ENGAGEMENT in October 2026

- We create opportunities for connection and community participation.
- We deliver inclusive, compassionate, and high-quality customer service.

Work Highlights

Public Services & Programs

An afternoon of Halloween fun for teens

The Middle & High School (MHS) Services Leading Edge Teen Advisory Board (LETAB) took the lead in planning and hosting our annual "Boo Bash" at the Main Library on October 28. This two-hour afterschool event included Halloween-themed crafts, spooky cookie decorating, and trivia, all led by LETAB members. MHS Services staff transformed the space with festive decorations, adding to the lively atmosphere. Refreshments were served, and the event wrapped up with treat bags for all participants. **The program was a huge success, welcoming approximately 110 young people for an afternoon of fun, creativity, and community engagement.**

Promoting civic engagement

Civic Literacy Librarian Simon Czerwinskyj organized a variety of civic engagement programs this fall. In September, we launched a new "Local Government 101" series, with the first program featuring Village Clerk Christina Waters. In October, Lindsey Nieratka from the **Oak Park Sustainability & Resilience Office** continued the series, and **a two-part "Civics 101" program** was offered in partnership with **15 West**. **Multiple election-focused programs were also offered in September and October**, including "Together We Vote: A Voter Education Event" with **CHANGE Illinois**; "Ready, Set, Vote: A Conversation on Being an Informed Voter," offered in partnership with the **Schaumburg Township District Library** and the **League of Women Voters**; "The **Injustice Watch** Guide to Cook County Judicial Elections"; and "Curate Your News with RSS Feeds," a media literacy program in collaboration with Creative Technology Specialist Kay Slater.



Simon also worked with Graphic Designer Gabriela Denton to create a voting information banner and display in the Main Library Lobby, including materials created by the Schaumburg Library through the Civic Empowerment **RAILS Networking Group**. Visitors could engage with the display by sharing why they vote on a sticky note. Responses included: "Because I want to make a difference in the world" and "To honor my ancestors who were denied this right." **Capping off our fall civic programming was the Barbara Ballinger Lecture, a panel program entitled "Beyond the Headlines: Civics, Community & Democracy,"** featuring Marie Newman, Dr. Michael Spikes, and Heather Cherone, and moderated by Monica Eng.

Collections

An engaging local history podcast program

On October 24, Special Collections hosted a program featuring a live recording of 77 Flavors, a popular Chicago-based podcast with thousands of listeners that promotes a deeper appreciation of local history and combats historical erasure through engaging and relevant storytelling. During the live event and in their promotional video, hosts Sara Faddah and Dario Durham shared the history of the Oak Park Public Library, along with stories about individuals from Oak Park and the greater Chicago area. The event sparked lively discussion among attendees, and the **promotional video** received more than 200 interactions.

LEARNING in October 2026

- We encourage exploration of new ideas through diverse collections, programs, and other resources.
- We support community members and staff in developing the knowledge and skills to reach their goals.

Work Highlights

Finance & HR

Prioritizing staff development

Aligned with our strategic commitment to supporting staff development, we were pleased to support library team members in participating in extensive professional development this fall. Over 20 staff members represented the library at major industry conferences, including the Joint Conference of Librarians of Color (JCLC), Illinois Library Association (ILA), Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), Back in Circulation, Othering & Belonging Conference, Association of Bookmobile and Outreach Services (ABOS), and the International Symposium on Academic Makerspaces (ISAM). Cross-departmental coordination and flexible scheduling enabled robust participation while maintaining uninterrupted public service for patrons. To ensure the whole library benefits from these opportunities, staff who attended these conferences led two "Takeaway Sessions" to share tools, programming ideas, and industry trends with colleagues. Supporting staff development and creating opportunities to share learning keeps our staff engaged, connected to the wider library community, and ready to bring new ideas to Oak Park.

Collections

Sharing expertise with library peers

Manager & Curator of Special Collections Kathleen Spale participated in a panel presentation at the Illinois Library Association (ILA) Annual Conference in October. She co-presented alongside Lindsay Laren, Assistant Commissioner of Collections at the Chicago Public Library; Victoria Martinez, Librarian III in Special Collections at the Chicago Public Library; and Ellen Keith, Executive Director of the Chicago Collections Consortium. **Their presentation, titled "Archives to Activation: Reaching New Audiences Through Collections, Culture, and Community," provided a valuable platform to explore strategies for making archives accessible and relatable to community members.** The discussion highlighted ways to center diverse and historically underrepresented voices while strengthening partnerships with key archival institutions across the Chicago area.

Community Voice

A patron who recently used Creative Studio resources for a family project shared the following positive feedback with staff in Adult Services and Communications:

"**I came to the library over 3 different media lab reservations to digitize my parents' honeymoon videos & their wedding tape.** My parents, brothers, sister, and I went to Italy this month as a gift from our parents, and they had not been back since their honeymoon trip. I copied the 6 VHS-C tapes and then edited them into one shorter highlights video and played that for everyone on the last night of our 2 week trip. Everyone loved it! **I'm so grateful the library has that type of technology available for use so that I could enhance our trip with something so personal**."

