

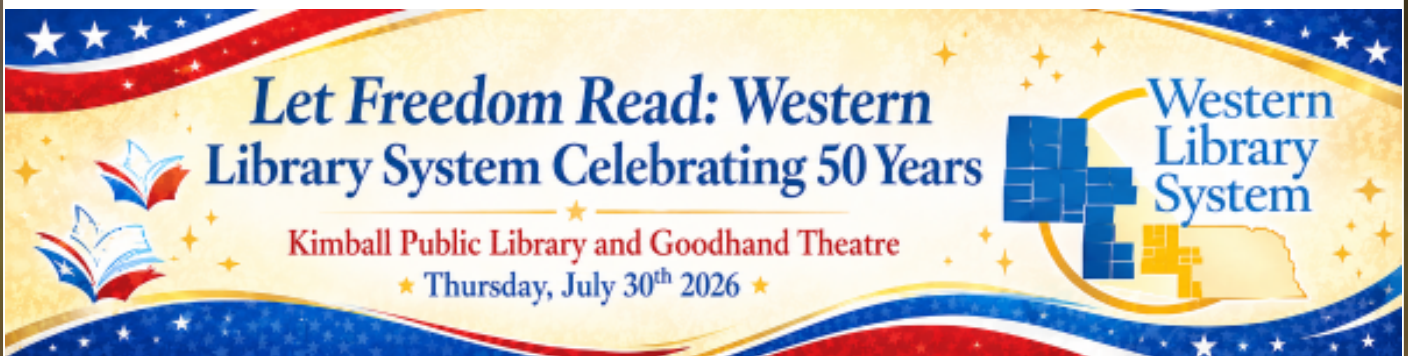


May 2026

# The Western Sun

*The Western Library System's Monthly Newsletter*

## Let Freedom Read: Western Library System Annual Meeting



Get ready to check out a star-spangled day in Kimball!

The **Western Library System Annual Meeting** will be held on **Thursday, July 30, 2026**, in **Kimball, Nebraska**, at the **Kimball Public Library and Goodhand Theatre**.

Please plan to arrive at the **Kimball Public Library** at **9:30 a.m. MT** for registration, library tours, coffee, and networking. The meeting will begin promptly at **10:00 a.m. MT**.

This event is free to attend. Please register by the end of the day on **Wednesday, July 22**, so we can plan accurately for lunch and refreshments. **To personalize the event for everyone, we kindly ask that each person register individually.**

[Register](https://bit.ly/WLSAnnualMeeting2026) for the Annual Meeting here: [bit.ly/WLSAnnualMeeting2026](https://bit.ly/WLSAnnualMeeting2026)

Ethan, Richard, and the Annual Meeting Committee look forward to welcoming you to Kimball for a day of conversation, networking, celebration, and library cheer. This year, we will celebrate three red, white, and book-worthy milestones: the **250th anniversary of the United States**, the **125th anniversary of the Nebraska Library Commission**, and the **50th anniversary of the Western Library System** (formerly known as the Panhandle Library Network).

We are especially excited to welcome **Sonnet Ireland**, former Louisiana Library Association President and current Director of the Washington Parish Library, who will speak on the importance of intellectual freedom. Drawing from her experiences with book challenges in her own community, Ireland will offer a framework for approaching these issues and lead a conversation about the library's role in preserving the freedom to read and freedom of information.

After lunch, join us for a screening of the PBS *Independent Lens* film **Free for All: The Public Library**, followed by a short discussion.

Attendees will receive **2 Continuing Education credits** for the meeting, plus an additional **2 Continuing Education credits** for the film showing and discussion.

This year's annual meeting will also include a **Free Swap Table!**

- Bring items in good condition that you think could be used by another library, such as media cases, library decorations, jigsaw puzzles, unused Summer Reading supplies, and similar items. Items must be small enough to fit in a car; please do not bring anything that would require a truck to haul.
- You do not have to bring something in order to take something. Everyone is welcome to browse and take any goodies they can use.
- If you do bring something, rest assured that you will not have to take it home with you. System staff will dispose of any leftovers.

