



RANDY PARKER/THE DAILY TRIBUNE NEWS

Valerie Gilreath, founder of The Bookmobile, smiles as a young reader selects a book from the mobile library at the SPARK Community Center Monday afternoon.

## Reading to Go Places!

### Bartow celebrates Bookmobile Week April 7-13

BY MARIE NESMITH  
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Embracing the opportunity to broaden a child's horizon, Valerie Gilreath furthered her nonprofit's reach during Bookmobile Week in Bartow County. From April 7 to 13, the Cartersville resident's The Bookmobile: Reading to Go Places! visited five sites and served 154 youngsters.

"I am passionate about literacy and reading because it played an immeasurable role in my own life," said Gilreath, founder and president of the mobile resource's board of directors. "It improved my academic success, sure, but more than that it opened my eyes to the larger world. It introduced me to people and places that I would never have known about otherwise. Books introduced me to possibilities for my own life — what I could do, who I could be."

"No one in my family — in the previous generation — went to college. My parents and most of my aunts and uncles did not graduate high school. My role models in terms of academics and career came from books. Once I could read, I could learn about anything and anybody. That is why I felt it was important to promote literacy."

Starting Monday afternoon at SPARK Community

Center off Mac Johnson Road, The Bookmobile visited three other Cartersville venues — Little Lambs Learning Center and Budgetel Inns & Suites Tuesday, and Sunshine House Wednesday — and Evergreen Village Mobile Home Park in Emerson Thursday.

Along with a complimentary age-appropriate book, each child received a goodie bag filled with bookmarks, a Bookmobile bracelet, sticker, reading-themed activity sheet, advice for parents on reading with their youngster and details about online resources. Supporting The Bookmobile's efforts, the Bartow County School System donated 250 kindergarten through eighth-grade books, which were obtained with its Literacy for Learning, Living and Leading in Georgia grant funds.

"To celebrate National Bookmobile Day [April 10], we decided to declare an entire week of Bookmobile activities in Bartow County," Gilreath said. "The goal of Bookmobile Week in Bartow County was to visit as many new sites as possible in order to raise awareness about our program with both clients and supporters. Our hope is that this leads to long-term relationships with the families and locations that we meet this week."

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RANDY PARKER/THE DAILY TRIBUNE NEWS

Madison Cowart, a volunteer with The Bookmobile, reads to children Tuesday at Little Lambs Learning Center in Cartersville.

# Jesus paid for our sin debts with his 'It is finished'

Debt. It's something fairly common to our day. Lots of people have debt. Many have a car loan or a house note or credit card payments. While debt is not necessarily a good thing, it is part of life for many.

Let's imagine that you log on to your computer and you go to the website of the bank or company that has your house mortgage. You log in to your account and your information comes up. You are planning to make your monthly mortgage payment.

When your information comes up, it says you owe nothing. Your mortgage has been paid. You think,

"Yeah, right! There has to be a mistake." You refresh the page expecting what you think is the right in-

formation to pop up. But again, the information says your mortgage has been paid.

You think, "I've got to call the bank. Surely, this isn't right."

So, you call the bank. When you finally get to someone in the mortgage department you explain your situation. The person says they will be glad to look into it. They do some research and come back online and they say, "Yes... it appears your mortgage has been paid off."

You are startled! You ask, "By who? Who paid my mortgage?"

The bank representative tells you and you thank them. You then contact the person who paid your

mortgage. You tell them repeatedly how thankful you are. You tell them you could never repay them and they tell you they don't expect it.

You put the phone down. You sit there and you let the wonderful news sink in. You are now living in a home that is paid off! You are ecstatic! Lord, it feels so good to have some debt paid off!

That's exactly what Jesus did for us. He paid a debt we could not pay. Man had a sin debt that He could never pay off. It didn't matter how good man was or how much man gave, he couldn't pay his debt. It was simply impossible.

But God sent His only Son into this world and Jesus went to the cross to do what man couldn't do; Jesus paid the sin-debt for man's sins. And why did He do it? Because He loves us.

