We’ve finally had a chance to tabulate the responses to our last patron survey, and the results were something of surprise. A pleasant surprise, actually.

According to the 166 patrons who replied to our questionnaire, we’re doing better than we suspected. Slightly more than two-thirds of our respondents gave our LBPH services an overall rating of “Excellent,” and 29% more rated us “Very Good.” Only 3% gave us an overall rating of “Fair,” and not a single soul checked the dreaded “Poor” space.

We’re very grateful to everyone who responded, and happy that so many of you rate us so highly. But there are obviously some places where we need to improve. For instance, more than 90% of respondents said that they “always” or “almost always” receive the help or information they need when they contact the Library. But that means nearly 10% of you don’t. And that includes 1.2% who said they “almost never” get the help they are looking for.

Here’s another instance. Almost two-thirds of our respondents have their reader advisors select books for them at least part of the time. Nearly 7% of these patrons report that they are seldom or never satisfied with the selections we send.

Let us give you one other example. Roughly one in six of our respondents reported that they sometimes receive unwanted materials, the most common problem identified on the survey. But the survey responses don’t indicate what these unwanted materials are.

To correct these problems, we obviously need direct input from you as individuals. If you feel that you are not getting the information you need when you contact us, or that our book selections are seldom what you want, or that you are receiving materials you don’t want or need, please let us know. Contact your reader advisor by phone at 1-800-342-3308 (the preferred method for 71% of our respondents), mail (as 7% of you prefer) or e-mail (also 7%), and tell us exactly what the problem is.

Remember there are things we can’t do, like make John Grisham write more books or keep Harry Potter out of trouble. But we’ll be very happy to try and change the things we can.

And please do let others in your family, church or community know about us. More than a quarter (27%) of our survey respondents say they first learned about LBPH through word-of-mouth from a friend or relative. That’s second only to the 30% who learn about us through social agencies or rehabilitation programs. Obviously, our patrons are among our most important marketing agents. That’s another reason we need to keep you satisfied.
Small Town Girl (RC 43784) tells of a rising country star who must put her Nashville recording sessions on hold while she nurses her mother through hip surgery, back in her small home town. And Music Row turns a bit sinister in Karen Kijewski’s Honky Tonk Kat.

The Sixkiller Chronicles (RC 23733) also revolves around the family of a Grand Ole Opry star, but author Paul Hemphill moves the focus back to country music’s family-centered Appalachian roots. Historical roots are also the matter of historical novels like Dinner at Belmont (recorded by the Illinois and Kentucky LBPHs, respectively), Alfred Leland Crabb’s classic celebrations of Tennessee’s early movers and shakers, and Forests of the Night, a darker and grittier rendering of life.

Among our recent acquisitions, two of my personal favorites are Widow of the South, by Robert Hicks (RC 60662), which traces the decades-long aftermath of the bloody Battle of Franklin, and At Risk (RC 62949), a new Patricia Cornwell thriller set in Knoxville, which is rapidly becoming the world center for forensic science.

Of course, I don’t want West Tennessee readers to feel left out. They can choose between the Nora Roberts “In the Garden” trilogy -- Blue Dahlia (RC 59460, LP 09009); Black Rose (RC 60606); and Red Lilly (RC 61562, LP 09723) -- or Pullitzer-Prize winner Peter Taylor’s Summons to Memphis (RC 25807, LP 02447), all set in the Cotton City.

Music has played a major role in Tennessee life from pioneer times down to the present, and readers may enjoy several stories which feature music as a major element. Lee Smith’s The Devil’s Dream (RC 35770) traces the interplay of music, religion and honky-tonking across a half-dozen generations of one Tennessee family. LaVyrle Spencer’s Widow of the South (RC 60662) tells of a rising country star who must put her Nashville recording sessions on hold while she nurses her mother through hip surgery, back in her small home town. And Music Row turns a bit sinister in Karen Kijewski’s Honky Tonk Kat (RC 48543), as female Private Investigator Kat Colorado strives to protect an established country music star from threats that may be coming from the star’s own family.

The Sixkiller Chronicles (RC 23733) also revolves around the family of a Grand Ole Opry star, but author Paul Hemphill moves the focus back to country music’s family-centered Appalachian roots. Historical roots are also the matter of historical novels like Journey to Nashville and Dinner at Belmont (recorded by the Illinois and Kentucky LBPHs, respectively), Alfred Leland Crabb’s classic celebrations of Tennessee’s early movers and shakers, and Forests of the Night, a darker and grittier rendering of life on Tennessee’s forest frontier by Madison Jones (recorded by the Alabama LBPH).

Of course, we would be letting our own side down if we didn’t put in a word for Hearts of Hickory (RC 44089), a fictional account of Andrew Jackson’s early military successes by the late John Trotwood Moore, longtime head of our parent institution, the Tennessee State Library and Archives.

For these and other Tennessee titles, including histories and memoirs as well as fiction, don’t hesitate to call us. Tennessee’s literary traditions are as deep and diverse as our musical heritage. You’ll be missing a lot if you don’t sample them.

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It’s staff’s recommendation to correct that oversight. LBPH holds a number of good novels with intriguing Tennessee settings, and we have access to some other Tennessee classics -- by authors like Madison Jones and Alfred Leland Crabb -- through interlibrary loans.

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