2025

ANNUAL REPORT

DEFIANCE PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM

Defiance

Sherwood

Hicksville

PREPARED BY :
DPLS Administration

DEFIANCELIBRARY.ORG
@DPLSLIBRARIES

READ, CONNECT, GROW

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Cara Potter
Director

In 2025, the library system maintained regular services while pursuing fundraising and construction plans for a library annex across from the Defiance Public Library, and renovations to the main library. The year also saw several personnel transitions.

Long-time CFO Nancy Roehrig departed in March, and Kristi Keefer joined as CFO in May. Since her arrival, Keefer has familiarized herself with the library system, selected new timekeeping and accounting systems which will be implemented in 2026, and contributed to annex and renovation planning. We are pleased to welcome her to the team.

The DPLS Board also saw several changes. Longtime board president Laura Connor resigned in June 2025, and board member Dennis Sobecki assumed the presidency. Sadly, beloved community and board member SG Brugler passed away in September. Additionally, board treasurer Ken Boroff concluded his 12-year tenure in December 2025.

In 2025, we welcomed new board members, Jenny Derringer of Defiance, and Tammy Bowers of Ney. I thank all past and current members for their service to the library system.

In March 2025, the CFO's facilities management responsibilities were transferred to the director. Facilities Manager Gary Ford oversaw several 2025 projects, including upgrading the ten rotunda portholes to LED, resealing the exterior atrium windows, installing AED cabinets in each library building, and many repairs to the DPL HVAC system.

In April 2025, a lightning strike on the Fort Grounds damaged the library's HVAC system. During repairs, it was determined that the entire system will need replacement, and plans are in place to address this.

In summer 2025, the State of Ohio changed public library funding from a percentage of general revenue to a fixed, line-item appropriation, reducing Defiance Public Library System's budget by approximately $80,000. To manage this cut, the library system reduced purchases of books and other materials.

In August 2025, the library system engaged architectural firm SHP, which consulted with staff and management, gathered feedback, and presented initial schematic drawings to the board in December. Proposed exterior drawings for the annex are shown on the following page.

In November 2025, the library system engaged Mach73, a fundraising company owned by Defiance resident Gary Cates, to support financial planning and fundraising for the annex and future renovations.

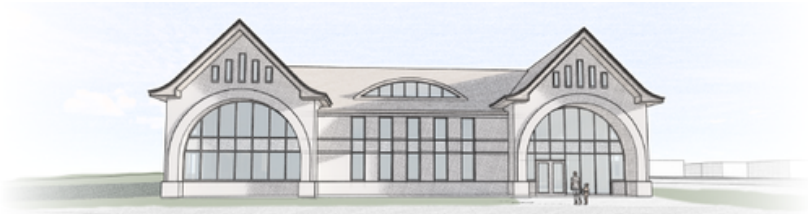
CONT.

Other highlights from 2025: the Friends of Johnson Memorial Library, which owns the Hicksville branch building, completed interior renovations and will undertake exterior renovations this year. The Worthington Cemetery Project, a long-term local history project of the Defiance Library, was approved for an Ohio Historic Marker, which has since been installed. Retired kindergarten teacher Freda Stritt donated a special collection of more than 200 illustrated picture-book versions of *A Night Before Christmas* by Clement Moore. Finally, I concluded my term as President of the Rotary Club of Defiance in July 2025.

It's been a very full year, and I am looking forward to 2026.

PRELIMINARY SCHEMATIC DRAWINGS OF ANNEX EXTERIOR

Provided by SHP Architecture & Design



Carnegie steps | Looking south

Fort Street | Looking east

2025 BY THE NUMBERS

Circulation of all physical materials
162,131

Circulation of all digital materials
82,998

Books borrowed from another library
52,750

Patron visits to the libraries
84,688

Programs offered
798

Program attendance
19,149

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Kristi Keefer
Chief Fiscal Officer

The library's financial approach is guided by a simple principle: every public dollar entrusted should be managed with care, foresight, and purpose. Sound financial stewardship ensures not only the sustainability of library services today, but the ability to adapt and serve our community well into the future.

Throughout the year, the library remained consistently under budget while meeting or exceeding service goals. This reflects deliberate planning, conservative forecasting, and ongoing of expenditures - not deferred service or unmet needs. Resources were allocated strategically to prioritize public access, staff support, and the long-term care of library facilities and collections.

