

## Volunteers Make Memories and Engage Customers Virtually

Volunteers have long been a vibrant thread within our organization. Our volunteer program cultivates strong relationships with library customers who are advocates for the services we provide to the community.

Anna Todd, teen librarian at the Bethany Library, recalled a Summer Reading experience that deeply touched her and enlivened her own passion for the library. She was discussing superheroes with one of the teen volunteers when he mentioned a superhero costume. She said he should bring it in and show it to her.

"The very next day and every shift after that, he came in a different costume and walked around the library encouraging customers to sign up for Summer Reading. He loved to have them guess who he was each time and was especially great interacting with our younger customers," Todd said.

When the pandemic hit, she was concerned about her volunteers and what both the volunteer and customer experience would look like in this new virtual setting. "I was very lucky that some of my veteran volunteers were up for the challenge," she said.

The virtual Rocket Readers program that Todd manages at her library requires the support of many volunteers, without whom, she said her program would not be possible.

"We were worried it wouldn't be well received and that we would lose not only the regular readers, but that sense of connection that had already

been established when the program was in person," Todd said.

However, with the help of her volunteers, Todd found that making the connection was not as difficult as she thought. The volunteers came prepared with their own teaching materials and games to motivate the children along in a virtual setting.

"They really helped me to think outside the box on solving certain problems we faced," she said. "Our volunteers are truly amazing people who are dedicated to helping these kids improve their reading skills and to the power of reading. I am so grateful every day that I get to work with these amazing people!"

Todd says the children in her Rocket Readers program develop such a special connection with the volunteers that they will request them by name. Her 2020 program continued to have its longstanding



## Our Volunteer Coordinator



While the pandemic changed many aspects of not only our jobs but our day-to-day lives, Volunteer Coordinator Heidi Port was able to use her socially distanced time to focus on a game-changing volunteer certification that will help our library system's volunteer program continue to thrive.

Port earned her Certification in Volunteer Administration (CVA) in 2020, allowing her to develop skills to reinforce the library's commitment to professional excellence in volunteer services, access a network of other volunteer professionals and create a renewed vision and focus for volunteers and their participation in achieving MLS goals.

The CVA is known internationally as an esteemed professional credential in volunteer engagement that demonstrates a high level of commitment to meeting standards in the field, according to a United Way [blog post](#). Candidates must have three years of full-time experience related to volunteer management to be eligible to apply, including documenting previous education and related experience, and a letter of reference recommending them as a CVA Candidate.

The focus of the certification program is providing an independent assessment of the knowledge, skills and competencies required for competent performance rather than a certificate program in which knowledge is tested based on intended learning outcomes. Port studied, completed and passed the exam for certification within 10 weeks, something that can take as many as six months of study.

Through her training and experience, Heidi is also even more equipped to align our volunteer policies with industry standards and the most up-to-date guidelines. New policies were approved by the Commission in January.

Congratulations, Heidi! Thank you for your commitment to MLS!

success, even during the pandemic, through the efforts and collaboration of Todd with her team of library volunteers.

One of Todd's Rocket Reader program volunteers is Daniel Fields, a retired children's librarian, who says that he does it because he gets the opportunity to encourage children and share his love of reading.

"My reward is to see children gain confidence in their reading abilities and enjoy their time spent reading. When I look into the faces of children, I feel there is still hope in the world," Fields said.

The library's volunteer program has also long served a role in helping teens get the service hours they need for extracurricular programs and even high school graduation. When students were faced with the challenges of the pandemic, they began to find getting those service hours was seemingly impossible.

"Our volunteer coordinator, Heidi, reached out to me and asked if I had any opportunities available for these students so they could get what they needed to graduate and I said, 'Sure, send them my way!'" Special Collections Manager Larry Johnson said.

The Special Collections team worked with about 50 volunteers throughout the year, and the work that was accomplished through the volunteer program is impressive to say the least. Volunteers worked on several projects, including transcribing oral histories, conducting oral history interviews, tracing U.S. Census records from the 1900 Census and even transcribing a book written during the Oklahoma Dust Bowl. The Special Collections staff are using the volunteers' contributions to further their research projects.

