

LIBRARY OF THE YEAR NOMINEE

CONTACT: Chuck Gibson, Director
South Georgia Regional Library
300 Woodrow Wilson Dr.
Valdosta, GA 31602
Phone: (229) 333-0086
Fax: (229) 333-7669

STATISTICAL DATA FOR 2008:

Total Annual Budget:		
Total Revenue	\$1,750,145.16	
Total Expenditures	\$1,767,126.03	
% of Budget Spent on Materials	12%	
Circulation	476,592	Up 11.4% from 2007
Number of Items in Catalog	263,076	Up 8% from 2007
Population:		
Lowndes County	101,790	
Lanier County	7,947	
Echols County	4,093	
Moody AFB	9,400	
Valdosta State University	10,503	
Total Population Served	133,733	
Registered Borrowers	33,227	Enrollment up 43.88%
Per Capita:		
Revenue	\$13.08	
Operating Expenditures	Unknown at this time due to changes in software.	
Total Expenditures	\$13.21	
Total Staff	42	
Part-time Staff	15	
Full Time Staff	27	
Professional Librarians	5	
Number of Public Computers	81	
Computer Usage	130,100	Up 24.89% from 2007

INFORMATION PRESENTED

- I. Introduction – “A Place for All People”
- II. Serving a Diverse Community
 - a. Hispanic / Latino
 - b. African-American
 - c. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender
 - d. Unconventional library users
- III. All Stages of Life
 - a. Children
 - b. Teens
 - c. Adults
 - d. Seniors
- IV. Signature Events
 - a. Fall Festival
 - b. Snow Day
 - c. Dr. Seuss Day
 - d. And the Band Played On: Remembering the Titanic
 - e. Summer Celebration
- V. Improving the Economic Base
 - a. Work Ready
 - b. GED Class
 - c. Helping Your Child Succeed
- VI. Creativity and Innovation
 - a. Beyond Books
 - i. ParkPass
 - ii. Health Screenings
 - b. Outreach
 - c. Technology
 - d. Partnerships
- VII. From the Inside Out
 - a. Staff Policy Manual
 - b. Blackbaud
 - c. Going Green
- VIII. Conclusion

A Place for All People

Change has marked 2008 as a historic year at the South Georgia Regional Library. This year has been dedicated to identifying and addressing the needs of our community and striving to meet them while working with an increasingly shrinking budget. Everything from programs and member policies to our systems core organizational structure has been overhauled to economically provide our community with a better service.

Before we can discuss the amazing transformation our system has undergone, you must first know a little about the unique challenges our branches face. Our tri-county service area is home to approximately 103,784 residents, not including the 9,400 military personnel stationed at the nearby Moody Air Force Base or the 10,503 students who attend Valdosta State University during the school year. This blending of people makes our area a melting pot of cultures, ethnicities, political views, and socioeconomic status. While the saying goes that "you can not please all of the people all of the time" the South Georgia Regional Library does an excellent job of addressing the needs of all its members.

Our six branches are vibrant community centers which tailor themselves to fit the needs of the neighbors they serve. Our Allen-Statenville Library, for instance, serves a disproportionately high number of Hispanic members than our other branches. In fact, 28% of the county identify themselves as Hispanic. As a result, we have partnered with the Mexican Consulate to provide a variety of services, including English as a second language courses, at this location. (For more information on our partnership with the Mexican Consulate see page 4.) Valdosta, in contrast, just received metropolis status after its city's population rose to over 50,000. With this sudden boom in growth came a small business incubator, an increased interest in art, and an emphasis on city planning. Our system has addressed these issues by forging a partnership with the Chamber of Commerce, hosting a variety of musical performances, and looking toward the future home of the main library branch.

We face the challenge of meeting the needs of: city dwellers, farmers, English and Spanish speaking patrons, conservative military personnel, and liberal university students. Our system may be small and our budget limited, but we believe no library in the nation performs more efficiently or provides better service per dollar. This is the David and Goliath story of the South Georgia Regional Library System.

Serving a Diverse Community

What makes us different is what makes us strong. Our system never passes up an opportunity to take part in cultural celebrations or support minorities through programs and materials.

Hispanic / Latino

The Hispanic population in Echols County well exceeds the Georgia State average of 7.8% with a staggering 28% of its population identifying as Hispanic or Latino. Much of the Hispanic population in the area are migrant workers, many of whom are illegal immigrants. In an effort to reach this often disenfranchised group, the South Georgia Regional Library partnered with the Mexican Consulate to provide free online Mexican GED courses and give access to a host of resources about everything from nutrition to legal advice.

On November 19, 2007 the Allen-Statenville Library became one of only 270 Plaza Comunitaria (PC) locations operating in the United States. Plaza Comunitaria or *community plaza* offers the opportunity for youth and adults to begin literacy courses and to start or continue their elementary, middle, and high school education in Spanish. Each student who completes his or her education through this program receives a certificate issued by the Mexican Ministry of Education. This allows participants to apply for their GED in Spanish, or if they are proficient enough, to apply for their GED in English.

