

Still Connected

Greetings from the Board President

This pandemic has taught us how important it is to be connected—to our families, friends and to our communities. As David Belanger mentions in greater detail, our libraries have been able to serve the community both in-person and virtually in numerous ways this past year.

David and I have worked closely over the last six years, and as he mentioned, he will retire in 2022. David leaves LMLS in terrific shape. He has ensured we have a healthy Strategic Plan, that our policies and procedures are well documented and up to date, that we have dedicated, energetic staff members in place and that we are ready to take the LMLS to new heights in the future. He has planted the seed for new initiatives, and given the staff, and board, the freedom to dream big. We are more connected than ever.

Having weathered the worst (we hope) of the pandemic by virtue of David's steady, wise guidance, I look forward to our reinvigorated renewal at full strength in 2022.

Betty-Ann Izenman
President, LMLS Board of Directors

From the Desk of the Director

2021 was a year of continued adaptation for Lower Merion Libraries. We responded with innovative solutions to pandemic surges, service expansion, and uncertainty. Staff found the best ways to provide outstanding service to the public while maintaining the health and safety of the public and our fellow employees. In spite of all the challenges, libraries remained connected to the community.

Libraries moved from curbside and digital services to welcoming our members back into the building in the spring. We increased in-person hours and, in the fall, returned to our full pre-pandemic schedule. Also in the fall, we began limited in-person programming for adults.

Use of libraries continued to rebound in 2021. The digital library was enhanced with the addition of Weiss Financial Ratings, the expansion of the Kanopy streaming video service, additional ebooks and audiobooks. We continued to purchase print books too. Library members responded by returning to the libraries and checking out more materials. By the end of 2021, circulation of library items returned to 88% of pre-pandemic levels.

Staff also began an analysis of the collection to ensure that our shelves contained books that are equitable, diverse, and inclusive. The first effort was a review of the children's picture book section, and it showed a diverse collection, with room for expansion. Work is ongoing to analyze more sections of the library.

The pandemic disrupted funding streams that pay for books and programs. Many fundraising events were canceled, and income from overdue fines was significantly lower. Thankfully, individual donors continued their financial support. Libraries were fortunate to receive several grants through federal stimulus programs.

Another major change for libraries in 2021 was that I announced my retirement in 2022. Serving as the Director of the Lower Merion Library System has been a pleasure and an honor. The respect and appreciation provided by the public and elected officials is gratifying. Working with a library staff that is dedicated and skilled is a privilege; they are the best. I thank everyone and wish you continued enjoyment of Lower Merion libraries.

David Belanger, Director of Libraries

Library Updates

Ardmore

Ardmore staff continued to demonstrate flexibility, dedication and creativity to provide outstanding patron service. Staff completed over 2,000 contactless pickups. More than 175 programs were offered via Zoom, Facebook and at the Clevenger Fountain. Traditional programs were supplemented with new offerings, including our Coding Club. Staff created 68 individually themed Grab-and-Go activity bags that were distributed to over 1,400 children. Poets submitted 555 odes in the Annual Poetry Contest and celebrated the award ceremony via Zoom. Staff weeded and inventoried the collection in preparation for a diversity audit. The Ardmore Board showed incredible commitment to the library through innovative fundraising ideas. *Red Door Recipes: The Ardmore Free Library Community Cookbook* was published to rave reviews and fantastic sales. Board Members also supported the System-wide car raffle, bringing in over \$5,000. Ardmore ended the year on a full operating schedule and ready for 2022.



Bala Cynwyd

Bala Cynwyd Library provided exemplary service in a challenging year. The library returned to full pre-pandemic hours, including Sunday service. BCL topped 2021 circulation, lending 205,128 items to patrons. Bala offered wonderful programs, such as "A History of Racism and Ethnic Inequality in Lower Merion", Family Day with the Union Fire Association of Bala Cynwyd, Tech Q&A sessions, and the Fairy House collaboration with Merion Botanical Park. The library received grants for books and children's STEM materials. Bala expanded the collection of museum passes to include more outdoor attractions, such as the John James Audubon Museum at Mill Creek, Philadelphia's Magic Gardens, and the Brandywine Conservancy and Museum of Art. BCL was awarded renewed Gold Star status by the Pennsylvania Library Association for demonstrating



commitment to maintaining a standard of excellence to the community. Many thanks go to Bala's patrons for generous fund drive donations.

Belmont Hills

In 2021 Belmont Hills Library found innovative ways to serve the community through different pandemic phases. In the early part of the year, patrons were not permitted in the building, so we offered a popular "book concierge" service to personally recommend materials. Programs for all ages were offered both online and outdoors, and we even had a "drive-thru" book launch with local children's author Hallee Adelman. Program highlights included a Zoom visit with author Una Mannion, from her home in Sligo, Ireland; Miss Gwen's popular outdoor story times, held from May to December; and our Dinovember scavenger hunt. Take-home craft kits included sewing projects for adults and teens, and two or three projects per month for the younger set. With the help of the Penn Valley Civic Association, the library installed a Monarch Butterfly Waystation to attract pollinators and showcase native plants.



