



Altamont Free Library 2022 Annual Report

*The 2022 Altamont Free Library Annual Report is dedicated to the memory of
Judge Harold Hughes and Betty Spadaro*

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: Deborah Marion Katz

Vice President: Shannon Duerr

Secretary: Rachel Lane

Treasurer: Melanie Shatynski

Assistant Treasurer: Paul Scilipoti

Trustees: Amanda Beedle, Katie Barker, Christine Carpenter, Tracy Mayer, and Katherine Nelson

Library Staff

Library Director: Joe Burke

Library Assistants: Ann Gainer, Jo Ann Mulligan (*resigned in April 2022*), Erika Peterson, Bradley Towle

Library Clerks: Albert Rusch (*resigned in May 2022*), Meg Seinberg-Hughes (*on leave June 2022-January 2023*)

Maintenance: Claudia LeClair

Bookkeeper: Jason Cooper

Circulation, Membership, and Collection

Please see the attached spreadsheets for additional details.

In 2022, Altamont Free Library lent out 22,930 physical and 8,339 digital items for a total circulation of 31,269 items. Circulation of physical items was up by 9% compared to 2021, and our digital circulation increased by 19% over 2021. Combined digital and over-the-counter circulation was up by 12% compared to 2021.

Compared to a pre-pandemic three-year average of circulation from 2017 to 2019, circulation of physical items was down by 13%, and our digital circulation increased by 118%. Combined digital and over-the-counter circulation was up by 3% compared to the pre-pandemic average. Exclude adult and children's AV materials, our 2022 over-the-counter circulation was actually up by just over 1% over the pre-pandemic AV-excluded average, which is a long-winded way of saying that we're seeing more books go out than we did in the three years prior to 2020, which is likely a rare distinction among libraries.

Over the course of 2022, Altamont Free Library added 114 new library members, for an overall total of 2,280 patrons. We also added 537 new items and withdrew 1,160 (which represents two years of delayed weeding) for a year-end total collection of 13,366 items.

Social Media Outreach

In 2022, we expanded our social media reach significantly, with 180 new Facebook followers for a total 1,164. We've also gained 44 Instagram followers in 2022 for a total of 381.

Finances

Primary sources of income were: Town of Guilderland: \$63,000; Village of Altamont: \$60,000; Town of Knox, \$8,000; Fines & Fees: \$2,662; Fundraising: \$21,755; Gifts & Donations: \$25,681; Grants: \$2,529; Program Revenue: \$2,233. Copies of the full budget are available at the Library.

Notable Programs

- Orsini Park Storytimes (May through November)
- Altamont Reformed Church Storytimes (February through May and October and December)
- Monthly *Bundle Up/Get Outside* Storytimes with Shannon Duerr
- First Monday Book Club (Both via Zoom and outdoors in Orsini Park)
- Slow Reads Book Club (via Zoom)
- Monthly ukulele meetups
- Young Readers Book Club online and in-person meetings (Led by Jo Ann Mulligan)
- *Every House Project* presentations by Jeff Perlee
- Black bears presentation by Katrina Talbott at Altamont Reformed Church
- Summer Reading Program
- Schilling Park StoryWalk
- Summer Reading Buddies tutoring program
- Oral history interviews
- Display case exhibits on the history of the Altamont Train Station by Village Archivist Dan Barker and Diane Campion artwork
- Five summer concerts in Orsini Park (One concert cancelled due to weather)

Building Improvements

- Repair of library sign and fence by Paul Scilipoti after winter damage
- Exterior cleaning by Stu Linendoll
- Replacement of fluorescent lights with LEDs in September
- Construction of the Dick & Ellen Howie Patio
- Donation of three works of local art in honor of Marijo Dougherty and Norman Baumann

The Year in Summary

2022 at Altamont Free Library was a mostly happy and successful one at Altamont Free Library. After a slow and measured reengagement with our core programs and services throughout the year in 2021, we

began 2022 well positioned to lower barriers, broaden access, more fully engage with our community, develop new programs, and reintroduce previously successful ones. At the beginning of 2023, we can be proud of our incredible community support, strong financial position, excellent staff, and dedicated Board of Trustees. I am tremendously proud of the work that the Board, staff, and I have done in 2022 to provide our community with engaging programs, stellar library services, a diverse collection, and well maintained building. We have much to be proud of and much to be grateful for.

