



San Mateo
County
Libraries

Open for Exploration

Annual Report 2021-2022



OUR MISSION

San Mateo County Libraries strengthen our community by creating an inclusive sense of place and environment for learning.

OUR VISION

San Mateo County Libraries ignite growth through transformative experiences.

Exploration at San Mateo County Libraries extends outdoors as kids enjoy a bubble program.

Director's Message

At San Mateo County Libraries, we're champions of learning, sharing and exploration – of open minds, new ideas and bright futures. In the pages of this report, you'll see how our 13 libraries are welcoming, inclusive places that inspire curiosity and sustain community connection.

Through ongoing recovery efforts, we became experts at adapting to meet critical needs and never wavered in our commitment to provide equitable library services.

Our accomplishments would not have been possible without the valued support of our Library JPA Governing Board and Operations Committee, our generous donors, incredible Friends of the Library and Foundation for San Mateo County Libraries, our volunteers and of course our extraordinary staff.

Together, San Mateo County Libraries continues to provide award-winning services and work in partnership with our diverse communities to build upon our 110 years of success and relevance.

ANNE-MARIE DESPAIN
DIRECTOR OF LIBRARY SERVICES

1st

IN CALIFORNIA STAR
LIBRARY RATINGS

3rd

IN NATIONAL STAR
LIBRARY RATINGS

110th

ANNIVERSARY AS A
COUNTY FREE LIBRARY

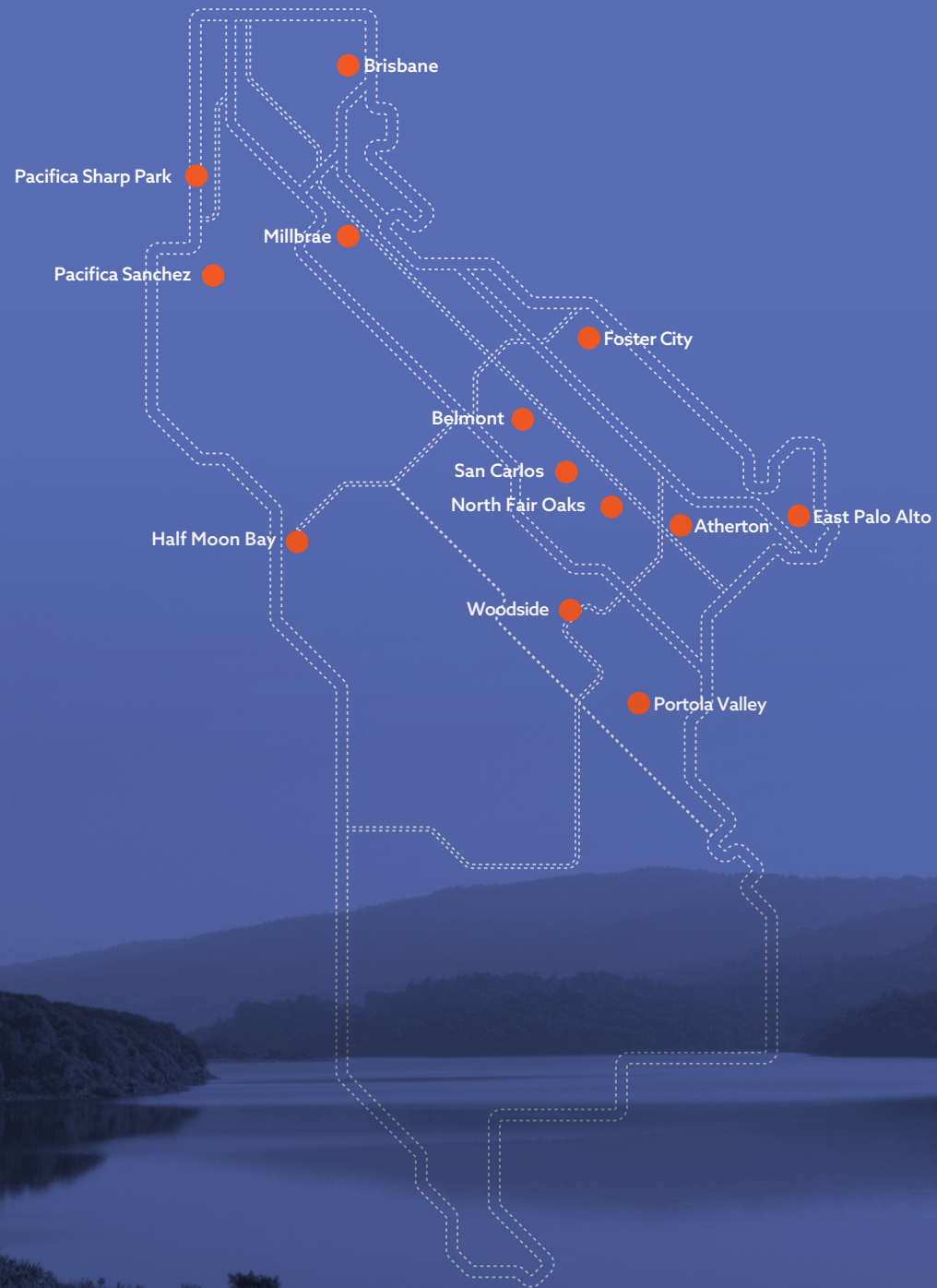
Library Governing Board

Atherton
Rick DeGolia
Belmont
Charles Stone
Brisbane
Karen Cunningham

East Palo Alto
Regina Wallace-Jones
Foster City
Sanjay Gehani
Half Moon Bay
Deborah Penrose

Millbrae
Reuben Holober
Pacifica
Mike O'Neill
Portola Valley
Maryann Derwin

San Carlos
Sarah McDowell
Woodside
Dick Brown
San Mateo County
Carole Groom



Covering 351 square miles, our service area is comprised of 11 cities and the unincorporated areas of the County. Photo of Crystal Springs Reservoir by Andrew Solovay.

Demographics

283,000
people live in
our service area

76%
of our service
population has a
library card

Households
in our service
area are **78%**
suburban,
15% urban
and **7%** rural

25% are
enrolled in
school, **45%**
of whom are in
grades K-8

At home,
16% of our
community
speaks Spanish,
8% speaks
Chinese and
another **15%**
speaks another
language other
than English

- White, non-Hispanic
- Hispanic or Latino/a
- Asian
- Multiracial
- Black
- Native Hawaiian/
Pacific Islander
- Other
- Unspecified

OUR COMMUNITY

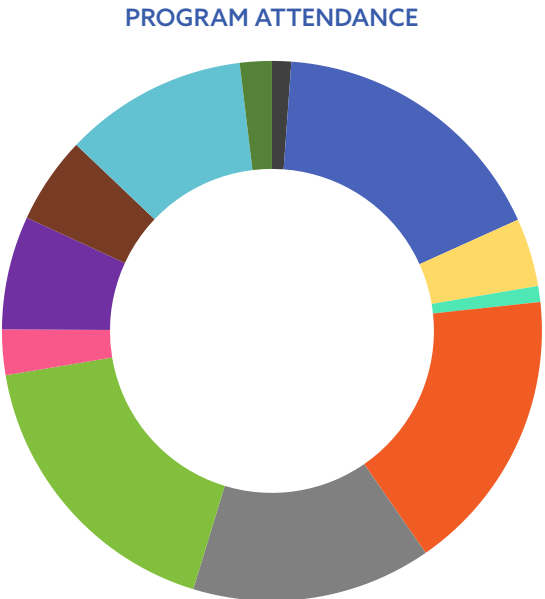
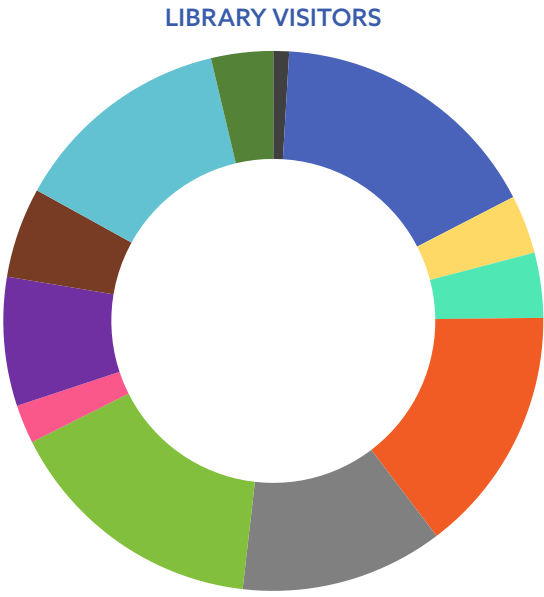
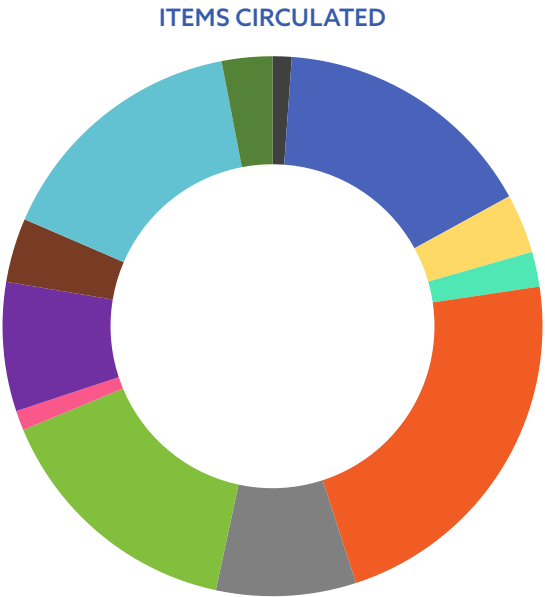
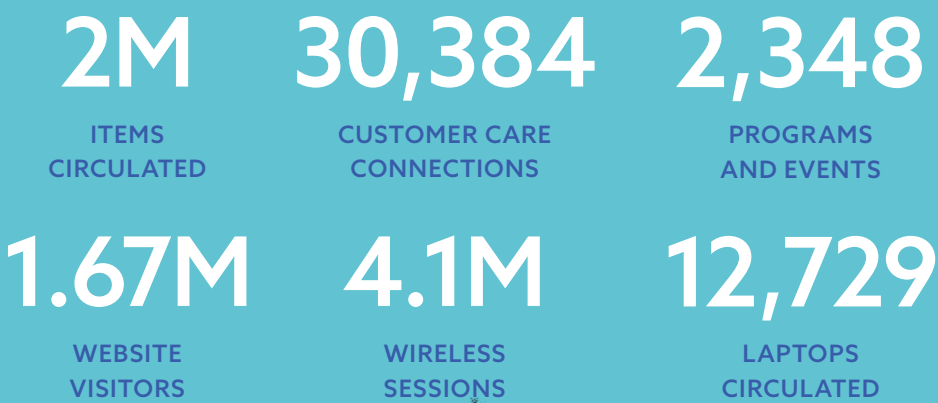


