

Director's Report for March 28, 2024

Remodeling Updates: CDI has reported the numbers back from their subcontractors. Perhaps all the worrying I did about the final pricing paid off because my concerns did not come to pass. The construction costs are right on the nose of the \$25M we have available to spend for the construction work. As noted earlier, when the fees and contingency costs are added, the project total will rise to \$30M, which we have available in public funding from capital improvement bonds. These numbers cover everything our architects had drawn months ago, except for three items we discussed last month that were pulled out: removal of two columns on the 5th floor in the new Darragh Center; the 5th floor balcony extending out from the Darragh Center; and the stage and related amenities in the Children's area on the first floor. The architects asked to put back into the plans the removal of the two columns on the strength of their confidence that they can find savings over the course of the project to cover this \$585,000 expense. Reese Rowland from Polk Stanley will be present Thursday to explain where we are and answer questions.

Williams is on pace to be finished by the beginning of next month. The staff is excited about what they have seen and eager to get back in their library. The manager of Williams told me earlier this week that she was very pleased with the remodeling. Latina said the architects "listened." Tickets for the Family Dinner Night fundraising event, April 18, 6:30-9pm, to support programming are available here:

<https://app.etapestry.com/onlineforms/CentralArkansasLibrarySystemF/DinnerAtWilliams.html>

We will have the ribbon cutting on April 19 at 9 a.m. There will be a neighborhood block party on May 4.

Update on CALS Network Disruption: CALS has fully recovered from the ransomware attack that occurred on February 7, 2024. The IT Department has completed the restorative actions planned after the attack. These include rebuilding our server and firewall, and downloading copies of our domain controllers that were maintained offsite. There were some relatively minor losses in the form of some documents that did not get restored, such as an inventory of the art CALS owns, and some forms used by the Finance Department.

To help reduce the risks of future ransomware attacks, CALS has engaged the services of Arete, the company that our insurance carrier deployed after the attack to help with recovery work. Arete will monitor the CALS network 24/7. IT is also now routing all logins through Azure for Office 365 using MFA (Multi-factor Authentication). In addition, IT has updated its staff training in computer security.

Strategic Planning: Our consultant, Stephanie Chase, will appear virtually at the meeting Thursday to help do some community mapping. **Board members are asked to bring the names of 5-10 people, organizations, or community demographic groups you feel are important for us to reach out to as part of the strategic planning process, along with your reasons for including them.** You will have an opportunity during the meeting to collaborate with your fellow board members to craft the final list. You'll also have an avenue for sharing more names that you may think of later.

Used Book Sale: The first CALS Used Book Sale open to the general public at the Port location took place on March 7-9. It was a successful venture by every measure. We had over 100 shoppers on Thursday, nearly 500 on Friday, and more than 700 on Saturday. We collected over \$25,000 in sales which exceeded the revenue from the March 2023 sale in the basement of Main. And we did that volume in fewer hours (10 compared to 16 at Main). The used book sale serves several worthy objectives, including giving volunteers an opportunity to connect with CALS and other book lovers, and providing an outlet for repurposing hundreds of used books that patrons drop off every week at their library. Proceeds from the sale support many library programs and grants to every branch. Thanks to Polly Deems, Lily Kauffman, and all our volunteers for working hard to make sure the sale was a success for CALS and our shoppers.

Development: Library Giving Day (a nationwide fundraising event similar to Giving Tuesday, but just for libraries) is April 3. This year we are encouraging donors to contribute to CALS's Legal Fund, which pays for the legal costs associated with challenging Act 372. The Arkansas Public Law Center will match donations up to \$15,000. You can donate to the campaign here: <https://www.justgiving.com/campaign/free-to-read>

Lots of good grant news in the last month, including a \$500,000 grant from a funder supporting projects at Roberts Library. (More details to come on this exciting news very soon – we are preparing a press release.)

The CALS Foundation has received \$75,000 from Walmart to support Rock It! Lab. The funding will support the salary of the Rock It! Lab Coordinator and consulting fees paid to Benito Lubazibwa, who provides technical assistance to entrepreneurs who access the lab.

The CALS Foundation has also been approved for \$12,500 from Tyson Foods to support Be Mighty Little Rock. The funding will purchase food items for our library-based Little Free Pantries and community fridges.

Finally, CALS has been approved for \$10,000 from the LRCVB to fund the placement of ads and other marketing materials promoting the 2024 Six Bridges Book Festival.

Count Up: We reported at last month's board meeting that we had been approved to enter the contracting phase of negotiations for the proposal we submitted on behalf of Count Up in response to the City of Little Rock's Youth Positive Prevention Program funding opportunity. After meeting with representatives from the City – and careful consideration and communication among Ellen Samples (Director of Programming), Amanda Orgel (Youth Services Coordinator), and the executive team – CALS has decided not to enter into the contract. Based on the current structure and capacity of Count Up, this contract was not the correct fit, and moving forward would have required some radical restructuring of the program. However, we were heartened by the City's enthusiasm for the library and look forward to the possibility of collaborating with the City of Little Rock in the future as other funding opportunities are made available.

Communications: Planning for the Williams Library grand reopening celebration is going well. The Family Dinner Night is on track with three weeks left before the event. We're about halfway to our \$15,000 goal. We encourage board members to share the event with their networks and

purchase a couple of tickets for themselves. We've added a discounted ticket for children ages 5-12. We'll have refreshments provided by Afrobites, Community Bakery, El Sur Street Food Co., Flyway Brewing, K. Hall & Sons Produce, Mockingbird Bar & Taco, and Rock Town Distillery. We'll also feature live entertainment from Bijoux and the Little Rock Central High Jazz Band. The Dunbar Middle School band will perform during the block party on May 4. Here are links to the [Facebook event](#) for Family Dinner Night and the [landing page](#) that includes details about the entire three-day celebration.

