



Altamont Free Library 2021 Annual Report

The 2021 Altamont Free Library Annual Report is dedicated to the memory of
Dick Howie
A great patron, a valued Trustee, and a loyal friend of Altamont Free Library

Mission

The Altamont Free Library is a state, town and village funded association library, which provides for the informational, cultural, educational and recreational needs of patrons living within the stated area of the Library charter. To this end, the Library provides print and non-print materials, interlibrary loan, reference services, and programs to its users.

Trustees

President: Dan Capuano

Vice President: Amanda Beedle

Secretary: Rachel Lane

Treasurer: Melanie Shatynski

Assistant Treasurer: Paul Scilipoti

Trustees: Katie Barker, Shannon Duerr, Deborah Marion-Katz, Katherine Nelson

Trustee Emeritus: Dick Howie

Personnel

Director: Joseph Burke

Library Assistants: Ann Gainer, Jo Ann Mulligan, Erika Peterson

Library Clerks: Ann Cartmell (retired in September 2021), Albert Rusch, Meg Seinberg-Hughes

Maintenance: Claudia LeClair

Bookkeeper: Jason Cooper

Circulation, Membership, and Collection

Please see the attached spreadsheets for additional details.

In 2021, Altamont Free Library lent out 21,007 physical and 7,066 digital items for a total circulation of 27,918 items. Circulation of physical items was up by 65% compared to 2020, and our digital circulation increased by 6% over 2020. Combined digital and over-the-counter circulation was up by 44% compared to 2020.

Compared to a pre-pandemic three-year average of circulation from 2017 to 2019, circulation of physical items was down by 21%, and our digital circulation increased by 85%. Combined digital and over-the-counter circulation was down by 8% compared to the pre-pandemic average.

Once regular in-person browsing was reestablished midway through 2021, circulation dramatically improved. In four out of six months between July and December, we bettered our pre-pandemic average combined circulation, which is remarkable.

Over the course of 2021, Altamont Free Library added 123 new library members, for an overall total of 2,188 patrons. We also added 587 new items and withdrew 270 for a year-end total collection of 13,947 items.

Social Media Outreach

In 2021, we expanded our social media reach significantly, with 68 new Facebook followers for a total 984. We've also gained 53 Instagram followers in 2021 for a total of 337.

Finances

Primary sources of income were: Town of Guilderland: \$63,000; Village of Altamont: \$57,000; Town of Knox, \$7,500; Fines & Fees: \$3,373; Fundraising: \$12,201; Gifts & Donations: \$17,087; Grants: \$3,176; Program Revenue: \$1,975. Copies of the full budget are available at the Library.

Mode of Operation Timeline

January-March: Curbside Only

March-June: Curbside plus Browsing by Appointment

June: Curbside plus Browsing by Headcount & Resumption of Saturday Hours

July-present: Normal Browsing

The Year in Summary

The story of 2021 at Altamont Free Library has been the story of the attempt to regain a sense of normalcy in the face of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic after the extreme disruptions of 2020. We engaged in a slow and measured reengagement with our pre-pandemic mode of operation, and at times throughout the year, I think we very nearly achieved a sense of sense of normalcy and equilibrium, while at all times striving to ensure a safe and healthy environment for our staff and patrons. We had hoped that by this time the worst of the pandemic would have been behind us, but as we confront another winter surge, we remain conscientious that the pandemic is not over by any stretch of the imagination. Nevertheless, I am tremendously proud of the work that the Board, staff, and I have done in 2021 to provide our community with engaging programs, excellent library services, and an atmosphere of respite from the uncertainties and troubles of the world outside our doors. Here, then, are some of the notable events, challenges, and achievement of the past year:

2020 Annual Appeal (November 2020-April 2021)

In November 2020, we made an appeal to our community for donations to make up for the income that we had expected to realize from the fundraisers we had planned for 2020 but were not able to hold. Our hope was that the proceeds from the appeal would cover the \$6,000 in income we had budgeted, and that all of the donations would be received by the end of 2020. As it happened, we saw nearly \$21,000 come in by the end of 2020, but then the donations just kept coming. Through the early months of 2021, we raised an additional \$8,725 from our appeal, far surpassing even our highest expectations. All of these months later, I am still overwhelmed by the success of this campaign and overflowing with gratitude for the support we received from our community.

