Celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month

DENVER PUBLIC LIBRARY

Engage!

SEPTEMBER 2020

DENVERLIBRARY.ORG
2020 Eric J. Duran Award Recipient

Jesse Ogas

Jesse Ogas was born and raised in Santa Clara, New Mexico. Mr. Ogas has championed the struggles for children who have experienced sexual and mental abuse. He tells of his own story with sexual abuse and how he was able to heal and become a productive citizen and family man. He spoke to the legislature about his personal and painful experience during a session regarding Sexual Assault on Children. He has also taken on a quest to help those on the autism spectrum to attain their full potential.

As the director of Firefly Autism, he goes beyond the expectation of the Board to reach out to monolingual Spanish speaking children and their families. This population has been sorely underrepresented in therapeutic care. In his volunteer endeavors with Clinica Tepeyac and the President’s Community Cabinet at Metropolitan State University of Denver (MSU), he purposely ties in the resources of these organizations to the needs of children on the spectrum, creating a wider sphere of care. For example, he is working with MSU faculty to create a program for MSU students who wish to major in the behavioral sciences specifically for children with autism.

Jesse has embraced diversity and equity in his work, volunteer and personal life. As a member of Su Teatro, Jesse has a platform to tell our story, our traditions. He is very intentional in representing himself as a gay Latino with pride and conviction. In addition to his role at Firefly Autism, Jesse also currently serves as a board member of NewEd, Clinica Tepeyac, Escuela Tlatelolco, and the Mental Health Center of Denver.

2020 Lena L. Archuleta Community Service Award Recipient

Angela Cobián

Angela Cobián is a first generation Mexican American and a first generation college graduate. Ms. Cobián graduated from Colorado College in 2011. During this time she earned the Fred Sonderman Award in Political Science and membership in the Pi Gamma Mu Honors Society.

Following college, Ms. Cobián returned to Denver to teach Literacy for English Language Acquisition-Spanish students in the second and third grade, she also earned a Masters in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Colorado-Denver. In 2013, she was awarded a Fulbright scholarship to consult with Ensena por Mexico on program development for student-led social change initiatives and to teach English at the National Pedagogical University in Mexico City.

Upon her return from Mexico, Cobián was a Bilingual Community Organizer with Together Colorado, an affiliate of the PICO National Network. She co-led school and congregation-based organizations alongside parents and parishioners addressing immigration and education issues. She continues her work in collective action today as the Director of National Organizing and Development with Leadership for Educational Equity (LEE). The Denver Foundation awarded her the Swanee Hunt Emerging Leader Award in 2017 in recognition of her community work.

Ms. Cobián currently represents District 2 on the Denver Public Schools (DPS) Board of Education. She also serves as Treasurer and Chairperson of the Finance and Audit Committee, and co-led the 2020-21 budget process and COVID-19 response with the DPS Chief Financial Officer.

Ms. Cobián is not only a voice for her constituents, she has used her organizing skills to activate her constituents to be involved in education and elevated their voices in the Denver Public Schools decision-making process.
Emanuel Martinez

Emanuel Martinez was born in Denver, Colorado in 1947. Mr. Martinez began his career as an artist at the age of 13, when he painted his first mural. He was just 16 when he became an activist by joining Los Voluntarios, a political organization headed by Rudolfo “Corky” Gonzales.

In 1966, Martinez was one of the incorporators of the Crusade for Justice civil rights organization and met César Chávez at the union hall in Denver. At this event, Emanuel had his first art exhibit and presented Chávez with a painting. Chávez invited him to go to Delano, CA to work as an artist for the United Farmworkers Organization. Emanuel was paid five dollars a week. At the age of 20, he created the “Farmworkers Altar” in Los Angeles for the 1968 event where Chávez broke his 25 day fast. This altar and another one of Martinez’s pieces are now in the permanent collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of American Art in Washington, D.C. That same year, Emanuel volunteered his time to the Poor People’s Campaign in Washington D.C. as a staff member for the Southern Christian Leadership conference (SCLC), and art director at the Crusade For Justice cultural center.