In Jesus' sixth phrase while on the cross, He said, "It is finished!" The three words "It Is Finished" come from one Greek word. The word is a banking term than means a debt has been paid. So, as Jesus was about to breath His final breath, Jesus' mission had been accomplished. He came to earth to die for man's sins. That task was now done. The task was finished!

Because Jesus paid our sin debt,

mankind has the opportunity to be redeemed of their sins. Today, if you are a believer, your sin debt has been paid. If you are not a Christian, you have a debt that Jesus wants to pay off if you will let Him.

Our sin debt is paid. Jesus loves us! Celebrate that this week and this Easter season.

"Man of Sorrows!" what a name for the Son of God, who came to Ruined sinners to reclaim! Hallelujah, what a Savior! Lifted up was He to die, "It is finished!" was His cry; Now in heav'n exalted high; Hallelujah, what a Savior!"

## Bookmobile

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"... We hope children gain a love of reading and an excitement from their experience with The Bookmobile," she said, adding the nonprofit's efforts were boosted last week by its volunteers — Kim Dennis, Madison Cowart, Glenda Davis-Canteen, Faye Gilreath, Tracey Stephens and Stacey Gheesling. "We hope that parents and children feel seen, heard and cared for after an interaction with us. And we hope that they look forward to us returning and know it will be a fun and uplifting experience."

Calling The Bookmobile a "valuable resource," Manja Arnold enjoyed seeing children at the SPARK Community Center immerse themselves in the nonprofit's materials. The Cartersville resident is the leader of the After School Club, a ministry of Highland Springs Church that serves residents of a nearby mobile home park.

"I am thrilled that Valerie reached out to me and brought The Bookmobile to our community," she said. "Valerie Gilreath, Kim Dennis and Madison Cowart immediately connected with the kids. They introduced the young readers to The Bookmobile and promoted its summer program. Everyone loved participating in reading activities."

"Madison sat next to a young girl helping her [follow] the story. It is such a valuable resource to the kids who don't have the opportunity to visit the local library or purchase books on a regular basis. The families are looking forward to The Bookmobile's summer visits. It will keep them reading through the summer break."

One of the highlights from this year's Bookmobile Week was the volunteers' visit to the Budgetel near Cass-White Road in Cartersville. While serving about 26 children, the mobile library served conducted a reading circle and provided each participant a goodie bag and several books.

"The Budgetel is an extended-stay motel, but there are a lot of families that live there," Gilreath said. "These families are one step away from homelessness. Some may be fleeing dangerous circumstances. My mother's church, Grace Baptist, has been doing outreach at the Budgetel Inn, and she told me there are a lot of children living there who could benefit from bookmobile services, so we decided to check it out."

"Several people questioned us about the wisdom of going into what is perceived as a dangerous environment. 'You mean the place where all the druggies live?' someone asked me. Yes, exactly, that place. The Bookmobile exists to serve those who need it most. If children can be there, we can be there. We had a great response from

management, parents, children and other residents. ... The children were very excited to learn that we will be bringing The Bookmobile there regularly throughout the summer months."

Currently expanding The Bookmobile's reach, Gilreath is planning to visit sites across the county this summer, forge connections with childcare centers and offer a mobile technology lab in the near future. In reviewing Bartow's Kids Count Data, she is pleased to see increases in the percentage of students embarking on the "reading to learn" phase of their lives.

"According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count Data, only 40.3% — 2018 — of children in Bartow County achieve Proficient Learner or above on Milestones English Language Arts assessment," she said. "The remaining 59.7% are at risk of falling behind as they move into fourth grade. The fourth grade marks the end of a student's 'learning to read' and the beginning of 'reading to learn.' Not reading well by the fourth grade impacts a child's ability to succeed in other subjects, such as science, math and social studies."

"However, that 40.3% number represents a significant improvement from just a couple of years ago — 33.9% in 2015; 34.2% in 2016; 36.8% in 2017 — so I am encouraged that we are moving in the right direction with the variety of literacy efforts in Bartow County. In addition to The Bookmobile, both school systems have implemented additional reading supports, and these are bolstered by other community efforts, such as the Bartow Literacy Council and the Read to

Grow initiative."

