Overland Park, Kansas-based Dimensional Innovations designed and installed the 26-foot-high Community Bookshelf façade along the south side of the Library’s parking garage in 2004.

## Contents

3 Welcome
   Pete B. Browne

4 Yeah, your Library does that
   Youth and Family Engagement
   Building a Community of Readers
   Digital Literacy and Access
   Your Library on the Move
   Beyond Books
   20 Things to Do With Your Library Card

12 Signature events

13 Art in the Library

14 Celebrating 150 years of discovery

16 Library locations
   Central Library and L.H. Bluford Branch
   North-East and Plaza branches
   Irene H. Ruiz and Southeast branches
   Sugar Creek and Trails West branches
   Waldo and Westport Branches
   Digital Branch and Missouri Valley Special Collections

22 The Community Bookshelf

23 Honors

24 Philanthropy

25 Freedom to read

27 The Library’s mission statement

28 Library leadership

29 How to get a Library card
Welcome

WELCOME TO ONE of the nation’s great library systems, the Kansas City Public Library, home to a distinguished history of service to its community dating to 1873.

On December 5, 2023, we mark the 150th anniversary of our founding. Proudly, there is much to celebrate.

Winner of the National Medal for Museum and Library Service, designated six times as a top-tier, 5-star library by Library Journal, and recipient of a host of other national, regional, and local awards, the Library is a conduit to information and ideas – “a doorway to knowledge,” as our mission statement prescribes. As one of the city’s leading and most accessible cultural destinations and a hub of community engagement, it has helped set the bar for public libraries in the 21st century.

Twenty-one years ago, as the Library launched a campaign to move the downtown Central Library to its current grand location, the former First National Bank building, the distinguished scholar, historian, and humanitarian Vartan Gregorian offered memorable testament to the importance of public libraries to their communities. Eight years of his remarkable career were spent as head of the New York Public Library.

"In our democratic society," Gregorian said to the 2002 gathering at the Kansas City Club, "the library stands for hope, for learning, for progress, for literacy..." and hence, is a symbol for democracy itself.

Those words still resonate across the Kansas City Public Library system. While our resources and services have evolved over 150 years, our commitment remains the same. To inform and inspire. To enrich and empower.

These pages offer a snapshot of our work – past, present, and looking to the next century and a half.

Pete B. Browne, President
Kansas City Public Library Board of Trustees

Vartan Gregorian, 2002

“The Library stands for hope, for learning, for progress, for literacy...”

The oldest item, Mathematical Tables, written by Sir Jonas Moore in 1653. Longtime Kansas City school superintendent J.M. Greenwood autographed this copy and presented it to the Library on January 3, 1898, giving the 370-year-old book a special Kansas City connection.

Other “elderly” items in the collection include:

• A 1672 digest of the English legal landscape under kings Henry VIII and Edward VI and queens Mary and Elizabeth I.
• A copy of Arthur Collins’ The Peerage of England, or, An Historical and Genealogical Account of the Present Nobility from 1709.
• A 1722 edition of The History of Virginia, in Four Parts by Robert Beverley.
• Edmund Burke’s An Account of the European Settlements in America, published in 1765.

While books this old deserve gentle treatment, all five are available to researchers for study in the Central Library’s Missouri Valley Room.

The Library’s current collection of more than 800,000 items grew from a modest set of encyclopedias. Those volumes are long gone, but other books remain that have been part of the collection for nearly the same amount of time - and approach being ancient.

The Library’s current collection of more than 800,000 items grew from a modest set of encyclopedias. Those volumes are long gone, but other books remain that have been part of the collection for nearly the same amount of time - and approach being ancient.

The Library’s current collection of more than 800,000 items grew from a modest set of encyclopedias. Those volumes are long gone, but other books remain that have been part of the collection for nearly the same amount of time - and approach being ancient.

The Library’s current collection of more than 800,000 items grew from a modest set of encyclopedias. Those volumes are long gone, but other books remain that have been part of the collection for nearly the same amount of time - and approach being ancient.

The Library’s current collection of more than 800,000 items grew from a modest set of encyclopedias. Those volumes are long gone, but other books remain that have been part of the collection for nearly the same amount of time - and approach being ancient.

The Library’s current collection of more than 800,000 items grew from a modest set of encyclopedias. Those volumes are long gone, but other books remain that have been part of the collection for nearly the same amount of time - and approach being ancient.

The Library’s current collection of more than 800,000 items grew from a modest set of encyclopedias. Those volumes are long gone, but other books remain that have been part of the collection for nearly the same amount of time - and approach being ancient.

The Library’s current collection of more than 800,000 items grew from a modest set of encyclopedias. Those volumes are long gone, but other books remain that have been part of the collection for nearly the same amount of time - and approach being ancient.

The Library’s current collection of more than 800,000 items grew from a modest set of encyclopedias. Those volumes are long gone, but other books remain that have been part of the collection for nearly the same amount of time - and approach being ancient.

The Library’s current collection of more than 800,000 items grew from a modest set of encyclopedias. Those volumes are long gone, but other books remain that have been part of the collection for nearly the same amount of time - and approach being ancient.

The Library’s current collection of more than 800,000 items grew from a modest set of encyclopedias. Those volumes are long gone, but other books remain that have been part of the collection for nearly the same amount of time - and approach being ancient.

The Library’s current collection of more than 800,000 items grew from a modest set of encyclopedias. Those volumes are long gone, but other books remain that have been part of the collection for nearly the same amount of time - and approach being ancient.

The Library’s current collection of more than 800,000 items grew from a modest set of encyclopedias. Those volumes are long gone, but other books remain that have been part of the collection for nearly the same amount of time - and approach being ancient.

The Library’s current collection of more than 800,000 items grew from a modest set of encyclopedias. Those volumes are long gone, but other books remain that have been part of the collection for nearly the same amount of time - and approach being ancient.

The Library’s current collection of more than 800,000 items grew from a modest set of encyclopedias. Those volumes are long gone, but other books remain that have been part of the collection for nearly the same amount of time - and approach being ancient.

The Library’s current collection of more than 800,000 items grew from a modest set of encyclopedias. Those volumes are long gone, but other books remain that have been part of the collection for nearly the same amount of time - and approach being ancient.

