



Blue Hill Library

NOTES

SUMMER 2025



Inside: Youth Chess Club, BHPL's New "Free Range Librarian," Outdoors at the Library, and More!

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Kids' After-School CHESS CLUB

-Tom Batt, Volunteer Chess Coach

If you come by the Howard room 3:30 on Thursdays during the school year, you'll find a lively scene guaranteed to make you smile: a dozen or more kids of all ages playing chess, eating Goldfish crackers and oranges, racing around, hiding under tables, and just doing what kids do when they're free and happy. Parents mill about, chatting, sitting on the floor with their toddlers, and occasionally sitting down to play a game with the kids. If the weather is fine, there may be impromptu dancing on the porch. This is Kids' Chess Club.

The club started in 2018 with a few kids and a few boards and has grown so much since then that sometimes we have to set up extra tables to accommodate everyone. You wouldn't think a game that is supposed to be "hard" would be so popular, but the kids play fearlessly, utterly absorbed in their matches. When their attention starts to flag toward the end of the hour, "Crazy Chess" sometimes makes an appearance. That's chess without rules. Or rather any rule at all applies so long as your opponent agrees to it, such as pawns moving like

knights or two boards combining into one giant game. There's also blindfold chess (an exercise in hilarity) and "Hand-Mind," played in teams, where one player chooses which piece to move and their teammate chooses where to move it. But for the most part, the kids play real chess the whole hour, pausing only to grab snacks or listen in, transfixed, on other conversations, as kids do.

Claire Malina, the Children's Librarian, is always on hand, exuding warmth and good humor, and Woody Petrie, a retired professor of psychology, stands ready to teach the kids how to castle or take a pawn en passant. The ages of the kids vary widely, from GSA students to uncannily focused three-year olds. The club has been around long enough that we've seen regulars come and go, to be replaced by another set of regulars, then still another, a poignant rhythm. The club is for the kids, of course, but it's also for the parents, who really seem to enjoy the scene. For me, it's the best part of the week. How could it not be? You're surrounded by a kaleidoscope of kids, some concentrating ferociously but just as many in constant motion, laughing, chattering away, tugging at each other, playing all the games kids do, chess just happening to be the one that brings us together.



It isn't uncommon to draw 20-25 kids and parents to our weekly Youth Chess Club, which runs during the school year on Thursday afternoons from 3:30 to 4:30. Yummy snacks help draw in unsuspecting future chess players!

FREE RANGE Librarian

-Rich Boulet, Library Director



A young patron's mom took her photo with each of her scoresheets for "1,000 Books Before Kindergarten," and here she is with her first and last scoresheets (in the second photo, she is too engrossed in the book to look up for the photo). BHPL's program, 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten, encourages families and friends to read to young kids, and keep track. They receive a special bookbag when they reach 1,000 books!

A few months ago, I got an email from a patron who wondered, how could BHPL increase its early childhood learning opportunities. This family has young children who have been fans of the excellent work being done by Claire Malina, such as 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten, Storytime, Preschool Playgroup, Family Place Workshops for families, and also specially designed areas of the Larchwood Children's Room to invite our tiniest patrons to browse and be creative. These kind folks wanted to see about ramping those efforts up even more.

One problem: there is only one Claire and her plate is, to say the least, full. Storytime on Tuesdays, Toddler Playgroup on Wednesdays, Chess Club on Thursdays, plus outreach to local schools, one-off events, and helping people use the Larchwood Room, collection development, etc. means adding more would not be sustainable. (Fun fact: last year the library was open 303 business days. We offered 302 youth-oriented library events!)

Further investigation revealed that this patron was interested in helping to make this work happen. So I reached out to Jen Rosenthal, whose work at Friend Memorial Library I had heard good things about, to see if she had interest and capacity to take on more. Jen was interested, and she put together an excellent proposal for new, ongoing activities that we've accepted:

- Mondays will feature a new Storytime in the Larchwood Room that focuses on music and movement. Mondays have traditionally been Claire's day off, so it will be good to have this new complimentary program on that day.
- Thinking about all of the children and families who can't get to the library on weekdays, we will also be offering outreach storytimes to any childcare center on the Blue Hill Peninsula that would like to host us.
- We are also working on a partnership with the YMCA, to present a monthly storytime and open gym to let those toddlers get that energy out.

