



F·R·I·E·N·D·S

OF NORTH CAROLINA PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Supporting Friends of the Library Statewide

F*R*I*E*N*D*S TALK

January 2026

Dear Friends,

A NEW YEAR has begun! Happy New Year to all. Each new year holds such promise - new friends (Get it?), new experiences, new activities/projects, and new books to read, of course! New challenges face some of us, and you will read more about some of those in this edition of our newsletter.

Dorothea Benton Frank is one of my favorite authors. She has passed away, so there will be no more new books from her "pen." However, discovering old ones not read can be delightful. One showed up at our Sparta bookstore a few weeks ago, and I grabbed it! While the holidays are over, The Christmas Pearl is worth a read. Not to give too much away, it's about an old southern family and the drama that can surround holidays. If you're still in the mood, try to find a copy and give it a read. It's not even a very big/long book.

Have you heard? "Slop" has been chosen as Merriam-Webster's 2025 "Word of the Year"? Now, being a bit of a dinosaur, I learned a different definition from Webster's which reads: "digital content of low quality that is produced usually in quantity by means of artificial intelligence." However, moving into this century, that definition makes sense to me as well. I spend considerable time deleting lots of posts from my texting and email accounts that clearly qualify as "slop"! But, I am a news junkie (radio, TV, actual paper

newspapers, and electronic), so I choose to deal with it all. Other words were chosen by different sources, so I'll let you select your "favorites."

This is the start of a new week, a new month, and a new year. Let's pledge to settle our differences, disagreements, misunderstandings and move forward in a positive, supportive manner that benefits all.

I leave you with one of my favorite quotes from one of my favorite authors:

"Nothing can dim the light which shines from within." Maya Angelou

Yours in Friendship,

Joyce Speas, President





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**2026
DUES
\$35!**

JOIN US THIS YEAR

**It's time to renew!
Join as a Friends group
or as an individual...**

We hope you will join or renew your FONCPL membership! It's more important than ever for FOL's around NC to stand together as advocates and fund raisers for our libraries.

FIND THE GROUP FORM [HERE](#). FIND THE INDIVIDUAL FORM [HERE](#).

FOLLOW-UP ON MOU ISSUE

The Friends serving libraries in the Forsyth County Library System were recently presented with an MOU by the county. Several of the Friends Boards decided to contest this MOU, so they consulted an attorney who clearly articulated that the library/county cannot legally dictate or oversee the funds of a nonprofit. The library does have the right to disassociate itself from the Friends. We made both these points in last month's newsletter. The question is how much are your Friends dependent on the library for services? If they withdraw these services, can your Friends survive?

So, let's say the library and the Friends are at an impasse and that the impasse revolves around the sale of books. Let's say, hypothetically, that the Friends get the bulk of their operating funds from the sale of books. The library receives donated books for the Friends, stores the donated books, and allows the Friends to use space in the library to sell the books. The library also gives the Friends its discards to sell. The Friends conduct the sale and use the proceeds for their operations and programs. If the library won't allow any of this unless the Friends sign an MOU, both will lose out. The Friends will have to find other

methods of fundraising and the library will be stuck with dealing with the discards AND donated books. So, actually it is beneficial for both parties to find a middle ground.

What might that middle ground look like on paper? Well, the Friends could look at their book sale proceeds and their budgets over the past five years and see that they could appropriate say \$X per year to the library as a grant and stipulate in writing that the funds may not be used to supplant library funding. The funds could be earmarked for the Summer Reading Program and other public programs during the library's fiscal year. Any funding not used for that purpose by the end of the fiscal year must be reverted to the Friends. This forces the auditor to ascertain how the library spent those funds (because it was a grant) and insures that unspent funds get returned and not end up in the county's coffers.

FONCPL continues to encourage Friends to understand their rights, to have a proper legal status, to keep their bylaws updated, to understand their finances, to make financial grants to the library and stipulate in writing how those funds may be used, and to comply with the law.



