Dear Friends,

In all good stories, and, as you know, that of the Stonington Free Library is one of the best, each chapter builds on what has gone before while containing the seeds of what is to come. The chapter of the past five years has been just that, building on the vision and achievements of all those who have been a part of this history. It has been a time of dynamic growth and change thanks to the teams of wonderful staff and volunteers whose tireless dedication and many skills have brought them into the pantheon of those who have gone before and those who will come after them.

The vision of a Library accessible to all and that meets the needs of a 21st century community has been realized - most poetically on the 30th Anniversary of the Americans With Disabilities Act - indeed, timing that is nice in the true sense of that word. The final addition to our ADA project was the installation of the automatic door opener on the handicap ramp (paid for with a further generous grant from the Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation) - our own version of the Golden Spike being hammered in to join the two railroads in the 1939 movie "Union Pacific". Truly an exciting chapter in this good story!

The breadth, range and complexity of this project was at once inspiring and daunting. But what stands out to me as the most important aspect of this whole enterprise is that it has been, from day one, a community based project. The vision sprang first from a Strategic Plan developed by the Board of Trustees which in turn opened the way to the Community Conversations that laid the groundwork for everything that has happened since.

All that has been done at the Library has been in response to the thoughts, ideas, wishes and desires expressed by our community and I truly believe that this is the reason for the success, success beyond all imagining, of what has been accomplished. The Library has received support from the Town of Stonington, from Stonington Borough and from the Connecticut State Library Board as well as from the Wimpfheimer Foundation, the Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation and many other benefactors. Through strong advocacy and relationship building, an enduring relationship with the Board of Finance and the Board of Selectmen has been established, one that will serve all the area libraries now and in future years. As throughout the Library’s history, our donors have been generous and supportive beyond all expectations, and continue to be so.

The daily life of the Library has also been one of continuous reward and satisfaction as we created many new outreach programs - all before the building and refurbishment projects had even begun - in immediate response to the Community Conversations. We realized there was much that we could do immediately to expand
the mission of the Library in outreach, both physically and virtually. To establish the Library as a library for the whole of the Town of Stonington became a primary goal. The staff and volunteers extended the reach of the Library by establishing Library branches at the PNC and at Stonington Human Services, by supporting book groups at StoneRidge and Masonicare assisted living facilities and providing programs for seniors from The Elms in Westerly.

We also invested in a state of the art website that made the digital library available to all, 24/7, creating the library without walls that became so vitally important with the arrival of the pandemic - enabling the Library to pivot to meet the challenges of the pandemic, allowing us to be available to our patrons even while our doors were closed. Our skilled staff has allowed us to maintain a strong presence on social media which has been key to connecting with our patrons and our community, doing our part in helping to mitigate the effects of isolation and loss that the pandemic brings.

A key program in the effort to build community was the creation of the Stonington Non-Profit Roundtable, bringing together many local non profit groups to share resources and ideas, to coordinate calendars and to collaborate on projects. Monthly meetings in the Library brought many opportunities to get to know each other. As we have found over and over, conversation around the table is powerful in what it brings about - even via Zoom it can be done - and a library, any library, is the perfect place for conversations to happen, the safe space that we so badly need.

Here I take the opportunity to gratefully acknowledge the vital support and assistance that we received from Jason Vincent, the Stonington Town Planner whose recent untimely death we mourn. But for Jason’s drive, energy, guidance and support in the initial stages of establishing the Roundtable it would never have turned out to be the vital, valuable and growing community organization that it now is. He believed in us and found time in his overcrowded schedule and that made all the difference.

An important aspect of the past years is that the Library’s reach into the community has been broad and wide and has achieved the goal of firmly establishing it as the library for the whole Town, as we say, from River to River. We collaborated with the Stonington Village Improvement Association (SVIA) in the establishment of four Little Free Libraries and in establishing a tradition of sharing in the Village Stroll. Another happy collaboration with the SVIA and the Merrill House led to the creation of the Sandy McClatchy Memorial Library and Poetry Corner in the Library gallery. A unique and special place that enhances the Library while connecting it to both the Merrill House and the world of poetry and literature, bringing patrons as well as visitors from around the world to browse, study and work. We offer library services and support to the Pawcatuck Neighborhood Center, Stonington Human Services, the local senior and assisted living centers, our neighbor merchants and small businesses. Our fundraisers, the Book Sale at the Village Fair, the Readathon and the Mystery Dinner have all served to enable the Stonington Free Library to contribute to the strong and enduring network of mutual support which is the true meaning of community.

