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**ASA Broadband
transformative for
rural libraries**

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ASA Broadband proves a gamechanger for public libraries with internet woes

by Joanna Bailey

Director, Bay Minette Public Library

Once upon a time there was a beautiful library with slow internet and sketchy Wi-Fi access. Then came along a fairy godmother – the Alabama Supercomputer Authority (ASA) – and all the library's internet problems were magically solved.

The truth is no fairy tale, but it does have a very happy ending. I was tangentially aware of ASA from attending the Alabama Library Association's annual convention and picking up a cool triangular highlighter. When I received notice of ASA's new initiative, I was intrigued but also a little apprehensive. There was the problem of distance to consider, and what if something happened? Sometimes change is good and sometimes change just creates different problems.

So, I did my homework and spoke extensively with Rick Bagwell at ASA who assured me that the transition would be relatively smooth and painless. He answered question after question and was very kind and patient. He also referred me to Shelia Harris, the Director of the Enterprise Public Library, who was more than happy to speak to me about her experience with ASA. And, after being a part of ASA since June, I see why she was so eager to help.

Prior to ASA, we were on the county system that throttled down our internet speed. It had ridiculous filtering that kept our patrons from accessing innocent information on topics like breast cancer or advertisements. When it came to resolving our internet issues, we were routinely standing in



ASA Broadband solves typical issues rural libraries have using other internet providers including bandwidth throttling and spotty Wi-Fi reception

a very long line, leading to frustration and delay for all involved.

It was clear that something had to be done. And, the more I learned about ASA, the more certain I became that it would be a problem solving, positive step for my library and our patrons.

The transition was painless. My library is in AT&T territory, so they ran the fiber they needed in order to get us Alabama Supercomputer ready. John Fisher and Mike Harper were assigned to set everything up for us. They were so nice and helpful and a pleasure to work with throughout the entire process. They walked me through everything they were doing with friendly, professional, and concise explanations. It was such a breath of fresh air!

I had always been told that we wouldn't be able to have good Wi-Fi in my library. The main reason given? It is two stories, loaded with bookshelves and, of course, books. It also has steel beams running through the walls. A formidable obstacle, at least to some.

But not to John and Mike, who proved the naysayers wrong! We went from two wireless access points to four and now have wonderful coverage throughout the building. People using our program room can now also use their computers and are able to close the doors for privacy as well. Before, it was almost like someone being stranded in the middle of nowhere holding their cell phone up in the air and wishing for even one flickering bar.

Talk about high performance internet. We went from tortoise to hare overnight. It is amazing not having to wait to bring up a page or to conduct an internet search.

The switch to the Alabama Supercomputer has meant that now our patrons have the sort of fast internet access that makes the experience more than simply productive; it makes it a pleasure too. And they can find what they need without being filtered to death by the internet Nazis.

Joining the Alabama Supercomputer

See **ASA** continued on next page

Authority has been one of the best decisions I've made for the library. Not only is it free, (I can't tell you how happy that made my city's finance director), but the process was seamless, smooth and simple. What's not to appreciate about that?

The biggest selling point for me was that a human being is monitoring my library's internet connection 24/7. A few times since joining ASA, our power has gone out, especially after a couple of pretty potent storms and at least one hurricane. Well, in no time at all I received emails notifying me of the outages and asking detailed questions aimed to resolve the problems presented. I was blown away! I can't tell you how comforting it is to know someone is monitoring the internet and my library's connections all the


time, ready to help and capable. This means that our patrons can rely on our internet connection either from our patron computers during library hours or via Wi-Fi which is available to them 24/7 in the courtyard and parking lot.

My library was closed for a few weeks due to the Covid pandemic, and we had patrons outside using the wi-fi to do work, schoolwork and to pay bills online. Thanks to the ASA, that ability remained available to them even when the physical library was not.

The ASA Broadband Initiative is a godsend for my area of the county. We are rural, and the further north you go the worse the internet connections tend to get. Our being able to provide 24/7 internet truly levels the playing field for those who had to forgo the internet in order to keep food on the table and other bills paid, especially during these difficult times of pandemic and isolation.

Internet access is a civil rights


issue as well, because in our rural area the poorer parts of the county don't have equitable access to the internet. Most of these poorer areas are predominantly populated by minorities. Internet access inequality is a genuine issue with serious implications that I see every day in my community. Knowledge and access to knowledge are power and the means to self-enrichment. I am so glad that the good guys with the Alabama Supercomputer Authority are working seriously to combat this problem. They are definitely heroes of the underserved.