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## Craig Johnson Author Tour

The Western Library System is excited to announce that Craig Johnson, bestselling author of the Walt Longmire mystery series, will visit four western Nebraska communities this September. During his presentation, "The Man from Ucross: Population 26," Johnson will discuss his writing and the Longmire series. Attendees will also have the opportunity to purchase books and connect with fellow Longmire fans.



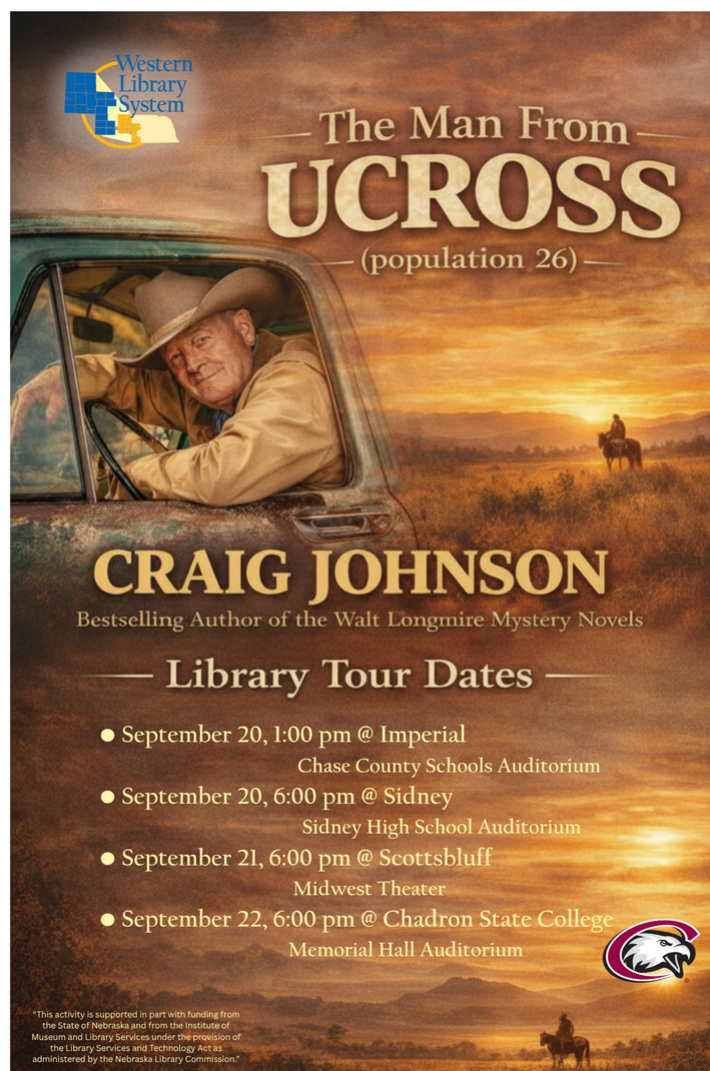
### Tour Schedule

- September 20, 1:00 p.m. MDT – Imperial (Chase County Schools Auditorium)
- September 20, 6:00 p.m. MDT – Sidney (Sidney High School Auditorium)
- September 21, 6:00 p.m. MDT – Scottsbluff (Midwest Theater)
- September 22, 6:00 p.m. MDT – Chadron (Chadron State College, Memorial Hall Auditorium)

All events are free and open to the public, and no registration is required.

To help promote the tour, the Western Library System will provide bookmarks and 11" x 17" posters to your library free of charge.

Please contact the Western Library System office if you have any questions about the tour.



## Technology & Digital Skills Workshops

Amanda Sweet, Technology Innovation Librarian at the Nebraska Library Commission, is traveling across the state in May to hold Technology & Digital Skills Workshops. These sessions will give you the opportunity to explore tech trends and resources covering everything from computer basics to AI. Amanda will introduce innovative tools, spark ideas for new library services, and gather input to help shape ongoing support tailored to your needs.

Same session offered at four locations:

### **Tuesday, May 19:**

Alliance, Alliance Public Library, 10:00 am - 12:00 pm MT

Scottsbluff, Western Library System Office, 2:00 pm - 4:00 pm MT

### **Wednesday, May 20:**

Ogallala, Kathleen Lute Public Library, 10:00 am - 12:00 pm MT

Imperial, Lied Imperial Public Library, 2:00 pm - 4:00 pm MT

The sessions are free to attend, and participants will receive 2 CE credits.

