

## Main Library Marks 75 Years

Jamie Turbak, Library Director

The Friends of the Oakland Public Library was established in 1950, just in time for the new Main Library, which opened in 1951. As OPL cheered on the Friends' 75th Anniversary in 2025, we knew that an important part of Oakland's public library system would also soon be turning 75...

Please join us on Saturday, January 24 from 1:00-2:30 to celebrate the current Main Library!



Jamie Turbak

We'll have a group photo in the lobby shortly after 1:00, a costume contest for those dressed in 1950s attire, and a trivia game. Plus, cupcakes! And don't miss the wonderful exhibit by the Oakland History Center on 75 years of the Main Library.

This celebration is made possible by the Friends of the Oakland Public Library.

## Congrats to New Officers!

Noah Cohen, Friends of the OPL Director

The Friends of the Oakland Public Library would like to thank Kathryn Sterbenc for serving as our Board President for nine remarkable years! Kathryn is gratefully passing the gavel to our new President, Ynez Arce, who has been on our board of directors since 2017 and serving as Vice President since 2020.

We are also excited to announce our newly elected Vice President, Corey Hatcher, who joined the Friends board in 2018.

Additional congratulations go to Co-Treasurer, Sara Jewell, and Secretary, Elizabeth Falkner, who were reelected for this new term.



Ynez Arce,  
Board President

## Gen Katz Memorial Initiative: a Year of Library Visits

The library community lost a great friend and advocate in December 2024, when Genevieve "Gen" Katz passed away. Gen served on the City of Oakland's Library Commission from 2004-2012 and on the Friends of the OPL Board of Directors from 1998-2020.



Celebrate Dioramas! at the Main Library, attended by Director Diana Kaw on 10/4/25.

Photo by Doug Zimmerman

Throughout her lengthy tenures, Gen encouraged her colleagues to visit Oakland libraries beyond their home branches, as she frequently did. Understanding each neighborhood's unique needs, she told us, was the key to successfully advocating for strong library services.

In Gen's memory, the Friends Board formalized this good advice by implementing the Gen Katz Memorial Initiative last January. Throughout 2025, Friends of the OPL Directors visited libraries that were new to them and took part in library activities they might otherwise have missed. At each Board meeting in 2025, Directors shared their experiences.

The library and the Friends miss Gen, and her exemplary service continues to inspire us.



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## Get to Know Your Grants

By Sara DuBois, OPL Coordinator of Grants & Volunteers

The West Oakland Library is bustling with activity. Since coming on board in late 2023, Branch Manager Nitoshia Ford has made a significant impact at this beloved neighborhood branch.

Nitoshia created the popular Black Authors Book Club, which meets monthly to discuss selections from the African American Special Collection. The book club has developed a consistent core group of regular attendees, while also welcoming new participants.

She has also cultivated a strong partnership with Mandela Partners that activates the library's outdoor space on a regular basis. Mandela Partners hosts a produce market at the branch every Friday, providing fresh fruits and vegetables directly to the community. In addition, Mandela serves as the vendor for the library's twice-monthly cooking demonstrations, Taste of West, a food justice and food education program. As part of Taste of West, the library distributes ten bags of the produce used in each recipe to families, allowing them to recreate the dish at home and extending the program's impact beyond the event itself.

The branch has also hosted well-received special events that brought in new and returning community members. A community line dance class, organized in conjunction with the 2025 Black Cowboy Parade, drew a lively crowd.

Another major highlight was the Black Maternal Health Expo, which featured a panel of Black doulas, midwives, lactation specialists, and Black maternal health scholars, alongside numerous community organizations and clinicians tabling and sharing resources. The event reflected the branch's commitment to addressing pressing community health concerns and was made possible by the Friends of the Oakland Public Library, West Oakland Library Friends, and generous community donations.

These activities -- and more -- are further enhanced by the thoughtful use of Friends of the OPL grant funds. Produce and ingredients for the cooking demonstrations, snacks and drinks for

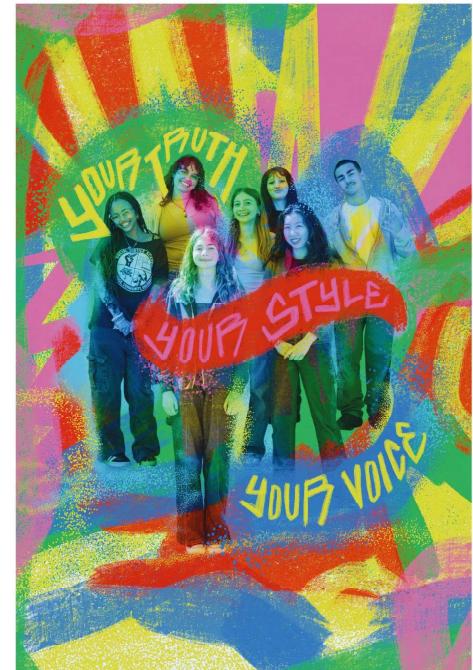
book club meetings, and materials to support the branch's community garden are just a few examples of how support from the Friends makes a tangible difference.

