Your Library, Your World

The Ferguson Library
Annual Report 2007 ~ 2008
To simply say that 2007–2008 has been a year of challenges is an understatement. This year, more than any other in recent memory, The Ferguson Library has been on an operational rollercoaster, with ups and downs which have continually tested our ability to respond: ups in expanded community usage, and downs in declining funding.

We began the year facing a $260,000 operating budget shortfall, due to reduced funding by the city of Stamford, and were forced to contemplate ending Bookmobile service and reducing hours at the Branches. It was gratifying to see the public respond to our predicament with dozens of letters to the newspaper advocating greater support for the Library. But faced with its own choices, the city was unable to provide sufficient additional funds, and the Board of Trustees was still confronted with the unpleasant task of deciding whether to reduce hours, or buy fewer books and other materials. The Library's materials budget has been very lean over the past few years, and the Trustees were reluctant to cut it any further.

Then in November, the rollercoaster headed up a bit, with generous donations of $50,000 each from the Friends of Ferguson and the Garden Homes Management Corp, a prominent Stamford business, to help keep Branch hours intact. At the same time, the Library launched its first ever community-wide fundraising campaign, sent by direct mail to 50,000 Stamford households. We are very grateful to The Ferguson Library Foundation for underwriting the effort. The appeal, called Bucks for Books, brought in about $57,000, a good first step that helped raise community awareness of our budget limitations and difficulties.

These donations, although very generous, were insufficient in total to bridge the budget gap, and in January the Board of Trustees made the hard decision to cut the materials budget for the rest of the year, rather than reduce hours at the Branches and on the Bookmobile. While the whipsaw effect that our budget uncertainty created was difficult for both the public and staff, the Library has continued to provide Stamford with the outstanding service this community expects and deserves. Ferguson staff members have risen to the occasion, and are truly among the finest library professionals anywhere.

We are also grateful for the dedication and support of a vast array of community leaders and library volunteers. As always, the leadership of the city of Stamford plays an important role in the Library’s vitality, and I thank Mayor Malloy and the city fiscal boards for doing what they can for The Ferguson Library in this time of widespread economic challenge.

As we look to the coming year, I am confident the Ferguson will emerge healthy and strong, aided by a sense of innovation and ever committed to public service. With the steadfast support of our community, volunteers and government leaders, The Ferguson Library will continue to serve Stamford with distinction and in the process, get off the roller coaster.

—Thomas M. Cassone, Esq,
Chair, Ferguson Library Board of Trustees
Message from the President

As our world changes at an accelerated pace, public libraries have become more critical than ever. They are places where people go for information, education, leisure and community. There, they find a book, CD, DVD, magazine or newspaper, access a database, learn to use technology, see a film, or chat with friends, among a myriad of other important activities. And in these difficult economic times, the free services libraries offer are being used even more heavily. We have seen this trend right here at The Ferguson Library. Our summer reading clubs are thriving, books and DVDs fly off the shelves, and children's storytimes fill up on the first day of registration. One statistic speaks volume—our circulation increased ten percent this year.

We have implemented some exciting new services to try and meet this demand. Our new Express DVD service, generously funded by the Friends of Ferguson, allows customers to borrow popular new films overnight. This has reduced the waiting time for new arrivals, and meant that more people can view them. We also instituted self pick-up for reserve materials, reducing wait time at the circulation desk for customers who have items on hold. On a program note, we are still growing our services for new Americans. The Library’s Let’s Talk English conversation groups help English language learners improve their conversational skills in a relaxed setting. This volunteer-run class, now in its second year, enjoyed a sixty-three percent increase in attendance this year.

Our newly redesigned website puts our best face forward. When people look for The Ferguson Library online they find a clear, friendly presence with easy to access information. Almost a quarter million visitors connected to us via our website this year, many of them using our various information databases, a seventeen percent increase over the year before. Our blogs foster conversation between the Library and our online users, keeping us up to date in the all important new world of social networking. We have begun growing our digital collections as more users look for material they can download and listen to in the car, or read from a portable device, wherever they are. Online usage will continuously evolve, and The Ferguson Library is constantly innovating with new and exciting technologies.

