

Hamilton Township Public Library

2023 Annual Report to

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Respectfully Submitted

Scott A. Chianese

LIBRARY DIRECTOR

Introduction: It is with pleasure that I present to you the 2023 Hamilton Township Public Library Annual Report. As mandated by the Library Board of Trustees, this report not only summarizes our service levels for 2023, but comments on the overall health of the library within the context of our Strategic Plan.

The library understands its role as a vital resource for our residents, and we are committed to providing the best possible service to our community. The library continues to make the best and most responsible use of the funding provided by taxpayer monies to serve the wishes and needs of Hamiltonians, with dedication to our vision and mission as our guide. Beyond the needs of our residents, the library's primary concern remains the financial stability of our institution. Essential financial support from our Friends organization aids in our undertaking, as does generous support from our Mayor and Township.

The reader may notice that comments do not exist in areas for which noteworthy progress was not made in 2023. This does not indicate that the stated goals do not remain vital to the future success of the library.

Strategic Initiative #1: Service Excellence

Hamilton Free Public Library exists to meet the needs of the community. We are focused on the customer experience and anticipate user needs. We provide consistent, convenient, friendly, knowledgeable services. We recognize that an important part of our job is to communicate effectively so that the community is aware of and can take full advantage of Library services, resources and programs. We actively seek out best practices and adapt to the needs of Hamilton.

Goal: Offer customer-focused service throughout the organization.

Objectives:

- *Evaluate workflow, staffing levels and budget allocation to maximize customer satisfaction with resources and services.*

- *Provide clear and accessible communication with Library visitors and patrons, both physically and digitally.* This year, in answer to confusion caused by the various renditions of our name, we were officially rebranded the Hamilton Township Public Library. Once this took effect, new signage was prepared to reflect this change. The signs on Justice Samuel A. Alito Jr. Way were replaced by Department of Public Work's constructed wooden structures with yellow lettering to match our official township colors. The labelling above the front entryway of the building is also in the process of being modified.

Goal: Strive to provide service excellence, keeping up with current trends, and evolving community needs.

Objectives:

- *Incorporate continuous improvement and ongoing evaluation into all Library operations and services.* In order to protect against illegal downloading of copyrighted material and information using our WIFI network, content filtering was added to our firewall. Rather than replace the entire system, modifications were made to the current version to save taxpayer

dollars. Changes to our cyber insurance policy required upgrades to our current employee practices and security, including the installation of multifactor authentication on all workstations, laptops, servers and email.

- ***Gather, evaluate and implement best practices from other libraries, and adapt them to our operation, as appropriate.*** Reflecting advances in the distribution procedure evidenced in neighboring libraries, we were able to convert the majority of the passes from our ever-growing Museum Pass Program to a printable/downloadable version. Patrons can now obtain their pass at home, and no longer need be concerned with the pickup and return time constraints instituted in the previous system. The ease of use of this process has already generated increased usage of our passes. Should they choose, patrons may still pick up disposable passes at the library.

- ***Evaluate Library policies and procedures against current trends and evolving community needs to improve the experience of all Library users.***

- ***Create innovative services and programs and share with other libraries and our community.*** Continuing our efforts to provide stimulating programming and events, we collaborated with the Emergency Education and Development group to provide patrons with a bleeding control class. State certified instructors experienced in emergency services shared techniques with attendees, giving them the ability to recognize life-threatening bleeding and act quickly and effectively to control it. Local musician and entertainer Charlie Zahm returned for the first time since the pandemic to perform Irish and Scottish tunes in honor of the St. Patrick's Day holiday. Children's programming continues to be offered on an almost daily basis, with creative and interactive events including music programs by Tim Hoh and Jim Gaven, drop-in story times, crafts and activities. All of these programs were provided without expense to taxpayers due to sponsorship by our Friends of the Library organization.

Strategic Initiative #2: Access to Information

The free exchange of ideas and access to information are fundamental tenets of a democratic society. The Library is committed to the principles of intellectual freedom. We provide free access to information and resources that our users need and want. We respect and protect the privacy and confidentiality of our users. We affirm the American Library Association's "Library Bill of Rights."

Goal: Make the Library easier to use for everyone.

Objectives:

- ***Evaluate policy, economic, language, cultural, and physical barriers to reduce or eliminate barriers to access.*** In response to the current rise in material challenges throughout the nation, wording was added to our policies to clearly define the process to be followed should a member of the community propose that an item be removed from our collection. The Library Board of Trustees voted unanimously in support of the American Library Association's Freedom to Read Statement, demonstrating their steadfast belief in a patron's right to choose.

