

Scenic Regional reports strong year

By Geoff Folsom
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Scenic Regional Library saw an increase in visitors in its fiscal year that began July 1, 2023 and ended June 30, 2024.

The library had 368,401 in-person visits at its nine branches, an increase from 349,598 in the 2022-23 budget year, according to an annual report presented by library district Director Steve Campbell to the Franklin County Commission at its Tuesday, Oct. 8, meeting. The 150,959 visits to its website were down from 171,219 the previous year.

The district issued 6,730 new library cards in its budget year, bringing its total active users to 14,643.

The district had 462,819 physical items circulate during the year, with nearly a quarter of them, 106,523, in Union, the most of any branch. Pacific had 55,017 items circulate, while St. Clair had 39,214 and New Haven had 18,878.

The library system had 492,375 physical

"I imagine the ukuleles are a hot topic, 51 is impressive," Presiding Commissioner Tim Brinker said.

The library works with outside agencies on some of the items, Campbell said.

"We partner with the Missouri Department of Conservation to get the fishing poles, they provide those," he said. "We get the telescopes, we have a partnership with the St. Louis Astronomical Society, they do repair work and things like that for us."

Meeting rooms at the library branches were used a total of 1,534 times, including health care groups, chambers of commerce, government organizations, churches and hobby groups.

"If anyone's interested in reserving our rooms, it's free," Campbell said. "They have digital projectors in them and everything."

Computers in the libraries were used a total of 25,601 times, while wireless internet was used 60,075 times.

Campbell also noted that all branches now offer color printing.

Campbell said. "It's an amazing service."

Campbell pointed out that all nine branches do passport photos. The district took 1,947 passport applications, processing more than 800 photos.

"Some of the post offices in our community just refer people to us, even though they also do (passports), because our hours are longer," Campbell said.

The library generated \$90,000 in passport fees, he added.

Campbell also provided a sneak peak of the 2025 Community Read book, which will be "The Flower Sisters" by Michelle Collins Anderson.

"It's a historical fiction book that's based on a dance hall explosion in West Plains, Missouri that killed 40 people back in 1928," Campbell said. "I'd never heard of it. ... I just finished reading it. It's a really great book."

The author will visit in April, and other programs related to the book will be held, Campbell noted.

Commissioners praised Campbell's report. "It's interesting. as



Pedal to the metal

The annual MO70 trip took off from Washington early Saturday morning to bike the Katy Trail to Hermann. Following an overnight stay in Hermann, the participants canoed back to Washington on the Missouri River. This is the sixth year the two-day adventure has been organized by Terrain Magazine.

Missourian Photo/Eileen Wisniewicz.

Arson suspected in New Haven fire, no arrests yet

By Christopher Parker
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A fire that broke out last week at a New Haven charcoal warehouse is being investigated as arson, according to the Missouri Division of Fire Safety (DFS).

Mike O'Connell, communications director for the Missouri Department of Public Safety, said Monday the fire at the facility leased by Blues Hog Barbecue has

inside the building continued to smolder, and officials said they would allow it to burn itself out while monitoring the situation.

The initial dispatch message to fire crews included references to a man present at the scene and identified by the 911 caller as the person responsible for setting the fire. That message indicated the man was schizophrenic and believed his kids were inside the building. But

Cody Strawman, an on-scene coordinator for the Missouri Department of Natural Resources,

39,214 and New Haven had 18,878.

The library system had 492,375 physical items circulate in the 2022-23 budget year.

Library patrons checked out 265,823 electronic items, including 95,910 audio books, 90,544 pieces of e-music and 67,716 e-books. E-circulation is up by 39.7 percent since the 2022-23 budget year.

"About 28 percent of our usage is e-books and audiobooks," Campbell told commissioners. "So, the vast majority of check-outs are still books and other physical items."

The library had a balanced budget of \$7.27 million in the 2023-24 fiscal year, an increase over \$6.95 million the previous year.

"Almost \$1.2 million of that is the bond repayments for our construction, for our buildings we built in 2018 and 2019," Campbell said.

The art gallery at the Hermann branch has been a success, Campbell said, with three exhibits occurring in the budget year.

"The library's gallery is completely financially sustainable on its own now," Campbell said, adding that the gallery is funded by grants, and the library district receives a third of each sale of works displayed in the 2,000 square foot gallery.

The library checked out numerous "non-traditional" items, including 864 headphones, 746 mobile hotspots, 180 cake pans, 87 telescopes, 51 ukuleles and

used 60,070 times. Campbell also noted that all branches now offer color printing.