As I write this at one of the gravest times in our national history I feel confident in saying again, but even more strongly, that libraries remain beacons of hope, their doors open to all, welcoming everyone, regardless of age, gender, orientation, race or economic status. How beautiful is that? How grateful I am that I was granted the opportunity to be a part of this story, to work alongside so many wonderful people. How grateful I am to know that the future of the Library is secure in the hands of our new Director, Micayla Hall, and the team that will support her just as they have supported me. I am filled with awe and gratitude when I think on all this, the story of the Stonington Free Library, our story, that will continue to be one that graces us all.

Belinda deKov

"THE OPPORTUNITY TO"
BE PART OF THE STORY"
I am grateful and excited to be stepping into another new role at Stonington Free Library (SFL). My time at SFL began in September 2012, fresh out the University of Rhode Island (URI) with my Master of Library and Information Studies (MLIS) degree, and since then I have worked in virtually every area of the Library. I was initially hired as a part-time Youth Services Assistant by Youth Services Director Maris Frey. I owe a sincere debt of gratitude to Maris for her consistent and dedicated mentorship over the years and for giving me my first real job opportunity in the public library world.

Upon entering, I was warmly greeted by beloved staff members at the time, Peggy Brissette and Sue Buchman, two people who would soon become adored colleagues and friends. I would have never guessed as I first walked into the building, that I would one day become Director. You simply never know what life has in store for you.

Before my position at SFL, I worked part-time in URI’s Fine Arts Visual Resource Library while earning both my bachelor’s in Art History and MLIS. Linda Mugica, then Curator of the Fine Arts Visual Resource Library, was instrumental in my path to an MLIS degree. I also interned at the Connecticut College’s Linda Lear Center for Special Collections and Archives to gain experience in an academic library and the Groton Public Library (GPL) for experience in a public library setting while pursuing my degree. I owe another debt of gratitude to Jennifer Miele, now Director of GPL, for mentoring me during my internship. I would not be where I am today without Jennifer’s kindness, guidance and belief in me. My experience at GPL ensured my career path in public librarianship.

In 2014, I became full-time at SFL and split my time between working in Youth and Adult Services. In the spring of 2016, I was asked by the Board of Trustees to become the Assistant Director. Another immense thank you to Nicholas Kepple, then Board President, Mary Kelley, then Board Vice President, and Belinda de Kay, Director, for believing in me and offering me the Assistant Director position.

I still vividly remember entering the Library’s beautiful front doors for the first time for my interview. I was both nervous and in awe of the gorgeous architecture that still draws countless visitors.
Words fail me in describing my time and beautiful partnership with Director Belinda de Kay. I truly cannot thank Belinda enough for all that she has done for SFL during her tenure. As I frequently tell her, she is truly one of my favorite people in the world. Her mentorship has had an immeasurable and lasting impact on me.

Belinda has been training and mentoring me since the day I stepped into the position to take over when she felt the time was right for her to move on. As sad as I am to say that that day has officially happened, I am also ready to step in to lead SFL into the future. Do not worry however, as Belinda will remain a figure at SFL as Director Emeritus in a part-time capacity. She will continue on curating the adult library collection, writing for the Library (she is the very best writer!) and assisting with our programming and outreach. I simply wouldn’t have it any other way. Congratulations on a well deserved semi-retirement Belinda!

During our time working together, Belinda and I have accomplished a great deal and Belinda will leave a lasting legacy with near impossible shoes for me to fill. A strategic plan was developed, our Community Conversation happened, SFL’s new and improved website was launched, our digital library, outreach and adult programming were significantly expanded, a substantial advocacy campaign with Town leaders was launched, our building and renovation projects were successfully completed, we continued library services effectively during the COVID-19 pandemic and more! Belinda, I will do my very best to complement your energy, commitment and love for the Stonington community.

As I take over as the Director of SFL, I know there will be much work to do to revitalize our programming, services and outreach in a post-COVID world. We were highly successful in transitioning our programming and services during COVID through virtual, digital and curbside means, but there is much work to be done to rethink and revitalize as COVID hopefully subsides. We will continue to expand our digital library offerings. This month we launched Hoopla, a new digital service that allows SFL card holders to borrow movies, music, audiobooks, ebooks, comics and TV shows for free! I have further ideas to restore and increase access to technology, offer new programming and services that help to close the digital divide, support workforce and life skills development, continue to increase collaboration with other community organizations and find new and creative ways to strengthen the Library’s vital role as a welcoming, helpful, informative and supportive community center for all.

