

Rotary  
Club of  
Charlotte



# THIS WEEK'S SPEAKER

July 27, 2021

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## Marcellus "MT" Turner, CEO & Chief Librarian, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Library

**Elly Clary** introduced Marcellus Turner (or, as he prefers, "MT") the CEO and Chief Librarian for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Library who began on April 1<sup>st</sup>. MT is a recent addition to Charlotte after having spent 10 years as Chief Librarian at the Seattle Public Library. Turner was joined by Jenni Gaisbauer, Executive Director of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Library Foundation. Together they revealed the plans for the new main library in Center City.

After offering **David Erdman** a job because of the wonderful Health and Happiness presentation he offered about the history of the library in Charlotte, Turner started his dialogue by thanking us for the very warm welcome (think temperature) to Charlotte but also asking for a break as he learns to drive again – especially on the I-77 exchanges.

Turner's affection for the library began in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade as students were required to volunteer at school. As he shelved the "red books," he realized he was fortunate to be assigned to the library. Libraries are much more of a layered organization now. Charlotte-Mecklenburg's current main library has been "greatly loved" but we are about to embark on the next generation of libraries.

Turner shared slides showing the current library system had over 5.6 million in person and online visits last year. Also, 400,000 people attended programs held at libraries. There are 20 library locations as well as a digital branch which delivers 20% of all library programs. Two-thirds of the community have used the library and one in five Mecklenburg County residents do not have home internet. Due to the growth of the city, the

library system is expected to grow with a Mobile Library (due next month), a relocation of the University City library and a new library in Pineville in 2022. Turner and the library system are working to figure out how to come out of the pandemic to get back to a familiar place. However, the library system is also working to “redefine the library.”

Turner turned the program over to Jenni Gaisbauer to discuss the next generation of the library. Gaisbauer started out disclosing how she often gets asked whether or not people still use a library and “What is a library?” Her numbers show 700,000 people use the library system each year. “The library is more than just a repository,” said Gaisbauer. Gaisbauer told us what the library truly is and how it has been redefined moving forward, “especially the new main library.”

Gaisbauer told of how the current library is public collaboration. There are over 100 community partners every year that deliver community programming. Plans are for 40-50% of the programming be (co)delivered by community partners. From job fairs to digital literacy, they plan to create a hub for collaboration. The new library will be “technology forward but developed responsibly.” As part of Mecklenburg County, they are a public institution but developed as a destination for residents as well as visitors. Gaisbauer told of how the library provides services for everyone from health care workers to the homeless population for access to information.

As she moved on to the physical characteristics of the new main library, Gaisbauer explained how the building will connect to the two theaters, McGlohon Theater and Duke Energy Theater. The only entrance to the theaters will be through the library entrance. A slide of a rendering of the new main library showed “the doors will (now) be on North Tryon Street” and will sit 15 feet off of Tryon. Snohotta Architecture Firm and Clark Nexsen has designed the building and Rodgers and RJ Leeper Construction will build the building. Planned as a 5-story building, the new main library will be slightly smaller than the 3-story building the main library is currently in. Office operations will be moved to a support service center on Eastway and North Tryon.

The new main library will include two terraces, tables outside the front, an event space for about 300 as well as 15 meeting rooms to provide a place for organizations to use the space. “Lots of glass” will make the building welcoming and include a café which hopes to include beer and wine to enhance that destination feel. The lobby can fit about 500 people and will include art by Tiff Massey out of Detroit, MI. And, Gaisbauer promises, “There will be books!”

The new main library is “not your grandmother’s library.” It is meant to be used and active. The new main library will be a place where “you can be alone together; you can meet with friends; you can study, you can work; you can use this as your work space, because that is what libraries have become.”

Gaisbauer closed their remarks by providing the timeline of construction with the goal to be in the building and “ready to serve the community by 2025.” In the meantime, a church partner will supply computer access and book pick up and drop off will be in Founders Hall.

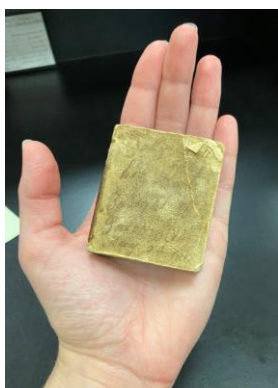
In response to questions, Turner and Gaisbauer answered that:

- There will be 1,500 parking spaces on the block and a half development. Negotiations are still going on over the cost of parking.
- Book lovers have found on-line and virtual books and programming. “We know some customers will not come back because they are comfortable at home.” The library will continue to grow the online and virtual options. While at the same time making people comfortable coming back.
- Streaming technology is the direction many libraries are moving towards. Some music platforms are allowing free streaming with a library card. The library has just hired a person to do this job full time.
- The comprehensive project will cost \$135 million. \$65 million is from Mecklenburg Co. The building cost \$100 million = \$50 million is from Mecklenburg Co. with private funding at \$50 million.

Mr. Turner was kind enough to follow-up with an email to the question about the oldest book and the smallest book:

“...while I take pride in being a librarian, I have to give credit to two of our librarians: Collections and Access Manager, Harold Escalante, and John O’Connor, Manager of our Robinson-Spangler Carolina Room, here on staff with getting answers to these questions so that you can share back with your Rotarians.

“...we've confirmed that the actual smallest book that we know of is *History of the Bible and Testament* published in 1809. It measures 2"w x 2.5"h x 0.5"d. This is housed in the Charlotte Museum of History Collection in our archives, so it's not available in the catalog. Pictures of the book for scale are attached (thanks to our wonderful archivist/hand model Sydney).



“It's also worth noting that while 1720 is the date of the oldest *book*, it's not the oldest *thing* in our collection. The contains arrowheads from the Early-Late Archaic Period (8000-1000 BC).

Oldest:

[A Collection of Several Pieces of Mr. John Locke Never Before Printed, or Not Extant in His Works](#) was printed in 1720 and is held in the Mecklenburg Room.

Smallest, we're not entirely sure about. The smallest book that Robert has note of in the catalog is:

[History of St. John's P. E. Church, Richmond, Va. : erected 1741 / compiled by E. W. Moore](#) which measures 12cm (4.75 inches) along its longest edge and is 43 pages. So volumetrically is probably quite small.

And about the question of Streaming Services offered:

“...we have [Hoopla](#) which offers a lot of movies, tv shows and also music. Then there's [Kanopy](#) which has a lot of great films including The Criterion Collection and also documentaries and classes from The Great Courses. I highly recommend you check it out. If they want music we offer [Freegal](#) which has access to 15 million songs and also music videos.

“If they want content just for kids we have the [NC Kids Digital Library](#) from Overdrive and also [Just for Kids Access Video](#) which has a lot of great educational content from NCLive.”

While there were more questions in waiting, time expired. Many thanks to MT Turner and Jenni Gaisbauer for generously sharing their time with us.

\*A recording of the program is available here: <https://vimeo.com/580046346> Mr. Turner's presentation begins at 14:55 minutes.