

**Appalachian**  
**REGIONAL LIBRARY**  
WILKES \* ASHE \* WATAUGA  
**APPALACHIAN REGIONAL LIBRARY DIRECTOR'S REPORT**  
January 2026

## **Administration**

- The regional staff training day has been scheduled for Thursday April 16<sup>th</sup> at the Ashe Public Library. Details about the training will be forthcoming as they are worked out.
- Budget season is here. The County Librarians, Russell and Tammy will be working together to develop our budget requests for each county. The county budget work sessions are at different times in the next four months.
- There is an issue with the HVAC “cooling” tower at the Wilkes PL and the whole thing needs to be replaced. It is in imminent danger of failing, which means that the lower floor of the library would not have heat or air conditioning. The estimate for repairs has come in at \$58,000. Russell is working to schedule a meeting with Wilkes County manager John Yates to discuss the repair.
- Russell and Tammy are working with Deron Geouque, Watauga County Manager to have John Arnaud named the architect of record by the Watauga County Commissioners for the Watauga Public Library renovation project. This will make him the project manager with authority to negotiate and hire contractors and deal with all issues related to the project.

## **Personnel**

- Ashe currently has one open 19 hour Circulation assistant position.
- Watauga is currently fully staffed.
- Wilkes is currently fully staffed though Nicole is scheduled to retire as of January 23<sup>rd</sup>. Brigett will be promoted to the Tech Services Manager position effective January 24<sup>th</sup>. The plan currently is to refill Brigett’s position with one part-time Tech Services Specialist and one part time Library Assistant.

## **Technology**

- We're rolling out self-check units purchased with the Digital Champion Grant at all locations. These self-checks have touch screens and operate off of the existing open-source Evergreen self-check feature, so there are **NO** on-going costs associated with the project.

- We've signed a new contract for broadband and WAN services across all 5 buildings that will begin on July 1, 2026. The costs for our broadband and WAN services will **decrease** in monthly fees compared to our previous contracts, while **increasing** speed dramatically at all locations. Traphill and Western Watauga will increase their speeds by **5X**, while the Wilkes, Watauga, and Ashe buildings will increase by more than **2.5x**. Our wireless usage has grown considerably at all locations, so the increase in speed will be welcome. The federal E-Rate program reimburses 90% of these monthly costs when we file our monthly invoices.
- Our firewall vendor (Sonicwall) recently released an update which improved our content filtering. We haven't had any recent issues, but it's always good to improve our CIPA (Children's Internet Protection Act) compliance to protect the patrons who use our PCs. We use the filtering software to prevent access to pornography, inappropriate content related to drugs, and other questionable material. If a website has been mistakenly blocked, I'm able to whitelist it if a patron requests it. CIPA compliance is required for libraries and schools accessing any federal funding, which we use to help provide internet access and to replace hardware like firewalls, switches, and our centrally managed wireless system.
- We finished up the final steps of our grant-funded replacement of our server and disaster recovery equipment. Our servers are now running on newer, faster hardware. We should be in good shape for the next 5 to 6 years. We have also updated our disaster recovery plan that details how we would recover from a major issue at any of our buildings, or if something happened to the technology manager.

## **Policy Updates**

The second reading of the revised circulation policy will be presented to the Governance committee of the Regional Board for their approval. Pending committee approval, the proposal will go to the full Board for their approval.

Work on the revisions to the Collection Development policy was paused in the fall due to several issues. The Collection Development policy committee will be reformed in late January or early February with goal of having a draft ready for the Board in either May or July.

## **Strategic Planning**

The admin team reviewed the three viable proposals presented by companies or individuals with the knowledge and experience to assist the ARL with the upcoming strategic planning process. A recommendation will be made to the Regional Board and pending approval by the Board; the company or individual will be approached about their willingness to work with ARL on the project. The information will be used to complete the LSTA funding application due to the State Library by March 1<sup>st</sup>.