

Director's Report for December 12, 2024

Main Remodeling: The Main Library remodel continues on pace for a June 2025 completion date. The contractors are currently working on finishing out the interior and will soon begin construction on the east facing stair tower, which is a prominent new feature for the old building that will make entering the building and moving among the various floors more exciting.

Other Branches: Our maintenance team is currently working on the Ron Robinson Theater updates and are painting the interior this week. Their next project will be the installation of new carpet in the theater at the Children's Library. They also aspire to finish installing the new flooring at Dee Brown before year end.

Strategic Planning: The staff strategic planning team (SPT) is in the process of editing the community engagement report, which analyzes the results of the community and staff surveys, the focus groups, and individual interviews conducted with members of the community. Library visitors have been providing more feedback by answering questions presented on posters at each location. Some of you have probably seen these. There will be more community meetings in January before the SPT meets in February to begin writing the final plan. The SPT has made the wording change in the core values statement that was requested at the October board meeting. Carol will present the final version of the mission, vision, and values statements at the meeting for your approval.

Program Updates: Youth Services Coordinator Amanda Orgel has been working with the Arkansas Museum of Fine Art (AMFA) over the past year to bring a literacy component to their stage productions. Most recently, we offered a Winter Reading Challenge through our Beanstack platform, where young patrons could track their reading as well as visits to CALS locations and AMFA for a chance to win a family 4-pack of tickets to *Madeline's Christmas*. Participants have logged over 12,000 minutes of reading during the challenge. We also helped host literacy day at AMFA on Sunday, December 8, with a library information table, literacy and learning activities for families, and free books. Our next event with AMFA will be in conjunction with their upcoming show, *An Unlikely Hero*, which runs January 18-26. We will focus on graphic novels for this show.



CALS programming staff have been busy representing the library at community holiday events. On Saturday, December 7, in addition to the holiday programs at Children's, McMath, and Terry, the CALS Cruiser made an appearance in the Sherwood Christmas Parade, and in what is now a yearly tradition, our staff participated in the Southwest Little Rock Christmas Parade. Coming up this Saturday, staff will be providing library info and an activity at the Grinchmas event at Park Plaza Mall.



Be Mighty is closing out the year with a series of holiday-themed recipe kits. They have been making the kits available at select locations and sharing information about the holiday observance and related authentic recipes on their social media. The series has garnered positive attention including connecting with folks who want to volunteer to help with future kits.

Our annual Food for Fines is currently underway. This year, we have extended the program to last for two weeks. From December 8-21, patrons can present non-perishable food or hygiene items to the library to have their library fines forgiven. Patrons without fines can also donate items to and pay it forward to help cover the costs of the fines of others. Most items will remain at CALS to stock the Little Free Pantries.

Update on Homelessness Task Force: On October 30 at the Ron Robinson Theater the audience heard a presentation from Dallas and Nashville homeless services offices who outlined their best practices for collecting reliable data to submit to HUD for federal grant funds and creating unified strategies for addressing homelessness. The afternoon before the visitors from Texas and Tennessee toured shelters around central Arkansas. Our guests had dinner with a group of local leaders, including five members of the Little Rock City Board. The mayor is asking the city board to fund an additional 5 employees to work in homeless services. This would enhance the city’s capacity to help businesses, libraries, providers, and homeless individuals in ways that these other cities are doing.

Development: The end of the year is always a busy time in Development. We mailed out a fundraising appeal to 10,000 people on November 19, mailed a follow-up postcard this week, and have been communicating consistently with our donors through social media and email. To date we have raised \$61,867 in response to these efforts, from 287 donors. We have also been developing our brochure of 2025 sponsorship opportunities, and we still have a couple more grant proposals due before December 31. We are awaiting notification on two federal grants, along with several proposals to prospective capital campaign donors.

CALS Used Book Sale (CUBS): This has been a year of transition for the library’s popular used book sale. We held the first open-to-the-public CALS Used Book Sale at our Port location in March 2024, with additional sales in July and November. When we moved to the Port, we weren’t sure if the book sale’s devoted fans (accustomed to the basement book sale at Main) would come with us to Sloane Drive. So, we only budgeted for \$51,550 in revenue from book sales, trying to be conservative. Turns out we needn’t have worried – thousands of shoppers have

come out to our new location, and to date we have earned more than \$76,000 from our used book sales in 2024. Considering that the vast majority of sales are from books priced at \$1 or \$2 – that’s a lot of used books! We have tried to make stronger connections between CUBS and wider library programming: adding library outreach tables to the sales floor, stationing the CALS Cruiser outside the sale, and providing small “pop-up” used book sales at community events throughout the year. We often receive feedback that patrons love the opportunity to buy affordable books for their home libraries and enjoy the community of passionate booklovers always present at the sales. Our last book sale event of the year will be on Saturday, December 14, from 11am-2pm. We have invited our CALS Foundation donors and former Friends of CALS members to a special one-day sale as a way of appreciating these supporters for their contributions to the library. Our next open-to-the public sale is scheduled for February 13-15, 2025. Revenue from CUBS is distributed as grants to branches and library programs.