Maintaining financial stability also means planning beyond the current fiscal year. The library continues to build and maintain responsible reserves, allowing us to absorb unexpected costs, respond to emergencies, and reduce reliance on sudden funding increases. Capital improvements and major replacements are evaluated through a long-range lens to ensure assets are maintained before they become liabilities.

Transparency and accountability remain central to our financial practices. Regular and timely financial reporting to the Board of Trustees, adherence to public finance standards, and external oversight provide assurance that funds are used as intended and decisions are made in the public interest.

Fiscal stewardship is not an end itself - it is what allows the library to remain reliable, accessible, and responsive. By managing resources prudently today, we protect the library's ability to educate, connect, and inspire our community tomorrow.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kristi L. Keefer, CFO

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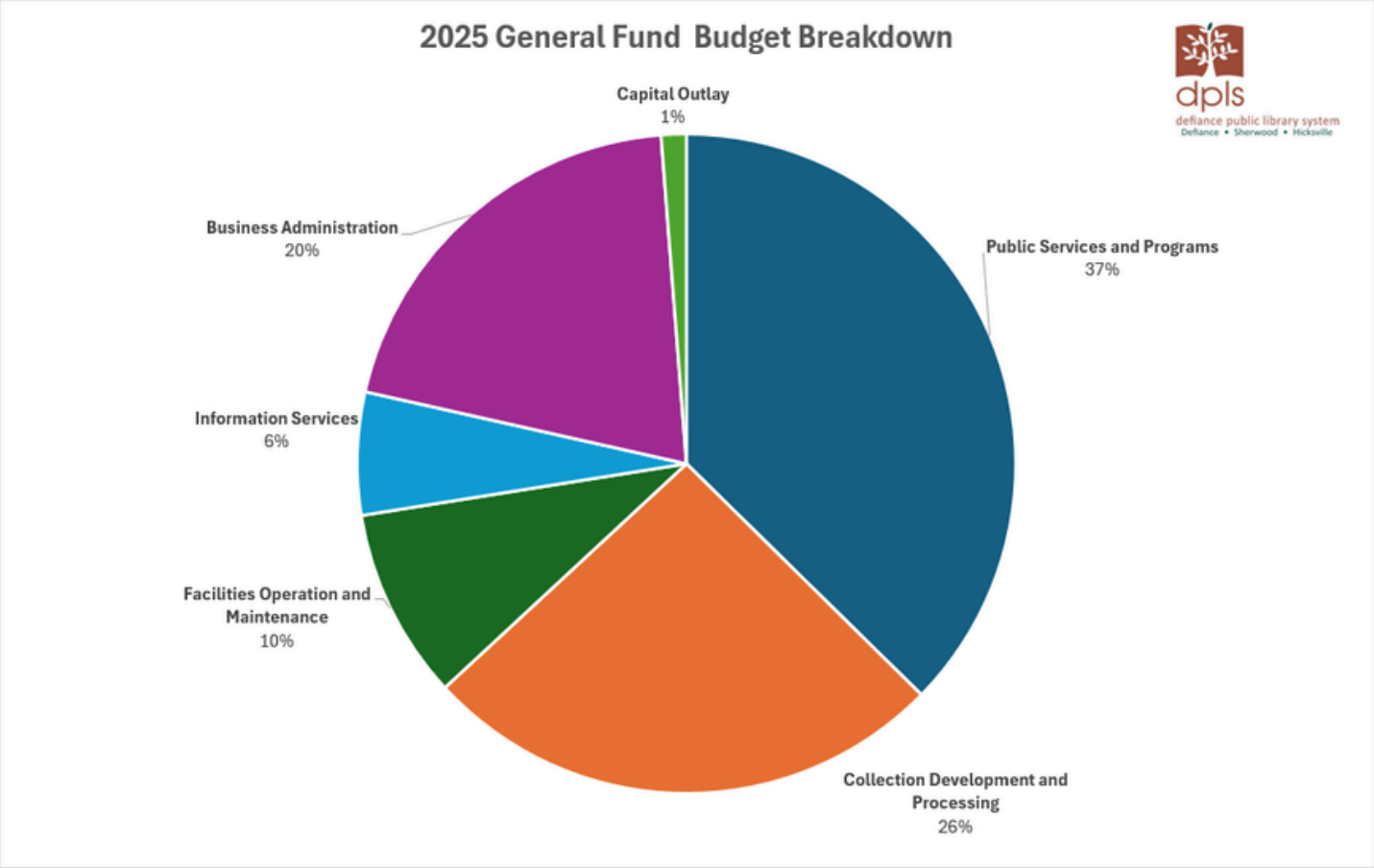
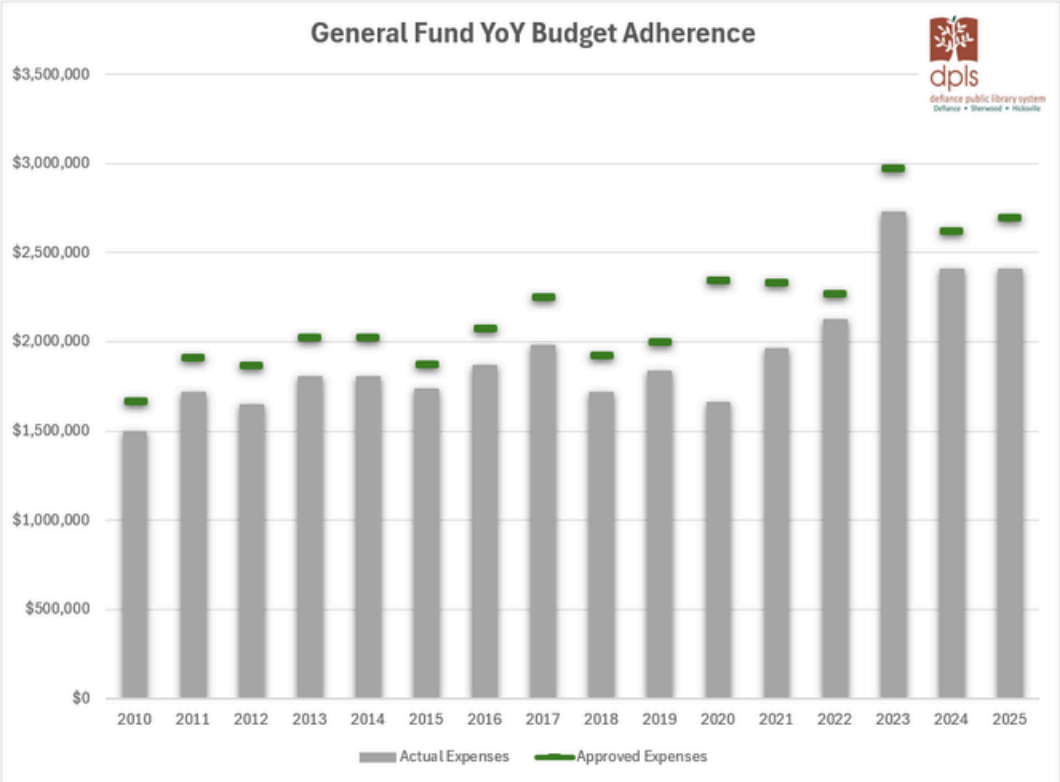
FINANCIAL OVERVIEW, CONT.





