

Success in Uncertain Times

Dear neighbors & library patrons,

In 2019 the LMLS board focused on the governance of the libraries. In 2020 we honed in on simply staying open, safe and useful. We talked about PPE, discussed how to clean computer keyboards and adopted safety measures, including requiring face coverings.

We have marveled at the creativity and ingenuity of our wonderful library staff as they have created ingenious ways to interact with patrons virtually. From grab and go bags, to reading circles for children, to adult book clubs, to fundraisers, they've tried and succeeded at it all. The Board extended the suspension of reserve fees. In short, like everyone else in 2020, we pivoted.

Incredibly our community has responded with gusto. Even with the restrictions, in November 2020 libraries reached 71% of their circulation from the year before, even with Ludington being partially closed.

The Board thanks David Belanger for steering us resolutely into and through the worst of the pandemic. We're not home free yet, but we have every confidence that we will emerge supported and ready to rebuild. We look forward to a year filled with health, safety and success.

Wishing you all a healthy, safe year to come.

Betty-Ann Izenman
President, LMLS Board of Directors

What We've Learned

Needless to say, 2020 was a year unlike any other, yet libraries succeeded by adapting to change and reimagining library services to meet the needs of the community. Lower Merion libraries responded to restrictions, safety protocols, limitations, and shifting service expectations. Along the way, library staff have discovered many insights into our community.

- **Lower Merion residents love their libraries.** During the pandemic, we heard over and over how much members appreciated the services we provided, and how they were looking forward to returning to the library.
- **Library services can be delivered in new ways.** When library buildings closed, staff quickly reinvented programs and delivery methods to meet the needs of residents. Online programs, expanded digital offerings, and safely delivering books all became possible and appreciated.
- **Technology is our frenemy.** Staff quickly learned Zoom, Facebook Live, YouTube, and how to work from home. This made services accessible to a larger audience. There were technical glitches and some loss of connection, but the show went on.
- **We are fortunate to have a township that supports libraries.** Lower Merion Township provided exceptional assistance to libraries, allowing service to continue with the funding and the needed protections for staff and the public.
- **Equity, diversity, and inclusion requires more attention.** Staff became more aware of the need for library services to reflect the greater community in collections and in programming.
- **Library staff are the best.** Library staff quickly and creatively responded to the challenges of the pandemic. New services and reimagined delivery were implemented with dexterity and speed by gifted and dedicated employees.
- **Gratitude.** Most of all, we have learned to appreciate our library friends and family, dedicated board members, and the public officials who make libraries possible in Lower Merion. Thank you.

David Belanger, Director of Libraries

Library Updates

Ardmore

2020 began with great expectations and a plethora of programming: weekly story times and music play groups, tech sessions, and more. Service hours increased with an additional 22 hours of staff time. The Kitchen Tour and Poetry Celebration were scheduled—spring programming was ready. COVID hit and the library closed. Thanks to quick action from the Board, both programs became virtual. All programming went virtual and contactless pick-up began. Eventually the library opened with limited access for browsing and computer use. Staff Zoomed with Bala Elementary classes to encourage summer reading. Additional programs were added, and all were well attended. Weekly Grab and Go activity bags were available, and a pre-school program kicked off in September at the Clevenger Fountain. The full collection was weeded and the children's library was reorganized to be more accessible. Ardmore staff adapted to schedules and technologies to continue providing excellent services to our patrons.



Bala Cynwyd

Bala Cynwyd Library rose to the challenge of providing quality service to our community during a difficult year. Prior to March, we had 72 in-person programs, with 2,052 attendees. We adapted to the needs of our patrons. The library offered enhanced digital collections as well as combined in-person browsing and contactless pick up of reserved items. Bala hosted 105 online events, reaching 8,739 residents. Popular youth programs included First Friday STEM, Snapology Coding, Sunday Scaries, and DIY crafts. Melissa Klapper's presentation on her book *Ballet Class: an American History*, Orsi Lazar's Garden Design in Practice, and a local history talk on the Pencoyd Iron Works were hits with adults. We expanded our model of communicating with residents, alerting all to new programs, staff recommendations, and updates on library hours via weekly Constant Contact



newsletters and Facebook. The staff is committed to providing exemplary service to our patrons in 2021.

Belmont Hills

Belmont Hills found various ways to serve the community throughout 2020. In January, our added Friday hours (12 to 5 pm) were met with excitement from patrons. After mid-March, all programming moved online, featuring lectures (neighborhood history, mushroom hunting), author visits (*Mill Town's* Kerri Arsenault), craft programs (botanical drawing, quilting), and story times for adults. For children, weekly morning and bedtime story times continued, along with many craft tutorials and activities. Once staff was permitted back in the library building, Children's Librarian Gwen Gatto began coordinating take-home kits so that children could complete crafts at home, guided by tutorial videos she created. During periods where service was limited to contactless pickup of materials, patrons of all ages enjoyed our "book bundles", receiving items hand-selected by staff targeted to the patron's preferences. In a trying year, the Library was happy to be a constant support to a community with ever-evolving needs.