Regular readers of my missives have read about my "WWAPD" criteria. Shorthand for "What would [BHPL pioneer and person responsible for the building in which I write] Adelaide Pearson do?," I suspect she would be quite pleased by the goals and outcomes of this new effort.

This program is funded by generous gifts from Randy and Callie Curtis, and anonymous donors, that will allow this work to continue for at least a year. Want to help us keep it going? I would love to speak to you about ways that could happen. Please feel free to reach out!



AN APPRECIATION OF PENNY RICKER, a Mainstay of Student Art Month

-Claire Malina, Youth Services Librarian



Penny on the right, pictured with her daughter Melissa Rioux, who is the art teacher at George Stevens Academy, and Melissa's daughter Maggie, at the April Student Art Show reception.

April is one of the best months of the year at the Blue Hill Library because it is Student Art Month, with all peninsula schools and homeschoolers invited to show their art here. The library transforms into a kaleidoscope of color, with artwork adorning the walls from floor to ceiling and inspiring sculptures take the place of books on top of the bookshelves. It is a wonderful occasion for all of the schools and students to come together in one place and it is all made possible by the devoted local art teachers. Library

patrons are surprised and delighted—many tell us it is their favorite art show.

Penny Ricker has been a champion of Student Art Month for over 15 years. She is the extraordinary art teacher at the Blue Hill Consolidated School and despite teaching over 250 students, she ensures that every single student has at least one of their pieces on display in the art show. Penny practically lives at the library during the month of April—racing over to hang artwork even on Saturdays and Sundays, walking every class over to see their own art and to appreciate the

artwork of other peninsula students. Throughout the rest of the school year, she will often bring her students to see other art shows going on at the library.

The art projects that the students create with Penny's instruction and guidance are unique and diverse in medium: handbuilt clay animals, drawings of local town architecture, potato prints of birds, needle felted owls, collages, and more. Each year, in one grade level, each child gets two quarters of a calendar picture and they are challenged to draw the rest. It is amazing to see how well they do!

One of my favorite aspects of the show is when kids come to the library with their family members, in search of their artwork and a scavenger hunt ensues. The kids are proud to have their work on display here at the library and Penny strongly believes that their work deserves to be celebrated and admired. Her commitment to each child having work on display in the show is powerful and very meaningful to the children and their families.

Every year visitors to the library are astounded at the level of talent displayed in the April art show. The kids in our community are fortunate to have such impressive art programs designed by the wonderful teachers in the local schools, and unbelievably dedicated art teachers. Next time you see Penny or another one of our local art teachers, please join me in thanking them for all that they do for the kids.

ELVIRA'S RED WAGON AND THE WORK OF THE FRIENDS: Celebrating the Volunteers Who Keep us Rolling from Year to Year

–Nina Fleming, Friends of the Library Board Member



L to R: President of the Board John Diamond, long-time Friends Board Member Ellie Andy, Library Director Rich Boulet, recently-retired Friends of the Library Board President Malcolm Purvis, current Friends of the Library Board President Ann Pladson.

If you've ever been in the basement of the Blue Hill Public Library, chances are you've seen it: the small red wagon with more than a few dings and dents, parked near a pile of book donations. Often buried beneath a load of boxes, this humble wain has quietly supported the Friends' work for over two decades.

Elvira Bass volunteered her Radio Flyer at the inception of the Book Nook in 2002. She was a brilliant and endlessly capable champion of the library, and the wagon is classic Elvira – practical, unpretentious, just right for the job. Since then, it has been used for just about everything the Friends have done over the years: basement sales, tent sales, bake sales, and every kind of event prep. My own children rode in it when they were toddlers, helping Elvira sort books. If a FOL volunteer has ever had to lift, sort, decorate, or deliver something, you can bet the red wagon was there to help carry the load.

And so it is a fitting symbol for the Elvira Bass Outstanding Volunteer Appreciation Award, created in the fall of 2024 to honor those who demonstrate exemplary service to the Friends' mission. Our primary work is straightforward: we clean, sort, and re-share your gently worn tomes, and then have the pleasure of directing the proceeds right back into the library. The award celebrates not how long a volunteer has served, but the kind of dedicated, hands-on contributions that make the Book Nook and library events so successful.

