



Two locations serving the communities of Granite City, Mitchell, and Pontoon Beach.

2001 Delmar Avenue
Granite City, IL 62040

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Granite City, IL 62040

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Six Mile Regional Library District During the Pandemic Tina Hubert

At the end of February 2020, I and many library colleagues from across the country spent a week in Nashville, TN at the Public Library Association Conference to discuss services and programs in public libraries. A short three weeks later the world came to a screeching halt when the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic.

In the Initial Months

On March 17, 2020, the Six Mile Regional Library District (SMRLD) closed to the public and began demonstrating our ability to pivot and adapt instantly. On March 18th, SMRLD began sharing a spreadsheet of local restaurants with curbside, drive-through, and/or delivery service in 62040, based on a list the Granite City Township started. That first week, SMRLD began highlighting online resources from both the library and beyond. Emphasis was placed on following reliable information sources and resources for children. Due dates on checked out materials were extended. We began posting weekly challenges to try to keep people engaged.

The Library, like everyone else, had to cancel all in-person programming. We discovered online programming wasn't in demand in our community. However, we did figure out how to complete the tax season – the Library provides free tax service for low to moderate income individuals and families in partnership with Gateway EITC Community Coalition. Closing in the middle of tax season was stressful, and we determined a path to continue to help as many people as possible during this challenging time.

While closed, staff continued to work. Many staff members worked from home, others continued to work in the Delmar Avenue building, and those whose duties rely on providing direct public service attended online classes, webinars, and other training opportunities. A complete inventory of the collections at both locations took place. Library materials continued to be ordered, received, cataloged, and made available for check-out.

After discovering that purchasing glass barriers were cost-prohibitive for the Library, custodial staff crafted wooden frames with plastic barriers at all public service

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To make a significant difference in the everyday lives of the people, institutions, and communities of Granite City, Mitchell, and Pontoon Beach by listening, understanding, and then transforming needs into proactive library services.

desks. Everyone contributed to getting the library ready to allow the public back into the buildings: “safety” items were purchased and protocols were put in place, furniture was removed, spacing was prioritized for public use computers and where to stand to check out materials, among other things. We purchased 2 self-check stations that are now available at both libraries; the self-check stations allow those who wish to have the lowest level of in-person interaction to still check out library materials.

In the library world at large, studies were initiated to determine safe ways to handle library materials. Returned physical items were quarantined for a specific period of time before being handled. There was a huge unknown as to how the virus was transmitted and what was safe and what wasn't.

At the same time Library services pivoted to prioritize electronic (or online) access. We figured out a way to provide library card numbers to people via an online registration form – for those who didn't already have a library card. Through that form we presented library card numbers for people to use to borrow e-books, e-audiobooks, and stream movies and music. We also increased our electronic collections to meet needs. At the same time the library expanded the hours and capacity for WIFI access from our parking lots at both library locations.

Summer to Fall 2020

Book return boxes reopened for materials on June 1st. Soon after, we began offering curbside service from our Johnson Road library. Curbside service allows customers to request physical items and drive through the parking lot to pick them up when ready. We continue this service to this day. It is also available at the Delmar Avenue Library. Library staff created “grab and go” craft kits for all ages that were then available (and are still available) for folks to take home to give them a creative outlet and something new to do. These are wildly popular.

The Delmar Avenue Library re-opened to the public on July 7, 2021. At that time, we severely limited the number of people allowed in the building at any one time. However, we were able to restart US Passport application processing, provide notary services, sell Illinois license plate renewal stickers and Illinois Department of Natural Resources fishing & hunting licenses, register people to vote, help people complete online government forms, and more (including allowing people to browse collections and select books to take home).

Because of the pandemic, more people found themselves in situations where they needed additional assistance with online unemployment, social security, job applications, and job onboarding forms – we were able to help with those. We also assisted the US Census Bureau in encouraging people to complete the census and providing a place where people could complete it online. We

promoted where people could get help for all sorts of basic needs, such as emergency mortgage or rental assistance and mobile food markets.

All the while we encouraged people of all ages to continue to read and enjoy a creative escape from the everyday. Youth services staff began producing video demonstrations of science experiments that could be completed at home. At the same time, we began publishing decades of the digitized Press Record newspaper archives. We subscribed to tutor.com for online live homework tutoring. Tutor.com also provides help to adult learners and job seekers.

The Johnson Road library reopened in October for limited numbers of people in the building at any one time.

