



A LIFELINE FOR THE COMMUNITY



HIGHWOOD
PUBLIC
LIBRARY

ANNUAL REPORT FISCAL YEAR 2021

A LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

Last year, I wrote about the Library's "wonderful year of growth" where we made great strides forward in our strategic plan, building impactful partnerships, collaborating with local businesses and organizations, and learning all about the needs of our beautifully diverse community. A lot has happened since that last letter, more than any of us could have guessed.

In March 2020, our lives changed as the COVID-19 pandemic hit our community, and we closed our physical doors. Not knowing when we would reopen, we quickly pivoted out of necessity, and began to find ways to reach our families every day in every way.

Library services didn't stop, they adapted. Despite being technologically unprepared, staff worked hard to connect with the community remotely and ensure that they had access to the collection, digital resources, and online information they needed to learn, grow, and thrive.

Programming and events went virtual, and we enthusiastically offered a multitude of activities and learning opportunities for all ages and interests. From children's crafts and storytimes, to adult Spanish GED and English language classes, staff produced and provided remarkable online content. A new Winter Reading Program was developed to engage the community through the hard winter months indoors.

Partnerships and collaborations continued to be a priority and we worked with local organizations like Curt's Café and the Roberti House to provide thousands of meals for families in need. We also provided access to a network of health services to ensure the community had personal protective equipment, like masks, thermometers, and gloves; and the knowledge about COVID-19 that they needed to stay safe. The Library team hosted numerous donation drives to collect holiday gifts, winter clothing, and more.

One year after COVID-19 closed our doors, our fiscal year ended on a high note. In May, we were announced as one of only six winners of the 2021 Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) National Medal, and the only library in Illinois even selected as a finalist. This is the nation's highest honor given to libraries every year. We were chosen because of our unwavering commitment to truly engage and impact the families of Highwood, lift their barriers, and help them reach their full potential.



We continue to navigate these challenging times by finding ways to meet community needs and be your lifeline. The ways we serve you may look a bit different, but we will continue to be here for you as always.

Carmen Patlan

Executive Director
Highwood Public Library



"The 2021 National Medal for Library Service award is recognition of the outstanding work that the Highwood Public Library has put in to serving our community, Under Executive Director Carmen Patlan's leadership, the Highwood Public Library has transformed into a vital hub of support for local families and the growing immigrant population in Highwood. The Highwood Library's technology and education services help ensure that local children and families of all backgrounds have the tools they need to succeed. Thank you to Carmen, the Highwood Library staff, and the IMLS for your commitment to serving our Highwood and Lake County constituents."
-Congressman Brad Schneider

2020-2021 HIGHLIGHTS AND INITIATIVES

Awarded the National Medal

In May, we were announced as one of six winners of the 2021 Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) National Medal, after being the only library in Illinois to be selected as a finalist. For more than 25 years, the National Medal has been the nation's highest honor given to museums and libraries that demonstrate significant impact in their communities.

Spanish programs for Latinos and Immigrant Families

Our Spanish programs, like Conversational English and Spanish GED, create stepping stones for underserved immigrant families learning to navigate the U.S. workforce and education system. Since they began, over 42 students have been consistently attending classes. Four students have now graduated with their GED and three are now enrolled in community college courses.

Citizenship

The library has been working to be an advocate for social change and immigration justice. This past year, we can proudly share that one of our first newly sworn in U.S. naturalized citizens exercised her right to vote in the 2020 presidential election.

Robotics

As a response to this pandemic, we pivoted the robotics program to a virtual one through a partnership with 4H. The Highwood Library is one of only two libraries in the whole state to offer this virtual opportunity.

The 2020 Census

The library joined the fight to ensure a complete and accurate count in the 2020 Census by targeting Highwood's hard-to-count population. Despite the fear spread by anti-immigrant rhetoric, 70.9% of our community was counted. Because of our effective engagement strategy, our team was asked to assist Waukegan and North Chicago with their outreach, and in two months, we helped increase their count by 14%.



