



A Year *full* of Wonder

Burlington County Library System
Annual Report 2024

A Wonderful Year, Indeed



On the cover and above: Performances by Roxey Ballet thrilled audiences at **Burlington County Library** in Westampton. From several other thematic pieces, the first performance featured work choreographed for dancers with physical disabilities.

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REFLECTING BACK ON 2024 with members of our valued BCLS team, we were struck by the many examples of enhancement, enrichment and inclusion taking place throughout our library system. The overall takeaway is that it was, indeed, a year full of wonder – one in which we witnessed everything from lofty technological advances to the simple joys of a butterfly release. This report highlights just a few of our most noteworthy achievements, and I'm eager to share them with you.

First and foremost, we're proud of our decision to eliminate overdue fines. It was a forward-thinking initiative that resulted in a dramatic increase in checkouts and a welcoming back of customers who had stopped using our services. We also continued to invest in improvements to our library spaces; the renovation of the children's department at Pemberton resulted in a colorful and more functional space for kids and parents. Our second annual Book Festival drew thousands of attendees from across South Jersey, once again promoting our role as a vibrant gathering place for the community. And we're encouraged by a sweeping increase in checkouts and downloads – both general and digital - making it clear that our libraries are more relevant than ever!

As you delve into this review, you'll surely be touched by the images of the breathtaking performance featuring dancers with physical limitations. Note the joyful expression on the face of a participant at the Special Needs Social Hour, a program that brings people with challenges together in a safe and welcoming setting. Learn how teens from the Burlington County Special Services School District are now operating a café at our BCL branch, resulting in a win-win situation for the students and library customers alike. Check out the photos of the Solar Eclipse Watch Party, an event made possible through a partnership with our valued Friends of the Burlington County Library, Inc. Finally, read about our knowledgeable staff, as they continue to engage with customers in helpful ways and offer opportunities to learn about resources that improve lives. And none of this would be possible without the support of our dedicated Friends groups and the BCLS Foundation, along with the leadership of the Library Commission. We look forward to continuing to fulfill our mission to the residents of Burlington County – and of making even greater strides in the years to come!

Ranjna Das

Director
Burlington County Library System

The mission of the Burlington County Library System is to provide opportunities for learning, growth and personal development.



Officer Rich Hernandez from the Community Engagement Unit of the Evesham Township Police Department reads to children at the **Evesham Library** in celebration of national "Read Across America."

Fine-free!

We saw a 20% increase in checkouts from the previous year and welcomed back many customers.

WHEN WE ANNOUNCED our decision to eliminate overdue fines, we took another step in our mission to ensure that our libraries remain accessible to all – regardless of personal circumstances. The move promotes equity by removing a barrier and encourages residents to take advantage of everything our libraries offer and has been well received. Under the new policy that went into effect July 1, overdue fines for most library items no longer accrue.

Overdue fines previously ranged from 15 cents per day for books to \$2 per day for late Chromebooks, tablets and mobile WiFi devices. We also opted to forgive past overdue fines, ensuring that all accounts reflected the same clean slate.

According to Burlington County Library Commission Chair Jonathan Chebra, the new policy that applies to all 15 BCLS locations followed more than a year of discussion and research. Studies have shown that

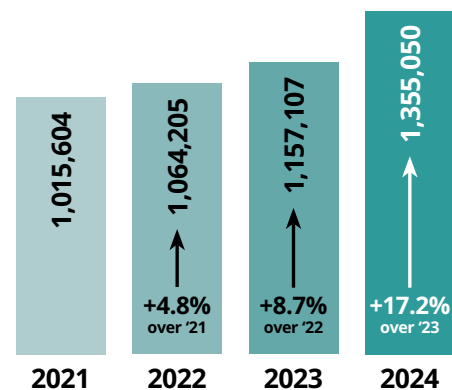
small fines do not encourage the timely return of items and, in fact, customers with fines are more likely to never return to the library.

Additionally, overdue fines disproportionately impact those in low-income households. The financial loss from the fines, which equates to less than 1 percent of library revenue, was absorbed through careful planning and without cutting programs, services and ongoing investments.

Notably, other libraries that eliminated overdue fines found that the policy has been successful; item return rates, material circulation, library card registrations, and overall library use all increased. And, BCLS is experiencing the same positive results! In fact, we saw an immediate 20 percent increase in checkouts, an increase that continued month-to-month throughout the year.

