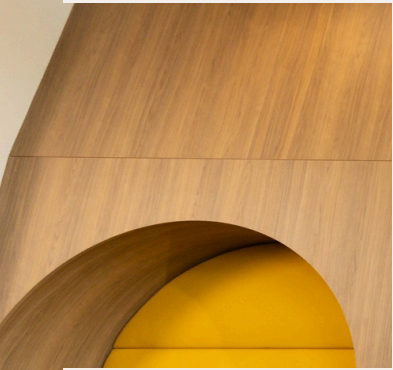


MILWAUKEE PUBLIC LIBRARY

2025 Annual Impact Report

Access.
Literacy.
Community.
Free to All.





LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Joan Johnson
LIBRARY DIRECTOR

As I look back on 2025, I am struck by how much our community accomplished together. This was a year of new beginnings, meaningful partnerships, and deepened commitments to the people we serve. I am proud to share this report and grateful for everyone who made it possible.

The highlight of the year was September’s opening of our new Martin Luther King Jr. Branch. This project was a mixed use space nine years in the making and more than 1,300 community members showed up to celebrate. The community helped design it, and what they asked for is exactly what was built.

All of the work highlighted in this year’s report depends on the dedication of our staff and the support of our partners, City leadership, Board of Trustees, and private donors. Connecting Milwaukeeans to the resources they need to live empowered lives is a shared responsibility and joy.

We feel that commitment deeply at MPL and we are grateful to serve alongside so many who feel it too. 2026 holds exciting work ahead. We look forward to continue welcoming and serving our community. The library has a great deal to offer our residents and we’re just getting started.



LETTER FROM THE MAYOR

Mayor Cavalier Johnson
CITY OF MILWAUKEE

This past year, Milwaukee Public Libraries showed us how valuable they are to our city. The library team continued its mission, providing knowledge, expanding horizons, and preparing residents for greater opportunities. In neighborhoods all across the city, libraries add significantly to our quality of life.

Our libraries distinguish themselves by adapting and embracing change. Yes, books are a centerpiece of the offerings. At the same time, the variety of assets and programs demonstrates a commitment to provide meaningful and contemporary amenities. Just stop by one of the libraries’ makerspaces and you will be impressed. Creativity in our young people is blossoming with access to 3D printers and sound recording technology.

Everyone can take advantage of the robust digital access at all our branches where high speed access, Wi-Fi, and computers are all available. The work of our Milwaukee Public Libraries is not contained only within the building walls. Outreach efforts prepare preschoolers to read and connect resources with patrons who are unable to get to a library.

Perhaps the greatest accomplishment of 2025 was the opening of the Martin Luther King, Jr. branch, which reflects our commitment to keep our libraries modernized and relevant. That work will continue as the Milwaukee Public Libraries invest in our city’s future.

WHO WE ARE

Milwaukee Public Library is dedicated to finding new ways to inspire and connect with the people in our neighborhoods and throughout our community.



→ Vision

MPL is an anchor institution that helps build healthy families and vibrant neighborhoods - the foundation of a strong Milwaukee.

→ Mission

Inspiration starts here - we help people read, learn, and connect.

2025 BY THE NUMBERS

→ 1,174,898

Patron Visits

→ 2,038,400

Total Circulation, Traditional and eCirculation

→ 259,059

Active Card Holders

→ 162,252

Public Computer Sessions

→ 195,313

Unique WI-FI Users

→ 260,329

Print/Copy/Fax/Scan Sessions

→ \$1,965,559

Economic Value to Milwaukee Businesses.
Source: ULC Business Value Calculator

→ 14,825

Meeting Room Use

→ 86,081

Program Attendance

→ 437,912

Social Media Followers



Literacy Is at the Heart of Everything We Do.

Across Milwaukee, families, schools, and community organizations are working together to build a stronger foundation for reading and Milwaukee Public Library is proud to be part of that effort. Literacy has always been central to who we are and what we offer, at every age and every stage.

In 2025, MPL deepened its literacy commitment across every stage of life: new programming for the youngest learners, a unified summer reading experience for the whole community, and a growing ecosystem of support for families navigating Milwaukee's reading crisis together.