Fine Free for YA Materials (starting in January)

After eliminating overdue fines for children's materials in 2020 (to inconclusive results, due to the disruptions of the pandemic), we expanded that program in 2021. The Board-approved budget for 2021 did not include any anticipated revenue from overdue fines from Young Adult materials, and we welcomed in the new year by saying goodbye to overdue fines for YA materials. In 2021, we circulated more YA fiction than in any year since 2017, while seeing no increase in overdue YA returns. I don't necessarily believe that there is a causal relationship between eliminating fines and the increased circulation, but I do think it is noteworthy that we had an increase in a collection area that we had previously seen several years of decreasing circulation.

Return of In-Person Programming (May-November)

In May, we resumed outdoor in-person programming in Orsini Park. We began with adult programs, including our First Monday Book Club and monthly ukulele meetups. In June, Ann Gainer resumed weekly in-person storytimes for the first time in over a year, and the response was absolutely overwhelming! Our first several outdoor storytimes in

Orsini Park had audiences of between thirty and forty participants per week, numbers that would have been impossible to accommodate in our community room. Between June and August, we counted just over 300 storytime attendees. Participation in outdoor storytimes remained very strong through August, when we had to move the program to the library patio, where they remained until moving indoors in November. We will resume outdoor programming as soon as the weather allows.

Post Pandemic Survey (May-August)

Beginning in May, and lasting through the summer, we conducted what we called a post pandemic survey of our community. This had initially been designed as a part of the Long Range Plan (LRP) data collection process, but evolved through Board discussion into a survey more focused on how our community felt that we should respond to the pandemic, and what services they wanted from us. In total, we had 64 responses most of which were overwhelmingly positive and helpful. We will use the feedback gathered from this survey for the next LRP, which we will craft over the coming year.

Summer Reading Program (July-August)

Over the summer of 2021, we had a phenomenally successful series of programs related to our annual Summer Reading Program. Our kick-off program featuring the amazing llamas of Wunsupana Farms had our highest attendance of any non-concert library program in my tenure with over 120 attendees (not counting the llamas). Other programs, including Dan Capuano's bird-watching program, Kelly Martin's rehabilitated animal presentation, and Amy Martin Read to Lula program were all reasonably well attended, even in some challenging weather. All together, we counted 204 attendees at our in-person SRP programs. Even better was the strong participation in SRP BINGO, which has been as high as we've ever seen it. In total, we had 53 children register for the SRP, and they read for a combined total of 27,160 minutes!

Summer Reading Buddies (July-August)

One major new program that we introduced in 2021 was our Summer Reading Buddies Program, which partnered six struggling readers from Altamont Elementary School with six Guilderland High School students who acted as reading skills tutors. It was a fantastic and very successful program, and I remain grateful to AES reading teachers Katie Barker and Katie Meckem for all of their work on the program. We plan to enlarge the program this coming summer with additional tutors and students.

Summer Concert Series (July-August)

After a year off in 2020, we were overjoyed to be able to bring back the annual Orsini Park Summer Concert Series this year, and it could not have been a greater success. Despite four weeks of constant threats of rain, we managed to pull off all five concerts without incident, which in and of itself, was a small success. Attendance at the concert was incredible week after week, with two of the concerts featuring the highest attendance we've ever had for a concert. Our July 20th Shades of Grey concert had not only our highest attendance ever (about 300 attendees) but also by far our highest donations total ever (over \$550). In fact, donations were so spectacular that for the first time, we actually made money on the series. But far, far more important, everyone just had such a good time. There were more kids buzzing around happily, and more neighbors reconnecting, and more smiles, and more thank you's than I've seen in a long, long time. The sense of gratitude towards the library for putting the concerts on was absolutely overwhelming. Much of the success for the series has to go to Lori McCutcheon, who picked five fantastic bands and kept in touch with them while we struggled each week in deciding whether or not to cancel in the face of the omnipresent rainstorms of this past July.

Schilling Park Storywalk (June-September)

As part of our Summer Reading Program, for the second year in a row, we created a very popular storywalk in Schilling Park. Storywalks are deconstructed books, with the pages laminated and affixed to wooden posts, and set up along an outdoor path. The purpose is to get people, especially children, to read a book while they play outside in a familiar outdoor space. This year, we featured a wonderful book called *It's OK to be Different* by Todd Parr. We look forward to doing it again this coming summer. Many thanks to Mary Fellows of UHLS for her invaluable assistance in creating the Storywalk program.