- ***Explore techniques to better market and promote the collection.***

● ***Reach out to special client groups such as youth, teens, seniors, persons with disabilities, English language learners, underserved communities, etc., to meet their needs.*** The library is collaborating with the New Jersey Department of Human Services Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services to provide information and Naloxone (Narcan) on sight to those in need. We host twice a week, free English as a Second Language (ESL) classes offered by Literacy New Jersey, helping patrons to improve their speaking, grammar, reading and writing skills. Additionally, this need is addressed through our connection with a local business, The Goodwill. Here, patrons can take advantage of ESL classes as well as math instruction in a classroom setting at no cost to attendees. The library works closely with the Township Health Department hosting vaccine clinics, and we continue to promote the health of the community with displays in conjunction with the Mayor's Wellness Campaign. Our Friend's organization responded to a request from Preferred Care at Hamilton Nursing and Rehabilitation Center with a donation of books for residents that are unable to visit the library in person.

Goal: Increase staff and public awareness of what we do and what we have.

Objectives:

- ***Raise public awareness by promoting services, materials, and programs.***
- ***Ensure that all staff are fully conversant with Hamilton Free Public Library's collections, resources, policies, and procedures.***
- ***Share the Library's core values with staff and community.***
- ***Improve and increase outreach efforts.*** Library staff conduct off site visits to many community schools, providing information about resources, offering library card signup opportunities and supplying materials to borrow. We participate in the National Night Out each year, sharing our message with the community regarding our collection, services and events. To increase our digital footprint on social media, we have created a presence on Instagram. This utilizes our website and is directly linked to our Facebook account, which drives traffic to that platform and has led to a dramatic increase in followers. Our township historian provides outreach through the presentation of programs to local community organizations throughout the year.

Goal: Create ways to reach patrons who cannot or do not visit the Library.

Objectives:

- ***Continually assess the needs of our Hamilton resident population, including non-drivers and homebound residents.***
- ***Create partnerships with government entities and nonprofit organizations to provide access to Library collections and services.*** Our successful working relationship with the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program continued, providing free help from IRS-certified volunteers. Patrons making \$54,000 or less, persons with disabilities, the elderly and limited English speakers were eligible. During American Heart Month we teamed with the Hamilton Township Health Department in conjunction with Rutgers Pharmacy students and Olden Pharmacy employees to provide blood pressure and glucose screenings to community members. We host the Police Department's Safety Town program each summer, as well as tours and programs they

run throughout the school year. This past fall, the library worked closely with the Mayor and various organizations throughout the township in support of the John O. Wilson Neighborhood Community Center children's winter coat drive, assisting in their goal of collecting 500 new coats for disadvantaged boys and girls in the community.

Strategic Initiative #3: Learning Organization

We believe that we provide the best possible Library services when we are engaged in professional development. We consciously and continuously seek to gain new knowledge and skills. We are in a state of continuous assessment and adaptation. Everyone's contribution is valued. There is a clear, shared, inspiring vision, and a strong sense of shared purpose.

Goal: Be a responsive, evolving organization.

Objectives:

- *Recognize exceptional individual and group performance, innovation, collaboration, creative problem-solving, and continuous learning.* A staff member that has been an exemplary employee over many years of service at the entry level position was promoted. He has fulfilled various roles, completed projects quickly, thoroughly and without objection, and demonstrated initiative and leadership potential. This increase was well deserved, and will also serve to improve morale and a dedication to service.
- *Create the optimal workforce for the Library's future; identify appropriate workload staffing levels necessary for running operations; strive to attract and retain a staff that reflects the diversity of our community.*
- *Share knowledge throughout the organization, and encourage staff to avail themselves of both onsite and offsite professional development opportunities.*
- *Actively practice open, honest communication*
- *To the extent that it is fiscally possible, financially support professional development of staff.*
In order to ensure the ability of staff to take advantage of professional development opportunities, a line item was added into our budget to address fees associated with programs, seminars and other offerings under this category.

Strategic Initiative #4: Lifelong Learning and Enjoyment

Hamilton has a proud heritage of diversity and inclusion, and is strongly committed to education and learning. The Library has an important role in providing services and resources to people of all ages and abilities. We promote early literacy through innovative and creative children's programming. We work with educational institutions to ensure academic success for all. We reach out to teens, adults, seniors and special client groups to make sure we are meeting their needs. We instill a love of reading by demonstrating and communicating our own enthusiasm and joy. We provide materials, programs and resources that entertain, inspire and inform all members of the community.

Goal: Promote literacy and the love of reading and learning for all ages.

Objectives:

- ***Develop opportunities for staff and the public to cultivate and share their love of reading.***

Each month, our “For the Love of Reading” book club provides an in-person setting for readers to converse and discuss shared interests. Local authors hosted events where they discussed new works with patrons and read passages from their books. Nicole Gonzalez presented “The Book Every Teen Should Read: Discovering Your Self-Worth, Positive Mindset and Personal Values”, introducing teens to the power of personal development and providing dozens of strategies on how to grow into your best self. Author Donna Chmara related moving experiences from her past during her presentation of “Surviving Genocide: Personal Recollections”. Previously mentioned participation in outreach to local schools and township events allow us to promote literacy to community members outside of the library.