ABC Academy: Where Letters Come to Life

Launched in summer 2025 at Central Library, ABC Academy is MPL's newest early literacy initiative. Built on the American Library Association's recommended practices of talking, singing, reading, writing, and playing for pre-reading development, the program gives young children a joyful, structured foundation for learning to read. Each week focuses on a new letter, with songs, games, and crafts designed around deliberate repetition. Parents participate alongside their children, building the home literacy habits that reinforce what happens in the library every week.



SUMMER WITH MPL: ONE COMMUNITY, ONE INVITATION

In 2025, Milwaukee Public Library unified its children's, teen, and adult summer reading programs under a single banner: Summer with MPL. Reading together has no age limit and neither did our summer reading program.

Every participant received a free book to build their home library, putting 22,859 books into the hands of Milwaukee readers over the course of the summer.

Summer reading no longer ages out. It belongs to families, neighbors, and the full range of Milwaukee's reading community.



Milwaukee hip-hop artist Wave Chappelle, a regular at MPL's Martin Luther King Branch with his son Sol, has become a vocal advocate of the importance of early literacy, using his platform to reach younger parents.



→ *"We want to encourage all the parents – not just the older parents, young parents too – to bring your kids, because this is a really beneficial program."*

A NEIGHBORHOOD'S NEW CHAPTER.



On September 6, 2025, more than 1,300 people came to the corner of Martin Luther King Jr. Drive and Locust Street. They came for a library.

What started as a community vision nine years ago became the newly reimagined Martin Luther King Jr. Branch, a 17,400-square-foot, \$11 million investment in the Harambee neighborhood, supported by American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, the City's Housing Trust Fund, Tax increment financing (TIF) support, and private grants and loans.

Now the third largest branch in the MPL system, the new King Branch is also the greenest library in Southeast Wisconsin: geothermal heating and cooling, rooftop solar panels, and EV charging stations. Inside: the largest community meeting room in the MPL network, reservable study rooms, flexible modular spaces, and a new makerspace.

Branch Spotlight

The opening campaign centered community voices including a local influencer partnership that generated 5 million social media impressions and the largest opening-day turnout in MPL's recent history.

Branch Manager Tiffany Thornton's vision for the space is clear: "My goal is to have this branch become a hub, not just a space where there's books, but a community space where everyone can connect within the Harambee area."



NOURISHING MILWAUKEE

Food literacy, the knowledge and confidence to understand, prepare, and make choices about food, is one of the most practical skills a library can teach. In 2025, MPL's food literacy program grew from one location into a three-location network.

The Cargill Community Kitchen at Mitchell Street Branch is the anchor in the MPL system with a full-scale community kitchen. Led by Sharrie Agee, a culinary educator with 20+ years of experience, it serves patrons from toddlers to seniors through weekly Snack Hack sessions, Community Meals, and special events that weave food with poetry, culture, and creativity.

In 2025, two mobile food preparation stations expanded the network. One launched as a signature feature of the new King Branch; a second was added at Washington Park Branch.

Food literacy now reaches three Milwaukee neighborhoods, meeting communities where they live in spaces they trust.



“You’re not limited with food. There are so many possibilities. And even that is kind of an understatement.”
- Chef Sharrie Agee



Making Things. Building Futures.

MPL's makerspaces give Milwaukee teens a place to make, build, and create with staff who take their ideas seriously. In 2025, we expanded to four makerspaces across the system, with programming designed to teach teens real, tangible skills.

During fall programming, local creator Marie Carter of The Classic Shoppe, a Milwaukee streetwear brand rooted in hip-hop culture, led teens through the full arc of fashion design: concept, prototype, brand strategy, and production. The result was four original T-shirt designs, one per makerspace, printed locally and sold in the MPL Merch store.

This is 21st-century workforce development built inside a public library.



Four original designs. Four makerspaces. One clear signal: at MPL, teens aren't just learning about the creative economy. They are participating in it.

