

Hiawassee welcomes state school superintendent, librarian

By Shawn Jarrard
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The Towns County Public Library recently made the shortlist for consideration in the Georgia Public Library Service's Top 10 Most Beautiful Public Libraries.

And though it did not end up making the Top 10, the Hiawassee library was selected from a pool of nearly 400 other Georgia libraries as one of seven Honorable Mentions, for its modern comfort design and picturesque setting, and it has been included in literature that's being distributed all over the state.

So, when it came time for the Georgia Public Library Service to team up with the Georgia Department of Education for their annual kickoff tour promoting summer reading, the Towns County library was chosen as one of four libraries statewide to receive some very special guests.

State School Superintendent Richard Woods and State Librarian Julie Walker paid a visit on Friday, June 16, and brought with them 3,500 books to be shared among the children of the county and library system.

During the visit, Woods read "The Day the Crayons Quit" by Drew Daywalt to two dozen children gathered in the Children's Area of the library.

Woods and Walker both made sure to interact with the kids, encouraging them to answer questions and participate that Friday morning.

The children are taking part in the Towns County Public Library's weekly Summer Reading program, and Branch Manager Debbie Phillips was excited for her kids to meet Woods and Walker.

"It's a big deal," said Phillips of the visit. "The last time the state librarian was here was three years ago when we did our re-Grand Opening.

"They're busy doing the things they need to do, and they don't get to go out and do a lot of visits, especially in this North Georgia area. So, it is quite a privilege for us to get to see them."

This year marks the second in a row that the state's library service and department of education have coordinated trips to public libraries to advocate for childhood literacy, which needs special reinforcement during summer.

"We all agree that it's one of the key factors in school success, for children not to have what they call the 'summer slide,' not to lose what they learned in school over the school year by not reading and continuing to learn in the summer," said State Librarian Julie Walker. "We love having these at libraries to remind everybody that we have over 400 libraries in the state of Georgia."

"Almost every community has a wonderful resource like this that has lots of programming, story times, puppet shows, special guests, and lots of books to take home to read."

State Superintendent Woods said that, when it comes to childhood literacy,

it's crucial that students become proficient readers early on in their educations.

"For us at the state, trying to increase our literacy scores is definitely a need that we see," said Woods. "Right now, we're probably between 34, 40 percent reading at proficiency at third grade, so I think catching our kids early is extremely important."

"But also, what we have found out is that many kids throughout the state don't even have a book inside their home. With the initiative working with Better World Books, we're here trying to distribute as many books as we possibly can."

Better World Books is sponsoring the Summer Reading initiative, and has donated 100,000 books this year toward the cause, 3,500 of which will benefit the Mountain Regional Library System thanks to Woods and Walker's visit.

"We're very proud to have our state representatives come up to North Georgia," said MRLS Director Vince Stone. "Any time we can have them come and see the mountains and see what we do up here, we're happy to have them. It's a great day."

Public libraries perform a variety of valuable services, and



Georgia Schools Superintendent Richard Woods reading a story to children of Towns County. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

Stone encourages residents to check in with their local libraries to see what they have to offer.

Also present for story time on Friday: David Baker, GPLS Director of Communications and Strategic Partnerships; Towns County Schools Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong; Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw; and a passel of

young voracious readers, their parents and other guests of the library, including several school administrators.

Currently, all MRLS libraries are hosting fun-filled Summer Reading programs: Union County Public Library on Mondays, Fannin County Public Library on Tuesdays, Mountain Regional Library in Young

Harris on Wednesdays, and Towns County Public Library on Thursdays.

Residents can also visit their local libraries for more information on other Summer Reading programs, such as the "Home Run Readers" with the Atlanta Braves and the "Check-It-Out Reading Challenge" with the Atlanta Hawks.



Kids going through boxes of books donated by Better World Books. Photo/Lowell Nicholson



L-R: Stephanie Moss, Shannon Moss, Richard Woods, Jim Melton, Julie Walker, Darren Berrong, Connie Hobbs, Vince Stone and Debbie Phillips. Photo/Lowell Nicholson