



# LIBRARY NEWS

Sharing stories of Georgia libraries transforming lives and communities

Volume 19, Issue 2, Spring 2022



## Growing food and more at the library

Georgia public library award winners in focus

Libraries check out technology kits for local programs



GEORGIA PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE



# Library employee of the year finds new ways to serve her community

“Everybody wants to be heard. People just want somebody to help them, to listen. People need someone to be interested in them.”

And by listening and connecting to her library’s community, Natorra Moody has made an impact in unexpected ways. Because of this, Moody is the recipient of the first Library Employee of the Year Award from Georgia Public Library Service.

Moody is the branch manager at Alma-Bacon County Public Library, part of the Okefenokee Regional Library System. The city of Alma is located in the southeast corner of Georgia and has a population of a little more than 3,400. It is the nucleus of Bacon County, and while small and rural, Alma is home to a close-knit, caring community.



Library Employee of the Year Natorra Moody reads a story to a young patron at Alma-Bacon County Public Library in southeast Georgia. Moody grew up in the small town of Alma and has been a volunteer, clerk, and now branch manager at the library there. Photos courtesy of Okefenokee Regional Library System.



# 2021 Georgia Public Library Awards

"It's important to build a rapport with the people you serve. You can't just help them and send them out the door. You have to get to know them," says Moody. "When patrons see that you are genuinely interested in them and their lives, they are comfortable being vulnerable and honest about the help they really need. And that's when we can step in and help fill the gap."

One of Moody's most well-received initiatives is Project Prom, where the library provides prom dresses to those who need them.

"Attending prom is a highlight for most high school girls," Moody says, "but the dresses are so expensive, and affording one is a barrier for many students, especially in our community. Thanks to the generosity of people in and near our community, we are able to secure dresses and accessories that we can give the girls."

But this opportunity to dress the community is not limited to prom season.

"We once had someone from a local school reach out because they needed help preparing students for an academic competition in California," Moody shared. "Between the cost of airfare and lodging, they couldn't afford dresses for a part of the event. We recognized that this was a great opportunity for girls, so we gave them dresses to use. To our surprise, they cleaned the dresses and returned them to us when they were done."

The students told Moody that they wanted to pay it forward to the next person who might need the same support.

"It might seem trivial to some, but making these dresses available helps some of our patrons look and feel beautiful and can relieve at least one burden our families face," said Moody. "That can free up mental space they can use on other things that will help them succeed."

The Project Prom loan program is open to high school girls in Bacon and surrounding counties.

Providing prom dresses isn't the only way Natorra and the library help their community get ready to be their best.

"We are a very rural area, and we have lost a lot of jobs in the last couple of years," she said. "People are actively searching for employment, and being well-groomed can play a part in their success. We want to help them have the confidence needed in the job market."

*(Continued on page 4)*



"Natorra has exceptionally high standards for herself, co-workers, and our system," said Martha Powers-Jones, director of Okefenokee Regional Library System. "These all center around 'what are we doing for our people?' Because these are our people. She reminds us of that every single day – in her work effort, in her advocacy, and in her fierce devotion to our communities."

Moody is very dedicated to the library and serving her community, leading programs such as a prom dress donation campaign that helps students who can't afford formal wear obtain the clothing and accessories freely at the library. She also started a partnership with the local food bank to provide toiletry items to those in need through a shelf in the library, since the pantry only provides food items. Members of the community come to the library for these donated items as they need them.

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– Natorra Moody

She established a Community Shelf at the library, where community members can donate toiletries like soap or toothpaste. People can take these items as needed from the shelf with no questions asked. If they need more or something different than what’s readily available on the shelf, they can ask Natorra and she will put together a package for them.

Natorra also makes sure her library provides other resources.

“It’s important to help the library connect with patrons in ways that help them expand their minds,” Moody said. One way that happens is through library story time.

“I enjoy reading to children,” said Moody. “One of the most rewarding feelings is watching their faces as their little minds make connections with the words I’m reading. Children are very curious about the world around them, and it’s a privilege to have our library play such an important part in their development.”

Natorra has led efforts to make the library a place where readers of all ages and interests can find something to read and enjoy.

When she began managing the branch, most of the books in the collection were by white male authors. There were few titles by Black authors and none by Latino or Asian writers. There also were no graphic novels.

After some initial pushback to the additions to the collection, patrons have responded favorably to the diversity.

