News Release

For Immediate Release

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Urban Libraries Council Honors Roanoke County Public Library with Innovation Award
Meeting You at Your Wonder Demonstrates Cutting-Edge Approach to Transforming Public Libraries

(Roanoke County, VA – October 18, 2019) – The Urban Libraries Council announced Roanoke County Public Library (RCPL) as one of 10 Top Innovators during the 2019 Innovations Celebration held on October 17 in Salt Lake City. The annual Innovations award program recognizes leading practices from ULC's member library systems across the U.S. and Canada.

A panel of expert judges selected RCPL from 260 submissions in 10 categories that showcase out-of-the box thinking and creative applications of library resources. RCPL won in the category of Workforce and Economic Development. Award winners were recognized for their level of creativity, ability for other libraries to adapt their work and the outcomes achieved. All 2019 ULC Innovations can be viewed at urbanlibraries.org.

"This year's winners put forth bold ideas that will fundamentally bring about positive change," said Urban Libraries Council President and CEO Susan Benton. "For this year's Innovations Initiative, we received our most diverse and exceptional submissions to date. We celebrate RCPL for presenting a groundbreaking initiative that is sure to transform their community and inspire libraries across North America."

RCPL embraced AI when becoming the nation's first public library to recruit Pepper®, the humanoid robot. The recruitment was in response to the cultural shift ushered in by the tech revolution and its implications for the region's economic development. RCPL reimagined all tech programs in the context of digital citizenship, from basics to unique high-level workshops, to help establish the area as a desired destination.

"Our program was designed around our core values and belief that libraries have a responsibility to address AI's challenges, while supporting economic sustainability by preparing people for the jobs of the future," says Shari Henry, Director of Library Services for RCPL.

About Urban Libraries Council

The Urban Libraries Council is an innovation and impact tank of North America's leading public library systems. ULC drives cutting-edge research and strategic partnerships to elevate the power of libraries as essential, transformative institutions for the 21st-century. More than 150 urban member libraries in the U.S. and Canada rely on ULC to identify significant challenges facing today's communities and provide new tools and

techniques to help libraries achieve stronger outcomes in education, digital inclusion, workforce and economic development, and race and social equity.

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INNOVATIONS

TOP INNOVATORS

TOP INNOVATOR

Supporting Wonder: AI and Economic Development

Roanoke County Public Library, Virginia | roanokecountyva.gov/library

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— **Shari Henry**
   Director of Library Services

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Roanoke County Public Library recognized the need to respond to a cultural shift ushered in by the tech revolution and its implications for the region's economic development. With a laser focus on digital literacy, the library embraced artificial intelligence as a foundation for preparing the future workforce. The work began with the recruitment of Pepper®, a humanoid robot, which raised the library's profile in the tech community and led to new partnerships and programs including one with The Advancement Foundation, a local business incubator that hosts Virginia's largest business program and competition.

In one year, the library offered 60 advanced adult tech programs attracting 350 people. Classes that have been added to the library's offerings include Photoshop, stop action video, Python, Scratch and Linux. The library has worked with the Roanoke Economic Development Department and TAF to offer more sophisticated workforce development training programs such as Lead Generation 101 and Digital Media Relations.

Beginning with recruiting Pepper®, the library has leveraged its deep roots in innovation, privacy, equity and access to become a leader in AI and workforce development, particularly for tech skills.