



Library Profile **VICTOR FARMINGTON, GENEVA, AND WOOD LIBRARIES**

ONTARIO COUNTY, NEW YORK

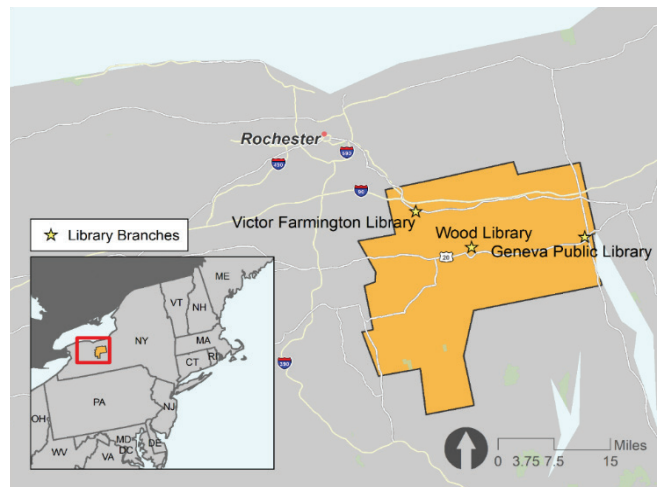
Library Profile: Victor Farmington, Geneva, and Wood Libraries



ONTARIO COUNTY, NEW YORK

The Victor Farmington, Wood, and Geneva Libraries in Ontario County are part of the Pioneer Library System (PLS). PLS is a four-county library system that serves 42 member libraries and shares materials through interlibrary loans; provides technical assistance for strategic planning, IT infrastructure, and board development; and promotes information sharing about successful practices and programs. PLS also assists the libraries with outreach to eight New York State-targeted outreach populations, including seniors, the disabled, homebound residents, and incarcerated individuals.

Victor Farmington Library’s mission is to “promote and nurture a sense of community by offering the space and resources for educational, recreational, and cultural enrichment for patrons of all ages.” In 2019, the library hosted 116,535 visitors and nearly 900 programs in Victor, New York.



Wood Library in Canandaigua provides “exceptional public library service in a comfortable and safe environment where people can satisfy their curiosity, stimulate their imaginations, and connect to the local community and to the world.” In 2019, 234,252 materials were circulated by the library, more than 18,000 people attended programming, and nearly 1,000 community meetings were held in library rooms.

The mission of the Geneva Public Library in Geneva is to inspire and support a lifetime of learning and creativity for the Geneva community. Total annual attendance in 2019 was 69,964, with 32,989 adult books and 19,716 children’s books borrowed.

All three Ontario County libraries promote lifelong learning and public health in their communities through a range of programs and partnerships. They also serve as critical gathering spaces for residents to socialize and connect.

ONTARIO COUNTY

Ontario County has a population of 109,450. The median household income is \$58,070 and the poverty rate is 6.7 percent, as compared to the national poverty rate of 11.0 percent. A total of

90.6 percent of residents are White, 2.3 percent are African American, 4.2 percent are Hispanic, and 1.2 percent are Asian.

	Population	% Change in Population (2000–2016)	% White	% Black	% Hispanic	% Asian	% Other	Median Household Income	% Families in Poverty
United States	318,558,162	13.2	62.0	12.3	17.3	5.2	3.3	\$55,322	11.0
Ontario County	109,450	9.2	90.6	2.3	4.2	1.2	1.7	\$58,070	6.7

Compared to other suburban counties across the country, Ontario County enjoys elevated levels of community health. Ontario County fell in the top quartile of all suburban counties on the Community Health Index.¹ Manufacturing,

Retail Trade, Health Care & Social Assistance, and Education Services are the largest employment sectors in Ontario County, accounting for 55 percent of working adults in the county.

	Total Labor Force	% Manufacturing	% Retail Trade	% Health Care & Social Assistance	% Education Services
United States*	131,362,978	9.3	10.9	14.5	9.2
Ontario County	46,818	15.0	14.0	14.0	12.0

Data Sources: 2012–16 American Community Survey five-year estimates; U.S. Census Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD), 2017.

*Continental figures for total labor force include the 48 lower states and Washington, DC.

¹ Data elements included in the Community Health Indexes, along with measures for Ontario County, can be found in the beginning of Appendix II.

SITE VISIT PARTICIPANTS AND DATA COLLECTION

In fall 2019, the study team conducted interviews with seven current library staff from the different libraries and representatives from four different partner organizations. Site visit interviews conducted with library staff and partners focused on understanding the programming and partnerships that support formal and informal education and community health in Ontario County.

