



**STONINGTON  
FREE LIBRARY**

**2021-2022**

**ANNUAL  
REPORT**

# FROM THE DIRECTOR



Another year at SFL has come to a close and our focus on reimagining and expanding library programs and services is reflected in all we have done. Our unwavering commitment to being a welcoming and responsive community library was evident with the return of many familiar faces and activities that we all missed dearly.

One of our proudest achievements this past year was meeting a longstanding goal of increasing our hours of operation: the Library is now open 7 days a week! Expanding hours by 23% meant hiring more staff and all of our new, friendly and knowledgeable team members are here to help you Monday-Thursday 10-7, Friday 10-5, Saturday & Sunday 10-3.

It was a pleasure to welcome both new and returning library visitors. I thoroughly enjoyed giving tours of the addition and renovation and seeing it all through the awestruck eyes of those viewing it for the first time. We are so happy that in-person

programming has returned with the added benefit of offering access to anyone, anywhere with hybrid and livestream delivery formats. Even if you aren't able to visit the Library in person, we continue to expand our digital library offerings, which are available to SFL cardholders 24/7 and provide access to ebooks, audiobooks, music, movies, tv shows, magazines, newspapers and more.

We hope you are enjoying our two newest additions: PressReader provides access to 7,000 magazines and newspapers from all over the world on any internet connected device, and LinkedIn Learning is a digital library of over 16,000 courses covering a wide range of technical, business, software and creative topics.

More library access for more people when and where they need the Library brings to mind a quote from [The Library Book](#) by Susan Orlean - "The publicness of the public library is an increasingly rare commodity. It becomes harder all the time to think of places that welcome everyone and don't charge for that warm embrace."

We were very successful in securing funding opportunities that were created in response to the pandemic. We were awarded American Rescue Plan Act

(ARPA) funding from the CT State Library, the Borough of Stonington and the Town of Stonington. The funds from the CT State Library were used to purchase new laptops for public use, new computers in the Teen Room, a new computer for patrons to search our collection, a Square register for front desk transactions, devices and software that allow us to automatically count the number of visitors who enter the Library and use our WiFi, a brand new book drop and a cart that securely stores and charges all of our devices.

The ARPA funding from the Borough allowed us to create the new outdoor seating area on the western side of the building. We are thrilled that it has been so well received. Visitors love to sit near the majestic bronze lions that are a welcoming presence in a space where the community can work, meet, relax, read, eat, or chat. The lions, tables and chairs were donated by community members making it a true community project. We hope to see you out there soon!



The ARPA funding from the Town of Stonington will be spent on new projects during FY23. We look forward to sharing the positive impact these funds will have on the Library. We greatly appreciate the generosity and commitment of all of our supporters, volunteers, patrons and municipal funders (the Town of Stonington, the Borough of Stonington and the CT State Library). Without your support the projects, services, programs and accomplishments outlined in this report would not have been possible. Thank you for recognizing the vital role of your library in the community. It is because of you that the Library is the trusted, beloved and vibrant institution that it is.

With excitement for the future,

*Micayla*

Micayla  
Library Director



# FROM THE PRESIDENTS



In July 2018, when we were elected co-presidents of its Board of Trustees, the Stonington Free Library embraced the challenge to answer the following question: “How can we increase access to library services and programs for all the residents of Stonington?”

Little did we know that this one question would guide every action and major project we undertook over the next four years. Open access for everyone has long been a celebrated library value and this is truer now more than ever. You only have to look around the new space and ADA-enhanced facilities to see the obvious improvements -- but it is often the small things that matter most.

When the world stood still because of Covid, the staff, Board and volunteers pivoted to accelerate our plans for 24/7 access through a digital transformation that included not only materials but programs that kept groups together and

encouraged new participation. We surprised our users when the phone was answered and we remained “open” for curbside pickup and to patiently “talk” users through digital downloads. This all seems so 2020!

As the capital campaign committee reached out to share our goals for the next chapter of the Library, the energy and passion was not hampered by meeting remotely. The building committee volunteers and staff were likewise driven to keep the building project moving forward despite lockdowns and supply chain challenges.

As the Library evolved, survived, and most definitely thrived over these last four years, we have sought opportunities to reimagine the content and delivery of services, materials, and programs, as well as the availability of devices needed for access, allowing the Library to support the community in ever expanding ways.

