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North Carolina and Louisiana Libraries Team Up with Barbershops to Promote Literacy and Positivity

WASHINGTON, D.C. - As part of a national partnership with Barbershop Books (BSB) and the Urban Libraries Council (ULC), Charlotte Mecklenburg Library (N.C.) and Shreve Memorial Library (La.) will host events on Saturday, June 3, 2023, to celebrate the launch of their Barbershop Books programs. The program aims to expand reading opportunities for children in need by creating child-friendly reading spaces in barbershops and providing early literacy training to barbers.

Barbershops provide a unique opportunity to increase access to books and help young Black boys identify as readers that develop positive attitudes about reading. The collaboration between Barbershop Books and ULC brings together leading library systems to increase out-of-school reading for the eighty-two percent (82%) of Black and Latino boys nationwide who are not proficient in reading.

"As stewards of stories and incubators of imagination and curiosity, librarians have been long-time supporters of and collaborators in our work in communities across America," said Barbershop Books Founder & Executive Director Alvin Irby. "This unique project between Barbershop Books and library systems speaks to a shared mission and commitment to cultivating the reading identity of children."

On Saturday, June 3, 2023, at 11 a.m., Charlotte Mecklenburg Library will host a kickoff event at Just for You Barber/Styling Academy, located at 5108 Regan Drive, Charlotte N.C., 28206. The event will celebrate participating barbershops and connect young people with literacy through story times, face painting and access to MoLi, Charlotte Mecklenburg Library's mobile library.

Meryle A. Leonard, assistant director of outreach services for Charlotte Mecklenburg Library stated, "Data continues to show that African American boys and boys of color have a lower reading level than their counterparts. By supporting the Barbershop Books program, we at the Library can increase access to books and reading by reaching our younger community members where they are; and a barbershop is one of those places."

Shreve Memorial Library will also host its launch on Saturday, June 3, at 10 a.m. at Bos Man's Barber College, located at 2724 W. 70th Street, Shreveport, La., 71109. The family-friendly event will introduce attendees to the program and feature free haircuts and book giveaways.

"We are super excited about the partnership with ULC and Barbershop Books," said Deonci Sutton, associate director for library services at Shreve Memorial Library. "This is another great opportunity for

Shreve Memorial Library to show young people that reading is fun as well as provide books and programming to the barbershops in our communities.”

ULC President and CEO Brooks Rainwater added, “It is fantastic to celebrate the official launch of this programming in Charlotte and Shreveport. This partnership with Barbershop Books is a promising way to amplify ULC member libraries’ community partnerships and literacy services, particularly for young Black boys.”

Shreve Memorial and Charlotte Mecklenburg are two of four public libraries to pilot this partnership, funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Columbus Metropolitan Library and Cleveland Public Library will kick off programming later this summer.

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About the Urban Libraries Council

The Urban Libraries Council is an innovation and impact tank of North America’s leading public library systems. ULC drives cutting-edge research and strategic partnerships to elevate the power of libraries as essential, transformative institutions. More than 170 urban member libraries in the U.S. and Canada rely on ULC to identify significant challenges facing today’s communities and provide new tools and techniques to help libraries achieve stronger outcomes in education, digital equity, workforce and economic development, and race and social equity.

About Barbershop Books

Founded in 2013, Barbershop Books, Inc. is a nonprofit literacy organization based in New York City. As a trusted curator of culturally relevant children’s books, we support a variety of positive, developmentally appropriate, and fun reading experiences that inspire Black boys and other vulnerable children to identify as readers and to read for fun. Working with library systems, school districts, municipalities, and individuals, Barbershop Books empowers communities to bring transformative literacy content and programming to where kids are. To date, we have distributed over 50,000 books and engaged more than 15,000 children throughout the United States.