- ***Develop programs in support of, and in coordination with, the collection.*** This year’s Fourth Annual Scarecrow Contest included a day of activities for children as well as a program entitled “Ghost Hunting in New Jersey” for our more mature visitors. In celebration of Black History month, we welcomed performer and storyteller Michelle Washington Wilson to share the story of abolitionist and women’s suffrage supporter Harriet Tubman. Ms. Wilson has more than 30 years’ experience telling stories that relate Harriet’s connection to our area, including her role as a conductor on the Underground Railroad’s path through Mercer County. The library offered a screening of the Emmy-award winning film “They Survived Together”, the story of a Jewish family’s escape from Poland during World War II. This was followed by a Q&A session with director John Rokosny and producer Andriette Redman. Library staff created and host a monthly scrapbooking club using materials from the collection to develop ideas. Our children’s department schedules various musical and craft related performances on a regular basis, often accompanied by activities and giveaways consisting of crafts, school supplies, and other fun and educational materials.

Goal: Build, manage and evaluate our collection in order to meet the educational, recreational, and cultural needs of the community.

Objectives:

- ***Evaluate community and patron desires and make sure they are reflected in our collection.***

- ***Define the role of the collection and the appropriate balance for types of materials, including formats, age levels and subjects.***

- ***Provide easy, user-focused access to the collection.***

Goal: Use technology to provide innovative Library services and to reach out to remote users.

Objectives:

- ***Evaluate our integrated library system to ensure optimum customer service and financial stewardship.*** We continued to improve system-wide service by replacing outdated hardware with increased backup storage on the Cloud. Savings were realized by choosing this software only option rather than purchasing new hardware and licensing. This choice also provides more security and offers future room for growth. The library practices due diligence with regard to

contracted technical support, requesting proposals on a regular basis to guarantee we receive the best return on our investment.

- *Use the interactive potential of the catalog and website to get feedback from our users.*

Strategic Initiative #5: Cultural Center

Hamilton is a dynamic hub of cultural activities and civic engagement. The Library builds and engages in mutually beneficial relationships with other community groups and organizations to create a vibrant web of community activity. We are a full partner in finding solutions for community problems that are consistent with our Mission and willingly accept our role in community improvement and government. We are a physical place and a virtual destination where people and ideas connect. We are a repository of local history and heritage. We are a clearinghouse for community information.

Goal: Offer programming which serves the needs and interests of the Hamilton community.

Objectives:

- *Improve Library-wide coordination, planning, and evaluation of programming.*

- *Work in collaboration with other organizations (libraries, schools, businesses) and cultural institutions to develop, co-sponsor and publicize programs.* The library endeavors to connect with more and different organizations each year to provide entertaining and educational programming to our community. The library collaborated with a coalition of home inspectors, realtors, attorneys, and title agents to present a program entitled “Home Buyers Workshop: How to Buy a Home in Today’s Market”. We hosted a program on powers of attorney, living wills, trusts, asset protection and healthcare proxies held by an attorney with over 50 years’ experience as an Assistant Prosecutor, Newark Municipal Court Judge and member of the New Jersey Bar Association Committee on Estate Planning. We were delighted to welcome back the Hamilton Township School’s Art Show for the first time since the pandemic, displaying works by talented local students throughout the month of March, including a program and awards ceremony for family and friends. Local artists continue to be solicited to display their paintings, sculpture, photos and much more, beautifying the library building and grounds, and demonstrating the importance of the library as a cultural destination. We lent support to a local girl scout troop’s endeavors to collect reusable bags for area food banks and shelters backed by efforts from the New Jersey Clean Communities Council and New Jersey Food Council. We worked closely with the Hamilton Township Historical Society to present a wide variety of programs about the area, and our Children’s Department continues to work hand in hand with the Hamilton Township Police and local schools throughout the year to offer “Safety Town” programming.

Goal: Optimize the use of meeting rooms.

Objectives:

- *Maintain a centralized listing where all events and programs held in the Library can be posted.* Event information is provided electronically via the library webpage and calendar, which also includes links to our Facebook and previously mentioned Instagram account. In addition, this material is shared with the township so that it may be circulated to subscriber’s

township-wide via weekly emails. Our Children's department creates paper copies of monthly schedules for distribution, and bulletin boards and a digital sign in our lobby are used exclusively to post upcoming library programs.