WHAT A LIBRARY MAKES POSSIBLE



Total economic value to Milwaukee entrepreneurs and businesses

→ \$1,965,559

Training & Education

→ \$501,000

Research Services

→ \$1.1 M

The Business Value of MPL

Using the Urban Libraries Council’s Business Value Calculator, MPL documented its economic impact to Milwaukee’s entrepreneurs and small business owners between May 2024 and June 2025.

The total figure spans one-on-one business consultations, training & education, technology access, meeting and coworking spaces, device and Wi-Fi access, and expert staff support.

All free, all through the library.

→ *“Thank you for your commitment to supporting local organizations. It serves as an inspiring reminder of the role libraries play in empowering individuals and nonprofits alike.”*
- Patron feedback after a Book a Business Librarian session

BIRDING, BELONGING & THE OUTDOORS

In partnership with the BIPOC Birding Club of Wisconsin, MPL added Birding Backpack kits to every branch location in 2025, giving any patron the tools to explore the natural world for free. In March, MPL hosted Emmy-winning naturalist Christian Cooper at Central Library as part of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts & Letters’s statewide “Birds and Beyond” series. The evening ended with a standing ovation. The message: the outdoors belongs to everyone.



Adults in the Community

LEARNING. CONNECTING. EXPLORING.

In 2025, Milwaukee Public Library marked the year with three signature community celebrations across our branch clusters: Beat the Blues, Art & Soul, and Unity in the Community. Each event brought together patrons of all ages for music, artmaking, food, and culture, reflecting the full range of what Milwaukee's neighborhoods have to offer.



BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Milwaukee Public Library is governed by a Board of Trustees, a dedicated group of citizens committed to supporting and advancing the library for the benefit of all Milwaukee residents.



2025 Board of Trustees:

Mark Sain, President
Michele Bria, Ph.D., Vice-President
Teresa Mercado, Financial Secretary
Joan R. Johnson, Secretary, Library Director
Alderwoman Milele Coggs
Darryl Jackson

Matthew Kowalski
Michael Morgan
Felicia Saffold, Ed.D.
Alderman Scott Spiker
Alderwoman Larresa Taylor
Venice Williams
Supervisor Kathleen Vincent

In Memoriam

Mark Sain, Board President



In 2025, the Milwaukee Public Library lost one of its most steadfast advocates. Mark Sain served as President of the MPL Board of Trustees, bringing to that role a lifetime of commitment to literacy and public education, including prior service on the Milwaukee Public Schools Board of Education. He passed away while in service to this institution and to this community.

If you wish to donate to the Mark Sain Memorial Fund, gifts can be directed to the Milwaukee Public Library, Library Business Office, 814 W Wisconsin Ave, Milwaukee, WI 53233.



2026: The Work Continues.

2025 proved what MPL has always known: when a community invests in its library, the library delivers. A new branch. A growing literacy movement. A food literacy network spanning three neighborhoods. Teens designing and selling their own work. A summer reading program that brought everyone to the same table.

2026 will ask more of us. And we are ready.

Thank you to our community and everyone who supports this essential work. We're proud to be a part of the Milwaukee community.



DONORS & SUPPORTERS

Milwaukee Public Library is grateful to the Milwaukee Public Library Foundation, the Friends of Milwaukee Public Library, and the many donors, partners, and community members whose generosity makes this work possible.

\$100,000+

Burke Foundation

\$50,000+

Brewers Community Foundation, Inc.
John and Janice Carroll
Ely Leichtling and Sally Merrell
The Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, Inc.
Northwestern Mutual Foundation
The Richard and Ethel Herzfeld Foundation, Inc.

