

**OSSINING PUBLIC LIBRARY**  
**Director's Report**

**Karen LaRocca-Fels, Library Director**

As I write this, I am anticipating our Annual Meeting and Report to the Community on December 9<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 in the Budarz Theater. I want to express my sincere appreciation to those who help with this event every year. Our Department Heads provide highlights from the year for our presentation, the Friends and Foundation prepare and give their presentations, our Board of Trustees participate in the presentation and provide their support and ideas, Steve Hamilton wrangles trophies and awards, and Mallory Marinaro puts it all together and prepares a professional, fun presentation and flow that makes the evening special. I'm so grateful to Jeff Saper for being willing to present the Riley Elmore Saper Voracious Reader of the Year award every year and to Suzy Zavarella and Ignayra Lopez for being supportive of including the Battle of the Books recognition in our event. A big thank you to Molly Robbins for helping us bring back our Employee of the Year award. And I'm excited that Nate Hill is speaking about METRO and the Library Field. It'll be a lovely event as always and will be a happy memory by the time you read this.

This month wraps up our Long-Range Strategic Plan (LRSP). The plan, which was wonderful, challenging, controversial, and ambitious, has been a focal point of the board and the staff for four years – and those have been four challenging years – oftentimes in a good way, sometimes, as little less so. I do feel that we've learned a good deal as an organization, and I have learned just as much as a director during this time. Our Board of Trustees, too, has grown in understanding, knowledge, patience, and experience. I appreciate the work that everyone – staff and trustees – has done in the furtherance of our LRSP and look forward to the next one.

**Board and Committee Work**

The Finance Committee briefly met in November and will revisit the financial reports at their December meeting. They are also working on securing a new treasurer.

The Policy/Personnel/Bylaws Committee did not meet in November due to lack of availability and have scheduled to meet in December. On the docket for the committee are a draft proposed Programming Policy, the concept of a public relations policy, a discussion of and plan for new policy requirements by New York State, the progress of the Employee Handbook, and a revisit of the Use of Meeting Room and Performance Space Policy.

The Community Outreach Committee did not meet in November and will meet in December.

**Building and Grounds**

The contract with Calgi has been fully executed and will be approved at the Board of Trustees meeting in December. We continue to work with our attorney and SGH to finalize the library's contract with SGH. (Goals 5.5 and 5.6)

We continue to attempt to coordinate use agreements with our neighbors. As I reported to the Buildings and Grounds Committee, I did hear from the daughter of one neighbor and responded with an offer to speak or meet directly with her. I will continue to follow up on the offer, as I have not yet heard back. Sarah Spencer (Bond Schoeneck and King) plan to meet to discuss next steps for those neighbors from whom we have had no communication. (Goals 5.5 and 5.6)

We are working with our team to institute a payment procedure for the bond project. The school district would like to handle all the payments, which is different from what we anticipated based on early conversations with them, but as always, we adjust and move ahead. (Goals 5.5 and 5.6)

The bid has been accepted for RTU-6 and we have moved ahead with approvals and contracts. We look forward to scheduling this work soon. In the meantime, our building has been holding heat as well as expected. The second floor and mezzanine are cold, as we had anticipated. Molly Robbins ordered more space heaters to keep staff comfortable and bring some heat into the areas. The office spaces and 2<sup>nd</sup> floor conference room as all on a different unit and are, so far, comfortable with the exception of a week in November when the unit serving that area struggled. Steve Garrett and Clean Air got everything up and running again, Steve Garrett is following up with Clean Air on some outstanding proposals that were prepared for other units that need work and we will make some determinations, likely with OLA's guidance, about what should be done and what we can forego. (Goal 5.5).

The building regularly surprises us with little mysteries that are sometimes easily solved and sometimes take a good deal of time and investigation. We worked to get to the bottom of an issue happening with our fire panel that was causing an alarm call to go out when there was no actual issue. A lack of hot water on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor led to the discovery of a burned-out water heater that will be replaced. A strange odor on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor is still being investigated. Steve Garrett is usually the detective who is called on to solve these mysteries, though Molly Robbins, Allison Robbins, me, and sometimes others get involved. Managing a building of our size, while a joy, is also a challenge. Add to that the sheer volume of traffic that we have and the fact that we are in a busy downtown area and our days are often filled with the unexpected. It is rare that the plan that I have for my day upon arrival is what actually happens – and this experience is shared by many of us at the OPL.

