

'We're not dead yet.' Southern Maryland celebrates National Library Week

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Leonardtown, MD – The week of April 7-13 marks National Library week, an event that reminds citizens that their local library isn't "dead yet, despite what people might think," as St. Mary's County Library Director Michael Blackwell puts it.

Started in 1958, the American Library Association (ALA) has sponsored the event since its inception. This year's theme is "Libraries = Strong Communities," a fact that is especially true in St. Mary's county.

"Our libraries are definitely great institutions in our community and if you do not have a library card there is no excuse, you definitely should have one and be using it," said St. Mary's County Commissioner Eric Colvin after the holiday's proclamation at the April 9 business meeting. The commissioner also acknowledged that the libraries in the county serve 38,000 current card users and that the county has the "fourth highest circulation rate in the state and highest in Southern Maryland."

The success of the St. Mary's libraries is attributed by Blackwell and Leonardtown Branch Manager Marylee Russell to their ability to adapt and offer services still unavailable to many community members in the twenty-first century. "There are lots of little segments in this county that do not have high speed Internet. We're constantly looking at different ideas and ways to bring services to the community. Technology is quickly moving forward all the time," said Russell. Blackwell added that the library will be adding both 3D printers and virtual reality software later this year, adding to the mobile hotspots, eBooks, audiobooks, and other modern offerings from the library.

In addition to technological offerings, Blackwell attributes the library's high engagement to their early childhood programs, like their various story times. "The more words kids hear early in life, the more likely they are to be interested in learning. One of our goals is to have every child read 500 books before they've reached five. It's an essential foundation for building success later in life."

Both Russell and Blackwell are excited for the opportunities that the new Leonardtown Library building will bring to the community. "This library will offer more than the other two branches," stated Russell who added, "We've been waiting for this new library for years. It's finally happening and it's going to be a real asset." The new library is poised to open in January 2020 according to Blackwell, pushed back by an especially rainy year. "Much needed" space will be the key addition to the Leonardtown Library, giving the community access to study rooms, dedicated teen and children areas, story time rooms, and more community space.

The library's combination with the Garvey Senior Activity Center should also open up unique opportunities according to Blackwell who hopes that the two will have a symbiotic relationship. "It will open up opportunities for seniors, but also to involve seniors," stated Blackwell who looks forward to senior center members volunteering to read to kids and that teens could help teach them how to use their phones as an example. The \$16.9 million library will be 29,730 square feet and be located right next to the new Duke Elementary School off of Leonard's Grant Parkway.

The work of Blackwell, Russell, and all of the St. Mary's County Libraries helps serve a community that visits their libraries an average of five times a year, checking out books 14 times a year. Please check out the [St. Mary's County Library website](#) for more information on it and its three branches.

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