



LIBRARY NEWS

Sharing stories of Georgia libraries transforming lives and communities

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Not your typical yoga studio

Libraries connect patrons to the information and inspiration to become more active in their communities

Public libraries in public spaces are meeting people where they are with what they need



GEORGIA PUBLIC
LIBRARY SERVICE



Deborah Hakes

Not your typical yoga studio

Libraries are the perfect partners for healthy living initiatives.

Working intentionally with local partners, libraries connect their patrons to the information, inspiration, and expertise needed to change lives and communities.

Around 30 people filter into a medium-sized conference room that has been transformed - tables and chairs cleared, lights turned low, and meditative music playing. Everyone greets each other warmly and rolls out their mats. The group ranges from college students to retirees, and every age and ability in between. There's a sense of community in this diverse group, and a sense of trust. This isn't your typical yoga studio - it's free weekly yoga at the public library in Cartersville, Georgia.

"Yoga at the library brings in all ages and levels," said regular attendee Hannah Arroyo, 22. "In this setting, no one is judging each other's ability. I have been able to build community and get to know people - I see the same people here as in the local grocery store."

When Hannah first moved to Cartersville in the spring, she was having trouble connecting with others in her new community. She didn't know where to meet others with similar interests, and so she sought out a familiar place to help.

"I found the nearest library," she said. "I knew I could begin to feel more comfortable here."

An avid audiobook lover, it was an unexpected surprise to Hannah that the Cartersville Library also offered free weekly yoga. This quickly became a go-to event for her.

Library Director Carmen Sims wants the library to be a community center. "We have this space

- we should use it," she said. And they do - the Bartow Library system also hosts tai chi, Scottish country dancing, a Maypole May Day festival, hiking, and more. Programs are well-attended and make the library an active space on any given day.

The library's There & Back Again monthly hiking group walks along a winding 4½-mile trail through a rolling forest.

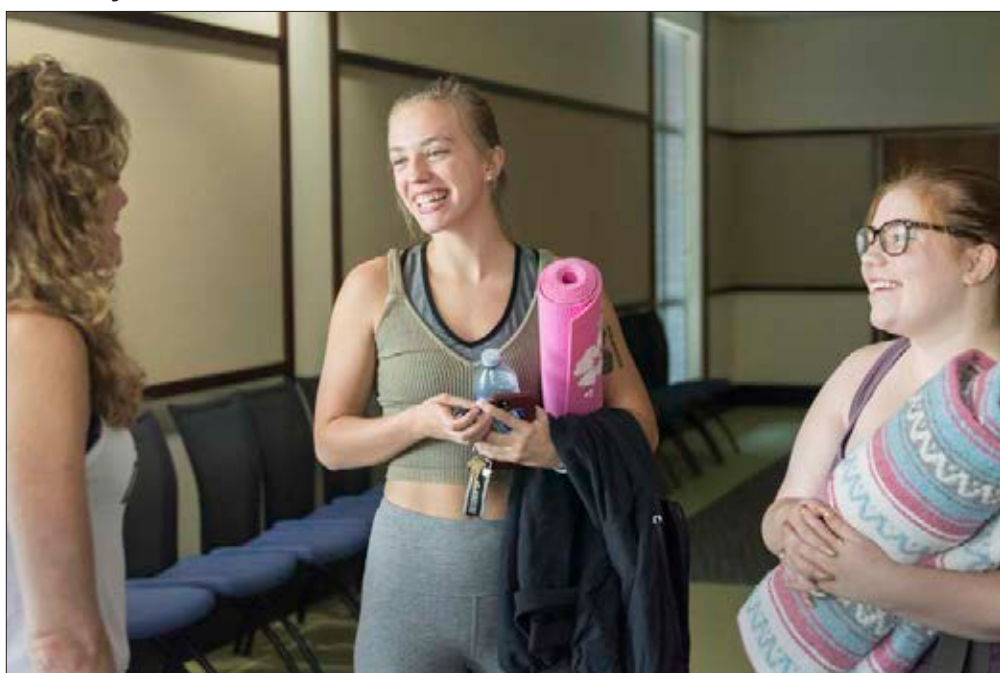
"Pine Log Creek Trail is beautiful - one of my favorites in the county - and I think it will be a perfect place to see the fall colors and enjoy the cool autumn air," said Adult Services Librarian Meghan Stipe, who usually has around 20 hikers join her

every month.

