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## Georgia, Iowa Lead OCLC Campaign for Increased Library Support

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*People, Libraries  
and Agencies* **IN THE NEWS**

## Georgia, Iowa lead OCLC campaign for increased library support

On April 14, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation announced a \$5 million grant to the OCLC library cooperative to develop a public information campaign that will help public library leaders heighten awareness of the needs of local libraries and increase support for the services they provide during these challenging times. OCLC will pilot the campaign in select areas of Georgia and Iowa. The Georgia campaign kicked off June 23, with numerous festivities in downtown Savannah. Later in the year, OCLC will make available community awareness campaign materials and other guides to assist library leaders throughout the country in their efforts to strengthen support for local libraries.

The current economic crisis has led to dramatic increases in library visitation across the nation, as people rely on libraries for free computer and Internet access to conduct job searches, access government services, learn new work force skills and use other resources they can no longer afford at home.

The tightening economy has also put library funding — 80 percent of which comes from local sources — at risk. Many library systems predict deep state and local funding cuts in 2009, a growing burden for the roughly half of all libraries struggling against declining or flat budgets. “There has never been a more important time to highlight the importance of and support the services provided by public libraries,” said Jill Nishi, deputy director of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s U.S. Libraries effort. “As a longtime partner to libraries, we believe it’s critical to help ensure they remain strong during this especially challenging time. But we hope new partners, community leaders and local governments will also continue to recognize the value of libraries and support them accordingly.”

OCLC is working with Leo Burnett USA, a Chicago-based marketing communications agency, to design and test the community support campaigns in Georgia and Iowa with the help of field managers. They are using advertising,



*Sha Dishong (top right), children’s librarian at Live Oak Public Libraries’ Bull Street branch in Savannah, leads a storytime as part of the Georgia campaign launch on June 23.*

direct marketing, online engagement, public relations and grassroots community initiatives to heighten awareness of the need for increased library support

“The value and relevance of libraries are especially clear in a difficult economy; however, few people are aware of how their libraries are funded and of the increasingly fragile state of library funding,” said Cathy De Rosa, global vice president of marketing for OCLC. “It is our goal that the campaign model jointly created and piloted with local communities can provide a road map for building awareness of the vital services libraries provide and how to convert that awareness into increased support.”

“Public library use in Georgia is soaring, and many of our facilities and staff are strained,” said State Librarian Dr. Lamar Veatch. “We are very pleased that OCLC and the Gates Foundation have selected Georgia to participate in this important library advocacy program. This work should help refine techniques to enhance the understanding on the part of local funding sources of the vital roles that libraries play in their communities.” ►►