How to Build a Program on a Dime

When a patron recently asked about special programs at the library during the upcoming Spring Break, Linebaugh Youth Services Coordinator Katie Turner took this to heart and with her Assistant, Emily Garrett, came up with a week of programming within a matter of four hours and at no extra cost to the library.

Spring Break at Linebaugh was born!

While still conducting regularly scheduled activities, the Youth Services staff came up with a daily afternoon program that gave parents and caregivers another outlet for children and built literacy all at the same time. Here’s their promotional information:

We've got extra activities to “Spark” a Love of Reading during RCS and Murfreesboro City Schools’ spring break March 28 – April 1. Join us each day Monday through Friday at 2 p.m. for fun events featuring the elements of early literacy—talking, singing, reading, writing, and playing!

Using light as a theme, staff came up with activities that took minimal preparation and staff involvement.

• Monday: We’ll TALK about the science of electricity and light, share science experiments and stories.
• Tuesday: We’ll SING along to some of our favorite stories.
• Wednesday: We’ll wear our pajamas to the library and READ with our families.
• Thursday: We’ll WRITE invisible letters.
• Friday: We’ll PLAY games with our families and friends.

None of these programs required extra supplies, as leftover materials were used from previous years. If there is one thing Youth Services staff have lots of, it’s extra stuff! This helped Katie and Emily to come up with some easy activities to share.

They made great slides for each day using their Canva account, and put them on the in-house digital signage, Facebook page, online calendar, and kids’ page.

Now they are set for families who need a free, fun afternoon activity during spring break! And all in four hours of planning.

If you want to know more about this program, contact Katie Turner at kturner@rcltn.org. There’s nothing that makes a manager or supervisor happier than seeing her staff think outside the box and come up with creative ideas to meet patron needs!

—Carol Ghattas
Linebaugh Public Library
“Fred’s Formals” at Vaught Memorial Library

At the Vaught Memorial Library in Hartsville, Outreach Librarian, Beth Sutherland, started a formal dress/accessories checkout as part of their non-traditional collection. The following write-up is directly from Beth to share with us all.

The inspiration came to me when I was cleaning out my closet and found two of my old prom dresses. They had not been touched in years and I had no idea what I was going to do with them. I thought I would love to donate them. Maybe a young lady would be able to use them and breathe new life back into them, but being in a small town we did not really have anywhere I could take them. I thought about taking them out of town, but I really wanted to help the young ladies in my community. As the Outreach Librarian I knew I had an opportunity to help in a way that others would not. I pitched the idea to my director and she loved it. I did not know what to call this program or initiative, so I tried out several names and none really sounded good to me.

I knew I wanted to incorporate the name of our library into it, and thus Fred’s Formals was born.

To say that I have been blown away by the support from our community would be an understatement. I was hoping to get just a few dresses. I wanted just enough to have a couple options in case a young lady came in and needed a dress, but we have far surpassed a few. We have nearly sixty dresses in various styles and sizes. Every time I walk by them, I am stunned every single time. I truly cannot thank all our amazing donors enough. We even have jewelry and shoes as well. We have twelve pairs of shoes and several necklaces and earrings. The dresses and accessories are part of our non-traditional checkouts and are going to be available permanently in our library.

We have been able to help a couple young ladies find prom dresses and even a pageant dress. My goal was to help just one young lady that might not have had the means or access to get a nice dress. Those dresses are expensive, and I know these past few years have been hard. I just wanted to help a young lady if she needed it. When the first young lady came in, I was so excited I could have jumped over the building with happiness. She got a beautiful dress and shoes. Getting to see the smile on her face was just incredible and that was what I set out to do.

I just wanted to help and maybe help put out some good in the world, because we need it now more than ever.

—Beth Sutherland
Vaught Memorial Library

Welcome to Project Chaos: Creating Havoc, Advancing Our Spaces!

Our story begins with a community survey sent to patrons several years ago. Our patrons overwhelmingly wanted more meeting and gathering spaces. The library is locked into our current footprint after a renovation/expansion in 2008-2009 that increased the square footage to 55,000 total. We cannot expand our building outward or build upwards. As we were reviewing the survey responses, we quickly realized we should be focusing on spaces, not collections. We started looking at the library as a blank slate. Where would we put collections if the building was just constructed?

Patrons wanted a gathering space to have family time, small meetings, and a talking space. We have two large spaces we were able to focus on: our current Media Room and Periodical Room. The Periodical room is supposed to be a quiet area; however, it is in one of our busiest locations in the front of the building right off the main circulation desk. So, magazines and newspapers were moved out, circulating artwork will be moved in and displayed on the walls for checkout, honor puzzles and games are available to take or play here. We will be adding a large farm-style table to the room. This room will now allow families the space to play games and work puzzles. Future library programs will be held here as well. This room is now meant to be active and noisy. Therefore, we needed to find a new quiet space for our patrons.

