



2023 Annual Report

Belmont Public Library

Department Head: Peter Struzziero

Assistant Director: Lauren Pfindner

Purpose and Duties:

The Belmont Public Library is guided by the past and focused on the future. Its mission is to enrich the lives of the community by empowering its citizens' personal, educational, and professional growth. The Library is dedicated to advancing literacy and fostering life-long learning.

The Belmont Public Library aims to provide a center for information and discovery through innovative programming, robust collections, and responsive services. The Library is a place for Belmont to learn, share, and create.

Our Core Values

Knowledgeable staff and great service
Intellectual freedom and access to knowledge for all
Current and historical digital collections
Technology and information literacy training
Spaces for study, collaboration, and innovation
A place where Belmont comes to explore, learn, and discover

Summary of Activities and Accomplishments:

"I have made so many friends. I struggled to find people like me for my entire life but I have formed some really close connections here. I don't know where I would be without the Library, it seriously changed my life for the better."

-A happy patron-

Administration

2023 Was the final year of service for the beloved (but beyond its useful life) building located at 336 Concord Avenue. It was one of the most successful years statistically in Library history with collection use over 660,000, 2nd highest ever for us. We continue to be a top ten Library in Massachusetts, and expect to do even better when our new building opens. While the Library Trustees, Administration, Support Organizations, and Building Committee focused on the march towards our new library, the library staff made sure that we made 2023 a fantastic year for patrons.

In the spring of 2023, over 500 patrons attended two days of Mini Golf inside the Library including a Putt N' Pint event held on a Friday night. Special thanks to The Friends of the Library who helped organize and run this event with now Assistant Library Director Lauren Pender. Many thanks also to



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many local community sponsors and The Sam Adams Brewery of Boston for their sponsorship. This was one of the most successful in person programs in Library history.

Another popular event saw 150 patrons in house for our Friday night Books in Bloom event in April. Many thanks to the FOBPL, Garden Club, and Library staff for putting together a wonderful event.

The First Annual Town Wide Yard Sale was approved, hosted and enthusiastically received. Over 120 Belmont homes had yard sales on the same day in September. This was a great collaboration between the Library, The Council on Aging, and Recreation Department. The estimate of patrons who participated is in the thousands. In the 2024 effort, we will plan the process of promotion to start earlier to see if we can expand participation even further.

The Library Administrative team has been undersized for decades. Despite the challenges our Library Director and team have found ways to be successful, but not without great strain on staffing at all levels. 5+ years ago, we realized that more administrative support was needed, but that it ultimately should be the final step in a complete staffing model assessment and plan.

Library Administration has spent those years working on right sizing staff. We finished a complete staff reorganization where positions were adjusted, updated, created, and retired, depending on the needs. Dozens of job descriptions were changed and two major back of the house departments were combined.

In addition, we automated in major ways. We decreased the headcount, cut tens of thousands in part time salaries by putting in self-checkout machines, launching a mobile app for self service in the building, and creating an online chat to streamline the ways we can communicate. We also converted the collection to RFID, to keep staffing costs in line permanently. In the future library we have planned for even further automatic material handling to allow us to process even greater volumes of materials.

In 2023, we built off these years of effort and took the step to create an additional Library Administration role, an Assistant Library Director position. Our budget-working group, who identified the opportunity to create the role without asking for additional funding from taxpayers, completed a thorough budget analysis and reallocation of funding needs to support this position. We now have this this critical #2 position, which will allow for improvements in our operations and servicing. As 2023 came to a close, Lauren Pfindner, our library's Coordinator of Reference and Public Services, was selected by a search committee and appointed by the Library Director and Trustees as the first Assistant Director in over 30 years.



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Library Building Project

After the positive votes of 2022 it was clear that 2023 would be a year spent on planning and Design Development. Our Building Committee set out to take the work completed in our Schematic Design Phase and bring it forward through final design.

At this point, while preliminary efforts had been made, we dedicated ourselves to an honest search for temporary housing. Working with Trustees Kathy Keohane and Mary Stearns, with support from now Assistant Director Lauren Pfendner, we looked extensively for commercial space in Belmont. The reality set in quickly that we did not have any “extra” funding in the lean project budget, and that any dollars that could be saved for the permanent library should be. The costs of the limited commercial real estate in town were too high for our project to afford.

In parallel, we were also searching for opportunities in private buildings or churches. While we learned that some space might be available for occasional use, there was nothing that would suit the needs for a permanent temporary location.

