

# Now Playing in the Library

MLA Annual Conference  
October 16, 2024

Ali Van Doren – Reference & Instruction Librarian, Lake Superior State University

Marc Boucher – Director of Library and Academic Services, Lake Superior State University

# Session Outcomes

By the end of this session you should be able to:

- Cite benefits of play for both your patrons and staff
- Identify two or more play-oriented activities to try at your own library
- Have tools to brainstorm play-oriented activities in the future
- BONUS: Assessment ideas

# How do you define “play”?

“The opposite of play is not work – it is depression.”

- Stuart Brown

“It’s just about having fun.”\*

- LSSU Definition

# What are our goals?

- To build relationships
- Expand beyond the traditional perception of the library
- Promote diversity
- To HAVE FUN and reinforce the Library as the “Academic Heart Of Campus”

# The Academic Heart of Campus

- We are the GO TO spot for faculty/staff/student/community collaboration
- We are the HUB for actively demonstrating lifelong learning
- We facilitate cross-disciplinary exploration
- We provide both curricular & extracurricular resources

# About our Library

- Three Floors – To each their own space
  - Downstairs – Books and Silent Study: (RED)
  - Main Floor – Engagement: (GREEN)
  - Upstairs – Serials, Media Studio, Archives: Mid-level quiet (YELLOW)
- Decent amount of community patron use
- Very small staff and budget



# Why PLAY?

- Improve mental health
- Connect with others
- Build creativity and problem solving skills
- Breaking down barriers
- Decrease fear of library and librarians

# Where do we get our ideas?

- Past experiences from other libraries
- Engagement with library organizations (UPRLC and WLA-OSRT)
- Bouncing ideas off faculty (what would YOU like to do?)
- Partnering with other departments (Math, CETAL)
- Professional literature
- ALWAYS learning from other librarians!



# Brain Storming Tools

- Round Robin
- Rapid Writing
- Lotus Blossom
- Bad Idea

# Types of programming efforts

- **Academic**
  - Teach academic/research skills and promote lifelong learning
- **Games**
  - Entertain while breaking down boundaries between 'classes' of people
  - Develop team building skills and create community
- **Creativity**
  - Foster creative exploration and create a sense of belonging
- **De-stressing**
  - Provide opportunities to support mental health needs

# What events have we done?

## Game Events

- Pi Day
- Pictionary
- Jeopardy
- Family Feud  
(coming soon)
- Pandemic Board  
Game Night
- Chess Club

## Creativity Events

- Book Art
  - Blackout Poetry
  - Book folding
  - Paper beads
  - Wreaths and  
garlands
  - Ikebana
- 2x2 Tiny Art
- Palm of the Hand

## De-stressing Events

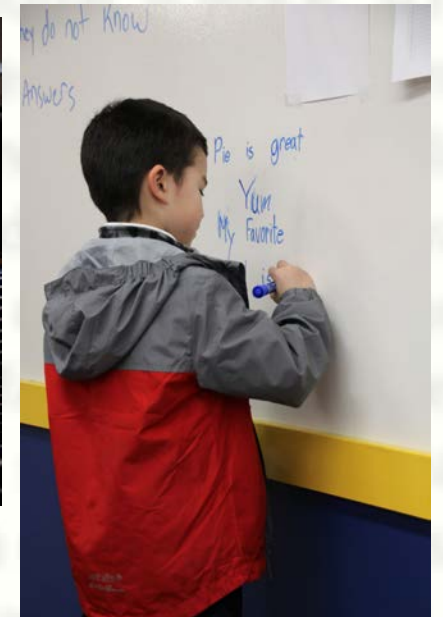
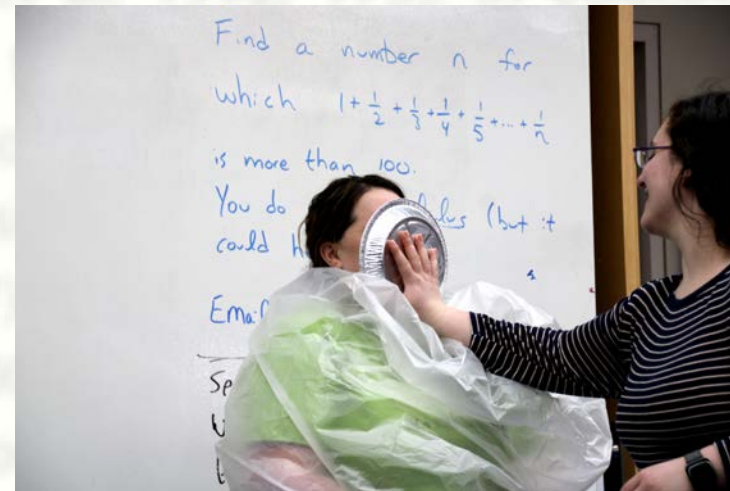
- Comfort dogs
- HyggeKrog
- Coloring pages
- Community Puzzle

