



LIBRARY NEWS

Sharing stories of Georgia libraries transforming lives and communities

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GUYS READ builds confidence and love of reading for boys



Georgia Public Library Award winners exemplify innovative service to communities

Libraries boost local economic development and workforce skills



GEORGIA PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE

Georgia Public Library Award winners exemplify innovative service to communities

Our annual awards honor the outstanding service and achievements of public libraries, librarians and advocates. We honored award recipients at the Georgia State Capitol on Feb. 13, 2019, in an event attended by Gov. Brian Kemp and other legislators and at local library events.

Georgia Public Library of the Year: DeKalb County Public Library

DeKalb County Public Library is a system of 22 individual library locations serving unique communities with diverse interests and needs. Director Alison Weissinger participated in this Q&A.

How does DeKalb County Public Library impact lives and communities?

For the last several years, DeKalb County Public Library has focused on early childhood education initiatives, because we are well-positioned to fill the gap before children start school. We have sought funding to expand PrimeTime Family to four additional communities as well as ensure that we can distribute 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten reading kits to several thousand children each year.

What are some of your innovative projects?

- Barbershop Book collections – placing high-interest collections of books in spaces where kids often get stuck waiting for their parents. Barbershops are community hubs

in many African American neighborhoods, so it was a natural fit.

- Fine Free Summer, which exempted all overdue juvenile materials from fees. This program encouraged parents and children to check out books to prevent summer learning loss.
- “Take the Internet Home with You” offers patrons free mobile hotspot devices for checkout and bridges the digital divide for those who can’t afford internet at home.
- Our Local Author Expo allows for DeKalb County-based authors to talk about and showcase their work. This has given us an outlet to be able to recognize and support local, self-published authors.

What are you most proud of?

DeKalb County Public Library is part of a network of great public libraries all over Georgia – the history of resource sharing and strong statewide leadership have helped us be stronger than we would be on our own.

We also are proud of our dedicated staff, whose spirit of service and desire to meet community needs are the heart of our library. We are grateful for the strong support from our many Friends of the Library groups at the DeKalb Library Foundation; these are folks who volunteer time and money because they believe in what we are doing.

How do you keep the community engaged with the library?

Our Read More Campaign coalesced all 22 library locations under a common goal of promotion, outreach and unity. The campaign included promotional items such as staff t-shirts, car magnets and signage, as well as integrated outreach efforts. Our slogan “Read More. Think More. Play More. Make More. Get More.” highlighted the many ways to engage with library resources.



“DeKalb County Public Library is part of a network of great public libraries all over Georgia – resource sharing and statewide leadership have helped us be stronger than we would be on our own.”

- DCPL Director
Alison Weissinger

At left, (l to r) State Librarian Julie Walker, Chancellor Steve Wrigley, DeKalb trustees Dr. Curtis Clark and Sara Fountain, Weissinger and Gov. Brian Kemp.

We reflect community needs and interests in the programs and services we offer, and we look for organizations to partner with and expand opportunities for our patrons.

For example, we work with DeKalb Workforce Development to host their mobile career bus, host the Mobile Farmer’s Market run by the DeKalb Extension Service at branches located in food deserts and work with the DeKalb Board of Health to provide rapid HIV testing.

Librarian of the Year: Sandy Hester, director of Coastal Plain Regional Library System

Sandy Hester served as interim director in both the Fitzgerald-Ben Hill County Library and Coastal Plain Regional Library systems in 2018, as they merged into a single system to strengthen their libraries.

What inspires you every day?

I’m inspired by the small things in life. You don’t have to do big things to make a difference in this world. Small things sometimes matter more, like helping a library user apply for a new job or venture into a new hobby, empowering a library employee to break out of their comfort zone and



Roy Cummings

Librarian of the Year Sandy Hester (r), with State Librarian Julie Walker.

develop new skills or just convincing a reluctant reader that finding the right book will open the door to exciting new worlds. As librarians, we sometimes get to be on the front lines of major change,



Library Champion of the Year Dan Aldridge.

but we often miss it when we focus too much on the big.

What programs are you most proud of?

If I had to pick just one program, it would be the Prime Time Family Reading, which I have had the pleasure of being involved with for nearly 10 years. This program allows us the opportunity to break down barriers and make life-altering connections with families. This program isn't simply about encouraging a child to read. It's about transforming behaviors and thoughts about reading and learning. Children leave with an increased confidence in their ability to comprehend and really think about what they are reading. Parents leave Prime Time empowered to take a stronger role in their child's education, and sometimes even their own.

What do you enjoy about librarianship?

Librarianship provides the perfect harmony between consistency and change. The fundamentals of public library services haven't really changed for centuries but our methods, delivery and content are constantly evolving. I love working in a profession that maintains service to all as its core value, regardless of the specialty. Whether we are cataloging an item, planning a program, balancing

the finances, upgrading technology or communicating our value to stakeholders, librarians are ultimately working toward one thing. We strive to get the right information to the right person at the right time and in the right format.