COVID-19 Safety

To ensure that our families had the resources they needed to stay safe, we secured funding from a local foundation and distributed over 1,000 PPE kits that included masks, gloves, thermometers and more to residents that otherwise would not be able to afford them. Since July 2020, we have provided free masks everyday to everyone who needs them.

COVID-19 Food Distribution

In order to combat food insecurity during the pandemic, we worked with our partners in the community and transformed our garage into a pop-up food bank. Since March 2020, we have distributed food to over 250 families every week.

Abriendo Puertas

Our award-winning program helps empower Spanish-speaking parents by helping them become their child's first teacher and playing a more active role in their educational journey. In 10 sessions, parents are given training on self-advocacy, communication, early childhood literacy, and much more.

Access to Information and Digital Resources

We set up a safe meeting space for local high school teachers to meet with families regarding their child's school progress. We found several of the students using the library for access to the internet were either failing or barely getting by. We now offer free printing to all students, access to school supplies and reliable internet, and function as a hub for supporting parents and students in their efforts to transition to a new model of education.



STRATEGIC PLAN AND CAPITAL PROJECT

In 2020, the library entered the third year of its first formal four-year strategic plan to *Build Community Through Library Service*. As this Strategic Plan comes to an end, the result has been a complete transformation into a robust array of programs and services responding to the needs of our most vulnerable populations. Our programs have proven to be a doorway to progress and opportunity, increasing adult and early childhood literacy, access to education, and combating the impact of the digital divide. We have truly engaged our families in a way that connects them to fruitful opportunities that help them reach their full potential and pursue their ultimate goals.

Library As People

With a focus on community building, partnerships, and becoming an active member of the community, we:

- Hired new staff and recruited a corps of volunteers that engaged the community in new ways.
- Held focus groups and distributed surveys to gather data, identify needs, and measure outcomes.

Library As Place

With a focus on a facility plan that creates a warm and welcoming space, we:

- Initiated “The Campaign for Literacy and Transformation” that reimagines the library as a community anchor.

- Worked with architects and consultants to develop new floorplans that focus on learning centers designed for all age groups.
- Created a collection strategy that increased our Spanish language collection and weeded out resources that were no longer relevant.
- Developed new multicultural and bilingual programs and services for all ages.

Library As Platform

With a focus on supporting the community’s digital needs, we:

- Launched a new user friendly website that was easily navigable and offered our families the resources they needed at home.
- Partnered with the school district to ensure all students had the digital tools to be successful outside of the classroom.

Library As Literacy

With a focus on literacy in all aspects, we:

- Supported adult literacy by creating relevant programming that focused on practical skills and eliminating educational barriers to success.
- Became the community’s early learning center for young children, including programs on parenting.

Friends of the Highwood Public Library CAMPAIGN FOR LITERACY AND TRANSFORMATION

The Highwood Library was last substantially renovated in 1976, and while the staff has evolved to meet the changing needs of our residents over the last 40 years, the physical structure has not.

So in 2019, the Friends of the Highwood Public Library initiated a capital campaign to transform the library into a 21st century space that meets the immediate and future needs of our families. This campaign will create a Highwood Public Library and Community Center (HPLCC), a central hub of the city that inspires innovation and self-empowerment for all Highwood residents.

After being awarded an Illinois Construction Grant for \$670,000, the Friends set about raising the remaining \$1.3M from private donors by the June 30 deadline.



Thanks to pro-bono architectural support, we have a renovation proposal that includes the following design elements:

- Updated lighting, new carpeting, and energy efficient measures
- Flexible, collaborative learning spaces
- Study/meeting rooms and a computer classroom
- Engaging book displays, coffee station, and a laptop bar
- Experiential learning spaces including museum-like exhibits, a theater and stage, recording booth, and makerspace

