



LIBRARY NEWS

Sharing stories of Georgia libraries transforming lives and communities

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Mobile libraries bring books and more into communities

Georgia Public Library Service funds technology projects across the state

Public libraries step up in tough times



GEORGIA PUBLIC
LIBRARY SERVICE

Georgia public libraries step up in tough times



Ben Carter

By Julie Walker, state librarian for Georgia

As a new year begins, we look forward with hope to new opportunities and ways to serve our Georgia communities in 2021. I'm so proud of our library staff across the state, who, even while libraries were closed, found ways to help patrons in need of books, internet access, and more. Their innovation inspires me every day.

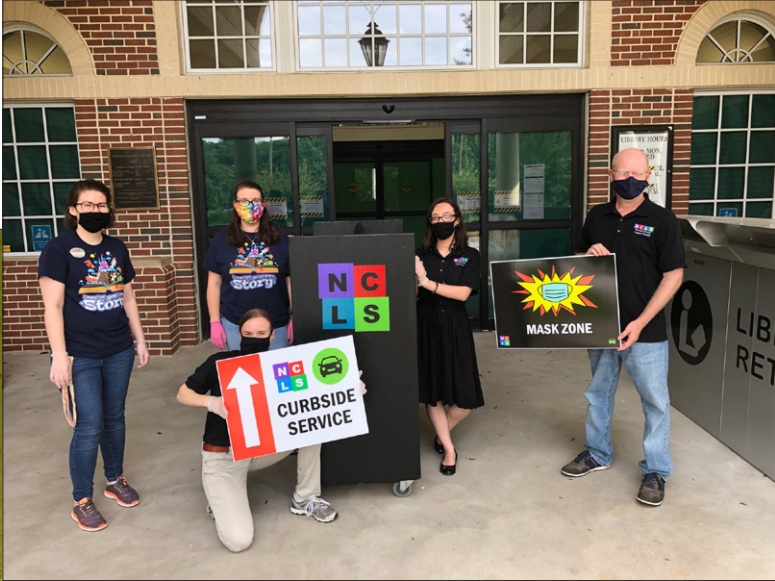
I'm pleased to share some of the ways that Georgia's 411 public libraries stepped up during COVID-19.

Getting digital learners and workers what they needed, fast

In spring 2020, Georgia Public Library Service met the urgent needs of students learning remotely. We purchased laptops on behalf of our libraries and assisted them in making connections to K-12 and college students who needed them. Because Georgia Public Library Service is located within the University System of Georgia, we coordinated with all 26 campus locations to quickly give students without a device the tools they needed to finish their semester.

We heard from college students, workers, and parents with young children who were grateful for being able to borrow devices to complete their work.

Additionally, libraries provide a host of [online resources](#) to help students of all ages, including the free practice tests and lessons in Learning Express and language learning in Mango Languages. Our PINES library card serves more than 300



Courtesy of Newton County Library System



Chelsea Kovalevskiy

libraries across Georgia, and this fall, we launched a [PINES ecard](#) that gives you an easy way to register for all digital resources offered at your local library, including GALILEO and the Entrepreneurial Learning Initiative.

We partnered with Grow with Google to connect jobseekers and small businesses with [library resources](#) to build digital skills and grow businesses online. Connectivity offered by libraries provided a lifeline to Georgians in applying for jobs or government services during this particularly difficult time.

Providing internet to those without access

Many people who live in Georgia's rural areas lack basic internet access, which became an even bigger problem during times of distance learning and business shutdowns. This spring, there were many times when our library parking lots were full of vehicles - workers, families, and students logging on to the free internet that all of our public libraries continue to provide outside their buildings. We have seen record internet usage across Georgia libraries in 2020.

Our public libraries have played such an essential role in providing access as Georgians coped with the consequences of COVID-19.

We also are funding bigger projects using TV white space and some Wi-Fi extenders, so libraries could share their free Wi-Fi out into more public areas like parks and community centers. Currently, we are granting funds to our public libraries to boost their technology services for things like lending internet



GPLS

hotspots or tech-to-go packages to patrons. You can read more about our efforts [here](#).

