



Burlington County
Library System
2021 Annual Report

← **CELEBRATING** *our past;*
Creating **OUR FUTURE** →

bcls.lib.nj.us



Message from the Director



Over the course of 2021, **BCLS DIRECTOR**, Ranjna Das, conducted media interviews via Zoom, oversaw the celebration of the library's first 100 years, and developed effective strategies for moving into our second century of service to Burlington County.

FOR THE Burlington County Library System, 2021 was marked by perseverance and progress. We continued to adapt during the lingering pandemic, we looked back with pride as we celebrated our **100th ANNIVERSARY**, and we

looked forward with renewed enthusiasm as we unveiled our brand-new BCLS website and logo. Our beloved Pinelands branch found a new home, and we celebrated more than \$300,000 in grants and donations earmarked for exciting library initiatives. In short, 2021 was another extraordinary year filled with challenge and triumph, and it began with the same uncertainty we faced in 2020. We kicked off the year with trepidation and a degree of caution. With the COVID-19 vaccines not yet available and the number of cases in the county intensifying, we were forced

to scale back services and operating hours. Protocols involving masks, social distancing, enhanced cleaning procedures and quarantining remained in place. And staff reverted to an alternating, winter work-from-home schedule to minimize the number of people in our libraries.

At the same time, initiatives implemented in 2020 remained firmly in place. For the convenience and safety of our customers, we continued to offer - and enhance - our online resources that prove especially popular in challenging times, including ebooks, audiobooks, streaming video and virtual storytimes. We maintained curbside pickup for those not yet ready to enter our buildings and free WiFi access from the parking lots of several BCLS branches.

Throughout the year, safety remained paramount, but we balanced that caution with a determination to inch our way back to a pre-pandemic sense of normalcy inside our libraries too. We offered study spaces by reservation and

computers by appointment, and after the vaccine started to become available in March, staff returned on-site full time. Soon, we began offering seating without reservations, increased our hours of operation and augmented virtual programming with some outdoor activities and storytimes, as well as a limited number of indoor events.

Summertime brought warm weather and renewed optimism. And when more customers began flowing through our doors, we were eager to welcome them back! To improve access, we kept our branches open on Saturdays through the summer, and in the fall, we reopened the doors to our auditorium for several well-received live performances. By the time winter arrived, the whole library system was beginning to hum with activity once again.

There have been unanticipated bumps along the way that required quick response and creative adjustment. But as you page through this year's annual report, I invite you to discover all the innovative ways we were able to serve despite the obstacles in our path. I'm happy to report that our libraries remained open and welcoming throughout the year and, importantly, we never lost sight of mission to enrich the lives of all Burlington County residents. We made tremendous progress in 2021 and we look forward to meeting new challenges and making even greater strides in 2022.

Ranjna Das
Director

Burlington County Library System



Burlington County Board of County Commissioners

Felicia Hopson, *Director*
Daniel J. O'Connell, *Deputy Director*

Linda A. Hynes

Tom Pullion

Balvir Singh

Eve Cullinan,

County Administrator

Burlington County Library System Commission

Jonathan A. Chebra, *Chair*

Sarah Holley, *Vice Chair*

Heather Cooper

Tanyika Johns

Albert T. Lutner

Burlington County Library System Foundation

Patricia Lindsay-Harvey, *President*

Stephen Raymond, *Vice President*

Ralph Shrom, *Secretary*

Carla Reinas, *Treasurer*

Jo Anderson

Ranjna Das, *Library Director*

Vinessa Milando

Deepa Patel

Holly Srogota

Michael Staff

the mission of
the Burlington County
Library System
is to provide
opportunities for
learning, growth and
personal development.

Celebrating 100 years of Progress

“...our story began more than a century ago when three local teachers saw the need...”

IT WAS a yearlong party. BCLS reached a major milestone in 2021 when we marked our 100th anniversary, a notable point worthy of both reflection and celebration - and everyone was invited to join in the festivities! All year long, we traveled back in time to share our success.

We posted treasured photos and

articles about how our libraries evolved and flourished on the BCLS website. We offered fascinating facts about our incredible past on social media. And in October, we invited the community to join us for a special anniversary event featuring a live musical performance that filled our auditorium with tunes from the 1920s. We've come a long way in 100 years and couldn't wait to share it all.