## **Foundation & Friends**

Leslie Allen, Chair of the Ossining Library Foundation, Nancy Panagacos, President of the Friends of Ossining Public Library, Meghan Huppuch (our Board President) and myself met at the request to Leslie to discuss the roles of the three organizations now that the bond vote is in the past. I was thankful that we had the opportunity to meet and discuss and look forward to continuing to work with these two amazing groups. We are very lucky to work with folks who are passionate about our library and our community. (Goals 1.1 and 1.2)

## **Grants and Donations**

We were notified by the Carnegie Corporation of New York that, as a Carnegie Library, we will be receiving a grant of \$10,000 in 2026 in honor of the country's 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We plan to use this gift to support programming in honor of the 250<sup>th</sup>. (Goal 1.3)

## **Personnel**

I am happy to announce that we have filled our Library Assistant (Spanish Speaking) Part Time Plus for the Children's Department. Our current part-time Library Assistant Alexandra Pintado will be filling that role. We are currently posting our Library Clerk, Part Time Plus for the Patron Services Department. This position will be filled by a current part-time staff person and interviews are being scheduled shortly.

## **Projects, etc.**

Allison Robbins will be overseeing a food drive to benefit our community and is working with the Ossining Food Pantry to start this in the new year. Many organizations that work on food insecurity see a drop-off in donations after the holidays and we learned that timing our initiative during a lower-donation period will best help our community partner.

## **News from the Public Library Directors Association and the Westchester Library System**

Terry Kirchner shared that the Westchester Library Association is anticipating significant cuts in funding from the county and state. As a result, they will be eliminating Kanopy as a system-funded subscription service, effective June 2026. They are providing member libraries with information about the cut that we can share with our patrons.

At our meeting, we were joined by Sam Helmick, President of the American Library Association, who shared with us their inspirational thoughts about the importance of public libraries in our society. They shared their own library journey and told us about the advocacy and legal initiatives that ALA is pursuing in the face of funding and existential cuts to the IMLS. Sam recommended several books, including [\*The Let Them Theory\*](#) by Mel Robbins and [\*1929: Inside the Greatest Crash in Wall Street History – and How It Shattered a Nation\*](#) by Andrew Ross Sorkin.

## **Some Meetings, Trainings, Programs I attended:**

November 17: Board of Trustees Regular Meeting

November 19: Library Bond Meeting with the school district, plus a pre-meeting and post-meeting

November 20: Public Library Directors Association Meeting

November 24: Meeting with David Chen

December 1: Meeting with Leslie Allen, Nancy Panagacos, and Meghan Huppuch

December 4: Board of Trustees Work Session

December 8: Buildings and Grounds Committee Meeting

December 9: Annual Meeting and Report to the Community

## **Assistant Director Monthly Report for November 2025**

November seemed busier than usual perhaps because of the fading light and the sheer number of programs and events. I look through the work orders and calendar of events, but the brief descriptions do not do justice to the amount of time and the number of people

required to coordinate events, repairs, and routine maintenance. Changing a burned out light often turns into a search for a ballast or the discovery of a more serious electrical problem, reports of strange smells can take days to weeks to track down and resolve as drains are flushed, walls are scrubbed, vents are cleaned, and filters are replaced. The B&G staff are called on not just to replace missing toilet paper rolls but to review security footage in an effort to figure out who is writing on the walls in one of the men's room. And no one is working alone. All the staff in the building are regularly helping each other with everything from finding art supplies to help keep a group of cold and bored grade schoolers who teachers brought them to the library 30 minutes before we opened entertained (thank you Jenny for tracking down the supplies) to helping move around set-ups because only one B&G staff member is on duty and someone has requested a change.

As assistant director I feel responsible for keeping an eye on issues large and small that I can help resolve. Walking around the building and checking in with patrons about the temperature, replacing a missing sign with the building hours, and cleaning up after a program when there is short turn around when other staff are busy at service desks are all important to me. It is part of what makes us loved by our users that we pay attention to the details and make a visit to the Ossining Public Library a memorable experience because of the excellent service and facility.