Gilreath launched the mobile resource in July 2017, initially focusing on the south Bartow community. Since its inception, The Bookmobile has checked out 1,309 books, donated 3,445 books — not including Bookmobile Week — and issued 302 Bookmobile library cards.

"I saw a need, particularly in southern Bartow County, through my work with Bartow County government and Northwest Georgia Public Health," said Gilreath, who serves as the director of Bartow County Grant Writing department. "Low-income families in our community, many mired in generational poverty, struggling to give their children the tools needed to break the cycle. It's not usually a question of if they want to or not. It's more that they don't know what these tools are, and, even if they do, they likely don't have the resources to provide them."

"...The Bookmobile's purpose is to get age-appropriate books into the hands and homes of children. We do this via the mobile library, giving away a free book to each child every time we see them, and establishing Little Free Libraries. We believe that increasing access to books in this way will increase childhood literacy in Bartow County and result in children that do better in school, stay in school through graduation, and have greater economic success as adults."

Enhancing the lives of south Bartow residents also is personal for Gilreath, who shared the area is "close to my heart."

"My mother and her siblings grew up on Glade Road," she said. "Most of my extended family on that side was raised

there even though I was not. I have several first cousins who were victim to the drug epidemic that swept through Glade Road in the '80s and '90s. One lost his life to a heroin overdose a couple of years ago. They experienced poverty, substance abuse, incarceration, teenage pregnancy — the litany of challenges we associate with 'at-risk' populations."

"When I saw the disparities that still exist in poverty and educational attainment between Allatoona and the rest of the county, I knew firsthand that it had been that way for more than 40 years. It hit me that nothing had changed since I was a child. Immediately I tried to think of how change could begin. The best way to combat generational poverty is education, and the surest way to ensure academic success is early childhood literacy. Hence the seemingly simple act of getting books into the hands of a child from an early age impacts his/her life for decades."

Continuing to be a fixture at the Allatoona Resource Center — 6503 Glade Road in Acworth — The Bookmobile is open to the public the third Saturday of the month from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. This month, due to Easter, the nonprofit will change its visit to the fourth Saturday.

"We being the south Bartow community absolutely love The Bookmobile and can clearly see the impact that they're making in the lives of our clients," ARC Site Coordinator Nichole Varnell said. "We at the ARC have been onboard since the inception of The Bookmobile. We believe in their mission. It aligns well with ours and we are glad to support them in any way possible."

"The nearest Bartow County library is over 10 miles away. That is a nice distance for many of our clients to travel, and oftentimes that poses an issue. Therefore, The Bookmobile is

here meeting a prevalent need within our underserved community ensuring that southern Bartow County has access to books, which is awesome."

She continued, "We value the passion and dedication of Valerie and Kim and all that they pour out into the community. They are making a huge investment in the lives of the people here. The Bookmobile is a cornerstone, a staple here on Glade Road. Even in the time of internet, Kindle and YouTube, The Bookmobile is classic, a mainstay."

Since The Bookmobile is a separate entity from Bartow County government or the Bartow County Library System, the literacy effort relies on the public's support. In addition to donations, the program is funded through grants and sponsorships from various organizations.

When reviewing some of her favorite Bookmobile moments, Gilreath shared two recent interactions with the community stand out.

"We had one woman, a regular Bookmobile visitor with her three children, tell us that we are her family," she said. "This tells me we are doing something right. We work with a lot of families that don't have a support system or a safety net. We want to help provide them with a sense of community."

"Secondly, The Bookmobile had taken a hiatus in January and February, because the cold weather keeps most people from coming out to visit. When we began making regular stops again in March, we had one mother tell us that her son 'couldn't sleep last night he was so excited to see The Bookmobile.' That made our day."

For more information about the Bookmobile, visit its website, readingtogoplaces.org, or Facebook page, www.facebook.com/pg/bartowbookmobile/posts.

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