



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

September 2026

Dear Friends,

This column has been started and restarted about a dozen times. The reason is a decision regarding sharing or not sharing a traumatic event in my hometown of Sparta. You may have heard about it anyway, so let me tell you the good and bad news. There was a terrible building fire on Main Street in Sparta just two doors down from our Books 'N Friends bookstore which scared me to death - almost. I drove to town early the next morning to see what I could see after a call from our library director that ended with both of us in tears about what might happen to our residents, friends, and business owners - AND our Books 'N Friends bookstore just two doors from the main fire. Even smoke damage would be devastating to books. The fire was contained in one building that held several businesses and apartments. The restaurant next door to the main fire did get some roof and water damage. Coming in the backdoor of the bookstore, holding my breath, turned out to be a wonderful surprise - NO DAMAGE! NO SMOKEY SMELL! Everything was just as we had left it on Saturday. Whew! The firewalls that were installed after the last big Main Street fire did their jobs! After several closed days, all businesses and the bookstore have been given permission to reopen - except the restaurant (of course). That will take some time and work, but they will be back.

I am so impressed with the quality of articles this issue (and all from previous editions, too) contains. Please take note of the one by Karen Robbins (your Board Secretary) on page 6 regarding advocating for your library outside of attending the variety of programs they offer. None of the ideas described by Karen are so time-consuming that extra planning would be required to perform. So, try them out!

Also, please take note of the invitations by Karen Schrader to participate in our grant and/or recognition programs. We want to celebrate you, your outstanding members, and help you with other activities or programs. The process for each is relatively easy, so don't be intimidated.

Now to the September and October events Judy has listed on the last page. One of my favorites is Roald Dahl Day on September 13! I have a collection of his children's books that will probably get donated to our bookstore; but I'm not ready to part with them yet.... Even better is World Gratitude Day on September 21st. We could all use more of that and should express more of that.

Yours in Friendship,

Joyce Speas, President

2026 FONCPL CHALLENGE GRANT

TIME TO THINK BIG! What has your Friends group wanted to implement but lacked the funding to make it happen?

FONCPL Challenge Grants for up to \$1,000 are now available. Apply on or before September 15th. If you are not ready to apply this year, begin planning now for next year.

All current 2026 FONCPL members are eligible to submit grant applications.

FONCPL welcomes applications that demonstrate the following:

- An innovative and creative project or program proposal.
- Strong potential for achieving the stated objective.

- A high-quality application that reflects thoughtful planning, conciseness, financial soundness, and clarity.

The FONCPL Board will evaluate applications based on how well each project or program aligns with the mission and purpose of the Friends group and directly benefits local Friends organizations. Grant funds may not be used to purchase goods or services for the library or library system.

For questions or assistance, please contact Karen Schrader, FONCPL Director of Awards and Grants, at karenschrader12@gmail.com or 336-407-6851.

For the application, [click here.](#)

Nominate Your Friend of the Year by 9/30 by Karen Schrader

FONCPL members still have time to nominate one or two of your Friends volunteers who have made an outstanding contribution to your Friends group this past year. The Friend of the Year award is not a competition, but recognition of those who have poured their heart and soul into your Friends of the Library group. Please take a few minutes to write a paragraph about an outstanding Friend who has gone above and beyond to volunteer his/her time to promote your local library by sup-

porting your Friends' efforts. Please include a picture of your nominee. [Click here](#) for additional information:

FONCPL will confer this honor to ALL the nominees and be highlighted in the FONCPL monthly newsletter. It is not a competition. It is a recognition of his/her dedication. Nominations are due on Wednesday, September 30th to Karen Schrader, FONCPL Director for Grants/Awards at cell, 336-407-6851 or karenschrader12@gmail.com



Smart Start Network Reacts to the Passing of Dolly Parton

This is from their Facebook Page:

The Smart Start Network is deeply saddened by the passing of Dolly Parton. Her belief that every child deserves access to books and the opportunity to develop a love of reading transformed the lives of countless children and families.

Through [Dolly Parton's Imagination Library](#), the Smart Start Network is honored to help bring free books and the joy of reading to children across North Carolina—helping families build connections, spark curiosity, and nurture

a lifelong love of learning.

We will continue carrying forward her vision and remain committed to helping children build strong foundations for lifelong success. Her legacy will live on every time a child opens a book and discovers the joy of reading.

If you wish to commemorate Dolly and honor her legacy, please contribute to [The Dolly-wood Foundation](#). Or you can donate through your local Smart Start organization.