The Library’s current collection of more than 800,000 items grew from a modest set of encyclopedias. Those volumes are long gone, but other books remain that have been part of the collection for nearly the same amount of time - and approach being ancient.

The Library’s current collection of more than 800,000 items grew from a modest set of encyclopedias. Those volumes are long gone, but other books remain that have been part of the collection for nearly the same amount of time - and approach being ancient.

The Library’s current collection of more than 800,000 items grew from a modest set of encyclopedias. Those volumes are long gone, but other books remain that have been part of the collection for nearly the same amount of time - and approach being ancient.

The Library’s current collection of more than 800,000 items grew from a modest set of encyclopedias. Those volumes are long gone, but other books remain that have been part of the collection for nearly the same amount of time - and approach being ancient.

The Library’s current collection of more than 800,000 items grew from a modest set of encyclopedias. Those volumes are long gone, but other books remain that have been part of the collection for nearly the same amount of time - and approach being ancient.

The Library’s current collection of more than 800,000 items grew from a modest set of encyclopedias. Those volumes are long gone, but other books remain that have been part of the collection for nearly the same amount of time - and approach being ancient.

The Library’s current collection of more than 800,000 items grew from a modest set of encyclopedias. Those volumes are long gone, but other books remain that have been part of the collection for nearly the same amount of time - and approach being ancient.

The Library’s current collection of more than 800,000 items grew from a modest set of encyclopedias. Those volumes are long gone, but other books remain that have been part of the collection for nearly the same amount of time - and approach being ancient.
The Kansas City Board of Education approves a resolution: That there be established in connection with our schools a library for the use of the officers, teachers and scholars of the public schools of this district, to be known as the Public Library of Kansas City. The first collection consists of eight volumes of the New American Encyclopedia, shelved in an oak bookcase purchased for $8 and placed in the school superintendent’s office.

James M. Greenwood is appointed superintendent of schools and director of the Library, which will remain affiliated with the school district for more than a century.
Summer Reading
Every June, July, and August, the Library leads the community in a multifaceted celebration of books and reading. Once designed to encourage kids to continue reading while school was out, Summer Reading now extends to an array of family-friendly activities with an emphasis on staying engaged and stimulated. On fostering creativity. On having fun. The Library’s Mobile Services department has expanded the reach of the initiative, taking activities to families where they are part of the Pop-in at the Park program.
Nearby 3,000 people – a record – participated in the 2023 program, themed All Together Now. More than three were adults (4,804, also a record), continuing an upward trend since the Library made Summer Reading a 2½-month, all-comers celebration in 2017. Prior to that, it offered Summer Reading to youth and Winter Reading to adults.

Book groups
You’re into tales of adventure? Mysteries? Classics by African or African American writers? Queer-themed books or the works of queer writers? We’ve got you – and many more – covered with 18 Library-sponsored book discussion groups that gather regularly across the KCPL system. For youth, there are HBO’s Books for Boys, which meets at the Plaza Branch, and the Teens Reading Club at the Central Library. Find a group that meets your interests at kclibrary.org/readers-books-bookgroups.

The Kaufman Collection
This special selection of books and other materials is intended to enhance the Library’s overall collection with works of high quality, both in content and construction. Principally falling within the humanities, they embody classical ideas and ideals or have made significant contributions to other areas and range from printed books, e-books, and audiobooks to pamphlets, essays, maps, interview transcripts, still images, and videos. The collection is made possible by the Ewing Kauffman Book Fund, established in 1991 through a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and named for the late Kansas City entrepreneur, philanthropist, and civic leader Ewing Marion Kauffman. It also includes supporting materials that assess, critique, and examine the featured works.

Digital Literacy and Access
In an increasingly online time, when our quality of life is tied to the quality of an internet connection, the Kansas City Public Library stands as a local and national leader in the provision and promotion of Digital Literacy and access. This starts with computer labs and stations at every Library location, including the expansive OneNorth technology center on the first floor of the Central Library, and extends to a number of innovative and impactful programs.

Tech to Go
The Internet to Go service offers more than 80 mobile Wi-Fi hotspots for checkout for 21 days at a time. Each device supports basic web browsing on as many as 10 desktop or laptop computers, tablets, and other devices or can accommodate streaming on two or three devices, allowing an entire family to connect. The Chromebooks to Go program makes 250 laptop computers available for checkout, again for 21 days at a time, allowing borrowers to complete homework, work on business projects, apply for jobs, pay bills, or take care of other everyday tasks and activities online.

Tech Access
Launched in 2018, the unique Tech Access program offers one-on-one sessions, classes, and other resources to help adult patrons learn to employ technology and other digital tools in their day-to-day lives – everything from using a smartphone to creating an email account, setting up a Zoom meeting, using Snapchat or Slack, and bolstering online safety and security. Drop-in sessions are scheduled at most Library locations, and classes are offered five days a week at community and senior centers and low-income housing complexes.

Digital Literacy Leadership
The Library has played a lead role in local and national efforts to narrow the digital divide – the economic, educational, and social inequity between those who have computers and online access and those who do not. KCPL figured prominently in the founding of Digital Inclusion KC, a coalition of representatives from 80 nonprofits, government agencies, corporations, and other entities. Carrie Coogan, the Library’s deputy director for public affairs and community engagement, has implemented and overseen an array of Library initiatives and currently is part of the Digital Inclusion KC steering council. She also served on the board of directors of the National Digital Inclusion Alliance and was part of a select team that put together the Digital Equity Strategic Plan adopted by Kansas City’s city council.

OUTREACH HAS BEEN an important element of the Library’s services since the 1870s, when it hosted public lectures in an effort to burnish its educational and cultural standing while boosting interest and pride in Kansas City. Today’s outreach services are geared to patrons who have difficulty reaching a Library location, connecting them with many of its resources. That ranges from the Bookmobile, which makes regularly scheduled stops across the metropolitan area, sets up at selected community events, and is available by request, to the Books to Go program serving preschools, kindergartens, and child care sites. The Lobby Stops program sets up small, monthly pop-up libraries in senior housing sites. RC Library by Mail provides mail delivery of books, DVDs, and other materials to homebound patrons. Of note: In concert with the Library’s Community Resources department, the Bookmobile also offers a selection of reading glasses for patrons who need them – to keep, not just borrow – and care bags of food and hygiene items for individuals experiencing homelessness or with emergency needs. Bookmobile staffers also can help individuals connect with social service providers.

