Beyond the Bookshelves

Alongside beloved reading programs, the Friends help Portland Library connect with the community through meaningful projects all year long.

- **Holiday gift baskets:** Each December, the Friends supply high-quality, age-appropriate books for families served by the Portland Food Bank, striving to support or inspire a love of reading.
- **Book giveaways:** We purchase and distribute hundreds of books at town events, such as the *Quarry Celebration* and *Halloween on Main*, sparking curiosity and smiles long after the day ends.
- **Staff celebration:** Every June, the Friends host a Staff Appreciation Luncheon and invite each staff member to choose a personally meaningful item to be added to the Library's collection.
- **Digital content:** Our contributions fund e-books, Portland Library's entire DVD collection, and BookFlix early-literacy software, ensuring resources for every age and interest.
- **Design tools & seasonal murals:** We fund the cost of the Library's design tools and, along with the Portland Library Board, share in the cost of the whimsical murals that brighten the windows.

Love Your Library?

Have a little free time and want to make a big difference? Whether you are early in your career, raising a family, already retired, or anywhere in between, there is a place for you on the Friends of the Portland Library Executive Board! Contact us at info@friendsofportlandlibraryct.org.

Cannot join our Board? Your donations can make an enormous impact. Simply renew or become a member today using the enclosed form or the QR code. And together, we will continue to ensure our Library is a place where curiosity thrives, creativity shines, and our community comes alive.

A Gallery Close to Home

Throughout the year, Portland Library's Mary Flood Room continues to showcase the creativity, talent, and stories that make our community unique. Sponsored by the Friends, each art reception offers visitors an opportunity to meet local artists, explore new perspectives, and enjoy tasty refreshments and thoughtful conversation.

In 2026, the diverse lineup of exhibits included photographic studies of Portland by **Nancy Brault** and **Sarah Weeden**, **Youth Art Month** presented by students of the Portland Secondary Schools, **Bob McDougall's** panoramic photo collages of Portland's Main Street that he has created every 10 years since 1995, as well as **John Bula**'s American flag collages that celebrated creativity through an unmistakably patriotic lens.

The year concludes with two especially memorable exhibits. **Portland X Portland** featured the work of thirteen local photographers, offering a variety of perspectives on the town we call home. Then, **Invisible No More: Wangunk Artists**, curated by Wangunk Elder **Gary Red Oak O'Neil**, explores connections between family, land, memory, and cultural preservation while honoring the original caretakers of this region.

Looking ahead to 2027, visitors can enjoy Portland Portfolio by **Bivenne Staiger** and **Maria Johnson**, and **Three Decades of Change on Main Street Middletown**, another look through the lens of local photographer **Bob McDougall**.

Please check the *Rivereast News Bulletin* or the Library's monthly newsletters for featured artists and reception dates. Artists interested in exhibiting their work at Portland Library are encouraged to contact the Library's administrative team at ppladmin@portlandct.org.

Check out the Friends' website at

www.friendsofportlandlibraryct.org

Follow us on Facebook
@ Friends of the Portland Library, Portland, CT

Supplement to the *Rivereast News Bulletin*

Friends of The Portland Library

Volume 36 **2027 Membership Information Enclosed** Fall 2026

Your Library, Powered by the Friends

You might come for a book ... and stay for a cooking class. Or an art show. Or a craft night. Or simply to connect with neighbors and friends. Whatever brings you through the doors, Portland Library is a place where culture, creativity, and community have a way of finding each other.

Fueling discovery: With a little help from the Friends of the Portland Library (FPL), Portland residents of all ages enjoy opportunities to learn, create, and connect at our town library. In 2026 alone, children became wildlife detectives, explored colonial life, and tackled countless challenges from building leprechaun traps to navigating scavenger hunts. Teens gathered for a tie-dye party, murder mystery, and culinary adventures. Meanwhile adults acquired new skills and knowledge on subjects ranging from calligraphy and crafts to American history, music, and even beer.

The Friends made the Library's *Summer Reading Challenge* possible, paying the full cost of prizes, supplies, and special events that encouraged young readers to keep turning pages all season long. And, adults read for a special cause once again, helping to fund musical instrument rentals for Brownstone Intermediate School students for the coming school year.

Opening doors: The Friends strive to ensure that learning and entertainment extend beyond Portland Library's walls, continuing to fund additions to the Library's extensive e-book collection — for which Portland residents receive priority access — along with the entire DVD collection and *Museum Pass Program*.

Residents can explore destinations across Connecticut and beyond through free or discounted museum passes, including beloved gems like the New England Air Museum in Windsor Locks, the Beardsley Zoo in Bridgeport, and KidCity Children's Museum just across the bridge in Middletown. Whether discovering history, art, science, or hands-on family fun, Portland residents' library cards open doors to new adventures.

Starting early: The Friends know it is never too early to fall in love with books. That is why we surprise every new Portland baby with a *Books for Babies* gift bag filled with a board book, literacy resources, and baby's first library card.