Lowering Barriers

In one of our first acts of the new year, the AFL Board of Trustees voted at our January meeting to completely eliminate overdue fines. This momentous policy change occurred after several years of intermediate steps and thoughtful study of the issue by the library leadership. We were assisted in our decision making process by many people: Betty Spadaro, who at age 103 made an extremely generous \$1,000 donation to the library for the purpose of replacing the fines that we had expected to collect over the course of 2022; Natalie Hurteau, then of UHLS, whose December 2021 presentation to the Board of Trustees gave us a sense of the broader context for fine elimination; and Tim Wiles and the Guilderland Public Library Board of Trustees, who voted to take this step in concert with AFL. We owe each of them our gratitude. This report is dedicated to the memory of Ms. Spadaro who passed away shortly after we voted to use her gift in order to eliminate barriers to library access for the community she so loved.

The overall effects of our fine elimination are difficult to calculate. One way of measuring the impact of the new policy might be to look at the number of billed items that we have lent out and have not been returned. Some Trustees had been concerned that in the absence of overdue fines, patrons would be more likely to keep items out long beyond their due dates since there would be fewer consequences for doing so. At the end of 2021, prior to the introduction of the new policy, we had 27 books that had been checked out in 2021 with a “billed” status, meaning that they were still out 30 days beyond their due dates and actively accruing fines. As of the end of 2022, there were only 14 items checked out earlier in 2022 that were in “billed” status. It seems, therefore, that that patrons are *not* keeping items out for excessive periods despite the diminished consequences. In addition, several patrons have expressed that they were able to return to the library after an absence because their outstanding fines had been forgiven.

In eliminating overdue fines, AFL joined a still growing list of libraries that have adopted such a policy. Indeed, as of January 1, when the East Greenbush Public Library went fine-free, only three libraries in UHLS still charge overdue fines for children’s materials, and only five charge fines for any late items.

In 2022, we additionally lowered barriers to access by activating automatic renewal. So long as nobody is waiting for checked out materials, all UHLS materials are now automatically renewed two times, effectively lengthening the loan periods for most items and reducing burdens on our patrons. UHLS also entered into a reciprocal digital lending agreement with the Mid-Hudson Library System, so that Libby users from both systems can borrow ebooks and digital audiobooks from both system catalogs.

Over the course of 2022, we also removed some of our remaining COVID-related restrictions, most notably our September decision to eliminate our masking requirement. We have also returned toys to the children’s section to encourage longer visits, and returned to holding indoor in-person programs during the colder months. In January 2023, we brought Storytime back to the library, having held it in Orsini Park and in the Altamont Reformed Church Fellowship Hall (a large indoor space that allows for better social distancing) since 2021.

In With The New

Over the course of 2022, in addition to continuing or reinstating many previously successful programs, we also introduced a number of new programs.

In January 2022, we introduced a new monthly children's nature-themed storytime presented by Thacher Park Nature Educator and AFL Trustee Shannon Duerr. These *Get Outside/Bundle Up* Storytimes are held outdoors in Orsini Park, and feature fun and educational stories, activities, and crafts. During some summer months, they have attracted over a dozen children along with many happy caregivers. Cold weather months have proven to be less well attended, but just as fun.

The Every House Project was launched in May 2022 with a pair of standing room only presentations by County Legislator and newly-minted AFL Trustee Jeff Perlee. The goal of the Every House Project is to encourage community members to research and document the histories of homes in the Village and its surrounding areas. We've created a website where people can find research tools and resources, and launched a Facebook community where people can post their findings and seek research assistance.

We also created the Slow Reads Book Club, where rather than discussing one book per month in one meeting, we take important books a chapter or two at a time and meet weekly to discuss the sometimes weighty issues that come up. It has been a wonderful addition to our repertoire of programs, and after hiatus, we will be resuming the Slow Reads Book Club early in the new year.

