

Better NB

Case Studies of City Initiatives
Making New Braunfels a
Better Community

The New Braunfels Public Library: A Story That's Still Being Written

Gretchen Pruett



The City of New Braunfels is proud to reflect on the evolution and growth of the New Braunfels Public Library under the tenure of retiring Library Director Gretchen Pruett. It's been nearly 16 years since then Assistant City Manager Robert Camareno offered her that role, which she gratefully accepted, starting a new chapter for the small but growing library system.

"Becoming the Library Director for the City of New Braunfels has been one of the most significant professional and personal experiences," said Gretchen Pruett, who enters retirement on September 1st, 2024. "Serving as the Library Director has been the highlight of my career, and I have deep gratitude for the friendship and devotion to literacy and libraries shared by the New Braunfels community."

The New Braunfels Public Library system has grown significantly during Pruett's nearly 16-year tenure with a 32% increase in total materials in circulation each year, a 62% increase in requests for library-related information, and attendance at library programs increasing an impressive 114%.

	2009	2023
Number of people attending programs each year	12,874	47,062
Requests for Information	41,455	78,730
Total Material Circulation	584,098	809,678
Total Visitors	246,216	215,122

Part of the Library's growth can be attributed to a consistent focus on expanding programs and services to meet the needs of an ever-growing and changing population. Often, books are the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about libraries, but, in New Braunfels, it's so much more than that. Residents can also find a plethora of other services including digital resources like apps, databases, access to eBooks, audiobooks, music, movies, and magazines. The Library also offers employment resources, veterans support, ancestry databases, tutoring, language lessons, business databases, computer classes, K-12 resources, and so much more, with most of those services being provided free to resident library card holders.

That continued push to be more and do more for New Braunfels residents has made the Public Library a leader in the state, particularly in programming, thanks to the addition of the Westside Community Center, a two-story multi-use facility that includes a commercial kitchen, gymnasium, and multiple meeting rooms. The Westside Community Center transformed the library's offerings, allowing for a variety of programs beyond traditional library services, including fitness classes, nutrition sessions, and an outdoor garden program. More recently, the addition of the Westside Branch Library has expanded the public library system's reach and allowed for even more diverse programs.



Pruett is quick to give praise to various community partnerships as the cornerstone of the success of the New Braunfels Public Library. Those partnerships include numerous local non-profit agencies like the New Braunfels Food Bank, Communities in Schools, the Comal Master Gardeners, the McKenna Foundation, and the New Braunfels Art League, just to name a few. But there is one local non-profit organization that Pruett credits with providing critical support for the library.

"The support and generosity from the community, in particular from the Friends of the New Braunfels Public Library organization, is extraordinary and unparalleled. No library system functions effectively in isolation, and the support from the Friends of the Library has been overwhelming," Pruett said. "Whenever there has been a challenge, the Friends of the Library have partnered with us to overcome funding obstacles or other barriers."



Friends of the Library annual book sale at the New Braunfels Civic/Convention Center. Proceeds from this event support New Braunfels Public Library materials, events, and programs.

Funding from the Friends of the Library has allowed library staff to pilot many programs and online resources, without having to reduce purchases for traditional library materials. From art supplies and musical instruments to authors and magicians, the programs and materials supplied by the Friends of the Library have become staples that library patrons and staff have come to rely on.

More than Just Books

Digital Resources

- eBooks
- Audiobooks
- Movies
- Magazines
- K-12 resources
- Ancestry database
- Employment resources
- Computer Classes
- Wireless printing
- Language lessons

Programming

- Toddler Time
- Adult Book Groups
- Tween Activities
- Group fitness classes
- Arts and Crafts
- DIY Lessons
- Parenting programs
- Gardening
- Sit & Stitch
- Tech Tutorials

Events

- Juneteenth Celebration
- Cinco de Mayo Party
- Summer Reading Program
- Veterans Services Fair
- Health Resource Fair
- Baby Day
- Kids Dance Parties
- Fiesta Patria
- Fall Fest

The New Braunfels Public Library Foundation has also played a key role in supporting Library programs and initiatives, donating approximately \$1 million dollars since its inception. Those funds went to, among a variety of projects, a portion of the cost to build the Main Library, the purchase of the RIOmobile, and the construction of the community garden at the new Westside Branch Library.

Now, a new chapter at the library begins, as Pruett hands the reigns over to a new director, Cole Johnson, who will oversee continued expansion and growth of the library system, including the construction of a new library branch on the East side of I-35 that was approved by voters in the 2023 bond election.

"Saying goodbye to all the friends I've made over the years is difficult," said Pruett, "but I am so excited for the future of the New Braunfels Public Library and I can't wait to see what's to come!"



809,678

Total Materials Circulation



108,040

Patrons accessing the internet



9,176

RIOmobile Visitors



305,931

E-Resources Usage



4,272

Library Programs



73,566

Program Attendance