**Mary Adams Stephens: A Reading Connections Founder**

Reading Connections lost one of its founders last July when Mary Adams Stephens died at 87, but Greensboro lost a tireless advocate for learning who believed education was the surest way to help people help themselves. She backed up her belief with philanthropy, leadership and personal example.

It’s not hard to understand her motivation. She graduated from Manhattanville Sacred Heart College in New York, a school ahead of its time in promoting racial equality. After school and as a devoted Catholic, she worked for The Christophers, a religious organization that advocated putting hope into action.

She combined the rest of her life with a love of learning and with action.

“She thought it was important to be a student for life,” said her daughter Melanie Sizemore. “When she came across unfamiliar words, she researched their meaning.” Mary referred to them as “Words of the Day”.

She took her eight children to the library each week, sometimes checking out as many as 64 books at a time. She read to each of these children each day, until she fell asleep.

In 1989, Mary and Cynthia Doyle, another Greensboro philanthropist, founded Reading Connections in the basement of St. Pius X Catholic Church. What started as a referral hotline for other literacy agencies, grew into a group of volunteer reading teachers.

“When it came to Reading Connections, she saw a need that had not been identified, and she addressed it,” said her daughter Melanie**.** She felt it was important to meet people where are they and empower them. Her favorite student was an elderly man who wanted to learn to read his Bible.

In addition to being a co-founder of Reading Connections, Mary was a board member, tutor and regular contributor who left a generous legacy through her estate to support the ongoing work of Reading Connections.