Johnson is now working on using oral history transcriptions from Northeast Oklahoma City residents to create a map of the physical locations of Black-owned businesses in OKC. He has identified hundreds of locations and those locations are linked to oral histories to make the experience come alive for our customers.

Northeast Oklahoma City was previously where Black Oklahoma residents lived during segregation, Johnson explained. Census records traced by volunteers will be used to identify where Black residents lived prior to segregation.



"The goal is to explain how systemic racism and injustice has affected how we live now," Johnson said.

One interview project led by Special Collection's Librarian Lisa Bradley, together with a volunteer, recorded oral histories of people who lived in an area of Oklahoma affected by sonic booms. These loud and scary-sounding booms sound much like an explosion or a bullet flying, caused by aircraft travel at high speeds. At one point in history these were more common, and the U.S. government used some populous areas to experiment with the effects of frequent booms on the residents.

Heartwarming volunteer stories are all around



us. Some staff members you work with may have started as volunteers and volunteer experiences have inspired some volunteers to pursue their masters in library and information studies and become librarians. Teen Services Manager Emily Williams, reminisced about working with Evelina, a teen volunteer at the Village Library.

"She was our Teen Advisory Board president and loved making accessories out of duct tape (I still have a duct tape clutch she made for me). We spent hours talking about video games, superhero movies and comic books, and I pulled new Walter Dean Myers books for her when they came in," Williams said.

Evelina is now a youth librarian in Chicago. She was a part of filming an advocacy video for the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) and the video was played before the ALA Youth Media Awards in January to an international audience.

While the pandemic continues to affect how we reach our customers, we can continue to offer high quality programs and services through virtual mediums, and the virtual volunteer opportunities will also continue. Summer Reading preparation is in full swing and our volunteer coordinator, Heidi Port, is working diligently on creating summer teen volunteer opportunities to keep teens engaged all summer long.

The Summer Reading teen volunteer program will now include a variety of creative virtual opportunities such as social media content creation like video book reviews, Instagram Reels video creation, bookstagram and more. Teens will also have the option to complete projects like coloring sheet creation, how-to video creation, sidewalk chalk and flyer marketing and others.

The Samaritan volunteer portal website was recently upgraded, which will allow our Development and Volunteer Services department to better collaborate with library staff to engage and recruit volunteers. They will use our new Niche Academy services to ramp up the volunteer training as well.

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## HELLO!

**Tamela Smith**

*NW Access Manager II*

**William Betts**

*DN Adult Engagement Specialist I*

**Alyssa Katsion**

*AL Library Aide*

**Chloe Crawford**

*HUM Administrative Specialist*

**Maria Kissner**

*BE Library Aide*

## GOODBYE

**Christian LeFlore**

*Help Desk Technician I*

## CONGRATULATIONS Promotions & Transfers

**Reagan Kloiber**

*DN Youth Engagement Specialist II FT to RE Youth Engagement Specialist II HT*

# BLACK HISTORY MONTH

February is National Black History Month. Our library system offers a variety of programs for all ages that celebrate the rich history and contributions of Black people.

