



LIBRARY NEWS

Sharing stories of Georgia libraries transforming lives and communities

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LeRoy Childs posthumously honored for broadening library services to rural poor



Libraries support 2020 Census through technology, outreach

Next Chapter provides life skills training, and a second chance, for county jail inmates



GEORGIA PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE

Libraries support 2020 Census through technology, outreach and information sharing



Census GA

Because the Census will take place primarily online for the first time, internet access could be a barrier for some to complete their form. Public libraries will be an important part of the effort - all public libraries in Georgia offer free high-speed internet, and in many rural communities may offer the only free internet access in town.

“By having a public library in every county, we have the opportunity to make sure people have access to that free internet connection,” said Wendy Cornelisen, assistant state librarian at Georgia Public Library Service. “They don’t have to own their own device; they don’t have to pay for an internet connection at home.”

West Georgia Regional Library Director Jeremy Snell is leading the local Complete Count Committee. These volunteer committees are intended to increase awareness and motivate residents to respond to the 2020 Census.

“It’s very important for libraries to be at the table for the Census,” said Snell. “As trusted public institutions, libraries already interface with a number of hard-to-count populations, such as children age 0-5 and their caregivers, those experiencing homelessness and college students. Our system is making use of the technology funding provided by the Georgia General Assembly to place kiosks in each of our 19 facilities to allow a member of the community to complete the Census without needing a library card or providing any identifying information. Essentially, we want the experience to be similar to having the technology at home.”

The Brooks County Public Library, Ochopee Regional Library and the Carrie Dorsey Perry Memorial Library in Nashville, Georgia, were among the 59 libraries selected nationally by the American Library Association to receive Library Census Equity Fund minigrants to bolster services to hard-to-count communities and help achieve a complete count.

The 2020 Census will have far-reaching impacts for political representation and government funding. Public libraries across Georgia are supporting a complete count through technology, outreach events and information sharing.

These efforts are so important that in 2019, the Georgia General Assembly dedicated \$1 million to libraries specifically for technology that facilitates Census completion. Libraries across the state have utilized these funds to expand the number of computers, tablets and in some cases, mobile hotspots.

The Carrie Dorsey Perry Memorial Library in Nashville, Georgia, will host events in three communities, featuring food and activities, along with tablets and hotspots for residents to complete their Census.

“With Berrien County among the hard-to-count areas, we are hopeful that these events will help facilitate census completion and emphasize the importance of being counted,”-said Branch Manager Angi Hughes. “As an added bonus, we will be able to reach out to our communities to provide information about general library services.”

The counties served by the Ohoopie Regional Library have very little internet coverage as well, with only 60 percent of Toombs County residents having access to satellite internet.

“We are working with the local Complete Count Committees to provide Wi-Fi hotspots and Chromebooks in mobile Census units that we will take out to churches, recreational departments, senior centers, migrant housing, and anywhere else they need us,” said Director Cameron Asbell.

“We are promoting the Census now at events, telling people that there isn’t anything to fear and that the Census provides needed resources determined by the count of people. We are providing the technology, as we partner with different communities and the people they trust to help us open the doors. Our goal is to go out to where people gather.” ■

Complete your Census form using your public library’s free internet and resources. Ask your librarian for more information.

Next Chapter provides life skills training, and a second chance, for county jail inmates

Finding an innovative way to fit the needs of their community is something for the Dade County Public Library to take pride in, just as they hope Next Chapter may offer a model for other Georgia public libraries to emulate.

For individuals leaving Dade County Jail in Trenton, Georgia, the barriers to re-entering normal life in the community may feel unsurmountable. A large percentage of inmates don’t know how to use a computer, much less how to create a resume or navigate the internet in search for a job.

“The biggest failure in helping our inmates succeed in post-jail life is the very basics,” said Captain Joseph Chambers of the Dade County Sheriff’s Office. “Stuff we take for granted, like how to open a checking account, rent an apartment, or pay bills online.”

A collaboration among the public library, Sheriff’s Office, and Bank of Dade seeks to reduce the county’s 70 percent recidivism rate through an enrichment program called Next Chapter, which promotes digital literacy, economic self-sufficiency, and stable living for inmates of the Dade County Jail. The Next Chapter program is set to launch in its entirety by the end of summer 2020.

