

LIBRARY NEWS

Sharing stories of Georgia libraries transforming lives and communities

Volume 19, Issue 1, Fall 2021



Local support helps communities and libraries thrive

Libraries go green

GLS keeps people reading with braille and audio books



GEORGIA PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE

Libraries go green

Incorporating renewable energy sources can play an important role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, as well as saving libraries and their patrons money. Across Georgia, several public libraries have invested in renewable energy through partnerships or grant funding.

Georgia Power brings electric vehicle charging to Oakland Library

Georgia Power launched electric vehicle (EV) chargers at the Oakland Library in Lee County, Georgia, in August 2021, as part of a statewide initiative to enable EV adoption and connect communities. "As an information center that is constantly evolving to include new technologies for the community inside and outside its walls, the library is proud to be a part of Georgia Power's network of safe, reliable and convenient charging infrastructure," said Library Director Claire Leavy.

The installation represents the newest technology in EV fast chargers. A vehicle can charge enough to go 100 miles from a 12-minute charge while charging at 125 kW.

"EV charging stations at libraries make so much sense," said State Librarian Julie Walker. "While the vehicle is charging, patrons can use library computers to check email or maps, and check out books for the family. As more manufacturers make electric vehicles, the demand for charging stations will only grow, and libraries are a logical location in many communities."

Braselton Library EV chargers funded through a grant

The Braselton Library installed electric vehicle charging stations back in 2018, courtesy of a grant awarded to the Town of Braselton. The chargers made sense locally, because the town has a wide path for golf carts to be driven from neighborhoods to retail buildings, restaurants, and offices in the Highway 211 area. The town also is located near the Panoz car company, which is building the first all-electric road-racing sports car.

"We have actually gained patrons because of the charging stations," said Lori Hayes, library manager. "One frequent user came to us instead of another

The electric vehicle chargers at Oakland Library represent the newest technology. A vehicle can charge enough to go 100 miles from a 12-minute charge while charging at 125 kW.



Liz Sandefur

library closer to his house because we had the chargers.”

Athens incorporates EV chargers and a solar garden

Two electric vehicle charging stations were installed at Athens-Clarke County Library in 2015. They are part of a network located throughout the county at parks and public parking decks that was funded by a grant from the Charge Georgia program and rebates from Georgia Power. The library’s central location makes it a convenient spot for residents who need to charge their electric cars. The charging stations complement the library’s 2013 silver LEED-certified renovation. Cars charging as their drivers spend time inside the library are a frequent sight.

The library also has a unique solar garden installation through a \$100,000 grant from EBSCO Information Services to reduce environmental impact and electric costs. This solar installation was completed in 2018 with technical assistance from the Athens-Clarke County Sustainability Office. The installation features two fixtures that provide energy to the library facilities, including one that follows the movement of the sun. The solar garden is a useful and educational experience that demonstrates that just as plants get their energy from the sun, so can we. The library has a touch-screen kiosk, where visitors can monitor the garden’s energy output.

Solar panels provide free electricity in Hog Hammock

One of Georgia’s most unexpected libraries sits about 20 minutes off the southeast coast on Sapelo Island, a state-protected territory only accessible by ferry boat or aircraft. At the center of the island’s Hog Hammock community sits a small, blue, former two-room schoolhouse: the Hog Hammock Public Library.

In 2019, the library installed solar panels that provide electricity. Tim Echols, vice chairman of the Georgia Public Service Commission, was instrumental in this project by engaging the Hog Hammock Foundation and several community partners to build the solar pavilion and install the 16 panels. The installation will provide free electricity to the library for the next 30 years.

“Helping libraries save money on their power bills in poor areas of our state like the Sapelo branch makes them more sustainable,” said Tim Echols.

For other libraries considering solar power, Echols has this advice: “Libraries that have a fairly new roof or an outside gazebo or pavilion are great candidates for solar panels. By placing solar on libraries, we are helping patrons learn about renewable energy and its benefits for the building and the grid,” he said.

Patrons across Georgia can save money through the Kill-A-Watt meter loan program

All Georgia library patrons can check out a Kill-A-Watt meter from any public library for two weeks. Simply plug appliances and electronic devices into the meter instead of the wall outlet directly. By doing so, the device shows how many kilowatt hours that particular appliance or electronic device uses, whether it is switched on, running, idle, or in stand-by mode. This allows patrons to determine the dollar amount it costs to keep that particular appliance or device plugged in. Over the years the Kill-A-Watt meter has been available in libraries, residents have saved more than \$70,000 in the purchase price of a meter and additional thousands off annual electric bills. ■



Rhiannon Eades

“I use the charging station at the library once a week. It takes an hour or two. I go inside and study while my car is charging.”

