



# LIBRARY NEWS

Sharing stories of Georgia libraries transforming lives and communities

Volume 20, Issue 2, Spring 2023

Chromebooks  
and learning  
tablets now  
available for  
checkout

Georgia public library  
award winners in focus

Mayors and libraries  
partner to build literacy



GEORGIA PUBLIC  
**LIBRARY** SERVICE



# Library Employee of the Year brings

joy

## to the library for all ages

The crowd was rowdy. Everyone was on their feet stomping and dancing, and that was before the human-sized dinosaur entered the room. Then kids and grown-ups alike all lost it in a fit of shrieking and laughing.

“I was teaching the kids a prehistoric marching dance,” said Rebecca Ballard, regional Children’s Services coordinator at Athens Regional Library System. “They loved acting like dinosaurs. The expressions on everyone’s faces when they saw the T-rex walk in was hilarious and fun to experience.”

Ballard has been awarded Georgia Public Library Employee of the Year for her efforts to bring joy to the library for all ages.

She is locally famous for her children’s band, Rebecca Sunshine Band, which she incorporates into programming at the library. Her undergraduate studies in music, theater, and costume design at the University of Georgia have enabled her to further share her talent through library workshops, puppet shows, costumes, and theater.

“I love that I can help make the library a welcoming second home for people,” she said. “I love designing programs, and I love getting kids excited about literature and the library.”



Photos courtesy of Athens Regional Library System

*“I love that I can help make  
the library a welcoming  
second home for people.”*



# 2022 Georgia Public Library Awards

Ballard also leads a Lego Club, hosts events with children's book authors, and organizes a local Star Wars Day that has become an annual community event attracting hundreds of attendees. Her programs are neuro-inclusive and often highlight underrepresented groups.

"Rebecca is absolutely critical to the mental health and well-being of this community, especially its children and parents," said Jo Robertson, a library supporter.

She received many Library Employee of the Year nominations from parents, who all noted the impact that she has had on their lives.

"From the time that my daughter was a baby – during story times to now as a young reader – Rebecca remembers my daughter, can recall her specific interests, and is always delightful with a positive personality and a knack for connecting to children," said Sandy Green. "Her gifted music abilities, involvement in the community, knowledgeability, and overwhelming kindness have meant so much to our family and many others."

"Miss Rebecca, as she's known to our patrons, is such an asset! With her creativity, talent, and skills, she is an enthusiastic champion of childhood and family literacy," said Valerie Bell, executive director of the Athens Regional Library System. "She has touched many lives in her years at the library, and we are beyond thrilled for her contributions to be recognized with this award."



Ballard began her library career at the Athens-Clarke County Library working in educational technology. When she transitioned to a position in children's services, Rebecca began developing new programs highlighting music and puppetry. She became a Children's Services manager at the Oconee County Library branch, developing creative library programming and increasing children's program attendance by 400 percent.

"Rebecca's cumulative talent is a force of nature that the library is wise to nurture and support," said library supporter Chari Pavlos. "The children of the Athens and Oconee communities have a safe, caring space to explore their world, arts, learning, and growth when they engage in the library's children's programs with Miss Rebecca."



## Georgia Public Library Employee of the Year: Special Recognition

*Georgia Public Library Service would also like to recognize five additional nominees for Library Employee of the Year.*

### **Ruby Allen, assistant branch manager, Sandy Springs Public Library, Fulton County Library System**

Ruby Allen is one of the shining stars in the Sandy Springs Public Library, according to nominator and co-worker Sugandh Goswami. "She has a very energetic and encouraging personality, and I love attending the art and crafts classes that she organizes," said Goswami.

Allen has developed strong relationships with patrons, community groups, and organizations. The residents of the Villa Palazzo Senior Living Community visit the library on a regular basis to see Ruby and participate in her special programs for seniors. Patrons often ask for her by name because of her patience, knowledge, and engaging personality.

"Ruby is one of the hardest-working people I have ever known and a wonderful example to staff," said Michael Kim, Sandy Springs Library branch manager. "Patrons and staff frequently marvel at her boundless energy and breadth of knowledge. She has a nurturing nature and is patient with staff, always willing to sit down with them to assist or guide them."

### **Henny Holbrook, adult services librarian, Switzer Library, Cobb County Public Library System**

Henny Holbrook was nominated by several library patrons who noted that she leads a very popular monthly book club, Let's Talk, which focuses on cross-cultural understanding. The club highlights and promotes dialogue about books on different cultures and subcultures. Holbrook brings in speakers and foods from featured countries to enhance the experience.



