



APPLETON PUBLIC  
LIBRARY

2025 Annual Report



# Director's Message

This past year marked a turning point for the Appleton Public Library. After years of planning, patience, and persistence, we opened the doors to our transformed downtown library. The energy since opening day has been unmistakable, and it has been a privilege to watch the building come to life every day.

None of this happened by accident. The success reflected in our annual report rests on strong partnerships and a shared commitment by many.

The City of Appleton's support extended well beyond funding. In addition to the financial investment made by the city and its taxpayers, colleagues across many departments contributed their time, expertise, and problem-solving throughout the project.

Friends of Appleton Public Library's capital campaign made the library far more than it could have been with public funds alone, and their ongoing support continues to expand what we can offer.

Our staff carried the transition forward with care and professionalism, then quickly turned their focus to shaping services, collections, and programs that meet the needs of a growing and curious community.

Finally, our community brought energy, creativity, and their own ideas, making the space truly come alive.

Our annual report illustrates what the first year back downtown looked like in practice: busy meeting rooms, welcoming spaces, creative programming, and strong use of collections across all ages. It reflects the scale of the milestone and the daily work that makes the library matter.

Throughout the year, the library received several honors, culminating in being named the Wisconsin Library Association Library of the Year for 2025. This recognition reflects the dedication and skill of our staff, and it also belongs to the community, whose partnership and engagement make this work possible.

Thank you for your trust, your support, and for making the library a place that belongs to all of us.