REFERENCE & TECHNICAL SERVICES

Renee Hopper
Reference & Technical Services Manager

In 2025, adult services planned and facilitated 120 events with a total patron attendance of 3,357. Top events included:

- Def Com X with 1,873 children, teens, and adults attending.
- Living History Encampment, in conjunction with RiverFest, brought in approximately 350 individuals to learn the history of Defiance County between 1790 and 1812.
- Haunted Library gave 287 attendees a hauntingly good time.

Other events of note include:

- Summer Reading Challenge (181 participants)
- Buck Cemetery historical walk (75 attendees)
- Paul Plassman author talk (27 attendees)

The Worthington Cemetery historical marker was installed near the site of the cemetery on Bowman Rd. in October. A dedication ceremony is being planned for May 15, 2026.

Teen Services again saw record numbers for Teen Night Thursday. Attendance averaged 34 teens each Thursday night; on our highest night, we saw 60 teens in our Teen Space. Teen Lit Kits continue being successful, with all 10 boxes being claimed each month.

Due to the closing of one of our main book suppliers, Technical Services cataloged 1,500 fewer books than in 2024. With help from the Fiscal Office and other departments, the Tech staff were able to clear out the old orders and organize the numerous new orders placed in late November. The department also completed 15 projects for the system. Projects included updating missing prices in the ILS, recataloging lease books for the regular collection, and updating the call numbers of smaller collections to make them consistent across the system.