\$25,000+

Fidelity Charitable, Together We Rise Fund
Friends of the Milwaukee Public Library
Greater Milwaukee Foundation

- OMC Legacy Fund
- McBeath Community Partners Fund
- Luedke-Smith Fund

Herb Kohl Philanthropies
Mary and Ted Kellner
Marianne and Sheldon Lubar
Rockwell Automation
Suzanne and Allan Selig
Mary Sprague

\$10,000+

David Baum
BMO Harris Bank
Roberta and Andrew Brehm
DAFgiving360, Brook Lopez Fund
Janice Ereth
Fidelity Charitable, Francis A. and Dorothy T.
Vandenberg Charitable Gift Fund No. 2
Leona Fitzsimonds
Forest County Potawatomi Community Foundation

\$10,000+

Greater Milwaukee Foundation

- George and Margaret Barrock Fund
- Judith A. Keyes Family Fund

Kristina Islo and Charles Evans
Laskin Family Foundation, Inc.
Maihaugen Foundation
Nancy and Mike Roos
Louisa and Andrew Seifert
Ellen Sexton
Stella H. Jones Foundation
von Briesen & Roper, s.c.
Weiss Family Foundation
William Stark Jones Foundation
Wisconsin Club
Wochinske Family Foundation
Laura Zahn and Brenden O'Gorman

\$5,000+

American Endowment Foundation
Natalie Beckwith
Crescent Grove Advisors
Matthew Falk
Jean and James Garfield
Harri Hoffmann Family Foundation, Inc.
Ken Kaufman
Susan and Kent Lovern
Mary McAndrews
Mary Mowbray and Roland Schroeder
Greg Myers
Robert Puissant
Barbara Stein
Florence Steinberger
Jonathan Ward

DONORS & SUPPORTERS

\$2,500+

Leigh Barker-Cheesebro
Blachford Acoustics Group
Brennan Insurance Agency
Burke Properties
Vanessa Carmona-Lewis
Mary Pat Compton
Croen Foundation
Katherine Falk
Gene and Ruth Posner Foundation, Inc.
Dana and Richaad Guthrie
Peter Hitler
Madeleine and David Lubar
Linda and Robert Mlynarek
National Philanthropic Trust, Joan P. Lubar
Charitable Fund
Jamshed and Deborah Patel
Judith Peck and Stephen Kaniewski
Caitlin and Jess Ripp
Rotary Club of Milwaukee, Inc.
Richard and Alison Schreiner
Virginia Schwartz
Scribner, Cohen & Company, S.C.
SixSibs
Jean and Sammis White

\$1,000+

ACME Production Resources
Anne Marie Adsen
Mary Ann Affeldt
Anonymous
Artisan Partners
Lois Bernard
Boswell Book Company, LLC
Heather and Charles Brennan
Brookbank Foundation
Anne Marie and Michael Bula
Carrie and Mike Burton
Teri Carpenter

\$1,000+ (cont.)

Catch-22 Creative, Inc.
DAFgiving360, Anonymous Fund
Irma and John Daniels
Julie and Mark Darnieder
Theresa Delgadillo
Annemarie Domurat
Linda Elmer
Fidelity Charitable

- The Constance Crooks Charitable Fund
- Madonna and Jay Williams Family Fund

Kate Freed and John Goggin
Krystine Giesa
Jane and Robert Gleeson, M.D.
Greater Milwaukee Foundation

- Susan and Howard Hopwood Fund
- Mary and Charles Kamps Fund

Shane Greenwood
Judith Guelig
John Gurda and Sonja Nelson-Gurda
Barbara Haig and Daniel Schley
Ann and Jon Hammes
David Heiny
Sue and Michael Heyer
HH Camp Foundation
Raynetta Hill
Dolores Holman
Paula and Andrew Holman
Julia Ihlenfeldt
Jane Islo
J.P. Morgan Charitable Giving Fund

- Anonymous Fund
- Boyle Charitable Fund

Jewish Community Foundation

- Eileen & Howard Dubner Donor Advised Fund
- Paul & Susan Bernstein Donor Advised Fund

Elaine and Paul Jobling
Bradley Kalscheur

DONORS & SUPPORTERS

\$1,000+ (cont.)