In fact, our story began more than a century ago when three local teachers saw the need to establish county libraries in the state. Luckily, the voters agreed and on Oct. 7

See *RECEPTION* on page 2

In 1921, Adeline Jessup Pratt (*rear row, center*) was appointed as Burlington County's **FIRST LIBRARIAN**.



From the archives of the Burlington County Library System, circa 1922

Reception/Making Memories Worthy of our Legacy

Continued from page 1

1921, Burlington County Library became the first county library in the state. From our humble beginnings operating out of a small room of the Mount Holly YMCA, to the modern, far-reaching library system we have today, it's been a remarkable journey.

To kick off our celebration, we created a timeline featuring vintage photographs that illustrated some key points in our history. We also sifted through our library archives and old newspaper clippings to craft a series of centennial stories that highlight the notable people, places and ideas that led us to where we are now.

Readers learned about Assemblyman Emmor Roberts who drafted the County Library Law in 1920, our first librarian Adeline Jessup Pratt, and the innovative leaders who followed her.

We shared details about our early years of operation, the original "book truck" that traversed the county as a precursor to future BCLS bookmobiles (and our present-day Mobile Library), and the branches we added and renovated to meet the demands of our growing population. We also reviewed the significant advances in technology that improved the way we serve the community and helped us swiftly adapt during a worldwide pandemic.

While COVID-19 kept our anniversary celebration largely virtual, we were excited to also invite the community to visit our libraries



To mark 100 years since the founding of Burlington County Library System, **BCLS FOUNDATION** president, Patricia Lindsay-Harvey (*center*) celebrated in style - 1920s style, that is - at a centennial celebration held in Westampton.

for some in-person centennial events in the fall, many with themes linked to 1921. The mix of virtual and live programs included a presentation about Flappers: Women of the 1920s, a book club discussion of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* and other Jazz Age Stories, an all-day children's storytime featuring 100 books, and more.

The celebration didn't end there, either. The festivities culminated on Oct. 2 when the Library Commission and the BCLS Foundation teamed up to co-host a memorable, 100-year birthday bash at the Burlington County Library.

During the event, our "history walk" encouraged visitors to flip through

See JAZZ on page 3



As part of the **100th ANNIVERSARY** celebration, we welcomed the public to a sensational concert by Svetlana and The Delancy Five (*above*), featuring musical selections that were popular at the time of the library's inception.

Jazz/Songs of the Past Help Herald in the Future of BCLS

Continued from page 2

scrapbooks filled with vintage photos, newspaper articles, annual reports and other library publications from the last 100 years, while our digital slideshow illustrated highlights from the decades.

Library Director Ranjna Das shared pivotal moments from our past, Commission Chair Jonathan Chebra, Senator Troy Singleton and County Commissioner Dan O'Connell offered inspiring words and BCLS Foundation President Patricia Lindsay-Harvey reminded everyone of the important role the foundation and the Friends groups play as our fundraising partners.

Afterward, a dazzling, live



Jonathan Chebra, chair of the **LIBRARY COMMISSION**, shared his appreciation for the library's past as well as his excitement for its future.

performance by Svetlana and The Delancy Five filled the auditorium with the jazz and swing sounds

popular during the decade the library got its start. Seamlessly moving from sophisticated tones to foot-stomping music, the group revived some of the hits made famous by Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, Cole Porter, Louis Armstrong and more.

All year long, we were proud to share our amazing history and highlight the decades of achievement that began with a simple, yet groundbreaking idea. We think it was an anniversary to remember, and we look forward to celebrating even more exciting milestones during our next century of service. Here's to another 100 years of progress!





From the archives of the Burlington County Library System, circa 1957

Awards & Grants Launch

New Initiatives

IN 2021, BCLS continued to perfect the pandemic pivot. As the world struggled to navigate an uncertain future, we found new ways to enrich the community through innovative programming and brand-new initiatives. We also continued to place a strong emphasis on equity and inclusion, garnering thousands of dollars in grant funding to support some exciting new services.

Introduced in January, our Inclusion Diversity Equity and Accessibility task force gathered and recommended resources focusing on important topics, such as race, LGBTQIA communities and accessibility. The task force also offered virtual training to staff to improve library services and encourage a supportive internal working environment.

Conducted by Lourdes Tango, a consultant who specializes in cultural competence, diversity and inclusion, the training was funded by a \$3,500 ALA/EBSCO Information Services Library Staff Development Award.