A LOOK AT DPL'S 2025 EVENTS & PROGRAMS

Young patrons enjoy Storytime with Miss Rebekah

Children from area schools were treated to a visit by author Michelle Houts

An Ohio Historical Marker is installed at Worthington Cemetery

Community members gather to hear stories from the past at Buck Cemetery

Staff & volunteers prepare to scare at the Haunted Library event

Incredible costumes were on display at Defcom 10

THE MAKERSPACE

Cara Bolley
Emerging Technology Lead

The MakerSpace is continuing to grow in usage as the community learns about what the space has to offer. This year, our teens have discovered the MakerSpace and have started using it. Over the course of 2025, there were over 700 uses of the MakerSpace. General usage continued to be the most common reason for visiting, followed by 3D printing. We also continued to provide Maker kits that allow patrons to craft at home, with 1,216 being taken over the year. The MakerSpace has continued to do outreach to schools and groups, while also providing programming both in the space and at the branches.

This year's popular programs included needle felting, candle making, and sewing. Also well attended was the annual craft exchange, where participants can bring in their old crafting supplies and find new treasures left by other artists and crafters.

In the summer, the art theme was a great fit for the MakerSpace, and each week, the space hosted a different art medium to try out. The yearly STEAM camp focused on the science of art, where the kids learned about color theory, chromatography, animation, and how art can be used in fields like engineering. This year's attendance at MakerSpace classes and events totaled 699, which is a 23% increase.

The MakerSpace also provided support for other departments and branches' programming. Staff also utilize the space to create things for their programs, decorating the library, or other services they provide. This year, the MakerSpace offered support to the multi-department Haunted Library that was well attended, and the Halloween Parade float that the Friends of the Defiance Public Library sponsors. Our Sleepy Hollow-themed float won 2nd place and handed out 35 books along with candy.

From left: STEAM Camp participants try their hand at watercolor. A group learns to needlefelt at Sherwood Branch Library. Patrons work on their sewing skills at Johnson Memorial Library in Hicksville.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Marja McGuire
DPL Children's Services Manager

Programming expanded in both scope and participation, highlighted by new offerings such as Saturday family programming, I-Spy Tales and Treats at the StoryWalk, and the Haunted Library, which attracted nearly 300 attendees and provided an accessible alternative to community members who cannot afford traditional Halloween haunt encounters. Designed for all ages, it had broad reach, offering the slightest shivers to the very young and fearful downstairs, while heightening the scares on the main level for those brave enough to take on more frightening experiences.

Ongoing monthly programs, including Storytime and Lego Club, as well as seasonal celebrations, continued to see strong attendance. The Summer Reading program achieved a 23% increase in participation, engaging more than 450 children, while Def-Com attendance grew to nearly 2,000, with children representing close to 25% of attendees. With support from the Friends of the Library, we provided free access to these and other cultural and educational experiences, such as Opera on Wheels, El Corazon De Mexico, puppet shows, and visiting authors and artists, ensuring equitable access to the arts, cultural enrichment, artistic inspiration, educational opportunities and more for the community.

Outreach and passive programming remained cornerstones of service. Thousands of literacy information bags were distributed throughout county agencies. Additionally, partnerships with schools, NOCAC, the DDVB and other community organizations expanded the library's presence beyond the building. Major attractions among passive experiences were the imaginative learning environments of the Waldorf Playhouse, STEAM kits, I-Spy and scavenger hunts, and rotating crafts. Seasonal displays and interactive literacy challenges further enriched the patron experience, including the offsite StoryWalk, which offered families year-round opportunities to engage in shared reading with a diverse selection of titles.

Circulation analysis this year confirmed distinct collections require deeper, more strategic weeding due to decline in usage caused by technology and changing patron preferences. That work resulted in a 45% reduction in the children's audiobook collection. Continued evaluation in the coming year will support further refinement of collections to ensure they remain relevant and well used.

The Children's Department demonstrated resilience, creativity, and strategic focus during 2025 through expanded programming, increased participation, community partnerships, and expanded collection maintenance efforts. The year reflects a strong commitment to literacy, learning, and community connection, positioning the department for continued future success.

CIRCULATION

Tabitha Sullivan
Circulation Manager

Last year, I spent time training staff for Defiance Public and Johnson Memorial libraries, including two 30-hour Youth Service Associates for Defiance Public Library, one 20-hour Circulation Assistant for Defiance Public Library, and one 20-hour Circulation Assistant for Johnson Memorial Library.

