TRANSFORMATION STORIES

Town Creek Public Library

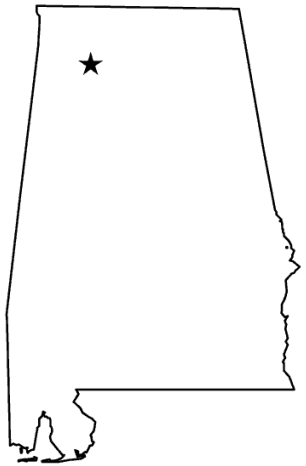
Town Creek, Alabama

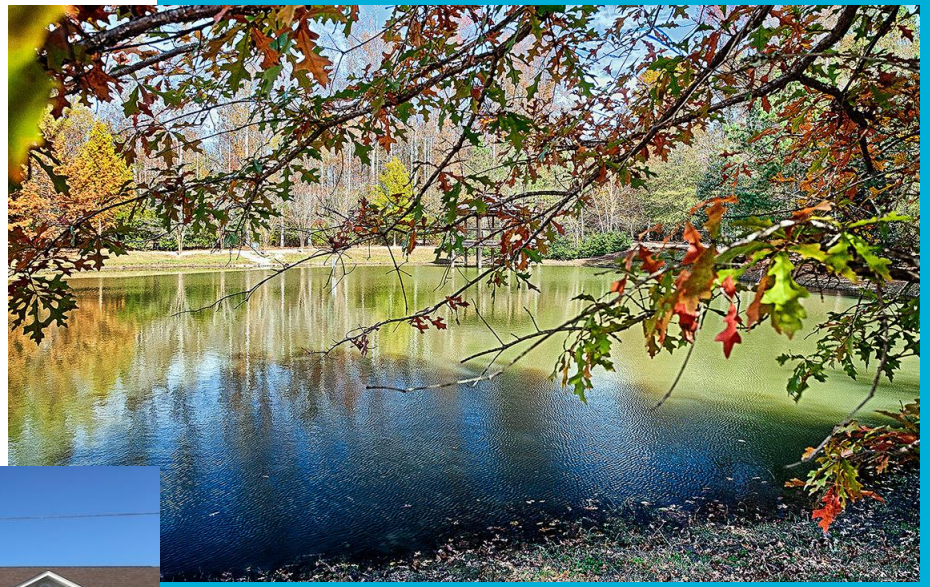
The Community

Every community is unique

Town Creek, Alabama

- **Service population:** 1,100
- **Location:** Northwest corner of the state
- Birthplace of many notable people





Town Creek park pond by George Thomas on Flickr CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Even with its small population, Town Creek has been home to many notable figures.

Town Creek Notables

- Football players: Chris Goode, Kerry Goode, Antonio Langham, Kalvin Pearson, Don Jones, Bob Penchion
- Musicians: Ali-Ollie Woodson (formerly with The Temptations), Matt Vickery
- Rilous Carter, Vice President of Disney's Epcot

Before the Changes

Small Libraries can create Smart Spaces

“As a community, we are sincerely struggling with a ‘sense of existence’ due to a declining economy. With [this project’s] help, we can inspirit a much-needed positive mindset our community so desperately deserves.”

Sharon Green, Town Creek Public Library Director

Town Creek RR tracks by Brian Stansberry on Wikimedia Commons CC BY 4.0

Town Creek Main Street by Brian Stansberry on Wikimedia Commons CC BY 4.0

Town Spirit

The low median income places almost 24% of the population below the poverty line. We only have one elementary school (K-7). We have no industries or manufacturers and our only revenue comes from small independently owned businesses.

However for Green, the prominent notable alumni of the town “continuously remind our youth that their small town is not known for limitations but for a tradition of success.”

Director Sharon Green prominently displays the notable sports, music and business alumni in the Town Creek Library.

Revitalize the library to revitalize the community

We have a lot of people who are not where they need to be education-wise, a lot of people behind on technology. They don't have the means (financial, etc.) to keep up with it. Many patrons have missed out on higher paying job opportunities (50K and more) due to not having basic computer skills.

We're looking to make the library more welcoming as a place for the community to come together and learn.

Engage & Explore

Engaging community members in visioning and planning

Being from a very small town, we feel our best tool is a "vocal" survey.

We depended on our well-known main source—"the talk"—to gather information, thoughts and ideas for development.

There's a group of coffee drinkers who gather daily—"The Word Around Town Committee." They may not visit the library but they will offer suggestions to others that do.

Photo: by tomasz przechlewski on Flickr CC BY 2.0

We compiled every wish into a category, creating our community poll.

“I was very intimidated in the beginning fearing we would hear more "complaints" than suggestions. Boy was I wrong! I am so thankful for the community’s input; for it has opened up several doors we were not even seeing that are right in front of us.**”**

We learned that limitations of all kinds are REAL and ALIVE at our own front door. Limitations such as education, disabilities, health awareness and community needs.