I have one last thank you to extend to Denise Easton and Allegra Griffiths, Co-Presidents of the Board of Trustees, and to the entire SFL Board, I am honored to have been chosen as the next Director of SFL. I look forward to continuing to serve this wonderful community in my new role.

[Signature]
The word “pivot” has become synonymous with COVID 19, as the world has been forced to address and adapt to our new reality. We have assessed and adjusted our plans here at the Stonington Free Library since last year with the safety and health of our patrons and staff as our top priority and we will continue to do so as we move forward. We know that many beloved programs are missing and we are working diligently to maintain those that can be safely continued, as well as innovate some new options to satisfy our patrons.

Our renovations to the library have been completed and the Children’s area is brighter with fresh paint, new lower shelving that is more “child friendly”, new replacement furniture, and an expanded, improved children’s tech area. We are now accessible to all our patrons with an elevator and ADA compliant restrooms. The office has new furniture with improved storage and work flow areas.

A familiar face to many, Cathy Taylor is now at the library all year. A preschool teacher for many years, most recently at Pine Point School, Cathy has been working with me during the summers for the last eight years and part-time on Saturdays. I am so pleased to have such a valued early childhood expert with experience and fresh ideas. Her knowledge and understanding of our programs, collection and patrons is invaluable. I am confident we will continue to be a great team and bring you and your families excellent guidance and programs.

The library’s YouTube channel became our Outreach Story Time beginning last March. We added September Stories this fall and have made playlists for both 50 to Grow On and our Family Reading Challenge. There have been over 200 book videos posted with over 4,000 views to date. The interest these stories generate is gratifying and it has been wonderful seeing photos of your children enjoying virtual stories.

Plans may not always work out, but ideas can be modified and come to life. This has been an important personal lesson this year and one I hope to continue embracing as we face the future. One aspect of this last year that I am grateful for has been the opportunity to connect with many of you on a more personal level, albeit via email. I never get tired of seeing your children as they read, grow, create, smile, and demonstrate their resilience. They are your greatest achievements and I thank you for sharing them with us.

With gratitude,

All challenges are open and will run through April 2. In order to ensure safety, all registrations are remote on our website and everything you need to keep track of your progress can be picked up curbside. All books read are emailed to me marisfrey@stoningtonfreelibrary.org. And, of course, there are prize opportunities available for all levels. Super fun and easy! 50 to Grow On is for children ages 7 and younger and focuses on building a read-aloud habit and love of story. The Family Reading Challenge is for students in grades 1 - 8 and can incorporate both independent and read-aloud reading. Children’s comprehension and interests can far surpass their reading level, so continuing to read together is a wonderful way to encourage reading interest and build background knowledge. There is a small overlap in age between these two programs and children are welcome to sign up for both. Our Adult Reading Challenge encourages genre exploration with many different types of books, from beach reads to biographies.
Grab and Go Crafts

To provide hands on learning and family fun, we have gone curbside with fun activities to bring home and enjoy. Halloween was the perfect time for some trick or treating that came home in a bag along with Halloween themed craft projects and coloring sheets. December brought a take home project for either a Hanukkah or Christmas Gingerbread House Decorating kit. We are most grateful to Vesta Bakery for working with us in providing the most delicious treat of the season! In January, we celebrated winter weather with a glittery snowman bottle project.

Upcoming Grab and Go Crafts will feature St. Patrick’s Day March 12, Earth Day April 16 and Mother’s Day May 7.

Upcoming Events

FEBRUARY 6
Take Your Child to the Library Day has been swapped out for Take the Library to Your Child Day. Families are invited to take advantage of the new Hoopla platform. You can sign up for Hoopla using your library card number and PIN, accessing tons of content, including books, music, movies, and television shows. We'd love to have photos of your children enjoying something on our latest offering and we'll post them on our social media pages. There are some great children’s options available! There will also be a Teen Grab a Book Bag for those ages 11+, while supplies last. The bags will have a free book, a snack and some swag. If you want to participate, just email your photos and comments to marisfrey@stoningtonfreelibrary.org.

APRIL 9 and 23
Our Dungeons and Dragons Club will meet virtually 3:30 - 5 for two sessions for ages 12+. Dungeons and Dragons is a limited size group that will require preregistration, so watch our website and social media for updates.

