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Georgia Library Spotlight - Cherokee Regional Library System

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Cherokee Regional Library System

Georgia's public library of the year, Cherokee Regional Library System, is a four-branch system that has found ways to build upon its already award-winning services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Cherokee Regional Library System has previously been recognized by the Institute of Museum and Library Services with a national grant for their Next Chapter program, which combats a high recidivism rate through a life skills enrichment program at the county jail. The Dade County branch was a runner up for Library Journal's 2016 Small Library in America award for efforts like lending Chromeboxes, bringing programming and Wi-Fi into the community park, and hosting Prime Time Family, which includes weekly reading activities at the library for at-risk, low-income families..

During COVID-19, the library system doubled its daily open hours so that more people could safely utilize the library, including people who travel from other communities because their home libraries remained closed.

Cherokee Regional Library System Director Lecia Eubanks is proud of the can-do attitude of library staff. "We do not easily say the word 'no' – we find ways to say yes," she said. "In the early days of the pandemic, we saw the importance of the library to our community. We understood the library to be instrumental in

their ability to adapt to COVID-19. We crafted a plan to stay open safely, with protocols in place to protect the staff and our users. Every staff member supported the decision, and we are so very proud of them for their hearts of service and love for their community."

Located in northwest Georgia, Cherokee Regional's 30 staff members serve a population of around 86,000 in Dade and Walker counties.

The library developed the Time with Teacher tutor program to help students struggling with virtual learning. The program averages 200 free tutor sessions per month, and the program has helped some of the community's most financially disadvantaged families.

Another recent project was providing digital library cards to Walker County Middle School students and waiving fines for those who already had a card to ensure immediate access to the library.

Patrons credit the library for the many ways it enables them to improve their lives. "Being able to use the computer lab to attend an online university has given me the opportunity to improve my living situation and the future of my children," said Kim Robinson.

Additionally, an associate professor at nearby Dalton State College lacked adequate bandwidth with her internet access at home,

and so she utilized the library to teach her online classes.

For entrepreneurs and small business owners, the library is one of the few places to access essential services like printing, scanning, faxing, and copying, as well as meeting space.

"It's important that we not only provide basic library service, but that we look around our community and stand in the gap in as many areas as we can," said Eubanks. "We continue to be the place in our community for high-speed internet access, communal meeting spaces, high-quality family programming, preservation of our local history, and a safe place to just hang out."