Georgia Public Library Champion of the Year: Dan Aldridge

This award is presented to an outstanding advocate who is not employed by a public library, but whose support significantly raised the profile of libraries and improved services. 2018 recipient Dan Aldridge is the current president of the statewide network Friends of Georgia Libraries (FOGL).

What do you enjoy most about your work building support for libraries through FOGL?

I love traveling around the state and having the opportunity to meet so many extraordinary volunteers in Friends of Library groups. I'm always amazed at the talent and creativity that these individuals display in support of their local library. Their enthusiasm is an inspiration to all.

What is the biggest challenge faced by Friends of Library groups?

It is a challenge to attract young adults to join and volunteer, but their participation will determine the future of friends groups in Georgia. FOGL encourages groups to keep reaching out to young adults in their community to explain the vital role that a library plays in their community and the need the library has for support. By volunteering, people can help the library achieve its mission of improving the lives of everyone in a community.

How do libraries impact lives?

No other organization has the influence that a library does in being able to reach out and impact virtually every age, race and economic group; it is singularly situated to be able to improve the lives of every community member. Learning is a life-long endeavor, and libraries are vital to that learning process. At the heart of every thriving community, you will find a strong, impactful library. ■



Deborah Hakes

GUYS READ builds confidence and skills for boys

Ten fourth-grade boys collectively yell “EWWW-WW!” as Johnny Rodriguez, 48, read aloud how mold can form on their leftover food. They were sitting in their school’s library, eating their lunch and listening to Rodriguez read *The Bacteria Book*.

“I love the loud and funny voices he uses,” said Jordan Colson, 10, who attends the Reese Road Leadership Academy in Columbus, Ga. “Mr. Johnny makes reading so fun.”

Rodriguez is a volunteer of the GUYS READ program through Chattahoochee Valley Libraries, an initiative that brings a volunteer “guy” to 17 elementary schools in Muscogee County twice a week for five weeks. Rodriguez has participated since the program launched in 2013.

“Mr. Johnny has become a part of the Reese Road family, and the boys look forward to seeing him,” said Katrina Long, principal of Reese Road Leadership Academy. “GUYS READ provides an awesome opportunity for our boys to see a positive male role model share his passion and love for reading.”

Students are selected for the program because they are reluctant readers performing below grade level and often lack positive male role models in their lives, and the program is for boys specifically because of the gender gap in standardized reading tests. According to Muscogee County test results, 14.1 percent of fourth-grade boys failed to meet Georgia’s reading standard compared to 10.1 percent of fourth-grade girls in 2013-2014.

Anecdotal survey results from Chattahoochee Valley Libraries suggest that participating boys improve their reading as much as one-and-a-half grade levels after starting GUYS READ at least one year below grade level.

“I want these kids to know that they are capable of being whatever they want to be,” said Rodriguez. “I loved to read growing up, and the skill has provided me with opportunities in life.”

He greets each child with an enthusiastic “Hi!” and he especially encourages one solemn boy with

“I want these kids to know that they are capable of being whatever they want to be.”



“It’s fun to read with Mr. Johnny. I can learn from him and make character noises. Reading is an important part of life.” - John Thompson, 10

“Let me see that \$3,000 smile!”

The boys sit down at a table, and Rodriguez engages them in an interactive conversation about the selected book. Par-

ticipants from prior year programs wave from the hallway or pop in to say “hi” to Rodriguez throughout the period.

The boys follow along as he reads, raising their hands to interject with comments from “I never get sick!” to “I love cats!” They smile, laugh and hang on his every word.

When the session is nearly finished, the boys line up and shake Rodriguez’s hand. He encourages them to smile, look him and others in the eye and be kind to others. He stresses the importance of gratitude, of thanking people in their lives.

“He is showing these kids that reading is fun and important to their success in life,” said Alan Harkness, director of Chattahoochee Valley Libraries. “But just as important is the mentorship that he provides at a critical moment in their lives.”

The program ends with a wrap-up party at the Columbus Public Library that celebrates the boys and includes their families and GUYS READ volunteers. Each

Boys may improve reading by one-and-a-half grade levels or more through GUYS READ.

participant is given a book, and additional books are donated to school libraries.

“As a component unit of the local school district, the Chattahoochee Valley Libraries have been tremendously successful in forging strong relationships with educators and media specialists in our community,” said Director Alan Harkness. “We are a natural partner to bridge learning gaps through less traditional models such as special reading programs and library resources that foster reading improvement.”