Since 1965, Emanuel has been committed to the Chicano/Latino struggle for justice in the United States. He has donated his time and his artwork to numerous Latino organizations for decades. At 72, he continues to work with incarcerated youth through the Emanuel Project, a nonprofit organization started in 2011, where his achievements include 50 murals in facilities in 14 different states.

As a muralist, painter and sculptor, Martinez occupies an outstanding status among nationally known artists. Since establishing a studio in 1968, Martinez has received international acclaim and prestigious awards for his design capabilities and high standards of workmanship.

Some of his awards include the 1985 Governor’s Award for Excellence in the Arts, 1995 Mayor’s Award for Excellence in the Arts, 2001 Civil Rights Award presented by NEWSED, and he was inducted into the Colorado Latino Hall of Fame in 2018. Throughout his lengthy career he has volunteered his service for numerous Chicano organizations, committees and boards.

Guadalupe “Lupe” Briseño

Guadalupe “Lupe” Briseño was born in Texas and began her working life as a migrant laborer. Mrs. Briseño eventually settled in Colorado.

In 1968, she began working at the Kitayama Carnation Farm where she experienced deplorable working conditions. She organized the primarily Latina workforce at the floral farm in Brighton, Colorado to form the National Florist Workers Organization to demand better working conditions, medical coverage, and higher wages.

As the organizer of the Kitayama Carnation Strike, Lupe Briseño demonstrated the effectiveness of Latina leadership in Colorado’s Labor Movement and set the stage for the Colorado Chicano civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Her story is an important chapter in the history of Colorado, the evolution of Latina feminist leadership and the struggle for Chicano civil rights.

Lupe’s work as a labor and union organizer has been recognized by the Colorado Women’s Hall of Fame, where she was inducted in 2019. Her role in history has inspired a play by Su Teatro and she is a central figure in the Year of La Chicana exhibit at History Colorado as well as in the history of women in the labor movement at the Byers Evans House. Her role in Latino history in Colorado is also documented in articles by academic researcher Dr. Priscilla Falcón.

Additionally, we would like to recognize and honor the women who supported Mrs. Briseño’s efforts—

The Strong Women of Brighton

Martha del Real
Mary Padilla
Mary Sailas
Rachel Sandoval
TAKING PLAZA DIGITAL:
Serving our Immigrant and Refugee Customers Virtually
By Virginia Vassar Aggrey, Plaza Program Manager

In early March, a Tuesday evening at the Gonzales Branch Library would be bustling with activity, the smell of coffee brewing, and the murmurs of many voices. Some people practice English together, while others work on homework assignments nearby, or drill civics flashcards to prepare for their U.S. citizenship exam. This was Plaza - weekly programming designed to build community and to make immigrant and refugee newcomers feel welcome at Denver Public Library.

Before COVID-19, eleven Plaza locations provided 48 hours of programming per week: English conversation tables, naturalization support, immigration legal help, job search and computer help, as well as activities for kids that allowed families to work and play in the same space. Overnight, all of it shut down. Knowing the importance of this programming, and the community it instilled, Plaza’s 40 staff members pivoted quickly and learned to facilitate online. Within a month or two, staff were leading six online conversation tables per week, as well as a citizenship study group and appointment services.

COVID-19 has created many new barriers, but as some obstacles sprang up, others were suddenly gone. Some participants in online groups could never have made it to a library because of prohibitively long bus journeys or unforgiving work schedules. Many older adults faced health concerns or mobility issues that prevented their attendance. Suddenly, these customers are able to participate from the comfort and safety of their home. Online groups are also attractive for those who are shy or introverted. There have been a surprising number of new faces participating during the last four months. Staff have also found creative ways to facilitate engaging conversations online. Adult education lead Kalid Al-Rajhi, for example, has taken his group on virtual museum tours. Together, they have explored the Louvre and the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History in New York City, zooming in to read plaques and discuss what they observed.

