The Pratt Promotes Digital Literacy with New Wash & Learn Program

This summer the Pratt and community partners transformed laundromats into pop-up libraries!

CREATIVE PARTNERSHIP IS PUTTING A NEW SPIN ON DOING YOUR LAUNDRY.

According to research, the average American spends 90 minutes a week in a laundromat with only half of that time spent doing laundry. Combine this with a tangible need for digital access and training in Baltimore City, and you’ve got Wash & Learn (WALI), an innovative initiative that is placing the library’s much-needed resources in four local laundromats.

“The more the Library can be a presence in the community, the better” says Pratt President and CEO Heidi Daniel. “WALI is about removing barriers and making sure all Baltimoreans can take advantage of the myriad of services that the Pratt offers as a 21st-century library. It’s exciting to offer our programs in spaces that act as community anchors in the same way our branches do.”

In partnership with The Robert W. Deutsch Foundation, Media Democracy Fund, and Libraries Without Borders, the Pratt has equipped four laundromats with technology installations, providing laptops and iPads for use whenever the laundromat is open. Customers can take a seat and follow basic technology tutorials, search for jobs, or connect with community resources, while children can develop early literacy skills, emotional intelligence, and basic coding skills on iPads. These tech stations look to promote digital equity, offering access and opportunities to connect.

Two of these laundromats will also feature the Pratt’s mobile job center, which will visit laundromat sites twice a month, providing important workforce development programming. As always, the Library’s programs and services are free of charge.

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This program represents an exciting new chapter for the Pratt with a clear nod to its core mission. “At the end of the day, it’s about access and opportunity,” says Daniel. “We want to make the passive time people spend in laundromats more active and engaging. You can work with a librarian to make your first resume or take your child to a storytime that sparks their love of learning. You might be able to take that first step towards a better life while meeting a very basic need.”

WALI launched in June at HIPP Laundromat on Pulaski Highway, Laundry City on Frederick Ave, and two Sudsville Laundromats on Erdman Ave and Reisterstown Road.
After more than 20 years of planning and 3 years of work, the renovation of the historic Central Library is nearing completion.

Preserving the past, positioned for the future...

Plaque at the Forest Park Branch (pictured above) where Lillian and Willard met in 1938.

"The library plays such an extraordinary role in the community. So many of the branches are located in underserved neighborhoods that are facing tough issues like food deserts and joblessness."

"The library plays such an extraordinary role in the Baltimore community," Nancy says. "So many of the branches are located in underserved neighborhoods that are facing tough issues like food deserts and joblessness," she explains. "There are a million opportunities for our libraries to improve these conditions by giving people the information and tools and support they need to transform their lives and get back on their feet." Pratt programs that help job seekers improve their chances of finding employment are of particular interest to her. In former Pratt board member Calvin Butler, the CEO of BGE, Nancy found a true partner.

"We both realized that if you don't create job opportunities for people, including young people, we will never address the difficult issues facing our city," says Butler. "When we do open up those opportunities, we create a sense of hope in the future among our residents that otherwise would not exist."

Nancy saw BGE's Mobile Job Center as a positive model and worked with Baltimore City to extend the initiative. "Once Nancy gets her mind wrapped around an idea that she's passionate about, there's not a lot of talk, it's all action," explains Butler. "She wants to make a difference in the city, and she knows how to leverage whatever resources she has to make that happen."

Nancy is thrilled about the other community-based initiatives the Pratt's President and CEO Heidi Daniel is creating. "She is bringing the Library even more into the 21st century," Nancy says. Butler agrees. "The library continues to be a place for collaboration that offers much needed resources to the community," he says. "That's the roadmap Heidi is putting together."

On September 14, Nancy's tireless work as a Board member and co-chair of the highly successful Pratt Campaign for Central Library Renovations will be on full display as city residents celebrate the grand re-opening of the newly refurbished Central Library. "I'm very proud of this city, but we all must be," Nancy says. "We need everyone's ideas for how to make us better."

Giving to the Pratt is easy. Go to WWW.PRATTLIBRARY.ORG/GIVE to make an online credit card donation.
Selections from the CEO

Trying to decide what to read next? Save a little time and take a page from us. We asked Pratt President & CEO Heidi Daniel for some of her favorite recent reads. Make sure to check these books out from your local library branch!

