Dear Library Friends and Patrons,

These quotes bring to my mind the experience of James Baldwin as described by David Leeming in his compelling biography of Baldwin. He tells how, when Baldwin was a very young boy living in dire poverty in Harlem he was encouraged by his teachers to go to the public library at 135th Street “where he read voraciously in the newly established Schomberg Collection. The library became his sanctuary and, in his mind, as he never went to college, his alma mater – the place where on his deathbed he was to ask that his papers be deposited”. So, it was a particular shock – a heart piercing shock – to hear on July 17th of this year the NPR correspondent announcing the death of the Civil Rights Leader Congressman John Lewis and saying that as a young boy, in his hometown of Troy, Alabama, he was denied a library card because he was black. Because he was black.

Now, in 2020, there has never been a moment in our history when libraries have been of greater importance to the social and civic health of every community.

A library is the economic and social leveler in an increasingly stratified society. Libraries bridge the digital divide that does so much to perpetuate the systemic ills of racial and economic injustice of our times.

Another story, received recently from a former Library patron who grew up in Stonington. He wrote “I remember vividly when I was a young boy and my mother would bring me to the library with her. It was a year or two later that I began to check books out on my own - the library had a series of biographies of important Americans written for young readers which I devoured and which led me later to earn a B.A. in U.S. History. I am sure that there are many others like myself who grew up in Stonington, made the library an integral part of their lives, were enriched by it and are grateful that such a special place continues to serve not only young minds but all members of the community in so many different ways”.

FROM THE DIRECTOR

"A library is....one of the greatest human expressions of hope, of understanding, of possibility"
- Susan Orlean, “The Library Book"

"This is my thank you note to every librarian who’s ever helped a kid like me, nobody from nowhere, find her doorway through a library shelf into citizenship of the world."
- Barbara Kingsolver, author of “Unsheltered” and “The Poisonwood Bible"
When the Pandemic hit and we had to close our doors we had already established a ‘library without walls’, a digital library with a highly functional website, creative use of social media and a new high speed fiber optic internet connection thanks to a grant from the CT State Library. We were able to assure our patrons that the Library continued to offer information, books, e-books and audio books, programs, book groups and knitting groups via Zoom and, most importantly, an online Summer Reading Program and online story times. Our staff immediately began to think of creative ways to increase ease of access for our patrons, to offer help and information to guide people in this digital world and to offer opportunities for social contact through Zoom so that our various groups could continue to meet. This is an ongoing exercise in being proactive and intentional in our thinking as new challenges face us all.

Libraries are also key resources for information across the spectrum of political and social opinion, building their collections to reflect current thought while maintaining and curating a core collection of classic works in all genres. This is of particular value at times of national crisis, political unrest and racial and economic injustice. Libraries by their nature are able to play a vital role as forums for conversation – conversations that can continue virtually even when our doors are closed. In response to the murder of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and the Black Lives Matter movement, the Library issued a statement condemning racism. We have also posted a list of books available in the library collection that touch on the subject of systemic racism in addition to a link to an anti-racism resource list for patrons to access. In July, the Library hosted a Thoughtful Thursday program via Zoom on Frederick Douglass in New London. This started a conversation about racism as it has played out in our own local history. Two follow up programs were scheduled for September and October.

All this has provided, and continues to provide, a sense of human contact, continuity and community in a time of painful isolation. When all the world seems to be on hold, when event after event is cancelled, when children and young people cannot be in school, friends and families cannot gather, I am deeply grateful that, in spite of the Library building being closed to the public, due both to the pandemic and to our construction project, the Library continues to be the beating heart of the community. This is all due to the support, encouragement, guidance and expertise of our Trustees, our extraordinary volunteers whose dedication, talent and hard work defies description, and to the loyalty, flexibility and cheerful willingness of our wonderful staff.

I know that I speak for the Trustees and staff when I say that we are quite overwhelmed by the generous financial support from our donors, which has been unwavering during this uncertain and challenging time. We are also very grateful to the Board of Finance and the Board of Selectmen of the Town of Stonington for their increased financial support which signals a recognition of the important role that libraries play in the life of the community. With our fully accessible refurbished building we will now be able to offer the 21st century Library that our community asked for some five years ago. The Stonington Free Library continues to be the vital and positive institution that it has always been.