- Evan Swain, early education major at the University of Georgia. In this photo, she is charging her vehicle at the Athens-Clarke County Library.



At right, scenes from the Ohoopsee Regional Library in Vidalia, Georgia, which is being renovated thanks to local and state support. The library needs a more flexible space for patrons and staff. The current building has very little room for storage, staff work space, and programming, and the air conditioning is from 1968. The library has operated on the same budget for 20 years with no increase.

ON THE COVER: Vidalia-Toombs County Library Board member Mary Moon, left, talks with Ohoopsee Regional Library Director Cameron Asbell about the renovation plans.

All photos by Rebekah Arnold.

LOCAL SUPPORT HELPS LIBRARIES AND COMMUNITIES THRIVE

On any given afternoon in the rural town of Vidalia, Georgia, best known for the delicious sweet onions it produces each spring, the library is full of local residents. Kids participate in STEM programming, read books, or try out the 3D printer, while adults use the free Wi-Fi to apply for jobs or stay connected. Tutors and their clients spread across tables in the main room. A local preacher writes his weekly sermons using one computer. It didn't used to be like this.

Five years ago, when Cameron Asbell started her job as director of the Ohoopsee Regional Library in Vidalia, it was dark. "Literally dark," she said. "I walked into the building and thought it hadn't opened yet. There were no patrons in there, and the lights were so dim, I didn't realize they were on." Staff had attached adhesive, motion-sensitive lights to the book stacks just to see the titles. "On my second day, I had to put a tarp on the bookshelves to protect them from rain coming through the leaky roof. I thought, 'What have I gotten myself into?'"

The community didn't support its library, and it showed. One resident suggested that the best thing that could happen to the library was to bulldoze it and build a Starbucks so there would be something of value on the lot.

Asbell went with the library board to community leaders to talk about the library. "We were not well-received," she said, laughing. "They kept saying things like, 'the library makes promises and doesn't keep them.' I spent the next few years applying for every grant I could, making updates, and following through. We created a STEM room and received a grant to fix the lights. Then I would visit funder of-

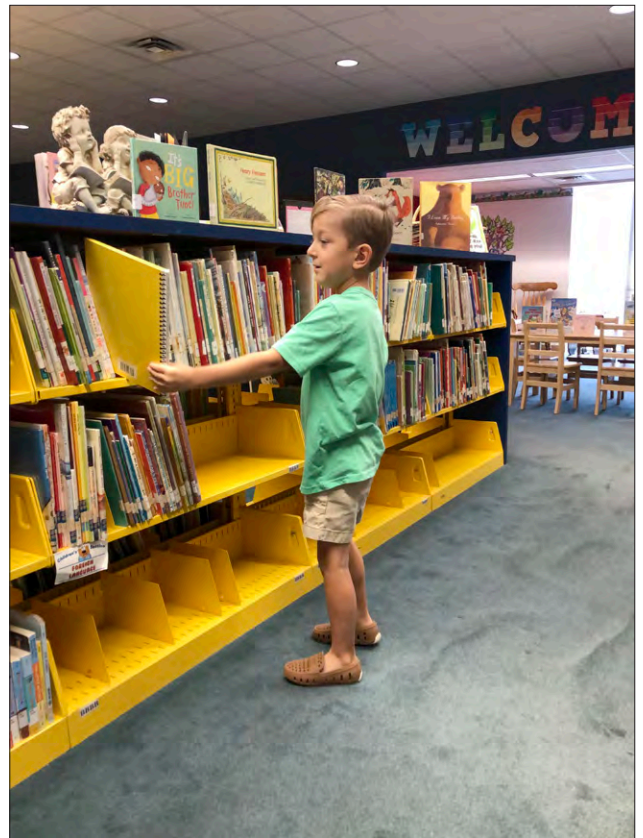
fices to tell them what we did. By now they knew my face. I worked to change the library's culture. I would ask my staff, 'What does it cost you to say yes?'"