In addition, the following data were used to create the network map included in this profile:

- 2016 (IMLS) Public Libraries Survey responses
- Program evaluations for several PLS programs
- Interview notes and related materials collected by the case study team

This site profile includes the following:

- A summary of select PLS programming and partnerships that support community health and social wellbeing
- A descriptive network map that illustrates the scope and variety of connections PLS maintains with local partners throughout the county and beyond

ONTARIO COUNTY LIBRARIES PROMOTE PHYSICAL WELLBEING BY CONNECTING PATRONS TO THE OUTDOORS

Residents in Ontario County engage in a wide array of outdoor activities and have easy access to local natural resources, including the nearby Finger Lakes and the mountains. The libraries partner with organizations focused on outdoor activities to support programs that move beyond the library walls. For instance, Wood Library partners with the Cumming Nature Center, an environmental education facility and nature preserve, to provide Unplug and Explore Adventure Packs. These are themed backpacks with materials for outdoor activities—insect-catching materials, nature journals, and binoculars—that patrons can check out from the library and take to the nature center. The backpacks promote both informal learning and health, especially for school-age children. Cumming Nature Center staff believe that more outdoor time for school children is a public health issue, and activities like the backpacks offer young people “repeated immersion in the natural world, which builds resilience,

confidence, and motor skills.”

Similarly, the Victor Farmington Library branch offers astronomy and bird-watching kits for patrons. “It’s about letting [people] explore,” said one librarian of the outdoor-centered resources. Victor Farmington also partners with the local Victor Hiking Trails group and the Parks and Recreation Department. The library leads hikes to Ganondagan State Historic Site in Ontario County, the location of the largest Seneca village in the 17th century. As one staff member said, the library is always thinking of how to engage its community in new ways—“getting people outside for hikes and building bridges outside the library walls.”

Wood Library also seeks to get community members involved in physical activity. It manages a story walk in Canandaigua, where residents walk through town to read a children’s story: Brightly colored, laminated pages of a

children's book rest on stands mounted on posts along the route. The featured story changes periodically, encouraging repeat visits. These types of programs across all three libraries promote literacy and learning, support healthy lifestyles through promotion of physical activity, and encourage families to spend time together outdoors.

Within the library walls, Wood Library also partners with Cumming Nature Center to devise monthly nature-themed events—for instance, Nordic Fest included book displays on cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. Providing programming in the libraries helps the Cumming Nature Center reach new audiences and helps the library vary its subject matter.

The libraries provide other resources that promote outdoor activities. For instance, Wood Library's adult services librarian saw a need for outdoor activities at community events like graduations and parties. Wood Library now offers outdoor game kits (such as cornhole, ladder ball, washers, and even fishing poles) that patrons can check out. The libraries offer admission passes to New York State Parks that patrons can access as well.

Ontario County libraries have also integrated environmental awareness and sustainability into their programming. The city of Canandaigua is a New York-certified bronze Climate Smart

Community, and the Climate Smart Canandaigua Task Force meets at Wood Library. The Task Force plans community activities in collaboration with Wood Library and participated in a community-wide effort to develop environmental sustainability goals into the library's strategic plan. For instance, in recent years, Wood Library hosted Earthapalooza, a festival designed to raise awareness of environmental issues and educate the community on sustainable actions to help reverse climate change like recycling, composting, and bicycle transport.

Victor Farmington also hosts environmental health and climate change awareness workshops that coach people to be active in their own community. It has hosted beekeeping classes in partnership with Kettle Ridge Organic Farm; participants then visit the farm to take part in sustainable activities like syrup or honey making.

Municipal government officials described the libraries as part of the infrastructure needed for a healthy and active community because they provide residents with the resources they need to live healthy lifestyles. Integrating learning opportunities into the outdoors, promoting physical activities, and emphasizing environmental stewardship are some of the ways that these libraries promote physical and mental health and wellbeing.

ONTARIO COUNTY LIBRARIES SERVE AS CRITICAL COMMUNITY HUBS THAT PROMOTE SOCIAL CONNECTION

All three library buildings serve as central meeting places for community members. They are important resources in areas that otherwise have scarce access to affordable gathering spaces. As one librarian put it, "There's no community center here, but the library is the center of the community." The libraries offer space for community members to engage in activities that support formal and informal education and health. Patrons use meeting spaces for group meetings, tutoring sessions,

nonprofit board meetings, and a variety of other uses, and they benefit from programming that the libraries host on-site. As a librarian at Wood remarked:

"There was a stereotype of the library as a place to get books and be quiet—that has completely changed now. Libraries have become interactive social gathering places—our bread and butter is always going to be books, but that focus has changed."

