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## Southern Maryland celebrates National Library Week

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George Washington Carver Elementary School students have their photo taken alongside the St. Mary's County's Mobile Library during a March 4 stop at the school.

MICHAEL REID/SOUTHERN MARYLAND NEWS

Ready, set, library.

That's the theme for National Library Week 2024, signifying how libraries give us a green light to something special in an online era — a place to connect with others, learn new skills and focus on what matters most, according to the American Library Association.

Beginning in 1958, National Library Week is sponsored annually in April by the American Library Association and observed in libraries across the country. School, public, academic and special libraries alike are invited to participate.

The event started after research in the mid-1950s showed Americans were not reading as many books and spent more time on radios, televisions and musical instruments.

In response to the study, the American Library Association and the American Book Publishers formed a nonprofit citizens organization called the National Book Committee in 1954 that set the goals of encouraging people to read in their increasing leisure time, improving incomes and health and developing strong and happy family life.

Local public libraries shared key statistics from across the region in a March 27 press release distributed by the Southern Maryland Regional Library Association.

In a 2024 year-to-date study, it was found that library materials have circulated 546,331 times, including checkouts and renewals, 37,385 people used their library cards, 4,240 people signed up for new library cards and mobile hotspots for those unserved/underserved by broadband circulated 1,164 times.

In fiscal 2024, customers at Southern Maryland's three public library systems checked out 738,879 physical materials and 298,421 digital materials.

"National Library Week is something that we look forward to every year, because it celebrates so many facets of libraries and all of the wonderful things we do," Erin Del Signore, the associate director of community engagement for Charles County Public Library, said. "We connect our communities with so many different resources that people might not realize all that we have to offer."

Charles County named this year's celebration "Love Your Library Week." Starting April 3, the celebration kicked off with Library Giving Day, which is an online fundraiser to support libraries across the community.

"This year we are raising funds to continue to provide free and equal access to technology for all members of our community. Donations will help us offer vital resources such as computers, Wi-Fi and digital skills training," Del Signore said.



The library is constantly looking for ways to help share resources equitably and have opened a library location in the Charles County Detention Center, created a new 24-hour library kiosk at the Nanjemoy Community Center last year, partnered with the county to provide free Chromebooks to residents who qualify and are launching a new outreach vehicle this month.

The outreach vehicle — named the Discovery Lab — will focus on bringing technology to the community, including free Wi-Fi, computers, printing, gaming and STEM and STEAM learning activities.

In February, Calvert Library revealed its itinerary for moving its Twin Beach location from a temporary commercial building in Chesapeake Beach to the new multi-story structure overlooking the Chesapeake Bay in North Beach.

The new building's 18,000 square feet is four times the amount of space at the former Twin Beaches location in the Captain's Quarters. There will be Wi-Fi throughout the building, porch and terrace views of the bay, a sound booth for podcasting and recording, parking under the building and an "Imagination Station," an interactive play area for children to develop early learning skills.

Calvert Library expects to host the ribbon cutting at the new location on Tuesday, April 16, at 2 p.m. and the public is encouraged to attend, a press release from the library system said.

St. Mary's County Library recently launched a new mobile library that holds 2,000 books, 200 DVDs, computers, a check-out station and interchangeable shelves, carts and seats. It is also outfitted with Wi-Fi and work stations so visitors can look up form or register for classes or events.

The 33-foot Freightliner, which cost about \$340,000, finally hit the road in late January after a multi-year delay due to a "materials shortage," according to Director Michael Blackwell.

For more information on the Southern Maryland Regional Library Association, which provides resources to local library systems, go to [smrla.org](http://smrla.org).

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