She was laying the groundwork for community support, but what the library really needed was money. They had operated on the same budget, without any increase, for 20 years. Roofs leaked, turning on the air conditioning unit from 1968 was a safety risk, and patrons didn't have space to sit and read. It was becoming nearly impossible to operate the library's seven different branches across four counties, including a nationally known genealogical library. City officials asked them to close or consolidate a branch.

The library had applied for \$2 million in funding from the state of Georgia to renovate their main branch in Vidalia, but funds would not be granted until the library could obtain \$650,000 in matching local funds.

It was at that point, in spring 2020, that Asbell met someone who could help build needed support for local funding. He was mowing the library's lawn.

"A branch manager approached me to say that a strange man was mowing our lawn," said Asbell. "I asked, 'how strange?'" It turned out that a concerned community member was mowing the library's lawn simply because it needed to be mowed. That community member happened to be Howard Holman, Vidalia's "Man of the Year," who had held many officer positions in local civic clubs. He helped build the local new hospital, cancer center, and the Boys and Girls Club. When he came back to trim some trees a few weeks



“Community support for libraries is vital to their success, and good libraries, in turn, support their community’s needs.”

later, Asbell asked him to serve on the library’s board.

Holman attended the next board meeting, where Asbell presented a budget showing reduced open hours and staffing, trying to keep the library operating despite the lack of funding. Even though the state funds were available, the library had no support to raise the local matching funds.

“I told her, we are going to turn this ship around,” said Holman. He assembled a group of new board members who were active and in-

One resident suggested that the best thing that could happen to the library was to **bulldoze it and build a Starbucks**, so there would be something of value on the lot.

fluential in the community - former city council members, journalists, and fundraisers. “We met with the mayor, city manager, and many others to explain why the library was so important. Our library is a lifeline for many in our community. No one had

ever grabbed them by the collar and said, ‘This is important.’”

Soon, the city had pledged \$100,000 toward the library renovation. The county followed with a \$100,000 donation, and within 60 days, they had raised the needed matching funds of \$650,000.

“This project would not have happened without a strong and active library board and director,” said State Sen. Blake Tillery. “Few other rural communities can match the local fundraising accomplishment, and the citizens in this area showed they value this asset.”

In a county where more than a third of households lack internet access, the library is vital.

“We are the only place that does what we do,” said board member and former city council member Lisa Chesser. “Our library contributes an important piece to the quality of life in our small town. When everything shut down during the pandemic, the library was there with virtual programming and curbside service, as well as free internet in the parking lot.”

Community support has also grown - prior to the pandemic closures, the library’s usage went up 300 percent over the past several years. More books are being checked out, kids are attending programming, and patrons know each other and the library staff. At the Ochoopee Regional Library headquarters in Vidalia, the board is currently reviewing ren-

