

Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

State Library of North Carolina

Accessible Books and Library Services

TAR HEEL TALK...

Fall 2024

No. 176

Major BARD Updates

BARD on Alexa

My Talking Books is an Amazon Alexa skill that the National Library Service (NLS) patrons can use to access and stream English-language audiobooks from BARD. Using the skill's voice-only interface, you can search the BARD catalog, manage your wish lists, book lists, bookshelves, bookmarks, preference settings, sleep timer, reading speed, jumping in time, and book-specific volume setting, as well as find book descriptions and review your streaming history.

As an Amazon Alexa skill, My Talking Books is available on Alexa-enabled devices. At present, verified Smart Speaker devices for My Talking Books include:

- Amazon Echo (2nd Generation and above)

- Echo Dot (2nd Generation and above)
- Echo Show 5 (2nd Generation and above)
- Echo Flex
- Alexa App on Android
- Alexa App on Apple iOS

My Talking Books is currently in its Open Beta testing phase with a limit of 5,000 users nationwide. Interested NLS patrons can register for Open Beta using the My Talking Books – Open Beta Registration Form located at

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/mtb-open-beta>. Registered patrons will be added on a first-come, first-served basis until the 5000-user limit is reached. Patrons registering for Open Beta after the limit is reached will be waitlisted for future access.

Listening to BARD on Your Computer

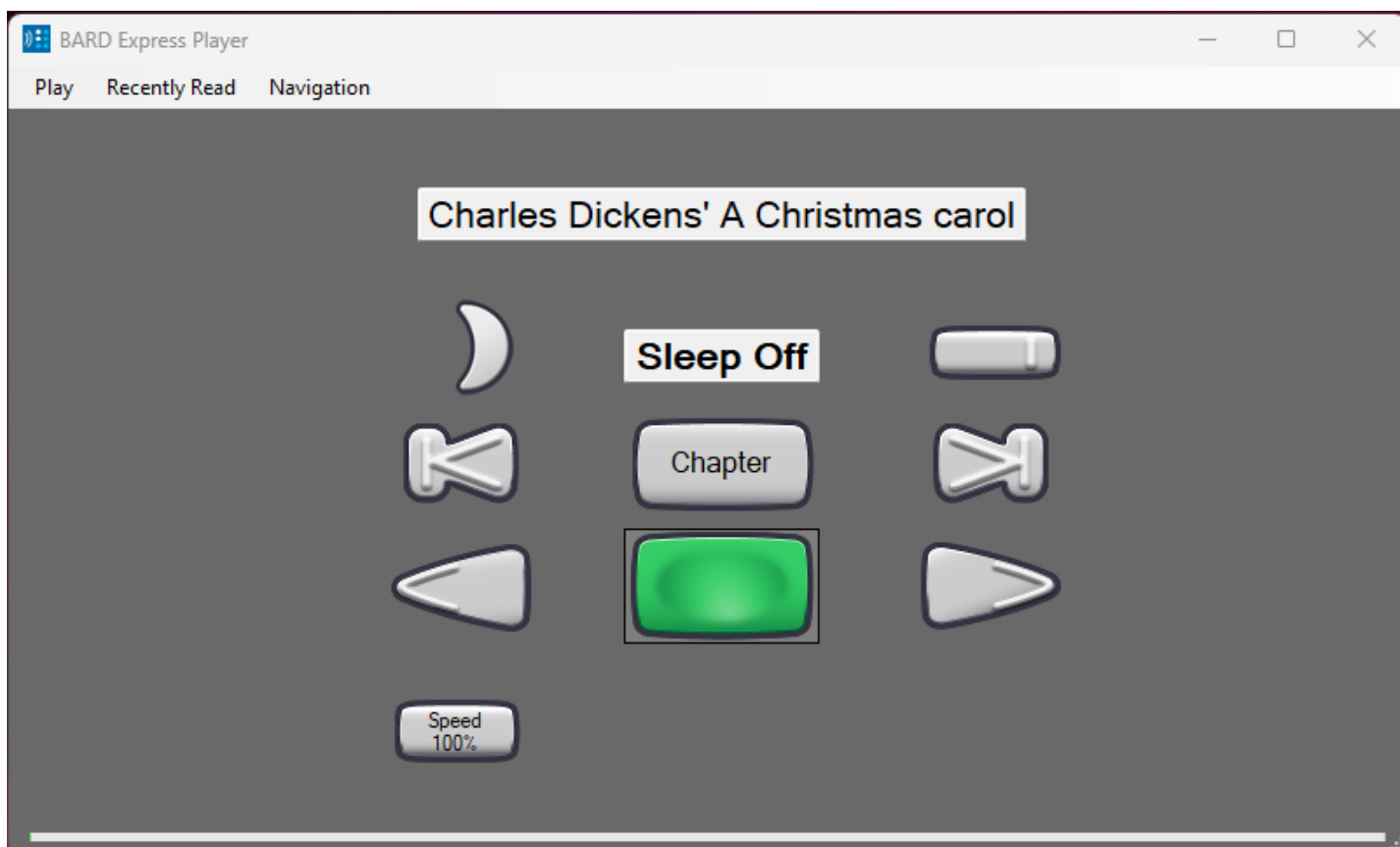
The National Library Service (NLS) has announced the release of a new BARD Express Player. This BARD Express update allows users to select and listen to audiobooks and magazines directly from their BARD Express bookshelf on their Windows-based PCs. It is currently available on PCs running Windows 10 and 11. It does not yet run on Apple computers.

