

CHARLOTTE MECKLENBURG LIBRARY

FOUNDATION

transformations

SPRING 2024 NEWSLETTER FOR CHARLOTTE MECKLENBURG LIBRARY SUPPORTERS



EpicFest at ImaginOn: The Joe and Joan Martin Center

SPECIAL REPORT

Lessons of a Library Dropout

What can we learn from someone who's not visited the Library in decades? Turns out... a lot.

DONOR SPOTLIGHT

Fifth Third Bank shifts MoLi into the next gear

The Library's mobile unit gets "refueled" with the help of a visionary corporate partner.

PLUS...

Notable News

CommonSpark update, new Main Library construction news, and so much more.

LETTER FROM LEADERSHIP

There is no institution more trusted than the American public library.

It's rare (and sometimes inadvisable) to make such a declarative statement and be able to stand behind it without any reservations, but I do. It's not a boastful or arrogant statement either, because a public library will always be a place for everyone to access unlimited knowledge and resources and to convene as a community.

We've been working diligently over the past 10 years to make new Main Library possible. Now it's becoming a reality right before our eyes.

Demolition is complete, the debris is being cleared, and by the time you read this newsletter, the foundation will be poured. Despite the obvious physical reality of construction, sometimes it feels too good to be true.

But that's the power of a public library, an institution that will always be working toward what is good, what lifts us up, and what makes us better. We've stayed true to our original vision, building a free educational center that is as architecturally distinctive as it is technologically forward. The impressive and efficient team of Rodgers | Leeper is bringing this vision to life — with the steel structure going up by early fall and the progress staying on track for a 2026 opening date.

None of this growth happens without you. I invite you to reach out to me if you have questions or would like to learn more about the new Main Library and the impact it will have on our community. The Around the World in 21 Branches events are a wonderful opportunity to come out to a local branch and learn more about the project as well as all the wonderful things happening at your neighborhood Library.

2026 will be here before we know it. I can't wait to welcome you all into your new Main Library.

With gratitude,

Jenni Gaisbauer, CFRE
Executive Director



Scan the QR code for
a bird's eye view of
the new Main Library
construction site.

*P.S. I am 100% serious about contacting me. Email or call me to talk —
jgaisbauer@cmlibrary.org or 704.351.1721.*



CAMPAIGN REPORT

2024 promises to be another strong year for growth at the Library

We have **\$17 million** more to raise for the new Main Library, and we have a promising pipeline to meet our goal.

Overall, we are **90% to goal** for the public-private comprehensive campaign of \$165M.

People from **all walks of life** have supported the CommonSpark campaign.

Recent Notable Gifts

- State of North Carolina
- PNC Bank
- Marsh Foundation
- Fifth Third Bank
- Crandall and Erskine Bowles
- Laurie and Ned Durden
- Sally and Bob Miller
- The Leon Levine Foundation (second gift to campaign)

We look forward to sharing some **exciting news** this summer with you. Stay on top of all Library Foundation news by subscribing to our e-newsletter, *The Update*.



Jenni with Rodgers
superintendent
Donald Alston in
February

Lessons of a Library Dropout

by Isolde Karro

Despite her candor about library attendance, Isolde loves to read. Her favorite book is John Irving's A Prayer for Owen Meany.

Before we get started, there's something you should know. **I'm 51 years old, and I've never set foot inside a public library.**

I know what you're thinking. It's okay ... I think it, too. I was an English major! Chalk it up to childhood memories of being loudly shushed in middle school and, boom, a formative experience was cemented.

Why do I confess this embarrassing shortcoming to you? To shamelessly GRAB YOUR ATTENTION and tell you what I've learned about our remarkable Library system from its talented, caring, smart and funny Library staff — through volunteering.

CONVENING PEOPLE: Libraries bring communities together

Much to my surprise, today's libraries are anything but quiet. The Charlotte Mecklenburg Library is like a bustling city where you can choose your own adventure every day. Each one of its 21 branches is a mini town center where people regularly connect with each other to learn, do and grow.

Hyperbole? NO.