Our dynamic community volunteer organization, the Friends of Ferguson, once again gave generously to the Library, a tremendous help in this challenging budget year. In addition to making special gifts to the Library’s collection, the Friends have funded all of our programming for the past several years, enabling us to continue to meet the community’s needs.

We look forward to another exciting year ahead as we grow and change to meet the unique demands of our time. We can do so with confidence due to the strong commitment of our Board of Trustees, Citizen Advisers, Foundation Board, Friends of Ferguson, the city of Stamford, and the dedication of a talented staff of professionals and support personnel, who are the interface between our community and a world of information and education. I am sincerely grateful to them all.

—Ernest A. DiMattia, Jr.
President
Our Mission

The Ferguson Library, Stamford’s public library, provides free and equal access to print, audiovisual and evolving electronic resources, and supports childhood education and lifelong learning through reading and other forms of communication by addressing the informational, educational, cultural and literacy needs of the Stamford community.

Our Vision

The Ferguson Library will remain the community's leading choice for information access, educational materials, and lifelong learning by continually and effectively adapting to technological and other changes in the environment.

989,189 people visited the Library this year.

Our Core Values

Accelerate Promotion of Reading
Beyond providing resources—support outreach, basic literacy and lifelong learning habits.

Access
Provide convenient hours for the Stamford community and 24/7 access via the “virtual branch.”

Accountability
Responsible to our community.

Creativity/Innovation
Introduce and/or adopt new technology, services and work styles.

Diversity
Embrace the numerous cultures, races and ideas in the community.

Equity
Freedom from bias or favoritism.

Intellectual Freedom
Encourage the free exchange of information and ideas in a democratic society.

Safety/Security
Create a safe and comfortable haven that is conducive to reading, studying and browsing. Provide quality customer-driven services.

Technology Leadership
Use the latest technological advances to help provide better services.
In response to the Library's budget reduction, the Ferguson Library Foundation undertook a first time ever community wide fundraising campaign, the cost of which was underwritten by the Foundation. The appeal, called Bucks for Books, was sent by direct mail to 50,000 Stamford households. Donors were able to contribute by mail or through our website. Bucks for Books generated 436 donations for a total of about $54,000. The response was less than we had hoped for, but the publicity surrounding the appeal was valuable in raising community awareness of our budget difficulties.

Main Library Renovation
The long awaited Main Library renovation got underway in June. The project will upgrade and modernize the interior of the 1909 building. It is the first update since 1980. After 14 million plus visitors over the years, the building needed a face lift. Work will be completed in five phases to minimize disruption. The project is beginning on the fourth floor, which will have minimal impact on the public. When the second phase begins in the fall, several collections and activities will be relocated temporarily.

Overall, the renovation will dramatically renew the interior of the Library. Space will be reconfigured to better reflect 21st century library usage, with new computers and study tables on the second floor, an enlarged children’s room and teen area, and an expanded computer lab on the third floor. The building will get new shelving, carpet and furniture, and some interior walls will be relocated. It will be handicapped accessible throughout.

The $14 million dollar project is being funded primarily by capital budget grants from the city and some support from the state and other sources. The Library will remain open throughout the entire project, which is expected to last 18 months to two years.

Handicapped Ramp
After several construction delays, the Main Library handicapped ramp was completed and opened to the public. The graceful marble ramp provides front door access for strollers and wheelchairs, and replaces the Bedford Street handicapped entrance.

New Cooling System
We were able to replace the Main Library's aging cooling system thanks to generous grants from the Connecticut State Library and Connecticut Light and Power. The new chilling and cooling tower has meant better and more energy efficient interior climate control for the building. The work was completed just in time for the summer season.
New Services this Year

Express DVDs
Our new Express DVD service was an immediate hit when we launched it in July. Express DVDs are recent releases that go out for one night only. This has dramatically improved turn around time for these popular new films. The Express DVD collection was funded by the Friends.

Self Pick Up Reserves
In order to streamline the retrieval of reserve materials, the Library began offering self pick up reserves in July. Customers who have a reserve to pick up now can find their materials on a shelf behind the circulation desk. Materials are held in folders for privacy, marked with a portion of the patron’s name and library card number.

