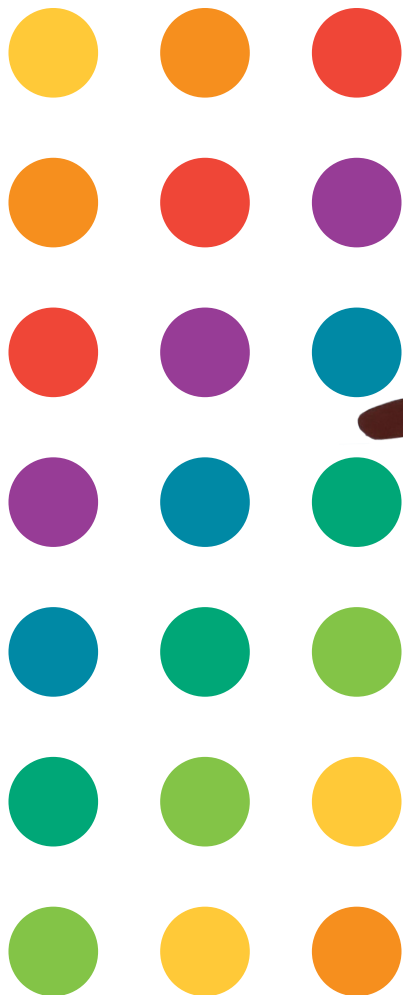


2023 Annual Report



**L.E. Phillips Memorial
Public Library**
SO MUCH MORE...

400 Eau Claire Street • Eau Claire, Wisconsin



DIRECTOR'S NOTE ●●●

As 2024 began, we celebrated the first full year of operation in our renovated home. We're still settling in, but our initial transition is complete and we've learned much about how we can best use this new space. We've already launched new initiatives, and we're looking forward to all we can accomplish with these fantastic new amenities.

To ensure we're serving the community to our full potential, we spent a lot of time in 2023 on Strategic Planning. We gathered a lot of data. We tallied a staff survey, hosted community focus groups, and conducted a large-scale customer survey resulting in over 1,200 detailed responses. We analyzed all feedback received to create an ambitious yet practical Strategic Plan designed to meet the needs of our evolving community. Now, our plan is underway.

One major theme in our new Strategic Plan involves basing decisions on solid, up-to-date data. Our Programming Committee created a special survey about events, customizing it for adults, teens, and kids. After hundreds of responses, we're using it to plan this fall's calendar of programs. Staff and customer safety are crucial factors in the new plan. Following input from staff and customers, we created a new, full-time position of Security Monitor, an individual tasked with promoting Appropriate Library Behavior and a safe and welcoming atmosphere. These are just two examples of goals we've already met, with many more to come.

We are your library, and we welcome your support and guidance. Keep giving us your valuable feedback, and drop in as often as you can to see what's new. If you haven't been in for a while, welcome back! The landscape of our beloved city is shifting faster than ever, but we're ready to support these changing needs through creative thinking and the wise investment of time and money. Downtown is the heart of Eau Claire and we strive to be the heart of downtown. Open access to collections, programs, and services is the lifeblood of a public library. Our staff is dedicated to keeping these valuable resources thriving and strong.

OUR MISSION

The library promotes lifelong learning, creates collaborative spaces, and supports open access to diverse materials and resources to enhance the quality of life in the community.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nancy Kerr". The script is fluid and cursive.

Nancy Kerr
Library Director

STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

1. MAKE THE MOST OF THE NEW BUILDING.

- Evaluate space usage.
- Optimize use of both indoor and outdoor spaces.
- Identify workflow efficiencies to optimize operations and improve performance.

2. CHAMPION PUBLIC ACCESS.

- Identify barriers to access.
- Evaluate building hours and usage patterns.
- Advocate for public parking.
- Connect community to services through outreach and marketing.

3. PROVIDE A CONSISTENT EXPERIENCE.

- Encourage a positive staff outlook toward change and growth.
- Educate customers on foundational library skills.
- Ensure consistent customer treatment through effective staff training.
- Evaluate staff structure, wages, and benefits.

4. FOSTER GOOD STEWARDSHIP OF PUBLIC INVESTMENT.

- Develop guidelines for evaluating community partnerships.
- Pursue and broaden funding opportunities.
- Assess programs and services to ensure relevance and resource efficiency.
- Advocate for fair and justifiable funding with an eye towards long-term sustainability.
- Maintain budget transparency with both staff and the community.

5. DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN DIVERSE COLLECTIONS.

- Increase collection usage.
- Reflect the unique needs of our community.
- Leverage usage data to drive collection growth.
- Interconnect collections with programs and services for mutual benefit.
- Develop collection promotions using effective strategies and evaluation methods.

6. DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN CRUCIAL PROGRAMS AND SERVICES.

- Reflect the unique wants and needs of our community.
- Develop effective tools to evaluate community impact.
- Leverage usage data to ensure continuous relevance and resource efficiency.
- Develop promotions using effective strategies and evaluation methods.

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED SO FAR ●●●

Take-Aways from the 2023 Community Survey

COLLECTIONS

While e-books and other digital materials continue to increase in popularity, the survey confirmed that print materials are still vitally important to our community. The top three selections of the “what library materials are most important to you?” question were print materials, with adult fiction books being almost 40% more popular than downloadable books and audiobooks. Given those responses, it wasn’t surprising to see that the second most popular response (behind “more parking”) to the “what library offerings would you like to see in the future?” question was “more/different physical materials to check out.” Knowing how important books continue to be, we have an entire goal devoted to developing and maintaining diverse collections, and you can bet print books will continue to be a top priority.

