Orange Beach: Hotspots for the Underserved
by Steven Gillis

With the rise of one-to-one computer initiatives and the expansion of state-funded educational resources like the Alabama Virtual Library, the Orange Beach Public Library was concerned about Internet access for underserved children. When Baldwin County switched from Apple Computers to the Chromebook platform as a cost-savings measure, we decided that we had to act to support our community. Chromebooks, without WiFi, are pretty much bricks.

The library has begun to provide Internet access to children in our schools with slow-or-no Internet through our Educational Hotspot program, developed in partnership with T-Mobile. We also explored the government MiFi card program from Verizon, and while this was an option and actually had better speeds, the price-point was higher on a per-month basis. It is possible that the MiFi cards can be obtained without an up-front cost, and depending on the situation and the local network strength, they could be a better choice. The up-front cost for the bulk of our hotspots was waived due to a promotional event that let us get the T-Mobile device purchase-price prorated over time, then refunded monthly. Effectively reducing the purchase price to $0 as long as the device remains active.

Orange Beach Library already provided a small number of hotspots that have unlimited data on T-Mobile’s 4G network for checkout in our area. However, the number of students identified by the elementary school’s guidance counselor as having limited or no connectivity at home was greater than what our fifteen 4G hotspots could provide. Our original Hotspot program was inspired by Carrie Steinmehl’s program in Hoover, which was the first public library in Alabama we know of to offer these devices for checkout. Our first tests of the network were very poor, but after a network upgrade to our area, T-Mobile speeds became viable broadband.
- varying from 4-17 Mbps depending on where you are in the community.

Since the circulating hotspots with unlimited 4G are around $35 per month, we talked to T-mobile to see if there were options to support our school with limited-data hotspots. By adding a SIM card for voice services to our account, we were able to add hotspots for just $10 a month. We used the SIM card in a phone donated by the Friends for our Books-on-Wheels program in partnership with Meals on Wheels, but the real benefit is taking the cost of the hotspots down by 50%. In other words- having a voice line for around $20 a month = 1/2 price hotspots on that account. Considering this is 30 hotspots, that $20 saves me 300 :) Net win of 280! These educational hotspots have 2 Gigabytes of data per month at 4G speeds, then dial down to 3G speeds - less useful for bingeing videos, but adequate for homework. At any time, we can choose to increase the monthly cost for the unit and dial them back up to 4G unlimited if data demands warrant it, at a difference of $25 per device.

Considering the promotional offer reducing the up-front cost of the hotspots, and the number of needy students identified by Orange Beach Elementary School, the Library Board decided to provide 30 hotspots for our community. Outreach was made to the School Media Specialist and School Guidance Counselor who agreed to help identify the children who may have slow-or-no Internet access at home. These children will be issued hotspots for the entire semester on request. We did make a big decision on lost or damaged devices: no charges occur for the program, and there will be no cost to the parents if a hotspot is lost. With the hotspots under a promotional offer, the Library Board felt that the chilling effect of a possible $114 bill for loss or damage might prevent underserved patrons from using the service. We plan to check on any semester-long checkouts for data use each week, to ensure that the device is being used and not sitting in a drawer or lost in the woods but unreported. In the case of loss, the data can be cut off on the device with a simple call to T-Mobile. Currently, the school no longer allows children to take their Chromebooks home. We plan on revisiting with our school’s principal in the Fall of 2017 to see if there will be any changes. If not, we may expand the program to other schools in our area that are allowed home use of school devices. The program as intended has been on hiatus and the Educational Hotspots are used to supplement our unlimited hotspots for general use by the community. We still reserve ten hotspots for use by school children in case they are needed. While we can’t control what our Board of Education decides to do with their technology, the Orange Beach Public Library stands ready to make sure the children have the resources they need to succeed.

Steven Gillis is the director of the Orange Beach Public Library. For questions about their hotspot policies, contact Steven at sgillis@cityoforangebeach.com
Homewood Public Library recently held a Computer Creatures event for tweens - 4th-7th graders. Tweens were able to use old computer parts to construct new creations.

Oneonta Public Library had their own Frankentoy adventure. Staff said the process was just as fun to watch as seeing the creations.

Save the date! This year’s Snapshot Day will be held on August 17, 2017. APLS wants to make it as easy as possible by providing a toolkit featuring a stats tally sheet, customizable press release, and photo consent form. Young adult and children’s librarians will be busy enough hosting programs, so take advantage of the toolkit by visiting our website: http://webmini.apls.state.al.us/apls_web/apls/apls/snapshot

Your Snapshot Day results are a great way to show how important libraries are to the youth in your communities. You are providing essential resources and services to Alabama’s kids, preventing the summer slide, and creating a safe space for learning and growing. Don’t let that be kept a secret! Use Snapshot Day to show off and tell your library’s story. #SnapshotDayAL17
STEAMing Along

Straw Roller Coaster
activity and pictures courtesy of frugalfun4boys.com

This activity works great for younger kids and teens alike. Older kids and teens can use a cool melt glue gun, and younger kids can use Play-doh to pit the straws together until they find a configuration that they like, then a grown-up can help glue it together. This activity is great for working in pairs or teams, with someone holding the straw in place while the glue dries.

