San Mateo County Libraries

Agenda Item IV.

To:	JPA Governing Board
From:	Anne-Marie Despain, Director of Library Services
Date:	May 13, 2025
Meeting:	May 19, 2025
Re:	Director's Report

This report summarizes significant library operations and program activities that have occurred since the last meeting of the Governing Board. Services and activities are aligned with our Strategic Plan Goals.

We listen to our community and create responsive services and spaces where everyone belongs

Cultural Connections

We believe in the power of cultural programming to bring people together, honor shared heritage, and deepen connections across our vibrant communities. Rooted in a strong commitment to reflecting the diverse stories, traditions and perspectives of our neighbors, our events invite everyone to explore, learn and celebrate the rich tapestry of cultures that make our county extraordinary.

Black History Month – Grammy-nominated artist Andre Thierry brought the history and rhythms of Kreole and Zydeco music to life, while Soul 4Kidz delighted families with joyful renditions of classic children's songs. Singer Tiffany Austin shared the transformative power of song, and One led a village celebration rooted in connection and unity. Families explored social-emotional literacy through energizing drumming workshops and Grammy-nominated storyteller Diane Ferlatte captivated all ages with her masterfully woven tales. Over 800 community members joined us in this month-long celebration of culture, history and togetherness.

Women's History Month – Highlights included a compelling lecture series on the early 20th-century self-defense movement and its connection to the women's suffrage movement. Participants bridged past and present through hands-on self-defense seminars focused on awareness, boundary-setting and instinctive response. Programs spotlighting women's wellness—such as yoga dance, sound meditation, creative writing, mindfulness, and nutrition—offered inspiration and connection to more than 150 participants.

SWANA Heritage Month – Throughout April, storytelling, author talks and drumming workshops illuminated the traditions of Southwest Asian and North African cultures. From Wafa Shami's engaging storytelling to Faisal Zedan's dynamic pan-Arabic drumming workshop, attendees were immersed in vibrant cultural experiences that celebrated the beauty and depth of SWANA heritage. The month's events created meaningful opportunities for dialogue, connection, and celebration—reinforcing the library's commitment to prioritizing culturally relevant, community-focused and intergenerational programming.

Belmont Library Improvement Project

We are pleased to announce that the Belmont Library project is progressing with good momentum. The City of Belmont is leading the work and interior painting is now complete, featuring a vibrant color palette, accent walls, and modern, clean finishes. Exterior painting is currently underway, and new flooring and carpet installation are scheduled next. In parallel, the library is working to improve spaces with new furniture, a refreshed staff workspace, advanced meeting room technology and an upgraded makerspace— thanks to generous support from the Friends of the Belmont Library.

Throughout the renovation process, we've ensured that patrons remain well-connected. Over 1,946 holds have been mailed to residents' homes, ensuring continued access to library materials. Off-site programs, including storytime, Tai Chi, Maturing Gracefully, and STEAM Team, continue to thrive at the Barrett Community Center and Twin Pines Senior Center. We look forward to unveiling the beautifully reimagined Belmont Library this summer, offering an enriched and welcoming space for our community to enjoy.

Atherton Library Children's Garden

We are pleased to share exciting progress on the Children's Garden project. Following the Town Council's approval on February 19, we are now finalizing the design and preparing for review by the Planning Commission, anticipated by the end of May. Pending approval, the project will advance to the competitive bidding phase this summer, with a contractor recommendation to follow shortly thereafter. We expect to break ground this fall and unveil the reimagined 6,500-square-foot garden this winter. This thoughtfully designed, nature-rich space aims to spark curiosity and create a strong connection with nature. Play is foundational to child development, through play, children explore language, build social skills, and develop critical thinking that supports early literacy and lifelong learning. The new children's garden will serve as a vibrant extension of the library's mission, where young minds can explore, imagine, and grow.

Article: Atherton to construct children's nature space behind library, The Almanac, February 25, 2025

New East Palo Alto Library

The City of East Palo Alto and Library are making major strides toward a new, modern library that reflects the community's vision and needs. In early 2022, the City purchased 1.07 acres at 2474 Pulgas Avenue, next to the EPACenter arts facility, with the goal of building a new library. After selecting Noll & Tam Architects as the design partner, the City and Library launched the design project in May 2024 and began extensive community outreach over the summer.

Guided by community and stakeholder feedback, Noll & Tam developed an inspiring conceptual design and cost model for a two-story facility. On March 4, the City Council approved the updated design—marking a major milestone for this transformative project. The updated concept design will offer areas for quiet and active experiences, hands-on activities, literacy classes, technology exploration, and outdoor spaces that celebrate nature. This exciting new facility will strengthen community bonds and position the library as a vibrant public hub.

San Carlos Library Makerspace

Exciting progress is underway on the new makerspace at the San Carlos Library—an imaginative, hands-on environment where creativity, curiosity and collaboration can thrive.
This fall, we will present the project to the San Carlos City Council to seek approval to release a Request for Proposals (RFP), with a goal of selecting a contractor to start the work in January. This 1,000-square-foot space will be located on the library's second floor, providing ample room for a variety of creative activities and learning experiences. Envisioned as a hub for learning and exploration, the makerspace will offer tools, technology, and a flexible space that empower users of all ages to experiment, create, and bring their ideas to life.

