

Director's Report for April 30, 2026

Board Appreciation

April is National Volunteer Month, and CALS is fortunate to benefit from the passion and service of hundreds of volunteers every year (in 2025, 722 volunteers gave 8,698 hours of their time to the library). Our volunteer board members play a critical role in the success of the library. I know that the time commitment is significant. Thank you!

In appreciation of your efforts, we want to give each of you a CALS T-shirt or sweatshirt from the online shop that is typically only open to CALS employees. Follow the link here to select your item: <https://cals2023.itemorder.com/shop/home/>

Then, email your pick and size to CALS Volunteer Coordinator Mattie Thacker: mbthacker@cals.org. She'll order then get you your shirt at a future board meeting (or mail it to you if necessary). Thanks again for your dedication to the library.

Sale of 1001 Monroe Street

I reported in the annual budget memo last December that we were budgeting \$100,000 that we had projected from the proceeds of the sale of a rental house that CALS owns close to the Children's Library. This house at 1001 S. Monroe was purchased when this library was built in 2012 to help stabilize the immediate neighborhood around the library. CALS has rented the house to several tenants since then. The development of the UAMS Day Care across from the house gives us confidence that CALS no longer needs to carry the expense associated with owning this property. After our tenant left we did some work on the house to get it ready to market. We listed the house in early March after our listing broker, La Kesha Crow of Coldwell Banker RPM, helped us price the property. We have accepted an offer for the full listing price of \$130,000. We now anticipate net proceeds of \$120,000 from the sale. The closing is set for May 4. I need authorization to execute the deed on behalf of CALS. La Kesha and Stuart Mackey, another real estate broker who has helped us price the house, will be at the meeting to answer any questions you may have.

Cumberland & 2nd Park

On April 14, a nursery in Georgia delivered two large tulip poplar trees as part of our agreement with ARDOT and the city to turn the vacant lot across from CALS into a park. Brian Glover, the

head of landscaping for CALS, with some help from Better Lawns & Gardens of Little Rock, planted them alongside 2nd Street in the middle of the block. Brian has been watering the trees and reports they seem to be doing well. I learned this week that the city has received permission to narrow 2nd Street to two lanes eventually, making room for more street parking beside the park space, and making it safer for patrons to cross from the library to the park. As soon as the city and ARDOT pick a location for them, we will build a 10' x 12' covered programming area and a pathway from one end to the other of the park. When the weather and growing season are optimal, we'll get the pollinator gardens established with the help of volunteer naturalists.

A.I. in the workplace

On April 16, Priscilla, Ray, and I attended a briefing from lawyers at the Wright Lindsey & Jennings law firm that advises CALS on employment matters. The topic was emerging issues surrounding A.I. in the workplace. We heard about the need for us to adopt an AI policy for employees to disclose what uses they might be making of A.I. while on the job. The two lawyers conducting the session advised that the central truth about any aspect of CALS work that is being done with A.I. is to remember to always have a human in the loop. AI policy should also consider prohibited uses of AI (and explain why those are prohibited), have an approved AI program for staff to use (whether it's ChatGPT, Copilot, etc.), and have human review before anything is published or distributed. We will be presenting a draft policy in the near term for your consideration.

Library Square Books

Volunteers Walter May and Sam Ledbetter have made a lot of progress building shelves for this enterprise. Gonzalo is supervising their work. You should stick your head inside the space on Clinton Avenue and see what great work they are doing. We have hired a new manager of Library Square Books and the used book sale events. Her name is Jessica Scott, and her first day is May 18.

Roberts Archive Exhibition Space

Last month I provided a summary of the archive exhibits we would feature in this space once CDI finishes the renovations on the first floor of Roberts. One of the items I mentioned was an interactive Ideum map table that Brian Robertson will configure in Roberts to enable visitors to see digitally various items in our archive collection. [Here](#) and [here](#) are a couple of examples of how this equipment works in other cities to make photos and maps more accessible to students

and visitors to Colonial Williamsburg and New Orleans. Glenn Whaley, the Roberts manager, will be at the board meeting to give you an overview and answer questions.

Arkansas Heroes

Sculptor Vinnie Bagwell is working with CDI, our architects, a local installer, and CALS staff to finalize the platform for her sculpture depicting the USCT soldier. The bronze piece is scheduled for installation between the Roberts Library and Main in the third or fourth week of May. Vinnie and Ronnie Nichols will be the speakers at our June 3 Legacy and Lunch program to talk about the art and the Arkansas history it commemorates. A brief dedication ceremony will take place that day following their talk.

Program Updates

Our 2026 Big Read is coming to a close. We've had a month-long celebration of the poetry collection *Catalog of Unabashed Gratitude* by Ross Gay. We hosted dozens of related programs including a visit by the poet on April 10, distributed over 600 free copies of the book, and fostered discussion and creative expression in our community.

