

# Transformations

Spring 2026 Newsletter for Charlotte Mecklenburg Library Supporters

## COMMONSPARK UPDATE

### For exciting new chapters

Countdown begins for Main Library grand opening celebrations

## LEGACY AT THE LIBRARY

### For stories that live on

The Portwoods share why the Library is part of their future plans

## STORY BUILDERS CAMPAIGN

### For building our story together

Join our exciting new endeavor to stock the shelves at new Main Library

**CHARLOTTE  
MECKLENBURG  
LIBRARY  
FOUNDATION**

# From our Leadership

Since its founding in September 2012, your Charlotte Mecklenburg Library Foundation has grown tremendously. What began as a start-up effort fueled by vision and possibility has evolved into something far more established and impactful. Today, we are no longer in our infancy; we've entered our "teen years," a phase marked by momentum and a deepened sense of purpose.

Over the years, we have intentionally increased our visibility and strengthened our impact through beloved community initiatives like Verse & Vino and EpicFest, through support of all 21 Library locations and their programming, and through leadership in the campaign to reimagine the Main Library, The CommonSpark. Each step has helped shape a Foundation that is more connected, more strategic and more essential to the Library's future.

In Fall 2025, we reached an important milestone by convening our first-ever joint retreat with the Library's leadership team and Foundation Board. Together, we explored a defining question: When the CommonSpark Campaign is successfully completed, how can we have the greatest impact moving forward?

The energy in that room was truly electrifying. There was a shared sense of purpose, alignment and readiness to do the work ahead. In fact, our consultant remarked she had never seen a board so unified and committed to advancing its organization. It was a moment that both reflected how far we've come and clarified where we are headed.

From that retreat, we developed a set of guiding values that will shape our path forward. These values, which you'll read more about on the following page, are grounded in our belief that libraries are a vital anchor in our community and that our role is to help ensure they continue to thrive for generations to come.



*Helen Hope Kimbrough and Jenni Gaisbauer*

As the Foundation continues to mature, our focus remains clear: to raise the profile and philanthropic resources necessary for the Library to deliver on its mission to improve lives and build a stronger community. In partnership with Mecklenburg County, we are committed to ensuring that our growing region has access to first-rate library spaces — places that are safe, welcoming and filled with opportunities to learn, connect and grow. Said more succinctly (and with a nod to our new brand)... a place for every story.

It has been a privilege to be a witness and a guide for this evolution. And even more so, to do so alongside a community of supporters who believe deeply in the power of libraries to transform lives.

With gratitude and excitement for what lies ahead,

Helen Hope Kimbrough  
*Chair, Board of Directors*

Jenni Gaisbauer, CFRE  
*Executive Director*

## Our Values

*Charlotte Mecklenburg Library Foundation exists to connect generous supporters like you with the transformative work of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library.*

*In support of the Library, the Foundation builds lasting relationships, stewards resources with care, and creates opportunities for our community to invest in literacy, learning, and access. To guide how we do this work, we've articulated three values that reflect our commitment to our donors, our Library, and the community we serve: **Collaboration, Integrity, and Acceleration.***

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### Collaboration

We actively engage our community to create experiences, connections and opportunities to welcome all to support and benefit from our Library.

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### Integrity

Guided by principles of stewardship, transparency and reliability, we strive to be a trusted, accountable partner to our Library, our donors and our community.

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### Acceleration

We spark curiosity, innovation and partnerships to proactively and thoughtfully maximize resources to create meaningful impact.

*Together, these values guide our actions and empower us to create the future we envision for our Library and the community we serve while giving our donors confidence that we are growing thoughtfully and stewarding their contributions with integrity and intention.*

## New Library brand “For Every Story” makes its debut

We got an update — and you'll start to see it all around Mecklenburg County! The Library is rolling out its new brand, and that means the Foundation is getting a refresh as well. From your local branch to community events, from *Verse & Vino* to Final Draught, you'll start noticing a vibrant new identity that reflects our entire community and the stories we share.

Under the leadership of Chief Marketing Officer Krystal Green, the process began in Fall 2024 with the selection of a creative partner to reimagine the Library's brand. The goal: to develop a fresh identity (including a new logo) that reflects the Library's remarkable growth and deepening impact across our community.

The previous brand, built around the “I Can” promise and developed by Wray Ward in 2012, has served as a powerful and inspiring voice for the Library system for more than a decade.