Requiesce in Pace John Lewis, Rest in Peace. I am deeply sorry about your library card, that key to freedom and equality that should be freely available to everyone. I wish with all my heart that it had been otherwise. But as David Copperfield’s inestimable aunt, Betsey Trotwood, said to him - “It’s in vain, Trot, to recall the past, unless it works some influence on the present”. Our Library, all libraries, are at once keepers of the past and beacons of hope in the present.

~Belinda de Kay
“May you live in interesting times” is said to be a curse; like it or not, we are surely living in a most interesting age! To paraphrase Robert Kennedy, “interesting” times may include their fair share of danger and uncertainty, but they also inspire more creative energy than any other periods in history.

When the pandemic began and statewide restrictions on public spaces were implemented, the Library’s resourceful and flexible staff swiftly pivoted to serving our community on a virtual basis. All of the past efforts to enhance the digital collections and redesign the Library website were put to good use, as programs like Story Times, one-on-one technology help as well as the popular Thoughtful Thursday and Sunday Evening Lecture Series moved online. Community members quickly adjusted to our online programs, and many, like children’s Bedtime Stories, provided a welcome sense of normalcy for families in an uncertain time. Lectures via Zoom were also well attended, with waiting lists for some events despite the ability to accommodate more viewers online than the Library could hold pre-renovation. (Note: Nearly all of our programs have been recorded and are available to view on our website at www.stoningtonfreelibrary.org.) We were also able to provide curbside pickup and drop-off of Library materials whenever possible.

Fortunately, the Library was awarded a loan of nearly $70,000 under the Payroll Protection Program to make up for the economic impact of the pandemic, which has allowed us to keep our staff members employed throughout this period. We anticipate this loan will be forgiven under the terms of the PPP later this year. The Library’s 2019-2020 Annual Appeal closed in June within 5% of goal despite these challenging times - we are so grateful for the support of the Stonington community!

Looking back, it can be difficult to remember our lives before the onset of COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown that forced the Library to close its doors to the public for possibly the first time in its history. Despite continued uncertainties about the future, it is worth reflecting on the accomplishments and milestones that were achieved and will outlive the current crisis.
One silver lining of COVID-related closures has been that construction of the new addition, renovation of the existing interior and installation of high speed fiber-based broadband were able to proceed without further disrupting our services. Considering global supply chain challenges and new work protocols, we are delighted that the construction and renovation progressed essentially on schedule and within budget. As the final books are reshelved, the physical reopening of the Library to the public is planned for the latter half of October. The capital campaign, which has made all this possible, has similarly moved forward, raising a total of $1.475 million by June 30, 2020, more than 80% of our $1.8 million goal; we plan to successfully conclude the campaign before the end of December.

As we move ahead with our plans for the 2020-2021 fiscal year, including safely reopening to the public, we recognize that the “how” of our ongoing services, programs and resource delivery will need to be flexible and sensitive to changes we cannot currently anticipate. The “why” remains constant - our commitment to serve the entire Stonington community as a reliable and free resource for social, cultural and educational engagement.

Together, we are building for the future.

~Denise Easton and Allegra Griffiths
Circulation and Adult Programming

This past year we offered 162 programs for adults which were attended by 2,456 participants. Our last in person program was held in early March before we shifted completely to virtual programs due to COVID-19. Our book groups, knitting group, tech help sessions, SFL Nightclub, Sunday Evening Lectures and Thoughtful Thursdays all went virtual.

Before the pandemic began, we started several new programs including a Wednesday Evening Book Group, an introduction to PowerPoint class led by volunteer Sharon Sisitzky, an outreach book group and branch at Stonington Human Services and a regular presence at the Stonington Farmers’ Market in conjunction with the Stonington Non-Profits group of which the Library is an active member.

Even though the building was closed for several months due to both COVID-19 and our construction project, our combined physical and digital circulation was still an impressive 46,139. Our digital library usage increased by 206% year over year! Since June, we have offered curbside pick-up services and we look forward to safely having members of the public back in the building once the interior renovation is complete.