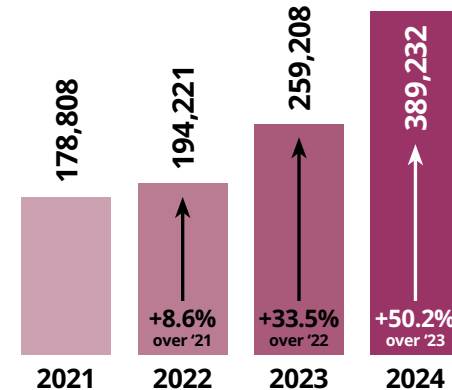
You are reading more, and we noticed!

General Collection Checkouts and Downloads



This shows a sweeping increase of 33.4% over four years.

Digital Collection Downloads



A remarkable upwards surge of 117.7% over the past four years underscores unprecedented interest in our digital products.

"Eliminating fines promotes equity and underscores our commitment to a barrier to critical services, especially for children, low-income families and seniors on fixed incomes — customers who disproportionately benefit from the public good that is our library system."

— Jonathan Chebra
Chairman, Burlington County Library Commission

Solar Eclipse WOWS Library Visitors

WHERE DID YOU VIEW the solar eclipse? For hundreds of Burlington County residents, the library was the place to be! In celebration of the rare occurrence, we hosted numerous fun and educational programs for all ages, including a much-anticipated watch party that had attendees craning their necks – and shielding their eyes – outside the Burlington County Library on the big day. Sponsored by the Friends of the Burlington County Library, Inc., our Solar Eclipse Party drew excited families, friends and coworkers to the county amphitheater adjacent to the library for the historic April 8 event. During the gathering, spectators enjoyed activities, and were offered multiple ways to safely view the eclipse, including special glasses, a solar telescope and a sunspotter. Burlington County Commissioner Dan O’Connell and Director Ranjna Das joined in the fun and the clouds cleared up just in time to view the 90 percent coverage.



Residents from all over Burlington County gathered at the library-adjacent amphitheater in Westampton to view a near-total solar eclipse during our community celebration of science. The elclipse was safe to view thanks to ① a solar-safe telescope, ② a sunspotter projection scope and ③ protective glasses provided by the Friends of the Burlington County Library, Inc.. Burlington County Commissioner Dan O’Connell and Director Ranjna Das (*below*) greeted our many visitors and enjoyed a great view of the event.





Photo provided

At a Glance: Most Borrowed

Adult Fiction

The Women
by Kristin Hannah

The Heaven & Earth Grocery Store
by James McBride

Lessons in Chemistry
by Bonnie Garmus

Adult Nonfiction

*The Demon of Unrest:
A Saga of Hubris, Heartbreak,
and Heroism at the Dawn
of the Civil War*
by Erik Larson

*The Boys in the Boat:
Nine Americans and Their
Epic Quest for Gold
at the 1936 Berlin Olympics*
by Daniel James Brown

*Killers of the Flower Moon:
The Osage Murders
and the Birth of the FBI*
by David Grann

The ever popular Charlie Zahm returned to the **Burlington County Library** auditorium with a special performance celebrating Irish heritage .

BurlCo Book Festival Returns



KIM KELLY IS an independent journalist, author and organizer. In her presentation at the Burlington County Book Festival held in May, Kelly discussed her book, *Fight Like Hell: The Untold History of American Labor*. She also spoke about her journey into labor journalism and the kinds of stories she covered for *Teen Vogue* and other news outlets.

She has been a labor columnist for *Teen Vogue* since 2018, and her writing on labor, class, politics, and culture has appeared in *The New Republic*, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Baffler*, *The Nation*, the *Columbia Journalism Review*, and *Esquire*, among many other publications.

Our Team: Employing Excellence

Staff of the Year: Naju Webb Johnson

Awarded for understanding the lifelong learning needs of our diverse and wide-ranging community, looking for sustainable solutions and working with the BCLS team to deliver instruction, training and other learning opportunities.

Great Solution: Staff Development Committee

Awarded for reinvigorating system-wide staff continuing education efforts after a gap of several years and turning a day-long event into a multi-day conference hosted at multiple locations.

