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RPL Launches New Pilot – The BookBox

We have been teasing about a new futuristic box where you can pick up books for a while now. After plenty of testing and putting on a fun colorful wrap, the RPL BookBox is ready for public use! So how exactly did we get to this point? Let's look at how RPL got on board with a new vending-style approach to library materials, and what you can look forward to in the future.

The Concept

At the 2019 Public Library Association conference, former Library Director Audrey Betcher noticed a new technology that allowed a small collection of materials to be securely placed in an offsite location. Fast forward to 2020: while the library was closed due to COVID, customers shared that they really missed the

opportunity to browse a physical collection. Library staff considered this when preparing to reopen and explored innovative ways to reach new customers. One of those ways found a strong advocate in former city council member Nick Campion. Council Member Campion loved the idea of curating a collection for a specific community and changing the collection to suit that population's specific needs. With Audrey Betcher's knowledge of the available technology, and Nick Campion's vision for piloting services in areas with lower library card density, the idea of the BookBox was born. Shortly after, a new Lyngsoe Systems LibCabinet – known as our BookBox – was purchased with support provided by the RPL Foundation.

The Box Arrives

In November 2022, RPL was notified that the box had been shipped and arrived at Fire Station 4 (1875 41st St NW). Installers arrived from Lyngsoe Systems and installed the large blue vending machine box inside of the fire station entryway. To match our brand, a full design was put together by our graphic designer Nicole, and in January 2023 the box was wrapped and filled with materials. Like the BookBike, the BookBox has its own collection—each item inside is marked with a fun box sticker—that will only be available from the box itself.

"The BookBox" continued on back page.



Letter from the Director

In late January, the Rochester Public Library Board shared in a joint study session with the Rochester City Council, with a focus on space challenges at the library.

library operates with almost 10% more staff than it did in 1995, and the library circulates more physical materials as well. The increase in people and in materials means that some library “back of the house” work needs to happen in spaces that used to house meetings and activities.

A short presentation summarized the library’s 25+ year history of challenges, which were present even when the building opened in 1995. With an original plan for three stories and enough space for 528,000 items, the building was cut back due to a funding shortfall. To address these challenges, the library has leaned into three necessary approaches: focusing on outreach services, modifying current spaces, and limiting the size of the physical collection.

Pre-pandemic, RPL offered three meeting spaces available for community use. Over the course of the last three years, those spaces have been used to support various projects and initiatives, including: processing 1,000 Chromebooks as part of a 3-year grant project, hosting setup and planning for outreach activities, storing excess furniture as customers sought out more open spaces in the library, and other needs.

In Spring, the library will once again start offering community room access, but there will only be one space available.

Outward Focused

Outreach has been a part of RPL even before the first bookmobile was added back in 1968. Today the Bookmobile continues to be the busiest in the state (based on circulation statistics) and is even busier than most other physical library locations in the 11-county SELCO (Southeastern Libraries Cooperating) region. In addition to the Bookmobile, the library operates the popular BookBike and ArtCart during the summer months. Starting this year, the library will add a BookBox at Fire Station # 4 (1875 41st St NW) which will provide quick access to popular books and other materials. A specialized van to support outreach activities is also expected to be added to library’s fleet of vehicles in the coming years.

Limited Space Limits Collection Size

A report penned in 1988 recommended that Rochester’s library should house 528,000 volumes by the year 2010. Today the library has shelf space for 453,582 physical books, DVDs, CDs, and other items.

RPL, like other libraries, has added more digital titles in recent years. While this provides access to digital materials, those items frequently cost more than their print counterparts. In addition, not all library customers have ongoing access to technology or a reliable internet connection.

Even with these challenges, the staff and library board continue to work through ways to provide sustainable quality services to the community while having conversations on how we can best plan for the future.