None of this would have been possible without the support of our community, which includes our local officials, who recognized the importance of library funding so we could add hours and be the only local library open seven days a week.

We deeply appreciate all of our donors and volunteers and every supporter who let us know in myriad ways just how important SFL is to them.

During the past four years, we have seen first hand how the connection between the Library and the community has been strengthened through shared experiences and communication. The Stonington Free Library is now even better prepared to respond, adapt and serve our community because we have listened and learned and created opportunities to be a partner in defining what the community wants and needs.

As we write this letter it is important to look to the left and right and say thank you to each other -- it would have been impossible to be the stewards this Library and our community need without both of us bringing our energy, passion and commitment to the table.

## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Allegra Griffiths - Co-President	Kathryn Brandl
Denise Easton - Co-President	Jean Fiore
Kevin Bowdler - VP/Treasurer	William Griffith
Richard Cole - Secretary	Dave Purvis
Ann Baldelli	Clare Sheridan
Diana Beck	Sage Williams
Marggie Blake	<small>*As of June 30, 2022</small>
Betsy Bowman	

Looking forward, there will always be more to accomplish and new challenges to overcome, and we are confident that our successor, Board President Kevin Bowdler, is capable of rising to any occasion. Kevin has a strong history of service to the Stonington community and the connections he has forged, together with his practical business and management skills, position him well to continue SFL's mission: to enrich lives and build community by bringing information, ideas and people together.

With much appreciation,



Denise Easton and Allegra Griffiths  
Co-Presidents



# PROGRAMS AND SERVICES



A welcome trend this year is for community members to spend a lot of time at the library. Whether it is in our new outdoor seating area or at one of the tables inside the building, folks have been setting up their devices and spending the day enjoying our free wifi. Both online and in person, people meet up at SFL for the purposes of education, work, and socializing. We continue to act as concierge to the community by providing information, directions and restrooms to anyone who comes through our doors.

The theme for our programming this year has been collaboration. Along with our dedicated Program Committee, we have offered programs in cooperation with Stonington Historical Society, Stonington

Garden Club, James Merrill House, Lyman Allyn Museum of Art, Always Home, Denison Pequotsepos Nature Center, Stonington Borough Merchants Association, Ocean Community Chamber of Commerce, One Book One Region, URI Master Gardener Program, Stonington Farmers' Market and a Digital Programming Collaborative consisting of ten area libraries. We have made our events as accessible as possible by offering them in person, streamed live online, and recorded for future viewing.

In addition to reserving books, checking all materials in and out, procuring interlibrary loans, and assisting patrons with all manner of technology, the front desk offers some new services. Thanks to a grant from the Association of Rural & Small Libraries, we started a video game lending program. We also lend out Chromebooks now, purchased with a grant from the Emergency Connectivity Fund. Library cardholders now have access to LinkedIn Learning classes and thousands of publications online through PressReader.



With thanks,

*Karla*

Karla Umland  
Assistant Director

# LIBRARY PROGRAMS FOR ADULTS

\*July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022



- Local artist Roxanne Steed: Introduction to Watercolor
- International tour guide Marianne Millard: The Canadian Maritimes
- Local photographer Markham Starr: Barns of Connecticut
- Sophia Gipstein of Lyman Allyn Art Museum: No Mistakes in Art
- Tricia Cunningham, Executive Director of Always Home: Preventing Family Homelessness
- Rob Reas of Denison Pequotsepos Nature Center: Nature Illustration
- Master Gardener Noreen Kepple: Putting the Garden to Bed
- Connecticut Poet Laureate Margaret Gibson: The Glass Globe
- Gingerbread House Grab & Go activity kit
- Jessica Cerullo: The Ships in the Night, informal poetry creation
- Collaboration with local libraries. Galen Abdur-Razzaq: History of Women and Jazz
- Collaboration with Stonington Historical Society. Stuart Vyse: Steamboat Hotel
- Roxanne Steed: Watercolors for Absolute Beginners
- Collaboration with local libraries. Olena Lennon: Ukraine Information Session
- Collaboration with James Merrill House. Peter Filkins: Poetry Reading
- Local Musician Faith Leitner: History of the Harp
- Professor Kenneth Bleeth: Chaucer's Adam, Chaucer's Alice
- Collaboration with local libraries. Olena Lennon: Follow-up Ukraine Information Session
- Professor Willard Spiegelman: How I Became an Art Critic by Looking
- Noreen Kepple, Lavina Kepple, Greta McGugan: What is an End-of-Life Doula?
- Collaboration with Stonington Garden Club. Craig Floyd: Regenerative Gardening
- Poet Sue Ellen Thompson: Jack Gilbert and His Poems
- Connecticut author Karen Guzman: Arborview and the Writing Process



