



THIS WEEK'S PROGRAM

January 27, 2026

2025-2026 Board Members

President Patrick Baker
Pres Elect Bill Bartee
Past Pres Kim Brattain
Secretary Bill Gill
Treasurer Craig Field
Exec Dir Christine Cipriano

Directors 2024-2026

Benton Bragg
John Cantrell
Tish Atkins Charles
Dena Diorio
Jesse Hite
Virginia Owen

Directors 2025-2027

Byrd Bergeron
Karen Calder
J Hill
Ayo Johnson
Lori Keeton
Michael Orzech
Robert Shaw
Elizabeth Teagarden
Mike Wollinger

Membership Co-Chairs:

Linwood Bolles &
Shelley Dean

Programs

Elizabeth Teagarden



Craig Scharton
*Founding Director – Charlotte Location
Connect Labs Charlotte
Wexford Science + Technology*

by Paul Bartholomy

This week, our Rotary Club welcomed Craig Scharton, Founding Director of Connect Labs Charlotte, for an exciting and forward-looking presentation on Charlotte's rapidly growing health and life sciences ecosystem. As a longtime Rotarian himself, Craig shared both his personal journey and his enthusiasm for what he called one of the most special and collaborative projects he has worked on in his career.

Craig introduced members to The Pearl, Charlotte's new health innovation district that is quickly gaining national and international attention. Anchored by Wake Forest School of Medicine, global medical companies, and advanced surgical training facilities, The Pearl represents a major investment in Charlotte's future. It intends to diversify the region's economy while strengthening our city's position as a leader in medical education, research, and innovation.

At the heart of the district is Connect Labs Charlotte, a flexible lab and office environment designed to support startups, researchers, and growing companies. Craig shared that the Charlotte location opened with the highest occupancy of any Connect Labs site in the country - proof that health innovation has been happening here all along and now has a central place to connect, collaborate, and grow. The space is able to bring together entrepreneurs, investors, corporate partners, and economic development organizations to accelerate ideas into real-world impact.

Craig closed by inviting Rotarians to see the space firsthand and to play a role in making Charlotte "the most supportive place in the country to do health

innovation.” From attending events and tours to supporting local innovators, he emphasized that Charlotte’s greatest competitive advantage is its strong sense of community. By “building on our southern hospitality”, we can help foster an environment where innovators feel welcomed, supported, and connected.

Below are the recordings of the meeting:

With slides: <https://vimeo.com/1159015904?fl=pl&fe=sh>

Without slides: <https://vimeo.com/1158998233?fl=pl&fe=sh>

The introduction begins at approximately 26 minutes and 40 seconds.