



Report to County Council

From: Brian Masschaele, Director of Community and Cultural Services

Date: April 9, 2024

Subject: Library, Museum and Archives 2024 Service Update

Recommendation(s):

THAT the report titled “Library, Museum and Archives 2024 Service Update” dated April 9, 2024 from the Director of Community and Cultural Services be received and filed.

Introduction:

This report provides County Council and the public with recent service and project updates for Elgin County Library, Elgin County Museum and Elgin County Archives.

Background and Discussion:

The following is a general update on recent programs, projects and initiatives at each institution, with illustrations attached in many cases:

Elgin County Library

- Income tax clinics are being hosted at both Belmont and West Lorne branches, facilitated through the Canadian Revenue Agency’s Community Volunteer Income Tax Program. The program provides free income tax support to those with modest incomes.
- Employment Services Elgin is now hosting individual employment support sessions at Dutton, West Lorne and Rodney branches. An employment counsellor is available to assist clients at all three branches through regular weekly hours. This is part of the agency’s revised service delivery model as it scales back services offered directly at its West Lorne location and takes advantage of the library’s ability to provide space at locations that are more convenient for many of the clients being served.

- Staff have developed a program to provide service to individuals experiencing precarious housing situations who may have been previously ineligible for a library card due to lack of a permanent address in Elgin County. These individuals are asked to fill out a postcard in the branch which is mailed to a temporary home address in Elgin County of the individual's choosing. The individual then brings the postcard back to the branch and a library card is registered with that address. This is another initiative in the library's diversity, equity and inclusion strategy.
- All branches are participating in a program called "1000 Books Before Kindergarten" which is being managed through the library's Beanstack account which allows families to track their progress relative to collective and individual reading goals.
- March Break was once again a busy time for all ten branches, with programs encompassing reptile shows, magicians, crafts, escape rooms, ventriloquism, fossils and board games, among many others. Attendance at programs remains highly popular with advanced registration often required to conform to occupancy limits. Several programs reported attendance of at least 50 children and a program featuring reptiles attracted over 250 people at the Keystone Complex in Shedden.
- All branches are running educational programming surrounding the total solar eclipse that will encompass much of Elgin County on April 8th. Six branches are also open that day for viewing opportunities. Explore our eclipse-themed learning and library resources [here](#).
- The delivery van has recently been re-branded as the "Bookmobile", incorporating archival images reflecting Elgin County Library's rich tradition of mobile deliveries. This rebranding is timely as staff are currently working on a pilot project to bring a bookmobile service to long-term care and retirement home facilities. Council can expect further information on this initiative in the coming weeks.
- All ten branches participated in this year's Winter Reading Arctic Circle Challenge during February, which was also managed online through Beanstack and in person in branches. Kids and families read for 2,964 hours to beat the challenge of reading 2,646 hours and thus successfully snowshoed 2,646 kms from Elgin County to the Arctic Circle.

Elgin County Museum / Elgin County Heritage Centre

- Over 60 people attended a presentation by former Warden Paul Baldwin on harmonica virtuoso Tommy Riley and his father James, leader of Elmdale Public School's award-winning harmonica band in the early 1930s. This event also attracted significant media attention.

- The Museum's current exhibit is called 'Port Stanley – Canada's Coney Island'. This exhibit highlights entertainment and beach attractions over the years as part of Bicentennial celebrations to mark the naming of the village.
- The Heritage Centre was once again open on Family Day with just over 50 children and their families visiting and partaking in activities along a beach theme to tie into the current exhibit. Similar programming was also offered over March Break.
- In May 2023, Council authorized the production of an interpretive mural depicting the settlement story of Oneida Nation of the Thames on the exterior of the Elgin County Heritage Centre. Staff are pleased to report that this mural has been completed and was entirely produced by volunteers at the Oneida Language & Cultural Centre. The mural depicts the 1840 settlement journey of the Oneida Nation of the Thames, a journey that took them from upstate New York, across Lake Erie and through present-day Elgin County to lands on the Thames River. Installation on the Heritage Centre's westward facing exterior wall is expected shortly. A formal launch ceremony is being planned for a County Council meeting in May or June 2024 and involving representatives of both Oneida and County Council. Further details to follow.
- Collection review activities continue in earnest. A contract Museum Collection Assistant will be on staff for the remainder of 2024 to assist with processing and de-accessioning of artifacts relative to the museum's current mandate. This position is being funded entirely through donations, including the Bushell Estate and funds received from the estate of Ms. Joan Watt.
- Madeleine Howard has now assumed the role of Curator for the museum effective March 21st. succeeding Mike Baker who recently retired. A celebration of Mike's career took place at the Heritage Centre on March 28th, 2024.
- The Elgin County Museum Advisory Committee met for the first time in 2024 in February to review the museum's operations and get updates from other County museums. Councillors Giguère and Hentz serve as Council's representatives on this committee. The committee generally meets at least four times per year.