In April, three of the circulation staff attended an in-person workshop, “Body Language,” offered by Norweld. In May, I attended the virtual webinar “Ohio Library For The Blind and Print Disabled Program,” where I obtained valuable information and was able to register DPLS as a signup location for qualified patrons to apply for an audio reading device system.

The Summer Reading Program was a busy time for processing new library cards. Circulation staff at Defiance processed a total of 329 new library cards in June and July.

Our Homebound Program remains a well needed service in the community. Library staff delivered a total of 4,225 items to approximately 37 residents each month, including those in nursing facilities. Items delivered consisted of 2,098 books, 126 music CDs, 1,006 DVDs, 372 audio books, 49 Playaways, 570 magazines, and 4 video games. Along with those materials, homebound patrons also received upon their request various activity sheets and/or simple craft projects. These patrons look forward to and enjoy receiving these extra activities.

COMMUNICATIONS

Taryn Lawson
Communications Coordinator

In 2025, the communications coordinator created promotional artwork packages (flier, web, slideshow, and social graphics) for more than 200 events and programs across the system’s three locations, issued 46 press releases, and sent out 12 monthly "Shelf Life" newsletters. **The current year’s releases and newsletters are available to view at defiancelibrary.org.**

DPLS continued to have a lively, growing presence on social media in 2025, totalling 1.7M content views on Facebook alone. DPLS’ main page garnered 829 new followers in 2025. The opted-in mailing list also grew in 2025, with 878 new contacts added. With 17-28% considered a strong open rate for mass-marketing emails, DPLS logged an exceptional 39% open rate. There were 51K unique visitors to the DPLS website who initiated an “engaged session” (10+ seconds or 2+ page views).

In addition, the Communications Coordinator served on the Annex Communications, DEF-COM, and Halloween Parade committees, oversaw website maintenence and security, supervised an 8-week intern from Defiance College, and assisted in hosting Chamber After-hours & Community Information Session programs related to the Annex/Renovation Project.

SHERWOOD BRANCH

Patrons explored the theme of “Color Our World” during our Summer Reading Challenge. Our goal was to encourage a love of reading through creative activities. Entertaining performers, mixed-media art activities, backyard fun, and engaging storytimes filled our weeks. A favorite with the adults was an evening of art reimagined. Adult patrons were invited to recreate Van Gogh’s “The Starry Night.” Every Tuesday was Art Hub Day. Patrons participated in a different process-art project. Process art emphasizes the experience over the final product. Balloon painting, pressed flower butterflies and marble painting were also offered. Other favorite activities included Mess Fest, Tinsel and Tie Dye, and water day.

In August, we held one of our most successful events of 2025. Former residents Mark and Missy Meyer with Balloons Over America generously partnered with us to present a ballooning event at Moats Park. The evening began with Mark sharing an introduction to ballooning. Mark and his crew then inflated their beautiful Jim Shore Hot Air Ballon. There was much excitement in the crowd when Mark announced that he would be offering tethered rides to attendees. Many in the audience took advantage of the opportunity for a ride. It was an unforgettable experience for all. There was a great deal of positive feedback, with patrons sharing how much they enjoyed the evening.

The Sherwood Branch staff take to heart the importance of the library in our community. We do our best to provide important and timely information and events for the patrons we serve. We look forward to a productive year in 2026.

Kathy Holtsberry
Branch Manager

Programs offered:
15 for adults
72 for juveniles

Total program participants:
1,145

Take & Make Kits distributed:
618

Fairview classroom visits:
170

Students visited:
3,118

Summer lunches distributed:
1,807

Left to right: A young patron enjoys Water Day; children gather in the Community Room to work on a summer art project; a painting class attendee displays her creation.

JOHNSON MEMORIAL

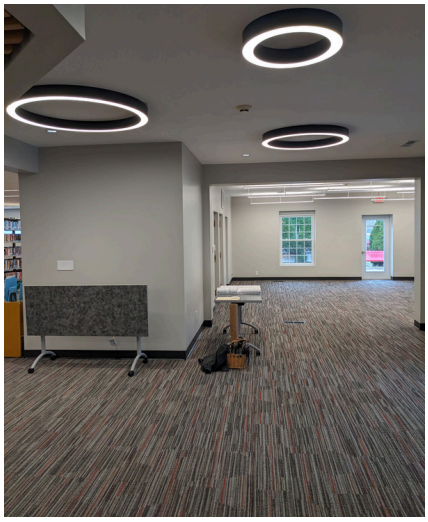
Angela Powell
Branch Manager

Johnson Memorial Library got a whole new look in 2025. Starting in June, JML received all new ceilings, windows, lights, floors, carpeting, countertops, and a breakroom. The walls are a cool gray color now instead of the beige and green. The community really loves the fresh look. Next up are new shelves and furniture and an outside renovation!

