

WISDOM WONDERLANDS

Local libraries offer digital delights and other treasures

Story by JEN CALHOUN



The Lawrence County Public Library recently reduced staff space, added a children's wing and made the whole place lighter and brighter.

Every month, about 10,000 people walk into the Lawrence County Public Library to attend an event, borrow a book, use the library's reference materials or experience one of the organization's many public services.

"In a community like this, with a population of a little over 15,000 people, that's a pretty big number," says Carlie Pelfrey, the library's director. "Before COVID-19, and before our renovation finished in 2020, we were probably only averaging about 5,000 visitors per month, which is still a lot."

The high numbers aren't really surprising to Pelfrey and other library directors in the region. With renovations, varied programs and increased public need for online access, public libraries have experienced a renaissance in the digital age.

MORE THAN JUST BOOKS

Sure, many patrons still come to borrow books or to catch up on their reading at the public libraries in Lawrence, Magoffin and Johnson counties. But an increasing number of people go for the programming and events. They'll attend the children's story hours and preschool skills classes. Others might come to research their family history with ancestry.com and local collections. Still others check out e-books or use language learning programs. Some people might print, make copies and send faxes. "Libraries were founded, obviously, with books and reading in mind," Pelfrey says. "That's our foundation, and it won't change. But many libraries have moved to a program service model that's heavy on events, fun, educational programs and community services."

For example, the Johnson County Public Library has offered a weekly chair yoga class for the last four or five years, Director Christy Terry says. Magoffin County partners with other community groups for movies in the park. Lawrence County's library runs a feeding program throughout the summer to make sure children are fed when school's out. And all the libraries focus on literacy and educational programming, while also offering free Wi-Fi, devices and research space in their buildings.

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS

But even with the increased need for libraries, some people don't realize just how important they've become in the digital age. "We've heard a few snide remarks that nobody checks out books anymore," Pelfrey says. "I know there are still some misconceptions among some people about the relevance of libraries."

Those misconceptions can cause problems with state and local funding. Pelfrey says staff collects data for everything they do, but it doesn't always reflect all the good things libraries offer, much less their impact on a community. "The people who use libraries understand how important they are more than ever, especially in an area like this," Pelfrey says. "There aren't as many cultural or educational opportunities in our region outside of the public schools, but libraries can bring so many opportunities here."

Terry, at the Johnson County Public Library, agrees. "It's just amazing the things you can access for free here every day," she says. "There are people who might pay \$15 a month or more to subscribe to audiobook services like Audible. But we can loan out audiobooks for free with your library card. We also keep all the bestsellers in stock, and we're part of an interlibrary loan service. So, if we don't have what you need, we can probably get it from other libraries."

Terry says libraries also partner with other community organizations in the county, including economic development groups, schools, tourism organizations, the health department and family resource centers. "We just do a lot together and try to spread out all the responsibility for making sure our communities are healthy and strong and our kids are well educated," she says. 🗨️



Photos by John Michael Laney



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: The Lawrence County library offers plenty of computers for research and studying.

The Lawrence County library's new space offers plenty of space to study, read and work on projects.

The Lawrence County Public Library set out to create a space that would ebb and flow with the community's needs.

CHECK IT OUT

If you haven't visited your local library in a while, it's time for another look. Not only are all of the local library buildings updated and refreshed, their resources and programs are more relevant to people of all ages than ever. As an added bonus, each of these libraries is powered by powerful fiber internet from Foothills Communications.

For example, did you know Lawrence County Public Library is developing a Memory Lab that will allow people to convert their home movies from VHS or DVD and other media into digital files? You might also be surprised that Johnson County Public Library holds chair yoga classes as a way to breathe life into the mind, body and spirit while also building community. And Magoffin County Public Library hosts a book club, annual book signings and so much more.

Find out more about all the opportunities at your fingertips by visiting your local library soon.

Johnson County Public Library

444 Main St.
Paintsville, Kentucky
Visit the website at johnsoncountypubliclibrary.org, find it on Facebook or call 606-789-4355.

Lawrence County Public Library

102 W. Main St.
Louisa, Kentucky
Visit the website at lcpky.org, find it on Facebook or call 606-638-4497.

Magoffin County Public Library

141 S. Church St.
Salyersville, Kentucky
Visit the website at youseemore.com/magoffinpl/, find it on Facebook or call 606-349-2411.

