

The Library, Rewritten!



2021 Annual Report



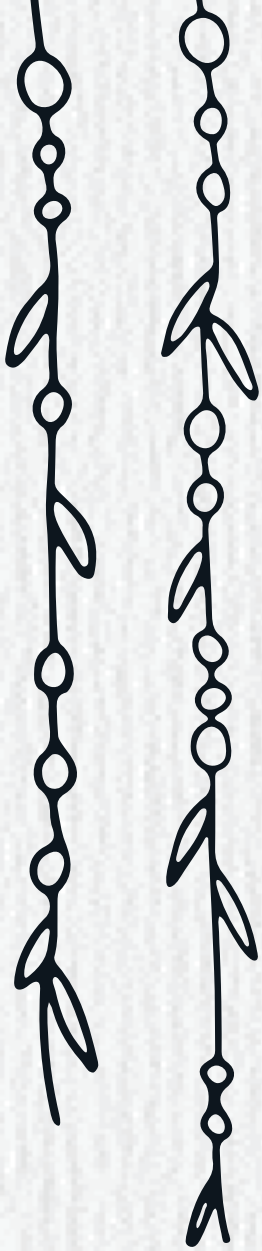
CENTRAL
ARKANSAS
LIBRARY
SYSTEM

On the Cover

AUTHOR: Adaja Cooper

TITLE: Ignite Your Imagination

DATE DUE	BORROWER'S NAME
2021	<p>Adaja Cooper is an award-winning 20-year-old artist from Little Rock, Arkansas, who is a student at Hendrix College. At age 17, Adaja fell in love with painting when she began experimenting with bright colors and immersive portraits. She further developed her skills with acrylics and oils when she attended Governor's School in the summer before her senior year of high school. Along with winning multiple state art competitions, including AYAA (Arkansas Young Artists Association), she has entered her paintings into national competitions. In 2019, she won third place in the painting category at the National NAACP Act-So Competition in Detroit. Her art has also been published in multiple books and magazines.</p> <p>Cooper uses her experience as a Black woman living in America as inspiration for her art. Her works typically feature Black subjects with bold and expressive facial expressions, or calm expressions with vivid backgrounds.</p> <p>On view now at Sue Cowan Williams Library.</p>



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Prologue

(letter from the Executive Director)



If 2020 was largely consumed by scrambling to survive an unprecedented challenge, then 2021 was spent achieving unprecedented successes at CALS. These are the product of hard work and planning by all of our staff. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, we tasked our outreach team with hitting the streets and bringing the library to the community. We received an overwhelming vote of confidence from citizens who approved a millage increase for operations that will enable us to continue meeting needs that only a world-class library system can address. And we continued to find new ways to engage with patrons despite battling two COVID surges in 2021 that greatly hampered in-person program planning.

Thanks to our top-notch development team's ability to showcase an impressive lineup of programs, we received over \$1.1 million in competitive grant funding commitments to support a variety of efforts. These include providing meals for children, hiring digital navigators to help patrons, buying art supplies, adding accessibility upgrades to the Encyclopedia of Arkansas website, and bringing in an award-winning lineup of authors to the Six Bridges Book Festival.

Perhaps the most notable philanthropy came in winning the 2021 Jerry Kline Community Impact Prize (and its accompanying \$250,000 grant!). The prize was handed out in March of this year at the Public Library Association's conference, which highlighted CALS as one of the best among a number of amazing public libraries across the country. Central Arkansas can be genuinely proud of the commitment it makes to sustain its library. For us at the library, we are grateful for the honor and the support of other local agencies that collaborate with CALS. We also know that with this award comes the responsibility of maintaining our focus on serving the community in whatever ways we can. We promise to strive to continue to meet the standards of excellence reflected in the Kline Community Impact Prize.

As we head into the final year of the CALS Strategic Plan, we find ourselves focusing on pulling together the last bits of the plan that were set out in 2019, including renovating some of our facilities and spaces, as well as looking inward and focusing on our organizational culture. Both projects have elements that are in the works already. We can't wait to show you what 2022 has in store for your local library.

Nate Coulter
Executive Director





CHAPTER 1



The Story of Us



REVENUE

\$18,842,279

Property Tax

\$516,638

State of Arkansas

\$434,810

Fines, Fees, Rental Income

\$1,595,411

CALS Foundation, Friends of
CALS, Grants

\$356,669

Other

\$21,745,807

Total

EXPENSES

\$12,673,367

Salaries & Benefits

\$1,608,562

Library Materials

\$5,129,917

Operating Expenses

\$395,188

Capital Expenses

\$19,807,034

Total

The Story of Us

MILLAGE

On November 9, Little Rock voters went to the polls to vote on whether to increase the operational millage rate in the city. We were excited and gratified by the results. The measure was passed with roughly 71 percent of the vote. This will give CALS about \$2.4 million annually in additional funding.

The support CALS received from Little Rock voters underscores the fact that public libraries are still widely recognized as essential to a vibrant community. The vote in Little Rock demonstrates clearly that voters want CALS to be a thriving part of our city, and that CALS staff are dedicated public servants delivering first-rate services and materials in fine libraries all around the city.