The Friends also purchase hundreds of books that are distributed for free to children and families at community events, including *Quarry Celebration Day* and *Halloween on Main*. We provide books for the Portland Food Bank's holiday gift baskets, fund BookFlix early-literacy software, and cover the supplies and prizes that make Library programs memorable throughout the year.

Adding a little extra: From seasonal window murals to diverse exhibits, many of the Friends' contributions aim to surprise and delight. We proudly sponsor art receptions and refreshments, offering opportunities for local artists to share their work with the community.

The Friends also celebrate the people who make Portland Library special. Each year, we host a Staff Appreciation Luncheon and invite each staff member to select an item to add to the Library's general collection or its *Library of Things*. Additions in 2026 included a mahjong set, a food scale, preschool learning boards, and — you guessed it — more books to be enjoyed by patrons for years to come.

(continued on page 2)

2026 BY THE NUMBERS

- **Close to $31,000 invested** in programs, materials, resources, and services
- **More than 100 programs supported** for children, teens, adults, and families
- **Hundreds of books distributed** at community events and special initiatives
- **Thousands of pages and days logged** by readers of all ages over the summer
- **Countless extras provided** covering resources and collection enhancements

A Summer Full of Stories

For the summer of 2026, Portland Library once again transformed reading into something much bigger than books alone. From toddlers to retirees, readers of every age were invited to participate in a summer filled with stories, flavors, creativity, and laughter.

Reading, creating, and exploring

The season kicked off in magical fashion with a visit from *Magician Michael OJ*, who delighted families while launching another exciting *Summer Reading Challenge*. For the next two months, young chefs focused on cooking basics, international cuisine, and colonial-era foods. Budding scientists unearthed new discoveries during *Science Heroes: Digging It*, an interactive program filled with experiments, explosions, and plenty of surprises. Families also gathered on the Town Green for memorable performances, including the jaw-dropping acrobatics of *Flying High Disc Dogs* and the crowd-pleasing antics of *Comedy Juggler Ned Gelfars*.

A special place for teens

Teens made the Library their own through a variety of creative and social programs. Participants designed *Red, White & Blue Tie-Dye Tees*, mixed up refreshments at a Summer Smoothie Party, and tested their detective skills during *Murder Mystery: Homicide at the Tacky Sweater Shindig*. Plus, the annual Library Lock-In once again proved to be a favorite tradition, bringing teens together after hours for games, pizza, and plenty of fun.

The *Summer Reading Challenge* also relied on an impressive team of young supporters: 45 teen volunteers staffed the Library's prize desk throughout the summer, contributing more than 500 hours of service. Their efforts helped keep programs running smoothly while creating a welcoming experience for hundreds of participants.

Reading for a cause

As always, reading remained at the heart of the program. Children and teens logged thousands of reading days while earning prizes, charms, and raffle entries along the way. Adult readers continued the long-standing tradition of reading for a charitable cause, with each page read helping the Friends fund two musical instrument rental scholarships for Brownstone Intermediate School students.

Summer reading by the numbers:

- 494 children, teens, and adults registered
- 218,000 pages and 7,561 days of reading logged
- 61 programs hosted with 2,072 attendees

Year after year, the Friends of the Portland Library proudly fund every aspect of the *Summer Reading Challenge*, including activities, performers, prizes, refreshments, and supplies. Thanks to the creativity of our Library staff, the dedication of teen volunteers, and the generosity of Friends members, another summer of reading, learning, and adventure is in the books.

Second-hand, First-rate

Year after year, the Friends' *Fall Book Sale* is both a community highlight and an important fundraiser. A big thanks to everyone who browsed, bought, and volunteered in 2026, making this major undertaking possible and ensuring that every dollar raised goes straight back to our Library.

Can't wait for the next big sale? The Friends keep the shelves stocked year-round at the *Second-Hand Prose Book Shop*, located in the hallway near the Mary Flood Room. Here you'll find quality books at bargain prices ($0.50 to $2), including **mysteries, general fiction, non-fiction, romance, young adult and children's books**, as well as **puzzles, games, and DVDs**. New treasures also arrive each week, so there is always something fresh to discover.

Throughout the year, the Friends host pop-up book events:

- **Holiday Book Store:** A month-long sale of gift-quality second-hand books starting November 30, featuring festive finds for adults and children.
- **Books for the Beach:** A chance to stock up on paperbacks every June and July for perfect vacation reading.

To keep our pre-loved book supply strong, we also hold donation days four times a year. Bring gently used books, DVDs, puzzles, and games to the Library on one (or more) of these Saturdays in 2027:

- **January 9**
- **March 20**
- **June 12**
- **September 11**

Please make sure all items are in "sellable" and enjoyable condition. (Sorry, no textbooks, business books, computer books, VHS tapes, or magazines.)