Staff at Geneva Library agreed that there has been a shift toward nontraditional and holistic community engagement.

Local families are another group that uses Ontario County library space frequently. The libraries provide many activities at no cost that would otherwise be unaffordable for many. They try to “meet people where they are” and support patrons where they need it. For example, Victor Farmington has structured opportunities for sensory play, messy art, dance parties, and a play café that all offer families free activities. It also holds sessions every morning that supplement a lack of universal pre-K in the community and partners with the local food pantry, Victor Farmington Food Cupboard, to whom it has donated more than 1,000 books.

Community members from all ages and backgrounds also benefit from the libraries’ role as central meeting places for community members. Wood Walkers is a group of Wood Library volunteers who have met at the library for walks and discussion for the past 12 years. The group is a low-commitment opportunity for patrons to participate in a healthy activity and meet other people. The group is primarily (although not only) seniors. Victor Farmington also hosts adult learners for evening classes put on by the Finger Lakes Community College, promoting lifelong learning.

Supports for Seniors Promote Physical Wellbeing and Social Connection

One group that has benefited from the libraries’ space is senior residents. There are no publicly funded senior centers in Ontario County. The libraries fill a critical gap by providing a place for seniors to gather, socialize, and engage in lifelong learning and physical health pursuits. The libraries collaborate with the County Office for the Aging (COA) by hosting COA’s programs and disseminating information to seniors.

New York State requires libraries to provide “coordinated outreach services” to eight targeted populations, one of which is senior citizens;² libraries must report to the state on how they provide services to these groups. All three libraries’ engagement with COA is an important way that they provide services to seniors. Wood Library runs COA-funded computer classes for residents over age 60 to learn how to use computers to find health information, sign up for Medicare, and access their Medicare accounts. Wood Library also hosts COA-organized Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s support groups, and COA holds a program for seniors to promote balance at Victor Farmington Library. A librarian at the Geneva Library hosted a program for seniors about how to be an active member of the community.

COA also has caregiver centers at seven Ontario County libraries with information in a variety of formats on how to care for the elderly. Wood Library ran an eight-week program on Powerful Tools for Caregivers. Staff at COA described libraries as important connectors because they have accessible, central locations, and libraries promote their programming well, usually resulting in well-attended events. They noted that their relationship with county libraries has been collaborative; each partner suggests ideas for programming and promotion.

By supporting a wide range of targeted groups, from children to seniors, and fostering social connections around health and lifelong learning, all three libraries provide space and opportunity for social wellbeing to flourish.

² Information about the New York State Coordinated Outreach Services Program is available at <https://www.nysl.nysed.gov/libdev/outreach/index.html>.

ONTARIO COUNTY LIBRARIES BRING PROGRAMMING INTO THE COMMUNITY

The Ontario County libraries noted that their role has transformed to one that is increasingly outward facing and attuned to their communities' needs. Wood Library's strategic planning process emphasized the importance of improving community access: "The library is more than the physical building and must reach out to all populations, including those who cannot access the library." As a result, the library has begun to explore and implement ways to bring library services to underserved populations like the elderly and homebound, while addressing barriers that restrict access in other ways. Victor Farmington Library implemented a Books on Wheels program, a free volunteer service that delivers library materials to patrons who are unable to come to the library for health or physical reasons.

Geneva Library rolled out the popular Hotspot Kit Lending Program. These kits contain a Wi-Fi hot spot and a laptop, and in 2019, library patrons borrowed 219 kits. By providing those devices for patrons without internet access, the library helped close a resource gap and address a "digital divide" in the region, helping people better

connect to information and services. Finally, PLS also seeks to reach a different audience by providing support to libraries in four state correctional facilities and four county jails. The system also supports pop-up libraries scattered throughout the area to promote further access to materials.

County libraries have also responded to other community needs. The libraries' increasingly flexible role—as a community connector and a nexus for health and education services and outreach—demands an adapted set of skills for librarians. "A lot of tasks don't necessarily need a library degree, but you need training and skills, confidence, and competence," said one librarian. There has been increasing emphasis on being able to interact with patrons and respond to community issues. At Geneva Library, for instance, staff have engaged in training around the mental health of patrons as well as CPR and Narcan trainings to address opioid abuse concerns in the area. According to one staff member, "[We] want it to be everywhere you look, the library is supporting. That's what will help the library last—responding to community needs."