# Goofy events Marc did at his previous library

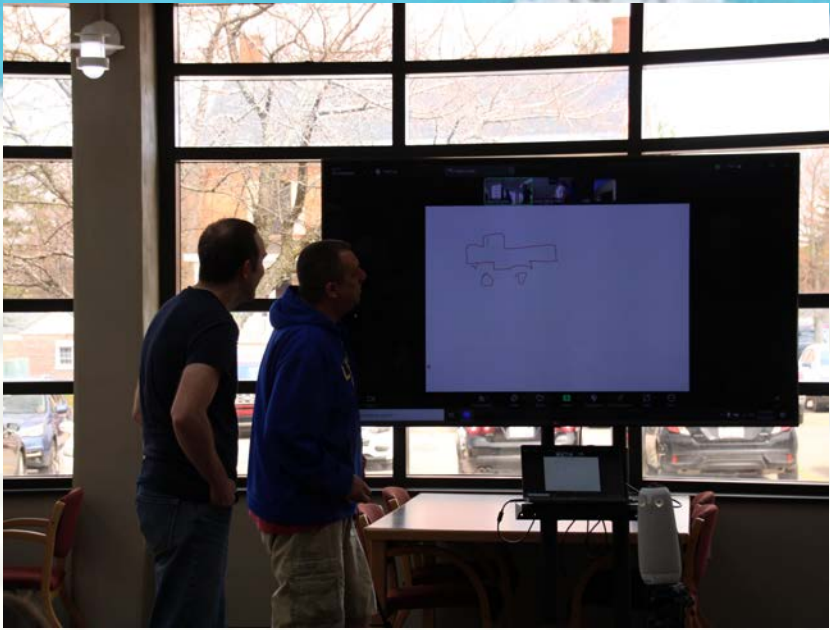
- Food eating contests
  - Milk Drinking (1/2 gallon)
  - Hot Peppers
  - Saltines
- Math Jeopardy
- Bound journal Christmas trees
- Palm of the Hand Memoir Workshops
- Community novel

# Highlights: Pi Day

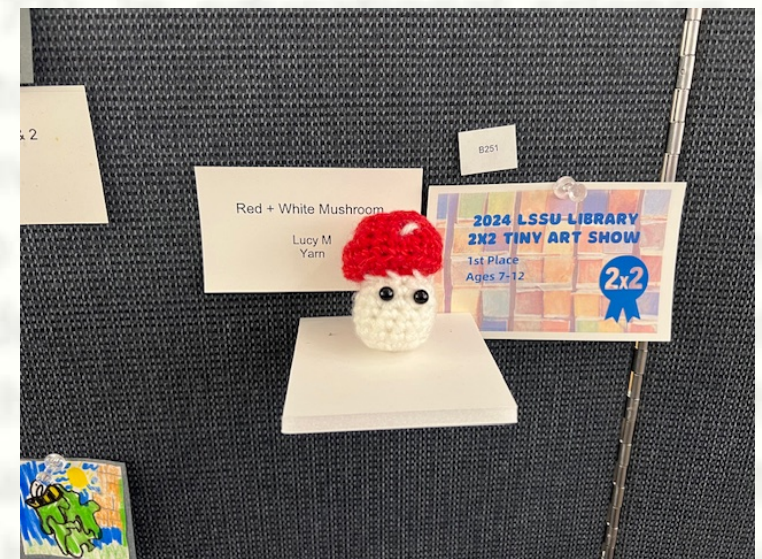
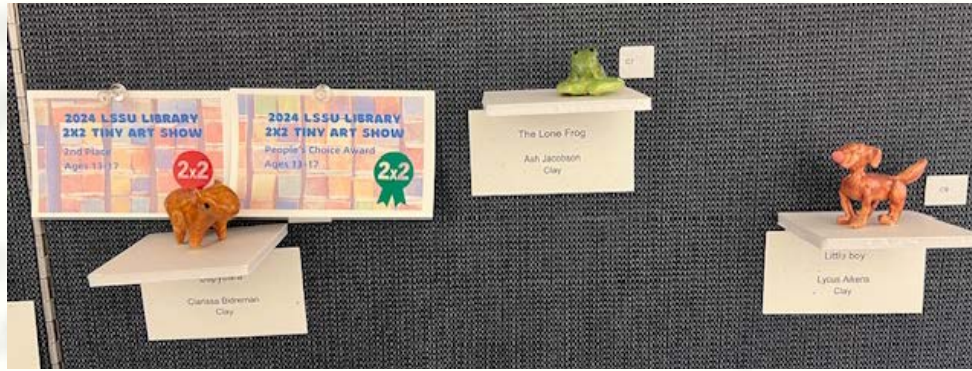
- Pi Day
  - PiKu's
  - Reciting Pi
  - Pi Shapes Game
  - Pie Eating Contest



