

Hamilton Township Public Library

2024 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 2024 Hamilton Township Public Library Annual Report. As mandated by the Library Board of Trustees, this report not only summarizes our service levels for 2024, but comments on the overall health of the library within the context of our Strategic Plan.

As the library enters its 50th year serving the Hamilton community from the Justice Samuel A. Alito Jr. Way location, we understand our role as a vital resource for residents. We are committed to providing our patrons the best possible service and responsibly expending taxpayer monies with dedication to our vision and mission as our guide. Essential financial support from our Friends organization aids in this undertaking, as does generous support from our Mayor and Township employees.

The reader may notice that comments do not exist in areas for which noteworthy progress was not made in 2024. 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.* We continue to update our name in all representations after officially rebranding as the Hamilton Township Public Library in 2023, replacing signage above the front entryway and redesigning library cards to reflect the change as well. The Township sign shop now creates lawn signs for the wide variety of programs that we host, which we place on our grounds and surrounding roadways to announce upcoming events to the public. We will be adding a large “Around Town” style sign near our parking lot entrance this year to be used exclusively for the promotion of library happenings.

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.* Each year we replace some out-of-date computers with more modern machines. We do this on a rotating basis to help staff provide quicker service and to allow patrons the ability to utilize a wider range of electronic applications. In addition, all our machines were

updated to the latest computer operations system (Windows 11) as support of the previous edition was discontinued by Microsoft, and our security software was no longer compatible. The new system will keep our public computers functional, and will make repairs easier for our contracted IT assistance and less intrusive for library patrons as fixes can be done remotely after the library is closed.

- ***Gather, evaluate and implement best practices from other libraries, and adapt them to our operation, as appropriate.***

- ***Evaluate Library policies and procedures against current trends and evolving community needs to improve the experience of all Library users.*** Noticing a rise in senior living developments in our area, the Board agreed to reduce the annual library card fee for non-residents over the age of 65 from \$75 to \$10 to assist those in the community that may already face financial hardship.

- ***Create innovative services and programs and share with other libraries and our community.*** Library staff collaborated with community partners to create a Seed Library to provide vegetable seeds at no charge to food insecure residents in hopes of building self-reliance among gardeners of all experience levels. Participants were encouraged to return and share their seeds at the end of the growing season so that the program may resume next year. Our Friends of the Library organization continues to provide funding so we may present entertaining and educational programming at no cost to taxpayers, including events celebrating African, Irish, Latino and other cultures. A wide variety of children's programming is offered almost daily, such as music programs, interactive story times, crafts and activities.

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.*** Township personnel improved walkway access for patrons restricted to wheel chairs by restoring our curb cuts, and also installed more benches along the approaches to our building for visitors that are unable to make the entire trip without a break. We continue to monitor the legislative status of the Freedom to Read Act bill and intend to modify our policy on material challenges when it is made into law.

- ***Explore techniques to better market and promote the collection.*** Posts promoting the addition of new material to the collection appear on social media and our website on a regular basis, as do new electronic resources that patrons can access remotely. The Director participated

in a radio interview with a local high school during National Library Week to discuss the wide variety of resources the library offers.

- ***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 works closely with a variety of organizations and individuals to ensure that all members of our diverse community are served. A “navigator” from the New Jersey Senior SAVE Program was on hand to provide flyers and information, and to sign up eligible residents. Students from the Mercer County Community College Nursing Honors Society performed community service at our location, distributing pamphlets on education and strategies to prevent illness. The previously mentioned reduction of the non-resident senior library card fee will encourage users that previously could not afford a card to register. In observation of Great American Smokeout Day, members of the RWJ Smoking Cessation Program hosted an information table with resources to help people quit smoking and vaping. We continue to promote community health in league with the Township Health Department through the Mayor’s Wellness Campaign.

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

Objectives:

- ***Raise public awareness by promoting services, materials, and programs.*** We continue to utilize our website and social media presence to promote events and share information regarding provided services, and this year have added a monthly email newsletter to reach library patrons directly. Our Friend’s organization supplied funds for us to advertise upcoming program dates and descriptions in our local newspaper, “The Hamilton Post”.

- ***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.*** Staff conduct visits to community schools, offering library card signup opportunities and providing books for borrowing. The library started sending out a monthly e-newsletter, “The Library Ledger”, to proactively contact members of the community and share programming and event information, important policy changes, and various other news. Our township historian continued his outreach to local senior groups, whose members often have difficulty visiting our site due to physical limitations. This year’s trips included presentations at the Evergreen Senior Community Center, the St. Raphael’s Church Elderberry Club, and the Juniper Village at Hamilton Assisted Living Center, among others. We anticipated attending the National Night Out that was cancelled due to inclement weather, but were once again able to send representatives to Oktoberfest to share resource and program information, and promote our Friend’s group by handing out free materials from their shelves.

