

Library Director's Report

April 2023

2023 Trustee Election/2024 Budget Vote

The Trustee Election and 2024 budget vote will take place on Tuesday, May 2nd at the Library. Polls open at 9 am and close at 8 pm. Kim has arranged for election inspectors to be at the Library that day; they will be paid the Library's current minimum wage of \$15.47/hour.

Trustee Laura Whitford will run to finish the term she was appointed to in 2022, of which one year remains. Gretchen Copella turned in a petition to run for the seat being vacated by Trustee Larry Sorokes. On April 3rd, the deadline for petitions to be turned in, the Library received a petition to run from Sadie Jay-Edwards. When I spoke with her the day she turned in her petition, she said a Library staff member had encouraged her to run. Therefore, we have 3 people running for 2 seats. One of the terms on the ballot will be for a five-year term, while the other will be for a one-year term. Whoever gets the most votes gets the longer term, while whoever gets the least votes will not be elected to the Board.

The public hearing to present on the proposed budget and to allow constituents to ask questions will be held on April 18th. I will give a report on the hearing at the April Board meeting.

Grants [Strategic Plan Goals 2&3]

The Library was the recipient of 2 generous grants in March and April. In March, we received a check from the Frances Bean O'Connell Art Program Fund at the Erie Community Foundation in the amount of \$3,846.00. This is an annual grant that we receive from the endowment set up by Frances Bean O'Connell's son Kevin O'Connell to support arts and crafts programs at the Library. On April 6th I received an email from Kevin notifying me that the Library will receive a second check this year in the amount of \$5,336.00 from another donor advised fund (I believe recently set up by him and his wife Susan in their new home in South Carolina), bringing the total 2023 grant to \$9,182.00. He did not say when we should expect to receive the second check. In his email, he also stated that "depending on the markets the library will get the proceeds of 4% a year from about 250-300k."

This funding is allowing us to offer high quality arts and crafts programs that draw many participants; many now have long waiting lists. Because we have this gift to work with, we are going to start offering a second class for the ones that have long waiting lists, in order to better serve our patrons.

We also received a letter dated April 3rd from the Burt Memorial Fund Committee at the First Presbyterian Church along with a check for \$8,000! The grant came with the instruction that it be used to support youth programs at the Library. The Library was a previous recipient of grant funding from the Burt Memorial Fund in 2017, when they provided \$10,000 for the establishment of the Teen Room. This has proven to be a great success. We intend to use part of this year's grant to update furniture and technology in the Teen Room, along with helping to pay for supplies, as the number of teens using the Teen Room after school continues to grow. The grant will also be used to support regular teen programming, after-school STEAM programs for school-aged children, and programs for children and families.

We are so grateful for this generous support. Thank you letters have been sent out to both benefactors.

Community Pantry [S.P. Goal #3?]

Rachel Elser reached out to the Library in late March to discuss an idea that the Creekside Food Pantry has to place "community pantries" in areas of need throughout the Olean community. She is wondering about possibly placing one in the Library. It would include a refrigerator and a cupboard that would contain foods such as bread, pastries, and fresh fruits and

vegetables. The food pantry would be responsible for stocking and cleaning the pantry, and it would place no restrictions on who could take food or how much.

We discussed that some patrons may not abide by standards of fairness and may take all of the food at once. The Library does not have the resources to monitor how much a person takes or how often they visit the pantry. That is not a concern to the food pantry, as they simply want to ensure that people have access to food at multiple points of need.

I have run the idea past key staff, not all of whom responded. Among those who did respond, there is very little support for the idea, citing concerns over space (the ideal spot identified for it is in our new “tech” area where the Boundless Connections donated equipment is situated. Apparently the space along the wall identified for the pantry was already being considered for a needed table to house equipment. Other concerns included people eating in the Library, although people already do eat in the Library. There is concern over increased crumbs that could attract rodents and bugs. Other concerns included patrons putting food in the pantry that hasn’t been safety checked, or the pantry not being cleaned often enough by food pantry volunteers. The point was made by more than one that our mission is to assist people in locating needed resources, but not necessarily providing those resources to them.