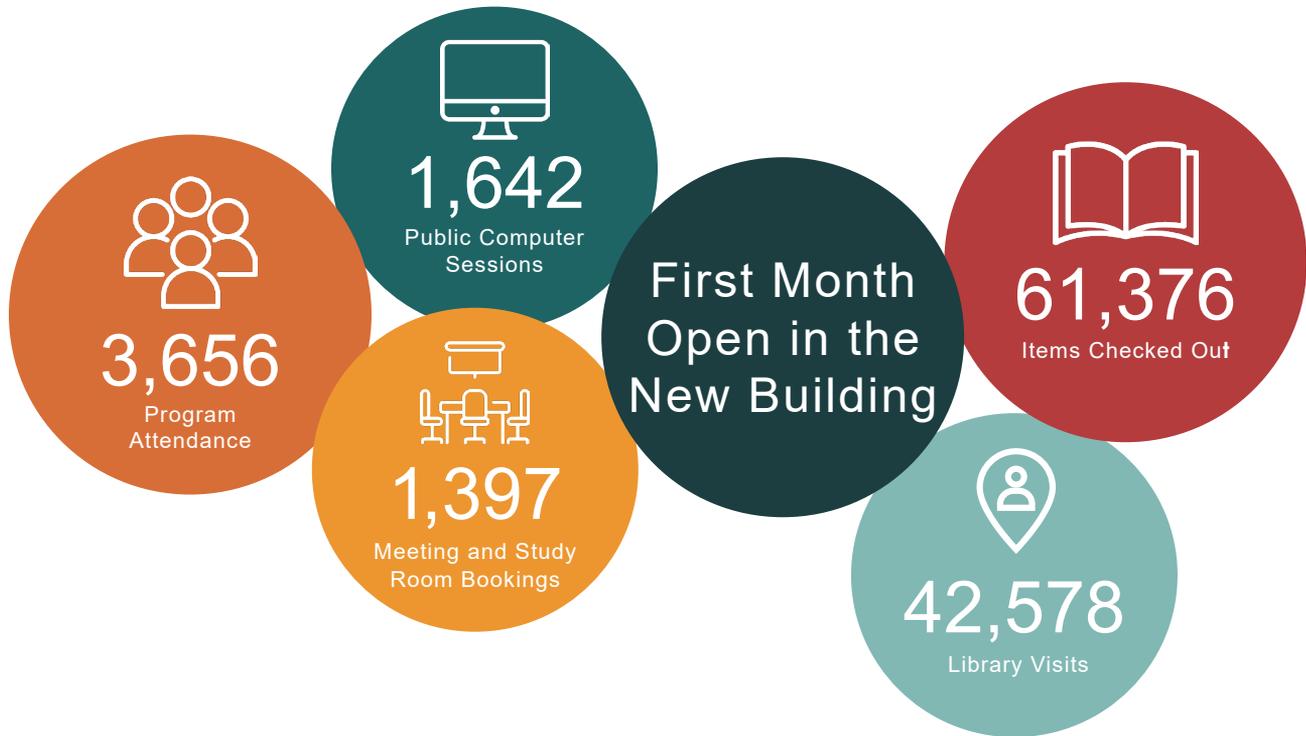
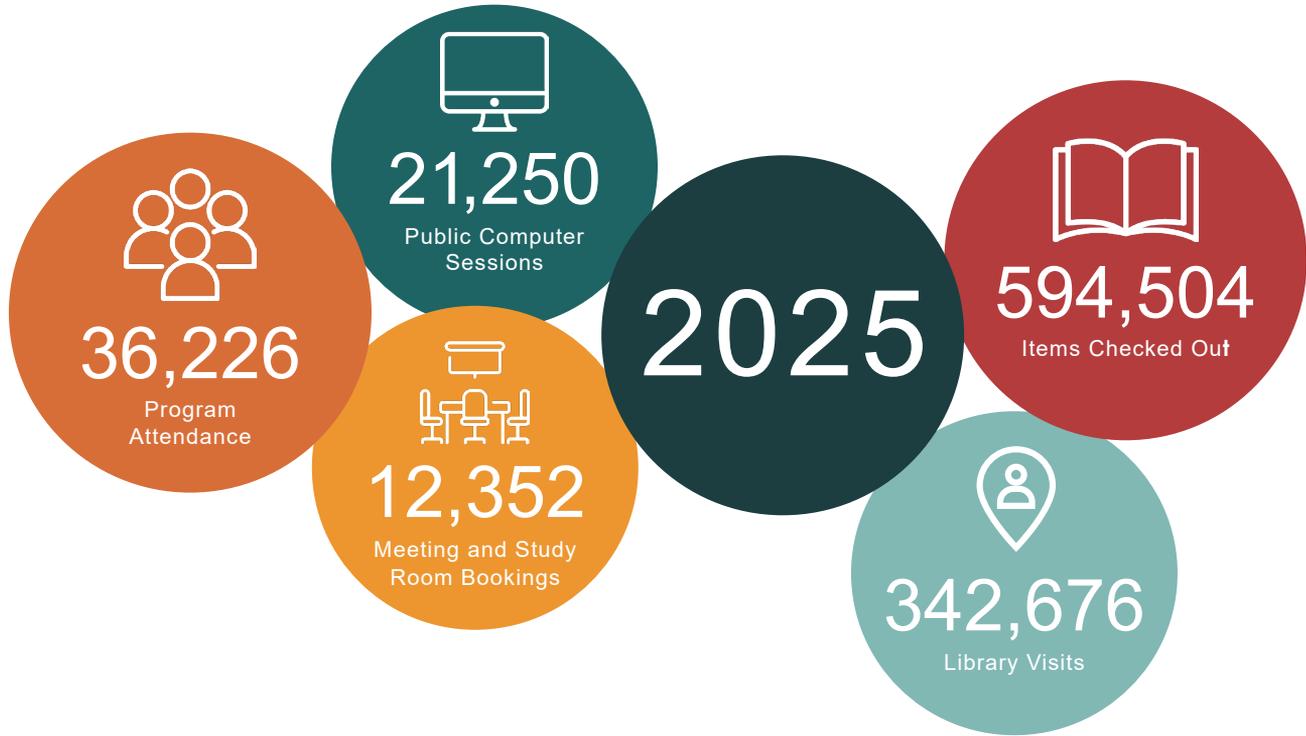
Colleen Rortved  
Library Director

## Library Board of Trustees

Bastia Looker - President  
Jason Brozek - Vice President  
Nanette Bunnow  
Kevin Englebert  
John Keller

Mary Lokensgard  
Margret Mann  
Nancy Scheuerman  
Alderson Martyn Smith  
Brian Vargas

# By the Numbers



Expenses and Revenues

**\$5,427,404**

Expenses

**\$1,449,784**

Revenues

**\$4,286,055**

Capital Expenses

**\$79,500**

Grants



## Friends of Appleton Public Library

A special thanks to Friends of Appleton Public Library, who use donations to grant funds to support the library's mission. Friends' grants are essential in our ability to provide innovative and creative library programs and services. We're grateful to have a strong partnership.



