

# *Gainsboro Branch Library manager retires*

Carla M. Lewis, who has been branch manager of the Gainsboro Branch Library for 36 ½ years, will officially retire on June 25. She thanks God, her family, directors and a very involved community for their combined support in the many accomplishments during her tenure as branch manager which includes: Oral History Initiative, a \$1.3 million renovation, story hours/puppet shows and seeing the Gainsboro Library registered as a Virginia Historic Landmark and placed



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on the National Register of Historic Places by the United States Department of the Interior.

Mrs. Lewis' historic

adventure began with the advice of a former librarian of Virginia Union University who encouraged her to apply for a position at the Gainsboro Branch Library in 1973.

"I was told right away that I had the position," states Mrs. Lewis. "I was driven to meet with Mrs. Louise Bowling, the only staff member at the branch at that time, and to find out the availability of housing in the area.

"We have a large house and you can come live

*(See Lewis, Page-5)*

# Lewis

(Continued from Page 1)

with us," Mrs. Bowling said.

"Well, that was one of the best decisions of my life," Mrs. Lewis continues, "because I was nurtured and loved just like a family member and ate scrumptious meals every day. Mr. Bowling prepared most of the meals during the week and Mrs. Bowling would prepare the Sunday family feast. I lived with the Bowlings for six months (and 10 pounds heavier) before moving to an apartment in the Claytor's old home place, across the street from the library."

Directors with whom Carla worked, during her tenure with the Roanoke Public Library System include: Ms. Himes, Ms. Keyser, Mr. Whitelock, Ms. James, Mr. Zarasky and Mrs. Umberger.

Numerous accomplishments she was able to complete during her 36 ½ years of service began in 1973, with story hours for pre-school age children that included First Baptist Church, Rugby, Lincoln Terrace and the primary students at Roanoke Catholic Elementary. Programs were planned and implemented for after school youth, especially during the holidays when schools were closed for several days.

She honored Mrs. Virginia Y. Lee, who was most instrumental in the construction and success of the library, by naming the collection the "Virginia Y. Lee African American History Collection" in 1982. The collection consists of autographed pictures, rare and first edition books and a taped interview of Mrs. Lee. Many volumes have been added to keep this collection updated for schools, casual readers and those who will continue to do research.

The branch also worked closely with a Virginia Cooperative Extension Agent to assist new mothers with fast and easy ways to prepare nutritious and healthy snacks for their family. Programs were also initiated through that partnership to inform patrons of nutritious facts and how to read can labels.

Through a Bill and Melinda Gates grant, the library was able to get new computers donated where the economic status of the homes were in the mid to low income bracket.

Initiated in 2006 was the Roanoke Public Library's Oral History Project that

collects and preserves stories of long-ago by interviewing neighborhood patrons. They shared stories which made it possible for children, researchers and family members (as far back as the 1920s & 1930s) to listen and compile data for future generations. This project is used by most of the libraries in the City of Roanoke today and Virginia Tech School of Public and International Affairs in the College of Architecture and Urban Studies.

Also initiated were the Thursday Night Gatherings to discuss current events, music, child care, nutritious snacks, girl talk, guy talk, marriages, buying a house, reading to children, best books, job openings, buying a car and many other topics that become our famous "Caf'e Night." This idea was expanded upon by adding light jazz, poetry slams, story telling, name that tune and yes, refreshments.

In 2008 a major renovation was made to this library, which was built in 1942. The size of the building has almost doubled, adding a spacious meeting room (125 capacity), a teen center, study room and lots of other improvements.

One outstanding Oddball Outreach project included participation in a Christmas parade. A tractor trailer was borrowed from a local business, WS Connelly &