Patricia Keating Kahn and Charles Kahn
Rozsa Keller and Ryan Daniels
Chris Kling
Kathleen and Neil Knutsen
Julie Krawczyk
Amy Kuchenbecker
Brenda and Matt Levatich
The M Group
Mawicke & Goisman, S.C.
Michael McNeil
Susan and Robert Mikulay
Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design
Helen Mueller and John Archibald
Rhonda and Greg Oberland
Lindsey O'Connor
Angelina Ogan
Ellen Pappas
Pamela and Randall Penn
Donald Polite
Kathleen Raab
Christine Rieck-Risser and Craig Risser
Marianne and Matthew Robbins
Caitlin and Andrew Schreier
Cynthia Schultz
Courtney and Saravanan Shanmugabaskaran
Mary Ellen and Scott Stanek
Liz Summers
Anna Teerlink
Karen A. Tibbitts
Lynde Uihlein
United Way of Greater Milwaukee and Waukesha County
UnitedHealthcare Community Plan Wisconsin
Ellen and Bob Venable
Waterford Wine and Spirits
Waukesha County Community Foundation, Kloida Giving Fund
Kelly Wochinske

\$500+

Pat and James Wood
Frances Wurlitzer
Paul Anders
Karen Anderson
JoAnne and Nick Anton
Nancy Arndt
Kelie Berendt
Deborah and Aaron Bernstein
Elizabeth Berrien
Best Ed Business
Karin Borgh and Bill Christofferson
Maria Burke and Lonny Howard
Lindsay Burke
Emily Burkholder
Jackie Q. Carter
Christin Cleaver
Susan Comstock
DAFgiving360

- Anonymous Fund
- Randy and Judy Nelson Charitable Fund
- The Sally J. Lewis and Kathleen M. Rivera Fund

Sarah Damsgaard
Dorothy Dean
Roberta and David Drews
Beth Duray
Julianna Ebert and Frank Daily
Jay Ehrfurth
Ellen and Thomas Etten
Fidelity Charitable

- Brown Lam Family Fund
- Constance Tresch Gift Fund
- Groth Family Fund
- Herd-Barber Charitable Fund
- Killian Giving Fund
- Lynn Bechthold Barney Fund
- Robert and Jane Gleeson Fund
- Sweek Family Fund

Jennifer and Thomas Florsheim

DONORS & SUPPORTERS

\$500+

Anne and Franklyn Gimbel
Marlene Gisser and Thomas Gaudynski
Ellen Guiseppi
Alice Hagen
Linda Heintz
Natalie Herman
John Hetzer
William Holahan
Tonya Hubbartt
Jenya Iuzzini-Seigel and Matt Seigel
Nancy Jacobs
Jeremy Jansen
Josh Jeffers
Sarah Jelencic
Joan Johnson
Emmaline Jurgena
Blaine Kaniewski
Eileen Kehoe and Carl Reinhold
Daria and Brian Kempka
Jean Kies and Lew Wasserman
Noreen Killian
Kathlynn Kirk
Kristin and Brian Kobylinski
Linda and William Koenig
Marie Kohler and Brian Mani
Tory Kress
Angela Krueger
Kathryn and Alvin Krug
Molly Kuether-Steele
Anne Landre and Charles Dee
Sam Leichtling
Daniel Lentsch
John and Evelyn LeRose
Michael Loos
Laura Loos
Sandra Melcher
Linda and John Mellowes
Midwest Institutional Trust Company
Pamela Mitchell
Diana and Michael Morgan
Shawntel Mosby

\$500+ (cont.)

Hon. Derek Mosley
Cathy Nemerovski
Kathy Nusslock
Mary Beth Peterson
Diana and Richard Pine
Susan Ploetz
Matthew Price
Quorum Architects, Inc.
Catherine and Randall Ralph
Adrianna Ray
Raygun
David Riemer and Ellie Graan
Patricia Rieselbach
Susan J. Riordan
Brett Rohlwing
Joyce Rubenstein
Jane Sauer
Imogene Schley
Dawn Schmidt
Erik Schmidt
Angie and Matthew Schoenwald
Margaret Schumacher
The Sheehan Family Foundation
Jocelyn Slocum
Judith Stano
Stere Management Co., Inc.
Laura Stevens
Melissa and Jim Strack
Michele Sumara
Tawauna Swanigan
Fred Syrjanen
Sileshi Teklesilassie
Hakimah Terry
Walker & Dunlop
Beth Weirick
Kay Weisman
Laura and Paul Weisman
Emilie and Jonathan Williamson
Peggy and Peter Wolf
Alejandro Zamora, Jr.
Thomas Zimmerman and Robert Derenne

