

TAR HEEL TALK



**Warm up with a good book
Join Winter Reading! 4**

FEATURES

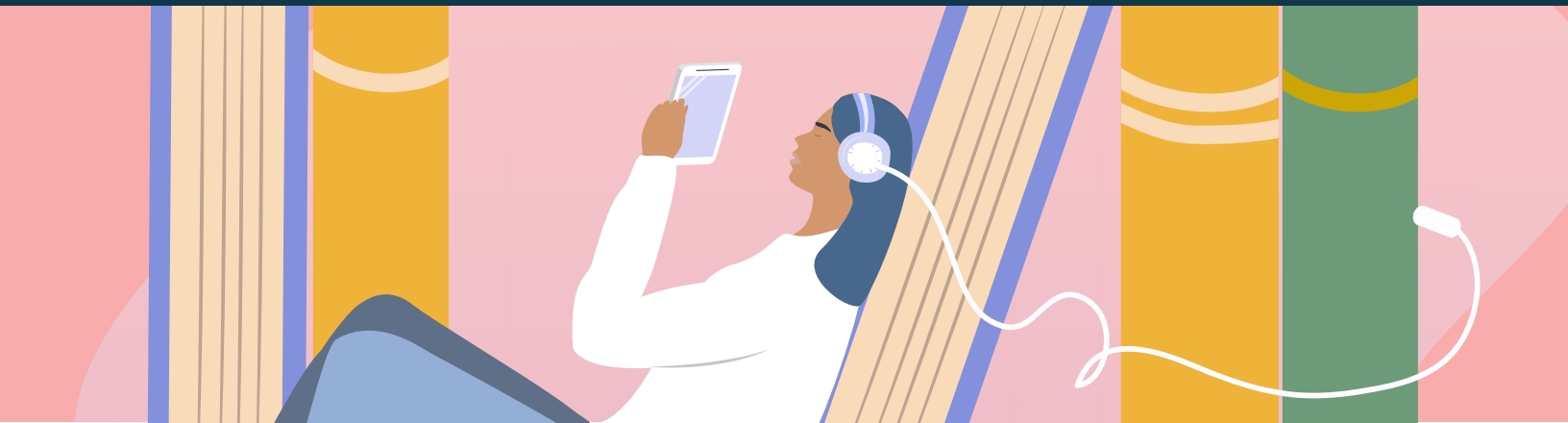
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WHAT'S NEW WITH BARD 2



For nearly 20 years, BARD (Braille and Audio Reading Download) has been the main platform for patrons to download their braille and talking books.

Since its inception, patrons have accessed BARD through a web browser, allowing them to download books to flash drives, listen to books on talking book players, and to read braille from a refreshable braille display.

Over the years, The [National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled](#) (NLS) has expanded BARD to include a mobile app, BARD Mobile, an application for Windows computers, BARD Express, and more recently My Talking Books on Alexa devices. Now, NLS has launched an updated version of the BARD website, **BARD 2**, which was designed to improve the user's experience.

BARD 2 sports a new look and features designed to make browsing and downloading easier for its users. The main page includes a My BARD section which contains familiar options such as Wishlist, Reading History (formerly Previous Downloads), and Account Setting. My BARD offers new options such as Subscriptions where users can manage subscriptions to series and magazines, and features a Language Preference setting where users can choose their preferred language; there are over sixty language options.

The Wishlist feature has also been improved. The BARD 2 Wishlist allows users to search within it, refine the titles in the Wishlist, and prioritize titles for download. In addition, titles located in the Wishlist will once again display their publication dates.

BARD 2 also introduces a new feature that alerts patrons to titles they have previously downloaded when viewing them in a set of search results. Patrons no longer need to check the Reading History feature to verify whether they have previously read a title.

These BARD 2 updates will eventually make their way to BARD Mobile, so users of the BARD Mobile app can look forward to an enhanced user experience in the future.

WINTER READING 2025-2026



The Winter Reading Contest is here! Any books that participants read between December 1, 2025, and February 28, 2026, will count towards their Winter Reading score. Participants who read at least five books will earn a prize, and the 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 into **digital books** (Talking Books, digital braille, and BARD) and **physical books** (large print and physical braille). Patrons under 21 years old will compete in the youth division.

Participants have the opportunity to increase their Winter Reading score by contributing to the **Rate & Review program**.

One bonus point will be added to participants' scores for each book that they rate, and eight bonus points will be added for every book review of at least fifty words. That's potentially ten points for each book!