Although the library has not had an operations tax increase since 2007, it has added new libraries, meeting rooms, and a theater. The global pandemic that we are all still dealing with accelerated the growing demand for digital materials, particularly popular ebooks and audiobooks, all of which are costly. A third of the money from the millage increase will go toward creating a more robust collection of digital and print materials with additional copies of the most popular titles. Another large portion of the funds will go toward ensuring that our devoted, skilled staff is paid a living wage. The remainder of the funds will go toward deferred building maintenance and upgrading the technology at each branch to enhance the patron experience.

Because of the city's investment, CALS can continue to offer an ever-evolving array of programming and services, as well as strengthen and expand our efforts to support aspiring entrepreneurs, students, and those who just need a helping hand.

WHERE WILL THAT MONEY BE SPENT?

\$400K *Technology & Outreach*

\$400K *Deferred Maintenance*

\$800K *Staff Recruitment & Retention*

\$800K *Collection Materials*

JERRY KLINE COMMUNITY IMPACT PRIZE

CALS was the proud winner of the 2021 Jerry Kline Community Impact Prize. Developed in partnership between the Gerald M. Kline Family Foundation and *Library Journal*, this national award recognizes the public library as a vital community asset. CALS was profiled in the December issue of *Library Journal* and received a \$250,000 grant from the Kline Family Foundation.

“This is a wonderful achievement for Central Arkansas and our library staff,” said CALS executive director Nate Coulter. “The Kline Prize emphatically highlights the trust our community has placed in CALS, the dedication of our staff that honors that trust, and the effectiveness of our many partners who help us serve our patrons.”



Library Journal photo shoot: Back row, l.-r.: Little Rock Mayor Frank Scott Jr.; Little Rock City Director Capi Peck; CALS Deputy Executive Director of Technology & Collection Innovation Nathan James; CALS Director of Finance Jo Spencer; CALS Director of Operations Lance Ivy; CALS Board of Directors Vice President Stacey McAdoo; former CALS Board of Directors President Nancy Rousseau; and CALS Board of Directors member Ryan Davis. Front row, l.-r.: Little Rock City Director Kathy Webb; Little Rock School District Superintendent Mike Poore; CALS Executive Director Nate Coulter; CALS Director of Communications Tameka Lee; CALS Deputy Executive Director of Library Operations and Director of Literacy & Learning Lisa Donovan; and Arkansas State Representative Denise Ennett. Photo by Jacob Slaton

CALS also benefited from several American Rescue Plan Act grant opportunities to provide funding for pandemic relief activities, such as:

\$262,221 Arkansas State Library

for automated external defibrillators, technology equipment for virtual and hybrid programming, outdoor furniture, ebooks and audiobooks (non-competitive grant)

\$250,000 Small Business Administration’s Community Navigator Pilot Program

for the Rock It! Lab

\$150,000 Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER III)

for Count UP and other enrichment activities

\$82,474 National Endowment for the Humanities

for the Encyclopedia of Arkansas

\$25,000 Arkansas Humanities Council

for accessibility upgrades to the Encyclopedia of Arkansas and other CALS websites

In 2021, CALS and the CALS Foundation secured a record number of grants to support library programs and services. Highlights include:

\$225,000 Windgate Foundation

to fund visual art programs, bolster community outreach, and hire two full-time digital literacy guides

\$75,000 City of Little Rock

for Be Mighty

\$13,500 Arkansas Humanities Council

for the Six Bridges Book Festival

\$10,000 Bank of America

Charitable Foundation

for the Rock It! Lab

\$7,200 Communities for Immunity

to boost COVID-19 vaccine confidence

\$5,000 Heart of Arkansas United Way

for the Rock It! Lab

\$5,000 Fred Darragh Foundation

to fund Banned Books Week activities

\$5,000 Kum & Go

to provide 952 backpacks filled with shelf-stable meals and snacks

\$3,000 American Library Association

to combat food insecurity in the area around Millie Brooks MicroLibrary

\$3,000 Whole Kids Foundation

to fund garden programs at McMath Library

\$2,000 Arkansas Flower and Garden Show

to add native plants at Dee Brown Library

\$2,000 Dollar General Literacy Foundation

to add literacy kits at Terry Library

THE SWITCH TO VEGA AND LIBBY

CALS continues to provide the most cutting-edge software for patrons in order to stay ahead of trends and adapt to growing needs. In 2021, CALS began to shift its collection catalog from BiblioCommons to Vega, a newer, still-under-development program that is more user friendly. The OverDrive app, the service that allows patrons to access ebooks and audiobooks, is being transferred to Libby to allow for easier use and provide a single place to access all of our ebooks, audiobooks, and magazine offerings.

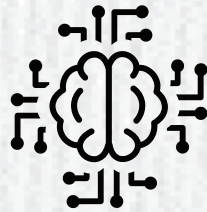
HOTSPOTS ADDED TO THE CALS LIBRARY OF THINGS

In June, CALS released a fleet of 100 hotspots across its branches. Patrons can now check out internet service and take it home with them for up to two months. These hotspots have been circulated 868 times since joining the collection as part of our Library of Things.