MODE, a Charlotte-based integrated brand experience agency with an impressive roster of clients including Lowe's, Bank of America and Wendy's, was selected to lead the transformation of the Library's new identity.

The new brand is a reflection of our mission and captures the heart of what we do: *For every story* promises that every person, experience, and idea has a place at the Library—from the stories found in our books to the ones we carry in ourselves. It's an invitation and celebration of the shared stories that connect us. ///

**“We were excited to take on this project because Charlotte Mecklenburg Library plays such an important role in the life of our city. It is one of those rare institutions that truly serves everyone, creating access, connection, learning, and opportunity across the community.”**

**John Pietrafesa**  
Founding Partner / Executive Creative Director, MODE



COMMONSPARK UPDATE

## For Charlotte and beyond, a new chapter begins

Momentum is building — *quite literally* — at the site of our new Main Library, and we are thrilled to share that construction is progressing right on schedule. By the end of 2026, we will take occupancy of this transformational space.

What follows will be an intensive and highly coordinated period of preparation in early 2027, as collections are installed, technology is activated, and every floor is readied to welcome the public. This is where the building truly becomes a library: thoughtfully planned, fully equipped, and designed for discovery from day one.

And then, the moment we've all been waiting for: a grand opening celebration in April 2027.

This will be more than a ribbon cutting; it will be the Uptown event of the year. A week filled with dynamic programming, special guests, and unforgettable moments, the celebration will reflect the energy, innovation, and spirit of the community this library was built to serve. Stay tuned because there's so much more to come.



Behind the scenes, the momentum continues with the CommonSpark campaign. We are now just a few million dollars away from reaching our ambitious \$165 million goal. This progress is made possible by extraordinary generosity, including two significant recent commitments: one from Susie and Rick Schnall, and another anonymous gift that will fund the remaining technology needs of the new building.

Meanwhile, hard hat tours are offering a firsthand glimpse into what's ahead, and the response has been overwhelming. Our visitors walk away inspired, struck by the scale, beauty, and intention behind every space. It's already clear: this will be a place that belongs to all of us, and one that reflects what our community truly deserves.

As we look ahead to opening day, we're inviting everyone to take part by filling the shelves through our Great Big Story Builders campaign. This initiative is a call to action for our entire community by creating opportunities at every level to contribute to this extraordinary resource. Every gift, large or small, helps build a beacon of learning, connection, and opportunity for generations to come.

For every story, the future is taking shape. ///

NEW MAIN LIBRARY

Susie Orman Schnall with Amor Towles at the Carnegie Circle Appreciation event



# Everyone can be a Great Big Story Builder

BY SUSIE ORMAN SCHNALL

Books have always been a constant and important part of my life — from my earliest days reading stories borrowed from the library to my current career as an author of five published novels about ambitious women.

After moving to Charlotte from New York last year, I wanted to find an organization where I could devote time and resources. An organization that shared my passions and values, supported all Charlotteans (especially those who are under-resourced), and worked earnestly to move our city forward. Today, as a proud member of the board of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library Foundation, I can confidently say I found exactly that.

I was thrilled and honored to be asked to co-chair the Great Big Story Builders Campaign, an effort that serves as the crowning moment of our years-long CommonSpark capital campaign that is building our impressive and stunning new Main Library in Uptown. With Story Builders we're inviting all Charlotteans to help stock the shelves of the new space — a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to contribute meaningfully to Charlotte's storied history.

I'm truly looking forward to watching our community come together during this final push. So many have already played a role in bringing New Main to life, and now every resident and business can be part of filling it with a collection that will teach, entertain, enlighten, and inspire for decades to come. ///

Thank you to our Community Challenge Sponsors for inspiring our Story Builders:

Katie and Mark Caldwell

Evelyn Cormier Fund

Sam Hart

Honeywell

Sallie Scarborough

Susie and Rick Schnall

As of April 15, 2026



STORY BUILDER PROFILE

## A taste for big ideas

*Sam Hart, executive chef and founder of Charlotte's celebrated restaurant counter-, is bringing their passion for storytelling to the Great Big Story Builders campaign to build the opening day collection for the new Main Library.*

*Hart, whose restaurant earned both a Michelin star and a Michelin Green Star for sustainability, will be joining us in conversation with moderator/chef Nikki Moore at ImaginOn on May 18 to help us launch our campaign with a special announcement. Tickets are \$15 and can be purchased at [foundation.cmlibrary.org/samhart](http://foundation.cmlibrary.org/samhart).*

# For good advice from welcoming sources

Billie and Nick Anderson's story started like a lot of relationships do; they were introduced by a mutual friend while students at Clemson University. When we seek out good advice, our first instinct is often to ask a friend.