THE LIBRARY PLAYS a central role in the lives of people across the Kansas City area in many, many ways – emblematic of the evolution of public libraries in the 21st century. KCPL is a true community center, a source of resources and services for a range of community needs.

Community Resources
This dedicated team provides individuals experiencing life challenges with needed connections, services, and support: help with the completion of forms for utilities, rent, and other housing; assistance in locating free meals, food pantries, clothing, and showers; and direction to medical and dental services. Monthly Coffee & Conversation sessions offer a cup of coffee, healthy snacks, direct access to resources, and emergency supplies such as socks or hygiene items. The award-winning Street Sheet provides vulnerable patrons who lack access to common means of media or communication tools with a regularly updated guide to available services and financial assistance. Printed in both English and Spanish, it’s available at all 10 Library locations.

Community Reference
Meet one-on-one with our specialists for assistance with:

- Small business and entrepreneurship (starting and growing a nonprofit or small business, business plans, business research)
- Health and wellness (health literacy and programming)
- Legal and government affairs and civic engagement (tax preparation, voter registration, legal forms)
- Career development and personal finance (résumés and cover letters, interview coaching, test proctoring, financial literacy)
- Housing (housing assistance in navigating the court system)
- Family literacy (家庭教育, 职业发展, 个人理财等)

Through Legal Aid in the Library, patrons can make appointments to meet one-on-one with attorneys from Legal Aid of Western Missouri. In partnership with several justice-involved organizations, monthly Tap in Centers at the L.H. Bluford Branch allow individuals facing warrants to meet with an attorney, learn their case status, apply for a public defender, connect with local services, and get other assistance in navigating the court system.

The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck is one of the Library’s most beloved and controversial books, removed from circulation in 1939 after school officials ordered the book removed from the shelves. The books were replaced with library cards, and the Library Board ordered them removed from circulation. In 1939, the Library’s circulation surpassed 2 million.

1954 The Garrison Square Branch opens December 25 in a recreational facility in Garrison Square Park, the first sustained effort by the Library to serve the African American community.
1922 The Lincoln Branch opens at Lincoln High School, becoming the only library location specifically serving African Americans in the state of Missouri. Library circulation surpasses 1 million.
1931 Library circulation surpasses 2 million.
1937 The Bulletin of the American Library Association identifies the Library as one of eight in the nation hosting regular radio programs for children. The segments include storytelling, reviews of children’s books, and author interviews.
1939 The Library is caught in a nationwide debate over the suitability of John Steinbeck’s The Grapes of Wrath. Against the wishes of Head Librarian Louis Nourse, the school board orders the book removed from circulation – then allows its return nine months later (still keeping it off Library shelves and inaccessible to children).
1944 A remarkable 44% of Kansas City’s population holds library cards, highest among the nation’s large cities.
1945 More than 170 names are listed in an honor roll of Library alumni who served in World War II. Seven former staff members were killed in the conflict, including U.S. Army Air Forces Lt. Glessner Reimer, a P-47 Thunderbolt fighter pilot who participated in more than 60 air missions. The former Main Library stack room staffer died in action over Vire, France, in July 1944.
Beyond Books

Project engages a cadre of stipended AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers at agencies across the city. In February 2023, they packed 365 personal hygiene kits for individuals experiencing homelessness, sorting enough donated soap, shampoo, conditioner, and lotion to fill another 700 kits. Additionally, AmeriCorps members in the Library’s 1-year-old Digital Corps have helped more than 1,000 members of the community access and use vital digital resources, including assistance in applying for jobs, submitting assistant applications, and writing emails.

Also...
Free notary service at all Library locations / Passport services / Excel Adult High School / Yoga sessions and other free fitness classes / Blood pressure check stations across the Library system / Senior services, including the Senior Listen Line with recorded stories and tips on health, fitness, and other senior-related topics.

Refugee & Immigrant Services & Empowerment (RISE)
Under the direction of a fulltime refugee and immigrant services outreach manager, RISE offers a range of services including English Language Learning (ELL) courses and preparation for naturalization. The Central Library is a frequent location for naturalization ceremonies conducted by the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Missouri.

Kids Café
The Library has worked with the Harvesters community food network for more than 10 years to provide after-school and summer meals for children and teens at selected Library locations.

The Library VISTA Project
AmeriCorps VISTA members serve communities across the country in myriad efforts in the Kansas City area. The Library’s VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America)
Signature Events

LAUNCHED IN 2006, the Library’s signature events series quickly became and remains a linchpin of its programming. Kansas City audiences can attend presentations by visiting authors and other notable speakers, discussions of pressing local and national issues, and musical performances and other cultural events.

Never, perhaps, has such public programming been more essential. In a time of deep political and societal division and a critical need for civil public discourse, the Library continues to facilitate the exchange of ideas on difficult issues and concerns.

The wide-ranging menu of free events has long been understood by the generous support of the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation.

Among the featured speakers have been Supreme Court justices Stephen Breyer and Sandra Day O’Connor, attorney and Brandeis University professor Anita Hill, Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer David McCullough, and former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

The ongoing Making a Great City series, launched in 2018, brings in prominent urban planners from around the country in an effort to facilitate the “smart growth” of Kansas City and make it a model for fiscally responsible development and financial resiliency. A new series, IDEAL Entrepreneurship, kicked off in February 2023, examining ways to make entrepreneurship in the city more inclusive, diverse, equitable, accessible, and liberating.

The Library has similarly propelled public dialogue and action on the alarming rate of home evictions in the Kansas City area and its disproportionate impact on African Americans, regularly partnered with the Urban League of Kansas City in discussing the organization’s State of Black Kansas City assessment, and provided a pre-election forum for the city’s mayoral candidates.

The ambitious public outreach endeavor has won a number of awards including two regional Emmy’s and the American Library Association’s Excellence in Library Programming Award.

More people than ever – over 42,000 – engaged in the programming in 2022-23, attending in person or via livestream or subsequently viewing videos of the presentations on the Library’s YouTube channel.

