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 Paul Eisenberg

 8 min read

## Landmarks: Library working to showcase Oak Lawn's legacy as 'artistic hot spot'

In Memphis, it's possible to stand in the footprints of Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis and Carl Perkins, whose impromptu get-together at Sun Studio later was dubbed the "Million Dollar Quartet."

Appointments for tours of that [historic studio](#) in Tennessee are offered daily and include the space where the famous musicians were photographed around a piano, set up to look just as it did then. It's a worthwhile way to spend an afternoon for anyone who's a fan of music and of history.

Closer to Chicago, appointments are available that enable visits to another historic studio building where famous musicians cut bestselling albums. But it's a good idea to first check if it's in network with your health insurance.



Gary Loizzo, who operated Pumpkin Studios in Oak Lawn in the 1970s and '80s, recording iconic rock albums such as "Paradise Theatre" by Styx, in 1998 in his home studio in Orland Park. (JOHN SMIERCIAK)

Now a physical therapy office, the former Pumpkin Studios in Oak Lawn was where the rock band Styx recorded hit albums such as "Paradise Theater" and "Kilroy Was Here."

Studio owner Gary Loizzo achieved initial fame in the 1960s with the hit song "Bend Me, Shake Me" with his band American Breed. He packed up his recording equipment in 1991 and moved the studio to his home in Orland Park. Loizzo died in 2016, but his work during Pumpkin's 15-year run in Oak Lawn remains a source of civic pride.

The Pumpkin Studios building may have been repurposed, but it still has the same floor plan, "so people can have their physical therapy appointments in what used to be the recording rooms," said Kaye Jansen, the Oak Lawn Public Library's archivist and local history librarian.

Around that same time and in the same genre, Oak Lawn native Kevin Cronin was scoring chart toppers with the band REO Speedwagon. But that hasn't stopped him from popping in occasionally at the library.

Jansen said colleagues who have worked at the library for years indicated Cronin's parents were regular patrons, and sometimes Cronin himself would stop in to pick up items for his father.

"One of my co-workers told me this rock star came in, but he was just picking up books on hold," Jansen said.

It's those sort of associations Jansen said they want to highlight with an exhibit about Oak Lawn's musical legacy.

Last month, Nick Malone, the library's content coordinator, started a public search to uncover more of the village's musical past.

"We're beginning work on an ambitious new exhibit for our Local History wing," he wrote. Called Music Legends of Oak Lawn and set to open next spring, "this exhibit will feature firsthand stories, interactive live and studio recordings, memorabilia and more from the unsung musical history of our neighborhood."

While radio rock from the 1980s might constitute the village's most notable connections, a former longtime institution likely gave people a more direct link to the art.



A photo of musicians from the Oak Lawn Jazz Festival in 1979 is among the archival material planners will draw from as they assemble an Oak Lawn Public Library exhibit celebrating Oak Lawn's musical heritage. (Oak Lawn Public Library)

For more than 20 years, jazz bands from throughout Illinois traveled to Oak Lawn Community High School for an annual jazz festival. The competitive event drew bands from Chicago suburbs such as Elk Grove Village, Itasca and Buffalo Grove, and from as far away as Rockford, Champaign and Decatur.

“It blossomed into something jazz bands from far and wide would want to come to,” he said. “They came to compete and to have their performances recorded and pressed to vinyl.”

Festival organizers hired mobile studios to come record the performances, creating audio snapshots of some of the best student musicians in the state, as judged by college

professors and even, in 1972, the publisher and managing editor of Down Beat magazine.

Malone has been scouring the internet on sites such as [discogs.com](https://www.discogs.com) searching out recordings from the festival.

“Getting our hands on these and digitizing them was pretty important,” he said. “People have been very eager to share things from their collections. We’ve found people have these records in their collections and have never lived in Oak Lawn. They don’t even know where Oak Lawn is. We reached out to them, and it turns out they picked them up at used record shops and then moved their way across the country over the years.

