



THOMPSON FREE LIBRARY

NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2026

Cold Temps, Warm Vibes



by Kim Brawn

Dreams really do come true. That's right, one of librarian Michelle Fagan's pet projects became a reality on November 15 with TFL's first-ever Night Market. It started at 4 p.m. which in Maine—post-time change—descends into darkness quickly and feels much later. Outside, artisans sold their wares and organizations offered hot food and drinks; inside, authors promoted their books while the ten-cent book sale continued in the basement.

Michelle was pleased with the results, "The night market went really well for a first-time event. It was very cold for November, but we had heaters in the pavilion for people to stand near to warm up. Cindi from Backwoods Goat Milk Products who does many many events said that she felt like this was a warm inviting community event. It isn't every day that people help other vendors set up and break down their spaces. Other vendors commented

on the vibe being very community oriented and that the library is what made it feel so welcoming. We may have ended early but it was a great success. I think we will do it again maybe earlier in the year before it gets too cold."



Exceeding Expectations

Our cereal drive in November was a big success as area residents enthusiastically focused on a common goal. Youth services librarian Michelle Fagan explained how she got the idea, "With people in our community looking at hunger without food supplement money I thought that a food drive was an easy way for the library to help. We did a cereal drive because Kelly (Sirimoglu) from the food center said it was a big item and not always easy to get. I said 500 boxes kind of on a whim, not thinking it would actually happen. But it certainly did—we are so lucky to have a community that cares and responds to the call for help." In the end, we sent 525 boxes of cereal to the PR Food Center! —Kim Brawn

To donate to/learn more about Piscataquis Regional Food Center, visit prfoodcenter.org or find them on Facebook & Instagram.

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A Space of Their Own



by Kim Brawn

Space may be the final frontier but it's also a refuge—a place of one's own. While a public space is not usually intended for complete privacy, having different areas for different uses is essential. The YA section at TFL has been transformed into the Teen Space.

Michelle Fagan, our youth services librarian, spear-headed the changes and gives us the rundown:

"We added furniture, games and other things for middle school and high school use only, a way to make the space be just theirs during specific hours. I worked with Jenny Chase, the transportation director for Sedomocha, so we could have a few seats on

the bus for kids who wanted to come to the library. I will be offering programs from time to time for kids in grades 5-12. The surveys we did pretty much said the students wanted a place to hang out with comfy furniture and maybe some games. They said programs around cooking/food and art/writing may be things they would take part in. We are hoping that by revamping the YA area and making it a teen space we will bring in more teens to be library users."

Teen Space hours (middle & high school kids only): Tues & Thurs: 2:30-7; Weds & Fri. 2:30-5; Sat. 9-1



Maine Libraries: Stronger Together



by Jon Knepp

We're always excited to work with our neighboring libraries and the broader Maine library community, so we were excited to host the Maine State Library listening tour on September 30th. MSL staff heard from regional librarians and got a good perspective on what's going on in the area. At the same time, we local librarians heard from the state library about their priorities for the upcoming year. Maine libraries are always stronger when

we work together, and events like this help to showcase this, as well as the tremendous job MSL has done to coordinate this work.

Maine state librarian Lori Stockman, shown here wearing a TFL hoodie (still available!), has done a terrific job of guiding the state library and all the libraries in the state, through a very challenging few years. These efforts led to her winning the Emerson Greenaway Award at the 2025 New England Library Association Conference, given for "distinguished service in librarianship." Lori's efforts have had a tremendous impact throughout the state and we're glad to have her leading Maine's libraries!



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Seasonal Surge



by Kim Brawn

Hometown Holidays kicks off the yuletide season in Dover-Foxcroft, and the library is one of the first stops. As the morning of December 6 ticked on, we began to wonder if folks had slept in or the cold weather was keeping them away, but then the rush began. People of all ages poured in. "Families are always excited to come and make crafts and eat cookies," said youth services librarian Michelle Fagan, who helped kids create fun ornaments. "It's a very busy high energy day

at TFL and we all look forward to it. It's great because it can be a multi-generational event—with very littles and often parents and grandparents in attendance."

Shannen Rhoda, who made her signature pizzelles (crisp Italian waffle cookies) said that "time flew by, with lots of kids helping make pizzelles for the first time—who doesn't love cookies?" Rounding out the activities, Camilla Gosselin from Piscataquis 4-H, had an eager crowd designing cards for home bound seniors.



Spinning Webs & Breaking Records



Inspired by the E.B. White classic Charlotte's Web (written in Maine), TFL's Shannen Rhoda created an elaborate Charlotte costume and roped in her fellow library comrades to join in the Halloween fun. Later in the day, during the annual trick or treat for books, Ms. Michelle and Ms. Blaire gave away 240 books—beating their record by 66 books! "It was the busiest Halloween yet—it's always a whirlwind adventure," said Michelle. —Kim Brawn

Saving Seeds

by Jon Knepp

Heron Breen convinced us all of the power of seed saving with his presentation at TFL on October 23rd. Heron never saw himself becoming a farmer and passionate advocate for heritage plants as a kid growing up hating work on the family farm. But, a sudden illness in early adulthood left him with a lot of time on his hands which he devoted to gardening and he has never stopped.

Heron loves to share the history of seeds. There were no seed catalogs 100 years ago, every farmer saved seeds out of necessity! This led to plants that were very adapted to their particular home farm. These types of adaptations are especially important in a place like Maine, with a short growing season and a harsh climate. Losing connection with the fundamentals of seed saving leaves us more vulnerable to crop failure—a single illness, drought, or pest could wipe out all the tomatoes in the country if they were all one variety. Diversity, specialization, and adaptability



are the keys to successful seed saving.