Libraries help students keep reading

Summer reading is such an important tool to keep kids learning when school is out. In 2020, our libraries made the switch to virtual summer reading programs. Librarians were able to create vibrant, well-attended online programs. Many libraries continue to use Beanstack year round for reading programs in partnership with local schools. Additionally, we continue to provide the [eRead Kids](#) digital library, which features more than 20,000 electronic and audiobooks for kids in pre-K to fourth grade. It is freely available through all public libraries in the state.

Libraries, innovated

Our libraries have done an exceptional job pivoting to an entirely new service model in 2020. Going far beyond curbside service and virtual programming, they have stayed in touch and in tune with their individual communities to provide whatever

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er is needed, from food to connectivity to entertainment to educational support, all the while striving to keep everyone safe and well. Libraries have built and strengthened community partnerships, as people continue to depend on libraries for much more than books.

In 2020, we've learned that, more than ever, libraries are essential. I look back with gratitude to all of our library patrons, staff, friends, and funders who helped sustain us. It's because of you that our libraries can transform lives and communities.

Please reach out anytime with questions or feedback at communications@georgialibraries.org. ■

Georgia Public Library Service funds technology projects across the state

Public libraries across Georgia have played an essential role in providing internet access during COVID-19, especially in rural and underserved areas that lack basic connectivity. This has been especially evident during times of distance learning and business shutdowns, when people needed to access public Wi-Fi to complete work.

For the 35,000 residents of Harris County, Georgia, the local library has been a lifeline during COVID-19 closures. The two-year-old facility is in Hamilton, a rural town with around 1,100 residents located just north of Columbus, Georgia.

"To say libraries are still offering a vital service during the pandemic would be an understatement," said Ryan Willoughby, the executive director of Habitat for Humanity of Georgia, Inc. "There is only one public Wi-Fi spot where I live, and that is the Harris County Public Library - for the entire county."

During the statewide shutdown, Willoughby spent several hours a day using the library's parking lot Wi-Fi access to do his work. A majority of Harris County does not have access to broadband internet apart from unreliable cellular options, and broad swaths have no internet access at all.

Recognizing this need, Georgia Public Library Service has dedicated federal CARES Act funding,

along with state and private grant funding, to a variety of technology projects through the Libraries Without Walls grant. The funding aims to boost the connectivity needs of our public libraries to better serve their community's needs in five focus areas:

- Bringing libraries up to a standard level of Wi-Fi connection and statistics gathering.
- Providing Chromebooks so libraries can create a lending program for patrons.
- Migrating libraries from outdated email and productivity tools to the cloud-based G Suite from Google.
- Supporting projects that embrace innovative technology to address the changing needs of libraries.
- Using Wi-Fi expansion technologies to boost the internet beyond the library.

Grants have already been awarded for 11 tech innovation projects totaling \$186,000, from network hardware upgrades to tech loaning programs.

Two of the 11 recipients are the Sara Hightower Regional Library System and Oconee Regional Library System.

The Sara Hightower Regional Library System, located in north-west Georgia, will use the grant to provide internet hotspots for checkout.

“A number of our patrons live in areas where internet access is not available,” said Delana Sissel, director of the Sara Hightower Library System. “Our library serves three counties with many people who need these hotspots to be able to complete their work and studies. This service to our community

will ensure educational opportunities are not missed due to poverty or lack of access.”

The Oconee Regional Library System will use their Library Without Walls grant to fund a Tech to Go program. The library will combine an assortment of useful technology and guide materials that patrons can check out just like a book. Examples include at-home internet access kits for school, job hunting, research, and productivity; digital photography and digital media creation and editing; kid-friendly stop-motion animation kits and tutorials; outdoor adventure kits including a GoPro; and digital music production.