Remembering
Dolly
August 25, 2026

**Dolly Parton's
IMAGINATION
LIBRARY**

24,872,704
books mailed to
children in NC
since the expansion of
DPIL in 2017

smart start
Each Child. Every Community.



Host a Right to Read Night Event During 2026 Banned Books Week

It's not too early to begin to plan this low-key event for your community. Here are a few tips to help you plan from the National Coalition Against Censorship:

Choose a place. Plan where you will host your event. Select a site that is comfortable, fun, and engaging. It could be at a bookstore, a library, a community center, a coffee shop, a place of worship, or even someone's home! Even if you're having trouble coordinating a venue, consider holding a virtual discussion instead!

Choose a time. Banned Books Week takes place from October 4-10. Confirm with your venue and potential participants before finalizing the time that works for people in your community! Generally, weekday evenings are when most people of all ages will have time for an event like this.

Register your event. Once you have the time and place set for your event, register it online. Once you register your event, NCAC will send you a welcome toolkit, promotional swag, and an event sign-up sheet for more info.

Spread the word. After posting your event, make sure to share it with your friends, family, and community members, both directly and on social media. Ask others to share, and get

the word out about your event—get creative! What are the bulletin boards, newsletters, and Facebook groups where your community hears about upcoming events?

Register Participants. Set up registration for the event to capture contact information and create a list of expected attendees. We recommend using a simple Google form or an Eventbrite page.

Read the Book. This year for Right to Read Night, we are reading *Brown Girl Dreaming* (Penguin Random House, 2014) by Jacqueline Woodson. The book tells the story of Ms. Woodson's early childhood growing up in the 1960s and the events that led her to become a writer.

While "Brown Girl Dreaming" is the book selected for this event, you are not limited to this, or any specific book. The could be just a silent event with each attendee bringing their own favorite banned book to read. NCAC has a whole kit that covers every aspect of such an event including security. <https://www.righttoreadnight.com/toolkit>

We encourage you to consider hosting a Right to Read Night during Banned Books Week, October 4 to 10. **NOW** is the time to be planning Banned Books Week events.

BANNED BOOKS WEEK[®]

OCT 4-10, 2026

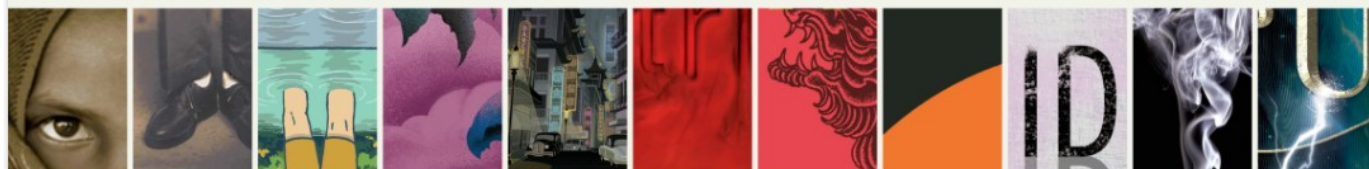
LET BOOKS BE PROTECT THE FREEDOM TO READ

ALA.ORG/BBOOKS

ALA American Library Association

TOP 11

MOST CHALLENGED BOOKS OF 2025



LET BOOKS BE PROTECT THE FREEDOM TO READ

ALA.ORG/BBOOKS

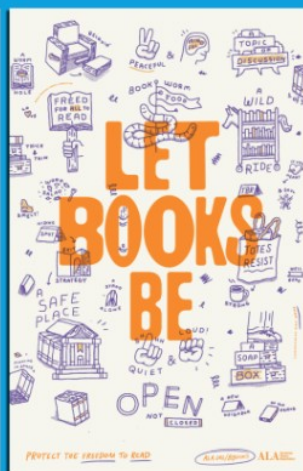
ALA American Library Association



Art by Love's Wise



Art by Hyesu Lee



Art by Mikey Burton

LET BOOKS BE

PROTECT THE FREEDOM TO READ

BANNED BOOKS WEEK[®]
OCT 4-10, 2026

ALA.ORG/LETBOOKSBE

TOP 11 MOST CHALLENGED BOOKS OF 2025

This is copied from the ALA website:

Every year, ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF) compiles a list of the Top 10 Most Challenged Books in order to inform the public about censorship in libraries and schools. The lists are based on information from confidential reports filed by library professionals and community members, as well as news stories published throughout the United States.

