



# 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

May 2026

Dear Friends,

In dreams  
and in awakening---  
the color of the iris

Shushiki

Haiku, as you may know, is a form of Japanese poetry. So much is said in so few words. This haiku felt special to me this month as the iris blooming along my driveway are spectacular! After the late cold snaps and snows this spring, I was afraid the iris would not appear or not appear in abundance. I shouldn't have worried. I wish you could see them.

Are you shaking off the winter blahs and looking forward to fun plans for your Friends group? Our Friends group has several events that are keeping us busy. I'm happy to report that our StoryWalk may actually get installed this year. The placements of the separate stands have been marked along the walkway around the children's playground in our downtown park. Our library director is working on the book to inaugurate the Storywalk. We can't wait! Another big event for our Friends group is a whole-store half-price sale at our Books 'N Friends Bookstore. It will take place on Friday and Saturday, May 1 and 2. Come see us. We're right on Main Street in Sparta. Store hours are 10:00 - 4:00 (or a little later). This is also the weekend of our Fried Apple Pie Festival at our fairgrounds. In my hum-

ble opinion, I think we help each other.... I know we would love to see you.

I am excited to have received an invitation to visit our Booneville Chapter later this month. We've been working on this visit for some time and decided to wait until the weather was more unlikely to interfere with our chosen date. Judy has done a number of visits during her tenure as Board President, but this will be my first.

As usual, Judy Hills (newsletter editor), with the help of some of your board members, has prepared a newsletter full of important and helpful information for Friends groups and members. You will find good "nuts and bolts" ideas to strengthen and support your organization. Let us know if you have other needs that we might be able to address for the good of all our chapters and members. You are why we exist, and we work to support you and your organization.

We especially appreciate hearing from the Camden County Friends and the Mount Pleasant Friends regarding their use of the Challenge grants FONCPL awarded in 2025. Please consider applying for these grants in 2026.

Yours in Friendship,

*Joyce Speas, President*

## Friends Group Using AI by Cindy Shipley

A **Friends of a Public Library** group can get a lot of practical value using AI tools—especially for outreach, fundraising, and operations. The key is to focus on tools that save volunteer time, expand community impact and strengthen the mission. The key is using AI as a **time-saving assistant** — letting it handle drafting, research, and organization so your volunteers can focus on the human side of library advocacy and community building.

Keep in mind that although AI is useful, it shouldn't run everything. Check for accuracy, always review outputs as AI can make mistakes. Never input sensitive patron data. Keep your tone in an authentic voice.

- **For Outreach and Marketing**, AI can help you consistently promote library programs without burning out volunteers. Draft social media posts, newsletters, and flyers using tools like ChatGPT or Canva; Generate event descriptions for book sales, author talks, or children's programs and rewrite announcements in different tones (formal, fun, kid-friendly).
- **For Fundraising Support**, AI can make fundraising efforts more professional and persuasive. Draft donation letters and grant applications; brainstorm fundraising event ideas tailored to your specific community and analyze past campaigns to suggest improvements. AI can create messaging for different audiences such as parents, retirees and local businesses.
- **For Program Planning**, AI can help generate ideas and structure events by suggesting themes for reading programs or seasonal events; creating discussion questions for book clubs and building-schedules or activity plans for children's programs. For a Summer Reading Theme, AI can generate weekly activities, crafts and book lists.
- **For Volunteer Coordination**, AI can help manage volunteers by writing recruitment posts, onboarding guides and training materials and handbooks; creating shift schedules or sign-up sheets and drafting thank-you messages and recognition posts.
- **For Administrative Tasks**, AI is the most helpful at repetitive writing and organization. Use AI tools to summarize meeting notes; create or improve bylaws and policy updates; organize and clean up membership databases and creating templates for reports and emails.
- **For Book Sales**, AI can generate item descriptions for online sales (eBay, AbeBooks, etc.); research book values to help with pricing and write promotional content for used book sales.
- **For Advocacy & Comm. Engagement**, AI tools can summarize library usage data into compelling talking points for city councils or boards; draft op-eds and letters to elected officials supporting library funding and research best practices from Friends groups elsewhere.