A Satisfied FONCPL Member Group

"Just wanted to drop you a line to tell you our library Friends group board recently voted on a newly revised set of bylaws based on the recommendations you shared with us. We have also made other changes based on your consultation. We want to thank you again for your help!"

David Scott, President
 Friends of Rube McCray Memorial Library
 Lake Waccamaw, NC
<https://www.facebook.com/FriendsofRMML/>

Our FONCPL is happy to consult if you have questions or issues and you need help.

ALERT! ALERT! ALERT!

BANK FRAUD

One NC Friends of the Library group just recently set up an online event payment system with a software company that advertised low rates for nonprofits. It seemed like a good deal. Not very long after they did this, a **large amount of money was removed from their checking account via wire transfer**. Now, they have not been able to definitively say that there was a correlation between these two events, but it is suspicious. Had the treasurer not been frequently monitoring the checking account, it might have taken a lot longer to be noticed. They were also surprised that at the nonchalant attitude of the bank—"it happens all the time."

QR CODEs

Another thing happened this past month. One group was checking online for a free QR code generating program. One site offered a free trial period. OK, fine—that works—or so they thought. The QR code was needed for a program to be held in January, so they set up their flyer using a QR code generated on that site. After the flyer had been available for about 8 days, they got a call that the QR code has stopped working. Because the flyers had been disseminated so many places via different

partners, it was impossible to redo and republish them. They ended up having to pay a large amount to get the QR code activated again. They took a subscription for the smallest amount of time possible knowing that if they used the QR code generated on that site for a longer term use (e.g., a link on a StoryWalk board to their website) that it would no longer work after the end date of the subscription (without having to renew it).

So, we caution you to ensure that you use a truly free QR code generator. If you subscribe to a service understand that the QR code may no longer function at the end of the subscription period.

LATEST ITERATION OF EMAIL SPAM

Have you received an email from a friend or acquaintance (a name you know) saying that he or she has broken their hip? You'll note that even the email address is correct (first way to recognize spam). Don't reply to that email. Use the email address you have in your address book to reply. It is a gift card scam.

There are a number of free online email verification tools. Consider using one.

Signup Newborns at Birth for Library Card?

British authors Sir Philip Pullman, Richard Osman, and Kat Mosse are backing a library card issued at birth that would boost literacy. They suggest that the card be linked directly to birth registration, so library cards would be waiting for newborns at their local library. At present, parents have to sign their kids up online and bring proof of address or an ID to a library.

"Giving library cards to babies as part of new parent packages is a growing trend, championed by authors and literacy groups, to promote early reading, combat parent isolation, and integrate families into community support, often distributed via hospitals or health visitors with a kit including books and info on early literacy benefits, creating a special "first experience" to foster lifelong reading habits and build social connections for parents.

How it Works & Why it's Done

- **Early Literacy & Bonding:** Libraries provide cards for newborns (often through parent application) to encourage reading aloud from birth, boosting vocabulary, listening skills, and parent-child bonding.
- **Combating Isolation:** These programs connect new parents with library resources, classes, and other families, addressing social isolation, say proponents.
- **Integrated Services:** The idea, supported by groups like United for Libraries, is to link library services with health visitors, midwives, and hospital discharge programs.
- **"Rite of Passage":** Getting a first library card becomes a memorable event, creating a positive association with the library and reading from infancy.

Examples & Implementations

- **Hospital Partnerships:** Programs like Gail Borden Public Library's offer cards at hospitals, with special gifts and photo ops for parents.
- **Doorstep Delivery:** Some libraries send kits to new parents via local health services or even utility bills, offering personalized book selections.

Benefits for Families

- **Access to Resources:** Immediate access to books, digital resources, and early learning programs.
- **Community Connection:** Fosters a sense of belonging and provides a network for parents.
- **Support System:** Positions libraries as vital community hubs for new families.

Key Takeaway

It's a proactive, cost-effective way to build early literacy and support young families, turning babies into card-carrying library members from day one."

