

THE FERGUSON LIBRARY ANNUAL REPORT 2008 – 2009

a lifetime of learning



Message from the Chair

For the second year in a row The Ferguson Library grappled with budgetary limitations that negatively impacted both users and staff, and left the Board of Trustees in the unenviable position of having to reduce public service hours systemwide to offset a projected \$400,000 budget deficit. During the prior fiscal year, 2007-2008, the Library also faced a sizable deficit, but was able to limp through the fiscal year with \$144,000 in one time donations, and a \$100,000 reduction to the book budget. Those donations were not available this year, and the Ferguson did not receive enough funding from the city to keep operating at the same level. That, coupled with a drop in revenue from the Library's passport operation, and increased energy and health insurance costs, lead to the unavoidable decision to cut costs and reduce staff.

In early July, hours were reduced seventeen percent systemwide. This meant cutbacks for the Main Library, the Harry Bennett Branch, the Weed Memorial & Hollander Branch, and the Bookmobile, which is now on the road just one day each week. Hours at the South End Branch remained unchanged. This was a difficult decision, but the budget reality was inescapable. In setting new hours, we tried hard to pinpoint times when use of the facilities was lightest, so closing during those times would not be as disruptive to our users, but, nonetheless, the reduction in hours was significant.

This year had its bright spots, the most important of which was the beginning of our long anticipated renovation of the Main Library. Work started on the fourth floor, and by the end of the fiscal year, the first two phases of the project were complete. Our users and staff both have been more than gracious about, and patient with, the disruption, and at this point in time, there is light at the end of the tunnel; the project should be finished in late spring, 2010.

In spite of the stress of the past year, the Library continued to strive to provide Stamford with the excellent service the community has come to expect. This was only possible because Ferguson staff members are professional and steadfast in their commitment to public library service. We are indeed fortunate to have such a dedicated team. We are also appreciative of the support of our community leaders and library volunteers, especially our Trustees, Citizen Advisers, Friends of Ferguson Directors and Ferguson Library Foundation Board members. It was a challenging year for everyone, and the city leadership, under the direction of Mayor Dannel Malloy, did the best it could for us in this difficult economic climate.

I am optimistic as I look to the future that even with the reductions we were obliged to make, The Ferguson will remain healthy and vibrant, a center of learning, and an oasis of stability for the Stamford community. Our Library is more important than ever during these times of economic uncertainty. It is a place of education, information, and culture, and is a refuge for those in need of its services. The Ferguson willingly accepts its role as a beacon for lifelong education. I am confident that whatever lies ahead, The Ferguson Library will continue to serve our community with distinction and perseverance.

Ernest N. Abate, Esq.

Chair, Ferguson Library Board of Trustees

Message from the President

In these rapidly changing times, The Ferguson Library remains a constant source of information and community in a world that often seems wildly unpredictable. It was a year of highs and lows, a year that gave us new hope, tempered with the realities of an economic recession. Through it all, The Ferguson provided not only the exceptional service Stamford has come to expect, but innovative programs and services to meet the changing needs of our community. We have seen the Library become a hub for job seekers who use our computers to write resumes and look for work, as well as those looking to retrain and change career directions. To meet the demand, we added extra computer classes and offered career programs like speed networking, that have been very popular. Our new book-a-librarian service, which offers an hour of one-on-one time with one of our professionals, has been heavily used by people looking to fine tune their job search skills.

In part due to the economy, The Ferguson reached a special milestone this year, when our circulation of library materials passed the one million mark. This would be an impressive achievement at any time, but the fact that it happened after we had reduced hours 17% the prior year speaks volumes about our community. Clearly, library services are more important than ever. We see that reflected in our popular programming. Even with our reduced hours, attendance at children's programs was higher than last year. One very special programming highlight was the Presidential Inauguration in January. We showed it on a large screen to a full house in the auditorium. People from all over Stamford came together to watch this historic moment. They shared it here at the Library, elbow to elbow, a tangible sense of community in the room. It was a rare moment that was both exciting and inspiring.