*Get to Know Your Grants* is a regular feature which highlights library activities that are supported by the Friends of the OPL. Sara can be reached at (510) 238-6572 or [sdubois@oaklandlibrary.org](mailto:sdubois@oaklandlibrary.org).

## Oakland Youth Poet Laureate Application Cycle Now Open

The Friends of the Oakland Public Library has proudly sponsored the Oakland Youth Poet Laureate (OYPL) program since its launch in 2012.

The Friends' Annual Grants to the library provide the \$5,000 scholarship for the winning poet, \$500 finalist prizes, and program expenses such as meeting refreshments, room rental fees, and videography services.



This program is much more than a poetry competition. The experience encourages youth to use and hone their voices, creates a true community of young poets, and provides them with opportunities to share their ideas and work throughout the year.

The 2026 application cycle is open through Sunday, February 1. Most youth would not apply without the encouragement of a trusted adult. Please promote the program to the teens (ages 13-18) in your life. Visit <a href="http://www.oaklandlibrary.org>YouthPoets to learn more.

## Welcome, New Directors!

The Friends of the OPL appointed Jessica Meksavan, Crystal A. Moore, and Brad Thomas to the Board of Directors on December 3, 2025.



As a child, **Jessica Meksavan** spent countless afternoons after school at the local public libraries. There, she developed a deep love of reading and experienced how libraries are more than just a place to borrow books; they are essential

community hubs where people can connect and grow. With a background in finance, she supports the Friends of the Oakland Public Library in helping sustain the resources and services that make OPL such an essential part of Oakland. Jessica is a Bay Area native, currently resides in San Francisco and is a proud mom to two budding readers.



**Brad Thomas** is a retired banker who specialized in accounting and finance. His parents were passionate about reading and education, and started reading with him at an early age. He is an enthusiastic supporter of making learning available to all.



**Crystal A. Moore** is a public scholar committed to helping schools become the equitable and socially just places that students deserve. Hailing from the Bronx, Crystal is a graduate of Princeton

University, the University of Pennsylvania and Stanford University, where she earned a doctorate in the sociology of education. Her academic research uncovers the ways in which African American students and educators experience inequities in the public education system. She works collaboratively with urban school districts to explain how their organizational structures and leadership impact Black students, teachers and principals. Outside academia, Crystal enjoys writing creative nonfiction and poetry.

**Make library programs part of your New Year! There's something for everyone at:**  
**[oaklandlibrary.org/events](http://oaklandlibrary.org/events)**

## Giving

Every gift can be a tribute gift! Please just let us know who you're thinking of when you donate online or via check. [fopl.org/donate](http://fopl.org/donate)

- In memory of Genevieve McElroy, from Covert Murphy
- In honor of Winifred Walters, from Louise Rothman-Riemer
- In honor of Tom Simonson, from Anne Simonson
- In honor of Em Jahn, from Valerie Villanueva and Paul Jahn
- In memory of Tina Wong, from Steven Wong
- In honor of Montana Miller, from Jeff Miller
- In honor of Bill Curtiss, from Elizabeth Curtiss
- In memory of Doris Lowenfels, from Ellen Oppenheimer
- In memory of Adam Twain, from his colleagues at OPL
- In memory of the following artist/designers, and members of the Oakland Deaf community, who attended the Collage and Upcycled Textile workshops at Oakland Main Library over many years: Sheldon Batiste, Doris Compton, Delorise Shelby, Dannez Davis, Catherene Ervin. With much appreciation to FOPL for funding these art and community fostering accessible events, from Leslie Colón and Rock Paper Scissors Collective.

**Tributes made with  
 75th Anniversary donations  
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## Friends of the OPL Board Members

- ♦ Ynez Arce, President
- ♦ Mifta Chowdhury
- ♦ Noah Cohen
- ♦ Erica Dennings
- ♦ Elizabeth Falkner, Secretary
- ♦ Aniya Grimm
- ♦ Colleen Haikes
- ♦ Corey Hatcher, Vice President
- ♦ Sara Jewell, Co-Treasurer
- ♦ Diana Kaw
- ♦ Pooneh Koohyar
- ♦ Jessica Meksavan, Co-Treasurer
- ♦ Alexis Joseph Merritt
- ♦ Crystal A. Moore
- ♦ Rebecca Pfiffner
- ♦ Glenn Poppe
- ♦ Kathryn Sterbenc
- ♦ Brad Thomas

We welcome your feedback & comments:  
[info@fopl.org](mailto:info@fopl.org)

If the date on your mailing label is **12-31-2025**  
or earlier, PLEASE RENEW TODAY!

