

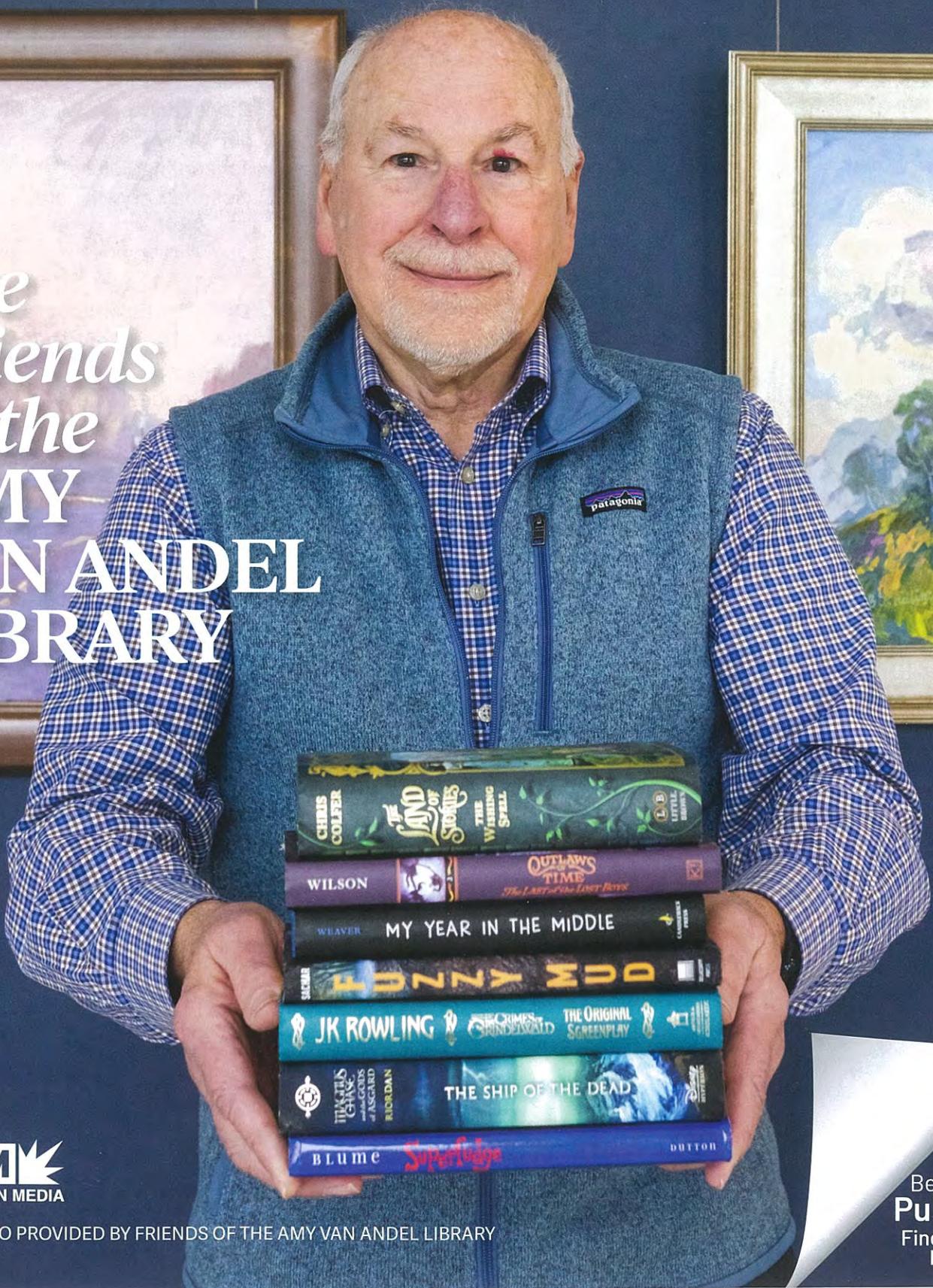
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February 2026