The Plaza offers online courses through CONEVYT educational portal (www.conevyt.org/mx) which include: English as a second language, computer training, and job training. According to the Georgia Department of Education's website: "PC has proven to be a successful place to educate Hispanics as it provides a wide range of resources and materials in Spanish regarding health, family values and democracy, among other topics." The literacy, elementary and middle school as well as other online courses are provided free of charge by the Mexican government. They also train tutors for the program and provide books and other educational materials for no charge. There is a nominal cost for high school education courses.

While initially met with some resistance by the community, the Consulate partnership has fostered tolerance and understanding between the townspeople and Hispanic migrant workers. From this understanding a new program has blossomed, Spanish classes for

nonnative speakers. Taught by Alicia Rodriguez, the woman involved with bringing the Consulate's program to the branch, residents are learning to communicate verbally and connect personally.

African-American

The Allen-Statenville Branch is not the only library which looks after the unique needs of a specific minority. Although only 28.7% of the state identifies as African-American, the population is quite larger in Valdosta. The latest Census reported that 48.5% of Valdosta residents classify themselves as African-American. With this population in mind, our McMullen Southside Library is dedicated to empowering its African-American members through education and expression.

Every February, our system circulates African-American performers and storytellers throughout the branches to educate the community about Black History Month. It is not enough, however, to recognize the rich history of African-Americans only once a year. Our McMullen Southside Branch has created a yearlong celebration of African-American culture.

From December 26th to January 1st, the library hosts a special event for every day of Kwanzaa. Each activity is related to the day's core principle and offers an opportunity for community discussion. It is an educational experience for many, who did not know the origin of the festival or the meaning of its rituals. Since the branch first started celebrating Kwanzaa several years ago, the library has become a holiday season tradition among many families.

In the summer the McMullen Southside Library also participates in a regionally recognized Juneteenth Celebration. The three day long event commemorates African American freedom and emphasizes education and achievement. It is a celebration marked with music, guest speakers, picnics and family gatherings. It is a time for reflection and rejoicing as well as a time for assessment, self-improvement and for planning the future.

Part of the Juneteenth celebration is focused on remembering the sacrifices of those who came before and the battles African-American community leaders fought to pave the way for later generations. Selected community elders have their biographies read to the crowd before being presented with a certificate.

A similar program is held every year at our Hahira branch. The Salter Hahira Library honors influential African-American members of the community with an annual luncheon. In 2008, over twenty leaders were selected to receive special recognition at the event. Each individual was given a certificate of appreciation for their contribution to the region. This small gesture is only one of many. The South Georgia Regional Library has also taken progressive steps towards reaching out to other minorities in the area.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender

In 2008 we were honored to participate in the Valdosta State University's first Pride event hosted by the campus's Gay-Straight Alliance. We were the only public organization to participate and we took a proactive role in the day's events by sponsoring the karaoke area. Dozens of students stopped by to learn how the South Georgia Regional Library was supporting the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community. Most were shocked to realize we offered LGBT material and were eager to suggest books and documentaries for our collection. Out of this relationship with those we spoke to that day and at meetings with the president and vice-president of the Gay Straight Alliance, we were able to add relevant material to our catalog.

Unconventional Library Users

We believe that everyone deserves access to information and quality programming regardless of physical or mental handicaps. Our system has tirelessly pursued opportunities to engage our unconventional users and meet them at their point-of-need.

The South Georgia Regional Library is the home of one of the sub-regional Talking Book Centers (TBC). The TBC is an organization dedicated to providing books on tape and large print material to the visually impaired and physically handicapped. This free service includes the use of an audio player on which to play cassettes and return postage. The TBC's twelve county service covers all of central south Georgia.

Established in 1974, the Talking Book Center has grown from only 2,000 titles to over 30,000 books on tape. The TBC collection includes material for children and adults in every genre, both on cassette and in Braille. The center has also expanded to include local newspapers and an assortment of magazines including Time, Southern Living, Redbook, and Women's Day.

Keeping its users informed about services is an important part of the TBC's mission. They produce both a large print newsletter and a newsletter on tape for their users to ensure they are aware of any service changes or improvements. This is particularly important now, as the TBC looks towards switching from cassette format to digital.

In 2008, the TBC mailed out 20,730 cassette books to their patrons. Without the important services provided by the Talking Book Center, hundreds of patrons would be unable to enjoy the written word.

The system also hosts special storytimes and activities for several special needs groups in our area. The field trip to the library is the highlight of their week and is often a privilege earned through good behavior. Our trained Children's Co-Coordinator utilizes her experience to make each session fun for the group and give the caretakers a much needed break.

In December of 2008, the library invited all our special needs groups to the library for a special holiday program. After a lively storytime, the system's Community Relations Coordinator took photos of each individual with a festive holiday background and holiday props. The images were then burnt to CD and distributed to the various caretakers. The gesture deeply moved one of the teen's parents who commented that it was the first gift they had received from their child.

Engaging the participants increases their social skills and can, in some cases, lead to them living higher functioning lives. The special needs programs we provide improve the quality of life for dozens of disabled teens and adults.

All Stages of Life

Children

It is never too early to begin kindling a lifelong love of reading in every child. From infant in arms up, our youth services department is dedicated to making reading engaging and easy. Part of that mission is accomplished through the subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) incorporation of pre-literacy skills in every program.