Once upon a time there was a beautiful library with slow internet and sketchy Wi-Fi access. But now? Now, thanks to a partnership with the ASA, everything has changed. And the patrons (and librarians too) are living more happily than ever, after. 

TPL holds kickoff for new StoryWalk

The Tuscaloosa Public Library (TPL) held a kickoff event for the newly installed Tuscaloosa StoryWalk® on April 11.

The Tuscaloosa StoryWalk® program seeks to encourage families to engage in physical activity and literacy learning using interpretive walking trails in accessible outdoor recreational areas. The exhibit was first installed at the Tuscaloosa Riverwalk, and will be rotated to various parks throughout the city and county.

TPL will select storybooks for the interpretive trails each month. 



Two TPL patrons enjoy the StoryWalk® at the Tuscaloosa Riverwalk


 **Help welcome us back!**
Send in your story ideas today.

Contact Ryan Godfrey
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or
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Wiregrass United Way surprises Ozark-Dale County PL with \$5K grant

Ozark-Dale County Library Director Karen Speck was recently surprised by a prize patrol visit from Walter Hill, director of the Wiregrass United Way.

Through the generosity of the Wiregrass Foundation and Wiregrass United Way, the library was awarded a \$4,971 challenge grant to replace their old and leaky outdoor book drop. The library is excited for the new book drop to arrive in the weeks ahead.

Shown with Speck by the book drop to be replaced, is Joni Wood, the library's administrative assistant. 




The Ozark-Dale County Library receives a check for \$4,971 to replace the library's outdated bookdrop



Gadsden City Council honors GPL

Gadsden Mayor Sherman Guyton acknowledged Gadsden Public Library's important role in serving the community during National Library Week by presenting a proclamation from the city at the April 6 city council meeting.

Jillian Reeves (left), children's department manager, and Rachel Cole (right), teen department manager, were on hand to receive the proclamation. 

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HMCPL celebrates grand opening of new \$9 million library

The Huntsville-Madison County Public Library (HMCPL) added a new state-of-the-art-library to its system, with the grand opening of the new North Huntsville Public Library on April 7.

The new library is a renovation and addition to the former Berachah Academy, which served as both a school and police training academy in its history.

The new library, which replaced two, small aging libraries, is 19,000 square feet and features the latest amenities including a workforce development lab, a makerspace with 3D printers, a laptop checkout kiosk, and an automated sorting machine. It also has a large community room, an additional meeting space, a teen room with games, and a public lounge.

"Libraries connect people to resources that build community," said Cindy Hewitt, Interim Executive Director for the HMCPL. "And we are so excited to show the North Huntsville community what their library can do."

The \$9 million library started as a grassroots movement from members of the community back in 2016. With support from both public and private partners, the library hosted community planning meetings to prioritize amenities.

"This is a great example of what happens when public and private entities



The Children's Area of the new North Huntsville Public Library


come together to make something exceptional for the community," added Hewitt.

Major donors include Redstone Federal Credit Union, First Missionary Baptist Church Foundation, Alabama A&M University, Madison County Commission District 6, The James Cecil & Margaret G. Ashburn Foundation and Toyota Alabama.

As part of the planning efforts, the community also stressed the need for more recreational facilities. The City of Huntsville developed the campus surrounding the library into a park with a

playground, walking trails, picnic pavilion and pickle ball courts and a gym.

All of the on-campus facilities are part of the Dr. Robert Shurney Legacy Center, named after Dr. Shurney in recognition of his valued contributions to the U.S. Space Program. As a NASA engineer and one of the most important leaders in manned space flight, Dr. Shurney was a trailblazer in the African American community.

The HMCPL is also finalizing construction on the new South Huntsville Library, scheduled to open this summer. 

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Library collaboration results in digital preservation of Shoals-area history

A joint effort between the Florence-Lauderdale Public Library and the Helen Keller Public Library is significantly expanding digital archives of the rich and unique history of the Shoals.

Since last fall, Colby Dow and Patti Hannah at Florence-Lauderdale have teamed up with Helen Keller Library Director Elisabeth South to record local historical documents.

South, who previously worked at the Florence library, contacted her archivist friends after discovering a trove of stored historical documents at the library in Tuscumbia.

