

Director's Report 2016

Highlights

- Bookmobile Service approved/planning begins
- Music-is-the-Word programming
- 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten begins
- Digital Johnson County cooperative launched

Connect-Engage-Enrich are the main themes of the Library's new strategic plan and in our first year we have worked hard to make the Library even more inviting and welcoming by providing opportunities for engagement and learning that offer something for everyone. We focused on expanded programming opportunities for all ages, creating new partnerships, and securing funding for our first bookmobile with the hope of making library services more equally accessible to all.

Bookmobile Planning

A major initiative of the new strategic plan is offering bookmobile service. Iowa City is the largest community in Iowa with only one library location and community feedback shared during the planning process revealed that many feel it is a hardship to come to our downtown location. The purpose of the bookmobile is to offer collections and services throughout the community. Funding for the capital purchase of the vehicle was already in place -- \$100,000 approved last year as part of the FY17 City's capital improvements (CIP) budget, \$100,000 committed and held by the Friends Foundation for this purpose, and additional funds available through the Foundation's annual gift. The next step was securing funding for operating expenses in FY17. Annual costs include staffing, and one new full-time person was requested during the City's budget process, as well as other expenses such as gasoline, insurance, printing and site preparation. A commitment to support additional hours of staffing with gift funds was also made. Due to concerns about fiscal challenges, the City Manager did not recommend funding these operating costs in the FY17 budget draft sent to the City Council in late December. He did not recommend any new staffing City-wide which was paid from the general operating budget.

In January, during a budget session with the City Council, a request was made directly to Council by Board President Robin Paetzold for the necessary funding. Although several Council members were supportive, they were also concerned about the impact of the new service on an existing nonprofit bookmobile operating in the summer primarily in southeast Iowa City. The Antelope Lending Library has been providing service for several years and submitted a proposal to receive City funding to expand their service to year-around. After several back and forth discussions, a majority of the City Council members agreed to include the ICPL funding in the budget with the stipulation that then Assistant City Manager Geoff Fruin meet with representatives from both entities to determine how cooperation between them could improve service to the community. Those meetings were held, a report made to City Council, and on May 17, 2016, the final approval for the bookmobile service was received from Council. A consultant was hired to assist with the vehicle purchase and a Request for Proposal has been sent to vendors. Intensive planning regarding stops, collections, and services will be a staff focus in the next few months. This service is a major change to how library services are delivered and will have a significant impact on library operations. We hope to introduce the bookmobile in spring 2017.

Programming

We kicked off nine-months of special music-related programming on September 17, with a Musical Revue at the Englert Theatre. More than one hundred music-themed events were presented to welcome the University of Iowa School of Music to downtown Iowa City, just three blocks from the

Library. The new building, built to replace the facility on the banks of the Iowa River that flooded in 2008, will open in the fall of 2016. The ambitious “Music is the Word” series of programs included performances, lectures, and workshops attended by more than 5,000 people. The eclectic offerings brought a variety of people to the Library. Many encountered music just being in the building, pausing to enjoy the performers who presented in the lobby over the noon hour. One staff member noted, “People in this town are so generous with their time! Everyone I approached about being a part of this series agreed to take part... I’ve made so many great contacts.” We also began what will, hopefully, be a long and productive partnership with the School of Music. The series concluded in May with a free outdoor concert on the Ped Mall by Catfish Keith. This programming was made possible by the support of the Iowa City Public Library Friends Foundation, and many performers who donated their talent. The Foundation’s spring fundraising event, *Looking Forward*, featured John Hasse, curator of American Music at the Smithsonian Institution, who presented a program on Duke Ellington.

New programs aimed at children were also introduced this year. On February 5, we launched 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten. The national program is designed to give children the tools they need to become successful readers by encouraging reading to young children before they enter kindergarten. Studies show reading aloud to children from birth strengthens language skills and builds vocabulary. By the end of June, 476 children were registered. The program is supported by a grant from Pearson to fund book bags and book prizes for participants. Pearson staff have also helped register children for the program. As part of a strategic plan goal to offer more programming for children in K-2 grades, the Crazy 8 Math Club was introduced, and a Governor’s STEM Program grant supported a four-week series called Pint Sized Science. Both programs were filled to capacity with many positive reviews. We plan to repeat them in the fall.