[Learn more about the workshops here](#)

Register here (to help with planning):

<https://forms.gle/ihjDRSdAQ87CnHxR6>

Walk-ins are also welcome!

Western Library System  
Nebraska Library Commission

This activity is supported in part with funding from the State of Nebraska and from the Institute of Museum and Library Services under the provision of the Library Services and Technology Act as administered by the Nebraska Library Commission.

Scan here to learn more details!

2 CE Credits!

JOIN  
**AMANDA SWEET**  
FROM THE NEBRASKA LIBRARY COMMISSION  
FOR A TECHNOLOGY & DIGITAL SKILLS WORKSHOP

Register Here!  
[bit.ly/WLSTechSkills](https://bit.ly/WLSTechSkills)

\*for planning purposes!  
Walk-ins welcome!

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Tuesday, May 19	Wednesday, May 20
▶ Alliance Alliance Public Library 10:00 am - 12:00 pm	▶ Ogallala Kathleen Lute Public Library 10:00 am - 12:00 pm
▶ Scottsbluff Western Library System Office 2:00 pm - 4:00 pm	▶ Imperial Lied Imperial Public Library 2:00 pm - 4:00 pm

## Dinosaur Breakout Box Challenge

Tammi Thiem from Three Rivers Library System created some dinosaur themed Breakout Box kits perfect for Summer Reading! If you are interested in reserving a kit, please reach out to the WLS office. I would be more than happy to travel to your library and demonstrate how they work! They are a great activity for children, teens, and even adults!



A huge thank you to Tammi for sharing her awesome puzzles with us!

[Find a link to all of the Dinosaur puzzles here](#)

## News from Around the System

Grant County Library is Celebrating Bird Month

May is Bird Month in Nebraska. Grant County Library Board Member Glenda Burgess made the library birds to hang up and a checklist so the patrons can go birding in the library! We have 42 birds in the library native to our Sandhills area. Glenda was also able to get brochures from the Nebraska Game and Parks for us to hand out listing the different species of birds and different bird lists. We are hoping to get some of our area children interested in birding as our area has a lot of them to see!

*-Jennifer Holthus, Grant County Library Director*



## Community Lens



Panorama of Lyman with Laramie Park

Michael Mitchell has lived in Lyman for 10 years. Both he and his wife enjoy capturing the beauty of this world through their lenses. His Bio is short and sweet!

I'm just an old man who spent his whole life pursuing the horizon and sleeping under the stars - Michael Mitchell



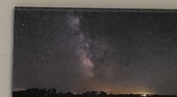
Pucker Lake. Taken with a GoPro on a K10



Lyman. Taken with a GoPro on a K10



Milky Way Rising Over Pucker Lake



Our Community Lens display at Lyman Public Library highlights photography from community members.



Lyman Public Library's recent Open House featured a puppet show and face painting.

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Junk Journaling has become a popular pastime at Chadron Public Library. Junk Journaling involves taking an old book and turning it into a personalized journal by decorating the pages with stickers, cutouts from magazines, and other decorations.

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## 10 Year Anniversary at Culbertson Public Library

We will be in our present library for 10 years in July and we are planning an Open House for our 10 year Anniversary. We want to let everyone know about our milestone. I have been here for the last 5 and a half years and really can't believe it's been that long. I came into this position not understanding how much a library director does, took some classes offered by NLC, and got myself in the loop as best as I could. I am still learning new things everyday with the way the world is changing.



Saturday, July 18 is the date of the Open House. We will be serving cupcakes with tea or coffee, and we will have activities and book grab bags for all ages.

*-Deborah Dack, Culbertson Public Library Director*

## Lego Club Fun

Lego Club has become a popular after-school activity at Culbertson Public Library.



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## Furry Friends



The cat from the gas station across the street likes to visit Crawford Public Library occasionally



Allie the cat supervises the circulation desk at Big Springs Public Library

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## Springing Into Stories at Bayard Public Library

Bayard Public Library celebrated the season with a cheerful “Spring into Reading” display and a fun tribute to Dr. Seuss’s birthday.