OUR EMPLOYEES



Year in Numbers

"SMCL always surprises me with how much is offered to the community. We are so grateful for the variety in services and the role the library plays in our community."



- Atherton
- Belmont
- Brisbane
- East Palo Alto
- Foster City
- Half Moon Bay
- Millbrae
- North Fair Oaks
- Pacifica
- Portola Valley
- San Carlos
- Woodside

The much anticipated new Atherton Library and renovated Historic Town Hall opened on June 4, 2022.



Staff pride themselves on connecting with our library users one on one to offer personalized support.

Here for You

"An excellent and valued community resource that has proved of even greater value during these strained times for me and my family. Thank you."

EXPANDED HOURS

This year, we've focused on providing places for added exploration by expanding hours and opening our new, vibrant, technology-packed Atherton Library. In 2022, we were excited to establish 7-day-a-week service in all of our cities for the very first time. Expanding evening hours and reopening our libraries on Sundays allows the community more opportunities to visit our libraries to borrow materials, check out technology and enjoy inviting spaces.

Increased hours help ensure people can access the library when they want and need to. Community members expressed their excitement about the new hours, "This is such welcome news," one patron said. "We often want to go on Sundays." Many library users made it clear how much they appreciated our careful approach to reopening and how delighted they are to return for more in-person services.

935,621

TOTAL
IN-PERSON VISITS

29,749

TOTAL NUMBER
OF HOURS OPEN



Patrons enjoy browsing our diverse collections.

PROGRAMS RETURN

Library staff were thrilled to begin hosting programs again at each of our libraries. Welcoming back patrons to such beloved library activities as storytimes and author talks was an encouraging moment for community members, who look forward to these curated events.

We've had 57,574 attendees at our in-person and virtual programs this year. Families were delighted to join together again inside library spaces or outside in library gardens and nearby parks. Several other events have also returned in person including STEAM offerings, conversation clubs and art classes.

"I have fond memories of going to the library myself and am happy to pass on the love of reading to my daughter."