# Highlights: Pictionary



# Highlights: 2x2 Tiny Art



# We would like to try..

- One act plays – partner with theater department
- The Moth-style story telling
- LEGOs
- Community jigsaw puzzle
- Family Feud
- Scrabble Tournament



# What do students get out of it?

Beyond a place to study, they learn the library is a place to:

- Relax
- Make connections to other students
- Interact with faculty on a different level
- Explore ideas outside of their course of study

# Assessment

- Standard data collection
- ACRL Project Outcome
- End of school year student feedback survey

# Assessment By The Numbers

- Academic Year 2023-2024
- 19 Number of events
- 732 Total Attendees
- By Type
  - Academic - 10 events, 380 attendees
  - Games - 2 events, 75 attendees (not counting Chess Club)
  - Creativity - 4 events, 67 attendees
  - Stress - 3 events, 238 attendees

# Funds - How do we pay for this?

- How much was spent?
- What did we use the money for?
- Where did we get the money?
- What did administration say about these activities?

# What could we improve on?

- Consistent gathering of assessment data
- Promotion of events
- Integration with more academic disciplines
- Just say no to Marc more often

# Lessons Learned – or What we got out of it

- IT WAS COMPLETELY WORTH IT!
- Yet some events didn't outweigh the staff costs
- You can do this with almost no budget!
- Increased visibility of the library on campus
- Helped strengthen our motto of 'The Academic Heart of Campus'
- Made students feel more comfortable engaging with faculty and staff
- Will this help us beat some of the budget cuts?

# Further Resources

- Brown, S., & Vaughan, C. (2009). *Play: How It Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul* (1st ed.). Penguin Publishing Group.
- Guitard, P., Ferland, F., & Dutil, É. (2005). Toward a better understanding of playfulness in adults. *OTJR: Occupational Therapy Journal of Research*, 25(1), 9–22.  
DOI:10.1177/153944920502500103
- Koeners, M. P., & Francis, J. (2020). The physiology of play: potential relevance for higher education. *International Journal of Play*, 9(1), 143–159. DOI:10.1080/21594937.2020.1720128
- Lotts, M. (2021). *Advancing a culture of creativity in libraries: programming and engagement*. ALA Editions.
- Lotts, M. (2024). *The playful library : building environments for learning and creativity*. ALA Editions.
- Magnuson, C., & Barnett, L. (2013). The playful advantage: how playfulness enhances coping with stress. *Leisure Sciences*, 35(2), 129–144. DOI:10.1080/01490400.2013.761905
- Nance, M. K. (2022). Playing for keeps: How academic libraries are prioritizing student mental health and well-being through play. *Journal of Play in Adulthood*, 4(2), 162–176.  
<https://doi.org/10.5920/jpa.1026>
- Sicart, M. (2014). *Play matters*. The MIT Press.

# Thank you!

- Contact Information
- Ali Van Doren
  - Phone – 906-635-2124
  - Email – [avandoren@lssu.edu](mailto:avandoren@lssu.edu)
- Marc Boucher
  - Phone – 906-635-2404
  - Email – [marc.boucher@lssu.edu](mailto:marc.boucher@lssu.edu)