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An Engaging Community Experience: Fayette County Public Library

By LaKeisha Fleming

It was a beautiful day outside, and our family had something unusual—a free day to do what we wanted! My sons wanted to play chess, do computer activities, and practice their Tae Kwon Do Korean phrases. A forum for local political candidates peaked my husband's interest, as well as the possibility of polishing his resume. I just wanted to find a comedy on DVD, then ultimately curl up with a good book. There was only one place where we could enjoy all of those activities together. It's a place that offers the community an engaging experience—the Fayette County Public Library (FCPL).

More than just a facility of books, the Library is driven by one compelling mission—to interact with the community and serve the needs of its patrons. “All of our programs are effectively crafted with a community and book-focused concept, to attract the children, older adults, students, parents, job seekers, professionals, and entrepreneurs,” stated Library Director Christeen Snell. Librarian Gina Martin explained, “It is a public gathering space for all to find resources, enjoyment, pleasure, relaxation, and connection.” The library addresses community needs in a number of ways, through education, empowerment, and engagement.

Education happens on every level. “Our programs build a positive foundation of curiosity and learning for children,” explained

Ada Demlow, children's librarian. Charlotte Stargell, children's paraprofessional, agrees. “Mothers come in and tell you that their children would rather go to the library than the park.” Robyn Sutton frequently brings her two young sons to the Children's Department. “Getting a new batch of books and visiting friends at the library is one of the highlights of our week!” Robyn stated.

In addition to offering Sing and Play with Stories for babies, toddlers, and preschoolers, and a monthly STEAM program full of hands-on

exploration for all ages, the Children's Department lets patrons know that library programs aren't just for daytime. Pajama Night at the Library, and Family Book Club, bring families together to have positive learning experiences.

Another educational event, Fayette on the Page: One Book One Community, is an innovative program that promotes the joy of literature. “Each year, we encourage everyone across the county to read [a] selected book, then get together with other readers at the library for

book discussions, theatrical presentations, musical offerings, and other activities that relate to and amplify the story and themes of the book,” noted Librarian Sara Trowbridge.

Fayette County Public Library programs also empower patrons with practical knowledge.

Lift Every Voice
20TH Annual Blended Heritage
at the Fayette County Public Library

Sensational Soul Cruisers

Friday, February 23, 2018 · 7:00 p.m.
FREE ADMISSION · LIMITED SEATING

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Librarian Jessica Kuhr helps others gain digital proficiency through one-on-one computer sessions. “Teaching people to use technology changes lives, whether it keeps them in touch with their family through social media, or helps them get a job because they learned how to use Microsoft Word,” she stated.

Money Smart Week is another empowering tool, as it provides financial literacy programming for all ages. Fayette Face-to-Face allows citizens to interact with county departments, encouraging transparency in government. Numerous other programs, including the Hot Off the Press—Coffee, Community, and Conversation series, empower attendees to learn more about their world, and the importance of having a voice in the community. “I want attendees to leave with new information, resources to refer to, and greater understanding or appreciation of a subject,” noted Gina, who organizes community outreach programs.

FCPL is unparalleled in providing engaging experiences to its patrons. “My concept of what the library is for [is] helping people make connections with stories and with each other,” stated Sarah. One way this happens is through its Learn & Play Chess sessions. “I want to encourage people to have a love for the game and meet new people,” said Jim White, paraprofessional and chess instructor. Those skills can then be put to work in the library’s new game room. Another active engagement tool is offering patrons workshops to improve their lives. From life-coaching presentations to

the WorkSource Atlanta Regional Mobile Career Lab, the desire is to see the attendees excel.

Engagement also means expanding horizons, and February 2018 provided a huge opportunity to do so with the Blended Heritage Celebration. This monumental 20th annual celebration included the renowned Sensational Soul Cruisers from New Jersey. The 11-man horn group and their soulful vocalists play hits from the 1960s, 70s, and 80s that get the audience grooving! “The Blended Heritage [event] is designed for the entire family, focusing on live performances by individuals from diverse backgrounds,” noted Librarian Gloria Thomas. It is a popular event, bringing together people of all ages.

No matter how many programs are offered, FCPL would be nothing without the knowledgeable, caring staff behind it. “Scholarly, brilliant, customer-focused and humorous,” are just a few words Chris used to describe her staff. Ada added, “I think that our community-minded, joyful, and innovative staff make walking into this library like no other.” As a patron of the FCPL, I wholeheartedly agree. Thank you to the staff of the Fayette County Public Library for using your passion, creativity, and tireless energies to nurture and develop your community. This library is not just a building of books; it is an engaging experience, and my family and I are thankful to be a part.

LaKeisha Fleming is a Patron of the Fayette County Public Library