The second year of our Summer Reading Buddies Program expanded the program's reach. This year we partnered ten struggling readers from Altamont Elementary School with six Guilderland High School students who served as reading skills tutors. It was once again 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 schools in the Guilderland School District in conjunction with our friends at Guilderland Public Library. In addition, I have presented on Summer Reading Buddies to the UHLS Directors and at the New York Library Association Conference. In the coming months, Katie Barker and I will be talking it up on a statewide teleconference organized by the NYS Division of Library Development. Our hope is that other libraries will be inspired to organize their own local versions of SRB.

Old Friends

In late April and early May, we lost two of our longest serving employees, Jo Ann Mulligan and Albert Rusch. Both resigned in order to pursue new job opportunities. Jo Ann and Albert began working at AFL in 2014 and were at the times of their departures our longest serving frontline employees. Jo Ann, in particular, had almost single-handedly revamped our Young Adult book section, and ran our young readers book club, doing a terrific job with both. Many of their hours were filled by Erika Peterson, to whom I am very grateful. In September, we hired Brad Towle and he has been an invaluable addition to the staff, though he too will be leaving us soon in order to accept a new job.

Over the course of the year, we also marked the passing of a few of our greatest supporters and favorite patrons. Betty Spadaro, as mentioned above, was a hugely significant figure to generations of Altamont residents. She began her long teaching career in a one-room schoolhouse in Knox in 1939 before becoming one of the first teachers hired at the newly-built Altamont Elementary School, where she taught until 1979. She passed away in May at the age of 103.

Judge Harold (Hal) Hughes was a pillar of the Altamont Community for many decades, and, along with his wife Mary, one of our most faithful patrons. He was a voracious reader and a warm presence in the library. He was particularly proud of his daughter, Meg Seiberger-Hughes, an AFL employee for the past few years.

Both Hal and Betty asked that contributions to the library be made in their honor, and we have been the grateful recipients of many donations in their memory.

Home Sweet Home

2022 was the 125th anniversary of the construction of the historic Altamont Train Station, and the 10th anniversary of the opening of the Library here. It was fitting, then, gave a little extra care and attention this past year to the building that will be our forever home.

Over the winter of 2021-2, the building and grounds took a bit of damage from high winds and heavy snows. First our roadside sign collapsed as a result of decaying posts, and then icy snow coming off the roof warped our trackside fence. Both were repaired by AFL Building Chair Paul Scilipoti. Repairing the sign, in particular, was a huge amount of work for Paul, and it now looks as good as new. The fence remains visibly warped and its gate is unusable as a result, but it looks much better than before.

Several volunteer efforts resulted in a beautified building. First, in April, several Trustees and friends of AFL joined us to wash windows, prepare garden beds, lay down mulch, and generally tidy the grounds. Later in the fall, Stu Linendoll took it upon himself to scrub the exterior of the building singlehandedly.

We also undertook some building improvements, some temporary, some permanent. In September, we unveiled a travelling mural that was created by Black and Latinx teenagers from Scenectady, Troy, and Albany under the mentorship of educators from an Albany-based organization called Amplified Voices. This huge and vibrant artwork fit very naturally under our platform canopy and was on display for over a month to widespread appreciation. Paul Scilipoti once again took the lead on the hard work of transporting and erecting the mural, aided by Gavin Warner.

In addition, we were able to finally close the loop on two projects that have been many years in the making: the replacement of our overhead fluorescent lights with LEDs and the construction of the patio under our platform canopy. Both projects were paid for through a State & Municipal Aid (SAM) grant that we received in conjunction with the Town of Guelderland that we applied for back in 2016. We are very grateful to Assemblymember Pat Fahy, Town Supervisor Peter Barber, and ToG Grant Administrator Don Csaposs for their assistance in securing the money for those projects. The LED replacement has already lowered our monthly electricity usage by a third, and we look forward to using the new patio for library programs beginning in the spring.