“I just got off a call with a guy who had a record from the 1979 performance — the 20th anniversary of the show. He got it at a garage sale in Wyoming and still has it there. It’s made it a pretty long way from Oak Lawn for sure.”

The library already has some of the [tracks digitized and available online](#), but once the exhibit goes live next year, Jansen and Malone hope to include an in-person audio element, a listening station where visitors can experience that direct link to music created over the decades in Oak Lawn or by Oak Lawn residents.

Besides the music itself, the planners have connected with a photographer who worked with Styx and REO Speedwagon and plan to incorporate his images of the bands.

They’ve also put out a call for artifacts community members are willing to lend or donate to the library’s archives. Jansen would love to include a guitar from Rossi Music Center in Oak Lawn, where Cronin long ago gave guitar lessons.

“It would be a dream come true if Kevin Cronin loaned us his childhood guitar, if he held on to something like that,” Jansen said.

They also are hoping to acquire sheet music used over the years at the jazz festival, adding a direct visual analog to the sounds captured at the events.

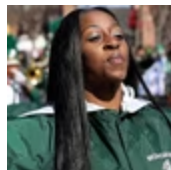
"We're looking for more artifacts to fill in the gaps in the story," Jansen said. "We need more documentation of this aspect of Oak Lawn history."



Musicians gather for a photo at the 1984 edition of the Oak Lawn Jazz Festival. Recordings of the festival from the 1970s will be part of an exhibit showcasing Oak Lawn's musical legacy. (Oak Lawn Public Library)

So they put out the call early. The exhibit is planned to open by the end of May in hope of collecting items as well as stories about the village's musical legacy.

"We want to hear from people," Malone said. "Any footage or photos, firsthand accounts bring stuff so much more to life than if it's just purely historical fact."



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They hope also to explore some of the lesser known facets of Oak Lawn's musical history, a heritage that includes connections to a diverse array of artists including [Liza Minnelli](#), [Kanye West](#) and Dan Donegan of the [metal band Disturbed](#). Gospel artists recorded at Pumpkin Studios along with pop singers.

There also could be opportunities to incorporate performances from current Oak Lawn musicians or ensembles from the village's schools.

"It will be a lot of fun," Jansen said. "There's a lot of potential for what can be done with this exhibit."


For Malone, it's also a way to showcase Oak Lawn, a place sometimes overshadowed by its proximity to Chicago and confused by outsiders with similarly named towns such as Oak Forest or Oak Park.

"A big part of why this is such an exciting project for us is making sure Oak Lawn is recognized for the artistic contributions the town has made," he said. "It doesn't take long for cultural memories to be erased.

"Oak Lawn isn't always remembered as an artistic hot spot. We're trying to change that."

*Landmarks is a weekly column by Paul Eisenberg exploring the people, places and things that have left an indelible mark on the Southland. He can be reached at [peisenberg@tribpub.com](mailto:peisenberg@tribpub.com).*

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 Janice Neumann

 6 min read

## People from around the globe gather to converse, make friends at library program in Oak Lawn

A group of people from far flung points on the globe gathers each week at the Oak Lawn Public Library, taking advantage of an opportunity to practice the language of their adopted home while making some new friends in the process.

The library's English Together sessions are a way to turn the daunting task of learning a new language into a welcoming dialogue, organizers said.

It's a message that resonated with the dozen women at a recent Thursday session, who said the extra support from the library is crucial as they expand their conversational skills.





Women participating in the Oak Lawn Public Library's English Together program discuss kitchen terms during a recent meeting of the group, which focuses on conversational aspects of communication rather than grammar rules. (Janice Neumann/Daily Southtown)

“I need to learn English because I want to speak English with my friends,” said Kamola Almatova, who is from the central Asian nation of Tajikistan.

Aamena Mohammed was a medical student in her native Yemen who now lives in Chicago Ridge and still hopes to have a career in health care.

“I like this place because they focus on pronunciation and conversation,” Mohammed said. “They’re very kind. If you make a mistake, they help you fix it.”

Even with help, learning how to navigate a foreign culture takes a concerted effort, she said.