Sunday Evening Lectures

- Joeb Moore on Historic Preservation & Modernism in Dialogue
- Deborah Royce on Finding Mrs. Ford
- Dan Post Senning on What are Manners Today?
- Tolly Boatwright on Imperial Women of Rome
- Peter Filkins on Writing History and Writing Biography: Capturing H.G. Adler’s Many Worlds
- Howard Park on Circumnavigating the World
- Paul Janssens on A Child’s Witness to War
- Russell Jinishian on Marine Art of Today and Yesterday
- Harry Martin on Grant and Lee: Good Comrades, Great Adversaries

Thoughtful Thursdays

- Sarah Dove and Tara Kennedy on Conservation of the James Merrill House and Museum Collections
- Linda Christensen on Getting Started on Ancestry
- Mark Seth Lender and Valerie Elaine Pettis on Smeagull the Seagull

Speaker Programs July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020

SFL by the Numbers:

- Active Cardholders: 3,372
- Summer Reading Program Registrants: 285
- Volunteers: 133
- Trustees: 14
- Part-time Staff: 10
- Little Free Libraries: 4

Dan Post Senning presents “What are Manners Today?”
August 11, 2019
Our year began as many others have, with Drop In and Preschool Outreach Story Times, third grade visits to the library for the Look It Up collaboration between the library, the Rotary Clubs of Mystic and the Stoningtons, the Holiday Family Gingerbread House Decorating Workshop, the Village Stroll Story Time and Winter Reading Challenges. A donation from Mr. and Mrs. Michael Del Balso funded our Winter Reading Challenges, 50 to Grow On for children ages 7 and younger and our Family Reading Challenge for those in grades 1 – 8. We were able to offer books and prize chances to participants and we had a fabulous visit from Pete the Cat on Take Your Child to the Library Day, thanks to the Del Balsos generosity. Many thanks to Dan Brandl, who captured the true spirit of Pete and delighted all of our attendees.

Construction in the library necessitated that some story times be moved upstairs, and access to the Children’s Room harkened back to the days when a reader placed a request for a book and a librarian retrieved the requested materials. We persevered through the changes and then the world changed.

To offer options to families in quarantine and with schools closed, we began offering story times and read aloud chapter books on our YouTube channel. In total, we made 179 videos which were viewed 3,455 times. We received many thanks from families, who appreciated the sense of continuity and also the opportunity to have an uninterrupted cup of coffee. In order to finish up our Winter Reading Challenges, the closing date was extended and logging of books moved to email. All prize entries were made remotely and we offered curbside pickup for all final prizes.

These adjustments gave us a framework for reimagining Summer Reading as a virtual program. The elementary schools requested a video to be incorporated in their remote learning, highlighting the program and we remained committed to providing the sense of continuity for the children and teens in our community. Realizing that live performances could not safely be offered, after conferring with our donor, we used the funds normally spent on performers to purchase multiple gift cards from the small local businesses who have been loyal supporters of our Summer Reading Program. Local, small businesses have been our heroes for years; this year, we had the opportunity to give back and stand with them. The gift cards proved to be very popular surprises in our Mystery Bags. Our program is about fostering reading skills and independent decision making, encouraging higher level thinking and providing all readers a competition free opportunity for rewards. Running the program remotely allowed us to adapt what we do best to a changing environment while keeping our young friends safe and healthy. We asked our participants to answer a short survey and we were so encouraged by the responses.

We will continue to modify and fine tune our offerings to our patrons as we move forward in our "new normal". We are so grateful for the support of our community.
Planning for the future is an exciting, challenging and ultimately rewarding undertaking. Our beautiful and historic Library building was not designed for over 70,000 annual visits, more than 50,000 items checked out, 600 average summer reading program participants and standing room only events and programs. We clearly needed to address the challenges of the present as well as the future that we could only begin to anticipate.

All our decisions since the inception of this project have been guided by paying attention to what our community wants today and what it will require in the future. The overall goal of the Campaign is to provide increased access to Library services for all patrons, which will be delivered through three interdependent initiatives.

Increase Floor Space and Improve Accessibility
The first part of the building project improved physical access to all areas of the Library for everyone, regardless of disabilities, as well as digital and other infrastructure access for our cardholders.

This part of the project is the most visible, and required thoughtful integration of a 700sf addition on the east side of the Library’s central section for an accessible entrance, elevator, and bathrooms. Construction broke ground on November 3, 2019, and the final result is what we hoped for: “it looks like it has always been here.”

The newly freed up 575 sf of floor space within the existing building has created a feeling of much more space. What you don’t see but is critical to our digital world, are the upgraded electrical infrastructure and fiber-based broadband that deliver up-to-date technology and digital access for all users. Access to reliable, high-speed internet is essential to our operation and one of our most utilized services is free access to public computers and Wi-Fi to all who step through our doors.

