Director's Report for September 24, 2026

Act 372 Update

I mentioned in an email to all of you on Sunday afternoon that the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals had issued an order on Friday directing the state of Arkansas to file a response to our pending motion for reconsideration of the court's July 30th decision vacating the trial court's injunction of Sections 1 and 5 of Act 372. The State Solicitor General asked for an extra 2 weeks to respond to our request so the motion will not be fully briefed until 10/13/2026 or later. In practical terms, we thankfully now have another month to finalize our policy changes to comply with Act 372. I have asked our lawyer, John Adams, to return to the board meeting again to continue the conversation he began with us last month. Since we do not yet have a determination about whether we are going to be exposed to criminal charges for shelving books with sexually explicit material, or does it require affirmative acts on the part of library staff to "furnish" such "harmful" material as the law defines that term to a minor, John will not be able to give us a firm legal opinion. He will, however, spell out several things that we know we will need to do to comply because where the court lands on the "furnish" or "shelve" question won't change those. Staff can then begin devising the policies to meet his recommendations. John can also address the request made last month by the employee at Dee Brown for a board resolution committing the library to provide any employee who, while acting in good faith, might be prosecuted under Act 372 as a result of work they performed for CALS. We have had a lot of questions and concerns, particularly from both our youth and adult programming staff, over the last several weeks about the implications of the law for them and their work. I have agreed to do a program at Fletcher on October 9 at 11am, to answer staff and patron questions. On September 13, the *ADG* published an essay of mine, addressing the challenges Arkansas libraries face trying to discern what compliance with the new law entails. My opinion piece is Here

Materials Review Process

At last month's meeting when you tweaked our policy to align it with the requirements of Section 5 of Act 372, Board member Dustin McDaniel asked whether the board gets a report on each Request for Reconsideration. The answer to that question was no, that had not been the practice for the nearly 11 years I've been the director. And it was not, to my memory, the practice when I was on the CALS board for 6 years (2003-2008). But if the board wants to start

receiving those, that is certainly doable. There was a recent request which has now been addressed by the library. The patron has been notified that his request to remove the DVD containing the movie *Razor Blade Smile* was denied. The request and my letter that included the three library staff evaluations of the movie are available here. As I said last month, I estimate that there has been an average of one to two of these annually over the 11 years I've been here. Under the new law, once it goes into effect, any appeal of the staff's decisions on these requests will go to the Little Rock City Board.

Searching for New Development Director

We posted Eliza's position after she was named the new Director of the Main Library. We received 32 applications. I will chair a small committee that will start interviewing the strongest candidates. Initially I considered letting my successor hire this person. But I decided in consultation with Eliza to move ahead. There were two factors in that decision. The primary concern is that it could be 3 or 4 months at a minimum before a new director is here and sufficiently settled in to give this the attention it deserves. I did not want to suggest to our development staff or our generous donors by delaying that this was of secondary importance to CALS. It also will be helpful to spare the new director from having this on a long "To Do" list when they arrive. The second factor for me was that I know from watching Eliza and her staff what the position entails and what skills to prioritize when filling it.

Rock IT! Lab

This entrepreneurship program started in 2020, with the site in the Cox Building officially opening in 2021. It has been successful in helping patrons connect to mentors and other expert resources to guide their small businesses. We need to renew our memorandum of understanding with our partner. I have been working with the staff to make changes in the document that reflect what we have learned about oversight and management of the program in its six years. We produced a draft MOU and sent it to Benito, our partner who operates the program out of the Cox Building. I met earlier this week with Benito and asked him to respond as soon as he could to the draft with his comments and questions.

The Park Across from Main

Gonzalo and I met last week with the landscape design architect who is working with the city and its consultants on the long-term creation of the entire 30 Crossing Park. Tanner is also working with CALS to design and manage our efforts with the city to start establishing this fall a garden on the corner of the vacant lot across from Main. He has the drawings and has given Gonzalo the go ahead on finding a contractor to do the work of putting down a couple of pathways, a shade structure, and framing the boundaries of the garden. Our volunteers will work on establishing the garden designed by Tanner as soon as it's feasible. Tanner believes this will be in November. The Arkansas Department of Transportation has approved these steps at the request of the Little Rock Parks Director, Leland Couch. On Tuesday of this week I met Katie Rutledge, the new project manager hired by the city to oversee the development of the 30 Crossing Park and the expenditure of the Bezos Earth Fund grant of $30M. She indicated she would be in touch and that she supported what the library wants to do with our little corner of the park.

Program Updates

Hispanic Heritage Month programming kicked off mid-September and will continue through mid-October. The system-wide HHM event for families will be a celebration this Saturday at the Children's Library, but all locations have included activities and displays to celebrate and educate about this annual observance.

This Saturday will also be the first opportunity for patrons to experience the new West Gallery historical exhibit space on the first floor of the Roberts Library. Though still a work in progress, we will be offering guided tours of the Roberts Library which will include a first look at the West Gallery. Our planned physical exhibits highlight Japanese American art from incarceration, the USCT in Arkansas, and highlights from our photo collections. Our planned digital displays will highlight the Enrique Fuentevilla Newspaper collection for Hispanic Heritage Month and the Marche community history project. We will also have interactive digital screens to visit our digital projects and explore EOA quizzes. One important digital component of the exhibit space, an interactive map table, will not be in place for this first glimpse tour, but a future event will highlight the completed space and exhibits to a larger audience.