2,228,221

Total Circulation



877,239
Digital Circulation
Total



379,089
EBooks



288,717
Audiobooks



1,526
Video Licenses



182,493
Songs



25,414
Magazines



1,350,982
Physical Circulation
Total



988,402
Books



317,335
DVDs



13,084
Music CDs



20,668
Books on CD

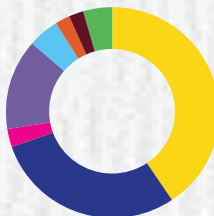


5,171
MOBIUS/
Interlibrary Loan



6,322
Library of Things

LIBRARY OF THINGS DIVIDED AMONG:



● Puzzles

● Hotspots

● Toys

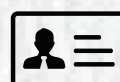
● Tools

● Fishing Poles

● Other Items

● Telescopes

● Birdwatching Kits



191,033

Total Card Holders
(includes student tech cards)



CHAPTER 2



The Story of Community



The Story of Community

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

The Community Outreach team has completed its first full calendar year at CALS. Team members devote their time to making sure that the library feels accessible to communities that have previously been overlooked or may not have felt welcome at the library. Through partnerships with other local organizations, this team is able to reach a new segment of patrons and introduce them to the services that CALS provides.

The team has made great strides at the Millie Brooks MicroLibrary, including creating a community closet of professional clothing and adding a community garden with the help of volunteers. In 2021, they were able to harvest peppers, basil, oregano, sage, and a few tomatoes, as well as add perennial plants to attract pollinators.



The closet was started in response to a patron handing us a note that simply read, "I need help." And we helped.

CALS GOES TO KOREA!

Library supporter Tamela Tenpenny Lewis is an international flight attendant based in Little Rock. Tamela loves to promote CALS wherever she goes and did so on the way to South Korea by taking grab & go projects in the air and convincing her crew to wear them en route while singing CALS's praises.



Audubon Pointe Apartments in Maumelle

CALS donated two computers to the computer lab for residents at this HUD facility apartment complex focused on giving seniors and the disabled a safe place to call home. With help from CALS Volunteer Coordinator Polly Deems, we will continue to add donated books to their library. In addition, staff at the Maumelle Library are making plans to hold some adult programs on site for residents.

Highland Valley United Methodist Church

We're now partnering with HVUMC in Little Rock and supporting them in their efforts to educate and entertain more than 60 kids at their Wednesday night community meetings by dropping off grab & go activities and coordinating larger outdoor events.

Ossie Barnes Empowerment Foundation

We've partnered with this organization in Hensley on multiple occasions, donating books to their library, providing grab & go Summer Reading Club bags to kids in the area, and sponsoring their Easter Egg Hunt.



Book Signing at Brooks: Forty-four people attended a signing featuring local Wrightsville author Calvin Wilbon, who is a professional dog trainer, and his dog, Primo. Wilbon signed books while Primo accepted pats on the head and treats.

HISPANIC OUTREACH

Census data shows Little Rock to be a diversifying city, with a large gain among the population identifying as “two or more races” (from 3,374 ten years ago to 11,626 or up 244.58%). The Hispanic and Latino population grew from 13,076 to 20,285, a growth rate of 55.13%, from 2010 to 2020. This growth has spurred CALS to increase its outreach toward and inclusion of the Latino community.

CALS hosted and co-hosted a variety of events throughout the year. Hispanic Heritage Month, held from September 15 to October 15, had nine different events that hosted 112 attendees. On November 2, CALS partnered with the Mexican Consulate of Little Rock and the Downtown Little Rock Partnership to host a Día de los Muertos party. Held in the alley beside Main Library, the celebration featured face painting and other activities, bringing in over 500 people. CALS also teamed up with the Mexican Consulate to present Puentes Literarios Arkansas-Mexico (Literary Bridges). Designed to encourage cultural and bilingual interaction amongst our patrons, the program featured four author events and a variety of literacy education workshops and saw 172 attendees. The Welcome Back to School & Bilingual Vaccination Clinic resulted in administering 350 vaccines and handing out 1,000 school supplies.

FOOD FOR FINES

In 2021, across all CALS locations, patrons donated 3,360 pounds of food in exchange for CALS waiving their library fines. That equates to more than 2,500 meals provided to people around central and southern Arkansas.



Hispanic Outreach Highlights

300 ATENDEES

Forest Heights Hall High
K-12 Stem Academy Block Party

100 ATENDEES

"Parent University Training"
initiative, focused on guiding parents on the virtual
teaching method

300 KIDS

Christmas Mall 2021 event was a free experience for
parents so that they'd feel honored and proud that
they got to shop for their kids. Three hundred children
received toys.



UNSHELTERED OUTREACH FAIR

Grants and Development
VISTA Olivia Domba
and CALS Community
Liaison Maria Aguilar
share information about
COVID-19 vaccinations
at an Unsheltered
Outreach Fair in North
Little Rock in October
2021. CALS's presence
at the fair was supported
by a Communities for
Immunity grant from
the Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention.



Volunteers at the Friends of CALS Used Book Sale in March 2022

FRIENDS OF CALS

Each year Friends gives about \$50,000 to support the Six Bridges Book Festival, book club kits, Arkansas Sounds concerts, branch programs, Summer Reading Club, and youth programs. Membership fees and purchases at the Friends of CALS Used Book Sales are what make these gifts possible.

