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LIBRARY DIRECTOR ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT
*Kent Oliver's 51-Year Career Concludes in July;
Library Board in National Search for New Director*

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – After a 51-year career in public libraries, Nashville Public Library director Kent Oliver will retire July 22. The library's board of directors will identify a new, permanent director.

"Our library is the democratic institution next door, a beacon people can count on to be there for them, every day," said NPL Board Chair Joyce Espy Searcy. "I've watched our library grow and thrive under Kent's leadership. We've been fortunate and proud to have his leadership for the past decade, and we will bring a stellar new director to this great organization."

Oliver joined NPL in 2012. Since then, the library has expanded its community education initiatives in health, digital, citizenship and adult literacy and has grown its nationally recognized partnership with Metro Schools.

In 2017, the "Library Journal" named NPL Library of the Year – the best public library in the U.S. and Canada.

"It has been the privilege of a lifetime to serve people by serving America's public libraries," Oliver said. "I'm glad and grateful that the latest, and last, chapter of my director career happened here, at Nashville Public Library."

Governed by a seven-member [board of directors](#), NPL is also a department of Metro government and works closely with Nashville's mayor and other city agencies.

"Kent is an outstanding public servant, a nationally recognized library leader but most of all, he is a good and decent person who is adored by all who work with him," Mayor John Cooper said. "We will miss his leadership and his vision for the Nashville Public

Library system, and we are deeply grateful for his exemplary work the past decade. While they are big shoes to fill, I am confident that we will identify a dynamic and exciting candidate through our national search to lead the Nashville Public Library into its next phase of success.”

NPL: A Decade with Oliver at the Helm

The library’s footprint has grown under Oliver’s leadership, with new locations at Bellevue and Southeast and a new Donelson branch library set to open in 2024.

“Kent and I stood in the parking lot of Donelson Plaza together several years ago and envisioned how the new Donelson Library would serve as a true civic anchor and bring the community’s vision to life for ‘Downtown Donelson’,” District 15 Metro Councilmember Jeff Syracuse said.

“Kent’s collaborative vision and leadership have been one of the highlights of my experience as Council Member for the fifteenth district,” he added. “Nashville should be very proud of Kent’s extraordinary dedication that has made our Nashville Public Library system one of the best in the country.”

NPL also built and renovated several Metro School libraries under Oliver’s leadership. Its partnership with Metro Schools, called [Limitless Libraries](#), gives Metro students access to 2-million-plus books and materials as NPL delivers to every campus, every weekday.

“Metro’s school librarians are some of the most dedicated employees in our city. They’re passionate about supporting each of our students, with books and learning resources that help and encourage them in their individual learning journeys,” Metro Schools Director Dr. Adrienne Battle said. “Our partnership with Nashville Public Library means our school librarians have a team of professionals – and an entire city library - behind them, supporting and helping them, so that they in turn can pour even more into our students.”

Meanwhile, NPL’s adult literacy initiatives have grown to include health literacy ([Be Well at NPL](#)); digital literacy (Digital Inclusion at NPL); and citizenship and civic literacy ([Pathway for New Americans](#)).

The library serves an estimated 4 million-plus neighbors a year, inside and beyond its walls, with programs in early literacy ([Bringing Books to Life](#)); out-of-school enrichment ([Nashville After Zone Alliance](#)); puppetry ([Wishing Chair Productions](#)) and science, education, technology, art and math for middle and high school students ([Studio NPL](#)) – all supported through a public-private partnership with the Nashville Public Library Foundation.

“Over the past five years, I have had the privilege of working alongside of Kent,” Foundation president Shawn Bakker said. “Under Kent’s leadership, Nashville Public

Library has grown and transformed our community in so many exciting ways. I know his legacy of a deep love for literacy and our city will continue to have an impact for years to come.”

The library in 2017 [eliminated all overdue fines](#) for greater community accessibility and will this year resume Friday operating hours at all 21 locations, thanks to support from Mayor John Cooper and the Metro Council.

A Career Dedicated to People and the Freedom to Read

Oliver has led public libraries in Kansas, Missouri and Ohio. He is a three-time president of the Freedom to Read Foundation and previously chaired the Intellectual Freedom Committee of the American Library Association. His writings on intellectual freedom and the First Amendment have appeared in numerous publications, including *Forbes* and *The Tennessean*.

“When I reflect on a library career that’s taken me to six different public libraries and six different cities, it’s the steady, everyday work of serving customers that really brings things full circle,” Oliver said.

“It’s the common, constant thread of helping one person at a time that I can point to throughout my entire career. It is about the ways we serve people: Helping patrons find their next great read. Supporting them in their searches for answers and information. Encouraging them. Meeting them where they are. Being there for them, every day.”

“I am extremely proud of my career, and I’m also very proud of my team, and grateful for the past ten years,” Oliver added. “I know I will look back with pride at the NPL years as I become a regular, ‘civilian’ library patron.”

About Nashville Public Library

With more than 2 million books, movies and music items to choose from - plus great programming and resources to improve early and adult literacy, STEAM, ESL and other key skills - NPL is Nashville’s gateway to some of the best resources our city has to offer. Every year, across our 21-location system, thousands of visitors discover how our library lives up to our philosophy: at NPL, books are only half the story.

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