United for Libraries' Books for Babies is one such movement. "Organizations such as Friends of the Library groups, Women's Clubs, and Junior Leagues purchase Books for Babies packets. These fully assembled packets feature a board book for baby, baby's first library card, and a variety of brochures with reading tips and early literacy information from nationally-recognized educational organizations. Groups often supplement the packets with information about local resources, including library locations and contact information as well as details about lapsit and preschool storyhours." Do check it out.

NC Advocacy—Randolph County reported by Karen Robbins

As you read this story about the Library Board of Trustees in Randolph County, please think about your own board. Be sure to stand with them as they continue to make tough decisions regarding the library. They are advocates for your library. Attend their meetings to let them know you are there for support if needed. Attend county commissioner meetings in support of the library. Smiling library FOL members can work wonders. Keep a positive focus on all the good trustees and commissioners can do for libraries, budgets, and recognition. Remember that trustees are volunteers. They deserve our respect and support. But also be ready to stand up for the freedom to read and the first amendment rights of all people to use the library and find books they need.

The Randolph County Public Library decided, by a vote of 5 to 2 to keep a book in the children's section after it was challenged by a local grandmother. (October)

The book is Call Me Max and explores a young boy trying to understand his identity. It is the only book of 20,000 on the topic.

More people attended the library board meeting than usual when the book and its placement were up for discussion. The people who spoke were divided in their opinion on how the book should be shelved. Some felt it was simply wrong to have it in the children's section. Others said that they do not have to check it out, and that parents should monitor their children's reading, without telling others what they can or cannot read.

The library board stated that relocating the book was a "slippery slope".

(Randolph County is situated just south of Greensboro, with Ashboro as a central city

within the county.)

The decision to keep the book, Call Me Max, in the children's section of the library sparked residents to attend the county commissioners December meeting. Most community members spoke in support of the trustees' decision. However, Commissioner Lester Rivenbark said that the issue wasn't censorship or removing the book altogether, but where it should be shelved "appropriately."

Tami Hinshaw, Library Board of Trustee member, said she thought that restricting access was censorship. She thought that she might be dismissed for her vote and her opinion, but she wanted to stand up for the children in the county. She was right.

In a divided decision, Randolph county commissioners voted 3-2 to remove all the Library Board of Trustees, dissolving the Board, which had recently voted to keep Call Me Max, a book about a transgender boy, in the children's section. (December)

The meeting was attended by around 200 people, weighing in on both sides of the issue. After the public comments, the commissioners voted to dissolve the Library Board of Trustees 3-2. One of the dissenting votes came from Commissioner Hope Haywood. She said that she believes that the board will be reestablished with new guidelines, but wished they had been in place before dismissing the trustees.

Reactions have been varied. The culture conflicts continue. Tami Fitzgerald, head of North Carolina Values Coalition, a conservative group focused on religious freedom, drew media attention to the library board's decision. She argued the book "teaches children that their parents may be wrong about their gender, and that their gender is actually whatever they feel it is." (Continued on p.7)

NC Advocacy—Randolph County reported by Karen Robbins (cont'd)

However, the book's author, Kyle Lukoff, a trans man, said, "If there are people in power who simply believe trans people don't belong in their communities or the world at large, they will simply twist those policies to try and make it a reality."

The FONCPL has been in touch with the Friends of the Randolph Public Libraries. The situation is delicate. This is a time when the Friends of the North Carolina Libraries can help local FOLs remain vigilant, informed, and ready to support their libraries and trustees.

Sources:

Randolph commissioners dismiss entire library board after book controversy. 88.5 WFDD - Public Radio For The Piedmont | By Amy Diaz. Published December 9, 2025 at 5:07 PM EST

Randolph commissioners to hold public hearing on the future of the library board 88.5 WFDD - Public Radio For The Piedmont | By Amy Diaz. Published December 5, 2025 at 5:21 PM EST

Dozens speak at Randolph library meeting on children's book about transgender boy. 88.5 WFDD - Public Radio For The Piedmont | By Amy Diaz. Published October 10, 2025 at 4:58 PM EDT

Reading tips for 2026

One way to start is to consider these questions: What was the most recent book you read, series that you streamed, or movie that you really enjoyed? What genres or themes did they have in common? What authors do you like? Many libraries offer a service called [Novelist](#) which suggests "read-a-likes" for various books and authors. If you click on that link you will be taken to a page. Type in your library's location to see if they provide the service. There are 100 locations in NC according to their website.