“America is a dream country for a lot of people — education, safety and medicine is so much better,” Mohammed said. “But you have to focus on yourself, build on yourself.”

The actual learning was casual but true-to-life as led by

Kate Donley, a programming librarian at Oak Lawn, taught ESL courses at the university level for 20 years and spent time in the Peace Corps, where she learned a bit of various languages, including Arabic.

She tries to keep the English Together sessions casual. At the recent meeting, she asked everyone to repeat “I’ve got to go, see you later” and discussed the nuances of phrases such as “whatcha gonna do today, whatcha want to do today and whatcha have to do today?”

They talked about how to pronounce these sentences and how different they seemed from the more formal versions they had learned.



Patricia Alvarez, who lives in Oak Lawn after emigrating from Mexico years ago, practices her English conversation skills at an Oak Lawn Public Library program. (Janice Neumann/Daily Southtown)

“I think most of our Arab countries learn British English,” Mohammed said. “That’s why we are confused when we come here.”

The class also usually includes two library associates and several community volunteers who are retired teachers. The associates help watch the attendees’ kids, as well as with the learning.

“This opens up the class to parents who otherwise have to hire or find child care,” Donley said. “We just love having the kids around.”

Donley, the library associates and volunteers all say they love working with the students.

“This library group gives me a sense of community in Oak Lawn and also a sense of humanity in the world,” said volunteer Marlene Magon. “Kate Donley has created a safe place for people of different backgrounds to share ideas.”

Patricia Alvarez, who is from Mexico and lives in Oak Lawn, wanted to learn English when she first moved to the U.S. but had to stay home tending to her kids until they were older.

“I like this group because here I have the opportunity to practice,” said Alvarez, who has a GED certificate. The few other English classes she took elsewhere focused on grammar and at home the family spoke Spanish.

One of her sons was in the hospital for a few days this summer, where she realized more fluency would have helped.

“That’s why I want to continue with it,” Alvarez said.



Samia Habibe brings her daughter, Mennaseh, 1, to English Together sessions at the Oak Lawn Public Library, where library staffers help out keeping an eye on youngsters while their mothers practice conversational English. (Janice Neumann/Daily Southtown)

Samia Halibe, who is from Lebanon and lived in Brazil before moving here, also didn't get much of a chance to speak English at home. Though her husband knew the language, it was easier for them to converse in Arabic.

"I like it because I understand Kate," said Halibe, noting that other ways of learning didn't fit her busy schedule, either. "I have no time to watch TV."

Another benefit of in-person learning? "I've made good friends," Halibe said.

In one case, Halibe asked Donley to talk to her son in Brazil after he, his siblings and her ex-husband were robbed at gunpoint there.



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“She wanted me to know what happened,” Donley said.

The library also helps connect students with other free resources, such as an ESL class at Moraine Valley Community College, and organizers collaborate with counterparts at libraries in Chicago Ridge and Evergreen Park to be sure each offers the class on a different day, so people can attend more than one.

It’s part of a wider ESL effort at libraries throughout the Southland, including Orland Park Public Library, Green Hills Public Library in Palos Hills and Blue Island Public Library.

Oak Lawn, which has been holding the class for a year, has students from Russia, Vietnam, South Korea, Jordan, Palestine, Brazil, Lebanon, Yemen, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Morocco, Mexico, Ecuador, Colombia, Iraq, Syria, Serbia, India, Ukraine, and Poland.

The library also holds a Friendship Club in the summer, where participants can also learn about each other’s cultures. In August, they discussed their daily lives and shared photos.

“Our focus is on conversation,” Donley said. It’s a natural way for people to relax and make friends. It’s a way for some people to start making community connections in a way that’s supported.

*Janice Neumann is a freelance reporter for the Daily Southtown.*

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 <https://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/daily-southtown/ct-sta-oak-lawn-author-showcase-st...>

 Janice Neumann

 5 min read

## Library, bookstore team up for Oak Lawn's first Local Author Showcase

Difficult life experiences made Oak Lawn resident Ralph Rosenbrock determined to persevere, a simple message he conveys in his book, "Just a Farm Kid."