**\$1.97M**

in Grants Received  
Since 2000



**\$121K**

in Grant Funds  
Received in 2025



**135**

Programs and Special  
Projects Funded in 2025

# Hub of Learning and Literacy

We support and sustain education for all ages.



## Library Cards

Library cards offer community members free access to information and knowledge, supporting learning opportunities and growth at every age; from babies to older adults.

One of our most impressive stats from our first year open in the new building is the number of people who signed up for or renewed their library cards. Just under 31,000 people either signed up for a new card, got a replacement card, or renewed their account since the building opened on February 15. Just over 30% of the people were completely new library patrons. The new building offered us an opportunity to connect previous non-library users with all the library has to offer.



## Summer Library Program

Research shows students who don't engage in reading activities throughout the summer are susceptible to losing an average of three months of learning achievement. This loss is cumulative from one year to the next, regardless of the quality of the school.

Helping support the educational needs of our community is a critical library service. Our summer library program helps to fight summer learning loss by providing easy access to books and a fun and

engaging experience--including offering prizes such as a bank vault tour and a City of Appleton Public Works bucket truck ride.

There are other important benefits to participating in summer library programs and they're not just for children and teens. Our adult program offers lifelong learning opportunities which helps lead to a more enriching and fulfilling life.

In total, just over 1,850 community members participated in the program.



30,915

New, Replacement, and Library Card Renewals



1,868

Summer Library Program Participants



86%

Increase in Summer Library Program Participants from 2024

# Collaborative Environment

We connect with partners to share knowledge and information.





## Friends of Appleton Public Library Capital Campaign

In late 2023, Friends of Appleton Public Library launched the public phase of their Building Beyond Words Capital Campaign. Their goal was to provide \$12 million to support the City of Appleton's investment and ensure the library had the needed features and enhancements to serve and advance the community.

Over the course of 2024, Friends staff, their board of directors, and the Building Beyond Words capital campaign committee worked tirelessly to complete their fundraising goal. They offered unique opportunities for community members to engage with

fundraising efforts, such as sharing community stories of impact and working with local businesses to provide eggroll sales. Three local children even hosted a lemonade stand raising \$185.

"This project is a testament to the power of community support," said Nanci Micke, Friends of Appleton Public Library Board President. "We are incredibly thankful to our generous donors who helped us achieve our fundraising goal. Our vision was to help our city create a library that will serve many generations to come and it's amazing to see that become a reality."



625

Number of Donors



\$5 - \$3M

Range of Gifts



88%

Of Support Came from  
Individuals or Foundations

# Educate and Inspire Youth

We ensure that children and teens find a supportive place for their futures.



## Children's & Teen Spaces

One of our most exciting stories from over the year was the ability of all the new library spaces to transform the way we're able to serve our community.

Some of our early observations from our first few months open include the increased use of the library by teens and young adults. Typically, these audiences are one of the most difficult to reach. By offering welcoming and flexible spaces, teens are excited to come in and use their library.

We've also noticed benefits of the intentional design and placement of the Vira Stoner Flex Box. The space serves as both a gathering and programming space near the Thomas P. Fanning Teen Area. Teens who use the teen area while library programs are taking place in the flex box have been able to engage in the programs and more importantly build relationships with other community members and staff.

Additionally, we've seen a huge increase in the number of children and caregivers we have been able to serve, thanks in part to the amount and variety of spaces available in our Children's Department.

This year we were finally able to bring back some of our popular programs because of all of the new space we have. One of those popular programs is our messy Little Learners program. Caregivers love this program because they're able to keep "the mess" at



the library and we love being able to host these programs because we have the flexible (and wipeable) space to do so.

Our play area also continues to be a very popular place for caregivers to bring children. Children have the chance to explore, create, and collaborate with other children in a safe environment.

We'd like to extend a big thank you to the Building for Kids Children's Museum for helping us transform our play area with their Planet Imagination exhibit during the last few months of 2025.



