

Dear Mississippi Mills,

The Library had to close our doors to the public on March 14, 2020. It was a stressful, unsettling time and we all struggled to understand how to move forward during a pandemic. We watched residents and employees at Almonte Country Haven fight through a horrific health crisis and heard from many community members as they struggled with the impact of isolation. Public libraries have played a key role in creating community space and helping to combat isolation so we felt helpless as we watched from the sidelines.

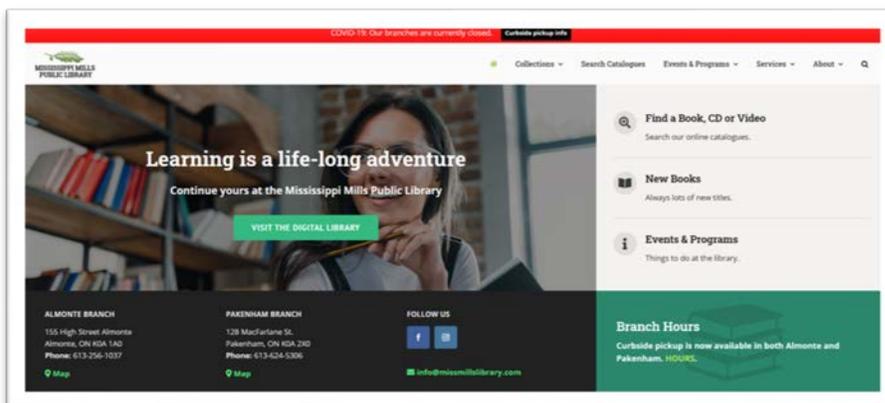
Fortunately, our time on the sidelines was short. Thanks to the lobbying effort of the Library Board and the public library community, the Ontario government included libraries in the first stage of the reopening plan. In this stage, libraries were able to offer pickup service. In our community, pickup service was welcome news because many residents do not have adequate high-speed internet needed to access online digital material.

As soon as we received provincial approval, the Library offered pickup times at both the Almonte and Pakenham branches. This alternative service has been more successful than we ever anticipated. Since May 19th, we have circulated 6,800 items through the new pickup service. This high demand reflects the community need for library material and made us feel that our efforts truly do make a difference in people's lives.



Pick-up service is not the only thing keeping us busy. Library staff collaborated with the Community Economic & Cultural Coordinator, and participated in the Mississippi Mills Backyard Garden Program. Through this program, we mailed-out 415 seed packages to residents.

During our closure, we also had the unexpected opportunity to build a new website. It is an attractive, easy to navigate site that was possible thanks to an amazing community volunteer, Brent Eades.



We were happily surprised to learn that public library computer labs were included in Stage 2 of the province's reopening plan. The Almonte computer lab is now open from Tuesdays to Saturdays from 10-2. Visits are by appointment only. For more information and to book a time, please go to <https://www.missmillslibrary.com/2020/06/22/mmpl-computer-labs/>.

Last week, we started a weekly Craft in a Bag program. These bags include instructions and supplies to create fun, easy crafts. For example, this week the craft bag includes sponge water bomb materials and instructions, a reading journal with stickers, a colouring postcard that you can mail, a Captain Underpants trading card, and a tattoo strip. These bags are free thanks to funding from the Friends of the Library. Parents and grandparents have been very eager and we have already given away over 100 bags, and the demand continues to grow.



Through all the disruptions and changes, we have many people to thank for our success. To start, the Library would not be able to reopen and offer new service options without dedicated staff. The Library Board has been library champions, taking time to approve new health and safety guidelines, write letters to ministers, and advocate for the needs of residents and staff. We have also received guidance and support from the Municipality and Council. The Friends of the Library continue to raise money for new programs and the Elizabeth Kelly Library Foundation checks in regularly to see how they may help. There are too many individuals to thank personally so please know that your support and encouragement has been appreciated.

Have a wonderful Canada Day.

Sincerely,

Christine Row
CEO/Chief Librarian
Mississippi Mills Public Library