

Director's Report for August 22, 2024

Main Remodeling: The architects and contractors believe that the water main rerouting will be wrapped up shortly and that the report last month of 3-4 weeks additional time to complete the project attributable to this surprise is unchanged. CDI has not been able to move forward with the extensive outside work on the east end of the existing building until this underground effort concludes. In the meantime, they have continued to work on the inside. [Here is a little bit of video](#) the staff made recently inside the space when I was touring the work with Amanda Sturgell of Polk Stanley Wilcox.

One of the new features on the first floor inside the entrance and the children's area are 11 spaces on the ceiling where we will put quotations and excerpts from books. We are currently seeking through August 31 suggestions from staff and the public. Board members are welcome to participate, too. Here's the [link](#).

Another New Arts and Cultural Facility Opening Near Main: The Arkansas Symphony Orchestra has opened its new music center down the street from CALS. They will have small concerts and teach music lessons in the building. They have some recording spaces where they can produce content from their musicians that they have promised to share with CALS so we can use it in our branches for after school programs. They will have a weekend celebration of the opening on September 14-15. CALS will host a storytime as part of Saturday's kid activities.



Strategic Planning: The staff committee and consultants are now engaged in conducting focus groups and interviews with patrons and stakeholders to supplement community input offered in the survey that wrapped up earlier this month. We received more than 3,500 responses to the community survey, and that data is currently being analyzed by Stephanie Chase and our other consultants. Carol and Stephanie are working on plans to solicit more public feedback via the branches and social media during the fall, and the staff survey is under development. Karama will have more to report at the meeting.

Change in WiFi Hours: We have made some adjustments to our Wi-Fi access hours. Over a year ago, at the request of the Jacksonville Police Department (JPD), we began limiting Wi-Fi access at the Jacksonville Branch. The police had difficulty removing campers from the property because the 24-hour Wi-Fi service was technically considered a service to the public. After the change, we observed a significant reduction in camping-related problems there. Based on this

experience, the Administrative Council (20 department leaders and branch managers who advise the Executive Committee), have recommended that we turn off Wi-Fi everywhere from 10 PM to 6 AM to see if the positive impact in Jacksonville might also occur at other branches. For some context on this change, we instituted 24-hour Wi-Fi during the pandemic for people who lacked connectivity at home and other their other sources were shuttered. Before the pandemic our Wi-Fi hours were aligned with our building hours. The new schedule will continue to support the community with WiFi into the evening but not overnight. We will monitor to determine what, if any, affect this reduction may have on the camping-related problems.

CALS Cruiser: Last month I introduced our new manager of the book mobile, Katherine Blake. She is trained and ready to go but the vehicle is still not here. We were told it would be here by now. But last week we learned that the outfitter of the vehicle, Farber Specialty Vehicles in Reynoldsburg, OH, will once again fail to meet its own promised delivery date. About six months of the two years since we ordered this vehicle after taxpayers approved the bond refinancing in May 2022 are attributable to manufacturer Mercedes's covid supply chain issues. Jo has been told that she will hear an update Monday from Farber. To state the obvious, Farber has no credibility left with us. CALS has paid about half of the \$300,000 cost of this vehicle. At this point we must explore all of our options, including legal recourse, for recovery of our money or expediting the long overdue delivery.

Communications: Our communications efforts for the next month will focus on promoting the [Six Bridges Book Festival](#), Library Card Sign-up Month, Hunger Action Month, and Hispanic Heritage Month. Content related to Six Bridges will become more frequent in our newsletter and on social media, with ongoing paid promotions via Little Rock Public Radio, digital ads with the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, and social media. Expect an increase in both print and digital ads, flyers, signage, and media appearances next month.

September is Hunger Action Month. For that Be Mighty is preparing materials for the "Hunger CAN't Wait" food drive, which offers incentives for supporting our Little Free Pantries. The list of businesses participating in the [Bookworm Bargains program for Library Card Sign-up Month](#) is now finalized, offering discounts and perks to cardholders throughout September. We'll also use the month to highlight the value of libraries.

For Hispanic Heritage Month (September 15 - October 15), our Programming team is finalizing activities, and Communications will publish a dedicated landing page and develop marketing materials to mark the occasion. Lastly, [Fletcher Library](#) will celebrate its 50th anniversary on Saturday, September 7, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. with games, crafts, food, and more. Branch manager Liz Wooley describes Fletcher as "a place to study, collaborate, explore, and create," emphasizing its role in bringing the community together. Come greet Liz and her staff on the 7th and wish Fletcher a happy birthday!

Development: We learned last week that the City of Little Rock has approved the funding of our Be Mighty program for another year. The \$100,000 contract extends through June 2025, and will fund the salaries of our Be Mighty specialist and Be Mighty outreach facilitator. CALS is very grateful for the City of Little Rock's ongoing support for this very successful program. We are also pleased to share that the Windgate Foundation has approved a grant to the CALS Foundation for the fourth year in a row. We were approved for a \$247,000 grant to be spent in 2025. The grant will fund visual arts programming at every library branch and a variety of outreach initiatives, and it includes line items for new art acquisitions for the Main Library. The grant will also fund the appliance purchases for the Main Library's two demonstration kitchens. Finally: Grants Coordinator Hannah Saulters is currently deeply engaged in developing a proposal for the National Telecommunications and Information Administration's (NTIA's) Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program, which could potentially provide significant increased capacity to the library's digital literacy program (this enables our digital navigators who were the subject of praise in last month's report). The grant deadline is September 23. Find more information here: <https://www.ntia.gov/federal-register-notice/2024/notice-funding-opportunity-digital-equity-competitive-grant-program>

Capital Campaign Update: Our Main Library capital campaign committee meets monthly on the fourth Tuesday and continues to work hard making visits with potential donors. We have secured \$661,000 in pledges and have had several promising meetings with prospective donors over the past month. We are awaiting decisions from several donors who invited proposals from committee members. The development staff works closely with these volunteers to tailor proposals to individual prospects.