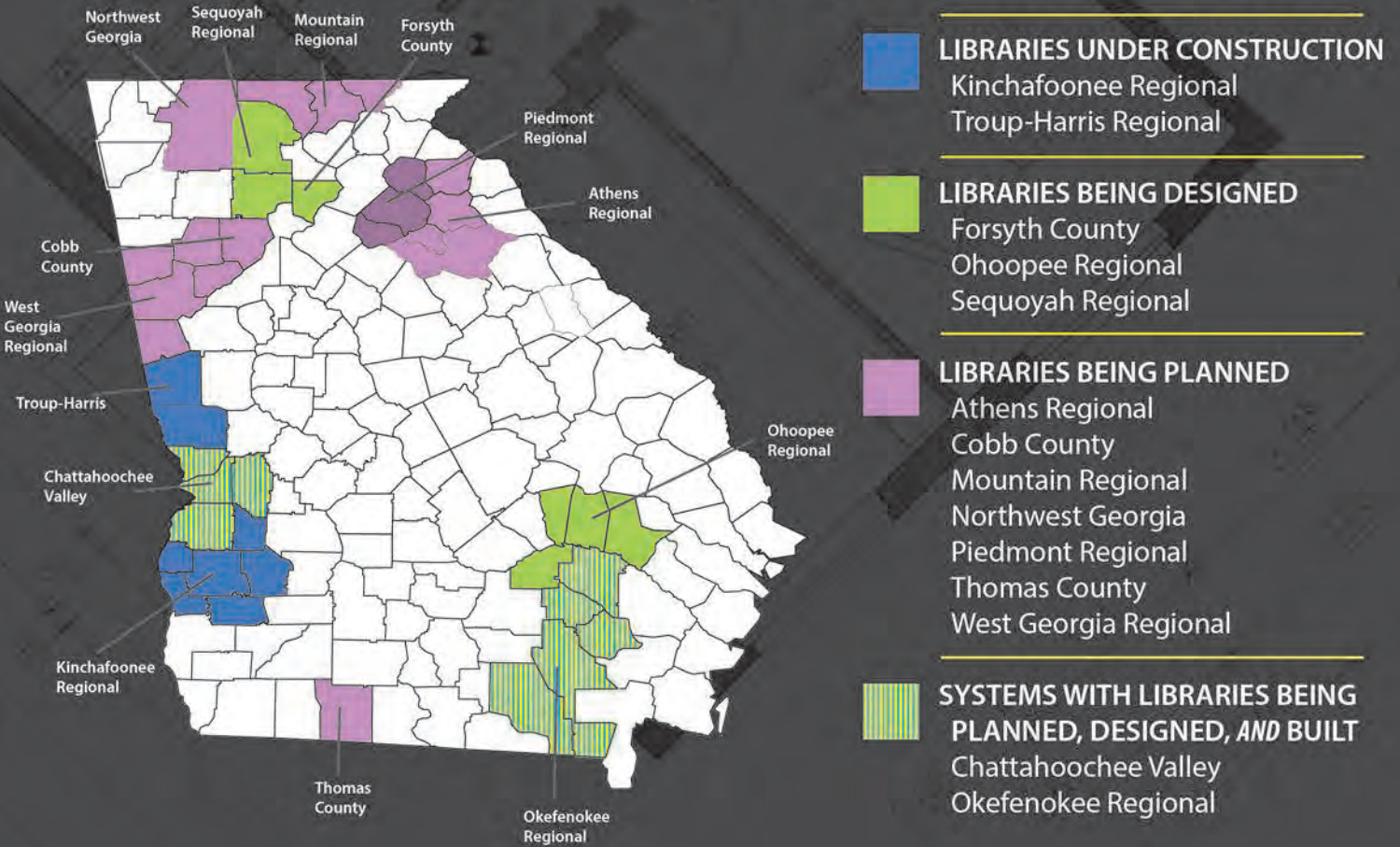
ovation plans, which will get underway this fall. The updated space will include a teaching kitchen, SPARK LAB for weekly kids’ programming, study rooms with smartboards, and movable shelves so the space can be adjusted as needs change.

“So many people in the community are excited about this project,” said Cameron Asbell. “Voters are telling our local legislators that the library is important and valuable, and they are listening.”

Georgia Public Library Service helps fund library renovation and construction by recommending projects to the Georgia General Assembly for funding of up to \$2 million dollars per project. Typically, four to five projects are approved per year.

“Support for libraries bubbles up from the community to the state,” said Nathan Rall, director of library planning and construction at GPLS. “Once libraries apply for state funding, local communities must match a certain percentage in order to be considered. Community members advocate for support by contacting the Senate and House committee leaders for higher education appropriations. Community support for libraries is vital to their success, and good libraries, in turn, support their community’s needs.” ■

Where are libraries being built or renovated in GA?



How are library construction projects funded?

- Public libraries apply through Georgia Public Library Service for a grant for new construction or major renovation and repair funding.
- GPLS recommends approximately 10 projects annually to the Georgia General Assembly for consideration. Communities must have a percentage of local funding to support the project. Community members advocate for support of their project by contacting the Senate and House committee leaders for higher education appropriations.
- The legislature approves four to five projects per year.
- About 90 percent of library construction or renovation funding comes from the state of Georgia, for the first \$1 million of the project. Funding is split evenly between the state of Georgia and local funding for up to \$1 million of additional funding.

How does your community support its library? Tell us by emailing communications@georgialibraries.org.

WHEN COMMUNITIES SUPPORT THEIR LIBRARIES, EVERYONE WINS

The **Chestatee Regional Library System** recently opened the new Lumpkin County Library, in part due to strong local support. The old building did not meet American Disability Act standards, and it was so small that patrons did not have room to comfortably utilize the space.

The new building added 12,000 square feet of space, including four tutor rooms, conference and technology rooms, and a computer lab. There is space for children's activities, STEM materials, and teens.

Several community members purchased naming rights to rooms in the library. The county was able to purchase all of the equipment, technology, and furniture that was requested. The new space will serve the community for years to come.