Visit the Events page of the Library website and you'll find entry-after-entry of free educational, informational, and fun programming for everyone — from newborns to retirees. I know because I perused all 400 pages.

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I haven't included any links because I want you to keep reading, but here's a few hot takes:

- There are dance parties for babies to stimulate their brains through music, language and socialization.
- Elementary school kids can get help with homework from trained volunteers to answer questions and practice skills.
- Run out of ideas for dinner? There are cooking demonstrations! (Shef Shaun — You were right about cutting out sugar. My elbows do feel better.)
- If you're new or returning to the job market, Library staff can help you polish your resume, do mock interviews and review computer basics.
- There's even a list of local mentors from different trades and professions who will share their experiences with you. It's like checking out a living resource to get more information on ... life.

And none of this programming is off the proverbial shelf (I had to get that pun in here somewhere). It's all customized. Because every community is different and each branch — big and small — is unique.

I mean, librarians really have to know their beat. THIS is why there's no more shushing in the library. Because convening people — truly bringing communities together — means hearing what they have to say.

The Personal Side of Programming

Not all programming is flashy. Some of it's quite personal.

Like a program called **Project Outpour** that offers people between housing and those without water where they live free access to a hot shower and toiletries. To date, four Library branches partner with Project Outpour to bring their customized trailer, complete with two full private bathrooms, to neighborhoods in need.

There's also **Learn2Earn**, a City of Charlotte program that helps bridge the digital divide by teaching adults computer literacy — building self-confidence, increasing self-sufficiency and, ultimately, developing skills for better paying jobs. At the end of the 14-week class, graduates get to keep the brand-new laptop and wireless headset they've been learning on, earning a seat at the digital table and all the benefits that entails.

Top five “OMG, you can do THAT at the Library?” moments

- 1 Influencers can record podcasts.
- 2 Gamers can get cosplay costume tips.
- 3 Designers can learn 3D printing.
- 4 Crafters can donate, trade & take yarn.
- 5 Seniors can get support understanding Medicare.



The Learn2Earn program is running at Hickory Grove, West Boulevard, Allegra Westbrooks, and Sugar Creek Libraries.



In a recent survey, Library staff requested interventional training and closer collaboration with social services. In response the Library is creating a curriculum with Mental Health America to provide staff with the tools they need to help their most vulnerable customers.

Pictured: Lonna Vines, branch manager at Myers Park Library.

SUPPORTING HEALTH & WELLNESS: Libraries meet people where they are

What does listening “look” like in action? Well, even though I don’t know you, I can still imagine you running into someone you regularly see. You make eye contact, you read their body language, and as you throw open your arms to greet them, you warmly say (in your best Oprah Winfrey voice): “Omigosh, how have you been?” And you listen.

Sometimes it’s just that easy.

Oftentimes, at the Library, it’s more complicated. The answer to this simple question can be ... I need a hot meal ... a dry place to go ... a safe place to sleep. I need help with addiction, depression, trauma. Or, I don’t know — but something’s wrong and I don’t know what to do.

Libraries see these kinds of crisis multiple times a day, every day. In a recent survey, Library staff revealed they want more interventional training and closer collaboration with social services and healthcare organizations to best help the most vulnerable in their communities.

Starting in March, Charlotte Mecklenburg Library is partnering with Mental Health America to offer staff at all 21 branches bespoke training on the specific emergencies they encounter (remember, each community is different) and how to connect people with the right care. The County will also teach de-escalation techniques, so every situation is approached calmly, kindly and safely.

As the Library builds on its original mission of providing free access to books for all ... to more fully connecting people’s physical, mental and emotional needs with the right resources (yes, books, and also programming, social services, empathy, compassion, commonality), all of our communities benefit. If you’re looking for proof, check out the story about the Mayor of Midwood on page 10.

It’s this evolution from the transactional to the relational that creates a special experience every time a person walks through that Library door. Silence in these hallowed halls is no longer an option.

Combating the Cost of Caring

When your workplace is the neighborhood’s favorite hangout, you meet all the faces of humanity. This means regularly helping people living through disaster, trauma and illness. And library staff see it all ... and feel it all.