THE KANSAS CITY Public Library’s relationship with the arts runs deep. In 1897, it housed a small collection of reproductions gathered by newspaperman and civic visionary William Rockhill Nelson.

The collection remained for 36 years and grew to include original artwork, both local and international, until its move to what is now the iconic Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art building. Similarly, the forerunner of the Kansas City Public Library operated out of the Library from 1897 to 1940.

Today, the Library serves as a destination for important traveling exhibitions and a showcase for up-and-coming artists seeking a foothold in Kansas City. It boasts two professionally curated galleries in its Central Library, the first-floor Genevieve Guldner Gallery and the Rocky and Gabriella Polony Mountain Gallery on the second floor.

The Plaza, Irene H. Ruiz, and Westport branches host rotating exhibitions as part of the Art Reach initiative, launched in 2022 and slated to expand to more locations.

Original exhibitions at the Central Library have ranged from 2013’s Greetings from Kansas City: Postcard Views of a Midwestern Metropolis, 1900-1950, which displayed some 200 vintage postcards pulled from a collection of 16,000 in the Library’s Missouri Valley Special Collections, to Here Where You Wish, a multisensory creation by Kansas City artist Ryan Wilks in 2018.

Among the notable traveling exhibitions have been a special collection of original works by renowned British artist and Hunter S. Thompson collaborator Ralph Steadman and a centennial collection of lithographs of the works of comic arts giant Will Eisner.

The Library also plays host each year to the Missouri Fifth Congressional District student art exhibition, sponsored by U.S. Rep. Emanuel Cleaver II as part of House members’ nationwide A Voyage of Artistic Discovery program.

A special series of exhibitions, including works by contemporary Native American artists and selections from the archives of the Library’s Missouri Valley Special Collections, is scheduled in 2024 in conjunction with the Library’s yearlong celebration of its 150th anniversary.

Further holding to its artistic heritage, the Library system is home to its own collection of more than 700 artworks, artifacts, and objects of ephemera – from paintings and murals to maps, etchings, posters, statues, photographs, and intricately designed clocks and other furnishings.

More than 200 items are on display at the Central Library. Others are on walls, shelves, or some other means of display across the Library’s nine outlying branches. Many of the pieces are accessible on the Library’s website (at kclibrary.org/art-objects) with high-resolution photographs, detailed descriptions, and information ranging from condition reports to whether or where they can be found in the Library.

Former Commerce Bancshares Vice Chairman Jonathan Kemper, who joined the Library’s board of trustees in 2001 and served 17 years as its president, has driven the growth of the collection over the past two decades, donating half or more of the Library’s present holdings.

Art in the Library

Librarians and archivists at the Kansas City Public Library Timeline

1987 Online catalog access becomes available at all Library branches.

1988 The Library gains its long-sought independence, separating from the school district with two-thirds approval from district voters. Mary Alley, who once chaired the school board’s library committee, is named president pro tem of the first independent Library board.

1989 The North-East and West Independence (Treadle West) branches open fewer than three weeks apart in January and February.

1990 With online catalog access available at all library locations, physical card catalogs are removed from the Main Library.

1991 Library Director Dan Bradbury is named Librarian of the Year by Library Journal. His tenure, from 1983 to 2003, sees the Library forge a new identity independent of the school district, secure tax levy increases, and embrace the internet age.

1995 The Southwest Branch opens.

1997 The Sugar Creek Branch opens.

1999 With online catalog access available at all library locations, physical card catalogs are removed from the Main Library.

2001 Library Director Dan Bradbury is named Librarian of the Year by Library Journal. His tenure, from 1983 to 2003, sees the Library forge a new identity independent of the school district, secure tax levy increases, and embrace the internet age.

2005 The Library launches its first public website.

2014 The Library’s signature events series quickly became and remains a linchpin of its programming. Kansas City audiences can attend presentations by visiting authors and other notable speakers, discussions of pressing local and national issues, and musical performances and other cultural events.

Never, perhaps, has such public programming been more essential. In a time of deep political and societal division and a critical need for civil public discourse, the Library continues to facilitate the exchange of ideas on difficult issues and concerns.

Among the featured speakers have been Supreme Court justices Stephen Breyer and Sandra Day O’Connor, attorney and Brandeis University professor Anita Hill, Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer David McCullough, and former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

The ongoing Making a Great City series, launched in 2018, brings in prominent urban planners from around the country in an effort to facilitate the “smart growth” of Kansas City and make it a model for fiscally responsible development and financial resiliency. A new series, IDEAL Entrepreneurship, kicked off in February 2023, examining ways to make entrepreneurship in the city more inclusive, diverse, equitable, accessible, and liberating.

The Library has similarly propelled public dialogue and action on the alarming rate of home evictions in the Kansas City area and its disproportionate impact on African Americans, regularly partnered with the Urban League of Kansas City in discussing the organization’s State of Black Kansas City assessment, and provided a pre-election forum for the city’s mayoral candidates.

The ambitious public outreach endeavor has won a number of awards including two regional Emmy’s and the American Library Association’s Excellence in Library Programming Award.

More people than ever – over 42,000 – engaged in the programming in 2022-23, attending in person or via livestream or subsequently viewing videos of the presentations on the Library’s YouTube channel.

Missouri Valley Special Collections, is scheduled in 2024 in conjunction with the Library’s yearlong celebration of its 150th anniversary.

Further holding to its artistic heritage, the Library system is home to its own collection of more than 700 artworks, artifacts, and objects of ephemera – from paintings and murals to maps, etchings, posters, statues, photographs, and intricately designed clocks and other furnishings.

More than 200 items are on display at the Central Library. Others are on walls, shelves, or some other means of display across the Library’s nine outlying branches. Many of the pieces are accessible on the Library’s website (at kclibrary.org/art-objects) with high-resolution photographs, detailed descriptions, and information ranging from condition reports to whether or where they can be found in the Library.

Former Commerce Bancshares Vice Chairman Jonathan Kemper, who joined the Library’s board of trustees in 2001 and served 17 years as its president, has driven the growth of the collection over the past two decades, donating half or more of the Library’s present holdings.
The Kansas City Public Library is celebrating its 150th birthday with a full year of special programming and other sesquicentennial activities, following the theme “150 Years of Discovery.”