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## Congratulations to Libraries Awarded ALA Grants!

Congratulations to Sidney Public Library, Bridgeport Public Library, and Kimball Public Library for receiving a national grant through the American Library Association's Libraries Transforming Communities initiative! 🐾🐾



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## Free Speakers Bureau Opportunity

### Remember The Ladies: Stitching Together a Revolution, Featuring Humanities Nebraska Speaker Janie York

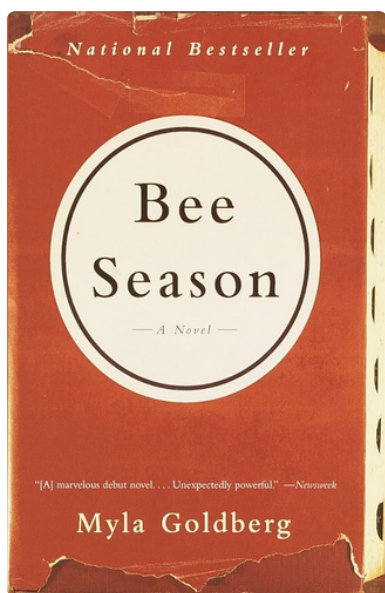
*The speaker booking fee for this program is waived through July 2026.* Step back into America's founding era with *Remember the Ladies: Stitching Together a Revolution*, a special presentation exploring the role of women during the American Revolution. Drawing from Abigail Adams' famous plea to her husband, John Adams, to "remember the ladies" as the nation's democracy was taking shape, this event highlights the courage, creativity, and resilience of the women who shaped history.



Presented as part of engagement initiatives around the new PBS documentary *The American Revolution*. Learn more at [NebraskaPublicMedia.org/AmericanRevolution](https://NebraskaPublicMedia.org/AmericanRevolution)

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## NLC Book Club Spotlight



### Bee Season

In 1908, The United States was at war with itself. The standardization of American English was torn between the language you're reading now, and the [Roosevelt/Carnegie-backed Simplified Spelling Board](#). The Spelling Board fought hard to "simplify" the written word, while the rest of the country scratched their heads at this new "fonetic" spelling. Then, from the depths of battle came the first ever [National Spelling Bee Competition](#), and its use of standard English spelling began the death knell of simplified English. Burgeoning out of our cultural emphasis on a unified language, spelling, education system, and its opportunity as a class equalizer, spelling bees provide a unique look into Americana. Myla Goldberg's 2000 debut novel *Bee Season*, uses this seemingly-squeaky clean All-American pastime to look at a modern family whose obsession to rise above banality ends up tearing them apart

Eleven years old and unimpressive by all accounts, Eliza feels dull compared to her gifted and successful family. Until she hits a stroke of luck and surprisingly wins her school's spelling bee, and then the district spelling bee after that. What follows is the portrait of a Pennsylvania family at the turn of the century as they encourage Eliza in her spelling pursuits while facing internal inadequacies and jealousies through religiosity, obsessiveness, and the pressures they put on themselves and each other. Eliza finds herself stuck in a dizzying world of ritualism, reaching out for her family who are lost in the realm of greater ascendancy.

Read the rest of Mackenzie's *Book Club Spotlight* [here](#)

**Mackenzie Marrow** is the librarian in charge of book clubs at the Nebraska Library Commission and wants to share with everyone the hidden gems in the [NLC's Book Club Kits Collection](#).

If you're interested in requesting *Bee Season* for your book club, you can find the Request Form [here](#). There are 11 copies.

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## Grant and Scholarship Opportunities



### [Creative Aging Arts Program \(CAAP\)](#)

Apply for CAAP grants at least six weeks ahead.

Grants cover most or all expenses. Funds are limited, and grants are processed first-come, first-served.

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### [Rob-See-Co Library Grant 2026](#)

[Applications due June 30, 2026](#). Preference is given to rural libraries operating in and serving local communities within the Rob-See-Co sales territory. Each grant will be a minimum of \$500. The focus areas for grant distributions will assist local libraries with expanding book collections, core educational programs for adults or children, and computer or software upgrades.