The report added that the library started a Tik Tok page, though nothing appears to have been posted on it since Aug. 27.

Campbell also noted the library's work with PreventEd, saying it started distributing 250 gun locks and 250 medication lock boxes, as well as prescription drug disposal bags.

It was also a big year for the library because of Gov. Mike Parson's book signing on April 16, which drew 70 people to the Union branch. Campbell said it was the first time a sitting governor visited a Scenic Regional branch.

"It was a great event, we had a great turnout," Campbell said. "He was very nice, we gave him a quick tour of the branch."

The library system also offered 983 youth programs that reached 25,591 children and teens, as well as 606 adult programs that reached 7,874 people.

"We saw a 20-percent increase in our programming attendance this year," Campbell said.

Scenic Regional's teacher assistance program fulfilled 116 requests from teachers, delivering 2,119 items. The program provides books to teachers to assist with lessons.

"They can say, 'I need 50 books on planets,' then we'll pull those 50 books, we'll deliver them to their classroom for them, and then when they're done with them,

Commissioners praised Campbell's report.

"It's interesting, as always," First District Commissioner Todd Bolland said.

Brinker asked Campbell to name the library's largest challenge and attribute.

Turnover is the biggest challenge, particularly among part-time employees, with only 31 of the district's 85 employees being full time, Campbell said.

The library system recently implemented recommendations from a compensation study, including \$17.26 starting part-time pay.

"We have a really great training program for new people, so when they hit the branch they're already prepared," he said.

The buildings, many of which are new or renovated, are a "huge asset," Campbell added.

"If you look at other towns across Missouri, that are in individual cities in a lot of cases, you're not going to see libraries this nice in towns of 2,000 or 3,000 people," he said. "It's been a huge asset for us, because it allows us to deliver services using these great facilities we have."

The public support for Scenic Regional is also great, Campbell said.

"We get tons of positive feedback on the libraries," he said.

The report to the county commission is required by state law. It can be viewed at scenicregional.org/about-us/library-reports/an-

schizophrenic and believed his kids were inside the building. But according to Pelton, police encountered no such person when they arrived.

Brian Strubberg, chief of the New Haven Berger Fire Protection District, added that dispatchers relay whatever information they receive from callers, but it's up to law enforcement to investigate the situation on the scene for any criminal activity.

Strubberg told *The Missourian* last week that crews were dispatched to the warehouse in the 500 block of Orchard Street, currently leased by the Washington-based barbecue supplies company, just after 5 a.m. on the morning of Oct. 10. Washington, Hermann, Beaufort-Leslie, Sullivan and Union fire crews responded to the scene.

The blaze grew to a 3-alarm fire before crews were able to get it under control. But the charcoal

making a right turn onto West Villa Drive. Erik Radman, 43, was driving a 2005 Harley Davidson Sportster 883 and heading westbound on Highway 100. According to the patrol, Radman was inattentive to the road

on-scene coordinator for the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, said the agency dispatched a team to New Haven on the day of the fire to test air quality around the site and the rest of the city. They determined there was no threat to the surrounding areas but took several precautions at the site to prevent contamination.

Strawman said Tuesday the state agency has continued to consult with local leaders on the status of the fire.

"There is still a small amount of charcoal that is smoldering within the property, but very little smoke is being generated from it. There is still no concern for the nearby community. I myself will be making a site visit tomorrow afternoon to confirm and talk to the property owner also," he said.

Strawman said he would provide any updates from his Wednesday visit to the scene of the fire.

Arnold man dies following motorcycle crash Saturday

An Arnold man was killed following a motorcycle crash Saturday afternoon outside of Villa Ridge, according to the Missouri State Highway Patrol.

The patrol reported that at approximately 12:52 p.m., a 2020 Ford F150 was traveling westbound on Highway 100. The driver, John Politte, 62, of Washing-



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quary by state investigators. He said that means there is a suspicion of arson as the source of the fire, and DFS will conduct a criminal fire investigation alongside local law enforcement as an assisting agent.

O'Connell did not share any other details, citing an ongoing investigation.

New Haven does not currently have its own police force after the city's aldermen dissolved the New Haven Police Department in February. The Franklin County Sheriff's Office has taken over policing duties in New Haven. Sheriff Steve Pelton said the morning of Oct. 10, last week no arrests had been made and that the DFS would proceed with its investigation once the fire had died down.

The sheriff said Monday he had no updates in the case. A representa-

encountered no such person when they arrived.

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and crashed into the rear of the Ford. Radman was transported to Mercy Hospital St. Louis where he was later pronounced dead. The report noted that Radman was not wearing a helmet at the time of the crash.