Because many book challenges are not reported to the ALA or covered by the press, the data compiled by ALA represent only a snapshot of censorship attempts in libraries.

The 2025 data reported to ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF) shows that **the majority of book censorship attempts continue to originate from organized movements. In 2025, 92% of all book challenges were initiated by pressure groups, government officials, and decision makers, up from 72% in 2024. Less than 3% of challenges originated from individual parents.**

The most common justifications for censorship provided by complainants were false claims of illegal obscenity for minors; inclusion of LGBTQIA+ characters or themes; and covering topics of race, racism, equity, and social justice.

Since 2021, ALA has tracked a sharp spike in censorship attempts in libraries. OIF tracked **4,235 unique titles challenged in 2025, the second highest ever documented by ALA.** The highest ever documented was 4,240 in 2023. Of the unique titles challenged in 2025, **1,671 (40%) represent the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ people and people of color.**

OIF 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. This is both the highest number of titles censored in one year and the highest rate of challenges resulting in censorship from 1990-2025.

The Top 11 (a tie for #5) Most Challenged Books lists are released annually during National Library Week and Right to Read Day. The include:

1. **Sold** by Patricia McCormick
2. **The Perks of Being a Wallflower** by Stephen Chbosky
3. **Gender Queer** by Maia Kobabe
4. **Empire of Storms** by Sarah J. Maas
5. **Last Night at the Telegraph Club** by Malinda Lo
5. **Tricks** by Ellen Hopkins
6. **A Court of Thorns and Roses** by Sarah J. Maas
7. **A Clockwork Orange** by Anthony Burgess
8. **Identical** by Ellen Hopkins
9. **Looking for Alaska** by John Green
10. **Storm and Fury** by Jennifer L. Armbrout

To view the full report, [click here](#).

Using AI? Take a Second Look submitted by Cindy Shipley

Using AI? Take a Second Look.

A quick guide from your library to using AI tools safely and wisely

AI tools can answer questions in seconds — but fast isn't the same as correct. AI can sound confident even when it's wrong or missing something important. That's why it pays to double-check before you trust an answer.

ASK → READ → REVIEW → VERIFY → EDIT

Remember it as the 5-step AI Double-Check Habit

Your 5-Step Checklist

1. **Ask clearly** — Tell the AI exactly what you need, who it's for, and what format works best.
2. **Read carefully** — Don't assume it's right just because it sounds confident. Slow down and read the whole answer.
3. **Review for red flags** — Ask the AI itself: “What might be wrong here?” or “What should I double-check?”
4. **Verify the important stuff** — Confirm names, dates, numbers, and instructions with a trusted source — a library database, an official website, or library staff.
5. **Edit before you use it** — Fix anything unclear, outdated, or incorrect before you rely on it or share it.

 **Good to know:** AI tools don't “know” facts the way a reference source does — they predict likely words based on patterns. That makes them great for drafting and brainstorming, but not a substitute for verified information.

You're the Captain

AI can be a helpful co-pilot — a map, a flashlight, a brainstorming partner. But you're the one steering. Use it, enjoy it, and let it help you write, plan, and learn. Just take one more look before you trust the answer.

Questions about using AI tools? Ask us at the reference desk or visit the library's digital literacy help page.

Double Check AI submitted by Cindy Shipley

Why AI Answers Need a Second Look: A Guide for Library Staff

AI tools can feel almost magical at the reference desk. A patron types a question, presses enter, and seconds later has a polished answer. It might explain how to file a small claims form, summarize a local history document, draft a resume, or help someone understand a confusing government notice. For many patrons — and staff — AI feels like having a research assistant available around the clock.

But here's the important part: AI is helpful, not perfect.

Sometimes AI gives excellent answers. Sometimes it gives answers that are mostly right but missing something important — like a local requirement or a recent change in policy. And sometimes it gives answers that sound confident but are flatly wrong. This happens because AI doesn't “know” things the way a librarian or a reference source does. It predicts likely words based on patterns learned from

Continued on next page

Double Check AI (continued)

huge amounts of text, images, and code. That makes it particularly good at explaining, organizing, and drafting — but it can also fabricate details, misstate facts, or miss context entirely.

That's why library staff should model and teach **the AI double-check habit**.

What Is the AI Double-Check Habit?

The AI double-check habit is a simple workflow for using AI tools more safely and wisely — one that fits naturally alongside the information literacy skills libraries already teach. It means never accepting an AI's first answer as final. Instead, you pause, check, compare, and improve.