2022 FRIENDS OF CALS BOARD

Barbara Soden, *President*
 Stephanie Purifoy, *Vice President*
 Jill Cox
 Susan Eschenbrenner
 Natasha Graf
 Dana Landrum

VOLUNTEERS

Much of the success of CALS comes down to the amazing volunteers who assist in every facet of the library system. After pausing volunteer activity for several months in 2020, our volunteers came back strong in 2021. Volunteers as young as 14 are welcome, with some programs requiring volunteers to be at least 16. We currently have 698 volunteers on file at CALS; last year, 392 volunteers donated more than 10,000 hours of their time, resulting in a cost savings of \$297,522 to the library. Volunteer opportunities included welcoming visitors to the Galleries & Bookstore at Library Square, stocking shelves, preparing grab & go kits, and sorting donated books in preparation for upcoming Friends of CALS Used Book Sales. Volunteers also worked with the Be Mighty program distributing meals curbside and preparing recipe kits; helped in the garden at the Hillary Rodham Clinton Children’s Library & Learning Center and at the Millie Brooks MicroLibrary; ran stations at the Day of the Dead celebration hosted with the Downtown Little Rock Partnership; and provided math instruction to K-12 students through Count UP. Volunteers were also integral to the Six Bridges Book Festival, moderating sessions, serving on the talent search committee, and assisting with preparation for the virtual event. Overall, the focus for 2021 was to reengage our volunteers and to do so in a safe manner.

CALS LIBRARIES DISTRIBUTED



44,603

USDA Meals for Kids & Teens



2,708

Meals for Adults



475

Fresh Produce Boxes



689

Recipe Kits

BE MIGHTY

Be Mighty Little Rock is a citywide campaign to connect kids and teens 18 and under to free meals, and CALS is proud to be a partner in the program. In 2021, we continued our pandemic response meal program, reached out to community schools, launched an online food security screening and referral tool, provided virtual nutrition education, helped with Earth Month programming (Be Mighty Goes Green), and leveraged our partnership with AmeriCorps to bring on Farm Corps members and summer associates. Since we began our contract with the City of Little Rock in July 2020, there has never been a gap of service. We have operated meal programs at 11 libraries six days a week. On Saturdays, kids receive two meals (one for Saturday and another for Sunday). Be Mighty provided grab & go informational kits at the Little Rock School District’s community café nights in November, March, April, and May. During these events, families received information about afterschool and summer meals, as well as our referral form with information about SNAP, WIC, food pantries, AR Kids First, and Medicaid. We held seven fresh-produce box distributions in November, December, and May utilizing CARES Act funding.

AMERICORPS VISTA MEMBERS

Since 2019, AmeriCorps VISTA members have been an asset to CALS by helping to improve programs and creating new partnerships. VISTA members have helped CALS increase the number of USDA-funded meals served, facilitate focus groups, and secure more than \$1.3 million in grant funding for library programs, many of which help alleviate poverty. CALS is grateful for our partnership with AmeriCorps and the individuals who choose to enroll in a term of service at the library. In 2021, CALS's AmeriCorps team supported Be Mighty Little Rock, the Grants and Development department, and the Rock It! Lab. Additionally, four associates assisted with USDA meal service at Children's, Dee Brown, Main, and McMath libraries for 10 weeks during the summer, piloting food insecurity screening and referrals, offering SNAP application assistance, and assisting with outreach and nutrition education.

VISTA PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Patron Survey

Olivia Domba completed a one-year term of service as Grants and Development VISTA in January 2022. One of her projects was to design and conduct a survey collecting information about patron usage of the library system, patron experiences, and feedback about services and programs. A total of 114 CALS patrons participated in the survey, and the average approval score for the library system was 9.19 out of 10. (Read one of the responses on page 21.)

MLK Day of Service

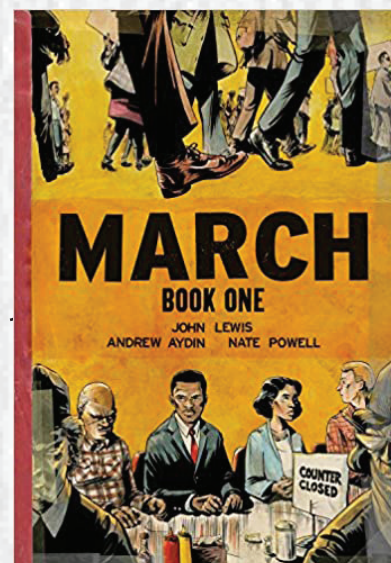
To mark Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Megan Bellfield, the Be Mighty Little Rock AmeriCorps VISTA, led a virtual National Day of Service program in partnership with Engage Arkansas. The event opened with a keynote address from Little Rock Mayor Frank Scott Jr., and then illustrator Nate Powell spoke with City Director Antwan Phillips about his experience working with late Congressman John Lewis on the *March* trilogy of graphic novels. Participants were able to pick up copies of *March: Book One* from library branches in Little Rock as well as the Fayetteville Public Library. Around 200 people participated in the event, which also included a National Service Meet and Greet and a public service panel featuring Senator Joyce Elliott, Jay Barth, and Kwami and Clarice Abdul-Bey.



CALS staff, volunteers, and partners distributed food boxes at Dee Brown Library in May 2021. This program was funded by a CARES Act grant from the Department of Human Services.



