

Best Sellers

Our favorite stories about your library's impact

WINTER
2024

EARLY LITERACY

African American Read-In Enchants Students

Over 150 third and sixth graders from the International Academy of Flint celebrated the African American Read-In at the library in February. Shani Womack, Flint master storyteller, author, and founder of Love and Literacy Village, led the program reminding the youth, "Whatever you dream – whatever you imagine for yourself – I'm here to tell you it is possible!"

The National African American Read-In was established in 1990 by the Black Caucus of National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) to make literacy a significant part of Black History Month. Every February, NCTE celebrates books written by authors of African descent that elevate Black experiences, an initiative that has reached more than six million participants worldwide.

After storytelling of folktales, students transitioned to reading



"Whatever you dream – whatever you imagine for yourself – I'm here to tell you it is possible!"

– Shani Womack

groups throughout the library for a time of silent and relaxed reading, while others were read to by guest readers. It was a powerful sight to see so many children, reading and listening to books that were written by Black authors, gathered in every corner of the library.

"It's very significant for all the kids to be here," Brittney Vargas, a sixth grade teacher, said. Many of her students have been impacted by the Flint Water Crisis. Therefore, Vargas found it inspiring that students were so engaged during both the storytelling and silent reading. "This

whole experience – just being able to be here in this space – it's all positive."

Studies show that both literacy and academic performance improve when there are books at home. In honor of the day, each student received a copy of Shani Womack's newest book, *Anancy and Why Groundhog is Afraid of His Shadow*, which she co-authored with her son Ande. Literacy gifts are seeds planted in the hearts, minds, and homes of our community. They're made possible by donations to the Gloria Coles Flint Public Library.

Life Purpose Explored, Discovered at the Library

Shani Womack began discovering her life passion at GCFPL when she was in middle school attending Whittier. Her mom was born in Jamaica and was strict.

“This was the hangout spot,” Shani said, laughing. “One of the places she never questioned or seemed to worry about me was at the library.”

As a child Shani remembers attending the annual storytelling festivals held at GCFPL. She was amazed at how grown-ups seemed to be acting like kids – telling stories, dancing, singing, and handling puppets. She noticed that they seemed to hold the audience in the palms of their hands.

“It captured my imagination,” Shani said. “I told myself, ‘One day, I’m going to become a storyteller.’”

As a young person Shani remembers the library as a space where she could have some autonomy, somewhere safe where she could develop some independence, and a place to find stories that resonated with where she was at as a teenager.

“It was important,” she said, “to find stories to help me feel like I wasn’t alone.”

Although the library has changed a lot since the days when she was reading Judy Blume’s *Are You There God, It’s Me, Margaret*, Shani continues to use the library much in the same way. “I’m a storyteller now, still hanging out in the Children’s section, still researching stories and folktales,” she said, laughing.



“The Library is for the neighborhood and for the community. It’s a hub,” she said. “It opens the world up to you.”

– Shani Womack



Her passion for storytelling extends to performances at school assemblies, festivals, conferences, churches, and libraries, and through her organization, Love and Literacy Village. She is dedicated to empowering others to connect and engage through storytelling and by offering group coaching to help individuals discover and embrace their true selves.

Shani gives back to the library, using her gifts of communication and storytelling in powerful ways.

In addition to leading the African American Read-In where she captivated students with her engaging style, Shani was the emcee for the 39th Annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Day event. Her husband Todd Womack helped to facilitate the post-event discussion, which was led by the members of Community Roots, a division of the North Flint Community Action Council.

Looking out on the crowd, Shani said she noticed how the event attracted people of all ages and all walks of life – children, families, adults, and seniors.

“The library is for the neighborhood and for the community. It’s a hub,” she said. “It opens the world up to you.”

Shani and Todd have shared their love for the Library with their three sons Ngozi, Osei, and Ande, bringing



them to the library since they were young. Their oldest now works at the UM-Flint library. Their youngest has co-authored and illustrated two children’s book.

Much like her own mother’s sentiments, Shani said, “The library is

just a place where, if I send my kids there, they’ll be okay.”

In a world where inclusive and welcoming spaces are essential, the library is more valuable than ever before.

DIGITAL HUB

The Library Brings Back Armchair Traveler

In the spring, GCFPL is once again offering a patron favorite program, this time with a twist.

Armchair Traveler was a weekly program that began in the 70s and ran until 2019. In the pre-internet era, it was a way for curious patrons to visit the library, bring their lunch, and explore travelogues together. With the invention of Google Earth and having the whole virtual world at our fingertips, interest waned over time.

