

CHARLOTTE MECKLENBURG LIBRARY

FOUNDATION

transformations

FALL 2025
NEWSLETTER
FOR CHARLOTTE
MECKLENBURG
LIBRARY
SUPPORTERS

*West Boulevard Library
celebrated World
Bee Day in May with
interactive exhibits, live
demonstrations, and
hands-on activities.*

IMPACT REPORT

Making more possible at the Library

See what happens
when a community
chooses action
over apathy

DONOR SPOTLIGHTS

The power of giving times three

Discover the “why”
behind our inspiring
Library supporters

PLUS...

Notable News

Library advocates of
the year, an upcoming
anniversary, and of
course, **Verse & Vino**

LETTER FROM LEADERSHIP

Dear friends,

It is truly an honor and privilege to serve as Board Chair of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library Foundation, a role I deeply value.

What makes this position so special are the incredible stories I hear and the innovations I see, both personally and professionally, throughout Charlotte.

"The Library has transformed my life."

I recently spoke with an attendee at a conference who shared how the library was a safe haven for her and her mother who was illiterate. Her mom made sure that her daughter engaged with books and increased her reading level. Spending quality time in the library strengthened their bonds and changed the trajectory of their lives.

There is no doubt that real lives have been profoundly changed by the Library's dedicated staff and valuable services.

"The Library is investing in my neighborhood."

The rebirth and relaunch of the University City Regional Branch has been incredibly successful. Its spaciousness has encouraged children and families to participate in diverse programs and services; it's become a true community anchor — like so many of our other branches.

I also receive inquiries about the Sugar Creek and West Boulevard Libraries. I'm pleased to share that plans for a new building for the Sugar Creek Library are underway, and plans for a new West Boulevard facility are forthcoming. As our county grows, our Library system grows with it.

"What's happening with new Main Library?"

For several years, we have been building support for the CommonSpark campaign including the new Main Library project and are incredibly grateful to Mecklenburg County and our generous donors for their significant investments.

Drive by North Tryon and Sixth Street, and you'll see the stunning flagship Library taking shape with a sign on the fence that reads, "A New Chapter Is Coming."

It's a chapter I cannot wait to start with you! Thank you for your continued support of the Library's mission and vision. The Library thrives because of you. Whether you are a supporter, staff member, or a customer of our services, you are an essential part of our Library and a testament to its amazing and transformative purpose. The Library is YOU!

Best,



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

"Whether you are a supporter, staff member, or a customer of our services, you are an essential part of our Library and a testament to its amazing and transformative purpose."



Charlotte Mecklenburg Library Foundation board members Helen Hope Kimbrough, Sharon Portwood, and Stephanie Alger (left to right above) were entertained and inspired by Ann Patchett and Kevin Wilson at the Carnegie Circle donor appreciation event sponsored by Duke Energy Foundation last April.



MAKING MORE POSSIBLE

In a time when so much around us feels like it's shrinking with fewer options and opportunities, the Library is choosing to do the opposite. We're doing more. More ways to learn. More ways to connect. More ways to belong.

Need a hand with homework? **We're on it.**

Lost your reading spark? **We'll reignite it.**

Digging into your family history? **Let's explore the past together.**

Digitally confused and exhausted? **Have a seat with us.**

Just arrived in town — or halfway across the globe? **Welcome.**

Facing unemployment, housing struggles, or a personal crisis?
We'll meet you with respect, resources, and hope.

That's what happens when a community chooses action over apathy. Our Library Foundation supporters have decided that a little more effort, a little more kindness, a little more possibility can change lives. **See what "more" looks like at your Library.**

This year, the Library Foundation was asked to do more,
and thanks to you, we delivered.



\$9M+ to new Main
Library goal

More donors. More dedication. More impact.

CAMPAIGN REPORT

More than \$4 million was raised in fiscal year 2025. We are grateful for our generous capital donors who continue to help us close the gap on the CommonSpark, a comprehensive \$165 million campaign driven by the need for a flagship library in Uptown, a dedicated centralized facility for Library operations, systemwide technology upgrades, an endowment for future needs, and annual operating support.

NOTABLE GIFTS

Dr. Joyce Davis Waddell
C. D. Spangler Foundation (second gift)
Chris and Elizabeth Daly

ANNUAL REPORT

Over
2,250
donors

46%
growth over
the past
five years

Carnegie Circle reached
339
members

73%
growth over
the past
five years

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

Recurring gifts hit
117
donors

113%
growth over
the past
five years

“When I toured the new Main Library for the first time and looked up through the five-story atrium to the skylight above, I cried tears of joy.

