



# THIS WEEK'S PROGRAM

February 3, 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



## **Robert "Wike" Graham** *Deputy Chief, Charlotte Fire Department Director, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Emergency Management*

by **Paul Bartholomy**

This week, Rotarians enjoyed a wide-ranging and highly engaging program from Robert "Wike" Graham, Deputy Chief with the Charlotte Fire Department and Director of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Emergency Management Office (CMEMO). Chief Graham was introduced by former Mecklenburg County Manager **Dena Diorio**, who reflected on their close work together during COVID-19 and praised his steady leadership, professionalism, and commitment to public service.

Chief Graham began by sharing the history of CMEMO and emphasized one of his core messages – all disasters start and end locally. When disaster strikes, local agencies are involved immediately before outside help arrives and local recovery support continues long after state and federal partners leave. Whether dealing with winter storms, hurricanes, public health emergencies, cyber incidents, or large-scale events, emergency management exists locally to help communities prepare, respond, and recover over both the short and long term.

Throughout the presentation, Chief Graham illustrated how emergency management quietly coordinates thousands of people and resources across city, county, and town lines. From infrastructure protection and cyber response to intelligence gathering and event planning, CMEMO's role is to connect partners, establish clear communication, and create order in moments that might otherwise be chaotic. As he described it, emergency managers "worry about everything, all at once," so others can focus on their specific roles.

One of the most memorable moments came when Chief Graham described the agency's all-hazards approach, saying, "If aliens are riding unicorns down Tryon Street, it's our job to have a plan." The comment drew laughter, but also underscored a serious point: emergency management must be ready for the unexpected, no matter how unlikely, and respond calmly, decisively, and collaboratively.

Chief Graham closed with practical advice for individuals and families, encouraging everyone to make a plan, build a kit, and stay informed. He reminded Rotarians that preparedness looks different for every household and stressed the importance of having multiple ways to receive alerts and information. The program left members with a deeper appreciation for the complexity of emergency management and strong confidence that Charlotte-Mecklenburg is prepared – no matter what comes down Tryon Street.

Below are the recordings of the meeting:

With slides: <https://vimeo.com/1161942500?fl=pl&fe=sh>

Without slides: <https://vimeo.com/1161946486?fl=pl&fe=sh>

The introduction begins at approximately 25 minutes and 45 seconds.