Enter Virtual Reality (VR). This technology makes it possible to feel as though you are walking the streets and experiencing the sights of faraway lands, simply by donning a headset. It can also be a moving experience for patrons interested in visiting places where their ancestors

were born, or where they may like to travel, yet cost and other commitments make it impossible.

“We’re developing a Bucket List of places people might be interested to see,” Lead Librarian Sarah Brooks said. “It’s a great way to take you out of your ordinary world and experience it vicariously through someone else’s eyes.”

This program is a good example where education and creativity meet cutting-edge technology. Since VR headsets can be expensive, this is a wonderful resource to have available to our community. The possibilities for this program are limited only by the imagination.



A Year of Dedication

The word *dedication* has many meanings: the quality of being committed to a specific task or purpose ... a ceremony to mark the official opening, naming, or renaming ... devotion, self-sacrifice, or loyalty.

In 2023, Flint Public Library (FPL) experienced each nuance of the word.

With the renovations complete, FPL *rededicated* itself to the community as Flint's go-to place to learn for life. Patrons found their way back to the Kearsley Street location as families attended storytimes, students booked study rooms, organizations held meetings in large, beautiful spaces equipped with state-of-the-art technology, individuals explored their genealogical roots, and the curious learned about podcasting.

Also, in response to a grassroots initiative, FPL was renamed to Gloria Coles Flint Public Library (GCFPL) in honor of Gloria Coles, the director from 1984 to 2004 who was the first woman of African descent to hold that position. Under her *dedicated* leadership, the library raised funds to build a two-story addition, spearheaded a successful millage campaign, established itself as an independent district library, and was awarded the John Cotton Dana Award for outstanding public relations. Her *dedication* was further recognized with the 2004 National Medal for Museum and Library Service from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the highest honor conferred upon museums or libraries for "above and beyond" service to the community.

Finally, the deep *dedication* of Kathryn "Kay" Schwartz was



One look at the often overflowing parking lot has made more than a few people wonder aloud, "What's going on at the library?"

recognized as she retired after a twenty-four-year library career. Kay guided the library through extraordinary challenges and triumphs, casting a vision, and working with a team of people who dared to make their dreams a reality. Kay's leadership played a pivotal role in transforming the library into a modern hub of learning, exploration, and connectivity. One look at the often overflowing parking lot has made more than a few people

wonder aloud, "What's going on at the library?"

Visionary leadership has paved the way for Taliah Abdullah to step to the role of the newest Executive Director of the Gloria Coles Flint Public Library. With Taliah's multifaceted experience in library service, and her passion for connection, commitment, and curiosity, GCFPL is poised to serve the community in new and innovative ways in the years to come.



“The Gloria Coles Flint Public Library is an invaluable community partner, with easy access, unmatched resources, great staff, helpful kitchens, and it’s not cost prohibitive. This space makes it possible for us to serve our community.”

– Robert Reid,
Greater Flint Health Coalition



REVENUE

● Property Taxes*	\$3,583,416
● Grants, Memorials, and Gifts	\$319,114
● State Aid and Fines	\$318,568
● Interest Income	\$44,591
● Other	\$60,697
Total Revenue	\$4,326,386

EXPENSES

● Personnel	\$2,690,357
● Operations	\$707,173
● Maintenance	\$712,356
● Grants Expended	\$128,053
Total Expenses	\$4,237,939

GRANT PURPOSES

Revenue in excess of expenses is assigned for use in FY 24 as follows:

● Grant Purposes	\$114,488
● Operations	(\$26,041)
Total assigned for use in FY 23	\$88,447

* The library is funded by a permanent 2 mill property tax. An additional 2.0 mill was approved by voters for 2012-2021 and renewed for 2022-2031.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

	2023	2019*	
Door Count	151,399	127,721	19% increase
Checkouts	157,308	105,564	49% increase
Active Patrons**	21,145	23,153	8% decrease
Room Use	4,157		
Digital Logins	14,725		

* Comparisons are done with 2019, which was the last pre-Covid and pre-renovation year.

**Note: 18% of our patrons are ecard users.



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JANUARY - DECEMBER 2023

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TO LEARN FOR LIFE.

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**Connection
Commitment
CURIOSITY**

Volunteers Needed!

**Learn for Life
Fundraising Breakfast**
Monday, June 10, 2024

The library is seeking volunteers to serve as table hosts for the annual fundraising breakfast. As a table host, you are a highly motivated and committed library supporter and ambassador who will inspire friends, family, neighbors, and colleagues to attend this event. Make a meaningful impact and help us achieve our fundraising goals by connecting supporters with the library.

To learn more, or if you are ready to join our dynamic team of table hosts, please contact Ashoka Rao, *Director of Development*, at arao@fpl.info or 810-399-9658.



WINTER 2024

810.232.7111 • www.fpl.info