Communications: November and December were busy with planning and hosting big events. On November 1, Maria Aguilar, CALS Community Engagement Coordinator, spearheaded the annual Day of the Dead Festival at Library Square. This vibrant celebration once again surpassed expectations, drawing a crowd of approximately 3,500 attendees and featuring over 30 vendors. Highlights included a lively parade down President Clinton and River Market Avenues, altars that celebrated various aspects of Latino culture, and captivating performances—all of which received enthusiastic praise from attendees. On November 8, the Communications team collaborated with Day 2 Marketing (formerly Thoma Thoma) to host Arkansas Razorback quarterback Taylen Green at McMath Library. The event highlighted the library’s resources and encouraged residents to sign up for library cards. Taylen delighted fans by autographing posters and custom “trading cards.” As we move into December, our partnership with Taylen continues with a holiday promotion encouraging donations to the CALS Foundation and highlighting the importance of “giving the gift of a library card.” You can find the landing page here: <https://cals.org/holidays>. Last week, we marked McMath Library’s 20th anniversary with a festive Holiday Open House. Special guests Andrea Lewis, City Director for Ward 6, and Justice of the Peace Elect Steven Person joined the celebration, helping branch manager Laura Hodo, assistant manager Tracey Eatmon, and Nate light the holiday tree. The library on Barrow Road is named in honor of Arkansas Governor Sid McMath who served from 1949-1953. His youngest son, Bruce McMath, and Bruce’s wife Becky McMath attended the celebration.



Circulation and Traffic: By the end of October, we had surpassed 1 million digital checkouts and by the end of November we had accrued more digital checkouts than we did in all of 2023. It is possible that OverDrive checkouts alone may surpass 1 million by the end of the year, if digital patrons decide to check out a lot of ebooks and audiobooks for holiday reading. If we do

not reach 1 million OverDrive checkouts in 2024, it is very likely that we finally will in 2025. We have offered OverDrive since 2009. So far, digital checkouts are running slightly ahead of physical checkouts for the year. At the end of November, digital checkouts were 50.2% of total checkouts. This may be the first year that digital circulation outpaces physical circulation. That didn't even happen in 2020, when digital circulation was about 48% of total circulation by the end of the year.

Staff Update: We have hired a new HR Manager. Priscilla Barnes will begin on December 16. She has considerable experience in HR, having served as the HR Director at Our House. Priscilla will report to Jo. CALS employee Heather Zbinden has been promoted by Ellen Samples to fill the Adult Programming Coordinator position. Heather has been with CALS since 2017. Before moving into this new role, Heather was serving as the Programs and Website Coordinator for the Roberts Library. I'm excited about what these talented women will do at CALS in their roles.

Public Library Association Leadership Role: Last spring at the PLA meeting in Ohio I volunteered to some officers of the association at a social reception that I would be willing to serve on the board. I told them I was interested in offering a perspective from a library system that serves rural, suburban, and urban patrons in a non-coastal conservative state like ours. Instead of putting me on the board, the PLA nominating committee has now asked me to stand for election next spring to the office of President Elect. I was reluctant but after talking to half a dozen librarians from around the country who are involved in PLA leadership, I agreed to accept this honor. There is no campaigning under the PLA rules and the committee does not disclose the names of the nominated candidates for a while. If I get tabbed – and that's a big if --the work would not constitute a significant time burden or otherwise diminish my capacity to do my job here. The board only meets quarterly, and two of those four are virtual. I have been told by one past president and another PLA board member that the primary responsibility of the PLA President during a one-year term is fielding queries about public library issues forwarded by the PLA staff from media. But this may not come to pass, judging from the role geography has historically seemed to play in these matters. The current PLA President is from CA; the two Past Presidents are from MD and MA; and the President Elect is from NYC. AR would be an outlier.

Board Retirement: Brandon Grice has been the CALS board member representing Sherwood since January of 2019. For much of that time he has been the Board Treasurer, faithfully going over the finances with Jo Spencer each month to keep our financial house in order. Unfortunately for CALS, Brandon is not eligible to be reappointed. We will have to find a way to get along next year without him. Even though he has a busy bank job and helps coach his kids' teams, Brandon has been at almost every one of the approximately 60 board meetings we've had these past six years, plus a fair number of committee meetings. CALS and I are indebted to Brandon for his time and the valuable insights that only a CPA can offer.

New Officers: Looking ahead to January, we will have a new board member from Sherwood to succeed Brandon. Madhav and Ryan are each in line to be reappointed to another 3-year term next week by the Little Rock city board. Stacey McAdoo has been the Board President for two years. She will still be on the board in the new year but has earned the right to pass the gavel. Karama Neal has agreed to take it up next year. There will be a slate of new officers to consider in January. Ryan Davis will continue to be available to serve as the Vice President of the Board.

Luke Underwood, the only other CPA on the board besides Brandon, has agreed to be the treasurer. We are very lucky to have all of you on this board and I'm particularly grateful that these three members are willing to take on board leadership roles next year.

Next Board Meeting: Our first meeting of 2025 will be on **January 23, 2025**, at McMath in observance of their 20th anniversary. Happy Holidays!