San Mateo County Libraries

Agenda Item IV.

To:	JPA Governing Board
From:	Anne-Marie Despain, Director of Library Services
Date:	May 5, 2026
Meeting:	May 11, 2026
Re:	Director's Report

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

We connect people and build partnerships to achieve shared goals

Maker in Residence

We launched our new Maker in Residence program to the community in February, opening the recruitment for our inaugural resident. Thanks to the generous support from the Foundation for San Mateo County Libraries, this paid six-month residency invites a local maker to lead hands-on STEAM learning through workshops, outreach and open office hours, creating opportunities for community members of all ages to build skills and explore creativity.

Inspired by successful residency models in museums and arts organizations, the six-month Maker in Residence program emphasizes sustained engagement rather than one-time instruction. The selected maker will work with community members through workshops, self-guided activities, outreach visits, and office hours. The program will help activate library spaces across the county as hubs of curiosity, creativity and connection.

Recruitment drew more than 80 applicants from across STEAM fields and was promoted through social media, LinkedIn, and local maker networks, generating strong interest from a diverse pool of applicants. A selection committee is currently reviewing submissions, and we look forward to welcoming our first Maker in Residence in the coming weeks.

Cultural Connections

We create opportunities for our community to both see themselves reflected in our spaces and to connect with the cultural experiences of our diverse county. In February, we celebrated both Lunar New Year and Black History Month with a variety of performances, hands-on workshops, and celebrations. Local vocalist Tiffany Austen graced several of our libraries to share the wonder of jazz. Traditional Lion Dancing groups set to heart pounding drums spread good luck and prosperity in the new year as crowds gathered to watch.

Adults were invited to practice Minhwa Painting in a series of workshops on these traditional Korean folk arts. Local Grammy nominated musician, Andre Thierry led an interactive musical adventure as families explored Southwest Louisiana's rich Kreole culture and Zydeco music. Both kids and adults got hands in while practicing West African Fabric Printing or Vietnamese Tò He toy making. More than 4,100 people attended, making the library a vibrant hub for cultural engagement, connection, and belonging.

Volunteer Appreciation

We celebrated our volunteers during National Volunteer Week, April 19–25. Since 1974, this annual celebration has been a time to acknowledge the importance of volunteer service and the tremendous impact that volunteers have in our communities. San Mateo County Libraries volunteers support welcoming spaces across our system as maker and program assistants, English Conversation Club facilitators, Adult Literacy Tutors and through our valued partners the Friends of the Library and Foundation for San Mateo County Libraries.

So far this year, volunteers have contributed 6,547 hours following an impressive 28,014 hours in 2025. In celebration of our volunteer community, each library is hosting volunteer appreciation events featuring refreshments and tote bag gifts designed by local illustrator Yijing Yan. Additional recognition efforts, including gifts, learning opportunities, and milestone celebrations are planned throughout the year. We are deeply grateful for our volunteers' continued dedication and impact.

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

Makerspace Enhancements

We've expanded makerspace services with new heat presses for vinyl and sublimation printing, as well as the ChompSaw, a kid-safe tool for cutting cardboard and encouraging creative design. The Pacifica Library now offers additional equipment, including sewing machines and a Memory Lab for digitizing legacy media formats, while Portola Valley Library has added more sewing machines to meet demand.

New maker programs include wood block printing, punch needle embroidery, Bojagi (traditional Korean cloth wrapping), and appliance repair. Beyond our library locations, maker activities continue through outreach, with more than 70 engagements this year at schools, community centers and public festivals.

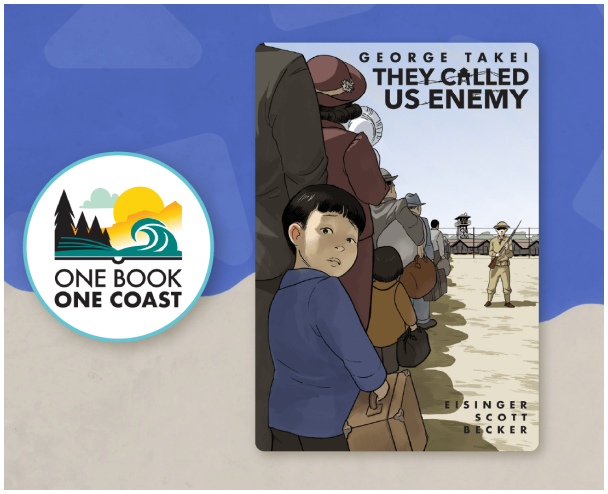
Mychal Threets

We ended the month of March with a weekend of Library Joy as we welcomed PBS Kids' Resident Librarian, host of Reading Rainbow, literacy advocate, and one of Time Magazine's Next Generation Leaders Mychael Threets to both the Half Moon Bay Library and Foster City Library. Threets visited our communities to share his new book, *I'm So Happy You're Here: A Celebration of Library Joy*, and inspire us with his message that the library welcomes everyone!

