

# transformations

FALL 2024 NEWSLETTER FOR CHARLOTTE MECKLENBURG LIBRARY SUPPORTERS



*In partnership with Children's Theatre of Charlotte, the Teen Loft at ImaginOn held a sewing camp this summer to introduce kids to basic techniques.*

#### IMPACT REPORT

### Surpassing Goals, Launching New Ideas

Vital donor support amplifies Library resources with staff ingenuity and Flight Fund grants

#### DONOR SPOTLIGHT

### New Main Library: A Starr Attraction

They aspire to bring people together. The Library is creating the perfect venue.

#### PLUS...

### Notable News

Fade to story at the barbershop, "Bookclubbing", and Verse & Vino line-up



Board chair Helen Hope Kimbrough (left), seen here with Booker Prize winning author NoViolet Bulawayo at our Carnegie Circle event last year, shared a letter about her experiences at the International Public Library Fundraising Conference. You can read her letter on our website.

[foundation.cmlibrary.org/kimbrough-letter](https://foundation.cmlibrary.org/kimbrough-letter)

Dear Library supporters,

I recently shared my experiences at the 2024 International Public Library Fundraising Conference this past June, hosted at the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library in Washington, D.C. The experience has already begun to shape the beginning of my term as the chair of Charlotte Mecklenburg Library Foundation and deepen the areas I plan to focus on.

**Advocacy**

Advocacy was discussed quite a bit at the library conference, and it revealed that it's important to lift up the case for libraries and how integral they are to you, me, and communities in general. As a champion and advocate (also serving on the Library's advocacy committee), my goal is to invite others to join the mission through building and cultivating relationships, engaging new and existing partners, requesting funding support for the Library (and the CommonSpark campaign), plus leveraging lived experiences and storytelling to share its impact.

**Access**

In the mission statement of the Library Foundation, it states, "Together we help CML improve lives and build a stronger community. We invest in educational success, economic opportunity and digital inclusion and ensure free, open access to resources for all."

As the funding arm for our local libraries, I'm drawn to the essentialism of access, affording everyone the opportunity to grow, advance, and be enriched by the programs and services that the Library has to offer. This intentionality is expressed in all the branches – each with their unique characteristics symbolic to their neighborhoods.

**Approachability**

Finally, my CliftonStrengths results state that I lead with Relationship Building. It's who I am in terms of being approachable. So, I can't wait to deepen my relationships with board members, Library staff and the community alike, and join various meetings and events. In September, I look forward to reading to children and families with MoLi, attending an outreach meeting with staff, continuing our advocacy efforts, and more as the fall season begins.

Here we go...

Helen Hope Kimbrough  
Chair, Board of Directors  
Charlotte Mecklenburg Library Foundation

Trained volunteers in the Reading Buddies program provide support and encouragement to help children experience and develop a love of reading.

FY24 Impact Report

# Turning aspirations into achievements

**W**e want to express our deepest gratitude to you for helping us achieve one of our most successful — *and impactful* — years.

Your support drives Library's growth with purpose and innovation, allowing us to enhance services and programming, grow our branches to meet community need, and engage with our Library customers in meaningful and life-changing ways.

Thank you for being part of another banner year for the Library. The Library and Foundation's achievements are your achievements. Congratulations!

————— continued →

## SPECIAL THANKS

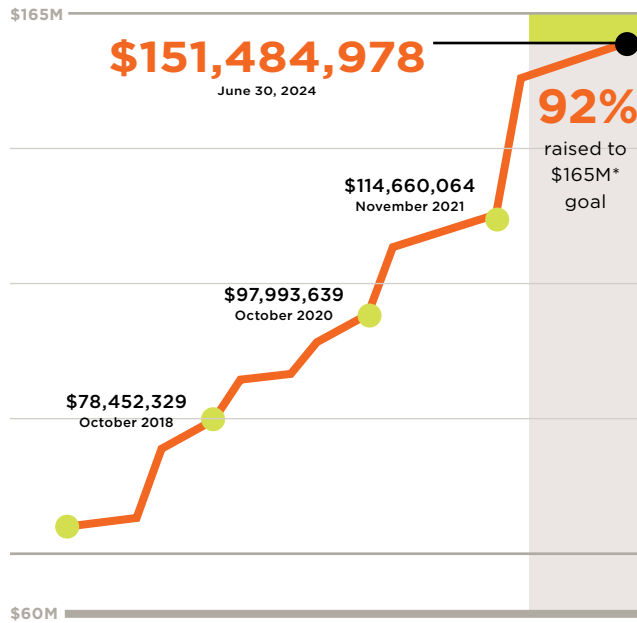
With immense gratitude we would like to acknowledge Mecklenburg County manager Dena Diorio (*pictured below*) and the Mecklenburg County Commissioners for their generous FY25 Library operating support and for funding for multiple capital improvements including new buildings for Sugar Creek and West Boulevard Libraries and a new location at Nations Ford. Their clear and progressive vision is a credit to our community.