Community Support & Supporting our Community

Throughout the year, AFL has been the fortunate recipient of an overwhelming amount of community support. This support has been expressed through our Long Range Planning feedback, in the kind words of library visitors, and—crucially—through charitable giving. Even without a gala fundraiser, 2022 was one of the best fundraising years in the library's long history.

In 2020 and 2021, we were unable to hold in-person fundraising events, but we brought back two of our most important ones in 2022. The May book sale and the Election Day bake sale each raised about \$750 for

the Library. Holding the book sale allowed the staff to do the first large scale weeding of the collection since the pandemic, and we withdrew nearly 1,000 underused items from our collection and got them into the hands of book lovers, allowing us the shelf space to purchase new materials. We also held a hugely successful Library Lights fundraising campaign in December, raising over \$2,000 and celebrating over 450 honorees at our annual gazebo lighting ceremony.

For the second time since 2020, we also sent an appeal letter to our community. Once again, I was overwhelmed by the support and generosity of our donors. We raised over \$20,000 in appeal contributions, far more than the \$10,000 we had anticipated in the 2022 Budget.

Between our fundraisers, memorial gifts, charitable donations, and keep-the-change's, AFL raised more than \$47,000 in 2022. We are overwhelmingly grateful for this extraordinary demonstration of community support for the library.

In addition to the financial support that we received from the public, we also saw significant increases in municipal appropriations for the coming year. Both Guilderland and Knox increased their commitments over previous levels for 2023. As they prepare their 2023-4 budget in the coming months, we will advocate for a similar increase from the Village of Altamont.

Community support goes far beyond fundraising however, and in 2022 we were fortunate to see incredibly high attendance at concerts, summer reading events, WinterFest, and other events throughout the year. We always say that the most important thing that our patrons can contribute is their presence, and in 2022 we were not disappointed.

Looking Forward

One of the Board's major tasks over the past year has been the gathering of feedback from the community for our new Long Range Plan of Service (LRP), which will cover the years 2023 to 2025. We gave ourselves the ambitious task of reaching out to every segment of our community, with a special emphasis on people who may not regularly use the library, or who may not have previously been asked what they want from their library. The LRP Working Group (with emphasis on "working") is composed of Chairperson Christine Carpenter, Deborah Marion-Katz, Shannon Duerr and Joe Burke.

Among the tools the Working Group used to solicit community feedback were:

- An online survey for the general public which drew 130 responses
- Targeted online surveys for homeschooling families, educators, young adults, and business owners
- Paper survey drop boxes at several locations in Knox and Berne
- Dedicated surveys for the entire AES fifth grade
- Focus group with the Altamont Seniors
- A special storytime in Schilling Park with activities for young children that allowed a focus group to be held with their caregivers
- Outreach to group homes for disabled adults in the Village
- Meetings with elected officials from the Village of Altamont, and the Towns of Guilderland and Knox
- A SWOT (Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats) Analysis session and a separate goal-setting workshop with the full Board of Trustees, moderated by Tim Burke of UHLS

Altogether, we heard from nearly 250 individuals, far and away the most that we have heard from for an LRP. Overwhelmingly, the feedback we've received has been very positive about the library and the programs and services we provide. This body of input includes numerous ideas for new programs, new modes of outreach, and ways we can enhance our collection in the future. The LRP Working Group's work is ongoing, and we hope to finalize the new LRP by April.

The Year to Come

In 2023, we have some noteworthy milestones to look forward to.

In the spring, we will dedicate our new patio in honor of two individuals who personify the sense of community that we hold so dear at Altamont Free Library: Dick and Ellen Howie.

We also look forward to inviting library lovers from all over the Capital District to AFL as we participate in the second UHLS Library Expedition. The Library Expedition challenges library enthusiasts to visit all of the 36 libraries in Albany and Rensselaer Counties. The 2019 Library Expedition was an overwhelming success, drawing in hundreds of visitors who has never previously experienced our library, and we are excited to once again have the chance to introduce Altamont Free Library to new audiences.

Finally, in 2023 we will unveil the 2023-2025 Long Range Plan of Service that we have worked so hard on throughout this past year. While the LRP is still a work in progress, I know that the finalized plan will be a positive, forward-looking document that reflects all of the hundreds of comments that we collected, and the many, many hours of thoughtful work that have gone into preparing it.