And, unlike dealing with transportation issues, the frustration of tackling new online tools can pay off in the development of tech skills. Staff have helped customers use their devices for new purposes, and now, when a new participant joins a group, other students often step in, or friends and family help each other get connected. Each time, it gets a little easier. Training around resources also allows staff to help participants connect with other organizations in the Denver area. As quarantine began, DPL worked with organizations around
Denver to create and maintain a list of service interruptions caused by COVID-19 that is now used by over 1,200 immigrant and refugee service providers in the metro area.

Despite the connections these groups have created, staff are still aware that for every one person connected, many more are left isolated and alone, without computers, internet, or the tech skills to join an online class. To fill the gaps, staff improvised a new appointment system to connect with people on a weekly basis, most often by phone to help with English, citizenship, computer problems, unemployment insurance, homework, job searching, and so much more. “It’s a big challenge to start from square one by phone with a new English-speaker,” says Amy Van Vranken, who hosts weekly calls with a newly-settled refugee.

Every Plaza staff member speaks at least two languages, so Amy is able to use French to aid communication. “Being able to have class by phone has filled a tech gap for a customer who doesn’t have a computer. I’m grateful for his patience and determination!” The leader of citizenship programs, Amanda Savasky, described what she has learned about online teaching: “There are fewer social cues - facial and body cues to guide the flow of conversation.” Staff have learned how much work it can take to create a natural feeling of spontaneity online, but they remain committed to providing this access for immigrant and refugee customers.

The last four months have certainly been challenging, but they have also taught staff to slow down, take one task at a time, and be patient with one another. In doing so, staff have helped new relationships develop and have forged deeper connections with and between customers. After all, through shared challenges, empathy grows. Even with freezing screens, audio glitches and faulty microphones, a moment of connection is a truly worthwhile endeavor.
On Friday, May 30, 2020, a large and historically significant painting by noted Chicana muralist, Carlota EspinoZa, was installed in the Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales Branch Library at 1498 Irving St.

The mural, *Mexican Heroes* (also known as *A Tribute to Mexican Heroes*) is a large, roughly 4.5 x 9-foot oil on canvas painting. It was one of two murals created in 1966 by EspinoZa for the Crusade for Justice Center. Founded in 1966 by Chicano activist Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales, the Center served as headquarters for the Crusade for Justice, a national activist organization in the Chicano Movement. The Center was once located in the old Calvary Baptist Church, 1567 North Downing St. in the North Capitol Hill neighborhood.

Imagery in the artwork depicts three individuals important to Mexico’s history: the 26th President of Mexico, Benito Juarez (1806-1872); Mexican Revolutionary, Emiliano Zapata Salazar (1879-1919); and Francisco “Pancho” Villa (1878-1923), Mexican Revolutionary General. Surrounding these portraits are small vignettes depicting the struggles faced by the Mexican people.

Damaged in a fire caused by an explosion at the Center on March 17, 1973, *Mexican Heroes* still exhibits losses of canvas and surface imagery. Yet, from a purely visual point of view, the mural is essentially complete. The losses and darkening of the mural’s surface areas only serve to emphasize the emotional content of the painting. Although EspinoZa’s second mural did not survive the 1973 fire, *Mexican Heroes* did, and as such may be the only physical reminder available documenting the existence of the Crusade for Justice Center. Today, the mural functions as both representative art and historic object.

*Mexican Heroes* survived the fire and was salvaged from the Crusade for Justice Center by local artist Carlos Santistevan. In 1968, Santistevan, a leader in the local Chicano Arts Movement, founded Denver’s first Chicano art gallery, El Grito de Aztlan at the Crusade for Justice Center. The location at the Center allowed for the sharing of ideas and symbolism, which created a bridge between activism and art. Carlos and his wife Anita Santistevan eventually donated the mural to the Western History and Genealogy department in 2012. The painting is now part of the DPL Western Art Collection.