As people come to the library for active programming, some stay and use the facility to check out books and materials.

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- Hannah Arroyo (*below right*), her sister, Ginny (*middle*), and the yoga instructor at Cartersville Library



Deborah Hakes

“The library is my peace, and it resets my kids,” said Kearha Whitley. “I visit weekly, either for an activity or just to check out a new book. Yoga at the library was thought of by a genius. It’s cozy, relaxing, and what a great area to meditate.”

Many public libraries in Georgia offer movement-based programming like yoga or hiking, and every facility offers passes for checkout that allow for free parking at Georgia State Parks, along with a park discovery backpack that includes binoculars, a guidebook, and more.

Noah Lenstra of Let’s Move in Libraries, an initiative to get people of all ages and abilities moving, tracks movement-based programs in libraries. “My own research has revealed that the history of these programs is much deeper than most realize,” he said. “Although the healthy living at the library trend may be accelerating, it is certainly not outside our historical wheelhouse.”

He believes that libraries are a natural fit for active programming.

“Libraries are trusted community institutions that

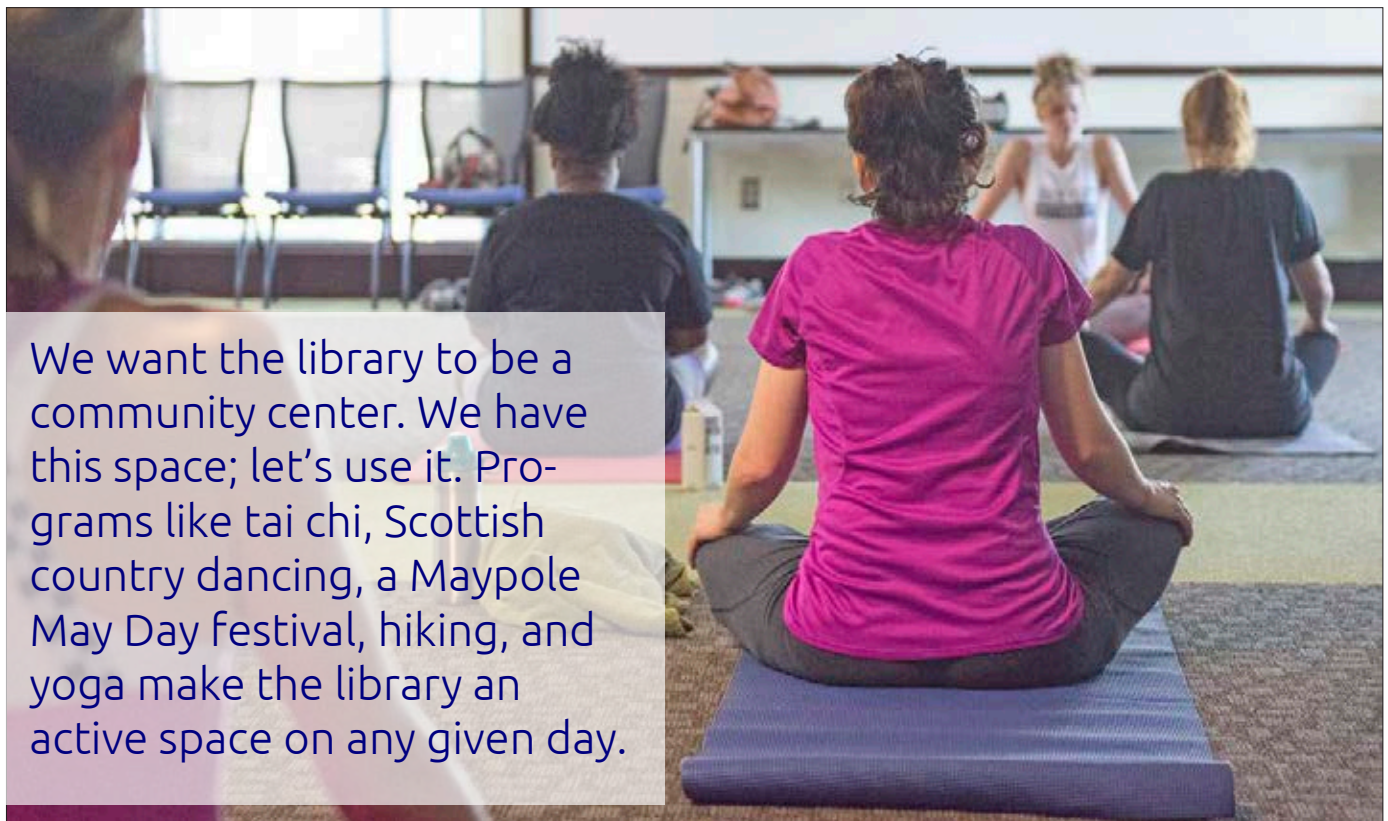
provide access to relevant and reliable information, community convening capacity, and that transform lives through learning,” he said. “We are the perfect partners for healthy living initiatives. Working intentionally with local partners, libraries can connect their patrons to the inspiration, information, and expertise needed to change lives and communities.”