After storytime, Mychal greeted attendees individually while signing his book and taking pictures. Over 450 community members of all ages attended these two events, where they received free copies of his book, connected with each other, and left with huge smiles. Mychal celebrated with all of us—young and old—the joy, comfort and belonging that libraries provide.

One Book, One Coast

San Mateo County Libraries is joining library systems across California, Washington and Oregon for One Book, One Coast—the largest book club on the West Coast. Beginning April 1, community members are invited to collectively read George Takei's graphic novel *They Called Us Enemy*, a powerful memoir that examines the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II.



Through shared reading, engaging programs and community discussion, this initiative highlights the importance of storytelling, history and connection. Unlimited digital copies of the book are available on our eBook app and all libraries have print giveaway copies for distribution. Special programming and the culminating Watch Party with Activist and Author George Takei will continue throughout May, One Book, One Coast programs and events.

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

Book Club in a Bag

We are excited to introduce Book Club in a Bag, the newest addition to our Library of Things collection. Book Club in a Bag is a winning Pitch It! staff grant proposal developed by library champions Greta Ruttenberg and Dorian Wu. Launched at the end of April, this initiative makes starting a book club effortless.

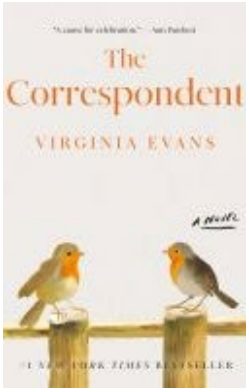
Each bag includes a set of 10 books and conversation prompts to help break the literary ice with friends, neighbors and community members. By combining convenience with creativity, Book Club in a Bag transforms the traditional book club model into something more accessible and adaptable. No need to track down multiple copies or spend hours preparing discussion materials—everything you need is ready to go in one convenient package. Simply check out a bag, gather your group, and start the conversation.

Popular in our Collections

Youth materials continue to grow in circulation year over year at a rate of 3%, led by strong demand for graphic novels, series fiction and picture books. Graphic novels such as *Dream On*, *The Squad*, and *The New Girl* indicate a high interest in stories about friendship and identity. Series remain the most popular reads, with *Dog Man*, *Wings of Fire* and *Baby-Sitters Club* titles appearing repeatedly among the most-circulated titles. Picture book circulation is equally robust, with read-aloud favorites such as Mo Willems' *Elephant & Piggie* titles and *Pete the Cat,* supporting early literacy and family engagement.

Both teen and adult reading trends show interest in popular fiction, with engagement driven by current events, personal development and lifestyle topics in nonfiction. While popular young adult graphic novel series show steady demand, other standout young adult titles, such as the *Shatter Me* series, tackle themes like self-empowerment.

Adult fiction circulation is concentrated in high-profile, bestselling authors and conversation-driven novels. Adult nonfiction circulation is led by biography and memoir, followed closely by business and economics, cooking, and travel. Reader interest is especially strong for titles focused on personal finance, longevity and wellness, mental health, leadership, and food culture, reflecting broader community interest in practical and timely titles.



Digital formats continue to grow, with eBooks and eAudiobooks among the most heavily used collections. *The Correspondent* is a great example of a title in high demand that benefits from availability in multiple formats. Audiobooks show particularly strong growth, in some cases circulating at higher rates than eBooks, with fiction titles dominating the top rankings and nonfiction staples discussing habit-building and personal development also performing well. Audiobook checkouts in Overdrive increased by 29% in the first three months of 2026 compared to the same period in 2025. The sustained popularity of these formats underscores the importance of maintaining a deep, up-to-date digital collection that supports flexible reading preferences while complementing print materials across age groups.

We champion a culture of continuous growth and discovery for all

Young Adult Novelist Convention

We hosted this year's Young Adult Novelist Convention on February 28th at the Belmont Library. Teens across the county were not only invited to attend but also had the chance to participate in a short story contest. A local Belmont student was announced as the winning author at the event.