"I have learned so much from this book club," said Eileen McDonald, library supporter. "Henny goes out of her way to make this an exciting adventure." Nominator Laura Agadoni noted that when she decided to check out the renovated Switzer Library, Holbrook took the time to show her how to use library services and programs that have changed over the years. "Now I'm using the library as a community space again in addition to checking out books," said Agadoni.

"When Henny sees a need, she acts, such as starting the Let's Talk book discussion group in 2021," said her supervisor, Suzanne Kincer. "The book club is a collaboration between Henny and other staff and demonstrates the diversity throughout the library and Cobb County as a whole."

#### **Gwendolyn Jackson, manager, Burke County Library, Greater Clarks Hill Regional Library**

Jackson was nominated for her dedication to the library and efforts to help library patrons. According to nominator Connie Herndon, she even opens the library after hours and on days the library is closed for patrons who need to use the facility.

She has served the community as a library employee since 1981, starting as a student assistant and working her way up to managing the three libraries in Burke County. Jackson also serves on the board of the Burke County Concert Series and the Woodmen of the World.

#### **Safiya Jeffers, technical services assistant, Covington Branch, Newton County Library System**

Jeffers has been a part of the Newton County Library System team since 2018 as a post-retirement career choice. Though she had never worked in technical services, she quickly learned to do her job with quality and precision.

Eight months after she started, the Covington Branch went through a full renovation. One of Jeffers' largest tasks was retrofitting the entire collection of 110,000 items to add radio-frequency identification tags (RFID). RFID uses electromagnetic fields to identify and track tags attached to books and other items.

According to nominators Ann Davis, technical services coordinator, and Lace Keaton, library director, without her dedication and commitment, the library would have missed its opening date deadline.

Jeffers also is an advocate for the library in the community. She happily answers any questions and provides information, even when out on personal errands. She will ask parents if they know about library programs and suggest that they bring the kids to the library. She also actively assists with promoting a StoryWalk, one of the library's biggest community partnerships.

#### **Erica Luke, senior library specialist for youth services, Embury Hills Branch, DeKalb County Public Library**

Erica Luke received many nominations from patrons who all emphasized her creative, welcoming, and caring nature. They noted that she creates wonderful programs that make the library a fun place for all ages. One young patron noted that Erica "has been very nice to me and made sure I got a black panther bracelet when I wasn't able to attend the library's event."

Known as Ms. Erica by the patrons who go to her many programs, younger patrons look for and ask for her if she is not at her desk. Jackson, a young Embury Hills Library patron, shared "I love Ms. Erica's library programs! First of all, we made posters and goody bags for the firefighters at Station 19. We made posters of the sea levels, and then we made an ocean in a bottle. She also pro-

vides games like chess, checkers, and lots of other good stuff."

"Erica's enthusiasm and dedication have sparked a lifelong love of learning and reading in many children," said Alison Weissinger, director of the DeKalb County Public Library. "Her commitment to building childhood literacy and connecting with patrons on a personal level inspires everyone around her."

#### **The following individuals also received nominations for Public Library Employee of the Year:**

- Abby Boatfield, Azalea Regional Library System
- Aaron Brown, Fulton County Library System
- April Coda-Hobbs, Cobb County Public Library System
- Katherin Crocker, Northwest Georgia Regional Library
- Laurie Eubanks, West Georgia Regional Library
- Karin Fulton, Flint River Regional Library
- Diana Graham, Marshes of Glynn Libraries
- Carrie Hall, DeSoto Trail Regional Library
- Dana Lance, Northwest Georgia Regional Library
- Sarah List, Athens Regional Library System
- Joane McGill, South Georgia Regional Library
- Melinda Miller, Marshes of Glynn Libraries
- Mari Mills, Lake Blackshear Regional Library
- Penny Mills, Athens Regional Library System
- Tracy Ralston, Henry County Library System
- Katie Rees, Flint River Regional Library
- Dana Seger, Azalea Regional Library System
- Jayshree Sheth, Fulton County Library System
- Edward Williams, Fulton County Library System



# 2022 Georgia Public Library Awards



## Winners of the Georgia Public Library Awards embody service to community

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.

Our annual Georgia Public Library Awards honor the outstanding service and achievements of public libraries, librarians, and advocates.