It isn’t easy to shake off someone’s human experience and quickly pivot to helping someone else find a fun read for their upcoming beach vacation. Ping ponging between these emotional highs and lows is HARD WORK and Compassion Fatigue is real. It can lead to depression and grief for many library staffers.

The upcoming partnership with **Mental Health America** will include training on self-care and strategies for handling the stressors directly impacting the Library’s front line — ensuring they can bring their best selves to work and back home again to their personal lives.

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GROWING FOR THE FUTURE: Libraries expand where needed

A few minutes before meeting with David Dillard, the real estate director for the Library, I kinda freaked out. What were we gonna talk about? After fumbling though my introduction, I blurted out: "Tell me what makes you proud of working with the Library."

Great. I just asked a brick-and-mortar person about their feelings.

And the next 25 minutes were amazing! Because like every other aspect of the Library, even real estate is about asking questions and listening.

The real estate team talked to Library leaders and staff about their experiences on the ground. They went into communities again and again and AGAIN to learn about their unique needs. They "heard" the maps telling them about underserved areas and they "listened" to the census data predict where the next population boom would erupt.

After racking and stacking based on urgency, developing cost estimates, meeting with the County Commission — going back to the County Commission — the team presented a facilities master plan (let's call it a central strategy) to best serve the County with physical infrastructure for the next 15 years. You can find the full document on the Library's website under *About Us* → *Building Projects*.

So out of all this, what is David proud of?

Five trends making libraries the next-gen "third place"

- 1 Borrowing books saves money! It's totally free with a Library card.
- 2 Using the library is better for the environment than buying books new.
- 3 Reading physical books is a digital detox from phones and screens.
- 4 Programs and events are a great way to meet people with similar interests.
- 5 Library spaces are places to see and be seen. Young people are dressing up and accessorizing to go to the Library... to get out of the house, make friends — even flirt! Could the library be the cure for the "loneliness epidemic" created by COVID?

The CommonSpark campaign amplifies public funding with private gifts to create dynamic change throughout the Library system including the construction of new Main Library.





Talk of the Town: New Main Library

No update on Charlotte Mecklenburg Library growth is complete without a nod to new Main Library. In fact, I'm contractually obligated to write about it.*

But with the grand opening slated for Spring 2026, what you need to know right now is ... people are really excited about it. Here's how I know.

At a February event hosted by Independence Regional Library, a couple fresh from traveling abroad stopped by the new Main Library information booth with lots of questions.

With tears in her eyes, the woman told me they had just visited all the famous libraries of Europe. They were moved by the architecture, the interior design, the flow of the public spaces, the outdoor areas, the art, the collections, even the cafes ... and they dearly (desperately) wanted all of this for our community here in Charlotte.

Library Foundation executive director Jenni Gaisbauer jumped in to show the couple the new Main Library rendering (it's 10' x 8' and it's glorious) and virtually walked them through all five floors using a 3D immersive digital tour. She touched on Snøhetta, Clark Nexsen and Rodgers|Leeper ... Knight Hall, Robinson-Spangler Carolina Room, the two outdoor terraces and, yes, the cafe.

They were overjoyed! And before they left, they addressed a postcard to their future selves inviting them to the opening ceremony. I can't wait for them to receive it.

**I'm a volunteer — I do not have a contract with the Library or Foundation.*

His stream of consciousness answer started with securing funding for some pretty big wins for the community:

- Moving Sugar Creek Library to a building double its current size for larger program space, more study rooms and a bigger collection area.
- Relocating and expanding West Boulevard Library — taking it from 12,500 to 20,000 sq. ft.
- Working with the County to include a library in their new Community Resource Center on Nations Ford Road.
- Approval to buy land for new branches in Prosperity Village, the Eastland area and the Thomasboro/Hoskins neighborhood.

But that's where he revealed a secret. Real estate isn't about the physical infrastructure ... it's about what the Library and its partners do inside the real estate that matters.