“Local jails must rely on local funding to provide educational resources to their inmates, but most rural areas cannot afford to fund this type of support,” said Marshana Sharp, manager of the Dade County Public Library. “We need these resources at the local level, when incarceration periods are short and there is still a chance for individuals to remake their lives to prevent a lifetime of repeat incarceration and separation from families.”

The idea that would develop into Next Chapter began at the library, which has utilized inmate labor for small projects like moving furniture or hanging decorations for years.

Through these projects, the library has been a positive role model in the lives of many inmates, who discovered that the library is a place where they can learn about computers, technology, and more. More than one inmate has asked library staff, “Can you teach us while we are in jail? And

can you do it in a way that will help us change our lives once we've been released?"

Library Manager Marshana Sharp took this request to heart.

"Marshana is highly respected among the inmates," said Captain Chambers. "She would have a grown man cutting up a paper choo choo train at the library, and this 6-foot-4-inch guy would be competing with another inmate cutting out an airplane to see whose is better! She talks with them, listens to their stories, and she saw education was a gap in their success."

Marshana reached out to Captain Chambers as well as Seth Houts, technology specialist for Next Chapter and assistant vice president of Bank of Dade, to figure out how they could design a program.

Photos by Deborah Hakes



"Being from a small town means we have no bureaucracy. There were no committees, no board meetings. Just three people with an idea deciding how to implement it." - Seth Houts, Bank of Dade

"This is a unique collaboration," said Houts. "Being from a small town means we have no bureaucracy. There were no committees, no board meetings. Just three people with an idea deciding how to implement it."

They developed Next Chapter in part by asking repeat offenders what resources they thought were needed to keep them out of jail for good.

"The answers we heard time and time again were technology education, GED certification, and help getting identification and documentation," said Marshana Sharp. "The library has worked directly with the Dade County Jail to develop tracks of coursework that address each need."

The foundation of each track is to help individuals become stable, self-sufficient citizens with the ability to navigate both the real and digital world.

Live GED classes will be held at the jail using a portable projector cart developed by Seth Houts. Other live lecture series will be offered using the same equipment.

Captain Chambers identifies inmates he believes may benefit from Next Chapter and invites them to participate; he follows their progress and assigns courses as needed.

Next Chapter was given a boost when the Dade County Public Library received a grant from the Institute for Library and Museum Services to fully fund a videographer for one year to film and edit

"I took parenting classes through Next Chapter. I also learned about nutrition and health, and then I started the GED track. I wanted to show my son that I could still turn my life around with support from the community. If I hadn't done Next Chapter, I would be back in jail."

- Taylor Daniels

coursework. Local organizations and residents can participate by teaching videos sharing their own skills.

“It’s characteristic of this town to collaborate; there aren’t many degrees of separation here,” said Houts. “We hope Next Chapter has an impact and grows. Let’s get people back in the community as contributing members of society.”

Local resident Taylor Daniels, 24, has been incarcerated five times in 10 years, but he has remained out since August 2019. In 2018, Captain Chambers identified him first as an inmate worker to the library, where he worked with Marshana Sharp, and then as an initial test participant for Next Chapter.

“I felt their trust and support when they allowed me to work at the library, and it showed me that I have more going for me than I thought,” said Taylor. “I wanted to get it right. I took parenting classes through Next Chapter. I also learned about nutrition and health, and then I started the GED track.”

For Daniels, another turning point was when his 4-year-old son told him that when he grew up, he wanted to “go to jail like daddy.”

“I reflected on myself and began to talk positively; I wanted to show my son that I could still turn my life around with support from the community,” said Daniels. “If I hadn’t done Next Chapter, I would be back in jail.”

Now Taylor is employed at a local mechanic shop and becoming more involved in his son’s life.

“Children thrive in stable homes with stable parents,” said Sharp. “The current caregivers of these children, whether they are grandparents, single parents or family members, will benefit by having their loved one home and taking care of him or herself.”

Next Chapter is truly a community initiative. Judges are excited to have an educational resource to include in the sentencing of inmates. Local groups are eager to help: The Hands Up Ministry has agreed to help program graduates find housing and jobs and several local employers said they will hire them.

