

Libraries launch online book clubs



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Reading has become increasingly popular as more and more people are finding the time now to deep dive into their wish list of books. This has inspired several new programs and groups at local libraries. With COVID-19 causing a mandatory closure of all public libraries the local libraries are getting inventive as they continue to serve their communities. This includes both enriching what they have available on their online platforms as well as renovating and preparing the library buildings for when they can open their doors again. As CEO of North Hastings Public Library Kim McMunn puts it, "The building may be closed but we are still open for business." Both the North Hastings Public Library and Hastings Highlands Public Library are improving their online collections with more eBooks and downloadable audiobooks and other resources that are free for registered library card holders. If a community member doesn't have a card or their card is out of date, new cards are available by contacting their local library via phone, email or Facebook. Both libraries have also started online book clubs. HHPL is running theirs through their Facebook page HHPL Online Book Club, while NHPL is running two book clubs. One is for general discussion on all manner of books while the other is for cook book lovers. Both clubs are hosted by the library on www.goodreads.com. Part of what local book lovers miss is the social activities and being able to search the book shelves for the next big find. Currently HHPL CEO Rod Moffitt says that one of the most popular books right now to readers is *The Last Wish* by Andrzej Sapkowski. "It's the series of short stories that are featured in the first season of the Netflix fantasy series *The Witcher*." The library does have this series available to readers. Moffitt also suggests new readers look into *The Malta Exchange* by Steve Berry. It is a historical fiction work delving into the relationships between Napoleon, Mussolini and the island of Malta. To help keep local readers stay connected Moffitt says they are working on several new online programs. These include Mystery Monday which is a reader's advisory initiative that will promote a different mystery book each Monday. Throwback Thursday is an idea for promoting the HHPL digital archive. A historical photo will be posted each Thursday for members of the community to comment on and give historical background information. While the Seniors Memory Project will be where local seniors will have the opportunity to submit historical photographs and provide historical information about the community. Both libraries are working on developing educational resources for those now having to do schooling and learning from home. Internet access does pose a problem for many book lovers and at-home learners but McMunn says they are working on ways to help those without internet access. "As it stands now, the government has closed our doors. We cannot defy the order to lend physical books, so we are reliant on our virtual library. We are hoping that in a few weeks, we could look at curbside pick-up or something similar." Until this can be organized, all educational aids and assistance the library has will be posted to their Facebook page. Both libraries are preparing for when they can once again open their doors. "I would like to reassure our patrons that this is temporary and we will have some wonderful new things to borrow, when we reopen. We are launching a new collection later this year. It is a collection of "things" games, puzzles, etc. that supports tactile learning and will help with reducing social isolation.

After so much time alone, I imagine the Experiential Collection will be a big hit," explains McMunn. In HHPL the librarians are still working behind the pages to keep their readers updated and they are making plans for future programming and reading challenges. While the doors are closed they are cleaning and reorganizing the library as well as ordering new books to ensure readers have the best reading selection to pick from when they can browse the shelves again. During this time, since the library is not open, the libraries have waived all late fees. Some online programs will not work if a person has late fees over \$10. If this happens book lovers are asked to contact their library to see if fees can be postponed. Moffitt explains, "We have remotely renewed all books that were due after March 13 and are renewing all other books remotely by request as necessary." To talk with one of the librarians at NHPL or HHPL search for their Facebook pages or reach HHPL at 613- 338-2262 or www.hastingshighlandslibrary.ca and reach North Hastings Public Library 613-332-3380 or www.northhastingslibrary.ca.