Our inaugural recipient, Ellie Andy, embodies that spirit perfectly. She's been with the Friends for 20-plus years, and when Elvira stepped down in 2010, Ellie stepped up – organizing shifts, managing sales, hefting countless boxes, and keeping everything humming along behind the scenes. Her thoughtful input, care, and willingness to roll up her sleeves define what the Friends are all about.

In that same spirit of continued commitment, Ann Pladson, who followed Ellie as Volunteer Coordinator in 2017, became the President of the Friends last fall. Ann worked closely with Ellie to document and refine basement book-sorting procedures, kept the Nook running smoothly, and helped create the Volunteer Appreciation Award. And now the torch has been passed again: we welcome Alison Rudel as the new Volunteer Coordinator. She joined the Friends board in 2023 and brings fresh energy to the library community (and her daughter, Esme, won the 2025 Maine State Spelling Bee!).

What remains constant through these transitions is the dedication of the Friends... and the red wagon that helps get all the work done. It is, after all, one of our longest-serving volunteers! If you'd like to help keep it rolling – whether by donating books, buying them, or volunteering – let us know. Just as there's always room for one more book on the shelf, there's always room for one more Friend.



FRIENDS OF THE
BLUE HILL
PUBLIC LIBRARY

Let's Think About the OUTDOORS LIBRARY

–Rich Boulet, Library Director



Many patrons enjoy working and relaxing outside on the library grounds, using the WiFi signal which is broadcast outside around the main building. A couple of the tables have access to an electrical outlet as well.

Back in 2022, BHPL purchased the property next door at 13 Parker Point Rd. with the intention of eventually using it to improve our exterior facilities and, in the distant future, have space to expand the library, if there is a need.

The goal of the campus plan improvements is to enhance the library user experience by developing welcoming and flexible outdoor spaces that will complement the uses of the indoor library spaces.

It is still early days, but we are taking baby steps in the direction of campus planning. The library board has hired architect Bruce Stahnke for consultation and design and together we have begun working on the design program.

The process has been pretty straightforward. Bruce began by convening the staff, board of directors, and Friends of the Library, each in different sessions, to hear what it is that we think this additional half an acre can do to further BHPL's mission. Our next step will be to listen to engaged constituents such as donors, active users, community leaders, abutters, and eventually, anyone who is interested in offering their thoughts.

We carry a few assumptions going into this process:

- The house that is on the property does not fit into our plans. We looked into what would be involved with renovating the

space to be suitable for things like after-school programs, early childhood activities, etc., but found in our building code review that doing so would be far more expensive than is worth it.

- Thus, our intention is to, we hope, give away the house to someone who wishes to move it off-site. Barring that, the library will demolish it.
- We also intend the new campus to be one, integrated whole, not two adjacent lots as they are now. That may mean reconfiguring our parking lot.
- Although whatever we design will allow for future expansion, at this time we are not planning any other major interior renovations.

One of the lessons of the pandemic is that people love working and relaxing outside at the library. When the weather is fair, the outdoor furniture is often in use by appreciative patrons. We've been discussing ways to take that further, better meet our service goals, while being mindful of our impact on the neighborhood, and we are excited about the possibilities that this additional land provides to help us better serve you.

Have any thoughts? Feel free to email them to Rich Boulet, rboulet@bhpl.net.

The library holds many events outdoors on the library grounds, from Storytime when the weather is nice, to classes and workshops, like this maple tree tapping workshop.



BOARD TRANSITIONS

-Callie Curtis, BHPL Board Member

One of the challenges of serving on the Blue Hill Public Library board is saying farewell to our board colleagues when their terms are up. This is balanced by two things. In a small town like Blue Hill, our paths will cross again, maybe often. And the board will be joined by three new members this year, who will bring energy and new ideas and perspectives to the group.

Leaving the Board are Bruce Stanke, Eleni Koenka, and Katherine Messenger. Over his three Board terms, Bruce has helped to keep our nearly 100 year old building well cared for. He will continue to serve the library by helping to design the Library's expansion. Eleni has served on nearly every committee in her 9 year tenure, completing her service as Board Vice President. And Katherine's term was highlighted by her understanding of how BHPL can better serve young families, and for originating the brilliant idea of the Groundhog Day Ball!