Quarterly Parent Email
In an effort to promote our many educational services, we initiated a special quarterly email to Stamford parents. The first issue went out in October, describing our research databases and online homework help. It was distributed through the Stamford public schools’ Parent Teacher Council, as well as to our own 16,000 member email list. Subsequent issues focused on family/children’s programming, and summer reading.

Our Collection
This was a difficult year for collection development. Because of the 11% reduction in our materials budget, part of the overall budget reduction, our purchasing was severely curtailed. There was scant money to purchase new materials or replace worn out titles, so many collections—fiction, nonfiction and DVDs—are suffering. In the past, we usually purchased multiple copies of frequently requested books. Now we are unable to do that, and customers may wait longer. Some research databases were eliminated but the most popular ones are still available, including the ReferenceUSA database, General Onefile and Health& Wellness Resource Center. Despite all this, overall library circulation increased by 9.5%.

We were also able to modestly augment some world language collections, including Chinese, Arabic, Polish, Spanish and Hindi. We received an anonymous donation of more than 100 Russian language books.
Embracing the Future

Website
After much hard work, our redesigned website debuted in January. The elegant homepage is intuitive and easy to navigate, and features a rotating image band, which lets us highlight several programs/services at once. The site is still a work in progress—interior pages need to be redesigned to conform to the look of the front page, but we now have a beautiful, up to date new homepage that is garnering rave reviews from the public.

Online visitors can access our catalog, databases and many other resources remotely or from inside the Library. Remote usage has skyrocketed. Over 225,000 people visited Ferguson Online from outside the Library this year, a 17% increase over last year.

Blogs
We added two new blogs this year—computer training and an Election blog, which keeps users current with news, analysis and commentary about the upcoming 2008 election. Blogs have become an important way to foster connections and conversation, and give us a presence in the all important world of social networking.

Tutor.com
Our online homework help service experienced explosive growth this year. A total of 3,241 students took advantage of this free tutoring service, an increase of 102%! Our vigorous marketing efforts undoubtedly helped, as well as increased awareness of the service by afterschool program providers. Students can access Tutor.com at home as well as in the Library.

225,371 people accessed our website from outside the Library, a 17% increase over last year.

3,241 students took advantage of our free online homework help.
**Special Events**

**WWE Photo Shoot**
It’s not often professional wrestlers spend the morning in the Library! In August, World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE), which is headquartered here in Stamford, took over the Library’s Stamford Room for a photo shoot promoting Teen Read Week. The four celebrity wrestlers were all gracious and took time to chat with young fans, who had lined up waiting for autographs. Not surprisingly, we had big media turnout too, and some great publicity.

**Haitian Book Festival**
The 8th annual Haitian Book Festival at the South End Branch in October drew 150 visitors, who browsed titles in English, French and Haitian Creole. They were also treated to a performance by a talented young dance group called Stars of Tomorrow.

**Radio Broadcast at the Library**
The Ferguson Library was front and center when 96.7 The Coast radio broadcast live for an entire day in front of the Library. The station was highlighting Stamford as part of its ongoing series of broadcasts spotlighting local communities. The DJs repeated all day that they were at the Ferguson Library, and gave us a chance to promote some of our special happenings.
From films to juggling to book discussions, our creative children’s programming brings kids into the Library whatever the season. In November we were thrilled to host Caldecott Medal winner Brian Selznick (above, left) as our guest author for the annual Jeanne Rinehart Family Program. Brian charmed the audience—adults and children alike—with stories about writing and illustrating his award winning book, *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*.

A new baby sign language class was a big success this year, along with our ever popular chess club, baby and toddler storytimes, Halloween pumpkin carving, and science programs. An appearance by the character “Clifford” in March was like having a rock star in the lobby. (Many thanks to the teen volunteer who gamely sweated inside the costume.) And school vacation programming is always a big hit—on Election Day the popular film *Ratatouille* drew a crowd of 275!

Our successful teen tech program entered its second year, with 70 applicants for 12 tech positions. We are lucky to be able to choose from a pool of so many talented young people. This paid internship program is part of a citywide initiative to give students interested in technology some real world experience. One of the projects they are involved with here at the Ferguson is creating an online index of the Advocate obituary file.