Storytimes at Altamont Reformed Church (November-December)

As the cold weather of November set in, we partnered with Altamont Reformed Church and OneLove Preschool to bring our storytimes indoors. Over the six week run of in-person storytimes, Ann Gainer presented storytimes both to the OneLove Preschool, which occupies a space in the basement of the church, as well as to a general audience in ARC's large community room. Storytimes at ARC were reasonably well attended, averaging six participants per week, until the surge in COVID cases locally made it necessary for us to suspend in-person programs in late December. When public health conditions stabilize, if the weather is still uncondusive to holding outdoor storytimes, we hope to be able to resume them at ARC.

Library Lights (December)

On Friday, December 10, we celebrated the 23rd annual *Library Lights* Gazebo Lighting Ceremony in Orsini Park. We received over 425 submissions of honorees, raising \$2,655 for the library. That represents over 100 more honorees and nearly \$1,000 more than we took in for the 2020 Library Lights, setting new records on both accounts by a considerable margin. The event was a huge success, with a good sized crowd of about 75 people, and the most agreeable weather I've ever seen for Library Lights. Dan Capuano, Amanda Beedle, Deborah Katz, and Paul Scilipoti helped read the names of our honorees at the ceremony.

Library Journal Star Library (December)

One final bright spot to end 2021, in early December, we learned that for the third year in a row and the fourth time in the past five years, Altamont Free Library has been named a Library Journal Star Library. Library Journal (LJ) is the most prominent trade publication in the library world. Each year LJ publishes a list of the best performing libraries for each of nine funding levels. Performance is determined by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the federal agency that oversees museums and libraries in the United States. Thousands of libraries nationwide were of sufficient size and stature to be eligible for consideration as Star Libraries and over a thousand share our funding tier. IMLS scores are determined by a number of factors, including per capita circulation, visits, computer use, wi-fi sessions, and other factors based on the statistics reported in our New York State annual report. In each funding tier, the libraries with the 30 highest scores are named as Star Libraries, the top ten receiving five stars, the next ten receiving four, etc. AFL was named a three-star library this year, as we were last year. We were, in fact, the 29th best performing library in the entire country with a budget between \$100,000 and \$200,000. This is a great honor for us, the highest honor that a library can expect to achieve, and we've now done it four times. Our staff, director, and Trustees all played major roles in this achievement, but the greatest role was, as always, played by the community that we all devotedly serve, without whose checkouts, visits, and program attendance, it would not have been possible.

Notable Programs

- Orsini Park Storytimes (June through November)
- Altamont Reformed Church Storytimes (November and December)
- Book Clubs (Both via Zoom and outdoors)
- Ukulele Meetups in Orsini Park
- Online ASL Classes (Shared program with Castleton Public Library & RCS Community Library)
- Young Readers Book Club Online and In-Person Meetings (Led by Jo Ann Mulligan)
- YRBC partnership with local author Lara Stelmazyk
- Digital Gratitude Wall
- Visit from State Senator Michelle Hinchey
- Assemblymember Pat Fahy Office Hours
- Summer Reading Program Events:
 - Meet the Llamas with Wunsupana Farms
 - Bird Watching with Dan Capuano

- Wild Animal Program with Kelly Martin
- Read to Lula with Amy Martin
- Department of Environmental Conservation program on local wildlife
- Altamont Ghost Stories Book Release with Thom Breitenbach and Tom Capuano
- Oral History Interviews with Ellen Howie and Betty Spadaro
- Community Room art exhibits from Joan Johnson and Maria DeAngelo
- Display case exhibit on the history of auto racing at the Altamont Fairgrounds curated by Dan Barker

Building Improvements

- Installation of a Knox Box for emergency access by Police and Fire Departments
- Installation of new basement stairs by Paul Scilipoti

The Year to Come

In 2022, we anticipate taking on two major projects that have been years in the making. Through the recent awarding of the 2017 State & Municipal Aid Grant, we will finally be able to upgrade our existing lighting system with energy-efficient LED lights. We will also be able to tackle the final piece of the Train Station renovation project that was begun in 2005 by reconstructing a portion of the train station platform.

