

Longtime WRL Staff Member Receives Award for Excellence in Mobile Library Outreach

September 1, 2020

Williamsburg Regional Library is pleased to announce that Mobile Library Services (MLS) manager Eletha Davis has recently been awarded the Association of Bookmobile and Outreach Services (ABOS) John Philip Excellence in Outreach Award.

Davis, who is currently the longest tenured WRL employee with over 36 years under her belt, is one of just three individuals selected this year to be honored with this international award, which recognizes outstanding contributions and prominent leadership in Bookmobile and Outreach Services.



WRL's Youth and Neighborhood Services department, the subset of the library's MLS division that Davis manages, brings collections, programs, and services out of the library buildings and into the community. They visit neighborhoods, apartment complexes, preschools, summer camp sites, and more, with particular attention paid to reaching children and families who may have difficulty getting to a library building due to transportation or scheduling issues.

Davis has personally coordinated many of the library's most popular and impactful MLS initiatives, including the annual WRL Preschool Training Day. This program, which is now in its 14th year, provides relevant professional development with continuing education credit for local preschool staff. She also created the Book Buddies program, which pairs older children who need practice reading aloud with younger children who can benefit from being read to. Most recently, she oversaw a project that brought WRL's popular STEAM Saturdays program to the Abram Frink Jr. Community Center. FunFest Saturdays, as the mobile version of the program became known, centered around STEAM (an acronym that stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics) activities for families, including animal shows, scientific demonstrations, and hands-on crafts and art projects. Davis even went so far as to canvass the adjacent neighborhoods prior to the events, encouraging families to come out and participate.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has brought new challenges to WRL's Mobile Library Services, and Davis has led the charge to quickly and thoughtfully adapt services in order to meet the changing needs of the community during this challenging time. Realizing that access to the internet was paramount to children's and guardians' education and livelihoods, Davis developed and launched a mobile WiFi hotspot program that turned the Bookmobile vehicles into mobile WiFi stations that could be deployed to neighborhoods, apartment complexes, and community hubs where people with limited home internet access were likely to live and congregate. She used her knowledge of the community to develop a schedule that took the vehicles to areas of the greatest need, including food distribution sites, retail parking lots, and local mobile home communities. This initiative received national attention, including features in *American Libraries Magazine* and *Library Journal*, and is continuing into the fall.

The John Philip Excellence in Outreach Award is far from the first accolade or distinction that Davis has received. She has served on the board of many local organizations and received numerous awards that reflect her commitment to serving her community, including the Williamsburg James City County Community Action Agency Community Star Award, the WJCC Best Program Design Award for the Mothers and Friends Literacy Program, the James City County (JCC) Excellence in Collaboration Award, the JCC Neighborhood Connections Youth Leadership Award, the Youth Aeronautics Educational Foundation Outstanding Community Service Award, and the Verizon Local Hero Award. She has also received several statewide recognitions, including the Virginia Public Library Directors Association Outstanding Program for Seniors Award for Intergenerational Programming. At the national level, she was the first African American to be elected to the Board of the Association of Bookmobile and Outreach Services, and in 2014 she was elected as the first African American ABOS President.

"WRL is excited that Ms. Davis has won this esteemed leadership award, but not surprised," said library director Betsy Fowler. "It was an honor to nominate her for this recognition because she has such a passion for public service. She tirelessly advocates for all members of our community, and is a treasured asset for the library and for greater Williamsburg."

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