We also had been exploring options in town owned buildings, and here we found success. Big thanks to all who joined the effort to find homes for the library. It was determined that public services could be offered from the Benton Library and Beech Street Center, with space for staff offices to be found in the Chenery Upper Elementary School and one office in the DPW Building. Our thanks to the various town leaders and government officials, in addition to school leadership; their support was critical to finding a successful outcome.

At the end of November, the Library building closed, a small amount of equipment and materials moved to the Benton Library and Beech Street Center over the weekend after Thanksgiving, and transition services were launched on Monday November 27. As December progressed, those services grew. We began the library move out in December and concluded it in early January, and launched full services including in person programming.

The Library redeployed various equipment to other town departments, charitable organizations and other Minuteman libraries. The focus was on repurposing equipment with the focus on reallocating primarily to other town and school groups (large-scale equipment including the library boilers, water bubblers, heating and air equipment, cleaning and office supplies, furniture, bookcases, book carts and more)

Small amounts of remaining surplus items were sold to the public, with the money going to the Town’s general fund.

In early 2024, we were proud to retire the building and its colors at a ceremony, which hosted Patrice Garvin, Town Administrator and her team, The Select Board Members, Robert Upton,



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Town Veterans Agent alongside several Veterans and many residents. Trustee Corinne McCue Olmsted, The Board Vice Chair, led this ceremony, which also had members of the Library Trustees, Friends, and Building Committee present. 2023 was a historic year as we completed the action of preparing for our new library.

State Requirements

As always, we want to share the requirements that must be met annually to be certified by the State.

The Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners outlines several criteria for operation and certification. If a library does not meet these requirements, then they face losing certification.

To be a certified by the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners, the library must:

1. Meet the Municipal Appropriation Requirement
2. Meet the minimum standards of free public library service
3. Remain open a minimum number of hours per week
4. Allow non-resident borrowing
5. Expend a percentage (based on population) of the municipal appropriation on materials
6. Have a Director with a Master's Degree in Library Science

By meeting these State requirements, the Town of Belmont receives the following benefits:

1. The Library is allowed continued membership to the Minuteman Library Network, which in turn allows interlibrary loans, reciprocal borrowing privileges, and free use of other libraries for Belmont patrons.
2. The Library is allowed access to grants and ensures yearly state funding.

Children's Services

The Children's Staff spent 2023 working hard to provide new services and programs while simultaneously planning a move to a temporary space as we look forward to the construction of a new library. Children's program attendance from in-person, virtual, and outreach programs totaled an estimated 6,775 participants, a nearly 30 percent increase from 2022. With the support of our patrons and our colleagues at the library, we are excited to look ahead and start planning the future while continuing our work to address the current needs of Belmont families. This is an exciting time and we are grateful for all of the opportunities ahead as well as for the generosity and kindness of our patrons.

Moving to the Benton Library

The work to find temporary space to move to while our new building is under construction started almost as soon as the citizens of Belmont voted to build a new library in 2022. A year of planning for Library Administration and Trustees, as well as the cooperation and help of the Benton Library



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Board, brought Children's Room staff, and as much of our collection as we could fit, to the E.C. Benton Library on 75 Oakley Road. Service started with patron holds as we worked to complete our move, but has expanded to browsing collections, programs, and providing study and work space. We could not ask for a better temporary home and are thankful to everyone who helped provide such a beautiful space. Children's staff, with tremendous support from Library Administration, worked very hard to make the space comfortable and welcoming for families.

Staffing

Many children's staff members were presented with new professional and personal opportunities and sought new careers in other communities. Long-time Library Assistant Mary Woods retired after over twenty years of work at the Belmont Public Library. While they are missed, we are grateful for their years of service to the Library in Belmont.

Library of Things Children's Collection

Families of Belmont have always been able to find great books and movies in the Children's Room, but now there are even more options. Toy food for pretend play, microscopes for making discoveries, reading pens to help readers pronounce new words, Rubik's Cubes for puzzle fans, a robot you can program yourself, and much more are all-available for our community to explore at home, thanks to the generosity of the Friends of the Belmont Public Library. We are looking forward to adding even more to our collection.

Programs for All Ages

We expanded programming in 2023. From infants to middle school kids, we had something for everyone.

