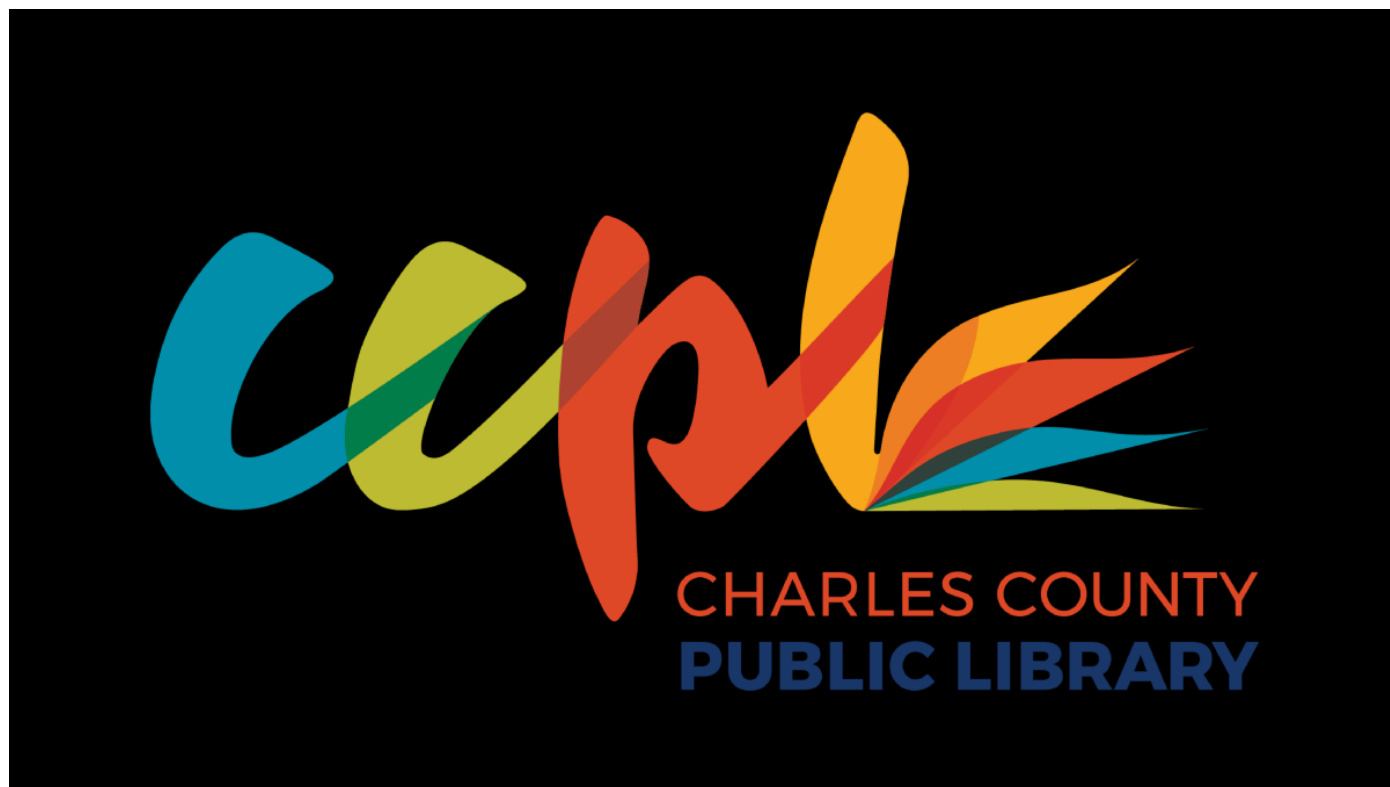


Youth Build Robots at CCPL's New November Series

Southern Maryland Chronicle southernmarylandchronicle.com/2025/10/29/youth-build-robots-at-ccpls-new-november-series

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October 29, 2025



The Charles County Public Library system begins two new technology-focused programs Nov. 6 in collaboration with RoboMasterminds, targeting students in grades 4-8 with sessions on robotics and online safety. Held at the Potomac Branch in Indian Head, the initiatives aim to foster skills in coding, engineering and digital protection through interactive workshops over three consecutive Thursdays.

Robot Ready, Set, Go! runs from 2 to 4 p.m. each Thursday, allowing participants to construct and code autonomous robots for challenge-based activities. The Cybersecurity series follows from 6 to 7 p.m., focusing on topics such as password management, threat identification and data privacy for grades 6-8. Registration covers the full three-week series, with spots secured upon signing up for the initial session; each child registers separately. Openings remain available as of Oct. 29.

KennethWayne Thompson, executive director of Charles County Public Library, highlighted the partnership's value. "Collaborations like this help the library strengthen connections within the community and expand access to innovative educational experiences," Thompson said. "By partnering with organizations like RoboMasterminds that share our mission to inspire curiosity and learning, CCPL continues to help prepare the next generation for success in an increasingly technology-driven world."

The Potomac Branch, located at 3225 Ruth B. Swann Drive in Indian Head, serves as the venue for both series. Opened in November 1996 after merging two prior facilities, the 20,000-square-foot site includes dedicated spaces for youth programming, such as a children's area with technology stations and group activity rooms. It draws families from southern Charles County communities, including Nanjemoy and Ironsides, where access to specialized STEM resources can be limited by distance to larger urban centers like Waldorf or La Plata. The branch logs more than 50,000 annual visits, supporting the library system's broader goal of equitable education outreach.

RoboMasterminds, the partnering organization, operates under funding from the National Defense Education Program, a federal initiative established in 1958 to bolster U.S. competitiveness in science and math. Jointly developed by the Army Research Laboratory in Adelphi, the Naval Surface Warfare Center in Indian Head and the Energetics Technology Center in Beltsville, the program delivers after-school, summer and internship opportunities for ages 8-18, plus college undergraduates. Participants engage in small-group projects emphasizing robotics, programming and engineering, often guided by near-peer mentors.

These November programs build on established CCPL offerings, including monthly maker spaces at the La Plata headquarters and virtual coding clubs accessible via the system's online portal. For families in Charles County, where public schools integrate STEM through initiatives like Project Lead the Way pathways for middle graders, library sessions provide low-barrier entry points without tuition costs. The robotics track, for instance, introduces basic circuits and algorithms using affordable kits, mirroring tools in local high school electives at schools such as La Plata High. Cybersecurity content draws from federal guidelines, teaching recognition of phishing attempts and safe social media use—skills vital as 85 percent of county teens report daily online activity.

The National Defense Education Program traces its roots to post-Sputnik efforts, evolving to support modern threats like cyber vulnerabilities in defense sectors. In Maryland, it funds targeted expansions, such as RoboMasterminds' summer camps at the College of Southern Maryland's Velocity Center in Indian Head, where 50 students annually dissect propulsion systems or simulate drone operations. These experiences prepare participants for internships at facilities like the naval center, which offers paid roles in engineering for high school seniors.

Beyond immediate skill-building, the series supports long-term workforce readiness in Southern Maryland, a region anchored by federal installations and growing tech firms. Charles County's economy, with defense contracts exceeding \$1 billion annually, demands proficiency in areas covered here, from autonomous systems to secure networks. By embedding such training in public spaces, CCPL reinforces its century-old commitment to free access, echoing expansions like the 2015 renovation of the Potomac Branch that added interactive whiteboards.

Interested families can visit ccplonline.org for sign-ups or call the Potomac Branch at 301-375-7375. Email inquiries go to potomacref@ccplonline.org. Both programs conclude Nov. 20, leaving room for holiday-themed follow-ups in December.