

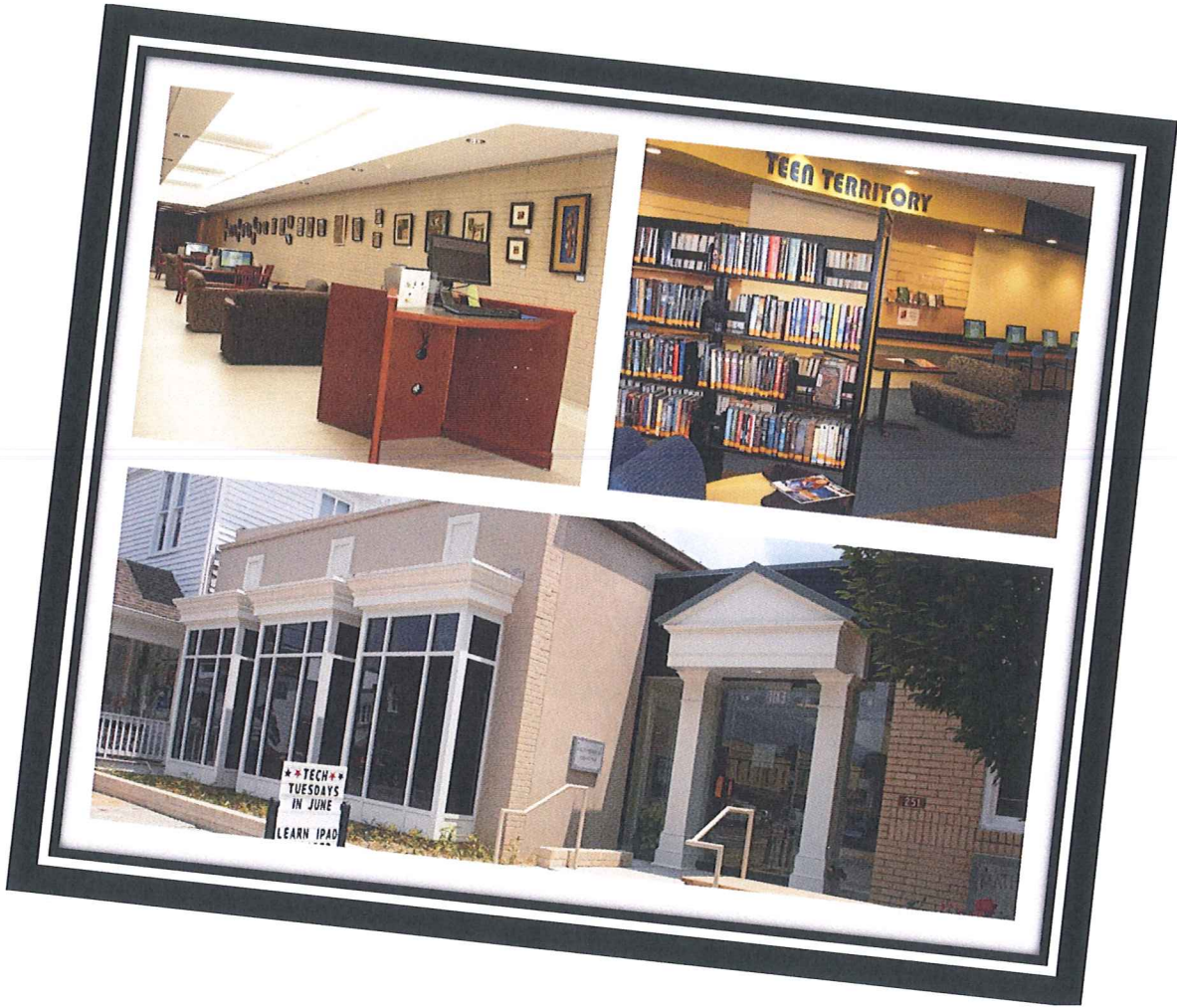
Recognizing the Best in County Government Programs



2014
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Mathews Memorial Library Expansion