The artist, Carlota EspinoZa was born in Fraser, Colorado. She is the middle child of 14 siblings. Espinoza began painting at a young age, and later in the 1960s, attended the Rocky Mountain School of the Arts and the University of Colorado at Denver. During the 1960s she participated in the Centro Cultural Center, organized exhibitions for artists, and was involved in the 1969 “Hispano Art Fiesta / Cinco de Mayo” events in Denver.

The Western History and Genealogy department at the Central Library also holds the Carlota EspinoZa papers (WH2225). Another mural by EspinoZa, *Pasado, Presente, Future (Past, Present, Future)* was created in 1975 for DPL’s Byers Branch Library. Other works by Espinoza can be found in Cuba, San Francisco, Texas, and Arizona.

Although it is currently not possible to visit the Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales Branch Library to view *Mexican Heroes*, the mural is still visually accessible from outside the library building. Installed high on the south wall of an open, interior stairway, the mural can be seen through the library’s large window located on the West Colfax side of the building.
READY TO VOTE?

1. REGISTER OR UPDATE YOUR ADDRESS NOW AT GOVOTECOLORADO.GOV
   or fill out a registration form and return it to the Denver Elections Division

2. TRACK YOUR BALLOT.
   Your ballot will automatically be mailed to you beginning October 9. Casting your mail ballot is safe and secure. Track your ballot and make sure your vote is counted!
   Sign up at BallotTRACE.org.

3. RETURN YOUR BALLOT at a 24-hour drop box, drive-through, or by mail
   OR VOTE IN PERSON beginning October 19

   Find locations at DenverVotes.org/VoterInfo
   Need a new ballot? Use our new curbside pick-up service or contact us

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD.
Drop boxes open October 9. Don’t wait to cast your vote!
Ballots must be received by 7 p.m. November 3.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT HOW AND WHERE TO VOTE, OR TO SEE A SAMPLE BALLOT, GO TO DENVERVOTES.ORG/VOTERINFO.
Even though they don’t earn a dime as Read Aloud volunteers, these heroes love reading to children. And, the kids to whom they are reading adore them right back.

Denver Public Library’s Read Aloud program sends trained readers into the community to read stories to children during the school year and the summer. In-person visits have ended due to COVID, but we want to acknowledge four volunteers who collectively have volunteered 70 years.

Colin Erickson and Rachel Weinberg have volunteered for the Denver Public Library’s Read Aloud program for two decades, and Jan Cotter and Terry Thoeming have each volunteered for 15 years.

We recently checked in with them, virtually of course, to ask what they love about reading to the children and why they believe the program is important.

**Colin Erickson**

“The teachers tell me how much the kids talk about me when I’m away and ask, ‘When is Mr. Colin day?’ That makes me feel great.”

Q: Tell us a little about yourself.
CE: I have lived near downtown Denver for the last 25 years. I’ve been with my husband for about 21 years and we have lived in City Park South for the last 10 years.

One of our main priorities in life is traveling the world and experiencing the people, culture, and nature of the place we’re visiting. We visited Rwanda a couple of years ago and submerged ourselves in the culture and the people, mainly learning of people’s experiences during or after the genocide of 1994. After our time in the city, we traveled to the mountains to trek hours through the jungle (machete in hand) to hang out and observe a couple of families of endangered mountain gorillas in the wild. It was a truly beautiful experience. This is how we choose to live our lives. Learning as much as we can and having unique and beautiful experiences.

Q: How did you become a volunteer with Read Aloud?
CE: I coincidentally worked at ING, located in the same building in which I currently work. Someone from the Read Aloud program came to give a presentation in hopes of recruiting volunteers. I was a huge reader when I was a child (to the point where I would actually get in trouble for reading too much) and saw this as a great opportunity to encourage children to read. I realized how my love of reading had such positive effects in my own life and thought it would be wonderful to be able to possibly affect others in the same way.
Q: Why do you believe that Read Aloud is important to our community?
CE: Reading is such an important part of being a member of our society and all societies. Education is extremely important, whether it be formal or self-taught. Encouraging our youth to read, and to love reading, can only move them forward in life. I feel that everyone needs to be encouraged to embrace that thirst for knowledge and other people’s stories at a very young age.