“The goal wasn’t to replace any particular kind of author but to introduce readers to the many great works that are out there,” said Moody. “You never know who could

be inspired to become an author based on the books they see on the library’s shelves.”

Whether it’s through providing dresses, toiletries, or diverse books, Moody’s commitment to elevating her community is personal.

“I was born and raised in Alma, Georgia,” she said. “My mother worked two jobs when I was a child, so I would always come to this library after school and just hang out. I’ve been spending time in this building since I was 8 or 9 years old, so it made sense to work here. I’ve been a volunteer, a clerk, and worked my way up to branch manager.”

While being in the physical library played a role, there are also people who have influenced Natorra’s path.

“Ms. Freddie Ann Taylor was my library lady as a child,” said Moody. “She would always say ‘the library is for everybody,’ and she was kind to everybody. Ms. Theresa Anderson trained me, and she instilled the idea that we are here to help people. Even if someone isn’t quite sure of what they need, it’s our job to do what we can to help them figure it out. That’s what I try to do.”

Natorra also credits her library system’s director, Martha Powers-Jones, with helping her understand that it’s not always necessary to dismiss an idea because it doesn’t seem doable. “She’s never told me that we can’t do something, but instead, she encourages me to focus on how something might be done. Sometimes you need to think outside the box.”

And it is this strategic and creative approach to service, as well as meaningful programs like Project Prom and the Community Shelf, that keeps Moody connected to her community. ■





# 2021 Georgia Public Library Awards



Every day, libraries in communities across Georgia are transforming lives as they offer opportunities for people to build new job skills, pursue degrees, stay active, learn to read, meet friends, and much more.

Our annual Georgia Public Library Awards honor the outstanding service and achievements of Georgia's public libraries, librarians, and advocates.

"I'm so proud of our library staff and supporters across the state who found new ways to bring library services into their communities, champion library funding, and help patrons access books, resources, internet, and so much more," said Georgia State Librarian and Associate Vice Chancellor for Libraries Julie Walker.

You can read about each of our award winners at [georgialibraries.org/gpla](https://georgialibraries.org/gpla). ■

At left, Library **Director of the Year** David Singleton, retired director of Live Oak Public Libraries

Second from left, **Library Champion of the Year** Georgia Senator Blake Tillery of Senate District 19

Top right, **Library Employee of the Year** Natorra Moody, branch manager at Alma-Bacon County Public Library

Bottom right, staff at Azalea Regional Library System, our **Library of the Year**

*Photos courtesy of Live Oak Public Libraries, Sen. Tillery, Okefenokee Regional Library System, and Azalea Regional Library System.*



# THE SEED LIBRARY



Growing food and more at the library





*Colleen Moultry had always wanted to start a garden in her yard, and with the seeds from the library, her family did it in 2021. "The first thing we grew was zucchini," said her daughter, Bethany, pictured at left. "I can't wait to see what we grow this year." Photo by Colleen Moultry.*

"We check out a book about gardening and then take seeds home, too," she said. "My kids have learned how to read a seed packet: How much sun does a plant need? How much water? They get lessons, even math lessons; for example, how far apart to plant each seed. Their reward is seeing plants grow and being able to eat the produce."

Krystal learned that some seeds are organic or heirloom, which are of high quality, and that the library changes them out according to the growing season.

"Our library system is so much more than books," said Krystal. "The library has learning, community, and outreach at its core. Even during this pandemic, we could safely pop in to grab kid activity kits, which were a lifesaver during the times of staying very close to home."

The Seed Library is free to anyone, with or without a library card. People can "check out" up to three packets a month. Live Oak is launching Seed Libraries at all of their library locations this spring, and a few libraries also will have raised garden beds.

**Rita Harris opened up the "K" drawer in the Live Oak Public Libraries' card catalog, but instead of pulling out an index card with book information, she gave a packet of kale seeds to a young library visitor.**

"Our Seed Library inspires healthy eating, environmental education, and hands-on learning for those who want to grow their own food or save seeds," said Harris, director of community engagement for the library.

The Seed Library began as a great way for Live Oak Public Libraries, a system of 16 library locations serving a three-county region in southeast Georgia, to connect with the community during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Gardening gives people something positive to focus on and look forward to as they follow the progress of their seeds – and something to celebrate as they see the results of their care for their plants," said Maryann Brickey, a former librarian with Live Oak Public Libraries, who managed the program until she recently left for another library.