FREE MASKS AND TEST KITS

San Mateo County Libraries is committed to supporting community members through the continued challenges of the pandemic. In February, we offered free masks and at-home test kits provided by the County of San Mateo. During a time when valuable test kits were not always easy to find, the masks and kits were available to pick up at all of our libraries. Providing free masks and test kits removed a barrier for community members who were most in need.

10,000
MASKS
DISTRIBUTED

25,000
TESTS
DISTRIBUTED

Expanding Meals Service

As an important venue for community resources, we have been offering free meals since 2015. The program began at East Palo Alto Library, then expanded to Half Moon Bay Library. In 2021, we added the free meal service to North Fair Oaks Library. Since then, we've served more than 9,300 meals at that location alone. These nutritious, fresh meals support community members who are experiencing food insecurity. They provide an after-school meal option for local

students and connect people to the library who otherwise might not have known about some of our services. The meals are easy to reach just outside our libraries, so that people receiving them can choose to just stop by or head inside to explore our other offerings.

32,356
MEALS SERVED

Empowering Community

"Thank you SMCL for leading with compassion and kindness for all."



Kids rushed inside the new Atherton Library to mark its opening, a symbol of our spirit of exploration.



The new Empower Card features fun designs that encourage reading.

STUDENT EMPOWER CARD

We launched a new kind of library card this year for students in San Mateo County called the Empower Card. The Empower Card simplifies student access to online resources across all libraries.

A student can use their Empower Card to access an encyclopedia for a school project, watch professional crafting tutorials, stream movies, check out eBooks and audiobooks in Spanish and Chinese, and so much more.

The Empower Card is the successful result of a pilot launched in March 2022. "Empower Cards break down barriers to library access and address inequities in resources by sending library cards directly to families," San Mateo County Supervisor Warren Slocum said. "These cards will open the door to an incredible amount of online and in-person resources."

7,449

EMPOWER
CARDS ISSUED

6

SCHOOL DISTRICTS
ENROLLED



Visitors could cool off and participate in arts and crafts while exploring our booth at the San Mateo County Fair.

SAN MATEO COUNTY FAIR

This year marked our big return to the County Fair. Each year, many fairgoers look forward to seeing our library staff and bookmobile among the smell of kettle corn and the sound of live music. We love the opportunity to share this annual event with the community and spread the word about our services. Our reading garden gives fairgoers a perfect place to slow down and rest, take fun photos, check out a book or try some easy, fun arts and crafts. This year's County Fair was a big success—we connected with new users, promoted our Summer Learning Challenge and gave away 5,500 books in seven days.

96%

FAVORABILITY
RATING

TREASURED RESOURCE

Libraries are keepers of local history and community memories. At the Half Moon Bay Library, this includes past high school yearbooks, which came in handy for an amateur detective. More than 30 years ago, Lucy Rodriguez's father found a 1987 class ring while walking on the beach, according to The Half Moon Bay Review. This year when Lucy was reminded of the found ring, she picked up the unsolved case with one clue in hand – the initials "PRS" engraved on the ring.

She headed to the Half Moon Bay Library for the 1987 yearbook and scoured it to find any seniors whose initials might match. Finally, she came across Peter Sabie, found him on social media and asked him to identify any details on a ring he may have lost. When Peter shared his initials "PRS," Lucy knew she had found the ring's owner with the library's help.

"Thanks to our local libraries for being such a great asset and valuable resource."

PROMOTING WELLNESS

We understand the impact mental health has on people and how its effects reach into our communities. Staff responded with a Mental Health Resources webpage that provides easy access to San Mateo County information and resources, relevant books in our collection, upcoming related events, like yoga and tai chi, and more. The page also highlights our partnership with Calm, a mindfulness app and service. As the first public library to partner with this app, we are providing a free, accessible way to practice mindfulness anywhere. In a time when stress is high, we are happy to offer resources to help our communities learn to take care of their mental health.



Tai Chi classes at our libraries help participants connect physical movement to internal energy to reduce stress.

"It is a joy to attend the Tai Chi class and I appreciate joining each week."

Equity Through Art

In partnership with the County's Office of Equity and Social Justice, we offered a series of well-attended library programs this year called Equity Through Art. We took a look at both the history and current state of race through art to highlight the complex relationship Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) have had living and trying to thrive in the County. For these programs, we were honored to bring in powerful voices from diverse communities across the

peninsula, discussing photography, mixed-media art, documentary, storytelling and cultural movements. Each program elevated the voices of speakers and community members to help us better appreciate the issue of racial equity and understand the history and pain that continues today. We culminated the series with youth to share their vision of the future of BIPOC in San Mateo County.