Celebrating their 25th anniversary this year as an independent library system, the **Forsyth County Public Library** enjoys tremendous community support for its four branches (a fifth is scheduled for completion in 2023). A dedicated friends and advocates group, as well as many local partnerships, are critical components of their success.

As the county has grown and diversified, the library has evolved to meet its community needs through the addition of an extensive world languages collection in Hindi, Korean, Mandarin, Marathi, Spanish, Tamil, Telugu, and more; outreach to senior centers, parks, and schools; and regular bookmobile stops to serve residents who have difficulty traveling to their branches.

Library use in Forsyth County has grown at a steadily higher rate than its population. FCPL's circulation at its two branches in FY2001 was 857,121, compared with 2,694,563 at its four branches in FY2021, a 214 percent increase. Forsyth County Public Library prides itself on serving the entire community.

In 2020, **Marshes of Glynn Libraries** received an anonymous request asking how the library could support early literacy efforts in Glynn County if they received \$5,000, \$10,000, or \$25,000.

An eventual donation of \$25,000 led to the creation of the Take 5 outreach program.

The library partnered with FACES Prekindergarten Center and Leaps and Bounds programs located in Bruns-

wick, which serves the lowest socioeconomic area in the county. For five weeks, the 200 students at the schools each received a new Take 5 bag. The fabric tote bags contained two high-quality books directly tied into that week's theme, toys that helped reinforce that week's theme, a flyer for caregivers with instructions on how to guide their child with that week's kit, and a giveaway book.

"This was an easy program for us with a huge amount of impact in parental involvement," said Library Director Geri Mullis. "After seeing the program's success, we have received additional private funds to continue as well as have applied for federal funding to grow the program to every public pre-K program in our county."

Local support for libraries builds when libraries support their communities. The **Athens Regional Library System** looks for ways to strengthen these relationships by partnering with local businesses and organizations across their region (Athens-Clarke, Franklin, Madison, Oconee and Oglethorpe counties).

They recently ran a campaign with 30 local businesses to help promote library cards during National Library Card Sign-Up Month, called Get Library Carded.

The participating businesses each offered a discount or promotion when customers presented a library card at checkout, and many of the businesses also donated gift cards to give to patrons in prize drawings.

Starting in April 2021, Athens-Clarke County Library has also worked with a group of local nonprofit organizations, agencies, businesses, and community leaders to hold a series of virtual community discussions and events surrounding the book "Stamped: Racism, Anti-racism and You" by Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi, funded by a federal grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

As part of One Book Athens: One Book, Many Stories, residents had the opportunity to get free copies of the book available at various locations around Athens, including free audiobooks, and the library was able to strengthen community bonds through dialogue.

The initiative even hosted a free virtual event with authors Reynolds, Kendi and Dr. Sonja Cherry-Paul, and moderated by Dr. Valerie Boyd of University of Georgia, in July 2021. ■

GLS keeps people reading with audio books and braille

Derrean Tucker, 22, is studying social science and psychology at West Georgia Technical College. He wants to be a guidance counselor for the blind, in order to help people meet their life's goals despite barriers they may face - just as individuals did for him when he lost his vision four years ago due to a detached retina from head trauma.

"I had to learn a new way to go about my day-to-day activities," he said. Besides attending college full time, he also is running for the secretary position for the Georgia affiliate of the National Federation for the Blind.

Derrean uses a talking book machine from Georgia Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (GLS) to read audio books of his school materials as well as suspense and detective novels.

"GLS allows those with disabilities to keep doing things they did before they lost their vision," said Derrean. "I can access literature and pursue my degree."

Through Georgia Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled, Georgia Public Library Service provides library services for individuals who are blind or whose physical abilities require the use of books and magazines in audio format or in braille. GLS lends talking books and the easy-to-use talking book players needed to use them free of charge. GLS also offers talking books and magazines online and through the Braille and Audio Reading Download (BARD) Mobile app. Reader advisors are available to help patrons with any questions or to select books via phone. GLS was formerly known as GLASS; the name was changed this summer to better reflect the program's services.

Keith Schuermann



Derrean Tucker, 22, uses a GLS talking book machine to read books for his university studies. "I can access literature and pursue my degree," he said.

Andi Counts



Audio books from GLS kept Alma Abernathy's spirits up during the COVID-19 isolation of long-term care residents. "Being able to read through GLS lifted her spirits, and this was so comforting to me," said Andi Counts, her daughter.