Special speakers
Highlighting the menu is a series of quarterly speaking presentations by authors and others “who have made prominent contributions to culture.” The December 5, 2023, kickoff to the anniversary celebration features an evening keynote address by Finnish-born scholar, urbanist, and innovative civic leader Tommi Laitio. Appointed nearly two years ago as the inaugural Fellow at the Bloomberg Center for Public Innovation at Johns Hopkins, he’s exploring partnerships for parks and libraries and other speakers, cultural exhibitions, and Native Hawaiian communities. Travois has been a longtime supporter of such contemporary Indigenous artists as Wendy Red Star and Camupa Hanska Luger. The Library’s rotation of diverse exhibitions further includes a recontextualization of historic art from its Missouri Valley Special Collections and a collection of works by Library staff.

And more...
The coming year also will feature programs by notable children’s authors and illustrators and a birthday-themed Summer Reading program in June, July, and August. The Library has reached out to partners for some imaginative touches. Betty Rae’s is formulating a Library ice cream flavor, and Café Ca Phe is adding a Library coffee drink to its menu in the spring. The Vine Street Brewing Co. has crafted a commemorative Library beer, “One for the Books.” J. Bigger & Co. is donating a specialty cocktail. And XPB is partnering with Charlie Horse as part of the company’s popular Communi-Tees program, offering a distinctive Library-themed T-shirt.

Exhibitions
Set in 2024 are solo exhibitions by local artists such as painters Harold Smith and Chico Sierra and others – including New York-based collage artist Andrea Burgay – from across the country. Also planned is a show featuring the works of Indigenous artists, curated from the collection of Travis, the Kansas City-based company that promotes housing and economic development for American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian communities. Travis has been a longtime supporter of such contemporary Indigenous artists as Wendy Red Star and Camupa Hanska Luger. The Library’s rotation of diverse exhibitions further includes a recontextualization of historic art from its Missouri Valley Special Collections and a collection of works by Library staff.

The Testaments
From her National Book Award win to four Newbery Honors, Jacqueline Woodson talks about her consequential and far-reaching career on March 8. The Library launches what promotes housing and economic development for American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian communities. Travois has been a longtime supporter of such contemporary Indigenous artists as Wendy Red Star and Camupa Hanska Luger. The Library’s rotation of diverse exhibitions further includes a recontextualization of historic art from its Missouri Valley Special Collections and a collection of works by Library staff.

All events are free and open to the community.

Kansas City Public Library
150 YEARS
OF DISCOVERY

1999 The Library opens a technology center and begins training classes open to the public.

2001 The new West Branch, originally called the Biblioteca de las Americas (Library of the Americas), is opened in the former First National Bank building. The Library receives the National Preservation Honor Award from the National Trust for Historic Preservation for its restoration of the almost century-old building.

2004 A new Plaza Branch opens at 48th and Main streets, across Brush Creek from the Country Club Plaza.

2005 The Library completes a move to the new Central Library opens at 10th and Baltimore in the former First National Bank building. The Library receives the National Preservation Honor Award from the National Trust for Historic Preservation for its restoration of the almost century-old building.

2006 The Library launches what soon becomes a nationally renowned graylist events series, featuring discussions by authors and other speakers, cultural exhibitions, and public forums addressing civic issues and concerns.

2007 The Stanley H. Durwood Film Vault opens on the lower level of the Central Library. The old steel-and-concrete First National Bank vault was converted into a 28-seat movie theater through a $208,777 donation from the Stanley H. Durwood Foundation.

2008 The Library receives the prestigious National Medal for Museum and Library Service from the Institute for Museum and Library Services. It honors “outstanding institutions that make significant and exceptional contributions to their communities.”

(Timeline continued on Page 20)
The Kansas City Public Library System

Central Library
14 W. 10th St.
Building dedicated: 1906 (as the First National Bank); home to the Central Library since 2004.

The Central Library is the cultural and administrative centerpiece of the Kansas City Public Library system. Located in the more than century-old former First National Bank building in downtown Kansas City – restored with private funds and a centerpiece of downtown revitalization – it houses the Library’s administrative offices, OneNorth technology center, Missouri Valley Special Collections, two formal art galleries, and other major departments. It also is home to many of the Library’s signature speaking and other special events.

Of note: Across the street is a four-story parking garage with a striking south façade depicting a giant collection of books, the renowned Community Bookshelf.

The Lucile H. Bluford Branch
3050 Prospect Ave.
Opened: 1988

Named for the beloved civil rights leader and longtime editor of The Kansas City Call, the Lucile H. Bluford Branch serves as a hub of community activity on the city’s East Side. Public computer use here is second highest in the Library’s 10-location system – only the Central Library sees more. The Bluford Branch also offers free health and wellness activities, numerous children’s and youth activities including storytime sessions and teen gaming nights, notary assistance, a Classics Book Club focusing on notable African American titles, and winter warming and summer cooling stations. An on-site Village Post Office offers basic services and products in conjunction with the U.S. Postal Service.

Of note: In January 2023, the Library purchased additional property near the Bluford Branch with an eye toward expanding its 15,000 square-foot facility. It has not been updated since a $1.9 million renovation in 2009.

The North-East Branch
6000 Wilson Ave.
Opened: 1989

The North-East Branch is a fixture in Kansas City’s Historic Northeast neighborhood, which is home to both a sizable immigrant population and influx of young professionals. The branch dates to 1914, when it was housed in Northeast High School. It was combined with the Library’s East and Blue Valley locations into the North-East Branch in 1986 and moved into its current building three years later. The facility underwent extensive renovation during the COVID-19 pandemic, reopening in 2021. In serving one of the most linguistically diverse communities in Kansas City (with an estimated 55 languages spoken among the 9,000 residents), the North-East Branch houses the Library system’s primary collection of materials in Spanish and other world languages.

Of note: The diversity of the neighborhood makes this branch an ideal home for the RISE (Refugee & Immigrant Services & Empowerment) program, which connects immigrant populations with services, resources, and lifelong learning opportunities through outreach, education, and advocacy.

