Annual Report 2021-22

Emerging from a historic pandemic, Willard Library continued to serve as a lifeline to the community by providing access to timely materials, offering valuable services, and hosting engaging programs.

After the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Emergency Orders were rescinded on June 22, 2021, Willard Library entered the fiscal year 2021-2022 with cautious optimism that services would return to normal. However, the surge of first the Delta variant and later the Omicron variant restricted in-person services such as one-one-one computer help and program attendance.

Throughout the ever-changing COVID-19 infection rates within the community, the Library circulated over 625,000 items, provided combined virtual and in-person programming for over 9,400 attendees, and gave internet access to over 23,000 public desktop users and over 78,000 wireless device users. The Library continued to expand its collection of digital products, and there were over 182,000 items circulated during the fiscal year. The Library was able to resume in-person assistance for guests, which allowed one-on-one assistance with web navigation, wireless devices, online unemployment services, and guidance on legal self-help services.

The Library continued to make progress toward its strategic planning goals and was awarded a 2021 Citation of Excellence Award from the Library of Michigan. The Library partnered with local organizations that reach the Spanish-speaking and Burmese-speaking communities within Battle Creek in order to distribute gift books and offer bilingual programs. The Library helped celebrate Juneteenth with a book giveaway and a promotional table at Juneteenth Family Day in Claude Evans Park. To better match the materials collection with the needs of a diverse community, a collection audit was completed. The creation of a social services information librarian position helped to better serve library guests. The launch of a promotional campaign - Discover Willard! - invited people back to the Library after the pandemic closures; this initiative included a fine-free check-in incentive to draw users back.

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The Library’s mix of virtual and in-person programming increased the entire community’s engagement. Total youth and teen attendance was approximately 6,200. The Summer Reading Kickoff in June 2022 hosted over 275 attendees. Local history programming included the popular Peeks into the Past virtual program with episodes on Sojourner Truth and the History of Maple Street. Battle Creek Reads returned to hosting an in-person event featuring author Bernice McFadden to discuss her novel, *The Book of Harlan*. A creative space on the main floor of Willard Library opened in the fall of 2021 with a similar creative space at the Helen Warner Branch opening in June 2022. Also, in June 2022, the Library hosted best-selling author James Patterson who spoke to a full house of over 1,200 at W.K. Kellogg Auditorium.

### Financial Report

The Library’s administration continues to monitor property values and proposed legislation that would affect library funding at both the local and state level. Areas of potential financial concern include local tax-capture agreements and the elimination of the Personal Property Tax. Property values increased slightly. Library expenditures are regularly reviewed for potential cost-saving measures.

Willard Library and the Helen Warner Branch continue to be popular destinations while operating at the same rate of 2.0 mills, which was adopted 20 years ago. With careful resource management, the Library’s administration anticipates continued success at this funding level for many years to come.