People relax, play and read inside Brisbane Library. Metropolis Magazine called the new library "a living room for a whole town." Photo by Cesar Rubio.

Imaginative Thinking

"The library has been the most important part of my kids' education and well-being... rising to the challenge of providing services during the pandemic. A forward-thinking leader in the county/state."

40,000

NEW eLEARNING
COURSES

700,444

DIGITAL
DOWNLOADS

GROWING OUR ONLINE RESOURCES

There is something for everybody in San Mateo County Libraries' online resources, including new materials for readers, writers, jobseekers and students. Picture books come to life with our new innovative picture book streaming service, offering animated videos and read-along audio in English, Spanish and Mandarin. Readers and audiobook listeners can also find our diverse collection of eBooks and eAudiobooks in a single place with a convenient, updated mobile app.

Aspiring authors and seasoned local writers can now publish their own eBooks through San Mateo County Libraries. We have also partnered with the Indie Author Project, a national initiative to help broaden the reach of our local authors.

We've always supported career development and lifelong learning. This year, thanks to a generous program through the California State Library, our community gained access to six added resources. Learners can attend university-level virtual classes, brush up on technology skills, prepare for job, citizenship and educational exams and much more.

"I am 82 years old and read a lot. Now I do all my reading on eBooks from the library."



Many of our libraries are popular after-school destinations. Our online offerings include homework help, language lessons and interactive encyclopedias.

SUMMER LEARNING CHALLENGE

This summer brought us together, marking a joyful return to vibrant Summer Learning Challenge experiences. The program activates imaginations, beginning with a free book to unleash a world of possibility and inspire further reading and discovery.

We connected kids to more than 35,000 free books in record time, books that serve as an invitation to build curiosity and community all summer. That invitation was enthusiastically accepted by community members who joined us in communing with farm animals, learning how to move our bodies to the music of the world, collaborating to make art with upcycled materials and so much more.

Being in the same spaces, meeting community members, making friends and building interests in the world we all live in has never felt more powerful.

"San Mateo County Libraries offer great activities, special events and resources for families."



BIG LIFT INSPIRING SUMMERS

This year has provided another uplifting session of The Big Lift Inspiring Summers day camps, where children benefit from evidence-based lessons and fun-filled days of learning and discovery. Serving eight school sites across six of our partner school districts, Inspiring Summers focuses on building early literacy and social-emotional skills. New program findings demonstrated strong positive academic gains in literacy and math. On average this summer, youth gained 1.5 months in literacy – matching our highest gain in the history of the program.



954

STUDENTS ENROLLED

149

YOUTH HIRED

Introducing Middle Scholars

We launched a new STEAM-focused program this year called Middle Scholars which caters to middle schoolers eager to explore. STEAM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math – academic subjects where student engagement from an early age is important. Pre-teens sometimes find themselves stuck between being under-challenged by elementary school offerings and too young for teen ones.

Middle Scholars aims to fix that by engaging sixth through eighth-graders with age-appropriate curriculum and hands-on activities. Middle school students hear from professionals in STEAM-related fields and then apply what they learned to fun, engaging projects.

"This is so cool. We never get to craft like this anymore."

Exploration and Growth

“The libraries are light and bright and wonderful spaces for adults and children!”



Children enjoy learning through our many hands-on programs that connect education with real-world information and ideas.

STATE PARKS PASSES

Part of the magic of the library is how often we can offer access to things and places beyond our walls. With the help of the California State Library and California State Parks, we rolled out our Explore Our Parks Packs—hiking backpacks that include a California State Parks day-use pass for users to explore many of our beautiful public parks without charge. This new program eliminates financial barriers and gives

everyone the chance to visit many state parks, lakes, beaches and monuments across the state. The backpacks are available at all libraries and include additional hiking items including binoculars and nature identification guides. We’re proud to be a part of this statewide program and give more San Mateo County residents the chance to visit their California State Parks.

“The library has evolved from a place for books, music and movies to a place of learning in so many forms.”



We launched the new California State Parks pass offering with hiking backpacks so users would feel ready to hit the trails.

43

EXPLORE OUR PARKS
PACKS AVAILABLE FOR
CHECKOUT

200

CALIFORNIA STATE
PARKS, LAKES,
BEACHES AND
MONUMENTS TO
ACCESS

NEW ATHERTON LIBRARY

On June 4, hundreds of community members attended the grand opening of the new Atherton Library and celebrated the completion of a project that was years in the making. Old-growth trees surround the building, adding to its inviting feel, and decks extend the library space outdoors. With a building design focused on flexibility for a variety of services and events, the library stands at the heart of the Town’s new civic center.