For infants through preschoolers, we had a full schedule of story times organized by age, including summer visits to the Underwood Pool and the Belmont Farmers' Market. Monthly concerts from Belmont favorite musician Matt Heaton returned as did Music and Movement with Rubi and Puppet Story time with Leigh Baltzer. Parents were also able to gain some insight into their child's sleep behaviors with a presentation by Lynne Caldwell, a registered nurse and a pediatric sleep consultant.

The Children's Room has once again built a partnership with Watertown Family Center. We hosted a new program called Little Bookworms where Belmont and Watertown families learned about authors and illustrators such as Mo Willems or Ezra Jack Keats and created art inspired by the books. Participants also learned details about the author's life, and had fun with friends while adults learned about important resources and literacy tips.

Children's staff also incorporated patron feedback and created a new monthly Monday Meet and Play program. Families had expressed a desire for a program where they could socialize with other families and where adults could have a much-needed chance to chat while their children enjoy the



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library's toys and other activities. This program helped families have an informal activity where they could make friends and have fun.

Our school-aged patrons also had plenty of fun at the library to choose from. The Children's Department and the Young Adult Department collaborated on our first ever Tween Dungeons and Dragons campaign. Participants worked together to complete their quest and enjoy an adventure together. Library staff also helped kids learn about the basics of role-playing games and how to create characters. Pokémon fans had plenty of opportunities for fun with regular card trading days. Crafty kids enjoyed several opportunities to create; 60 adults and kids attended our Glow in the Dark Crafternoon. Families used elements of nature to create homes for fairies in Underwood Park. Beads were turned into backpack charms for forty children.

Fun for all ages came due to the hard work and generosity of the Friends of the Belmont Public Library. Thanks to their STEAM program initiative, kids ages eight and up had the opportunity to learn how to design their own 2D video game with Empow Studios.

The Friends also provided two Halloween events full of spooky fun. 150 adults and kids came together on a rainy Saturday to dance along to a special Halloween version of Music and Movement with Rubi while collecting treats at stations throughout the library. On Halloween Day, 90 adults and children came to trick or treat for candy and take-home crafts.

When school is closed, families rely on the Children's Room more than ever. Our school vacation options included learning American Sign Language with instructor Marianne Molinari, an acrobatics program with world-renowned performer Li Liu, a bilingual concert with Marcos Valles from Rockabye Beats, and a balloon extravaganza with Jungle Jim.

Saturday Programs

It is not always easy for families to attend programs during the week. We worked to provide Saturday programs for all ages and interests. Children's Librarian Rosanna Clarke brought her popular weekly story time for babies to Saturdays with a Stories and Play program.

The Powers Music School attracted 130 attendees to their Musical Story time adaptation of *Elephants Cannot Dance!* by Mo Willems. New England Conservatory of Music student Honor Hickman and her quartet introduced children to elements of classical music through facts and stories about animals at our Musical Animals program.

The Boston Area Guild of Puppetry hosted a free craft program and performance from award winning puppeteer Honey Goodenough to celebrate the World Day of Puppetry. Families got together to socialize over board games at our Board Game Day and many signed up for our Learn how to Play Pokémon program presented by One Up Games.



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Summer Reading 2023

Moving Up and Moving Out, an original Summer Reading program designed just for our library, was a great success. Sign up started sweetly with ice cream for the first one hundred sign ups, courtesy of the Friends of the Library. Almost 350 kids of all ages spent their summer working on meeting a summer goal to earn a new book of their own. They also completed challenges in an activity passport full of activities that could be done at home or while traveling. The prizes and supplies were courtesy of the Friends of the Belmont Public Library.

Music, magic, science, and crafts were back in full force this summer. 1,852 attendees came to our summer reading performances, a nearly 30 percent increase from the summer of 2022. Our summer of fun included countless programs such as music and puppets with Harry and Good News Gus, yoga, a *Ratatouille* themed movie and craft day, Pizza Story time sponsored by Fiorella's Express of Belmont, a cooking demonstration with Kids' Test Kitchen, and much more.

For the first time, our littlest patrons did not have to feel left out of the summer fun. Children's staff members designed a story and play program just for infants and toddlers up to 18 months old, incorporating music, toys, and stories.

Outreach and Bringing the Community Together

Librarians continued their visits to the Wonder School, Waverly Square Daycare, and Payson Park Preschool and visited classrooms full of kids of all ages.

Budding wildlife artists found a great opportunity at the library. In a successful collaboration with Girl Scout Troop 82027, the library ran a local wildlife art contest. Kids ages 5 to 13 entered art projects of all kinds focusing on wildlife local to Belmont. Prizes included gift cards to Belmont Books and Rancatore's along with boxes of Girl Scout cookies. The contest provided an opportunity for kids to learn about creatures of all kinds who live in Belmont and members of Troop 82027 were able to use the initiative to help earn their Bronze Award.