## ONGOING PROGRAMS:

- Two SFL Book Clubs
- SFL Nightclub
- Knitting and Crochet Group
- Community Open Mic
- Find the Buoy
- Friday Flix
- Adult Reading Challenges

## OUTREACH PROGRAMS:

- Masonicare Book Group
- Stone Ridge Book Group
- Human Services Book Group
- Four Little Free Libraries
- Stonington Farmers' Market

# YOUTH SERVICES



## What was your favorite book as a child?

This simple question has sparked some of my most interesting conversations with other adults. It never fails to engage memories, provoke smiles, and usually a chuckle, over our youthful preferences. No matter your age, there is always a children's book that occupies a special place in your heart and mind.



Public libraries serve all ages at all stages of life. Interestingly, almost all perceptions of public libraries and their importance in a community are formed in either our own or our children's childhood interactions with the library. We remember visiting the library for new books, we remember a librarian pointing us in the direction of a new favorite author, we remember bringing our own children to story time and the friends we made there.

The theme of this year's Mystery Dinner "Once Upon a Time" focused on children's literature and some of those childhood favorites. It was great fun to welcome attendees into the library and the Children's Room, decorated for the occasion and showing off some of our latest books. We are very grateful for the support for our programs and thrilled for our community to remember that it all starts in the Children's Room.

Respectfully submitted,

*Maris*

Maris Frey  
Youth Services Director



# What do you like most about your library?

Question from CT State Library Survey

## Early Learners

- The books and the activities they host for kids
- 3 year old says, “books and her prizes”
- Friendly helpful staff
- Calm and welcoming environment
- Wide selection of books for children



## Children

- Prizes after reading
- The librarians
- Friendly, clean, organized and helpful
- Welcoming, fun activities
- The library and the store



## Teens

- Seed Library and I like the mystery prize bags
- Candy at the store
- Switch games and books
- Friendliness



*“My 16-month-old twins who love story time are able to participate in summer reading, and I can comfortably take my double stroller around the library and take my time looking around with both kids. Can’t wait to continue to bring them as they grow like I did as a kid.”*  
- Parent of Early Learners

# MYSTERY DINNER



## The second time was truly a charm . . .

After regretfully rescheduling our planned April date, June 4 dawned bright and sunny; a perfect day for the Library's 14th Mystery Dinner celebration.

Guests and hosts alike entered the library for cocktails, canapes and convivial conversation... and of course the answer to the mystery - where would they be dining that evening? This year's theme, "Once Upon a Time", celebrated children's literature past and present as well as SFL's recently renovated and expanded youth library. Guests were able to mingle upstairs, downstairs and outside, exploring all of the Library's new and improved gathering spaces. The rooms were decorated with images and items drawn from iconic literary favorites, and even the hors d'oeuvres were chosen from popular food-themed books (Green Eggs and Ham, anyone?)!

After the cocktail hour, guests were dispatched to their assigned host houses across Stonington, and a total of 155 hosts and guests sat down to 17 festive and delicious dinner parties. We gratefully thank our generous hosts, tireless and dedicated planning committee and beloved guests, without whom this popular event could not take place. The Mystery Dinner is the Library's signature event, and this year's version set a new record, raising over \$30,000 through ticket sales and donations. Thank you all for your continued support!