We renewed our commitment to help close the digital divide by launching our device lending program funded by a 2020 CARES Act Grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). Tablet kits, which enable residents to access the internet from the comfort and safety of their homes, come loaded with essential apps for video conferencing, online school, job hunting and more. Featuring a wireless mouse, keyboard and free mobile WiFi, each kit may be borrowed for up to three weeks with an option for renewal if available, ensuring that everyone



has the opportunity to stay connected. BCLS was also awarded a \$35,128 grant that will be used to purchase 75 Chromebooks and 50 hotspots. That funding is being made available through the Federal Communications Commission's Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF), a \$7.17 billion program

See FUNDS on page 6

Before shuttering the doors for the last time, the former Pinelands Library on Allen Avenue won Medford's **PRIDE on MAIN** decorating contest.

statistics

Top 3 Non-Fiction Titles Checked Out

1. *Till Murder Do Us Part: True-Crime Thrillers*
by James Patterson
2. *Keep Sharp: Build a Better Brain at any Age*
by Sanjay Gupta
3. *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck*
by Mark Manson

Top 3 Fiction Titles Checked Out

1. *The Four Winds*
by Kristin Hannah
2. *Where the Crawdads Sing*
by Delia Owens
3. *The Book of Two Ways*
by Jodi Picoult

Funds/Donations Support Library Initiatives

Continued from page 5

aimed at helping schools and libraries provide the tools and services their communities need to offer remote learning during the COVID-19 emergency.

We were also excited to learn that BCLS was selected to participate in the New Jersey State Library's Hub & Spoke Libraries pilot project, a statewide digital literacy training program designed to assist the state's workforce.

Three "hub" libraries will serve as regionally-based training labs and 11 "spoke" libraries, including the Burlington County Library, will provide additional literacy support starting this year. BCLS was awarded a \$22,166 competitive grant made

available through IMLS to fund the initiative that will offer residents job readiness and retention resources, digital literacy and career assessments, certifications and referrals.

An additional \$100,000 grant will be used to expand our mobile services to promote digital literacy throughout the county. Awarded through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 Grants for New Jersey Public Libraries, the funds support libraries in responding to COVID-19. Our Mobile Learning Lab will connect customers with digital literacy opportunities, job readiness and retention training, and more.

BCLS is also taking steps to promote health and wellness

education after being awarded \$107,000 from the New Jersey Department of Health through the New Jersey Health Equity Response to COVID-19 Grant Program. The funding will be used to increase access to COVID-19 testing, vaccines and educational resources through our "Healthy You" outreach project. BCLS plans to partner with other community and government organizations to offer quarterly pop-up clinics, monthly educational seminars and additional health-related services with a focus on higher-risk, underserved and disproportionately affected communities of Burlington County's increasingly diverse population.