Participate in Winter Reading!

How to Register:

- Online: <https://fs25.formsite.com/statelibrarync/gx1qx9r3ty/index>
- Email: ncabls@dnocr.nc.gov
- Call us at 1-888-388-2460

Rate & Review:

- <https://fs25.formsite.com/statelibrarync/kw4eixc2fl/index>
- To receive Rate & Review forms in the mail, give us a call at the number above and ask for Rate & Review forms.

NOTICE: PODCASTS ARE MOVING!

We at SLNC Accessible Books & Library Services would like to let you know **we will be discontinuing the use of Podbean for hosting the "Tar Heel Talk" newsletter and our podcast, "Heard Any Good Books Lately?"**



Moving forward, both will continue to be available as digital talking book serials, sent directly to patrons who are subscribed to those serials through the same service you use to receive your talking books and magazines. In addition, "Tar Heel Talk" and "Heard Any Good Books Lately?" will also be available directly through our website, making it easy to listen online whenever you like.

We truly appreciate your understanding as we make this transition to better serve you all.

If you have any questions or need help accessing the newsletter or podcast, please contact us at **1-888-388-2460** or ncabls@dncr.nc.gov.

FRIENDS CORNER



Dear Friends,

I hope each of you are doing well and had a terrific summer! It's hard to believe that the end of 2025 is upon us. September and October were busy months for us since we had the opportunity to talk with many of you at various outreach events such as the NC Council of the Blind statewide conference, the National Federation of the Blind statewide conference, and the VIP Fishing Tournament. It is always a pleasure to talk with all of our friends across the state!

Let me begin this letter by announcing we are very pleased to have elected three new Friends Board members who began their terms in July.

Please
welcome

Agatha Bisbikis from the Charlotte area, **Dare O'Connor** from the Raleigh area, and **Kim Tyler** from the Durham area.

We are very pleased to have these new Board members join us and look forward to working with them! Please see the list of all our Board members at the end of this article.

In this Friends Corner, I would like to call to your attention to one of our outstanding and well received programs that we have been offering for a number of years—the **James Benton Braille Writer Program**. As stated on our website, “James was a long-time supporter and friend to this organization, a

strong advocate and user of braille, and a long-time patron of SLNC Accessible Books and Library Services. This program was developed to assist individuals who are in need of securing a Braille writer for their personal use. Braille writers are very expensive, and this prevents many individuals from being able to obtain one. We have found over the years that many persons who have lost their sight and who are not in a position to receive services from other institutions, and/or resources, are not able to personally acquire a braille writer for their own use. These individuals are unable to develop appropriate braille skills that will allow them to gain independence and develop the only true form of written communication for

individuals who are blind or visually impaired. This braille writer program will assist these individuals with the ability to obtain a braille writer for their own use. It is our goal that this program will empower many braille users across our state to further their ability to live independently by being able to read and write in their own medium. I am very pleased to announce that we have distributed 52 braille writers across the state over the years, and folks tell us that this equipment is very much appreciated and are glad this service is available.

One way you can assist us with this program is to donate any unused braille writers to our collection so that they can be rehabilitated and distributed to those who need them to help

them in their daily lives. If you have a braille writer sitting around your home, on a shelf in the office, or abandoned in a storage unit, and you would like to see it serving an individual on a regular basis, please contact us, and we will be glad to receive this equipment. We have received braille writers from individuals not only from North Carolina but from other states as well. If you Google "braille writer donation", our program is one of the first programs that comes up on this search!

Please go to our website at www.fncabls.org and link to the Braille Writer Program page, and link to the application if you are interested in obtaining a braille writer. Send an email to info@fncabls.org if you have any questions regarding

the program or how to donate unused braille writers.

As we get closer to the end of the year, I would like to remind you that Friends will be sending out renewal notices after the first of the year to remind everyone to renew their Friends membership for 2026. You can renew online at our website www.fncabls.org and link to the Membership page, or send in your membership fee at FNCABLS, 1841 Capital Blvd., Raleigh, NC 27635.

If you are not a Friends member, you can also join using the link mentioned above or send in your membership fee to the address shown. An individual membership is only \$10 per year! Your membership helps us enhance and support the various programs and

services offered by the Library and the Friends organizations.

Thanks to each of you for your continued support of the Friends, and if you would like to contact us, please email me at info@fncabls.org. Until next time, as always, hug a friend, be a friend, make a friend, and join the Friends of the NC Accessible Books and Library Services.