## Using Claude.ai and the prompt: "How to market a Friends of the Library Book Sale Using AI Tools" by Cindy Shipley

Answer: Here's a comprehensive guide to marketing a Friends of the Library Book Sale using AI tools:

### Planning the Campaign

#### Use AI to build your marketing plan

- Ask Claude to create a full promotional timeline (6-8 weeks out)
- Generate a checklist of all marketing tasks and assign them to volunteers
- Brainstorm themes that make your sale feel like an event ("Summer Reading Kick-off," "Bookworm Bonanza")

### Writing & Content Creation

#### Social Media

- Generate a full series of posts for Facebook, Instagram, and Nextdoor — covering countdown posts, category spotlights ("We have a HUGE mystery section!"), and day-of reminders
- Ask AI to write posts in different tones (fun/casual vs. informative)
- Create hashtag suggestions relevant to your community

#### Email Campaigns

- Draft a sequence of emails: save-the-date, one-week reminder, last-chance, and thank-you
- Personalize appeals to different audiences (members vs. general public)
- Write subject lines optimized for open rates
- **Press & Community Outreach**
- Generate a press release for local newspapers and community blogs
- Write a pitch email to local radio stations or podcasts
- Draft a letter to schools, book clubs, and community organizations

### Visual Content

- AI Image & Design Tools
- Use Canva's AI features to create eye-catching flyers and social media graphics
- Use Adobe Firefly or Microsoft Designer to generate custom artwork
- Ask AI to suggest color schemes and layouts that feel welcoming and bookish

### Targeted Outreach

- Know your audiences — AI can help you write for each one
- Book lovers & collectors —highlight rare finds, specialty sections
- Families—emphasize children's books, low prices, fun atmosphere
- Teachers & educators—bulk pricing, classroom sets
- Budget shoppers —stress the incredible value and bargain prices
- Donors —remind them their purchases support the library

### During the Sale

- Use AI to write table and section signs that are inviting and descriptive
- Generate volunteer talking points so your team can confidently answer questions
- Draft social media live updates to post the day of ("Just restocked the cook book section!")

### After the Sale

- Ask AI to write a thank-you post for social media and email
- Generate a recap report template to document what sold, revenue raised, and lessons learned
- Draft thank-you notes to sponsors, donors, and volunteers.

## Continued from previous page

### Best AI Tools to Use

Tool	Best For
Claude	Writing, planning, brainstorming
ChatGPT	Content drafts, email sequences
Canva AI	Flyers, graphics, social images
Mailchimp + AI	Email campaigns
Buffer or Hootsuite	Scheduling social posts
Google Gemini	Research, summarizing data

The biggest win is speed — what might take a volunteer committee weeks to produce, AI can help draft in hours, freeing your team to focus on logistics and community connection.



### 2026 Booker Prize Shortlist

The shortlist of six books was chosen by the 2026 judging panel, chaired by award-winning author [Natasha Brown](#).

The selection celebrates the best works of long-form fiction or collections of short stories translated into English and published in the UK and/or Ireland between 1 May 2025 and 30 April 2026. The longlist of 13 books was announced on 24 February 2026 and was selected by the panel from 128 books submitted by publishers. The winning book will be announced on Tuesday, 19 May 2026 at a ceremony at Tate Modern in London.



The 2026 [International Booker Prize](#) winner announcement is being streamed live. The ceremony, held on Tuesday, 19 May 2026, at the Tate Modern in London, will be broadcast via the Booker Prizes' social media channels and website, including their YouTube channel, as indicated by the [Booker Prizes](#) announcement.

- **Event:** International Booker Prize 2026 Winner Ceremony
- **Date:** Tuesday, 19 May 2026
- **Where to watch:** [Booker Prizes YouTube](#) and social media channels.

**HERE IS A GREAT IDEA FOR A LAST MINUTE EVENT. BRING YOUR FRIENDS TOGETHER AND WATCH THE AWARDING OF THE BOOKER PRIZE ON MAY 19, 2026!**

## Advocacy Update for May by Karen Robbins

It is important to be the best advocates for our library and freedom to read that we can. Rethinking advocacy from time to time will help reset our priorities. Clear priorities are important now more than ever.