The Plaza Branch
4801 Main St.
Opened: 2005

The Plaza Branch’s floor-to-ceiling windows overlook the glittering Country Club Plaza with a view of Brush Creek winding its way east. It serves not only the immediate area but also surrounding neighborhoods in all directions, boasting a wealth of children’s and youth resources and activities, books on arts and crafts, and ample business materials. The lower-level Truman Forum Auditorium, with fixed seating for more than 200 people, regularly hosts the Library’s award-winning signature events series, including discussions and other presentations by locally and nationally known authors, artists, and civic leaders.

Of note: The original Plaza Branch, opened at Brookside Boulevard and Main Street in 1967, was the first branch built by Kansas City’s board of education outside a high school facility. (The Library had been established by the school district and remained under its jurisdiction until 1988.) “Because the other branches are in crowded high school buildings,” it was predicted, “the regional branch will attract adults from a much wider geographical area” – and indeed, today’s Plaza facility is the busiest in the Library system.
The Trails West name is derived from the Santa Fe, California, and Oregon trails, which passed through Independence in the 1800s. Shortly after the location opened, the Library conducted a public naming contest that drew more than 400 entries. Five suggested Trails West, a Library-appointed committee recommended it, and the board of trustees made it official in February 1989.

Located a few blocks off the Santa Fe Trail in Independence and within two miles of the Harry S Truman Historic District, the Trails West Branch is a friendly neighborhood library serving the West Independence, Three Trails, and Englewood neighborhoods. Formerly housed in Van Horn High School, then on a temporary site on U.S. 24 in the Fairmount neighborhood, it opened in January 1989 as the West Independence Branch – the fourth new full-service branch opened by the Library in a little more than six months (with the L.H. Bluford, Waldo, and North-East locations). Weekly storytimes and monthly family programs are popular here, and teens are drawn to book clubs and tabletop gaming.

Of note: The Trails West name is derived from the Santa Fe, California, and Oregon trails, which passed through Independence in the 1800s. Shortly after the location opened, the Library conducted a public naming contest that drew more than 400 entries. Five suggested Trails West, a Library-appointed committee recommended it, and the board of trustees made it official in February 1989.

Located a few blocks off the Santa Fe Trail in Independence and within two miles of the Harry S Truman Historic District, the Trails West Branch is a friendly neighborhood library serving the West Independence, Three Trails, and Englewood neighborhoods. Formerly housed in Van Horn High School, then on a temporary site on U.S. 24 in the Fairmount neighborhood, it opened in January 1989 as the West Independence Branch – the fourth new full-service branch opened by the Library in a little more than six months (with the L.H. Bluford, Waldo, and North-East locations). Weekly storytimes and monthly family programs are popular here, and teens are drawn to book clubs and tabletop gaming.

Of note: The Trails West name is derived from the Santa Fe, California, and Oregon trails, which passed through Independence in the 1800s. Shortly after the location opened, the Library conducted a public naming contest that drew more than 400 entries. Five suggested Trails West, a Library-appointed committee recommended it, and the board of trustees made it official in February 1989.

Located a few blocks off the Santa Fe Trail in Independence and within two miles of the Harry S Truman Historic District, the Trails West Branch is a friendly neighborhood library serving the West Independence, Three Trails, and Englewood neighborhoods. Formerly housed in Van Horn High School, then on a temporary site on U.S. 24 in the Fairmount neighborhood, it opened in January 1989 as the West Independence Branch – the fourth new full-service branch opened by the Library in a little more than six months (with the L.H. Bluford, Waldo, and North-East locations). Weekly storytimes and monthly family programs are popular here, and teens are drawn to book clubs and tabletop gaming.

Of note: The Trails West name is derived from the Santa Fe, California, and Oregon trails, which passed through Independence in the 1800s. Shortly after the location opened, the Library conducted a public naming contest that drew more than 400 entries. Five suggested Trails West, a Library-appointed committee recommended it, and the board of trustees made it official in February 1989.

Located a few blocks off the Santa Fe Trail in Independence and within two miles of the Harry S Truman Historic District, the Trails West Branch is a friendly neighborhood library serving the West Independence, Three Trails, and Englewood neighborhoods. Formerly housed in Van Horn High School, then on a temporary site on U.S. 24 in the Fairmount neighborhood, it opened in January 1989 as the West Independence Branch – the fourth new full-service branch opened by the Library in a little more than six months (with the L.H. Bluford, Waldo, and North-East locations). Weekly storytimes and monthly family programs are popular here, and teens are drawn to book clubs and tabletop gaming.

Of note: The Trails West name is derived from the Santa Fe, California, and Oregon trails, which passed through Independence in the 1800s. Shortly after the location opened, the Library conducted a public naming contest that drew more than 400 entries. Five suggested Trails West, a Library-appointed committee recommended it, and the board of trustees made it official in February 1989.

Located a few blocks off the Santa Fe Trail in Independence and within two miles of the Harry S Truman Historic District, the Trails West Branch is a friendly neighborhood library serving the West Independence, Three Trails, and Englewood neighborhoods. Formerly housed in Van Horn High School, then on a temporary site on U.S. 24 in the Fairmount neighborhood, it opened in January 1989 as the West Independence Branch – the fourth new full-service branch opened by the Library in a little more than six months (with the L.H. Bluford, Waldo, and North-East locations). Weekly storytimes and monthly family programs are popular here, and teens are drawn to book clubs and tabletop gaming.

Of note: The Trails West name is derived from the Santa Fe, California, and Oregon trails, which passed through Independence in the 1800s. Shortly after the location opened, the Library conducted a public naming contest that drew more than 400 entries. Five suggested Trails West, a Library-appointed committee recommended it, and the board of trustees made it official in February 1989.

Located a few blocks off the Santa Fe Trail in Independence and within two miles of the Harry S Truman Historic District, the Trails West Branch is a friendly neighborhood library serving the West Independence, Three Trails, and Englewood neighborhoods. Formerly housed in Van Horn High School, then on a temporary site on U.S. 24 in the Fairmount neighborhood, it opened in January 1989 as the West Independence Branch – the fourth new full-service branch opened by the Library in a little more than six months (with the L.H. Bluford, Waldo, and North-East locations). Weekly storytimes and monthly family programs are popular here, and teens are drawn to book clubs and tabletop gaming.

