

The Big Read Grant Application 2010

Submitted by

**LeRoy Collins Leon County
Public Library System**

Tallahassee, Florida

1. Profile: LeRoy Collins Leon County Public Library System

One-page organizational description: Describe your mission, principal activities, and the make-up of the community you serve. Describe any past programming that demonstrates your ability to develop and manage a successful Big Read program.

Tallahassee/Leon County is the biggest "small town" in Florida. With just under 300,000 people, the county is the largest in North Florida between Jacksonville and Pensacola. The county has the most highly educated population in the state and is home to the State Capitol and three post-secondary institutions: The Florida State University, Florida A & M University, and Tallahassee Community College. Residents of the five contiguous counties frequent Leon County for its educational and cultural amenities, shopping and recreation.

The LeRoy Collins Leon County Public Library System is a division of Leon County government. It has a main library and 5 branches. Services, collections and programs support the library's mission "to enrich the community by inspiring a love of reading, providing a dynamic resource for creative and intellectual pursuits, and enabling residents to live a life of learning." The library is well-respected and has suffered comparatively little in this depressed economy. Current capital improvement projects include two new library buildings and expansion of two branches.

In 2002 the Library began an annual reading festival called "BookFest" with a grant from the American Library Association. BookFest has been continued through a partnership with the Friends of the Library and the Florida State University English Department. The festival enjoys a loyal following. Although the program of events has varied through the years, BookFest always includes a well-attended presentation and book signing by a noted author.

The Big Read was held here in 2009. Featuring *Fahrenheit 451*, it was one of the most successful community-wide events ever held. From large group activities in a downtown park and in schools, to small book club meetings and television interviews, The Big Read and *Fahrenheit 451* were the talk of the town! Over 1500 copies of the book were distributed; 2300 people participated in a variety of programs and events; and hundreds shared their thoughts via "What Book Would You Save" forms. The Big Read was remarkably successful in reaching across the entire population spectrum of Leon County. The media loved it. Our daily newspaper hosted a library-written blog on its web site and printed it as a daily column as well. Creative marketing through billboard and movie theatre screen placement of the professional marketing tools provided by ArtsMidwest/NEA took The Big Read's message to all of the community.

Our public is awaiting the announcement of the next The Big Read. The loyal audience built by last year's book will bring those people and more to this program. The cost of doing a community reading program without The Big Read funding is beyond the limits of the county. However, the county administration strongly supports it and last year funded \$8,000 of unbudgeted revenue for The Big Read.

Our selection for The Big Read 2010-2011, *The Things They Carried*, will surely engage our community. The book offers endless possibilities for discussion, events, programs, media, theatre, poems, writing and READING. It presents numerous intergenerational opportunities as well. More than 10% of our county's adult population is veterans, including the Chairman of the Leon County Board of County Commissioners. These special individuals, as well as numerous community partners, will help readers of all ages understand and appreciate this classic work by Tim O'Brien.

LeRoy Collins Leon County Public Library System

2. Proposed Community Partners

- Leon County Division of Veterans Services
- Vietnam Veterans of America, Big Bend Chapter 96
- Amvets, Tallahassee Post 1776
- United Veterans of Leon County
- U.S. Army Reserve
- Downtown Improvement Authority
- Tallahassee Writers' Association
- Florida Department of State, Division of Archives & Library Services
- Tallahassee Senior Center
- Tallahassee Film Society
- COCA – Council on Cultural Affairs
- Elected Officials:
 - Leon County Chairman and County Commission
 - Tallahassee Mayor and City Commission
 - Sheriff
 - State Legislators
 - Congressman Allen Boyd
- Youth Leadership Tallahassee
- Boys and Girls Clubs
- Tallahassee Urban League

3. Proposed School Partners

- Leon County Schools (History teachers & English teachers at high schools & middle schools; individual schools' History Fair coordinators)
- Home Schoolers Network
- Life Skills Learning Center
- Private Schools
- Tallahassee Community College
- Florida A & M University
- Florida State University

4. Potential Media Partners

- *Tallahassee Democrat* (daily newspaper)
- Local television stations: WCTV (CBS), WTWC (NBC), WTXL(ABC), WFSU-TV (PBS)
- Local radio: WFSU-FM, WAMF, Clear Channel and Cumulus stations
- *FS View* weekly student newspaper

5. Narrative: LeRoy Collins Leon County Public Library System

The Big Read featuring *Fahrenheit 451* (2009) was remarkably successful in reaching the entire population of Leon County. Creative uses of The Big Read graphics, such as billboard and movie screen marketing, magnetic signs on the library van and a daily column in the newspaper drew in record numbers at events. Everywhere we went, people were talking about The Big Read! We expect to generate the same kind of energy and excitement for *The Things They Carried*.