“I’m so proud of our library staff and supporters across the state who found new ways to bring library services into their communities, champion library funding, and help patrons access books, resources, internet, and so much more,” said Vice Chancellor for Libraries and Archives and State Librarian Julie Walker.

Read more at [georgialibraries.org/gpla](http://georgialibraries.org/gpla). ■

### The 2022 winners are:

**Director of the Year**  
Cameron Asbell of Ochopee Regional Library System

**Library Employee of the Year**  
Rebecca Ballard, regional children’s services coordinator at Athens Regional Library System

**Library of the Year**  
Marshes of Glynn Libraries

**Champions of the Year**  
Clyde and Sandra Strickland, whose philanthropy supports Gwinnett County Public Library





## Mayors and libraries partner to build literacy

Local leaders are promoting the importance of literacy by participating in the Mayor's Reading Club, a literacy program established by Georgia City Solutions, the nonprofit arm of the Georgia Municipal Association. So far, 59 mayors across Georgia have signed up to read to groups of local children at public libraries, schools, or other spaces.

"I participate because literacy is important to everything we do throughout life, including the economic development of our community," said Mayor Betty Cason, who read recently to a rambunctious crowd of children at the Neva Lomason Library in Carrollton. "Reading is a vital part of developing our future, and through the Mayor's Reading Club, local leaders can demonstrate the importance of literacy to the overall strength of our community."

The club also encourages collaboration between a community and its county, area nonprofits, schools, public libraries, and local businesses by hosting reading events. When West Georgia Regional Library Director Stephen Houser learned about the initiative, he reached out to Mayor Cason to offer the Neva Lomason Library as a space where she could read to kids.

"The Mayor's Reading Club is a great civic literacy initiative and the library is a vital community hub," said Stephen Houser. "We felt this was a perfect fit. Our goal of working with Mayor Cason on this initiative is to educate children on the importance of local government and to provide a platform for her to tell the stories of the people who serve in our local government."





Photos by Deborah Hakes

“Through the Mayor’s Reading Club, local leaders can demonstrate the importance of literacy to the overall strength of our community.” – Mayor Betty Cason

Georgia City Solutions has commissioned a children’s book series that mayors can read to help teach young readers about how local government works. The first book, “Georgia Caroline Visits City Hall,” follows a class on a field trip to City Hall.

When Mayor Cason read the book in Carrollton, she brought bobble-head printouts of the city’s local leaders taped to popsicle sticks, which elicited laughs from the kids as she explained each person’s role.

According to Kay Love, managing director of Georgia City Solutions, literacy is a topic that has become very important to cities, not just from an educational standpoint, but also economic and workforce development. “Mayors are in a unique position to encourage and support young readers in the community and teach them about how their local government works,” said Love.

“When Georgia Public Library Service heard about this wonderful program, we immediately asked how libraries could get involved,” said Julie Walker, vice chancellor for libraries and archives and state librarian. “Libraries are natural gathering places and are happy to host the mayors as they read. Many libraries reached out proactively to their area mayors to encourage them to participate and to read at the library.”

Each participating library received a starter kit including a copy of “Georgia Caroline Visits City Hall,” a Mayor’s

Reading Club proclamation template, an implementation and resource guide, and a suggested reading list. Libraries typically add activities to the reading event that provide additional learning opportunities.

“If you are a proficient reader, there is no limit to what you can do,” said Walker. “This is crucially important work that benefits the entire community. Having the mayor involved stresses the importance of reading. The more they are seen prioritizing reading and literacy, the better it is for everyone.”

Azalea Regional Library System participates in the club and has hosted several mayors for reading events across the six counties it serves.

“The mayor is a key figure in any community, and when elected officials get involved and engaged with reading, it sends a message that literacy and learning are important,” said Stacy Brown, the system’s executive director. “This program brings our local officials into the libraries where they are able to see, firsthand, how taxpayer funds are being effectively utilized to positively impact the lives of all residents. We will always support and encourage initiatives to increase and promote literacy for youth, and this program is a win-win for the entire community.”

To learn more about the Mayor’s Reading Club or to sign up, visit [www.gacities.com](http://www.gacities.com). ■

Opposite: Madison Mayor Fred Perriman read to third-graders at Morgan County Elementary School.

Above: After Carrollton Mayor Betty Cason read, she answered questions and helped children with a craft. “Literacy is important throughout life,” she said.

