

Director's Report for October 23, 2025

Main Reopening: There were so many positive reactions from the people who came to the grand reopening or the book festival on October 4, or who visited in the days that followed. If those of us who had been immersed in the project for so long had possibly lost sight of the reason we were doing this, the reaction from people who gauging it more objectively was elevating. The number of rave reviews grew quickly enough that I suggested we set up a shared document for people to record their account of the comments they had heard people make. Maybe we can share that or start a new one for the board since surely some community members are sharing their reactions with you. We have a couple of short videos from the celebration and festivities we'll show you Thursday.



Other Good News: Comcast NBCUniversal has awarded the CALS Foundation a grant to help us keep our highly successful digital navigators working. They will announce the grant at the board meeting and present us with their generous check that will keep Jakeob and Camille working to assist patrons on how to use their personal devices and CALS digital hardware and software. This is a program that we launched in 2022 with a grant from the Windgate Foundation, who supported the program for three years. We are grateful to Comcast NBCUniversal for their generous grant and for recognizing the library's important role in helping patrons participate fully in our digital world.

Book Festival in the Books: The preliminary attendance numbers are good, exceeding the turnout from last year. I jokingly suggested early this week that maybe we have a giant

reopening party every year during the book festival. That did not go over well with the senior staff. But thanks to their work, the Six Bridges Book Festival did. The festival hosted 48 authors, with 15 of them visiting local schools — from elementary classrooms to college campuses — and gave away more than 570 books to students. The festival engaged nearly 6,000 audience members and students (our highest attendance figure since before the pandemic). Drew, Ellen, Heather, and Eliza will start working soon on next year's festival. One of the things they will study is whether we can hold off on assigning rooms in the new Main for each program until we have a better idea of the attendance for each author's event in the form of registration. If we can pull this off, it will maximize seating capacity for the most popular talks. In a couple of cases this year we wound up with some overcrowded meeting rooms with people crammed into one room on the 5th Floor while a larger room next door was drawing fewer guests. We will fine tune this.

Act 372 Litigation Update: The appeal by the state of Arkansas has now been fully briefed by both sides. The case has drawn additional Amicus brief filings from nonparties to the lawsuit who wish to influence the court one way or the other. The next step will be for the clerk of the 8th Circuit of Court of Appeals to assign the case to a 3-judge panel who will hear the oral arguments in St. Louis sometime later this year or early next year.

Program Updates: In addition to all the Main reopening and Six Bridges events that have kept folks running over the past few weeks, we have had a robust outreach presence at many fairs and festivals. Fall is a busy time for community events as people try to take advantage of cooler weather for outdoor gatherings. CALS outreach and programming staff can be found promoting the library and supporting our friends and partners at a variety of these venues around the service area. It is a great opportunity to connect with community members who may not visit the library, and the feedback and appreciation we get for supporting community events is gratifying to the staff who work these events. Here's a rundown of what they will be doing over the fall.

In November, we have several system programs to highlight starting with our annual [Día de Muertos/Day of the Dead celebration](#). Community Engagement Coordinator Maria Aguilar has worked tirelessly to develop this program that brings the community together in a dynamic cultural celebration. This year, we are trying something new by hosting the all-ages event at the Children's Library and Learning Center. It will be held on Saturday, November 1 from 11 am to 2 pm and feature live music, traditional foods, art installations, and family-friendly activities.

The following week, the Roberts Library will host their annual [Genealogy Workshop](#) in the new Darragh Center on Saturday, November 8 from 9 am to 3 pm. Guest presenter Kate Forry Guanci will share her expertise as the founder of Archoral.com, a platform that guides families and communities preserve their histories through a blend of genealogy and cultural archiving.

On November 15, Main Library will be the site of a [Sustainability Fair](#) in partnership with the City of Little Rock Sustainability Office and the Green Corner Store. The event will feature the CALS Repair Cafe, a monthly program normally held at the Dee Brown Library, as well as a screening of the documentary "Reuse! Because You Can't Recycle the Planet" followed by a Q&A with the filmmaker.

Commented [EB1]: [@Ellen Samples](#) Correct?

The Sanders Library in Sherwood will host a Senior Health Fair on Thursday, November 20 from 11 am to 2 pm. The event will include a cooking demonstration, senior fitness and self-defense sessions, a senior emergency preparedness class, a flu vaccine clinic, and blood pressure and blood sugar screenings. Several organizations serving seniors are supporting this effort and will be on hand to connect attendees to their services. Our community outreach funding from the Windgate Foundation is supporting this program.