We were able to continue our important projects with the Belmont Public Schools. 90 adults and children attended our International Valentine's Day program. Belmont Public School staff and library staff collaborated to bring a morning of crafts, stories, and learning to the English Language Learning community and beyond. Families new to the country and to Belmont came together to form friendships and find community resources while their children had fun creating and learning. In November, fifty-five second graders from Burbank Elementary came to visit the Children's Room to pick out their own books, and get library cards. Children's Room staff was also able to use the opportunity to make sure that the Burbank community was aware of the timeline for moving to temporary space and most important of all, that our brand-new library was coming soon.



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Circulation

The Circulation Dept. had a wonderful year in 2023. We were busier than ever and we continue to offer high quality service to patrons. A committed staff at Circulation made all of this happen. In 2023, we saw the departure of some wonderful staff for other opportunities, both in house and outside of Belmont. We thank them for their service, and were excited to welcome some new faces to our team.

In light of the change of service model as we moved into our temporary quarters, we did need to embrace some changes in the size of our workforce. Several positions have been left unfilled. In our new library, we will be excited to see automation as a new way to serve the public. New self-checkout machines, a self-return system, and new features yet to be invented await us in Circulation in the years to come.

A gentle reminder was sent to patrons with long overdue material, and we saw many items returned with embarrassed smiles. Proudly we have no late fees on most items, and welcomed the return of items to be shared with all library users once again. Some items having been hidden in suitcases after trips for two years, with others recovered from the abyss under the beds of youth patrons (now in college). All items were shelved for patron use, or stored for later use in the new library.

The transition into temporary space was quite the undertaking and while it seemed a daunting task, every day was an accomplishment. As Circulation continued to make adjustments and shift and move things around to ease into the temporary space and create a smooth transition for staff and patrons the help that was received from Peter and Lauren in Library Administration was impressive and very much appreciated. Anything that was asked of them was provided to us. If it was possible, they made it happen.

This year, the Circulation team handled hundreds of thousands of items, and we are looking forward to seeing those numbers increase when the new library opens. We updated close to 6,000 cards, extending the terms of use for patrons for another 3 years. Over 1,500 new library accounts were opened, and we answered over 12,000 questions for patrons at our desk. Belmont Library patrons love to use the Minuteman Network collection; over 182 thousand items came from other communities to accent all the materials we had in Belmont. With the RFID project largely completed, we look forward to utilizing this new technology to check out items this spring.

Reference and Adult Services

Community Partnerships & Programming

The library's community partnerships continue to thrive and expand in 2024. Just consider some of the following collaboration successes in 2023 that kept things moving forward.



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To ring in the New Year, The Reference Department added a LGBTQ+ Adult Book Club, RainbowLit, in January 2023. This group is co-sponsored by the LGBTQ+ Alliance; several members of the Alliance and members of BAR (Belmont Against Racism) participate. This community collaboration not only brings together folks for diverse reading experiences, but also illustrates the library's connection to community and its vision as a community center.

The library, in collaboration with The Belmont Human Rights Commission, Belmont against Racism, Network for Social Justice, and several neighboring libraries, was honored to host a talk with writer, historian, and lecturer Erica Armstrong Dunbar in February 2023. She led a discussion of her book *She Came to Slay: The Life and Times of Harriet Tubman*, which focuses on legendary abolitionist and suffragist Harriet Tubman and her various ties to the Boston area. Nearly 50 people attended the program virtually.

February 2023 also saw another intra-departmental collaboration: the library and the Belmont Light Department offered a cooking demonstration with Chef Tom Mottl to highlight the benefits of induction cooktops. This popular offering allowed for Belmont Light to illustrate the various rebates available to consumers for making the switch to induction cooktops as well as the library's newest addition to the Library of Things: two portable induction cooktops.

Belmont LGBTQ+ Alliance, Belmont Human Rights Commission, LexPride, Network for Social Justice, and the library 1 partnered to host a screening of *No Ordinary Man* in honor of Trans Day of Visibility (March 31.) *No Ordinary Man* is an in-depth look at the life of musician and Trans culture icon Billy Tipton, and was followed by a thoughtful discussion of what it means to be transgender in the United States, both during Tipton's time and today.