Notwithstanding the budget difficulties and access reductions of the past year, many people made it possible for us to continue our high service levels. I am particularly grateful to our dedicated Trustees, Citizen Advisers and Foundation Board whose stewardship is an inspiration, the Friends of Ferguson who consistently support our programming and portions of our collection, and the mayor and city boards for their investment in the important work that Ferguson does. Our staff is the foundation upon which our services grow and develop, our programs are planned and implemented, our collection is selected, acquired, and organized, and our facilities are maintained. They are a talented and resourceful group of people, who are always unwavering when it comes to customer service.

The signs of the future are challenging and will require us to sacrifice even further as we all cope with a less than stellar economy. Although we can expect an eventual recovery, the questions of when and how cause us to reflect on what lies ahead. There are, however, some things we do know: the Main Library renovation will be concluded in the new year, and will result in a fully and beautifully restored space for the entire community to utilize and enjoy; the demand for library services, already stronger than experienced in recent decades, will continue to grow and further tax our already limited resources; and all of those connected with Ferguson as volunteers and staff will find the perseverance to provide the resources and services that are vital to an educated and informed community, and are at the heart of the democracy we all enjoy.

Ernest A. DiMattia, Jr.
President, The Ferguson Library

Our Mission

The Ferguson Library, Stamford's public library, provides free and equal access to print, audiovisual and evolving electronic resources, and supports childhood education and lifelong learning through reading and other forms of communication by addressing the informational, educational, cultural and literacy needs of the Stamford community.

Our Vision

The Ferguson Library will remain the community's leading choice for information access, educational materials, and lifelong learning by continually and effectively adapting to technological and other changes in the environment.

961,580 people
visited the Library
this year, and
220,657 users
logged onto our
website remotely,
for a total of
1,182,237 users.

Our Core Values

Accelerate Promotion of Reading

Beyond providing resources—support outreach, basic literacy and lifelong learning habits.

Access

Provide convenient hours for the Stamford community and 24/7 access via the "virtual branch."

Accountability

Responsible to our community.

Creativity/Innovation

Introduce and/or adopt new technology, services and work styles.

Diversity

Embrace the numerous cultures, races and ideas in the community.

Equity

Freedom from bias or favoritism.

Intellectual Freedom

Encourage the free exchange of information and ideas in a democratic society.

Safety/Security

Create a safe and comfortable haven that is conducive to reading, studying and browsing.
Provide quality customer-driven services.

Technology Leadership

Use the latest technological advances to help provide better services.

Capital Projects

Main Library Renovation

Fiscal 2008 – 2009 saw the completion of the first two phases of the Main Library renovation project. The project began with the replacement of our aging cooling system, which will reduce energy costs over the long term. Once that was complete, work started on the fourth floor with the creation of a new computer nerve center and renovated administrative and cataloging offices. That first stage was completed at the end of December, and the fourth floor staff moved back into that newly reconfigured space after the first of the year.

Phase Two, which was nearing completion at the end of June, involved relocating the children's department to the third floor and moving all adult public service computers to the second floor, so parts of the ground floor and lower level could be reconstructed. The Passport Office was also temporarily relocated to the second floor.

The \$15 million dollar project is being funded primarily by capital budget grants from the city and some support from the state and other sources. It is the first time the Library has been renovated since the early 1980's. The project is scheduled to be finished in the spring of 2010.



Harry Bennett Branch Roof

Work began in May to replace the leaky roof on the Harry Bennett Branch. The Branch remained open during this project, with some areas temporarily restricted to the public for safety reasons. The project is expected to take about two months.

New This Year

Book-a-Librarian

The Library began offering a new research service this year. Our Book-a-Librarian service allows patrons to reserve up to one hour with a librarian for one-on-one information or technology help – anything from Internet instruction to help putting together a resume. The service has been very popular, especially with people looking for job search assistance.

