

Strengthening Libraries in Oklahoma through Friends of Libraries

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Libraries Are Essential Services

Libraries continue to be the bedrock of their communities providing lifelong learning opportunities for all ages.

Most people aren't even aware of all that libraries provide. They might know about childhood literacy, summer reading programs, and all those books on the shelves. But libraries in the digital age have captured the hearts of people who listen to audiobooks or read digital versions of books (all you need is a library card!). Many don't know that libraries help people:

- Get a GED
- Apply for jobs
- Start a new business
- Use a 3D printer
- Connect with telehealth services
- Learn through STEAM programs
- Train on computers
- Attend health programs

The list goes on and on. Libraries are the very heart of their communities, and each library tailors its services to its community.

Libraries are assessing community needs and providing services. Some libraries are providing programming for seniors to combat loneliness and build community connections. Social workers are available in some libraries to provide information and referral for needed services. Libraries are collaborating with other community partners and agencies to provide mutually beneficial services for library patrons.

Libraries also help children capture the joy of reading and learning. Libraries have year 'round activities but provide special programs during the summer to help children retain their reading skills and avoid the summer slide.

Danielle Borasky, Vice President of NoveList, recently shared in a blog a report from the National Assessment of

Educational Progress (NAEP) which showed that reading scores have continued dropping in both fourth and eighth grades (linked below).



Borasky continued, "Library staff carefully curate collections of books and plan programs to engage readers, such as story time and summer reading. They understand the importance of having readers choose the books that make them *want to read more*. Libraries cultivate a love of reading, and their staff are the fierce advocates for reading that our failing students desperately need."

The Educational Benefits of Public Libraries study by the American Economic Association (<https://www.aeaweb.org/research/charts/public-library-returns-investment>) showed that **investing in libraries has a direct correlation to increases in reading scores**. This study offers clear evidence that making capital investments in the local library increases reading test scores in subsequent years. Studies have also indicated that "library summer reading programs directly correlate with improved reading scores." Libraries make a difference.

Borasky, Danielle. "Invest in Libraries to Improve Reading Scores." NoveList <https://www.ebsco.com/blogs/novelist/libraries-improve-reading-scores>

"The State of America's Libraries: A Snapshot of 2024." (April, 2025) <http://bit.ly/3GcLK4B>

From the President. . .



A big "Thank You" to all those who made the recent FOLIO Day at the OLA Conference a success! We had a wonderful program on Early Literacy, a panel discussion on effective Friends groups, and a talk by a very talented author. You missed a wonderful day if you were unable to attend. It is so

important to network with other Friends groups and their leadership. Not only do we get new ideas but we are encouraged, energized, and inspired by the camaraderie.

Now, more than ever, we must communicate to anyone who will listen how important our libraries are. We, as Friends members and loyal library supporters, should always be ready to talk about the importance of libraries and reading. I have always loved reading, so I didn't need to be convinced, but I read an article recently of the benefits of reading every day.

Besides the obvious benefit of the sheer joy of reading, here are 10 benefits of the habit of reading every day: mental stimulation, stress reduction, knowledge, vocabulary expansion, memory improvement, stronger analytical thinking skills, improved focus and concentration, better writing skills, tranquility, and entertainment.

When we are telling others of the benefits of reading, we must also tell of the huge benefit that libraries provide to our communities and its citizens. Libraries have books and other materials on every subject imaginable. Encourage those in your circle of influence to read every day. There's a genre for every literate person. Whether their tastes lie in classical literature, poetry, magazines, biographies, religion, popular fiction, history, self-help guides, or romance novels, there is something at their local library to capture their curiosity and imagination.

"Thank you" to each of you for your support and advocacy of your public library!

Angie Lewis, President

"Investing in public libraries is an investment in the nation's future."

Bill Gates



Friends of the Helmerich Library wins Best Friends Award

This energetic group held a book sale that raised around \$20,000 last year with over 1,300 attending. They support special projects for all Tulsa City-County Library System libraries and departments.

Friends meet monthly; however, volunteers meet weekly to empty donations and clean and sort donated and withdrawn books. The Helmerich Friends completed more than 1,500 volunteer hours last year.

Activities included:

- Offering grants to TCCL libraries & departments. The libraries share appreciation for the financial support that enables their successful programs.
- Giving \$12,000 to 26 groups in 2025.
- Providing prizes and programs for the summer reading program, which had a 20% increase in attendance during 2024.
- Funding entertainers for "Story Time in the Park" with over 1,000 attending.

One program series for ages 8-14 that the Friends supported at the Helmerich Library was an Adventure Club: Legend of Zelda. They provided props, prizes, clues, and other game elements.