The Friends of the AMY VAN ANDEL LIBRARY



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THE FRIENDS OF THE AMY VAN ANDEL LIBRARY

BY ASHLEY INGERSOLL / PHOTOS PROVIDED BY FRIENDS OF THE AMY VAN ANDEL LIBRARY



Gallery In The Stacks / BetsyO'Neill

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FRIENDS OF THE AMY VAN ANDEL LIBRARY

The Friends of the Amy Van Andel Library is a non-profit organization that raises funds to enhance programs, facilities, and services provided by the Amy Van Andel Library in Ada. The reach of the Friends of the Library's work extends beyond the library, as Friends volunteers are familiar faces at community events such as the Ada Farmers Market, Ada Women's Night, Pumpkin Prowl, and holiday parades.

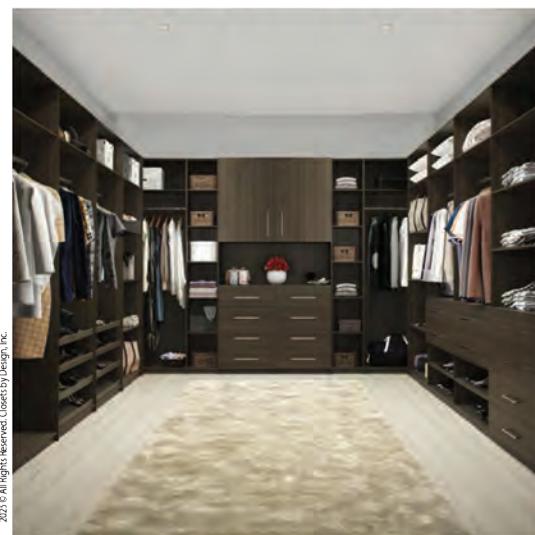
The Friends group was formed in February 2021 when a passionate group of Ada residents formed the organization to support the library. Friends Board president Jim Ferro, in his previous role as Township Planning Director, was part of the team that brought a Kent District Library (KDL) branch to Ada. He and Ada resident and KDL staff member Penny Zurgable, along with three other library supporters, became the original incorporators of the organization.

The Friends have since welcomed many library fans into their membership and have attracted an invaluable crew of volunteers to their mission. The Board of Directors is steered by Ferro and includes Amy Van Andel, Chelsea Bossenbroek, Kristi Krass, Teri Genovese, and Tessa Wiles, with input from library manager, Scott Ninemeier. The organization's five-year anniversary provides an inflection point for the Board to reflect on what's been working well for the Friends, and how best to engage all community members, especially library patrons, going forward.

Board member Amy Van Andel reflects on the Library Friends past and future: "We are so fortunate to have such a creative and dedicated Friends Board, and I am proud to count myself among them. Our work wouldn't be possible if not for such wonderful volunteers who dedicate their time and many talents to our community. There have been so many fun experiences and special moments over the past five years and I know there are many more exciting ideas on the horizon."

Anyone who's visited the library has encountered contributions from the Friends of the Library including toys and features in the children's section, the Gallery in the Stacks rotating art exhibit, sled dog visits, a community puzzle table, and much more. The non-profit, which celebrates its fifth anniversary in 2026, generates most of its income from the sale of used books donated by community members. The books are resold in the library's used bookstore.

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One eye-catching project spearheaded by the Friends of the Library is the Gallery in the Stacks, the library's quarterly art exhibit program that debuted in March 2023. The exhibit, located throughout the lobby of the library, showcases local artists' work and fills a previously unmet need in downtown Ada.

"Shortly after the library opened I stopped in to warm up, and the big, beautiful walls were so open and just begged to have paintings. I spoke with the library director and the

Friends, who were enthusiastic about the idea of bringing art to the walls," says Betsy Ratzsch, Friends member and curator of the exhibit program. "At that time Ada did not have an art gallery or space to exhibit art, so I was thrilled to have the library become home to 'Gallery in the Stacks.' The Gallery even won an award from the Friends of Michigan Libraries in 2024 for the Gallery's positive impact on our community."