## THE BOOKMARK — BOOKSTORE —

933 Broadway, Oakland, CA 94607  
[\(510\) 444-0473](tel:(510)444-0473) | [www.fopl.org](http://www.fopl.org)

All proceeds benefit the Oakland Public Library.

### MONTHLY MEMBER SALES

Members receive 50% off on Saturday and  
everyone receives 30% off on Sunday.

**January 17-18**  
**February 21-22**  
**March 21-22**

### DONATIONS

Material donations accepted at the Bookmark  
Bookstore on Fridays and Saturdays  
(except on sales weekends) from 12-4pm.

Use the new Donation Center near the gated  
parking lot on 10th Street. Please call to  
confirm before coming by: (510) 444-0473.

Erin Rivero, Operations Manager \* Cheryl Liquori, Volunteer Manager \* Lio Min, Online Sales Manager

To learn more about Friends of the Oakland Public Library, visit [fopl.org](http://fopl.org).

The Friends of the Oakland Public Library is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit.

Our tax ID is 94-2553734. All contributions are tax deductible.



## Anniversary Celebrations – 2025 in Review –

### The OPL Advocates Mixer



Photos by Pooneh Koohyar

On Sunday, April 6, the Library Commission and the Friends of the OPL co-hosted their 13th Annual OPL Advocates Mixer. Almost 100 library volunteers, boosters, and advocates attended, and the event included poems by 2024 Oakland Youth Poet Laureate Ella Gordon, remarks from Library Director Jamie Turbak, and cake to celebrate the Friends' 75 years.



### 75th Anniversary Fundraising Success!

We wanted to make our anniversary year about supporting the library, so we took this opportunity to conduct a special fundraising campaign. Members, Directors, and the community met the challenge with special gifts totaling \$55,000! These funds will support the library's most critical needs in 2026. Thank you for helping us with this important work! [www.fopl.org/donate](http://www.fopl.org/donate)

100% Board  
Participation

\$55,000\*  
Raised for OPL

Membership  
record: 1,550

\*Donations received specifically for the 75th campaign, as of 12/29/25.

# Library Tributes

The Friends of the Oakland Public Library could not have reached 75 years without strong commitment from passionate donors, members, and volunteers. Throughout 2025, we asked supporters about the people who inspire them to give, their thoughts about the role of libraries in today's society, and their personal library stories. Here are just a few of these special tributes, along with photos from our 75th Anniversary Open House at the Bookmark Bookstore on September 27.

Do you want to share your motivations for giving? Please send your thoughts to [Development@fopl.org](mailto:Development@fopl.org).

## In Honor of

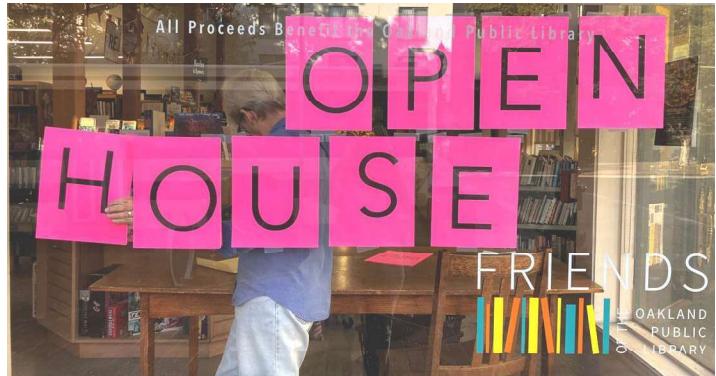
- \* **Mae Liu's 75th birthday**, from Hennie Hoogenbosch
- \* **Ronile Lahti**, for her many years of service on the Friends of the OPL board, from Tom & Winifred Walters
- \* **Susan Papps**, from Shannon Hackley
- \* All the **Oakland Heroes** – Samantha Towne
- \* Thinking of **Judith Tannenbaum**...
- \* **Claudia Epple**. Thank you, mama! – Ellen Jacobus
- \* **My baby niece, Raya Bouzberg** – Sumaia Masoom
- \* **My dad**, who was an American librarian overseas. – Lesley Mandros Bell
- \* Thank you, **Mrs. Freeman**, for your storytelling, singing and recommendations at Van Holten School Library in Bridgewater, NJ. You are the best school librarian ever! – Colleen Haikes
- \* **Meghan, Robin, and Charlie**. Our adorables who went to the library every day we could. When asked by the doctor at a 3-year-old visit, "What do you do when you're cold?" the answer was "Go to the library." – Ross & Jeanne Weir
- \* **Grandma Susie, Grammy Bulson, and Grandma Borden!** For inspiring me to read. – Laura Guzman