Article: San Carlos Library's makerspace blueprints a future for local creativity, Scot Scoop, May 5, 2025

We connect people and build partnerships to achieve shared goals

Safety Net Services at the Library

Recognizing the diverse and evolving needs of our community, we are proud to partner with the YMCA Community Resource Center and Coastside Hope to ensure our spaces remain welcoming, inclusive, and supportive for all. Together, we have provided vital safety net services to 444 individuals and families between July and March, helping them navigate challenges related to housing, food security, utilities, and digital access.

At the Brisbane Library, 82 clients received personalized support, including rental and utility assistance, diaper supplies, and SNAP referrals for new mothers during critical life transitions. At the Half Moon Bay Library, Coastside Hope served 362 clients with resources ranging from food distribution and rental aid to immigration services and tax preparation. The partnership also allowed unhoused community members to access free transportation and explore vital resources, with participants expressing gratitude for essential tools like Clipper cards.

Expanding Reading Through Partnerships

We're committed to expanding reading and learning opportunities beyond library walls. Through partnerships with more than 20 schools, youth programs and local organizations – including Pacifica's Boys & Girls Clubs and Millbrae's Rollins Gateway. We've placed library collections directly into the hands of our communities. These collaborations help remove barriers to access and introduce new audiences to the power of library resources, fostering deeper, more meaningful connections with reading, learning and each other.

Spring Hunt in East Palo Alto

On April 11th, East Palo Alto Library united with local nonprofits to host a Spring Hunt event at the Little Blue House. Over 180 community members came together to celebrate the season and connect with resources. Collaborating with Canopy, Communities Overcoming Relationship Abuse (CORA), Ecumenical Hunger Program (EHP), and The Little Blue House helped make the day unforgettable.

Families enjoyed free books and enrolled children ages 0–5 in the Dolly Parton Imagination Library, which delivers books directly to homes. Canopy delighted attendees with fruit tree tastings and take-home trees for families to cultivate. CORA and EHP connected with families and shared information about the important services they provide. Children and their families enjoyed exploring the Little Blue House playground, drumming with Afro-Peruvian dance company Cunamacué, and learning how music supports early literacy. The library provided bilingual tips for early learning and showcased our Adult Literacy programs. Each child went home with a goodie bag and families left inspired and connected to helpful resources.

Articles: East Palo Alto nonprofits unite for spring celebration, The Almanac, April 14, 2025
Hopping into Easter with the Family Spring Hunt, M-A Chronicle, April 14, 2025

We engage our communities through meaningful outreach and expanded access to resources

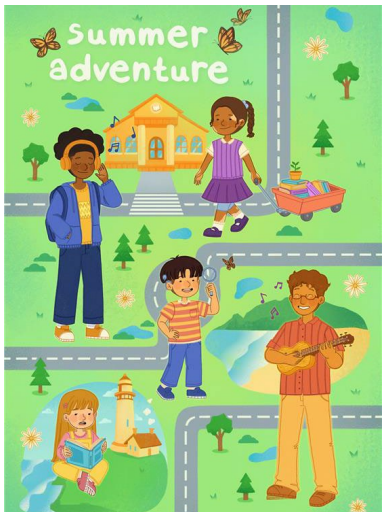
Library Night with the San Francisco Giants

We brought the energy and innovation of modern library services to a regional stage on Monday, April 7 at Library Night with the San Francisco Giants.

Teaming up with fellow Bay Area libraries, we proudly showcased our dynamic offerings and the impact of the Foundation for San Mateo County Libraries.

Before the game, we anchored lively festivities at China Basin Park, inviting attendees to experience our Makermobile, unwind in our welcoming Reading Garden, and sign up for special-edition Giants library card. In just a few hours, we engaged with 410 community members and issued nearly 220 new library cards, creating lasting connections through moments of discovery and joy. In the stadium, the Giants amplified our message with a public service announcement that celebrated our innovative and transformative role in the community—reaching a crowd of 30,000 enthusiastic baseball fans.

We champion a culture of continuous growth and discovery for all



Summer Adventure 2025 and Inspiring Summers
We're excited to showcase two transformative programs that open doors to opportunity, spark curiosity and joyful learning in our communities.

Summer Adventure invites learners of all ages to read, explore and create in ways that inspire. Participants will receive free giveaway books, learning passports and opportunities to win great prizes, including a $1,000 scholarship for one child or teen in every community. This year's unforgettable experience is brought to life with vibrant, commissioned artwork from local illustrator Adesuwa Ikechiuku, capturing the spirit of imagination and possibility.

Building on the excitement of Summer Adventure, we're also proud to deepen our impact through Big Lift Inspiring Summers, now entering its 10th year. Nearly 900 students in K-3rd grade will participate across eight camps, diving into literacy-rich activities, creative STEAM projects, and mindfulness practices. With visits from our Makermobile, field trips to local libraries and the return of Family Literacy events, children and families will be empowered to foster lifelong connections to reading and discovery. We're also thrilled to welcome new partner districts including Millbrae, Brisbane and Pacifica, bringing this impactful program to even more communities.

