Special Educator Chip Rowan serves lasagna in a take out container at The Beautiful Rainbow, a cafe run by students with special needs at the Gadsden Public Library.
When the Beautiful Rainbow Catering Company and Garden officially opened in 2017 inside the Gadsden Public Library, it was a cause of celebration for everyone involved.

Two years later, the library café is growing to become one of the biggest success stories in Etowah County. Sixteen students who have worked at the restaurant have moved on to permanent employment opportunities in the community.

The restaurant is part of a larger garden-to-table education curriculum for adolescents and young adults with significant cognitive disabilities in Gadsden City Schools. In addition to operating one of the area’s only vegetarian eateries, the program also operates a kitchen laboratory, classroom, and organic garden which grows vegetables year-round.

Chip Rowan, the director of the Beautiful Rainbow Project connected with the Gadsden Public Library in the summer of 2016. He had previously operated the venture as a summer learning and work experience opportunity for his students, and he was looking for a permanent home. A partnership was forged with Gadsden Public Library, Gadsden City Schools, and the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services all playing key roles in developing the project.

“Chip has taken this program to new heights,” said Gadsden Public Library Director Craig Scott. “These are kids who, otherwise, would never land jobs. After participating in this program, many restaurants and other businesses are hiring these students with good, paying jobs because of the valuable job skills they are acquiring while at the library café.”

Scott added, “It’s an honor and privilege to work with Chip and his students. This is a great partnership, and having the library involved to house their working classroom is incredible.”


Students with special needs develop valuable job skills at library eatery

The Beautiful Rainbow, run by students with disabilities, has operated inside the Gadsden Public Library since 2017

Beautiful Rainbow Project Founder Chip Rowan monitors students as they prepare food to be served in the public library’s restaurant

Pimento cheese is a Beautiful Rainbow favorite
Several Alabama public libraries have recently received awards, grants, and donations to better serve their communities.

**Athens-Limestone Public Library** won the 2019 Loleta D. Fyan Award, presented by the American Library Association. It will provide resources and training for librarians to learn how to better help young people on the autism spectrum develop social skills. A fall workshop is planned for public librarians to learn more about providing services to those on the autism spectrum.

**Tuscaloosa Public Library** received a $5,000 donation from Alabama ONE Credit Union during their annual meeting in May. The money will be used by the library for children’s programming.

The **Northwest Regional Library System** recently received a $4,000 grant from the Tombigbee Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Council for four Lamar County member libraries. Sulligent Public Library, Kennedy Public Library, Millport Public Library, and Mary Wallace Cobb Memorial Library in Vernon each received grant funding to purchase new adult and young adult books. The libraries also received an additional $4,000 grant from the council to help fund their summer reading programs.

The Tombigbee RC&D Council has generously supported the Northwest Regional Library and Lamar County libraries in recent years. The council provides support for projects to help improve quality of life in rural communities.

Congratulations to all award and grant recipients! If you would like us to acknowledge your award in a future APLSeeds, contact Ryan Godfrey at rgodfrey@apls.state.al.us.
Star Wars Day

May the fourth be with you!
The Autauga Prattville Public Library had more than 100 children attend their Star Wars Day event on May 4. Members of the 501st Garrison volunteered to help make this day even better.

Winfield Public Library hosts Elementary field trips

The Winfield Public Library recently hosted the entire Pre-K and first grade classes from Winfield Elementary School for their annual city tour field trips.

Winfield’s first grade classes celebrated Eric Carle’s 50th anniversary of the publication of “The Very Hungry Caterpillar” while the Pre-K classes listened to several Pete the Cat books and participated in activities. All of the students also learned about the library and how to properly care for books.
Spring Fling concludes Wonder Kids’ Book Club

Children show off their original masterpieces during the final Wonder Kids’ Book Club meeting held at the Albert L. Scott Library in Alabaster on May 14. Last year, the library was awarded the 2018 Virginia Hamilton and Arnold Adoff Creative Outreach Grant to exclusively fund the club. Books by Hamilton and Adoff as well as those of other authors were showcased throughout the club meetings.

The Atlantic spotlights BPL computer workshops, Google partnership

The Birmingham Public Library (BPL) recently received a special visit from the Atlantic, a New York-based magazine.

Writer Jordan Teicher and art director Drew Campbell led a team representing Atlantic Rethink, which spent three days in May at BPL. While in Birmingham, the Atlantic took photos and interviewed BPL employees and patrons for an upcoming spotlight on the essential role libraries play in providing digital skills training for the public. The magazine will also highlight BPL’s partnership with Google.

Teicher sat in on computer workshops at the Central Library and Ensley Branch Library led by Maurice Harley, BPL training coordinator. He interviewed BPL patrons, including Calvester Sanders, who was promoted to lead the housekeeping staff at the Redmont Hotel thanks to computer skills she gained from free workshops available at the Central Library.

The Atlantic also interviewed BPL Executive Director Floyd Council and other BPL staff about the role they play to help patrons learn new skills and achieve success.

“The Birmingham Public Library and City of Birmingham offer special thanks and appreciation to the Atlantic for profiling our library system and our vision for digital skills and the role of the public library space in supporting 21st century workforce development,” Council said.

This upcoming feature in the Atlantic is a result of a partnership BPL began with Google after hosting the first Grow With Google workshops in Alabama last August. Council said that BPL’s collaboration with Google is allowing the library system to better serve Birmingham metro area patrons.

“As an intentional Grow With Google Library Partner, we are very excited about how our profile in the Atlantic will lend inspiration and motivation to library systems around the world where the need for digital skills is just as essential as the need for clean water and electricity,” Council said. “BPL is also excited for our patrons to Grow With Google.”