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## **Bookmobile routes end after 60 years Regional service a casualty of budget cuts**

BRUNSWICK — The regional bookmobile, operated by the Brunswick-based Three Rivers Regional Library System, will officially end its services effective Nov. 1, after 60 years of service.

The library system's Regional Board of Trustees recently approved its new budget, and the decision to end the regional outreach service was based entirely on the need to cut back, said Leslie Jones, regional director.

In a typical month, the Three Rivers Bookmobile made about 40 stops at institutions such as preschools and daycares, Head Start programs, schools, prisons, assisted-living facilities and nursing homes in Brantley, Camden, Charlton, Glynn, Long, McIntosh and Wayne counties. About 350 individuals region-wide also used the bookmobile every month, often meeting at neighborhood and community stops or at their homes. This included services for homebound patrons and home-school families. Circulation has ranged from 22,000 – 24,000 items annually for the past few years.

The end of the Three Rivers bookmobile service is a sign of the times for many libraries across the nation. The slumping economy has brought dramatic increases in the number of people coming through library doors for free entertainment and free services such computers for writing resumes and the Internet for job searches. However, public funding for libraries has steadily dwindled.

**Three Rivers' funding agencies have severely cut its budget, and more cuts are anticipated, Jones said. For example, the library system received \$131,716 in state**

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**funds for materials in fiscal year 2007-08, said Jones. Funding dropped to \$91,924 for 2008-09, and \$43,500 for 2009-10. Librarians have experienced the same furloughs required of other state-funded employees, and on the county level, some member libraries have had to cut back, too. The St. Marys Public Library in Camden County has had to cut two part-time positions.**

“We recognize that the bookmobile is an institution, and many of our patrons have fond memories of the bookmobile rolling into their neighborhoods. It’s a sad day,” Jones said. “But we have to consider that the budget cuts are probably not over, and we have to make very difficult decisions and be prepared.”

Jones said the library system will begin exploring other ways provide outreach to patrons who cannot come to the library.

“We’re going to have to look at other more cost-effective ways to reach these patrons,” she said.

Three Rivers plans to invite patrons and former bookmobile staff to a farewell walk-through of the vehicle in the coming weeks. Details will be announced later. An online tribute to the bookmobile is also in the works, where patrons will be encouraged to share their memories and photographs of the bookmobile.

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*The Three Rivers Regional Library System is headquartered at the Brunswick-Glynn County Library, and includes Brantley County Library, Camden County Public Library, Charlton Public Library, Inc., Hog Hammock Public Library, Ida Hilton Public Library, Long County Public Library, St. Marys Public Library, St. Simons Island Public Library and Wayne County Library. The libraries are members of PINES, the Public Information Network for Electronic Services, a program of the Georgia Public Library Service, which gives libraries and their patrons access to more than 9.6 million books and materials, at more than 275 libraries and service outlets in Georgia.*