

Director's Remarks
February 2023

Northeast library update.

South if Larry doesn't mention.

Magazines & Newspapers

Standing room only. You know, when we built our libraries, we built meeting rooms to accommodate the needs of our community. We dedicated a conference room on the third floor of this building in which to hold Board meetings. We no longer have a space big enough to accommodate comfortably the number of people who wish to attend our Board meetings.

Oddly enough, I can relate this to our magazine and newspaper collections—but in the opposite direction. When South Regional opened fifteen years ago, the library subscribed to a large number of magazine and newspaper titles. And when Main reopened seven years ago, we subscribed to numerous magazine and newspaper title.

Magazine usage has declined steadily over the years, and the library has been discontinuing titles as this has happened. The internet has also contributed to a large number of cessations of magazine titles. As magazine sales dwindle and their publishers consolidate, the library has fewer options for distributors, and the distributors have less incentive to keep costs down or to deliver their products consistently. A lot of issues do not arrive, and we have no means to force a publisher to make good.

At the Main Library we have reclaimed the empty magazine and newspaper shelving to expand our large print collection. At South Regional efforts are being made to reclaim the empty shelves for other parts of the collection.

Newspapers have seen a combination of lower usage in the library, drastically increased prices and drastically reduced reliability. Let me give you an example, we subscribe to *The Daily Advertiser*, the paper of record for Lafayette Parish, for each of our branches. We report delivery problems, but they are not always resolved. Delivery is cancelled because we have not paid our bill. But we have paid it. We provide proof that we paid the bill, and the people who send the invoice cannot confirm with the people who receive payment that they were paid.

This problem is worse for national papers, such as, *The Wall Street Journal*. We cannot get reliable local delivery. We cannot get consistent delivery through the Postal Service. These publishers are shifting their business models online, but

the online access often costs significantly more than print. The online model often takes patron privacy concerns out of the library's hands.

We factor in staff costs when considering what we purchase. Typically, this applied to technology upkeep, but lately it has become an issue with periodicals.

Staff / Trauma / ALA

I attended the LibLearnX convention in New Orleans at the end of January. This used to be called ALA MidWinter. The conference serves as an opportunity to see vendors and products and as an opportunity for continuing education—a requirement for state certification. If you have any questions about the library's relationship with ALA, please refer to my comments at the November 2022 meeting. They are available on our site in print, or you can listen to the audio of the meeting.

That said, I want to discuss staff safety and wellbeing. I spoke with the Urban Librarians Unite representatives in New Orleans. They recently concluded a trauma study on library staff. Trauma comes in many forms for public service staff. And the cause is not always what one might think. Staff are subject to verbal abuse by unhappy patrons who do not get their ways. Staff are subject to verbal abuse from angry people. Staff are sometimes threatened with physical harm. They can be sexually harassed. They are called to protect the Constitution one moment and then called sexual predators the next. But these are all sort of obvious.

Contrary to what anyone might think they know about the library and its staff, the library has only three positions specifically required to teach classes. My teaching background might have come in handy when I worked a public desk, but teaching was not a spelled out job duty. Yet our staff regularly get called upon to teach when assisting patrons who have no access to technology at home, older people for whom using technology has now become a requirement for accessing services, recently unemployed people who need to apply for jobs and services online. Our staff are not trained social workers or medical providers, but they help a lot of people find the resources they need to find shelter or assistance or a meal. Our successes place a heavier workload on us. Yet many people think of our staff as a waste of money.

Speaking of money, recent funding issues and changes to staffing models were stressful to staff. When your job is placed before the voters every few years, it can be stressful, especially since these decisions are out of your control. The Board makes policy, and the library administration decides how to implement those policies. All staff can do is continue to show up for work, and hope that a dozen people have made decisions in such a way that the voters will fund the library. No pressure.

The staff are the most important part of the library. LCG put an employee assistance program in place because it knows that its people need support. The library has begun looking into better ways to keep staff safe at work and the public. We have increased awareness of library and LCG harassment policies, including the library's patron behavior policy. I have spoken to HR and to Civil Service about how we treat our staff and support them. I have spoken to DA Don Landry about best practices for handling issues that escalate to calling law enforcement.

Milton & Duson

Before the building program, began the library had small branches that were closed for one hour for lunch. These branches were staffed by a single person. After the building was significantly complete, the library stopped closing these branches for lunch. This required hiring part-time staff to cover lunch and assist with branch operations.

The Duson and Milton branch libraries are currently open from 9:00 am until 6:00 pm and are staffed by a full-time library associate and a part-time library technical assistant (LTA 1). The LTA 1 position is our entry level position, and part-time employees are not eligible for benefits. Thus part-time LTA 1 positions often serve as a foot in the door to full-time employment with LCG. People don't remain in these positions long, and it is difficult to fill them when they are vacant, and it is difficult to operate Duson or Milton when these positions are vacant. I will be bringing the Board recommendations for changing the hours at these locations. I will not be asking the Board to shut down either of these locations.

The Duson branch will be closed from 1:00 to 2:00 pm daily for the time being because of the staffing issue.