Changing Spaces to Meet Current Needs

Over the course of almost three decades, library teammates have addressed the impacts through space modifications, primarily by converting staff areas into public spaces like the popular Art Room, TeenScape, and a public meeting room. Today, the

Karen Lemke
Rochester Public Library,
Director



Meeting Room Reservations Return

We know you have been asking when you will be able to reserve a meeting space at the library again and we are happy to announce the reservations are back! Starting Monday, March 27, you will be able to make a reservation for our 2nd floor meeting room space. This space includes 7 tables and 30 chairs, a projector and cables, and can be reserved for up to 2 hours at a time. You can make reservations 31 days in advance and can have two scheduled reservations per 31-day period. For more details on making reservations and details on this space visit rplmn.org/services/more-services/room-rental

Watch the joint Study Session

On January 30, 2023 – City Council joined the Library Board in the library auditorium for a joint study session presentation on the current space situation at the library. This presentation covered the history of the current library building, as well as the challenges the library is currently experiencing. After a presentation from Director Karen Lemke, City Council, and the Library Board were taken on a tour through both the public side and operational side of the library. If you are interested in viewing the study session, go to the City of Rochester website or rplmn.org/space-needs



The 2023 Seed Library is Open

The Seed Library officially opened on March 1, 2023. Over 12,000 seed packets have been made available to check out. There are many, many fruits and vegetable seeds to choose from, including different varieties of beans, beets, bitter melon, carrots, corn, eggplant, melon, different greens, peas, peppers, radish, squash, tomatillos, and tomatoes to name just a few. The Bookmobile will also carry a collection of seeds. The library has plenty of resources to help you grow, harvest, and save seeds or can connect you with gardening groups and organizations in our community. 2022 was a very successful year with over 16,500 packets of seeds making their way out to gardens in our community. Thank you to the Friends of the Rochester Public Library, the Plant a Seed Initiative, library staff, and many volunteers that support and make the Seed Library possible.

How does the Seed Library work?

You can check out 10 seed packets from our stand collection with no due dates--no need to return those seeds, but we do hope that you can save seeds from what you harvest and return those new seeds to the Seed Library for others to plant in 2024. There is also a Community Donated Seed collection that you do not need to check out; we only ask that you limit to 10 packets of Community Donated seeds per person. More seeds will be added to the Community Donated Seeds through the spring and summer, including flowers, native plant seeds, and garlic, so visit the Seed Library often to see what's new!

Want to learn more about seed saving and native seed planting? Join us on Saturday, April 15 in the auditorium at 2PM to learn about proper methods of planting for seed saving.

More information about the seed library can be found at rplmn.org/seed





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Donate to the Library Foundation

YOUR dollars allow us to help develop the award-winning programs, technology, and services that our community has come to depend upon.

www.rplmn.org/donate



Letter from the Foundation Director

Thank you to sponsors, speakers, and guests for making our first in-person WIT at the Library a huge success. We were able to raise almost \$27K for high-priority pilot projects like the BookBox lending locker, which will provide access to a high-density neighborhood in

Northwest Rochester. Your help allows us to test new technologies like this to better serve our community.

If you were unable to attend or would like to pitch in for this program and others like it, please use the attached envelope today. Make it a gift in honor, memory, or appreciation of the book lover in your life!

Brenda Kardock
Rochester Public Library Foundation,
Executive Director



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In Memory

Ronald Jensen <i>in memory of Marlene Jensen</i>	Martha Williamson <i>in memory of Kenneth R. Williamson M.D.</i>
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In Memory of Maria Mungo

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John & Kathleen Mazur
Ms. Barbara Henoch
Mary Aronin
Wanda Hagquist
Sandy Tschida
Sharon Nichols

In Appreciation

MaKayla Swanson <i>in appreciation of all library staff & fine free!</i>	Susanne Todd Daood <i>in appreciation of members of my bookclub</i>
Scott Jordan <i>in appreciation of Allen Dollerschell</i>	Collette Ryder <i>in appreciation of Stephanie Pagel</i>
Heather Wiktor <i>in appreciation of Bill Wiktor & Elaine Case</i>	Kimberly Edson & Angela Joyce <i>in appreciation of the RPLF Events Committee</i>
Janice Wiersma <i>in appreciation of Jacquelyn Wiersma & Wendy Bronson</i>	Joan Chutka <i>in appreciation of Volunteers of the Friends of the Library</i>
Pat & Dave Siljeborg <i>in appreciation of Margie Brumm</i>	