*Meeting the Needs and Expectations of the 21st
Century Patron*



Submitted by
Mathews County, Virginia



APPLICATION FORM

Program Information:

Locality: Mathews County
Program Title: Mathews Memorial Library Expansion – Meeting the needs of the 21st Century Patron
Program Category: Community & Economic Development and Customer Service

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Mathews Memorial Library Addresses the 21st Century Patron

1928 was a big year for debuts. Mickey Mouse, Winnie the Pooh, penicillin, television, and the Lay-Z-Boy recliner all appeared on the scene for the first time. Another big start up was the Mathews Memorial Library, the first public library in Virginia established by the citizens. Imagine the effort and vision it took to raise money for a public library in rural Virginia in 1928! All the hard work of raising money and planning the project paid off when the library was poised to open in 1933. And then disaster struck in the form of the 1933 Atlantic Hurricane. The library building flooded, and all the books, which were still in boxes, were ruined. It took until 1935 to raise the money to replace the books, but the Mathews Memorial Library, having been deeded to Mathews County, was up and running as a County department. An extraordinary feat considering this money was raised with the backdrop of the Great Depression. If you ponder the history of community support for this Library, then the Library's most recent expansion is best viewed as another chapter in the story of the unstinting determination Mathews' people have to maintain an outstanding public library. It is instructive to note that Mathews County, with a population just under 9000, has 10,500 Library patrons. Obviously, the Library is valued by people who reside beyond the borders of the County. Clearly, the Library is a beacon not only of learning, but also community engagement.

In 2010, a local family provided \$200,000 to the Friends of the Mathew's Memorial Library to purchase the adjoining vacant building (a Radio Shack in its most recent incarnation). In 2011, the Friends began a capital campaign to raise money to plan, design, equip, and structurally

integrate the vacant building to the existing Library building. Over the course of just two years, the Friends raised \$1,342,000 for this project from donors all over the country. The County provided \$250,000, and private foundations \$150,000, but the bulk of the money came from pledges ranging from \$25 to \$500. A ribbon cutting on the new expansion was held November 13, 2013, and the expanded area was fully operational and opened to the public in earlier this year.

What inspired so many people to support this effort? In large part, it was the confidence they had that their donation would help address community needs; and the knowledge that the Mathews Memorial Library meets needs that are not traditional library roles.

As a rural community, Mathews is vulnerable to a deficit in technology. The expanded Library bridges this “great divide” by providing an equipped environment where access to technology means access to job search, health, small business, educational, music, genealogical, and social networking resources. Programming such as “Tech Tuesdays” provides workshops on topics such as iPad Tips & Tricks, Using Your Kindle, Android or Apple?, Doing More with Your Smartphone, as well as more basic computer skills classes.

One of the groups most in need of a technologically equipped environment is teenagers. The Library expansion provides a gathering space for teens easily accessible and visible from Main Street, and designated for teen needs and programs. The Teen Territory, aka “The Hard Drive Café – Food for Thought”, is equipped with eReaders, iPads, wifi, computers, and laptops (as is

the adult section). Bear in mind that this effort was supported by an aging population base; many of whom do not have any grandchildren or great-grandchildren in Mathews, but who value fostering engaged citizens.

By providing a new home for the teens, the expansion allowed the Children's section, called KidSpace the opportunity to expand as well. The larger KidSpace provides the youngest patrons with a safe and happy place to learn and explore. But it is not just the young people who now have a new learning environment. One elderly lifelong resident recently discovered the Library for the first time after years of walking by nearly every day. She is now a patron and an avid and enthusiastic reader.

Of course, the expansion project and the innovative programming would not be possible without the dedication and vision of the Library staff, Board of Trustees, Friends of the Library and the Board of Supervisors, who all share the vision that the Mathews Memorial Library is a place that exists for people. The expansion provides the opportunity to grow and develop new approaches to service. The Library is the single Mathews County facility that is accessible to everyone seven days a week, and with the eBook program, twenty-four hours a day. Mathews Memorial Library is truly a community engagement oasis on the front line of protecting the right to learn.