

A Digital Storytelling Program and Station

At the Duluth Branch of the Gwinnett County Public Library System

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**Executive Summary**

The Gwinnett County Public Library System proposes to create a Digital Storytelling Program at its Duluth Branch to promote a sense of community and sharing among its ethnically diverse community. “Digital Storytelling is the modern expression of the ancient art of storytelling. Digital stories derive their power by weaving images, music, narrative and voice together, thereby giving deep dimension and vivid color to characters, situations, experiences, and insights” (<http://electronicportfolios.com/digistory/>). The Digital Storytelling Program in Gwinnett County Public Library would give residents the chance to create and share their personal stories. It will promote exchange across age and ethnic divides, develop a multimedia community history, and teach technological skills. The Library requests \$10,000 in funds for 12 months beginning September 2011.

**Gwinnett County**

Founded in 1818, Gwinnett County is located 30 miles northeast of Atlanta, Georgia. Its population is 805,321 ([www.gwinnettcountry.com](http://www.gwinnettcountry.com)), and it is growing at a fast pace. In the past ten years, the population demographic of Gwinnett County has shifted immensely. Within this formerly homogenous suburb of Atlanta, the African-American, Asian, and Hispanic residents have rapidly increased from a combined 27% of the

population to 56% (US Census Bureau, 2000, 2010) many of whom are immigrants learning English as their second language.

### **Gwinnett County Public Library**

Composed of 15 branches, the Gwinnett County Public Library (GCPL) serves the residents of Gwinnett County. Winning the 2000 award for Library of the Year, the library's mission is "supporting your informational, educational, and recreational interest with convenient, creative, customer-friendly access to materials and services" with a vision to "provide resources and services that inform, inspire, enrich and amaze--as we promote community and personal growth" (<http://www.gwinnettpl.org/>).

The GCPL system is an integral and well-used resource in Gwinnett County with 328, 370 registered borrowers and 3,600 new cards issued per month. With 7,038,931 items checked out last year, GCPL has the highest circulation in the state of Georgia. In 2010, there were over 3 million visits to all the library branches and almost 3,300,000 visits to GCPL's website which provides downloadable video, books and music. Additional services and programs provided include Pre-School Story Time, Summer Reading Program, Gwinnett Reads, Mango Languages, tutor.com among others, and program attendance has increased 16% from 2009 to 2010 (GCPL Fiscal Report, 2010).

### *Staff*

In its staff GCPL mirrors the ethnic, age, and gender diversity of the community. The Duluth branch of GCPL is comprised of a diverse group of twenty staff members. Lorena Smith is the branch manager and has served GCPL for over ten years. Additionally three professional librarians help Lorena run and oversee the branch. The Duluth staff also includes six library associates, six library assistants, and four library

service assistants. Ten to fifteen volunteers also support the branch ranging from high school students to senior citizens in the community.

### **Statement of Need**

The changing demographics in Gwinnett County have occurred on a large scale and at a rapid pace. In 2000 the white population was 72.7%. Now it is 44%. The African American population was 13.3% and is now 22.8%, Asian was 7.2 % is now 10.5%, and Hispanic was 10.9% is now 20.1% (U.S Census, 2000, 2010). Many residents have emigrated from Korea, Vietnam and Latin America, and it is not uncommon to hear residents speaking Korean and Spanish and to see storefronts written only in foreign languages. This swift and extensive change and has created a population rich in diversity and culture. Unfortunately it has also generated tension and resentment among these new groups who are hesitant to feel welcome in their new home and the former homogenous white population who are wary of the new faces, languages, foods, and cultures of their neighbors. Yet amidst this change, the GCPL system has remained a popular and valued resource by all groups within the county.

Gwinnett County rapidly changing population needs a community-building program to foster relationships and understanding among these new neighbors. We believe the ideal resource for such a program is through the collectively used and appreciated GCPL system.