The program has grown from eight schools to 17, with 170 boys participating in 2019. Chattahoochee Valley Libraries hopes to grow the program to all 32 elementary schools in the district. GUYS READ is funded locally by Wells Fargo. ■

Rural libraries are essential to their communities

Deborah Hakes



Elizabeth Gomez and her three-year-old daughter visit the Pearson Library weekly to read and color, after the local health department recommended the library as a great place to build early literacy skills. The Pearson, Ga., population is 2,100.

The front door to the Ambrose Library is always open during business hours, red and silver hand-painted letters spelling “Welcome” on one side and “Hola” on the other. From inside the small brick building, you can hear children at the playground next door and the occasional train passing through this south Georgia town of 400 residents.

The library’s three public computers provide the only free broadband access in the community, and three days a week, you can usually find local artist Sule Opro using one of them.

“From the Ambrose Library I can travel the world,” Sule said. “I come here to research my next project, catch up on current events and see countries I may never visit.”

Sule believes that the library is an oasis of resources for him and other community members. “While I’m here, I see people dropping off books and sharing conversation, and kids coming in for storytime and socialization.”

Rural Georgia libraries like Ambrose, one of six branches in the Satilla Regional Library System, address significant challenges in their communities by providing computer and broadband access, building employment skills for patrons and strengthening literacy for all ages. In a place like Ambrose, where the median household income is around \$22,000, people can’t find these resources anywhere else locally.

The Satilla system also has partnerships with regional attractions including the Okefenokee Swamp Park, Jacksonville Zoo, Flint River Aquarium and the Georgia Agrirama in Tifton, allowing patrons to check out passes for free admission

for cultural enrichment.

Ambrose Branch Manager Sue Hepworth enjoys being a part of the small community and wants to keep developing library programming to meet its needs. She hopes to increase Spanish-language materials, introduce computer skills workshops and find ways to better reach the residents who live on nearby farms.

“The town residents and officials here love their library,” she said. “I want this to be a place where everyone feels welcome to learn and read and can access the resources they need to achieve their goals.”

On the other side of the state, the Cherokee Regional Library System serves two rural counties that are divided by a mountain, near the borders of Tennessee and Alabama. Lack of public trans-

“There are plenty of people in rural areas who have no daily access to technology. They may not need it every day, but the library has it when they do.” - Hart County Library Director Richard Sanders



All public libraries in Georgia have free high-speed internet, and Georgia is the only state that offers matching funds to completely cover a library's internet service bill.

Transportation can be a barrier for potential patrons to access a library, so the system partnered with schools to send a digital library card application home with every child the first week of school.

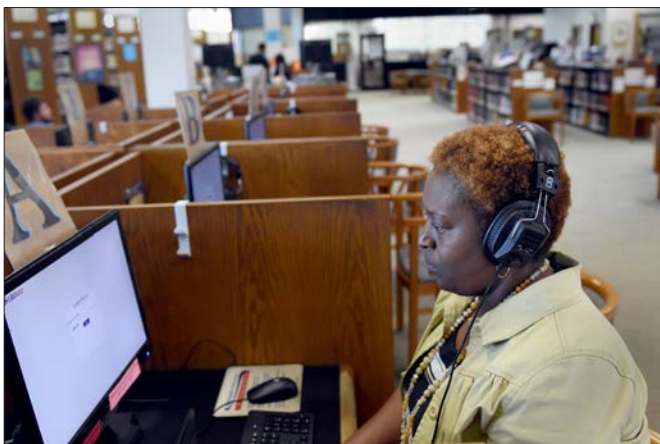
Their initial launch in fall 2018 reached over 3,000 students and their families, resulting in nearly 500 digital card sign-ups so far. The library has set a goal to have every child in their school system obtain a library card.

"There are many parents and caregivers in our community who are unaware of what the library offers and how it can impact their child's educational journey," said Lecia Eubanks, director of the Cherokee Regional Library System. "This project has the potential to make a big difference for many students in our region."

The e-card allows students to digitally access e-books, the GALILEO research database, Mango Languages, Learning Express tutorials and tests and more from beyond the library walls. A secondary benefit has been increased enthusiasm from students with an e-card to visit a library.

"We recently had a kindergartner and her mother visit the library for the first time," said Eubanks. "Her mother said the child had been begging to come to the library ever since she had gotten her e-card. She left with a bag full of books - this is exactly the type of response that lets us know we are on the right track with our e-card outreach."

The services provided by rural libraries are as unique as the different communities in which they are located. In northeast Georgia, the Hart County



Photos by Deborah Hakes

"Internet access at the library is a lifeline for many residents of Douglas," said Kandis Mingo, who used Satilla Regional Library's computers, printers, resources and internet as she obtained her master's degree in criminal justice. Even though she now has internet access at home, she still visits the library to look for potential jobs or to check out a good book. The Douglas, Ga., population is 11,400.



Library's single branch serves a county of 25,000 people.