Of course, the largest programming project coming up for us is the Six Bridges Book Festival which will kick off this Sunday and include over forty events through the following Sunday, October 4. The author lineup this year features many authors with local Arkansas connections as well as award winners and bestselling authors of national notoriety. Our Festival Coordinator Drew Herget and the Festival Talent Committee have crafted an author slate that offers books across a wide variety of genres and topics. In addition to all the author panels, Festival goers can also enjoy a Midday Mix session featuring live music, the reception and presentation honoring the Porter and Worthen Prize winners, a party featuring some of our visiting authors, a cooking demonstration, writing workshops, and Little Readers Rock, a family event presented in partnership with the Junior League of Little Rock. As a part of the Festival, sixteen authors will visit area schools, and the Fest will provide 540 free books to students at those schools.

Looking beyond Six Bridges, October will be another robust month of library events. The public service departments of the Main Library have been working on a collaborative Renaissance Fair event with activities throughout the building for all ages on Saturday, October 17. Also on the 17th, our Community Resource team is helping to present a community health fair at our Rooker Library location. We will host an event with David Stricklin, former director of the Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, who has written a new book about his father Al Stricklin, piano player who helped to develop the western swing style of music as a member of the band Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys. This event will take place at the Darragh Center on Thursday, October 22.

Development

Though the Development team is in the midst of a leadership transition, they are staying busy: Preparing for the CALS Foundation's annual year-end fundraising appeal; preparing for An Evening with Ariel Lawhon, our Six Bridges Book Festival fundraising event scheduled for the evening of October 4 (tickets are still available if you would like to attend!); and settling in to serving customers at Library Square Books, which has now been open for business for about a month. Book sorting volunteers have returned, and we expect we will soon announce the dates of our next Used Book Sale at Roberts Library.

We are also pleased to share that earlier this summer, the team at UAMS's Institute for Digital Health and Innovation invited CALS to partner on an

application for funding through the Arkansas Rural Health Transformation Program's THRIVE (Telehealth, Health-Monitoring, and Response Innovation for Vital Expansion) initiative. UAMS's application was successful and they have received a $2.3M grant to support their Virtu-RURAL program, aimed at "installing new telehealth capacities and improving digital health knowledge." As a subgrantee, CALS will receive $350,000 over ten months (October 1, 2026 – July 31, 2027) to support digital literacy and telehealth access at the library. Our portion of the project primarily provides for doubling CALS's digital literacy team from 2 to 4 navigators who assist patrons with using devices and software. Funds will also support facilitating greater access to telehealth resources and devices throughout the library, including a telehealth access point at Milam Library. We are looking forward to partnering with the team at UAMS to build on the successes of CALS's popular digital literacy guides and to provide greater access to telehealth throughout our service area.

Communications

Throughout September, Communications and Engagement has been focused on Library Card Sign-up Month and the Power of the Card campaign. We're wrapping up the month with Power Up and Play at Main Event this Saturday, September 26, from 10 a.m.- noon. Attendees will receive a free one-hour arcade play card, and the CALS Cruiser will be on site to assist with library card sign-ups.

In addition to Library Card Sign-up Month, the team supported ASO's recent performance of "Carnival of the Animals" at Main Library and two events taking place this Saturday: the Children's Business Fair at Williams Library and Fiesta at the Library, a celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month at the Children's Library.

As September comes to a close, the Six Bridges Book Festival is front and center. We're currently making our media rounds with appearances this week on KSSN, *Arkansas Style*, and the morning shows on KARK and Fox 16. The festival has also received coverage in the *Arkansas Times* and a few authors have been featured in the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, with additional media planned leading up to and during the event. Advertising efforts include outdoor (billboards and yard signs), digital (run-of-site web ads, social media, and Spotify), as well as radio and print.

We've also added an engagement activation ahead of the festival with a special Six Bridges edition of Midday Mix on September 30. The goal is to bring people to Main Library and build excitement ahead of the festival's big weekend, with live music from local artist Brae Leni and the Redd Shoee Creww.

Looking ahead to October, Communications and Engagement is also preparing promotional efforts for the Renaissance Fair on October 17 and the Día de Muertos Festival on October 24. Once the bulk of the Six Bridges campaign concludes, these two events will become our primary promotional focus.

Circulation and Traffic

You may have noticed that the programming attendance number that appears on the statistical report in the board packet (15,925 in August) and the attendance number on the new analytics dashboard (13,347) are different. While the board report attendance number includes participation in every kind of programming we do, the dashboard is reporting only in-person attendance at live library programs presented either at one of our locations or offsite at a location such as a school or festival. In-person programs run the gamut from story time to Six Bridges Book Festival events, but we also provide enrichment activities such as Grab and Go kits or what we call passive programs. Those can be anything from a jellybean counting contest to a scavenger hunt to participating in a parade. Passive programs do require some work on the front end, but do not take the time that an in-person program does. Unfortunately, Grab and Go kits and passive programs are not considered programs by the state library and cannot be submitted with the rest of our usage data for the Public Library Survey. So, we track them separately but combine them into one number for the snapshot that is the board report. Don't forget that the analytics dashboard is always available at https://cals.link/analytics_dashboard.

Next Board Meeting

Our next board meeting will be on **October 22, 2026.**