Another gift, this one from the Pilot Club of Iowa City, helped us bring programming to people at the other end of the age spectrum. Aimed at serving people with dementia who are residents of local care facilities, Tales & Travel Memories has a goal to facilitate conversation in a relaxed atmosphere. Each hour-long visit focuses on a particular country or region. Library staff bring special kits and present facts about the location, a relevant folktale or story is read by the facilitator, and illustrated books selected from the Library’s collection are available for participants to look at and discuss during the program.

Collections

After months of planning and preparation, a major collaboration between the public libraries of Iowa City, Coralville, and North Liberty began in July with the introduction of Digital Johnson County. The goal of the partnership between the three libraries is to jointly purchase digital content and share it with all of our patrons. This system saves each library overhead expenses, provides a larger collection for everyone, and simplifies access for most Johnson County residents. Initially, eBooks and digital audio books were available through Overdrive, a digital content provider. At year’s end, the partnership expanded to include magazines through the Zinio platform. Digital downloads were up 16.8% this year, topping 100,000 for the first time at 111,573, and accounting for 8.1% of all circulation. Overall, circulation was down 1.5%, but up slightly for children’s materials.

Our Digital History Project saw several exciting additions in FY16. Working with the First Presbyterian Church and their archivist, we were able to digitize our first document-focused collection. And the ten-year anniversary of the 2006 tornado provided an opportunity to solicit a significant amount of community input. Putting out a call for tornado pictures in the winter edition of *The Window* brought a whirlwind of responses. An online exhibit displaying a map of the tornado path allowed people to click along the map to see donated pictures from the specific area. This was very popular when mounted on our two large interactive digital sign screens.

We also began work on a new video series, *Iowa City People*, designed to capture the stories of people in Iowa City. This series is designed to continue the work by Ellen Buchanan, who hosted two interview programs, *Tell Me Your Story* and *One of a Kind*, and produced an invaluable legacy of more than 140 programs sharing the stories of area residents. As Ellen says, "Everybody has a story to tell." Planning for the new series is underway and one interview has been recorded. Look for more next year.

Although public use of our internet stations has dropped somewhat (due, we believe to the high number of people with access to a smart phone), the library plays a crucial role in making technology accessible to everyone, and we took a big step this year toward that goal. In March, we began circulating laptops running Windows 7. The Lenovo Thinkpads were selected after in-house examination of multiple options. The service was well received by people who do not otherwise have access to a computer. Demographically, the users represent a wide age range and both men and women. Initially, five machines were made available, but the program was so successful we added five more before the busy summer season. These ten are consistently checked out, often with a short waiting list. From March through June the laptops circulated 101 times.

A major collection move began in the fall with the Children's comic books, graphic novels, and manga, and this is now moving to the much larger adult collection. Following the example of many other libraries, these materials are being pulled out of the nonfiction collection (Dewey Decimal Classification 740's / Drawing) and placed in their own area, similar to most other fiction materials (poetry, drama and essays remain classified in the 800s). In the Children's Room, the collection is shelved at the beginning of nonfiction, and upstairs the new home will be across from young adult (YA) fiction. This popular genre has grown dramatically in recent years. In 2001, adult circulation was 20,485, in 2015 it was 40,253 – more than other fiction genres such as mysteries or science fiction.

Although overall circulation is down one and a half percent, the number of reserves placed continue to rise. More than 163,000 reserves were placed last year. It helps that about 25%, 42,099, were placed on e-collections which requires no staff handling. Still, the number of holds on physical items in the collection has risen almost 40% in the last five years. People are taking advantage of the convenience of placing holds online and picking their items up at the shelves near the Help Desk.

Looking Ahead

Reviewing the highlights of the year just ended, I think it's evident that the new strategic plan provides an opportunity to take a fresh look at traditional services. Libraries, like all service organizations across the country, are focusing on the customer in new ways. Locally, we are working hard to connect, engage and enrich the lives of the people we serve. I have worked in libraries for decades and one of the things that I love about them is the mutual support they provide and the collaboration in which they engage. In our community, it's not just libraries, but many other organizations that all work jointly toward the common good. Looking ahead to bookmobile service, continued growth of Digital Johnson County, great programs with new and old partners, reaching out to vulnerable populations, and being more proactive about capturing local history, I feel we are being responsive to our community. I'm looking forward to it.

Susan Craig,
Library Director