



The BEST *of* FRIENDS

Spring
2021

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Friends Project Puts Books in Children's Homes

Through the Books in the Community program, the Friends have been able to put books at children's fingertips by sending books home with them.

The program got its name and ambitious commission in 2017. Friends volunteers including Suzanne Lenhart and Laurie Pearl gather books that have been removed from library shelves or donated by patrons and redirect them to new homes. A representative of the recipients may pick up boxed books at Lawson McGhee or sometimes Friends deliver them. Over the years the groups who have availed themselves of this offering have been numerous and at times eye-opening.

Children's books make up the majority of what's outbound from the Lawson McGhee basement with Little Free Libraries, after-school programs, and social service agencies all benefitting. But by thinking outside the box, particularly during the pandemic, Friends has also used food distribution programs and free drive-in

movies to put books into the hands of young readers.

At the other end of the age spectrum, senior citizen centers, nursing homes, and retirement communities have enjoyed an influx of adult titles. In a small way Friends has also been able to help adults at big crossroads, sending books to the Florence Crittenton Agency and the Community Coalition Against Human Trafficking, for example. Laurie Pearl, known to her Friends as Pearl, points out that the Knox County Sheriff's Department has been able to offer books to prisoners who, in turn, are "actually working on the mileage for the Mayor's reading program."

When Cherokee Health sponsored a once-a-month Second Harvest "green truck" visit for fresh food distribution, Books in the Community saw a new outlet, and Pearl saw an unexpected development. She reports, "The

SEE BOOKS IN THE COMMUNITY, PAGE 2



Friends donated 800 books to the Amherst Elementary School PTA so that youngsters could enjoy this year's Book Swap. Each student took home two books.

Poet Laureate Rhea Carmon: A Woman For All 'Poetic' Seasons

You may remember Rhea Carmon, performing under the name RheaSunshine, as one of the “spoken word artists” who appeared at Poetry Lounge during KCPL’s Sights and Sounds program back in 2019. Or perhaps you saw her perform at Bonnaroo, at a Big Ears Festival, or with the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra. You may know her best as Knoxville’s current poet laureate.

Knoxville Mayor Indya Kincannon named Carmon as the city’s third poet laureate in August of last year. Carmon succeeded UT Professor Emerita Marilyn Kallet, who served as poet laureate from 2018–2020. (Musician R. B. Morris was Knoxville’s first poet laureate from 2016–2018.)

Carmon feels her mission as poet laureate is to be more involved in spreading the spoken word and poetry throughout Knoxville. She occasionally shares live readings of new poems during her Spoken Word Sunday series on Instagram (@rheasunshinepoetry) at 6 p.m.

Another of Carmon’s projects is the [Knoxville Speaks Youth Poetry Initiative](#), a free writing workshop for area students in grades 7–12. During the workshop, she introduces young people to this art form and encourages budding poets to better learn how to express themselves through both the spoken and written word. The program, which runs through May, currently boasts six students who meet twice a month via Zoom. Space in the workshop is available. Students interested in joining the workshop must submit one of their poems to <https://www.rheacarmon.com/knoxville-speaks>, as well as answer the following questions: Why do you like poetry? Who is your favorite poet or what is your favorite poem? What is your story?

Carmon was named an Artist of Change by Community Shares of Tennessee and inducted into the East Tennessee Writers Hall of Fame. She is also founder and Executive Director of the 5th Woman Cohort, a poetry and performance collective. Like many groups during the past year, the Cohort relies on virtual events to help prepare members for eventual return to live performances.

When she’s not writing poems or sharing her love for the spoken word, Carmon teaches math at Robertsville Middle School in Oak Ridge and volunteers with the praise and worship team at OneLife Church. She and her husband, Marcus, have two young sons.



Knoxville’s Poet Laureate Rhea Carmon, who has recorded three CDs and published four chapbooks, says on her website that she has poems that she hasn’t even written yet.

Books in the Community: Books at Home

Continued from Page 1

participants wanted cookbooks, and those cookbooks got snapped up really fast, from what people at Cherokee Health told me. If they were going to have this green food, they wanted to know how to prepare it.”

Another snap-up success was KAT’s Books on Buses in the summer of 2019. Over the course of a few months well over a thousand books found new owners. “I mean, those books were just gone,” Pearl recalls. “People really took to having books on the buses.”

The Books in the Community program has distributed untold volumes, but it all boils down to one-on-one interaction with the printed word. As fellow volunteer Suzanne puts it, “Our goal is to get books in the hands of people. It’s the thing, especially for children, of having a book that’s their book.”

Books in a Pandemic: Relief from Stress and Worry

By Jeff Johnson, *President*
Knox County Public Library Foundation

The last 12 months have changed all of our lives. Freedoms that we once took for granted, like browsing the shelves of our local bookstores, now require appointments, hand sanitizers, and special protective gear. While bookish activities are not the most important things in the world, books themselves can provide relief to everyday stress and worry.

I belong to a bibliophile society in New York City and in normal times I would only be able to engage in their activities once or twice a year. When the pandemic came, however, the club quickly pivoted and began putting meetings, show and tells, openings, and lectures on various online platforms, and I feel more connected than ever. I'm even serving on a committee.

This is not a typical outcome, however. Most in-person book clubs have suffered with limited or non-existent gatherings, and Zoom is no replacement for face-to-face communication. Last spring and summer provided chances for outdoor meetings but the tumultuous winter that is thankfully coming to an end was a time of isolation and worry.

Books have always provided an avenue for escape, a glimpse into a different world. Many people have sought out familiar titles, and I have a few recommendations. Not all are necessarily cheerful, but all are engrossing and have the needed element of creating an encompassing world that the reader can enter.