90%

Increase in Children's Services Space in the New Building



27,053

Number of Children's Program Participants



125%

Increase in Number of Teen Program Participants

# Creation and Innovation

We are a platform that sparks discovery, development,  
and originality.





## Artist-in-Residence

Another program we were able to reintroduce to our community after reopening the new library is our popular Artist-in-Residence program. The goal of the program is to celebrate and foster a creative and connected community through local art by providing a space for artists to showcase their work. Our Artist-in-Residence program officially began in 2015. Since then, over 30 artists have shown their work or held sessions through the program.

Each residency lasts three consecutive months. Artists provide three engagement events and display art in the Rick and Sue Detienne Gallery. Thanks to Friends of Appleton Public Library, artists receive an honorarium and funds for program supplies. Additionally, artists receive coordinated workspace and promotion of art and residency through our channels.

We have three professional artists who work with us to curate our Artist-in-Residence artists. Our first year back we were able to showcase a variety of artists and art to appeal to a diverse audience, including an illustrator and screen printer, a conceptual artist who works in nature, and a tattooist, oil painter, and photographer.

## Food Literacy Programming

When people have basic food knowledge, they feel more confident and in control of their health. That confidence can lead to better eating habits and long-term wellness. Having food literacy also helps address larger community issues like food insecurity.

This last year we were able to experiment with several creative food literacy program opportunities thanks to community partners and the Vira Stoner Flex Box; which offers a flexible environment for hosting this type of programming.

Adults enjoyed programs such as a cooking demo with local chef and restaurant owner Natasha Banks, and an informational session on understanding how sugar cravings work and how to address them with nutritionist Megan Normansell.

Teens enjoyed events such as how to make your own bubble tea with restaurant owner Fannie Xie, and a build your own charcuterie board program with support from Festival Foods grocery store.

# Engaged and Connected

We focus on how to make a difference in people's lives.





## No Questions Asked Collection

In late 2025, we established our new No Questions Asked Collection. This collection aims to support and expand health-related resources for our community. It includes a set of materials that focus on addiction, recovery, and mental health.

“This collection aligns with our mission to serve as a welcoming and supportive resource for all community members,” said Colleen Rortvedt, Appleton Public Library Director. “Particularly those who may be hesitant to seek help or those looking to take a first step towards recovery or healing from addiction or trauma.”

Materials are on a shelf at the west end of the upper level and do not need to

be checked out or returned. The model, inspired by an American Libraries article, helps people explore and access materials with ease and privacy.

The location also houses the Overdose Aid Kit Box (OAK Box). The OAK Box contains naloxone, CPR masks, fentanyl test strips, and information on local resources. The OAK Box is made possible by Outagamie County Public Health and City of Appleton Health Department.

A big thank you to United Way Fox Cities for providing the funding for the collection, as well as providing print materials for the community to learn more about free resources and services.

“We believe access to help should never come with barriers or judgment. The No Questions Asked collection reflects that same spirit, meeting people where they are and offering connection to the information, resources, and hope they need. It’s another way our community is saying, you’re not alone, help is here.”

Lisa Kogan-Praska, President and CEO of United Way Fox Cities

# Enriched Experiences

We provide experiences that are timely, inclusive, and aligned with community interests.



*Photo by Graham Washatka of Graham Images*

# Self-Directed Programs

In 2025, we were able to provide several new and engaging self-directed program opportunities for the community. Self-directed programs are defined as informal and interactive activities patrons can participate in independently without a set schedule.

Our self-directed programs encourage learning and creativity. They invite patrons to explore, reflect, and create without pressure. For those who may not want to attend a structured program, self-directed programs are a low-stakes and welcoming option; a way they can still engage with others and their community.

We offered self-directed activities for community members of all ages, with over 14,000 participants in 95 activities. There was an activity for everyone; from highlighting one of our Artist-in-Residents by designing your own tarot cards to celebrating Appleton's Bird City designation with a bird sighting board, and more.

# Meeting & Study Rooms

Free meeting and study space is usually difficult to find in a community. Our meeting and study rooms continue to be heavily used by our community members, fulfilling a need and reinforcing our role as a community hub.