Author Kim Ventrella

Kim Ventrella was the featured author at the FOLIO Author and Awards program at the Annual Oklahoma Library Association Conference in Norman. Ventrella is the author of *The Secret Life of Sam*, *Hello Future Me*, *Skeleton Tree*, and *Bone Hollow*, all with Scholastic Press. All of her novels are appropriate for middle grades. She lives in Oklahoma City with her dog, Hera.

Ventrella has been writing since she was young and got a prize for her writing when she was in the second grade. In middle school, she wrote & illustrated a children's book. She was a French major at the University of Oklahoma and planned to get a Master's degree in French, but after talking to librarians who were writing a book, she changed to a Master in Library & Information Studies.

Ventrella gave an entertaining account of her work as an author and speaker. Since she usually talks to kids, she gets some interesting questions from them. One of the most popular questions is, "Are you rich and famous?" When she goes to schools to speak, there is often a skeleton out at the schools and kids ask her if she just likes skeletons and nothing else. Other questions that she is asked are, "Do you do anything besides read and write all day?", "Do you have a real job?", and "How did you become an author?"

Ventrella discussed some of the reasons she began writing about the topics included in her books. Some of her ideas came from bad dreams that she had as a child. She said that scary stories, such as *Skeleton Tree*, satisfy our dark curiosity, provide a way to address topics that may frighten children, and help us deal with real life situations. Scary or sad stories release anxiety, give a rush, help process real events, make us brave, and help us experience things that come up in life since some things in stories are scarier than in real life.

Ventrella ended the session with reminding the audience that anyone can write a book because everyone starts at zero; most potential writers give up; all first drafts aren't good; and we are the only ones who can tell our own stories.

-Linda Pye, FOLIO Vice President

Kirk Baird Inducted into the FOLIO Hall of Fame

FOLIO honors persons for their outstanding and dedicated service to Friends of Libraries in Oklahoma by inducting them into the FOLIO Hall of Fame. Each honoree receives a commemorative plaque, and his/her name is inscribed on a large plaque located at the Oklahoma Department of Libraries.



On March 14, 2025, at the FOLIO annual Awards Ceremony, Kirk Baird was inducted into the Hall of Fame for his outstanding work on the FOLIO website. Kirk recently retired from a forty-year career in IT. Upon retirement, Kirk expressed a desire to use his skills to help a nonprofit organization. FOLIO was in the process of launching a new website. Kirk stepped in and has been immensely helpful in making the transition from the old website to the new one. He has updated information on the site and stands ready to post items and answer questions. FOLIO is grateful for his expertise and his willingness to dedicate his time and effort.

Judy Haight, FOLIO Past President

Yale Friends Review Successful Programs and Make Plans for the Future



Pictured Front row: Miranda Brown (Librarian) and Liana Teter; **Back row, left to right:** Neva Alsip, Tamara Walkingstick (Chair), Nancy Griffin (Treasurer), Becka Redding (Secretary), Wanda Eller, and Chantel Griffith

This winter FOLIO Board Member and Ambassador Karen Neurohr participated in the quarterly meeting of the Friends of Yale Public Library. Their agenda included Librarian Miranda Brown's report and reports about their bingo fundraiser and two programs: Letters to Santa and a Wild Food program, coordinated by Friends Chair Tamara Walkingstick.

The Friends of Yale Public Library is a dedicated group of volunteers whose efforts help the library with the summer reading program and general library improvements. Neurohr shared information about FOLIO and FOLIO's Annual Meeting on March 14 during the Oklahoma Library Association annual conference. She also answered questions and encouraged them to consider applying for FOLIO awards and honors: Best Friends and Friends of Libraries Week.

Friends of Yale Public Library was first organized in 1986 and looks forward to celebrating their 40th anniversary next year!

-Dr. Karen Neurohr,
FOLIO Ambassador & Board member

Seeds for Success Grants Focus on Early Childhood Literacy



Elk City Head Start students select books.

FOLIO has a long-standing commitment to early-childhood literacy. Since a child's readiness to read begins in the early developmental years, FOLIO saw the need for a grant that would give Friends groups an opportunity to more fully focus on young children. The resulting grant came in two parts: a monetary grant of up to \$500 and 100 picture books to put into the hands of young children.

Illiteracy negatively impacts people's lives. Lack of reading skills results in less earning power, more mental health issues, and reduced quality of life. Illiteracy can often be traced to a lack of resources in the very early years in a person's life, particularly in low-income households. Therefore, the new Seeds for Success Grants encouraged Friends groups to use the money and books to enrich the lives of the young children in their communities.