New board members include Mike Hewes, Karen Milliken, and Anne Piazza. Mike has lived in Blue Hill since 1975, when he started Hewes and Company. This well-regarded firm is now employee owned and boasts over 50 employees. The company recently completed the renovation of the library's main room which became the Adelaide Pearson Room providing a much needed meeting space for large gatherings.

Karen Milliken is an active resident of East Blue Hill and has been a board member of the Bay School and the Mabel Watson Center in Bangor. She has a background in microbiology and



Part of the job of the BHPL board is to hold fundraisers for the library, and for board members to volunteer at the events. Here, Board Secretary Gale Flax shows off the hat she won at last fall's Damn Girls, Hancock County's Premiere Country and Western Girl Band Concert, right after the cowboy hat auction, while Board President John Diamond (L), and Board Member Callie Curtis look on.

health education, as well as experience as a personal trainer and a much-loved East Blue Hill caterer!

Anne Piazza has been a long-time neighbor and friend of BHPL, and an active member of the community. She has coached cross country teams at the Bay School and Consolidated School, and has served on many boards in Blue Hill. She is a dedicated volunteer for many activities that make our community such a caring, great place to live.

We are all very grateful for these wonderful folks who take on the challenge of stewarding the library into the future. Their volunteering for the library helps further its mission of opening doors to information, culture, community, and the world.

BHPL by the Numbers in 2024...

96,665 people visited the library (an average of

about **322** people per open day!)

79,287 items were circulated

2,905 items were borrowed through Inter-Library Loan

4,639 items were loaned through Inter-Library Loan

Library Opens 25-YEAR-OLD TIME CAPSULE

—Tricia Thomas, Friends of the Library Board Member

It was a project that was 25 years—and a community-wide collaboration—in the making.

On April 22, board members, staff and the community gathered around a conference table in the library's Roland Howard museum and meeting room to open and examine an array of curiosities that were “buried” in a time capsule and stored in the facility's basement 25 years ago.

The plastic time capsule was hidden in the library's basement in April 2000 to mark the groundbreaking of a new, \$2 million addition that added three new wings, including the popular Larchwood Children's Room, when it was completed in 2001.

Susan Farrar, who chaired the library's board of directors and served on its building committee in 2000, was honored to open the capsule and help unpack it at the event. Farrar credits former library director Marcia Schatz, who headed the library from 1994 through 2001, with the novel idea for the time capsule.

“We asked people to put in things that they felt were representative of the time,” said Farrar, who now volunteers as treasurer of the Friends of the Library.

Items pulled out of the capsule and displayed on the table included a set of Pokémon cards, a photo of Apple iMac G3 desktop computers and floppy disks—all highly coveted at turn of the century—as well as copies of local news articles, the 1999 *Bay Community Register*, and a handful of coins, among other mementos.

The cylindrical capsule also contained both lighthearted and somber predictions of the future, hand-written



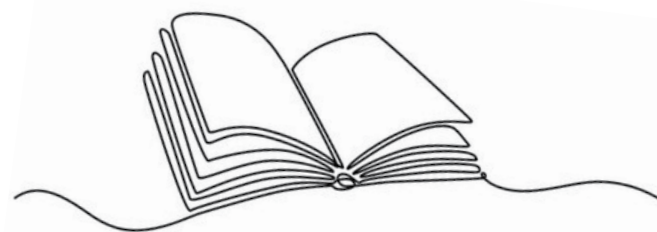
Susan Farrar, who chaired BHPL's Board of Directors and served on its building committee when the capsule was assembled, opened the time capsule, and looked through the contents with help from BHPL Board Member Jill Knowles.

on pre-printed cards by local children and adults.

“I hope...that environmental concerns will be more important than profit!” one card read. “And I hope people will be able to ‘beam’ places—instant transportation—so we don't have to waste fuel.”

The predictions, as well as the other items retrieved from the time capsule, will be put on display at the library later this year, said, library board member Jill Knowles.

“We're thinking about putting the items into a binder that people can page through while they're here,” Knowles said. “It also might be fun to ask people to make their own predictions for the future...for what the next 25 years hold.”



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