Among the many themes that the LRP Working Group have come back to time and time again is the concept of stewardship. For those of us who are privileged to serve on this Board and on the Library staff, stewardship is an idea that we take seriously. Our goal is to ensure that Altamont Free Library remains a vibrant centerpiece of our community for generations to come. We serve by the scout's rule, striving to leave our campsite in better condition than we found it. When each of us arrived at Altamont Free Library we found an already healthy, beloved, and thriving organization, and each of us through our hard work and dedication have nevertheless improved it even more. I firmly believe that every Board member, and every staff member, and every one of our supporters can be proud of the work we have done here. I look forward to our continued work together.

Prepared by Director Joe Burke

Submitted January 16, 2023

AFL Circulation Statistics by Month

Month	2022 Circulation			2021 Circulation			2017-2019 Averages			2021 % from Avg.	2022 % from Avg.
	Physical	Digital	Total	Physical	Digital	Total	Physical	Digital	Total		
January	1,630	775	2,405	1,295	618	1,913	2,153	295	2,448	-24.5%	-1.8%
February	1,695	617	2,312	1,225	534	1,759	2,006	283	2,289	-26.2%	-1.0%
March	2,179	746	2,925	1,360	620	1,980	2,231	205	2,436	-20.7%	20.0%
April	1,970	736	2,706	1,383	527	1,910	2,182	296	2,478	-25.9%	9.2%
May	1,608	739	2,347	1,242	699	1,786	2,154	325	2,479	-32.5%	-5.3%
June	1,972	674	2,646	2,024	494	2,518	2,334	355	2,689	-6.6%	-1.6%
July	2,314	719	3,033	2,830	579	3,409	2,613	343	2,956	14.2%	2.6%
August	2,316	707	3,023	2,528	607	3,135	2,688	369	3,057	2.5%	-1.1%
September	1,813	654	2,467	2,016	574	2,590	2,046	333	2,379	8.5%	3.7%
October	1,849	651	2,500	1,783	564	2,347	2,213	354	2,567	-9.0%	-2.6%
November	1,789	676	2,465	1,613	625	2,238	2,014	331	2,345	-4.7%	5.1%
December	1,795	645	2,440	1,708	625	2,333	1,819	336	2,155	7.9%	13.2%
Total	22,930	8,339	31,269	21,007	7,066	27,918	26,453	3,825	30,278	-8.1%	3.3%

Overall Circulation by Year 2015-2022

	Physical Circulation	Digital Circulation	Total Circulation
2022	22,930	8,339	31,269
2021	21,007	7,006	27,918
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

2015-2022 Over-the-Counter Circulation Statistics by Category

(Digital circulation excluded)

	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015
Adult Audio	376	602	453	890	1,036	1,142	1,624	1,793
Adult Fiction	7,201	6,483	3,799	7,256	6,819	7,493	8,416	8,249
Adult Nonfiction	3,100	3,043	1,696	3,266	3,171	2,881	3,252	3,702
Adult Periodicals	0	4	2	3	18	13	12	2
Adult Video	3,013	2,514	2,259	6,711	6,532	6,710	6,957	6,072
Electronic	9	28	8	18	22	29	55	130
Juvenile Audio	25	68	85	98	106	67	141	300
Juvenile Fiction	6,883	6,062	3,195	5,789	5,616	5,488	5,298	6,727
Juvenile Nonfiction	872	860	523	1,038	1,012	911	917	1,136
Juvenile Periodicals	0	0	0	3	0	4	0	0
Juvenile Video	597	374	282	607	728	740	990	1,113
Miscellaneous	386	489	136	536	463	367	500	255
YA Audio	5	5	1	18	11	21	34	24
YA Fiction	439	575	256	449	566	591	765	984
YA Nonfiction	24	38	16	62	34	56	75	37
YA Periodicals	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
YA Video	0	5	1	3	4	1	4	2
Total:	22,930	21,007	12,712	26,748	26,138	26,514	29,040	30,526