You can learn more about grantees and their projects at galibtech.georgialibraries.org/lift-grants. ■



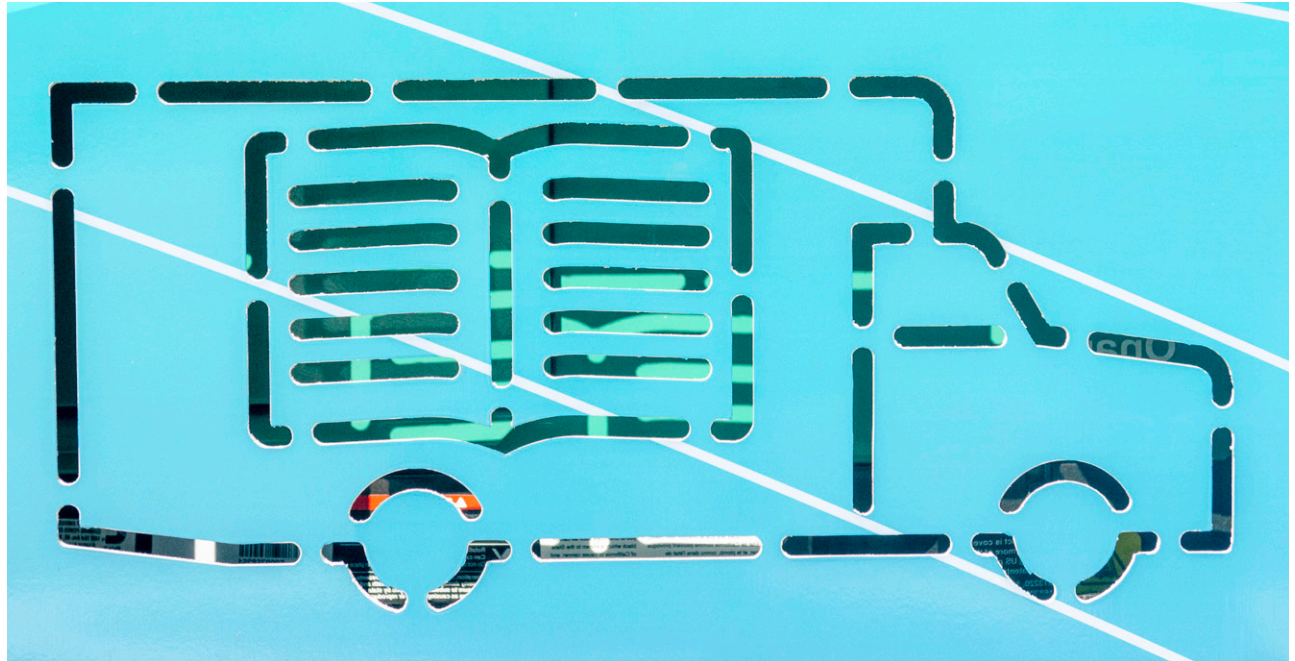
Daniel Zeiger



Forsyth County Public Library launched its bookmobile in November. With nearly 250 square miles to cover in the county of over 236,000 residents, demand for bookmobile services is expected to be high.



Cobb County Public Library's bookmobile partnered with local middle schools to distribute donated books to underserved communities.



Mobile libraries bring books and more into communities

For those who don't have transportation to get to a library, bookmobiles and other traveling library services bring books and resources directly to those who need them.

As the Cobb County Public Library's bookmobile came to its weekly stop at a local church, a four-year-old boy with his mom jumped excitedly up the stairs, eager to see if the librarians had found a new dinosaur or shark book for him to borrow.

"They are always here. Even if there is bad weather, the boy's mom will come to pick out books for him," said Mary Wood, community engagement manager at Cobb County Public Library. "During these visits, they received their first library card. The bookmobile enabled us to share the power of reading, literally bringing the library closer to this little guy."

For those who don't have transportation to get to a library, bookmobiles and other traveling library services bring books and resources directly to communities.

There are 10 bookmobiles across Georgia's public library systems: Cobb, Forsyth, Piedmont, Middle Georgia Regional, Bartram Trail, Moultrie-Colquitt County, Chattahoochee Valley, Conyers-Rockdale, Southwest Georgia Regional, and Gwinnett libraries offer mobile service.

Additionally, more than 20 public libraries have other types of mobile outreach, such as a van or even a bicycle that travels to community events, day cares, senior centers, and more.

