

KELLEYS ISLAND

Volunteers keep library going

By TOM JACKSON, Sandusky Register August 5, 2019

SANDUSKY

The Kelleys Island branch of the Sandusky Library isn't your usual public library. It's on an island, something not too many libraries in Ohio can claim, except for a public library on South Bass Island. It's also run entirely by volunteers, apparently making it unique in the state of Ohio. During the winter, "they are our lifeline to the outside world," said Leslie Korenko, a Kelleys Island year-round resident and the island's top historian. As befits a library serving a small population, the Kelleys Island branch library isn't a big-budget operation. Hours are limited. It's open 5-7 p.m. Monday, 10 a.m. to noon Wednesday and Saturday and 1-3 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday. The hours are at different times so everyone has a chance to come in, Korenko said.

And it's an all-volunteer operation, with about 20 volunteers helping over the course of the year, said Molly Carver, executive director of Sandusky Library. That may be unique in Ohio. Ida Rupp Public Library in Port Clinton has an Erie Islands Library branch at Put-in-Bay on South Bass Island, but it's run by a paid staff of about four people, said Ida Rupp director Lindsey Faust. Kelleys Island has the only library in the state run by volunteers, as far as the Ohio Library Council knows, said Angie Jacobsen, a spokeswoman for the group. But the island is a unique situation, as it serves only about 100 people in the winter, she noted. "Public library systems across the state have come up with different ways to meet the needs of the residents in their service areas. For example, the Licking County Library System's service area extends all the way to the Franklin County/Licking County line, but they don't have the resources for a full-service branch in that part of the county," Jacobsen wrote in an email. "So, they have a 24-hour, self serve kiosk where individuals can pick up, check out and return items. Our libraries are very creative when it comes to meeting the needs of the residents in their service areas."

Of course, the volunteers on Kelleys Island don't really go it alone. "The Kelleys Island Branch is dependent on paid staff at the main library who handle all of the collection development, technology and networking assistance, staff training, and other professional needs. Only the on-site exchange of books is handled by volunteer," Carver said.

Having a library on the island is an old tradition. Korenko's books on the island's history trace the library back to a Library Association organized in 1864, admitting young men 16 and over and young women 14 and over. Revenue included admission fees (\$1 for the men, 50 cents for the ladies). By the end of 1864, the library had 32 books and \$11 in its treasury.

Since then, the library has grown and been housed in various locations. The current building was dedicated in 2000. Although it's a relatively small operation, the island branch offers big library services. The branch itself has a nice offering of books, music and movies, Korenko said. "We are a real library — and have everything a small branch library could want," she said.

And like all Sandusky Library patrons, Kelleys Island library cardholders are connected to northern Ohio's CLEVNET library system. That's 45 library systems spread across 12 different counties, holding 12 million items. Those items can be requested and shipped to Kelleys Island by boat or plane and picked up at the local branch. Kelleys Island patrons also have Sandusky Library's digital offerings such as Hoopla music, movies and TV and Overdrive audiobooks.

But the library's importance goes beyond its library materials, Korenko said. The library, housed in an addition at the local school, provides a reliable internet connection on an island where internet and cell phone service is often spotty, Korenko said. Tables and chairs are set up beside the lobby for people who need a connection, or people simply connect in their cars, she said. "Plus, it's also a social area," Korenko said.

Island population: 312 in 2010 (859 houses on island, winter population about 100)

Island cardholders: 225 (versus about 23,200 in Sandusky Library system)

Items circulated in 2018: 3,069

Items added to collection last year: 807 (682 items withdrawn)

