

## Director's Report for May 23, 2024

**Main Remodeling:** The contractor has almost finished demolition except for the basement, which we expect will be completed in the next week. The southeast corner of the parking lot has been fenced off and they have begun work on the new entrance off 2<sup>nd</sup> Street. This new entrance should be finished by May 28. The Rock Street entrance will then be permanently closed. The Carnegie Columns have been shrouded with plywood to protect them during construction.

**Deferred Maintenance and Other Capital Improvements:** Materials for Terry's new floor covering have been ordered. Installation will begin once these materials arrive. We anticipate that it will be around June 6. We have replaced the Williams boiler and the McMath HVAC project is almost complete. Once the Maumelle roof replacement (hail damage) is finished, the same contractor will turn to the Dee Brown roof.

**Summer @ CALS:** Our annual summer reading/learning program (renamed Summer @ CALS last year) will kick off soon. Patrons can register beginning on May 28, and the series of weekly programs across the system will wrap up at the end of July. Participants will receive a free book bag and tickets to two Arkansas Travs baseball games when signing up for the program with other prizes and incentives distributed throughout the program. This year's theme is "Adventure Begins at Your Library," and our programming staff are planning activities for all ages that interpret that theme in a variety of ways from exploring the outdoors, learning new skills, and broadening horizons through reading. Summer @ CALS is our largest program each year (with over 9500 participants in 2023) and would not be successful without the buy-in and planning of staff across the system. Youth Services Coordinator Amanda Orgel has taken over the coordinating for Summer @ CALS this year and will share an update on the program during the meeting.

**Strategic Planning:** The Staff Planning Team met for the first time on Tuesday, May 21. Work is underway to develop the community survey, which will be released in the summer. Stephanie Chase will make a short report at the meeting to update you on her firm's work. Thanks to those of you who were able to participate in the board focus group on May 22.

**Communications:** We've hosted several events and activities this year, but our primary focus remains on boosting circulation and awareness of our offerings. We've launched a new series of ads for the "Check Out Both" digital campaign. Additionally, we're in the early stages of planning the 2024 Rock Paper Run, scheduled for September 14. More details will be available in the coming weeks. CALS has also earned another PR Xchange Award for video production, standing out among over 330 entries from across the country in both print and digital formats.

[Watch our 2024 winning entry, "WesFest."](#)

**Development:** Since the fall of 2022, CALS has been the recipient of a subgrant award from the Arkansas Department of Health's Office of Health Disparities Elimination (OHDE). Our project activities include connecting patrons with community resources via two additional full-time social workers. (The grant pays for the salary and benefits of two of CALS's three social workers and has paid for COVID-19 test kits distributed throughout the system, among other program supplies.) The source of the funding is the CDC, and the grant was scheduled to conclude on

May 31, 2024. Earlier this month, OHDE invited CALS to extend our award for one year and receive an additional \$100,000 to continue our project. We have accepted this invitation (which is contingent upon the approval of the CDC and ADH executive leadership). Last month representatives from CDC attended a site visit in Little Rock for recipients of the ADH-CDC Health Disparities Grant. CALS's Children's Library & Learning Center hosted some of the site visit activities and CALS social worker Chloe Kilcrease, whose position has been funded by this grant, presented on a panel.

Looking ahead a bit, we are seeking sponsors for the 2024 Day of the Dead Alley Party, to be held November 1, 2024, from 5-8pm. Save the date for the next CALS Used Book Sale: July 11-13, at the Port store. We are starting to think about where we will have the Used Book Sale after Main is reopened and we leave the temporary space at the Port.

**New Parental Leave Policy:** CALS has added a significant new employee benefit. Effective June 1st, CALS employees can receive up to 12 weeks of paid leave after the birth of an employee's child or a child the employee is parenting. This benefit also applies to the period following the placement of a child with an employee through adoption or foster care. It is available to part-time and full-time regular staff members who have worked at CALS for at least 12 months at the time of the birth or placement.