In Cartersville, partnering locally meant bringing in yoga instructor Susan Rodney.

“Teaching yoga at the library is unique. We see lots of people who may feel intimidated going to a studio, but they are building confidence and ability in a trusted place,” she said. “And they are making friends along the way.”

Hannah Arroyo has found an added bonus to free yoga. She has been able to convince her sister, Ginny, to drive to Cartersville weekly to join her at the library.

“As sisters, we get to spend more time with each other,” she said. “And as yoga and library lovers, we couldn’t ask for much more.” ■



We want the library to be a community center. We have this space; let’s use it. Programs like tai chi, Scottish country dancing, a Maypole May Day festival, hiking, and yoga make the library an active space on any given day.

Deborah Hakes

Get

MOVING



in Georgia's public libraries

- **Piedmont Regional:** The Commerce branch has Kidsercise, with songs and motor skill development
- **Forsyth County:** Early literacy and movement-based storytimes for kids
- **Bartow County:** Tai chi, Scottish country dancing, yoga, and a hiking club
- **DeKalb County:** Yoga, salsa dancing, and Story Stretches for kids
- **Troup-Harris:** The LaGrange branch features a virtual reality studio specifically designed to encourage physical activity
- **De Soto Trail:** Exercise class three mornings per week
- **Thomas County:** Weekly "Wiggles and Giggles" toddler storytime, "Stories, Songs, and Stretches" story times, and periodic yoga and dance for adults



W.H. Stanton Memorial Library (Uncle Remus) has biweekly Music and Movements for kids. "Kids get most enthusiastic when they can move. Children aren't meant to sit in one place and just listen. They need to be active and free to explore," said Library Manager Amy Hicks.



Stonecrest Library in DeKalb County has monthly one-mile hikes from the library entrance on the Arabia Mountain PATH and light snacks afterward.



"We use our Book Bike and Pop-Up Library to encourage kids and adults to meet us at outside locations to incorporate reading with nature," said Thomas County Director Trent Reynolds.



Use your library card to check out a **BACKPACK** and **PASSES** to visit **Georgia State Parks** from any public library in Georgia.





Public libraries, public places



everything they can to make sure no one is left behind,” said Emily Almond, the chief technology officer at Georgia Public Library Service.

