

Southeast Oklahoma Library System
For Immediate Release

September 16, 2020

Southeast Oklahoma Library System (SEOLS) is pleased to announce that its board of trustees has approved the purchase of a bookmobile at its September 15th meeting. The bookmobile will be a 35' long vehicle with computers, Wi-Fi, copy/fax/scanning capabilities, and a collection of about 2,000 items. It will visit rural communities in SEOLS' member counties (Coal, Choctaw, Haskell, Latimer, LeFlore, McCurtain, and Pittsburg) that do not have physical libraries.

With service planned to begin in fall of 2021, the bookmobile's stops will last 1.5-2 hours so that users will have time to use its computers and Wi-Fi.

When SEOLS began in 1967 (known then as Choctaw Nation Library System), it provided bookmobile service that lasted until 1976. "Bookmobile service was a staple of all Oklahoma library systems when they started," said SEOLS Executive Director Michael Hull. "These bus-sized vehicles, loaded with books, would show up at community centers, schools, nursing homes and post offices to deliver books. They would take orders and bring back specific titles people requested on their next trip. Kids and adults alike thrilled to see the bookmobile pull up. I can't tell you how often I meet people who tell me about their great memories of the bookmobile."

Faced with tough budget decisions, most library systems looked at bookmobile service for savings, and by the 1980s, only one system, in western Oklahoma, still provided bookmobile service. This effectively eliminated library service for many residents. Hull explained, "For the citizens of our 7 member counties, this means the only way to get library service the past 45 years has been to drive to an actual library. We have a lot of residents who can't do that. Some can't drive because of age or health. Persons on fixed income may not own vehicles or have the ability to afford the gas for even a 20 mile trip. Folks who work while raising families simply don't have the time to travel that far for library service."

In recent years, libraries across the country have come to recognize the importance of providing service to rural areas. "As a profession, we're exploring ways to truly serve everyone we represent," Hull added. Bookmobiles have also evolved to include much of the technology provided in brick and mortar libraries, such as computers, Wi-Fi, copying and faxing. With few outlets for such services in small communities, the need for library service through a bookmobile seemed more and more necessary to the SEOLS board.

"I'm excited for our communities," Hull said, "and I can't wait to see the look on children's faces when the new bookmobile pulls up and some kids get to experience library service for the first time in their lives."

With service scheduled to launch in one year, Hull's office will be very busy scheduling and setting up regular stops in rural communities. SEOLS Community leaders in SEOLS member counties interested in scheduling a regular bookmobile stop should contact Mr. Hull's office at 918-426-0456 to discuss the process for establishing a stop.