At the Valdosta-Lowndes County Library, infants are learning baby sign language as part of our weekly "Babytime" program. Parents have embraced this new way of communicating and bonding with their

children and class attendance has swelled as a result of word-of-mouth promotion. The class instructor offers up a new way to encourage their children's literacy skills each week. Simple things like allowing your child to see you read and reading billboards aloud, has had a tremendous effect on the speed at which a child take to reading.

With older children the incorporation of pre-literacy skills is not announced, but is ever present. Word games and humorous songs get children used to the rhythm of words and associate the library with pleasant experiences. Our goal at these sessions is as much to get children comfortable with coming to the library as it is to work with their literacy skills.

Every branch in our system hosts at least one children's program per week not including our annual Summer Reading Program events. In 2008 we hosted an astonishing 202 programs for children during the Summer Reading Program. Approximately 709 children attended these events, more than any previous year-to-date. The 2008 Summer Reading Program also broke all records with 1,319 children registering for the program and reading nearly 29,000 books.

Teens

Often considered the most difficult group to engage at the library, teens have had no problem finding their place at our libraries. The Miller Lakeland Library is a popular after school hangout among teens. Paula Bennett, the Branch Manager, has a talent for relating to young adults and handling the issues which accompany them. With her guidance she has not only created successful teen programming, but she has established a Leadership Teen Advisory Council (LTAC).

The object of LTAC is to shape today's teens into tomorrow's leaders through leadership training and community service. Special speakers are brought into the library to speak to the LTAC teens about subjects ranging from time management to conflict resolution. LTAC members also participate in a variety of community service projects. Not only do they assist in shelving books at the library, but they also clean up public areas around Lakeland. In 2008, the group picked up millions of cigarette filters as part of "Kick Butts Day." The teens also worked with the community to gather cans as part of their initiative to encourage recycling. (For more information on the LTAC's recycling project see page 25.)

As a reward for all their hard work, the Miller Lakeland Library hosts a "Lockin" every year for LTAC members. The teens camp out in the library, watching movies, eating pizza, playing games, and having fun. This event keeps the youth motivated and gives them a goal to work towards throughout the year.

Because our staff have made the library a cool place to hang out for teens, loitering was becoming an issue. Teens congregating near the doors and outside the library were becoming such a problem that a group meeting room was transformed into a dedicated teen lounge to give them a space to themselves. Featuring a videogame console, several computers, and a couch, teens continue to flock to the library. A similar area is in the works at the systems main facility.

The Valdosta-Lowndes County Library received a grant from Wal-Mart to redecorate the young adult area in order to make it more appealing to teens. While the project is still in progress, the effort has already attracted teen interest. We are seeking feedback from teens to make them feel a sense of ownership of the space. The project is slated to be complete by fall of 2009.

The 2008 Summer Reading Program featured, for the first time, a teen and adult component. No one knew what to expect and our goals for teens were set low. They needn't have been. We were blown away by the response: 354 teens enrolled in the program, approximately 5,880 hours were read, and we had 335 teens attend our programs.

The tremendous success we experienced was the direct result of planning and experience. Paula was an indispensable asset to the team as lead coordinator; it was her guidance and the dedication of numerous other part-time and full time staff that got the teen portion of the 2008 Summer Reading Program underway.

We designed the teen summer programs to be fun and relevant. The teen team selected a few "big ticket" prizes to keep teens motivated including six iPod Nanos and one iPod Touch. The group also engineered a dynamic lineup of teen programs to keep teens engaged all summer long.

With our theme being "metamorphosis" we were able to explore both internal and external changes. One of our most popular programs featured a henna tattoo artist who shared the history and cultural significance of henna and explained the process before giving each teen their own tattoo.

My Safe Space was a program designed to bridge the communication gap between teens and parents about MySpace. Our message that "MySpace is not evil" was welcomed by teens, while our comprehensive coverage of the privacy settings and safety precautions were appreciated by parents. We even showed parents how to create their own MySpace page to better connect to their children. The feedback was universally positive and our presentation has been shared to other libraries due to its tremendous success. Not only was 2008 the first year for teen involvement in the Summer Reading Program, but it also marked the formation of both the Animeniacs at the Allen-Statenville branch and the McMullen Southside branch's Open Mic Night.

Aptly named Animeniacs, this group of teenagers is drawn together by a common interest in anime and manga. The library has provided them a supervised space to meet and allowed them to utilize our system's Playstation and Rock Band equipment to host monthly "Battle of the Band" contests. Teens at our Southside branch are expressing themselves another way.

Poetic Magic, a local "Spoken Word Art" group, reached out to the McMullen Southside Branch with an interest in creating an outlet for city youth to constructively articulate their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. The result was a monthly Open Mic Night, which has steadily grown since its inception, to include performers of all kinds. The informal, coffeehouse atmosphere of Open Mic Night makes the library a natural gathering place; people of all ages congregate to listen to the voice of the young through poetry and music. Provocative subjects are often broached and later discussed, making this the perfect forum for talking about the issues which are truly effecting today's youth.

