San Mateo County Libraries

Agenda Item III. D.

To:	JPA Governing Board
From:	Anne-Marie Despain, Director of Library Services
Date:	June 10, 2025
Meeting:	June 16, 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.

Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month – Our AAPI Heritage Month celebrations engaged residents of all ages in honoring the rich cultures and lasting contributions of Asian and Pacific Islander communities. Families joined artist Justine Pon from The Ponnery—whose work is inspired by Asian American food and culture—for a joyful Power Up Afternoons craft session, creating vibrant yarn pom-pom keychains that sparked creativity. Adults enjoyed programs that evoked meaningful memories, from youth to present day, including live music with Jasmin Nicole, a thought-provoking docuseries screening, and hands-on mosaic and ikebana workshops. Hundreds of community members took part in our AAPI-inspired events and programs, coming together in learning, creativity and celebration.

Financial Literacy Month

In April, we offered a robust series of virtual and in-person programs aimed at supporting community members in building financial confidence. More than 150 participants joined us for events exploring practical topics like budgeting, estate planning, homeownership, investing, and protecting against scams. Interest grew steadily throughout the nine-session virtual series, culminating in 65 reservations for "Estate Planning Basics" on May 14. In-person events also saw strong engagement, with the "Better-than-Nothing Estate Plan" workshop at Millbrae Library reaching full capacity with all 16 available spots filled. The consistently high turnout—especially among older adults—reflected a deep community interest in strengthening long-term financial well-being.

Supporting Future Citizens

San Mateo County Libraries continues to support aspiring U.S. citizens by offering welcoming, accessible classes in Belmont, East Palo Alto, Half Moon Bay, Millbrae, North Fair Oaks, Pacifica and online. From July 2024 through May 2025, our citizenship classes have served a total of 552 participants. Most of our classes are bilingual, and our Millbrae location offers instruction in Cantonese, helping to reduce language barriers that can make the process more challenging. One senior participant joined just three months before her citizenship exam with limited English and concerns about the writing portion—but she passed on her first try. A library staff member reflected, "Seeing her proudly hold her citizenship certificate was a truly moving moment and a powerful reminder that one's strength, determination, and age should not be a barrier to applying for their citizenship."

Adult Field Trips

This spring, we partnered with senior activity centers across the County to offer enriching field trips for library patrons aged 55 and older. From behind-the-scenes tours at the Marine Mammal Center to hands-on pie-making at Pie Ranch and explorations of Filoli's historic home and gardens, each trip offered opportunities to learn, connect, and build lasting memories. Participants enjoyed discovering local history, exploring community resources, and forging new friendships along the way. On one recent trip, attendees even received Spanish-language books to expand their home libraries with topics like local travel, hiking, exercise, and wellness. To date, 380 older adults have taken part in sixteen field trips—and many have expressed how meaningful the experiences were, with hopes for even more opportunities to explore and connect in the future.

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

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.

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.

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

Healthy Relationships from the Start

This year, we deepened our collaboration with CORA (Community Overcoming Relationship Abuse) to reach twice as many families through our award-winning Healthy Relationships from the Start program. Designed for families with children ages 0–5, the eight-week series includes engaging take-home activities that encourage bonding, communication, and shared memories. A total of 396 families have participated this fiscal year, with many joining in-person mixers and celebration events to connect with others in their community. One participant shared, "We absolutely love the activities. We cannot be more grateful to live in a community that is so family-centered and has such wonderful and thoughtful resources like this. Super enriching for the kids and our family as a whole!" Additionally, as part of this year's expanded offerings, CORA led a new training for our Big Lift Inspiring Summers staff focused on modeling healthy relationships and setting positive boundaries with children.

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.

County Fair Outreach

We're thrilled to be back at the San Mateo County Fair this year from Thursday, June 5 through Sunday, June 8. We'll be welcoming visitors with free giveaway books and a cozy reading garden—a perfect spot to relax and recharge. Our pop-up library will also offer hands-on maker activities for all ages, along with the eBook Stop, making it easy to explore our digital resources. We'll also be issuing commemorative SF Giants-themed library cards to highlight the many benefits of having a library card. The County Fair is a wonderful chance to connect with community organizations, discover local resources, and kick off a summer full of exciting library programs and events!

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

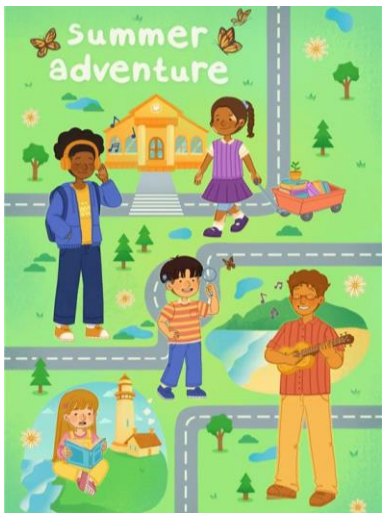
The magic of reading continues to grow as more and more children across San Mateo County enjoy Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. In May, with 6,912 children enrolled, our program achieved the fifth highest number of enrollees in the United States, out of more than 2,500 participating nationwide locations. Through this beloved program, families receive a free, high-quality book in the mail each month for children ages 0–5. More families are building early literacy and a lifelong love of books right from the start thanks to the Foundation for San Mateo County Libraries as our local host and partner. We also deeply appreciate the Friends of the Library groups, whose significant financial support makes this effort possible.