Similar to the NLS's BARD Mobile App and the Digital Talking Book Player, the BARD Express Player allows users to adjust narration

speed, jump to specific sections like chapters or articles, create bookmarks, and much more.

Patrons with JAWS and NVDA screen readers will be able to use keyboard commands for the BARD Express Player.

To download the latest version of BARD Express for Windows and to learn more about its new features, visit the NLS website: <https://slnc.info/bardexpress>



Braille Challenge 2025



SLNC Accessible Books and Library Services will host the Eastern North Carolina Braille Challenge, a regional event of “The Braille Challenge, ‘a national program of Braille Institute,’” for the third year in a row. The library’s staff is very excited about this chance to engage more students!

The Braille Challenge is an annual academic competition that offers students who are blind or visually impaired the opportunity to showcase their braille literacy skills. Participants are tested in areas such as reading comprehension, braille writing and speed, proofreading, and even braille-based math. It’s not only a contest but also a celebration of the students’ hard work and

determination to excel in their education.

In 2023, we held the event at the State Library of North Carolina’s downtown Raleigh location, where students displayed an impressive level of braille proficiency. In 2024, we partnered with the Governor Morehead School for the Blind, bringing the competition to its historic





campus. We're excited to announce that we will be returning to Governor Morehead School to host the challenge on Presidents' Day, Monday

February 17, 2025, continuing our collaboration with the school's dedicated community. The inclement weather date is Monday, February 24.

Whether you are a student hoping to compete, a parent who is looking for something to motivate your child, or a community member wanting to support braille literacy, now is the time to register!

To have a successful competition, we welcome volunteers to this event. Their help is essential for, event setup, assisting students during the competition, helping serve lunch, and more. If you have experience with braille or simply a passion for helping, we will welcome you to contribute your time to this important cause.

To compete or volunteer in the 2025 Eastern North Carolina Braille Challenge, please fill out an application at the following address: <https://slnc.info/ENCBC>

Together, we can make this year's Eastern North Carolina Braille Challenge another unforgettable experience for the students and their families.

If you're in the Western part of the state and are interested in participating in the Western North Carolina Braille Challenge in Winston Salem, scheduled for Thursday February 27, 2025, please contact Kim Shoffner at kshoffner@ifbsolutions.org and inquire about how to register!



Seasonal Reading

Summer Reading Winners

Thank you to all of the patrons who signed up for our 2024 Summer Reading Program. Our Summer Reading Program is held every year from June 1st until August 31st. Patrons who read at least 5 books will win a prize, and our top three readers in both Digital and Physical Books categories will win a gift card! Gift cards and other prizes are provided by the Friends of the North Carolina Accessible Books and Library Services.

Top Digital Books Readers Adults

- 1st place Jessica Smith
- 2nd Place Sharon Pressley
- 3rd Place Marcia Hackworth

Top Physical Books Readers Adults

- 1st Place Karen Reynolds
- 2nd Place Valari Rios
- 3rd Place Evelyn Brown



Winter Reading Is Here!

Any books you read between December 1, 2024 and February 28th, 2025, will count towards your Winter Reading score. Anyone who reads at least five books will earn a prize, and our top three readers in each category will win a gift card! All gift cards and prizes are provided by the Friends of the North Carolina Accessible Books and Library Services.

The program is split for digital books (Talking Books, digital braille, and BARD) and physical books (large print and physical braille). If you are under 21 years old you will be entered into the youth division.