"We had the documents and Florence had the means of digitizing it all, so we began working together," said South. It has taken a lot of time, but it's going to be well worth it to have all this information preserved digitally and physically."

Hundreds of items have already been scanned and added to the public digital archives at archive.flpl.org.




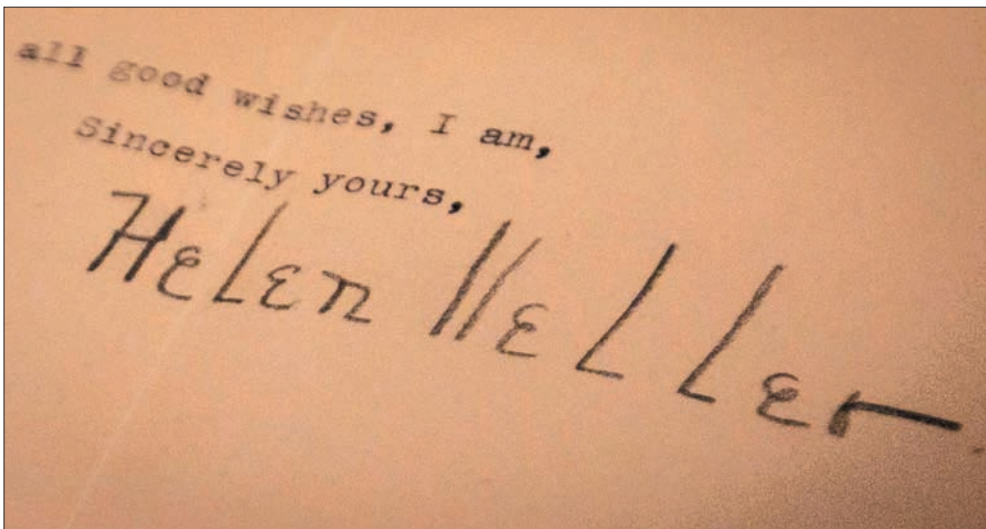
Colby Dow (left) and Patti Hannah of the Florence-Lauderdale Public Library organize Helen Kellar Public Library documents to archive

Items being archived range from letters Tuscumbia-area World War I soldiers mailed home from

France and Germany to a hand-signed letter from Helen Keller to a pediatric nurse living in Florence.

The small local history collection at the Helen Keller Public Library has grown significantly with these recent discoveries. The expanded history room at the library will feature memorabilia from Sen. Howell Heflin's career and countless other items.

"It's just about preserving very important information and our history," South said. "I'm beyond grateful for this partnership and their passion for preserving the past. We all benefit from it." 



A signed letter from Helen Keller is one of the documents being archived in the collaboration between the two Shoals-area public libraries

Foley Public Library holds scavenger hunt

The Foley Public Library wanted to develop programming where participants do not need to gather in the same room at the same time. FPL Director John Jackson had an idea to hold a new book scavenger hunt. The library started this new program in March and quickly found it to be quite popular.

Patrons come to the library and choose one of five authors about which they are asked a question. All answers to these questions can be found on the authors' websites. Once patrons figure out the answer, they must find the area of the library where their answer or subject matter might be found. When searching for their clue, they will find a "place-holder"



April winners of Foley Public Library's "Know Your Author" scavenger hunt

book which they will bring to the circulation desk to receive the actual new book to take home.

In March, all five new books were found by March 8. The next month, all five books were located by April 3.

Needless to say, Foley library patrons are enjoying this program. The library is planning to continue the scavenger hunt through the end of the year. It goes to show, it really pays to *Know Your Author!*