To visit 19th century New York City, one cannot do better than to read Jack Finney's 1970 novel about time travel, romance, and mystery, *Time and Again*. Its invocation of winter in the turn of the last century is compelling. It is also unusual in that it is a photo-illustrated novel.

The English countryside, villages, and estates are the backdrop to most of the novels of Angela Thirkell (1890–1961), a descendant of upper middle class artistic and intellectual families. She wrote a novel per year from 1933 through 1961, most set in the towns first established in Anthony Trollope's Barchester series. And while the plots are generally light-hearted and romantic, she does touch on current world events, especially World War II, and how they affect her characters. The last time I looked, KCPL had a wide selection.

On to Japan for what London's *The Guardian* newspaper calls "the best British novel about the Second World War," *Empire of the Sun* by J. G.

Ballard. Published in 1984, the novel is a semi-autobiographical account of a young British boy's experiences in Shanghai and at a prisoner-of-war camp during the Japanese occupation. The novel was made into an excellent film in 1987 by Steven Spielberg starring a young Christian Bale.

If a deserted island seems to fit your current longings, read one of the earliest of English novels, Daniel Defoe's *The Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Marnier* (1719). It is the story of a castaway's 28-year struggle. There is also a little-known sequel, *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, also published in 1719. Defoe went on to write *A Journal of the Plague Year*, but I wouldn't recommend it for current reading. Maybe in a year or two!

Paris and the south of France are the settings for James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* (1956), a study in complex relationships, loss, guilt, and murder. In a Knoxville-related side note, Baldwin was a friend in Paris to our native son, artist Beauford Delaney, who was deemed Baldwin's "spiritual father."

If you prefer to travel to another time but stay close to home, your best bet is Cormac McCarthy's *Suttree*. Set in Knoxville in the early 1950s, the novel is semi-autobiographical and centers on the title character Cornelius Suttree, a young man who has given up a life of privilege to become a fisherman and houseboat dweller on the Tennessee River. One critic called it "probably the funniest and most unbearably sad of McCarty's books...which seem to me unsurpassed in American literature."

Jeff Johnson has a long history with Friends of the Knox County Public Library. He has served our organization



as president and has been active in the Knox County Public Library Foundation since it was established in 2006 "to collect, invest, and distribute funds donated for the improvement of the Knox County Public Library." An

architect with McCarty Holsaple McCarty, Jeff is also a book collector who has contributed many essays about books and reading to *Best of Friends*.

Your Generous Commitment Makes a Huge Difference

While at times during the last year, it felt as if most of the world had disappeared, the same is not true for the ongoing commitment of you, supporters of Friends. Since November 2020, Friends has asked for support of three fundraising campaigns: a holiday ornament sale, Big Give Knox, and the Stay Home and Read a Book Ball. Each campaign surpassed expectations, thanks to your generosity!

During November, Friends solicited preorders for a limited-edition holiday ornament designed by Nashville artist Sarah Cooper. Sarah created the ornament using a vintage patron library card from Lawson McGhee Library that is part of the McClung Historical Archives. The ornament, created in celebration of our first 50 years of service, was a brilliant blue sphere of memory-inducing nostalgia. We sold more than 130 ornaments, allowing Friends to raise \$2,118.

On December 1, Friends took to social media to promote United Way's annual Big Give Knox, a 24-hour fundraising campaign designed to raise awareness and money for local nonprofits. Several Friends volunteers participated as ambassadors for the event. They rallied their contacts through social media and email to support and share the campaign. At the end of the day, Friends raised priceless awareness of our mission and more than \$6,400, including a \$535 prize from United Way!

On February 20, Friends hosted our first “non-event,” the Stay Home and Read a Book Ball. More than 15 local celebrities shared photos of themselves with their current or favorite book to show their support for the event. Union Ave Books and Libacious Cocktails helped create thank you gifts for our donors, and the Knox County Public Library Foundation kicked off the campaign with a \$5,000 donation. All money collected from this campaign is for the purchase of more e-books, the fastest growing collection at KCPL. Having donated \$50,000 in September 2020 for this same need, Friends is now able to give another \$17,680.38, thanks to your generous participation.

For these successes, and countless others, thank you for being our Friend! We have enjoyed reading your words of encouragement scribbled on your donor and membership renewal cards and seeing your comments and support given to our online posts. All of us look forward to the remarkable time when we can safely gather again.



Pat Marshall was the first customer in Friends @ Rothrock when the little shop with the big bargains reopened March 15.

Friends Used Book Sales

Something Old and New And More Yet to Come

“I’ve been waiting for this!” said Pat Marshall when the Friends @ Rothrock Used Book Shop reopened on March 15. Pat had come to purchase children’s books for Little Free Libraries in Maryville.

“Mom, this is so awesome!” exclaimed young Silas when he opened a grab bag of books from the Friends online bookstore. The bag was filled with his favorites — Spiderman and dinosaurs — and a few others.

And what did Jen Cooper, co-chair of the Sales and Distribution Committee (SDC), say when she heard that Friends would be able to hold book sales under tents at upcoming events hosted by the City of Knoxville? “Hallelujah!”

The return of book sales is an important step forward for Friends and a testimony to the creative approach the SDC team is taking to put books in the hands of shoppers in our community. And after over a year with no Annual Used Book Sale or Branch Sales, we have plenty of books to put in people’s hands. So if you, your family, and your friends are looking for good places to find books at reasonable prices, keep these current opportunities to shop in mind:

■ Friends @ Rothrock Used Book Shop: open Monday through Saturday from 11:30 a.m.–2:30 p.m.

■ Friends online bookstore at knoxfriends.square.site; the site currently offers \$10 grab bags of books for all ages and in several genres, movies on DVD, and audiobooks on CD as well as a selection of hard-to-find books for collectors.

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important your library is to you and to our community.

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