In the current Media Room, our furniture was large and outdated. The shelving is A-framed and takes up large sections of space per unit. With streaming services on the rise, our media checkouts are slowly declining, so we removed the media and
shelving and split our media room into two spaces.

We would use the back half as our new quiet space and the front half for our future learning lab. The front half (which will be the learning lab in the future) is currently used for exhibits and displays. The back half is our new quiet room. We have moved the magazines and newspapers to this area. We have also added a lovely faux fireplace. A wall will eventually go up to divide these two spaces. New doors to the quiet room will be cut and would lead into our fiction area. Our fiction is at the back of our library where it is quieter. Study carrels and study rooms are also in this area.

By emptying our Media Room, all our collections would now be housed in our great hall. It made sense to swap our fiction and nonfiction collection areas. By flipping nonfiction and fiction, this change would allow us to move our large print collection to the beginning of fiction where it will be closer to the front of the library for our elderly patrons. Our biographies would move to the end of the nonfiction section leading into our study rooms. All media would then be shelved in the middle section of the great hall. We knew this suggestion was a lot and would be a huge shock to the Director and Library Board members. So, we worked quickly to put together a pros and cons list.

Major Pro: We could send our horrible media furniture to city surplus on September 13th. Rooms to be renovated in the near future would be empty blank canvases (instead of storage/staging areas, holding all the broken-down shelving).

Major Cons: Chaos, collections were out of place. Staff had to hunt to help patrons find items they were looking for. Noise! Not only were we swapping items, we were also swapping the physical metal shelves. This meant quiet study spaces in the great hall were not available during this time.

Over the next six hours, we did a deep dive into our current collection numbers: current number of shelves per collection, guesstimate of items per shelf, and number of shelves needed per collection. This helped us determine if we could logistically swap these collection spaces.

Thankfully the numbers worked, and everything would fit in these new spaces! The next day, we presented these collection suggestions to our Library Board. They were skeptical but supportive and trusted our judgement. Obviously, this was going to be a massive project! We met with library managers that afternoon to get everyone on board. An email was sent to staff explaining the new layout and reasoning for this decision. It is so important to have staff buy-in and support when working on these large projects. We placed a sign-up sheet in our circulation workroom and asked staff to sign up for three hour shifts at a time. We had over forty staff members sign up to help throughout the week. Shifts began at 7 a.m. in the morning. The library opens at 9 a.m. so this allowed us to work for two hours without patron interference.

We blasted social media: Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, informing patrons of this upcoming project. Large signs were placed throughout the building as well. Many patrons use our library as their home office so we wanted to give them ample time to make other arrangements.

We began moving the collections fifteen days later on August 30, 2021. The library remained open during the entire project. Our goal was to be completely done in four days. We gathered and used every cart, meeting room table and flat surface available. As items were removed from the shelves and placed on a cart or table, they were kept in meticulous numerical and alphabetical order. Carts and tables were then placed back-to-back in a snake formation all around the library, one for nonfiction and one for fiction. LITERALLY, every surface was used. We never had an empty surface till the very end of the project. As a table or cart would be emptied, it was automatically filled again and added to the end of the snake.

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We knew we were facing multiple obstacles from the beginning. One obstacle was that the collections would not be a direct swap. For example, our nonfiction section was beginning where Fiction Cs were currently shelved. Remember that guesstimate of 30 items per shelf? Well… some nonfiction shelves had larger books and wouldn’t allow for thirty items. Some held as few as fifteen books and we quickly realized as we were currently shelving in the 600s that we would run out of shelves before the end of the 800s. We stopped everything and did a quick and dirty weed (which was fun because we had no empty carts for these items). So now we also have stacks of books all over the floor! We weeded five hundred items which gave us ample space to fit everything in the end. Another challenge we faced was a large nonfiction shelving section had to be swapped with a smaller section to help with aesthetics. Staff members quickly jumped in to help with this transition.

Multiple carts and tables tumbled! However, no staff were seriously hurt in the chaos of this project!

We are currently in the middle of a five-year strategic plan. Our spaces are still in transition awaiting architectural plans and future construction. For example, new doors will be added at the end of our nonfiction section, cutting into the quiet room. Our patron computer area will be removed, and we will have mobile laptops for checkout. Soft comfortable seating will be added to this area for a living-room feel.

Against the main front wall, we will have Brentwood history displays.

This was a daunting project with multiple moving parts! Staff flipped our entire adult collections and ended up moving 71,701 items. We finished the project a day early! We had amazing support during this time. The Friends of the Brentwood Library provided lunch several days and snacks, drinks, and candy daily for library staff. Staff had a blast getting to know each other. We wished we had written down some of the phrases overheard during this project. But most importantly, making these changes has allowed us to be prepared for the next steps of our strategic plan!

—Pamela Johnson and Robin Walden
John P. Holt Brentwood Library