Annual Director’s Report to the Community for 2021

Just as it has been for nearly everyone in America, 2021 was a tumultuous year for Hyde Park Library. Not only did we have to weather the effects of a global pandemic, but we also changed Library Directors part way through the year. The illustrious Mr. Gregory Callahan announced in February last year that after more than 20 years in the role, he would be retiring. After being thoroughly grilled by the Director Search Committee, twice, I was proud to accept when they offered me the position. The committee should be commended for their dedication to seeking and identifying the right candidate. They found me not too far away in New Paltz where I was the Assistant Director of Elting Memorial Library.

I took the wheel of this ship that we call Hyde Park Library at the end of June and I have not had a dull moment since. The library I inherited was by no means in bad shape. It has a respectable amount of traffic and circulation, many of its programs are well attended, and there is a dedicated core of volunteers both on the Board of Trustees and in the Friends Group. It can’t be stressed enough how important good volunteers and dedicated patrons are, so kudos to Hyde Park Library for having such excellent ones! Despite the continued resurgences of the various strains of Covid, we made 129 new cards and the eclectic and diverse programs we were able to offer in person in 2021 attracted well over 1,000 attendees (total) both young and not young. Many more tuned in on Zoom for virtual programming like book clubs and open mic nights. We added 1,279 physical items and spent over $5,000 on electronic material such as e-books and downloadable audiobooks. We received $5,400 in donations as well as grants from the NY State Department of Education, Dutchess County, Assemblywoman Didi Barrett, and the Adirondack Mountain Club and we were under budget in many expense categories.

All of this good fortune couldn’t come at a better time. The repository of knowledge that Sarah Roosevelt built and dedicated to the memory of FDR’s father, James in 1927 is, unsurprisingly, in need of a few updates, both structurally and technologically. Back in 2020 before he retired, Greg and the Board of Trustees submitted all of the copious paperwork to apply for a NY State construction grant and they were successful. On February 14th, work began on the renovation of the rear section of the adult library where we currently house the non-fiction collection. Windows are being installed that will open up the existing light-wells that
pipe sunlight down to the children’s room. This will let sunlight into that dark back room and render it a much more inviting space. The tall shelving will be removed and replaced with stacks that are short enough not to impede the line of sight from one end of the room to the other. The new shelving units will be mobile to allow flexible, creative use of the space. We are on track to have work complete by the end of April. Allowing staff the time they will need to re-shelve all of the books that are now in storage, the new space should be open for use early in May.

We have laid the groundwork for 2022 to be an exciting year full of new technologies and services at Hyde Park Library. We will soon be lending laptops, tablets, and Wi-Fi hotspots and our children’s room will boast two new computers dedicated to early literacy and two others dedicated to middle school homework help. This year was punctuated by the award we received from Dutchess County, in September. This generous grant from Dutchess County is being used to develop a media lab which we are calling The Hyde Park Library Collaboratory. This project has regrettably been placed on hold until the Adult Collection Renovation is complete. It was deemed unwise to store delicate equipment in a room so closely connected to a construction project. Although it disappoints us to need to wait, the parameters of the grant from Dutchess County allow us until the end of August to complete the work.

Once our current renovation is finished in April, all of the promised printers, recording equipment, computers and other Collaboratory-appropriate materials will be purchased and made available to the public (under strict guidelines, of course). What other libraries might call a “Maker Space”, we are referring to as a Collaboratory, but essentially they are the same thing: a space to experience and become familiar with a variety of media production techniques and to “make” media content. Since it takes a good deal of collaboration to produce a podcast or a newspaper, we felt that Collaboratory best captures the spirit of the space being created. It is our sincere hope that area youth and teachers will take advantage of having ready access to many of the tools of the media trades. Who knows? Perhaps we have the next Terry Gross or David Muir hidden among us just waiting to discover their vocation.

For a library to grow with its community, it takes more than new shelves and new technologies. Without enthusiastic, dedicated patrons and volunteers, stagnation can eventually set in. We know that Hyde Park Library has a wonderful, welcoming core of adherents, but we really need to expand and diversify that group. Throughout 2021, the Library has undertaken the Turning Outward project for which we thank all those who participated. Through our community conversations, we learned what members of our community envision and how the Library can be part of that. For example, we have been planning robust programming that will appeal to more diverse segments of our community. Our efforts in this area have already begun with outdoor music concerts, nature walks and game nights with both board and video games. These and more will continue. In 2022 we’ll have computer classes, art classes, author events, public education seminars and workshops, a lecture series or two, a babysitter certification
program, film festivals, book clubs and much more. Don’t forget that we use the annex walls in the main community room as an art gallery. New, local artists will be on display throughout the year with a new show being hung every couple of months.

Finally, and certainly not to be overlooked, collection development plays such a big part in determining how appealing our library is to the community. In preparation for the Adult Collection renovation that starts in February, we have had to undertake a large weeding project. This entailed removing large amounts of unused, damaged, or no longer relevant material to be rehomed or recycled. As painful as this process has been for booklovers to see, it presents us with a unique opportunity to assess the existing collection and map out areas that need attention. This, coupled with the emphasis lately being placed on developing better e-book and downloadable audio book collections and on improving access to streaming content, promises to transform Hyde Park Library’s collection into a diverse and up-to-date survey of the modern information landscape. Don’t worry! Of course we will continue to have actual books.

The Town of Hyde Park has always seen the value of offering access to information in all of its forms to the public free of charge and Hyde Park Library has ever striven to faithfully transform the town’s investment into a valuable return. For some, that is literacy. Others value the community engagement that the library represents. It is freedom of information, thought and expression. It is a communal temple to knowledge that is both a refuge and a source of comfort to any who seek it. These are strange currencies perhaps, but all-the-same, vital components of a healthy society in America. Improving the space, offering new services and new means of accessing information, and transferring parts of the collection into cyberspace are just some of the ways we are working to give Hyde Park the utmost in library service.

Sincerely Yours,

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Hyde Park Free Library

PS. We are always interested in hearing from you regarding possible programming or suggestions for the collection or any other ideas you may have. Please don’t hesitate to call or send an email or just drop in and chat with me. I may not be able to act on your idea, but I will always offer a willing ear and an open mind.