

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CHARLOTTE MECKLENBURG LIBRARY OFFERS FREE COMPUTERS THROUGH ITS MECKTECH PROGRAM FUNDED BY MECKLENBURG COUNTY

MeckTech works to bridge the digital divide by offering devices to qualifying residents

Charlotte, NC – October 1, 2020 – Charlotte Mecklenburg Library, funded by Mecklenburg County as a grantee of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, will make available 1,400 free computer devices to eligible households adversely affected by COVID-19 through its new pilot MeckTech program, with the goal of scaling up to potentially 5,000 devices once the model is proven. Many organizations and institutions rapidly transitioned to digital and online platforms to help serve their customers during the pandemic closures. Unfortunately, this rapid pivoting in services left a whole segment of the population behind. It is estimated that in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg community, nearly 20% of all households—or 80,000 households—lack a computer in the home. MeckTech kicks off on October 1 and is expected to run through the end of 2020 or until all the computers have been distributed. Residents wishing to apply can find more information online at www.mecktech.org or by calling 704.416.0100.

Each computer will come loaded with a Microsoft Office suite, online educational apps and videoconferencing software, and will include all hardware needed for setup (monitor, keyboard, mouse, power cord, webcam, speakers and microphones). The Library is contracting out the sourcing from a local computer recycler/refurbisher while working with Mecklenburg County and other county partners to identify users who exhibit one or a combination of the following criteria for eligibility:

- Be 18 years old and a resident of Mecklenburg County
- Impacted by COVID-19 in one of the following ways:
 - Health and Human Services / DSS client (TANF, Unified Workforce, Seniors) who cannot access virtual services due to COVID-19
 - Older adults (60+ years old) experiencing social isolation due to COVID-19
 - Adult who lost a job due to COVID-19
 - Adult needing to reeducate and reskill for the job market due to COVID-19
 - Adult needing access to telehealth services due to COVID-19

“We’re excited to launch this program and connect our community to the technology they need. The MeckTech program is for Mecklenburg County residents who have been adversely affected by COVID-19, and are in need of computer hardware to help them job search, create resumes, attend career development courses which have transitioned to online, and to seek out job help,” says Seth Ervin, Charlotte Mecklenburg Library Chief Innovation Officer. “Pre-COVID, the Library served as dedicated safe space where anyone could gain access to both Wi-Fi and technology but, unfortunately due to the crisis, nearly all of the Library’s technological services have been severely limited.”

“The Covid-19 pandemic emphasizes the need to address the inequities that exist within our society, such as the digital divide,” says Dena R. Diorio, Mecklenburg County Manager. “Mecklenburg County is glad to devote a portion of our CARES ACT funding to assist in providing computer access to residents who are in need.”

“The purpose of the CARES Act funding is to provide funding fast and direct economic assistance for workers and families, small businesses, and preserve jobs for industries. Working together with the Library,

Mecklenburg County is committed to are finding best ways to address the needs of our community,” says Leslie Johnson, Mecklenburg County Assistant County Manager for Sustainable Communities. “The COVID-19 pandemic has led to radical changes in the way everyday Americans engage in their work, education, health and personal development.”

There is a critical need in the community to bridge and erase the digital divide in Mecklenburg County and the Library continues to serve as a leader in the digital inclusion space, committed to making this effort a success. The Library recently moved into the second phase of its re-opening plan, which allows for customer browsing inside branch locations, holds pickup and self-checkout, limited express computer use and a continued focus on following safety procedures and protocols. More information on the re-opening and services available can be found at cmlibrary.org.

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About Charlotte Mecklenburg Library:

Charlotte Mecklenburg Library is one of America’s leading urban public libraries, serving a community of more than one million citizens in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. Through 20 locations, targeted outreach and online resources, the Library delivers exceptional services and programs, with a mission to improve lives and build a stronger community. For more, visit cmlibrary.org.

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Media resources:

Charlotte Mecklenburg Library newsroom: cmlibrary.org/library-news

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