


1-1-2017

## News - Oconee County Library, Athens Regional Library System

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### Recommended Citation

Ballard, Rebecca (2017) "News - Oconee County Library, Athens Regional Library System," *Georgia Library Quarterly*: Vol. 54 : Iss. 1 , Article 16.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/glq/vol54/iss1/16>

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

## Oconee County Library Athens Regional Library System

The Oconee County Library in Watkinsville, Georgia recently received a Vibrant Communities grant from the Georgia Council for the Arts, and Children's Specialist Rebecca Ballard designed a series of creativity workshops entitled the "Oconee Inspirathon" in order to inspire young minds to explore the arts in the library. As part of the workshops, Ballard invited master puppeteer David Stephens of All Hands Productions to teach "Puppet Camp" — puppet building and manipulation classes. Children learned about the history of puppetry from Stephens, and each child completed a unique fur, foam, and rod puppet by the end of the four sessions.

The Center for Puppetry Arts in Atlanta was also invited to participate in the Oconee Inspirathon workshops, and the library explored new technology by hosting live videoconferencing with the center. Staff at the Center for Puppetry Arts mentioned that this is the first time the center has worked with a public library to offer programming to patrons. Families talked with puppeteers at the center via the videoconference link, and patrons participated

in interactive puppet shows. At the end of each show, the puppeteers taught patrons how to make a variety of rod and shadow puppets.

The Oconee County community was truly excited about the workshops, and patrons visited the library in record numbers to learn more about puppetry. Many families were surprised by how much they enjoyed it. Jessica Ham, a patron whose daughter participated in David Stephens' classes, said, "I had no idea that Abby would have any interest in Puppet Camp, but I asked anyway and she wanted to attend.

She LOVED it! She came home excitedly each week telling me what she had learned and all about her puppet she was making: St. Lewis. On the last day, my mom had to pick her up for me since we were working at the mobile food distribution. Abby leaped out of my mom's car and was so happy to show all the volunteers and the people coming to pick up food her new friend. Since then, she has taken St. Lewis to the children's church at our church and entertained the kids, made music with him, and taken him on many adventures. I had no idea that puppet camp would have such an impact on her life. Thank you for this awesome opportunity!" Abby Ham says of her experience in the class, "What I liked about my puppetry camp experience was that I learned a lot about



puppets that I wouldn't have known if I hadn't come, like all of the types of puppets there are (like shadow puppet tools , full body and half body puppets, and Muppets puppets). I also liked how I can do whatever I want to decorate my puppet, it was a lot of fun experimenting

with fabrics and felt, and after the class I decorated my puppet's shirt with symbols and items from my favorite movies. My puppet, Saint Lewis, isn't just a puppet he's like a really fun friend!"