# New website provides easy access to audio and braille literacy resources

**Georgia Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled keeps people reading with audio and braille books. A redesigned website helps patrons, caregivers, and advocates gain easier access to resources.**

Georgia Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (GLS) has a new website that makes it easier to sign up or access audio or braille books and other low vision resources. The redesigned website has improved accessibility features and has been tested for ease of reading with screen-reading devices. The URL is <https://gls.georgialibraries.org>.

“The removal of barriers that prevent lifelong learning through reading is our ultimate goal,” said Kristin White,

director for Georgia Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled. “Our services provide a sense of community, independence, and entertainment. We want our patrons, caregivers, and advocates to easily access the information they need.”

Georgia Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled also launched a TV and radio public service announcement to raise awareness of the free services they provide.



Photos courtesy of NLS



“There are many people across Georgia who could benefit from our services but they don’t know we exist,” said White. “We hope our PSA and website can help reach them so they have the opportunity to keep reading and pursuing their goals.”

Through Georgia Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled, Georgia Public Library Service provides library services for individuals who are blind or whose physical abilities require the use of books and magazines in audio format or in braille.

The service lends talking books and the easy-to-use talking book players needed to use them free of charge and also offers talking books and magazines online and through the Braille and Audio Reading Download (BARD) mobile app. Reader advisors are available to help patrons with any questions or to select books via phone.

Georgia Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled isn’t just for those who are blind. Individuals also are eligible if they are low vision, temporarily or permanently physically unable to hold a book and turn the page, or have reading disabilities such as dyslexia. ■

“Our services provide a sense of community, independence, and entertainment.

We want our patrons, caregivers, and advocates to easily access the information they need.”

– Kristin White,  
GLS director

## Sign up for Georgia Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled

An application can be filled out by hand or computer and has basic questions such as name, address, qualifying condition, and the types of reading materials that interest the patron.

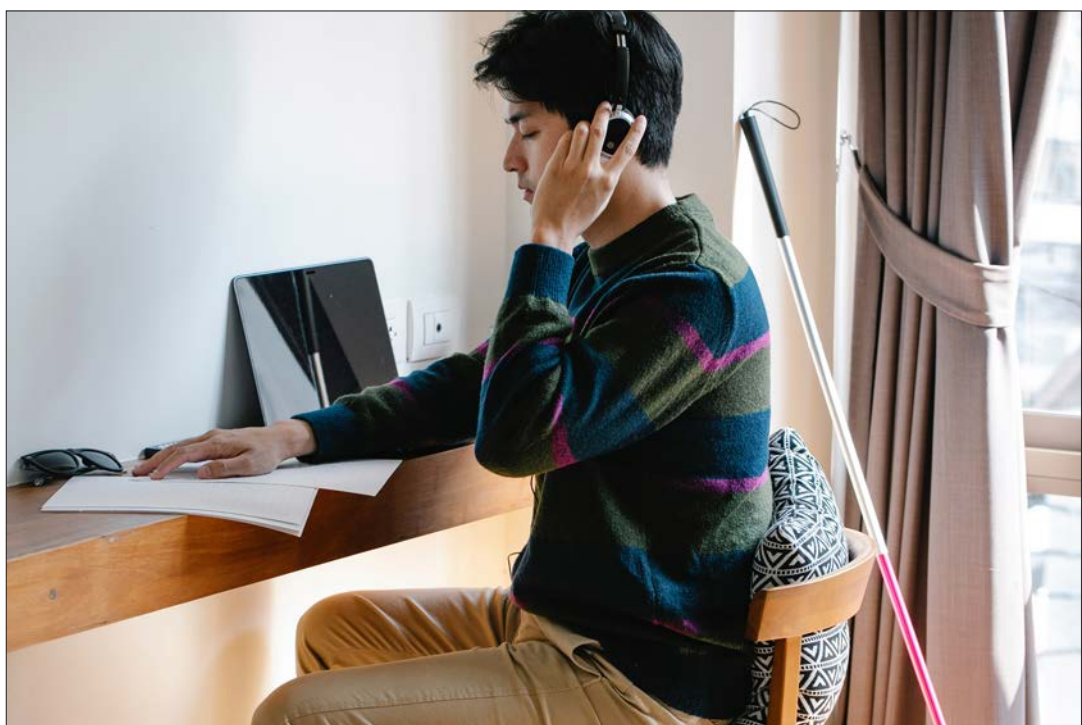
The application includes a place for the certifying authority to sign. A certifying authority may be a doctor, ophthalmologist, optometrist, psychologist, registered nurse, therapist, or professional staff of hospitals, institutions, libraries, and public or welfare agencies.