*Congratulations to our good friend and Library champion Dena Diorio on her upcoming retirement. Don't be a stranger!*



During FY24, more than \$5.2 million was raised toward the comprehensive goal of \$165 million for a total raised-to-date of \$151,484,978 for the CommonSpark, a public-private partnership that addresses an integrated set of needs including: a new Main Library with an innovative combination of resources, collaborative spaces, technology, and cultural experiences; Library Administration Center; systemwide technology, innovation and programming; an endowment for future needs; and annual operating support.



### NOTABLE GIFTS

Second gifts from The Leon Levine Foundation and Gambrell Foundation  
Sally and Bob Miller  
Marsh Foundation  
Fifth Third  
Crandall and Erskine Bowles  
U.S. Federal and N.C. State Funding

### AN OVERVIEW OF IMPACT

We are in the final stages of the CommonSpark. The new Main Library construction is proceeding on schedule as foundational elements are being finalized for the erection of steel beams this fall. Scan the QR code to see the latest aerial view of the site.



### A dynamic library deserves dynamic programs and events. And so does our community!

Significant progress has been made in securing funding to develop innovative programs and events for new Main Library including a generous endowment created by the Starr family. Read their "why" on page 6.

### Free services and programs that impact early literacy and school success are Library cornerstones.

Daily storytime experiences, Active Reading workshops, reading buddies, student success centers, and specialized programs like *Learning Together* benefit from your support. Attendance last year was up nearly 30% to more than 373,000.



help the Library exceed their goals with gifts large and small!

FY24 customer satisfaction score:

98%

8,675,973 total items in circulation

Library's Outreach team offered 3,625 programs and had 29,654 attendees in FY24.

**Donor gifts funded popular Library programs and launched new ideas.**

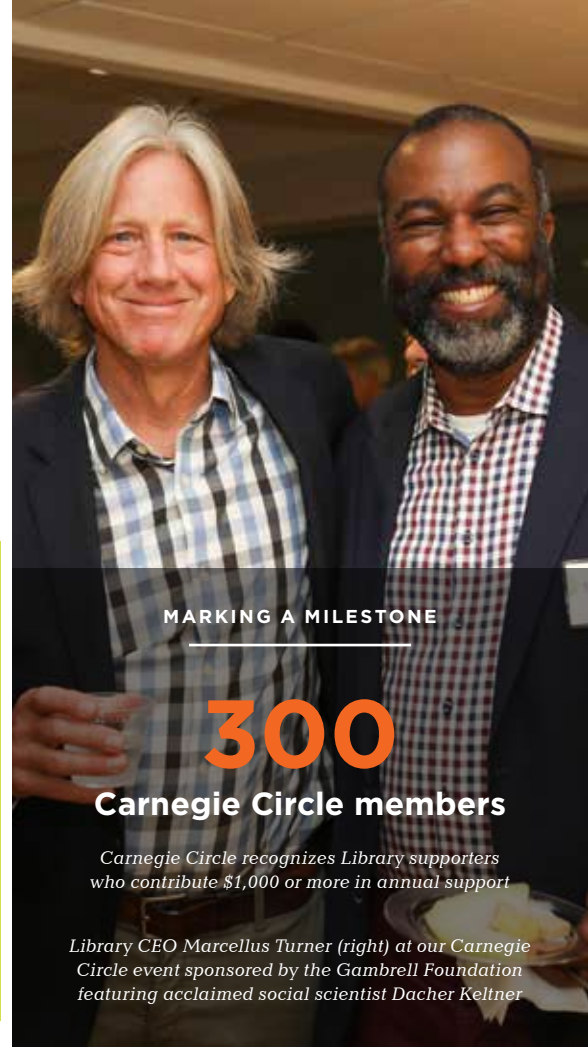
*Community Read, Summer Break and EpicFest* attracted thousands of participants this year and champion a lifelong love of reading. New event *Puppetpalooza* was supported by a Flight Fund grant and is slated to become an annual attraction.