“Now, when I take donors and partners on hard hat tours, I see the same sense of accomplishment and anticipation in their faces... the realization of what this Library will mean to our community.

“We are building Charlotte’s public commons, where everyone is welcomed and opportunities abound. I can hardly wait to cut the ribbon with you.”

Jenni Gaisbauer
Executive Director, Charlotte
Mecklenburg Library Foundation

MORE Reading

Donor-funded community literacy efforts got a new cheerleader (and sponsor) with lifelong reading advocate Charlotte Hornets' power forward Grant Williams and the Grant Williams Family Foundation. Encouraging Summer Reading participants to "block out time to read," the popular program attracted over 12,000 active readers during the 60-day challenge.



MORE Books

Over

9M

items were
circulated last
fiscal year

5.8% growth over previous year

MORE Access

Donor dollars helped secure a technology expert to ensure new Main Library is future-ready, multi-functional, and accessible to all when the doors open.



MORE Joy

Donor support powers events all year long — including EpicFest, Community Read, Puppetpalooza, Parasols & Petticoats with *Bridgerton* author Julia Quinn, and the "Get Curious" summer exhibit — that activate minds, attract families, build community, spark conversation, and expand understanding.



MORE People

The Library welcomed

2.6M

visitors last fiscal
year plus more than
540,000 people
attended the
Library's **26,000**
free programs

18.2% visitor growth over previous year

MORE Programs

The Flight Fund continues to tap into the creativity and talents of Library staff by funding their innovative ideas for new Library programming including cultural explorations through international cuisines, "welcoming week" author event, and even an introduction to mahjong. To learn more about our latest round of 100% donor-funded microgrants, scan the code.



MORE Kindness

During a challenging season for her family, Charlotte mom Eleanor Shell found unexpected comfort and connection through the Davidson branch of Charlotte Mecklenburg Library.

While she was away receiving treatment, her five-year-old son Jake became a "library kid" — welcomed by name, fueled by curiosity, and supported by caring librarians who turned the Library into a place of joy, learning, and belonging. Eleanor credits the Library's staff, system, and supporters with creating a safe and inspiring haven for her son when her family needed it most, and she looks forward to giving back to the cause that gave them so much.

"Jake knew exactly where to find his favorite books, which ones he could read aloud, how to play the computer games, and how to check out books — all by himself."

Eleanor Shell

DONOR PROFILES

The generous CommonSpark supporters make a point to visit libraries around the world

For the Dalys, Libraries are the Main Attraction



Chris and Elizabeth Daly with daughter Morgan (center)



“Main Library can be a place that levels the playing field...”

For Chris and Elizabeth Daly, libraries have offered lifelong answers to their individual curiosity about the world.

“Elizabeth and I actually visit libraries on our travels, as others might visit cathedrals. It’s particularly amazing to see works on shelves written before the founding of our country,” says Chris.

Charlotte residents for more than 40 years and Library supporters for over two decades, the Dalys have given a transformational gift to the CommonSpark campaign in support of the new Main Library. In recognition of their generosity, the Daly Family Reading Room will welcome visitors within the Robinson-Spangler Carolina Room on the fourth floor.

For Elizabeth, a retired science teacher and school librarian, books and libraries are a lifelong passion.

“There is something so elemental about sitting with a book on your lap and escaping to a different place and time. I always enjoyed watching my students develop a love of reading,” shared Elizabeth.

Chris’ interaction with libraries started as a child, when his mother would drop him off at the library while she ran errands.

“It was a different time. I don’t want to promote the idea of the library as day-care, but by the time she came for pick-up, I had my stack of books ready to go home with me.”

The Dalys’ belief in the Library’s role as a community hub and equalizer inspired their gift.

The Daly Family Reading Room will feature six solid oak Carnegie Library tables, dating back to Charlotte's first public library in 1903. They will be carefully refinished, enhanced with modern lighting, and powered for today's devices.

Rendering: Snohetta



"Main Library can be a place that levels the playing field," says Chris, "a place that will provide digital access, free of charge, to people who might not otherwise have what most of us have come to view as a necessity."

"We wanted to be part of such a wonderful transformation of this Uptown block," adds Elizabeth. "Everyone should have an interest in access to and free exchange of information. Libraries are where that happens."