Great Team: Book Festival Committee

Awarded for setting the stage and a strong foundation for a county-wide festival that informs and invigorates the community – all centered around books.

County libraries across New Jersey honor their respective staff at the New Jersey Library Association's annual conference.

The luncheon acknowledges employee accomplishments, team efforts and unique initiatives. It also offers honorees the chance to meet and network with colleagues across the state.

At a Glance: Public Computer Access

COMPUTER
SESSIONS

74,485

DEVICE
CHECKOUTS

1,136

WiFi
SESSIONS

56,783

SELF
CHECKOUTS

94,135



The Best Place to Be Together

OUR NEWLY LAUNCHED Special Needs Social Hour program encourages participants to get together to chat, create and connect at the library.

Open to special needs adults and their caregivers, the sessions are offered at the Burlington County Library once a month to help promote social skills in a relaxed and friendly setting. Themes are selected each month, such as "What Makes Me Great," a session that focused on positive self-esteem and self-confidence while incorporating the story *I Like Myself* by Karen Beaumont. During this gathering, participants also discussed positive affirmations, made a craft, and enjoyed a little music and movement.

Other themes featured "Let's Be Nature Detectives," a session that focused on the environment, "Let's Be Friends," which included a friendship bracelet activity, and "Animated Shorts and Tips for Managing Stress."

New initiatives like this ensure BCLS continues its long-term commitment to providing inclusive libraries where all are welcome and all abilities are celebrated.



Librarian Ceciley Binegar (*above*) presents stories, games, crafts, music and movement, and films to guests at our popular Special Needs Social Hour for adults and caregivers at **Burlington County Library**.



Bordentown Library hosts table gaming nights for kids and teens for evenings filled with unplugged fun.

The Children's Room at Pemberton Library Sees Big Changes

THE PEMBERTON LIBRARY'S children's department saw sweeping design changes and upgrades that made the branch a destination within the community! Renovations were completed to the library's children's room, including a colorful paint scheme that coordinates with pleasing new decorative elements, carpeting, shelving and seating. In addition, a new LEGO Discovery Table that keeps little ones busy and engaged, as well as other play equipment have been installed. Youngsters are also encouraged to nestle into cozy reading nooks while their parents mingle and network with other parents in spaces designed for lounging. The roughly \$200,000 in improvements were financed through Special Purpose Funding included in the FY2023 state budget.



Cozy, comfortable and fun new furniture in the children's department offers unique and imaginative places to hang out and play while visiting the Pemberton Library.

At a Glance: Online Resources

Most Visited

- Kanopy
- Newsbank
- New York Times
- Ancestry Library Edition
- Value Line Investment Center



Crawl for the Gold

Burlington County Library hosted Baby Olympics in celebration of the XXXIII Olympics held in Paris. Our toddler and preschool "athletes" competed in various events, then enjoyed time for crafts and companionship. The friendly competition expanded on the BCLS directive to encourage "Play at the Library" (see page 14) by providing families with opportunities, activities, and spaces that encourage creative play and immersive learning for kids.



Evesham Library hosted a dinosaur art party in which kids got to create their own prehistoric paintings (*above*), starting with a glowing sunrise, while **Pinelands Library** celebrated "Star Wars Day" on May the 4th with a LEGO building block get-together (*right*).

Activity Stations Encourage Play



The "Bookworm Bakery" is just one playtime configuration in the Children's Services area at **Burlington County Library**. The themed experiences rotate so kids can also enjoy some make believe with our "Snail Mail" post office toys, a "Fresh Finds" grocery store, an exciting "Jungle Adventure" setup and more.



Cinnaminson Library presented a series of Tai Chi classes for adults. The Chinese martial art involves gentle movement, meditation and breathing.

New Community Blend Cafe Opens

IF YOU ARE LOOKING for snacks and light refreshments on your next visit to the Burlington County Library, stop by the café for a treat. The Community Blend at Bestseller's Café opened to the public in December under a new partnership with the Burlington County Special Services School District Transition Program. Now, visitors will find a wide selection of light fare available for snacking while they visit.