GLS isn't just for those who are blind. Individuals also are eligible if they are low vision, physically unable to hold a book and turn the page, or have reading disabilities such as dyslexia.

"I used to go to the library a lot and get books with regular print," said Elizabeth Bennett, 100. "Then I went to large print, and then it got to the point where I couldn't see the books well on the shelves."

Her librarian recommended GLS, and now she is able to independently select books from her home over the phone, which are mailed to her free of charge and she returns via a self-addressed package.

"I order six or seven at a time and as I read one, I put it back in the mail," she said. "My favorite thing to do is read, which is a good thing, because at 100, there isn't much else I can do!"

She also participates in a monthly book club with other GLS patrons via phone. The club offers a chance for socialization, as the seven members get to know each other and talk about good books. Her favorite book so far is "Where the Crawdads Sing."

GLS services allow people to keep reading on their own. It provides a sense of community, independence, and entertainment for those who utilize it. GLS also provides a sense of comfort for caregivers, such as Andi Counts.

"My mom developed severe macular degeneration during the last decade of her life and used the GLS BARD system to listen to audio books from 2013 until her death in January 2021," said Andi Counts.

"Books became her only entertainment lifeline during the COVID-19 isolation of long-term care residents. During our frequent calls, she would tell me what she was reading and whether it was a 'goodie' or not so great. She would sometimes get what she called a 'doozie,' and we would joke about her librarian's (that was me) poor selections. It not only gave her something to do to relieve the monotony, but gave us something to talk and laugh about. Being able to read through GLS lifted her spirits, and this was so comforting to me," she said.

SIGN UP FOR GLS

The GLS application can be filled out by hand or computer and has basic questions such as name, address, qualifying condition, and the types of reading materials that interest the patron. The application includes a place for the certifying authority to sign. After GLS receives the application via postal service or email, they will be in touch to provide the service delivery in the way that the patron prefers.

Contact Georgia Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled: 800-248-6701, gls@georgialibraries.org, or gls.georgialibraries.org. ■



Keith Schuerrmann

"GLS allows those with disabilities to keep doing things they did before they lost their vision. I can access literature and pursue my degree."

- Derrean Tucker, 22



**Be independent.
Be inspired.**

The Georgia Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled program allows you to continue reading on your own.

What Is the Braille and Talking Book Program?

The braille and talking book program is a free library service administered by the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS), Library of Congress. The program is provided through a nationwide network of cooperating libraries that lend reading materials to residents of the United States and its territories and U.S. citizens living abroad who are unable to read or use regular print materials because of a visual or physical disability. Anyone, regardless of age, who experiences blindness, low vision or the inability to hold a book and turn pages may participate in the braille and talking book program.

The service is also available to people with reading disabilities such as dyslexia. Georgia Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (GLS) lends high-quality talking books and the easy-to-use talking-book players needed to use them free of charge. The materials are circulated by postage-free mail. In addition, GLS offers access to large print books and to audio or braille magazines.

Talking books and magazines in audio and braille formats are available online and on the go through the Braille and Audio Reading Download (BARD) service and the BARD Mobile app for smartphones and tablets.



APPLY FOR THE SERVICE TODAY!

Call 1 (800) 248-6701
or visit gls.georgialibraries.org

Georgia Library Service (GLS) for the Blind and Print Disabled administers Georgia's talking book and braille program so Georgians who are unable to read standard print due to a disability get accessible reading material at no cost!



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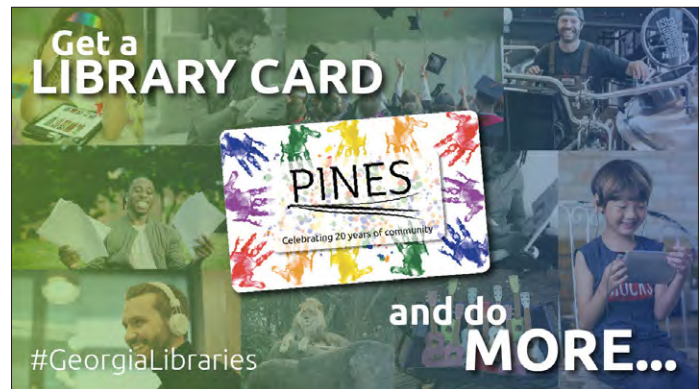
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