More than 240 patrons have "checked out" about 600 packets of seeds. Families have successfully grown vegetables and herbs at home. And at Southwest Chatham Library, part of the Live Oak Public Libraries system, customers and staff have enjoyed watching their community garden grow.

Krystal Goodwin takes her young children weekly to the library.

This program has inspired many other activities at the library, including library partnerships with local non-profits to provide programming related to gardening, nutrition, and healthy cooking and eating.

The library has a StoryWalk® with the book *Plant the Tiny Seed* by Christie Matheson, which can be found at Southwest Chatham Library and raises awareness about the Seed Library. Several libraries have started a Spice Club, which gives away a free monthly spice kit along with information and recipes.

The library also partners with a local farmers market food truck that does outreach in areas that are food

**"Our Seed Library inspires healthy eating, environmental education, and hands-on learning for those who want to grow their own food or save seeds."**

deserts, some of which coincide with underserved neighborhoods where libraries are located.

Funded through a Georgia Public Library Service strategic partnerships subgrant made possible through the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the Seed Library launched in 2020. Live Oak Public Libraries collaborated closely with their local University of Georgia County Extension Office and volunteer master gardeners for expertise and resources to get the Seed Library started.

“Our partnerships grant program was designed to encourage our public libraries to find ways to start or strengthen relationships with other local community-centric organizations,” said Dustin Landrum, partnerships director at Georgia Public Library Service, which empowers libraries to serve all Georgians. “Local partnerships are a win for libraries and their partners because by working together, they amplify their impact in communities.”

Colleen Moultry and her daughter Bethany, 7, were pleasantly surprised when they discovered the Seed Library. But to Colleen, it made sense. “The library is the heartbeat of the community,” she said. “It brings all different kinds of people together, young and old, no matter their background.”

She had always wanted to start a garden in her yard, and with the seeds from the library, her family did it in 2021. “The first thing we grew was zucchini,” said Bethany. “I can’t wait to see what we grow this year.” Learn more about the Seed Library at [liveoakpl.org/seedlibrary](http://liveoakpl.org/seedlibrary) ■

*You may be surprised at what you can do at your local library! Ask your librarian if they offer seeds, a community garden, a StoryWalk, or even a beehive. Find your nearest library at [georgialibraries.org](http://georgialibraries.org).*



*Krystal Goodwin takes her children weekly to the library, pictured here at their home garden. “We check out a book about gardening and then take seeds home, too,” she said. “Our library system is so much more than books. The library has learning, community, and outreach at its core. Even during this pandemic, we could safely pop in to grab kid activity kits.” Photo by Krystal Goodwin*



*Photo courtesy of Live Oak Public Libraries*

**The Seed Library is free to anyone, with or without a library card.**

**People can “check out” up to three packets a month.**

**Live Oak is launching Seed Libraries at all of their library locations this spring, and a few libraries also will have raised garden beds.**



# Libraries check out tech kits for local programming

Daniel Zeiger packs up a Makey Makey, which transforms everyday objects into computer interfaces, next to a 3D pen and Chromebook in a well-padded shipping box, to send to a public library.

“We know that many libraries can’t afford to purchase the latest technology, tools, and gadgets for their patrons, and that’s one reason we offer these tech loaner kits,” said Zeiger, IT director at Georgia Public Library Service (GPLS).

“A library staff member can request one for staff and patron training, programming, and to promote the library. This service helps our library staff and community members become more familiar with emerging technology. The kits also fill a financial gap for libraries, and they are just plain fun!”

As the state library administrative agency, GPLS distributes state and federal funding to 407 public libraries in every county in Georgia. GPLS tech loaner kits were made possible due to funds from the Institute for Museum and Library Services.

GPLS also looks for ways to empower libraries to provide

equitable services to their community, no matter where a library is located. Kits that libraries can check out are one way to do it.

“We saw that libraries were struggling to keep up with the rapid pace of technology because of the cost, lack of knowledge of what was available, and understanding what would work best for their community,” said Zeiger. “The kits are an opportunity to curate a collection of emerging technologies, enabling library staff to familiarize themselves with cutting edge technology and evaluate new programming to see what has the highest impact in their area.”

