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Live In Hope

7:30 in the morning at Park Road Baptist church, and you couldn't find a seat.

With disagreements over schools, housing, transportation and almost anything you could imagine, we sometimes forget the folks in Charlotte who work hard to erase the line between "us" and "them."

The Mecklenburg Ministries awards breakfast recognized two of them.

As Sidney Sussman, who won the Bridge Builder award, said: "People fear each other because they don't know one another." He lived through the great depression and served in the Army during World War II. And he hasn't stopped serving, with the Anti-Defamation League or educating others about his faith. On his bridge, he said, "the only toll that we charge is good will."

Every time you see Mary Nell McPherson, it seems she's trailing a troupe of smiling children. Her work with Seigle Avenue Partners and Freedom Schools earned her the Community Leader award.

She said she is driven by the needs of "Charlotte's most vulnerable population." Freedom Schools, with its summertime emphasis on the joy of reading, started with 50 students. It's now up to 500. She won't be happy until it's 10 times that. "It really is magic," she said and I agree. When I'm a guest reader, I leave feeling great.

On a serious note, she reminded us that jails grow bigger when reading levels drop.

But wouldn't you know, she fittingly left us with a song — "Deep and Wide," complete with hand gestures.

The message? "Live in Hope," from two people who do it every day.

Report by: Mary Curtis