Adults

With our adult patrons, our focus in 2008 was to connect people through books. Humans are social animals, and to deny this fact is to ignore the biggest opportunity to become a relevant part of our community's life. Whether we are involving people in literature through Booktalks with local authors or one of our numerous book clubs, the library is becoming personal.

Over twenty authors came to our branches in 2008 to speak about their novels and sign copies of their work. Joyce Oglesby, the

controversial Christian author of Keeping His Pants on Until He Gets Home, came from Indiana to give her presentation on marriage at our Valdosta-Lowndes County Library. Members of local churches were invited to attend and the result was a lively discussion on the Bible's take on love, sex, and marriage.

Other successful Booktalks in 2008 included Janice Daugharty, a prolific Georgian author heralded as one of the best southern writers of the day. Her presentation drew over thirty individuals on an otherwise slow weeknight. Featured in the Valdosta Daily Times, this event kept the community abuzz for days.

Book clubs add another dimension to literature and promote deeper exploration of the written word. We offer a variety of book clubs on different genres to entice everyone to participate. While each branch hosts some form of book club during the year, two in particular are the most popular among patrons.

Bookfellows is the oldest and largest existing book club the system offers. For over a decade the members of the group have gathered to discuss current bestsellers and books of literary worth. While Bookfellows is a traditional book club, we offer something starkly different for those with an affinity for paranormal novels.

The Vampire Book Club was the brainchild of Jan Odom, an English professor at Valdosta State University. Jan's goal was to study the fascination women have with vampires in fiction as part of a paper she was writing. The book club was never intended to last past the first series; the group became so popular, however, that it has expanded to read other series. Now with nine core members meeting weekly, and numerous others participating when their schedules permit, the group has added movie nights and field trips to the schedule. A spin-off book club for teens will begin meeting in 2009 to discuss the Twilight series.

By connecting people through books we are creating lasting friendships and allowing the library to evolve into a living place.

Seniors

Retirees have been a longtime staple of library usage. They come in, check out material, and leave. The trouble isn't in getting seniors in the door, but in finding a way to get them to stay. With the help of

our Adult Librarian we were able to begin offering meaningful programs to retirees, which address their specific cares and concerns.

Many retirees are looking to become more tech-savvy which is why we created The Silver Surfers. Designed for library users 55+, the class is a beginner level course which walks participants through basics such as turning on the computer and works them up to intermediate level classes. The goal is to get every participant comfortable navigating the computer and able to perform basic searches on the internet. This is our system's most popular program among retirees with approximately twenty participants at each weekly class.

Our Genealogy 101 workshop is also wildly popular among retirees. Started in the summer of 2008, this regularly held clinic teaches the basics of genealogy research including how to take advantage of the library's resources. Through GALILEO, every member of the South Georgia Regional Library may access ancestry.com for free. Our Valdosta-Lowndes County Library also features a room dedicated to local genealogy where primary research can be conducted.

An identity is stolen every two seconds in the United States, and of those a disproportionately high number are seniors. In response to this figure, the South Georgia Regional Library invited a local police officer to give a presentation on common con-games at one of the branches. Officer Vernotis Williams of the Valdosta Police Department taught citizens how to protect themselves from scams and what to do if they were ever defrauded.

The presentation included information on common scams including: staged car accidents, home repair fraud, Internet phishing, and pyramid schemes. This program was particularly timely, as a series of scams broke out across the county just weeks after Officer Williams' library lecture.

The Valdosta-Lowndes County Library has also hosted a series of lectures on "end-of-life" issues. Baby boomers were able to learn how to talk with their aging parents about difficult subjects such as: finances, independence and long term healthcare as part of a national education campaign called "The 40-70 Rule."

"The 40-70 Rule" is a guide designed to help children speak to their parents about end-of-life issues before a crisis happens. The title of the program refers to the first rule: "If you are 40 or your parents are 70, it is time to begin a dialogue."

The free, multipart workshop was held once a week for three weeks. Senior care expert, Jack Hartley, with Home Instead Senior Care discussed how to overcome communication hurdles when talking to an aging parent. Each of the sessions focused on a different topic including how to have your final wishes legally recognized without the assistance of a lawyer.

Not all programs for seniors are so serious; our system makes an effort to keep seniors entertained with a variety of programs and events. New in 2008 was our "Antiques Roadshow" series, where individuals were invited to bring their antiques to the library for an informal appraisal. Dozens of seniors turned out to the library with their treasures and, while few possessed items of great worth, everyone learned tips to use when antique hunting.

Improving the Economic Base

WorkReady

With the economy on everyone's mind, the library has become an important resource for job hunters. As part of our mission to improve the areas workforce, the Valdosta-Lowndes County Library began offering free Work Ready Certification in 2008 with the assistance of our community partners at Valdosta Technical College. The Work Ready Certificate is a nationally recognized credential that proves an individual has the skills necessary to perform on the job.

The South Georgia Regional Library hosts the four hour testing periods to make the certification process as convenient as possible to area residents. Proctors from the Valdosta Technical College then come in to monitor the sessions and handle the certification process.