Six Bridges Book Festival: The Six Bridges Book Festival will be in full swing five weeks from today. The festival is scheduled from September 22-29 and is packed with programs. The festival planners have aimed to curate a series of programs that will entertain, inspire, and educate readers of many tastes and interests. We have 50 confirmed presenters, including a 2024 Pulitzer Prize winner (Ilyon Woo), a 2023 Pulitzer Prize winner (Toluse Olorunnipa), two Pulitzer Prize finalists (Ann Patchett and Elliott West), many *New York Times* bestsellers (such as Ayana Gray, who lives in Little Rock and wrote a best-selling young adult novel that is being developed into a film by Netflix), and writers in a number of genres: suspense novelists, romance novelists, authors of fantasy, graphic novelists, children's book illustrators, cookbook authors, memoirists, historians, humorists, journalists, and even an author who will give a demonstration on container gardening. We are also lining up an all-star roster of local moderators, including board members Karama Neal and Ryan Davis (thank you!), and scheduling many visiting authors for local school visits in addition to their public presentations. All of the events are free, except for the culminating program – a festival fundraising event that will be held the evening of September 29. We currently have about 50 tickets available to that event, if you would like to reserve yours before they sell out:

https://app.etapestry.com/onlineforms/CentralArkansasLibrarySystemF/patchett_glasser.html

Drew Herget, our part time Six Bridges coordinator and project manager, and Eliza Borné will share more details about the festival at the board meeting.

Circulation and Traffic: In May of 2023, using federal covid relief funds, CALS opened book lockers that allow patrons to pick up books they have put on hold 24/7. These lockers are located at four branch locations—Main Library, McMath, Rooker, and Terry. Since that time, more than 8,400 items have been checked out via book lockers, in almost 2,900 transactions or sessions. We do not have a way of knowing how many individual patrons are using these book lockers, since that 2,900 count surely includes repeat users. Surprisingly to me, only about 21% of those sessions happened between the hours of 6:00 pm when most branches close for the day and 9:00 am when all branches open. A larger number, about 24%, happened between the hours of 11:00 am and 2:00 pm, which suggests that quite a few users are picking up holds on their lunch breaks. Although the number of checkouts through the book lockers is only a small percentage of our total circulation, locker use remains steady. The lockers at Terry Library are the most heavily used.

July program attendance was up 21% compared to July 2023. Physical circulation, however, was down 11% and digital circulation, although up 13%, was not enough to keep total circulation from being down by 1% in July. Total circulation is still up in 2024 year-to-date and digital circulation is growing. The number of unique users for OverDrive ebooks and audiobooks in July was 12,983, which is up 28% over the same period last year.

Homelessness Task Force: As anyone who visits our libraries knows, CALS and all other libraries in cities across the country are at the forefront of responding to a rise in the number of homeless patrons. Like everyone else at CALS with compassion for the least among us, I struggle to balance our obligations at the library to serve our unhoused patrons with our need to make the library as safe and inviting as possible to everyone. I decided I should try to convene a group of people at the library who know far more about the scope and nature of the societal challenge of people living without shelter, as well as what concrete steps other communities have taken to help merchants and libraries, and our customers/patrons, including those who are unsheltered. Last week a devoted group of shelter and law enforcement providers gathered at the library to discuss how they could craft a set of recommendations for elected leaders to consider. Meanwhile, an ongoing effort in Pulaski County to create a community for chronically homeless individuals offers some hope for help to all of us. Here is the story about the construction of Providence Park from digital and print media sources, both of which mention CALS' partnership with Providence Park.

<https://edition.arkansasonline.com/arkansas-democrat-gazette/20240821/281784224420575/textview>

<https://www.thv11.com/article/news/local/updates-tiny-home-village-pulaski-county/91-b0fe2721-0f12-4da5-9541-d537dab0a304>



New Manager at Sanders Library in Sherwood: We are happy to announce that Alison McKee has joined CALS. Last week was her first one on the job. She has big shoes to fill following Ginann, but Alison seems up to the challenge. Alison will join us at the meeting so she can introduce herself. By way of preview, I can tell you that she is a native of North Little Rock and comes to us after a distinguished career in the United States Foreign Service. She most recently worked for the U.S. State Department as a librarian in the Pacific Island of Fiji. Her husband is also a native of central Arkansas and a career officer in the U.S. Air Force. Meanwhile, Amy Sanders, for whom the library is named, celebrated her 100th birthday at the library a couple of Saturdays ago. According to Bobby Roberts, who attended the party, funding for this new library in Sherwood would not have been approved by voters in 2014 without Amy's tireless efforts. Amy is by far the youngest looking centenarian I have ever seen!"

Update on Joyce: I was heartened to hear recently from one of Joyce's friends and work colleagues that she was doing a lot of daily therapy and seemed determined to recover. Her progress is still slow, but Joyce is up and working hard to overcome her stroke. I will find a way before next month and share it with you if you want to send good wishes to her.

September's Board Meeting: This will occur at noon on September 26, at the UA Little Rock Downtown space across Rock Street from the Roberts Library. For that meeting and tomorrow's (in Roberts 204) you can enter the CALS parking deck by coming off Clinton Avenue onto Rock Street. If you want to park in the surface lot, much of which is taken up now by the construction project, you have to enter off Second Street.