COVID-19 Response

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, January found all Gloucester County Library System (GCLS) locations open to the public in a limited capacity with normal hours and normal staff schedules. We offered Special Hours on Tuesday and Thursday mornings, for at-risk patrons who are immunocompromised or over the age of 65.

April brought our first in-person programs hosted outdoors of the library and in various parks. The Library continued with mask requirements, social distancing, Contactless Pick-up service and limited capacity. All meeting rooms, study rooms, play areas, teen spaces and makerspaces remained closed with the exception of the Innovation Studio on the RCSJ Gloucester County Campus that was open by appointment only Tuesdays and Thursdays.

On June 1, indoor capacity limits were removed at all locations as permitted by NJ Executive Order 239. GCLS no longer offered Special Hours on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. In July, In-person programs resumed in most locations, however virtual and hybrid programs continued to be popular.

As of the end of 2021, all GCLS branches remain open to the public. Contactless pick-up continues to be offered at all locations. And the Mullica Hill Maker’s Space is available by appointment. The RCSJ Innovation Studio remains open on Tuesdays and Thursdays by appointment. All locations are providing programming that is predominantly in-person, though hybrid programs are very popular, allowing patrons to participate in-person or virtually.
GCLS Community Read
GCLS facilitated a Community Read during the month of April. The title selected was *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston. During the entire month of April, the library hosted several book discussions and supplemental programming to celebrate this literary classic. Programming included a Hip Hop Jazz Musicology presentation, a film discussion of *Zora Neale Hurston: Jump at the Sun*, a Family Cooking Class: Cuisine of the Deep South, Unlearning Partner Violence and Fair Housing, and Consumer Protections programs. A representative from The Harriet Tubman Museum in Cape May, NJ, also provided a presentation. The highlight of the month was a Zoom author discussion, with Dr. Keisha M. Blain, co-contributor of *Four Hundred Souls*. The event was sponsored by the Friends of GCLS.

StoryWalk® Project
The GCLS Swedesboro Library held a ribbon cutting ceremony on Saturday, July 31, at Locke Avenue Park for the StoryWalk® Project. NJ Assemblyman Adam Taliaferro, Mayor Vernon Marino, Deputy Mayor Natalie Matthias, Committeeman Michael Nocentino, Swedesboro Branch Manager Judith Pissano and Youth Services Librarian Teresa Carlton helped to launch the project. Ms. Carlton read the story currently on display, *There’s a Superhero in Your Book* by Tom Fletcher. The library served light refreshments and a craft to take. They also made a paper ribbon for the kids to cut. The Woolwich Township Parks & Recreation Department was a great partner in getting this project off the ground. Additionally, this project would not have been possible if not for the donation of Richard Sanquist, the support of the Friends of GCLS, and Library Assistant James O’Connor for the overall design of the yardarm and backer boards.

Grants
Due to the initiative and hard work of GCLS Staff, the library was awarded grants totaling $55,600 in 2021.

- American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 Grant - $24,000
- NJSL + Partners Digital Literacy Grant - $25,000
- Dollar General Youth Literacy Grant - $2,100
- LLNJ-Ready For Anything Mini-Grant - $4,500

Technology
GCLS upgraded to a state of the art catalog to make a better patron experience for finding materials and managing their accounts. This was a six-month project that was completed in July 2021.

Volunteers
- GCLS Mullica Hill had three student volunteers from Kingsway Regional High School’s (STEP) Special Services Structured Transitional Education Program.
- Both GCLS Swedesboro Library and GCLS Logan Library partnered with Kingsway Regional High School students, to provide computer coding classes.
- GCLS is pleased to continue to participate in the RCSJ Intern Scholarship Program. In 2021, four interns were placed at GCLS libraries and at the InnovationStudio at RCSJ.
Community Outreach

◊ The GCLS Seed Bank was started with guidance from the founder of LibrarySeedBank.info, Jeff Quattrone, who has helped a growing number of public libraries bring this great resource to their patrons. Through generous seed pack donations from companies like Seed Savers Exchange and Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds, GCLS made smaller packs of seeds available for free to our patrons.

◊ Library Assistant Bennett Carlton offered history walking tours of local cemeteries - Logan Township: Union United Methodist Church and St. Paul’s Church; Woolwich: Mt. Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church; Swedesboro: Trinity Episcopal “Old Swedes” Church, Bethesda United Methodist Church and Old St. Joseph Cemetery; and Mullica Hill: Mullica Hill Baptist Church Cemetery & Mullica Hill Friends Cemetery.

◊ GCLS continued to offer an award-winning pet-therapy literacy program provided by FURever As Friends at all branches. This program was offered virtually from January to May and resumed in-person programming in May through the end of the year.

◊ A Registered Behavior Technician from Helping Hands Family volunteered weekly to provide story times for toddlers with autism or special needs. GCLS Mullica Hill offered a special early hour before opening, that allowed children with special needs and their families to attend the library in a sensory safe setting.

◊ All children’s programs are inclusive programs which are open to children affected by Autism and Asperger’s syndrome.

◊ Both the GCLS Swedesboro and GCLS Logan Branch partnered with the Food Bank of South Jersey to offer lunches, snacks, milk and juice to community members under 18 years of age through the summer. It seems there was more of a need this year from previous years. This year was a grab-and-go service, and we were permitted to hand meals to adults for their children. We were also permitted to offer seconds to children if there was extra food.

◊ GCLS participated in the Gloucester County Cares about Hunger campaign with the annual Food for Fines, Feel the Love initiative. This year the GCLS community donated 427lbs. beating last year’s donation by 100lbs.

◊ The Swedesboro Library partnered with “Letters of Isolation” to make cards for seniors in nursing homes and care facilities. Staff created 40 card making kits that were distributed to patrons. Over 30 cards were returned and mailed to the organization.

◊ Throughout September, GCLS worked closely with the Gloucester County Office of Emergency Management and FEMA to provide disaster assistance to the residents of the County who were impacted by the destructive tornado on September 1. A disaster assistance and recovery center was open in the main meeting rooms at Mullica Hill seven days a week until October 2. All library programs and meetings scheduled in the meeting rooms were moved to other spaces.

◊ GCLS staffed an informational table at Harrison Township Day. Staff had the opportunity to meet a lot of people, including a few families who either had just moved to the area, or were in the process of moving. It was a great opportunity to introduce them to GCLS.

Farewell

GCLS Director, Ralph Bingham, resigned and his last day was June 25, 2021. We wish him well in his future endeavors as Executive Director of LibraryLink NJ.

Interim Director, Anne Wodnick, joined GCLS in July for the remainder of the year.
GCLS 2021 By The Numbers

Public-Access Computers 116

Weekly E-Newsletter Subscribers 4,014

197 YouTube Videos

YouTube Views 8,075

Visits to our website 253,370

Followers on:
- Facebook 3,972
- Twitter 1,500
- Instagram 1,893

SUMMER READING
- 891 children registered and read 18,496 books
- 121 teens registered and read 603 books
- 138 adults registered and read 544 books
- GCLS hosted 363 summer reading programs with 5,604 participants

1,772 New Cardholders

GCLS was awarded Grants & Awards totaling $55,600

270,026 Items Checked Out

77,363 E-content Checked Out

166,850 Patron Visits

2,309 Programs Offered

73,564 Program Attendance

16,890 Reference Questions Answered

95 Librarian By Appointment Sessions

215 Volunteer Hours