DONORS & SUPPORTERS

\$250+

Alfred Andreychuk and Allan Deptula
Timothy Askin
Bader Philanthropies
Tara Baillargeon
Shauna Baldwin
Juliet Battle
Lori and Kurt Bechthold
Joann Bielinski
Renee and Russ Bonfiglio
Maxwell Brooks
Nancy Burns
Liz and Jordan Caldwell
Mary Cannon
Annie Carrell
Lynn and Jim Connolly
Patricia Contreras
James W. Cope
Michelle Crockett
Mary Cronin
Patrick Cronin
DAFgiving360

- Anonymous Fund
- The Homan Family Giving Account

Julia and William Davis
Kristi Davis
Vickie Deutsch
Sandra Duffy
Hannah Dugan
Deidra Y. A. Edwards
Genyne Edwards
Charles Engberg
Emily Englert
Teresa Esser and Pehr Anderson
Mary and John Evans
Andrew Falk and Elizabeth Keuler
Carmen Fendt
Fidelity Charitable

- Barbara N. Fuldner Charitable Fund
- Kennedy Gift Fund
- Peterson Family Charitable Fund

\$250+ (cont.)

Fidelity Charitable

- Richard and Nina Edelman Family Fund for Arts and Education

Dean Fitzgerald
Barbara Franczyk
Anthony Franda
Thomas Gale
Gilbane Building Company
Stephen Glynn and Katie Walsh
Tiffany Goggins
Eloisa Gómez
Vivian Gonring
Christine Gould
Greater Milwaukee Foundation, Daniels Family
Pontem Charitable Fund
Nathaniel Haack
Dr. Eve Hall
Erin Hill
Lindsay Hochkammer
Linda Honold
Merri Snow Houdyshell
Indeed Brewing Company
Judith Jablonski and Robert Wait
Lynda Jackson Conyers
Carol Jackson
Chetla Jackson
Sharon Jackson
Annette Jacobson
Lisa Jansen
Alicia Jones
Aaron Justin-Szopinski
KCB Buildings, LLC
Lora Keller
Courtenay Kessler and Jack Miller
Marie Kingsbury and Leo Ries
Timothy Klos
Deborah Koconis and Mark Unak
Jeanne Kowalski
Alex Lancaster

DONORS & SUPPORTERS

\$250+

Mary and Robert Lerner
Laura and David Lewandowski
Mary Ann and David Lillich
Linda and James Lubner
Nancy Lucas
Mary Madigan
Jacqueline Margis
Catherine Markey
Mary McCormick
Kristen Mekemson
Ben Miller
Milwaukee World Festival, Inc.
Milwaukee Art Museum
Matt Moore
Morgan Stanley GIFT, Anonymous Fund
Brigitte Nash
Lois and William O'Brien
Sarah Osborn
Suzanne Osetek
Anna Patel
Hanna Paul
Mary Ann Pautz
Nancy and James Pomes
Chuck Pruitt
Nancy Puhl
Daniel Reeter
Viola Rembert
Kimberly Reyes and Mazio Barian
Annette Robertson
Emily and Mike Robertson
Nate Robertstad
Matthew Rochte
Charles Roedel
Mary Schnell
Robert Schweers
Janet Sekulski
Amy Siettmann
Donald and Susan Simon
Nancy Simuel

\$250+ (cont.)

Margaret and Gordon Skare
Jocklyn Smith
Monica Smith
W. Jeffrey Smoller
Jessica Snell
Joan Spector
Mary and William Stauber
Sandy Stirgus
Donna and Paul Tanzer
Gino Tassara
Andrea and Ethan Taxman
Opal Thompson
Ann Margaret Tylenda
Urban League of Greater Madison
Emily Van Dunk
Mary Beth and Harold Van Groll
Sofia Vela Hayes
Elizabeth Vokac and John Blanchard
Jayne Von der Linden
Sarah Wallisch
Judith Weitzman
Steven Whitson
Madonna and Jay Williams
Katherine Wilson and James Erlandsson
Linda Zaleski