



2020 Annual Report

In 2019, the library Board of Trustees completed a three-year strategic plan. This plan was scheduled to launch in 2020 and guide the library in community-driven enhancements and services. The action steps in the plan were energetically begun in early 2020 until we closed the library on March 13, 2020 to coordinate with the closing of School District of the Chathams and avoid mass congregation at the library at a time of intense public health concerns.

At that point, the library completely changed gears, immediately making it possible for staff to work remotely and shift our collections to downloadable eBooks, audiobooks, music and movies. Programming went virtual and supported community businesses and groups.

In an effort to provide information and entertainment services as usual, as well as to engage the community, the library began a series of unexpected, innovative initiatives.

- Launched the *1000 Masks Challenge* on March 29 and led the community to make 5,900 masks for first responders in a few months during the worst of the shortage. This would not have been possible without the help of Friends of the Library volunteers and Chatham First Aid Squad, with whom the library partnered.
- Immediately shifted to virtual programming for adults, teens and children that included meetings with local government officials, crafting programs, gardening workshops, lectures, book clubs and author visits, chess instruction, coding, yoga/meditation, and contests for gift certificates to local businesses of choice.
- Instituted a telephone access line so people without Internet could call into programs with a new schedule recorded on the line each week.
- Started a Home Delivery Service for homebound residents of the Chathams, with the help of Friends of the Library volunteers.
- Created programming to support local businesses, including virtual programs by local business owners and feature articles in eNewsletters.
- Issued library cards virtually starting in early April so people could download eBooks, audiobooks, music and movies from home.
- Answered reference queries by telephone and email.
- Staff was allowed back in the library starting on June 17, 2020 to provide takeout services. In an average month, we provided Library Takeout of 8,744 books, movies, audiobooks and music CDs to 1,198 residents. This represents about 53% of our usual in-person volume but people are also borrowing downloadable eBooks and movies in increasing numbers. We have purchased many more titles for those collections over the past months to meet the demand.
- Started a Virtual Browse by Appointment service (demo at <https://chathamlibrary.org/virtual-browsing/>)
- Library Board President Andy Hollander addressed the library community in a letter at <https://chathamlibrary.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Reopening-letter-final.pdf> regarding the library status.

- Library Director Karen Brodsky conducted a live weekly Library Update program to update our residents on the status of the library and answer questions.
- Disseminated a weekly eNewsletter each Saturday with the following week's programs and new resources in response to quarantine, such as Library of Things, puzzles to borrow, laptops and Wi-Fi hotspots to borrow.
- Mailed an abbreviated version of our print newsletter to every home and business in Chatham Borough and Chatham Township every few months with updated information about programs and resources as well as library services.
- Increased our downloadable eBooks and audiobooks collections extensively.
- Supported School District of the Chathams with a shared eBooks collection *eBooks for All*, developed by school media specialists and managed by library staff.
- Created a hosting service for virtual meetings for local nonprofit groups.

While accomplishing all the above for the public, internally the library staff struggled with compliance with CDC guidance for the safety of staff in what was already known to be a difficult building. There was no way to improve ventilation without exacerbating a three-year humidity problem, seemingly caused by using the NJ Direct Install program to replace a number of HVAC units.

The building was made as safe as possible for staff, but only the staff members needed for Takeout Services were a priority to work inside the building. Staff members worked remotely as much as possible.

At the end of the year, the library finally received UV germicidal lamps for its ventilation system. They were installed in December, after a six-month period of being back-ordered.

While all waited for the outcome of the New Jersey Library Construction Bond Act grant, the building continued to malfunction, including telephone system failures, fire alarm monitoring system incompatibility with new Verizon lines installed along Main Street during the summer, continuous air conditioning problems, electrical and more. The Bridging Space to Place project was on hold while we waited for that funding, which ultimately was not granted, as we learned late in 2020.

In December 2020, the library planned a community survey to help focus virtual library programming, and to prepare residents for another survey in January 2021 to reprioritize the Bridging Project initiatives.

Where are we headed?

The library must remain nimble, efficient and responsive as changing residents' needs emerge. Our Strategic Plan initiatives will be updated to reflect new community input from the survey data that will be collected in early 2021. New virtual programming guidelines are being refined every day and will likely remain in place to some extent even when in-person programming is again possible.

The Bridging Space to Place project will move forward in 2021, also following the community input both from pre-pandemic times and the present.