## **Black Veterans Stories**

Thursdays in Feb. @ 10am, Facebook & IGTV

## **Meechie and Kids Urban Groovezz**

Saturday, Feb. 6 @ 9:30am, Facebook & IGTV

## **Discussion with Filmmaker Laron M. Chapman** (writer and director of the film "You People" available on hoopla)

Saturday, Feb. 6 @ 2pm, Facebook

## **Online Storytime with Children's Author Kimberly Anderson**

Tuesday, Feb. 9 @ 9:30am, Facebook & IGTV

## **Inclusion in Art Live Demo with Local Artist Jasmine Jones**

Saturday, Feb. 13 @ 2pm, Facebook

## **Online Storytime**

Saturday, Feb. 13 & 27 @ 9:30am, Facebook & IGTV

## **Quilting a History of Black Towns in Oklahoma**

Monday, Feb. 15 @ 6:30pm, Facebook

## **Online Storytime with Ward 7 Oklahoma City Councilperson Nikki Nice**

Tuesday, Feb. 16 @ 9:30am, Facebook & IGTV

## **Author Visit with Tochi Onyebuchi**

Saturday, Feb. 20 @ 10am, Facebook

## **Author Hour: Celebrating Black History Month with Sharkira Bourne, Dr. Malika Grayson and Sarah Raughley**

Saturday, Feb. 20 @ 2pm, Facebook

## **Spiritually Bold Perform the Play "Soldier Girl"**

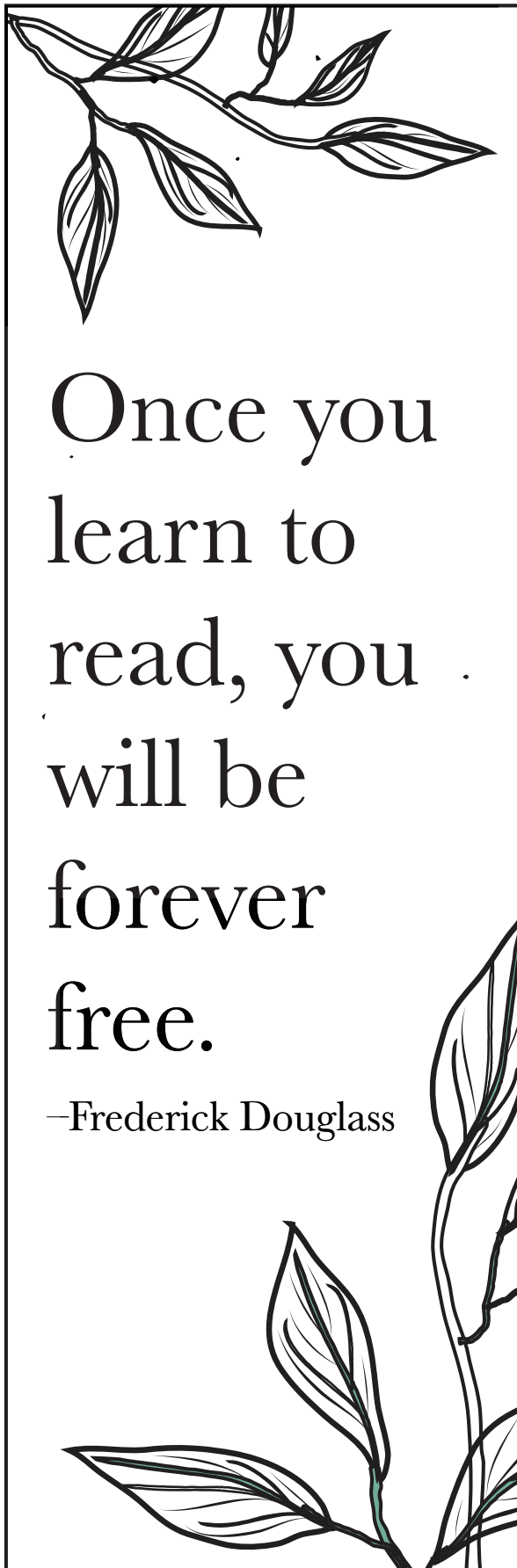
Monday, Feb. 22 @ 6:30pm, Facebook

## **Online Storytime with Writer and Musician Demetrius "Meechie" Gibson**

Tuesday, Feb. 23 @ 9:30am, Facebook & IGTV

## **RACE Dance Collective Performance**

Saturday, Feb. 27 @ 2pm, Facebook



Once you  
learn to  
read, you  
will be  
forever  
free.

—Frederick Douglass

## COMING UP

**Feb. 1-28**

Black History Month

**Feb. 18**

Commission Meeting



## DIY Development

### Niche Academy Webinar Serving Individuals with Autism

Over half a million individuals on the autism spectrum will become adults in the next 10 years. However, there is a lack of resources and services to meet the needs of this group, in particular, older individuals on the spectrum. In this course by Niche Academy, Carrie Rogers-Whitehead goes beyond sensory story time and provides practical recommendations on ways that libraries can better serve this growing population. In this presentation you will learn more about this group's needs and receive actionable guidance on ways to provide autism-friendly customer service, technology, and programs at the library. This course and other Niche courses can be found in the course catalog on [EduBrite](https://www.edubrite.com).