Paws for Tales
Paws for Tales is a beloved program that engages children ages 5 and up, to read aloud to specially trained therapy dogs, offering a welcoming space to build literacy skills. Research shows that children often feel less anxious and more confident when reading to animals, who provide judgment-free companionship. Available at all our 13 libraries, this warm and engaging program has delighted 800 children so far this year and is offered in partnership with the Peninsula Humane Society. Young readers eagerly reserve sessions with calm, attentive canine companions to build reading confidence and fluency, and turn reading practice into a joyful, encouraging experience.

Article: Paws for Tales is helping kids become stronger readers, The Almanac, March 3, 2025

Antonio López Named San Mateo County Poet Laureate

Former Mayor of East Palo Alto Antonio López has been appointed as San Mateo County's fifth Poet Laureate. A proud East Palo Alto native and award-winning poet and author of *Gentefication*, Antonio uses poetry to elevate the voices of underrepresented communities and explore themes of immigration, identity and resilience.

As a former Library JPA Governing Board member and passionate advocate, he has played an important role in championing the essential role libraries play in building equity, fostering creativity, and empowering communities.

Press Release: Antonio López Is the New San Mateo County Poet Laureate, April 9, 2025
Article: Antonio López becomes SMC poet laureate, Redwood City Pulse, April 15, 2025

Employee Service Awards

Early this year, the County honored four employees for reaching milestones in their years of service: Atherton Librarian Lynne Fetter (10 years), East Palo Alto Library Assistant Nineti Fanua (10 years), Portola Valley Library Assistant Rachael Hood (10 years) and Accountant Winnie Kuang-Todd (20 years).

Congratulations to Nineti, Lynne, Rachael and Winnie for their many years of service and invaluable contributions to the San Mateo County Libraries!

Personnel News

We are excited to share the following personnel announcements:

Carbelle Imperial, Library Assistant at the Pacifica Libraries, retired effective February 28. Carbelle worked for San Mateo County Libraries for more than 18 years and made significant contributions to technology services, including her leadership in the Personalized Tech Help program and active involvement in outreach and systemwide initiatives.

Sandy Wee, Access Services Division Manager, retired effective March 28. Sandy worked in the library profession for 33 years, including nearly 28 years with San Mateo County Libraries. She made lasting impacts through her leadership in access services, innovation in collections and programs, and national contributions to the library field through her work with ALA and APALA.

Amberlynn Auelua has accepted the position of Payroll Personnel Coordinator in our Human Resources division. Amberlynn previously worked at the Berkeley Unified School District as a Human Resources Technician. She holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from San Francisco State University and is currently pursuing her master's degree in human resources management at the University of Southern California.

Stefanie Jacinto Deo has accepted the position of Data and Performance Management Analyst in our Finance division. Stefanie joins us from GoFundMe, where she worked as a Data Scientist. She holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from Ateneo de Manila University and a master's degree in statistics from San Jose State University.

Stefania Diaz has accepted the position of Community Program Specialist at the Half Moon Bay Library. Stefania comes to us from Winter Consulting, where she worked as a Deputy Engagement Manager. She holds a bachelor's degree in political science from San Jose State University and is bilingual in Spanish.

Congratulations to our retirees, staff and new hires! We are grateful for their continued dedication to our mission and the communities we serve.

State Library News

The California State Library received formal notice from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) that, effective April 1, 2025, the federal grants awarded under the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) for the 2024–25 fiscal year have been terminated. This decision may significantly impact statewide library services unless funding is restored or replaced. Without alternative support, key programs and resources—including public access to the New York Times and educational tools, literacy and volunteer support services, staff training opportunities, and preservation and digitization initiatives—are slated for discontinuation in 2025–26.

San Mateo County Libraries has received an average of $100,000 from these federal and state grant over the last seven years. The State Library recognized the uncertainty this creates and is committed to advocating for solutions to sustain these vital services.

Press Release: California State Library Receives Notice of Termination of Federal Grant by IMLS

Libraries in the News

- Libraries planting ideas for healthy living, Coastside News, March 7, 2025
- How will cuts affect Bay Area libraries?, Daily Journal, April 1 ,2025
- San Mateo County Libraries encourage community engagement, The Almanac, April 6, 2025
- Two New Documentaries Highlight Anti-Censorship Activism, Publishers Weekly, April 22, 2025
- How Libraries Are Faring Under the Trump Administration Amid Detrimental Funding Cuts, TIME, April 26, 2025
- 10 Ways Public Libraries Make Our Lives Better, PBS, April 28, 2025
- Trump targets California libraries for cuts, Los Angeles Times, April 30, 2025
- Judge temporarily blocks dismantling of library agency, Associated Press, May 2, 2025
- Trump administration praised 'life-saving' naloxone, then proposed cuts, Washington Post, May 2, 2025
- California library funding saved by federal judge, SF Chronicle, May 7, 2025