

## Libraries are more than books

As we have settled into a time of social distancing and sticking close to home, it's comforting to know we still have resources available to combat cabin fever and expand our minds while staying safe and healthy. One of these invaluable community assets is the library system. We're fortunate to have a network of libraries that work together called [the Washington County Cooperative Library Services](#) (WCCLS) – it encompasses 16 libraries and part of its funding comes from a property tax levy, which is up for renewal in May.

Yes, libraries are physical places with books, and it has so much more to offer when we have the freedom to roam, but it still offers a lot, even now, as we do our part in staying home.

WCCLS provides a plethora of [online opportunities](#) we can turn to for fun, learning, skill building, and connections. The library system has been working to expand its offerings of ebooks and audiobooks - these are the books you can read on your iPad or Kindle. Last year the WCCLS had a checkout rate of nearly 1 million ebooks, an increase of 31 percent from the year before. I cannot imagine what it will be for 2020. You can also gain access to the NY Times through WCCLS.

If you don't have a library card to access these, don't worry. The WCCLS now offers an E-access card that you can [sign up for online](#). The staff at our local libraries are still available to answer questions through voicemail or email.

For those looking to build on their careers, the library can be a valuable key to prosperity. The programs Brainfuse HelpNow and LearningExpress provide job and career education, as does Lynda.com for building skills. There are also online tutorials and classes available on Kanopy. These are accessible for free through WCCLS and your library card. For students who are distance learning, there's also homework help available through Brainfuse HelpNow. If you want to learn a new language, the WCCLS provides access to Mango.com, where you can learn more than 70 different languages.

If you find yourself feeling bored, or just in need of a little distraction, Kanopy also has movies, documentaries, TV shows, and more. Plus, there is kids programming on Kanopy Kids. You can also find all types of suggestions on the libraries' social media channels. There are still online story times to help the kids get the wiggles out and to hear great story telling. You can even connect with others through virtual library events. There have been virtual book discussions on Zoom and Trivial Pursuit nights through Facebook.

When venues are open again, the WCCLS' Cultural Pass will reopen a door to adventure – free admission into gardens, recreation centers, and museums. Under normal circumstances, the libraries are wonderful community gathering places, which many of us are eager to take advantage of again. DVDs, activities, games, makerspaces, the library of things, fictional books (to escape through), or nonfiction (to learn from) can be found there, along with internet access. It's a place, where children can hear stories being read; special interest groups can hone their craft; public officials can engage residents on issues; and event goers can enjoy special occasions. It can be a place of democracy by giving people a place to drop off their voting ballots. In the City of Cornelius, the library is literally home to low income seniors – through a public private partnership, they live in the apartments above the new library. Sometimes the library is a place to eat – some libraries have small spaces for eateries. It's also a place to recreate, as many libraries are located next to parks or trails.

As you can see, libraries are an invaluable community asset. In May, you can help WCCLS by voting in support of its [property tax levy renewal](#) – the rate will remain the same at \$0.22 per \$1,000 of assessed value for five years (through June 2026). The levy provides 40 percent **of** WCCLS' funding. The WEA Board of Directors is endorsing this levy to support a resource that is evolving to meet our growing region's needs and will be crucial to job seekers as we arise out of the current crisis.