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BELLINGHAM PUBLIC LIBRARY

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2011 ANNUAL REPORT

“There is not such a cradle of democracy upon the earth as the Free Public Library, this republic of letters, where neither rank, office, nor wealth receives the slightest consideration.”
~Andrew Carnegie

Honorable Selectmen:

The past year, 2011, was a very busy year at the Bellingham Public Library. We continued to grow and change and met our mission: “...to be an important resource for all members of the community in their search for knowledge, ideas, information, and creative use of their leisure time.” We offer a vital town service and offer more than just a place to read and borrow books; we are a true community center that offers services to Bellingham residents of all ages. We provide not just library service, but a clean, contemporary facility for meetings of town groups of all ages.

Staff

The past year has seen a year of turnover of some key library staff. Nina Hunt, our Head of Youth Services since 2006, who revitalized children’s programming at the Bellingham Library, resigned her position in April 2010. In July, Steven Fowler took over the responsibilities as Youth Services Librarian and has increased children’s programming attendance by 30% over the previous 6 months. Also in April of 2010, Leslieanne Lavalley Costello, our Young Adult Librarian who worked with teens in our after school program, resigned her post to accept a full time position at the Norton Public Library. She was replaced by Janet Gallagher, a recent library school graduate who, in the spring of 2010, completed a for credit-internship at our library. During the time that both positions were unfilled, we hired a part-time Library Assistant, Nancy Ross.

We had a second graduate school intern, Angela Campbell, from May-July of 2011. Angela worked throughout the library assisting at the circulation and reference desks, and worked on a project in the history collection of the library. These internships, in collaboration with the Simmons College Graduate School of Library & Information Science, enable the library to get graduate level staff to work an unpaid internship for graduate school credit. We will continue to apply for interns from Simmons.

The library has continued to manage staffing levels to maintain necessary service levels. In fiscal year 2011, we were able to continue to increase some staff hours using funding from other sources including user’s fees and state aid.

Facility

As we have outlined as necessary in our long range plan, we have continued to make improvements to areas of the facility. The 22 year old library building is showing its age in both cosmetic and functional systems that need repair.

This year, with the generous donations from local businesses, we were able to begin the renovation of the area around the “Cartwheel” statue that is in front of the library. Originally the statue was surrounded by posts with a chain between the posts that over the years fell out and the area began to look run down and was occasionally the subject of minor vandalism. Also, with no protection, the statue was vulnerable to being hit by a vehicle. The statue now sits in a beautiful brick patio, instead of concrete, and is surrounded by a “wrought iron” fence that encloses the area.

In May, the library experienced problems with our fire sprinkler system that involved an expensive, over \$6000, unexpected repair. Repairs were also made to the exterior door hinges and the security alarm on all of the perimeter doors.

General Statistics

Libraries continue to be busy places in times of economic downturns, and the Bellingham Library is no exception. The number of visitors to the library averaged 320 per day, relatively unchanged from 2010.

- More than half of town residents have a library card. Almost 500 new cards were issue in 2011.
- Circulation of library materials is up 2.5% to 143,009 items in the calendar year.
- The use of the library’s computers for Internet access was up 13% for the year. This is due to the new, faster computers, we installed in July. Before the new computers we had an average of 711 sessions per month; with the new machines the average was 1365 sessions per month.
- As stated above, children’s programming attendance continues to grow. Last year 4700 children attended library programs, accompanied by almost 3000 adults.
- As use of e-book readers continue to expand, and the addition of Kindle titles to the shared library collection, ebook downloads increased from an average of 9 books per month in 2010 to almost 200 per month in 2011.

Staffing

- Total staff hours are nearly identical to 2010.
- After an increase last year of 24% in volunteer hours, this year the volunteer hours have leveled off. However, 1344 hours of service were donated to the library by members of the community last year.

Collection

- The size of the library collection has remained steady. Over the past year we have “weeded” materials that were outdated and damaged to improve the appearance of the collection.

Overall, the library has continued to maintain excellent services for the residents of the town by adjusting to the available resources and using them as wisely as possible.

MLS, CW/MARS and MBLC Affiliations

Integral to the services we provide are agencies with which the library is affiliated.

The Bellingham Library is a member of the Massachusetts Library System (MLS). MLS provides access to online databases that our patrons can access from home or in the library. These databases provide access to magazine, journal, newspaper, and reference source materials. The benefit of these databases is that they are known reliable sources to which we can refer patrons doing research for educational, information or recreational purposes. MLS also provides the delivery of library materials. Through their services, an average of 1700 items per month are shared between Bellingham and other libraries. Through the delivery system, if a Bellingham patron requests to borrow a title that the Bellingham Library either does not own or

our copy is not available, the item is received, usually within a couple of days, from one of hundreds of other libraries in the shared database.

The Central/Western Massachusetts Automated Resource Sharing (CW/MARS) is our library network. The annual dues we pay to CW/MARS funds our use of the shared database that facilitates the sharing of library materials among member libraries. CW/MARS also provides our computer network for staff and public access computing and access to a select number of research databases, as well as access to e-book titles.

The Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC) is the state agency that supports, improves and promotes library services in the Commonwealth. The MBLC certifies that libraries meet standards in order to be eligible for state aid and Library Services & Technology Act federal grants. These standards include a variety of metrics, such as the number of hours the library is open, the education level of staff and funds spent on library materials.

The 10.4% budget cut from fiscal year 2009 again prevented the library from meeting the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioner's (MBLC) Municipal Appropriation Requirement (MAR). The MAR requirement states:

“Public libraries are required to meet certain spending levels each year in order to receive state aid. Under the current system, a municipality must fund its library at 2.5% above the average preceding three years budgeted amounts. This is in order to provide balanced funding responsibilities within inter-library loan programs and continuity of library services from year to year. If a library cannot meet this requirement, it may petition for a one year waiver from the Board of Library Commissioners...”

In the fall we completed our state aid application and the waiver application. MBLC waiver applications were considered at the January 5, 2012 MBLC Board Meeting. After considering the waiver applications on January 5th, the Commissioners will vote to grant or deny waivers at their meeting on February 2, 2012. All indications are that since our cut was not disproportionate to the rest of the town budget, the waiver should be granted. Once the waiver is granted, we will be eligible for state aid and to apply for LSTA grants.

2011 at the Library

Throughout the year the Bellingham Library has provided ***free wireless Internet access*** for patrons. This year, through funds donated by Target for our “Libraries for Job Seekers” grant programming, we were able to add wireless printing. Patrons can now print to the library network printer from their own wireless devices.

Twice this year the library was able to provide emergency services to town residents in times of weather events. In late August when Hurricane Irene knocked out power to 90% of the town's residents, and again after the Halloween snow storm, the library stayed open beyond normal hours to offer services to town residents. During both storms we were a place for residents to charge their cell phones and access the Internet. During the Halloween storm, we were a warm place for those who had no heat in their homes.

The library has continued to be a gathering place for numerous community groups. In 2011 our ***Community Room*** hosted groups from all aspects of the community, including the Town of Bellingham, Boy and Girl Scout groups, sports groups of all ages, local businesses and business groups, school groups, Mom's clubs, playgroups, home schooling groups, the Polish Conversation Group, ten different condo associations, and the Bellingham Crafters.

Library staff worked to gather **publicity** to promote our programs and services. Each month we submit an article to the Bellingham Bulletin, Country Gazette and Woonsocket Call, and send updates to the Community Bulletin Board on Cable 8, the local cable television station, to keep the community apprised of library events. Our monthly Constant Contact Newsletter reaches almost 400 people each month; and the library Facebook page, to which we post reminders about library events, has over 300 “likes”.

Our new public access computers, installed in July of 2011, have enabled library patrons to more quickly complete their computer tasks. This has dramatically increased the number of public Internet sessions the library provides each month. We anticipate that having the 9 new machines will double Internet sessions this fiscal year.

The librarians and library staff continued their **professional development** by attending workshops held by CMRLS and CW/MARS. In addition, numerous staff members attended annual conferences of the Massachusetts Library Association and the New England Library Association. Bernadette Rivard, the library director is the Treasurer of the Massachusetts Library Association. Steven Fowler, Youth Services Librarian is on the Massachusetts Library Association’s Standards for Services to Youth Committee.

Two mandatory **state reports** were submitted in 2010. The Annual Report Information Survey (ARIS) was sent in mid-August; the State Aid Application was sent in October. These reports make the library eligible to receive state aid and grant funding from the MBLC. As noted above, the library has applied for a waiver to be eligible to receive state aid.

In 2011 **The Friends of the Library** funded programs, activities, and museum passes. The Friends of the Library funded \$7,635 for costs of programming and supplies and \$3,590.00 for museum passes. Without this funding, many of the wonderful programs we offer to the community would not be possible. We thank the members of the Friends for their hard work raising funds for the library year-round.

In 2011 the library’s **volunteer program** was active. We now have an average of 11 volunteers who provide over 110 hours per month of service to the library. Having reliable volunteers enables our staff to concentrate on library projects requiring specific skill or knowledge, and allowing our volunteers to contribute to the smooth running of the library.

Adult Programming

In 2011 the library hosted **lectures** on topics including: Retirement Planning; Financial Planning; Estate Planning; Medicare, Medicaid and Long Term Care Planning, as well as Period Furniture making; and a Halloween lecture from local author, Jeff Belanger.

We promoted reading with two **author events**: Local authors, Mike Remillard, author of *Squam Journal*; and Joy Ashe, author of *Gene Defense*, spoke at the library about their books.

Twice in 2011 the library offered a workshop on e-book readers to library patrons. The increase in use of Nooks, Kindles and iPads had led to a demand for not only free content for these devices, but instructions in how to use them. In addition to the workshops, in December the library hosted “Technology Petting Zoo” times, when members of the community could come to the library to compare these devices. Our aim was to provide an environment where people could use the devices to see what would best meet their needs, without pressure to purchase that can sometimes happen in a store.

We also hosted workshops on the following topics: Yoga for Adults and Pastel Painting.