We're finalizing the art for the bookmobile, which we've named the CALS Cruiser. It should be delivered in June. [Here's a link to the art.](#)

Six Bridges Book Festival: The 2024 Six Bridges Book Festival will be held September 23-29, 2024. As I reported to the board in a brief email a couple of weeks ago, our longtime coordinator for the book festival, Brad Mooy, has announced his retirement. We'll make some adjustments to staffing and supervision of the program, but the goal remains the same – to have a dynamic set of presenters who can entertain and inspire readers of all ages and highlight the power of books.

Public Library Association Conference: Next week four members of the senior administration and five other staff, most of whom work in branch management, will attend the biennial Public Library Association Conference in Columbus, OH. Tameka Lee will participate in a panel on the topic Communicating During Controversy: How to Lead with What You Believe.

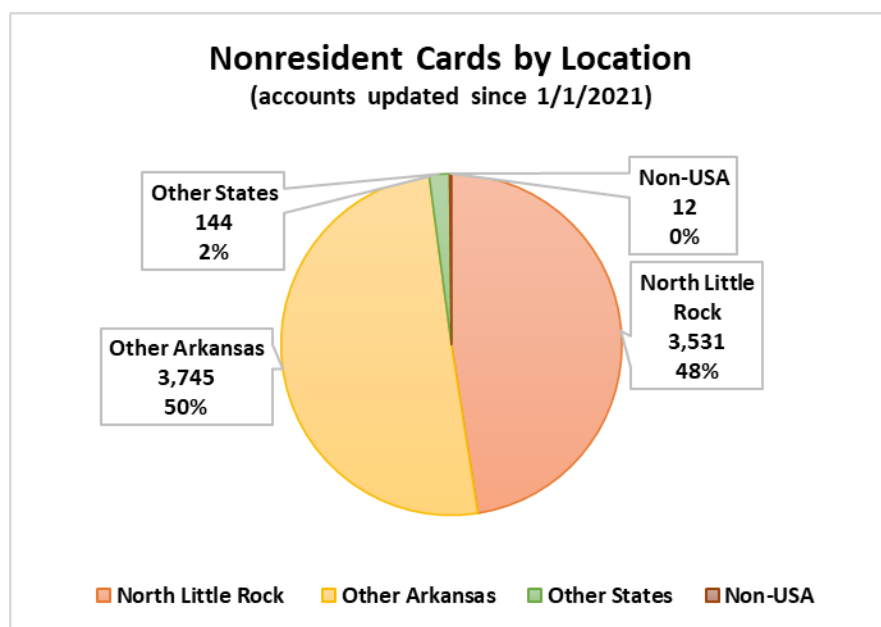
County Broad Band Assessment: When Pulaski County Judge Barry Hyde addressed the board at the January meeting, he talked about the Arkansas State Broadband Office's process to identify the needs for improved connectivity through high-speed internet. He noted that Arkansas will receive over \$1B in federal funds to apply toward closing the digital divide that keeps some residents from participating fully in the digital economy. The state has set up a Challenge Process for people to register and check the speed of their internet connection to help identify areas that need improved service but are not currently shown on the government's map of underserved neighborhoods. The County Committee is trying to assist with this effort so that people living in the more rural parts of the county as well as those living inside municipal boundaries who lack adequate service can have their needs recognized. This will influence the allocation of the money so it can flow toward those areas of the county where the need is greatest. Judge Hyde wants to be sure that Pulaski County gets roughly its share of the state population (10%) from the federal grant. If you or anyone you know wants to participate to help with the mapping of the needs anywhere in our service area (or beyond for that matter), please have people go to the state broadband website and read about how to do a speed check on their service and to report if neighborhoods do not have adequate internet access. [Here is the link.](#) The deadline is April 20, 2024, to register and do your test.

Circulation and Traffic: The two-week internet outage led to significant reductions in several of the metrics we track monthly. The two most obvious changes were computer and laptop use, which was down 45% from February 2023 and WiFi usage, which was down 37%. The use of our research databases was also down, by 19%. It seems likely that the inability to use the databases inside the library for those two weeks drove that number down. Physical circulation also saw a

drop of 13%. We've been tracking the general reduction in physical circulation for many months now, but the outage is probably responsible for at least part of that drop since holds could not be fulfilled during that time.

There was some good news in February. Program attendance was up 69% over the previous year and door count was up 11%. Growth in program attendance usually drives growth in door count. We had an extra day in February, but the daily average door count was up 7%, meaning the leap day was not the primary cause of that growth.

A board member recently asked about the geographic distribution of nonresident cardholders, which is depicted in the chart below. The date of January 1, 2021, was chosen to exclude North Little Rock patrons who elected not to pay the nonresident fee after 2020. Many of those accounts will likely be purged from the database in the next year or so. National standards call for patron databases to be purged of nonactive accounts at least every three years. Please note that the actual raw numbers may have changed slightly since this report was run, but the percentages are still correct.



Proposed Sale of 319 Clinton Ave.: As you know from the brief email the day after the special called board meeting on March 14, the buyer did not close the purchase of 319 Clinton Avenue on March 15 as anticipated. I have asked for a chance to follow up with the owner, Tim Heiple, to learn more about this and to work toward clearing up some of the uncertainties in the lease CALS has for an apartment in his building. This would facilitate the process if and when Mr. Heiple is presented with another offer to buy his building.

Act 372 Litigation Update: The Defendants' lawyers have subpoenaed me to give sworn testimony in *Fayetteville Public Library, et al. v. Crawford County et al.* My deposition is set for 9am next Monday, April 1. The lawyers have been deposing other witnesses this week and believe the case is proceeding as scheduled with an expected final ruling by the trial court sometime late summer or fall.