These services have become even more important during the COVID-19 pandemic, when people began working and attending school remotely. While all public libraries in Georgia provide free high speed Wi-Fi access in their parking lots, many people who lack internet access also lack a way to get to the



library.

Mobile outreach now increasingly includes ways to bring the library's free internet into communities.

For example, the Chattahoochee Valley Libraries' bookmobile provides internet for local nonprofits when requested, including one group that needed a safe, outdoor space for their participants to access the internet and power. The bookmobile also spends four hours a day at four regular weekly stops in areas with a high concentration of families without internet access.



Forsyth County Public Library launched its bookmobile in November. It includes a wide collection of books, an interactive screen on the exterior of the vehicle for programming, and internet access. With nearly 250 square miles to cover in the county of over 236,000 residents, demand for the bookmobile services is expected to be high. The library worked with local organizations to determine places that are underserved by library branches, as

"If it wasn't for the library bringing its large print collection and sharing about low vision accessibility services, I would have had to give up my lifelong love of reading."

well as areas where transportation options are limited.

"Many of the areas we visit are not only in need of wireless access, but also access to a computer and printer," said Sarah Reynolds, outreach manager at Forsyth County Public Library. "We have two patron laptops on board to help bridge this gap. Recently, I worked with a senior citizen to re-up her food stamp benefit using the bookmobile. Our services are very needed."



Top: A young reader explores a book on the Forsyth County Public Library's new bookmobile, which travels across the county's 250 square miles to serve residents. (Deborah Hakes)

Middle: Community Engagement Coordinator Keamber Farely with the new Middle Georgia Regional Library book bike that supports the mobile Library Without Walls (Library WoW) branch. (Mark Bohnstedt)

Bottom: Cobb County Public Library partners with a local food pantry for drive-through food distribution, where the library provides monthly craft kits for kids. (Cobb County Public Library)

Opposite page: Photos from Forsyth County Public Library's bookmobile (Forsyth County Public Library)

On the cover: The Piedmont Regional Library System launched its new outreach vehicle in November 2020. Though slowed down because of the COVID-19 pandemic, their Pop-up Rolling Library (PuRL) will visit farmers markets, day cares, community events, and senior centers across three counties. (Piedmont Regional Library System)



Forsyth Library has found that their most successful recent visits have been to lower income housing developments that have lots of children. Many residents are Spanish speakers, and the library's bilingual staff member has made a big difference in providing quality library services to parents and their children's reading adventures.

COVID-19 has both amplified the need for these services and also made changes necessary in the way bookmobiles operate. In Forsyth, masks are required, and patrons are given a limited amount of time on board to ensure safety for themselves and for library staff.

Cobb County Public Library modified its bookmobile strategy due to COVID-19 in several ways. The

library now partners with a local drive-through food distribution site to give out 1,100 craft kits to families each month. They work with two middle schools in high-needs areas to connect children to books and build home libraries for school breaks. They also host bookmobile pop-up in the park events where families attend an in-person storytime and check out books.

"We are responding to the changing needs of Cobb County residents to support learning and literacy in meaningful ways," said Mary Wood.

The Piedmont Regional Library System launched its new outreach vehicle in November 2020. Their Pop-up Rolling Library (PuRL) visits farmers markets, day cares, com-



munity events, and senior centers across three counties.

"COVID-19 hit just as we were getting PuRL," said Alicia King, community engagement and office administration coordinator at Piedmont Regional Library System. "As our communities are opening up, and safety standards have been established, PuRL is helping each library reach beyond their four walls to engage the whole community and promote all that the library offers."

One of PuRL's senior center patrons said that they could no longer travel to their local library.