The Library circulated a record 1,031,905 items this year, even with 17% fewer hours systemwide.

Social Networking

These days, it is important for libraries to have a presence in the fast changing world of social networking. That means Flickr, Twitter, blogs, etc. We post pictures of library events on our Flickr page, reachable through our website, www.fergusonlibrary.org, and even have a presence on Twitter, with fifty plus followers at year's end.

Last fall, we created an election blog with information, news feeds, etc., about the issues and candidates. We maintain other blogs all year round, including a film blog and book review blog.

Our Collection

Because of our budget difficulties, we have not been able to purchase all the books and other materials we need to maintain a healthy collection. Last year we spent only nine percent of our budget on materials, compared to a statewide average of over eleven percent. We have had to make hard decisions about which books to buy.

Even so, there were some bright spots this year. We inaugurated a modest Blu-ray DVD collection, and added some new world language CDs to the Harry Bennett Branch collection. We also purchased new language learning software called "Tell Me More," which offers online instruction in several languages, including English as a Second Language.



Technology

Website

The big news at the end of the year was our migration to a new web interface that allows more immediate updating. The look of the website is basically unchanged, with the same ease of navigation. What is different is that we now we will be able to update the site more quickly with more timely information.

The Kids Page got a whole new redesign this year, including an ambitious Stamford history page for children. That site offers a virtual tour of Stamford past and present, with wonderful archival photos of people, places and events in Stamford's history.

We also added a dedicated Seniors page with a wealth of information for seniors, including library services, health and welfare, transportation, and government services



RFID

RFID, radio frequency identification, is a fancy term for a new way of handling library materials. This year, the collection at the Harry Bennett Branch was tagged with this new technology. Eventually, the Library's entire collection will be labeled this way. Once the tagging is completed, RFID will enable the Library to handle items in our collection much more efficiently, do quick and accurate inventories, and introduce self check-out machines.

Special Events

Digital Bookmobile Visits Library



Overdrive's 74-foot long "digital bookmobile" paid a visit to the Library in August to promote digital downloading. Readers of all ages were invited to climb on board the high-tech truck and explore downloading digital books and audio through interactive demonstrations. Visitors had an opportunity to search the Library's digital media collection and learn how to download and enjoy ebooks, audiobooks, music and video.

Inauguration Broadcast

The auditorium was filled to capacity for a special live broadcast of the presidential inauguration in January. It was a unique moment that brought people from all over the community together to share this historic event. We were proud to be a part of it.

Radio Broadcast at the Library

The Ferguson Library once again got invaluable media exposure when 96.7 The Coast radio broadcast live for an entire day in front of the Library. The station highlighted Stamford as part of a series of broadcasts spotlighting local communities.



Just for Kids

Despite our budget difficulties, we were able to mount many terrific programs for children throughout the year. From our hugely popular storytimes to book discussions to art programs, our creative children's programming kept youngsters coming to the Library.

Award-winning author Amy Hest (right) was our guest author at the Jeanne Rinehart Family Program in November. She delighted the audience with the stories behind some of her books. And artist Nancy Elizabeth Wallace brought her talents to the Harry Bennett Branch for an interactive art program focused on recycling.

Halloween pumpkin carving has become a tradition at the South End Branch, and an Indian dance program at the Main Library got the audience up and moving. In April, a production of Pinocchio packed the auditorium with 250 parents and children and the beloved character Maisy (right) visited the Library, to the delight of her admirers.



Teens

The Library's teen volunteers are instrumental in helping with our children's summer reading club. They take registrations, listen to reports and generally keep the children's summer reading program running smoothly. This year, 312 teen volunteers worked 2,572 hours. The most teen volunteers ever!

Our nine industrious teen tech pages provide invaluable technology help in the Main Library and Branches. They troubleshoot with public service computers and help patrons who aren't familiar with logging on, printing, etc. Some of them have also been scanning archival photos as part of a Stamford history project. This paid internship program is part of a citywide initiative to give students interested in technology real world experience.