Our Local History Librarian, Logan Manchester, collaborated with students from Belmont High School in May 2023 for a short video on the history of the Clay Pit Pond for their weekly YouTube video channel, 5 Minutes Ago. Logan helped the students to locate informational sources on the history of the pond and was interviewed for their video. This collaboration helped to spread more historical information about a local landmark to the high school and greater Belmont community.

The Reference Department partnered with the Council on Aging for a variety of engaging programs, including a 1920's Murder Mystery Night in October 2023. The cast included Dana Bickelman, Former Director of the Beech Street Center, Assistant Director Lauren Pfendner, Librarian May Forkin, and Recreation Director Brandon Fitts. The players provided clues to the audience on who might be the murderer before the big reveal. The event was extremely successful, and both the players and the audience had a great time - another great example of Belmont collaboration!

The Reference Department also expanded technology help offerings on-site at the Beech Street Center. Reference & Public Services Librarian May Forkin provided help for the seniors with a focus



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on Libby, Hoopla, and Kanopy. These sessions were twice a month and provided the highly tailored approach that patrons have found to be most useful.

We also continued and strengthened our partnership with the Belmont Farmers' Market. The library was once again invited to table at the Market on the first Thursday of each month, in addition to the weekly story times the children's librarians provided. We brought books for children and adults about food, farming, and community that patrons could check out right at the Market. Residents could also sign up for a library card while shopping, and take home a story time related craft. Another savory collaboration between the library and Belmont Farmers Market!

Programming

The winter of 2023 saw the return of the Winter Reading program! A way to engage patrons with the library during the snowy months (January-March), the library offered activity ideas for all ages, with chances to earn gift cards to local businesses.

Collaborative programming across libraries did not end with COVID. Over the course of 2023, The Coordinator of Reference & Public Services & the Community Outreach Librarian collaborated with numerous libraries to offer 16 author talks with over 215 attendees. These events included visits from authors such as Renee Dudley and Daniel Golden, Kate Clayborn, and Isaac Fitzgerald.

2023 also brought the robust return of the Music on Saturdays concert series. Both in the spring and fall of 2023, the library was able to offer a range of musicians to satiate every musical taste from Johnny Cash fans to Celtic music lovers, with 6 concerts bringing in over 250 attendees.

Our newest book club, Book a Trip Abroad: World Literature Book Club, began in March 2023. This book club focuses on reading books both set in and by authors from countries around the world. The book club meets in a hybrid manner with options for patrons to attend either in-person or over Zoom. Ever since its creation, this book club has been well attended by a consistent and enthusiastic group of members.

Kinship for the Kinless is another new program that the Library initiated in the past year. This group was formed and is facilitated by a psychologist who is experienced with working with the senior population. Currently, there are close to a million "kinless seniors" also known as "solo agers" or "elder orphans" spread across the US. While many people want to maintain independent living as long as possible, they also want to avoid feelings of isolation and loneliness, both of which can have negative effects on emotional and physical health. This group discusses practical issues including affordable housing, estate planning, what kind of device to have if you fall or are in need of assistance, and much more. It also provides a social network for its participants, and has grown exponentially since its inception in May 2023.



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Taught by local programming expert Charles Ray Smith, the Reference Department continued to offer the 7-week class series on Programming with Python. This class brings a focus on adult lifelong learning.

The Amateur Telescope Makers of Boston joined us on the fields at Chenery Upper Elementary School in September, treating over 75 adults and kids to a telescope's eye view of the stars. Attendees were able to catch sight of Saturn, the Ring Nebula and double stars!

September 2023 also saw the beginning of a series of learning American Sign Language for Beginners. This course, taught by the ASL Institute, had great engagement and retention over the 4 weeks with a class of 20 attendees.

The Belmont Public Library Cookbook Club continued to thrive. Working from a different cookbook each month, participants selected a dish to make and brought it with them to the meeting creating a potluck meal for everyone. Participants enjoyed each other's creations while they discussed what they liked and disliked about the book. As a finale to the club's year, a true potluck was held where participants were able to share favorite recipes, regardless of the source. The club has had consistently strong attendance numbers since it started in February 2019 and showcases one of the library's most diverse print collections.

A virtual visit from Mei Mei taught the town's home chefs dumpling making techniques. Attendees learned how to create a variety of different dumpling shapes, as well as tips and tricks for fillings, pairings, and freezing and storing.