Four Friends groups received grants: Friends of the Elk City Carnegie Library, Patrick Lynch Public Library Friends, Friends of Kingfisher County Library, and Hennessey Friends of the Library. Each expressed big plans to reach out to children in poverty. The Elk City Friends gave books to the children at the Head Start in their community and to a local food bank to be included with family food boxes. They also plan to use the \$500 to buy books for their ongoing Bundles for Babies, which gives a handmade bag and a board book of nursery rhymes to each baby born at the Great Plains Regional Medical Center.

Hennessey Friends plan to install a small library box in walking distance of a low-income neighborhood and stock it with children's books. Friends of the Kingfisher County Library plan to use the funds to continue gifting books to children ages 0-5 and to help support Imagination Library. The Friends of the Patrick Lynch Public Library will use the grant to give books to children who come to story time, give books to the local Head Start, and place books in local health departments and community centers including those located within low-income apartment complexes.

FOLIO congratulates each of these Friends groups on their efforts to promote early childhood literacy to ultimately help stamp out illiteracy in our state.

- Judy Haight, FOLIO Past President

The Five Building Blocks of Early Literacy

The first program sponsored by FOLIO at the OLA Conference was presented by Trisha Hutcherson, MLIS, who is the Statewide Programs/Youth Services Consultant at the Oklahoma Department of Libraries. She discussed the fundamental building blocks for early literacy that comes from research conducted by the Public Library Association (PLA) and the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) and published at everychildreadytoread.org. Trisha emphasized that parents and caregivers are the most important teachers and that learning to read begins at birth, possibly before.



The five building blocks, which are also expectations for library story times, are Read, Write, Talk, Sing, and Play:

Read

- Be an enthusiastic reader
- Engage
- Use different voices
- Sing
- Use instruments or puppets
- Get to know kids by names
- Have crafts and free play time after stories

Write

- Form letters with blocks
- Use bathtub letters and magnetic refrigerator letters
- Use sidewalk chalk
- Play with shaving cream to write
- Form letters with playdough

Talk

- Talk with, not just to, the child
- "Share and Return"
 - Share the focus—see what the child is looking at
 - Support and encourage
 - Name it—things, actions, feelings
 - Take turns—back and forth
 - Practice endings and beginnings

(continued on p. 5)

The Five Building Blocks of Early Literacy

(Continued from p.4)

Sing

- Sing in the car
- Rhyme
- Rap
- Results of singing:
 - Self-regulation
 - Cognitive skills
 - Taking turns
 - Patterns
 - Memory
 - Counting
 - Symbiotic thinking
 - Building relationships

Play

- Uses language
- Stimulates imagination and creative thinking
- Can include singing and puppets

Trisha recommended *I'm a Little Teapot: Presenting Preschool Story Time* by Jane Cobb with ideas for activities. Thanks to Trisha for a lively and informative session.

- Melinda Howard, FOLIO Board

- We have snacks: cookies, pizza, chocolate, and a nut bar.

Why should Friends groups challenge themselves, get out of their comfort zone?

- We reevaluate our goals from time to time and brainstorm ideas.
- We try to be aware of changes in demographics of the library.
- We are willing to listen, be flexible and open to new ideas, and not allow personal opinions to interfere.
- We work with the library staff. The library manager attends monthly meetings to share what they are doing and planning.

What is unique about your Friends group?

- We meet outside of meetings, have meals together. Since some members are actors, we go to their plays.
- We have an ongoing book sale in the library with a cash box on the honor system.
- We have a lifetime membership. We raffle a quilt made by a Friends member.
- We hosted a holiday bazaar in the library.
- We provide all newborns a "Bundles for Babies" that includes a board book, and we give every first grader a Dr. Seuss book. We also provide books for shut ins.

How do we create a culture for younger Friends?

- Have a membership drive in the library at Story Times.
- Be open to new ideas.
- Change meeting times to accommodate their schedules and have virtual meetings.
- Use their talents, such as with craft workshops.
- Use social media like Facebook and TikTok.
- Provide childcare.
- Have an online discussion forum on your website.
- Have an "elevator pitch" of how someone can connect.
- Ask library staff to emphasize that something is funded by the Friends group.

-Melinda Howard, FOLIO Board

Gain More Followers on Social Media

Do you want more followers on your Friends of the Library Facebook/Instagram page(s)? A recent discussion on the Social Media Discussion Group shared these suggestions:

- Inviting anyone who positively interacts with the page to "Follow."
- Budgeting for ads for special programs or services is effective, since ads are geolocated from a specific location.
- Making the content engaging. Giving people a reason to follow you. How will the content they see be entertaining, educational, beneficial, etc.?
- Partnering with other local organizations that serve the people you want to reach and sharing on social media.
- Posting regularly - at least two times per week.
- Reviewing Facebook Insights Followers/Non-followers.
- Posting on Saturday. - A recent study says this is a popular day, when people aren't rushing to work.



