

Shore Library Director Highlighted in Microsoft News

(ACCOMAC, VIRGINIA) November 20, 2020 – Eastern Shore Public Library may be a small library system in rural Virginia, but it has attracted national attention with its work breaking down the digital divide. Cara Burton, Library System Director for the four-library regional system, was recently interviewed by Microsoft for its “On the Issues” column for an article called, “Bridging the Digital Divide: A New Chapter in the Life of the Public Library.” The online article interviewed librarians about the transformation of libraries to meet the digital access needs of their communities during the pandemic.

“It was quite an interesting interview,” reports Burton. “The writer lives in England. It was fun to chat with someone from the other side of the pond during a time when our traveling is so limited. Isn’t technology wonderful?”

“Eastern Shore Public Library received several grants this year because the Shore’s online access needs are so high, we stand out in the national statistics of the digital divide,” said Burton. “We were fortunate to receive these grants when we did.” An American Library Association Digital Lead Grant, supported by Microsoft, provided ten mini-laptops. These enabled staff at all four libraries to continue working during the lockdown by providing online meeting equipment, telecommuting capabilities for technical services, and collection inventory tools. The laptops were also used at outreach events for the 2020 Census.

The library also received an American Library Association Library Census Equity Fund grant that provided two SmartBus portable wifi access devices. One was installed in the Town of Tangier. The other’s installation elsewhere on the Shore is in the works. Another grant, from the Public Library Association, provided for two outdoor wifi access devices that were installed at Accomac and Nassawadox in September. More recently, the library received a federal Institute for Museum and Library Services CARES grant through the Library of Virginia that is funding a self-checkout and inventory management system for the new regional library.

“Because the Shore has such a digital divide, I was encouraged to apply as only a couple of other libraries in the state were eligible for these grants. Securing support from these outside sources helps us gain ground to provide our community what other library systems offer,” Burton continued. “We can’t wait to be in the new regional library now under construction in Parksley. We will have the space to provide training to use new technologies and the equipment to do so. We thank everyone who has supported this new library.”

To read the Microsoft article, follow this link: <https://news.microsoft.com/on-the-issues/2020/10/20/digital-divide-public-libraries-airband-covid-19/>

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