



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

GOING FOR GOLD: Buffalo & Erie County Public Library Announces *Passport to Reading*, Offering Limited Edition Golden Library Cards to the First 1,000 Winners

An expanded incentive with Summer Reading, designed to keep Erie County readers engaged through August.

BUFFALO, N.Y. – May 1, 2026 – Buffalo & Erie County Public Library launches its [Passport to Reading](#) program today, inviting patrons across Erie County to visit all of our branches before August 21. Participants collect a sticker at each location, recorded in a passport book available at any branch.

The first 1,000 people to complete the journey will receive a limited edition golden library card – fully functional, collectible, and exclusive to the very first program finishers. Participants are encouraged to post their visits on social media with the hashtag **#BuffaloGoesGold** and tag **@BuffaloLibrary** to share their progress, and encourage others to join.

Every member of a household who completes all 37 visits is eligible for a card. Golden library cards can be linked to an existing account as a replacement card or kept independently as a keepsake.

New this year, each branch features an *I Spy* challenge: the location sticker includes a photograph taken somewhere inside that library, and participants are encouraged to explore and find it.

The program is designed to address a well-documented problem. Research shows children lose up to two months of reading proficiency over the summer, and more than two-thirds of the reading achievement gap between 9th graders traces to cumulative losses during Summer Break.

"Summer is when the gap gets wider. Kids who read regularly over the break return to school ahead of where they left off," said **Dorinda Darden, Interim Director, Buffalo & Erie County Public Library**. "Kids who don't often spend the first months of the new school year catching up. We know the library can change that equation and encourage families to take advantage of resources available to them."

The impact is felt most acutely by children with limited access to books and structured enrichment outside of school. Buffalo & Erie County Public Library serves more than 400,000 cardholders across Erie County, and *Passport to Reading* is structured to draw participants into branches they

may not otherwise visit – particularly those in more remote communities, which the program's format specifically rewards.

“The golden card means exploring our libraries. Access to materials and free programs is one of the largest problems faced by our community,” said **Chelsey Lonberger, Manager, System Youth Outreach Services, Buffalo & Erie County Public Library.**

“By encouraging the public to visit every library, community members will discover what our libraries offer, for free, for all ages, over the summer,” **Lonberger** continued.

Passport books, stickers, and golden cards will be available at all 37 branches beginning today, May 1. Golden cards do not require a linked account and may be kept as a standalone trophy or used as a replacement card.

Passport to Reading runs May 1 to August 21, 2026.

About Buffalo & Erie County Public Library

Established in 1836, the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library is Buffalo’s oldest cultural institution. *Profoundly Public* in all we do, the Library serves more than 2.35 million visitors annually through 37 branches and mobile services. The Library also houses over 3.2 million resources, extensive digital collections, and innovative programming. With a collection of international and national note, the Library continues to significantly impact community education, equity, and cultural enrichment. In 2025, every dollar invested returned \$4.24 in community benefits, totaling over \$131 million in annual value. To explore resources and services, visit www.BuffaloLib.org.

Media Contact

Sean Piazza
Marketing Manager
Buffalo & Erie County Public Library
PiazzaS@buffalolib.org

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