In this county of 16,285 residents, everyone stands to benefit from the success of Next Chapter. ■



Dade County Public Library received a grant from the Institute for Library and Museum Services to fully fund a videographer for one year to film and edit coursework. Local organizations and residents can participate by teaching videos sharing their own skills.

The library will use Niche Academy as the online platform for Next Chapter, which means content can be shared with every Niche Academy user. All Georgia public libraries have access to Niche Academy through the Georgia Public Library Service.



Dade County Library Manager Marshana Sharp, seen here with Captain Joseph Chambers (right).

“Marshana is highly respected among the inmates,” said Captain Chambers. “She would have a grown man cutting up a paper choo choo train at the library, and this 6-foot-4-inch guy would be competing with another inmate cutting out an airplane to see whose is better! She talks with them, listens to their stories, and she saw education was a gap in their success.”



Georgia Public Library Service is proud to give this year's lifetime achievement award in memory of LeRoy Childs, whose vision to broaden access to library services to the rural poor brought him state and national recognition. Childs also was Georgia's first black library director. He died in 1986 at age 63.

LeRoy Childs broadened access to libraries for rural poor

LeRoy Childs lived with purpose, with a mission to establish the library as a place for lifelong learning, a place to even the playing field for those who lacked access to formal education. He pursued this goal through his leadership at West Georgia Regional Library and in the formation of state and national library policy.

"He wanted public library service to be more accessible for everyone. He watched out for people who were poor; for those who lived on dirt roads off the beaten path," said Roni Tewksbury, who worked with Childs from 1983-1986.

When Childs completed his bachelor's degree in social sciences in 1947, a resident of Bowdon, Georgia (population 1,100 in 1950), offered him and his wife, Vivian, free room and board if they moved there from North Carolina to start a local school for the children of sharecroppers. Childs had never seen such poverty. He and his wife taught children in a barn, and even when they began to be paid a small salary, they spent it on clothing and other materials for the students.

Eventually, the school was moved into a building

in nearby Carrollton (population 7,700 in 1950). In 1951, Childs was asked by Edith Foster, director of the West Georgia Regional Library, to be the branch and bookmobile librarian at the King Street Library, which served only African American residents of Carrollton due to segregation.

"I talked with Mr. Childs about what the assignment would mean: responsibilities, challenges, dedication, sacrifice - but all-in-all, the opportunity to enrich the lives of many people and to broaden his own horizons," said Foster in her autobiography, "Yonder She Comes."

The library had very little funding. Childs was the only staff member, and it was open to the public for two afternoons each week. To better serve the region's rural, poor population, he also drove the bookmobile to nine segregated schools and six communities across five counties each month.

He recognized the lack of adult education opportunities for those in his community, and he sought to make the King Street Branch and bookmobile models that other small, rural libraries could follow.



“He saw something in me that I didn’t see in myself – potential – and he motivated me to further my education.”

- Jacine Harrison Mason

His career grew at West Georgia Regional Library, and he was eventually named director in 1976. His reputation for ideas to improve library service gained recognition at a national level.

For many years he served as 6th District public library representative, working with colleagues in Washington, D.C., to obtain substantial funds to support libraries. He was appointed by Gov. Joe Frank Harris to the Georgia Committee on the White House Conference of Libraries, a position that took him to both Washington, D.C., and to Georgia’s

Capitol to promote his ideas. He held many other statewide offices as well.

“He had the respect of all the people including the governor. Legislators always had their doors open for him,” said former Library Director Edith Foster.

Photos by Deborah Hakes

Childs actively built community partnerships to strengthen adult education at the library by working with organizations such as the American Red Cross, Public Health Department, the Carroll County Chapter of the Mental Health Association, and many more. He offered these groups library space and services and was deeply involved in developing and promoting their programming, even selecting and purchasing books for the library tailored to their curriculum.

His commitment to bringing adult education opportunities to his community was deep. For example, he partnered with a group to train local Korean and World War II veterans in agriculture. Most of the veterans had a very basic reading level, if they were literate at all. None had the opportunity to complete high school. Childs went with the agricultural instructor to veteran homes to assess their reading and then acquire tailored materials to strengthen literacy.

He detailed these efforts in his 1960 thesis at Clark Atlanta University, where he attained his Master of Science in Library Service.