This year's theme was Fantasy vs Reality, and the thirteen authors in attendance spoke about how their books reflected either side of this coin. Both the panel discussions and the signing event were lively hubs showcasing the power of books and how readers connect to them.

Financial Literacy

We deliver a broad range of financial literacy programming through both in-person and virtual workshops, covering key topics such as retirement and college planning, wealth building, estate planning, budgeting, scam and fraud prevention, homeownership, healthcare and long-term care planning, and financial wellness. Across all workshops, there were over 350 total registrations, reflecting strong community interest in building financial knowledge and stability. These programs were designed to meet people at different stages of life, offering practical tools and guidance for both immediate needs and long-term planning. Together, these offerings demonstrated our commitment to providing accessible, relevant financial education. Financial literacy is an ongoing priority, with continued workshops and series planned to support the evolving needs of the community.

National Library Week and National Library Workers Day

April 19–25, 2026, is National Library Week, and April 21 is National Library Workers Day. This recognition offers an opportunity to acknowledge the essential role libraries play in our residents' lives. This year, the American Library Association has designated the theme "Find Your Joy," an invitation for all residents to explore the myriad of ways our libraries spark curiosity and create meaningful connections.

National Library Workers Day highlights the professional expertise required to provide these vital public resources and to create a welcoming "third space" for all. Our staff transforms our physical and digital spaces into essential anchors of civic life, and through their daily interactions, they uplift our communities and champion growth. We are incredibly proud of our team and the vital role they play in fostering a resilient, informed and connected society. We extend our deepest gratitude to our Library Champions for their unwavering dedication to excellence and for making San Mateo County Libraries a place where everyone can find their joy.

Personnel News

We are excited to share the following personnel announcements:

Grace Abusharkh has accepted the position of Program Coordinator in our Human Resources Division. Grace joins us from the Palo Alto Art Center Foundation, where she most recently worked as a community engagement specialist. Grace holds a master's degree in museum education from George Washington University and a bachelor's degree in history from the University of California, Berkeley.

Christa Bigue has accepted a work out of class opportunity as our Director of Communications and Marketing. Christa brings extensive experience in public sector communications. As a member of the County of San Mateo Communications team for 12 years, she led the County's social media efforts and worked closely with the Board of Supervisors as well as various departments to support special projects, media relations, outreach and engagement. She holds a master's degree in cultural resources management from Sonoma State University and a bachelor's degree in journalism from Emerson College in Boston.

Megan Gosch has accepted a work out of class opportunity as the Partnerships and Outreach Manager. Megan previously worked in the County Office of Community Affairs for over 15 years. She has led impactful outreach and inclusion efforts across the county, including managing countywide campaigns, the Immigrant Services team and supporting diverse communities. Megan holds a bachelor's degree in geography from California State University, Chico and a master's degree in Geographic Information Science and Technology from the University of Southern California.

Molly Shea has accepted the position of Public Services Program Coordinator. Molly joins us from the University of California's Nutrition Policy Institute, where she most recently worked as a research project manager. Molly holds a master's degree in public health from the University of California, Berkeley and a bachelor's degree in public health from George Washington University.

Employee Service Awards

Early this year, the County honored four employees for reaching milestones in their years of service: David Vargas, Belmont Senior Librarian (10 years), Julian Marquez, Half Moon Bay Library Assistant (10 years), Marie Fong, Woodside Senior Library Assistant (20 years), and Gary Ransford, Senior Community Technology Specialist (30 years).

Congratulations to David, Julian, Marie, and Gary for their many years of service and invaluable contributions to the San Mateo County Libraries!

Libraries in the News

- Ring in Lunar New Year in Silicon Valley with lion dances, festivals and special events, Palo Alto Online, January 22, 2026
- Our guide to Valentine's and Galentine's Day happenings around Silicon Valley, Palo Alto Online, January 29, 2026
- Community briefs: Ravenswood sustainability, maker-in-residence and school bonds refinanced, The Almanac, February 23, 2026
- Book bans and attempted bans remain at record highs, with 'Sold' topping the list, The Daily Journal, April 20, 2026
- San Mateo County libraries expand resources for residents during National Library Week, The Daily Journal, April 21, 2026
- Volunteer at your library — get fit, The Daily Journal, April 21, 2026