By providing access to free meeting and study spaces, we are supporting community connection, collaboration, and learning opportunities--regardless of income level.

With the new building, we increased access to meeting and study spaces by 100%. In 2025, community members booked our study and meeting spaces just over 12,350 times, from when the building opened in mid-February to the end of December.



95

Self-Directed Programs



14,536

Self-Directed Program Participants



41

Average Meeting and Study Room Bookings Per Day

# Services and Programs for All

We give our community opportunities for growth, self-instruction, and inquiry.



*Photo by Graham Washatka of Graham Images*

# Library of the Year

*From the Wisconsin Library Association*

In February 2025, after nearly two decades of planning and perseverance, Appleton Public Library opened its new facility

APL's achievement is even more remarkable given two relocations during construction. Through these disruptions, staff delivered exceptional service with minimal interruption, relocating programs to parks, schools, nonprofits, coffee shops, and partner spaces. They built new audiences, launched initiatives like the City of Appleton Poet Laureate Program, and piloted pop-up coworking programs with local businesses.

Since reopening, the library's impact has been profound. In just five months, APL recorded 173,000 visits, 299,283 checkouts, 6,548 new cardholders, and over 5,000 bookings for study rooms, meeting spaces, and creation studios. Its design reflects deep community input and a commitment to accessibility, with a sensory room, gender-inclusive restrooms with adult changing tables, hearing loops,

and welcoming spaces like the coworking space and the unconference room.

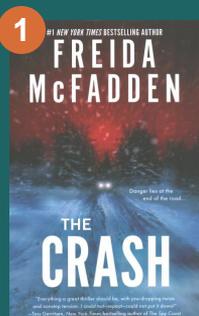
As Mayor Jacob A. Woodford notes, APL's ability to manage complex logistics while maintaining exceptional service "is a testament to their professionalism, resilience, creativity, and community focus." City of Appleton Council President Katie Van Zeeland calls the library "a living, breathing expression of our community's values" and praises its "radically inclusive space" that welcomes everyone.

APL's leadership extends beyond Appleton. As a key member of WiLS, System and Resource Library Administrators' Association of Wisconsin, and the City Library Collective, APL serves as a model of collaborative, future-focused service for libraries statewide.

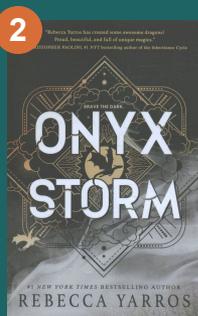
With its bold vision, resilient leadership, and unwavering commitment to equity and access, Appleton Public Library embodies the best of Wisconsin libraries.

## Opening Day Collection

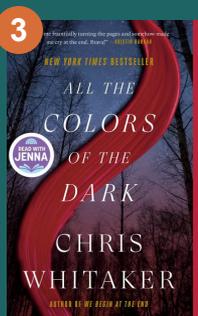
During our first six months open, we hosted a special collection of in-demand titles available in-building. A big thank you to our fellow Outagamie Waupaca Library System libraries for allowing us a special exception to resource sharing rules. Check out the top circulating items below.



*The Crash*  
Freida  
McFadden



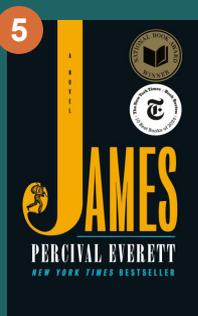
*Onyx Storm*  
Rebecca  
Yarros



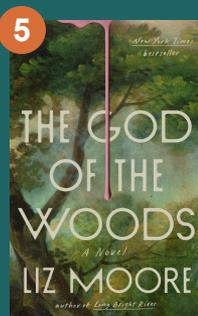
*All the Colors  
of the Dark*  
Chris Whitaker



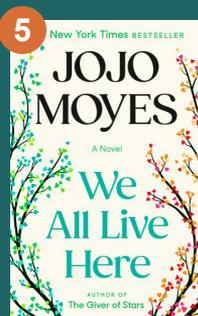
*Paranoia*  
James  
Patterson



*James:  
A Novel*  
Percival  
Everett



*The God of  
the Woods*  
Liz Moore



*We All Live  
Here*  
JoJo Moyes



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