Winter 2020-2021

Both library buildings closed to the public again in mid-November. Curbside pickup continued at Johnson Road. The Delmar Avenue Library reopened by appointment only the week of Thanksgiving. Johnson Road reopened by appointment only in early December. Visits to both libraries were limited to 30 minutes per day and by appointment only. Curbside pickup was available at both libraries.

The Library moved the annual Reindeer Visit to Wilson Park and the Park District provided additional fun for the 2020 Reindeer Cruise. People from all over were able to drive through the park and stop at vendor booths, see costumed characters, see the reindeer, and Santa.

Appointments to visit the library were no longer necessary by February 1, 2021. There were other restrictions still in place, but we were finally able to extend services beyond the prior limits. Visitors still had to wear face masks.

Spring-Summer 2021

We helped many people who needed assistance with making appointments for vaccinations. As in-person community events began again, we participated. We staff a booth at the monthly Melting Pot Market. We slowly began offering some regular programming in person. We refreshed some of our online services, such as our Jobs web page where we list local employment opportunities. We hosted a small open house as a semi-“back to normal” celebration. We held the Summer Reading Challenge Finale at Worthen Park with the Bubble Bus, snacks, crafts, and screen printing of T-shirts.

Things we are very proud of throughout the pandemic:

- SMRLD continued to provide high-quality essential library services to the 62040 community.
- There were no layoffs at SMRLD – all staff continued to have productive work even when we were closed to public visits.
- We even hired some new staff!

- SMRLD staff participated in 1,226 hours of continuing education.
- SMRLD staff kept public safety as a priority while providing the broadest library services possible.
- No SMRLD staff contracted COVID-19 from working at the library.
- We continued to engage with the community and forged new and stronger alliances with other community organizations. Library staff sit on a variety of boards, committees, and groups including:
 - Granite City School Board
 - Granite City Area Community Foundation
 - Chamber of Commerce of Southwestern Madison County executive board
 - Madison County Historical Society Board
 - Granite City Rotary Club
 - Granite City Optimist Club
 - Cool Cities Committee
 - Illinois Library Association’s Intellectual Freedom Committee
 - Partnership to End Homelessness
 - South Western Advocates for Youth Services
 - Libraries of Illinois Risk Agency executive board
- The Library entered an Intergovernmental Agreement with the Granite City School District to provide free library cards to teachers who do not live in 62040.
- We recouped \$16,600 in costs specifically related to the pandemic through grants from the Illinois State Library and DCEO.
- We continued to provide free tax services in 2020 and expanded service in 2021.
- Home delivery resumed in 2021; this service is provided to residents who cannot physically visit the library.
- Kids continue to participate in our 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten program; we continue to provide grab and go crafts and science experiments with video demonstrations; our community continues to use library resources both electronic and physical; we continuously seek ways to improve and provide beneficial services to our community.
- SMRLD staff continued to highlight special book lists, resources, and programs available through the Library.
- Library staff conducted a “diversity audit” to actively track how diverse our collections are. We continue to track the diversity of characters, topics, and authors of new materials.
- We have a wonderful staff who work well as a team and truly care about our community and about providing the best service possible.

What are we looking forward to?

- Creating Story Walks in partnership with the Granite City Park District
- Planning to bring back Bookmobile Services to 62040
- Continuing to be engaged with the community
- Forging new alliances and partnerships

- Entering an agreement with SIUe for a social work intern
- Expanding services for job seekers
- Providing in-person computer and online resources classes
- Doing what we do best – providing essential services that are beneficial to our community

And, finally, here is just one response we received recently from a customer who won a mug in the summer reading challenge. She outlines how essential library services have been to her.

“I know a mug seems like a "small" thing, but I lost my mom to cancer in September and have been living with Dad who has Alzheimer's since October. The mug will be a reminder to me each morning that I haven't spent the last 9 months away from my family in "limbo", but rather, read a new novel nearly every week to give myself respite time. That's a lot of reading! Reading has been an "escape" for me since I was old enough to read. I read Little Women in 4th grade, and was transported to the March sisters' home. This summer, I enjoyed mysteries (usually I'm more into World War 2 historical fiction) by Lisa Scottoline and Randy White. I actually had something to look forward to every day besides cooking supper, cleaning house, and watching the weather report and St. Louis news with Dad for hours.

Someday I will return to my family and farm in Tennessee, and I'll have my mug to remind myself that I was able to find a constructive, positive use of my time. Thank you so much! I'll pick it up tomorrow (and maybe some more novels for sale on the rack by the door!)”