

## **Director's Report FY17**

### **Highlights:**

- Bookmobile hits the streets
- Enhanced virtual branch features
- Friends Foundation is 25 years old
- Bathroom security cameras outlawed by State Legislature

The word for the year was “Bookmobile” – planning, planning, planning, training, training, training, doing, doing, doing. As big a project as the bookmobile is though, it is only a relatively small component of what makes us the busiest public library in Iowa. This year we offered a great diversity of programming and collections, made significant improvements in how we use technology to deliver information and serve our community, began a year-long celebration to mark the impact of the Friends Foundation’s 25 years of support, and faced some challenges to offering a safe and secure environment.

### **Bookmobile**

It truly was the year of the bookmobile. With funding secured after a lengthy budget discussion last year, a staff committee worked with a consultant to issue an RFP last September, with fingers crossed we could get our vehicle within both the budget and our ambitious timeline. We accomplished both. Built on a truck chassis, 32’ long and weighing 21,700 pounds, our beautiful (and bright – thanks to three skylights and windows on both sides) new bookmobile was delivered in April just in time to be part of the National Bookmobile Day celebration held at Mercer Park with the Antelope Lending Library. April and May were busy with maintenance, loading collections, training, and pop-up visits. The full, five-day, 24-stops summer schedule started on June 1.

The vehicle itself was only half of the story. Behind the scenes, staffing was being determined, schedules adjusted, and training offered. All regular bookmobile drivers and maintenance staff have to hold a Chauffeur’s License. The City of Iowa City’s Equipment Division was very generous throughout in allowing trainees to practice driving a similar vehicle, as well as with all of the many issues related to maintenance and adding a unique, new vehicle to the fleet. We first automated our library catalog and processes such as placing holds in 1979. Since then we have been a single site facility. Adjusting everything to be able to show a bookmobile location and allow people to pick up holds at multiple locations was a learning experience for both staff and patrons. In addition to the usual library technology needed to issue library cards, perform circulation functions, and use the library catalog, other technology on the bookmobile includes a security camera system, and batteries that charge from a variety of sources (including solar) to power the lights as well as various devices.

In the end it was all worth it. People LOVE the bookmobile. Our goal of extending library services to reach more people throughout the community is being met. We have issued new cards to people who have lived in town for years and never visited the downtown building, been swarmed by children at mobile home parks who have limited access to library materials and programming in the summer, were able to accommodate two people in wheelchairs at one visit, had hundreds attend special events, and made many new friends with all of the generous bookmobile hosts. Thank you to the Friends Foundation which made the purchase of the new bookmobile possible.

### **Programming**

Children’s Services staff continue to offer exceptional programming—more programs than there are days in the year! Last year, 588 programs were presented in the building, attended by 27,871 people. Many of the newer program offerings are STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics) related. In May, we held a first-ever STEAM festival, building a replica “steam engine” in one of the meeting rooms, offering booths, demonstrations, and programs in other spaces. The festival was scheduled for two days, focusing on offering a field trip to area elementary schools on Friday, and

aimed at families on Saturday. With the help of grants from the Community Foundation of Johnson County, the Bywater Family Endowment Fund, and the Iowa City/Coralville Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, we were able to offer top notch programming and every child who attended left with a free science book.

We received national attention for a new program – Autism Accessible Browsing Hour. We were approached by several mothers who had heard about a library offering special access for families who needed a quieter, more subdued environment so their autistic children could be comfortable in the library. In November, we offered our first special access event, opening an hour early on a Saturday morning. It was very successful, and has been repeated every other month all year. Especially heartwarming is that, after their initial visit, several attendees felt comfortable coming back to the library during regular business hours.

