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Georgia Library Spotlight - Cobb County Public Library System's Falls Prevention Awareness Initiative

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Cover Page Footnote

Please use the following as a byline Tom Brooks is Communications Coordinator for the Cobb County Public Library System and Chair of the Falls Prevention Awareness Initiative.

GLA SPOTLIGHT

Cobb County Public Library System's Falls Prevention Awareness Initiative

Cobb County Public Library System's Sherry Blomeley and Susan Irvin are engaged in a unique public health initiative.

Blomeley, a Cobb library regional manager, and Irvin, an adult services librarian, are "coaches," leading an evidence-based class designed to assist seniors in reducing the risks of serious falls. The eight week class, "A Matter of Balance: Managing Concerns about Falls," or AMOB, guides participants through strategies for managing falls, avoiding falls, and increasing physical activities. Cobb Senior Services provided their coach training and administers the class.

Blomeley and Irvin first led the class last summer at a Cobb Senior Center. Their second class ran through May at the East Cobb Library. Each class was limited to fifteen people—and both reached capacity before opening. The class was for seniors age fifty-five and up, and the \$30 fee was used largely for class materials.

Blomeley said that AMOB shows how libraries are effective in intervening to address significant community issues. A theme of the class is the ironic reality that seniors who limit activities to avoid falls are more likely to suffer

a serious injury and become socially isolated due to fear of falling. "It's a different format," she said of the librarians-as-coaches approach. "It's about increasing knowledge, increasing confidence, about improving the quality of life overall."

The class is part of the library system's Falls Prevention Awareness Initiative. Launched in 2015, the initiative is centered around the



Cobb County librarians Susan Irvin, left, and Sherry Blomeley

annual Falls Prevention Awareness Day observed nationally in September on the first day of the fall season. Cobb libraries presented nine events, including health screenings, safety checks, and the capstone Falls Prevention Awareness Open House at East Cobb. Participating

organizations included Cobb Senior Services, UGA Cobb Extension, WellStar Health System, Kaiser Permanente Educational Theatre, Georgia Department of Public Health, Shepherd Center, and Emory University Center for Health in Aging.

Injuries due to falls are costly. According to the CDC, national direct medical costs due to falls are \$34 billion annually. In Cobb, public health data shows about one emergency department visit per hour is due to a fall.

Cobb Library Director Helen Poyer said that the partnership with Cobb Senior Services is about enhancing quality of life. "This alignment

demonstrates how public libraries can effectively keep pace with the needs of our older adults by providing meaningful programs and services,” she said.

Irvin said that her experience with the seniors reaffirms the value of libraries to support

community goals like improving public health. “We are very open to community needs,” Irvin said. “The library is a gateway place.”

To learn more about the Falls Prevention Awareness Initiative, please visit: www.cobbcat.org/falls-prevention.