T-MAD, the library's teen volunteer group (right), helps plan teen programming and advise librarians on teen materials.



Programs

Because of budget constraints, we made the difficult decision to cut some long-running, high profile programs, including Poet's Voice, World of Words, and our Ferguson Flicks and Thursday Night at the Movies film programs. We also had to scale back author visits and other events. Despite these cutbacks, we were still able to offer many high quality programs throughout the year.

Job Programs

Job search/ training programs were in high demand this year. In March, the Harry Bennett Branch hosted a career coach who told an audience of fifty-five people how to keep looking for work without getting discouraged. We also offered a resume makeover class and 'speed networking' program, both which had large turn-outs. Our regular computer classes suddenly became filled with job seekers, looking to brush up on Microsoft Word, Excel and other programs vital to finding employment in today's market.

46,384 people
attended various
programs at the
Library this year.

Summer Reading Clubs

Our summer reading clubs enjoyed robust participation. In fact, this summer was record breaking – the highest number of children ever to register for summer reading: 2,957. This, in spite of a reduction in hours. Clearly, there is a strong demand for the programs and services we provide!



Book Discussions and Author Visits

Our book discussion groups draw a loyal following. A record forty-three participants turned out in August for the final meeting of a Jewish book discussion series at the Harry Bennett Branch. Author Wendy Lee (left) charmed the Harry Bennett book group in November when she talked about her book *Happy Family*, and we hosted author Lily Koppel (*Red Leather Diary*) as well.

Music and Drama

The Lumina String Quartet delighted over 100 people in February, and M & M Productions, a talented amateur theater group, performed the award-winning play "Doubt" in March.

The South End Branch hosted a poetry and jazz tribute to the late Herb Davison, a poet and long-time patron of the South End Branch. Seventy-two people came to pay their respects to this beloved member of the community.

Reaching Out

Special Needs Center

The Special Needs Center at the Ferguson Library serves parents and families whose children have disabilities. It has a large, current, broad based collection of easy-to-understand books, DVDs, magazines and other materials, as well as a bulletin board where families can learn about events and issues of interest. These specialized resources are not readily available, and the Library receives requests to borrow these items from locations all over the United States.

Staff answered 175,433 reference questions this year.

“Let’s Talk” Conversation Groups

Our “Let’s Talk” conversation groups help English language learners improve their conversational skills by chatting in informal groups. This popular program is now in its third year and runs with the help of a dedicated group of volunteers. 1,295 people attended our Let’s Talk groups at the Main Library and South End Branch this year.

I Have a Dream Writing Contest

The Library’s 6th annual “I Have a Dream” writing contest drew entries from 293 students from area schools. In honor of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., students ages 7 – 14 were asked to write about how they would bring about change in their communities. Winners (right) were chosen in two grade level categories.



Dial-a-Book/Visiting Books

Our Dial-a-Book and Visiting Book services help seniors and the homebound stay connected. Dial-a-Book mails books to homebound patrons for an extended six week loan period. The Visiting Books service brings books and other materials to residents at twelve assisted living and senior housing complexes each month.

Computer Learning

Attendance at our computer classes has been booming. 441 people took part in computer training classes this year. In March alone, ninety-five people attended five classes at the Harry Bennett Branch. Much of the interest seems to be spurred by the need to brush up on job skills. Classes run the gamut from Internet basics and Microsoft Word to PowerPoint and Excel. We also offer regular classes in Spanish and an orientation to our interactive English-as-a-Second Language program.



Business Resources

The Ferguson offers first rate business resources that include an impressive offering of web-based business databases, including Dun & Bradstreet Million Dollar Database, Business & Company Resource Center, Mergent Online, Standard & Poor's Net Advantage and Value Line, in addition to an outstanding collection of books and journals covering all aspects of business, management, economics, and finance. The Library maintains special collections related to small business and nonprofit management.

