mission of the Friends. The commitment is a 3-year term with 10 board meetings a year, each lasting only about an hour. Contact any of the current Board members or library volunteer coordinator Marilyn Campbell at 507-328-2341 if you would like more information.

Membership is an important part of our budget and we appreciate your support! As a reminder, 2020 and 2021 memberships will expire December 31. You should have received your membership renewal letter in the mail in October. You can always renew online, in person in the store, or by mailing your check to the library (attn: Friends Membership). Learn more at [www.rplmn.org/friends](http://www.rplmn.org/friends)

**John Hunziker**

Retiring President



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PUBLIC LIBRARY**

## Friends' Book Store Hours

**Monday, Tuesday,  
& Thursday  
11AM-6PM**

**Saturday  
12-3PM**

## Friends are back open for business!

The Friends are very excited to be back in business after a 20 month hiatus!

The Friends' Bookstore was open two days a week in October and November. The 50% off sale days in November were very successful. We also participated in the downtown tradition of Small Business Saturday. Thank you to all our new and returning customers! There is still a large backlog of inventory so we invite you to keep shopping as we keep refilling the shelves with great deals. In addition to books, we also have CDs, DVDs, games, and puzzles. Coffee table books are on display outside the store entrance and hardcover fiction books are in the lobby. When the store is not open, purchases from these displays can be paid for with cash, using the payment box at the circulation desk. Watch our website at [www.rplmn.org/friends](http://www.rplmn.org/friends) or our Facebook Page

for updates to store hours as we add days of operation to the store schedule. The store is a fun and flexible place to volunteer. If you are interested, please contact the library volunteer coordinator, Marilyn Campbell at 507-328-2341.

Our Autumn Auditorium Book Sale in October made \$4600 in profits. At press time, we are planning our December Gift Quality Book and Bake Sale. Mark your calendars for our next big auditorium sale February 10-13.


While we are still working through our huge backlog, small donation amounts are currently being accepted and can be left in the bin near the Bookstore entrance or in the bins outside the library garage door on 1st Ave. You can help make room for more donations by continuing to shop at the Bookstore, our auditorium sales and our online eBay store. Learn more at [www.rplmn.org/friends](http://www.rplmn.org/friends)



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## Library Hours

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**Friday - Sunday**  
10AM-6PM

507-328-2300 | [www.rplmn.org](http://www.rplmn.org)

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