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Spotlight on Public Libraries: The Pop-Up Rolling Library, PuRL, Meets Patrons Where They Live, Work, and Play

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SPOTLIGHT ON PUBLIC LIBRARIES

The Pop-Up Rolling Library, PuRL, Meets Patrons Where They Live, Work, and Play

Piedmont Regional Library System
Jefferson, GA

by *Hollie Stevenson-Parrish*

How do public libraries remain relevant and top of mind in their communities, all while giving their patrons the resources they need? They take the library to the people, which is just what the [Piedmont Regional Library System](#) did in May, 2020. Just as COVID-19 was sweeping the country, this public library system headquartered in Jefferson, Georgia launched [PuRL](#), the (Pop-up Rolling Library). Think bookmobile, but even better.

“Because of its mobility, we are excited to use PuRL to reach our community members that may have low or no access to our buildings,” said Assistant Director Kelli McDaniel of the Piedmont Regional Library System.

Complete with its own internet hotspot, patrons can obtain a library card, check out materials, and learn more about the library’s online services. Not only does PuRL travel off the beaten path where normal means of transport can’t go, but it travels to community events, like farmers markets, festivals, and senior centers.

“We really wanted to target populations that have reduced access to a library, or anyone who may currently be non-users,” commented McDaniel. “Our main goal is to meet our patrons where they live, work, and play.”

PuRL is a fully-functioning, rolling library on wheels that operates year-round in Georgia. While it is shared among the Piedmont Regional Library System’s 10 libraries, it serves all ages of the community. With its eye-catching design, exterior lights, on-board storage, and pop-up features, patrons are drawn to PuRL instantly. For some, it’s a fun, unique opportunity to check out a book in a different way. For others, it’s a lifeline to crucial services.

“PuRL is such an incredible tool for our libraries, and a wonderful bridge between our libraries and our communities,” stated McDaniel. “Our services are reaching more and more people that may not be aware of all the library has to offer.”

In 2016, the Piedmont Regional Library System changed the direction of its outreach services department and began bringing pop-up libraries out into the community. At various community events, the library would set up tables with makeshift shelves to display materials and offer a selection of items the library had to offer. The events were popular in the community and residents enjoyed seeing the library at different venues.



PuRL, the Piedmont Regional Library System’s Pop-up Rolling Library

“Sending staff out into the community gives the library an opportunity to meet patrons face-to-face,” said McDaniel. “The experience forges a deeper connection with people that is often hard to accomplish at a busy service desk inside of the library.”

In 2018, McDaniel and her colleague, Community Engagement and Office Administration Coordinator Alicia King, presented on their pop-up libraries at the Association of Bookmobile and Outreach Services (ABOS) conference in Raleigh, North Carolina. While there, they were introduced to Summit Bodyworks, a company that manufactures specialty vehicle and truck bodies. After seeing the vehicle Summit Bodyworks created for the High Plains Library District in Colorado, they knew this was just what their library needed.

For more than a year, they went back and forth on design and function, and the rest is history — the Piedmont Regional Library System had its very own pop-up rolling library, soon to be known as PuRL.

After a naming contest with staff and a mascot was chosen, PuRL became the official name of the new pop-up rolling library. You may be asking yourself how these librarians settled on PuRL for its name. It is all connected to knitting.

In honor of the Piedmont Regional Library System’s director, Beth McIntyre, who is an avid knitter, library staff chose the alpaca, an animal known for its high-quality knitting yarn as its mascot. Likewise, purl is a term used in knitting circles and is recognized as a basic stitch that is formed by pulling a loop of the working yarn back through an existing stitch and then slipping that stitch off the needle.

Under McIntyre’s leadership, the library system was able to purchase PuRL with allocations from its annual operating budget as a capital expenditure item. It owns the vehicle outright and provides services across three counties. Through partnerships, innovation, and inclusion, the Piedmont Regional Library System is supporting diverse communities, equalizing opportunity for patrons, and providing access to information and life-long learning.



PuRL and friends



PuRL's alpaca mascot

“PuRL provides an invitation to have a conversation with folks, which is one of the biggest focus areas of our current outreach philosophy,” said Kelli McDaniel, Assistant Director, Piedmont Regional Library System.



To have your library featured in a SPOTLIGHT contact the Editor, Ashley S. Dees, at aesorey@olemiss.edu.