Fulton County Library System’s Library on the Lawn was launched to meet community needs during extensive renovations to the Central Branch,

Under the green roof of a pop-up event tent among the tall trees of a central Atlanta park, community engagement librarian Amanda Densmore straightens chairs across a handful of tables as she checks that laptops have powered up. A few minutes later, people start trickling in. Some are regulars, eager to use the free computer access to email friends, look for a job or housing opportunity, or catch up on the news. A few individuals are hesitant at first, not sure if the computers are for them.

“I’ve had more than one person tell me that they don’t know how to use a computer, and when I offer to show them, they have been genuinely surprised and delighted,” said Densmore. “By being in the park, we are closing that last barrier between library service and the patron, because we are meeting people where they are, not asking them to visit us.”

Offering Wi-Fi and computer technology in public spaces is one of the many efforts public libraries are making to combat Georgia’s gap in internet access. While especially pronounced in rural areas, the divide affects patrons throughout the state, including the homeless population in metro Atlanta.

“There is no arguing any longer about how crucial it is to have access to information and communication technologies, and libraries are doing

but an unexpected benefit has been the ability to provide resources to those who wouldn’t typically come inside a library. With the help of staff, passersby can also learn more about library services, digital resources, sign up for library cards, or just use a computer and free Wi-Fi.

Ron McKinney recently used one of the laptops to apply for a job at a local restaurant, and Densmore was able to help him navigate how to get to the restaurant’s website, as well as offer tips for ways to answer certain questions like, “What does hospitality mean to you?”

“He was a little intimidated to type anything, but when I asked him to just tell me what he felt, he was very thoughtful and said a few great points that we were able to type in the application,” said Densmore.

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McKinney said that he uses Library on the Lawn frequently to search for jobs and appreciates the service. Library staff regularly assist patrons like him with applying for jobs online, and they sometimes hear back when individuals are successful in getting one.

Library on the Lawn is offered Monday to Wednesday from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. at Woodruff Park, except when the weather is bad.

Further south in Georgia, the Twin Lakes Library System now offers web access free to visitors of Milledgeville's public parks including the Oconee Greenway, Central City Park, and Huley Park. The library was one of just eight national recipients of this grant-funded project from the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

The project uses an innovative technology called TV White Space, which utilizes the unused spectrum in the TV bands. The system can deliver broadband to a hotspot miles away, passing through buildings, trees, and other obstructions.

Houser believes it could improve the city's resilience by adding another communication capability for disaster preparedness.

Millions of people across the United States rely solely or in part on public libraries to access the internet, according to grant administrator Gigabit Libraries Network. And in Milledgeville, a rural city of about 18,600 residents, the library is a key internet provider for many.

"Our library strives to deliver free access to its services to all community members, and this is part of our mission of connecting our resources to our patrons," said Stephen Houser, director of Twin Lakes Library System. "This grant allows us to be at the forefront of library services, especially in rural communities, while also adding value to taxpayer dollars by expanding the availability of the services that we already offer."

Houser said that about 2,000 users access the free Wi-Fi every month to study, connect to social media, apply for jobs, and more.



Brian Sintos



Stephen Houser

The library found community partners like the Oconee Greenway Foundation and Georgia Power to launch the project, as well as the City of Milledgeville.

Georgia's public libraries have long been a technology and internet trendsetter - the state was one of the first to have high-speed internet access in every public library - and through Georgia Public Library System Georgia is the only state that offers matching funds to completely cover a library's internet service bill.

Bringing high-speed internet and technology to people in public spaces is another way Georgia's public libraries can effectively adapt to meet the changing needs of their communities. ■

GLASS launches innovative new audiobook distribution

Georgia Libraries for Accessible Library Services (GLASS) has been selected by the National Library Service (NLS) to implement Duplication on Demand, a new way to distribute audiobooks to those who cannot read standard print due to blindness, vision impairment, or a physical disability that prevents them from holding a book and turning the pages.

When fully implemented nationwide, NLS will maintain a digital repository instead of producing single-book cartridges. For GLASS, this means their entire current warehouse of audiobook cartridges will be replaced by digital access.