The Work Ready assessment measures skills in Reading for Information, Applied Mathematics, and Locating Information. Individuals who participate earn a score between one and seven. A Work Ready Certificate is awarded to anyone who earns a score of three or higher. This certificate can be used to help market job seekers to employers. Applicants who want to increase their skill levels can get assistance at the library or contact Valdosta Technical College about internet-based training. After training, an individual may have their skill levels reassessed.

Employers can use these skill levels to better match applicants to jobs. Improved job matching has been shown to decrease training time,

increase productivity, and decrease turnover, all of which result in huge savings for employers.

As the area workforce becomes certified and our high school graduation rates continue to increase, the community can earn the designation of "Certified Work Ready Community." This designation will attract more businesses and industries to the area and promote economic development. Currently, Lowndes County is actively seeking this designation. (For more information about the Work Ready program visit www.gaworkready.org)

GED Classes

The Valdosta-Lowndes County Library became the site of a free GED preparation course in the fall of 2008. The program was brought to the system by the Valdosta Technical College when Alvin Payton, the program's coordinator approached us. While the college had been hosting the GED preparation courses for years, they were looking to expand the program. Immediately we agreed and began relocating the computer lab to the reference area to make room for the class.

The group now meets twice a week for three hours to prepare for GED testing. There is no expense to the student; the materials and the instructor are covered by the Valdosta Technical College. Once a student is enrolled in the class they may continue to attend indefinitely until they receive their GED. The course is about second chances, so no one "times out" of the program.

While the program may be inexpensive to students, nothing was spared in providing the participants with the best educational resources available. An instructor works on areas of general weakness with the class as a whole and then gives each student individual help as needed. Several computers in the library's lab area are also reserved for the class to use for online practice tests and training. This combination of techniques has proved very effective; the group has already tasted success with several members earning their GED and more assessments scheduled for 2009.

Helping Your Child Succeed

Representatives from the library have been busy going out to area businesses to share a program called "Helping Your Child Succeed." Created by the Valdosta Chamber of Commerce, the program is designed to get community leaders in front of area parents to teach

them ways they can encourage their children to stay in school. Our area suffers from a 40% drop out rate, which over the years has crippled our regions ability to attract lucrative businesses. Currently, the job pool does not have the skill sets necessary to succeed in a competitive world.

Several times a month a member of our administrative team goes out to local businesses to talk to their employees during their lunch break. This proactive measure positions the library as a forerunner in the fight to improve the regions economic base. The library is empowering people to improve their lives and the lives of their children.

Signature Events

Several of annual programs have become so engrained into the fabric of our community that we consider them signature events.

Fall Festival

In 2008, we celebrated the library's seventh annual Fall Festival and it proved to be the largest in system history with programming appealing to a variety of interests. The event featured a large selection of fall themed games as well as a bounce house with oversized boxing gloves. Visitors came in costume had a chance to win several door-prizes, including tickets to Wild Adventures, a local theme park.

In addition to these Fall Festival classics, the Humane Society preformed a special puppet show with their furry friend Bear, a special dog looking for a home. The goal of the show was to promote responsible pet ownership including the proper way to greet an animal. Children were then able to ask questions about the Humane Society and the animals they help.

Christian children's author, Glenn Simmions, also met fans and signed copies of his book, My Father's Work. He read excerpts from his debut book, which captures the wonder of creation through the eyes and faith of a child. Glenn's popularity lead to later book signings at other branches and at a nearby Waldenbooks store.

2008 was also the first year the library included a haunted house as part of its festivities. This addition was met with a little criticism, as some members of our community disapprove of anything pertaining to Halloween. Our Youth Services Department, however, felt it was

important to include an element which would appeal to teens. Dozens of groups circulated through The House of Horror; Scare fanatics found themselves stumbling through dark passages only to be brought face-to-face with a multitude of deranged characters. Several theater students from Valdosta State University not only participated in The House of Horror, but applied all the makeup. After the event, we received no negative feedback, even from those hesitant about the inclusion of a haunted house as part of the Fall Festival's activities.

The South Georgia Regional Library's ability to not only maintain this signature event, but improve it, in the face of crippling budget cuts is a testament to our institution's resourcefulness. While the poor economy forced many organizations, including the community's technical college, to abandon their fall celebrations the library flourished. Indispensable in our effort to expand the event were our community partners; local businesses rallied to provide us with the supplies we needed. The remaining funding gap was filled through a large grant provided by Target. The money allowed for the library to not only continue its classic programming, but to expand its offerings.

Snow Day

For two years the South Georgia Regional Library has delivered a surprise to the area's children: snow. Five tons of snow was blown onto the main branch's front lawn in January, turning the library into a real winter wonderland. Since most of the area's children have lived in southern Georgia their entire lives, it was, for most, their first experience with real snow.

The Snow Day program was advertised covertly to parents in an effort to surprise the children. Parents brought their children to the library for a presentation of songs from Babes in Toyland by a local acting troop, the 'Dosta Theater. The presentation was then followed by the Babes in Toyland movie and a brief skit performed by staff called "It Snowed Last Night." While the children were participating in the indoor activities, trucks full of snow busily transformed the lawn into a snowy paradise. At the conclusion of the "It Snowed Last Night" skit, the doors were opened to reveal the snow outside. Over 300 children poured outside to play in the fresh snow.