Staff involvement, marketing based upon graphics supplied by Arts Midwest/NEA, and a variety of activities to involve our diverse population will be integral to our program. One component of our past success was distribution of free books. We will purchase and distribute 1500 copies of *The Things They Carried*. The library will offer 5 circulating "Traveling Book Club" kits (10 copies each) for use by local book clubs and numerous copies to check out individually at all library locations.

Book-related programming presents unique opportunities to involve local veterans, veterans groups and ROTC programs. We have not targeted any of these groups for library support in the past. Intergenerational programming is a natural with this book and will encompass oral histories taken by youth from vets, interactive programs for all ages and engaging book discussions.

Events will include:

- **Kick-Off event: "The Things We Carried"**

A festive, interactive event to introduce the book and its themes to the public.

Intended audience: all county residents, with special interest in attracting reluctant readers of middle and high school age, families and seniors.

Local Veterans will share stories, memorabilia and more; opportunity for youth and adults to "carry" and/or pose with a fully loaded military backpack (supplied by FAMU & FSU ROTCs); children and adult civilians share what they would take along in their own packs by writing on a wall-sized display, young children participate by drawing; photographic display of Vietnam era by Florida State Archives; remembering the 1960's and 1970's through music, presented by community college and/or university students; local television station shares video clips from news reports during Vietnam war; refreshments; distribution of free books, reader's guides and calendars of events for The Big Read.

- **Book Discussions**

Library staff will lead ten discussions: one at each library location; the Tallahassee Senior Center Monthly Program; the American Legion Hall; the county courthouse; and online. Individual book groups and middle-, high school and postsecondary English classes will also be encouraged to host their own discussions.

- **War in Popular Films**

We will build upon the success of the film showings by Tallahassee Film Society in 2009. Those screenings were "standing room only"! Visual media has broad appeal and we were able to engage a good number of people who are not regular library users. Vietnam era movies will be shown and discussions will be led by FSU Film School faculty, history faculty or others.

- **Counterpoint: Nation at War with Itself**

In keeping with libraries' commitment to providing all sides of an issue and being a forum for public discussion, we would offer a panel discussion on the protests against Vietnam. Panelists would include local activists, journalists and others. At the event participants will also find a display of photographs and memorabilia from the anti-war movement.

- **Wrap-Up Event: Book Fair in the Park**

In partnership with the Downtown Improvement Authority, we will again co-host a book fair and keynote speaker. This was a highly successful event last year, drawing over 300 people and 27 local authors from the Tallahassee Writers Association. The event is held as part of the well-established "Downtown Marketplace", a Tallahassee tradition for 14 years.

School involvement:

Two middle schools and one alternative high school were very involved with The Big Read in 2009. In addition to marketing The Big Read to all area English and History teachers, we will build upon and expand our reach to students in two ways:

- **Oral history opportunities with veterans**

In partnership with schools' History Fair sponsors, Veterans' groups will organize a list of individuals willing to serve as resources for middle school and high school students working on state History Fair. Students will have opportunities to meet and work with veterans on oral histories or other projects as appropriate.

- **School Visits**

Library staff and members of ROTC and/or U.S. Army Reserve will visit Leon County middle schools to interest students in reading *The Things They Carried*. Students can try on military gear and compare to their own backpacks, hear a short book talk and discuss what they would carry with them if called to war.

Other activities:

- Web site for The Big Read hosted by the library, featuring online educational materials provided by NEA, calendar of events, and materials for further reading
- Blog by library staff, to be hosted by the *Tallahassee Democrat* (daily newspaper)
- Distribution of The Big Read educational materials at all library locations, via the bookmobile and at the county courthouse
- Coverage of selected events on Leon County's television station, Channel 16
- Library photo exhibit of Florida during the Vietnam era (from the Florida State Archives)
- Library System and The Big Read to have a presence in the local Veterans Day Parade

As home to more than 21,000 veterans, two ROTC programs and the Florida National Guard's HHC 779 Engineer Battalion, Leon County is sure to embrace The Big Read featuring *The Things They Carried*. We are looking forward to introducing this book to our community. It offers the best of literary reading: the book is well-crafted, thought-provoking, timely, and sure to inspire discussion. It is exciting to know that we can help foster and/or rejuvenate interest in reading through The Big Read.