

Where literacy meets the road — mobile library is back

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Reading and learning are on a roll in Charles County. Since 2017, the entire jurisdiction has been served by a mobile library — some old-timers might still call it a “bookmobile” — as part of Charles’ public library system.

Due to COVID-19, the mobile library hadn’t been making its scheduled rounds. The re-rollout took place earlier this year.

On Friday, Feb. 26, Southern Maryland News caught up with the mobile library at North Point High School in Waldorf. The 26-foot-long vehicle has 17 feet of loading space, includes a wheelchair lift and a side awning for outdoor programming.

In addition to a variety of books — it has a capacity to hold up to 2,000, most notably children’s books — and DVDs, the vehicle is equipped with WiFi and can also loan out wireless hotspots to library card holders.

“It’s great for people who are working from home,” said Megan Burrows, the mobile library branch manager.

When the mobile library is parked at a location “people can pick up the internet by driving up,” said Burrows. Motorists need to get within a 100-foot radius to pick up the internet.

While the book selection is substantial, it is, as you might expect, limited.

“If we don’t have an item we can get it from one of our branches,” said Burrows.

Julianna Hieb, the assistant manager at the library’s Waldorf West Branch, was helping visitors select books and other materials during the 90-minute stop.

In addition to responding to requests for the mobile library to appear at community events, including regular stops at the La Plata Farmers Market, Hieb said it travels to remote, rural areas of Charles as well.

“We go to places like Cobb Island where there is no library close by,” she said.

In addition to materials, the mobile library can also provide print and copying services. Burrows said the vehicle “can’t fax and we don’t take fines.”

Charles County Public Library’s mobile service has five staff members. Hieb said the librarians don’t need a commercial driver’s license to operate the vehicle.

Part of the current outreach being done by the mobile librarians is promoting the “500 by 5” early literacy program. The initiative aims to inspire children to read 500 books before reaching the age of 5. The library provides activity books for children to keep track of the books read.

Once a child has reached the 500 books read plateau, parents or guardians may take the child to a county public library branch to get the certificate on the back of the activity book signed or stamped by a library employee. The child will then receive a completion reward.

For more information on public library services in Charles, call 301-456-4333.

Go to www.ccplonline.org/mobile-library for more information about the mobile library, including its schedule of stops.