COMMUNITY MEMBERS VALUE ONTARIO COUNTY LIBRARIES, WHICH FOSTER SUSTAINABILITY

The executive directors of Ontario County libraries spend much of their time promoting library programs and fostering partnerships within their communities. Staff members emphasized that to connect with their community and raise awareness of their diverse programs, outreach and collaboration with other organizations is essential: "We talk to other organizations about ideas and how the library can help implement—it's always, 'What can I do to support?' And most people know this, so they reach out to library staff and board members."

The libraries integrate themselves into the community by welcoming patrons and community groups to meet at the library. But they also seek to contribute to local events off-site—"Whenever there is a festival, we're there." Still, library staff perceive community awareness of the library as an active and open place—not just a place to read quietly—as something they need to continually work on. Each library relies on levy funding that local voters must approve regularly; they cite consistent voter support as an indication that their services are valued and will continue to receive local tax

support. Interviewees emphasized both that local residents value their libraries and that each library needs to continually demonstrate its value to the community.

Strong relationships with community partners, diverse programs that bring the libraries into the community and the community into the libraries, and multiple approaches to exploring

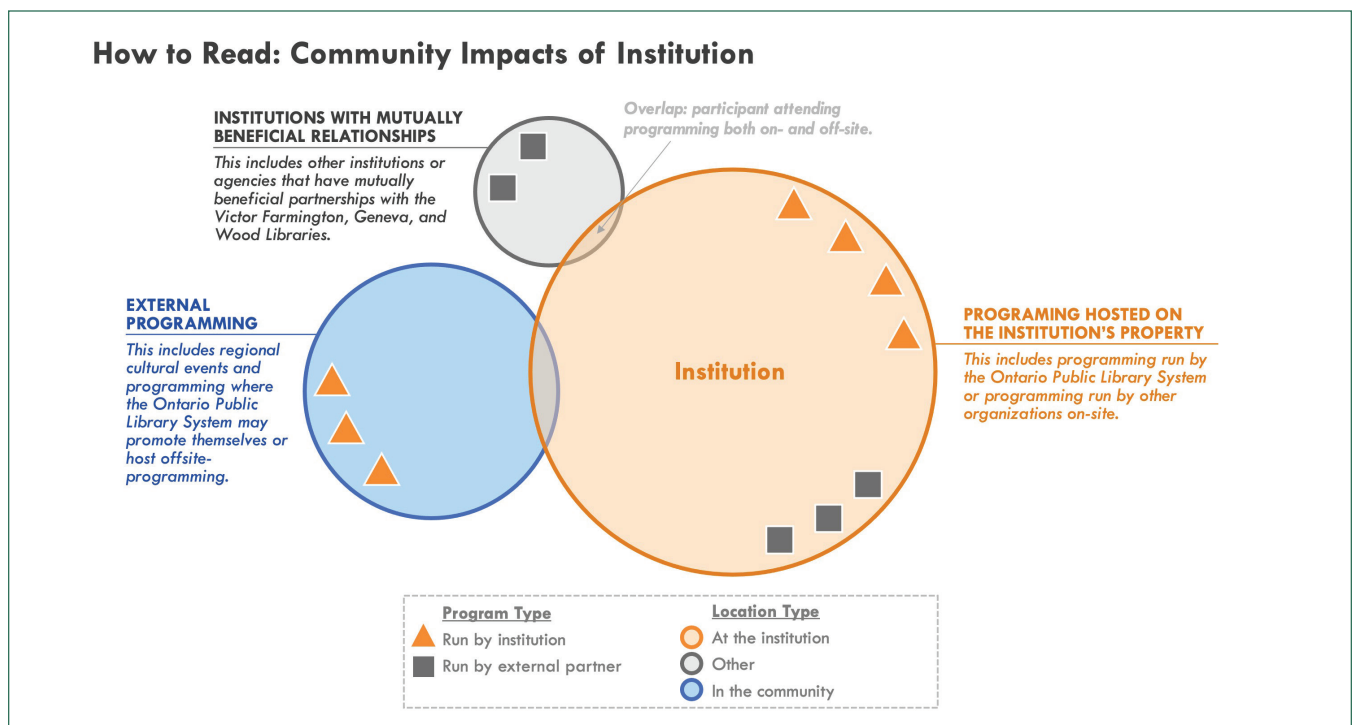
and connecting with the outdoors all help the Ontario County libraries play a meaningful part in promoting social wellbeing. By helping patrons actively enjoy the outdoors, connect with one another, and access the information they need to meet their diverse needs, the libraries simultaneously ensure their sustainability as local residents continue to value the libraries through their ongoing support.