Millie Brooks MicroLibrary Community Garden



LIBRARY SQUARE

100 ROCK ST. | LITTLE ROCK

MAIN LIBRARY

918-3000

RON ROBINSON THEATER

320-5715

ROCK IT! LAB

320-5748

BOBBY L. ROBERTS LIBRARY OF ARKANSAS HISTORY & ART

Butler Center for Arkansas Studies | 320-5700

Encyclopedia of Arkansas | 320-5714

THE GALLERIES & BOOKSTORE AT LIBRARY SQUARE

320-5790

CALS BRANCHES

MILLIE M. BROOKS MICROLIBRARY

13024 HWY 365 S. | Wrightsville | 537-3186

DEE BROWN LIBRARY

6325 Baseline Rd. | Little Rock | 568-7494

HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON CHILDREN'S LIBRARY & LEARNING CENTER

4800 W. 10th St. | Little Rock | 978-3870

JOHN GOULD FLETCHER LIBRARY

823 N. Buchanan St. | Little Rock | 663-5457

MAUMELLE LIBRARY

10 Lake Pointe Dr. | Maumelle | 851-2551

SIDNEY S. MCMATH LIBRARY

2100 John Barrow Rd. | Little Rock | 225-0066

MAX MILAM LIBRARY

609 Aplin Ave. | Perryville | 889-2554

ESTHER DEWITT NIXON LIBRARY

703 W. Main St. | Jacksonville | 457-5038

OLEY E. ROOKER LIBRARY

11 Otter Creek Ct. | Little Rock | 907-5991

AMY SANDERS LIBRARY

10200 Johnson Dr. | Sherwood | 835-7756

ADOLPHINE FLETCHER TERRY LIBRARY

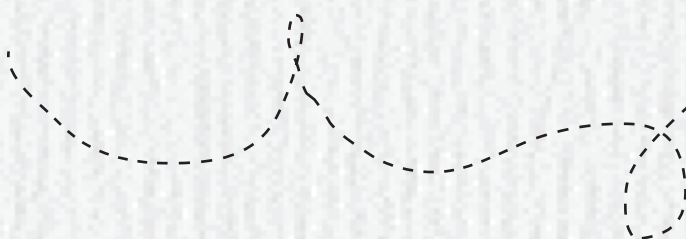
2015 Napa Valley Dr. | Little Rock | 228-0129

ROOSEVELT THOMPSON LIBRARY

38 Rahling Cir. | Little Rock | 821-3060

SUE COWAN WILLIAMS LIBRARY

1800 Chester St. | Little Rock | 376-4282



CALS and EntegriTY leadership broke ground on a new solar array on September 17, 2021. CALS's solar energy project will save a projected total of \$2.2 million over the project's lifetime.

CHAPTER 3



The Story of You



The Story of You

Across our branches we have a team of programmers who are dedicated to creating events and activities that stimulate the mind, encourage creativity, and help make life easier for our patrons. In 2021, Rides to Reads, a partnership with Rock Region METRO, was launched as a way to help connect patrons with several branch locations. In this first year, 458 free bus passes were given out. In February, several branches hosted Black History Month activities, including a virtual presentation by professor and author Nell Irvin Painter as part of the CALS Speaker Series. In April, Earth Month program materials were developed at the Darragh Center at Main and distributed to all branches. At Dee Brown, in addition to hosting the tool library, staff used the tools to repair and tune up bikes for patrons during the summer. And at Thompson, a sculpture was dedicated to the library namesake, Roosevelt Levander Thompson. Our programmers created impactful, educational opportunities throughout the system, whether for Women’s History Month, Banned Books Week, or just a fun Friday trivia event.

Staff Assistance & Resource Uses

Reference/Directional/ Account Assistance	565,385
Notary	14,216
Faxes	13,134
Computer Uses <i>(desktop/laptop/tablets/DVD players)</i>	96,516
Wifi Sessions	244,232

EARTH MONTH (GO GREEN WITH CALS)

Instead of just a single day in April, CALS celebrated Earth Month. The programming staff made and distributed just over 1,700 system-wide bags, plus some branch-specific bags. CALS hosted 12 (4 adult, 4 for families, and 4 from Be Mighty) system-wide virtual programs plus a community clean-up at Boyle Park, and developed a self-directed park passport activity.

	Number of Programs	Attendance/Views/ Kits Distributed
In-Person	1,258	26,393
Live Virtual	1,119	31,574
Recorded	569	23,760
Passive	447	10,960
Grab & Go	1,837	49,943