Development: We are still focused on reaching our capital campaign goal. To date we have raised \$1,748,733.80 in gifts and pledges to the Next Chapter campaign from 277 donors. However, the number we are most focused on these days is \$250,000 – the amount we need to raise in matching funds to meet the Windgate Foundation’s challenge grant. Of the \$1,748,733.80 we have confirmed in campaign donations, \$150,495 is eligible for the match. So, we officially have less than \$100,000 left to raise until we “unlock” the match and meet our goal (we still have to raise \$99,505, to be precise). We continue to be inspired by the conversations we have with donors who are moved to use their philanthropy to make a difference for the Main Library.

We are also getting organized for the CALS Foundation’s year-end fundraising campaign. The CALS Foundation will spend just shy of \$15,000 on a direct marketing appeal (one letter and one postcard each mailed to 12,000 addresses) and hope to raise more than \$80,000 in unrestricted donations to support the ongoing work of the CALS Foundation (primarily grants to CALS programs),

Finally, we are trying to think creatively about the next CALS Used Book Sale. Though we cannot yet fully set up a used book sale operation on the first floor of Roberts Library (the floors need to be refinished after Mini Main has moved out, for one thing) -- we hope to hold a “table top” used book sale on the first floor of Roberts timed to coincide with 2nd Friday Art Night in December. We know the community misses their used book sales and we want to bring them back as soon as we can!

Communications: The two largest projects of the year—the Main Library Grand Reopening and the Six Bridges Book Festival—are now in the rear-view mirror. The communications team did excellent work over the past several months to prepare then pivot once the reopening date changed. They are both exhausted and already looking for “the next big thing” to come their way. The department is now shifting its focus to upcoming programs, including support for the *Día de Muertos* festival and promotion for the Genealogy Workshop, Sustainability Fair, and others mentioned in and beyond this report. For the Grand Reopening, our goal was to stay as close as possible to the original vision of a “homecoming carnival,” and despite some adjustments we had to make to the schedule that affected availability for some scheduled performers and activities, the event was a huge success. On October 4, attendance at Main was approximately 4,300. We issued 103 new library cards that day. For context, 323 new cards were issued systemwide that week. The reopening and the festival both received significant media coverage (traditional and social) in September and October. Here are some of those highlights:

- [Urbane: Karama, Tameka, and Jessica | Main](#)
- [Arkansas Democrat-Gazette: High Profile | Six Bridges, Shelby Van Pelt](#)
- [Arkansas Democrat-Gazette: Video | Main](#)
- [Blackbelt Voices Podcast: Nate, Karama, and Tameka | Main](#)
- [KARK: Jessica McDaniel at Arkansas Style | Main and Six Bridges](#)
- [KUAF: Wright Thompson | Six Bridges](#)
- [Soiree: Audrey, Lisa Ferrell, and Martie North | Main](#)
- [Photo Gallery | Main and Six Bridges \(Saturday and Sunday\)](#)



Circulation and Traffic: Digital circulation was up only 1% in September over the previous year, which was not enough to counteract the 4% drop in physical circulation and keep total circulation in positive territory. Systemwide door count continues to grow. We're tracking Main Library's door count daily for the first month or so of being open and those numbers are looking very good compared to 2022, which was the last time the Main Library was open during this time period. Meeting room bookings are starting to happen, and those events should drive door count even higher than we've seen so far. There was a large jump in the usage of our digital research tools in September. Most of that was driven by heavy use of LearningExpress, which mainly provides test prep materials. It seems that at least one teacher was sending students to LearningExpress for ACT study materials in preparation for the ACT test, which was administered on October 18. It's possible that many of those users were also Tech Card holders, but there is no way to verify that. The usage numbers for LearningExpress remain higher than usual so far in October. Considering the high cost of many ACT test prep programs, it's good that CALS can provide this at no cost to the students.

New EV Charging Stations: CALS received a \$188,500 grant from Pulaski County and Metroplan to install dual electric vehicle (EV) charging stations at all of our libraries in Pulaski County. Gonzalo has been working with our solar energy consultant Integrity to purchase the appropriate chargers and train on the software. Arkansas Electric Cooperative is doing the electrical work and installing the EV chargers. These will be level 2 charging ports. We plan on having them all installed before the end of the year. Gonzalo will oversee monitoring the software and submitting quarterly data to OSHA/Metroplan in compliance with the grant agreement for the next two years.

Update on Joyce Elliott: Some of you may have seen the warm welcome that Joyce received when she made a public appearance a couple of weeks ago at an event in the Trio's private party room. Here is the [link](#) to the *Arkansas Times* Blog story.

Next Board Meeting: Reminder: There is no November meeting. The CALS board always combines its November and December business in a single meeting in early to mid-December. The staff proposes that your next meeting be on Thursday, December 11, 2025.