The Daly Family Reading room will not just be a space for quiet study. It will be a place where developers, lawyers, small business owners, historians, students and curious minds of every age can come to connect with Charlotte's past and shape its future.

Their advice to others considering a gift is simple: "The organizations we like to support are those that provide people with the tools and resources they need to improve their lives. It's the teach-a-man-to-fish philosophy. We can't think of an organization that offers more ways for people to obtain the information they need to get ahead than the Library."

Interested in being a part of Charlotte's next chapter? Contact Jenni Gaisbauer for a conversation about the CommonSpark campaign at 704.416.0801 or jgaisbauer@cmlibrary.org.



LET'S CHAT WITH **Alyssa**

Alyssa is a new recurring Library Foundation donor. We asked her a few questions to uncover why she booked her monthly support.

What inspired you to become a monthly donor to the Library?

I've always been a voracious (and quick) reader. When I was a kid, my parents didn't always have the funds to buy me books, because I would just speed through. It was because of that I would rely on the local library systems: classroom libraries, school libraries, you name it. Accessibility to books, technology, and other necessary resources is incredibly important to me for that reason. **I remember what it was like to be the kid that couldn't afford more than one book at the book fair.**

Do you have a favorite branch?

I love my local Steele Creek branch. It's small but mighty, the staff there is always lovely, and it has a beautiful outdoor reading area.

What does "Library" mean to you?

It means freedom of expression, building literacy and critical thinking skills... and even things like empathy when you learn about experiences that aren't just your own.

What would you say to someone who's considering becoming a monthly donor?

It's hands down **one of the most fulfilling things I could spend my hard-earned money on**, and I love being able to say I help fund the extremely important work the Library does, even if only a little bit.

DONOR PROFILES

*From sanctuary to lasting legacy:
a Library employee's gift of gratitude*

Everett's Brilliant Career



“The Library has been my lifeline of opportunities throughout my life since I was a 14-year-old boy... a place where I could be comfortable... my sanctuary.”

Four decades ago, a teenager walked into his neighborhood library seeking a safe place to study after school. Welcomed by North Branch* staff who saw his potential (most notably then branch manager Vanessa Ramseur), Everett Blackmon was given trust, encouragement, and a job offer that changed the trajectory of his life. That summer job led to a career spanning 40 years, a college education, and countless opportunities to serve the community he loves.

As he reflects on his journey, he credits the Library with “pulling him up from his undisciplined bootstraps” and giving him the stability, mentorship, and purpose that shaped his life. In gratitude, he has chosen to make a planned gift through his will to the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library Foundation.

He hopes his gift will ensure that future generations will find “a place that cares about the people in communities; that wants to see people be their best possible selves; a place equipped to help people be all they can be; a place of opportunities.”

YOUR LEGACY, YOUR LIBRARY

Your story doesn't end with you. If you choose to include the Library in your plans, please let us know so we can thank you and recognize your kindness appropriately. You can reach Teleia White directly at 704.416.0803 or by email at twhite@cmlibrary.org for a private, confidential conversation.

*Now Allegra Westbrook Regional Library



Bookmarked

Library Champions to be honored at annual National Philanthropy Day event

The Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) Charlotte Chapter recognizes the profound impact of generous individuals at its annual event to be held on November 13. Jean and Gene Cochrane, nominated jointly by the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library Foundation and YWCA Central Carolinas, have been named Outstanding Volunteers of the Year, and the late Katherine "Kat" Belk Cook, nominated by the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library Foundation, will be recognized posthumously as Philanthropist of the Year.



2025 OUTSTANDING VOLUNTEERS OF THE YEAR

Jean and Gene Cochrane



For Gene and Jean Cochrane, philanthropy is not just something they do; rather, it's who they are. Their approach to giving back is deeply rooted in a belief that when you see someone in need, you have a responsibility to step in and do something about it. Through decades of service, leadership and personal investment, the Cochranes have humbly shaped Charlotte's philanthropic landscape.

Gene Cochrane played a pivotal role as the Foundation's board chair during the launch of the \$165 million CommonSpark campaign. With his vision and steadiness through the uncertainty of the global pandemic, Gene guided the campaign toward its ambitious goals, inspiring fellow board members, donors, and community partners alike.

The Cochrane family's impact is deeply personal. Together, Gene and Jean have contributed to both the campaign and annual giving, hosted donor events in their home, and inspired their daughters to become steadfast Library Foundation supporters as well.

