

Library unveils new recording studio

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Local musicians and podcasters will have a new place to make recordings — the library.

Charles County Public Libraries held a launch party March 20 for its new Drop the Mic Recording Studio at the P.D. Brown Branch in Waldorf, the first library recording studio in Southern Maryland.

The event featured VIP passes for attendees, raffles, giveaways and demonstrations by local guitarist and singer Matt McKinley and hip hop artist Layna Lae.

“There’s nothing like this in Southern Maryland,” said DauVeen Walker, Potomac Branch manager.

Walker said the music studio is part of the library’s effort to meet the community’s changing needs.

“Obviously books are very important with libraries, but as library trends continue, it’s really more about how we can go out into the community and bring other types of programming to the community,” Walker said.

Branch manager Mariana Sprouse said several teenage patrons had expressed an interest in having a recording studio at the library.

“It is something we have seen starting at other libraries across the country, and we thought, that’s a great idea, we would love to offer that,” Sprouse said.

The studio was paid for through a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program and the nonprofit volunteer group, Citizens for the Charles County Public Library.

“We were able to make it so much bigger than I ever imagined,” Sprouse said.

Kiran “Ron” Situla, a member of the library system’s Board of Trustees, said the recording studio can not only be used for music, but can also be used to record podcasts, school projects and audio for YouTube videos.

Situla stressed the importance in communities’ investment in its libraries.

“How do we make sure the next generation have better opportunities than the current generation? It’s only through innovation and public investment in the public library system,” Situla said.

“I hope the next generation will continue to read books, I hope the next generation will continue to be engaged, I hope the next generation will continue to make wonderful music,” Situla added.

Sprouse said the recording booth is not completely soundproof, but acts as a really good sound buffer.

“It actually inflates the music really well, so that when you are recording, you’re not going to get a lot of ambient noise in the background, which is what we really wanted,” Sprouse said.

Sprouse said the recording booth and equipment is also portable and can be disassembled and reassembled at another branch, should the need arise.

The music studio is a PreSonus studio 192 USB Audio Interface and Studio Command Center with a Novation 49-key MIDI Controller keyboard and uses Studio One software, said Raymond Reed, information technology manager.

Ideally, anyone recording should come with a partner to operate the equipment. Library staff can provide basic help, but the recording studio is self-serve. The equipment can be operated by a single person if needed, Sprouse said.

“If you’re okay with that little bit of extra time at the beginning and end of your track, you can hit record, run inside, close the door, do your thing, then run back outside and stop the recording,” Sprouse said.

Recordings can be saved onto a compact disk or a USB drive, Reed said. Recordings are not saved on the studio computer once users log off, he said.

Sprouse said the next step is to get instruments that patrons can use at the library if they don’t have their own.

The next closest thing to the Drop the Mic Recording Studio is the Digital Resources for Electronic Applications in Media Lab in Fairmont Heights, part of the Prince George’s Memorial Library System, Walker said. The DREAM Lab is an audio and video recording studio, as well as website and graphic design, according to the PGMLS website.

The Drop the Mic Recording Studio is available for reservation by patrons through the library website at www.ccplonline.org/connect/drop-the-mic-recording-studio/. The website also contains information about the equipment and software, rules for use, an instruction manual and instructional videos.

The studio can be reserved for anywhere from a half an hour to all day, up to half an hour before the library closes. If it is needed outside regular hours, Sprouse said patrons can contact the library and they will try to make arrangements.

“At this point, we just want to open it up to let people use it and see what they can do with it,” Sprouse said.