

Dear Friends of The Westport Library,

We hope this message finds you well. As we look back on the past fiscal year, we are delighted to share with you some remarkable milestones and achievements that would not have been possible without your dedication and support.

In December 2022, our library soared to new heights, earning a coveted 5-star rating from the 2022 Library Journal Index of Public Library Service. This places us among the elite libraries in the United States and proudly designates us as Connecticut's sole 5-star library, a testament to our unwavering commitment to excellence in serving our community.

Our signature gala, *BOOKED for the evening*, honoring the incredible Laura Linney, not only broke records but shattered them, becoming the highest-grossing *BOOKED* event in our history. Your participation and boundless enthusiasm transformed this evening into an unforgettable experience — both for Laura and everyone in attendance.

A defining moment occurred with a landmark pledge of \$1 million from the Nancy J. Beard Foundation, laying the foundation for the Nancy J. Beard Lifelong Learning and Education Fund. This fund will bolster educational courses, lectures, workshops, and hands-on training, deeply engaging and educating our local community.

In addition, in June we etched our name in history as the world's first library to record, produce, and release a vinyl record: *Verso Records, Volume One*. This innovation underscores our dedication to celebrating the timeless power of music and media — and it was widely recognized, earning us media coverage in a number of prominent outlets and inclusion in the Congressional Record.

Which brings us to VersoFest 2023, our annual music and media conference and festival, which surpassed all expectations, drawing more than 4,000 attendees over four extraordinary days. Renowned figures like producer Steve Lillywhite and the Smithereens served as our headliners, and they were accompanied by a diverse array of programs, workshops, and concerts that enthralled audiences of all ages and backgrounds.

VersoFest was not alone in engaging the community — both in Westport and beyond. StoryFest, Connecticut's largest literary festival, captivated the hearts and minds of 2,000-plus participants. And our summer reading program and tutoring services touched the lives of over 1,000 children, providing essential learning opportunities.

In the past fiscal year, from July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2023, our doors swung open for an astonishing 335,000 visitors, marking a remarkable 41% increase over the previous year. The Westport Library now stands as a vibrant beacon in the heart of downtown, reminiscent of the bustling days of the city center department store.

In addition, during the course of the year, our meeting spaces played host to more than 17,000 community members, including students, government agencies, entrepreneurs, and community groups, reaffirming our essential role as a community hub.

We proudly offered more than 1,000 programs, with a total attendance of more than 126,000, both on-site and virtually, underscoring our resolute commitment to serving our diverse community.

While municipal support has been essential, it covers only 78.79% of our total operating budget. The remaining 21.21%, equivalent to \$1.3 million, is the Library's responsibility and includes the enriching programming, collections, digital resources, and innovative offerings that define our library.

In this crucial gap, it is you, our cherished donors, who stand as the bridge. Your generosity, whether through our annual appeal, signature fundraisers like *BOOKED for the evening*, or your myriad gifts large and small, leaves an indelible impact on our library's continued success. Your faith in our mission and dedication to our cause are the cornerstones of our achievements.

You are the lifeblood of The Westport Library, and we are immensely proud to have you as our partners in enriching the lives of our community members. Together, we mold The Westport Library into an exceptional hub of knowledge, inspiration, and community for all.

Once again, our heartfelt gratitude for your steadfast support. As we venture into another year of service, your unswerving commitment assures that our library remains a source of learning, creativity, and connection.

With profound gratitude and the warmest of regards,



Bill Harmer, Executive Director



Barrie Rosen, President of the Board of Trustees