SUPER HEROES, SUPER FANS

Comic book characters are flying off the page and screen into local stores and libraries.
The medium has become so prevalent in recent years that comics are now spilling out of specialty stores and into local libraries.

"I would say a good one third of our collection for young adults is dedicated to graphic novels and manga, which is the Japanese word for those graphic novels," says Jennifer Daddio, Head of Teen Services at the Valley Cottage Library. She adds that people often travel from different towns to browse the library's extensive collection, which boasts mainstream titles like Batman and Spider-Man, to lesser-known, foreign works like All You Need is Kill and Assault on Titan.

The genre's popularity inspired Daddio to organize ValCon, the first comic book convention in the Ramapo Catskill Library System, taking place at the library from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. July 18.

The event, which is free and open to the public, is loaded with activities.

Industry professionals, including longtime Batman scribe Dennis O'Neil, "Lunch Witch" creator Deb Lucke and veteran artist of 29 years Mark McKenna, will lead discussions on various topics. There are workshops planned covering costume-making, cosplay makeup and candy sushi rolling. Yoshio Amao from Samurai Sword Soul will perform a swordfighting demonstration and then lead a brief workshop.

And it wouldn't be a comics convention without the presence of artists and vendors selling their wares.

Valley Cottage isn't the only library embracing graphic novels. When the White Plains Library announced its own May 16 comic con, it quickly sold out with nearly 750 fans registering to attend.

Beyond entertainment, Daddio says comic books have educational value and can be a good jumping-off point to get children interested in reading.

"It's a gateway for a lot of people to other things," she says. "Even if they love graphic novels their entire lives, it'll open them up to trying new things."

Daddio says parents will sometimes approach her saying that comic books are the only thing their children are interested in reading.

"And what I say to that parent or that adult is 'Let them read it. Don't discourage them, because if you discourage them from reading, then they're going to lose interest in reading altogether,'" she said.

Daddio has seen the benefits of letting a child choose their own reading material firsthand. When her daughter Norah Durfee was younger, she would exclusively read the "Captain Underpants" series. Instead of insisting Norah broaden her horizons, she was allowed to make her own reading list.

Now, Norah is getting ready to graduate fifth grade and she's reading at a ninth grade level.

"And I think that's because we encouraged her to read whatever she wanted to read," Daddio said.

The Valley Cottage Library is located at 110 Route 303.

There are plenty of comic book stores in the lower Hudson Valley. Here are just a few:

- 3rd Universe Comic Emporium, 35 North Riverside Ave., Croton-on-Hudson. 914-827-3600, 3duniverse.net.

Twitter: @lew_incredulous

Paul Rudd proves that size doesn't matter when he takes on the mantle of "Ant-Man" beginning July 17.

Michael B. Jordan plays Johnny Storm in "Fantastic Four," which also stars Bedford native Kate Mara. It opens Aug. 7.

Paul Bettany in "Avengers: Age of Ultron." It's just one of several new comic-book superhero themed films.
Valley Cottage Library hosts comic book convention

Angela Wang and Danielle O'Keefe, with Kiss Kiss Cosplay, make some flower headbands during the Valley Cottage Library ValCon comic book convention.

Mia Clowes, head of circulation, and Darth Vader (Walter Hillegass) from the 501st Legion, during the first Valley Cottage Library ValCon comic book convention Saturday. The event featured workshops.

Kathryn Hunt, left, from Fashion Geek For Hire, leads a cape- and mask-making workshop during the Valley Cottage Library ValCon comic book convention.