## The Role of Libraries Today

In times ahead we need our libraries more than ever. I've been a Bookmark volunteer for five years. Nothing makes me happier than my group at the Bookmark.  
– Jeanette Nichols

The library is not just about books any more. The Library is a very important public service. – Trish Elliott



## In Memory of

- \* **Mary Lou Jones**, from Laila Halsteen
- \* **Eve Donlon**, from Susan Papps
- \* **Marlys Gaucher**, from Sara Gaucher
- \* "Wind in the Willows" author **Kenneth Grahame**
- \* **My Dad, Justo**, who got me going to the Main Library on Saturdays back in the 1960s. – Justus Samuels
- \* **My mother Evy** took me to the Rockridge Library every week and instilled a love of reading and libraries. – Ilona Frieden
- \* **Lee White**, outstanding OPL Director of the 20th Century, from Aileen Frankel



"Book Bouquets" made by Lesley Mandros Bell and Pooneh Koohyar. Photo also by Pooneh.

## Our Library Stories (excerpted)

- \* As a kid, I loved getting lost in stories or reading about new skills that I wanted to learn. The library gave me a sense of freedom and independence while also being in a comfortable and comforting environment. My goal was to read every book of fiction they had. I never came close, and I racked up a healthy number of overdue fines. Thank goodness Oakland Public Library doesn't charge overdue fines anymore! Thank you and Happy 75th Anniversary, FOPL!! - **Jamie Turbak**
- \* As a child, I loved books and going to libraries. My mother encouraged me to read and she enjoyed it herself. When my family moved to Oakland, I began going to the OPL. The working women in the libraries were very supportive. It's more important than ever to support our libraries. - **Marilyn Snider**
- \* In junior high, I was a volunteer at the library. - **Judy Wilber**



2025 Oakland Youth Poet Laureate, Cael Dueñas-Lara



Friends of the OPL Directors, photo by Jennifer Glen



Bookmark Bookstore Operations Manager, Erin Rivero

## Why We Are Friends of the Library

- \* I've loved libraries since I was a kid. I lived 5 or 6 blocks from the library, and I've been a reader all my life. I'm a member because it's a good cause, and I've upped my donation because of what's going on. If a whole lot of us do it, it makes a difference. We can't let them tell libraries what kinds of books to have. - **Vivian Thomas**
- \* In kindergarten I remember I first went to a bookmobile, then Orinda built a new library. It was exciting to go to the library – all the books! I joined the Friends of the OPL after meeting Winifred Walters at a board fair. Winifred was very persuasive, and she offered chocolate, which resulted in me serving 24 years on the Board – a lot of fun. - **Julie Waldman**
- \* I grew up in a town where there wasn't a lot happening in the culture department – no bookstore, no movie theater. The drugstore had a box on the floor of 45 RPM records for sale and the candy store had pulp paperbacks, and that was about it. But the library! That was everything. - **Charlie Haas**
- \* As an Oakland resident, the Oakland Main Library has become a valuable resource as I continue to expand my musicianship researching composers, music score studies, and sometimes sharing live music with my Trio and The Awesöme Orchestra Collective. - **Destiny Muhammad**
- \* I fell in love with books as a child, on Mom's lap listening to the Dick and Jane books. When I got to elementary school, my class had a regular library day. Each Friday, I would check out the limit of six books and my best friend would do the same. Every Wednesday, we'd exchange books. - **Denise Lombard**

Mayor Barbara Lee congratulated the Friends of the OPL with this special proclamation, presented by Library Director Jamie Turbak (below) at the September 27 Open House.



Photo by Jennifer Glen

### 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee

\*Diana Kaw, Co-Chair  
\*Colleen Haikes, Co-Chair  
    \*Noah Cohen  
    Stephen Cole  
\*Erica Dennings  
    Sara DuBois  
    Trish Elliott  
    \*Aniya Grimm  
\*Pooneh Koohyar  
    Erin Rivero  
\*Kathryn Sterbenc  
    Winifred Walters

\*Friends of the OPL Director

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