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**Address by Gary T. Johnson,**  
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Launching the Chicago Public Library Children’s Summer Reading Program, with the partnership of the Chicago History Museum.

What an absolute privilege it is to partner with the Chicago Public Library on the summer reading project - “City of Big Readers”! Thank you, Commissioner Mary A. Dempsey, and to all of your colleagues who made this possible, including Rhona Frazin-President & CEO, Chicago Public Library Foundation and Bernie Nowakowski, Director of Children and YA Services. I would like all of our colleagues from the Chicago History Museum who are here today to stand. Also with us today is the man whose generosity made our end of the project possible, our good friend, John Notz, Jr. Thank you, John and thanks to all of the Library’s supporters.

I was asked to offer the “inspirational address to launch the program.” That’s a very tall order, since you in this room are the ones who inspire me. I thank you for everything that you librarians do for the cause of literacy in the City of Chicago. I thank you for what you do every day for our city and for its future.

Your partner in this program is new, so let’s get acquainted. Let me tell you about the *new* Chicago History Museum.

[Description of new galleries and our exciting renovation.]

Of course, our new museum opened just a few months ago, but human nature being what it is, we already get the question, “What comes next?” What comes next is an exciting series of new exhibitions and new programs that will keep up all the excitement of our reopening.

This summer, when our reading project is full swing, there will be a new exhibition that will be great for families: “Is It Real?” We will look at the question of how a museum decides if something is authentic ... or fake. We will talk about the times we changed our mind. We’ve even made mistakes! This will give us a chance to display artifacts in our collection that we don’t ordinarily share with the public. It will be a great exhibition.

Next year, there is another exhibition that I am very excited about - Catholic Chicago. We will explore the story of the Catholic communities in our City that have contributed so much in so many different ways, all the way from the time of the earliest French explorers, to the present day. This is a story that is long overdue in this town, and we look forward to sharing it.

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But I would like to take you back to our new permanent installation on Chicago history, our Exelon Chicago Crossroads Gallery.

Chicago is one of the world’s great cities, but at every step of the way, it needs the perspective of history. For us at the Chicago History Museum, seeing Chicago as a crossroads is the most illuminating perspective. It tells us where we have been, where we are today and where we are heading.

How can we create the social services that we need in today's world without being inspired by the story of Chicago's Jane Addams, whose ideas and hard work earned her the Nobel Peace Prize?

As we build great schools, schools like Community Links High School in Little Village, we need to be inspired and informed by the story of education in Chicago. We need to know about John Dewey and so many others.

How can we handle immigration in our city, without learning the lessons learned when *all* the groups came here? They made it the city that it is -- a city of immigrants from other countries and from other parts of the United States, such as in the Great Migration from the South. We need to know their stories.

How can our young people save the environment if they don't know what we've done right, and what we've done wrong, with Chicago's great natural resources, including Lake Michigan? Our fresh water is the envy of the world, and we have learned some important lessons.

We could not compete for the 2016 Olympics and Paralympics without understanding how we handled the other great events in our city, such as the two world's fairs. People still talk about the grandeur of the World Columbian Exposition, with its Ferris wheel and its great buildings. But we will not forget that civil rights activist Ida B. Wells criticized the exclusion of African Americans from some of the fair's exhibits. Needless to say, when the 2016 Olympics and Paralympics come to town, we will do better -- especially if we understand history.

Our most memorable event, of course, was the Great Chicago Fire, and, to me, one of the most inspiring stories to come out of that event is the creation of the Chicago Public Library.

Money and supplies poured into Chicago as the world responded to the terrible disaster, but back in London, there was a realization - a wonderful realization - that in the wake of disaster, a great city needed books, along with a food, housing and jobs. A.H. Burgess of London, with the support of Thomas Hughes, formulated a plan that came to be known as the "English Book Donation." They proposed that England should present a free library to Chicago. Not just a library, but a *free* library, something that Chicago had never had. Among the donors was Queen Victoria.

And that first gift led to a civic decision to create a free library. And not many years later, that beautiful building that we now call the Cultural Center was built. And in our own day, the Harold Washington Library Center was built.

And think of our neighborhood libraries. Isn't it wonderful living in a big city that still builds new neighborhood library buildings?! We know that in today's big cities, library building is not a certainty. And now we have neighborhood building projects, in places like Austin-Irving, Logan Square, Rogers Park and Avalon.

It all began with an understanding that even a city that had burned needed books.

Summer in the library is a special time. Think back to your own summer reading. I remember the corner of the linoleum floor where I sat and read because it seemed cool there, even

though the building was warm. I remember how the books felt. I remember some of the titles of the books I read. There was no formal program back then for summer reading, but I remember the librarian who helped us kids find books during the summer. Her name was Mrs. Knight.

*Literacy* in Chicago is a cause. They knew that back when a free library system emerged from the Great Chicago Fire. And *history* in Chicago is a cause. We will never forget the events, the people and the challenges. What makes literacy a cause? What makes history a cause? Books have the power to change lives. History can change the human heart. And there is a call to action. Literacy doesn't just happen. It happens because of the work you do every day in the Chicago Public Library. And history doesn't just happen. We remember the past, explore the present and prepare for the future through the efforts of the Chicago History Museum.

So this summer, something very special is going to happen. Something very powerful. The cause of literacy and the cause of history will join forces. We will be in it together. Together for reading. Together for history. And lives will be changed.

Thank you for giving the Chicago History Museum this wonderful opportunity.

We can hardly wait for summer!