SUMMER 2021

The upcoming theme for Summer Reading 2021 is Tails and Tales. We are brainstorming ideas to make participating easier this year. All decisions will have health and safety as our first priority. We hope for a fun and engaging summer!
It is hard to believe that our last in-person program was in March 2020, just before the pandemic shutdowns began. Since then we have been highly successful with transitioning our programming to virtual platforms. Our book groups, knitting group, tech help sessions, reading challenges, SFL Nightclub, Sunday Evening Lectures and Thoughtful Thursdays have all continued on via Zoom. If you missed any of our Sunday Evening Lectures or Thoughtful Thursdays, they are available to view on the Library’s YouTube channel.

We are hopeful that at some point in 2021 in-person programming will return, but until then we will continue on virtually. We are thinking ahead and considering changes instituted during the pandemic that may remain into the future. When in-person programming does return, how do we also maintain the virtual element that allows participants to conveniently participate? Some may not have made it to our physical programs before due to location, work, time, etc, but through virtual means they can. This is just one consideration of many that we will need to find a balance for once the pandemic subsides.

Our next session of SFL Zoomclub, an inclusive program for adults, is fully registered and will run from January 25-March 1. Each week a special theme is selected, such as art, music, movies, writing, etc. and participants socialize, share and take part in activities inspired by each week’s theme. There are also special guests planned for further excitement.

We are currently in the midst of planning our next season of Sunday Evening Lectures and Thoughtful Thursdays. Four confirmed speakers are Stuart Vyse on his book “Superstition: A Very Short Introduction” on March 14 at 5 pm, Noreen Kepple on Pollinators on Thursday, March 18 at 5 pm, Margaret Gibson and selected poets reading from their new poetry anthology “Waking Up to the Earth: CT Poets in a Time of Global Climate Crisis” on Sunday, April 11 at 5 pm and Deborah Goodrich Royce on her new book “Ruby Falls” on Sunday, June 13 at 5 pm.

Noreen Kepple has started requesting seed donations from seed companies for our seed library. We are hopeful that we will obtain enough to offer this popular annual service, but we recognize that demand for seeds has risen greatly during the pandemic. Keep an eye on our website and social media for programming updates.

Don't forget to register for our Adult Winter Reading Challenge, which runs through April 2. You can register on our website or email marisfrey@stoningtonfreelibrary.org. Once registered, you will receive our reading challenges and can enter to win prizes as you complete them. If you can’t participate this winter, don’t worry, we are currently planning our Adult Summer Reading Challenge.

If you are interested in joining our virtual book groups or knitting group, please email ivyhope@stoningtonfreelibrary.org. Our Thursday afternoon book group meets the second Thursday of each month at 2 pm. Our Wednesday evening book group meets the first Wednesday of each month at 5:30 pm. Our knitting group meets every Wednesday from 1-3 pm.

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### Hoopla is now available!

**Borrow movies, music, audiobooks, ebooks, comics and TV shows for free with your SFL card!**

With your Stonington Free Library card and pin number, you now have access to Hoopla. Hoopla is an all-in-one media service where you can browse 800,000+ titles in six different formats—audiobooks, eBooks, comics/graphic novels, full music albums, movies, and TV—and instantly borrow, then download or stream, the titles of your choice! You can access the title you borrow instantly on your computer, tablet, or smartphone. With Hoopla, there are no holds or waiting! As a library cardholder, you may borrow up to 6 titles per month. To register for and enjoy Hoopla digital for free with your library card, please download the Hoopla digital app from the Apple or Google Play store on your mobile device. If you are using a computer, visit [https://www.hoopladigital.com](https://www.hoopladigital.com). For more information, visit [stoningtonfreelibrary.org/digital-library/](http://stoningtonfreelibrary.org/digital-library/)

Feel free to contact us if you have any questions. We hope you enjoy Hoopla digital!
AND PROGRAMMING

BOOK GROUPS

AFTERNOON AND EVENING GROUPS VIA ZOOM

February 5 at 5:30 pm - The Island of Sea Women by Liza See
February 11 at 2 pm - My Brilliant Friend by Elena Ferrante
March 3 at 5:30 pm - The Art Forger by Barbara Shapiro
March 11 at 2 pm - Never Let Me Go by Kazu Kibuishi
April 7 at 5:30 pm - Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead by Olga Tokarczuk
April 15 at 2 pm - An American Marriage by Tayari Jones

email ivyhope@stoningtonfreelibrary.org to join the group!

ADULT WINTER READING CHALLENGE

Participate in our reading challenge. Enter to win great prizes!

How many books can YOU read in 5 months?

Register on our website.
www.stoningtonfreelibrary.org

NOVEMBER 2 - APRIL 2
20 High Street Stonington, CT 06378

SFL expanded our digital library with Kanopy!

