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## Library programs help conquer the January doldrums

By MEGAN JOHNSON [msjohnson@somdnews.com](mailto:msjohnson@somdnews.com) Jan 1, 2016



Staff photos by MEGAN JOHNSON

Levi Goetz of Waldorf enjoys some creative construction during an imaginative play time program at Waldorf West library on Dec. 17

When the last holiday decorations have been boxed up, guests have departed and the house is officially clear of Santa-shaped cookies, many families look up to ask, “Now what?”

After the busy, frantic, holly-jolly atmosphere of December, January can seem desolate. Long. Dull.

But not at your local library.

“Libraries have really gone from ‘sshhh’ to community meeting places,” said Glenda Fields, children’s librarian at the Waldorf West branch of the Charles County Public Library. The family-oriented programs Fields helps lead are just a few of the many opportunities available for residents to learn, explore and socialize in Charles, Calvert and St. Mary’s counties.

The offerings are diverse. Whether you’re looking to improve your confidence when public speaking, seeking new job opportunities, wanting to learn a craft or needing a new hang-out your kids and teens, libraries provide both fun and knowledge.

“The public library is the place to go for lifelong learning,” wrote Janet Salazar, executive director of the Charles County Public Library, in an email. “Our classes and programs offer our community a chance to learn new skills, experience new ideas, meet new people and be part of the larger community. Libraries used to be like warehouses for books, but we are so much more. Libraries are the heart of their communities and we strive to make our branches places our patrons want to be.”

At the Calvert Library, offerings include writer’s workshops, resume and cover letter help, children’s storytimes, a “Harry Potter”-inspired book night, gardening help and much more. Calvert’s central library is located in Prince Frederick with branches in Owings (Fairview), Chesapeake Beach (Twin Beaches) and Solomons (Southern).

The St. Mary’s County Library — with locations in Lexington Park, Leonardtown and Charlotte Hall — also features many programs for the young and young at heart. Computer assistance, interview skills, storytimes for kids and family jam sessions — bring your own instruments! — are coming up in January.

In Charles County, branches are located in La Plata and Indian Head (Potomac), with two in Waldorf (P.D. Brown Memorial and Waldorf West, the newest location).

For as much as these facilities offer patrons, librarians feel rewarded, too.

“I love my job,” said Fields, a children’s librarian for 20 years with the last three spent at Waldorf West. “To see [the children’s] development . . . first, they’re shy; then they warm up, begin to socialize and participate. It’s so rewarding to see parents and kids interacting with each other.”

At an imaginative play time session on Dec. 17, children prepared “food,” constructed structures from blocks and took turns with the library’s many bits and baubles — all carefully organized by Fields — over the 30-minute session. Mothers and grandmothers joined their little ones on the floor,

reaching for “cake” and “spaghetti” proffered on tiny plates. (Just don’t take a bite.)

“Play is vital to young kids,” Fields said, noting that imaginative learning can help with language development, math skills, fine motor skills and more. With so many developmentally-appropriate toys from which to choose, the kids almost seemed overwhelmed — but one area is a clear favorite.

“Everyone flocks to the kitchen,” Fields noted, an undeniable observation once she welcomed Sabrina Goetz of Waldorf and her three sons: Levi, 5; Micah, 3; and Silas, 1. Joined by Nicole Vaughn-Eckloff and daughter Meadow, 4, also of Waldorf, the “kitchen” was pumping out enough meals for a holiday feast.

Children’s activities like these can enhance the parent/child bond — and help kids learn to smoothly share, interact and socialize. It can be especially helpful for only children, Fields said. And not wanting to exclude working parents, many libraries also host evening and weekend events for families.

“The library is also the great equalizer,” Salazar said. “Whether you are young or old, well-off or just getting by, highly educated or just starting school, it doesn’t matter. The public library is here for you.”

Programs and classes may require registration and are subject to change. To see what’s happening at the St. Mary’s County Library, see the events calendar at [www.stmalib.org](http://www.stmalib.org). In Calvert, go to [calvert.lib.md.us](http://calvert.lib.md.us). For Charles, go to [www.ccplonline.org](http://www.ccplonline.org).