As with Summer Reading, you can greatly increase your Winter Reading score by participating in the Rate & Review program. You can earn an extra point towards your score for each book you rate, and eight extra points for every book you provide a review of at least 50 words. That's up to 10 points for each book you read!

Additionally, in recognition of Braille Literacy Month in January, patrons who read at least five physical or digital braille books in the month of January will win a prize provided by the Friends of NCABLS! No need to sign up for this particular challenge if you're already registered for our Winter Reading Challenge. Simply check out braille books from our library, and those will automatically be contributed to your score.

Participate in Winter Reading!

How to Register:

Online: <https://slnc.info/srr>

Email: ncabls@dncr.nc.gov

Call us at 1-888-388-2460

How to Rate & Review your Winter Reading Books:

Online: <https://slnc.info/ratereview>

If you would like to have Rate & Review forms sent to you call us and ask for Rate & Review forms.

Evan Wilkerson: The 17-Year-Old Paralympic Swimmer Breaking Barriers and Inspiring Dreams

By Jabria Williams

Meet Evan Wilkerson, a 17-year-old Paralympic swimmer from Wake Forest, NC. Evan, a patron of SLNC Accessible Books and Library Services, has been swimming since he was five. Naturally a competitive spirit, he tried sports such as soccer and Beep Baseball, a game similar to traditional baseball but with a ball that beeps and allows players with visual impairments to hear when the ball is near. But swimming was more in his lane. When Evan was five, he started lessons at the Granite Falls Swim and Athletic Club, and he found that swimming was a sport he could succeed at with few accommodations.

Evan was born with Leber's Congenital Amaurosis (LCA), the infant onset form of Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP). This visual impairment is a genetic disability where the person is born with low vision and loses more vision over time.

In 2016, Evan and his family attended his first Paralympic trials in Charlotte, NC. His experience there, as his family described the trials to him, taught him about the very important role that "tappers" play in making competitive swimming



Photo Provided by Evan Wilkerson

accessible to people with visual disabilities. Tappers are tasked with sitting at both ends of the pool lane and "tapping" swimmers with a long pole when it is time for them to turn. After watching Tharon Drake, a two-time Silver Medalist Paralympic swimmer for Team USA compete in the trials in 2016 with the help of the tappers, Evan thought to himself "if he can do it, I could definitely do it."

Evan says his biggest motivation is reminding himself that while, yes, he has struggles, so does

everyone, and it would not be fair to give up on a dream because of those struggles. As someone who has “always been competitive”, he set his goals and will keep swimming until he meets them.

During the 2023 Parapan American Games, Evan made his international debut on Team USA’s roster. There, he won the silver medal in the 100 meter backstroke and the bronze medal for the 100 meter breaststroke. Having reached this significant milestone, Evan has set his sights even higher.

Evan competed in the 2024 Paralympics for Team USA in Paris. When asked how he felt about competing, Evan said, “I am pretty psyched.” Evan swam in the following events:

August 31st – 100 meter Backstroke;
1:06:00, 9th Place

September 4th – 100 meter Freestyle,
1:00.56, 15th Place

September 4th – 4x100 meter Freestyle Relay, 4:05:26, 5th Place (Along with David Abrahams, Olivia Chambers, and Anatasia Pagonis)

September 7th – 100 meter Butterfly,
1:05.60, 13th Place

Although Evan did not advance in his individual events, his determination and resilience shone through as he competed alongside the

best Paralympic swimmers in the world.

In his senior year, Evan is beginning to plan for his future. Evan aims to swim at a collegiate level, so he is taking a gap year to better his technique and make himself a top prospect for colleges. “I am planning on taking a gap year after I graduate to focus on swimming and start to look into colleges,” he said. Swimming remains a top priority for him. With Paris now behind him, he hopes to qualify for the Paralympics Championship in Singapore in 2025. After that, he hopes to compete in the 2027 World Aquatics Championships in Budapest and is determined to be a “major contender” for the 2028 Paralympics in Los Angeles.

When Evan isn’t swimming, he enjoys reading science fiction and history books. Since he is often on the go, he appreciates using BARD, a free service available to all patrons.

“BARD is super easy to access,” says Evan, highlighting its convenience for his busy schedule and the quick download times that allow him to enjoy his favorite hobbies during his free time.

Evan also mentioned how much he values having access to braille books. “Getting copies of things in braille is nearly impossible, so having these services so accessible is a true delight,” he said. “Being able to go on

the website and get whatever I want to read in braille has been really enjoyable.”