statistics

Social media

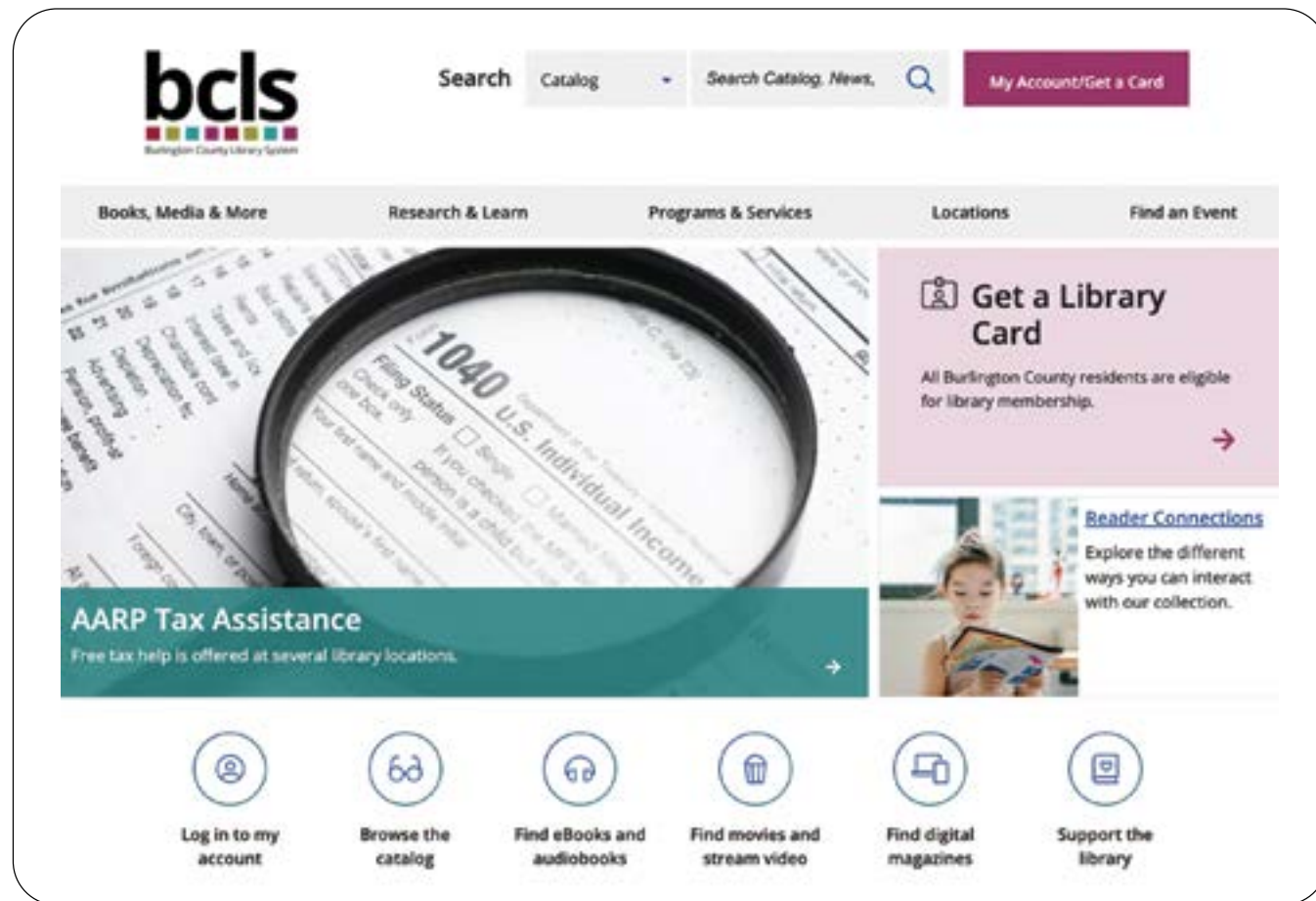


Each of our platform accounts saw an increase in followers. Follow us [@bclsreads](#)

As 2021 drew to a close and COVID protocols began to ease, music lovers could once again enjoy **LIVE MUSIC** at the Burlington County Library in Westampton. During the holiday season, members of The Essence of Harmony Choral Society (*right and following page*) performed the "Hallelujah" chorus from Handel's *Messiah* before a near-capacity - and fully masked - crowd.



NEW website



NEW look

IN 2021, BCLS launched a completely redesigned website and unveiled a brand-new look. We think the updates are just what the library system needed to usher in its next century of progress!

In the planning stages for more than a year, the new BCLS website replaced one that had been in service for nearly a decade. This modern, “digital destination” offers customers a fresh online experience and a virtual gateway to everything BCLS has to offer.

To bring the new website to fruition, staff worked tirelessly behind the scenes, updating existing information, overseeing the development of new content and facilitating its migration.

So far, the website that went live in November has been well received. Featuring improved navigation and enhanced functionality, the site makes it easier than ever for customers to learn about library events and services, or discover their next great reads. Plus, the website reformats itself to present information clearly on a desktop, laptop, tablet and/or smartphone.

We also seized this time to make some other changes too. We replaced the library system’s previous logo, the letters BCLS intertwined with a green vine and three green leaves, with a crisp, colorful block art design. And we introduced a bright new color palette featuring four vibrant hues: redwood, hinting at the cozy crisp feeling of autumn; moss, the new leaves and flower buds of spring; glacier, the icy days of winter and frozen ocean waters; and berry, the vivid fresh fruits and flowers of summer.

Our sharp new look can be found on our website, Mobile Library, social media platforms, and signage around our buildings.

Coupled with our cutting-edge website, we think this clean design better reflects the future of BCLS as we embark on our next 100 years of growing, adapting and offering state-of-the-art services.