Think of AI as an extremely fast page or intern who sometimes needs supervision. It might pull together a great first draft of a booklist or a program flyer — but you still want to check the details before it goes out under the library's name.

For example, if a patron asks an AI tool "What documents do I need to get a library card?", it might list ID and proof of address — a reasonable general answer. But it won't know your library's specific policies, age requirements, or fee structure. The double-check habit is what catches that gap, whether it's you or the patron doing the checking.

A Simple Workflow Staff Can Teach and Use

Here's a practical version of the habit, useful both for staff workflows and for patron-facing digital literacy instruction:

1. **Give clear instructions.** State what's needed, who it's for, and what format works.
2. **Read the answer slowly.** Don't assume accuracy just because the tone is confident.
3. **Flag anything important.** Facts, numbers, names, dates, policies, or advice that need verification.

4. **Ask the AI to review itself.** Prompts like "What might be wrong here?" or "What should I verify?" can surface weak spots.

5. **Check trusted sources.** Confirm key details against library policy, reliable databases, official documents, or a colleague's expertise.

Edit the final version. Make sure it's accurate, clear, and appropriate for the patron or situation.

A simple phrase to remember and share:

Ask, Read, Review, Verify, Edit.

Key point for staff training and patron programs: AI tools can produce confident-sounding mistakes. Encourage patrons — and remind yourselves — to treat AI answers as a *draft to review*, not a final answer to accept automatically. This is a natural extension of the source-evaluation skills libraries already teach.

Why This Habit Matters for Library Work

The double-check habit isn't about discouraging AI use — many libraries are actively integrating these tools into reference work, programming, and patron support. It's about using AI with confidence and professional judgment.

Staff who double-check AI output:

- Catch errors before they reach a patron or a public-facing document
- Ask sharper follow-up questions, getting more useful results
- Adjust tone and accuracy for the audience — a teen homework helper session looks different from a business resource consultation

Continued on next page

Double Check AI (continued)

Model good digital literacy practices for patrons who are learning to use these tools themselves

As AI tools show up in more research databases, learning apps, and patron devices, library staff who know how to guide and verify AI output will be better equipped to support their communities — whether that's helping a student with research, a job seeker with a resume, or a senior navigating a benefits form.

The Final Rule: You Are the Captain

AI can act like a map, a flashlight, a drafting assistant, and a patient tutor. But staff — and patrons — remain the captain of the ship.

The captain decides the destination. The captain checks conditions. The captain watches for hazards. The captain listens to advice but doesn't hand over responsibility.

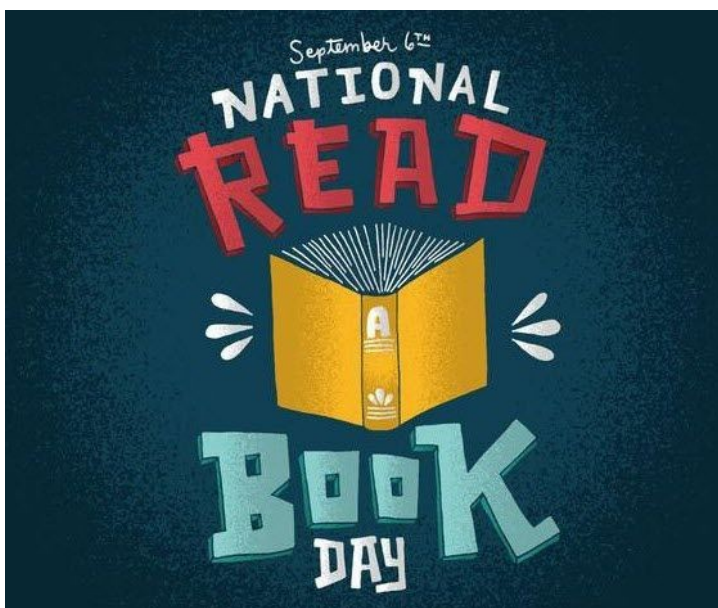
That's the heart of the AI double-check habit — and a message worth sharing at the reference desk, in a digital literacy workshop, or in a staff training session.

Use AI. Explore it. Let it help draft communications, brainstorm program ideas, and summarize materials. But before trusting an answer, take one more look. Ask one more question. Verify one important fact. Sharpen one unclear sentence.

A little double-checking turns a good AI answer into a reliable one — and helps library staff use this technology safely, wisely, and in service of the community.