As extraordinary as the response was to this signature event, what is even more impressive was the cost. The library paid nothing for the snow. Because our budget is so small, we capitalize on every partnership we can. (To learn more about our partnership philosophy

see page 22.) In exchange for publicity, the Adel Ice Company donated the snow for the day's event.

Dr. Seuss Day

The annual birthday party for Theodor Seuss Geisel (AKA: Dr. Seuss) is the longest running signature event the library hosts. For nearly a decade children have gathered at the library to participate in the "seussical" fun.

We celebrated what would have been Dr. Seuss's 104th birthday in March of 2008 with all the fanfare he deserved. A dozen games, all Seuss related in some way, were set up outside for children to play for small prizes. Our youth services department ensured that we had games appropriate for all ages and abilities. Staff and volunteers worked each game to encourage children and make sure no one walked away empty handed. Inside, children gathered in the amphitheater to listen to various Seuss stories being read by our children's librarian and await a special guest appearance by the Cat in the Hat. Cutting the giant birthday cake and sharing it with our neighbors concluded the day's events.

And the Band Played On: Remembering the Titanic

The Salter Hahira Library puts history in perspective by inviting local sixth graders onboard the tragic journey of the Titanic. For five years, the library has hosted "And the Band Played On: Remembering the Titanic" an interactive experience where students see first hand the events that led to the deaths of over a thousand passengers.

The Thespians for Literacy, an acting group comprised of library staff and volunteers, relives the night the Titanic sank in front of students and often brings them into the action.

When each class first arrives to the library they are given a ticket with the name of a real passenger aboard the Titanic. This denotes what class of passenger they are and, ultimately, if they survived or perished.

Janet Register, the library's branch manager, went above and beyond to authenticate every aspect of the presentation, right down to the menu of what was served that fateful night. This field trip compliments what the children were learning in school about the early

1900s. At the conclusion of the program the character from the play recommend reading about the Titanic.

Nineteen performances were given in 2008 to the local middle school students. Circulation of Titanic related material increased system wide as we experienced a surge of interest on the subject. The performance, we've been told, has inspired many book reports on the Unsinkable Molly Brown.

Summer Celebration

The Summer Celebration was the grand finale to an exceptional Summer Reading Program. Our system had not planned on hosting this event, but after seeing the amount of community support we received during the Summer Reading Program it was only natural to share our success with our neighbors.

Three radio stations hosted live remotes from the library during the day's six hours of activities. This publicity attracted hundreds of local listeners to the library, some of whom had never been to the library before. Over 800 people came out to the main branch to enjoy snow cones, a bounce house, face painting, storytimes, door prizes, and an assortment of other entertainment free of charge.

Our library invited all of our community partners to participate by setting up booths both inside the library and out on the lawn to promote their services. The result was a colorful fair like atmosphere. People milled from table-to-table collecting freebies and educating themselves on area businesses and governmental organizations.

Children were given balloons as they entered the library and a giant screen set up in the reference area looped a slideshow of photos taken at all the branches during the Summer Reading Program. Local performer Shawn Hopper provided background music by playing his acoustic guitar. The environment at the library that day was palpably different than at any other program before.

We had set out to create a community building event and nothing could have proved our success more than the spontaneous joining of talent between Shawn Hopper and Poetic Magic. Shawn was scheduled to play for two hours before giving the stage area over to the local youth poetry group, Poetic Magic. Instead of leaving after his set, Shawn stayed and provided musical accompaniment to the group's poetry. To anyone who didn't know better it would have

seemed rehearsed, but it was simply an impromptu exchange of creative energy.

The day concluded with area VIPs drawing the names for the Summer Reading Program grand-prize winners. We gave away four season passes to a local theme park, an iPod Touch, and a laptop to a few of our lucky patrons.

Although 2008 was only our first year to hold the Summer Celebration it has already become part of the fabric of our community. Planning is currently underway to expand the event in 2009.

Creativity and Innovation

Beyond Books

The South Georgia Regional Library is working to become more than just a warehouse of books. The system is evolving by providing free passes to Georgia State Parks through a statewide project and offering anonymous health screenings to our patrons.

The South Georgia Regional Library and Georgia State Parks & Historic Sites are making it easier than ever for patrons to "Get Out, Get Dirty, and Get Fit." With only their library card, patrons can now borrow a Georgia State Park "ParkPass" or Historic Site pass from any of our branches for seven days. The passes are good for free parking and admission at 63 parks and historic sites statewide.

The ParkPass folders include an annual ParkPass that exempts visitors from paying the daily parking fee at any Georgia state park, an annual Historic Site pass good for free admission for one visitor to any of Georgia's 18 state historic sites and a copy of the "Guide to Georgia State Parks & Historic Sites." The guide features descriptions, photos, directions and a map of all 63 state parks and historic sites.

The ParkPass Program is a joint initiative of the Georgia Public Library Service and the Parks, Recreation & Historic Sites Division (PRHSD) of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. GO Georgia, a multi-year campaign, challenges Georgians, especially families and children, to participate in family-friendly, nature-based, healthy outdoor recreation in the beautiful, secure surroundings of Georgia's state parks.