*EpicFest, a free annual children's literary festival at ImaginOn, is made possible by donors like you.*



**The Foundation received a grant from the Knight Foundation to fund the development of a new strategic direction for the Library.** The areas of focus were developed via internal and public surveys and expert analysis, were unanimously approved by the Board of Trustees, and will guide the work of the Library for the next three years. The plan will be shared later this year.

**Donors help the Library preserve the past.** The acquisition of an Atom planetary scanner in the Robinson Spangler Carolina Room will increase the scale and improve the speed of the digitization of over 500 historical maps and the film collection chronicling the changing landscape of our city and county. Learn more on page 8.



MARKING A MILESTONE

**300**

**Carnegie Circle members**

*Carnegie Circle recognizes Library supporters who contribute \$1,000 or more in annual support*

*Library CEO Marcellus Turner (right) at our Carnegie Circle event sponsored by the Gambrell Foundation featuring acclaimed social scientist Dacher Keltner*

*Flight Fund: microgrant opportunities exclusively for Library staff*

## **Community-informed programming: Library staff leverage local interests**

Within minutes of announcing her new Flight Fund-supported program series, "Women's Health in the Second Half of Life," Tiffany Boeglen got an alert that all 100 of the online slots for her six sessions were filled. She immediately logged into the event system and increased each section to 300. Once again, within an hour, two of the six programs were completely booked, and the waiting lists were filling up.

"We've had popular programs in the past, but this particular theme hit on a serious community need," said Martha Yesowitch, who leads the Flight Fund's grants advisory team.

You might think the Library's collection is its most important asset (and yes, it IS important,) but you'd be sleeping on the hundreds of Library staff members who are actively interacting with the community and recognize their needs.

"I was doing research about my own health and realized so many others in my community were asking the same questions," said staff librarian Tiffany Boeglen. "By sharing this knowledge and creating this program with the Flight Fund, we were able to connect people with life-changing information and resources. It's what the Library does best."

Tiffany's program engaged Rosy Crumpton, a board certified health coach who led the online sessions, and Library partner Novant Health and their physicians.

With 100% donor support, Flight Fund has launched 30 new and enhanced programs for the Library including **Neurodiverse Sensory Storytime, Loft Leaders Academy, Black Families Swimming Together with McCrory YMCA, and Edible Landscapes.**



**"Flight Fund ideas are getting bolder, your vision for the future ... even more inspirational."**

**Jennifer Bennett**  
Library Foundation Board member



Scan the QR code to learn more about these Flight Fund programs including WelcomeCLT's Naturalization Ceremony (pictured above).





*Gary and Stephanie Starr are helping create a vibrant and forward-thinking culture at the Library to help enrich, educate and entertain our fast-growing city through programming.*

*Starr Family Endowment for Programming*

## The Starrs align for Main Library programming

**S**tephanie and Gary Starr want to get to know you. And they're creating the perfect reason to do it.

The Starrs have joined other donors who have made a transformative commitment to the Library community with the establishment of an endowment fund designed to support groundbreaking programming and initiatives at new Main Library.

This generous endowment underscores the Starr family's dedication to enhancing community engagement and fostering intellectual growth. By funding innovative new programs, the endowment will enable new Main Library to offer a diverse array of activities, from live debates on our most pressing community issues to adult-focused programming adapted to the evolving needs of our world.

"We need the Library and its community programming now more than ever," said Stephanie Starr. "The divisive nature of the rhetoric we are bombarded with every day is creating a threat to our individual health and the well-being of our community. The Library's programming brings people together."