He told me a story about being a little boy, climbing into his mom's lap where she would read to him. He wants that experience for every child because literacy enhances the educational, economic and health outcomes for communities. The Library is more than checking out books. It's about learning how to read, how to read to a child, where to find information and what to do with it. It's about accessing programs and resources — and transforming your life with them.

And thanks to your contributions, David and his team and Mecklenburg County are working with resources that can pay dividends immediately and into the foreseeable future.

Tour new Main Library in 3D with our virtual reality experience, available at any of our Around the World in 21 Branches events.

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THE STORY DOESN'T END HERE

My experience volunteering with the Library is just that — one person's broad account of something much bigger than themselves. It's actually impossible for me to tell you everything there is to know about the Library because it's a living, breathing being whose never-ending story is being written in real time by more than one million people across Mecklenburg County.

But one consistent theme came out of every interaction over the last few weeks ... the Library is about sharing knowledge.

Thank you to Sugar Creek Library, Independence Regional Library, Hickory Grove Library and branch manager Viviette White, Plaza Midwood Library and branch manager Catherine Haydon, real estate director David Dillard, and the Library Foundation for sharing what you know.

Here's what you taught me:

- Libraries spaces, programs and services connect our communities.
 - People with widely different needs from wildly different backgrounds use our libraries.
 - Library staff welcome them ALL with open arms and helping hands.
 - All of it is free of charge at a time when everything else comes at an increasing cost.
- Growing this critical institution is more important now than ever before.**

So now that you've come this far, I can tell you the truth. I have actually been in a library or two — many, many moons ago. But clearly, I am overdue in returning and it's about time I got myself a library card. Shhh ... I'm working on it!

Three cheers for supporting the Library

- 1 With a long history of public service, this trusted institution has adapted to the needs of the community.
- 2 The Library is a model for public-private partnerships, amplifying County dollars with generous gifts that punch way above their weight.
- 3 You get a lot of bang for your (philanthropic) buck. A large majority of Americans (77%) reported that libraries provide them with the resources they need. This is especially true for young people: 84% of those between 16 and 29 say this.*

* Pew Research Center report.

Isolde Karro lives in Huntersville with her husband Jerry, her dog Penny, and cat Peso. In addition to reading, she enjoys Doritos and Law & Order.



Programs that enrich the lives of families like EpicFest, a free annual children's literary festival at ImaginOn, are made possible by donors like you.



Bookmarked

University City
Regional staff braved
the cold to mark a new
chapter for the branch.

Library releases its first Intellectual Freedom statement

The Library's Board of Trustees led by chair Charles Thomas unanimously approved a statement on intellectual freedom in October 2023. With the rise in censorship in public libraries nationwide, the Board was compelled to publicly state the commitment of the Library to a fundamental tenant of our democracy. Read the full statement:

"Charlotte Mecklenburg Library is committed to protecting the First Amendment's guarantee of free and open access to information and ideas—a principle vital to our democracy and to each individual's search for knowledge. We seek to provide our diverse community with a comprehensive collection of materials and programs providing a wide range of knowledge and perspectives."

Driven by community, strategic planning process aims to clarify the Library's evolving role

Led by seasoned consulting firm Karen Dash Consulting, the Library has embarked on a strategic planning process to create an essential blueprint for its next decade of service. The four-phase process began in December 2023 with the firm's discovery and analysis efforts. Currently the Library is in Phase II, the community engagement phase, and is seeking feedback from all Library customers.

Consider being a part of the process by completing a survey to help the Library uncover new possibilities, evaluate current services and challenge perceived expectations. Visit cmllibrary.org/lead-the-way to take the survey and encourage your friends, family and colleagues as well. All voices are welcome – and needed!



Flight Fund grant recipients cleared for takeoff

Established by the Foundation in 2023, the Flight Fund awards Library staff with financial support up to \$2,500 for creating and expanding community activities that align with Library programming and equity priorities. Grants are evaluated by a selection committee of Library staff including Martha Yesowitch, Emily Nanney, Meryle Leonard and Reginald Villegas, and Foundation Board member Jennifer Bennett. The committee reviewed an impressive group of submissions and approved 10 projects for funding including Black Families Swimming Together at Allegra Westbrooks Regional Library, PuppetPalooza 2024 at ImaginOn, and Ramadan Cultural Exploration at four branches just to name a few.