Days to Celebrate & to Have Fun

Sometimes we take ourselves (and our Friends) too seriously. It is time to kick back and have some fun! Every issue of this newsletter we provide a calendar of events—some serious, and some not so. Take "Talk Like A Pirate Day" to a whole new level. A week or so before, go to a local playground. Take a few pirate props or a pirate face on a stick. You want the faces obscured. Ask the child to don the props and talk like a pirate. Do a short video. With parental permission, post the video to your FB page or website. Why not add an element of FUN?



The Library of NC by Karen Robbins

This month FONCPL's is reminding all Friends groups in the state that there is an amazing resource at your fingertips. The Library of North Carolina not only has a dynamic and helpful website, but training and enrichment opportunities for all North Carolinians.

The Library of North Carolina gives you access to information that supports strong libraries, and encourages lifelong reading and learning. Three distinct areas that the library supports are, according to the website:

- Accessible Books and Library Services (ABLS) provides books and magazines specially designed for people who can't use regular print because of a visual or physical disability.
- The Government & Heritage Library (GHL) has materials and tools to help you explore our state's history, culture, and even your

own family's past, whether you work for the state, go to school, teach, or just want to learn more about North Carolina.

- Library Development (LD) helps North Carolina Libraries serve their communities by providing consulting services, supporting continuing education opportunities, and administering grant programs and Aid to Public Libraries fund. LNC Website 8/20/2026

Most important for Friends of the Library, there is a training sessions that will help you organization become stronger and more in step with how the Library of North Carolina is focusing on excellence. [You can find it here.](#)

Take time to explore what the Library of North Carolina has to offer, and be sure to share it with your own FOL.

Advocacy Can Be Simple by Karen Robbins

Use your library, and tell your friends about how cool it is so they will use it too. We library lovers already know all the fabulous things we can learn and do at the library. But are we sharing that?

Do we mention the programs or new books or computer access to our friends and acquaintances? Do we remind them of clubs that meet and share fun crafts or discussions? Or let people know about useful, idea-packed library or FOL newsletters? Or invite friends to support the library by becoming a Friend of the Library? Or remind them of books on sale that benefit the Friends?

Try to know the data. Do we ask the librarians what statistics they track? Every time we walk into the library, that is data. That data can support requests for funding. Every time we check out a book, again, data to back up requests for funding.

Every time we attend a library program, or function, or book club, we become part of the data that the library can use to show the importance of continuing to fund our library or to add additional funds for library materials, books, and programs.

Every time we share important facts about the library, with our friends and neighbors, they may add a library stop to their errands. Then they boost statistics that facilitate future funding, allowing more books, more programs, and more functions. How cool is that? It costs nothing, but adds up to a wealth of information to provide the library with the data they need to grow and thrive in the community.

Finally, don't forget to advocate for our FOLs. When sharing good library news, ask your friends and neighbors to join the Friends. Share the activities, volunteer opportunities, and the mission to financially support our libraries. As we watch book challenges, wavering funding, and indifference, let's be the ones to remain positive and point the way to keep libraries strong. The personal touch helps spread the word.

My favorite advocacy link:

<<https://www.ala.org/advocacy>>

You can decide how you want to advocate for libraries.

Seasonal Reading Programs from Accessible Books & Library Services

The **Library of North Carolina Accessible Books and Library Services (ABLS)** offers two **Seasonal Reading Programs** that provide patrons with visual disabilities the opportunity to participate in fun and inclusive reading challenges. The Winter Reading Program begins December 1st and runs through February 28th.

The programs consist of four reading categories :

- Digital and Downloadable Books Adults
- Digital and Downloadable Books Youth (20 and younger)
- Physical Books Adults
- Physical Books Youth (20 and younger)

Program participants provide library staff with ratings and reviews for the books read and receive points towards prizes provided by the Friends of NC Accessible Books and Library Services. Participants can earn 1 point for rating the books and write an original book review of at least 50 words to earn 8 additional points to add to their overall Seasonal Reading score. Participants can use the **online form** to rate and review their reading picks or **download a form** to mail or scan in. Participants may also request to have a pack of 10 Rate and Review forms mailed to them by calling 984-236-1118.

WHO IS THIS RESOURCE FOR?

The **Seasonal Reading Programs** are available to youth and adult library patrons of Library of North Carolina's Accessible Books and Library Service.

Library staff across North Carolina are encouraged to promote the Library of North Carolina's Accessible Books and Library Services (ABLS) to community members who may benefit from ABLS. ABLS is a free, convenient library service for North Carolinians who are unable to read standard print due to low vision, blindness, or a physical, perceptual, or reading disability. Patrons receive titles by downloading them and/or having the materials mailed directly to and from their residence at no cost. To learn more about ABLS and determine eligibility for services, visit the **Blind and Print Disabled** section of the **Library of North Carolina** website.