Gladwyne

The year opened with art classes, a quilt exhibit, book discussions, and the Library League's Arts and Crafts Show and Junior Author Contest. Then boom! The pandemic changed us to masks, sanitizing, distancing, working from home, and online EVERYTHING! There were virtual book discussions, a "Virtual Visit with Susan B. Anthony", a virtual Revolutionary War in Montgomery County lecture, and virtual programs by some of our Museum Pass partners. We started a virtual Film Discussion group. We had story hours, science experiments, classes on music, dance, yoga, drawing, and crafts, bedtime reads, and ukulele lessons. We created Grab and Go STEM kits for home learning.



The Board started the 100 Year Legacy Walkway Project. For \$250, patrons can purchase an engraved paver. There was Take-Out Night with Carlino's Market, and a new roof!

Staff adapted to changing schedules and environments, and scrupulously adhered to safety precautions. Despite the struggles, our patrons missed us and we remain the "Heart of the Village!"

Ludington

Ludington Library faced many challenges in 2020; however, staff persevered. Much of our success was achieved by quickly adapting to unforeseen changes, and pivoting toward offering innovative service



solutions at every turn. Whether it was creating safer spaces for patrons to pick up their items using curbside delivery, or to come in and browse our shelves, or by expanding our online outreach, we worked to safely be where our patrons needed us most. We offered "book bundles" for our Juniors, hotspots to those who needed an online boost, and Zoom "Chair Yoga and Meditation" for those who needed a little serenity during a difficult year.

Other large projects included replacing much of the lighting along the Bryn Mawr Avenue

addition with LEDs, as well as on the main level. We are eager to share our brighter look with patrons in 2021 when we hope to move closer to normal operations with many new ideas ready for further exploration.

Penn Wynne

The theme of the year was change—the library changed as the world changed. We created hundreds of Grab and Go bags for children, filmed and



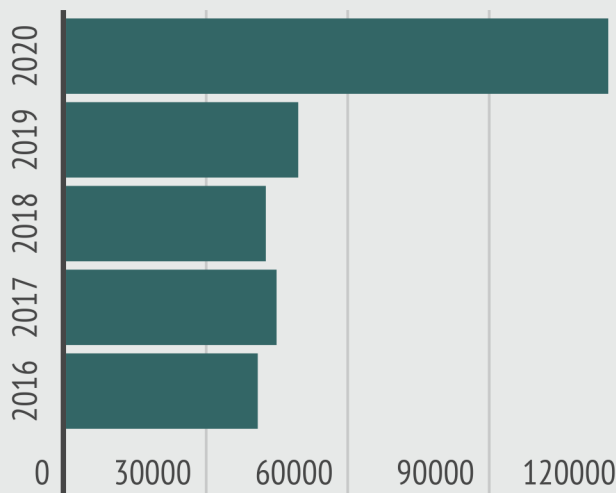
aired story times over Zoom and Facebook, had seven storywalks installed, had story times with EMTs, firemen and alpacas and we learned how to provide service in new ways. Our patrons have embraced contactless pickup with enthusiasm, and found that it is a great way to get their books easily. We had cooking classes, opera concerts, and book clubs virtually. The board found ingenious ways to raise funds with their Spot-A-Truck Scavenger Hunt, tie-dye kits, shoe drive, and holiday pictures in Suburban Square. The library was a polling place during the historic 2020 election, with 400 voters in the building. We've learned that libraries are even more important than ever, and we look forward to continuing to serve our patrons.

System-Wide Services and Events

In 2020, LMLS undertook many system-wide projects, adapting to pandemic restrictions while meeting the needs of the community.

- Made a rapid transition to online programs, using Zoom, Facebook Live and YouTube. Worked with Lower Merion TV to broadcast select programs on the township's television channel.
- Implemented call center technology to allow staff to answer library telephones from their home, providing updates about library services and pandemic information.
- Increased availability of digital resources with additional spending on digital materials, adding more ebooks and audiobooks. Implemented a video streaming service. Working with the County Library, increased the digital magazine collection to over 3,000 titles.
- Participated in Voter Registration Day and helped promote Census awareness.
- Began a Book Concierge Service where staff select book bundles for customers while in-person library browsing was limited.
- Promoted Park & Surf WiFi for the public to use library WiFi from outside the building.
- Worked with the Lower Merion Library Foundation to expand fundraising activities, including expending \$15,000 in EITC donations, generating donations for Library Giving Day and Giving Tuesday. Expanded use of the LMLS donor management program to include two libraries.
- Began addressing Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in the provision of library services.
- Started planning how to integrate new pandemic-era services into normal library programs.

2020 at a Glance



Program Attendance Soars

The bright spot in the pandemic for libraries was in program attendance. When libraries closed for the quarantine, staff quickly and effectively moved to online programs, more than doubling attendance from prior years.

Service Highlights



1,100 Online
Card Applications
Received



Enhanced Giving
Options

Book Concierge Service:
We Browse for You



Streaming Video Service Added



Call Center
Software for Staff
to Answer from Home



Started a YouTube
Channel

Circulation of Materials Limited; Digital Grows

2020 presented unique challenges for Lower Merion Libraries in delivery of services. With weeks of quarantine, restrictions to in-person browsing, and limitations on occupancy, the lending of materials was greatly reduced. The good news was a 36% increase in digital downloads.