"It's exciting to see the evolution of Flight Fund applications," shared Jennifer Bennett, "Your ideas are getting bolder, your vision for the future ... even more inspirational. Propelled by your passion and imagination, these small — and mighty — awards are growing engagement with our Libraries' diverse services, programming and support."

Library breaks ground on the system's largest branch yet

Construction of the future University City Regional Library location is now underway with an anticipated completion time in 2025. One of the most visited libraries in the system, last fiscal year the branch circulated nearly 300,000 materials and hosted over 15,000 customers in its programs. The new facility will be located less than a mile from the current facility on Waters Edge Village Drive in the new Waters Edge development along J.W. Clay Boulevard.

"This new facility has the customer in mind with generous spaces for dedicated program areas, a large community room, new and ample technology, and flexible meeting spaces, along with comfortable individual and group-size reading and study spaces," Library CEO Marcellus Turner said.

Mecklenburg County approved a \$39.6 million capital ordinance for the project in 2022, which allows the Library to purchase the land, building and various needs such as furniture, fixtures, equipment and technology necessary to open to the public.

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Living Archives goes West

Living Archives project manager Sarah Gherghel presented in March at the SXSW conference in Austin, TX, as part of a panel with John Bracken, executive director of Digital Public Library of America (DPLA), and Elaine Westbrooks, university librarian of Cornell University, on "Safeguarding Our Histories: Libraries and Inclusive Stories." The session looked at the ways in which libraries can support educators, storytellers and the public in ensuring access to information that supports an understanding of a truly inclusive and representative history.

Began in 2021, Living Archives project is gathering, preserving and sharing the stories of Mecklenburg County residents who navigated the COVID-19 virus, focusing on equity and predominantly Black, Hispanic, Asian and Indigenous stories that are often excluded from this type of work. The project is made possible by the generous support of the Duke Endowment, DPLA, North Carolina Humanities and the Library Foundation.

Library Foundation adopts new (and greener) acknowledgement processes

We value every gift made to the Library and aim to acknowledge the generosity swiftly and sincerely. With the rising costs of paper, postage and processing fees, the Foundation has revised its criteria for acknowledging some gifts. While donations less than \$250 will receive the electronic letter and receipt only, gifts of \$250 or more will still receive a mailed thank you letter and receipt as well as an electronic letter and receipt (if an email address is on file.) However, if you require a hard copy of your donation of any size, we are happy to print and mail you a copy. Reducing the amount of mailing costs for the Foundation means a lighter impact on the environment plus more dollars go toward the Library. It's a win-win.

STORY OF IMPACT

Tia and the Mayor of Midwood



"I was about to throw in the towel," Tia remembers in a particularly overwhelming time in her life.

In 2022, Tia joined Roof Above* as a nurse in their Homeful Housing Program at HillRock Estates. As she introduced herself to the tenants she would serve, she met a familiar face: her old friend James.

Nicknamed the "Mayor of Midwood," James spent 20 years living on the streets. He often passed the day at the Plaza Midwood Library, reading everything from science fiction novels to nonfiction books about history, archaeology, astronomy and anatomy. That's where he met Tia, who was studying to become a nurse.

Tia soon became overwhelmed trying to balance her nursing studies with her duties as a mother to four children. One day, she sat down at James' table. The two eventually struck up a conversation, which led to a friendship, eventually taking turns buying each other lunch from Subway. One day stands out to Tia.

"I was ready to throw in the towel," she says, "I felt so overloaded." Then James said something that inspired her to keep going.

"I looked at him and thought, 'This is why I'm doing this. It's for this population that needs good health care.'"

Years passed by, Tia graduated, and James continued to struggle with homelessness. The two lost touch until Tia started at Roof Above and knocked on James' door to introduce herself as his on-site nurse.

Just as James helped Tia persevere through her studies, now Tia is helping James get the tools he needs to monitor his blood pressure and blood sugar in a home of his own.

