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Washington Memorial Library to Become 21st Century Information and Community Hub

Knight Foundation Grant Supports Information Needs of Bibb County Residents

MACON (Dec. 15, 2009) Macon and Bibb County residents will be able to gain computer skills and expand digital access thanks to a \$500,000 grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

The Washington Memorial Public Library, in the heart of the College Hill neighborhood, will be transformed from an aging traditional library into “The Hub” for information and community activities accessible to area residents. In partnership with the Bibb County Commission, the library will be renovated, 85 new computers will be purchased and an array of training classes will be offered to library patrons.

“The Washington Memorial Library already serves as an important technological link for local citizens without access to computers. “The Hub” will improve and strengthen that access and more importantly become a community gathering place”, commented Bibb County Commission Chairman Samuel F. Hart, Sr. “Bibb County’s Library System is one of our best assets and Bibb County is pleased to partner with the Knight Foundation with a Commission-funded \$450,000 renovation project to create a hub of civic activity and a welcoming space for gatherings.”

“The library has always been about information and making it accessible to everyone. Libraries are the greatest providers of free Internet-offering residents access to the critical news and information they need to make decisions about their lives,” said Beverly Blake, Macon program director for Knight Foundation. “Through this partnership with the Bibb County Commission and Friends of the Library we look forward to creating a prototype of the 21st Century Community Library as a high-tech and welcoming gathering place”.

The \$500,000 grant is part of a \$5.5 million Knight Foundation initiative benefiting library users in 20 communities across the United States. The effort reinforces the sweeping recommendations by the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy, a project of the Aspen Institute. In a report issued earlier this year, the Commission asserts that democracy in America is threatened by the lack of equal access to quality information. Funding public libraries, as centers of digital and media training, is one key to filling the gaps, the commission says. Its report is available at www.knightcomm.org.

About the Local Library System

The Middle Georgia Regional Library System serves 6 counties in the heart of Georgia. The Washington Memorial Library is the main library of the five libraries in Bibb County and bridges the digital divide for those in the community who would otherwise have no access to computers, the Internet and other digital resources. During fiscal year 2009, Washington Memorial library offered 60,700 hours of Internet access as well as access to online databases, information and research assistance to patrons who would otherwise have no access to computers and digital resources.

The grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation will allow the library to purchase additional computers to improve Internet access doubling its current usage to 120,000 hours per year. It will also allow the library to offer training classes to patrons to enhance the use of library resources. The addition of new furnishings and study areas will create a gathering place which will transform Washington Memorial Library into the digital hub of the community.

About the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation advances journalism in the digital age and invests in the vitality of communities where the Knight brothers owned newspapers. Knight Foundation focuses on projects that promote community engagement and lead to transformational change. For more, visit www.knightfoundation.org.