Childs wrote: “These programs were generally successful and added to the educational well-being of the persons who participated. The branch library in the meantime gained new friends and patrons.”



LeRoy Childs led a school for the children of sharecroppers in Bowdon, Georgia, before becoming a librarian. He had never seen such poverty. Children learned in a barn before this school was eventually built.

He also had the respect of his staff at West Georgia Regional Library, where he served as mentor and teacher to many.

"He always had our best interest at heart," said Jacine Harrison Mason. Childs hired her as a library memory typewriter operator at age 17. "He saw something in me that I didn't see in myself - potential - and he motivated me to further my education."

Former staff describe him as a hands-on leader, willing to do whatever the job required.

"If he needed to help at the front desk checking out books, he would do it," said Mason. "Or if he got a call that they needed his advice at the Capitol, he'd be out the door."

In 1967, the local libraries were desegregated. The King Street Branch closed, and Neva Lomason Memorial Library became the location for all residents of Carrollton. Childs was assistant director of the library system at the time.

Roni Tewksbury remembers standing with Childs at the library's window one morning afterward. They looked across to an adjacent cultural arts center, where overnight someone had painted racist graffiti on the windows.

"I told Mr. Childs, 'I've never seen anything like that before,'" Tewksbury said. "He replied, 'Then you haven't lived.'"

Childs' grandson, Jason, believes this was a teaching moment. "Racism was a distraction from what he was trying to accomplish," he said. "He did not participate in the social construct of racism. By not participating, he was able to be elevated, to be above it."

He was a trailblazer in his community and a part of many local organizations, and he advocated for years for a new library branch to serve Douglas County. In the summer of 1986, his advocacy came to fruition as that branch was opened.

"Mr. Childs worked so hard for that building but when I saw him at the celebration, I knew something was wrong," said Roni Tewksbury. "He called me the next Monday morning to say 'I won't be in this week, please take care of the library for me.'"

He died almost a week later from cancer; only his family and close friends knew of the illness.

His legacy remains strong, and in Carrollton, Georgia, many residents still speak highly of him 34 years after his death.

"He believed that the library is for the person who doesn't have the opportunity to go to college but wants to be a police officer or scientist," said Jason Childs. "The library provides an opportunity to educate people who don't have many opportunities in life." ■

Read more about LeRoy Childs, as well as the other 2019 Georgia Library Award winners, at www.georgialibraries.org/gpla



Photo by Deborah Hakes

"My grandfather believed that the library was for the person who doesn't have the opportunity to go to college but wants to be a police officer or scientist. The library provides an opportunity to educate people who don't have many opportunities in life." - Jason Childs



Photo by Roy Cummings

Hog Hammock Public Library manager Shun Gaskins shows off materials in the youth area of the library. "They really enjoy it here. We try to provide books and resources that we think kids will like."

southeast coast on Sapelo Island, a state-protected territory only accessible by ferry boat or aircraft. Visitors must preregister for tours to access the island.

On Sapelo Island is Hog Hammock, one of the last surviving Gullah-Geechee communities. It's a tight-knit, culturally rich community founded by former enslaved people. At the center of the community sits a small, blue, former two-room schoolhouse: the Hog Hammock Public Library.

"The library started as a room inside of the local preservation organization, the Sapelo Island Cultural and Revitalization Society," said Dr. Diana Very, director of Three Rivers Regional Library System. "People could borrow books, but there were no activities for the community."

The library became a branch of Three Rivers and a PINES member in the mid-2000s.

"The community embraced the new branch from the very beginning," said library board member Renee Valle-Hay. "The library was run by an all-volunteer

One of Georgia's most unexpected libraries sits about 20 minutes off the

Communities advocate to establish local libraries

Public libraries in rural places provide an area for community members to get to know each other as they access resources like free high-speed internet and the PINES statewide catalog.

Having a local library was so important to the rural communities of Hog Hammock and Woodbine, Georgia, that they advocated for years to have them established. Here are their stories.

staff for the first 10 years or so."

Now, the library is open three days a week for 20 hours and operated by paid staff. Through PINES, patrons of this remote library have access to more than 11 million library materials across Georgia.

Shun Gaskins has managed the library for almost six years.