While Evan is on the go often with competing, school and life, he still enjoys the services offered by SLNC ABLIS. Evan wanted to leave a message to all patrons and anyone who is doubtful of pursuing a dream: “Having a disability isn’t always the easiest thing in the world, but you can’t quit. If you quit, you are never going to reach your full potential.”



Friends Corner

“Life is better when you’re in it.” — Susie Moore

Dear Friends,

Hello and welcome to Fall! As I write this Friends Corner, we are just over two weeks out from experiencing the worst hurricane that we have ever experienced in North Carolina. My heart, prayers and thoughts are with our North Carolinians in the Western part of the state who have suffered tremendous losses of life and property due to the horrific Hurricane Helene. Their lives have been changed forever, and I urge everyone to keep them in your thoughts and assist in any way you are able. The recovery from this storm will take months and years of rebuilding. I reached out to the Library staff to find out if they have had communication with patrons in the affected area. I learned that 1839 patrons live in the 25-county area, and the Library is in the process of checking in with these patrons. We will stay in touch with the Library and determine how we will proceed as the recovery moves along.



Here is an update from the Friends Board. As you are aware earlier this year, we held an election for Friends Board members. As of July 1, the following Board members were elected for a two year term. Returning members are: Brice Smith as Vice President, and Debbie Meadows as Secretary. Heather Brown returns as a board member and will be joined by three new members: Chris Flynt, Claire Hakin, and Mary Sedgwick. We welcome both returning members and our new members to this Board. We look forward to working with each of them and the other members of this outstanding Board.

I’ve had some interesting activity with regards to the James Benton Braille Writer program. Over the past few months, I have received several inquiries from individuals from both in- and out of state about how to donate braille writers to this Program. If you are not familiar with this project, we provide braille writers to individuals who cannot afford to purchase one, and for whom no other resources are available to them to help with this equipment. They can keep this equipment as long as they are using it. This is a terrific program since braille is the only written form of communication available to folks who are blind. Two of the inquiries I received were from out of state. One was from California and the other one was from Arkansas. I asked these folks how they learned about our program, and they indicated that they Googled it, and we came up. So, I thought this was interesting, and I Googled “how to donate a braille writer”, and sure enough, the

first thing in the search was our Braille Writer program! I was impressed! This tells us that we are providing a phenomenal resource available to our North Carolina blind community. To find out more about how to apply for a braille writer or learn how to donate one to us, check out our website at www.fncabls.org and link to the Braille Writer Program, or contact us at info@fncabls.org, and we will be glad to assist.

We thank each of you who are members of the Friends of the NC Accessible Books and Library Services. Your support enables us to continue to enhance and support the Library with the services and programs they provide. Your membership and donations also enable us to provide funding for large print books, DVD Movies for the Descriptive Video Service, the James Benton Braille Writer program, and more! As a reminder, this is an annual membership that runs from January to December each year. So, we will be sending reminder notices to renew your memberships soon. You can renew online at our website www.fncabls.org, or you can send us your individual membership fee for \$10 to: FNCABLS, 1841 Capital Blvd, Raleigh, NC 27635. There are other levels of membership as well, and all donations are welcomed and accepted.

Until next time, Happy Holidays! As always, Be a friend, Hug a friend, and Join the Friends of the NC Accessible Books and Library Services!

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Your Public Library

We hope you are enjoying all the services that are available to you through our library! Qualifying for our services means you are entitled to everything our library has to offer. This includes talking books and magazines, large-print books, braille books, descriptive videos, BARD, BARD Mobile and the newly updated BARD Express. You're invited to participate in



our annual library programs, such as our seasonal reading program and our writing contest. Do you need a recommendation for your next read? We have Reader Advisors on staff to help you select your next book. Are you having troubles with your book player, or need help logging into BARD? We have library staff who can help you with that too!

All these services are available to you as long as you are registered as a patron of our library. Now, here's a question for you: do you know about your local public library's services? Do they perhaps have a robust collection of large print and audio books? Do they have Maker Spaces that you can use? What kind of programming do they offer their community?

Your public library offers a wealth of resources and programs that can complement the services you receive from us. Many public libraries now provide access to digital collections, including eBooks and audiobooks, which you can access through your smart devices. Some libraries also offer homebound services, bringing materials to your door.