BY THE NUMBERS DURING COVID-19

10,133

Total Library Visits



899

Teen Program Attendees

3,152

Children Program Attendees



6,606

Physical Material Checkouts

24,205

Adult Program Attendees



1,277

Digital Checkouts



1,338

Computer Uses

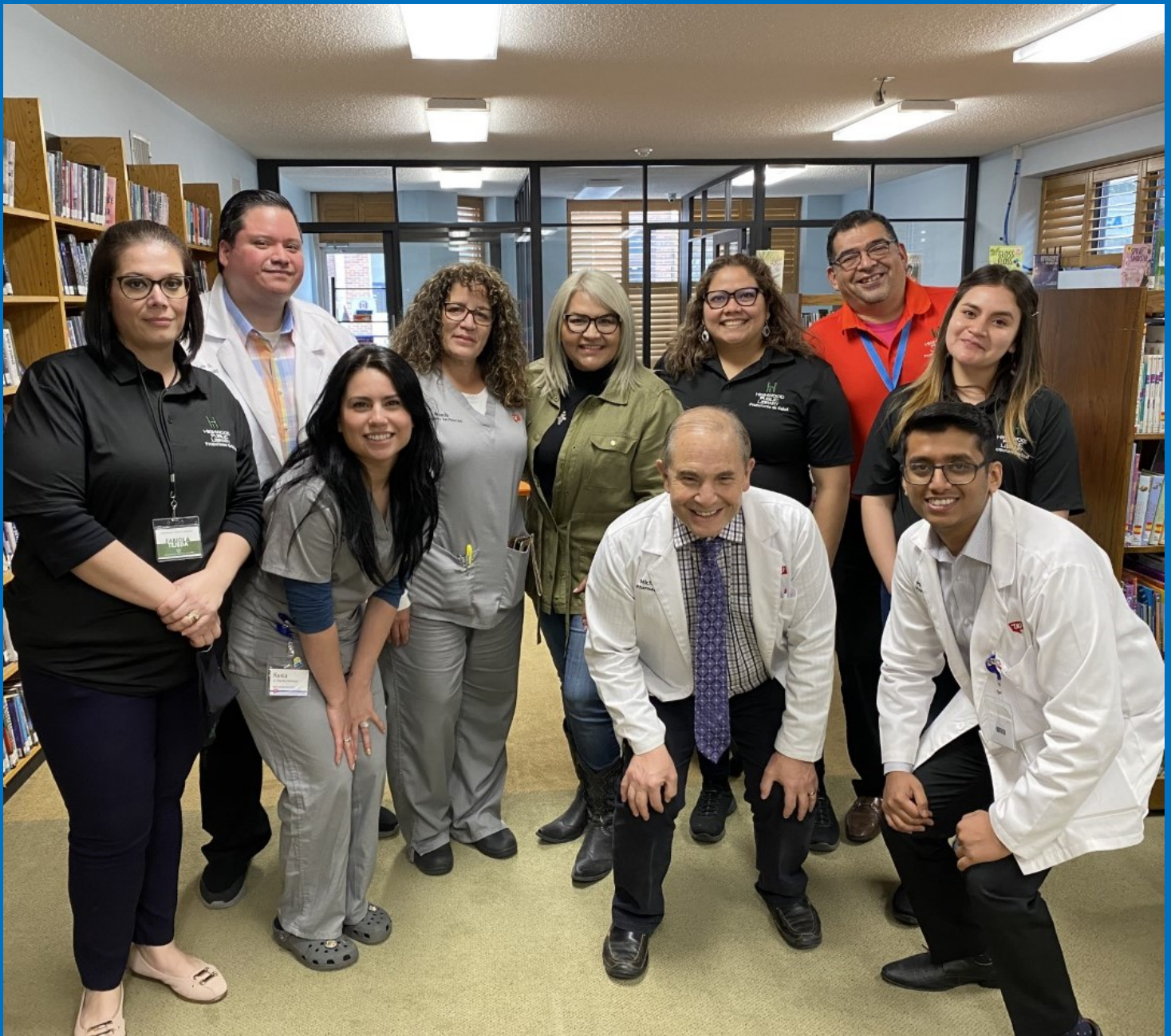
56,632

Computer Hours

1,349

Active Library Cards





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