When conversations opened up a “wish list,” folks were pretty straightforward with what they wished for. So, it was very simple to interpret their “wishes” as “needs” and interpret the wish list as necessities that required us to not only explore but take action.

Prepare for Change

Making way for transformation

Our purpose now is to create a space that will also be appropriate to address any limitation one feels has been placed upon them.
A space suitable for group discussion forums and workshops as well as "one on one" interests and concerns.

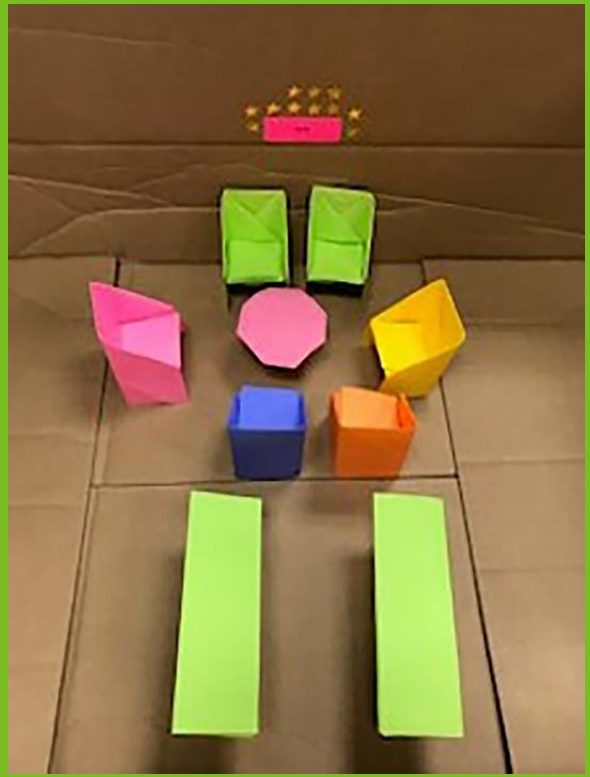
Sharon Green, Library Director

Turning ideas into tangible models

Green's 12-year-old daughter produced this colorful, eye-catching model with origami furniture.

"And just for the record, my plan B in case plan A didn't work out was to buy doll house furniture!"

When patrons compliment the "paper furniture" model, Green credits her creative daughter.



Transform

Make it happen!

New furniture stirs new hope

Several areas have been transformed, with each space tailored to meet specific active community needs.

Group learning area supports the intersection of discovery and community and fosters the social connection

The children's play area has a new interactive easel and a new child-sized table and seating

The new worktable attracts teens and tweens with interactive games and puzzles, and storage for projects below.

A Christmas Story

For the first time ever…

- We had an anonymous donation during Christmas of new children's books each attached to a stuffed animal for the early readers to take home with them.
- Our community hosted a "Toys For Tots" at our library, which was tremendously successful!

"Just the beginning of our transformation has given so much HOPE and LIFE to our community; it almost seems too good to be true!"

Learn

Activate the space with people and programming

First Ever Makerspace

This “makerspace” in a workbench has really been a hit with our tween and teen patrons. The setup offers so much versatility without taking up a lot of space and the built in storage is wonderful! It is my favorite new thing!

The workbench and stools invite young people to get involved without making them feel like a “little one.”

New Concepts

The kids’ grasp of all things STEAM is very low because these concepts are not taught in the local schools. So this active learning space encourages them to play and explore new frontiers of learning.

Since receiving our new furniture, we have seen a great increase with patrons visiting the library more frequently and staying *much longer*.

Multi-Purpose

Our adult education, family guidance program, and Chapter Chicks book club utilize our new group furniture, supporting the intersection of discovery and community, and fostering social connection

Plugged-in Table

Not only does this modest-looking table have built-in stools, it has built-in electrical and data outlets.
"When adults are using their phones or tablets at this table, you might as well be watching children for the way they are lovin' it!"

Celebrate & Sustain

Continual community connection

Partnerships allow the library to expand its offerings.

We are partnering with **Family Guidance Center of Alabama** to participate in their free program, **Kids & Kin**. The program offers professional training and discussion groups on a wide variety of topics, including:

- CPR
- Keeping Children with Disabilities Safe
- Respiratory Syncytial Virus

We partnered with **Northwest Shoals Community College** to offer free classes, including:

- Adult Education
- Non-Traditional High School Diploma classes
- Work Keys for today's job searchers
- Beginner's Technology

CELEBRATE SUCCESS

Several Town Creek residents are now able to pursue a college education as a result of using the library's proctoring services and computers.

This service is invaluable in small towns.

Town Creek lives.

"We went to a local restaurant for lunch and before we left five people had said what a wonderful job Sharon Green has done transforming the library. The restaurant owner told her to be sure to let him know if she needed support or funding for summer reading. It's clear she is making an impact on the townspeople."

—Jennifer Pearson, Director of a rural library in Tennessee

For more information on how Small Libraries Create Smart Spaces and more case studies please visit **oc.lc/SmartSpaces.**

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