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### [USDA Distance Learning & Telemedicine Grants](#)

[Applications due June 30, 2026](#). \$50,000 to \$750,000 grants to assist rural communities, with populations of 20,000 or fewer, in acquiring equipment and technology that support distance learning and telemedicine services. 15% match required.

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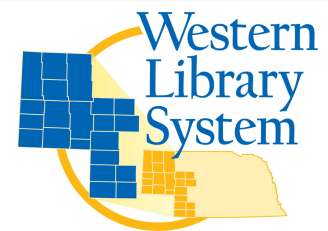
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## Western Library System Scholarships

The Western Library System (WLS) created a scholarship fund to support and encourage the professional development of library staff in the system. Member library staff may use the money for professional membership association dues and meetings, classes, workshops, or other

professional development activities. Funding may also be used for presenters at your library. Upon approval, funds will be dispersed.

[Apply for a WLS Scholarship](#)



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## Education and Training

### Education & Training | Nebraska Library Commission Blog

[Here](#) is a list of free training opportunities coming up this week and some recently recorded webinars!



### Maine State Library Continuing Education Calendar

[Here](#) is a list of free training resources which is compiled each month by the Maine State Library and WebJunction.



**CE CALENDAR**  
Continuing Education

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### Upcoming NCompass Live Shows

[NCompass Live](#) is broadcast live, every Wednesday, from 10am - 11am Central Time.



#### [Engaging New Voices in Advocacy](#)

- **Date:** 5/20/2026
- **Register by:** 5/18/2026

#### [Pretty Sweet Tech: Preparing Tech Ready Librarians](#)

- **Date:** 5/27/2026
- **Register by:** 5/25/2026

#### [Connected America 2026](#)

- **Date:** 6/3/2026
- **Register by:** 6/1/2026

#### [Law for Librarians](#)

- **Date:** 6/10/2026
- **Register by:** 6/8/2026

The [shows are recorded](#) for anyone who may want to watch again or who cannot attend at the scheduled time. Registration for a live show is not required to view the archived recording.

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## Basic Skills Courses



### Class: [Communication](#)

- **Class Dates:** Self-paced
- **Registration Dates:** Available any time

### Class: [Readers Advisory](#)

- **Class Dates:** 6/1 - 6/12
- **Registration Dates:** 4/20 - 5/22

### Class: [Reference](#)

- **Class Dates:** 7/6 - 7/17
- **Registration Dates:** 5/25 - 6/19

### Class: [Library Policy](#)

- **Class Dates:** 7/27 - 8/7
- **Registration Dates:** 6/15 - 7/10

### Class: [Collection Management](#)

- **Class Dates:** 8/17 - 8/28
- **Registration Dates:** 7/13 - 8/7

[More information about the Basic Skills for Nebraska Librarians Courses](#)

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## Upcoming Events

**May 21** - Quarterly System Directors Meeting with NLC, Omaha

**July 14** - Western Library System Board Meeting, Scottsbluff and Virtual

**July 30** - Western Library System Annual Meeting, Kimball

**October 14, 15, 16** - [NLA/MPLA Joint Conference](#), La Vista

**October 17** - Nebraska School Librarians Day, Kearney and Omaha



**Save the Date**

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# We've Moved to a **New Website & Email!**

Please update your records with our new contact info:

 Visit Us:

▶ [westernlibrarysystem.org](http://westernlibrarysystem.org)

 Email Us:

▶ [wls@westernlibrarysystem.org](mailto:wls@westernlibrarysystem.org)

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*Supporting Libraries Serving Our Communities*

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Dawes • Deuel • Dundy • Garden • Grant • Hayes  
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Morrill • Perkins • Scotts Bluff • Sheridan • Sioux

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Becky Henkel, Secretary  
Beth Falla, Vice President  
Carole Matthews  
Cheryl Hamilton  
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Dana Morgan  
Jennifer Holthus  
Jodi Storer  
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**Western Library System**

[www.westernlibrarysystem.org](http://www.westernlibrarysystem.org)



Western Library System

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