LIBRARY STAFF

The survey included questions to evaluate how customers feel about the level of customer service, friendliness, and expertise they receive from library staff. While the overwhelming majority (just under 90%) either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that staff are meeting those marks, there were 10–15% who either disagreed or did not have an opinion. There were many comments shared about the “awesome” and “phenomenal” library staff. There were also comments that indicated we could do a better job of providing a more consistent customer experience, which is one of our new goals. The very first thing we will work on is staff training and opportunities for all staff to learn more about the library as a whole so we can be better advocates for all of our collections, programs, and services.



SECURITY

One topic that was commented on throughout the survey was how safe people feel when they visit the library. 18% of respondents indicated they don't feel safe when visiting the library and about 25% of the respondents who said they don't use the library indicated the reason they do not is due to safety/security concerns. Unfortunately, with the return to normal library services and increase in overall number of daily visitors to the library, staff have seen an increase in violations of the Appropriate Library Behavior policy. Most violations are simple infractions related to sleeping, eating, or storing of personal possessions, but as a large public facility that had more than a quarter million visits last year, we also had a number of more serious incidents. While all staff have a responsibility to ensure a safe and welcoming environment for customers, the survey indicated a need to take the community's concerns seriously and provide more support to ensure our policies are being followed. In addition to other measures taken to make all staff more comfortable and capable of addressing issues as they arise, the library hired a full-time Security Monitor to help provide assistance in policy enforcement as well as creating more consistent and positive relationships with customers who experience challenges following guidelines. The position was funded by a one-time donation from the Connie and Pat Ulrich Trust.

PARKING AND ACCESS

A major focus of the recent renovation and expansion project was to increase accessibility throughout the building. Materials were shifted away from shelves that were either too high or too low to reach, aisles were widened, and carpeting was replaced with smooth floors more conducive to wheelchairs and walkers.



However, many respondents still perceive access to the building as difficult, citing limited parking options that require navigating a narrow ramp, crossing a street, or time limits. 34% of respondents who said they don't visit the library stated it was because of parking. And, when asked "what library offerings would you like to see in the future" 60% said "more parking options," which is more than double the number who selected the next most popular option. The library is limited in our ability to create additional parking options, but we know this is important to customers and will continue advocating for parking and access to the building at the City level. We were able to use the information from our survey to help make a case for additional parking spots in the former US Bank drive-thru lot, which added five new parking spots in the fall.

SO MUCH MORE ●●● HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2023

ALMOST 20,000 ITEMS were added to the library's physical collection. Staff kept busy selecting, ordering, cataloging, and processing all those materials. In addition, we created over 125 book displays for kids, teens, and adults to help people find their next great read.

THE CHIPPEWA VALLEY BOOK FESTIVAL held 10 free events in the library's 200-seat Riverview Room in 2023. This was the first time the library played host to such a large percentage of the Festival's offerings, and feedback from Festival organizers and customers alike was extremely positive. In addition to providing marketing, room set-up, and event staffing, the library also hosted events as a live digital streaming service.

A STRONG FOUNDATION IN LITERACY can change a person's whole life for the better, and a community of people engaged by literacy can shape a whole city for the better. In 2023, the library sustained three collaborative outreach services that provided free, high-interest books in English, Spanish, and Hmong for children ages 0 to 8.

- Eau Claire Laundromat Libraries: Delivered 1,663 books to seven laundromats.
- Chippewa Valley Little Libraries: Delivered 1,375 books to five partnering sites including a park, food pantries, a meal site, and a shelter in Eau Claire.
- Books on Buses: Provided 1,774 books on Eau Claire city buses for both kids and adults.

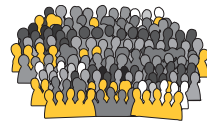
In addition, the BookBike attended 46 events, served 5,568 visitors, issued 69 new library cards, answered 38 reference questions, and checked out 1,202 books.

THE DRIVE-THRU FOR HOLDS PICK-UP was made more accessible by cutting the curb back closer to the building. This allows vehicles to pull up closer to the drive-thru window. Drive-thru checkouts made up 4% of our annual checkouts. While it was a initially a struggle for both staff and customers to find a good flow for the process, it's popularity steadily increased throughout the year.

THE AUTOMATED MATERIALS HANDLER (AMH) was in service for the entirety of 2023. The machine checked in 90% of our items. During our 2023 time study, staff spent 6,830 minutes manually checking in items over four weeks, which equates to \$1,976.89 in wages per month. While we didn't have pre-AMH data to compare, the 90% decrease in manual work suggests a significant savings.

A TEEN INTERN was added to our staff for the summer in collaboration with the Summer Teen Internship Pilot Program funded by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). Owen, our teen intern, fit in really well with our team and was a cheery presence for six weeks. He chose to do a 3D modeling and printing event for middle schoolers as his connected learning project, and it was a big success. We are incredibly proud of his accomplishments here at the library, and were very sorry to see his internship end.

2023 STATISTICS . . .



**33,042 people
attended events**



**33,236 reference
questions answered**



**20,117 public computer
sessions**



**630,853 items
checked out**



**27,644
cardholders**



**373,458 public
Wi-Fi sessions**



**266,630
in-person visits**





L.E. Phillips Memorial
Public Library

400 Eau Claire Street
Eau Claire, WI 54701

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