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.*** Working in collaboration with the office of Assemblyman Wayne DeAngelo, the library served as a drop-off location for their “Sock-tober” sock collection drive for homeless members of the community. The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program returned in 2024 to again provide free tax help for qualifying individuals, and we work closely with the Hamilton Police Department’s Safety Town program throughout the year. The library also partnered with “She’s the First”, an organization formed to promote educational equity and empower women, to collect hygiene products for those in need.

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 junior member of the staff was promoted for demonstrating a willingness to fulfill needs in a variety of different roles, including volunteering to serve in the capacity of a public notary, coordinating the interlibrary borrowing and loaning of materials with libraries throughout the state, and designing promotional flyers and signage at a level that far surpassed previous efforts.

- ***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.*** After thorough vetting of candidates, a vacated part-time reference librarian position was filled by an applicant that is a Hamilton resident with decades of experience.

- ***Share knowledge throughout the organization, and encourage staff to avail themselves of both onsite and offsite professional development opportunities.*** A member of our staff attended the Super Library Supervisor training seminar sponsored by LibraryLinkNJ that consisted of four sessions over several weeks. The workshops culminated with remarks from their Executive Director at a graduation ceremony for successful attendees.

- ***Actively practice open, honest communication***

- ***To the extent that it is fiscally possible, financially support professional development of staff.*** Each year, the library budgets funds specifically for the purpose of professional development, and shares the details of offerings from a wide variety of library affiliated organizations.

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.***

Our local writing club has come under new leadership and rebranded itself the Hamilton Creative Writers and Poets group, working together at their weekly meetings to assist one another with their work. The former leader conducted a meet-and-greet event with local authors before stepping down, where new and previously written works available for loan from our collection were presented and discussed. One local author presided over a solo event several weeks later, recounting the painful struggles of his daughter's addiction as seen through his eyes. This was held at no cost to the library, the author simply hoping his presentation would educate attendees in similar circumstances and give them ways to cope. Other literary presentations included "Travel Suggestions for Black, Brown and Intellectual Folk" with a local author who accomplished her research on site, and a masterful musical rendition of Washington Irving's classic, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow". Our "For the Love of Reading" book club continues to provide an in-person setting for readers to converse and discuss shared interests on a monthly basis.

- ***Develop programs in support of, and in coordination with, the collection.*** With the generous support of our Friend's organization we are able to present programs throughout the year, attracting patrons to our library so that we may share resources on a wide range of topics. In 2024 these programs included exploring America's Natural Parks as well as travel tips for the nations of Iceland and Japan, and a local author's showcase presented by our Creative Writer's Group. We celebrated Black History Month with presentations on the Great Migration and Zawadi African Dance, Irish heritage with the Music of Ireland on St. Patrick's Day, Women's History with A Musical Tribute to Women, and Latino culture with a Musical Celebration of Latino Heritage. For our younger patrons, Bright Star Touring Theater presented the children's classics "Winnie the Pooh" and "Alice In Wonderland", and the Trenton Coin Club shared a program entitled "Coin Collecting for Youngsters".

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.***

The demand for remote electronic access to information continues to grow, and in response we have added several new resources to help fill the needs of our community. For adults, we now offer CreativeBug, an unlimited-access database that provides thousands of closed captioned,

downloadable DIY arts & crafts videos. There's also ComicsPlus, which delivers access to 28,000+ titles in their collection, and patrons will never have to wait on hold or be limited in the number of titles they can borrow. And lastly Brainfuse, an online tutoring company that allows patrons access to real-time assistance available in English and Spanish for all subjects. Brainfuse programs come in three categories: HelpNow, which provides homework help for patrons of all ages; VetNow, which was developed with veterans and their families in mind, helping them to understand and apply for the benefits they are eligible for from local, state, or federal programs; and JobNow, which connects users with career coaches and resources to assist them during all stages of their job search. At the request of library patrons, we added "The Trentonian" newspaper in digital format, providing electronic access to their archives from the year 2000 until today. In addition, we expanded our offerings of "The Times" digital edition to include the "Times Historical Archive/Trenton Evening Times" dating back to 1883. For children, we have added ABC Mouse at Home, which allows users to create customized lessons that can be targeted to help a child improve in specific skill areas identified by assessments. In addition, we now provide kids access to TumbleBooks and TumbleMath, e-book databases with no check-out times or wait lists. These resources teach children the joys of reading and math using stories that combine animation, narration, and sound to create a compelling and enticing experience.

- ***Define the role of the collection and the appropriate balance for types of materials, including formats, age levels and subjects.*** Our Township Historian has been in close contact with several township departments in an effort to collect and preserve materials from their archives that reflect local history, preventing their loss as these files were scheduled to be discarded.

- ***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.***

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

The library receives requests for material purchases, programming ideas and other suggestions through our website and social media. We utilize the previously mentioned monthly e-newsletter to proactively contact members of the community to share important updates.