November started with one of our most popular programs on the schedule – Defensive Driving and with the end of daylight savings time. Steve Garrett changes all the clocks in the building and gives them fresh batteries. He then makes sure the timer for the exterior lights is set properly and that all exterior fixtures are in good working order. The time change also brought to my attention the fact that more staff need training to turn on extra lighting when earlier darkness falls. There are a lot of light switches in the building and even I do not know where all of them are.

Tuesday, November 4 was Election Day. This is another good example of how many staff participate in a routine event. James Trapasso and Steve Hamilton are part of the scheduling, and arranging for equipment delivery, I over see scheduling B&G staff and making sure the received equipment is safely stored on site before and after use. Steve Garrett arrives before 5:00 am to open the building for election workers and Emilie Dickinson stays past 9:30 as they wrap up their day. Next day all the equipment is collected. Finally, Karen, James, Steve H., Bob, and I make sure that the county gets the proper information regarding costs for reimbursement.

November is the month of our fall roof inspection and cleaning. Canopy roofing was onsite on November 13 and no major repairs were needed.

In November I also arranged for secure shredding of over 20 boxes of documents that were cleared to dispose of according to the rules of the NYS retention schedule. We also arranged for removal of obsolete and damaged equipment and furnishings. Everything that can be recycled is.

Our second OSD Pop-up shop event of the 2025-2026 school year was November 19. This program is one of my favorites and I enjoy speaking with the program visitors some of whom are coming to the library for the first time.

Also, on the 19<sup>th</sup> I met with the Friends. We happily discussed the upcoming ETSY fair and book sale, collected funds from the coin drop, and discussed their upcoming annual meeting in January.

Following the passage of the building bond there were meetings to discuss financing and next steps. Some days featured as many as three separate meetings related to the building project. Calgi was present for the opening of the bids related to RTU 6 on Monday, November 10. Throughout the month staff from OLA, Lothrop, and SGH called or scheduled visits for additional information related to the building systems.

As the cooler temperatures started, we rolled out area space heaters that staff have given rave reviews, Clean Air Quality Services and OLA have been in regular contact with the library and each other to stay ahead of any potential service problems that our ageing system may develop.

### **Diana Lennon, Adult Services**

The November highlight for me was author Sam Sussman's visit to OPL on Nov. 16, which was sponsored by the Friends. He was appreciative and gracious and spoke eloquently about his novel Boy from the North Country. The audience had incredibly interesting questions that allowed him to delve into his writing process, and how the novel's characters are reflective of his own life, and a lot more! Some patrons from my book club attended and they decided that they want us to read and discuss his work together in the coming year—which we'll do! Hudson Valley Books for Humanity sold a number of his books too, a percentage of which will be donated to the Friends. Please see the attached photos of this event. (Goals 1.1, 2.1)

We had more special moments during the Q&A session of the final UNSUNG: *Alone Multimedia Community Presentation*, when an attendee stood up and made a statement that he was sad that the series was ending because the entire series really touched his life and had a profound impact on him. He said he thoroughly enjoyed each program, and he hoped we have more of them in the future. His comment was very moving for everybody and shows the impact our programming has in the community. (Goals 2.3, 4.3)

Mark and Scott attended a Library Field hike to explore this new outdoor space and discuss possible outdoor programming for adults in 2026. We hope to have some fun options in place that focus on science and the environment, specifically in our area. Scott is also working on programs that tie the Ossining area to the 2026 celebration of the anniversary of the Revolutionary War. We are looking forward to hearing Caroline Curvan and Scott speak about "Ossining in Neutral Ground" on January 28. They are looking at creating another program that fits into the Rev 250 celebration and Karen and I also are exploring ideas for programs on this theme. (Goals 3.2, 4.1, 4.3)

November was also a month of winding down our programming for 2025 and finalizing those for winter 2026. Guillermo will host the Multicultural Film Series in January, February, and March; James will host Ola Nosseir who will discuss "American Muslim Family Life" on Jan. 21. Our Basic English class and Bibliotherapy Book Group ended, and both will begin again in January. As a nice way to end the year, Guillermo and I are looking forward to hosting a

December 15<sup>th</sup> Potluck Fiesta for our patrons who participate in our English and Spanish classes and Conversation Groups. I am sure it will be a fun and lively event! (Goals 2.1, 2.3)