The fund will ensure that the Library remains a vibrant public commons for learning and creativity, reflecting the Starr family's vision of forward-thinking programming that creates much needed human connection.

"We've met people from all walks of life at Library programs and events who have enriched our lives by expanding

our perspective and understanding." Stephanie and Gary Starr are longtime *Verse & Vino* attendees and feel that "attending author talks and lectures, listening to inspiring music, watching entertaining performances, taking workshops, and volunteering with others in our community have given us a profound feeling of connection to and appreciation for what Charlotte has to offer."

"With this endowment, the Main Library is poised to become a beacon of lifelong learning and meaningful community connection in Uptown Charlotte, offering opportunities that extend beyond traditional Library services," said Jenni Gaisbauer, executive director of the Library Foundation. "The Starr Family endowment highlights a profound commitment to enhancing our cultural and educational resources, ensuring that Main Library will be a dynamic destination and essential asset for years to come."

The Starrs were motivated to give because of their own experiences with Library programming. "We were inspired to pledge our financial support to help ensure that the new Main Library, with its state-of-the-art facilities, will have the financial capacity to offer equally impressive community programming that will bring the Charlotte community together."

**“With this endowment, the Main Library is poised to become a beacon of lifelong learning and meaningful community connection in Uptown Charlotte...”**



Rendering: Snohetta.

### WHISTLE STOPS A.K.A. SUPPORTER-LED FUNDRAISERS



Board member Jennifer Bennett co-opted her yearly cookie exchange party into an opportunity to highlight her advocacy for intellectual freedom in public libraries and inspire others to join her.



Board member Caton Morris and Rebecca Tanner held a traditional garden party at Wing Haven to inspire the next generation of philanthropists. To quote our hosts... "It's our turn."

A formal event at McColl Center combined a lavish nightclub concept with a passion for libraries and literacy. With the clever moniker "Bookclubbing" board member Alessandro Morante brought his friends together for an evening of glamour and giving.



Interested in throwing a Whistle Stop fundraiser for the Library? Contact Jenni Gaisbauer at (704) 416-0801 or [jgaisbauer@cmlibrary.org](mailto:jgaisbauer@cmlibrary.org).

Mary Louise  
Phillips Fund for  
the Robinson-  
Spangler North  
Carolina Room



Rendering: Snohetta.

## The Room with a view of the past and the future

### DEWEY CIRCLE LEGACY GIVING SOCIETY

*Mary Louise Phillips is a member of the Dewey Circle, our legacy giving society named for Charlotte's first librarian Elizabeth "Bessie" Lacy Dewey. Anyone can leave a legacy gift of any size, and there are simple ways to do it. Call or email Director of Individual Giving Teleia White to have a confidential conversation about estate planning and how the Library can be a part of your legacy.*

(704) 416-0803  
twhite@cmlibrary.org



In Mary Louise Phillips' retirement from Charlotte Mecklenburg Library, then Director Hoyt Galvin noted that hiring her was his best day's work ever in his 30 years at the Library.

She became head librarian of the North Carolina Room in 1960 and expanded it from a small collection of local history and genealogy to one that covered five southern states.

"It was a natural [fit] for Mary Louise. When she got in there, the room began to take on a personality. She was dedicated to the job..." Galvin remarked. "In that type of operation, you get all the books you can, but books aren't enough. You've got to pick up everything that is loose around town, stuff that will be the local history in 25 years. She knew how to do it."

There are countless stories in the *Charlotte Observer* by local writers who visited the Carolina Room seeking her help including when the popular 1977 television series *Roots* kept Mary Louise and her small staff busy as the public's interest in genealogy took off. Her work laid the foundation for what is today, the largest genealogical collection in a North Carolina public library.

Even after retirement, she continued to donate every year. It was no surprise that she remembered the Library in her estate. Upon her death in 2013, Mary Louise established a fund for her beloved North Carolina Room.

Her legacy of historical preservation will live on with the acquisition of a Digital Transitions Atom planetary scanner.

"This will allow us to begin digitizing materials at scale and in compliance with current quality guidelines," said John O'Connor, Robinson-Spangler Carolina Room Manager. "We will be digitizing over 500 maps and all our film collections that chronicle a changing Mecklenburg County over the last 150 years. This scanner will also allow us to explore digitizing other types of material, such as 3D objects."