The Great Believers by Rebecca Makkai

This beautifully written novel tells the story of Chicago’s gay community as it deals with the AIDS crisis in the 1980s alongside a gripping tale of a mother searching for her daughter in modern-day Paris. What I loved about this book was its ability to create both a logical and emotional context for the AIDS epidemic, while also acknowledging that the pain of those losses are very much still with us, to this day. It’s a reminder of exactly why. An emotionally frank tone, you realize that Land is unpacking just how much work it is to be poor and under-served in our country. It’s a much needed reminder that attention must be paid to all of those around us.

Daisy Jones & The Six by Taylor Jenkins Reid

If you’re looking for something to read on the beach, look no further! Reid crafts a delightful oral history of a fictional rock band led by Daisy Jones. The characters are richly drawn, the situations wild, and the style is constantly fresh and funny. You’ll finish the book and be instantly ready for the movie!

The Care and Feeding of Ravenously Hungry Girls by Taylor Anissa Gray

When I first heard this book described as a cross between “An American Marriage” and “The Mothers,” I knew I had to read it. I was not disappointed. The story explores the relationship between mothers and daughters (complicated, as you can imagine). It’s also about how families come together in difficult times to take care of each other and provide “home” for each other. It’s incredibly specific and universal at the same time.

Young people today who share that feeling of wanting to fit in, who struggle with ongoing violence, who believe grownups don’t understand them. She and her “peace goon” activities collaborated with the Pratt to lead conversations in all 22 library branches. The Pratt also helped support another citywide campaign, “Choose Civility,” and asked Erricka and her trained volunteers to host and help lead conversations in local Pratt libraries. “It’s not easy to build a movement,” she admits, “but grappling together with these really tough issues that so often divide us is part of that process.”

On a broader scale, the Pratt Library supports the Ceasefire movement by spreading the word about its activities and promoting its message of non-violence. It offers spaces in its local branches to hold their meetings and activities, says Erricka, and dramatically expands the visibility of the movement by putting up their flyers and posters and calendars of events. Plus, she says, “Pratt Libraries are safe, and open, and free, and accessible, and its employees care deeply about what must be done to improve our City.”

Erricka remembers the 2015 Freddie Gray uprising when the Pratt Library in Penn North opened its doors when so many others were slamming theirs shut. “That kind of positive response reflects the high level of trust that the Pratt has earned in our communities over the years.” And the Pratt will again organize the “One Book” initiative, with the selected book to be announced when the author joins the Pratt Library in Penn North for a discussion of the book.

Now in its third year, “Baltimore Ceasefire 365” continues to inspire anti-gun violence activities across the city. The success of its mission relies on the principle that no one person or organization can end the epidemic of violence by themselves. “The whole city has to own it and do it together,” says Erricka. In response, the Pratt Library has become a significant partner in these peace-focused efforts. Last year, in partnership with the T. Rowe Price Foundation and Baltimore City Public Schools, the Pratt Library launched the “One Book Baltimore” initiative that provides 7th and 8th graders and their families the chance to connect with each other by reading the same book.

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Coming to the Pratt*

Sep 11
Rebecca Makkai, The Great Believers. Central Library, 7 p.m.

Sep 19
Valerie Jarrett, Finding My Voice. Central Library, 7 p.m.

Oct 3
Dan Rather, What Unites Us. Central Library, 7 p.m.

Oct 29
Dorothy Gilliam, Trailblazer. Central Library, 7 p.m.

Nov 14
Colson Whitehead, The Nickel Boys. Central Library, 7 p.m.

Nov 19
Rick Atkinson, The British Are Coming. Central Library, 7 p.m.

SAVE THE DATES!
Jan 15 • Writers LIVE! David Grann
Jan 25 • Black & White Party
Mar 10 • Writers LIVE! Jon Meacham
April TBD • Mr. Pratt Presents

See the latest issue of Compass or check out prattlibrary.org for a complete list of upcoming speakers and programs.
Ms. Leslie Brown
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Carolyn and Allen Baron
Dr. and Mrs. Frank H. Baker
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Mr. Lawrence J. Appel
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