One FOLIO session at the recent Oklahoma Library Association Conference was a panel discussion composed of these representatives from Oklahoma Friends of Libraries organizations: Quoc Vo, President, Friends of the Rudisill Regional Library; Sherry Spurrier, Past President, Friends of the Helmerich Library in Tulsa; Leslie Durham, Library Director of the Elgin Community Library; Judy Haught, Past President and board member, Friends of the Elk City Carnegie Library.

Angie Lewis, FOLIO president, led the panel discussion and asked these questions.

How does the camaraderie among members affect results?

- We share stories with each other. We are friends outside the library—attend movies and plays together as couples and network.
- We see each other in other contexts. We had an article in the paper that said "Everyone is welcome."
- We emphasize mutual goals. We work on not being too "cliquey," and avoiding "snarkiness" and back-stabbing.

Congratulations to FOLIO Scholarship Recipients

FOLIO awards up to three \$1,000 scholarships each year. The Lillian Born Norberg and Mary Lou Atkinson Staff Support Scholarships are offered to full- or part-time employees of a public, academic, or special library in Oklahoma in the process of furthering their education. Scholarship awards are presented at the annual luncheon that is held during the Oklahoma Library Association Annual Conference in the spring. FOLIO has awarded these scholarships since 1997.

Christina Connelly

Christina Connelly is currently a customer service assistant working with children at the Hardesty Regional Library of the Tulsa City-County Library System. She has taught in high school and done administrative work. She began working toward her MLIS last year. She loves engaging with people and helping meet their needs.



Connelly has seen the effect the library can have in a community, including helping unhoused patrons, facilitating literacy programs, delivering books to homebound patrons, and helping children learn to read. She says, "I fully align myself with the ethics and goals of public librarianship...I love having something for everyone to find, the community events, and the role we play in our neighborhood."

Lupita Gonzalez



Guadalupe "Lupita" Gonzalez is currently a graduate assistant at the Digital Collections and Digitization department of the University of Oklahoma Libraries, where she's had the opportunity to assist in digitization projects that are educational and that preserve the cultural heritage of communities within Oklahoma. She is

finishing her MLIS degree this spring with a graduate certificate in Digital Humanities.

Gonzalez plans to pursue a career in digitization, digital preservations, and digital collections in an archive or special collections setting. Her goal is to work to preserve the cultural heritage and histories of communities that have been historically neglected or omitted from traditional archives and the digital cultural record.

Crystal Millemon

Crystal Millemon is currently a Library Associate at the Southwest Oklahoma City Library of the Pioneer Library System. She has been supporting libraries as a library volunteer, a library advocate, and a patron, both in the past as a child and now as a parent with her own children. She says, "The library has always been a place of refuge, learning, and inspiration for me."



Millemon enjoys having a variety of responsibilities - reference, reader's advisory, outreach services, technology assistance, programming creation, and Maker Lab services. She finds joy in providing reader's advisory to library guests. Millemon says, "I also enjoy having patrons come to me needing help with a challenging problem that we are able to resolve together."



Hillerman Oklahoma Literary Site

Pictured from left: Anne Hillerman, author and daughter of Tony Hillerman; Lisa Wells, Pioneer Library System Director; Mary Sims, Shawnee Library branch manager; Dr. Bill Hagen, FOLIO Board and Friends of the Shawnee Library; and Angie Lewis, President, Friends of Libraries in Oklahoma.

The new Oklahoma Literary Site honoring Tony Hillerman was dedicated on March 15 at the Shawnee Public Library, Pioneer Library System. Anne Hillerman related, "The time Dad spent in Oklahoma really shaped him into the person he became. You know, he came from hard-working Oklahoma roots and that really formed who he was the rest of his life."

Dunagan, Natasha. "Anne Hillerman Speaks..." (20 Mar 2025) <https://www.countywideneews.com/news-people-and-places/anne-hillerman-speaks-oklahoma-literary-site-plaque-dedication->

Need Help?

Call your FOLIO Ambassador.

FOLIO has Outreach Ambassadors who are ready and willing to talk or consult with your Friends' groups or your officers. We want to help you be successful and strengthen your library. Let us know how we can assist you.