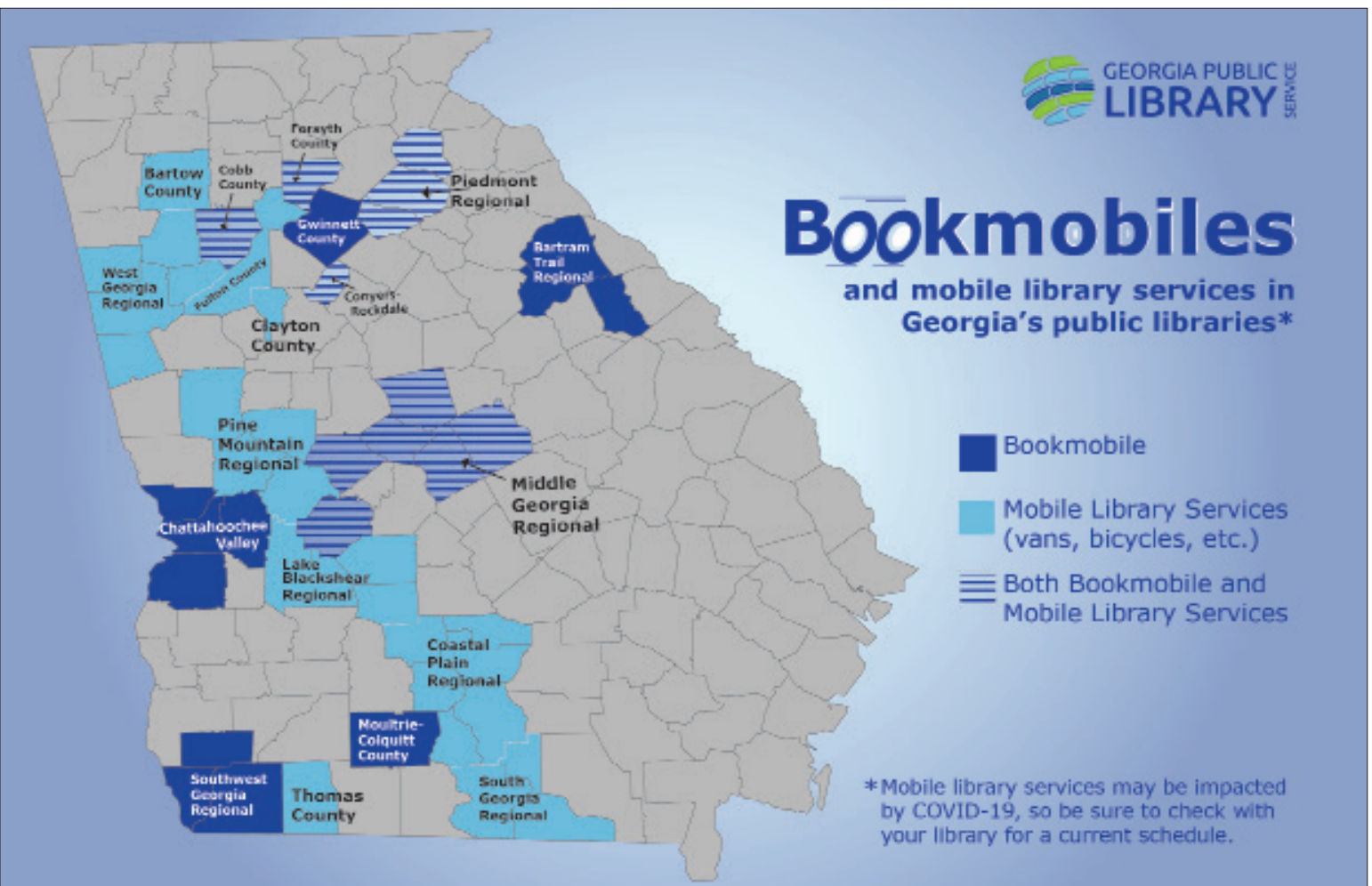
"If it wasn't for the library bringing its large print collection and sharing about low vision accessibility services, I would have had to give up my lifelong love of reading," she said. "I love the days they come to our center!"

In 2020, Middle Georgia Regional Library launched both a bookmobile and a book bike that travels by request into the community for events and festivals. It is the third bike of its kind in Georgia (the others are at Fulton County and Thomas County public libraries).

Both vehicles serve Middle Georgia's Library Without Walls mobile branch (Library WoW), which has brought library services to the community since 2017 and can be requested through the library's website.

Library WoW provides both English and Spanish services, and it is especially focused on populations who may have difficulty accessing the library in a traditional way, such as senior citizens, the homeless, those who have been incarcerated, and those who might not be comfortable accessing traditional libraries.