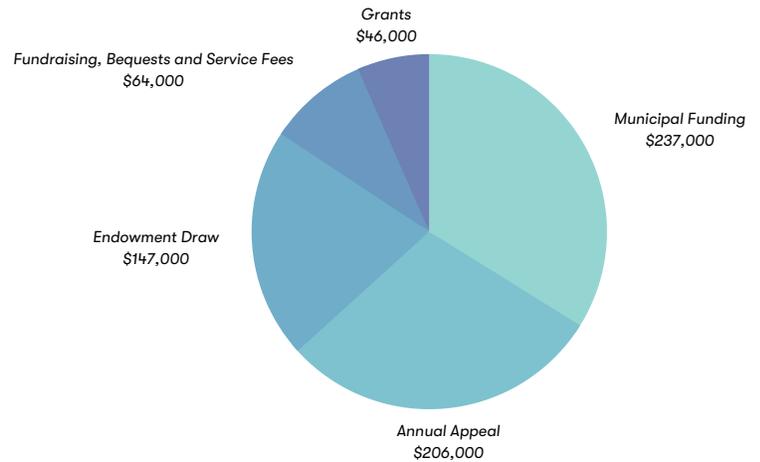


# FINANCIALS



We are pleased to report that the library is in good financial health and has made good strides towards achieving financial sustainability with the completion of the Capital Campaign, strong fundraising efforts and stable Municipal Funding.

Over the past fiscal year, the Stonington Free Library recorded approximately \$700,000 in operating income, up from \$570,000 in the previous year. This increase was driven by the Annual Appeal which was \$30,000 higher than the previous year, and fundraising income that was \$36,000 above the previous year because we had two Mystery Dinners occur in the same fiscal year. The Endowment draw was \$20,000 higher because of the increased amount in the Endowment. Municipal Funding from the Town and Borough was flat at \$237,000 (40% of our revenue) after the material increase received the previous year. In addition to Municipal Funding we received \$46,000 in grants from the Town, the Borough and the State. The majority of



the additional grants were from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) designed to assist non-profits recovering from the effects of COVID. The Annual Appeal raised \$206,000 or 29% of Operating Income. Draws from the Endowment amounted to \$147,000 providing 21% of the total.



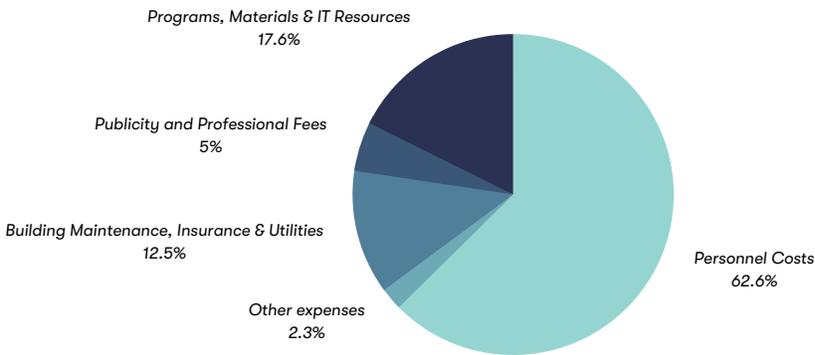
## Endowment Update

The Endowment balances which grew materially over the last two years because of the Capital Campaign and the strong market performance, took a substantial hit with the market downturn that started in 2021. At the end of June, the unrealized losses were \$722,000. The Endowment balance peaked above \$5,000,000 and was \$4,300,000 at the end of June 2022. The balance at the end of June 2021 was \$4,600,000. The Endowment has performed inline with the market for our agreed upon investment strategy. We do not see any reason to change our investment strategy or our 4% spend policy. Unrealized losses are not included in the Operating Income numbers stated in this report.

Respectfully Submitted,



Kevin Bowdler  
Vice-President and Treasurer



Operating expenses for the year were \$663,000, an increase of \$93,000 over the previous year. This increase was due primarily to payroll expenses associated with the increased opening hours. The library is open an extra 10 hours per week, including Sundays. Payroll costs were \$415,000, (63% of total expenses) an increase of \$45,000 over the prior year. The next largest expense category is Library materials, programs, and digital resources at \$117,000 or 18% of total expenses. All other expense lines are less than 4% of total expenses. The library received a one-off payroll tax credit from the Federal Government of \$91,000 under the Employee Retention Credit program. This amount is not included in the Operating Income numbers stated in this report. The library had \$210,000 in the bank account at the end of June 2022.