"Hog Hammock is a one-of-a-kind, special place. Everyone is family," she said.

"I'm working on creating evening programs right now," said Gaskins. "We will get better participation at night since the kids are in school on the mainland during the day. We are developing computer classes for the Hog Hammock community, who don't know much about computers and the internet. I hope people will use the skills they gain to share stories about Hog Hammock and Sapelo with the world."

The library is the only place in the community that has 24/7 internet connectivity for the public.

"You can sit underneath the pavilion, in a rocking chair on the library's porch - anywhere near the building and you can get online. For most, the library

is the only place they can get online.”

When speaking of the library’s impact, Director Very says it’s a “culture center.”

“The library has resources and artifacts about the history of the island and community. We also have a gift shop where people can buy souvenirs. We not only contribute to the knowledge of the people on the island, we contribute knowledge about the island to people who visit.”

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. He engaged the Hog Hammock Foundation and community partners YellaWood, Southern Current, and EDF Renewables for resources to build the solar pavilion and install the 16 panels. The installation will provide free electricity to the library for the next 30 years.

Gaskins is also proud of the library’s impact. “We

“We not only contribute to the knowledge of the people on the island, we also contribute knowledge about the island to people who visit.”

have been able to keep the library relevant despite limited resources. I’m happy to introduce the community to new technologies. I enjoy teaching them about the internet, email, and the resources through PINES that can enhance their lives.”

WHAT’S OLD IS NEW AGAIN IN WOODBINE

About 30 minutes south of Sapelo Island sits an abandoned building in Woodbine, a rural community in the southeast corner of Georgia. It was once a city fire station. Soon it will be the new Woodbine Public Library.

Only a few chairs and furniture donated by the school system occupy the space, but eventually the building will be a full-service library with public computers and community spaces.

“We don’t have a library on the north end of the county. It’s desperately needed and has been for many years,” said Lannie Brant, District 1 Commissioner in Camden County. “When I was younger, the library helped me immensely. Now, I have a 12-year-old granddaughter who is home-schooled, and having a library in her community will give her and other students opportunities I had growing up.”

Chuck Byerly, chief deputy of Camden County, shares this enthusiasm. “I’m always looking for something to do with my kids. Unfortunately, there’s not a lot to do in Woodbine. This library will be a place we can get together. We have computers and the internet at home, but the new library gives us a place to interact with other families face to face in the same space. My child will have a chance to build friendships and I’ll be able to spend time with other parents.”

The idea to open a library in Woodbine started with the Woodbine Woman’s Club in 2015.

“The club has different areas that we focus on – public issues and education being two of them. Opening a library was a perfect way to address both,” said library trustee Rhetta Sutton. “Janet Heath, who’s a member of the Woman’s Club, came up with the idea



Photos by Roy Cummings



Dr. Diana Very (left), director of Three Rivers Regional Library System, and library trustees Colleen Weinkle, Gloria Rudolph and Rhetta Sutton show the blueprints for the Woodbine Public Library.

At top, the former firehouse that will be the Woodbine Public Library.

and she stuck with it.”

The club has hosted several events to raise support and enthusiasm for the library. One of the most popular programs was the “History of Woodbine,” which celebrated the history and culture of the area.

Both the city of Woodbine and the Georgia General Assembly have been integral in the project.

“The city gave us the building,” said Colleen Weinkle, a library trustee. “They put on a new roof, did some plumbing work, and gave us a new A/C unit. They’ve been very thoughtful, very helpful and are excited about the prospect of having a library here.”

Sen. William Ligen, who represents the district, is a supporter of public libraries.

“Libraries provide important research and literary resources for many of the residents of our county,” said Ligen. “They are especially important for children as they encourage students to read and

“The new library gives us a place to interact with other families. My child will have a chance to build friendships and I’ll be able to spend time with other parents.”

provide a quiet space for them to study. In addition to books, libraries provide internet access and educational programs fostering lifelong learning and literacy skills that open the door to future possibilities.”

Woodbine’s students agree.

“I’m excited about the library coming because it can help people and help the community,” says Lily, a student at the local elementary school. “I look forward to reading, talking to my friends, and maybe starting a book club.”

The Woodbine Public Library is slated to open later in 2020. ■



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