



THIS WEEK'S PROGRAM

March 11, 2025

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Christopher Lawing and The Joy of "Sign" Language

by **Marilynn Bowler**

Bill Barte's introduction of our speaker at Charlotte Rotary on Tuesday just hinted at what fun we were in for. Bill was grinning when he described our speaker as a graduate of NC State University, an eighth-generation Charlottean, a work colleague, operations manager at Jesse Brown's, community leader and friend, and he was grinning because he knew that we were in for the great treat of a walk down memory lane. And a walk with pictures to grab our souls.

Our speaker's last name is tied to one of Charlotte's longest and most successful businesses and he clearly bears the genes of that famous family and its dedication to our city. So, it was no surprise to us when Christopher Lawing hit the ball out of the park with his fascinating presentation on his dedication to preserve many of the old signs that hung/stood outside of popular shops, restaurants and business establishments for decades ... which Charlotteans grew to love. And which we now miss.

Where are those beloved signs that beckoned us to eateries, theaters, florists, shopping strips, hotels/motels, and beautiful architecturally designed office buildings in the heart of our city? When those businesses closed, it cut to the soul of Charlotte's history.

Hundreds (in his words, "tons") of those vintage signs have been preserved,

stored safely, and were on display at the Charlotte Museum of Art from the Fall of 2021 thru the Fall of 2023, thanks to the man who has instigated the preservation of these incredible monuments to Charlotte's history ... our speaker, Christopher Lawing.

The twenty or so visuals he presented for our enjoyment ~ along with the history behind them ~ included the magnificent Kale-Lawing Co. Office Supply sign positioned on its building situated at 227-229 So. Tryon St., right in the heart of our city for almost fifty years; as well as the Ratcliffe's Flowers sign, the Green's Lunch sign, the Diamond Restaurant sign, the Athens Restaurant sign, the Oakhurst Flowers sign, and the still neon blinking Bar-B-Q King Drive-In sign.

Christopher responded to questions about the status of the beloved Coffee Cup restaurant sign (someone stole it!), the Zack's sign (it was dismantled), the Anderson's sign (it remains on the side of the building on Elizabeth Ave.), the Penguin sign (it's been moved to a new location on East Blvd.), as well as the Pound & Moore sign, the Manor Theatre sign, and Phat Burritos' sign, and the list goes on. When asked if he happens to have a "favorite," he smiled and pointed to the gaily-lit neon *South 21 Drive-In* sign featured on the screen at the close of his presentation.

We were intrigued, amused, fascinated and ready to hear more. Luckily, Christopher Lawing can provide us with much more of the same simply by reading his book, **Charlotte: The Signs of the Times**. It's available at Jesse Brown's and perhaps (most probably) the author will sign your copy.

When asked "What's next?" Christopher plans to permanently display and house his stunning collection of Charlotte's history via a Multi-Purpose Center to permanently display and house his historical signs.

Once again, our esteemed Program Chair, **Luther Moore**, has provided us with the most unique, interesting, and quite excellent programs.

A recording of the meeting can be found here: <https://vimeo.com/1065702518>

The introduction begins at about 23 minutes and 30 seconds.