



PRESS RELEASE

FRANKLIN COUNTY RECEIVES TWO VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES 2021 ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

For Immediate Release
August 9, 2021

Rocky Mount, Virginia --- On August 5, 2021, the Virginia Association of Counties (VACo) announced that two Franklin County programs received 2021 Achievement Awards. The award-winning programs included the 24 -Hour Library at the Summit View Business Park and River of Lights. This year, VACo received 102 submissions and selected only 30 recipients for the 2021 Achievement Awards. Franklin County was one of only seven counties that received multiple awards.

“I want to thank all who participated in the 19th year of the Achievement Awards,” VACo Executive Director Dean Lynch said. “Our counties face challenges every day, and those challenges are written in these program submissions. What’s also written are the innovative solutions that overcome these obstacles to make life better for communities across the Commonwealth. We celebrate these victories with all who participated.”

The Franklin County Public Library’s (FCPL) application described the newly installed self-service 24-Hour Library kiosk, located at the Summit View Business Park that allows the public to access library materials 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The FCPL conceived of the kiosk when the COVID-19 pandemic restricted access to the library’s physical and digital materials. Individuals without internet service—who comprise more than 30% of Franklin County’s population—were particularly impacted. Because the demand for books and other library materials increased during the pandemic, the FCPL needed an innovative way to provide materials safely and continuously for both the digitally disconnected and the public at large. The 24-Hour Library operates like a traditional vending machine, except the items are free, and the machine is Wi-Fi enabled. Users can visually browse and select from 235 books, audiobooks, and DVDs, then scan their library card to dispense items. The kiosk’s free Wi-Fi service allows users to borrow and download e-books, audiobooks and periodicals to their personal e-readers or smartphones. The Summit View Business Park is located along a heavily trafficked section of US 220 that connects Rocky Mount to Roanoke County to the north and Henry County to the south. A \$150,000 allocation from Franklin County’s receipt of CARES Act

over - next page

Press Release continued....

funds paid for the 24-Hour Library. In addition, the 24-Hour Library received technical, logistical, and leadership support from the Franklin County departments of economic development, information technology, and parks and recreation and from the Franklin County Board of Supervisors.

Alison Barry, Director, Franklin County Public Library: "The COVID-19 pandemic reinforced our responsibility to continue to serve county residents who don't have internet access or are unable to visit our physical buildings. Thanks to the 24-Hour Library, people now have access to library materials around the clock."

Parks and Recreation's winning application detailed the River of Lights event. Due to COVID-19 health restrictions, Franklin County Parks and Recreation had to cancel its signature three-day paddling festival. The inability to shuttle hundreds of participants safely between river access points led the County to reimagine a new socially distanced river event. River of Lights, a nighttime tubing event on the Pigg River, combines the use of natural resources with repurposing of seasonal Christmas supplies. Four thousand feet of overhead string lights illuminated the river in this adventurous, no-shuttle-needed, family-friendly activity. Waid Recreation Park provides the perfect location with its shallow water and easily accessible amenities. River of Lights has attracted interest cross-country, with registrants from 15 states, including Washington State, Maine, Texas, and Florida. The program reached over nine million views on Facebook and sold out all 1,200 tickets within hours of opening registration. While the County welcomes all benefits of tourism, it strives to be able to serve our community with low-cost, world-class recreational opportunities, which make the residents proud to call Franklin County home.

Paul Chapman, Director, Franklin County Parks and Recreation: "There is no other event like this in the world where you can tube at night in a river illuminated by thousands of lights. This one-of-a-kind event showcases why Franklin County is such a great place to live. We have amazing rivers and lakes, endless outdoor recreation opportunities and a friendly and welcoming community. "

For more information and details, please visit: <https://www.vaco.org/county-profiles/achievement-awards/>
or <http://www.franklincountyva.gov>

#