The long-standing Bestseller's Café launched in the mid-1990s, and now operated by the school district's culinary arts program, has been a welcome improvement! BCL became the first library in New Jersey to feature a café, albeit somewhat modestly, in 1996, when a cappuccino trolley installed in the lobby began selling pastries, bagels, sandwiches and other refreshments. When the library expanded in 2013, the spacious new Bestseller's Café became a central feature of the bustling entrance and lobby area, offering both indoor and outdoor seating. More recently in this post-pandemic era, however, café visitors found their choices limited to the offerings of only a few vending machines.

The culinary arts program students who run the café continue to tweak their menu, which includes an assortment of baked goods, yogurt parfaits, salads, wraps, coffee, tea and more. The partnership also provides a terrific learning opportunity for the students taking advantage of the work-based internship opportunity.

At a Glance: Most Borrowed

Young Kids

Don't Let Pigeon Drive the Bus!
by Mo Willems

The Pigeon HAS to Go to School!
by Mo Willems

Don't Let the Pigeon Stay Up Late!
by Mo Willems

Older Kids

Kristy's Great Idea
a graphic novel illustrated
by Raina Telgemeier

Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Long Haul
by Jeff Kinney

Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Hard Luck
by Jeff Kinney

Teens/Young Adults

Powerless
by Lauren Roberts

The Summer I Turned Pretty
by Jenny Han

The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes
by Suzanne Collins

Video Games

New Pokémon Snap

Nintendo Switch Sports

Animal Crossing: New Horizons

AT a GLANCE: Most Viewed

Kanopy Films

Past Lives

The Whale

Anatomy of a Fall

Kanopy Television

Shakespeare & Hathaway: Season 2

Father Brown: Season 10

Beyond Paradise: Season 1

You streamed 22,404 Kanopy videos in 2024.



Looking forward

BCLS Director Ranjna Das and Chief of Technology Tim Patton discover virtual reality sets at **Burlington County Library** in Westampton, as the library system explores new programming ideas for the public.



AT a GLANCE: Budget



Personnel.....	\$ 9,793,800
Administrative.....	628,000
Books & Materials	1,173,500
Technology	630,000
Events & Activities	118,600
Other.....	1,606,093
Total	\$ 13,949,993

Stories can be expressed in many ways



THE THUNDERBIRD AMERICAN INDIAN DANCERS performed at the 2nd annual book festival with stories that preserve culture and traditions. Using song and dance as their medium of expression, they performed to a full crowd in the Burlington County Library auditorium. In addition to this performance, storyteller TAHIRA shared tales of freedom fighters in a dramatic performance. Other speakers at the book festival included authors Alliah Agostini, Mike Dawson, Allen Crawford, Jim Cullen, Angus Gillespie, Kim Kelly (*see page 7*) and Jay Cooper.

The book festival, co-hosted with the Burlington County Library System Foundation, is an annual celebration of reading, books, storytelling and authorship. During this one-day festival, authors and booksellers gather to share their works and enlighten the community through the medium of words.

Cultural exploration through stories, music and dance, were part of the 2nd annual Burlington County Book Festival at **Burlington County Library**. One performance featured the Thunderbird American Indian Dancers.

At a Glance: Borrowers

New Library Cards Issued

15,165

Total Borrowers

48,642



Families gathered at **Riverton Library** for a hands-on butterfly release.

bcls.lib.nj.us

 Burlington County Library System

- Burlington County Library**
5 Pioneer Boulevard • Westampton
- Beverly Free Library**
441 Cooper Street • Beverly
- Bordentown Library**
18 East Union Street • Bordentown
- Library Company of Burlington**
23 West Union Street • Burlington
- Cinnaminson Library**
1619 Riverton Road • Cinnaminson

- Crosswicks Library Company**
483 Main Street • Crosswicks
- Delanco Public Library**
1303 Burlington Avenue • Delanco
- Evesham Library**
984 Tuckerton Road • Marlton
- Florence Library**
1350 Hornberger Avenue • Roebing
- Maple Shade Library**
200 Stiles Avenue • Maple Shade

- Pemberton Library**
16 Broadway • Browns Mills
- Pinelands Library**
49 Union Street • Medford
- Riverside Library**
10 Zurbrugg Way • Riverside
- Riverton Library**
306 Main Street • Riverton
- Sally Stretch Keen Memorial Library**
94 Main Street • Vincentown

Mobile Library

We visit more than 30 additional locations throughout the county on a regular schedule.

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