

Thinking outside of the box: “Idea Box” makerspace opens in uptown Charlotte

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Charlotte Mecklenburg Library encourages visitors to get “creatively messy” with free access to tools to design, build and co-create.

Inside a glass room in Main Library in uptown Charlotte, you’ll hear the whirring of machines. It’s the sound of learning and comes from “Idea Box,” a makerspace that opens to the public on February 17.

What is a makerspace? It’s a learning environment for people to connect with others and create meaningful projects, using technologies and other tools that might not be easily accessible. Idea Box will have MakerBot 3D printers, CAD stations, vinyl and laser cutters, sewing machines and a variety of tablet devices like Kindle Fires and iPads.

“We envision the space as a vibrant, collaborative and creatively messy environment,” says Director of Libraries David Singleton. “Idea Box will be a place where anyone can explore new technology as well as design, prototype and build inspired ideas from start to finish.”

The Library will also offer [free workshops](#) on how to use the tools.

Idea Box is the Library’s second makerspace. The first, which serves youth ages 10 to 18, is [Studio i in ImaginOn](#). It opened in 2005. The Studio i makerspace offers access to equipment for sound recording, live action movies, stop motion animation, game design and music creation.

Expanding on the principals of Studio i, Idea Box will bring the makerspace experience to adults and families. The project was supported by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

"Today's economy is shifting to one of more independent work and more makers," said Susan Patterson, Charlotte program director for Knight Foundation. "The Library is the perfect place — welcoming and accessible — for people to come together, experiment and learn and make things together."

Kelly Czarnecki is a member of a team of librarians leading the project. She also has worked with the teens that have used Studio i in ImaginOn. Czarnecki knows first-hand why libraries are an ideal home for makerspaces.

"Libraries have always been a central place for stories," says Czarnecki. "A makerspace is a way for the community to create stories through objects and projects, built and constructed with technology and tools."

Adds Singleton, "There are many incredible ideas in all parts of our community. This is a place where those ideas can take begin to take shape. And that can only be good for all of us."

Idea Box opens to the public February 17, 2015. Operating hours will be Tuesday and Wednesday Noon to 2 p.m. and Thursday 3:30 to 7:30 p.m. It is located in Main Library (310 N. Tryon St, Charlotte), in the Dowd Foundation Learning Studio on the first floor. To learn more about the free public programs offered in the Library's Idea Box makerspace, visit cmlibrary.org/programs (search for "Idea Box") or call the Main Library at 704-416-0100.

About the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library: The Charlotte Mecklenburg Library is one of America's leading urban public libraries, serving a community of over one million citizens in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. Through 20 locations, targeted outreach and online, the Library delivers exceptional services and programs, with a mission to create a community of readers and empower individuals with free access to information and the universe of ideas. For more, visit cmlibrary.org

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