Eddie Weaver,
President

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

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Web Page: <https://statelibrary.ncdcr.gov/blind-print-disabled>
Internet Catalog, Ordering Site: ncabls.klas.com

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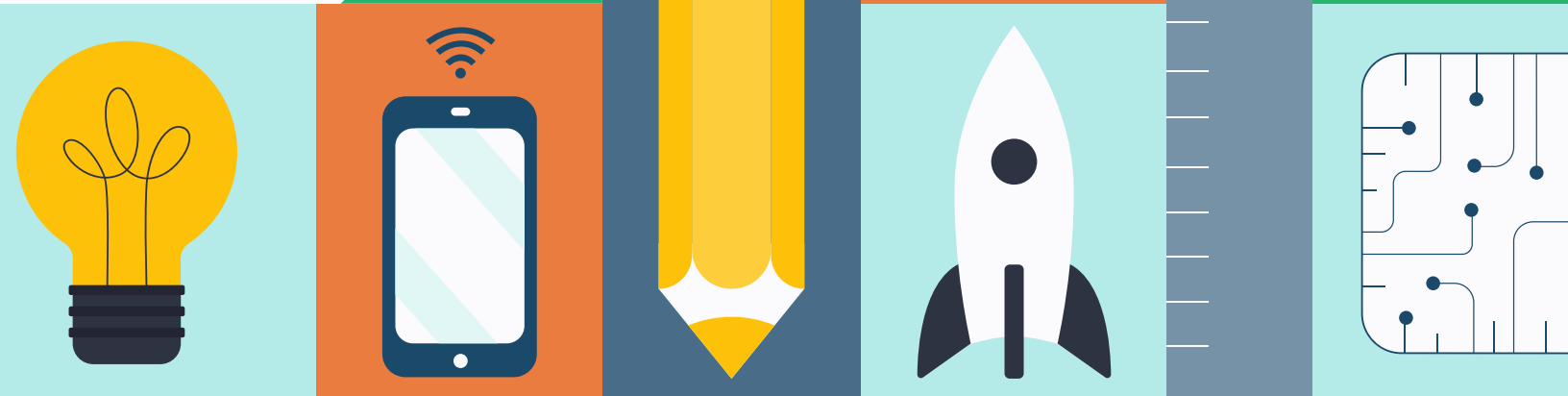
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Dare O'Connor

Kim Tyler

**Catherine Rubin,
*Nonvoting***



CATALYST OPEN HOUSE

High school students with disabilities interested in science, technology, engineering, or math (STEM) subjects are invited to learn more about **NC State University's Catalyst Program**. The Catalyst Program is a free, award-winning, year-long initiative for high school students with disabilities to gain hands-on STEM experience and prepare for college and the workforce.

To be considered, interested students and a parent or guardian must attend one of the program's Open Houses:

Virtual Sessions: Thursday, January 15, 2026, 7:00 PM – 8:00 PM
(Join between 6:30 PM – 6:45 PM)

In-Person Session: Saturday, January 17, 2026, 10:00 AM – 11:00 AM (Arrive by 9:45 AM) at NC State University. Free Parking is available.

To register for the Open House,
visit go.ncsu.edu/catalyst-open-house-2026.

STAFF FEATURE

We have a few new employees to introduce who are new to the library, **Courtney Silver**, **Sonya Williams**, and **Brett Morris**!

Courtney is our newest Cataloger. In this role, Courtney is responsible for the creation and maintenance of title records within our system, enhancing the overall user experience within our collections. Furthermore, Courtney assists in the verification of copies and volumes received for new braille and large type titles. She also regularly coordinates with State Library catalogers to

obtain full catalog records for large print titles. Additionally, Courtney plays a pivotal role in the dissemination of local, in-house produced braille and digital book items, ensuring their inclusion and visibility within the National Library Service catalog.

Sonya serves as our Circulation Clerk. Her work keeps library materials flowing smoothly from the shelves of our library to our patrons' homes. Each day,

Sonya helps prepare digital talking book cartridges, large print books, and braille books for mailing to our thousands of patrons across the state. She is also responsible for checking in and shelving materials returned by patrons. In addition, Sonya takes turns with other staff driving the mailing truck, delivering outgoing mail to the post office to send out to our patrons, and bringing back library materials returned from patrons. Sonya and Teresa, our other Circulation Clerk, ensure that our patrons receive materials quickly and reliably.