Of note: The Trails West name is derived from the Santa Fe, California, and Oregon trails, which passed through Independence in the 1800s. Shortly after the location opened, the Library conducted a public naming contest that drew more than 400 entries. Five suggested Trails West, a Library-appointed committee recommended it, and the board of trustees made it official in February 1989.
"Allen Library" remains inscribed over the heart of the commercial and residential Among the MVSC’s many notable collections Special Collections is the Library’s 150 YEARS of DISCOVERY KANSAS CITY PUBLIC LIBRARY of thousands of items in its The Library offers two award-winning What’s now the Library’s Waldo Branch was once called the South Branch when it opened in December 1988, touting an electronic center with IBM PC and Apple IIE computers. The current facility was called the South Branch when it opened in December 1988, touting an electronic center with IBM PC and Apple II computers. Today, the branch serves an area stretching well beyond its immediate neighborhood, with demand high among seniors and others needing access to computers and the internet, groups looking for public meeting space, and those in need of passport processing and connections to vital social services.

Of note: What’s now the Library’s Waldo Branch was once a small outpost – the Southwest Branch – at Kansas City’s old Southwest High School on Wornall Road. The current facility was called the South Branch when it opened in December 1988, touting an electronic center with IBM PC and Apple II computers. The current facility was called the South Branch when it opened in December 1988, touting an electronic center with IBM PC and Apple II computers.

Of note: What’s now the Library’s Waldo Branch was once a small outpost – the Southwest Branch – at Kansas City’s old Southwest High School on Wornall Road. The current facility was called the South Branch when it opened in December 1988, touting an electronic center with IBM PC and Apple II computers.

Missouri Valley Special Collections
Opened: 1960
THE MISSOURI VALLEY Special Collections is the Library’s repository of local and regional history, holding thousands of books, manuscripts, photographs, maps, postcards, and other records that the MVSC makes available to researchers and others in the general public. Dating to 1960, when it was housed in the old Main Library at 12th and McGee streets, the MVSC now occupies a beautifully appointed space – the Missouri Valley Room – on the fifth floor of the downtown Central Library. More than 25,000 items, plus an extensive local history index pointing to articles in books and other publications and in other special collections, can be accessed digitally through kchistory.org.

Of note: Among the MVSC’s many notable collections are the Ramos Collection of books and records on African American history and culture; the collection of more than 16,000 vintage postcards donated in 1996 by Mrs. Sam Ray; the Folly Theater Collection of vintage burlesque and other performing arts ephemera related to the 123-year-old theater in downtown Kansas City; and the Stockyards Collection of maps, photos, and blueprints documenting the all-but-vanished livestock industry in Kansas City’s West Bottoms.

Digital Branch
Opened: 2013
BEYOND THE HUNDREDS of thousands of items in its physical collection, the Library provides a wealth of digital materials and services through its 24/7 Digital Branch – from e-books and downloadable audio books and music to dozens of databases, including the complete Kansas City Star archives, and other electronic resources. Get help with homework, finding a job, or learning a new language. The Digital Branch oversees the Library’s main website as well as kclibrary.org, which houses nearly 26,000 historical images and other documents in the Library’s Missouri Valley Special Collections.

Of note: The Library offers two award-winning websites illuminating momentous periods in Kansas City-area history. Civil War on the Western Border (civilwaronthewesternborder.org) spotlights the border war that shook the Missouri-Kansas region from 1864 to 1865. The Pendergast Years: Kansas City in the Jazz Age & Great Depression (pendergastkc.org) brings to digital life the raucous period in the 1920s and ’30s when political boss Tom Pendergast ruled Kansas City’s government and criminal underworld.

Westport Branch
118 Westport Rd.
Opened: 1898 (as the Allen Library). Joined KCPL system in 1899.
THE OLDEST AND one of the most history-steeped branches in the Kansas City Public Library system celebrated its 125th year as an anchor of the Westport community in February 2023. Originally opened in 1898 as the Allen Library, it joined KCPL when Westport was annexed into Kansas City late the following year. It was the system’s first expansion beyond downtown and the Main Library. Today, the branch serves an area stretching well beyond its immediate neighborhood, with demand high among seniors and others needing access to computers and the internet, groups looking for public meeting space, and those in need of passport processing and connections to vital social services.

Of note: “Allen Library” remains inscribed over the front entrance, honoring the man who championed its establishment in the late 1800s: former Jackson County Presiding Judge Arthur M. Allen, who was a member of the Westport school board.

Waldo Branch
201 E. 75th St.
Opened: 1988
LOCATED IN THE heart of the commercial and residential neighborhood for which it is named, the Waldo Branch is a destination for residents of the surrounding area extending across the state line into Kansas. That makes it one of the busiest locations in the Kansas City Public Library system, with nearly 88,000 visits and almost 133,000 books and other items circulated in 2022-23. Demand is high for all services, programs, and facilities, from books and computers to meeting rooms and study spaces.

Of note: What’s now the Library’s Waldo Branch was once a small outpost – the Southwest Branch – at Kansas City’s old Southwest High School on Wornall Road. The current facility was called the South Branch when it opened in December 1988, touting an electronic center with IBM PC and Apple II computers.

Above, patrons of all ages enjoy one of the Library’s busiest locations, the Waldo Branch. Right, the branch, on East 75th Street, is the Library system’s southernmost location.

Above, the 125-year-old Westport Branch is the oldest branch in the Kansas City Public Library system. Left, inside the branch in the 1950s.

Above left, inside the Central Library’s stately Missouri Valley Room, which houses the Library’s history department, the Missouri Valley Special Collections.

Above and left, inside the Library system’s Westport Branch.
The KANSAS CITY Public Library’s downtown parking garage – a parking garage! – has been a popular landmark for the better part of two decades, its nearly 26-foot-high rendition of a equestrian showman Tom Bass. The garage location at Ninth Street and Baltimore Avenue was home to the Sam S. and Memory Bass Foundation Library, which closed in 2014.

In 2013, the library system acquired the land on which the garage is located, although it has no plans to reopen the library. The garage is scheduled to be razed to make room for a parking structure.

The Community Bookshelf

The striking Community Bookshelf, accentuating Baltimore Avenue from Metropolitan Avenue to the more Kansas City-connected Border: The Missouri-Kansas Conflict, 1854-1865 (civilwaronthewesternborder.org). It receives four national awards from historical and museum associations, including the American Historical Association’s Prize for Exemplary Community Achievement from the Missouri Humanities Council.