Adults also had some great program offerings this year. A new partnership with UI Associate Professor Bryant McAllister began with his offer to help interpret personal genetic tests during National DNA Day. Public interest was overwhelming and the group began monthly meetings to address issues such as inferences of traits, exploration of human genetic variation, societal impacts of DNA research, and DNA myth busters. Our local history “Weber Days” programming in the spring brought many out to history programs including *University Town*, *Union Town*, *The Jefferson Hotel and the Murals of Mildred Pelzer*, and *Voxman and Eble, Iowa City’s Music Men*. One of the Pelzer murals is on temporary display on the second floor of the Library during the renovation of Longfellow School.

People of all ages benefited from a variety of programs and displays during Black History Month this year. Children’s staff planned special storytimes, crafts, and programs which included learning about the Underground Railroad through materials from the African American Museum in Cedar Rapids and some of the great jazz musicians with the University of Iowa’s Art Share Jazz Ensemble. Adult programs featured a visit from a Harriet Tubman re-enactor, a concert from The Gospel Explosion Ministry and several lectures including Lena and Michael Hill talking about their book, *Invisible Hawkeyes: African Americans at the UI During the Long Civil Rights Era*.

In June, we were part of one of the biggest programs of the year. The Iowa City Downtown District threw a block (9 square blocks, to be accurate) party and we, and 30,000 people, were part of it. Our typical closing hour of 6:00pm on Saturday was extended until 10:00, and we hosted a video game tournament, offered an opportunity to play retro video games, or participate in a fundraising scavenger hunt. All were very well received.

## **Collections**

Although overall circulation dipped this year, mirroring a nationwide trend, collection use is still very strong at 1.3 million items. Use of electronic/downloadable materials continues to grow. Downloads now account for 12.8% of all adult items circulated and 2.1% of all children’s materials checked out. With only about one month of circulation from the bookmobile it’s hard to predict what the most popular materials will be, because in the summer the bookmobile collection is heavily used by children. Use patterns will change in the fall. Reserves rose to more than 170,000 this year.

Subscription databases account for a significant percent of our overall collection expenditures, but they are not counted in our circulation numbers. We only count the number of uses. And, use was up this year to 257,482. We added several new historical resources including the *Historical New York Times*, *Digital Sanborn Maps*, and the *Historical Statistical Abstract of the United States*. At the end of the year we learned that the State Library chose a new vendor to provide heavily subsidized access to online information resources. This was a surprise announcement and we have chosen to retain overlapping resources for some time as we handle the transition.

We began circulating wi-fi Hotspots this year, a service that has been widely popular. We received 10 Hotspots from a nonprofit called MobileBeacon. We receive fairly low cost wi-fi service, which we pay on a monthly basis. We added seven Hotspots that people can connect to their computer for a free

internet connection, and three are circulated in a package with a laptop computer. The service is very popular and we will add an additional ten as soon as we can.

### **Technology**

Bookmobile internet connections and circulating Hotspots are just two examples of the profound impacts of technology on the delivery of modern library services. We continually try to keep up with changes on both the public and staff side of running a library. A major project this year has been envisioning and designing a modern, flexible media lab to replace our old computer lab. It was designed in 2000 with 20 computers, arranged in a fixed classroom style. Currently, the lab is home to many heavily used programs including Minecraft and VITA income tax assistance, as well as the space for drop in tech help and technology classes. The new lab will support these functions with more computer stations and also take advantage of more flexible space with options for drop in use of resources such as Adobe Creative Cloud Suite software that most people cannot afford to own for personal use. The software supports graphic design, video editing, web development, photography, and cloud services. We now offer classes on this software that have been well attended. The lab construction is planned for the late fall.

Several major improvements were made this year in our Virtual Branch – that is how we describe the many ways people interface with us online. Early in the year, we gave the online event calendar a facelift and made the site more mobile-friendly. Later, we migrated our main website to a new platform, updated the navigation, and introduced a more modern, clean layout. We conducted usability testing with patrons before and after the changes. Patrons also participated in a card-sorting exercise that informed the navigation changes. All of the content on the website was reviewed and edited to eliminate duplication and to make it easier to understand. This is the first phase in a series of steps aimed at improving our online services.