ONTARIO COUNTY LIBRARIES NETWORK MAP

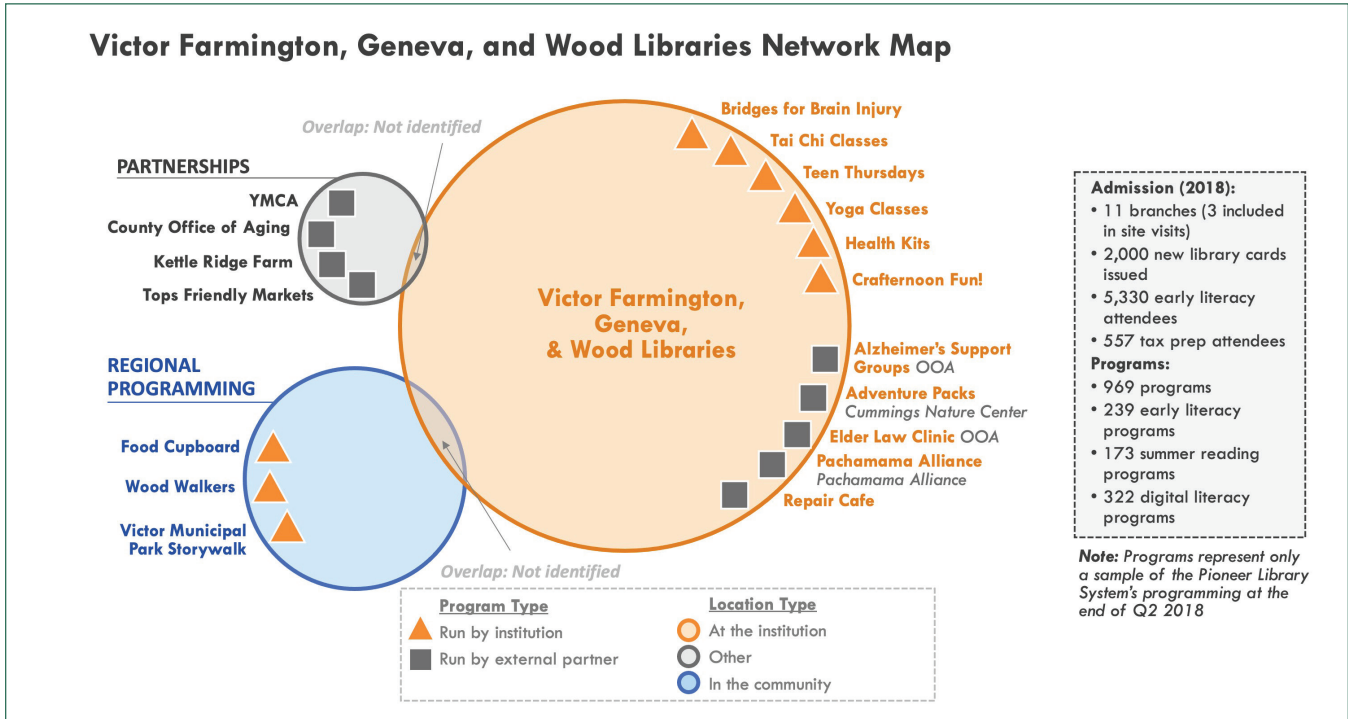
Using data provided by Victor Farmington, Geneva, and Wood Libraries, the study team developed a descriptive network map to highlight the different types of connections the libraries maintain with other institutions in the local community. The map illustrates the relationships between these libraries and those entities that offer programming at the libraries

and those that support cross-marketing efforts or have reciprocal relationships with the libraries, and it includes examples of off-site, library-led programming. The map does not provide an exhaustive list of the libraries' programs but attempts to illustrate a subset of the relationships that the libraries maintain.

NOTE: The network map is purely descriptive. The connections represented on the map do not necessarily, and are not intended to, provide estimates of the duration, durability, intensity, or broader economic impact of the relationships between the libraries and any single entity, or the broader network itself. The goal of the network map is to represent the range and diversity of different types of institutions that connect to the libraries in different ways.



Victor Farmington, Geneva, and Wood Libraries Network Map



The figure above represents three of 11 branches within PLS and illustrates a *sample* of the connections of the hundreds of programs offered across the three libraries. Within the orange circle is a small sample of programs conducted on the physical property of the institutions—both programs produced by the libraries and those produced by others; these are organized in terms of key program areas identified by the libraries. Within the blue circle is a sample of programs produced by the libraries and offered off-site in the community. The gray circle represents a sample of connections with other regional organizations that have mutually beneficial relationships with the libraries.