### **Ignayra Lopez, Children's Services**

This fall, Alexandra and I had the opportunity to participate in a 12-week 6-session webinar through the Collaborative Summer Library Program called Community-Based Summers. The series aimed to help libraries provide summer services all while focusing on the community and their needs. We participated in 4 activities to help guide us. The first activity was thinking about our summer why, "Why does our library provide summer services?" The "Why" of summer services is our purpose and ideally our purpose should reflect our community's needs, values, and goals, especially for those who are often left out of library planning. We then looked at traditions. Many summer programs are filled with things that we do year after year. Simply asking, "Does this serve our why?", will help with letting go and reimagining how we provide for the community. One of the most important aspects of the series, in my opinion, is our discussions around connecting with our community. OPL has many familiar and trusted partnerships, but how can we reach those communities who haven't been centered in library planning. Building these partnerships as partners in conversations with the focus on learning and not on library services will help us truly know our community. Lastly, how do we measure progress? We had discussions about rethinking how success looks and figuring out what progress looks like. As well as connecting our progress to our Summer "Why." I'm really looking forward to putting all this learning into practice as we plan for Summer and sharing what I learned with other library staff.

Our Roosevelt visits and Park PreK visits wrapped up this month. I visited the First Steps Play Group for 2- and 3-year-olds on Wednesday, November 19. I hosted a traditional Storytime and spoke to caregivers about library resources and programs. I visited Ossining Children's Center on November 13 and November 25 for our monthly Storytime for babies, toddlers, and preschoolers. (Goal 4.1)

Our Fall programming session has come to an end. We had amazing participation in our regular weekly programs as well as our special programs. Some highlights include Kids Learn to Knit on Saturday mornings. Children individually completed mini knitting projects. Kevin hosted a Pokémon Tournament on November 11. My favorite part of the tournament was watching 2 dads playing Pokémon; one was teaching the other how to play. Our Little Critics Book Club met on November 26 to celebrate Native American Heritage Month. Our critics chose *The Dream Catcher* by Marcelo Verdad as their favorite story.

As we approach the end of the year, we're excited to welcome families during the break with a special lineup of programs that blend holiday magic with beloved library traditions. Our winter session begins in January and promises to bring back some cherished favorites along with a few new twists to keep things fresh and engaging. We look forward to making this season a memorable one for our community's children and hope to see familiar faces—and new ones—as we turn the page into the new year together.

### **Mallory Marinaro, Patron Services**

Last month, I promised a review—I think I actually tried to will into existence a smashing success by using the word *glowing!*, because I am either very hopeful or very naïve—of Ingram, the supplier we are now using for purchasing books.

WELL.

A review would mean receiving any of the books that have been ordered, a milestone we have not yet managed to reach. I am not particularly surprised by this; the remaining book suppliers were absolutely inundated with requests following the demise of Baker & Taylor, and we managed to squeak in just before the proverbial buzzer, as Ingram stopped accepting new accounts mere hours (!) after we got situated.

We've spent a lot of time working out our internal processes and getting ready for what will happen when we're invariably overloaded with hundreds of books coming in at once. Sumbul Faridi, Sheena Glanville, and Jenny Meudt are handling it all tremendously well, and we're very confident that we'll hit the ground running when orders start to arrive. They've become incredibly skilled at covering books, which has been put to good use as we process the materials we've purchased from Hudson Valley Books for Humanity. So many people in our department have offered assistance in cataloging and technical services as we grapple with these hiccups, and it's so gratifying to see people approach a problem with good spirits and come together as a team.

### ***Annual Meeting***

As I write this, we are mere hours from our Annual Meeting and Report to the Community, which has been the dominating focus of my last few weeks. It's always a wonderful evening and I am so happy that we decided to host it in December, rather than June, and not just because taking this on in the midst of our bond vote preparations possibly would have caused me physical harm, as well as emotional anguish—the year in review of it all just makes sense for the year's end, fiscal year deadlines be damned! Didn't we all look forward to our Apple Music Replay or Spotify Wrapped? It puts a bow on the entire year (and puts into stark relief your tendency to hyperfixate when you see that your top song of the entire year was only released on October 3) (that was a purely hypothetical example and in no way relates to the song "Elizabeth Taylor" or its placement on my Apple Music Replay).

