

Charles County opens three libraries for computer use by appointment

Caleb M. Soptelean csoptelean@somdnews.com

As of April 12, three of Charles County's public library branches are open for computer use by reservation in one-hour blocks.

According to a press release, the La Plata, Potomac (Indian Head) and P.D. Brown Memorial (Waldorf) branches are offering the service. The branches have been generally closed to visitors since the pandemic began more than a year ago.

In an email, Erin Del Signore, the library's marketing and communications manager, called it "exciting news."

She said the county's other library, Waldorf West, is not open for computer use. "Its size makes it more challenging to open safely right now, but we are currently working on plans and hope to open West in the next step of our reopening plan," Del Signore said.

The action is a continuation of the third phase of the library's reopening plan, which includes the previous redeployment of the mobile library and curbside pickup service at all of its branches.

With the passage of The Building Lifelong Learners Act of 2020, which makes all public library accounts for minors in the state fine-free, Charles County Public Library and its board of trustees made the decision to forgive all current overdue fines for all customers. In total, over \$350,000 worth of fines was forgiven.

The new law also stipulates that by July 1 all minors be given a clean slate, so all lost/damaged fees on minors' accounts will be waived as well.

However, after July 1, libraries can continue to bill minors for lost/damaged items, but overdue fines will no longer be assessed. Any lost/damaged fees on adult accounts will not be waived.

“We felt it was critically important to forgive fines system wide and not just for minors,” Kenneth Wayne Thompson, executive director of the library, said in the release. “This is something we’ve been wanting to implement for a very long time as fines for overdue items created a barrier for our customers that need our services and resources the most, and often deterred them from coming into the library. Removing all fines for overdue items makes CCPL a truly welcoming and inclusive space for all residents of Charles County.”

Instead of late fines, customers will be charged a replacement fee if items are never returned or if they are returned damaged. Items borrowed from other library systems may still be subject to late fines.

To make a computer appointment, go to ccplonline.org.