When we were planning the Main reopening events last fall, we had planned a performance for families of Carnival of the Animals with an ensemble from the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra. When our reopening celebration dates had to be moved, we worked with them to reschedule the performance to late January, and that date was ultimately cancelled due to inclement weather. Because of the full schedules of ASO musicians, it was best to postpone that larger performance to a future date, but we are excited to host the Quapaw Quartet that this Saturday, May 2, in the Children's Center at Main for a performance and instrument petting zoo. We are hoping to still hold the larger event with the performance of Carnival of the Animals in the fall. Maybe the park space across the street will be ready by then to host this!

For several years now, we have partnered with Central Arkansas Master Naturalists and Arkansas Monarch Conservation Partnership to host Naturally Arkansas to help educate patrons about growing native plants. This year the event is moving from the Children's Library to the Main campus and will take place on Saturday, May 9 and feature native plant vendors as well, educational talks, a screening of the film *The Extraordinary Caterpillar*, and activities for children.

Development

Library Giving Day was April 1, and we had a successful campaign. We encouraged donors to give in support of CALS Park. We raised \$18,210 from 73 donors toward the greenspace

improvement project. In addition to those gifts, we received another \$6,635 from 64 donors who chose to allocate their gifts to other projects or make unrestricted gifts. To date, we have raised a total of \$37,635 in support of CALS Park from nearly 100 donors. Through June 1, donations to CALS Park up to \$50,000 will be matched by the Judith K. Faust Memorial Fund.

We are always trying to do what we can to expand the capacity of CALS programs. We are pleased that we have secured a \$15,000 sponsorship from Bank of America Arkansas in support of programming at Rock It! Lab, CALS's entrepreneurship center. These funds will support activities such as Rock It! Lab's ongoing Lunch & Learn programs and their upcoming fifth anniversary celebration. We are grateful to have BOA Arkansas's support!

Last month we reported on the nice [article](#) published in the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette about the CALS Foundation's memorial funds. A community member read the article and reached out to Eliza because the story gave her the idea to create a new memorial fund in memory of her son, who was a page at Fletcher Library in the 1980s and an avid reader. She donated \$10,000 to the CALS Foundation to create the fund, and the annual distribution to CALS will support the library's purchase of Science Fiction & Fantasy books (her son's favorite genre).

Communications

The team has been focused on supporting systemwide programs and initiatives, with an emphasis on launching the new website, promoting the NEA Big Read, and coordinating activities for National Library Week. The redesigned website went live on April 24 with the goal of meeting updated accessibility standards by the deadline, which has now been extended to April 26, 2027. Our focus now is ensuring accessibility across platforms, including PDFs and alt text for website and social media content.

National Library Week took place April 19–25. We kicked off the week with the annual Rock, Paper, Run 5K in partnership with the North Little Rock Public Library System. More than 400 people registered, and 329 participated in the race on April 19. A post-event survey has been distributed, and feedback to date has been positive. While expenses are still being finalized, the event will net approximately \$5,800, to be split evenly between the two systems. The week concluded with a celebration at the Main Library featuring the Mobile Memory Lab, a pop-up used book sale, the CALS Cruiser, and NLRPLS's Rover bookmobile and Mobile Makerspace. Attendees also enjoyed shopping and giveaways at the Rock It! Lab, grab-and-go kits in the Makerspace (inside Main), the bounce house, crafts, performances by Arkansas Circus Arts, and music by DJ Ally Lynn. Approximately 300 people attended.

Community Engagement Coordinator Maria Aguilar collaborated with the team at the Maumelle Library to host the annual Children's Day (El Día del Niño) program. Artist Vicente Yáñez led a craft activity, and guests could enter a raffle to win a LEGO set. Attendance was 333, surpassing previous years.

We're bringing back Midday Mix. The first event in March drew around 270 people and received positive feedback from attendees, so we're hosting another session in celebration of 501 Day on May 1, 12–2 p.m. Featuring music by DJ AJ, we hope you'll bring your lunch or take advantage of a special discount at Boulevard Bread and enjoy the rooftop. In the event of rain, we'll host the event on the 5th floor.

Circulation and Traffic

Because we ran long last month, I had to postpone the presentation that Leslie and Carol will make to respond to some of the questions that arose in the February meeting about the cost of digital circulation numbers. My preview/summary is that while the patron demand for digital content (primarily in the form of audiobooks and eBooks) continues to rise, the cost to CALS (and other libraries) to meet this demand goes up but not just because we are securing a larger quantity of books. It also rises because the publishers are hiking the prices of each title we circulate. This means we and other public libraries are getting fewer licenses from digital publishers for a given amount of money than we were getting a year ago for that same expenditure.

Next Board Meeting

Our next board meeting will be on May 28, 2026. We will meet that day at Children's Library. Following the meeting, board members will be invited to stay and help with our recent efforts to join the city's Adopt a Street program. In January, after I participated in my church's litter pickup service project on the MLK holiday, I had the idea that CALS administrative staff should help with litter pickup at our various locations. Mattie and Priscilla improved on this with their idea that we should adopt a street near Children's and enlist CALS volunteers to help periodically with keeping our adopted streets clean. On Earth Day last week, some staff gathered in the Children's parking lot to pick up litter on several nearby blocks of Maryland and 10th St. that were assigned to us. We can show you how it's done next month.