"I always felt if I could tell my story and if one person read it and decided not to give up on life, all the work would be worth it," Rosenbrock said.

He's among the authors who will be sharing their works at the first Local Author Showcase from 6:30 to 8 p.m. Aug. 16 at the Oak Lawn Public Library, 9427 Raymond Ave.

The event, organized with Bookie's Bookstore in Chicago's West Beverly neighborhood, includes almost 20 area authors as well as raffles for an "Illinois Love Basket" full of homemade goods, memorabilia and snacks from Global Media Award recipient Melanie Holmes and a bookworm-friendly prize package from Bookie's. Books from the participating writers also will be available.

Participating authors, many suggested by Bookie's operations manager Rich Wojcikowski, are Alanna Turner, Emily Hornburg, Emily VanderBent, Farrell McNulty, Jennifer Worrell, John Crivellone writing as Jack Crivalle, Joseph Weisz, Mark Edward Langley, Melanie Holmes, Myah Bawadi, Nubia Shambee, Pat Camalliere, Ralph Rosenbrock, Rebecca Garner, Rose Gabler & Sheila Lamb-Gabler, Sheila Maloney, Tom Dobrez and Zachary Jeffries.

"I think a program like this really connects to one of the core missions of the library, which is to amplify the voices of Oak Lawn," said Kate Donley, adult and young adult programming

librarian. "I think if most people were to think about where Chicagoland's hot literary scene is, they would not say Oak Lawn. But in a way we are making it happen."



Oak Lawn resident Ralph Rosenbrock will discuss his book, "Just a Farm Kid" at the Local Author Showcase at the Oak Lawn Public Library on Aug. 16. The event features nearly 20 authors from the area. (Ralph Rosenbrock)

Rosenbrock, who grew up on his grandfather's farm south of Chicago after losing his parents, was a helicopter crewman/door gunner in Vietnam, and later a helicopter maintenance technician and manager of the corporate flight department for a Fortune 500 company. His other writing stint was as editor of an international business publication on helicopters.

Writing the book was a challenge for the first-time author. Bur it also was therapeutic.



“No matter what happened in life, you can have a positive outlook and good life,” Rosenbrock said. “People read it and extract different portions of it related to their own lives.”

Melanie Holmes, who lives in Palos Park, said in “100 Things to Do in Illinois Before you Die,” she wanted to show the wealth of interesting but sometimes little-known gems in the state. The book covers food and beverage, music and entertainment, sports and recreation, culture and history and shopping and fashion.

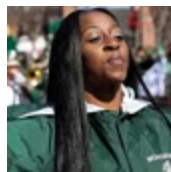
One of her favorite experiences was in Wildlife Prairie Park outside of Peoria, where she spent the night in a train caboose.

“I love unique lodging experiences myself, and other people will love the fact that you can roam this wildlife park and spend the night in it,” she said. “It about as unique as you can get.”

The two Capitol buildings in Springfield are another draw, she said.

“When you talk about landmarks like that filled with paintings, statuary, history — it’s really fascinating,” Holmes said.

A “lifelong travel enthusiast,” Holmes started traveling the state with her mom at age 7.



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“I hoped I could do the state justice, to say, ‘this is us, all of us,’ she said. “Diversity is a very important passion of mine, so I always wanted to give voice to a diverse array of people and cultures and arts and experiences.”

Emily Hornburg, who lives in Oak Lawn and grew up in Evergreen Park, is presenting “The Night’s Chosen,” a retelling of Snow White with fantasy, adventure, quests and a dragon. Her third book in a series, Hornburg has been writing and telling stories since childhood.

“I’ve always loved fairy tales and Snow White has always been my favorite fairy tale,” said Hornburg. “It’s the first movie I saw when I was two years old.”

Like the other authors, she’s also a fan of the Oak Lawn library, and appreciates the opportunity to showcase her work in her hometown.

“Local authors really can add a lot to what you’re reading and diversify your reading,” Hornburg said.