All services, including the mailing of books and equipment, are provided at no charge. A combination of federal and state funding provides for library materials and operational support.

After staff receive the application via postal service or email, they will be in touch to provide the service delivery in the way that the patron prefers.

Georgia Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled is a network library of the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled, a division of the Library of Congress, and receives funding from the Institute for Museum and Library Services.

The new website and PSA were funded by the American Rescue Plan Act. Contact Georgia Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled: 800-248-6701, [gls@georgialibraries.org](mailto:gls@georgialibraries.org), or [gls.georgialibraries.org](http://gls.georgialibraries.org).



## NEW IN LIBRARIES

# Chromebooks and learning tablets now available for checkout



*A volunteer tutor helps a student using a Launchpad at Worth County Library, which received 13 Launchpads from GPLS. Photo courtesy of Worth County Library.*

Georgia Public Library Service (GPLS) has provided more than 7,000 Chromebooks and 2,800 Launchpad learning tablets for children to public libraries across Georgia as part of \$2.3 million Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) funds awarded by Gov. Brian Kemp.

The funds are intended to support learning recovery initiatives and programs as educators and students continue to confront the learning loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Students, workers, and job seekers already are checking these items out and using them in their daily lives," said Vice Chancellor for Archives and Libraries and State Librarian Julie Walker. "These will replenish the connectivity and remote learning devices in our state's public libraries, and they will make a huge impact in the many rural areas our libraries serve."

Georgia Public Library Service shipped the equipment directly to each library to ensure fast deployment in communities where they are needed most. In addition to the Chromebooks and learning tablets, GPLS also purchased charge carts and laptop bags for libraries. All 60 public library systems in Georgia received devices.

The Launchpads arrive at libraries preloaded with applications and games that encourage language and literacy development.

"I was talking with a family who was checking out a Launchpad," said Debby Gerl, assistant branch manager at the Sequoyah Regional Library System. "They were already back for their second one since Monday of this week! Their little girl is in first grade but struggling a little with reading, and the mom is very impressed with the language-centered Launchpads."

The girl showed Gerl which games she was most excited to play on the device, and she even ran over to the library display to show which Launchpad she wanted to check out next.



The Worth County Library in south central Georgia received 13 Launchpads, and patrons checked out 11 in the first three days of starting the new service.

Gina Dorminey checked out a Launchpad for her sons. "My six-year-old has enjoyed practicing his sight words in a new, game-like format," she said. "It has boosted his confidence enough to start picking up books to read by himself." Dorminey's 3-year-old enjoys practicing writing numbers on the device and hearing the sound each letter makes with each tap of his finger.

"There has been an amazing response from our patrons," said Director Leigh Wiley.

To check out a device at your library, visit in person or search their online catalog. ■



*ABOVE: Josiah Murray, kindergartener at North Lafayette Elementary School, is a huge fan of the library and the new Launchpads. His father is thankful to be able to have access to educational resources that his kids love. He believes literacy and curiosity is the foundation of education. As a single parent, he often finds it a struggle to provide affordable entertainment for his children, especially when he is in need of transportation. Photo courtesy of Cherokee Regional Library.*



*LEFT: Kids test out a Launchpad at the South Columbus Public Library. Parents there have shared that they love that this is positive screen time with the preloaded, interactive, learning content. An internet connection is not required, so the content is secure. Photo courtesy of Chattahoochee Valley Library.*

*BELOW LEFT: Georgia's public libraries started checking out laptops to patrons during the pandemic, assisting students and workers in completing their work during a difficult time. The demand has grown steadily, and GPLS is pleased to have provided more than 7,000 Chromebooks to libraries in 2023. Photo courtesy of Chattahoochee Valley Library.*





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Information presented in this newsletter will be provided in alternative formats on request. For more information about Georgia's libraries, visit [georgialibraries.org](http://georgialibraries.org)

Front cover: Photo by Jennifer Champagne,  
Live Oak Public Libraries.



*Georgia's public libraries are places where children and families can discover the joy of reading, get help with homework, learn through hands-on activities, and get free admission to great places around Georgia.*

*Visit [georgialibraries.org/kids](http://georgialibraries.org/kids) to learn more.*