

Library Director's Report

May 2023

2023 Trustee Election/2024 Budget Vote

The vote on the tax increase was successful, with 147 in favor and 38 opposed (a 79 percent approval rating, which is very good). The turnout was the highest at the Library since I started in 2016. There were 143 ballots cast in person, while 42 absentee ballots were mailed in. We received more yes votes from the in-person voters than those who submitted absentee ballots (83 percent versus 69 percent approval). The high turnout was likely due to Trustees' get-out-the-vote efforts and to people coming in to attend the large number of popular programs scheduled that day. The Children's Department programs alone brought in 215 people, 95 of whom were adults and potential voters. We also had 32 adults attend Amy's evening craft programs.

Trustee Laura Whitford was elected to a 5-year term; this is the term opening up with the retirement from the Board of Trustee Larry Sorokes at the end of June. Laura received 136 votes. Gretchen Copella was elected to a 1-year term, which is what remains of the term Laura filled after John Bartimole's resignation from the Board in 2022. Gretchen received 130 votes. Both terms begin on July 1st. Sadie Jay-Edwards, a third candidate who ran for one of the two open seats, received 72 votes.

NYS Budget

On May 2nd, Gov. Hochul and state legislators finalized the NYS FY2024 budget. Libraries did not fare well in the budget, although it could have been worse if the Governor's proposed cuts had been realized. The budget, which runs from April 1, 2023-March 31, 2024, holds library funding flat at FY2022-2023 levels. Library Operating Aid (LOA) will remain at \$99.6M. Hochul had proposed a cut of \$3.5M, while the Assembly pushed for a \$5M increase and the Senate for a \$3.5M increase. Library Construction Aid (LCA) will remain at \$34M. Hochul proposed a \$20M cut to LCA, while the Assembly proposed a \$20M increase to the program and the Senate proposed a \$5M increase.

With increased fiscal pressures due to inflation and large annual increases to the minimum wage, flat funding will mean libraries will likely have to cut spending in order to stay within their budgets.

Grants [Strategic Plan Goals 2&3]

As reported at the April Board meeting, the Library received a check in March 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 would receive a second check in the amount of \$5,336.00 from another donor advised fund to supplement the first grant. We received the second check in May; it was written from the O'Connell Family Fund, also at the Erie Community Foundation, bringing the total 2023 grant to \$9,182.00.

This funding allows us to offer high quality arts and crafts programs that draw many participants; many of these offerings have long waiting lists. Because we have this gift to work with, we have begun offering a second class for the ones that have long waiting lists, in order to better serve our patrons.

We also received two checks for \$100 each from the Bush Family Charitable Fund. These are grants we receive annually from the donor-advised fund. They are unrestricted, so the funds can be used wherever they are needed most.

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

Gifts and Donations Policy [Action Item] [SP Goals 1&2]

While the Library has written guidelines and procedures for accepting gifts and donations, there is no official policy in place. We have had numerous requests in recent years from people wishing to give gifts of items other than circulating materials, including furniture and artwork. While we do make every effort to accept all gifts and donations offered, not all are ideal for the Library, and so having a policy in place that explains our rationale for accepting or rejecting gifts would be helpful. Additionally, when art work is donated to the Library, it is not unusual for donors to request appraisals of the work so they can include it when they do their taxes. We are not able to provide appraisals, as they are cost prohibitive, nor do we accept art work for its monetary value, but only if it is of local interest. We also get questions/complaints from donors when they discover that a book that was donated to the Library as a memorial years earlier has been weeded from the collection. A draft policy is attached for the Board to review and vote on.

Non-Resident Library Card Fee [Action Item] [SP Goal 3]

For years the Library has charged out-of-state residents a \$10 annual fee for signing up for and renewing their library cards (this does not apply to out-of-state residents who work or go to school in NYS). Neighboring libraries, including Allegany and Portville, have eliminated out-of-state card fees, and so PA residents simply go to those libraries to sign up for a card to avoid the fee at OPL. Given that other libraries are eliminating the fees and there is no law requiring that we charge them, I would recommend that we also eliminate the non-resident fee for obtaining a library card.

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

At the Friends' May meeting, they approved the annual \$1,500 gift to help support the Summer Reading Program. The money is used to pay for presenters for children's programs in July and August.

As mentioned at the April Board meeting, the Friends approved a gift in the amount of \$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. The cabinets are now installed in the children's play area and they look great! I encourage Trustees to walk over and take a look when they are in the Library. Kathy O'Malley noted that the addition of the cabinets in the play area helps 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 add extra space for building and playing as well. The cabinets can be relocated if necessary. The Manga media tower has also arrived and is located just outside of the Teen Room. It also looks great and the teens are really making use of the collection. As always, we are truly grateful for the generous support of our Friends group! They also agreed to pay for flowers for our outside planters, and they recruited a couple of volunteers to do the planting. The flowers were planted this past weekend. Sheryl will put a note in our newsletter thanking the Friends for the flowers.

The annual Bookmark Awards Ceremonies took place on Saturday, May 6th, with one ceremony at 11 am and the other at 1 pm. The morning event celebrated winners from the Olean school district, and the afternoon event celebrated winners from the Portville and Allegany-Limestone districts. Approximately 125 people attended each ceremony. The contest is beloved by area students and their families. The bookmarks were on display in the Gallery throughout the month of May, with the exhibit opening on the day of the budget vote.

News from the Library [S.P. Goal 3]

As mentioned in Kathy O'Malley's report, the League of Women Voters donated two upholstered reading chairs, a decorative shelf, and a quilt in honor of Barbara Chew who passed

away in 2022. The donation is housed in the Children's Department. The LWV held a ceremony on Saturday, May 20th to dedicate the new reading area. Approximately 75 people attended, many of whom were Barbara Chew's relatives who came from all across the country to take part in the ceremony.

The Library observed National Library Week from April 24-29. Thirty people wrote on hearts (what they love about the Library) which were turned into a display. Seventeen children and teens participated in daily scavenger hunts throughout the Library. They learned where to find things in the Library and earned a prize for completing the hunt. There were 3 raffle baskets, one for children, one for teens, and one for adults; 354 tickets were put in by patrons hoping to win.

Alijah has been updating the Teen Room using the recently awarded Burt grant funds. She purchased 9 new chairs/seats to replace the old bean bag chairs. The new seating will accommodate more kids in the room, as the bean bags took up a lot of space. She also purchased a new Nintendo Switch Lite which will allow the teens to play a variety of new games in the room. The Teen Advisory Board has been assisting Alijah in deciding what to purchase for the room to keep it fun and appealing to that age group.