What is the purpose/process of advocacy? San Jose State University School of Information defines advocacy like this:

"Library advocacy is the process of influencing library users, stakeholders, and policy-makers to support libraries at the local, regional, state, and national levels. This can be done through doing outreach, facilitating meetings with leaders and managers, and spreading awareness about these causes"

—SJSU Web <https://ischool.sjsu.edu/library-advocacy>

We may see advocacy as a single form of communicating about our libraries (FB, newsletters, or posters for example). But if you

reread the definition above, we should strive to reach as many users, stakeholders, and policy makers as we can. Each of these community members is unique in relationship to the library and should be met with that in mind. Identifying who to reach is crucial to being successful in our advocacy outreach.

Our ability to advocate within our community influences what support, resources, and relevant materials, books, and technology are available for everyone in the community. Our advocacy can help libraries avoid budget cuts, stand up against limiting, censoring or banning materials or books, contribute or raise funds to upgrade out-dated technology, foster community engagement, and encourage partnerships with other groups within the community. **Without strong advocates, the community may stop turning to the library for services that should be available, free to everyone.**

## We Want Your Stories by Karen Robbins

This month I am asking for FOL's around the state to share stories about their libraries. Advocacy includes sharing and publicizing great things that are going on—ways the Friends are contributing, how the FOL has expanded services at their branch, new materials that are being used with success, as well as alerts about potential trouble, such as issues with censorship or restructuring the library board.

So, readers, please email me, Karen Robbins, at [robbinska31@gmail.com](mailto:robbinska31@gmail.com) with any stories you'd like to share about your FOL, your librarians, and your reading community. Please keep your replies short enough they can be printed in our June newsletter.

Let's share our unique news/stories from around the state. Pictures too! Maybe we can inspire others and grow our state organization which will strengthen us all.



## Quick Advocacy Issues Update by Karen Robbins

HR 7661, a partisan bill about challenging or banning books as of now has passed the committee stage and is awaiting floor action in the House. Called the "Stop the Sexualization of Children Act," it contains vague language that prohibits federal funding programs or activities or purchases of literature for children under 18, including "sexually oriented materials" and "for other purposes." Notice the vague language which could lead to misuse of funding denials by individual states. Censoring books and materials will be easier. Remember that libraries do not have obscene materials. Please call the Capital switchboard: 202-224-3121 to ask your member of Congress to oppose this bill.

IMLS funding got a break this year, as the Trump administration dropped its appeal to defund the IMLS. However, the proposed budget for 2027 defunds IMLS entirely. There are still court cases to be heard, but library supporters should still contact Congress to protect the IMLS.

Book banning in public schools in states like Texas and Florida has led to fewer books by women, people of color, and with gender identi-

ty themes being purchased. These states are large enough that they influence what publishers publish. Books considered inappropriate or obscene in Texas or Florida affect the publishers, and thus many titles that would have been published and available are not longer getting published. Book ban lists hurt readers in every state as publishers try to negotiate the current political climate.

**Censorship Numbers.** ALA documented 4,235 unique titles challenged in 2025, as well as 713 attempts to censor library materials and services, 487 of which targeted books. Of the unique titles challenged in 2025, 1,671 (39%) represent the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ people and people of color. 92% of all book challenges were initiated by pressure groups, government officials and decision makers, up from 72% in 2024. ALA documented 5,668 books banned from libraries (66% of the total challenged) in 2025. An additional 920 books were censored through access restrictions such as relocation or requiring parental permission.

**Did you know that according to the American Library Association, "In 2025, 92 percent of all book challenges were initiated by pressure groups, government officials and decision makers, up from 72 percent in 2024. Less than 3 percent of challenges originated from individual parents."**

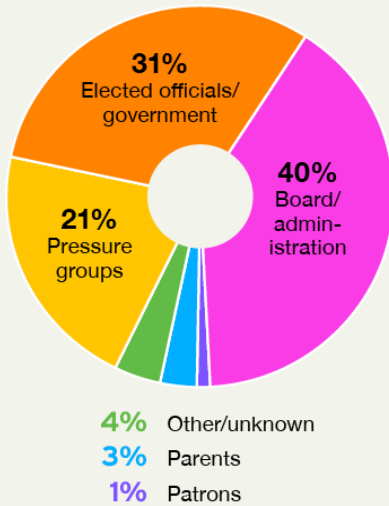
# CENSORSHIP BY THE NUMBERS

In 2025, the American Library Association documented the second highest level of book censorship attempts ever and the continuation of an organized effort to systematically suppress voices and ideas that began in 2021. Last year, **4,235 unique titles** were challenged, only five titles short of the highest number ever documented by ALA and significantly exceeding the annual average of 273 unique titles over the period from 2001–2020.