The library finds creative ways to host programs such as weekly yoga and Zumba - funded entirely through a voluntary tip jar for instructors, a Walking Dead day complete with zombie children roaming stacks of books, and Skype visits from authors to book discussion groups. Their local Friends of the Library group funds all their newspaper and magazine subscriptions, new best-selling books each month and some Summer Reading Program activities.

"Rural libraries often must do more with less," said Director Richard Sanders. "Our uniqueness is the level of personal, welcoming service we can provide our patrons with a staff of mostly long-time employees. And while we can often be more responsive to requests for materials or programming, budget limitations mean we can't do some things. Fortunately, with networks like PINES, we can facilitate access to more resources even if we aren't providing them directly."

Hart County Library is deeply embedded in the community, with groups meeting there regularly to sew clothes for babies, stitch quilts for charity fundraisers, discuss books by local authors and more. It's also a critical technology access point.

"The local McDonalds may have Wi-Fi, but they aren't providing the computer to let people get online or printers for the papers they may need,"

said Sanders. "There are plenty of people in rural areas who have no daily access to technology. They may not need it every day, but the library has it when they do." ■



"From this little library, a person can access the PINES system of more than 11 million shared library materials across Georgia, and within a week it will be here. PINES creates equity no matter where you live." - Nicholls Branch Manager Bobbie McGray.

Libraries boost economic development and local workforce skills

The value of public libraries has shifted way beyond books, with libraries serving as lifelong learning centers that tangibly impact local economic and workforce development.

All public libraries provide resources to build marketable job skills through GALILEO's Learning Express Library, and many libraries also share consumer information for startups, host small business workshops and more.

"Georgia's public libraries offer tools for workers to gain skills and open doors to new opportunities," said State Librarian Julie Walker. "Libraries

also maintain a very personal, local connection in their communities. After helping someone gain resume skills, we have examples of librarians loaning out their tie to a patron for a job interview!"

In Macon, the Middle Georgia Regional Library has a Business and Nonprofit Center that provides training and cooperative work space, helping grant seekers research and prepare thorough proposals.

Business owner Charise Stephens visits the library's Business and Nonprofit Center at least weekly for everything from researching grant opportunities to taking workshops on 3D printing.

"When you own a small business, you have limited time and need to use it in the most strategic



Roy Cummings

Hall County Library and Piedmont Regional Library systems partner with SCORE Northeast Georgia to host free small business workshops.



way possible,” said Charise. “This library has great courses on grant searches, budget proposals - I go to all of the workshops. The library saves me time and is such a great resource; it is a wealth of knowledge.”

Charise runs the Georgia Wellness and Fitness Festival, which has expanded from local to state-wide in its sixth year, as well as U Create Macon, which focuses on youth empowerment and will partner with the library this summer to encourage year-round reading.

According to Library Journal, one of the most pressing needs facing communities is upskilling their local workforce. As nontraditional employment or automation requires people to gain new skills, libraries are increasingly playing an integral role in workforce development.

Hall County Library and Piedmont Regional Library systems partner with SCORE Northeast Georgia to host free small business workshops. The workshops are presented by SCORE mentors, who are usually retired businesspeople who volunteer to share their expertise.

“The library saves me time and is such a great resource; it is a wealth of knowledge.”

- Macon business owner
Charise Stephens

Blackshear Place Library, part of the Hall County Library System, held a recent training for business owners to build a marketing plan.

Instructor Leo Cortjens shared tips with attendees such as how and when to market their business and how to manage their promotional budget. For Cortjens, the library is a natural place to hold the workshops because small business owners are already coming there for research and skill-building.

Attendee Michael Paywala agrees.

“As a bootstrapping entrepreneur, I look for free community resources that can help me grow my business,” said Michael Paywala, owner of HKP Non-Emergency Medical Transportation, LLC. “While visiting the Goodwill Career Center, I saw an advertisement for the SCORE workshop at the Hall County Library, thought it looked interesting and useful, so I decided to come. I’m glad I did.”

Other library systems in Georgia offer monthly resume coaching, financial literacy series, entrepreneurial workshops and career buses.

In Brooks County Public Library, a single-branch system serving the 16,000 residents of Brooks County, assistance is often more informal.

“Our librarians usually have a close relationship with patrons and are constantly looking out for them,” said Director Scott Routsong. “When we have a job fair coming up, we may call some people to give them a heads up. We often know the struggles that they are going through and when they get a job, it warms our hearts as they truly appreciate someone caring.”

Visit your local library to learn what local workshops and resources are offered near you. ■



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Information presented in this newsletter will be provided in alternative formats on request. For more information about Georgia's libraries, visit georgialibraries.org

Chattahoochee Nature Center



We are pleased to announce the new Chattahoochee Nature Center Library Family Pass! The pass admits up to four people to the center for free general admission. Visit your library to check out the pass, and go to georgialibraries.org to learn about all our partnerships with great organizations around the state.