We also introduced the MyICPL mobile app, which allows patrons to conveniently access and manage their accounts, search the catalog, add events to a personal calendar, and contact the library. The mobile app has been very popular and we are planning several enhancements next year.

The number one reason people visit the website is to search the library catalog, which is part of our library automated system. There were changes in the catalog, brought about by the addition of the bookmobile – new locations, options of where to pick up holds. And we said good bye to a legacy version of the catalog, Catalog Classic, which was no longer supported by our vendor. In the coming year, we will be taking a close look at the catalog software we have, and at other available options to determine the best fit for our needs.

We also revamped our digital signage with new layouts and added new options for electronic newsletters. The touch screen signs on the first and second floors have a more dynamic, colorful design that is interactive and responsive to user interaction. The signs show featured events, Instagram feeds, and building maps. They also feature more timely information such as a Weber Days history quiz and 1000 Books Before Kindergarten graduate photos. New e-newsletter options include *The Windshield*, to share news about the bookmobile service, and *The Little Window*, which focuses on topics of interest to children and families.

### **Friends Foundation 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

The ICPL Friends Foundation is celebrating 25 years of generating private resources to support the Iowa City Public Library in 2017. Those donations make a difference every day in our ability to serve so many people, offer up-to-date collections, and cutting edge programs and services in a building that is designed to best serve the community's needs. Thank you to everyone who has given to the Friends Foundation in the past.

Friends Foundation board members, working with the Library Development Office staff, have created some unique fundraisers for the occasion, including a quarter drive, Eat Out to Read partnerships with

Iowa City restaurants, and ICPL Rocks My Block parties. We are looking forward to the next 25 years with all of our long-time and new friends.

### **Urban Library Woes**

Two hundred and thirty-five people an hour, on average, enter our doors. A very small percentage of them have behaviors, sometimes caused by mental illness, that require action on the part of staff to maintain a safe and secure environment for all. This is no surprise to anyone who works in a modern urban library. This year, we lost an important deterrent to bad behaviors when the Iowa Legislature, in response to a complaint from an Iowa City resident, outlawed security cameras in any space of a public restroom. Ours had been in the common areas only. We also had several people banned for repeated bad behavior, including sexual harassment and fighting. Several times, children were left unattended for the entire day in the library. This summer we had to carefully monitor behavior in the Teen Center. These incidents are caused by a very small number of our many, many visitors, but can take a great deal of staff time. We consider them a necessary cost of offering an open, safe environment to all people, which is what we strive to do.

Another concerning national library trend is dealing with bedbugs. Several larger public libraries in Iowa have combated the pests in recent years. They can enter the building on people's clothing, their belongings, or, as in our case, returned library materials. We had discussed the issue and tried to prepare for the eventuality, but the reality was hard. Several thousand dollars-worth of library materials were destroyed, and others quarantined and treated with freezing temperatures. Our ongoing precautions include regular visits from a dog trained to sniff out bedbugs.

In June, a sewer backup in the middle of the night affected about 25% of the space in the Children's Room. Carpet, baseboards, cupboards, drywall, and insulation in the affected areas had to be removed and discarded along with some furnishings. Worst of all, this happened during our busiest month of the year in the Children's Room. Thankfully, we had just completed an update of Meeting Room D and were able to move all scheduled activities from the Storytime Room to Room D. After cleaning, carpet replacement, and wall repairs, we moved back in to the space. We are awaiting the replacement of some furnishings.

### **Summary**

It's been an exciting year at ICPL. The new bookmobile mixed things up in many ways and made us look at the way we do things with new perspectives, always a good thing. We continue to try to meet the needs of our community wherever they might be – in the building, on the bookmobile, in the cyber world. During our Valentine's Day display, people wrote comments about the library on hearts and posted them. One said, "There is more freedom here than anywhere else I've ever been," another, "No one believes me but I decided to move to Iowa City after I visited this Library. I LOVE THIS PLACE." I will work hard to keep earning those sentiments.

Susan Craig,  
Library Director