While we took time to reflect on the past during our milestone 100th anniversary year, we also embraced our future.

statistics

Visits to
bcls.lib.nj.us

6,758,429 pageviews
5,363,937 unique pageviews

REDWOOD <i>Autumn</i>	MOSS <i>Spring</i>	GLACIER <i>Winter</i>	BERRY <i>Summer</i>
---------------------------------	------------------------------	---------------------------------	-------------------------------

The seasonal colors in the **NEW BCLS LOGO** act as a visual reminder that customers can access our resources all year round by visiting our new website 24 hours a day or by stopping at any location during business hours.

statistics

Circulation

- Total circulation: 1,040,284 items
- Youth Services circulation: 379,201
- Adult Services circulation: 661,083
- Total number of resident borrowers: 71,451
- Total number of out-of-county borrowers: 1,161
- Total number of new library cards issued: 11,868



From the archives of the Burlington County Library System, circa 1962.

Top 3 Youth Services Titles Checked Out

1. Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Deep End (Book 15)
by Jeff Kinny
2. Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Greg Hellfley's Journal (Book 1)
by Jeff Kinny
3. Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Dog Days (Book 4)
by Jeff Kinny

Top 3 Teen Titles Checked Out

1. The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes
by Suzanne Collins
2. The Hunger Games
by Suzanne Collins
3. The Inheritance Games
by Jennifer Barnes



SONIA SANCHEZ



TEMPLE GRANDIN

Unable to host live events for much of 2021, BCLS staff found creative ways to host poet SONIA SANCHEZ and activist/scientist TEMPLE GRANDIN by utilizing the video platform Zoom to present a **VIRTUAL SPEAKERS SERIES**.

Virtual Storytime

8,606 episodes and more than 950 hours of content were viewed in 2021. Clearly a favorite, "What the Ladybug Heard" with Miss Lisa, was viewed 2,348 times alone.



See Books in a Whole New Way: Stroll StoryWalk® at BCL

ON A white-hot day in early June, dozens of excited families ignored the temps to visit Burlington County Library in Westampton for the opening of StoryWalk®. The exhibit, developed with the assistance of the County Parks Division, is an open-

air, tech-free installation that allows visitors to interact with a curated and rotating selection of vividly illustrated children's books. The walk-along display encourages early literacy, physical activity and family togetherness. Feel free to visit!



After an **OFFICIAL RIBBON CUTTING** (clockwise from top right) and gathering of partners in the project, families took time to discover StoryWalk® on their own before being treated to a fun children's concert with Mr. Scott the Music Man.





After much anticipation, staff at Pinelands Library welcomed customers to a bright **NEW FACILITY** which houses an upgraded technology center, work spaces, plenty of on-site parking and more.

Pinelands Library finds a New Home

AN INTEGRAL part of the Burlington County Library System for nearly half a century, Pinelands Library celebrated another important milestone last year when it found a brand-new home in the Medford community. The beloved library relocated to the new township municipal building at 49 Union St. in December, just in time for the holidays.

Pinelands' new location represents yet another step forward in its long history of serving the greater Medford area and surrounding region. The library joined BCLS in 1972 after the Medford Library Association was formed to drum up support for the local branch. Previously located off Main Street, the original library was a former bus garage purchased by Medford Township and refurbished to serve the region's swelling population. A separate children's area was added to the building in the mid-1980s.

Today, the Medford Library Association continues to play a vital role in supporting the Pinelands branch. To help defray the cost of technology and furnishings for the new

location, the association generously donated \$50,000 to the BCLS Foundation, a nonprofit organization that also continues to lend its support through fundraising and advocacy.

BCLS staff closed the old library's doors for the final time on Dec. 7 and began welcoming visitors to the new branch less than one week later, on Dec. 13. Customers eager to explore the site were excited to find the same warm, inviting ambience and strong sense of community that has long been associated with Pinelands, plus an improved layout just right for reading and relaxing. Offering easy access on the first floor of the Medford Town Hall that opened in the spring of 2021, the new library features a modern aesthetic, comfortable furniture and state-of-the-art equipment that will allow us to continue to grow and better serve our customers.

The impressive list of amenities includes:

- Dedicated tech center featuring Macs and PCs
- Study room
- Event space
- Improved customer parking
- Larger children's department
- Friends of the Library room
- Café, meeting and work space in shared foyer
- ...and much more!

With municipal offices located on the second floor of the new Medford Town Hall, the 23,000-square-foot building offers "one-stop shopping" to local residents thrilled to have a state-of-the art library to call their own. Naturally, we couldn't agree more!



An **EASY-TO-READ SIGN** along Union Street marks the entrance to the Pinelands Library located in the newly constructed Medford Township Town Hall.

