

INTRODUCTION

NORTHEAST GEORGIA REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM

WHAT IS IT? - The Northeast Georgia Regional Library System is not a single place, although the Regional Services Office is located in Clarkesville. The System is made up of the four counties of Habersham, Rabun, Stephens and White. These four counties cover a geographical area of around 1,067 square miles. The System was founded in 1944 as the Habersham-Stephens Regional Library System. In the early 1950's, Rabun and White Counties joined. In the late 1960's, the City of Toccoa in Stephens County joined forming the system as it exists today.

LIBRARIES - There are six library facilities in the four counties. A list of their individual schedules, addresses, and phone numbers is included in this handbook as Appendix A.

EXTENSION SERVICE - In addition to the six permanent library facilities, the Northeast Georgia Regional Library System also operates an Extension Services program. These services extend library service to people in all four counties who are unable to use the permanent facilities.

GOVERNANCE - The Northeast Georgia Regional Library System is governed by the Regional Board of Trustees. Each affiliated county has a county board of trustees; at least one and up to four representatives from each county board comprise the Regional Board of Trustees. A list of all current trustees is available at the Regional Services Office in Clarkesville.

WHO'S RESPONSIBLE FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN GEORGIA - Several levels of government work together to create, maintain and improve library service for the citizens of Habersham, Rabun, Stephens and White Counties.

A. The Georgia State General Assembly provides the legal framework and amends laws applicable to libraries as needed. It also appropriates the funds for the operation of the state library agency (Georgia Public Library Service), the State Library and state-aid money for library system operation and maintenance. Laws applicable to public libraries are readily available on the Internet.

B. The Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia is charged with the responsibility for promoting the development of libraries and maintaining public library service through the Georgia Public Library Services.

C. Governing authorities in counties and municipalities may establish a public library system (Georgia Code 20-5-40). Officials allocate local funding for local services, operations, and maintenance and appoint trustees.

D. Trustees appointed to county public library boards by local publicly supported agencies formulate policies and budget funds for library service to the community. Local library service is funded by the local taxing agencies, who are represented by their appointees to the board, and by other private and charitable funding sources. Representatives from each county board make up the Northeast Georgia Regional Board, which formulates policies and budgets funds for system functions. Appendix B reproduces the Constitutions and By-laws of the library system and the member libraries.

E. The Library Director assists and advises trustees in formulating policies and budgets regional funds for library services. The Director implements policies, generates procedures, supervises library operations and acts as administrator for the Regional Board. Each county board is responsible for the maintenance and funding of services and facilities for its county. The Regional Board is responsible for the maintenance and funding of services and facilities serving the entire Region.

WHY A REGIONAL SYSTEM?

Library systems have demonstrated that broadening the base for public library services generally results in

- more effective planning and administration
- Lower unit cost through larger scales of operations
- Greater flexibility to maximize use of available resources
- Better performance of library services

More specifically, library systems can coordinate many activities which are difficult or impossible for a single library, such as:

- Establishing and operating area-wide delivery services
- Area-wide collection development, especially in expensive reference materials, audiovisual materials, and special collections
- Shared purchasing of materials and supplies to obtain greater discounts
- Reciprocal borrowing for all residents in the area
- Specialists in adult, children's, and technical services
- An efficient channel for implementation of state and federal appropriations and programs
- A channel for taking advantage of state incentives to regional systems

NORTHEAST GEORGIA REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM FUNDING - As mentioned earlier, the Northeast Georgia Regional Library is not one place, although the Regional Services Office is located in Clarkesville. It is a system which serves Habersham, Rabun, Stephens and White Counties. The system receives grants through the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia, Georgia Public Library Service for the salaries of the state-certified

librarians (who act as department heads for all major library functions), materials, operations and maintenance for Regional Services functions, and travel of the Regional staff.

In each of the four member counties, the local libraries are supported by local tax money, except for materials and extension services, with a small amount contributed by other sources.

A. LOCAL SUPPORT

HABERSHAM COUNTY - In Habersham County, the local library program is funded by the Habersham County Board of Commissioners, the City of Cornelia, and the City of Clarkesville. These funds are used to provide for all local library support and functions. Additional funds for materials are provided to the region by the Habersham County Board of Education.

RABUN COUNTY - Support for the Rabun County Public Library program is handled by the Rabun County Board of Commissioners on behalf of Rabun County and supporting communities. These funds are used to provide for all local library support and functions.

STEPHENS COUNTY - The Stephens County Library program is supported by the Stephens County Board of Commissioners. These funds are used to provide for all local library support and functions.

WHITE COUNTY - The library program in White County is supported by the White County Board of Commissioners, the City of Cleveland, and the City of Helen. These funds are used to provide for all local library support and functions. Additional funds for materials are provided to the region by the White County Board of Education.

B. STATE SUPPORT

State Support for the regional operation comes in the form of three grants: a system services grant, a materials grant, and a state-certified librarians salaries grant.

The system services grant is based on the Georgia Office of Planning and Budget's census projections and Georgia Public Library Services New Directions formulas. The system services grant is used to pay for a portion of the utilities at the Regional Services Office, part of the payroll costs on regional non-certified employees, telecommunications costs, equipment purchase costs, supplies, insurance costs for the Regional Services Office, and repair and maintenance costs on regional office equipment as well as services to the affiliated libraries.

The materials grant consists of a basic grant for regional services and a per capita amount decided each year by the Georgia State Legislature, with population figures based on Office of Planning and Budget census projections. An amount for processing tools and GALILEO database service for each county is taken off the top, since as these benefit all four counties. These funds are administered by the Regional Services staff in accordance with state regulations. This amount must be used for materials (books, magazines, newspapers, videotapes, and similar items).

For the librarian salaries grant, the current allotment is for four state-paid positions. They are: Regional Services Director; Department Head, Regional Acquisitions/Cataloging Services; Department Head, Affiliate Services/Library Development; Department Head, Regional Technology and Systems Services.

The state-certified librarians, as indicated above, serve as department heads for all major library functions within the system. They are responsible for overseeing the functions listed above in each of the libraries in the system and are instrumental in the development of policy and procedure in their areas of responsibility. In addition, the Regional Services Director may appoint qualified librarians Assistant or Associate Director as warranted.

CONCLUSION

The goal of the Northeast Georgia Regional Library System is to provide the best possible library service to the citizens of Habersham, Rabun, Stephens, and White Counties by the responsible administration of local public and private funding, and by taking advantage of and responsibly administering basic funds and regional incentives available through the State. The regional system is the most cost effective and beneficial method of providing library service, and we look forward to its continued support by the people of Habersham, Rabun, Stephens, and White Counties, and by the funding agencies, both private and public of all four counties. Excellent library service is a major concern of both longtime residents and newcomers to the area, and we need to insure that the individuals controlling our funding agencies are always mindful of this.

The Northeast Georgia Regional Affiliated Libraries are committed to the growth and prosperity of both the library and our communities. The coalition between the Northeast Georgia Regional Library System, the participating counties and municipalities, and the private and charitable sources which help fund the library operation has grown tremendously; we hope that our cooperation will be strengthened in the years ahead by open dialogue. Together we can provide better and better service, support greater levels of literacy in our communities, and maintain total fiscal accountability.