### *Digital Storytelling*

*“The library as a facilitator of conversation” (Lankes & Nicholson, 200,p.18).*

In 2001 Sandra Ball-Rokeach, Yong-Chan Kim, and Sorin Matei published the results of their study conducted in several diverse California neighborhoods, which

analyzed the role of storytelling in fostering community belonging. Their research proved that the “intensity of participation in interpersonal storytelling of the neighborhood [has] the strongest direct effects on belonging...[and] the more integrated the storytelling system, the higher the level of belonging” (Ball-Rokeach et al., 2001, p. 417).

The act of storytelling on a subject of mutual interest connects us with our neighbors diverse as they may be. Digital storytelling is a way to replicate the uniting function of storytelling in the digital era. Digital stories are a short multimedia-based video narrative on a common or shared theme. They are created by individual or group storytellers and presented in a digital format online. Digital storytelling allows participants to create information and share it in a meaningful, creative, and accessible way. In a local and public organization such as a library, digital storytelling provides participants an active role in creating and defining their community for themselves and their neighbors.

Digital storytelling programs are an effective and popular solution in uniting diverse communities. In 2006 the San Diego Public Library, which serves an ethnically diverse community, created a Digital Storytelling Station and in a year over 400 stories had been created (Zimmerman, 2009). The idea soon spread across the state, and by 2009 thirty California libraries had digital storytelling programs (Zimmerman, 2009). The overall effects were twofold. “When the stories are put together, you get a new feel for the community, a sense of its history and the diversity of a neighborhood... It’s also a way to connect people who might not be regular users of the library” (Zimmerman, 2009). The program gave participants an active role in the community and also provided a space for them to gather together in a shared initiative of creativity.

Another successful example of digital storytelling is Untold Stories. Working through public libraries across four European countries (Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, and Greece), Untold Stories aims to encourage “mutual understanding and tolerance among the ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups represented in all societies” (Davies, 2007). Additionally this program gives migrant communities experience and knowledge with digital technologies (Davies, 2007). They currently have over 125 stories available on their website which can be accessed in three languages English, Czech, and Greek ([www.untoldstories.eu](http://www.untoldstories.eu)).

A third example of Digital Storytelling is a project in Wilmette Public Library outside of Chicago. Their program is aimed specifically at teens with the goal of “nurturing and facilitating the development of important twenty-first century skills” (Czarnecki, 2009, p. 24). They have found it to be successful and “highly engaging” for teens and plan to create a separate program for teens to help senior citizens create their stories (Czarnecki, 2009, p. 26). Digital Storytelling has been highly successful tool in community building and has potential and application in a variety of environments.

### **Proposed Program**

The Gwinnett County Public Library proposes the creation of a Digital Storytelling Program and implementation of a Digital Storytelling station in their Duluth Branch. At this station, participants will be provided resources to create a digital story of their own which reflects their life, culture, and experiences in Gwinnett County to be shared and accessed on the GCPL’s website.

### **Project Goals and Expectations**

Our project goal is to provide a creative outlet for the diverse population to express their stories about their shared home, Gwinnett County. This will foster a sense of belonging to the new members of the community and help the community to abandon stereotypes and learn about each other. Additionally it makes use of the library as a shared community resource for learning and information access. Finally it will provide an opportunity to learn about and use various digital resources. We expect several stories will be created each month, active online viewing of the stories, and a considerable diversity of participants. If these outcomes are met and/or exceeded, we hope to expand the number of digital story stations to other libraries in Gwinnett County Public Library system.

### **Required Resources**

The Digital Storytelling Program will utilize current GCPL staff in their regularly scheduled hours for its creation and maintenance. However staff will need to be specially trained how to use the technology, how to make a digital story, and how to help patrons do so. Duluth Branch of GCPL system will be the site of the station due to its central and convenient location in the county as well as the interest, enthusiasm, and training-availability of the staff for implementing this project. A web developer will be needed to design and implement the online digital storytelling site. GCPL's current web developing company can be contracted to do this. The project would also require technology resources including an iMac computer with the appropriate software and supplies (microphone, camera, scanner) and a desk where the station will be installed (ALA, 2011).