In the fall of 2011, we announced the first Art Show the library has sponsored in many years and we now have a program to offer space to local artists to display their works in our community room.

Every month our Reference Librarian, Cecily Christensen, hosts a *book discussion group* that has between 8 and 12 participants. This year, in September, to commemorate the 10th anniversary of 9/11, the group read *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, by Jonathan Foer.

In addition to commemorate the 10th Anniversary of 9/11 the library screened “Rebirth” a full-length documentary that premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in January of 2011. The film follows 5 people that were directly affected, either they were injured or lost loved ones, in their journey over the past 10 years. The film was screened only two places in Massachusetts, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and the Bellingham Public Library.

Throughout the year we also screened other films, specifically classic books that had been made into feature films.

Numerous times throughout the year library staff served distance-learning college students as *proctors* for their tests and exams. In 2011, as we do every year, the library was the local facility where community members could pick up state and federal tax forms.

Staff Services

Although due to the Internet, simple reference questions are decreasing, our in-depth *reference interviews* continue to keep our reference librarian busy. Cecily Christensen provides top notch assistance to library patrons in finding information in print materials, online and in the library reference databases.

In 2011 we continued to see an increase in the demand for assistance with resume writing, *job searching* and job application. We found that many patrons needed assistance in setting up email accounts so that they could apply for jobs online. Many retailers and other service industry employers no longer accept paper applications; the only way to apply for these jobs is online. Patrons without Internet access or experience often come to the library for assistance in applying for jobs. In July of 2011 we were notified that we had been awarded an LSTA Grant in the amount of \$7000 to assist job seekers. This programming has begun and will continue throughout 2012.

Our *Circulation Staff* is the backbone of the daily operation of the library. Their exceptional customer service skills keep the library operating on a smooth basis every day. Whether it is answering phone calls, assisting patrons in locating library materials, working the check out desk or maintaining order in the library, the value of their contribution cannot be overestimated. We are continuing to adjust to the loss of part time staffing and hours. To their credit, the library staff has stepped up and continues to offer exceptional customer service every day.

Children's Services

Children's programming continues to be the library's most well attended, and in demand service. This year of transition has been an exciting one. With the loss of Nina Hunt, we experienced a couple of months with limited services to children. But as soon as Steven Fowler, our new Youth Services Librarian, joined us in July, almost every day he had events planned for children of all ages. Programming in 2011 included two to three weekly sessions of *Ring-A-Ding-A-Sing Thing* for preschoolers. It is our most popular program, which has attracted as many as 100 people with an average of 40 people attending each session.

Other programs offered in 2011: Kids Cook; Home Schooling Classes; Celtic Dancing, Percy Jackson Party; Fun & Games; Family Game Night; Kids Yoga, Wimpy Kid Party; Harry Potter Party; Digital

Scavenger Hunt; Country Club; Stuffed Animal Sleepover; How Well Do You Know Your Best Friend; Brain Teasers; Good Old Story Time; Alphabits; Doodles; History Adventures; Mother Daughter Book Club; Magic School Bus; Chapter One; Cryptids; Spooky Bingo; Let it Fly; National Gaming Day; Be a Marine Biologist; Gwendolyn the Pig; Thanksgiving Dessert; Artrageous; Cinquain Poetry; Twisted Fairy Tales; Improv; Halloween Storytime, Party, Parade & Movie; Gingerbread Man(ia); Polar Express; Drum Away the Blues; Giant Candyland and a New Year's Eve Party!

The theme for this year's summer reading program was "***One World, Many Stories.***" Throughout the summer, to support our effort to increase summer reading by children, the library offered many events to encourage summer reading, including storytellers, puppet shows, animal shows and a wizard show. We supported the school curriculum by adding school summer reading titles to our collection.

Young Adult Services

At least two days a week, when school is in session, the Community Room was transformed into "***Teen Zone,***" a supervised after school program where there are numerous activities for middle and high school student participation. Not only is there homework help, a place to socialize with friends and a supportive environment, there is fun! We have an XBOX, Wii and Playstation 2 for the teens to play fun, educational and competitive games. When the 2011 school year resumed, "Teen Zone" was changed to "***After School Caf ***" to encourage more middle school children, who weren't yet teens, to participate.

In addition to the regular after school programs, Janet Gallagher, our Young Adult Services Librarian, has offered numerous other programs of interest to these middle and high schoolers. These included: Trivia Night; College Planning; Henna Day; Teen Yoga, Mother Daughter Book Club and a Red Cross Babysitter Training Course.

In addition, the library has a Teen Advisory Board, a group of teens who meet monthly to participate in decision making not only for the focus of the "After School Caf " program, but also to assist with selection of library materials that are of interest to teens.

In closing, the Library Director, Library Staff and Library Trustees wish to thank the community for its continued support of the library. To quote Henry Ward Beecher, "A library is not luxury but one of the necessities of life." We are proud to continue to provide this necessity to the community and strive to continue to meet the changing needs of our residents.

Respectfully submitted,



Bernadette Rivard, Library Director
Suzanne Garten, Chair
Michael Carr
Russell Lafond

Kenneth Hamwey, Vice Chair
Lisa Hanson