Karen and I have been doing the annual meeting presentation together for several years and have gotten our system for it down to a science. Once I have a theme in place that can tie together all of our content and lends itself to an appealing color scheme, the presentation sort of falls into place.

WELL.

Sorry to use the same rhetorical device twice in a single monthly report, but it's true: a lot of my work in November centered around tying our varied and sometimes disparate news and updates with a keynote speech focused on the outdoors. Could I have started plugging away at the content before I had the aesthetics down? Of course I could have. Should I have? Also yes! Did I? No. I did not.

The creative aspect of my job is a double-edged sword—it's really fun and I'm good at it, but it's hard, if not impossible, to force inspiration. So I spent quite a large amount of time looking at an empty Canva template and jotting down a handwritten list of possible themes (Library *Field of Dreams*? Growing Pains? Topics that weren't necessarily associated with 80s popular culture?) until something felt right (this is my secret: anything graphic or creative that I do is almost entirely by vibes) (considering this meandering monthly report, perhaps it's more of an open secret).

When inspiration finally did strike in the form of...national parks signage (obviously), I came up with a color scheme and spent an inordinate amount of time trying to find out the exact shape of the national parks signage—they are asymmetrical trapezoids and were designed by Virgil "Bus" Carrell, about whom I now know quite a lot—until everything came together in a midcentury modern presentation. Many, many thanks to Karen who trusted that I'd come up with something and patiently waited while I did.

I'm very pleased with this year's presentation and am looking forward to how it's received!

### **Allison Robbins, Technology and Training**

November was filled, primarily, with keeping a variety of projects rolling along. Mostly unexciting things but work happening in the background eventually leads to visible end results!

**Windows 10:** Microsoft is discontinuing support for Windows 10 this year, which means OPL needs to upgrade existing devices to Windows 11 and/or replace devices that cannot support Windows 11. I am working with Logically to gather information and formulate a game plan that will be financially feasible. Thankfully, our annual technology budget includes a percentage of anticipated lifecycle costs to replace all our devices. --**December update:** Replacements have been purchased and received—laptops have been delivered to staff and desktop workstations will be installed shortly. The remaining computers in the building will be upgraded to Windows 11.

**Ossining Food Pantry:** I connected with Doug Gaynor from the Ossining Food Pantry, and we discussed some ways in which OPL can be a community partner in their efforts to meet food security challenges in Ossining. More to come in the new year. (Goal 4)

**Patron Services Programs and Events:** Mallory and I asked Patron Services staff for program and events ideas at our October department meeting, and we got so many good ones! We will be working with the staff who came up with the ideas and others interested in participating. Most will take place in Spring, 2026. (Goal 2.1)

**Self-Checkout:** We have reinitiated a conversation about implementing self-checkout stations at OPL. We got a renewed quote from Bibliotheca and are currently scoping out the best timeline to aim for installation/implementation with consideration of our construction schedule. We intend to seek grant funding for these devices. (Goals 1.3, 5.2)

Concise progress updates/statuses on some other projects:

- New session management and patron print software: Awaiting the conclusion of some developments with a company that appears promising. I should have more answers within the next few months as some software development for specific features is



completed. Preliminary quote should be forthcoming in October. **December update:** Still awaiting the quote. In the meantime, our current mobile printing provider updated the method by which mobile printing is provided. Android issues were resolved in November.

- Copiers: I've started working with different vendors and service providers to get quotes ahead of next year's contract expiration.
- Cat 2 ERate funding: Working on applying for funding with e2e in anticipation of needed work as a part of our building project. **December Update:** Our request for Category 2 Funding was submitted through our ERate consultants and our bidding window is now open.
- Phones and related systems: Some functional issues are being/have been resolved and work is reportedly still underway towards enabling SMS text messaging for the library.

### **Circulation Statistics:**

- Patrons Added: 104
- Interlibrary Loans
  - Received at Ossining: 1,726
  - Supplied to Other WLS Libraries: 995
- Total Checkouts (including eBooks): 16,468
- Mobile App Checkouts: 0 (Mobile checkout currently inoperable)
- OverDrive Total Checkouts (including shared, consortium items): 5,227
- Ossining Advantage Title Checkouts: 735
- Museum Pass Checkouts: 54
- Explorer Bags Checkouts: 1

### **Tech Statistics:**

- Items Added: 364
- Items Deleted: 506