The library's monthly adult craft along program continued to be popular and well attended in 2023. This year it was held entirely in-person with occasional collaboration with guest artists such as Leslie Doherty who taught patrons how to make mosaic sun catchers and Deenie Pacik Giuliano who helped patrons learn how to make fused glass pendants. Participants of all skill levels and ages were able to register for these events and then join us for a fun and relaxing social gathering to complete the craft.

The library's Virtual Trivia Night was a continued success in 2023. Participants are asked about a wide range of topics and the questions grow more challenging as the game goes on. The questions are geared towards adults in difficulty level but are tame enough that the game is still accessible for families to play together. This monthly event has had consistently high attendance since it was first offered in July 2020, with nearly 200 participants in the 10 months that it ran. The library also held its third annual R-Rated Virtual Trivia featuring questions that are definitely for grownups only.

The Page of Enlightenment Book Club had a great second year. The club reads a historical narrative each month and meets to discuss it. The club has a small but dedicated and enthusiastic group of regular participants. The program was offered hybrid in-person/online for the first time in 2023.



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English conversation circles doubled in size in 2023 and began meeting again in person for the first time since 2020. Thanks to the wonderful volunteers who help make this invaluable service possible!

Collections & Services Highlights

Thanks to the continuing generosity of Belmont residents with their book donations, the library is able to offer much needed reading material for incarcerated populations through partnership with the Prison Book Program in Quincy, MA. To date, over 200 boxes of books have been donated to help fulfill inmate requests.

Reference & Local History Librarian Logan Manchester undertook a large digitizing project in Special Collections this year, including scanning all of the Library Board of Trustees meeting minutes and exhibits from 1970 to 2012. This project allows for this voluminous material to be easier to access for staff when responding to information requests, as well as better organization and storage of associated documents. Similarly, we were able to reconnect with the Digital Commonwealth Digitization Team at the Boston Public Library to work on the digitization of the personal diary collection of notable Belmontonian Jay Benton. The collection will soon be completely digitized, making an amazing part of Belmont history publicly available and easily accessible for the first time.

The second half of the year was spent right-sizing the entire adult collection in preparation for the move to temporary space. Reference staff spent hundreds of hours weeding and RFID tagging the collection, ultimately making the transition into temporary space and move smooth.

Young Adult

This year, the Young Adult Department flourished with the base that had been built for teen programs and community partnerships.

Between January-August 2023, the library offered 231 programs for teens with 4,620 total attendees: nearly double that of last year and quadruple that of the years prior. Major highlights included the third virtual D&D Super Dungeon, our second in-person Teen Career Fair, regular school visits, and the continuation of seasonal Study Spaces for teens. Our virtual summer reading challenge for 2023 had 45 online participants, with 11 students reading over 205 books. Other programs, such as Boba and Board Games and Play-by-Post D&D, were integral in giving teens an outlet for creative, social, and academic growth. All of our gowns for the Prom Dress Donations were given away to teens who needed them.

We had a counter-balance of active teen volunteers as the high school stopped requiring volunteer hours for graduation. While the Teen Advisory Board attracted fewer teens, our Super Dungeon



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volunteers grew even more devoted, and attended weekly meetings from January-August. The focus for teens shifted from casual volunteer projects to passion-driven ones and the quality of volunteers also changed. Our two Theme Masters for the Super Dungeon both were accepted to MIT this year with the library being their only volunteer activity on their resume. Our other volunteers were accepted into Carnegie Mellon, Columbia University, and even more prestigious universities.

Outreach efforts were strengthened by collaborations with the BHS PTSO and school clubs. This year was the first time a librarian was regularly invited to do outreach activities in the high school. Our Coloring Station was always a big hit and provided opportunities for major engagement with teens.

Partnerships with the Children's Department brought in great Tween engagement for the library. Bethany Campbell hosted numerous tween events throughout the year, with the first five Tween D&D events being led in tandem with the YA Services Librarian.

The quotes from teens about the National D&D Super Dungeon speak for themselves:

"I'd say something heartfelt about now joining the super dungeon was the second best decision I've made in my entire life, but it's late and my phone is at 19%."

Q: "What value did you find in the Super Dungeon as a whole?"

A: "You are important and that with enough time strangers can feel like family"

"It helps me understand more about myself through the characters I make. It helps me train my social skills, and make new friends. The story is good and I'm invested in a lot of other people's characters so that's nice. Gms like Dennis are a bit of a role model for me. It's something to look forward to. It's just fun man."

"Super Dungeon is such an awesome community. It's a creative space for art and storytelling, and I'm so glad that I joined."