Refurbish and Upgrade Interior
The second phase of the building project addressed the renovation of the Library’s existing interior to improve flexibility and enhance access for users, programs, and community connection.

In December 2019, CT State Representative Kate Rotella informed the Board that the state bonding commission had approved funding for our CT State Library Construction Grant, meaning that detailed planning for our internal refurbishment could begin in earnest. Now what you see are open areas, mobile shelving that makes it easy to create functional meeting and public program spaces, easily configured furnishings and seating, including club chairs with built in outlets.

A perfect example of how both parts of the building project came together is the newly configured children’s tech and collaboration area. We transformed recaptured space on the lower level into a technology-enhanced area within our children’s library including new work stations, computers and outlets.
Build Financial Sustainability

The third stage of building for the future acknowledges that SFL depends upon its endowment for funds to maintain its physical plant, sustain its programs and services, and attract and retain our talented and caring staff. Successful completion of the Capital Campaign will add to our endowment, safeguarding the Library’s future financial stability while also generating increased current income to fund enhanced programs, services and operating hours for an ever expanding and diverse group of users.

How is this Plan Funded?

In order to afford the strategic initiatives outlined above, the Library determined that it needed to raise an estimated $1.8 million. A Capital Campaign was quietly launched with the participation of the Board of Trustees and other supporters, and by June 30, 2020 a total of $1.475 million in pledges had been received from more than 80 leadership donors, including grants from the Town of Stonington and CT State Library. Since the end of our fiscal year, SFL has launched its public Capital Campaign 2020 with a $100,000 matching challenge, and has received pledges totaling more than 90% of our goal. We hope that the entire community, from river to river and beyond, will join together to help us reach our goal and make this plan a reality.
FINANCIALS

Preliminary Financial results for the Year Ended June 30, 2020 (unaudited)

Operating Income
Over the past fiscal year, the Stonington Free Library recorded approximately $550,000 in operating income, including a $15,000 restricted bequest that cannot be used to offset current expenses. $185,000 or 34% came from Municipal funding including the Town and Borough of Stonington. Draws from the endowment amounted to $130,000 providing 24% of the total. The remaining 42% of income came from private donations and fundraisers. The operating income was $15,000 less than budgeted (-3%) due to lower than projected private donations of $6,000, fundraising income was lower by $5,000 and service fees were by $4,000. This was an excellent achievement considering that the Mystery Dinner fundraiser was canceled, and the library was closed for nearly four months which impacted service fees. We were running both a Capital Campaign and Annual Appeal at the same time which we believe had a negative impact on the annual appeal.

Operating Expenses
Expenses for the year were $525,000 before depreciation. This was about the same amount as the previous year’s expenses but $40,000 below budget. As you would expect, payroll costs represent most of the budget at $350,000 or 67% of total expenses. The next largest expense category is library materials, programs, and digital resources at $70,000. We budgeted $90,000 in library materials, programs, and digital resource expenses thus under investing $20,000 in these critical categories. This was a conscious decision to hold off spending on these discretionary items due to the library closing because of COVID-19. Ideally, we would like to increase the spend on library materials and digital resources in the coming year. We also saved money on publicity, fundraising expenses and supplies, due to the cancelation of programs and the library being closed for COVID-19. Unrestricted operating income of $535,000 was sufficient to cover cash outlays of $525,000. These numbers do not include any of the income or expenses associated with the current capital campaign which are being managed separately until the campaign and project are completed.

Endowment Update
The endowment had a significant change in July 2019. The Board approved the transfer of the Equity portion of the Endowment to very low-cost ETF’s from Vanguard which are designed to track the S&P 500 and a midcap and low cap index, as well as an International index. The fixed income portion stayed with the existing manager. The Endowment balance grew by about 0.6% to $3.4MM, as net returns of 4.4% slightly outpaced our withdrawal rate of 4%. 
Youth Volunteers
Helen Godshall
Clare Leamon
Bailey McCarney

Summer traditions continue - fun tie dye with shirts from 50 to Grow on

Listening to a guest reader during Read-a-thon 2019

Winter Reading Challenge winner

Holiday story time

Teen advisory club

“...The SFL Reading Program is a highlight of every summer - especially this summer! Our children love reading and being read to, and they enjoy keeping track of their minutes and selecting the amazing prizes!” – Anonymous Parent
LIBRARY VOLUNTEERS

