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Greek Library Receives \$1 Million International Award for Embracing Technology and Creating Vibrant Community Asset

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's 2010 Access to Learning Award honors Veria Central Public Library as successful model for libraries in Greece and around the world

SEATTLE – The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation today presented its 2010 Access to Learning Award of \$1 million to the Veria Central Public Library for its creative use of information and technology services to meet the economic, educational, and cultural needs of more than 180,000 people. The library has emerged as a leader in Greece by offering a range of services and programs for children and adults, and helping other libraries replicate its success. Microsoft, a partner of the foundation in its efforts to help public libraries connect people to the Internet, will provide the Veria Library with donations of software and technology training curriculum.

The Veria Library realized the power of technology early on. In 1992, the library's catalogue was already fully automated. In 1996, the library became the first in the nation to provide its users free access to computers and the Internet. In 1997, it was the first to have its own website.

"Our library is about making people's lives easier and better, not just about housing books and information," said Ioannis Trohopoulos, director of the Veria Central Public Library. "We are a small library that is committed to offering modern tools and services to help as many people as possible find new economic, academic, and social opportunities."

The library serves the 50,000 residents of Veria, and 130,000 more people in the surrounding area. To reach people in distant rural villages, the library sends out mobile libraries equipped with books and laptop computers.

In addition to offering advanced information and technology services to its users, the library has become a vibrant community center that promotes learning and creativity. It places a particular focus on young people with its new children's area, Magic Boxes, which provides computers, music stations, indoor and outdoor play areas, and a full schedule of activities—from storytelling to arts and crafts.

To develop a network of library and information services in the region, the Veria Library has worked diligently to form cooperative partnerships with other libraries, programs, and institutions within Greece and around the world. These relationships have provided opportunities to exchange experience and knowledge to benefit the communities these organizations serve. For example, the Veria Library helped more than 60 Greek public libraries develop their own websites and included them in the Veria Library's public libraries portal.

“The Veria Library is one of the most famous libraries in Greece,” said Apostolos Nestoropoulos, the mayor of Saint Paul Municipality. “We asked them to help us build our library because they have the know-how.”

The library conducts computer courses that teach real-world skills such as how to use software, create a resume, share videos online, and participate in social networking. It teaches seniors how to perform online searches and use social networking sites, helps immigrants adjust to their new homes, and gives teenagers a safe after-school location to complete homework and meet with friends.

It has also helped people deal with one of the worst economic climates in Greece’s history. Katerina Heimionidou was one of many unemployed young people in Greece. When she learned about an open position at a local mobile phone operator, she took a library training course that taught her how to create a resume with specialized software, which helped her get the job and gave her a head start in her career.

“The Veria Library has brought positive change to the lives of the many people it serves,” said Deborah Jacobs, director of the Global Libraries initiative for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, at an award ceremony in Gothenburg, Sweden. “It’s a testament to Veria’s ingenuity that such a small library in the mountainous region of Northern Greece is paving the way for its users and for others who can and have learned from its innovative use of technology and exciting programs.”

The foundation's annual Access to Learning Award recognizes the innovative efforts of libraries and similar organizations outside the United States in providing free access to computers and the Internet. It is awarded by the foundation’s Global Libraries initiative, which works to open the world of knowledge, information, and opportunity to help improve the lives of millions of people.

The Veria Central Public Library will use its award to expand its network of libraries, upgrade its IT infrastructure, replicate the Magic Boxes concept throughout the main building of the library and at all new branches, and extend its impact beyond the region through websites and social networking.

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Note to Editors

For more information about Veria Central Public Library, please visit <http://www.libver.gr/en/>.

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Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, it focuses on improving people’s health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty. In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people—especially those with the fewest resources—have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life. Based in Seattle, Washington, the foundation is led by CEO Jeff Raikes and Co-chair William H. Gates

Sr., under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett. Learn more at www.gatesfoundation.org or join the conversation at [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).