*LEARN MORE AT ALA.ORG/BBOOKS*

## WHO CHALLENGES BOOKS

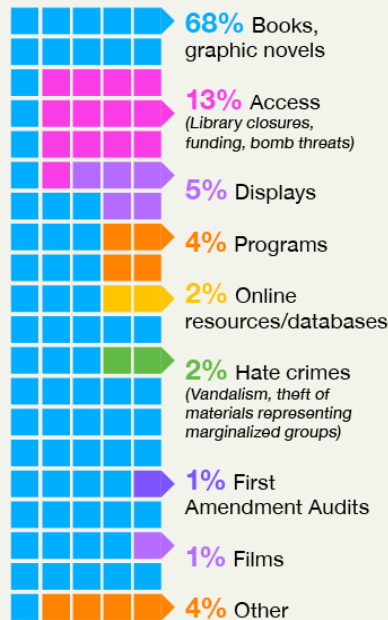
Nearly **92% of censorship attempts** in 2025 were initiated by pressure groups and decision makers swayed by them. This marks a 20-point increase over 2024.



Statistics based on 8,596 total titles targeted for censorship.

## BOOKS AND BEYOND

ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom tracked **713 distinct censorship incidents** in 2025. Here's the breakdown:



## WHERE CHALLENGES HAPPEN



**51%**  
Public libraries



**37%**  
School libraries



**8%**  
School curricula

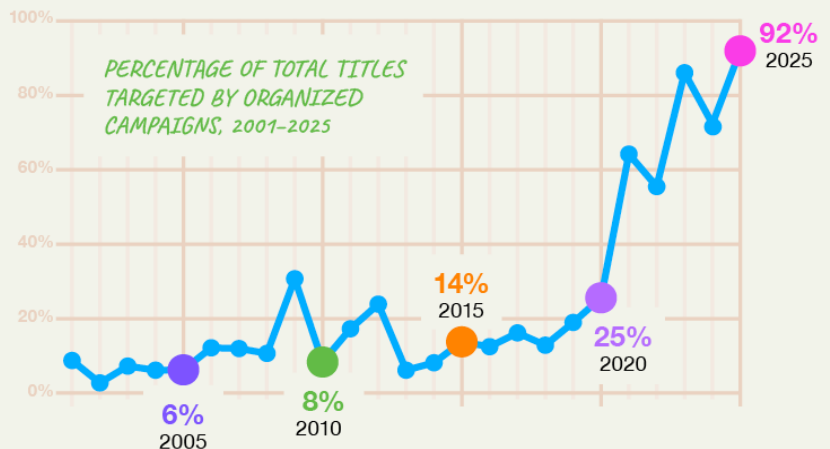


**3%**  
Higher education

Statistics based on 696 incidents with known locations and include challenges to all materials and services. About 1% of censorship attempts took place in other locations.

## CENSORSHIP TRENDS

The majority of library censorship remains tied to organized campaigns. Pressure groups and the decision makers they influenced targeted **7,884 total titles** in 2025. From 2001–2020, this constituency tried to remove an average of 46 titles per year. From 2021–2025, they targeted an average of 5,238 total titles annually.