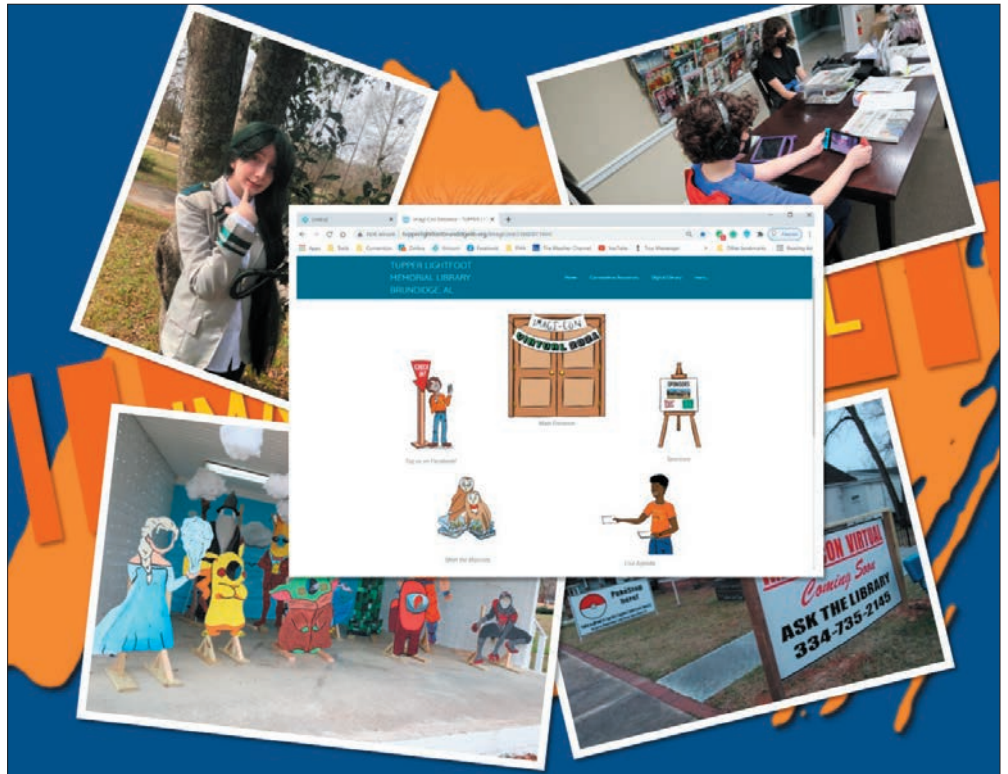
Brundidge library hosts virtual fan convention

Staff at the Tupper Lightfoot Memorial Library began brainstorming and planning for *Imagi-Con* — an in-person fan convention — in April 2019. When the pandemic hit last year, all that planning and work needed to be reimaged to take place in the safest way possible.

Library staff ultimately decided to host a virtual convention instead.

The goal was to bring community together by offering experiences, both fun and educational, that inspired others to create and to explore the world around them. The virtual convention featured activity kits, Facebook Live Speakers, character photo stand-ins, video chat Dungeons & Dragons, and a whole lot more.

It might not have gone as originally planned, but with 117 online attendees on the day of the event, and a lot of positive feedback, the staff are still happy with



The virtual *Imagi-Con* fan convention, hosted by Tupper Lightfoot Memorial Library in Brundidge, attracted more than 100 attendees


the outcome.

Hopefully, the virtual convention sparked an interest in the community that will boost future *Imagi-Cons* and

other library events.


Tupper Lightfoot staff have already started planning for the first in-person *Imagi-Con* to take place next year.

Poetry-palooza at Albert L. Scott Library

Poetry lovers celebrated April as National Poetry Month at the Albert L. Scott Library in Alabaster. On April 6 Poetry-palooza! showcased different kinds of poems and two poetry-related crafts. Youth Services Librarian Frances Smith discussed methods of writing poetry through the ages from the use of quills and ink to using manual typewriters. Families were able to participate by watching the livestream on the library's [Facebook page](#). 



Woodville PL receives grant from Google

Woodville Public Library recently received a \$14,000 STEM grant from Google to use to assist with virtual summer programming due to Covid-19 restrictions. The grant is currently being processed, and the library hopes to access funding by August. Scottsboro is serving as advisor on the grant, and Woodville is welcoming any advice or experience with carrying out the grant. 

Satsuma offers reading challenges for children of all ages



Just in time for Summer Reading, Satsuma PL is offering reading challenges to children of all ages. *1000 Books Before Kindergarten* is an exciting way to encourage children to read before starting school. The library has also launched *Reading Palooza* for children in first grade and up. Both reading adventures reward children with pictures on their Wall of Fame and a visit to the library treasure chest. 

Ashland City Library reaches community at local laundromat for clean fun

Ashland City Library Director Tina Nolen recently partnered with a local laundromat to set up a lending library as a way for the facility's visitors to pass time on wash day.

"Think about it. People are often stuck there for hours at a time. Now they have a selection of books to enjoy or read to their kids," said APLS Library Consultant Stephanie Taylor. "I think this is a genius way for libraries to reach out to the community."

The community agrees. In fact, the little lending library has proven so popular that the Ashland City Library is currently planning to also host regular storytimes at the laundromat for their new found friends. 