Access 10,000 streaming movies, documentaries and more with your library card!

Kanopy is a streaming service that focuses on enriching media. Known for its collection of documentaries, Kanopy also has independent & foreign films, classic movies, stories & shows for children, and The Great Courses!

You can watch Kanopy on your computer, phone, or TV!

5 free play credits + unlimited access to Kanopy Kids & The Great Courses.

Visit stoningtonfreelibrary.org/digital-library for more information.

ATTENTION MAKERS & CRAFTERS

SFL's Knitting Group is on Zoom!

Meeting every Wednesday from 1-3

All ages, experience levels, and craft styles are welcome

For more information email ivyhope@stoningtonfreelibrary.org

Stay tuned for upcoming information regarding our 2021 Mystery Dinner, Book Sale, and National Library Week.
Ringing in the New Year with a Newly Refurbished Library – And It’s All Thanks to You!

December’s ribbon cutting ceremony marked the completion of SFL’s ambitious addition and renovation project, a major strategic initiative. Despite the unique challenges of COVID, the project was finished just over a year after groundbreaking, on schedule and within budget.

In January, SFL was pleased to announce the successful conclusion of its capital campaign, having raised a total of $1.8 million in donations and pledged commitments. We wanted to take this moment to thank all of our generous donors for sharing our vision, and trusting us to carry it out. As we look to the future, our community library is now prepared to welcome us back with new and improved resources, upgraded infrastructure and a sustainable financial footing.

This extraordinary result could not have been achieved without the generosity and collaboration of all facets of the Stonington community and beyond. From its inception as a response to community needs, this campaign brought together a broad range of support, including state and local governments, charitable foundations and individual donors - individually, we could never have achieved these lofty goals, but together, we moved mountains (of earth, that is)!

SFL is so grateful to have received over 380 individual donations and pledges, and we value each and every one. With donations ranging from $10 to more than $75,000, our support truly came from every corner of our community. Approximately $1 million of the funds raised was used to fund the building addition and renovation effort, while the remainder will be dedicated to bolstering SFL’s endowment, ensuring greater financial stability for years to come.

Once again, words cannot adequately express our gratitude for your demonstration of community support, and we look forward to welcoming you through our doors once more!

Capital Campaign Steering Committee
Marguerite Moore (Honorary Chair)  Denise Easton
Thomas Moore (Honorary Chair)  Richard Easton
Beth Walker (Honorary Chair)  Wendy Eck
Marc Ginsberg (Co-Chair)  William J. Griffin IV
Allegra Griffiths (Co-Chair)  William Griffith
Frances Ashley  Beth Harding
Annie Fix  Archie Leslie
Kevin Bowdler  Susan Martin
Charles Clark  Caroline Muller
Belinda de Kay  Scott Muller
Barbara Dixon  David Purvis
Christopher Dixon  David Rathbun
Deborah Dodds  Clare Sheridan

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

The building project to make the Library accessible to everyone began and ended with the generous support of the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation. In 2017, the Foundation awarded the Library a grant to hire an architect to design 21st Century accessibility for our historic building. In December of 2020, the Reeve Foundation completed our project with a grant for the automatic door opener in the new entrance. Their gifts have brought us full circle in fulfilling our vision for providing access for everyone who comes to the Library.

Memorial and Tributes
Gifts made to the Capital Campaign in honor or memory of a loved one.
In Honor of Lucia Johnstone  In Memory of Kate Robinson
Barbara Barnes  Elizabeth A. Osha
In Memory of Bogart  In Memory of Rita Horan
Grace Your Home  Michael and Margaret Magana
In Memory of Dennis Souza  In Memory of Arline Marchenkoff
Portuguese Holy Ghost Society  Valentina Marchenkoff
In Memory of Richard C. Hall  In Memory of Bettie Kepple
Lucille M. Hall  The Kepple Family
In Memory of Bill White  In Memory of Nancy Drake Phelps
Betty Richards Tripp  Holly Phelps Miller
Lissa van Dyke  In Memory of Patricia Vargas
In Memory of Mary Gaus  David and Catherine Vargas
Elizabeth Gaus  In Memory of Mary Gaus
In Memory of Freeman F. and Carolyn M. Patten
Elizabeth Gaus  Elizabeth Gaus
Gary and Celinda Van Voorhis
In Memory of Robert Ellis
Judith Ellis

If there is a mistake in your name recognition or your tribute, please email development@stoningtonfreelibrary.org or call 860-535-0658.
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