Building Committee
Denise Easton (Chair)
Phil Biondo
Rory Contin
Chris Errichetti
John Malmros
George Sylvestre

Night Club Social Group
Jean Baur and Therapy Dog
Rudy
Eileen Fiore
Officer Tom Paige
Deidre Toole

Book Group Moderators
Mary Kelley
Carol Roper
Judy Westwood

Seed Library
Noreen Kepple

Window Cleaning
John Adams

Flyers/Marketing
Nan Danforth

Little Free Libraries
Rory Contin
John Malmros
Judy Westwood

Village Fair Book Sale
Dori Abele
Judith Alexander
Sally Ball
Elizabeth Bartholet
Stephen Bessette
Jeff Callahan
Jane Charbonnier
Susie Clapp
Anne Collette
Rory Contin
Barbara Corbeil
Polly Dufresne
Judy Dupont
Jerry Fingerut
Joyce Fingerut
Marcia Fix
Allegra Griffiths
Elizabeth Harding
Vera Harsh
Charlie Hatton
Barbara Heuer
Sophia (Maya) Heyniger
Mary Hughes
Pamela Kenny
Beth Leamon
John Leamon
Frank Lioneli
Jane Lioneli
Katherine Love
Sibby Lynch
Beth Barrett Lynn
Kathleen Macdonald
Malcolm Macdonald
John Malmros
Susan Martin
Janet Mattiucci
Dhannon McNeil
David Moore
Thea Moore
Scott Muller
Sandy Murray
Rita Nason
Cormac O’Malley
Joyce Pandolfi
Jonathan Post
Will Quell
Linda Rutan
McKenna Sisneros
Kevin Sisson
Steve Slosberg
Elizabeth MacLeod Stevens
Melanie Sullivan
Pat Talar
Chris Taylor and her sister
Patty Tucchio
Chris Turrentine
John Turrentine
Timothy Tyler
Lissa van Dyke
Judy Westwood
Meg Wilhelms
Sage Williams
Karen Wittliff
Kathy Williams

Battle of Stonington 5k
Jeff Anderson
Chris Calhoun
Emma Calhoun
Jack Calhoun
Deb Dodds
Bob Burdick
Emma Smith
Bob Buckingham
Terri Smith
Steve Dinsmore
Kelley’s Pace
The Mohegan Striders
US Coast Guard
Dime Bank
George Sylvestre
Sage Williams

Read-a-thon
John Bale
Pat Boyle
Holly Chase
Donna Currie
Tertius de Kay
Deborah Downie
Anne Marie Doyle
Hillary Evans
Hailey Fish
Amy Gaby
Alexa Garvey
Maria Haring
Lisa Kenyon
Nick Kepple
Noreen Kepple
Rebekah Kepple
Morgan King
Christina Korinek
Harry Martin
John McCarthy
with granddaughter Emilia
Robert Palm

Farouk Rajab
Kathleen Smith
Bob Statchen
Judy Westwood

Pawcatuck Neighborhood Center and Stonington Human Services Library
Beth Freeman
Rory Contin
Barbara Corbeil
Joyce Fingerut
Annick Gillis
Fred Souza
Susan Terkanian
Patricia Tuccio
Meg Wilhelms

Program Committee
Susan Martin (Chair)
Sally Ball
Kathryn Brandl
Dodie Bump
Laurie Cameron
Pam Leeming
Robert Palm
Vivie von Walstrom

Christmas Wreath & Lights
Dodie Bump
David Burchenal
Kathryn Burchenal

Holiday Stroll Story Time
Doug Rice
Cynthia Elliott

High School Volunteers
Jesyka Pacheco

Tech Classes for Patrons
Sharon Sisitzky

Stonington Non-profit Round Table
Katherine Milde
Leanne Theodore
Thank you to all of our volunteers.
The level of support we receive each year is a wonderful testimony to the continuing commitment of our patrons, donors and friends of the Library.

This report recognizes all contributors to the Library during the past fiscal year – July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020.

**STONINGTON FREE LIBRARY PEDIMENT SOCIETY MEMBERS**

The Pediment Society recognizes the generosity of donors at levels of $500 and above.

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