Heron also gave specifics on how to start your seed saving journey. For example, he showed us how to collect tomato seeds by fermenting tomatoes and filtering out the seeds.

His hour-long presentation was both packed with information and left us all wanting more! It was more opening the participants' eyes to the potential of seed saving rather than a how-to. We would love to have him back again to discuss seed saving further!

You can learn more about Heron at www.fruitsofourlabor.com

A Real Maine Adventure

by Kim Brawn and Tom Lyford

Award-winning poet Claire Hersom stopped by the library on Thursday, October 2 to discuss her debut novel *Smithville Junction*. Claire, a native Mainer, sets her book in small town Maine in the 1940s. It tells the story of a man who gave away his five-day-old baby, causing an uproar across the whole community. He faces the worst of circumstances on his rocky journey towards forgiveness—but an innocent young girl unexpectedly helps him find redemption.

Writer/poet, and former TFL staffer, Tom Lyford attended the program. He has a long-standing connection to Claire and was impressed by the unflinching tone of her book:

*Welcome to Maine. Not "The Way Life Should Be" Maine, and not our L. L. Bean Vacationland Maine with its many outlets and tourist centers. Hersom's *Smithville Junction*'s Maine is one built with*

historical accuracy and set among the gritty, multi-generations-old memories of a hardscrabble, almost Beans of Egypt, Maine way of life. So yeah, it's a tough tough story. But one beautifully written and one so easy to fall into. Because Claire is a writer with a big heart and an adept instinct for imagery, local color, and effectively pacing the elements of her story. She's an incredible writer.

Claire and I—and the book she came to discuss—go way back. One day, 35 years ago, I got an invitation to join a prose writers' group, and that was where I met Claire. And guess what work-in-progress she brought to the writers' table! A little short story (...or who knows, maybe she would flesh it out into a novella later—she hadn't really decided). I'm not sure if her project had a working title back then. But if not, an appropriate one would have been "Smithville Junction." Because



*yes, that was the very short story that was destined to take seed and grow over the decades of Claire's life into ... this very same, published in 2025 opus, *Smithville Junction: A Maine Novel*.*

Claire Hersom: the successful writer with a strong, hardy, nearly unbelievable trait of sticktoitiveness. Congratulations, Claire!

(*Smithville Junction* is available at TFL.)

Working Behind the Scenes

Okoha

by Jon Knepp

If I've been quiet or hiding in my office when you came in lately, I'm sorry, I promise I've been busy! We at TFL have been working very hard to make sure our new Koha integrated library system is running as well as it should be. After a lot of testing, fixing bugs, training, late evenings, and thousands of emails and phone calls, I'm confident that Koha is on the right path.

Some of our patrons might not be aware that our catalog is actually shared with the other members of our consortium: Balsam Libraries. This consortium has grown from a handful of our local libraries to over forty-five! In addition, we are now handling interlibrary loan, multiple ways to place holds, and much more. It had become much too much for our Evergreen system that we hosted ourselves, as you may have noticed when our system has

been down. A change was definitely needed and Koha software, professionally managed by our partners at Bywater Solutions, is just what we needed to provide the stability and reliability you deserve! Our catalog can still be found on the same places on our website (thompsonfreelibrary.org) or directly at (balsam.bywatersolutions.com)

Beyond reliability, there are things we've always wanted to do that we simply could not in Evergreen. We have already put in place automatic renewals, so there is no more need to call or stop in to renew your books (though we love hearing from you.) According to Michelle this move "will make interlibrary loan more accessible for the TFL and its patrons than it's ever been!" That is because you will soon be able to request books directly from Mainecat (mainecat.maine.edu), bringing 100+ libraries and 8.9 million items to your fingertips! All of this and more are in the near future, which looks bright thanks to Koha!



Small Room, Big Impact

The Remote Workers grant which the TFL received through the Maine State Library in 2023 is finally complete! Through that grant, we've been able to add new computer workstations and privacy booths upstairs, as well as renovate the large community room in the basement, and pay for part of our solar array on the roof. Tucked away in the basement is our new small meeting room! Individuals or small groups can meet in the room without distractions or worries about being distracting. It's also tucked away for more privacy for meetings as well. We've had real estate closings, social services meetings, dozens of Zoom calls, it's been really helpful. Our goal with the remote worker grant was to add more flexible spaces in order to allow the hundreds of different uses we see in the library every month. The small meeting room has been a big part of that, and we invite you to check it out the next time you find yourself needing a quiet, private space! —Jon Knepp

Screen Shots



Penguins took center stage on the library grounds as Michelle and her homeschoolers joined forces to create a family of these flightless, social seabirds. A fun team effort that delighted passers-by!



January saw Shannen celebrate National Puzzle Month with a Puzzle Exchange/Giveaway while her Time Travel display, complete with period-piece embellishments, invited patrons through portals, wormholes, and interdimensional doorways.



No longer left out, Jon's third cat Timber Jimber (it's a long story) finally made her Caturday debut in December!

Special Thanks As Always to Kazia Knepp for Helping with Layout of the Newsletter



This year, Michelle enlisted the help of her homeschoolers to decorate the TFL Christmas tree and, as always, she decked the halls with various festive touches!



We don't like things to go to waste—especially healthy, locally grown turnips, carrots, napa cabbage, beets, and rutabaga. They were all free for the taking during our Veggie Giveaway Day in November.