In many ways, the public library is simply a collection of really smart, really well-resourced friends.

For Billie, that friendship with the library began early. As the child of a Coast Guard family, she moved every two years. Exploring the local library was often one of her family's first stops in a new town, a way to understand the community and feel grounded. She vividly remembers browsing the children's section in Homer, Alaska, where the library offered both refuge and adventure in a small fishing village with little else to do. Even then, the library represented something dependable: a welcoming place in unfamiliar surroundings.

Years later, after launching their careers and starting a family in Charlotte, Billie and Nick found themselves returning to the Library for a simple reason: they wanted to read for fun again. Buying every book they were interested in wasn't practical, and they didn't want to fill their home with books they wouldn't reread. Borrowing from Charlotte Mecklenburg Library just made sense. What began as practicality uncovered a wealth of resources for their family.

Today, as parents, the Library plays a central role in their family life. Their children know that a librarian can help

them explore any topic that sparks their interest. With patience and kindness, librarians have helped their children learn to choose subjects independently, bravely ask for help, and manage expectations when a book they want isn't available. It's collaboration in action: families and librarians working together to build confidence and lifelong learning.

Their appreciation extends far beyond their own household.

"The Library is a beautiful institution that provides an invaluable service to our community," they shared. "At any given moment, you may find someone using a public computer to research food bank options, reserving a private room to hold a community meeting, browsing the aisles to find a book to bring on vacation, attending a storytime with their loved ones, or finding solace in one of the last third places in the City."

That belief led them to give at the Carnegie Circle level. They recognized that the services their family receives would cost far more than their annual gift. "When we needed the Library, it was there for us," they reflect. "Now that we can return the favor in this capacity, we're here for the Library."

"Our family reflected on nonprofits that provide immense value in the amelioration of Charlotteans' lives and determined that the Library was one of those institutions."

They dream of a future where everyone within the Library's service area can walk or use public transportation to reach their nearest branch within minutes. Their three-word vision says it best: welcoming, accessible, innovative.

They also hope more people consider how small shifts in habit can create shared impact. Instead of purchasing a book from a mass retailer, they suggest donating that money to the Library and borrowing the book instead — turning a single purchase into a resource for the entire community.

Committed to creating opportunity for others, Billie and Nick's story reminds us that the Library is more than a building or a collection. It's a trusted friend and a powerful resource for our community. **///**

*Nick and Billie Anderson*



***Interested in becoming a Carnegie Circle member?***

*Reach out to Tim Gibson at [tgibson@cmlibrary.org](mailto:tgibson@cmlibrary.org).*



Jeanenne Robinson

More than 25 years ago, a single outreach visit set a career in motion. While working at a child development center, Jeanenne Robinson attended a professional development session led by a children's librarian from University City Regional Library. The visit, filled with ideas about books and early learning activities, inspired her to pursue a career at the Library.

Already an avid library user, Jeanenne saw a path where her love of literacy, libraries, and working with children could come together. What began as inspiration soon became a profession.

"The Library is a product of the community, and it is circular," shared Jeanenne who is a part of the talented staff at Matthews Library. "The resources, services, and programs staff make available to customers are there because of the many ways the community underpins the Library. The Library leverages this relationship to be a part of improving everyday lives and building on the community we have."

Today, that same sense of community continues to shape her work and her generosity. As both an employee and a donor to the Library Foundation, the value of a library card has never diminished. If anything, it has grown.

**"The Library is a product of the community, and it is circular..."**

#### STAFF DONOR PROFILE

## For moments of wonder with just a Library card in hand

"I donate to give back to the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library as a customer," said Jeanenne, "I use the resources for my own recreational and informational needs regularly. My family have been library users for as long as I can remember and I have not lost my wonder of what is available with a library card... which is a lot!"

In her role as a teen librarian, she's especially passionate about programs like College & Career Connections: Road Map to Success and resources such as Universal Class, which features life-long learning and hobby-specific classes.