The Library’s teen volunteer program continues to thrive, with 198 volunteers this summer at the Main Library and Branches. T-MAD, the Library’s teen advisory group (right), has grown to 35 members this year. The group meets monthly to help plan teen programming and advise librarians on teen materials.
Outstanding Programs!

Author Programs and Book Discussions

We were lucky to have some exciting authors visit the Library this year, including Caroline Weber, whose book *Queen of Fashion* looks at the serious side of Marie Antoinette, and food writer Molly O’Neill (left), whose yummy memoir *Mostly True*, kicked off World of Words in April. We also hosted the charming Frank Delaney (who came back for the Book & Author Luncheon), mystery writer J.A. Jance, Anne Easter Smith and others throughout the year.

The Library debuted a new French book discussion series this year. The discussions, in French, were so popular the series was extended for the summer. Our regular book discussions at the Main Library and Branches enjoy a loyal following and continue to thrive as well.

Summer Reading Clubs

Our adult, teen and children’s summer reading clubs were a great success. The catchy Egyptian themed adult program, “Get Wrapped Up in Reading,” featured a strong schedule of programs including book discussions, films and an outdoor jazz concert at the Weed Memorial & Hollander Branch.

Our teen club, “CSI Ferguson,” drew 612 participants. A record 145 of them showed up for the end of summer invitation-only party.

2,836 children registered for “Get a Clue at the Library,” our 2007 children’s summer reading club, with many kids joining right into August. We came up with fun programs all summer, including films, chess club, craft programs and free live theater at the Palace for reading club members.

Italian Cultural Week

The Ferguson Library celebrated all things Italian the first week in October in partnership with the Italian Center Cultural Council and the Council of Italian American Organizations. We hosted several Italian themed programs, including a wine tasting, at the Harry Bennett Branch, and created a special newsletter highlighting all the community wide events that week.
Film Programs
From blockbusters to edgy indies, the Ferguson has earned a reputation as a place to come for interesting film. In January, we hosted our second International Film Day, spotlighting award winning short films from around the world.

Poetry
John Philip Santos (right) captivated the audience at our annual Poet’s Voice program in December, and graciously shared the stage with a young poet who came to hear him speak. We also provided a stage to local poets with our regular Poet’s Open Mic series at the Harry Bennett Branch.

... and Music
Libby Richman (left) and her band treated us to a jazz performance to celebrate Black History Month in February, and we hosted concerts by the Lumina String Quartet, the Connecticut Chamber Orchestra and classical guitarist Daniel Corr throughout the year.

51,423 people attended programs at the Library this year.
Computer Training

There seems to be an unending demand for computer training. We offered 70 classes in all this year. In addition to beginner level computer classes like Microsoft Word and Excel, we offer more specialized workshops, including PowerPoint, Buying on eBay and Finding Health Information in Spanish. PC Basics, taught at the Harry Bennett Branch, is extremely popular with seniors looking to master or brush up on introductory skills.

Business Resources

Helping You Succeed

The Ferguson offers first rate business resources that include an impressive offering of web-based business databases, including Business & Company Resource Center, Mergent Online, Standard & Poor’s Net Advantage and Value Line, in addition to an outstanding collection of books and journals covering all aspects of business, management, economics, and finance. The Ferguson maintains special collections related to small business and nonprofit management.

Staff Training – Learning 2.0

With technology changing almost daily, we initiated a voluntary training program for staff members who wanted to learn about new web tools, like blogging and social networking. Forty staff members participated in a 13 week, library-wide technology learning project, called Learning 2.0. It was a self directed program to encourage staff to experiment and learn about these new and emerging technologies. Twenty-three staff members finished the entire course and received an MP3 player for their efforts.
Special Needs Center
The Library’s Special Needs Center received a generous donation of materials from the Connecticut Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities (CACLD). The gift was provided through a grant from St. John’s Community Foundation in Stamford.

The Special Needs Center serves parents and families of children with disabilities, and is one of the largest resources of its kind in Connecticut. It has a current, broad based collection of books, videos, DVDs, magazines and other materials for families of children with special needs.

“Let’s Talk” Conversation Groups
Our “Let’s Talk” conversation groups help English language learners improve their conversational skills by chatting in informal groups. This popular volunteer-run program has taken off during its second year. 1,176 people attended our Let’s Talk groups this year, a 63% increase over last year.