"We want families and individuals to discover the great treasures that

are so close to home and quite often, right in their own backyard," said Becky Kelly, director of PRHSD. "Partnering with our local libraries is such a natural fit because they, too, are also assets to our state, our communities, and are accessible to every Georgian."

Georgia State Parks & Historic Sites preserve the state's diverse environment and history. It includes 45 state parks, three state historic parks and 15 historic sites, stretching from the Blue Ridge Mountains to the Colonial Coast. Together, the locations offer an exceptional variety of resources including mountains, canyons, forests, fields, marshes, waterfalls, lakes, swamps, rivers, battlefields, historic homes and Native American artifacts.

The libraries have become an access point for healthy living and interactive education through our adoption of the ParkPass loaner program. Since it became available, the pass has allowed dozens of families to take day trips and even week-long vacations around the state.

It is commonly said that "our health is our greatest asset" which is why in 2008 we hosted several free health and dental screenings. For the first time in our system's history the library served as a location for HIV testing. The confidential, needless, test offered results in as little as twenty minutes. For many, coming to the library to be tested was less intimidating than heading to the local clinic. The HIV screening was incorporated into a seminar on safe-sex practices given by a member of our local health organization. While the subject matter was heavy, the speaker kept the presentation light and gave away condoms to the crowd.

The program was advertised heavily on the university campus and in urban Valdosta. The event received rave reviews from those who participated. Since the system hosted its first HIV test in the fall of 2008, we have repeated the program three times.

For children, a local dentist has preformed free dental screenings at several system-wide events including our Summer Celebration, Fall Festival, and Dr. Seuss Day. The purpose of the dental screening is to alert parents to any potential cavities or dental problems their child may have. This service has been particularly useful to families without dental insurance, who can not afford to take their children in for regular checkups.

Outreach

Our system's book van is unlike other "book mobile" programs. Whereas "book mobiles" wait passively for patrons to visit their portable location, our book van goes out into the community delivering materials to dozens of public schools, private schools, daycares, and area "shut-ins." Averaging between 125 and 145 stops each week, the book van delivers thousands of books every month.

The book van staff are truly ambassadors for the library, delivering materials and goodwill. One of the most valuable, but least tangible, services the book van provides is to those who are unable to leave their homes. For many, the book van staff proves to be the only company they will have all week. Lonely, they crave interaction; extra time is always scheduled when visiting "shut-ins" to provide them with the companionship they need.

Changes to the way the book van conducts business has expanded the general catalog at the South Georgia Regional Library's main branch. For decades, the book van had its own private collection of books which only a staff member could retrieve for a patron. In 2008, those books were added to the main catalog and moved to public shelves. Patrons noticed immediately the extra books and circulation increased. So, for no additional cost, we were able to substantially increase the amount of material on the shelves.

Technology

The South Georgia Regional Library system does not have an impressive technology budget and it is quite small in comparison to most systems but what we cannot afford to do outright we find open source measures and other innovative ways to try to deal with all the issues that technology brings.

The state of Georgia provides bandwidth to our libraries through the Georgia Peach Net but the challenge that comes with that is conforming to CIPA rules and regulations. Internet service cannot be completely "free browsing" and this creates tension among staff and patrons in regards to what staff has to enforce that patrons cannot see at the library and what more than a few patrons would like to view at the library.

Wireless Internet access is a feature most people consider to be standard at a library or public gathering facility but it was not an easy

or simple task for our system. The usual cost of secure, functional, and fast wireless access points can rise into the thousands of dollars and was something that was out of reach for our systems budget. The challenge was met through buying introductory routers that offered little software functionality and bricking them with open source WRT software which offers features that two to three thousand dollar wireless access points offer. Through this innovation and research we were able to offer secure and fast B/G based wireless access to our patrons.

SGRL offers a state maintained and updated award winning database system known as GALILEO. This database system is available through any library computer with the current password and offers things like Novelist, Ancestry.com and an online version of the Encyclopedia Britannica.

SGRL also participates in the state PINES online book system known as Overdrive. Through this system, a PINES patron, may log in and borrow and listen to many different audio books on a wide range of titles from all categories of Dewey materials. The only requirement to use this system is a valid PINES library card.

SGRL has embraced and received support for and resistance against Web 2.0. Blogging, Facebook, Myspace, Twitter, and many other social networking sites are very popular with our patrons. We experience all the standard pro and con issues that come with Web 2.0 and all the things it offers. This is a delicate balancing act that we do our best to maintain on a case by case scenario with some ground rules in place. Our first and most important rule is that while social networking is not frowned upon, business and education needs come first and we ask any patrons on MySpace, Facebook and blogging sites to log off if another patron needs computer access for education or business related activities.

SGRL has a lot to offer patrons based on our ability to adapt to situations and different needs. We do not have state of the art equipment but our service is above and beyond the ordinary.

Partnerships

With a modest 1.7 million dollar budget to run six branches, it may seem we are living outside our means with the number of programs and services we provide. The truth is, we are. The South Georgia Regional Library lives and dies by our partnerships.

Under the leadership of Chuck Gibson, our director, members of the administrative team have been earnestly pursuing community partnerships. We have found support in a variety of sources including the local Chamber of Commerce, Valdosta State University, Valdosta Technical College, and countless businesses. In 2008, we estimate that we received several hundred dollars worth of donated service and material from our community partners.