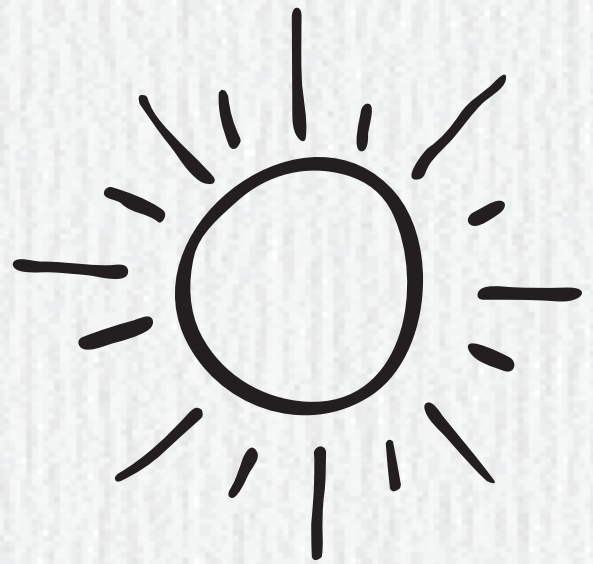
COUNT UP

In 2021, we helped 140 students through the Count UP program with over 2,000 hours of volunteer tutor instruction. In October, Tyler Compton started as the new program coordinator. She is a former classroom teacher who has worked in the library system for over three years and previously served as a children’s programmer. The Count UP team consists of two certified teachers serving as part-time paid tutors as well as a wonderful group of volunteer tutors of different ages and from all walks of life. The program currently receives funding from an ESSER III grant from the Arkansas Out of School Network.



LIFT EVERY VOICE POETRY WORKSHOP

CALS Youth Services Coordinator Ellen Samples described the Lift Every Voice Poetry Workshop as one of her "favorite programs of 2021." Aimed toward teens, the virtual series drew a diverse multigenerational audience. Featuring local poets (including members of the Writeous Poets) as presenters and instructors, participants were guided through exercises to expand creativity and hone writing and performing skills. The project was funded by a 2020 grant from the Library of America celebrating 250 years of African American poetry.



SUMMERTIME STORIES

Summer Reading Club

Our 2021 Summer Reading Club (SRC) theme was Tails & Tales, and staff and patrons had a lot of fun exploring animal stories and learning about all sorts of creatures. Programmers provided daily virtual storytimes for younger children and other programs for older children, including a magic show by Tommy Terrific, an animal yoga class with KeyFit Life, puppet shows by Bloomin' Puppets, and virtual field trips to local sites that house or serve animals. Guest readers participated from the Little Rock Zoo, including a special visit from Orion the Owl. Programs for teens included weekly presentations by Pinnacle Mountain State Park staff and an acting workshop by Drama Kids International. Grab & go activities for preschoolers, kids, and teens were available weekly during SRC, plus a few options for adults.

Almost 5,200 people registered for SRC. We gave out over 12,000 activity bags throughout the summer.

Summer Reading Club Goes on the Road

We took SRC on the road to Oak Grove, Daisy Bates, and Harris elementary schools. It was a wonderful opportunity for us to get to know the staff and students we serve and practice lots of crafting. We've continued these relationships in the current school year focusing on after-school programming. Local author Maria Hoskins joined us for a reading of her beautiful book, *Papa's Pets*.

Summer Celebrations

During July, we partnered with the City of Little Rock to host Summer Reading Celebrations, which were in-person outdoor events at our Children's Library & Learning Center. Families were able to join us for lawn and carnival games; gardening activities; demos and information from Be Mighty Little Rock; and free food, books, and other prizes and giveaways. The Summer Reading Celebrations featured a drumming workshop with Stephin Booth in addition to the wonderful roster of performers and presenters who made appearances during SRC. We hosted around 380 kids and families over the four weeks of celebrations.

Fish in the library



Mia Morales, 5, looks at fish in the new aquarium Saturday at the McMath Library in Little Rock during the facilities' "Great Untailing." The event featured Mermaids, snacks and crafts as the library celebrated the new aquarium. (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/Stephen Swofford)

Summer Reading Club kicked off with "The Great Untailing" at McMath Library. The library also unveiled its new aquarium. Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, June 13, 2021



Enjoying bubbles and games at the Summer Reading Celebrations at Children's Library.

A Heartfelt Dedication

On October 2, 2021, a large crowd, including some of Roosevelt L. Thompson's family, friends, and teachers, gathered to dedicate a new sculpture to honor his legacy at the West Little Rock library named for him.

The Roosevelt Thompson sculpture and the Scipio Jones portrait (unveiled in early 2022; located at the post office at 1700 Main Street in Little Rock) are successful collaborations between CALS and public groups to create artwork celebrating the history of Little Rock and Arkansas.



SIX BRIDGES BOOK FESTIVAL

The 2021 Six Bridges Book Festival was held October 21-31. The biggest virtual event yet, it had a total engagement of more than 6,300, with many programs continuing to garner views well after the event. With 81 presenters and 80 sessions, including the Writers in the Schools program, the Fest offered a slate of diverse, exciting programs from some of America's best authors. Presenters included notables such as Jacqueline Woodson, Sandra Cisneros, TJ Klune, Mary Roach, Vashti Harrison, Jasmine Guillory, Lauren Groff, Sharon G. Flake, Suzanne Simard, Leana Wen, and Ross King, plus many wonderful emerging authors. More than 20 of the Fest authors' books showed up on "Best of 2021" lists at the end of the year.

The Fest gave away more than 900 books and utilized 55 volunteers and 24 tech helpers. The audience enjoyed the new Trick or Toga pet costume competition and the Edible Book contest. The Classic in Context program featured *The*

Princess Bride, with a program by Ethan Nichtern, author of *The Dharma of The Princess Bride*, and a screening of the beloved film. The Fest remains thankful for the generous support of many sponsors, partners, volunteers, and donors.