According to information provided in a webinar attended by a staff member in 2021, “the ‘community fridge,’ [is] a concept begun in Germany in 2015 and rapidly spreading throughout the world. These are refrigerators where anyone can take fresh fruits and vegetables without limit and without proof of eligibility, thereby reducing stigma. Libraries are beginning to undertake these fridges as projects, coordinating with local farms, food pantries, or grocery stores to supply the fridge on a regular basis....The presenter said that their library’s goal is to increase health for everyone in the community, which means not just people of lower incomes, but people who are in a hurry and haven’t had time to shop, or who are passing by with a child and need a healthy snack, etc.”

I personally do not see the pantry idea as a problem for our Library, other than the issue of space. I am bringing this to the Board as this would be a new concept, and while it may not require official board approval, the Board may have opinions about housing this in the Library that should be considered.

Friends of the Library [S.P. Goals 1,2&3]

At their April meeting, the Friends approved a number of gifts for the Library. The annual \$4,000 gift to help pay for programs offered by the Library throughout the year, \$1,331 for cabinets to be installed in the Children’s play area, and \$352 for a revolving media tower to display our growing collection of Manga books, which are very popular with our teen patrons. In addition, they approved spending up to \$300 on soil and plants for our outdoor planters and have recruited volunteers to do the planting. Kathy O’Malley noted that the addition of the cabinets in the play area will help keep it free of toys and other small items lying around on the floor. Plus, the sorting and organizing of toys into the cabinets when putting them away is a brain building skill for children. The countertops will add extra space for building and playing as well. The cabinets can be relocated if necessary. As always, we are truly grateful for the generous support of our Friends group!

Also, a reminder that the annual Bookmark Awards Ceremonies are scheduled for Saturday, May 6th at the Library. One will take place at 11 am and the other at 1 pm. It’s necessary to split them up due to the large crowds that attend, usually around 125 people at each ceremony! The contest is beloved by area students and their families. The bookmarks will be on display in the Gallery during the month of May. The Friends agreed to have them on display in time for the budget vote.

News from the Library [S.P. Goals 1&3]

The Library is observing National Library Week from April 24-29. This year’s theme is “There’s More to the Story.” There will be a basket raffle for kids, teens, and adults; daily

“Coffee, Coloring, and Conversation” program will run Tuesday-Friday morning in the Gallery; there will be a fun scavenger hunt activity for teens, planned by the Teen Advisory Board, to help them get to know there’s more to the library than meets the eye; and an “appreciation wall” will be set up for patrons to express what they love about the Library and/or its staff. This is a nice event to precede the week of the trustee election and budget vote.

We have also planned a number of fantastic programs for the day of the vote, in order to bring in what we hope will be many of our supporters. Kathy O’Malley has arranged for Percy the miniature horse and two of the popular reading therapy dogs for a drop-in event that will run from 3 to 8 pm. There will be stories, crafts, refreshments, and children will be able to read to the dogs and Percy! Percy is a big draw, usually bringing in over a hundred people. Coffee, Coloring, and Conversation will be held in the Gallery that morning, and the Friends’ Bookmark exhibit will open to the public that day. There will also be an afterschool teen craft program, and one of Amy Chaffee’s much loved craft programs for teens and adults in the evening.

The Children’s Department Easter event, held on April 1st, was a great success, and it definitely illustrated the Library’s need for more space. There were hundreds of children crammed into the Children’s area, overflowing into the main area of the Library. Although it was a fun time for children and their families, it was crowded and difficult to maneuver. It was also loud and may not have been appreciated by patrons who were using the Library for other reasons. It was also difficult for Information Desk staff to answer phones and help patrons. Programming staff have been photographing crowded events for posting to our social media, and we are saving them in a shared folder for use in a future “Statement of Need” and other promotional materials we will need when we embark on the planned capital project.