Due to the renovations, programming was reduced compared to previous years. We still had a fun Summer Reading Challenge with a Bluey Party and a Nerf War at the park with the Fire Department. We hosted a water play day, made cake pops, went down to the Huber Opera House to watch the Mexican Ballet, and made banana sushi. Danielle continued her school visits, visiting 4 kindergarten classrooms a few times each month.

Local youth cool down during a Nerf War with the Fire Department.

Towards the end of the year, we had a lot of community-wide scavenger hunts for prizes. We hid pumpkins all over town in October and mini turkeys in November.
In 2026 we're looking forward to getting moved back permanently. No more shifting and lugging and hauling, just classes and programs and full library services!



Left to right: Bluey entertains the crowd during a special event; updates at JML include new, modern lighting fixtures; a crew works on interior renovations.

PROGRAMS SUPPORTED BY OUR FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY

These are just a few of the many free community programs and services sponsored by the libraries' three Friends groups in 2025.

FRIENDS OF DEFIANCE PUBLIC LIBRARY

El Corazon de Mexico Ballet Folklorico
Draw Along with Jeff Nicholas
Roz Puppets: Percy the Purple Cow
Cartooning with Duane
Musical Fun with Kevin Devine
Reading Challenge prizes
Fall Children's Author Visit
1000 Books before Kindergarten Graduation
DEFCOM 10
Shelf Indulgence LitKits
Hide-a-Book Day
Living History Encampment
YA LitKits
Readers' Circle Book Club
Mysteries & More Book Club
Book sales
Art in the Park
Lions Club Halloween Parade Float
STEAM Day Camp
Storywalk Storytime
Color our World Drawing Contest
Storytime with Santa
Haunted Library

FRIENDS OF SHERWOOD BRANCH LIBRARY

El Corazon de Mexico Ballet Folklorico
Draw Along with Jeff Nicholas
Roz Puppets: Percy the Purple Cow
Cartooning with Duane
Musical Fun with Kevin Devine
Trivia on Tap
Book sales
Friends of SBL Veterans' Program
Reading Challenge prizes
Fall Children's Author Visit
Cookies with Mrs. Claus
Snacks for various programs

FRIENDS OF JOHNSON MEMORIAL LIBRARY

Charlie Cart mobile kitchen programming
Plant-n-Sip Fundraiser
El Corazon de Mexico Ballet Folklorico
Draw Along with Jeff Nicholas
Roz Puppets: Percy the Purple Cow
Cartooning with Duane
Musical Fun with Kevin Devine
Reading Challenge prizes
Fall Children's Author Visit
Color Explosion Party
Bluey Party
Turkey Hide & Seek
Christmas Scavenger Hunt
Unwrap the Gift of Reading

2025 BOARD OF TRUSTEES:

Laura Rath Connor - President (through June 2025)
Dennis Sobecki - President (remainder of year)
Mary Elizabeth (Beth) Michel - Vice President
Kenneth Boroff - Treasurer
Chris Korhn - Secretary
SG Brugler
Shari Hedge
Jenny Derringer
Tammy Bowers

THANK YOU TO OUR 2025 DONORS!

$5,000 & over
The Estate of Emma Conley
Friends of Defiance Public Library

$1,000 - $4,999.99
Friends of Johnson Memorial Library
Friends of Sherwood Branch Library
Ohio Genealogical Society - Defiance Co. Chapter
Justin F. Coressel Charitable Trust

$500 - $999.99
Ann Small

$100 - $499.99
Dave Karr
Realty Five of Defiance
DPLS Staff
Carolyn Small
Fr. John F. Stites
James & Cynthia Impton
Linda Maag

$5 - $99.99
James & Carol McCann
Laura Rath Connor & Fredrick Connor
Robyn Small
Christine Korhn
Karen Graf
St. Paul's United Methodist Church
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