2013 – Awarded a regional Emmy, along with Kansas City PBS, for a Meet the Past program spotlighting renowned African American writer, folklorist, and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston.

2014 – April Roy, manager of the library’s L.H. Blackwell Branch, gives the I Love My Librarian award by the American Library Association, for “the accomplishments of exceptional public or college, community, or university libraries”.

2016 – Honored as a 5-Star library by Library Journal.

2017 – One of three recipients of the LibraryJournal.com Award from Library Journal, recognizing the libraries’ value to their respective communities.

2017 – Recipient of the American Library Association’s Paul Howard Award for Courage, given biannually for “unusual courage for the benefit of library programs or services.”

2018 – Won Steve Woolfolk, the Library’s director of programming and marketing, awarded the Library Journal’s Library Journal’s Margaret E. Monroe Readers’ Services Award, selected for “outstanding contribution to the field of public libraries.”

2019 – Honored as a 5-Star library by Library Journal.

2020 – Honored as a 5-Star library by Library Journal.

2021 – Honored as a 5-Star library by Library Journal.

2022 – Won an Award of Excellence from the American Library Association’s Public Services Division.

2023 – Awarded the Librarian of the Year by the Housing Authority of Kansas City.
**Philanthropy**

**150 Years of the Kansas City Public Library: A Philanthropic Legacy**

Since its inception, the Kansas City Public Library has stood as a symbol of Kansas Citians’ unwavering philanthropic spirit, as a beacon of knowledge and testament to community collaboration. Founded by a small group of advocates who pooled their resources to purchase the initial set of encyclopedias that laid its foundation, the Library boasts a century and a half of remarkable growth and transformation.

That growth has been – and remains – deeply intertwined with the generosity of its patrons. Two pivotal moments in recent history are indicative.

In the early 2000s, amid an effort to revitalize Kansas City’s urban core, a visionary alliance of civic and philanthropic leaders came together to establish a new home for the Library’s downtown location. Without them, the magnificent Central Library at 10th and Main streets would not exist.

A few years later, through the creation of a public affairs department and its signature events series, funded by the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, the Library deepened its commitment to providing engaging, accessible content to the community. For the first time, Kansas Citians could listen to and interact with leading authors, scholars, and visionaries. All, without charge, at their public library.

The Library’s philanthropic journey is long and varied. The challenging days of the COVID-19 pandemic drew all manner of support from many sources. Contributions large and small, from stalwart supporters and new friends, poured in. During the COVID-related shutdown, that support enabled the Library to serve as a lifeline to digitally disconnected patrons through the provision of Wi-Fi signals outside all 10 of its locations, the availability of wireless hot spots, and three mobile services vehicles.

In the most uncertain of times, Kansas Citians could rely on the Library as a source of stability.

As we celebrate the 150-year history of the Kansas City Public Library, we salute the enduring philanthropic spirit that has made it the civic and community anchor it is today, a trusted and accessible source of information, technology, and critical day-to-day support.

---

**Preserving Your Freedom to Read**

Even as the Kansas City Public Library celebrates the 150th anniversary of its founding, as we take pride in the vital services we provide and the indispensability of all libraries to the communities they serve, challenges to what we hold most dear – the freedom to read – continue to mount.

We have been one of the most vocal libraries in Missouri in responding: Efforts to ban or restrict access to books and other library resources are misguided, unhealthy, and harmful to a free society.

Organized factions are targeting titles they deem objectionable, the subject matter often involving racial and sexual (particularly LGBTQ) identity. States are backing them with legislation and other measures, including a new administrative rule enacted by Missouri’s secretary of state.

Those behind the challenges cite a need for parental engagement and oversight. For libraries, that’s already a central tenet. The Kansas City Public Library encourages parents and guardians to be interested and involved, to serve as arbiters of what their children— their own children— read, see, and hear.

They shouldn’t be empowered to impose their personal preferences on others, much less on an entire community.

Libraries are unequivocally inclusive, their buildings, resources, and services offered to everyone without charge. Their collections should, and do, mirror that wide representation, understanding that what one person might see as objectionable in the pages of a book, others see as a reflection of themselves and their experiences and a reason to feel less alone.

A broad collection serves broad interests. Narrowed choices promote exclusion.
The Kansas City Public Library is a doorway to knowledge for all people in our community.
Library Leadership

Cindy Hohl

KHOHL, KEMPER STEP INTO NATIONAL LEADERSHIP ROLLS

The scope of the Kansas City Public Library’s influence is underscored by the ascension of two members of its family to current positions of national leadership.

Cindy Hohl, the Library’s director of policy analysis and operational support, assumes the presidency of the American Library Association in July 2024. Elected by the membership of the national organization in April 2023, she’s serving now as president-elect. Hohl will be the first ALA president ever from a Kansas City-area library and the first from Missouri in 90 years.

A member of the Santee Sioux Nation of Nebraska, she is the second Native American to hold the office, following the University of Texas’ Loriene Roy in 2007-08. Hohl served as president of the American Indian Library Association in 2020-21.

She joined KCPL in 2017 as director of branch operations.

Crosby Kemper III, who served nearly 15 years as executive director of the Kansas City Public Library, is in his fourth and final year as director of the Washington, D.C.-based Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). Nominated for the position by President Donald Trump, he was confirmed by the U.S. Senate in January 2020.

IMLS, an independent federal agency, is the primary source of federal support for the nation’s libraries and museums through grant making, research, and policy development. Kemper oversaw the Library from 2005 to the end of 2019. He orchestrated a renaissance, making special events programming a nationally renowned signature and establishing KCPL as a local and national leader in the promotion of digital literacy and access. His tenure brought KCPL an array of awards including the IMLS’ National Medal for Museum and Library Service.

If you’re already one of the more than 200,000 card-carrying patrons of the Kansas City Public Library, thank you. We love serving you. If not, we’re here for you, too – and can help you get a card of your own.

Scan this code, visit our website, kclibrary.org, or come to any of the Library’s 10 locations. Your pass to information, education, entertainment, and opportunity awaits.
Kansas City Public Library
kclibrary.org | @kclibrary

Discovery begins with a library card.
Scan here to immediately get one online or to manage your library account.