Our intrepid archives and special collection team continues the work that Mary Louise Phillips championed during her lifetime. "Her 95 years of community impact opens a new chapter today."





# Bookmarked

## Well-groomed and well-read

Long gone are the days of public libraries serving only those who walk through the doors. Along with three other library systems, Charlotte Mecklenburg Library outreach team developed barbershop-based reading spaces and increased reading opportunities for boys of color in their local communities under the direction of Urban Libraries Council's project called Barbershop Books.

Each library partner identified and recruited 10 local barbershops, set up and maintained a bookshelf of children's literature in each shop, and partnered with the barbershops to host community events. The Library integrated the program into a systemwide goal of ensuring Library services are within one mile of all community residents.

"The goal of outreach is to reach people who can't use the Library and its resources traditionally. Barbershop Books is an extension of our work with an emphasis on representation," said Meryle Leonard, assistant director of outreach.

The pilot improved access to books for an estimated 37,648 Black and African American children 8 and under in Mecklenburg County in FY24 by locating books in barbershops within a one-mile proximity radius of their households. Along with strengthening community partnerships, the Barbershop Books program increased the visibility of Library resources and services for those who need them most.



**"I don't want to be shut out from the truth. If they ban books, they might as well lock us away from the world."**

**Rory Edwards, age 12**  
*Washington Post*, Getting It Down at Writing Camp

## Freed between the lines

The Library and Foundation celebrate our intellectual freedom with Freedom to Read Week from September 22-28, 2024 in conjunction with the American Library Association's Banned Book Week. Visit your local branch to see our Library's thought-provoking displays and support your librarians who provide critical access and protect our right to information and resources.

Freedom to Read panel discussions will be held in-person on Thursday, September 26 at 6:00 pm at SouthPark Regional Library and virtually on Tuesday, September 24 at 6:00 pm.

ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom documented 1,247 demands to censor library books and resources in 2023. The number of titles targeted for censorship surged 65% in 2023 compared to 2022, reaching the highest levels ever documented by OIF in more than 20 years of tracking: 4,240 unique book titles were targeted for removal from schools and libraries.

During Banned Books Week 2024 and beyond, let's share our love of our right to read and the freedom found in books. Let's be Freed Between the Lines!

Image  
courtesy  
of Anne  
Lemanski



## A horse in the Library

Construction is well underway on the new University City Regional Library, and something special is in store for Library customers.

The new location will feature a stunning sculpture from celebrated North Carolina-based artist Anne Lemanski. *Stella Terra* depicts a life-sized Appaloosa horse, the exterior hand stitched and constructed entirely of archival paper. The horse's spots—arranged in the pattern of an actual Appaloosa—are created using vintage children's encyclopedia images. The sculpture is being donated to the Library as a gift from a generous patron of the arts. It will be showcased at the top of the branch's open staircase with 360-degree views.

"Charlotte Mecklenburg Library is always looking for new ways to make art more accessible and celebrate the work of our artist and creative community," says Tony Tallent, associate director for the Library and the lead for many of CML's art endeavors. "Art is for everyone. The Library is for everyone. It's a perfect match."

Tony also recommends visiting Plaza Midwood and Pineville Library Branches to see the new art installations from Nico Amortegui and Melanie Cassen.

## Hope is a two-way street

Hope Street Food Pantry in partnership with the Library has established monthly distributions at various Library locations as part of their new mobile initiative.

Created in 2018, the nonprofit believes everyone deserves access to healthy food, regardless of their circumstances. Collaboration with the Library allows them to reach residents facing food insecurity in neighborhoods where they already feel comfortable and welcome.

Since March 2024, distribution events have been held at Allegra Westbrooks Regional, Hickory Grove, Sugar Creek, ImaginOn, West Boulevard, Steele Creek, and University City Regional libraries. An upcoming stop is planned at South Boulevard Library on October 15.

"Hope Street Pantry was part of the Library's 2024 Community Read program. With a theme of, 'Food as a connector,' it was the perfect collaboration. Hope Street offered the first pantry at our Allegra Westbrook location serving 133 children, 254

adults and 58 senior adults within two hours," reflected Meryle Leonard. "This partnership allows the Library to continue implementing its mission of improving lives and building a stronger community."