2025 PHILANTHROPIST OF THE YEAR

Katherine "Kat" Belk Cook

Born and raised in Charlotte, Kat's dedication to service was inspired early by her parents' example. Over her 98 years, she championed causes spanning education, the arts, housing, public health, and social justice. With her husband, Tom, she supported countless organizations through the Katherine and Thomas M. Belk Foundation.

In her later years, Kat focused on addressing pressing community needs, including homelessness and human trafficking. She volunteered and gave generously to organizations such as Roof Above and Lily Pad Haven, often anonymously, and inspired others to join her causes. Her \$25 million in gifts during the last decade of her life continues to transform Charlotte, including new Main Library.

A role model for her children, Kat believed philanthropy was both a privilege and a responsibility. As her pastor, Rev. Joe Clifford, shared, "Kat's capacity to live out love through her courage, compassion, curiosity, and incredible generosity blessed this world in more ways than I will ever know."



*Balombini and Bollini teapot
from the collection*



Under Construction, Overjoyed

"Hard Hat Tours" of new Main Library have been a truly illuminating way for our supporters to witness the incredible transformation taking place. Led by Ben MacBain of Rodgers Builders and executive director Jenni Gaisbauer, these behind-the-scenes visits reveal how this impressive project is progressing from blueprint to reality. Every tour leaves the Foundation team even more inspired by the progress.

We're deeply grateful to those who have already joined the CommonSpark campaign to establish a library destination like no other in our region. If you haven't yet invested in the project, now is the perfect time to be part of building a civic and cultural landmark.

Library debuts new strategic direction

Thanks to generous funding from the Knight Foundation, the Library has a new roadmap for the next three years, built around what matters most to our community. The Fiscal Year 2026-2028 Strategic Direction focuses on four key areas: Access and Welcome, Learn and Engage, Prepare and Excel, and Main Library.

The plan is the result of more than 4,000 voices coming together through surveys, focus groups, conversations, and expert guidance. A dedicated Library steering committee worked alongside community members to shape a plan that combines the needs of the people we serve and the challenges they face with the expertise of the Library.

To view the entire plan, visit cmllibrary.org/about/strategic.

The Art of Giving

Charlotte Mecklenburg Library was honored to receive over 25 art pieces from the personal collection of the late Robert Bush, a visionary leader whose 45-year career shaped the cultural landscape in our region and beyond. As past president of the Arts & Science Council and a tireless advocate for making creativity accessible to all, this gift of artwork continues Robert's legacy of ensuring that arts and culture are not only preserved but shared. We are proud to honor his life and legacy by exhibiting these pieces in our branches.

ONE Access turns 10

In 2025, Charlotte Mecklenburg Library is celebrating 10 years of its groundbreaking ONE Access initiative. Launched in September 2015, this ambitious partnership with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools allows over 142,000 students across 186 schools to use their Student ID number as their Library account number, providing seamless access to the Library's digital resources, research databases, and physical collections.

Over the years, ONE Access has expanded to include over a dozen charter and independent schools in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. The program represents one of the most successful school-library collaborations in the nation, breaking down barriers to information access and supporting school curriculum as well as academic achievement throughout Mecklenburg County.



Twelfth annual literary event presented by



nce upon a time, there were four extraordinary storytellers of great renown converging in Uptown to share tales of siblings on nail-biting journeys to find freedom and one another, a recently buried wealthy widow and her unburied secrets, sumptuous feasts soaked in the Mediterranean sun, and the big one.

THAT TIME IS NOVEMBER 6. Meet the authors. Experience the stories. Eat, drink and be a part of a thriving Charlotte Mecklenburg Library community. Tickets on sale now.

VERSE & VINO



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SAVE THE DATE



Amor Towles

April 7, 2026 at the Carolina Theatre

*To learn more about joining the Carnegie Circle,
visit foundation.cmlibrary.org/carnegie-circle.*

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.

Photography: Everett Blackmon, Maggie Bean, Dmitri Kasterine

We are delighted to welcome four exceptional leaders to the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library Foundation Board of Directors. Their commitment to the work of the Library and diverse experiences will strengthen our efforts. Please join us in thanking Mark Caldwell, Connie Carlson, Susie Orman Schnall, and Aarti Sura as they begin their service.



Mark Caldwell



Connie Carlson



Susie Orman Schnall



Aarti Sura

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