### **Planning and Implementation Schedule**

Our project will begin in September 2011. During the first month a committee will be created to compile a toolkit to instruct library staff and storytellers how to use the equipment and how to effectively create a digital story using resources from the University of Houston's Digital Storytelling process (<http://digitalstorytelling.coe.uh.edu>). Concurrently the Digital Storytelling Station will be implemented in the library and website constructed.

In the second month, designated staff members will participate in workshop training course with the Digital Storytelling toolkit and technology. The third and fourth months will be spent recruiting 5 to 10 test participants to create the initial digital stories. The stories should be short, about two to three minutes, and will be evaluated by the committee. Any necessary changes to the teaching and creation process will be made. The final versions of the test stories will be placed on GCPL's website as a source of promotion and recruitment for the project. The committee will contact other Gwinnett County organizations such as the Asian American Resource Center and the Latin American Association to encourage those organizations' participation and partnership.

During fifth and sixth months at least twenty more participants will be recruited and create their stories. Concurrently the program will be advertised through the library (at all the branches and on the website) and through any other supporting associations. In the seventh month a grand opening of the station will occur with a viewing in the Duluth branch of the twenty new stories. Participants can create their story at the station, or if they have their own software they can create and submit their digital story online.

After the grand opening a staff member will be appointed to manage the station two or three days a week to help participants create their story. Ideally the staff member will not do it for them but rather teach them how. Digital story topics will initially be on theme of life, experiences and memories in Gwinnett County. Additional themes may be created and decided by the community and different initiatives to encourage various members of the community to participate such as teens, recent immigrants, and the elderly. The stories will be organized within these themes by date published.

### **Schedule Outline**

Month 1	Appoint committee, compile Digital Storytelling Toolkit, build website, construct Station
Month 2	Train staff members with Digital Storytelling Toolkit
Months 3 & 4	Recruit test participants and community partners, create initial stories, evaluate toolkit
Months 5 & 6	Recruit 20 more participants and create their stories, market the program
Month 7	Conduct Grand Opening of Station and Program
Months 8-12	Create stories
Month 13	Evaluate project

### **Method of Evaluation**

In September 2012 the committee will evaluate the Digital Storytelling Program in the following areas:

- Number of stories published (at least 3 a month)
- How often the stories are viewed online. Data will be collected in the first month after the grand opening-when we anticipate it will be at its highest and it should not be below 20 percent of that initial number.



- Diversity of the participants. If diversity of age, ethnicity, and gender is not significant, campaigns will be performed to specifically target and attract those groups.

### Budget

<b><i>Equipment</i></b>		
iMac (with software for audio, video, and image editing; DVD/CD drive and USB port, built in microphone and camera, mouse and keyboard)		\$3000
Printer/Scanner		\$200
Station Desk and 2 Chairs		\$500
Digital Camera		\$300
Power strip		\$20
Headphones		\$20
Ethernet cord		\$10
External Hard Drive		\$75
<b><i>Marketing</i></b>		
Flyers (design, printing, distribution)		\$500
Grand Opening Celebration (Projector, screen, cables)		\$1000
<b><i>Website</i></b>		
Design, development, and maintenance of website with video uploading capabilities		\$4000
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$9625</b>

## Conclusion

Digital storytelling brings the power of community building to the modern age. A digital storytelling program at the GCPL will help Gwinnett County residents to hear each other's stories and to share their own. Through their stories and the process of sharing, the diverse people of Gwinnett County can become more than just residents of their town. They can become a community-united in their diversity, their shared home, and their stories.

*When there are walls of ignorance between people, when we don't know each other's stories, we substitute our own myth about who that person is. When we are operating with only a myth, none of that person's truth will ever be known to us, and we will injure them—mostly without ever meaning to. What assumption did you make because she's a woman? What assumption did you make because he is black? What myths were built around the employment of the father or the absence of the mother? What story did we tell ourselves in the absence of knowing this person's real story? (Wehmiller, 1992, p. 380)*

## Appendix

A. Gwinnett County Public Library Fiscal Year Report 2010

## References

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