Hope Street provides a 3+ day supply of food every week, including fresh produce and meat. Recipients are not required to have a referral or appointment and no ID or financial documents are required to receive food.

"Serving our mission at Library branches is absolutely fantastic and has exceeded all of our expectations," said Melody Leedy, Hope Street Director. "We still forget that sometimes the appearance of the community isn't always a true reflection of the need."

The success of the event has prompted conversations about expanding the frequency of the service at branches including MoLi, the Library's Mobile Library.



**"Serving our mission at Library branches is absolutely fantastic and has exceeded all of our expectations."**

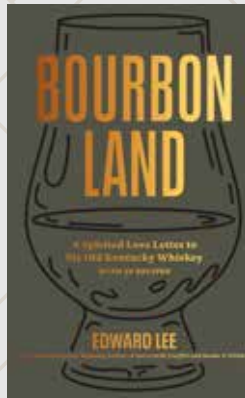
**Melody Leedy**  
Director, Hope Street Food Pantry

# VERSE & VINO

THE LIBRARY FOUNDATION'S ANNUAL CELEBRATION OF LITERATURE, LIBATIONS & LIBRARIES  
featuring NEW YORK TIMES BEST-SELLING & CELEBRATED AUTHORS



**THE BUZZ**  
Oscar-shortlisted producer stuns with debut novel



**THE BUZZ**  
Brown liquor lovers get their due at our wine-forward event



FEATURING

**Essie Chambers**  
**Emiko Jean**  
**Edward Lee**  
**Jessica Shattuck**

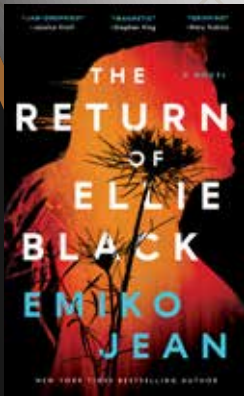
PRESENTED BY



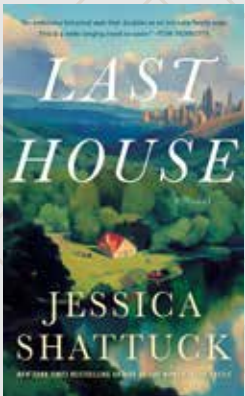
**November 7, 2024**  
Charlotte Convention Center

A night where literary magic and Library devotees come together in perfect harmony — this is *Verse & Vino!* Mingle with award-winning authors, dive into engaging conversations, and savor good wine and food with fellow book lovers.

It's more than just an event — it's a one-of-a-kind experience where we bring together the best of storytelling with the vibrant spirit of our Library community.



**THE BUZZ**  
This “jaw-dropping,” “magnetic” thriller is impossible to put down (Take Stephen King’s word for it)



**THE BUZZ**  
Tom Perotta praised “an ambitious historical epic that doubles as an intimate family saga”



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BEST SELLER SPONSORS



**Get your tickets ASAP!**

FOR COMPLETE LIST OF SPONSORS & TO PURCHASE TICKETS VISIT  
**FOUNDATION.CMLIBRARY.ORG/VERSE-VINO**

## SAVE THE DATE



### Ann Patchett & Kevin Wilson in conversation

**April 8, 2025**

To learn more about joining the Carnegie Circle,  
visit [foundation.cmlibrary.org/carnegie-circle](http://foundation.cmlibrary.org/carnegie-circle).

We're excited to welcome our three new board members: Jess Dienna, Sharon Portwood, and George Spencer. Their extensive experience and diverse expertise will be a tremendous asset to our team. With each new hello, we must say goodbye to valued board members. A heartfelt thank you to LeRoy Davis, Barb Ellis, Peter Keane, Gina Lawrence, and Cristina Wilson for their dedicated service.



Jess Dienna



Sharon Portwood



George Spencer

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The Charlotte Mecklenburg Library Foundation exists to help the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library improve lives and build a stronger community. The Foundation supports Library services, expands the Library's collection of print and digital materials, enhances programming for all ages, invests in innovative initiatives and strives to grow its endowment for future generations.