GLASS will be able to download up to 15 books onto a single cartridge to fulfill each patron's individual requests and then mail the cartridge to the patron's home.

Stuart Levenson has been a GLASS patron for more than 60 years and has witnessed firsthand the change in technology for how people with print impairment can read. He has used service provided on record albums, floppy disk, cassette tapes, digital cartridges with one title per car-

tridge and now, Duplication on Demand.

"Duplication on Demand is by far the best service that I have used," he said. "I enjoy having so many books on a single cartridge and the simplicity of the return process."

Pat Herndon, assistant state librarian and director of GLASS, believes that Duplication on Demand not only makes things better for the patrons, it makes delivering the service more efficient for the library as well.

"The new method will lower program expenses and increase access to more material for those who prefer to listen to books on digital cartridges," she said. "For patrons who do not like dealing with new technology, having a talking book machine and single cartridge loaded with up to 15 titles is an easy-to-use option."

Libraries in other states that piloted this program report that patrons are actually reading more books, but that many fewer cartridges are mailed out each day. Patrons are pleased and the service is simpler and less costly to deliver. ■

What's your library story?

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.

Here are a few of their stories.



Deborah Hakes

Rolando Alvarez

Alvarez is a county commissioner in Barrow County, Georgia, and a real estate investor.

I have lived in Winder, Barrow County, for my whole life. I grew up in a family of limited means, but with lots of love. My Dad is a Cuban immigrant, and we grew up in a one-bedroom trailer. My sister and I shared a room, and my parents slept in the living room. We didn't have access to many luxuries growing up, but my mother made sure we had access to the local library.

My middle school, Russell Middle, was next to the Winder Library. Going there started my love of reading, my love of knowledge. The first time checking out books I remember being concerned - was there a limit on how many books could I take? I would walk there after school to work on group projects, check out books (as many as I could tote!), and use the computers. In fact, the first time I ever used a computer was at the library; I remember typing a paper and printing there.

Back then and continuing to now, the library afforded me access to technology not readily available or affordable to individual families like mine. From word processing and microfilms in the 90s, to high-speed internet and 3D printing today. My library is important to me because of the doors it opened in unfamiliar, yet valuable places.

As an adult, I used PINES to reserve so many books to learn about how to start a real estate business. Much of my success in starting a small business was learned through resources at the library, some 15 years ago.

Coming from a family with limited means, it is apparent I owe so much of my success to libraries. There's no other way to say it. Libraries continue to provide access to critical resources and lifelong learning to many people across our state today. I am proud to say the story of my life has many co-authors, not the least of which has been the Winder Library. ■



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- Keirha Whitley

Anthony Jones: “The last five years, the library has seemed like a second home as I used it to complete my master’s degree and start work on my doctoral degree. I have developed friendships and received help from total strangers.”

Desiree M: “I came to this library as a child and loved to read. Now that I am older, I took a Microsoft Word class here, and it has helped me for my senior year in high school. This library gives you many opportunities.”

Cindy High: “I’m so thankful for the exercise class at De Soto Trail Library. We are a retired group of ladies very much concerned with staying active and healthy. We look forward to sweating together and sharing a common bond. This shows what an asset our library is to our community.”

Kandis Mingo: “Internet access at the library is a lifeline for many residents of Douglas. I used my library’s computers, printers, resources, and internet to obtain my master’s degree in criminal justice.”

Miracle Wiley: “GLASS (Georgia Libraries for Accessible Library Services) has helped me in my career. I can read along with my students and introduce them to different types of books.”
Miracle used GLASS to access assigned reading as she pursued a degree in education. Now that she teaches elementary school, she uses audiobooks in her classroom with students.



Carmen Sims

“I have attended Medicare and driver’s education classes at the library. These classes are so helpful for senior citizens, and the library is close to my home.” - Ruth Payne

Tell us YOUR library story by emailing communications@georgialibraries.org or using #GeorgiaLibraries.



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Patricia Prudente



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