For Tia, James is more than just a patient. He's a friend who inspired her to keep going when she felt discouraged. She says reconnecting with James seemed like more than a mere coincidence.

"It was one of those moments when the universe lets you know you're in the exact place you're supposed to be at this moment in time."

Republished and edited with permission from Roof Above

Update: When we reached out to Roof Above for permission to reprint the story, we learned that James had passed away last year. He had been very successful in the Homeful Housing program and had strong community ties. Tia was grateful they reconnected and glad she'd been able to spend the last 18 months of his life with him.

**Roof Above's mission is to unite the community to end homelessness, one life at a time. The nonprofit was born out of the merger of Urban Ministry Center and Men's Shelter of Charlotte, two prominent organizations long recognized as community leaders in homeless services.*



FIFTH THIRD

Fifth Third Bank shifts MoLi into the next gear

Cincinnati, Ohio-based bank will supercharge the Mobile Library with much-needed upgrades



DONOR SPOTLIGHT

MoLi serves customers of all ages and literary tastes.

Fifth Third Bank has pledged \$100,000 over the next 2.5 years to sponsor MoLi, Charlotte Mecklenburg Library's Mobile Library, through the CommonSpark campaign.

The mobile unit hit the streets in January 2022 and hasn't stopped since. In its first year alone, MoLi traveled 10,000 miles, visited 512 sites, and impacted 25 different zip codes, visiting everything from senior centers, Title 1 schools, Roof Above locations, festivals, parks and more. In 2023 MoLi circulation continued to increase, and new sites were added to the roster including Nations Ford Elementary Summer Nutrition Program, Southminster Senior Living, and Pineville Lake Park.

The well-loved branch on wheels needed to expand its offerings to meet with customer requests, and Fifth Third Bank was more than happy to be a part of the Library's vision of access for all.

"The importance of the Mobile Library cannot be understated and we are thrilled to support this service provided by the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library. We believe that reducing barriers to access is crucial to meet the needs of our

communities," said Lee Fite, President, Fifth Third Bank, Carolinas Region. "In recent years, we were reminded of the importance of meeting people where they are with resources like financial education, medical services or the treasure found in books. I know it will be a point of pride for our employees to see the Fifth Third logo on the Mobile Library in our Charlotte neighborhoods."

The sponsorship will help MoLi grow its permanent collection including the addition of junior graphic novels, large print urban fiction, circulating e-readers/iPads, and Spanish-language and urban fiction Playaways (preloaded audio devices). Many visually impaired customers have taken advantage of the Playaways, some reading everything MoLi has to offer. The funding will give them more access and variety.

In addition to the expanded collection, Fifth Third Bank's generous gift will enable customers to check out circulating WiFi hotspots, receive care kits if experiencing housing insecurity, and take free vegetable seeds and free classes in areas with food insecurity.



EVENTS CALENDAR

AUTHOR TALK & BOOK LAUNCH

A Conversation with Tommy Tomlinson Tuesday, April 23 at 7 pm

In partnership with WFAE

Featuring the launch of his latest book *Dogland*.
The event is free, but registration is required.

PLANNED GIVING VIRTUAL SEMINAR

A Conversation with Dr. Judy Butler Thursday, May 9 at 12 pm

How to create an emergency digital access plan to
manage your online accounts after death



For more detailed information
about all our events, visit
foundation.cmlibrary.org/events

*Congratulations to Selena who was nominated
to the United for Libraries Board of Directors, a
division of the American Library Association.*



STOP NO. 10

ImaginOn: The Joe & Joan Martin Center Saturday, April 26

In partnership with *Día* (El día de los niños/El día de los libros, or Children's Day/Book Day), a celebration emphasizing the importance of literacy for children of all linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The event is free to all.

STOP NO. 11

Myers Park Library Sunday, May 5

STOP NO. 12

SouthPark Regional Library Sunday, June 2

Stops 11 and 12 will featured special *Book of You* events with adult programming and activities centered around expanding your world. For details and to purchase tickets, visit our *Around the World* event page.

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*ex officio

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.