Brief YouTube video: http://frugalfun4boys.com/2016/08/14/engineering-project-kids-build-straw-roller-coaster/

What you will need for each participant (team):

A cardboard box or a piece of cardboard for the base
Straws – solid color straws (with multiple colors available) are fun!
Scissors
A hot glue gun and glue sticks or Play-doh for younger kids
A ping pong ball
A bowl to catch the ball at the bottom (optional)

As you can see from the pictures, it may work better to start from the top down. As they construct the coaster, they may find places to make their coaster more complex. You can also do things like who can make the longest, tallest, most complex with a given number of straws – teens can be very competitive – so this would be a great incentive for them.

This activity builds engineering skills and team skills (if working as a group); uses concrete and abstract math skills, through measuring and angles; and builds problem-solving skills.
STEAMing Along BOOKS

**Basher Science: Engineering: The Riveting World of Building and Machines;** Basher, Simon and Jackson, Tom; Kingfisher; 2/2017

**Engineering for Kids: Building and Construction Fun;** Baby Professor; 2/2017

**Engineering in Our Everyday Lives;** Miller, Reagan; Crabtree Publishing Company; 2/2014


**Hands-on Engineering;** Andrews, Beth; Prufrock Press; 6/2012

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**What's Up**

**Solar eclipse is August 21st.** Think about sharing with the YAK what kind of programming you did!

**2017 Summer Reading Statistics & 2018 Summer Reading Materials order form is due September 30th!** The form can be found on our website: [http://webmini.apls.state.al.us/apls_web/apls/apls/slp](http://webmini.apls.state.al.us/apls_web/apls/apls/slp). DON'T FORGET - failure to get your form completed by this date will result in not getting summer reading materials for next year!

**FREE Webinars/CES:**
The Wyoming State Library maintains a website to aggregate free training opportunities (webinars) from a variety of sources. Some of the upcoming August webinars of interest are:

- 8/17/17  PLAYful Environments That Foster Learning
  - Girls in STEM: Creating a New Era
- 8/22/17  Good Reads for Reluctant Readers
  - Once Upon a Time, Storytelling Was Learning
- 8/23/17  How to Break Up Boredom! Interactive Events for All Ages
- 9/19/17  From Apps to Robots: How to Evaluate Digital Media for Literacy Learning - Part 1
- 9/26/17  From Apps to Robots: How to Evaluate Digital Media for Literacy Learning - Part 2

There are plenty more on the site. Just click on the link below and then on the event you would like to attend. It’s that easy. THANKS, WYOMING!!

[http://library.wyo.gov/services/training/calendar/](http://library.wyo.gov/services/training/calendar/)
And Now a Word......

Since we featured an article about a program that might be text prohibitive to some libraries, I thought it might be appropriate to offer some advice about partnerships.

15 Things We’ve Learned About Partnerships @ the Comer Library

by Shirley Spears

During the last decade, librarians across the country have shared a bittersweet experience—the economy went down while library use went up! In Sylacauga where the Comer Library is located, the 2006 closing of Avondale Mills—Sylacauga’s largest employer—foreshadowed the upcoming loss of almost 50% of the county’s manufacturing base. By 2008 the Great Recession hit and the town’s revenue plummeted from $17 million to $13 million dollars, impacting the Comer Library with an eventual 20% decrease in the library’s local revenue.

For years, the Library Foundation had provided funds for Comer Library’s “frosting on the cake” but the deep impact of the economic downturn was too drastic for any one organization to alleviate. Out of the ashes of multiple efforts by the staff and boards—labor intensive events, break-even projects, and overused techniques—the miraculous phoenix arose in the form of partnerships!

For several years, the library’s existing partnerships were strengthened and the established pattern was followed to attract new prospects. Efforts were made by all team players to build trust and to find creative ways for new partners to contribute what they could—money, goods or services. The eventual take-away for the Comer Library was a breathtaking array of “win-win” partnerships, enabling the library to not only survive, but also to thrive as a significant player in re-building the economy of the town. The Comer Library’s good fortune and continued success with collaboration can be attributed to the following rules to live by while sustaining/expanding the partnership model:

• Make the first move; don’t wait for your partner to invite you to the dance
• Realize that no one can go it alone—the collective good surpasses individual effort
• Matchmaking sets the stage for success—choose the right project for the right partner
• Your good reputation is a must—partners want to be part of a success story
• Political climate affects success—stay neutral so as not to win a battle and lose the war
• The media is the indispensable partner—their showcase is your insurance policy
• All partners do not have to be equal—little projects are important too
• All partners do not have to be in for the long haul—some projects are hit and run
• The number of partners needed depends on the scope of the project—enough is enough
• A partner is more than a donation; value added services come in many forms
A partnership is not a product endorsement—which may cause resentment and legal issues.

