

February Spotlight: CLT Knight Emerging City Champions



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Letter from the Director



Charles Thomas

Director / Charlotte

Dear Stephen,

Happy Black History Month!

In honor of this time of remembrance and reflection on the ways we can deepen our support for our Black communities, I want to highlight three civic leaders in Charlotte — Knight Emerging City Champions (KECC) Cheryse Terry, Marlin Wilson and Jordan Braswell whose projects are advancing the Historic West End.

The [KECC program](#), powered by 880 Cities and funded by Knight Foundation, amplifies young voices in Knight's eight resident communities, fostering civic engagement through projects that revitalize downtowns and enhance public spaces.

Cheryse, Marlin and Jordan joined KECC's 2024 cohort last summer, representing the Queen City. Learn more about these rising leaders and their projects aimed at making Charlotte more inclusive, equitable and engaged.

Charles Thomas

Charlotte Program Director
Knight Foundation

Meet Charlotte's KECC Cohort

About Cheryse: Cheryse is a self taught archivist, having found her passion after losing her family's memorabilia to a house fire. She's a mother of three girls and a cafe owner in Charlotte — [Archive CLT](#) — which aims to preserve Black culture. Born and raised in the Queen City, Cheryse has dedicated her life to ensuring the physical memories of Black families are protected.

Project: "Digitizing the Community"

Project Description: Through this project, Cheryse is documenting the physical and oral history of Charlotte. By offering community scanning sessions where families scan and digitize their photo albums, relics and any item of memorabilia that is at risk of being destroyed or misplaced, the physical history of the community in Charlotte will live on. Oral history is recorded and archived as well.

What's New: Visit Cheryse's cafe, Archive CLT, and check out her website archiveclt.com for new items that are listed.



*Knight Emerging City Champion
Cheryse Terry*

About Marlin: Marlin serves as the Interim Director of Community Initiatives at United Way of Greater Charlotte, working with various community stakeholders towards changing the odds for individuals and families living in the region's most underinvested neighborhoods. Marlin is also a veteran and a father of five wonderful children and has been married to his amazing wife for seven years.

Project: "West Side Connect"

Project Description: Marlin's project seeks to bridge the gap between Historic West End residents and available resources, fostering a more engaged and equitable community. Many residents face challenges accessing vital services and information provided by community organizations. By creating a comprehensive resource guide and organizing a community fair, the initiative aims to enhance awareness of local nonprofits and services, allowing residents to access these resources more easily.



*Knight Emerging City Champion
Marlin Wilson*

What's New: Marlin's work in 2024 with United Way of Greater Charlotte's Live United Days has helped to shape his event planning strategy for the Historic West End. At no cost to residents, Live United Days events gather hundreds of volunteers and corporate and community partners to provide opportunities for communities across Charlotte to learn about various nonprofit organizations working within their neighborhoods.

The next steps in Marlin's project will be to engage Historic West End residents in focus groups to gauge their interest in physical resource guides to ensure community use. Working with local community partners, Marlin also plans to launch a book – partly inspired by the Negro Motorist Green Book – at the June 2025 Live United Day in the Historic West End.

About Jordan: Jordan is currently the Program Officer at LISC Charlotte, where he oversees a diverse network of Business Development Organizations. He provides crucial support to small businesses in the Historic West End by delivering technical assistance and enhancing their access to capital. Jordan also serves as an assistant pastor at Sanctuary Charlotte Church. Jordan holds a Master of Divinity from Duke Divinity School and a bachelor's degree in public relations from North Carolina A&T.



*Knight Emerging City Champion
Jordan Braswell*

Project: "Back Room"

Project Description: "Back Room" is a retail incubator that empowers entrepreneurs to gauge market demand for their products, attracts potential investors and fosters valuable connections. The initiative consists of quarterly markets that provide a platform for businesses to showcase and sell their goods. Back Room will be accessible for sellers while collaborating with financial institutions and organizations providing support for small businesses. The market is open to everyone, offering an opportunity to buy from small businesses. However, the ultimate goal is for investors and organizations to patronize the market and provide sellers with resources to grow their businesses.

The countdown to Knight Media Forum 2025 begins!

This year, Knight Foundation's annual Knight Media Forum will take place in Miami from February 18-20. KMF will feature a host of dynamic speakers — including former U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy and Bluesky CEO Jay Graber — and timely discussions on topics like the future of local news and the potential for AI to reshape America's cities.

To keep up with highlights from the conference, make sure to follow @knightfdn on social media. Video of KMF sessions will be available on YouTube following the conference.

Feel free to share this newsletter with your friends and colleagues. They can sign up [at this link](#) by selecting "Charlotte" as an interest.

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