



2020 Annual Report of the South Pasadena Public Library Board of Trustees

Date: December 2020

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Bianca Richards, President, Library Board of Trustees

The Library Board of Trustees (LBT) is pleased to present its 2020 Annual Report. The Board members who served in 2020 are Bianca Richards, David Uwins, Debra Beadle, Annie Chang, and Joseph (Mario) Molina. Mayor Robert S. Joe was the designated City Council Liaison.

The mission of the Board is to monitor the activities and progress of the South Pasadena Public Library and to advise the Library and the City of South Pasadena on library services. The Board's core responsibilities include establishing rules and regulations for the administration of the library, reviewing and submitting an annual operating budget to the city manager, and making recommendations to the city manager with respect to the appointment, suspension or removal of the city librarian.

The Library Board of Trustees' 2020 Work Plan included four main objectives:

- Library Administrative Policies review
- Make recommendations to City Council on whether to alter overdue fee policies
- Support Library staff in conducting a One City, One Story City-wide reading program
- Mark author Ray Bradbury's Centennial

2020 was off to a good start with a Work Plan in place, new trustees and new library staff. The latter consisted of full time Children's Librarian Judy Neeb, Adult and Digital Services Librarian Cynthia Mitchem (both hired in January 2020), and Adult Services/Local History Librarian Olivia Radbill.

The arrival of the pandemic presented unprecedented challenges to library services. In March the County of Los Angeles Department of Public Health issued a Safer at Home Order, which required the library to close to the public on March 16, 2020, and staff began working remotely on March 20, 2020. All planned in-person meetings and events were cancelled, including the local history-themed event Happy Birthday South Pasadena! Staying Great Since 1888, Teen Advisory Board Movie Night, Library Volunteer Recognition Luncheon, Earth Day Expo, the Eclectic Music Festival, and the Friends of the Library Restoration Concerts Series and Summer Festival. The City cancelled all non-essential City board and commission meetings and the LBT did not meet in March, April, June, and July. In May the LBT met virtually to receive a report on how the library was adapting to and planning for services in the context of COVID-19. During this time the Library Director kept Board members informed of operations, issues and concerns by email.

During the three months the library was closed, staff were able to stay engaged and pivot to providing services online. In anticipation of high demand for digital resources, funds were redirected from the regular book budget toward ebooks, eaudiobooks, and digital resources like the film streaming service Kanopy. Steps were taken to ensure that customers would have access to digital materials regardless of outstanding fine balances, and due dates were extended and no overdue fines accrued during this time. Use of digital resources did indeed soar during this period. In April, usage of the homework help platform Tutor.com increased by 86.3%, checkouts of children's ebooks on the Tumblebooks platform increased by 69.9%, use of Mango Languages language learning platform increased by 44.5%, and ebook and eaudiobook checkouts nearly doubled. Customers could contact library staff by phone and email Monday through Friday, and staff took more than 200 phone calls and issued 73 new library cards and reactivated 55. During the closure the library hosted a "Safer at Home" reading challenge that was joined by 300 people who read 51,000 minutes and wrote more than 60 book reviews. Staff were busy catching up on projects, system maintenance, planning for the eventual reintroduction of library services, and redesigning the Summer Reading Program to take place virtually.

The library reopened its book drops on Monday, June 8, and on June 15 staff returned to the building and Library Takeout, a no-contact checkout service, and Materials Matchmaker, a recommendation service, were launched. Between June and the end of November, 44,498 items were returned, and 33,460 items were placed on hold and picked up with Library Takeout. Customer response to these services has been extremely positive.

The Library presented its first ever all virtual Summer Reading Program (SRP) between June 1 and August 1, 2020. It was a great success, with a total of 1,095 readers registered on the Beanstack reading tracking app, who together read for 7,742 hours. Teens read the most hours overall, with 3rd through 5th graders right behind them. Pre-readers had the largest number of participants, at 322. The SRP Teen Volunteers provided 1,090 hours of service, writing reviews, creating samples of the weekly craft projects, writing letters to seniors, and chalking SRP messages on sidewalks around town. In conjunction with SRP the Library launched Instagram and YouTube. Librarians presented 9 pre-recorded Storytimes which were viewed 790 times on the Library YouTube channel. Virtual Wonderful Wednesday performances had 514 registered participants.

On July 1 the Library launched auto renewal of checked-out items, in which items are automatically renewed up to two times as long as another customer has not placed a hold on the item. This upgrade was well received by library users.

In spite of the exceptional times, the LBT met the goals laid out in its 2020 Work Plan. Due to COVID, the One City, One Story Citywide Reading Program was re-branded as One City, Many Stories (OCMS) and reimagined as a virtual program. Instead of focusing on one book and a big author presentation, One City, Many Stories allowed participants to engage in a variety of ways. The theme, which relates to the tumultuous times we've been living in in recent years, became "Exploring Common Ground". The topic was meaningful enough to encourage engagement and discussion but also deliberately broad enough to allow people to read widely in a variety of genres. OCMS took place September 14 through November 1, and included four library-led virtual book discussions, an Author Night presented over Crowdcast, and South Pasadena Poet Laureate Ron Koertge's original poem titled "Many Stories".

After extensive discussion and consideration, the Board unanimously voted to approve a proposal to eliminate Library Overdue Material Fees, which the American Library Association has recognized as "a form of social inequity" because they disproportionately affect socio-economically disadvantaged populations. This recommendation will be presented to the City Council before the end of December 2020 and with their approval South Pasadena would be a "fine free" library beginning January 1, 2021.

To celebrate author Ray Bradbury's centennial in August, South Pasadena Public Library promoted its special Ray Bradbury collection and was one of a select number of institutions to participate in the national Ray Bradbury Centennial Read-a-Thon of *Fahrenheit 451*, with award winning actor, James Reynolds reading several sections. Responding to another request, Poet Laureate Ron Koertge penned "In Memoriam" to honor Ray. Finally, the long-awaited fused glass triptych designed by local artist Tim Carey and fabricated at Judson Studios in South Pasadena was installed in the Library's Ray Bradbury Conference Room and unveiled on Thursday, October 29. The artwork, "Live Forever", will be a lasting tribute to this prolific and renowned author. The project was fully funded with a combination of private donations, City Councilmembers' discretionary funds, and support from the Friends of the Library.

The Board continued its systematic review of Library Administrative Policies and voted to rescind four obsolete policies: 1) City Council Recordings Policy; 2) Community Service Volunteer Policy; 3) Internship Policy; 4) Policy on Monitoring of Examinations. The impacts of the pandemic on library staff and the board meeting schedule made it impossible to complete the policy review as planned, therefore the review will continue into 2021.

Another significant action taken by the Board in 2020 was the decision in September to approve the expenditure of \$3,000 from the Romine Trust to acquire two unique collections of local history material from collector/author Rick Thomas. These collections, which focus on the Busch Gardens, which was located in the Arroyo, and the Solar Motor Company which was located at the Cawston Ostrich Farm, will be preserved and made available to the public.

As we head into the ninth month that library services have been disrupted by the pandemic, the LBT looks forward to a return to normalcy. All decisions regarding the reintroduction of in-person library services are dependent on the progression of the pandemic and State and County guidelines, however, staff have drafted a plan to reintroduce services in phases when it is safe to do so. The next phase on the horizon is to give customers access to computers by appointment.

Despite difficult circumstances, our library continues to adapt while providing essential materials and resources. None of the successes highlighted in this report would be possible without the dedicated and productive staff, an engaged board, city leaders, and a community that truly values the library.