Virtual Reality

Since its inception in 2019, our Virtual Reality programs have revolutionized learning, pushing the boundaries beyond our physical libraries. With the introduction of new VR headsets, we are setting a new standard for delivering immersive educational experiences. These state-of-the-art devices offer untethered freedom and seamless co-operative play, making them more advanced than our previous models. Participants can now dive into diverse, dynamic environments, exploring activities such as virtual culinary arts, interactive sports, and 3D puzzle solving.

This service, offered at all libraries, enriches our mission to provide innovative and transformative learning opportunities. By expanding access to cutting-edge technology, we inspire creativity and foster a deeper engagement within our communities, paving the way for a vibrant future of continuous exploration and discovery.

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

Pitch It! 2025

As part of our annual staff innovation fest, Pitch It! was held on May 22, and featured six staff presentations. Going strong for over a decade, this program gives Library Champions the opportunity to bring bold, creative ideas to life – whether it's a new program, service, or resource. Winning pitches receive up to $5,000 in funding, along with support and mentoring from library leadership. Past winning ideas have included karaoke machines, hiking backpacks, book bikes, sewing machines, and period products.

Staff from across the organization gathered to cheer on colleagues and vote for their favorite pitch. Congratulations to Susan Verlander, Library Assistant at Administration for her winning proposal, *Level Up*— a program that offers workshops and tutoring to help English learners and their families prepare for and pass the ELPAC exam.

Congratulations to Greta Ruttenberg, Library Assistant at San Carlos Library, and Dorian Wu, Library Assistant at Belmont Library, for their idea *Book Club in a Bag*. Their winning pitch proposed circulating ready-to-go kits with books and discussion guides to support community-led book clubs.

A huge thank you to all of our talented staff who stepped up to pitch their ideas. Their creativity, passion and commitment to serving our communities truly shined!

Employee Service Awards

Since March, the County recognized six employees for reaching significant milestones in their years of service. Congratulations to Atherton Librarian Lynne Fetter, East Palo Alto Library Assistant Nineti Fanua, Portola Valley Library Assistant Rachael Hood, and Millbrae Library Assistant Susan Hoff for 10 years of dedicated service.
We also celebrate Accountant Winnie Kuang-Todd and Foster City Senior Librarian Amy Selmi for reaching and incredible 20 years of service.

We are grateful for their many years of commitment and the invaluable contributions they continue to make to San Mateo County Libraries!

Personnel News

We are excited to share the following personnel announcements:

Meri Fern Ancic has accepted the position of Librarian in our Programming and Outreach Division. Meri joins us from Santa Cruz Public Libraries where she worked as a Library Information Specialist. She holds a Bachelor of Multidisciplinary Studies with a concentration in Library Science from the University of Nebraska at Omaha and a Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) from Valdosta State University.

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.

Isabella Bortolus has accepted a promotion to the position of Librarian at the Portola Valley Library. Isabella previously served as a Library Assistant at the Portola Valley Library. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of California, Santa Barbara and an MLIS from San José State University.

Daniela Castrillo has accepted a promotion to the position of Librarian at the Belmont Library. Daniela previously worked as a Library Assistant at the North Fair Oaks Library. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in World Languages from Lewis & Clark College and an MLIS from San José State University. Daniela is bilingual in Spanish.

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.

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.

Salina Yu Kwok has accepted a promotion to the position of Librarian at the Belmont Library. Salina previously served as a Community Technology Specialist at the Belmont Library. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from the University of California, Santa Cruz and an MLIS from San José State University. Salina is bilingual in Mandarin.

Peter Newson has accepted the position of Library Assistant at the Half Moon Bay Library. Peter worked as an Extra Help Library Assistant at the San Carlos Library before his most recent role in IT where he helped get the Makermobile out to our communities. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Applied Mathematics from Sonoma State University.

Marissa Premenko has accepted the position of Library Assistant at the San Carlos Library. Marissa previously worked as an Extra Help Library Assistant at the Brisbane Library. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Child and Adolescent Development from San Francisco State University.

Sneha Sunder has accepted the position of Library Assistant at the Foster City Library. Sneha previously worked as an Extra Help Library Assistant at the Atherton Library. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Literature, Political Science, and Mass Communication from Osmania University and a Master of Arts in Advertising and Marketing from the University of Leeds.

Jamie Westfold has accepted a promotion to the position of Librarian at the Belmont Library. Jamie previously served as a Library Assistant at the Woodside Library. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Pre and Early Modern Literature from the University of California, Santa Cruz and an MLIS from San José State University.

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.

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
- Bay Area library visits have sharply declined. But not in this tranquil suburb, SF Chronicle, June 6, 2025