STEWARDSHIP in October 2026

- We provide broad, effective, and equitable access to resources.
- We care for community resources, library assets, and library staff responsibly, ethically, and sustainably.

Work Highlights

Facilities

Maintaining & improving library spaces

The Main Library tuckpointing project — our largest planned capital project this year — was fully completed in October. The project, which began in June, addressed age-related deterioration of mortar, control, and expansion joints that help keep the building's exterior water tight. Several damaged exterior bricks and perimeter joint caulking were replaced, and a waterproofing sealer was applied to all brick and stone surfaces. Cracks in the parking garage retaining wall were ground out, filled, waterproofed. and painted. The western face of the raised bed planter on Lake Street was also completely rebuilt with new limestone.

Also in October, the Facilities Team continued internal repairs at the Main Library, including several plumbing and HVAC repairs, while also completing additional aesthetic improvements at the Maze Branch, including repainting the worn Maze Branch Library stone sign.

Technology

Improved device-charging options at the Main Library



The IT Team recently upgraded our patron device-charging infrastructure at the Main Library by removing the outdated lobby charging station and replacing it with nine new desktop charging units. Led by Website & IT Security Specialist Josh Soto, this initiative included installing new Kwikboost stations in public spaces on the second and third floors. The units are strategically positioned on multi-person study tables and near floor power outlets. Updated directional signage in the lobby guides patrons to the new charging locations, while tabletop notices remind users to keep their devices attended while charging. Special thanks to Graphic Designer Gabriela Denton and the Facilities Team for their contributions to this project.

Collections

A collection refresh at Maze Branch

Collection Management Librarian Dontaná McPherson-Joseph and Maze Branch staff recently refreshed the Maze fiction collection by reviewing the condition of existing books and identifying titles that needed replacement. Books that had been well-loved and heavily used by the community were replaced, ensuring that titles with evergreen appeal are always available in the best possible condition.

Community Voice

One way that our Collection Team interacts with patrons is through the purchase recommendation process. Recently, after receiving confirmation that their purchase request was fulfilled, a patron shared the following positive reply with Collection Management Librarian Kathy Sexton:

"**You and the rest of the Collection Team do a great job of keeping us, your neighbors, well-informed citizens.** We appreciate all you do for Oak Park and beyond."

ANTI-RACISM & EQUITY in October 2026

- **We develop and implement library policies and practices that promote equitable outcomes and experiences for staff and the public.**
- **We support our diverse community through responsive and intentional resource sharing, communication, and relationship building.**

Work Highlights

Anti-Racism & Equity

Othering & Belonging Conference 2026

Director of Equity & Anti-Racism Shalonda Lane, Executive Director Elsworth Carman, and Board Trustee Annie Wilkinson attended the Othering & Belonging Conference in Louisville, KY, October 9-10. The event brought together practitioners, scholars, and community leaders to explore strategies for advancing equity, fostering belonging, and addressing systemic barriers to inclusion. Key takeaways from engaging sessions, discussions, and networking opportunities at the conference will help inform the library's efforts to strengthen relationships, advance restorative practices, and further our commitment to equity and anti-racism.

Expanding the Equity & Anti-Racism Team

In October, we welcomed Donald Gordon as the new Restorative & Belonging Practitioner on the Equity & Anti-Racism Team. This position will play a key role in advancing the library's commitment to equity, inclusion, and belonging through restorative practices, multicultural programming, and relationship-building. Donald will work collaboratively with staff, affinity groups, and community partners to foster meaningful connections, facilitate dialogue, and support initiatives aligned with the library's Anti-Racism Strategic Plan.

Finance & HR

Staff diversity & retention update

Investing in and retaining a diverse and well-trained staff is foundational to everything we do at the library. **Our 2026 workforce data demonstrates organizational stability and equitable retention: As of November 2026, BIPOC-identified staff make up 45% of our workforce, up slightly from 2025 (43.9%) and 2024 (43.7%) and exceeding Oak Park's community demographics of 38.4% BIPOC. Our annualized turnover rate fell to 8.6% (11 separations), down from 9.3% (12) in 2025 and 16.7% (21) in 2024. Retention remained balanced, with 5 BIPOC staff and 6 white staff departing over the past year.** This underscores the positive turnaround from 2024 and reflects a stable workplace culture. Continuing to monitor this data alongside our hiring and retention practices ensures that our workplace remains an environment where all staff can thrive and where our team genuinely reflects the community we serve.

Public Services & Programs

An inclusive sewing program in the Creative Studio

On October 28, the Creative Studio hosted Gender-Affirming Garment Alterations, a program organized by Creative Technology Specialist Nick Meryhew. Fashion designer, community arts worker, and founder of Rebirth Garments, Sky Cubacub, supported attendees with altering their existing garments to make them more gender-affirming and/or adaptive. There was also robust discussion about designing for disability, gender, race, size, and sexuality and shaping/subverting established design fields to meet community needs. A few participants left the program with fully altered garments, and all attendees expressed a lot of enthusiasm for the program.