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New Reading Park Officially Opens with Ribbon Cutting Celebration @ Downtown Central Library

The previously unused “front lawn” area of the downtown Central Library, 1 Lafayette Square, is wearing a new look and title as “Buffalo’s Reading Park.” This new green space status as a “people place” in the middle of downtown Buffalo is being celebrated today, Tuesday, August 13 from 12 noon to 7 p.m. with free interactive activities for all ages, music performances, an author visit, food trucks and a “Reading Invasion” program.

Today’s outdoor celebration will officially launch with a 12 noon ribbon cutting led by Library Director Mary Jean Jakubowski, Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz, Reading Park partner organizations and Library Trustees. Today’s activities include: crafts for all ages by WNY Book Arts Center, Restoration Society and Albright-Knox Art Gallery; a chess workshop with Archangel 8 Chess Academy; music performances by Kevin McCarthy and Diaspora Drumming courtesy of Young Audiences of WNY; a Just Buffalo Literary Center Writing Challenge workshop; readings by local children’s author Stephanie Parwulski; a garden tour guided by the library’s expert gardener Beaufort Willbern and, of course, communal reading at the end of the day at the Reading Invasion.

Buffalo’s Reading Park was made possible through the national Southwest Airlines® *Heart of the Community* program grant that was awarded to the Library. In-kind planning and design support was provided by Project for Public Spaces of New York City. The Library’s main Washington Street entrance ramp and adjacent greenspace were targeted to be improved with performance spaces, seating, public art and new landscaping, plus regular all-ages outdoor programming to highlight literacy, the arts, and the heritage and diversity of the city. Design and programming ideas were suggested through a series of public meetings and surveys, and through design development student work at the University at Buffalo School of Architecture & Planning. With the collaboration of Buffalo Place Inc., Just Buffalo Literary Center, WNY Book Arts Center, Visit Buffalo Niagara, City of Buffalo, Erie County and the firm Joy Kuebler Landscape Architect, the Reading Park will serve as a new platform for extending Library programs outside its building and for bringing new types of fully-accessible free programs to nearby workers, residents, hotel guests, and passersby.

“We are very pleased to be able to celebrate our new Reading Park with the community and our partners. We see this as an evolving space with new attributes and programs being added as we go forward,” stated Library Director Mary Jean Jakubowski. “We are so

grateful to Southwest Airlines for the opportunity to make this former unused space into a place where people will want to be, with planned activity or a place to just relax and read. Stay tuned for more to come!"

"At Southwest Airlines, we are committed to building connections that bring people together to strengthen communities for a more resilient future," said Laura Nieto, Southwest Airlines Director of Community Outreach. "That has been the inspiration behind the Southwest Airlines *Heart of the Community* program and we're excited to see the positive impact Buffalo's Reading Park will have on the surrounding community and are proud to have been involved."

"Placemaking is all about finding ways for everyone in the community to feel a sense of ownership over their public spaces. Our mission with Southwest Airlines *Heart of the Community* grant recipients is to help them create a sense of place — bringing communities to their full potential," said Phil Myrick, CEO of Project for Public Spaces. "The Buffalo & Erie County Public Library has gone beyond opening its doors and its shelves to all of Buffalo. The new Reading Park marks a new page for public spaces in Buffalo; bringing some of the best parts of the library outside, to meet people where they are."

To see upcoming Reading Park events, visit the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library's website calendar at: <https://tinyurl.com/ReadingPark> or call 716-858-8900.

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