Registration for the Local Author Showcase is at [bit.ly/44Cx078](https://bit.ly/44Cx078) and more information is with Donley at [kdonley@olpl.org](mailto:kdonley@olpl.org).

*Janice Neumann is a freelance reporter for the Daily Southtown.*

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<https://www.southwestregionalpublishing.com/2023/07/21/oak-lawn-library-reflects-on-the-1967-tornado/>

 Kelly White

 6 min read

## Oak Lawn Library reflects on the 1967 tornado - Southwest Regional Publishing

Reliving the wild ride of the Oak Lawn tornado was the Oak Lawn Public Library on the tornado's 56th anniversary with a program called, The 1967 Tornado: Share Your Stories on July 8 at the library, 9427 Raymond Ave. (Photos by Kelly White)



Barbara Krueger, of Oak Lawn, survived the deadly 1967 tornado. She shared her experience at the Oak Lawn Public Library on July 8.

**By Kelly White**

Last week, a dozen tornadoes were reported in the Chicago area. One left a path of destruction from Burr Ridge to Stickney.

Just a few days earlier, witnesses to another tornado outbreak five decades earlier had gathered to discuss the 1967 tornado that hit Oak Lawn.

The 1967 outbreak was one of the biggest tornado outbreaks on record.

There were at least 10 tornadoes on the ground throughout the outbreak on April 21, 1967, and three of them had a hefty F4 rating on the Fujita scale with winds ranging anywhere between 207 and 260 mph.

The most destructive twister that day was the infamous Oak Lawn tornado and Barbara Krueger survived its wrath.

“My husband and I were just sitting down to eat dinner; it was raining,” Krueger, of Oak Lawn, said. “Then, he told me to get in the bathroom and sit in the bathtub.”

Krueger defined the tornado as deafening, a sound she will never forget.

“There are so many people who are alive today that say how life-changing the tornado was for them, especially as it was the deadliest ever recorded in the Chicago area, so naturally, many people still want and need to talk about it,” Kaye Jansen, Local History Librarian at the Oak Lawn Public Library, said. “It is important to remember how devastating this natural disaster really was.”

At its widest point, the Oak Lawn tornado was estimated to be three-quarters to one city block wide. In just 15 minutes, it traveled over 16 miles, leveling well-constructed homes and businesses in its path.

Reliving the wild ride of that horrendous day was the Oak Lawn Public Library on the tornado’s 56<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a program called, The 1967 Tornado: Share Your Stories on July 8 at the library, 9427 Raymond Ave.

During the discussion, led with factual data about the twister from Jansen, survivors were able to reminisce and share their stories.

“This event was for survivors or their family members to share their experiences with each other, and for residents wanting to learn more about the tornado of 1967,” Jansen said.

And, survivors did just that, including Pat Tenuto, who was a 21-year-old volunteer firefighter for Melrose Park at the time.

“It was my first time in Oak Lawn,” Tenuto, now of Oak Lawn, said. “Our department was called in to a residential area to look for survivors. You see tornados in movies, but it doesn’t do it justice. When I came out and actually saw the destruction, it was like, ‘Wow!’. It gave me an entirely new perspective and a whole new outlook on Mother Nature and what she can do.”

Saturday morning at the library was relaxed and was not so much a traditional presentation but more a round-table discussion as patrons, like Tenuto, were able to share stories in groups at their tables over pastries and to the crowd by using a microphone.

“The sense of community that’s fostered by remembering this hugely impactful event in Oak Lawn’s history will be very beneficial,” Jansen said. “There’s catharsis in talking about an experience that left a big impact on your life, even if it was so many years ago. Having that sense of solidarity, and relating to people who lived through the same event just adds to a sense of feeling validated. It’s not only educational, but it can be therapeutic as well.”

The library’s former Local History Librarian, Kevin Korst, wrote a book for the “Images of America” series on the Oak Lawn Tornado. These books are available to check out in the library’s collection, and there are more copies in the local history office. There is also a lot of content about the tornado available on Oak Lawn Public Library’s Local History page, as well, including photos and audio recordings.