In addition to tech loaner kits, Georgia Public Library Service currently offers tech kits to libraries that focus on other areas like 3D printing, virtual reality, digitization, and even a retro kit that includes a turntable, tape converter, and VHS adapter. Plans are in the works for additional ones to include telescope, 3D scanning, drone, and live streaming kits.

“We used the 3D printers mostly for programming but also let members of the public print from it,” said Jessica Wilson, assistant director of Roddenberry Memorial



Two tech loaner kits being packed to send to public libraries  
Photos by Myers Scott



Library, a single branch library system serving Grady County in south Georgia. She checked out a tech loaner kit for her library last fall from GPLS. “We’ve had patrons print specialty toys and small knickknacks, but also logo prototypes for their businesses.”

The tech kits must be reserved by a public library staff member, and libraries use them for a variety of purposes, such as programming for patrons or partnering with the community to make tech available for public use at the library.

Patrons can share their interest in using the technology with their librarian, who could reserve a kit from GPLS.

As an example, a librarian in West Georgia Regional Library System reserved a virtual reality kit for a patron, who produced a program for local teens using the equipment in a library conference room.

Librarian David Russell from the DeKalb Public Library recently checked out an oral history DigiKit from GPLS for three months. These kits contain various digitization technologies and digital recording devices. Each device comes with a charger, and each kit is housed in a ruggedized case.

“I reserved an oral history DigiKit so our patrons can record their stories digitally,” said Russell. “I prompt them with sample questions like, ‘What is a moment of kindness that has stuck with you?’”

He noticed that patrons would come into the library with general genealogy questions and express to him that they wished they had asked family members those questions while they were still alive.

“I believe in the power of storytelling,” said Russell. “I think it’s important for families to record this history for future generations.”

The recording device is tiny and connects to a laptop. With one click, it starts recording to a flash drive. Patrons can leave the library with the recording on a memory card that they brought from home or have the file emailed to them.

“Public libraries are in the business of removing barriers of access to knowledge and information, and one of the many ways they do that is through digitization,” said Angela Stanley, director of archival services and digital initiatives at Georgia Public Library Service.

GPLS introduced the oral history DigiKits in 2020 fol-

lowing the success of scanner DigiKits, which had been in circulation for two years. These kits are designed to support libraries in digitizing local historical materials, from photographs to microfilm to audio interviews. Libraries have used them to digitize African American funeral programs for preservation, host public scan day events, and document the pandemic’s impact on their local communities.

The DigiKits are popular; in the last five years, the 11 DigiKits have been in use by libraries for a combined total of 5,186 days – or more than 14 years.

Not all of the kits GPLS offers are technology related.

This spring, Georgia Public Library Service plans to launch Story Stroll kits for libraries to check out. These kits will feature a children’s picture book, with pages printed across 16-20 signs, that libraries can set up outdoors or in partnership with a local park. Story Strolls encourage families to read and be active together.

“We exist to serve Georgia public libraries and their communities,” said State Librarian Julie Walker. “We are proud to offer these resources to libraries, and we hope many more communities will reap the benefits.” ■

“Many libraries can’t afford to purchase the latest technology, tools, and gadgets for their patrons, and that’s one reason we offer these tech loaner kits. A library staff member can request one for training, programming, and to promote the library.

The kits also fill a financial gap for libraries, and they are just plain fun!”

– Daniel Zeiger,  
Georgia Public Library Service





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– David Russell, librarian,  
DeKalb Public Library.



The recording device within the oral history DigiKit is tiny and connects to a laptop. With one click, it starts recording to a flash drive. Patrons can leave the library with the recording on a memory card that they brought from home or have the file emailed to them. In these photos, Librarian David Russell interviews a patron using the DigiKit.

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Photos by Deborah Hakes





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*Library News* (ISSN 1546-511X) is published by the Georgia Public Library Service, the state agency that empowers public libraries to improve the lives of all Georgians.

This publication is made possible by a grant from the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services to the Georgia Public Library Service under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act.

Information presented in this newsletter will be provided in alternative formats on request. For more information about Georgia's libraries, visit [georgialibraries.org](http://georgialibraries.org)



*Libraries are for kids!*

*Georgia's public libraries are a place where children and families can discover the joy of reading, get help with homework, learn through hands-on STEAM activities, and get free admission to great places around Georgia. Find your local library and check their events calendar to find programming near you. Visit [georgialibraries.org/kids](http://georgialibraries.org/kids).*