Cultural Newsletters
We have begun publishing special newsletters aimed at the different cultural communities we serve. In October, we produced a colorful newsletter on Stamford’s Italian Cultural Week, and in early winter we came out with a newsletter devoted to India, another large community in Stamford. We have produced issues in Spanish and Creole as well.

I Have a Dream Writing Contest
The Ferguson’s 5th annual I Have a Dream Writing Contest drew 430 entries from students ages 7–14, including two of the winners on the left. In honor of Dr. Martin Luther King’s birthday, local students were invited to write about how they would end racism and violence in the world or their community.

Dial-a-Book/Visiting Books
Our Dial-a-Book and Visiting Book services help seniors and the homebound stay connected. Dial-a-Book mails books to homebound patrons for an extended six week loan period. The Visiting Books service brings books and other materials to residents at twelve assisted living and low income senior housing complexes each month.
Once again, the Friends generously funded 100% of Library programming, and also presented the Library with a $50,000 gift for materials during our Bucks for Books campaign. The Friends two used book shops—at the Main Library and Harry Bennett Branch—are the engine that make all this possible. The book shops earned a record $227,000 this year—a 12% increase over their banner year last year.

What the shops can’t sell is re-donated through the Friend–2–Friend Free Book Program, which supplies nonprofit agencies with free books. This year, Friend–2–Friend established a relationship with a young soldier from Stamford who is stationed in Iraq, sending about 50 books each month to her unit. U.S. Army Specialist Maria Cordero (right) visited the Library when she was home on leave in April.

The Friends 23rd Annual Literary Competition drew 361 entries from young writers in grades 3–12. After the awards ceremony at the Library, the students who wanted to read their work were able to do so at Barnes & Noble in Stamford Town Center.

The Book & Author Luncheon was back this year, with authors Mickey Sherman, Bernice McFadden and Frank Delaney. It was a lovely event at the Italian Center, with these interesting authors and an appreciative audience.

All these programs wouldn’t happen without volunteers. The Friends of Ferguson totaled 23,000 hours of volunteer time this year, a $176,000 in kind contribution to the Library.

The Palace Theatre partnered with the Youth Services Department to offer two free performances at the theater for Ferguson Library Children’s Summer Reading Club members. 150 families made reservations for each show. It was a nice collaboration between the Library and Stamford Center for the Arts.

The Ferguson continues to enjoy a longstanding relationship with the Stamford Public Schools. Book talks, the Purple Bus, Learning Kits to Go and summer reading lists are just some of the many services we offer teachers and students.

At the South End Branch, Connecticut Light & Power once again co-sponsored the Enlightening the Mind child/adult book discussion series.
The Library’s Passport Acceptance Facility reached a milestone this year, officially processing 75,000 passport applications since the service began in 1998. Unfortunately, due to the difficult economy as well as increased competition from area post offices and other libraries, revenue this year was down 13%.

The Ferguson offers passport services at the Main Library and Harry Bennett Branch.

The Bookmobile & Purple Bus

The Bookmobile is The Ferguson Library’s traveling branch, visiting childcare centers and other locations in neighborhoods throughout Stamford. In addition to its regular stops, the Bookmobile also participates in special events during the year. A former Stamford resident sent us this picture of the first bookmobile near her home on Webb’s Hill Road around 1942.

This year marked the 10th anniversary of the Library’s Purple Bus service. The Purple Bus brings school children from all over Stamford to the Library. This year, 2,699 preschool and school age children visited the Library on the Purple Bus. Younger children get an introduction to the Library; older students learn how to do research and use the Library’s many resources, including the online catalog and research databases. The Purple Bus also brought four adult ESL classes to the Library this year.

Ferguson by the Numbers

Financial Highlights
Operating support from the city of Stamford $7,548,899
Revenue from Library activities $966,296
Salaries & staffing-related costs $6,491,112
Purchases of books, electronic resources & other materials $801,168

Public Service Data
Items circulated 981,351
Visitors to the Library 989,139
Offsite Internet users 225,371
Reference questions answered systemwide 188,608
Total programs systemwide 1,743
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