## NC Advocacy Update by Karen Robbins

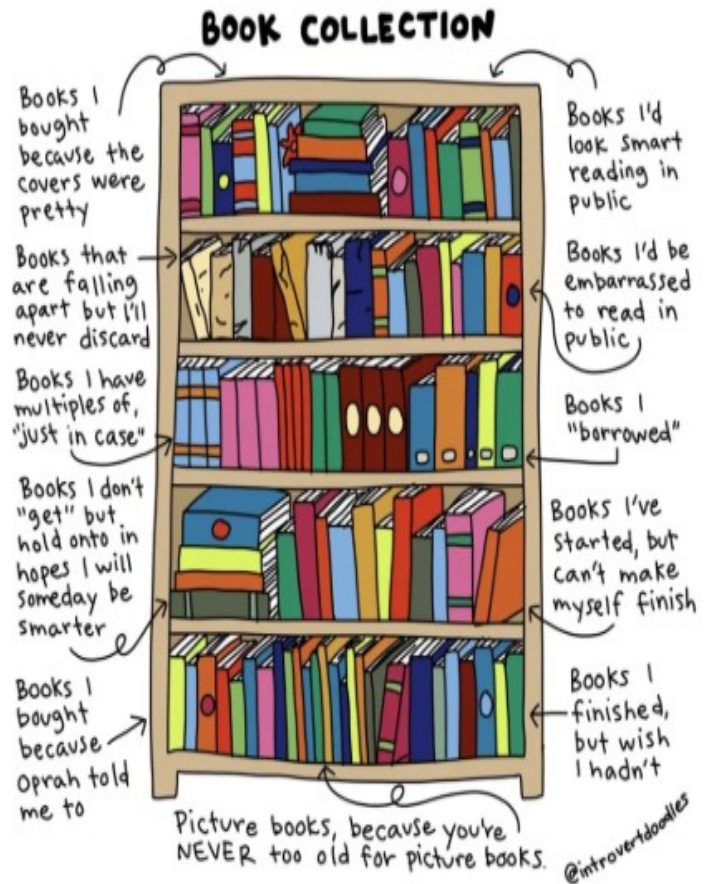
In North Carolina, according to Ahmed Jallow of the NC Newline, NC republicans still propose banning books and withholding pay over the "Parents Bill of Rights." House Bill 1043 bill was introduced Thursday, April 23, 2026, which threatens to withhold salaries from school district personnel who do not comply with the "Parents Bill of Rights."

The battle over this issue in Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools is ongoing. Both the superintendent and the library director were present at the 3 hour meeting. The bill, called "The Curriculum Honesty, Compliance, and Child Safety Act" would allow the NC Department of Public Instruction and the state auditor to investigate districts and penalize those they find in noncompliance, withholding salaries or state funding, or imposing fines.

Republican lawmakers say that library books are part of the curriculum. The library director, Al McArthur, said they are optional reading. According to McArthur, "Parents can have conversations with their school librarians... to ensure that whatever title... they disagree with is withheld from their child."

Superintendent Rodney Trice opines that the books under attack, especially LGBTQ books, are needed to support the diverse learning community. Democratic lawmakers called the bill a distraction from issues such as the state budget and teacher pay. They also stated their commitment is to the First Amendment where certain ideas or minorities are not singled out or ignored.

## Camden County Friends: Great Use of Challenge Grant



## How Much Money Can a 501(c)(3) Have in a Bank?

This is an AI generated overview on this topic.

There is no legal limit on the amount of money a 501(c)(3) nonprofit can have in the bank. Nonprofits are encouraged to hold financial reserves for sustainability, with best practices suggesting 3-6 months of operating expenses, although having enough to cover one year is acceptable.

### Key Considerations for Large Bank Balances:

- **Mission Alignment:** Excess funds must be used to advance the nonprofit's exempt purpose. Hoarding cash without a plan can raise concerns from donors and regulators.
- **FDIC Insurance:** Money exceeding \$250,000 in one bank should be managed via mechanisms like CDARS to ensure full insurance coverage.
- **Reputation:** Excessively high reserves may cause donors to question the need for further donations
- **Private Foundation Difference:** While public charities have high flexibility, private foundations face stricter rules on accumulating income.

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Those Friends "hoarding cash" are especially at risk of libraries and their governing entities wanting to access that money. "Because we might need it" is hardly a plan. This really is a discussion your Board needs to have if you are sitting on excess cash—and only you can decide what is excess. What are your operating expenses? What's your budget for the year to manage your organization and its projects and programs? Where does your money come from? As mentioned above, it is hard to justify raising dues, asking for cash donations, or holding fundraisers when you are sitting on a lot of cash.