At 10,000 square feet, the new library is our first location to offer a digital lab in addition to a state-of-the-art makerspace. Just as makerspaces provide high-tech machines intended for production and making, digital labs offer equipment designed to produce

digital creations. Using the special recording equipment, patrons can try out making their own podcast or creating music. At Atherton Library’s opening day, one patron recorded the first song on the new equipment, singing part of Frank Sinatra’s hit “My Way.” We can’t wait to see what others create in the space.

“With its many new, up-to-date amenities and impressive tech offerings including a large indoor-outdoor makerspace and a state-of-the-art computer training room, the library offers a place for new experiences. I am excited to see our residents come together here to learn and create.”

ATHERTON MAYOR RICK DEGOLIA



Staff love helping residents express their passions and creativity.

9,912

STEAM AND MAKER
EVENT ATTENDEES

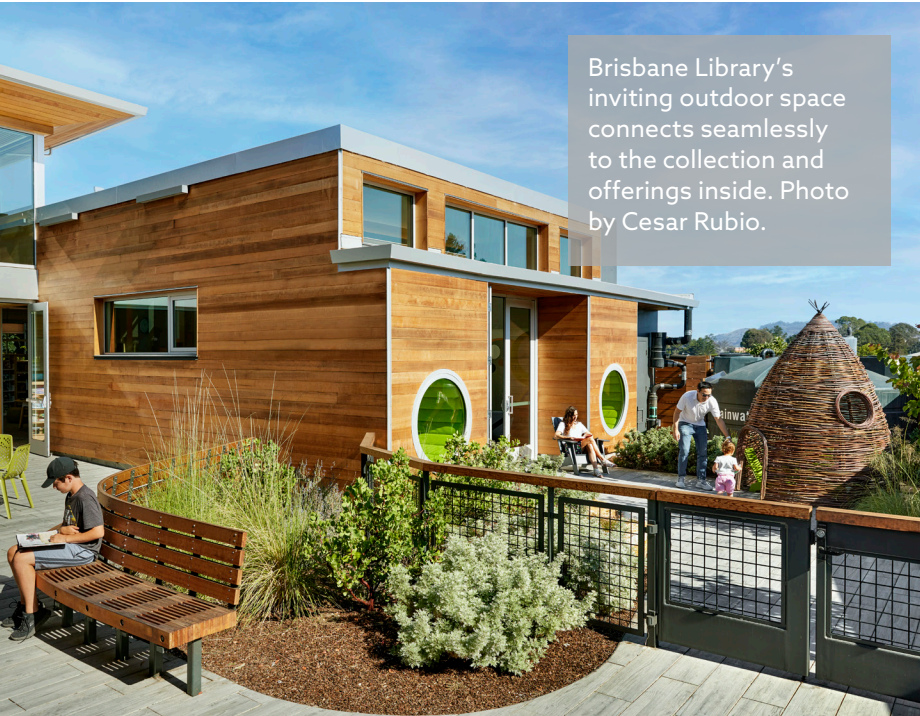
1,553

3D PRINTING
HOURS

AWARD-WINNING BRISBANE LIBRARY

The Brisbane Library was awarded a 2022 People’s Choice Award from the American Institute of Architects San Francisco. The award is proof of how much our community loves and appreciates the new building and all its incredible features.

We celebrated the opening of the Library with a special all-day event in October. Though the journey to opening slowed with the pandemic, the community has wasted no time making memories with silly storytimes, fun maker programs and shared time in the gardens.



Brisbane Library’s inviting outdoor space connects seamlessly to the collection and offerings inside. Photo by Cesar Rubio.

Makerspace Leader

Selected to be a national leader of the New Face of Library Makerspaces Collective, San Mateo County Libraries was recognized as an innovator in the design and creation of makerspaces in libraries. In recent years, we successfully opened new makerspaces that include special programming, 3D

printers, laser cutters, virtual reality, sewing machines and more. By joining the Collective, we will explore, share and grow together with other members and strengthen makerspace roadmaps for libraries across the United States.

“One of the main reasons I like coming to the San Mateo County Libraries is the makerspaces. There’s a lot of equipment I can’t get otherwise.”



San Mateo
County
Libraries

Always open for exploration at smcl.org