Northeast

- Candace Baird
NEAmbassador@okfriends.net

Northwest

- Dr. Karen Neurohr
- Linda Pye
NWAmbassador@okfriends.net

Southeast

- Dr. Bill Hagen
SEAmbassador@okfriends.net

Southwest

- Angie Lewis
- Terry Jordan
SWAmbassador@okfriends.net



- National Poetry Month - April
- National Library Week - April 6-12
- National Library Workers Day - April 8
- National Library Outreach Day - April 9
- Drop Everything And Read Day - April 12
- Children's Book Day - April 30
- Children's Book Week - May 5-11
- Oklahoma Book Awards - May 15
- Summer Reading Program - June-August
- Summer FOLIO Newsletter deadline - June 30
- Library Card Sign-Up Month - September
- International Literacy Day - September 8
- TeenTober - October
- Banned Books Week - October 5-11
- FOLIO Splash Friends Conference - Oct. 18
- National Friends of Libraries Week - Oct. 19-25

The time for you to renew or join is NOW!

Join FOLIO!

Great reasons to be a FOLIO member:

- To be inspired with new ideas, projects, and activities to promote your Friends group
- To encourage a vigorous Friends group in every library
- To be an advocate for libraries locally and statewide
- To ensure that Oklahoma libraries have the best educated staff
- To assist with starting or revitalizing a Friends group
- To network and share ideas for programming and fundraising
- To help bring new, progressive ideas to all libraries in the state

Contributions in addition to the minimum dues further support FOLIO's mission and are greatly appreciated. Your generous support helps FOLIO accomplish its mission: To strengthen libraries in Oklahoma through Friends of Libraries.

You may renew your membership and add an additional contribution online at

<https://okfriends.net>

or to pay by check, mail this form to FOLIO, Attn: Treasurer, PO Box 702585, Tulsa, OK 74170.

Basic dues are as follows:

- \$20 - Individual Membership
- \$25 - Friends Group Membership
- \$30 - Library Membership

Contributions above the minimum dues further support FOLIO's mission, are greatly appreciated, and are tax deductible as a charitable contribution.

Name: _____

(Name of Individual, Friends group, Library or Corporate Business)

Address: _____

City: _____

Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

(Please include this because we are transitioning to communicating by email only to save postage costs.)

FOLIO is a 501(c)(3) organization, tax ID 73-1053431. Dues are tax deductible to the extent of the law. Your personal information is not shared with third parties.

Dues Enclosed: _____

Gift Donation enclosed: _____

Designate gift for: __Additional Support __Endowment

FOLIO—We are Friends helping Friends!

P. O. Box 702585
Tulsa, OK 74170

Return Service Requested



FOLIO Announces Deadline Changes for Awards

An important part of the mission of the Friends of Libraries in Oklahoma (FOLIO) is to encourage and recognize the important activities and achievements of Oklahoma Friends groups. To accomplish that, FOLIO offers annual **Best Friends Awards** of \$1,000 for Friends groups that demonstrate exemplary success in support of their local library, one for communities over 10,000 population and one for communities under 10,000 population. These are given in the spring. The awards were increased from \$500 to \$1,000 this year.

FOLIO has also recently started awarding **Seeds for Success** grants for up to \$500 for Friends groups to give books to preschoolers, particularly those living in poverty and for free used picture books (50-100) books to place in take-and-share bookshelves, Little Free Libraries, day care centers, community centers, health centers, and housing centers, or related locations.

The deadline for applications for these awards has been December 31 in the past. FOLIO board members recognize that this is a very busy time of year, which makes it difficult for many Friends groups to apply. Regrettably, the Best Friends Award for communities under 10,000 population didn't even receive any applications for 2024.

Therefore, the board made the decision to extend the deadlines for the 2025 awards applications to January

31, 2026. Our hope is that this additional time will encourage more applications from deserving Friends organizations.

Now is the time to begin preparing to apply for the Best Friends award or a Seeds for Success grant. You can access the applications at the <https://okfriends.net> website under the Awards tab. We hope to see your application next January.

Melinda Howard, FOLIO Board

Advocacy Now

A key role for Friends of the Library is advocacy. Usually that's in the form of telling your friends, but now you need to share the importance of the library in your life with your Congresspeople. Call your representatives. Info at: <https://www.congress.gov/members>

The elimination of federal funding for public libraries will be felt in every community across the country, particularly in rural areas.

Funding is in jeopardy for the Institute of Museum and Library Services which funds the Library Services and Technology Act, E-Rate, and innovative literacy initiatives. Oklahoma is due \$2.5 million this year to fund statewide databases, eBooks, health literacy, workforce training, and more.

Watch Facebook of FOLIO and the American Library Association for updates. Sign up for alerts on needed action at <https://www.oklibs.org/>. Select Advocacy and Support Library Funding.