

Scenic on track to mark Hermann branch with June grand opening

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HERMANN — A June grand opening celebration is still penciled in for the new Hermann branch of Scenic Regional Library District, says Executive Director Steve Campbell.

The district administrator last week in his annual report to the Gasconade County Commission said the development of the ALCO building into the district's newest branch is on track to be unveiled next summer. The annual report covered a variety of activities conducted by the library district, from the traditional loaning of books to children's and adult activities to the availability of such things as microscopes and Wi-Fi hotspots.

"We're starting to rebound," Campbell said, referring to the branches shaking off the effects of the coronavirus pandemic that saw libraries shutting down and then reducing hours.

Library patrons continue to make use of high-tech connections not available where they live.

"Our wireless usage is growing," he said, referring to patrons connecting their digital devices to

the internet at the library. As for making use of the internet at homes in remote areas, including areas in Gasconade County, Campbell said the district has seen a big use of hotspot devices that are loaned out. Scenic Regional has a total of 75 hotspot devices available, he said. The devices were obtained with a federal grant.

"That's part of the federal government's effort to bring broadband to rural areas," Campbell said.

A sign of the return to normalcy for the library district is the activity regarding its youth outreach effort. "I think we're pretty much back to normal," he told county administrators.

There has been one significant change that came about in part because of the pandemic, or at least during the pandemic's effect on area schools: The longtime feature of the library district, the Bookmobile, has been discontinued.

"With the schools being the only ones using it, we decided not to continue it," Campbell said, explaining that the Bookmobile has been replaced by the district's Teacher Assistance Program.

The renovation of the ALCO building, located in the Bavarian

Hills shopping center at highways 19 and H, will include space for a medical clinic of Hermann Area District Hospital and an art gallery that will feature the work of local artists.

"It'll be a nice little tourism spot," Campbell said.

The site also will include two outdoor patios, he said.

Campbell said the district plans on a big blowout to mark the opening of the new branch, the last of the district's branches to be renovated as a result of a property tax increase in recent years. "We do a really big event," the executive director said, referring to the grand-opening event.

On the financial side of the ledger, Scenic Regional continues to be a good use of tax dollars. The annual report notes that for every \$1 of revenue going to the district, \$2.40 in library services is returned to the community. The total value of library services is \$14,402,912, the report says. The district's 2020 operating budget was \$6,001,938.

Campbell's report drew praise from the Commission.

"He has done everything he has promised," said Presiding Commissioner Larry Miskel, R-Hermann.