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North Carolina's Madison County Public Libraries Honored by *Library Journal* as 2018 Best Small Library in America

Rural Library System Nationally Recognized for Community Partnerships, Outreach, Relationships and Top-Notch Professional Service

NEW YORK, NY - September 14, 2018 - Madison County Public Libraries (MCPL), located where the Appalachian Trail meets the French Broad River in western North Carolina, is the Best Small Library in America 2018. Honored today by *Library Journal* with the support of sustaining sponsor Baker & Taylor serves a community of 21,000 residents through community engagement that includes partnerships, outreach, relationships and top-notch professional service.

As the Best Small Library in America 2018, MCPL will receive a cash prize of \$5,000 from Baker & Taylor and is featured on the cover of [*Library Journal's* September 15, 2018 issue](#), available in print and online. In addition, MCPL representatives will be recognized at the Association for Rural & Small Libraries conference this week in Springfield, Illinois. The Best Small Library in America Award was established in 2005 to identify and highlight the exemplary work of public libraries serving communities with populations under 25,000.

County librarian and MCPL director Melanie Morgan arrived on the scene four years ago, with ten years of experience in big libraries in Florida under her belt. Bringing new creativity and community outreach skills, she has built partnerships and relationships and energized staff to reawaken the library system.

The communities served by MCPL, Morgan noted, were already tuned in. "Our communities were already invested in our libraries when I came here. I didn't have to sell our libraries," said Morgan. "We worked to build libraries and services that fit into our Appalachia culture."

This year 16,000 people attended MCPL programs, with 12,000 of them attending children's events. MCPL's libraries include the main Madison County Library in Marshall and two branches, the Mars Hill library and the newly relocated Hot Springs Library, MCPL's smallest branch and one of only two libraries located on the Appalachian Trail.

To build a strong school-library connection, Morgan leveraged her experience as a former teacher. Today MCPL partners with Madison County schools to make sure

every student is issued an MCPL e-library account, providing access to MCPL ebooks and NC LIVE databases. MCPL also offers two after-school programs in collaboration with the schools to help struggling students: one-on-one tutoring and small group tutoring for students identified by teachers as being at risk of falling below grade level.

With Madison County spread out over 449 square miles, the average bus ride for public school students is 4.5 hours a day. Every day after school, those buses bring all the school children right to MCPL branches. There, they engage in MCPL programs and activities, along with homework help and tutoring and weekly STEAM and Lego after-school clubs. MCPL also offers literacy and high school equivalency instruction that empowers learners through tutoring and workshops packed with essential skills for gaining employment.

Another example of MCPL's community partnership outreach, MCPL's ELITE (Education Leads into Excellence) Jail Program, operates in partnership with AB Tech Community College. The program connects inmates in the Madison County Jail with high school equivalency (HSE) preparation classes and one-on-one literacy tutoring. The program is designed to help those most in need; 65 percent of participants graduated with HSE diplomas since it began last year.

"MCPL exemplifies the power and impact of our smallest libraries, engaging the community by understanding its needs and designing facilities, programs and services to meet them," said Rebecca T. Miller, editorial director of *Library Journal* and *School Library Journal*. "Library Director Melanie Morgan, with her small - but mighty - team, offers a model for any library leader looking to positively impact and enrich lives."

This year's finalists for the 2018 Best Small Library in America Award also share a commitment to developing programs and services that meet the unique needs of their communities. They are:

- Cazenovia Public Library, New York, under the leadership of Director Betsy Kennedy
- Patagonia Public Library, Arizona, under the leadership of Director Abbie Zeltzer

Also featured in the September 15, 2018 issue of *Library Journal*, the two finalists will receive \$1,000 each from Baker & Taylor.

Each nomination was evaluated by a panel of qualified industry professionals—including Craig Anderson, director of the Boundary County District Library, Idaho, *Library Journal's* Best Small Library in America 2017. Entries are judged based on criteria that include developing innovative services that can be replicated by other libraries, technology use and education, collaboration, and serving as a focal point for the community.

For award guidelines, visit <http://lj.libraryjournal.com/awards>.

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