Q: Do you have a favorite thing that one of the kids has said to you over the years?
CE: I’m always thrown off a bit but feel a little special when a child tells me that they missed me and/or they love me.

Q: We are certain the kids miss you during this time of COVID, and also assume that you miss them?
CE: I do miss them! I’ve been doing this for a long time and grow attached to the kids each year. The time I spend with them is definitely one of the highlights of my week! I always leave with a big smile on my face.

Q: What do you love about being a Read Aloud volunteer?
CE: Not having children of my own, I love the time I get to spend with these kids. It’s kind of a fix for me. And they really like having me there! The teachers always tell me how much they talk about me when I’m away and asking, “When is Mr. Colin day?” That makes me feel great.

Rachel Weinberg

“I blow the kids kisses when I leave”

Rachel Weinberg comes to the program with stellar credentials, although that’s not a requirement to be a reader. Weinberg retired as a reading teacher after a total of 32 years with DPS and other schools. Her credentials are impeccable: she says she knows all the fingerplays and songs!

Q: What do you love about reading to the kids?
RW: Part of it is for me. I love children’s books. It’s always a treat to see what the next week’s books are. I love to unzip the bag to see what’s coming up.

Q: What is a highlight for you when you read to the children?
RW: I like to get them up and moving. And, I blow them kisses when I leave!

Q: Why is Read Aloud important to the community?
RW: I believe it’s important that kids get a variety of books, including the classic children’s stories.

Terry Thoeming

“It’s just the best to hear the kids chime, ‘Miss Terry is here!’”

Q: Tell us a bit about yourself, and where you volunteer.
TT: I read for two classrooms at Bradley International School. I am a Denver native and my family has been here since 1870.

Q: What do you love about being a Read Aloud volunteer?
TT: To walk in the classroom and have the kids chime, “Oh, Miss Terry is here!” Also, I have developed really close friendships with the teachers.

Q:  Why do you think Read Aloud is important to the community?
TT: I think anytime a volunteer can engage with the children for whatever reason: puppets, field trip volunteers etc., it is good for all.

Q: What are some of the things the kids have said to you?
TT: I will always remember the hugs and the words ‘I love you’ that I received from the children! I go home with a smile that will last until the next time I read to them!

Q: How important do you believe this program is to the community.
TT: I believe the Read Aloud Program is critical to developing a child’s desire to learn and grow. If this desire is ingrained early enough, the child will have a much better chance of becoming an active and strong participant in the community in which they live.
Many library users have contacted Western History and Genealogy regarding more information on the historical details of the park, so we thought this might be a good time to dig in and explore. Obviously, we know little about any long-term settlements prior to American settlers coming from the East, though there were certainly seasonal camps established by Native Americans along the Platte.

The park is situated in the Sunnyside Neighborhood between 38th and 39th Avenues and Osage and Navajo Streets. In 1866, a wealthy East Coast investor and one-time treasurer of the Rock Island Railroad came to Colorado to establish what amounted to a land speculation company. According to an article from the September 27, 1866, edition of the Rocky Mountain News, he, along with Jacob Downing and Levi France, set up the Tows Land Company to “aid, encourage and induce immigration to the territory of Colorado, and for manufacturing and mining.” Among their local holdings was Block 23 of the Downings Addition, which would become the park in question.

In 1874, that block was sold to one August Heaton, who, in turn, sold the land to the City of Denver in 1906. Some apocryphal stories have circulated that it was the local Italian American community that purchased the land for the park. What is true, according to a Rocky Mountain News article from April 6, 1988, is that local Italian Americans did take up a collection of $7,500.00 in 1931 to “establish” the park. Obviously, this collection was no small feat in the midst of the Depression, but we uncovered park designs from the city going back to 1903, prior even to the purchase by the City. Other articles state that the money raised was for improvements, which would seem to be the reasonable conclusion.