What is a partnership? A partnership is not begging. A partnership is a symbiotic relationship between organizations. Many libraries fail to see what they can provide in exchange for a service or material. The answer is simple: publicity.

During the Summer Reading Program, for example, our Community Relations coordinator was able to get digital billboard space donated by Magic Media and a traditional billboard rented to us for only a fraction of the normal cost. In exchange for their services, we featured their logo on all our promotional material for the Summer Reading Program.

The struggle to build partnerships and ask for resources is often difficult. As the economy slid further into recession during 2008, many businesses and organizations have just been fighting to keep their heads above water. Fortunately, the system comes with one built in partnership: Friends of the Library (FOL).

Friends groups for libraries are a lot like opinions. Everyone has them, but not all of them are good. Fortunately, the South Georgia Regional Library has been blessed with a very progressive and highly involved FOL group. The friends have provided us with hundreds of hours of manpower for our numerous special events and have always provided what we have needed to fill the funding gap for programs.

They donated \$12,836 to the library in 2008 as a result of dues collected from members and profit from their sales at the Back Door Book Sale. Larger than most FOL group book stores, an entire large meeting room has been converted to a used book shop. Open twice a week, the Friends are able to generate hundreds of dollars every time they open their doors.

From the Inside Out

Staff Policy Manual

From the dress code to days off, every aspect of working at the library was examined and revised as part of an initiative to improve service to library users. With a commitment to updating antiquated polices and bringing our system in compliance with state guidelines, a complete review was conducted of our procedure manual.

The old policies were reviewed by a committee of employees who then made recommendations to the director. This staff input fostered a sense of ownership among employees which, in turn, made the adoption of the new policies easier.

Every aspect of the library has improved as a result of this project. The revised dress code visually signifies to library users that we are professionals. Staff too is pleased with the changes. Human Resource policies are now clarified in writing, eliminating much confusion among staff.

Blackbaud

This past year has seen tremendous change within our financial system as well. Until recently, our financial information was maintained through a contracted accountant service and stored on Quickbook software. This made getting timely updates and accessing the information without aid of the accountant very difficult. As part of an initiative to get financial information quicker and to better assist staff the decision to bring all accounting functions fully in-house was made and a full time accountant was hired and the switch to the state of Georgia based Blackbaud accounting system began.

This transition was long, hard and nothing short of miraculous. The training, dedication, and perseverance of our new accountant paid off and the system is truly state of the art. Data is backed up and maintained by the state and this relieved the problems associated with disaster recovery and loss of data due to disasters. All of our data can be accessed via secure Internet browsers and information is now far more timely and accurate. This change has allowed us to monitor our expenses much more closely and work with staff to cut costs across the board.

Going Green

Part of our mission to be good stewards means becoming responsible members of the global community; we are dedicated to decreasing our carbon footprint and increasing our community's awareness of environmental issues.

While still in its infancy, major steps have been taken to become more sustainable. We recycle roughly 100 - 400lbs of paper, books and cardboard weekly. Since we have begun the program we have recycled over a ton of waste which would have otherwise found its way to a landfill. Our energy reductions are even more dramatic. By changing to more efficient lighting and adjusting the temperature control in each branch we have saved approximately \$2,000 a month from previous years.

Nothing goes to waste at the South Georgia Regional Library. Like many systems, we accept used books from patrons to either add to our collection or sell in our FOL bookstore. If, however, an item is too damaged or dated to be used in either capacity we remove the cover and recycle the pages instead of throwing them away. This innovative solution to excess material has sparked plans to create a drop off area for recyclable material at our main branch to encourage our community to become more eco-aware.

These internal changes are only part of the picture. The Library Teen Advisory Council (LTAC) made a huge impact in 2008 by collecting and recycling cans. The group took on the recycling project as part of their mission to improve our community. Fourteen large trash bags full of cans were rescued from the sides of roads and area parks.

Our successful green initiatives have been created by reimagining everything we do on a day-to-day basis, from turning the lights on in the morning to watering the lawn at night. In every action we are mindful of the impact our libraries have on the environment.

Conclusion

2008 has come and gone. This Library of the Year application will never be complete. We can list all of our programs, all the accomplishments we can think of, and every accolade the library has been awarded, but our biggest accomplishment is every single patron that visits or uses any of our facilities.

Our goal is to help every community member we have at their point of need. This is a staggering goal that will always leave room for improvement and pushes staff to always find and embrace a new way of thinking about patron service. While we occasionally rest and enjoy the successes we have had, we know the job is never done and that tomorrow will bring with it another challenge to be met.

If South Georgia Regional Library is graced with the honor of being selected the 2008 Library of the Year winner we will be humbled and appreciative. If, however, we are not so fortunate to be recognized as the Library of the Year we will graciously look towards what the winners and top nominees have done and adopt any practices they exhibit to make sure that each and every one of our patrons continue to receive Library of the Year service every time they visit us.

South Georgia Regional Library would like to show appreciation to its staff and patrons with a celebration if we are honored with the cash prize. The bulk of the monies would be devoted to servicing our dwindling funds for both new materials and technology.