If she had to describe the Library in one word, it would be "dynamic! It is always changing albeit the core library values stay the same. Staff are encouraged to work on future initiatives while focusing on day-to-day library services, in and for the community." ///

# For a legacy that lasts: why the Portwoods chose the Library



*Drs. Sharon and Glen Portwood have called Charlotte home since 2005, when Sharon joined the faculty at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Originally from Texas and Georgia, respectively, the two are now retired and fill their time with traveling and cheering on their favorite teams. They have two sons: Bryant, who lives in Fredericksburg, Virginia, and Grant, in Charlotte.*

“The Library is a true institution in our community—one that will be here long after we’re gone.”

**Interested in making a planned gift to the Library?** Reach out to Teleia White at [twhite@cmlibrary.org](mailto:twhite@cmlibrary.org).

## **Why are libraries an important part of your life?**

I practically grew up in the library. Like me, my mother was a professor, and she would often let me spend time in the children’s section while she worked. My favorite spot was the Houston Heights Neighborhood Library. It was—and still is—a beautiful Italian Renaissance-style building, and I thought it was the most magical place on earth.

## **How did you get connected to Charlotte Mecklenburg Library?**

When I first moved to Charlotte, I served as Executive Director of UNC Charlotte’s Institute for Social Capital, working with nonprofits and government agencies across the region. I was often running between meetings, and whenever I had a gap, I’d head to the nearest library branch to get some work done. With so many convenient locations, the Library made my life much easier.

## **Why did you choose to make a planned gift to the Library?**

When thinking about a legacy gift, it was important to Glen and me to support an organization that will be here long after we’re gone. The Library is a true institution in our community, and there will always be people fighting to ensure it continues to serve Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.

## **What would you say to someone considering a planned gift to the Library?**

Do it!

## **Out of all the worthy organizations out there, what is it about the Library that tugs at your heartstrings?**

You’d be hard-pressed to find an author who doesn’t have a “library story.” Libraries bring us stories, and they continue to inspire new voices every day.

## **As an educator, why are libraries such an important part of our community?**

The contribution of libraries to education can’t be overstated. Whether you’re looking for information or inspiration, you’ll find it at the Library. And if they don’t have what you need, they’ll find a way to get it for you.

## **What are you reading now?**

I’m currently reading *The Other Bennet Sister* by Janice Hadlow, which revisits the Pride and Prejudice universe through the eyes of Mary Bennet. It’s a fun way to celebrate Jane Austen’s 250th birthday.

## **Who inspires you?**

At least one person inspires me every day! But during college basketball season, one of my biggest inspirations is Coach Dawn Staley. She has built a phenomenal program at the University of South Carolina and helped advance women’s basketball nationally, all while leading with grace.

## **Which of the Library Foundation’s new values resonates most with you?**

Collaboration. It was the foundation of my professional work in the health and human services field. You simply can’t address complex issues successfully if you’re working alone. ///

# For giving that's strategic from a lifelong reader



Susan Carr considers herself one of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library's most enthusiastic patrons. A resident of Fourth Ward, Susan has borrowed thousands of books from Main Library and used its resources for everything from research in the Carolina Room to community meetings and voting. In addition to her deep love of reading, Susan is a thoughtful philanthropist who supports a number of nonprofits through strategic giving, including the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library Foundation and her alma mater, the University of Virginia.

## Why do you use Qualified Charitable Distributions for your philanthropy?

For many years, I made most of my charitable gifts through a donor-advised fund (DAF) because it provided flexibility, tax benefits, and the ability for unused funds to continue earning a return. More recently, I began using Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCDs) from my IRA after learning how they could help manage my future required minimum distributions (RMDs).

By making charitable gifts directly from my IRA starting at age 70½, I can support organizations I care about without increasing my taxable income. These gifts also reduce the balance in my IRA, which will lower the amount of future required minimum distributions I'll need to take — and pay taxes on — when I turn 74.

I plan to continue using QCDs each year, even after required distributions begin, because those gifts can count toward my RMD and help reduce the taxable income it generates.

## How did you go about learning about QCDs?

I've supported the University of Virginia for many years and worked closely with both a Major Gifts officer and later a Planned Giving officer, since the university is a beneficiary in my will. As I approached my late 60s, the Planned Giving officer introduced me to the concept of QCDs. I used one for the first time last year and also discussed the process in detail with my investment manager here in Charlotte.