# PEDIMENT SOCIETY

This report recognizes contributors to the Library during the past fiscal year – July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022



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

## **\$10,000.00 and above**

Marc and Barbara Ginsberg  
Joyce and Francis Pandolfi  
Wimpfheimer Foundation

## **\$5,000.00 - \$9,999.99**

Ben and Marggie Blake  
Mr. and Mrs. Christopher Dixon  
Priscilla and Charles Hodges  
Memorial Fund  
Kelley's Pace  
Stuart and Casey Malcolm  
Kassy White

## **\$2,500.00 - \$4,999.99**

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Melanie Cava and Todd Drevo  
Michael and Dudley Del Balso  
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Edith and Herbert Lehman  
Foundation  
Tom's News Stand  
Raymond Uzasas

## **\$1,000.00 - \$2,499.99**

The Alice Fund c/o CFECT  
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Eric Baum  
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Jeffrey and Ana Schneider  
Willard L. Spiegelman  
Jeff Sprouse  
and Rebecca Lehmann-Sprouse  
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John and Christine Turrentine  
Susan Voorhees  
Josh and Alejandra Welch  
Liz and Harry White  
Clem and Sally Wood  
Edward P. York III

## BABCOCK-PHELPS SOCIETY

The Babcock-Phelps Society, named for the Library's two earliest benefactors, recognizes individuals who have chosen to remember the Library in their estate planning documents.

Cynthia Crawford Lichtenstein  
Maria McVitty\*  
Mr. & Mrs. Frederic C. Paffard, Jr\*  
Joyce & Francis P. Pandolfi  
Santo Puglisi\*  
Elizabeth Holliday Ramsey\*  
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Carol and Edward Sauers  
Owen Sherry\*  
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Donald Charbonnier  
Jane Charbonnier  
Inger McCabe Elliott  
Elizabeth and Charles Harding  
Priscilla F. Hodges\*  
Nan Jernigan  
Jean M. Jones\*

\*Deceased

Dear Stonington Free Library,  
Last Saturday when the garden  
four was here in Stonington, I made  
a Lemonade Stand. Since I LOVE the  
Library I decided to give some  
of the money from the  
Lemonade Stand.  
P.S.: There is a check inside.

# CONTRIBUTIONS

This report recognizes contributors to the Library during the past fiscal year – July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022



## \$250.00 - \$499.99

Ann and Michael Adair  
John A. Adams  
Jean M. Anderson  
Katherine Ballard and Revell Horsey  
Anne Bartholet  
Gary and Frances Bennett  
Alan and Ann Blanchard  
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Dan and Melissa Verdier  
Robert Walsh Jr. and Mary Jo McDonough  
Barry Weprin and Patricia Langer  
Joseph and Kirby Williams  
Thomas and Sage Williams  
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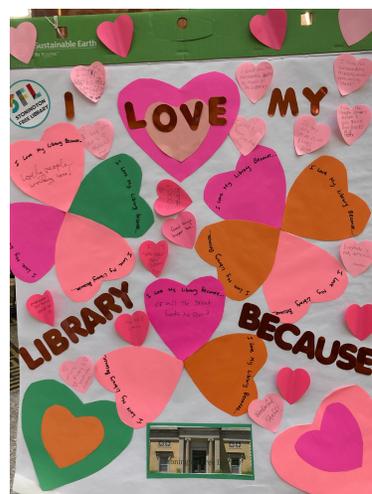
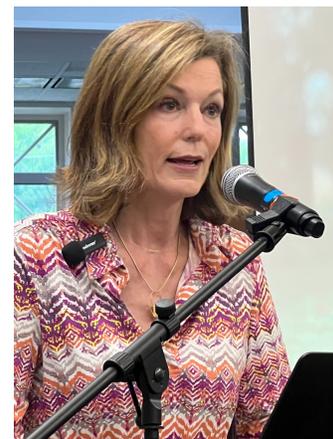
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Open 53 hours per week or 2,756 hours annually



New outdoor seating area  
\*Funded by a Borough ARPA grant



14,725 people attended 224 library programs



387 Summer Reading Program registrants  
84% participation rate and 4,100+ hours read



4 Little Free Libraries distributed 1,865 free books



21,157 public computer and WiFi sessions



44,000+ total visitors

All services are available to non-cardholders, except for checkout of materials



3,075 active cardholders

Stonington 50%/Pawcatuck 26%/Mystic 13%/Other 11%



48,000+ library website views



44,000+ physical & digital check outs



4,704 reference and tech questions answered



3 full-time, 18 part-time staff



Now lending Chromebooks and Nintendo Switch games.

\*Chromebooks funded by the Emergency Connectivity Fund. Nintendo Switch games funded by the Association for Rural & Small Libraries through the generosity of a regional partner foundation



142 volunteers worked over 2,000 hours. Est. value > \$62,296