Money sitting in either a checking or savings account is not earning any interest to speak of. If you have some cash and you want to grow it to say use for a future library renovation or special project, here are some AI suggestions for investing:

Nonprofits can grow funds by investing excess cash in low-risk vehicles like Treasury Bills ( returns), Certificates of Deposit (CDs), or money market mutual funds. Long-term growth options include establishing endowments or agency funds at community foundations, investing in diversified portfolios (stocks/bonds), and, for small organizations, high-yield savings accounts.

### Key Options to Grow Funds:

#### **Cash Reserves & Short-Term Investments:**

- **Treasury Bills (T-Bills):** Offer safe, short-term (under one year) returns.
- **Certificates of Deposit (CDs):** Provide fixed-rate, FDIC-insured returns.
- **High-Yield Money Market Funds:** Increase yield on operational cash.

#### **Long-Term Growth & Endowment Strategies:**

- **Agency Funds (Community Foundations):** Investing assets with local foundations provides professional management and pooling opportunities.
- **Endowments:** Creating restricted, long-term funds to build, preserving the principal and using interest for mission activities.
- **Diversified Investment Portfolios:** Investing in stocks (equities) for appreciation and bonds for stability.

Continued on next page

## How Much Money Can a 501(c)(3) Have in a Bank? (continued)

### Alternative Revenue Growth:

- Corporate Sponsorships: Engaging businesses for event or initiative funding.
- Grants: Utilizing databases like GrantWatch or AI tools like Zeffy to find grants.
- Merchandise Sales/Affiliate Marketing: Generating earned income.

### Investment Best Practices:

- Investment Policy Statement (IPS): The board should define investment objectives, risk tolerance, and liquidity needs.
- Professional Advice: Working with nonprofit-focused advisors (e.g., Infinite Giving).

Before investing, the Board of Directors must develop an investment policy that considers the organization's risk tolerance and liquidity needs.

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"A diverse funding portfolio ensures that your Friends can weather economic shifts, respond to urgent needs, and plan confidently for the future.

"If your fundraising strategy depends too heavily on one or two revenue streams, like annual events or grants, it's time to spread your wings. Diversification doesn't mean doing everything at once. It means choosing the right mix that aligns with your mission, capacity, and donor base." [Click here](#) to read 43 ways to diversify your funding sources.

## Top 15 Topics in Library Services for 2026 according to LibLime

"Libraries in 2026 are facing extraordinary challenges and opportunities. From battles over censorship and federal funding to the integration of artificial intelligence into daily operations, the profession is being reshaped from multiple directions. The following fifteen topics represent the most pressing and consequential issues defining library services this year."

1. Artificial Intelligence Integration
2. Intellectual Freedom and Book Challenges
3. IMLS Funding and Federal Advocacy
4. Digital Equity and the Homework Gap
5. Cybersecurity Threats
6. Web Accessibility Compliance
7. AI-Generated Content in Collections
8. Collection Pressures and Supply Chain Disruption

9. Makerspaces and Creative Technology Spaces
10. AI Policy Development and Staff Training
11. Workforce Development and Community Programming
12. Patron Privacy and Data Security
13. Emerging Technology in Library Systems
14. Serving Aging and Diverse Populations
15. Federal Advocacy and the Future of Library Funding

[Click here](#) to read the details on each of these 15 challenges.

## 2025 Challenge Grant Recipient Report by Amber Pope

I am Amber Pope, the Chair of the Mt. Pleasant Literary Festival and a member of the Friends of the Mt. Pleasant Library Board in Mt. Pleasant, NC. We were thrilled to be a recipient of the 2025 Challenge Grant and I wanted to share a report on our wonderful festival that you helped make possible!

The Mt. Pleasant Literary Festival Chapter 2 was a resounding success!

The Friends of the Mt. Pleasant Library proudly presented the Mt. Pleasant Literary Festival: Chapter 2: The Story Unfolds on March 19-21, 2026—a 3-day celebration of books, authors, and the literary arts, dedicated to fostering a love of reading in all ages. The Friends of the Mt. Pleasant Library are grateful to be 2025 recipients of a Friends of NC Public Libraries Challenge Grant, which helped make the festival possible.

From preschoolers to adults, the #MPLITFEST showcased authors and programming for everyone. *New York Times* bestselling author Meagan Church kicked off the festival, while *New York Times* bestselling author Kate Quinn captivated audiences on Friday night. Saturday evening culminated with *New York Times* bestselling and award-winning southern noir author S.A. Cosby delivering the keynote and closing the festival.