## What would you want our readers to know about QCDs?

For those approaching retirement, it's important to understand your expected income, expenses, and long-term investment outlook. Working with an investment manager to review these projections can help determine whether you may have extra cash flow available for charitable giving.

If so, a QCD can be an excellent option. It offers tax advantages starting at age 70½ and provides flexibility — you can choose the charities you support and even make multiple QCDs each year, within annual limits.

The process itself is quite simple. Once you decide to make a gift, you provide instructions to the trustee of your IRA specifying the amount and the charity's details. In my case, the trustee sends me a check made out to the charity, which I then forward with a note indicating how I'd like the funds to be used.

## Can you share why you are supporting Main Library?

I have been a voracious reader since childhood. One of my earliest memories is visiting the library in my hometown. Today, the Library continues to be an important part of my life. I regularly borrow books, attend meetings, and conduct research in the Carolina Room.

The new Main Library is about much more than replacing a building. The spaces, technology, and resources for learning and creativity represent an exciting opportunity for Charlotte's current and future residents—and one I wanted to support. ///

# Bookmarked

## Flight Fund micro grants take off across the Library

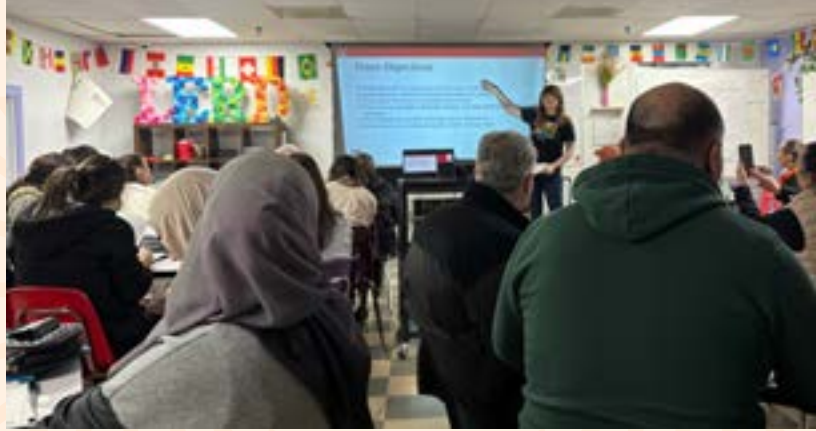
The Library Foundation has announced the January - June 2026 recipients of its Flight Fund micro grants, empowering Charlotte Mecklenburg Library staff to turn bold ideas into meaningful community experiences.

This latest round of grantees reflects the creativity and dedication of Library staff, with programs spanning writing, music, culture, wellness, and lifelong learning for all ages.

Highlights include the CML Writing Summit, featuring a virtual keynote by bestselling author and poet Maggie Smith; an After Hours Silent Disco celebrating the 2026 Community Read; and Genre Fest: Black Love Edition, a vibrant Black History Month celebration of Black romance and creativity.

Other funded projects include a traveling Shadow Puppetry Kit inspired by Asian storytelling traditions; Rooted & Rising, a Women's History Month series culminating in a community-created feminist zine; An Evening with author Daniel Black; a health-focused Senior Expo; and a new Sensory Magnetic Board to expand inclusive, hands-on learning in the Makerspace.

To learn more about these incredible 100% donor-funded programs, visit [foundation.cmlibrary.org/flightfund](https://foundation.cmlibrary.org/flightfund). ///



## MiLa program helps bridge the digital divide

A new digital literacy series at the Library's Mobile Internet Lab (MiLa) is helping neighbors build essential technology skills while opening doors to new opportunities. Coordinated in partnership with Refugee Support Services and supported by the City of Charlotte through its Learn2Earn grant, the program runs from February through October and offers hands-on computer training for participants.

Funded in part by a \$20,000 grant from PwC, this expanded initiative builds on MiLa's most in-demand services identified by both customers and staff. Through the series, learners gain practical digital skills and the confidence to navigate online tools that are increasingly essential for work, education, and everyday life. Participants follow along with Library-branded learning packets to track their progress, and graduates will receive laptops to continue learning at home. As many as 100 devices are expected to be distributed.