208,296 adults and 42,411 children used computers in the Library last year.

Community Partnerships

Betty Ruth and Milton Hollander, who have been generous supporters of the Library, presented the Weed Memorial & Hollander Branch with a very special gift – a charming sculpture titled “Ever the Twain Shall Meet.” The work, by artist Gary Lee Price, is a whimsical rendition of Mark Twain, with his immortal characters Tom Sawyer and Becky Thatcher, all grouped around a bench. It has become a popular spot to sit in front of the Branch.

Pitney Bowes once again funded summer Sunday hours at the Main Library with a \$35,000 grant from its Literacy and Education Fund, and the Library received a \$20,000 grant from the Fairfield County Community Foundation to support literacy programs and collections. This funding enabled us to offer programming for children while their parents participated in our “Let’s Talk” English conversation groups.

The Ferguson continues to enjoy a good working relationship with the Stamford Public Schools. Book talks, the Purple Bus, Learning Kits to Go and summer reading lists are just some of the many services we offer teachers and students.

At the South End Branch, Connecticut Light & Power once again co-sponsored the Enlightening the Mind child/adult book discussion series and the Palace Theatre partnered with the Library’s Youth Services Department to offer two free end-of-summer performances for Ferguson Library Children’s Summer Reading Club members.



Friends of Ferguson

The Friends of Ferguson is the Library's dynamic volunteer support group. The Friends once again generously funded all our programming, including summer reading clubs, author programs and book discussions for children and adults. The Friends' two used book shops, at the Main Library and Harry Bennett Branch, are the only used book stores in Stamford, and offer a unique service to the community. This year, even with sales down three percent, the book shops earned \$201,737.

What the book shops are not able to sell is re-donated through the Friend-2-Friend Free Book Program, which supplies nonprofit agencies in Stamford and elsewhere with free books (right.) Stamford teachers can choose as many books as they want for their classrooms. In addition, this year Friend-2-Friend donated books to a new community library in Chester, CT; a charter school in Hamden; CT prisons; and even to U.S. troops in Iraq.

The Friends 24th annual Literary Competition drew a record 570 entries from young writers in grades 3 – 12, who submitted selections in fiction, nonfiction or poetry. The winners were honored at an awards ceremony at the Library in April.

Authors Rosemary Wells, Jack Cavanaugh and Alice Schroeder captivated an audience of over 200 people at the 28th Book & Author Luncheon in May. The Friends added a silent auction this year and sold framed prints.



Passport Office

The downturn in the economy inevitably rippled into our passport service. We processed 7,470 passport applications at our two offices at the Main Library and Harry Bennett Branch, down 17% from the year before. This, even with marketing efforts like participation in Passport Day USA, and four weeks of advertising in area newspapers. Our passport service is an important source of funding for the Library and we are hopeful that as the economy improves the Library's passport operation will rebound as well.

The Bookmobile & Purple Bus

In July, with our other service cutbacks, we reduced Bookmobile service to just one day a week. The Bookmobile is on the road only on Wednesdays now. Even with this drastic reduction in hours, circulation was still two thirds of what it was the year before, a testament to the loyalty of Bookmobile customers, who have adjusted to the one-day schedule, and continue to find us.

The beloved Purple Bus continues to roll, bringing school children from all over Stamford to the Library (right.) This year, 2,502 preschool and school age children visited the Library on the Purple Bus. Classes and their teachers gamely climbed the back stairs when the elevator wasn't available due to the renovation.

For many children, the Purple Bus is their first introduction to the Library, and a trip they will remember for years to come.



Ferguson by the Numbers

Operating support from the city of Stamford	\$7,761,360
Revenue from Library activities	\$789,688
Salaries & staffing-related costs	\$6,465,905
Purchases of books, electronic resources & other materials	\$748,948
Items circulated	1,031,905
Visitors to the Library	961,580
Offsite Internet users	220,657
Reference questions answered systemwide	175,433
Total programs systemwide	1,591

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