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Excess books from Library of Congress journey to Boston branches

Posted by Matt Rocheleau September 6, 2011 02:42 PM

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By **Matt Rocheleau**, Town Correspondent

A friends group of the Dudley Branch library and staff at the Lower Mills branch have recently received separate donations of excess books from the Library of Congress through a program officials say helps engage area residents and youths with their local libraries.

On a daily workday basis, the world's largest library receives around 22,000 items and adds around 10,000 of those to its collection of more than 147 million items spread across three buildings on Capitol Hill.

The constant stream of new reading material creates a steady turnover and overflow of books, which the national library donates through its "Surplus Books Program" to schools, colleges, universities, museums, and public libraries, along with public bodies and nonprofit tax-exempt organizations.

However, Boston City Councilor Ayanna Pressley said in a recent phone interview that within the city's library system, the federal program was not used at all, as of two years ago, and even on a more general local level, it "wasn't really being access and utilized ... because of a lack of outreach and accessibility."

Prior to being elected to City Council two years ago, Pressley had become familiar with the program during her 11 years working for Senator John Kerry. The excess books initiative allows Congressional offices to aid one local library per month.

The councilor helped connect leaders of the Friends of the Dudley Branch Library in Roxbury two summers ago, and the Lower Mills Branch Library in Dorchester this past summer, with Sen. Kerry's office, which provided the final link to the Library of Congress program.

Last summer, a shipment of nearly 100 books was donated to the Dudley Branch friends group, according to Mimi Jones, chair of the organization that formed three decades ago and established itself as a nonprofit about five years ago.

Another 150 to 200 books, a wide-ranging mix of children, adult and reference materials, arrived at the start of this past summer, she said.

"We're very excited about this program," said Jones. "Anything we can do to promote reading and literacy I think is a no-brainer. It's a gift that will keep on giving and giving."

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Later this fall the group will begin handing out the books for free at various events the organization and library hold. Beforehand, volunteers will sort through and organize the books by reading level.

Each book will be marked with a stamped bookplate acknowledging the two politicians' involvement and the surplus program which made the donation possible. A bookmark will be inserted between each book's pages that lists the Boston Public Library's 26 neighborhood branch and main Copley Square branch locations.

The two measures, along with the donated books themselves, are designed "to connect residents back to the library and have them continue to read books from the library," Jones said, adding that she feels the program had successful results after books were handed out during events last year.

The Lower Mills branch received around 100 books in its first year involved with the program this summer. Some of those books, mostly adult reading-level, will be added to that library's collection; others will be put up for sale, library officials said.

Councilor Pressley said the program is an "untapped and underutilized" way to promote literacy and public library use. She said she hopes to work with other Boston library branches to join the surplus books initiatives.

"I worked hard along with my colleagues to keep our branch libraries open," said Pressley, referring to [cost-cutting proposals](#) in recent years to close some of the city's branches, which has been [averted thus far](#). "They play such a crucial role in our community. They're an epicenter, a place where community can come together."

Sen. Kerry echoed that sentiment in a statement from his office: "The Dudley Branch is so much more than a Library. It's a learning center, it's a rock of community, it's the arts. It's a central gathering place at the heart of a historic neighborhood. It's a second home for a lot of people."

During his tenure, the senator's office has connected more than 30 schools and libraries across the state to the federal excess books program, including a pair of Springfield schools after parts of that area were [devastated by tornadoes](#) earlier this summer. His office has another 20 program-eligible entities on a list that Kerry hopes to send donated books to in the future.

"I've really loved this book donation partnership we've got going with the Library of Congress," said Sen. Kerry in a statement. "It's one of the cool programs a lot of people don't know about and it's one of the small levers we can pull that directly help people. It was such a fit to send books from our nation's great library to one of our state's great libraries. And I'm especially proud I could partner with Ayanna who has been so intertwined with everything I've been doing for years and years."

For more information on the Dudley Branch friends group's involvement in the surplus books program, e-mail friendsofdudley@gmail.com or call 617-442-6186.

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