PwC's grant funding has also enhanced MiLa's ability to meet learners where they are. New Launchpad tablets, preloaded with educational resources, support children while their parents or caregivers participate in programs, and also serve seniors and adults with learning differences. A portable screen and projector now allow staff to deliver classes and demonstrations both inside partner organizations and outdoors, expanding access for larger audiences.

Additionally, MiLa has piloted new tools to strengthen workforce development and collaboration, particularly for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learners. Subscription services like Ellii and Airtable have proven highly effective, though historically cost-prohibitive, and PwC's grant support is helping bridge that gap. Funding also supports modest program supplies and presenter fees, ensuring the continued growth and impact of this vital community resource. ///



## PuppetPalooza draws nearly 4,000 to celebrate the art of puppetry

Nearly 4,000 community members filled ImaginOn on February 7 for the third annual PuppetPalooza, a lively day of performances, workshops, and hands-on creativity celebrating the art of puppetry. The festival, supported by the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library Foundation, welcomed 3,942 attendees and featured 18 puppetry troupes offering 44 shows and presentations across 11 performance spaces throughout the building.

The day began with a festive Puppeteer Procession and concluded with a colorful Puppet Parade, with highlights including puppet storytime that drew 185 attendees, roving performances, crafts and games, and even animatronic dinosaur encounters in StoryLab. Nineteen Charlotte Mecklenburg Library staff members from 12 branches helped lead workshops, performances, and activities, alongside 35 community volunteers who kept the celebration running smoothly throughout the day.

This year's festival expanded its accessibility and programming, adding bilingual performances — including a Spanish-language puppet adaptation of *The Dot* created by CML Frontline Puppeteers — dedicated sensory-friendly spaces, and an American Sign Language interpreter for stage performances. New puppetry styles were also introduced, including shadow puppetry and a finger puppet workshop led by Cheralyn Lambeth.

Organizers also piloted an educational component for adults with a Puppetry in Education and Therapy workshop led by Conni Mulligan of Puppeteers of America, offering a glimpse of future learning opportunities connected to the festival.

Thanks to the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library Foundation's National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) fund, PuppetPalooza continues to grow as a joyful community tradition, bringing together families, artists, and library staff to spark imagination, creativity, and connection through the magic of puppetry. ///

## The Library comes to them

When space limitations prevented February's in-branch adaptive program at University City Regional Library, staff took the program on the road, visiting Empowerment Quality Care Services and reaching more than 60 adults with disabilities.

The group already knew the Library team well. As staff arrived, participants who regularly attend the branch's monthly adaptive programs excitedly greeted them, calling out, "The Library's here! Ms. Cat and Ms. Leandal!" and introducing them to new participants who had not yet met the team.

The program focused on affirmations and the message that every person matters. Together, the group read *You Matter* and reflected on personal experiences, sharing powerful stories about seeing themselves — and being seen by others — beyond disability. Participants then created affirmation self-portraits, which now fill the activity room wall as a daily reminder of their worth.

The visit ended with a joyful sing-along of "Just the Way You Are," a standing ovation from the group, and an invitation for Library staff to attend the center's upcoming Black History Month play. Several participants who had never attended the Library's in-branch programs said they now can't wait to visit next month. ///





SUMMER READING 2026

## For the buzz of reading

This summer, young readers across Charlotte are invited to launch into A Universe of Reading, the 2026 Summer Reading program from Charlotte Mecklenburg Library. Kicking off June 1, the program is open to ages 0-18 and provides an engaging framework to encourage reading all season long.

This year's theme encourages readers to "blast off" into stories that span galaxies of imagination, from space and science to fantasy and real-world adventures. Back again this year, Grant Williams, power forward for the Charlotte Hornets, is teaming up with the Library to encourage kids to block out time to read and not drop the ball on their reading progress.

The program plays a critical role in helping prevent the "summer slide," when students can lose some of the reading skills they built during the school year. Through an interactive online challenge, hands-on activities at all Library branches, and creative opportunities like the bookmark contest, kids keep learning while having a great time.

This community-wide effort is made possible thanks to generous support from partners including Charlotte FC, the Grant Williams Family Foundation, the Charlotte Hornets, Wendy's, Discovery Place, Life is Sweet Candy Store, and Charlotte Mecklenburg Library Foundation. ///

### Thank you to our Summer Reading sponsors



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