“Customers...were excited to find the same warm inviting ambience and strong sense of community...plus a new layout just right for reading and relaxing.”

statistics

Top 3 Movies Checked Out

1. News of the World
2. Wonder Woman 1984
3. Pixar's Soul

Top 3 Video Games Checked Out

1. Super Mario Party for the Nintendo Switch
2. Animal Crossing: New Horizons for the Nintendo Switch
3. New Super Mario Bros. U Deluxe for the Nintendo Switch

Supporting Continued Success

LAST YEAR, we were excited to celebrate all that we accomplished during the past 100 years, but we didn't do it alone.

Right from the start, we've had the support of dedicated library volunteers and, fortunately, 2021 was no exception! Once again, the BCLS Foundation and our library Friends groups were eager to step up and assist during challenging times.

One of the important projects the BCLS Foundation tackled last year was its "Technology for All" initiative, which involved hosting two community collection drives for old, working laptops to help needy families stay connected during the pandemic. The equipment was wiped clean of data and outfitted with new software to benefit financially struggling residents.

A registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit charitable organization, the foundation also sought tax-deductible donations of cash and other assets to offset the cost of new hardware and software. Nonprofit partners Computer Smiles, TDI Connect, and South Jersey Apple Group pitched in to refurbish the equipment.

The foundation also threw its support behind the opening of the new Pinelands Library when the volunteer Medford Library Association donated

\$50,000 to the organization that was used to help cover the cost of technology and furnishings for the new building. And the foundation isn't stopping there; its mission to raise fund to benefit the new library's success is ongoing.

Other library locations are also lucky to have active volunteer groups working on their behalf. The Burlington County Library, as well as the

Cinnaminson, Evesham, Pemberton and Riverton locations, all have Friends groups, and the Pinelands Library is fortunate to have the Medford Library Association on its side. The Riverton and Bordentown libraries also have their own volunteer associations.

Throughout the year, these dedicated groups hold book sales and other events to raise funds for special programs and equipment for their branches that enhance public support.

In fact, the Friends of the Burlington County Library, Inc. hosted two well-attended outdoor book sales last year before taking measured steps to resume socially-distanced indoor sales in September. The funds are used to support library programs and initiatives, including live performances in our auditorium.

“...these dedicated groups hold booksalesandotherevents to raise funds for special programs and events...”



statistics

Total BCLS budget	\$ 11,857,046
Per capita state aid	\$ 157,302
Total fines and fees	\$ 102,660
Grant awards	\$ 223,366
Friends of the Library	\$ 90,000 <i>(estimated)</i>



Friends of the Burlington County Library, Inc., raised funds by holding warm-weather **OUTDOOR BOOK SALES** in Westampton.





On behalf of their BCLS Foundation, Pinelands Library branch manager, Danielle Haubrich (*rear row, center*), is all smiles after accepting a generous **COMMUNITY-FUNDED DONATION** from members of the Medford Library Association. The contribution will help fund a tech lab (*below, left*) and more at the library's new location.