- ***Communicate to the community the availability of and limitations on the use of meeting rooms.*** Information regarding our ever-popular meeting space is available via a link on our website that leads to an explanation of their use and restrictions. Room request forms can be accessed and completed digitally, or delivered in person to the library. This year the library was contracted to serve as the meeting place for the Weight Watchers organization. Seminars occur three times per week, generating \$1,600 in revenue per month for the library. We continue to serve as the emergency evacuation location for Grice Middle School.

Strategic Initiative #6: Stewardship

The township of Hamilton, its residents and businesses provide us with the funds to operate the Library and expect us to maintain the highest levels of efficiency and integrity. We practice transparent governance and align our financial resources with our institutional goals and priorities. We recognize that our financial resources are finite and we actively pursue alternative sources of funding

Goal: Develop a comprehensive plan to maintain and upgrade Library infrastructure (building, grounds, technology) to ensure safety, efficiency and the delivery of excellent Library service. Balance opportunities for improvement against costs.

Objectives:

- ***Determine and plan for upkeep-, upgrade- and replacement-costs for all systems on a continuing basis.*** Our technical support company reworked the cabling in our public computer area, replacing and repairing frayed wires, organizing cable runs to make them more manageable, and relocating box ports to raised surfaces to prevent trip hazards. Per a recommendation from our Public Works Department, the library established a preventative maintenance contract for our two boilers that had not existed before. A three-year agreement was accepted with a guarantee of no rate increase during that time. The library received a proposal to replace the largest components of our air conditioning system through the PSE&G Direct Install Program. Taking advantage of this offer will result in the replacement of the chiller and electric HVAC system, consisting of the air handler and wall mounted cooler (this project will be completed in 2024). The floor of our large meeting room was redone using an epoxy coating with a topcoat of polyurethane, the result being a surface guaranteed to last a minimum of ten years without need for repair or replacement.

- ***Explore with the Township of Hamilton, opportunities to reduce the environmental impact of the Library.*** The library is working with local business Terracycle to keep candy and snack wrappers out of our landfills by collecting them for reuse in products they manufacture. Our continued participation in the Sustainable Shelves program offered by our materials provider allows for the resale or recycling of materials removed from the collection, avoiding discarding. The aforementioned replacement work provided through the PSE&G Direct Install program will incorporate energy efficient units into our HVAC system.

Goal: Make the best use of available space.

Objective:

- ***Regularly evaluate the use of Library spaces, making changes as needed, within fiscal limitations.*** Our efforts to grow the outdoor sculpture park, with the help of local residents and the assistance of township personnel, continues to be met with success. This year four additional pieces were added, including a donation from our own Grounds for Sculpture. Artwork created by the Trenton Community A-Team, a nonprofit organization which supports, develops, and promotes self-taught local artists, is currently displayed throughout the building. Most of the artists that contributed works are patrons of the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen, where a weekly art program is held.

Goal: Align our budget with institutional goals and priorities, and ensure our budget process is open and transparent.

Objectives:

- ***Develop a budget process that actively encourages staff and public input.***
- ***Raise our cost consciousness and encourage staff participation in cost containment efforts.***
- ***Demonstrate operating efficiencies to the community.*** The library established a relationship with a new pest control company that will offer the same services as our previous provider but at state contract pricing. This will allow for savings and also keep us in line with other township departments, which can be beneficial during contract negotiations. Following a recommendation from our township chief financial officer, the library consolidated several accounts and transferred them to a new bank that charges lower fees. Our participation in the PSE&G sponsored program replacing the largest components of our HVAC equipment will result in a savings estimated at \$330,000 (80% of the total project cost, the maximum incentive allowed). We will also garner savings from the energy efficient replacement units projected at almost \$1,500 per month. The library takes full advantage of the generosity of our community members, utilizing donated materials to replace damaged items and adding other items that were not previously owned to the collection.

Goal: Broaden our resources.

Objectives:

- ***Maintain a centrally coordinated volunteer program that includes training and recognition of volunteers.***
- ***Explore ways to increase resources through community and Library partnerships, fundraising and grants.*** Our fundraising efforts grew exponentially this year, accomplished through the addition of several new events created, developed and hosted by library staff. The library presented flea markets (summer and fall) and vendor's fairs (spring and winter), with all four events selling out quickly. Demand from both sellers and buyers has been so great plans are already being made to offer both of these programs again in 2024. In addition, renowned spiritual medium Rich Braconi offered a program on-site in which half of the proceeds were donated to the library. Various large ticket items were donated to the library by several organizations and individuals, including a microfiche machine from the Corporate Giving Division of New Jersey Manufacturers Insurance Company, a white board for use in our meeting

room from the Hamilton Township Schools transition program, and three new benches for our outdoor space were contributed by individual members of our Friends of the Library organization. Accepting these items will allow us to utilize taxpayer funds on other endeavors. The financial support we receive from our Friends organization is essential, enabling us to provide goods and services at no cost to the library or our public, including a wide variety of programming

*** *End* ***