Friends of the Library volunteers and Board members appreciate different aspects of being involved so closely with the library:

"I've loved libraries my whole life. When I was a child, I was lucky enough to walk to the local library any time I wanted. It was an endless source of learning and fun," says Margie Sweeney, a Friends of the Library volunteer since 2022. "As a retired educator, I am happy to have the opportunity to support readers of all ages and stages through volunteering with the Friends program."

Board member Teri Genovese has a very similar feeling. "Once my kids were in full-time school, I knew I wanted to

give back to the community in some way. As an avid reader and library patron, joining the Friends of the Amy Van Andel Library Board was a natural fit. As a professional photographer, I've loved contributing by helping with events, taking photos, and managing the Friends' social media marketing," says Board member Teri Genovese.

There are several ways to support the Friends of the Library. First, volunteer! The organization's success depends on the volunteer time and talents of its patrons. In 2025, the small but mighty team of volunteers logged more than 500 hours sorting and shelving books, working book sales, and staffing booths at the Farmers Market and other community events. The Friends are always in need of volunteers, and there are lots of ways – and flexible options – to contribute time.

"For me, it's hard to imagine a more rewarding, hopeful, heart-warming cause than promoting reading and the essentiality of a local library," says Kristi Krass, Board member since 2023. "Joining the Friends gave me flexible options for volunteering, and the



constant thrill of getting to meet book lovers of all ages out in the community and among the shelves of our used bookstore."

The Friends also rely on the donations of gently used books, DVDs,

and audiobooks, which can be dropped off inside the library or placed anytime into the library book returns. Then, shop the thousands of books and A/V materials in the Friends' bookstore on the first floor of the library, where

An advertisement for Out Back Casual Living. The top left features the brand's logo, a stylized 'OB' in an orange circle, with the text "OUT BACK" and "CASUAL LIVING" below it. The top right features the slogan "DESIGNED FOR EVENINGS THAT linger" in a flowing, cursive font. The center of the ad shows a modern outdoor living space at dusk or night, featuring a large sofa, a coffee table, and several glowing lanterns. The bottom left contains the text "SHOP OUR DESIGNER SHOWROOM 4050 West River Dr, Comstock Park, MI" and "OUTDOOR FURNITURE | SHADE | KITCHENS | ACCESSORIES & MORE!". The bottom right features a QR code with the text "SCAN HERE".

everything is priced \$3 or less. Children's books, cookbooks, DVDs, adult fiction and non-fiction, religious books, young adult books, large print, foreign language books, and more fill the shelves.

Local Ada residents volunteer for a number of reasons. "I'm a reader. To organize and shelve the books donated to the Amy Van Andel Library is like being in the company of other readers, and it's stimulating to be in their company," says Ellen VanderMey, a Friends of the Library volunteer. "I learn about the interests and concerns of our whole community: adults, young adults, and children. Working with other volunteers to get these books, movies, and music on the shelves so that another person can find them and take them home is satisfying work."

Others appreciate the fun and comradery. "The most fun I have during the year is working side by side with the Friends," says Ninemeier. "From marching in the Fourth of July Parade, to organizing the sled dogs during Ada's Tinsel, Treats & Trolleys, to working the 'Friends Tent' at the Farmers Market, the Friends are part of so many staple events in Ada Township."

You can inquire about volunteering via email at adalibraryfriends@gmail.com.

Finally, consider becoming a dues-paying member of the Friends. A \$30 family membership (\$15 for seniors) offers benefits that include special event invites and the satisfaction of sustaining one of the Township's most vital institutions. Join on their website, adalibraryfriends.com, or at the library front desk.

On behalf of the entire team of Friends of the Amy Van Andel Library, they would love to hear from you.



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