statistics

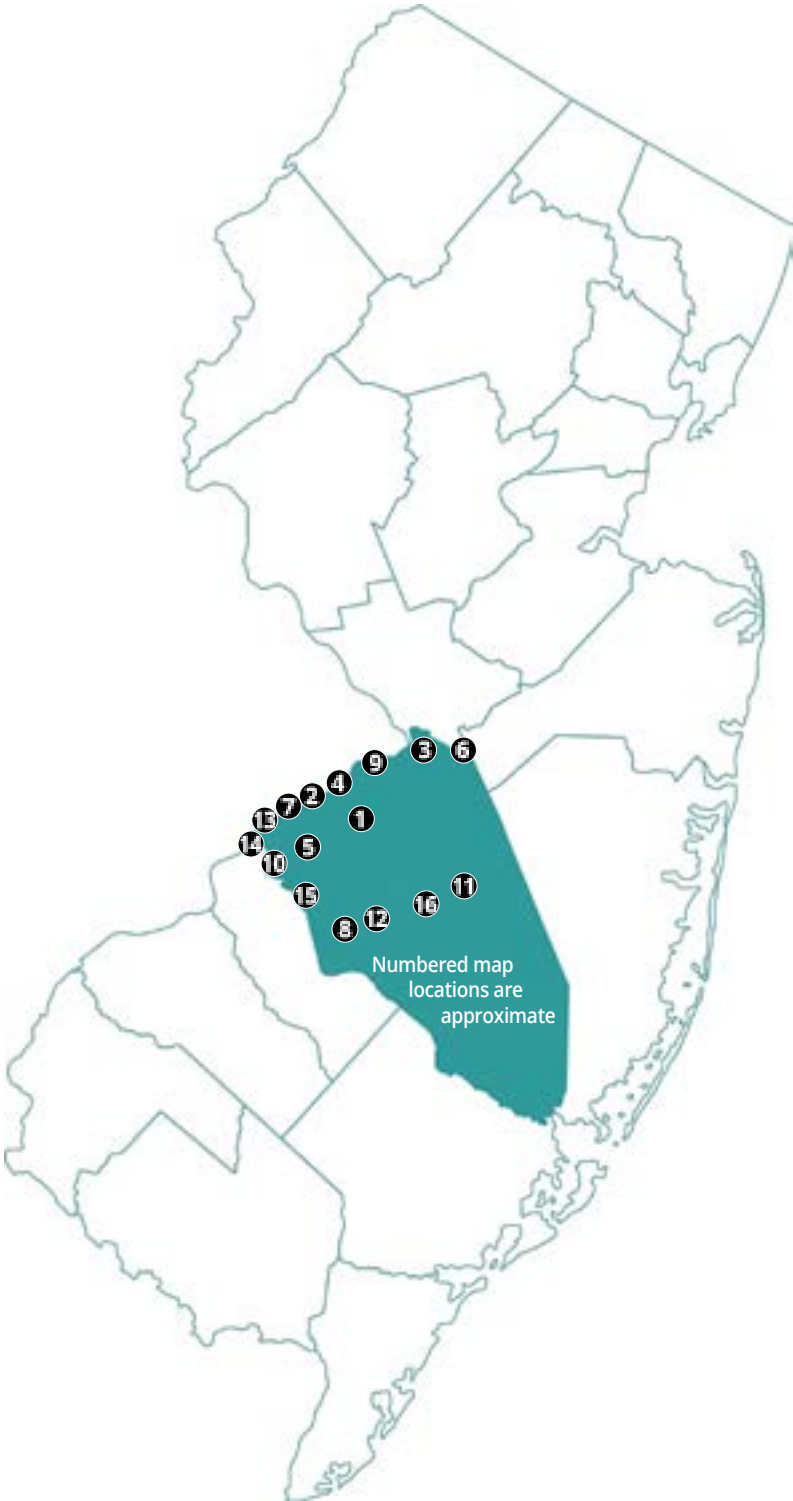
Top 3 Online Resources

1. UdeMy
Professional development and skill enrichment
2. Rosetta Stone
English and foreign language learning
3. Flipster
Popular magazines in digital format



Library staff relished the opportunity to **CUDDLE CATS and KITTENS** (*above*) at the Burlington County Animal Shelter in Westampton after dropping off customer-donated supplies.

And not even mask-wearing could "pop" the fun when BCL hosted a "bubble party" for the library's **YOUNGEST VISITORS** once state COVID regulations began to ease and in-person events could safely be held once more.



- 1 Burlington County Library**
5 Pioneer Boulevard • Westampton
- 2 Beverly Free Library**
441 Cooper Street • Beverly
- 3 Bordentown Library**
18 East Union Street • Bordentown
- 4 Library Company of Burlington**
23 West Union Street • Burlington
- 5 Cinnaminson Library**
1619 Riverton Road • Cinnaminson
- 6 Crosswicks Library Company**
483 Main Street • Crosswicks
- 7 Delanco Public Library**
1303 Burlington Avenue • Delanco
- 8 Evesham Library**
984 Tuckerton Road • Marlton
- 9 Florence Library**
1350 Hornberger Avenue • Roebling
- 10 Maple Shade Library**
200 Stiles Avenue • Maple Shade
- 11 Pemberton Library**
16 Broadway • Browns Mills
- 12 Pinelands Library**
49 Union Street • Medford
- 13 Riverside Library**
10 Zurbrugg Way • Riverside
- 14 Riverton Library**
306 Main Street • Riverton
- 15 Rowan College at Burlington County**
900 College Circle • Mt. Laurel
- 16 Sally Stretch Keen Memorial Library**
94 Main Street • Vincentown
- ★ Mobile Library**
We visit 27 additional locations throughout the county on a regular rotating schedule
To view the current timetable, visit bcls.lib.nj.us

→ Your valid BCLS library card may be used at any of our locations throughout the county.