"All chapters eventually end, this one was rather exciting and I hope the next will be even better. Thank you so much for making these wonderful stories."

Technology & Technical Services

When asked what this department does, the answer is - "If it circulates, or it gets plugged in, it's the responsibility of this department." While brief, this statement encompasses the range of roles of Technology & Technical Services. Technology handles all library IT infrastructure, from the large - maintaining separate staff & public networks, to the small - providing replacement computer mice to over 50 library workstations. Technical Services literally covers everything that circulates: sometimes with mylar, but always with barcodes, spine labels & protective covers - and new this year is the



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addition of RFID tags. It is a wide range of activities, without which the library simply would not be able to provide the more visible outward facing patron services.

Much of the year was spent on figuring out how to move all IT library services & functions to temporary spaces. It was an ongoing and fluid process as spaces were finalized.

Locations

In the end, it was determined that there would be two locations for patron-based services and two locations for staff only usage. In collaboration with Minuteman Library Network staff and Library Director Peter Struzziero, those spaces were assessed for library needs. A number of adjustments were needed to take our one building operation and set it up in 4 separate town locations. Our Department rose to meet all of these challenges, and we are proud to report that staff are settled in with all necessary technology equipment.

Transitioning

Library services began transitioning to the temporary spaces in November. Technology was moved to the Beech Street Center, and to The Benton Library.

There were innumerable technology needs that needed to be considered and planned for. Suffice it to say, moving all IT functionality that had been put in place over a number of years was a challenge that we were up to. The work continues in 2024 and beyond.

One on One Tech Help

One on One Tech Help appointments got an upgrade this year. Appointment booking was made easier and more visible for patrons with a streamlined scheduling process accessed directly through the library's events calendar. Technology Librarian Jack Clark met with patrons for dozens of appointments over the course of the year, providing assistance on a variety of topics that included how to use library apps, loading Ebooks onto Kindles, and computer/mobile device basics. The one-on-one approach has been determined to be the most useful given current staffing levels and the unique nature of most of the requests. Patrons also appreciate the individual attention and the ability to ask questions directly to a tech expert.

Library of Things

From Kindles, the first thing, to one of the latest - Induction Cooktops, the Library of Things continues to be very popular. All items combined circulated over 2,000 times in 2023.

The next expansion to the Library of Things is on the horizon: the Library of Tools. During 2023 we researched avenues for potential additions to the Library of Things, settled on a basic category of "home and auto", and acquired the items in question. The Library of Tools will include things like stud finders, outlet testers, and automotive diagnostic code readers -- things that come in handy



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when patrons need them, but may not need often enough to own: perfect candidates for the Library of Things!

Staffing

It was again a year of transition for this department, from retirements to promotions.

Key Technical Services library assistant AnnMarie Zocchi retired in June after 17 years at the library. Over her tenure, the Administrative Assistant position had been expanded to include many responsibilities. Her contributions will be greatly missed, but we wish her the best in her retirement. In June, Technical Services library assistant Smitha Prasad was promoted from her previous position within the department after having transitioned two years earlier from the Circulation Department. With little formal training, Smitha has taken to this new role and become a leader in the department.

The library was fortunate to be able to replace Smitha as Library Assistant in Technical Services with Mahmonir Pooladgar, another internal hire. Mahmonir fit seamlessly into the department, as she had been a part time employee for many years before having been hired in a full time capacity in the Circulation Department. She brings a background in Technical Services, and also an enthusiasm for developing new skills.

Projects

In spite of staff upheavals and keeping up with the regular workload, Technical Services identified and took on a number of projects over the course of the year. These include:

- **Theme-based periodical displays**
 - Belmont subscribes to over 125 periodicals from daily newspapers to weekly and monthly magazines. In collaboration with Circulation Supervisor Gráinne Griffin, three new sections were separated out to better highlight particular areas of interest: Cooking, Health, and World Languages. This brief pilot project was met with positive feedback from patrons.

- **Feedback forms for DVDs and blu-rays**
 - It is impossible to monitor the condition of circulating AV materials beyond a basic visual inspection upon check-in and periodic analysis of high circulating items. A simple feedback form, designed by the Community Outreach Librarian, is now included in all circulating DVDs, blu-rays and physical audiobooks for patrons to inform staff of any playback issues. This crowdsourcing gives patrons agency in helping to maintain the collection and further indicates the interest that Belmont Public Library has in ensuring that patrons have the best possible materials.