Gladwyne

We continued to connect with patrons in the ongoing pandemic, with staff producing amazingly varied, entertaining, and educational online content, and a few limited in-person programs. Adult offerings included Hoopla, Kanopy and Overdrive content, spring and fall Book Discussions, Film Discussions, a Revolutionary War series, and programs showcasing the expertise of our Museum Pass partners - Museum of the American Revolution, Mercer Museum, Chester County History Center, and Tyler Arboretum. In-person offerings included crochet classes, Sit and Stitch sessions, and craft programs (earrings, holiday ornaments). As pandemic conditions eased, Museum passes slowly returned for borrowing.



For kids, all programs remained virtual (except for outdoor story time, weather permitting). Online programs included science experiments, music and dance sessions, drawing classes, acting classes, and crafts. We made weekly Grab-and-Go bags, and Summer Reading Club featured activities with the theme of Tales and Tails. We had a giant Scrabble Board in our lobby.

Ludington

Ludington Library stayed connected to our community in 2021. Staff faced ongoing challenges as the pandemic continued to play a starring role in operations, but



perseverance was key. Ludington offered an array of dynamic programming for children and adults through Facebook and Zoom. As the year progressed, the Junior Room reopened and creative passive programming was introduced to keep children engaged while in the building. Staff cautiously brought in-person adult programming back by the end of the year with a recurring Board Game Night where patrons could socialize safely again. Ludington's annual Craft Fair also returned at the end of the year and was incredibly successful. Vendors and shoppers alike were pleased to return and exchange creative ideas and

wares. Ludington's foundation of rich resources and meaningful interaction among patrons and staff held while new paths were forged revealing ways of providing top-notch service during this time of great change.

Penn Wynne

What a year of changes—staff, hours, collections and programs. We adapted to changing hours, did thousands of bags for curbside pickup, and then



welcomed our patrons back inside. We added museum passes, WiFi hotspots, and Kindles loaded with Reading Olympics books. We had online story times and Books and Blankets at Penn Wynne Park; online visits to zoos, alpacas, mermaids; and thousands of Grab and Go bags for our youngest patrons. The Board ran a Spot-A-Truck Scavenger Hunt, shoe drive, a virtual Appetite For Books, and bake sales for both Election Days. A Noon Year's Eve celebration with a ball drop from a firetruck and candy for everyone ended our crazy year. The Penn Wynne Library changed but never stopped being a vital part of our community, and we are grateful to our staff, patrons and Board for helping us evolve and thrive through this unusual year.

System-Wide Services and Events

In 2021 LMLS accomplished many system-wide projects and continued to adapt to pandemic restrictions while meeting the needs of the community.

- Conducted programs, both limited in-person and virtual, using Zoom, Facebook Live and YouTube. Worked with Lower Merion TV to broadcast select programs on the township's television channel.
- Increased availability of digital resources with additional spending on digital materials, adding more ebooks and audiobooks.
- Added Weiss Ratings, an online service with evaluations of stocks, mutual funds, EFTs, banks and insurance products.
- Held a car raffle to benefit libraries, sponsored by Ardmore Toyota, with net proceeds of \$20,000.
- Worked with the Lower Merion Library Foundation and libraries on fundraising activities, including grants from the MontcoStrong program and the CARES Act; generating donations for Library Giving Day and Giving Tuesday. Expanded the use of the LMLS donor management program to libraries.
- Completed an update to the LMLS Strategic Plan.
- Upgraded the county-wide computer system to latest version and standardized data for easier access.
- Added the Overdrive ebook and audiobook collection to the traditional library catalog.
- Conducted a diversity audit of the children's picture book collection, planned for a diversity review of the remaining collection.
- Began to integrate new pandemic-era services into normal library programs.
- Circulation returned to 88% of pre-pandemic levels by the end of the year.

Lower Merion Library System

2021 At a Glance

1,225

Programs,
both live and
virtual



34,366

Program
attendees



29,267

Active card
holders



264,439

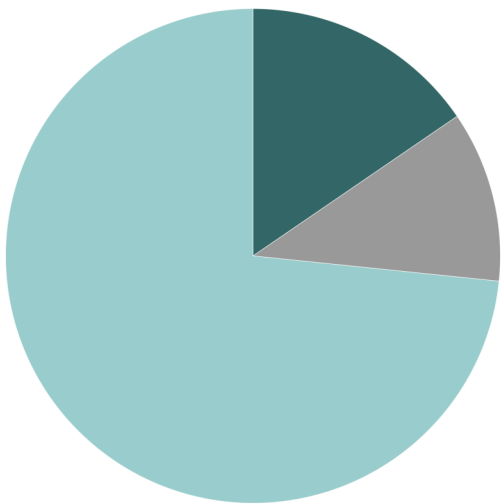
In-person visits

321,150

Virtual visits



Library Circulation



- Digital Downloads
- AV Material
- Print Material

**720,353 items were checked out
in print, AV, and digital formats**

\$20,000

Net amount raised from the
car raffle. Thanks to our
sponsor Ardmore Toyota



Libby.

Digital content from Overdrive/Libby
was integrated into the traditional
library catalog of physical materials,
allowing patrons to manage multiple
formats from one interface



INVESTMENTS • BANKING • INSURANCE
MEDIGAP • FINANCIAL LITERACY

New Service

Online investing information and
ratings of mutual funds, EFTs,
banks, and insurance



Diversity Audit

With the assistance of a Drexel student, LMLS
analyzed its picture book collection. The
collection is appropriately inclusive.



Summer Reading

PreK - 12th Grade:

627 Participants who read for
278,143 minutes