In Honor

Michael & Marilyn Sheehan <i>in honor of Audrey Betcher</i>	Shyamala Bhat & Yogish Kudva <i>in honor of Jayanthi Bhat</i>
Harriet Hodgson <i>in honor of C. John Hodgson M.D.</i>	Gwen Riggin <i>in honor of Jeanette Hallbeck</i>
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Moses & Emily Margritt Rodriguez <i>in honor of grandchildren, Soren, Henry, Nora, Leo, Liva & Leif</i>	Rhonda Miller <i>in honor of Lucia Miller & her love for reading</i>
Wayne & Mary Alice Richardson <i>in honor of Gwen Riggin</i>	Cathe Devos <i>in honor of my book club</i>
Judith Wasser <i>in honor of Janice Ulrich</i>	Alan & Nancy Johnsrud <i>in honor of Sarah Johnsrud</i>

In Celebration

Susan Hollis
in celebration of Librarians



Friends Annual Meeting Highlights

Over 50 Friends members attended the 2023 Annual Meeting Luncheon in January to conduct the organization’s yearly business and to provide a recap of 2022 highlights.

- Thank you to the many library volunteers who put in almost 16,000 hours last year!
- Almost 7,000 donated items were added to the library collection or used to support the Neighbors Read program, with a value totaling over \$139,000.
- Friends were able to fund \$40,566 worth of library programming and materials with revenue received from online sales, auditorium sales, memberships and donations.
- The Bookstore generated another \$65,000 of revenue to support additions to the library collection.
- Friends also supports other community organizations, such as the “Read with Me” book bags for babies program.
- Donated materials were forwarded to the Day Center; mini libraries; schools in Rochester & Chatfield; and Operation Paperback for Soldiers, among others.

Library Director Karen Lemke’s greeting included a few specific examples of how the library used funding from Friends: various online database subscriptions, Summer Playlist bags, Seed Library labels, and the totes used by outreach services for homebound, nursing homes, and daycares.

Our guest speaker, Kim Edson, talked about the issue of book challenges in the news and here at our library.

It was a fun and informative meeting!

Friends Bookstore Hours

Monday - Thursday
11AM-6PM

Friday & Saturday
11AM-2PM

New inventory daily!
Watch our Facebook page for pop-up sales and other great deals!
www.facebook.com/FriendRochPubLibrary

Winterfest Book Sale Results

The February Winterfest Book Sale was a resounding success! The Friends of the Library made \$7,700 making it the second-highest-grossing winter sale ever. Our next sale will coincide with Rochesterfest in June. Sign up to receive an email reminder of future sales at bit.ly/friends-subscribe.

Friends Rochesterfest Book Sale

Thursday, June 22 | 5-7PM (Members Only Preview)
Friday, June 23 | 10AM-5:30PM
Saturday, June 24 | 10AM-5:30PM
Sunday, June 25 | 1-4PM

Memberships can be renewed or purchased at the door.
www.rplmn.org/friends

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"The BookBox" from cover page.

Using the BookBox

In the beginning of March, we were able to soft launch the BookBox and start to prepare for our official grand opening. If you want to visit the box now, it is open between 8AM-10PM and you can use the following steps to check out materials:

- 1 Scan your library card, enter your pin, and unlock the door
- 2 Look through the materials inside the BookBox
- 3 Take out what you want and close the door tight
- 4 Materials will be checked out to your card

We are excited to plan an official grand opening soon and are happy to be able to provide the community with another option for using library materials. You can find more information, including a video on how to use the BookBox, at rplmn.org/BookBox

Library Hours

Monday - Thursday
10AM-8PM

Friday - Sunday
10AM-6PM

507-328-2300 | rplmn.org

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The OverDrive mobile app is going away...say hello to Libby

In April, the OverDrive mobile app will be discontinued. We encourage you to make the switch to Libby, the newer reading app. Libby is made by the same people, with the same goal of connecting you to your library and to your favorite books, audiobooks, and magazines. For more information on the switch visit overdrive.com/apps/libby/switchtolibby

