

NJLA Nomination – Library Champion Award for Significant Advocacy

The Gloucester County Library System (GCLS) is excited to nominate the entire Borough of Swedesboro for a Library Champion Award in the category of Significant Advocacy for their outstanding history of support for their public library – past, present, and future.

In 2008, the Borough government committed to the construction of an addition to the library building, approving a bond referendum even in the midst of an economic downturn. The plan was to cease library operations for the duration of construction, and direct residents to other GCLS branches until the library re-opened. However, numerous citizens of Swedesboro requested that another option be explored. Members of the former Board of Library Trustees, now functioning as an advisory board, expressed the desire to maintain some form of library service in the Borough during the construction. Their recommendation was to find an alternate location that could serve as a temporary library. Carol Gahrs, a Borough resident and library advocate, addressed a Borough Council meeting. She expressed concerns about the lack of availability of computer access, particularly for the children who visited the library after school.

Mayor Thomas Fromm was determined to find a suitable space. In an extraordinarily generous move, he offered use of his office, and borough employees Tanya Goodwin, Dolores Connors, Bonnie Coleman, and Lois Elder offered their adjoining break room for library use. This created the space for GCLS to operate a temporary “satellite” library in Swedesboro’s Borough Hall. With the approval of Borough Council, Public Works Supervisor Chuck Simmerman and employees Bill Goodwin, Ken Hunt, Carl Bagby, Mike Sparks, and John Gangemi painted the walls and moved furniture, computers, and boxes of library equipment. The Bethesda United Methodist Church, located across the street, generously permitted the library to hold programs in the church hall and classrooms.

When the Swedesboro Branch closed its doors for the start of construction, the bulk of the library’s collection was placed in storage. The satellite library opened on May 3, 2010. It provides public access computers, OPACs, newspapers and magazines, a public copier and fax service. Attendance at the satellite library has been so high that the hours were extended to accommodate the public.
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The Mayor and residents of Swedesboro continue a long history of support for their local library. The Borough of Swedesboro has had a library since 1783. Originally housed at the Trinity Episcopal Church (Old Swedes), and chartered as the Swedesboro Library Company in 1867, the Swedesboro Public Library was housed in the Borough Hall from 1937 to 1944, when it moved to its present location, the former Swedesboro Trust Company at 1442 Kings Highway. The Swedesboro Public Library became a branch of the Gloucester County Library System in 2005.

In the spring of 2011 the newly expanded Swedesboro Branch of GCLS will open its doors. GCLS wishes to recognize the entire community for their extraordinary commitment to maintaining over two centuries of continuous library service for their residents.