North Carolina Ousts Entire Library Board Over Book With Trans Kid. By Malcolm Ferguson, December 16, 2025



Next to create a habit that sticks, start by scheduling reading into your day. Avoid distractions by keeping phones, tablets, and computers out of sight. Most benefit from a quiet setting, but some prefer to host a silent book club—where people read their own books together in coffee shops and libraries. Setting a reading goal works for some.

Regardless—read more in 2026!

AWARD-WINNING NOVELS OF 2025

Below is the list of the winners of the biggest fiction prizes of 2025. To read more and for a list of finalists for the prize, [click here](#).

Book	Author	Name of Prize
“James”	Percival Everett	Pulitzer Prize—Fiction
“The True Story of Raja the Gullible (and His Mother)”	Rabih Alameddine	National Book Award
“Flesh”	David Szalay	Booker Prize
“Heart Lamp”	Banu Mushtaq	International Booker Prize
“My Friends”	Hisham Matar	National Book Critics Circle Award
“The Slip”	Lucas Schaefer	Kirkus Prize
“The Safekeep”	Der Wouden	Women’s Prize for Fiction
“Small Rain”	Garth Greenwell	Pen/Faulkner Award
“James”	Percival Everett	Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Fiction
“The Adversary”	Michael Crummey	International Dublin Literary Award
“Natch”	Darrell Kinsey	Center for Fiction First Novel Prize
“Cinema Love”	Jiaming Tang	Los Angeles Times Book Prize—Art Seidenbaum Award for First Fiction
“Say Hello to my Little Friend”	Jennine Capo Crucet	Los Angeles Times Book Prize—Fiction
“The In Crowd”	Charlotte Vassell	Edgar Award
“Someone You Can Build a Nest In”	John Wiswell	Nebula Award
“The Tainted Cup”	Robert Jackson Bennett	Hugo Award
“The Haunting of Velkwood”	Gwendolyn Kiste	Bram Stoker Award
“Say Hello to my Little Friend”	Jennine Capo Crucet	Joyce Carol Oates Literary Prize
“The Horse”	Willy Vlautin	Joyce Carol Oates Literary Prize
“Pick a Color”	Souvankham Thammavongsa	



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Helping Friends Build Resilience

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CALENDAR

All material for the newsletter is due to editor
Judy Hills by the 25th of each month.

[Click here](#) for the 2026 Calendar of National
Events—use these to plan your activities.

FONCPL Board Zoom Meetings 10 AM quarterly

Here are a few dates of note:

JANUARY

- 1/1 New Year's Day
- 1/2 National Science Fiction Day
- 1/3 J.R.R. Tolkien Birthday
- 1/4 Trivia Day
- 1/5 National Bird Day
- 1/7 Zora Neale Hurston Birthday
- 1/8 Stephen Hawking Birthday
- 1/9 Law Enforcement Appreciation Day
- 1/14 Dress up your pet day
- 1/15 national Hat Day
- 1/19 National Popcorn day
- 1/19 Martin Luther King Jr. Day
- 1/19 Civil Rights Day
- 1/21 Squirrel Appreciation Day
- 1/23 National Pie Day
- 1/24 Belly Laugh Day
- 1/24 National Compliment Day
- 1/27 International Holocaust Remembrance Day
- 1/28 National Lego Day
- 1/29 National Puzzle Day
- 1/29 Curmudgeons Day
- 1/31 National Seed Swap Day

FEBRUARY

- 2/1 National Freedom Day
- 2/2 Groundhog Day
- 2/3 US Feed the Birds Day
- 2/4 National Girls and Women in Sports Day
- 2/7 Take your Child to the library day
- 2/8 National Boy Scout Day
- 2/8 National kite flying day
- 2/8 Super Bowl Sporting Event