"Six Bridges Presents" is the Fest's series of virtual programs held throughout the year, typically one a month. This year's programs included A Tribute to Albert Murray, *South to a Very Old Place*; Kristin Hannah, *The Four Winds*; Shugri Said Sahl, *The Last Nomad*; Sarah Everts, *The Joy of Sweat*; Eric Cervini, *The Deviant's War*; Kevin Brockmeier, *The Ghost Variations*; C.M. Waggoner, *The Ruthless Lady's Guide to Wizardry*; and *The Intrepid Bourdain!*, a tribute to chef and author Anthony Bourdain.

CALS Speaker Series presented authors Nell Irvin Painter, *Creating Black Americans*; Roxane Gay, *Roxane with One 'N'*; Charles Yu, *Interior Chinatown*; and Karla Cornejo Villavicencio, *The Undocumented Americans*.

Banned Books Week at Library Square focused on the graphic novel *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi, with the annual writing contest, a "crazy free book" giveaway of 50 copies of *Persepolis*, and a free screening of the Academy Award-nominated animated film.



Authors Ayana Gray and Kelli Marks (a CALS staff member) met up at WordsWorth Books during Gray's book signing.



ROCK IT! LAB

The Rock It! Lab is a collaboration between CALS and Advancing Black Entrepreneurship (ABE) that assists aspiring business owners within under-resourced communities. The program is located at Library Square in the Cox Building, with three main spaces that entrepreneurs can use to help grow their business. The first floor is the River Shop, a co-retail space for local entrepreneurs to showcase and sell a variety of creative works, goods and merchandise; the second floor is the Village Coworking Space, an environment for building a community where entrepreneurs can work, collaborate, and share ideas in a shared office space; and the basement is the 501 Makers Space, an area that provides collaborative workspace and access to tools like a screen printing machine, 3D printer, sewing machines and more, plus the knowledge for makers and artists to transform ideas into tangible products and intellectual works.

On October 17, the Rock It! Lab inaugurated its first “class” of entrepreneurs, with businesses running the gamut from simply an idea to full-fledged operations seeking to take their ideas to the next level. This class represents a variety of enterprises, including food makers, artists, and jewelers, as well as service providers like the growing industry of home healthcare, cleaning services, and even athlete marketing. Each class requires a six-month commitment as they go through the mentorship program.

For Small Business Saturday on November 26, the Rock It! Lab opened its doors to guests and had over 350 visitors; some vendors garnered hundreds of dollars in sales. It made for a successful kickoff to the holiday season. The Rock It! Lab has hosted three pop-up shops in the River Shop, resulting in over 1,000 visitors and thousands of dollars in sales generated for the vendors.



The Rock It! Lab's inaugural class



On July 22, onlookers cheered as Benito Lubazibwa, executive director of ABE, cut the ribbon held by CALS Executive Director Nate Coulter, Mayor Frank Scott Jr., and Little Rock Regional Chamber Ambassador Andre Webster. Guests were invited to tour the Cox Building (which previously housed CALS's used bookstore) as the new home of the Rock It! Lab.

Last year, we served over 1,100 people with technical assistance, consultations, workshops, and mentorship. Over 80 percent of those served are women and most are from economically disadvantaged communities.

CALS FOUNDATION

The mission of the CALS Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, is to provide support for educational and cultural programming for the patrons, communities, and neighborhoods being served by the Central Arkansas Library System. To make a tax-deductible donation to the CALS Foundation or discuss sponsorship opportunities, contact Eliza Borné at etborne@cals.org or 501-320-5750.

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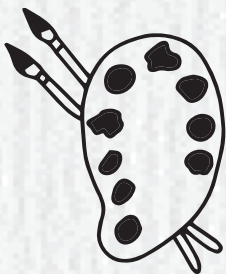
GALLERIES

Over the course of 2021, the viewing/public galleries at the CALS Galleries & Bookstore at Library Square displayed 10 different exhibitions by Arkansas artists. In one community-based exhibition, students from the Little Rock School District, in collaboration with Central Arkansas Water, produced artwork imagining the effects of a day on Earth without water. Despite the challenges of holding in-person events safely during the COVID-19 pandemic, the galleries successfully hosted 2nd Friday Art Night (2FAN) six times throughout the year, featuring exhibition openings, live music, and a featured author and artist.

1,250 2FAN attendees

The Galleries & Bookstore represents nearly 50 Arkansas artists and 20 Arkansas authors and carries a wide selection of gently read books. The retail gallery features paintings, drawings, ceramics, glass, jewelry, mixed media, printmaking, sculpture, and wood. The year also saw the reopening of the retail gallery space in Concordia Hall, which had been postponed for several months due to the pandemic.

CALS also collects artworks by Arkansas artists through purchases, commissions, and donations. About 150 paintings and drawings were donated in 2021 to the CALS Permanent Art Collection, whose works are displayed throughout all CALS branches. Reproductions of some of those works—including the annual report cover art by Adaja Cooper—can be seen on the rooftop billboards atop the Roberts Library in Library Square.