**Six Bridges Book Festival:** Planning and fundraising for the 2024 Six Bridges Book Festival are in full swing. We have recently hired a temporary project manager, Drew Herget, who will assist with this work between now and the conclusion of the festival (which will be held September 23-29, 2024). On Wednesday, May 15, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) announced that CALS has been approved for a Grants for Arts Projects award of \$25,000 to support the presentation of the 2024 Six Bridges Book Festival. And, on May 16, we announced a ticketed fundraising event to be held September 29 in support of the Six Bridges Book Festival. The event is headlined by Ann Patchett in conversation with Robin Preiss Glasser, and tickets are now on sale [here](#).

**Circulation and Traffic:** Recent patterns of usage continued in April. Physical circulation is still trending down, while digital circulation is up 23% over April 2023 and year-to-date. While most digital services are seeing some growth, the primary driver of this seems to be the additional access to hoopla audiobooks and ebooks, which we added near the end of 2023. We expect the rate of growth to slow once we are comparing current usage to similar usage in the prior year. The usage of digital research resources is up some as well, driven primarily by the addition of the older *Arkansas Gazette* and *Arkansas Democrat* digital archives to our collection. On the other hand, meeting room usage is down. Some of that change can be attributed to the temporary loss of Main Library's meeting spaces during the renovation, but some may be due to the changes in meeting room rules that we made when we went live with Communico Reserve. We will monitor this metric and have the Admin Council review the results with an eye toward any changes we need to make. Door count is also down, again, mostly attributable to the closure of Main Library.

**Digital Navigators:** Hannah, Eliza, and I met with three members of the State Library staff on May 9<sup>th</sup> to discuss the possibilities of working together to formulate a statewide model for teaching digital skills. One of the discoveries we made is that a lot of the state broadband office's focus is in the area of creating a uniform curriculum they aim to use to instruct a goal of 275,000 Arkansans. In the libraries, however, the needs are more ad hoc and urgent. We did not think our patrons would have an incentive to sit through several classes as part of a course designed to raise basic digital literacy generally. Our users typically have a more immediate need that cannot wait for a structured classroom setting the following week. One positive was that contrary to what we had anticipated, the state does not have to disburse the capacity grants before the year end. This federal funding may be allocated over the next five years according to the ASL. The additional funds will be issued under a competitive grant program that will be controlled by the federal NTIA rather than the state broadband office. The notice of funding opportunities for that has not yet been issued. The state library is meanwhile conducting focus groups with agencies like the state cooperative extension office to gather more information on ways to offer more digital skills training. Appropriate CALS staff will join in these.

**Ongoing Exhibit at Roberts:** The exhibition in the Underground Gallery at the Roberts Library has generated a great deal of interest. It's called "What Did You Learn in School Today" and it was created and curated by Little Rock native Jay Youngdahl. It focuses on the textbooks used in Arkansas during the twentieth century and how that education influenced thinking in the decades since. Jay offered a discussion of the exhibition at the Second Friday Art Night's opening in April. The *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* and KUAR media have covered it [here](#) and [here](#). The exhibit runs through next month.

**Williams Incident:** Someone broke through a window and entered the teen center at the remodeled library overnight on May 15-16. He was unable to go to other rooms because staff are trained to lock all the interior doors at closing. We suffered some property damage and lost a play station video console. But the new security cameras helped the LRPD identify the burglar who also broke into several nearby properties that same night.

**CALS Call Center:** We are continuing to look at the implications of routing most calls initially to a central location to maximize the customer experience by ensuring that we have highly skilled people responding with thorough information about the callers' questions. Kate Matthews is studying this with the assistance of a small committee I have appointed to research what other libraries have done and why they believe this has enhanced customer satisfaction and advanced library promotion. Earlier this week I spoke with a library director who said that they call their center "Info Now," and the goal is to provide a detailed answer to anything more than a basic query about hours or what staff is on duty. This director indicated that the patrons can still dial a number directly to the branch but there is a general number posted and published for information about the library and those ring at the Info Now center. And of course, staff answering calls at either the branch or the center can transfer the caller to the other. We will report down the road on the research we gather like this and the assessment of it from Kate's committee. I need to correct one inaccurate piece of information provided in the last board meeting. Staff indicated at the meeting that the number of calls received system wide for the month of February 2024 was 7,640. That number, however, is 7,801.