The library currently has a Voices in the Wind exhibit on display about the 1967 tornado, specific to its path in the Oak Lawn area.

“I have had many patrons come to tell me about their memories of the tornado, and before the Voices in the Wind exhibit was installed again this year, I had several people tell me how much they missed the original 2017 exhibit when it was first hosted,” Jansen said. “The

comeback of this exhibit has been so popular and well-received that when I was considering an event led by a presenter, I realized that we have so many patrons who want to talk about their experiences themselves. Why bring in an outside presenter when our patrons have so much profound firsthand experience to share?”.

Mary Alstrom, of Oak Lawn, was just one of the many patrons who attended. She graciously shared the story of her husband, Kenneth Alstrom, who survived the Oak Lawn tornado.

Kenneth was just 15-years-old at the time.

“His mother had sent him to Dominick’s on 87<sup>th</sup> and Cicero to get food for the family and that was when the tornado struck,” Mary Alstrom said. “Thankfully, the tornado turned and he was able to safely return home.”

However, Kenneth did not stay home. He climbed on his bicycle and rode around Oak Lawn taking countless photos of the destruction that Mary generously donated to the Oak Lawn Public Library after his passing in 2010.

“We were married for 36 years and all I ever heard about was the tornado,” Mary said. “It was such a huge part of not only Oak Lawn’s history, but our own.”



Reliving the wild ride of the Oak Lawn tornado was the Oak Lawn Public Library on the tornado's 56th anniversary with a program called, The 1967 Tornado: Share Your Stories on July 8 at the library, 9427 Raymond Ave.

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 <https://patch.com/illinois/oaklawn/small-mighty-tiny-art-show-debuts-thursday-oak-lawn-library>

 Lorraine Swanson

 3 min read

# Small But Mighty 'Tiny Art Show' Debuts Thursday At Oak Lawn Library

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OAK LAWN, IL – Miniature art representing Oak Lawn's diverse residents will be on view in the [Oak Lawn Public Library's](#) first-ever Tiny Art Show, Thursday, July 13. The community art exhibit opens with a Tiny Art Show reception starting at 6:30 p.m. at the library, 9427 S. Raymond Ave.. with mini baked treats provided by [Simply Sweet Creations](#).



The library collaborated with [Acorn to Oak Studios](#), a non-profit youth and community art center that meets at [Pilgrim Faith United Church of Christ](#) and offers fine art classes across mediums. Earlier this summer, registered library patrons received tiny art kits from the library, containing a miniature canvas, paints and a brush. Participants returned their completed works to the library last week.

Over 100 tiny works of art are expected to be shown. Prizes from [Blick Art Materials](#) and [Jerry's Artarama](#) will be awarded to the best paintings of the night, decided by one of Acorn and Oak's resident artists, Linda Vorderer, as well as a People's Choice Award. The entire community is invited to take in their neighbors' ingenuity, soundtracked by a performance from the Oak Lawn Flutes.

## **Find out what's happening in Oak Lawn with free, real-time updates from Patch.**

"This project nurtures a sense of belonging and celebrates the variety of voices within Oak Lawn," Vorderer said. "We love this project because it encourages individuals to discover and express their unique perspectives and emotions. It's a great fit for our studio, too, as we find our voice as a new cultural center in the heart of Oak Lawn."

Organized by programming librarian Kate Donley, the show is just one part of the ["Find Your Voice" Summer Reading](#) celebration at the Oak Lawn Public Library. Artists and patrons will have the chance to join in on all the summer's festivities and programs, from book clubs, to film screenings, to concerts, to crafts. All submissions to the Tiny Art Show will remain on display at the library through the end of July.

## **Find out what's happening in Oak Lawn with free, real-time updates from Patch.**

"With the Tiny Art Show, we will be watching for the creativity in our citizens," Acorn to Oak's Andrea Zumhagen said. "We know it is there. We want you to show off your voice in this tiny but mighty way."

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