Elgin County Archives

- Planning has begun to move public services and staff working areas to the 4th floor of the building from the current location in the basement. The imminent completion of accessible elevators that serve the entire building now make this move possible and will create a more welcoming space for researchers and staff. Museum and archives staff will also be able to work in the same location to create better synergies. Modest capital improvements will be completed on the 4th floor in the coming months to accommodate this move which will be contained within existing funds in the capital budget. The archives current space in the basement will be maintained as climate-controlled storage and workspace for special projects.

- Newspaper Digitization Project - Roughly 87,491 newspaper pages were scanned in 2023 and so far, 23,738 pages have been scanned in 2024. St. Thomas Times-Journal newspapers covering the First World War and the Inter-War period (1914-1938) have been digitized and made available to the public. A substantial portion of this project is made possible due to the generous support of the Blidner Family Foundation (\$20,000 annually since 2021). The project has sparked the interest of other heritage organizations in the area. Several have contacted us asking how they can start their own digitization program. We have spoken to members of the Norfolk County Archives, the Region of Peel Archives, Haileybury Heritage, and now the London Library about our project, technology, and techniques.
- Migration to Andornot Cloud hosting services - Andornot Consulting based out of Vancouver have been our database consultants since the Archives was established in 2002 for both our in-house and online databases. Due to the large amount of data that we were constantly adding to the County's servers, and the threat of complications with nearing capacity, we have successfully migrated our databases, associated media, and web interfaces to Andornot's servers.
- 2023 saw a significant increase in social media activity for the Archives. In 2023, the Archives reached an approximate total of 5.8 million people from just over 1,000 social media posts across Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter). This is a 60% increase from 2022. The highest reach and engagement came from the Archives Facebook account. The most popular Elgin County photograph on Facebook for the past year was the exterior of Mackie's/Port Stanley boardwalk, ca. 1947 (see attached). That post reached over 110,000 people and was interacted with just over 7,000 times. The Instagram reel created by our Digitization Assistant Tysha Rieger was our most engaged with Instagram reel and post for 2023. It showcased the newspaper digitization process. The reel was played almost 1,200 times and received 108 interactions. Our average Instagram post sees between 20-40 interactions. This reel can be accessed [here](#).
- Outreach - Some recent highlights include running Green Screen programs at the Horton Farmers Market in St. Thomas and at the Port Stanley and Shedden libraries. Also, we made a presentation to Grade 7 and 8 students at the Southwold Public School on the difference between primary and secondary sources as a way to prepare them for a local history essay competition.

Financial Implications:

Not applicable.

Alignment with Strategic Priorities:

Serving Elgin	Growing Elgin	Investing in Elgin
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ensuring alignment of current programs and services with community need. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Exploring different ways of addressing community need. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Engaging with our community and other stakeholders.	<input type="checkbox"/> Planning for and facilitating commercial, industrial, residential, and agricultural growth. <input type="checkbox"/> Fostering a healthy environment. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Enhancing quality of place.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ensuring we have the necessary tools, resources, and infrastructure to deliver programs and services now and in the future. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Delivering mandated programs and services efficiently and effectively.

Local Municipal Partner Impact:

Local municipalities are kept informed on matters such as maintenance of library branch facilities and are responsive in this regard. Archives continues to accept regular transfers of records from local municipal partners.

Communication Requirements:

All three services have a vibrant social media presence and update websites on a regular basis.

Conclusion:

Council can expect further updates on library initiatives such as a mobile delivery service and branch performance relative to recently released guidelines. 2024 will be a year of transition for both museum and archives due to staffing changes and plans to relocate services in the Elgin County Administration Building.

All of which is Respectfully Submitted

Approved for Submission

Brian Masschaele
 Director of Community and
 Cultural Services

Blaine Parkin
 Chief Administrative Officer/Clerk