In between, we hosted drawing workshops with graphic novelist Brian Anderson and 2 time Eisner award-winning Hope Larson; fun, interactive storytimes with children's authors Ashley Belote, Maya Myers, and Derick Wilder; homeschool and elementary age STEM-focused programs with Annette Whipple; a writing workshop intensive for aspiring authors with Cathy Pickens; and immersive tales from master storyteller Donna Washington. Novelist Tita Ramirez and mystery writer Caleb Wygal shared their journeys as writers, and *New York Times* bestselling sci-fi and fantasy author Beth Revis gave an author talk. *New York Times* bestselling author and journalist Valerie Bauerlein held a Q & A regarding her work investigating the Murdaugh murders in SC, while prize-winning historian and professor David Goldfield shared details of his upcoming book.

Over the three days, nearly 800 people stepped through our library doors, and the energy and excitement was palpable. The Mt. Pleasant Literary Festival continues to shine a light on the wonderful resources at the Mt. Pleasant Library. Our branch manager reports that adult program attendance has increased as a direct result of the festival, and that patrons feel more comfortable using the online calendar and registration system because of their experience with the fest. Our reputation for excellence continues to grow, with regional draw across the state and beyond. We even had an out-of-town bookclub book all the rooms at the local bed and breakfast in order to attend our events!

The Mt. Pleasant Literary Festival is a free event, made possible through generous donations from sponsors, individuals, and fundraising. This project is also supported by a grant from the Grassroots Arts Program of the North Carolina Arts Council, a state agency, and the Cabarrus Arts Council. We are thankful to all our wonderful supporters who share our vision to ensure that the MPLITFEST, like the library itself, is free and open to all. To find out more, visit our website: [www.mpfol.org](http://www.mpfol.org)

The Friends of the Mt. Pleasant Library present

**Mt. Pleasant Literary Festival**

March 19-21, 2026  
Chapter 2: The Story Unfolds

**MEAGAN CHURCH • KATE QUINN • S.A. COSBY**  
NY Times Bestselling Author of *The Mad Wife*    NY Times Bestselling Author of *The Briar Club*    NY Times Bestselling Author of *King of Ashes*

**BETH REVIS • VALERIE BAUERLEIN • HOPE LARSON**

**DAVID GOLDFIELD • DONNA WASHINGTON**

**CALEB WYGAL • CATHY PICKENS • TITA RAMIREZ**

**BRIAN ANDERSON • ASHLEY BELOTE • MAYA MYERS**

**ANNETTE WHIPPLE • DERICK WILDER**

**FONCPL 2026 Challenge Grant Applications due September 15, 2026.**

**[Click here](#) to apply.**



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Public Libraries**

**Helping Friends Build Resilience**

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**Functional Roles**

**Webmaster--Lyn Marsh**

**Newsletter Editor--Judy Hills**

**Advocacy Coordinator—Karen Robbins**

**Membership Coordinator—Vacant**

**Contact Information**

**Tim Como**

**104 Mooreland Dr NE**

**Conover, NC 28613**

**828.446.9472**

**[826mechanic@gmail.com](mailto:826mechanic@gmail.com)**

**<https://foncpl.org/>**

## **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:**

**May**

5/1 Law Day

5/1 May Day

5/1 Mother Goose Day

5/2 International Harry Potter Day

5/2 Kentucky Derby

5/3 National Paranormal Day

5/4 Star Wars Day (May the 4th be with you)

5/5 Cinco de Mayo

5/6 National Nurses Day

5/6 National Teachers' Day

5/7 National Day of Prayer

5/8 Military Spouse Appreciation Day

5/10 Mother's Day

5/12 Limerick Day (Edward Lear, the Limerick)

5/15 Peace Officers Memorial Day

5/16 Armed Forces Day

5/21 World Day for Cultural Diversity

5/22 National Maritime Day

5/24 National Scavenger Hunt Day

5/25 National Wine Day

5/25 National Missing Children's Day

5/25 Memorial Day

5/30 National Creativity Day

5/31 National Smile Day