Over the coming year, the AFL staff and Board of Trustees will also create a new Long Range Plan, which will detail our strategic goals for the years 2023 to 2025. Throughout the year, we will gather ideas from people from every corner of our community so that we can better serve them in the years to come.

Finally, 2022 will mark the 125th anniversary of the 1897 construction of the Altamont Train Station, the library's forever home.

As I look forward to that anniversary, I reflect upon all of the people who have passed through the station's doors over its long life: Civil War veterans and polio survivors; Women who fought for the right to vote, and Black people who fought for the right to exist; People who were the first in their neighborhood to see an airplane, and people who were the last in their neighborhood to get a smartphone; Children who dreamed of seeing people on the moon, and children who hope to make it there themselves someday. The world outside our doors has seen war, peace, disease, medical breakthrough, depression, recovery, disaster, and triumph. Inside our doors, however, we remain what we were in 1897: A place of adventure, exploration, and discovery; A place of community, where loved ones can reconnect; A small building that connects our small, beautiful village to the great big world beyond; A place that belongs to everyone who walks through its doors, and a place that six generations and counting carry on with them in their hearts as their train pulls away.

We who have chosen to work here have taken on the responsibility for the temporary stewardship of this very special place, and we look forward to many more journeys still to come. Thank you all for taking this one with me.

Prepared by Director Joe Burke

Submitted January 17, 2022

AFL Circulation Statistics by Month

Month	2021 Circulation					2017-2019 Averages			2021 δ from Avg.
	Physical Circulation	Digital Circulation	Total Circulation	Borrowed From	Loaned To	Physical	Digital	Total	
January	1,295	618	1,913	943	593	2,153	295	2,448	-24.5%
February	1,225	534	1,759	949	531	2,006	283	2,289	-26.2%
March	1,360	620	1,980	936	596	2,231	205	2,436	-20.7%
April	1,383	527	1,910	867	514	2,182	296	2,478	-25.9%
May	1,242	699	1,786	699	393	2,154	325	2,479	-32.5%
June	2,024	494	2,518	740	428	2,334	355	2,689	-6.6%
July	2,830	579	3,409	802	536	2,613	343	2,956	14.2%
August	2,528	607	3,135	836	534	2,688	369	3,057	2.5%
September	2,016	574	2,590	751	433	2,046	333	2,379	8.5%
October	1,783	564	2,347	723	439	2,213	354	2,567	-9.0%
November	1,613	625	2,238	675	414	2,014	331	2,345	-4.7%
December	1,708	625	2,333	743	427	1,819	336	2,155	7.9%
Total	21,007	7,066	27,918	9,664	5,838	26,453	3,825	30,278	-8.1%

Overall Circulation by Year 2015-2020

	Physical Circulation	Digital Circulation	Total Circulation
2020*	12,715	6,662	19,377
2019	26,778	4,844	31,622
2018	26,189	4,201	30,390
2017	26,514	2,762	29,276
2016	29,040	2,152	31,192
2015	30,526	1,754	32,280
'15-'19 Avg	27,809	3,143	30,952

Physical Circulation Statistics by Category

(Digital circulation excluded)

	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015
Adult Audio	602	453	890	1,036	1,142	1,624	1,793
Adult Fiction	6,483	3,799	7,256	6,819	7,493	8,416	8,249
Adult Nonfiction	3,043	1,696	3,266	3,171	2,881	3,252	3,702
Adult Periodicals	4	2	3	18	13	12	2
Adult Video	2,514	2,259	6,711	6,532	6,710	6,957	6,072
Electronic	28	8	18	22	29	55	130
Juvenile Audio	68	85	98	106	67	141	300
Juvenile Fiction	6,062	3,195	5,789	5,616	5,488	5,298	6,727
Juvenile Nonfiction	860	523	1,038	1,012	911	917	1,136
Juvenile Periodicals	0	0	3	0	4	0	0
Juvenile Video	374	282	607	728	740	990	1,113
Miscellaneous	489	136	536	463	367	500	255
YA Audio	5	1	18	11	21	34	24
YA Fiction	575	256	449	566	591	765	984
YA Nonfiction	38	16	62	34	56	75	37
YA Periodicals	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
YA Video	5	1	3	4	1	4	2
Total:	21,007	12,712	26,748	26,138	26,514	29,040	30,526