That leaves **Brett**, our new Circulation and Machine Unit Supervisor. In this role, Brett oversees the daily

operations of the Circulation and Machine units. In his time here, he has completely reorganized our storage areas to make room for the new digital talking book players, the old digital talking book players, and the Braille eReaders. Like Sonya, Brett ensures that our patrons reliably receive the books and equipment they request. Since our library serves all 100 counties in North Carolina, Brett plays a crucial role in maintaining the efficiency of the workflows of the circulation and the machine units.

Here is your chance to learn a little more about our new library staff!

Q: What led you to join this library team?

Courtney: Cataloging and working in special libraries were two interests I developed during my time in grad school. Applying for a position at ABLS presented an opportunity for me to explore both areas of librarianship. Accessibility-centered work was also a key focus in my career goal to contribute to making libraries inclusive and safe spaces for all communities.

Sonya: I've worked in libraries in the Midwest and New England for 12+ years. When I moved to North Carolina last Autumn, I started working at 2 public libraries, both part-time. When I saw the posting for the position at ABLS, I jumped at the opportunity,

partly because it is a full-time position, but mostly because I worked at a library in Milwaukee in their "Talking Book and Braille Department", so I knew the gist of what the day-to-day life at ABLS would be like. I love it.

Brett: After spending 10+ years working in the visual art community in Raleigh (first as Program Coordinator at Artspace, and then as Art Handler at the NCMA), I was looking for an opportunity to grow and serve the community in a different way.

Q: What do you enjoy most about working here?

Courtney: Working here has been a great learning experience. I've gained

a lot of insight into how services and resources can be adapted to accommodate diverse needs and interests.

Sonya: I love feeling like we're helping the people of our state have access to books—whether it's through large text, braille, or audio books. Personally, my main escape from the stressors in life comes from getting lost in an audio book, and I like the idea that we're making it possible for others to do the same.

Brett: I love feeling like I'm making a difference in our patrons' lives. Helping to make books accessible to thousands of people across our state is very fulfilling.

Q: Who is your favorite

author and why?

Courtney: My favorite author is Octavia Butler. Science fiction has always been one of my favorite genres and I think Octavia had an amazing talent for using it to reflect on the world in a very innovative and unique way.

Sonya: Oh gosh, there's no way I can narrow it to just one, so I'll share my top 5:

1. Taylor Jenkins Reid
2. Karin Slaughter
3. Kristin Hannah
4. Fredrik Backman
5. Jodi Picoult

Brett: Cormac McCarthy. I discovered his work in high school when the Coen brothers adapted "No Country for Old Men" and

I've been hooked on his writing ever since. His work tends to be rather nihilistic and violent, so it's not for everyone, but he weaves the darker scenes among some of the most breathtakingly poetic descriptions of nature and the human condition I've ever read.

Q: If you could only read one book for the rest of your life, what would you choose and why?

Courtney: I've never read a book more than twice. I don't think I'd ever read just one repeatedly for the remainder of my lifetime.

Sonya: "Meditations", by Marcus Aurelius

It brings me peace and reminds me that even when

I find myself in the company of those who choose to do wrong, I have the ability and power to choose to do what is right.

Brett: The Bible. As a Christian, I'm almost obligated to say this, but it's true. I will be reading and studying and trying (and often failing) to understand this book for the rest of my life.

Q: Do you have a favorite quote or work? Why is it your favorite?

Courtney: A work I really like is "The Year of Yes" by Shonda Rhimes. It is a great book about believing in yourself and having the courage to experience as much of life as you want to.

Sonya: "You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream." C.S. Lewis

This quote gives me inspiration to not get stagnant in my life. I've been known to say, 'I'm forever a student', and it's true. My body might feel my age, but my thoughts and aspirations are still in my 30's.

Brett: My wife is full of random nonsense words that make me laugh, but a standout is "tikitaka." It never fails to bring a smile to my face and until recently neither she nor I thought it meant anything. Apparently, it's a soccer term?

Q: Can you share a fun or interesting fact about

yourself?

Courtney: A fun fact about me is that I love food and music. Traveling for concerts and dining in different places is my favorite hobby.

Sonya: My B.A. is in photography, but I originally started out as a film major. I switched to photography after taking a class in it over the Summer to fulfill one of the requirements to take a course outside of my field of study. That was in 2003. Twenty years later in 2023, I went back to school and got certified in cinematography. I wrote my own script for a short film, auditioned actors for the cast, and directed it. I've yet to enter it in a film festival, but I hope to do just that once I finish editing it.