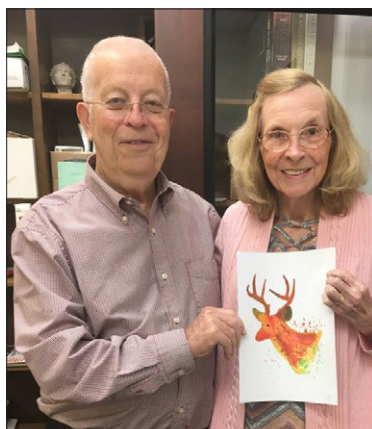
"Georgia's public libraries have long been leaders in developing innovative ways to serve their communities," said State Librarian Julie Walker. "It's no surprise to see them respond quickly to COVID-19 to bring literacy resources, internet, and more to those in need." ■



The Hart of the Library

By Jessica Wilson,
Roddenbery Memorial Library

Jessica Wilson



Tom Hart and a student, Joan Cassels, with her first watercolor painting. After a career as a librarian, professor, and library designer, Hart has gained a reputation for being a great watercolor instructor at the library.

Tell us YOUR library story by emailing communications@georgialibraries.org or using [#GeorgiaLibraries](https://twitter.com/GeorgiaLibraries).

Every Thursday morning when we walk down the stairs to open the library, at least one person is there waiting and asks, “Is Mr. Tom coming today for watercolor?”

What started as a hobby became an unexpected passion for retired librarian Tom Hart. Semi-famous in the south Georgia, north Florida area as a former instructor at the School of Library and Information Science at Florida State University, Tom has also worked as a consultant for libraries, and he can even be occasionally heard rallying the pledge drive for the local NPR station.

Tom first became involved with the Roddenbery Memorial Library in Cairo, Georgia, in the 1970s. He would bring his library school students to look at the state-of-the-art audiovisual system, and it was then that he met Wessie Connell, Roddenbery Library’s founding director.

As their friendship grew, Hart began taking library staff to listen to lectures at the university. After learning about Hart’s work on various building projects, Connell invited him to consult on the library’s renovation in the 1980s.

“Miss Wessie envisioned the library as a community center and a museum. She recognized that for many patrons, the library might be their only opportunity to visit such a place,” said current Library Director Janet Boudet. With its marble walls, airy ceilings, art collections, and beautiful garden areas, the Roddenbery Memorial Library is a focal point in the city. Connell saw Hart as someone who could help bring this vision to reality.

Tom went on to design other libraries in the United States and across the world, including Lima, Peru; Alexandria, Egypt; and Paris, France.

After retiring from teaching in 2005, he started watercolor painting as a hobby. In 2011, a former student of his, Pamela Grigg, became the director of the Roddenbery Memorial Library, and Tom’s involvement with the library was renewed when she invited him to teach watercolor painting classes there.

It didn’t take long for the weekly class to fill up. The classes were packed elbow-to-elbow into a makeshift space. As the library began planning its next renovation, completed in 2019, it became clear that the library needed a classroom dedicated to adult learning, and the library’s makerspace was born.

Once the renovation was complete, Tom and the class were free to meet with more room to move. As word spread that the library was open again, more students began showing up. One group in particular, a special needs learning group, became regulars. And after Tom learned that not everyone was able to come because of transportation issues, he decided to take the class to them. It wasn’t long before he offered to teach the class at the local senior center as well.

“Who knew, of all the things I have done in my life, this would be the most rewarding,” Tom said of teaching the watercolor class. For this retired librarian, teaching in the library became a way to fulfill and share a passion. ■



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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



Courtesy of GPB

Georgia Public Library Service is pleased to partner with Georgia Public Broadcasting to celebrate Be My Neighbor Day: Share a picture or video to show us how are taking care of yourself, your family, and your community! We'll highlight photos and videos on social media and on GPB TV. Tune in to GPB TV on Feb. 20 at 9 a.m. for a special Be My Neighbor Day watch party with Daniel Tiger himself! Be My Neighbor Day is supported by PNC Grow Up Great.® www.gpb.org/neighbor.