

Robertson Memorial Library makes digital shift with CWMARS membership



Robertson Memorial Library in Leyden. STAFF PHOTO/PAUL FRANZ



Robertson Memorial Library Director Karin Parks talks with Leyden resident Abbi Pratt in the Leyden library on Monday. STAFF PHOTO/PAUL FRANZ

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LEYDEN — By joining CWMARS and expanding digital access for patrons, Library Director Karin Parks says the Robertson Memorial Library is “very excited to move on to the next century.”

In fact, according to Parks, the Robertson Memorial Library is the last in Franklin County to make the shift.

Thanks to a grant for small-town libraries that is available through CWMARS, which stands for Central and Western Massachusetts Automated Resource Sharing, Leyden was able to avoid the hurdle presented by the high annual membership fee of roughly \$6,000. Instead, the library will pay an annual fee of \$640, which Parks said is much more manageable for a small community like Leyden.

CWMARS automatically renews the grant for the library each year, so the price is set, Parks explained.

CWMARS enables patrons of participating libraries to order books and other resources such as DVDs directly from the app or website to be delivered to their local library. Although Robertson Memorial Library previously participated in interlibrary loans, patrons had to come into the library during its 12 open hours each week and Parks had to order the books herself, limiting access to materials.

"Patrons had to go through me, and I had to request everything for them," Parks explained. "But now, patrons will have the opportunity to do that on their own, and it just shows up here and notifies them when it arrives."

CWMARS membership also gives Robertson Memorial Library patrons access to online resources, such as ebooks, audiobooks and movies, which Parks said is especially helpful due to the library's limited hours. Robertson Memorial Library is open at 849 Greenfield Road from 1 to 6 p.m. on Mondays and Wednesdays and from 10 a.m. to noon on Saturdays.

"Our little library here is only 432 square feet," Parks said. "It was built

in 1913 and we are still in the absolute original building, and we are open a whopping 12 hours a week. So when we join CWMARS, that also means that you don't have to physically come to the library during open hours — you have access to everything 24 hours a day, which really opens us up and makes us so much more useful for the community."

Parks says that she has been working on getting the library to join CWMARS since she started in her position at the library in 2019. She is now hoping the transition will be complete by late fall.

"We'll still have our lending materials here. Not everything will be digital," Parks clarified. "Nothing here will change, except that we get to enter the real world and we'll be scanning barcodes instead of our little due-date slips."

This transition is bittersweet for Parks, who grew up going to the Robertson Memorial Library.

"I am sad to see them go," Parks said of the due-date slips. "I love finding the little treasures inside. ... I find books that I checked out back in the early '90s, that my 9-year-old is now checking out."

Still, Parks thinks the shift away from physical due-date slips will be positive overall.

"We are moving toward readers' rights," she explained, "and a little bit of anonymity as far as who checks out what, so this will be a big step toward that."

Plus, the library will be saving several due-date slips and framing

them, she added.

"The library is truly the heart of our town," Parks said. "Especially since our elementary school moved to Bernardston a few years ago. The library is really, truly the only gathering place where people can come, even in our teeny-tiny building, and just know that it's a safe space where everyone is welcome."