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- **Recataloging Children’s World Languages collection**
 - As the Children’s World Languages collection was expanded with additional languages and materials over the past few years, there were opportunities to recatalog the collection to maximize ease of use. A new easier to use category was created along with a new spine label to help identify the materials more easily.

RFID

The library has a long-term plan to implement RFID tagging for all circulating items. The goal this year was to convert the new and current holdings as much as possible before the planned storing of the majority of library collections. Overall, it was an overwhelming success due to the collaboration of all departments and the support of Library Administration.

Regular staff began tagging existing materials in the library stacks, literally starting with 0.00 in Adult nonfiction. This took place simultaneously in tandem with tagging in Juvenile Fiction and Adult Reference collections.

Technical Services staff continued to tag all new items along with AV materials, again as time allowed.

As progress moved through the building, returned materials for those completed collections were tagged as available. Aptly named “Grab and Tag”, this enabled staff working at public service desks to continue the overall process of RFID tagging - again, as time allowed.

While tagging was moving along, it became clear that with the current availability of staff hours, the process was at a plateau. Administration opened up additional paid hours for all staff, and tagging increased substantially from May 2023 and onward.

At this point, statistics for all seven RFID stations began to be tracked on a monthly basis, and the numbers increased considerably. It is a credit to all involved from part- and full-time staff to Department Heads who moved the process along, training as needed and coordinating progress through the many library collections.

At this point the majority of the collection (over 100,000 physical items) have been tagged, with a small percentage remaining. To give a comparison, no other comparable Minuteman library has completed a RFID project within a 12-month period, not once, not ever.

The next step is to set up RFID for circulation purposes. Planning for this is underway.



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Friends of the Belmont Public Library

Executive officers in 2023 were Stephanie Cahoon and Kristen Carte-Smith, Co-Presidents; Cyndi Reitmeyer, and Anne Lougee Co-Treasurers, and Pamela Delalla, Secretary. In September, Stephanie and Anne sought new opportunities and new officers were sought. We thank Stephanie and Anne for their service.

Among the new members we drew, we vetted a dozen candidates interested in the secretary and co-treasurer positions. As a result, Kabin Shrestha filled the vacant co-treasurer position and Wendy Coup Conroy became our new secretary. Pamela Delalla was voted in as vice president. In addition, Mary Stearns, a former friend's president became Trustee/ Friends liaison; and Assistant Library Director Lauren Pfindner was named Library/ Friends Liaison. In addition, we formed volunteer, and governance committees to support our ever-expanding Library development.

Books-in-Bloom, a library program led this time by the Friends, Library Staff and the Belmont Garden Club returned as an extended celebration of our 50th anniversary celebration and collected thousands in ticket sales. We raised thousands for the Library through our annual book sales. Katie Brown, who will be attending the University of San Diego, was recipient of the newly-formed Senior Scholarship Award. Friends Annual Meeting Guest Speaker was Lucia Gates, a member of the Belmont Garden Club and advocate for sustainable and ecologically-inspired landscapes. We were happy to have her included. The Friends looks forward to supporting programs and services in the new library. We thank our members and supporters.

Fundraising for the Library Building Project

Coming on the heels of the successful vote to construct a new library, the Belmont Library Foundation in partnership with the Trustees, have focused on meeting our \$5 million goal that we set for private support for the new library.

To date, the Foundation in conjunction with the Library Trustees have raised and contributed \$2.9 million and we are on track to meet our 5 million dollar goal. Toward the costs of construction, 100% of donors have satisfied their pledges to or the town for library construction. This is an excellent indicator of the commitment that Belmont donors have to completion of this project. We continue to focus on this important priority.

The Belmont Library Foundation will continue to raise money for the library project. We want to be prepared in the event that the project experiences unexpected construction cost overruns. Publicity about the library continues to attract the attention of many who want to contribute to the project, and we have continued to build relationships with citizens, library supporters, and others who have an interest in supporting the library project.



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Thank you

In closing, we want to extend a specific note of gratitude to all Belmont Residents and Library supporters. Without you, there would be no project. We are particularly grateful for all the dedication and effort of the Trustee Chair and Building Committee Member Kathy Keohane, who has been a true leader for the organization and Belmont at large for the last decade and more. Working alongside Kathy leading the Building Project is Building Committee Chair and longtime supporter, Clair Colburn. Without these two leaders and extraordinary people, the future of the Library would be very different indeed.

Kindest Regards,

Peter Stuzziero

Library Director