The Galleries & Bookstore at Library Square in the Bobby L. Roberts Library of Arkansas History & Art



Earrings made from discarded books, David Monteith



Moon Caves, Donna Dunnahoe



▲ **What'chu Eatin' Wednesdays** began as an idea to bring customers to the Galleries & Bookstore on a typically slower sales day while also supporting local food trucks on a day that was slower for them as well. The trucks have become highly anticipated by CALS staff, patrons, and others in the River Market area, often selling out due to the large numbers of attendees. Visiting trucks included Minute Man, GoldFingers Woodfired Pizza, the Croissanterie, Lili's Mexican Street Food, the Prickly Pickle, and Low Ivy.

BUTLER CENTER

The CALS Butler Center for Arkansas Studies has continued its focus on digitizing the extensive archival materials held in the Roberts Library of Arkansas History & Art, making it possible for patrons to access photos, yearbooks, videos, oral histories, and more from any device; in 2021, patrons viewed these and other Butler Center resources such as finding aids and books online a total of 322,435 times. This digitization has also allowed significant headway in ongoing community history projects related to the history of Central Arkansas that juxtapose images from the past against modern images using Google Earth technology. The Mapping Downtown Little Rock Project is an architectural tour of the city, focusing on its commercial history between the end of the Civil War to the 1960s and showing how the built environment has evolved over the years. Similarly, the Lost West Ninth Street Project gives a glimpse into the city's past to show how the construction of Interstate 630 and other factors led to the demise of the once vibrant African American community known as "the Line" that was home to Black residences, businesses, churches, entertainment venues, and fraternal groups.

93 virtual programs, with a total of 5,684 attendees

Virtual offerings such as the monthly Legacies & Lunch and Finding Family Facts programs as well as dozens of speakers and panel discussions (many available on CALS's YouTube channel) brought history into people's homes, providing opportunities for dialogue, community, and learning.

EOA

The CALS Encyclopedia of Arkansas—a free, authoritative online source of information about the rich history, geography, and culture of Arkansas—marked its 6,000th entry in early 2020 and added nearly 300 more in 2021. Of particular interest in 2021 were entries on such varied topics as steamboat disasters, women who have served in the state legislature, and civil rights and social issues (including an entry on Black Lives Matter and an extensive and frequently updated entry on the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic). More than 1,000 photos and other media were also added to the site, including 462 digitized photos from the Butler Center's collections. The EOA, available any time of day from any device, served as an especially indispensable tool for teachers and students pursuing virtual learning this past year. The EOA also hosted seven virtual programs for Black History Month and Women's History Month (many available on CALS's YouTube channel), allowing scholars and experts to connect with EOA users in lively talks, beyond the written word.

1.6 million EOA website users

3.3 million views

NINTH ST. PROJECT



For many decades, Little Rock's West Ninth Street was the heart of the city's African American community. Unfortunately, by the early 1960s, societal changes, urban renewal, and the construction of Interstate 630 were leading to the demise of the once vibrant community. The Butler Center in the Roberts Library is "rebuilding" it through historical photography coupled with digital technology.



SCAN TO TAKE A
DIGITAL WALK DOWN
"THE LINE."

Acknowledgments

CALS is a first-class library system because of its staff. Each day, this dedicated group finds ways to expand our successful efforts to support learners of all ages, aspiring entrepreneurs, and everyone in our community who just needs a little help finding information and services. They know their communities. They listen and adapt as they hear about the needs and requests of those we're here to serve. They are the reason CALS has been recognized nationally. We are thankful for the signs of trust and positive recognition the library has received.

“I think CALS underestimates how amazing they are. And I say that because I’m from Austin, Texas, and come from a major metropolitan city where the libraries often felt dated, especially in communities of color. One of the reasons why I actually still stay in Little Rock is because of CALS.”

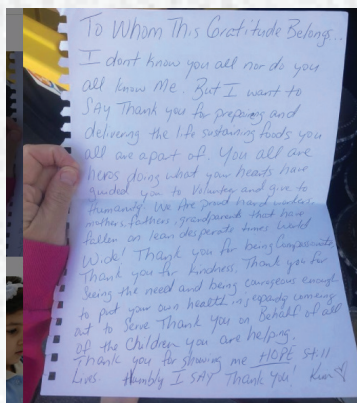
— Response to a patron usage survey conducted in 2021

“Public libraries always played an important role in Mom’s quests for knowledge and entertainment. Mom grew up during the Depression in the inner City of St. Louis. At times, her family was hungry. Money for food was not always available and there was never money for luxuries such as books. However, there was a public library, and, with the guidance of an amazing librarian, Mom discovered a world beyond her experiences, had grand adventures and learned.”

— Cynthia Milazzo funded a memorial bench in honor of her mother, devoted library patron Lorraine Hensley, at the Maumelle Library

“Thank you for seeing the need and being courageous enough to put your own health in jeopardy coming out to serve. Thank you on behalf of all the children you are helping.”

— From an anonymous letter left with Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families recognizing the efforts of CALS, Be Mighty Little Rock, and the Little Rock School District



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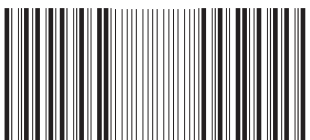
MISSION

The Central Arkansas Library System provides resources and services to help residents reach their full potential, and to inspire discovery, learning, and cultural expression.

VISION

CALS is recognized as a leading community institution improving literacy, the exchange of ideas, workforce development, and social engagement.

Central Arkansas Library System
2021 Annual Report



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