This block was also known as Navajo Park, due to its location, for decades prior to the official dedication on Columbus Day 1931. While Italians had populated the neighborhood for several decades, there had been a great deal of prejudice in Colorado against the Italian immigrant population during the early 20th century. Christopher Columbus, an Italian, had become a symbol of Italian ownership in the American Dream and a validation that they belonged in America as much as any other ethnic group. It was Denverite Angelo Noce who successfully fought to establish the first state-recognized Columbus Day in the nation in 1907. Noce was aided by Colorado Senator Casimiro Barela and they would go on to push for a national holiday.

It was in the 1930s, on the heels of the community investment in the park, that the name was officially changed to Columbus Park. For a time, that was that. But as history shows us, demographics change as societies and immigration patterns change. While the Latino community had always had a place in Sunnyside, the post-World War II years saw many Italians moving to the suburbs and more Latino families taking their place in Sunnyside. By 1970, the Latino community would begin pushing back against what they saw as race-based marginalization and neglect from city agencies—similar to what Italians faced earlier in the century.
The first to garner the anger of the community was Joe Ciancio, Jr., Denver’s manager of parks and recreation. Locals complained to Ciancio and local park staff about conditions at the Columbus Park pool, stating that the poorly filtered and seldom cleaned water looked like a cesspool and that glass on the bottom of the pool frequently cut children’s feet. In 1970, anger boiled over and, when two staff members were thrown into the pool, police were called and a violent confrontation with police ensued.

The community had also demanded that a local resident be put in charge of the facility. Soon after, Arturo Rodriguez became an employee of the Parks and Recreation Department and would lead recreation programs at the park. During a ceremony in June of 1972, he and other local residents gathered to unofficially rename the park, “La Raza”. As the *Rocky Mountain News* put it on June 6, 1972, “La Raza translated literally means ‘the race,’ but for thousands of Chicanos in Denver it means a unity of all the world’s races—and taking pride in that humanistic mixing.”

Over the years, the park continued to be a place of celebration, community, and a handful of violent standoffs between police and activists. The pool was removed in 1983, but the park remains central to the community. Attempts to officially rename the park have continued throughout the decades and, in 2020, Councilwoman Amanda Sandoval collected many more signatures than required to present her petition to the Parks and Recreation Advisory board. We might all do well to take to heart an insightful comment made by a woman working at Patsy’s Italian restaurant. She was asked about the name change in the May 1, 1988, edition of the *Rocky Mountain News*. She shrugged her shoulders, said, “Things have changed,” and continued changing tablecloths.

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While we aren’t able to meet for programs and events in-person, we are still connecting virtually. Every day we are hosting free events online for all ages and interests, like storytimes, book clubs, lectures, gaming groups, maker meetups, and much more. Connect with us at [denverlibrary.org/events](http://denverlibrary.org/events)
A celebration of Denver Public Library
Featuring *New York Times* bestselling author Kwame Alexander

By Nicole Capage-Brown, Director of Philanthropy - Corporate Giving, Denver Public Library Friends Foundation

Support Denver Public Library from the comfort of your home this year with the reimagined Booklovers Ball. After 22 years of hosting a black-tie fundraising gala at the Central Library, COVID-related closures have disrupted those plans, leading the Denver Public Library Friends Foundation to host its first ever FREE virtual event, *Booklovers Online: Bookmarked*, scheduled for Saturday, October 24, 2020 at 6:45 p.m. This innovative solution will ensure guest safety and follow social distancing, while expanding access to the event and including some exciting new event features for all to enjoy whether clad in black tie or pajamas.

New for event attendees this year is a special guest performance by *New York Times* award-winning author Kwame Alexander. He is a poet, educator, and the bestselling author of 37 books including the Newbery Medal winning middle grade novel, *The Crossover*. During the Booklovers Online event, Mr. Alexander will discuss engaging children in age-appropriate discussions of race and anti-racism, as well as the role children’s literature plays in racial equity and social justice. He will also read his new Caldecott Medal winning book, *The Undefeated*. “We are honored and excited to bring Kwame Alexander and his work to a Denver audience for this important and timely conversation,” says Friends Foundation Executive Director, Jeff Riley. “We also want to thank our Booklovers Online co-chair, Judy Allender. “We hope library supporters of all interests and ages join us on October 24.” We look forward to celebrating with you online!