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 continually seeks to connect with a wide variety of organizations to provide entertaining and educational programming for the community, and this year was no different. We partnered with Penn Medicine-Princeton Health with support from the Mayor's Wellness Campaign to present a Virtual Dementia program that allowed visitors to experience the symptoms caused by this disorder. We worked with the Mercer County Park Commission to coordinate a series of events including displays, story hours and hands-on activities, strengthening our mutually beneficial bond with the local Tulpehaking Nature Center. The Board President attended a ceremony in celebration of the Hamilton Baha'is beginnings, accepting a financial award on our behalf "in honor of the dedication, tireless work and accomplishments of the library for the benefit of our residents". We host community blood drives on an almost monthly basis in collaboration with the Miller-Keystone Blood Center and the American Red Cross, and welcomed the Nottingham Garden Club ("Expert Gardening Tips") and the Central New Jersey Lead & Healthy Homes Coalition ("Keeping a Healthy Home") so that they could offer free programs to the public. We were pleased to welcome back the Hamilton Township School's Annual Art Show, displaying works by talented local students throughout the month of March and hosting two separate awards ceremonies to help mitigate concerns regarding overcrowding and parking issues. In addition, we worked with the Township Health Department to host influenza and vaccine clinics.

Goal: Optimize the use of meeting rooms.

Objectives:

- ***Maintain a centralized listing where all events and programs held in the Library can be posted***
- ***Communicate to the community the availability of and limitations on the use of meeting rooms.***

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.*** Thanks to the efforts of individuals throughout several township departments,

the library was able to procure substantial federal grant monies that will allow us to complete renovation projects concerning our restrooms and windows, and replace furniture in our children's area. A proposal initiated in 2023 to replace components of our HVAC system through the PSE&G Direct Install Program was completed this year, allowing us to take advantage of 80% savings on the machinery and labor with expected savings on future electrical costs. Our basement hallways were refinished in the same manner as our previously completed meeting rooms, resulting in a surface guaranteed for many years of maintenance free use. A large retractable door original to the libraries' construction in 1975 was replaced, and walkway railings were installed on both the main and lower entryway ramps to assist visitors that have difficulty accessing the building. We replaced our outdated production and backup servers, whose hardware was no longer supported, with a new Microsoft Hyper V server and cloud backup service, ensuring that hosted files, applications and security of our Windows network are not lost due to failure.

● ***Explore with the Township of Hamilton, opportunities to reduce the environmental impact of the Library.*** To encourage the use of sustainable products, the library purchased shopping baskets for patrons to utilize while inside the library, replacing disposable plastic bags with a more durable product. The library partnered with BookDrop, a recycling company that will allow us to eliminate the addition of discarded and damaged books to local landfills by accepting books in any condition. We also continue our participation in the Sustainable Shelves program offered by our materials provider, where materials in reusable condition are collected for resale rather than discarded. The aforementioned HVAC work incorporated more energy efficient units into our system, the upcoming window replacement project will employ state of the art materials that will reduce temperature loss/gain throughout the building, and the planned restroom upgrades will lead to a decrease in water usage.

Goal: Make the best use of available space.

Objective:

● ***Regularly evaluate the use of Library spaces, making changes as needed, within fiscal limitations.*** With funds donated by our Friend's organization we were able to replace our lobby display cabinets with lighter yet sturdier units that included interior illumination. The previous cabinets were gifted to the Civil War and Native American Museum in Veteran's Park. In addition, our local history display case was moved from the basement hallway to the main room on our first level to allow for better exposure to the public. Three picnic benches were added to our grounds to provide space for visitors to relax and enjoy our surroundings, as were three park benches that were generously donated by members of the community. Chairs, desks and various other pieces of furniture that were original to the building, damaged and underutilized are being replaced by more practical, ergonomic pieces that take patron use into consideration. Meeting room tables and chairs will be smaller and portable, allowing for multifaceted use by the various groups that frequent our library. Computer desks and chairs will now be a uniform size and design better suited to their current usage, and furniture that is underused will be replaced by items to create a comfortable group study area. Our library grounds continue to be enhanced by the addition of more sculptures from local artists, including our largest piece to date which was placed near the parking lot entrance. Township personnel are always on hand to assist with sculpture installation, this year relocating several works to more visible locations while also creating improved signage.

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 previously mentioned Direct Install air conditioning replacement project sponsored by PSE&G resulted in the maximum incentive allowed, a savings of 80% of the total project cost. We anticipate additional savings each month from the new, energy efficient machinery. Our recently established relationship with the BookDrop recycling program generates a new funding stream for the library, and our continued participation in the Sustainable Shelves program provides savings reflected in credit applied to purchases from our materials provider.

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.*** The previously mentioned Seed Library program, created with the goal of providing free fruit and vegetable seeds to help prevent food insecurity, utilized the assistance of community partners including Home Depot, Lowes, Walmart, Dragonfly Farms and Ace Hardware. Collaboration with the Tulpehaking Nature Center allowed us to present a series of environmental events for children. Our fundraising efforts multiplied as we increased the number of flea markets and vendor's fairs hosted, each reaching full capacity so that the maximum amount of funds were realized. The always-appreciated financial support we receive from our Friends of the Library organization allows us to provide a wide array of services and programming at no cost to the library or our community.

***** End *****