Library Card Sign-Up Month may have concluded, but you can sign up for a library card at your local library at any time! Ultimately, libraries are here to support communities. So, we encourage you to explore what your local public library has to offer so you may enjoy the best of both worlds! Here's a State Library of NC link to find your local North Carolina public library: <https://slnc.info/locallibrary>

Save Your Box for Returning Your Braille eReader to the Library

The boxes for eReaders are specially designed to hold all accessories, so if you need to return your eReader for service or withdrawal, it is important to keep the box and Styrofoam that you received with the machine.

When returning your braille eReader, please return all the accessories with the machine.

Accessories included:

- _____ USB-A to NLS cartridge cable
- _____ AC adapter
- _____ USB-A to USB-C charging cable
- _____ Lanyard
- _____ Case/Cover
- _____ Cartridge



Staff Feature: Katie, Alexis, and Jerry

First, we are happy to introduce Katie Guthrie, our new Head of Collections Access and Discovery Services. Katie oversees collection management, circulation, and systems and digital services. Katie also assures the integrity of the data contained in the book and equipment databases. She supervises our cataloging processes, which helps the Reader Advisors to provide the best service possible to our patrons.



Up next is Jerry Sherron, one of our newer Reader Advisors. Our Reader Advisors help our patrons select books, resolve issues within their services, and address any other needs. Working with patrons on a daily basis, Jerry helps support our patrons however they may need it.



Last but not least, we welcome Alexis Moye. Alexis is our new Circulation and Machine Unit Supervisor. In this role, Alexis ensures that requests for Digital Talking Books, Large Print, braille, digital equipment and accessories are sent out to our patrons. Since our library serves all 100 counties of North Carolina, Alexis works to make certain that patrons get their materials in a timely manner.



This amazing crew works hard for our patrons! Let's get to know them.

Q: What led you to join this library team?

Katie: I am passionate about helping readers read and learners learn. It is a joy to hear an audible gasp or squeal of excitement from a happily surprised library patron discovering a new book or library service. Working in libraries has allowed me to work with like-minded people who strive to help their communities.

Jerry: A lot of things lining up together along with my interest and history with library science.

Alexis: I wanted to get back into the state system after taking a year of exploring corporate America. I knew working in a library system was very familiar and when I found out about this opportunity I loved the mission of this library.

Jerry: Being able to help people in a quiet place.

Alexis: Serving this special population of our neighbors...I'm grateful for the purpose of my department as we are the backbone of this community.

Q: What goal or goals would you like to accomplish here?

Katie: One of my first goals is to learn the ins and outs of KLAS [the library's online catalog] and the coding I'll be using on a regular basis. This will allow me to support the team and the library moving forward.

Jerry: Mostly become better at this job and learn how to help in a greater capacity.

Alexis: I would like to learn as much as possible with this type of operation and to be the best employee possible.

Q: What is most important to you in a library?

Katie: A robust collection that supports a variety of reading interests and learning outcomes.

Q: What are you looking forward to most in your job?

Katie: I look forward to working with the collection and getting to know the team at ABLS better.

Jerry: Being able to help as many people as possible find what they want or need.

Alexis: Serving your patrons and community

Q: Who is your favorite author and why?

Katie: I have been an avid reader since I was in 7th grade and discovered *Howl's Moving Castle* by Diana Wynne Jones in my middle school library. I now own a first edition of this book that has the same cover as that library copy I first picked up. I'd have to say this one is my favorite for sentimental reasons, although I have many favorite books, authors, and series now.

Jerry: Jim Butcher, great writing style with a well-done mix of drama and humor.

Alexis: Maya Angelou...I just loved her books and what she stood for.

Q: What is one book and one movie you would bring to a deserted island?

Katie: Maybe a wonderful long book like the unabridged *Les Misérables* or

The Count of Monte Cristo. I'd have to choose a comfort movie like The Princess Bride or My Neighbor Totoro.

Jerry: How to get off/survive on a deserted island.

Alexis: I'll take two books....I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings and The Coldest Winter Ever

Q: Can you share an interesting fact about yourself?

Katie: I love nail polish (especially holographic nail polish) and have a collection of nearly 200 unique bottles from the brand Holo Taco. I'm currently wearing two shades from Holo Taco that change color depending on the temperature! Painting my nails while I listen to an audiobook is a form of self-care for me.

Jerry: Probably not.

Alexis: I love taking pictures of nature (landscape photography)

"Tar Heel Talk" is a quarterly publication of the State Library of North Carolina Accessible Books & Library Services (SLNC-ABLS) and the N.C. Department of Natural and Cultural Resources.

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