

# Quality: Second to None!

The Annual Report of the Office of the County Librarian and the

Cullman County Public Library System

Fiscal Year 2004



*From the County Librarian*

I appreciate the opportunity to provide my 13th Annual Report to the Library Board, local governments, the Alabama Public Library Service and to the users of the Cullman County Public Library System. In all aspects, I hope that the quality of CCPLS will shine through in this report.

The people of Cullman County may not have the highest quantity in collections, the very latest in library service trends, enough library employees to meet their needs, or even passing (let alone optimum) library facilities. But the services that are provided by the public libraries of Cullman County are second-to-none. This quality is evidenced by the continually growing usage and circulation, CCPLS's ability to obtain grants and private resources to assist in library development, and regular advances in services.

We achieve that quality by having a committed Public Library Board, a talented and dedicated staff, and a great community to serve. We've made many advances in providing that quality service this year, and I am very proud of them. And I greatly appreciate everyone who made those advances possible. From state, county and municipal officials down to the child who attends story time, everyone cooperates to provide a positive experience in the public libraries of Cullman County.

Respectfully Submitted,

John Paul Myrick, MLS

County Librarian / Chief Executive Officer

### *Quality - By The Numbers*

Statistics related to the provision of library service in this county tell a wonderful story of the quality of services offered. While we are not as busy as many of our peer libraries, the services that we provide are second-to-none.

The total number of items borrowed from the public libraries of Cullman County increased again this year, although not at the same pace as FY2003. In FY2004, circulation grew to 123,670, up from 122,022 the preceding year, roughly 2%. Total item usage (loaned items, plus items used inside area libraries) increased dramatically from 139,520 in 2003 to 148,263! This proves a trend that library staff noted several times during the year -- that more people are spending more time in area libraries. Circulation was also boosted with updated borrowing policies and the opening of the Crane Hill Branch, which loaned 807 items during its first 9 months of operation.

At the close of the year, 17,478 active library cards were in use by the residents of the county, roughly an 18% increase over the previous year! One in every five residents has an active library card.

Less stringent funding cutbacks than those expected during FY2003, and increased collection funding from grants and private sources allowed the Library to add 7,678 volumes to the collections of all libraries during the year. These additions, along with discarding of old and

worn items through the year, brought the total strength of the libraries of CCPLS to 89,614 volumes. Three major archival collections were added in FY 2004 as well.

The Library System remains exceptionally proud of the quality reference and informational services provided to area residents. Out of 10,039 reference, informational and directional questions received, only 96 were unable to be appropriately answered by the System's staff, or less than 1%! This 99% reference completion rate is among the highest of any public library in the State of Alabama!



***Checking out two of over 148,000 items used in FY 2004.***

Computers drastically changed the way by which not only patrons receive information, but also how persons access it. Over 16,163 persons signed in to computers in the public libraries of the county through FY 2004. An estimated 40,000 persons from around the world accessed information through the Library System's website at **[www.ccpls.com](http://www.ccpls.com)**, which received major upgrades this fiscal year.

The loss of 5 employees at the Central Library during the year greatly impacted library services provided at that facility. It is hoped that funding will become available in 2005-2006 to alleviate this shortage.

### *Obvious Quality!*

One area in which the libraries of Cullman County excel is public educational programming. CCPLS has long been recognized as a leader in the state of Alabama in public library programming. Lectures, children's programs, exhibitions, and other means of providing educational and recreational opportunities by CCPLS improve the quality of life in the county, and helps CCPLS offer something for everyone.

Over 281 programs of various types were held for the residents of the county and visitors. The majority of these programs were for children including the popular 2004 Summer Reading Program "Step to the Beat - Read." Over 10,000 persons attended library programs during the year, not counting those who viewed exhibitions and displays at the various libraries.

