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State library agency names 10 Most Beautiful Libraries in Georgia

Facilities in Atlanta, Covington, Columbus, Dacula, Douglasville, Macon, Savannah, St. Simons Island and Washington will be featured in promotional passports to be made available statewide this summer

ATLANTA — From a 130-year-old English Baroque library with stained glass crafted by Tiffany to a seaside casino turned National Literary Landmark to a contemporary Atlanta architectural icon, Georgia Public Library Service's newly recognized list of the state's 10 Most Beautiful Public Libraries offers a treasure trove of charms waiting to be discovered.

In chronological order, the list includes:

- The Mary Willis Library in Washington (1888)
- The Carnegie Branch Library in Savannah (1914)
- The Washington Memorial Library in Macon (1923)
- The St. Simons Island Public Library (1937)
- The Buckhead Branch Library in Atlanta (1989)
- The Columbus Public Library (2005)
- The Hamilton Mill Library in Dacula (2011)
- The Dog River Public Library in Douglasville (2011)
- The Porter Memorial Library in Covington (2011)
- The Metropolitan Library in Atlanta (2015)

To identify and recognize these libraries, GPLS solicited help from residents around the state. After a two-month online-submission campaign, the agency received nominations recommending a total of 60 facilities.

“Those libraries were then judged on their overall design, both in form and function, as well as for their interior and exterior styles and sense of timelessness,” explained State Librarian Julie Walker. “We also wanted to recognize libraries that are, or were, innovative for their time, as well

as those whose design reflects and serves their respective communities.”

A panel of public library and architecture professionals reviewed the candidates this winter and, over the course of three rounds of voting, narrowed the 60 nominees down to 10. The judging panel included Leslie Sharp, associate vice provost with the Georgia Institute of Technology and a teacher of historic preservation in the College of Architecture there, and Allyson McCarthy, architect and partner with Turco McCarthy Architecture & Design, who is a former chair of the Atlanta Urban Design Commission. Panel members from GPLS were Walker; Wendy Cornelisen, assistant state librarian for library innovation and collaboration; Jessica Everingham, assistant state librarian for library development and support; Nathan Rall, director of library planning and construction; and David Baker, director of communications and strategic partnerships. Between them, Rall and Baker have nearly five decades of experience working in the design and construction industry.

Georgia’s most beautiful libraries will each be recognized at a 2 p.m.ceremony on April 10 at the Mary Willis Library — the state’s first free library and the first in Georgia to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Headquarters of the Bartram Trail Regional Library System, the library is located at 204 East Liberty Street in Washington.

Beneath the stained glass windows at Mary Willis, representatives from each beautiful library will be presented with a framed certificate and individualized “10 Most Beautiful” stamps for endorsing their respective pages in promotional passports that will be available free at each recognized facility and at hundreds of other participating public libraries around the state in time for this year’s summer vacation season.

Based on recommendations by the judges, the passports shine a spotlight on seven additional public libraries that did not make the final 10 but whose architectural significance or spectacular settings make them equally worthy destinations for travelers. These facilities include the Atlanta Central Library, the Eatonton-Putnam County Library, the Lavonia-Carnegie Library, the Royston Branch Library, Savannah’s Bull

Street Branch Library, the Senoia Branch Library and the Towns County Public Library by Lake Chatuge in the town of Hiawassee.

“Design knowledge isn’t just for architects; we can all learn from the buildings around us, and every Georgia library is a great place to begin that lesson. By highlighting the artistry and history of our public libraries, we hope the passports will be a fun way for families to explore and learn,” Walker said. “Once people experience the architecture, heritage, scenery and friendly faces that await, I’m confident they will fall under the spell of these 10 community treasures and be impressed by the immense pride and joy that the library staff who work inside them take in showing them to visitors.”

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