Learn to do more with less—donors admire frugality and like their money used wisely.

Forget “we’ve always done it this way”—social media has created a new world.

Unplanned outcomes may be the best—everyone loves the ripple effect.

The whole really is greater than the sum of the parts—collaboration makes the pie bigger.

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**Shirley Spears is the past director of the B.B. Comer Library in Sylacauga. She graciously gave us a bit of her retirement time to write this article.**

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**Ozark-Dale County Public Library’s Five Rules for Partnerships**

by Sandra Holmes

As you may know, sometimes it is difficult to continue successful programs with little or no money, but we have discovered that our community is ready and willing to help us out, if we just ask them. There are a few rules we have followed.

1. Always say “Thank you!” for anything given to us, no matter how small or insignificant. These letters of thanks are accompanied with a tax statement and the individual or group’s name is placed in our newsletter.

2. If a donation is made by a business, we want them to remember us, so we are sure to give them public thanks for their gifts. For example, each year we give free Summer Reading Program (SRP) T-shirts to all our attendees. We use the same person to make the shirts and publicly thank him for his generous discount.

3. We start with our Friends of the Library (FOL) group. The Children’s librarian gives a presentation, explaining what she will be doing for the SRP and she gives an idea of what she needs in the way of assistance.

4. Next we mail letters to all businesses explaining our upcoming SRP and asking them to donate. (We do the same thing during spring break.) Since we have 3rd Class Permit mail, the cost is greatly reduced. Usually by June, we have all we need to start a great program.

5. We also have PSA spots and live interviews on TV. We try to be as visible as possible and on air as often as possible.

These ideas will work for just about any kind of program, but I think the key to the success is maintaining a strict policy of saying “Thank You” anytime and all the time. And we do this for any donation whether they are memorials, books, etc.

Sandra Holmes is the director of Ozark-Dale County Public Library.

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“This is a library. Kids and adventurers welcome. All others stay out.”

Dean Koontz, Cold Fire
Spanish Fort Public Library teens serving up scrumptiousness at ice cream social night (ice cream donated by Publix of Eastern Shore).

Every year the teens from McGregor-McKinney Public Library visit the Hartford Retirement Village and play checkers with some of the residents. The kids and residents really enjoy it. They can get pretty competitive!

Pell City Public Library teens whip up some “Green Screen Magic”!

Foley Public Library teen Book club have a wonderful discussion about the book “Wonder” by R.J. Palacio.

“School is Cool” is the message Homewood Public Library sends with their Countdown to Kindergarten Popsicle Party.
Title: The Star Thief
Author: Lindsey Becker
Release Date: April 11th, 2017

Honorine knows nothing but the Vidalia mansion. An orphan with no heritage, she is lucky to have been given a place to live as she grew up, and later a job to provide for herself. She dreams of being an explorer like the missing lord of the manor. She misses her best friend Francis, Lord Vidalia’s heir, who now attends boarding school. She wishes that something, anything, would happen to make a change in the dull routine her life has become.

She gets her wish in a manner she never would have anticipated. Shortly after finding a journal of Lord Vidalia’s filled with incredible information about his travels and discoveries, the manor is attacked. Strange men search through the halls while a large black bird and a girl with wings tell her they must flee immediately. Honorine is drawn into a conflict that has lasted since before she was born between mortal men who wish to control the very heavens, and the constellations who fight for their freedom.

The Star Thief was an enjoyable read. The story was well-paced and the settings were imaginative. Honorine was a likable character and easy to commiserate with, and I enjoyed how Becker gave both sides of the conflict understandable motivations. Having constellations be actual characters in the books was brilliant. The idea that they each represented an aspect of humanity and inspired that aspect in people with their presence was a fun twist. Honorine herself as a character was torn between two worlds and I like how that theme reoccurred and reinforced itself throughout the book without being heavy-handed with it.

My main complaint about the story is that I would have loved to see more included about the mythology that was behind the different constellations who were characters in the book. I think that due to the nature of the story Becker probably wanted to keep things moving without being bogged down by a lot of exposition, but so much was omitted that you were left with barely anything at all. There should have been a way to balance giving more hints and information about different characters without boring the reader or feeling awkward, but unfortunately it isn’t there. It was a missed opportunity for sneaky education through storytelling, which I always approve of. That being said, I still enjoyed the book and would say it would be a solid addition to anyone’s bookshelf.

**Recommended for:** Fans of adventure fantasy.
**Things to watch out for:** Fighting, but nothing graphic.