And remember: Every purchase and every donation directly supports Library favorites. Your book sale bargain truly comes full circle — turning stories you share at home into programs and resources for the whole town.

Your Library, Powered by the Friends (continued from page 1)

Thanks to our supporters: Every program, event, resource, and enhancement is made possible by our members' unwavering support. We would be remiss if we did not expressly thank Liberty Bank and an anonymous private foundation for their substantial contributions last year. Their generosity made a meaningful difference to the programs and resources we were able to fund in 2026.

Please renew your membership or join today using the enclosed form or QR code. And, whether you are stopping by for a few minutes or planning to linger longer, thank you for helping to keep curiosity, creativity, and opportunity within reach across our community.

Something for Everyone

If there is one thing Portland Library proves time and again, it is that there truly is something for everyone. Thanks to the creativity of our librarians and support from the Friends, residents of all ages found opportunities to create, learn, play, and engage throughout the year.

Create: Creativity flourished in every corner of the Library. Adults explored new artistic skills through calligraphy, sea glass wire wrapping, ribbon flag crafting, clay roses, and paint parties. Teens made quesadillas and designed Pop-Tart plushies and haunted dollhouses. Meanwhile the youngest patrons and their families crafted yarn snowmen, terracotta bumblebees, decoupage paper lanterns, and beautiful painted pumpkins.

Learn: Learning continued long after many school or workdays. History enthusiasts explored topics ranging from the Revolutionary era and the stories behind Hamilton and 1776 to local heritage and the history of American beer. Interactive programs such as *Write like a Founding Father, Wildlife Detectives*, and *Crime Lab* encouraged hands-on discovery, proving that curiosity has no age limit.

Play: Laughter and excitement filled the calendar all year long. Children and families delighted in visits from a magician, jugglers and high-flying border collies, competed in a jigsaw puzzle contest, hunted for eggs, boogied with bubbles, planned an escape from the Oval Office, and enjoyed *Christmas in July* — complete with a cozy fireplace, frozen hot chocolate, and gingerbread houses. Teens came together for a *Library Lock-in*, murder mystery, smoothies, and a world record challenge, reminding everyone that learning and fun often go hand in hand.

Engage: The Library also brought people together through experiences that encouraged shared discovery. Drum circles, Music & Movement, and Music & Sign Language programs invited residents of all ages to explore new forms of expression and spend meaningful moments with family, friends, and neighbors. Whether trying something entirely new or rediscovering a favorite hobby, participants enjoyed a welcoming and inclusive environment.

While each event offered something unique, together they served a larger purpose: creating space for residents to discover new interests, develop new skills, and make new friends. In 2026 alone, the Friends funded more than 100 programs, helping to ensure that our Library remained a place where creativity, lifelong learning, and community thrive.

"I was unsure if I should sign up for one program this summer and ended up coming back for two more,"* said one local teenager. *"There's always something different happening at the Library, and it's become one of my favorite places to hang out with friends."

"Portland Library has introduced me to new authors, hobbies, and places I can enjoy in retirement,"* another patron explained. *"Whether I come in to attend an event, borrow a museum pass, or discover a local artist, I always leave with something worthwhile."

The First Chapter

Through the *Books for Babies* program, every new Portland baby can receive a free welcome kit filled with everything needed to begin a lifelong journey with books. New parents or caregivers can pick up their kit at Portland Library, the Town Clerk's Office, or by contacting FPL Board Member Marilyn White at atwmsw@sbcglobal.net.

In recent years, the Friends have funded more than 373 kits, each containing a high-quality board book, a baby's first library card, and reading tips and resources — such as a guide to the Portland Library's *1,000 Books Before Kindergarten* program and the *Babies Need Words Every Day* book list.

The Friends also cover the full cost of BookFlix — an online tool that pairs storybooks with nonfiction e-books to strengthen early literacy skills — as well as prizes for the *1,000 Books Before Kindergarten* program. Families can celebrate each milestone — and you can follow along — via adorable photos of Portland's youngest readers on the Library's social media.

Borrow an Adventure

Looking for a family day out that costs little or nothing? The Portland Library's *Museum Pass Program* unlocks free or reduced admission to many cultural gems across Connecticut and beyond. Reserve a pass online, by phone, or at the Library and enjoy:

Free admission to treasures such as the American Clock & Watch Museum, The Carousel Museum, Connecticut River Museum, Connecticut's Old State House, Eric Carle Museum, FloGris (formerly Florence Griswold) Museum, KidCity Children's Museum, Lyman Allen Art Museum, Mattatuck Museum, New Britain Museum of American Art, and Wadsworth Atheneum

Reduced admission to family favorites like the Beardsley Zoo, Lutz Children's Museum, The Mark Twain House & Museum, Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame, Mystic Seaport, Connecticut Science Center, and New England Air Museum

Most passes can be printed at home, making it easy to set off on a spontaneous visit. Whether sparking a child's love of art or enjoying a weekend history trip, each outing is made possible by the Friends' ongoing support.