Brett: In 2019 I rode my bike from Raleigh, NC to Sunset Beach, NC. I spent a few days hanging at the beach with my family and then I rode back. I did both trips solo, and the trip took just over 11 hours. I had a mechanical failure at mile 100 on the ride back and despite getting help from a good Samaritan I ended up having to call a friend to come pick me up. I've always wanted to take another shot at that trip and do it all in one go, but I just don't have that kind of time anymore.

COLLECTIONS COMMUNIQUE



A QUARTERLY COLLECTIONS UPDATE:

- The **DA2 User Guide** is available in our catalog as **BR26189** and may be requested as a Braille on Demand. Braille on Demand requests may be kept permanently for your personal use. Learn more about Braille on Demand requests: <https://www.loc.gov/nls/services-and-resources/braille-on-demand>
- The **DA2 Getting Started Guide** is available in our catalog as **BR26188** and may be requested as a Braille on Demand as well.
- In June 2025, **37 new DVD titles** were added to the DVS Club Collection. You can access a full listing of titles available by visiting our [Online Public Accessible Catalog](#).

You can also call our reader advisors to learn about the most recent titles added to this collection.

- This year, we bid a fond farewell to two staff members from our Collection Access and Discovery Services team, **Deborah Jernigan** and **Paul Luckham**. Both have now retired from ABLIS after more than 24 years of service each. Deborah served as our Lead Machine Technician, repairing machines for many years, while Paul began work in the Circulation Department and later served as our Machine Clerk. Both worked daily to ship out our digital talking book machines and braille e-Readers.
- Did you know that NLS now provides **Collections Connections**, an e-newsletter assembled by the staff of the Collections Division? Collections Connections highlights works of diverse interest that you can download from BARD. To sign up, you can send your name and email address to the Collection Connections team at connections@loc.gov or use the subscription box at the following website: <https://www.loc.gov/nls/new-materials/collections-connections>.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: CAROL



At SLNC-ABLS, it is no secret our volunteers play a crucial role in making our services possible. Among other duties, volunteers help to convert books and magazines into an audio format through narration. For this newsletter, we'd like to feature one of our narrators, Carol!

Each week, Carol lends her voice and time in two-hour sessions to make

more accessible books and magazines available to our patrons. If you are a regular listener of "Wildlife in NC", "Carolina Country", or "Our State", you may have heard her voice! She just finished recording the SLNC ABLS 2024 Writing Contest Winners as well. Carol has been volunteering with the library for a couple of years, and here's your chance to get to know her!

Q: How long have you been volunteering with the library?

A: I started volunteering at the library in the winter of 2023.

Q: What made you want to volunteer at the library?

A: I had been searching for somewhere to volunteer.

I had tried a couple other organizations, but they weren't fulfilling for me. On another deep dive into volunteer needs in the area, I came across SLNC-ABLS. This opportunity truly excited me since I have a passion for reading and a desire to help spread the media to all those interested in reading.

Q: What are your favorite moments while volunteering here?

A: Favorite moments are getting to know the great people who

work at the library. My daughter has recently begun volunteering here and is my partner: she works the sound equipment while I narrate. We make a great team! Also, I feel a great sense of accomplishment when I've completed narrating a magazine and know it's ready to be sent out to the patrons.

Q: Are there any interesting hobbies of yours you'd like to share with our readers?

A: When I'm home, I enjoy reading and gardening. In 2020 I spent most of my days outside creating a large garden area since we had recently built a new house on a 1-acre lot and I had a blank slate to work with. Keeping my hands busy kept me sane during those months of lockdown!

I also enjoy traveling as often

as possible. When my husband and I traveled (by car or motorcycle), we loved exploring and took back roads instead of interstates whenever we could. Our motto was 'happiness is in the journey, not just in the destination'.

Q: What would you say to people who are interested in volunteering for our library?

A: I would encourage anyone interested in volunteering to do so without hesitation. There are several great NC-published magazines that are narrated for the patrons, and each magazine is uniquely different.

Q: Has there been a favorite reading that you enjoyed during your time here? If so, why?

A: There was an interesting

issue of "Wildlife in NC" that talked about Hurricane Helene. It was fascinating to learn more about some of the NC wildlife employees who were deployed to aid at the onset of the hurricane and the truly heroic lengths they went through to rescue people in dire need.