Adult programs and exhibitions included a special showing of "Lives of Quiet Affirmation", an exhibition detailing the life of a band of Jewish settlers in a small Alabama town. Cullman was one of 6 cities in Alabama where "Quiet Affirmation" was exhibited. Specialty lectures on history, humanities, medicine, consumer issues, and other programs sponsored by the library and jointly with other organizations rounded out program offerings for adults.

In addition to the Summer Reading Program, children of the county delighted in visits with "Clifford the Big Red Dog", puppet shows, the "American Girls" reading club and other activities. Tours of the libraries by school classes also kept youngsters in area libraries and encouraged them to pursue lifelong learning.

### *Insuring Quality Growth*

The staff of CCPLS was exceptionally happy to work with community residents and finally open a branch library in Western Cullman County in December 2003. The Crane Hill Branch Library serves residents primarily west of Interstate 65 and North of Alabama Highway 69. This brings the total of fixed-base libraries in the county to six, double the number of ten years prior.

The loss of the Cullman County Bookmobile was to be alleviated in 2004 with the addition of a new unit funded by a federal grant and local appropriations. Mechanical and technical issues with the unit provided by Matthews Specialty Vehicles of North Carolina and the Library Administration and Board commitment to insuring the county received a quality product led to the unit being returned for a refund in early August. With state approval, the Library System is currently re-bidding this project. A new bookmobile unit is expected to be delivered by June 2005. The Matthew's unit was displayed at the American Library Association Conference in Orlando, Florida in June where an estimated 25,000 persons from around the world learned of the quality of library services in Cullman County, Alabama.

All libraries of the system experienced significant computer problems during the year as equipment in library facilities is aging rapidly. With the assistance of a federal grant obtained by CCPLS in 2004 and funding from individual municipalities, all systems in the branch libraries will be replaced in 2005, and several libraries fully automated for the first time - insuring faster service on a county-wide scale.

In order to better accommodate growth and deal with poor management issues on the part of the vendor, the Library Board directed that CCPLS withdraw from membership from the Library Management Network, Inc. beginning in August 2004. CCPLS will purchase its own automated library system to allow for better management, which will ultimately provide better service for area residents.

With advances in technology come improved methods for speeding materials to library users. An estimated 75% of all book and material orders placed by CCPLS during 2004 were placed electronically with various vendors. This online ordering speeds delivery of new popular materials to library users, cutting the lag time between publication and availability on the shelves from months to days. Having funding to provide an adequate number of copies of popular materials and the staff to process them would cut that delay even further.

Also to speed access to information and library materials, CCPLS began offering key-chain type library cards in September of 2004. These dual-use cards help alleviate many of the lost card issues which delay getting books in the hands of library users.



## *Commitment to Quality*

Insuring that library users receive quality service is the main goal of CCPLS associates. Every associate receives regular training and encouragement in working hard to insure that every patron leaves happy and leaves with the information they need. This commitment was further strengthened in FY 2004 and will continue to guide us in all that we do.

The Library Board adopted a new Policy and Procedures Manual during the year clarifying many basic tenets by which CCPLS operates. Also completed during the year was a new Five-Year Plan to guide the Board, Staff, and local officials in the development of information services. Plans were made for additional promotional materials to assist patrons in accessing library services.

Within very limited budgetary constraints, maintenance of library facilities and shifting of collections to accommodate growth was a priority during 2004. Patrons commented on the extra degree of cleanliness in drastically aging library facilities, and the library's ability to provide quality service despite lack of appropriate space.





***The Library System is in desperate need of additional space at the Central, Fairview and Hanceville locations.***

***The Quality Will Continue***

CCPLS will continue to strive to maintain quality informational and recreational services of the residents of this county, as it has for 76 years. To continue to do so will require hard work on the part of the Board and the associates of the library, the dedication of the newly formed Cullman Area Library Foundation, and strong support from state and local officials. ***Together, we have achieved much, and together, we will continue to provide second-to-none, quality public service to the residents of Cullman County!***