HOW TO ACCESS THE SEASONAL READING PROGRAMS:

Patrons interested in participating in the programs, first need to register as an ABLS patron and then can **sign-up** for the reading challenges online. Winter Reading begins December 1st and runs through February 28th.

LEARN MORE

For more information about the Seasonal Reading Programs or ABLS services, **chat** with an ABLS staff member online, call (888) 388-2460 or email NCABLS@dncr.nc.gov.

Submitted by Joanne Straight



Waitlists at NC Libraries for Popular Titles

North Carolina library patrons are increasingly familiar with a frustrating experience: finding a popular book in the catalog only to discover hundreds—or even thousands—of people ahead of them on the waiting list. While demand for both print and digital books has increased, e-books and audiobooks have created especially difficult challenges for public libraries.

Libraries in fast-growing communities such as Wake County and Charlotte-Mecklenburg are facing rising demand as population growth brings new residents and library users. At the same time, libraries across the country have seen increased use since the pandemic. Digital borrowing has grown dramatically, placing additional pressure on already limited collection budgets. In Wake County, digital circulation rose from approximately 1.1 million checkouts in fiscal year 2019 to more than 3.5 million in fiscal year 2026—a 200 percent increase.

Popular books can quickly generate enormous waiting lists. Viral titles, celebrity book club selections, and bestsellers often require libraries to purchase additional copies to keep waits manageable. Wake County Public Libraries also use a “Lucky Day Collection,” purchasing extra copies of selected popular books and placing them directly in branches for immediate checkout rather than adding them to hold lists. This strategy gives patrons another opportunity to borrow sought-after titles.

The problem is even greater for digital content. Unlike a physical book, which can remain in a library collection for years, e-books and audiobooks are usually purchased through licensing agreements that expire after a set period or number of checkouts. Libraries may pay significantly more for a digital title than an individual consumer pays, yet their access is often temporary. Some licenses last only 12 to 24 months, requiring libraries to spend additional funds to maintain access.

As a result, libraries must make difficult choices. Wake County officials report that much of their digital collection budget is used to renew expiring licenses and purchase additional copies of high-demand titles, leaving

less money available for new and lesser-known books. Older digital titles that receive limited use may be removed from collections when licenses expire, while physical books can often remain available until they wear out.

Digital borrowing does offer advantages. E-books and audiobooks are returned automatically, never lost, and immediately become available to the next person in line. Libraries are also exploring different licensing models to address high demand more efficiently.

Library leaders believe the long-term solution will require cooperation among libraries, publishers, distributors, and local governments. More flexible and affordable licensing arrangements could help libraries provide greater access while using taxpayer funds responsibly. Despite misconceptions that libraries and publishers are competitors, both benefit when more people read.

As demand for digital content continues to grow, North Carolina libraries will need innovative strategies and fairer pricing models to meet the needs of their communities and keep reading accessible to everyone.

This article appeared in NC Newsline under the title “Surging book demand leave NC libraries struggling with long waitlists, pricey content” by Kate Denning. It was restated by AI. Submitted by David Scott, President of the Friends of Rube McCray Memorial Library.

Follow-up: The most requested and in-demand title at the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library is Yesteryear by Caro Claire Burke with digital waitlists stretching past 2,200 readers and an estimated 15 to 17 week wait time for digital formats!



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Public Libraries**

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:

September

9/6 Read A Book Day

9/7 Labor Day

9/8 International literacy day

9/9 International Sudoku Day

9/11 National Day of Service

9/13 Roald Dahl Day

9/13 National Grandparents Day

9/15 National online learning day

9/16 National Step Family Day

9/17 Constitution Day and Citizenship Day

9/18 Air Force Birthday

9/18 National Cheeseburger Day

9/19 International Talk Like a Pirate Day

9/19 National Dance Day

9/21 World Gratitude Day

9/21 World Alzheimer's Day

9/22 Autumn equinox

9/29 National Coffee Day

October

Oct 4-10 Banned Books Week

10/5 Child Health Day

10/7 Random acts of poetry day

10/10 National Chess Day

10/11 National coming out day

10/12 Farmers Day

10/12 Columbus Day

10/12 Indigenous People's Day

10/13 Navy Birthday

10/16 Boss's Day

Oct 18-24 National Friends of the Library Week