Registration is free, but space is limited. Register today at *bookloversonline.eventbrite.com*

Sponsorships (including catered meal and cocktail delivery options) are also available. For more information, email Nicole Capage-Brown at ncapage-brown@denverlibrary.org
Digital access has become a part of everyday life. Just think of the number of times you have used a device today to access the internet, and what you have accessed via that device. Did you check your email? The weather? Social media? These days, our economy, our news and especially our connection to family and friends are all dependent on access to, and familiarity with, digital tools like computers, social media, and more. Unfortunately, not everyone in our community has easy access to the tools and skills they need to navigate this digital world, creating a digital divide between those who have access and those who do not.

According to the American Community Survey in 2018, approximately 20% of Denver households do not have broadband internet at home and almost 20% do not have a desktop or laptop computer. There is also a skills and confidence gap when it comes to using technology. A 2016 digital readiness report from Pew Research Center showed that 45% of adults in the US are not confident using computers, smartphones and other gadgets and usually need help with a new device. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed the importance of digital access.

Now, already daunting tasks of getting an education, finding work, dealing with legal issues, receiving health care and other social programs require people to have stable digital access.

Equitable access to technology is not a new challenge, and DPL has been working specifically to address inequities in digital access since 2016. Before the pandemic, DPL’s many public computers were one of its most popular services, with 801,820 customers utilizing computers throughout its 26 locations in 2019. To further increase access to technology for customers, DPL’s collection includes 100 wireless internet hotspots that allow home internet access and can be checked out for a three week period.

Even before COVID-19 closures, the hot spots were so popular they ran a waitlist; with COVID closures reducing or eliminating public computer access, that waitlist now sits at 270 people. With limited access to even the wireless hotspots, it is important for DPL to bridge the digital divide in unique ways to ensure that customers can connect with resources and people during this time.
One easy way to help people connect digitally during COVID-related closures is to maintain Wi-Fi access in an outdoor environment. Since library closures began March 16, DPL has preserved access to Wi-Fi in its library parking lots and has observed significant usage. There were more than 12,000 Wi-Fi connections at DPL locations between March 22 and May 26, and this trend is expected to continue as the pandemic and deteriorating economic conditions make digital access less available for customers. A recent report showed that 28% of people with home high-speed internet are concerned about their ability to pay for it in the coming months, and 30% of smartphone owners say they worry about paying their cell phone bill. With those challenges in mind, DPL is going even further to expand digital access outside of several library branches while library buildings are closed by providing 30 minute walk-up laptop computer sessions at 11 locations during curbside services. Customers can access this service for free, on a first come, first served basis, at appropriately distanced tables to maintain public safety.

In addition to these enhanced services, DPL also looks to bridge the digital divide by assisting those who may need guidance using technology. Customers can get basic tech questions answered via the main library phone line or AskUs chat service. And for those who need greater assistance, DPL recently began offering Virtual Tech Help Appointments where customers can schedule up to an hour to work with library staff remotely on their technology needs via phone or online.

Digital access has become, and will remain, a necessary component of a thriving community. Barriers to that access have unfortunately been exacerbated by the COVID pandemic and recent economic challenges, but DPL remains committed to supporting equitable and reliable access to digital services for all during these unusual circumstances and into the future.

**AT A GLANCE**

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Bridging the Digital Divide
We miss talking to you!

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All virtual programs have automated voice to text captioning available. If the program you are attending is hosted with Google Meet, visit support.google.com/meet for instructions. To request a sign language interpreter or live captions for a program hosted on Zoom or in person, contact SignLanguageServices@denvergov.org or 720-913-8487, with a three (3) business-day notice. For other public accommodation requests/concerns related to a disability, please contact DisabilityAccess@denvergov.org.