



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Mountain Area Workforce Development Board recognizes outstanding employers, adult, youth and workforce staff at 2023 Recognition Luncheon on Tuesday, December 12 at the Virginia Boone Building, WNC Agricultural Center, Fletcher, NC. The program for the event is attached. Special thanks to the Clyde A. Erwin High School Orchestra for their performance prior to the recognition ceremony.

#### **NCWORKS NEXTGEN YOUTH PROGRAMS**

**Lori Cole**—Goodwill NWNC

**Lavendar Mullican**—Madison County Schools

**Lolita Perez-Patishtan**--Henderson County Public Schools

#### **NCWORKS BUSINESS PARTNERS IN THE MAWDB REGION**

**UPM Raflatac, Inc.** —NCWorks Career Center Henderson County

**Transylvania Economic Alliance**—NCWorks Career Center- Transylvania County

**Elderberry Health Care**—NCWorks Career Center-Madison County

#### **NCWORKS & WIOA ADULT & DISLOCATED WORKER PROGRAMS**

**Timothy Underwood**--Mountain Area Regional Business Services

**Jamis Gaughan**--Mountain Area Regional Business Services

**Dameion Fenton**—NCWorks Career Center Buncombe County

**Brian Spreng** –NCWorks Career Center-Henderson County

**Brenda Hicks**—NCWorks Career Center-Madison County

**Kita Bowman**--NCWorks Career Center Buncombe County

#### **MAWDB REGIONAL BUSINESS SERVICES – EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT**

**Western Carolina Sewing Company**—Mountain Area Regional Business Services

#### **DEB HOLEBROOKS OUTSTANDING CUSTOMER SERVICE AWARD**

**Mary Moore**—NCWorks Career Center Henderson County

#### **MOUNTAIN LOCAL AREA SPECIAL RECOGNITION**

**Michael Horvath** - Experienced Workforce Initiative (Asheville 50+)

**Meet the Geeks** – Career Pathway & Workforce Development Collaboration

**Vannoy Construction**—Strategic Regional Partnership- Construction Career Day

**MB Haynes Corporation** – Regional Apprenticeship

#### **About Mountain Area Workforce Development Board**

Mountain Area Workforce Development Board, a department of Land of Sky Regional Council, oversees a single, comprehensive strategic plan for the four-county area by meeting the workforce needs of local employers and job seekers. Our budget approaches \$2.5 million annually, and we allocate those funds for workforce development and training in the four-county area. Learn more at [www.MountainAreaWorks.org](http://www.MountainAreaWorks.org). The Mountain Area Workforce Development Board is an Equal Opportunity Employer and Provider of Career Development, Training and Employment Services.

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**MOUNTAIN AREA  
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT  
BOARD**

***WIOA Recognition  
Luncheon***

**December 12, 2023**

**WNC Agricultural Center  
Virginia Boone Building  
Fletcher, NC**

**MOUNTAIN AREA**

**Mountain Area Workforce Development Board  
WIOA Recognition Luncheon Meeting  
WNC Agricultural Center  
Virginia Boone Building**

**Tuesday, December 12, 2023**

## **AGENDA**

**1) WELCOME – 11:05AM**

**Master of Ceremonies- Graham Fields, MAWDB Chair**

**2) LUNCHEON – 11:10AM**

**3) CLYDE A. ERWIN HIGH SCHOOL ORCHESTRA – 11:05AM-12:00PM**

**4) PROGRAM – 12:00 - 1:30PM**

**Graham Fields, MAWDB Chair**

**NCWORKS NEXTGEN YOUTH PROGRAMS**

**Lori Cole\*\***—Goodwill NWNC

**Lavendar Mullican**—Madison County Schools

**Lolita Perez-Patishtan**--Henderson County Public Schools

Faith Bischoff

Vicki Whitt

Marisela Aguillon

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Shanda Bedoian

Jason Chappell

Stacy Peek

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**Jamie Gaughan**--Mountain Area Regional Business Services

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**Brian Spreng \*\***--NCWorks Career Center-Henderson County

**Brenda Hicks**--NCWorks Career Center-Madison County

**Kita Bowman**--NCWorks Career Center Buncombe County

Barbara Darby

Barbara Darby

Samantha Justice

Jason Chappell

Stacy Peek

Irene Canivet

**MAWDB REGIONAL BUSINESS SERVICES – EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT**

**Western Carolina Sewing Company**—Mountain Area Regional Business Services

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Irene Canivet

Marc Czarnecki

Graham Fields

Graham Fields

*\*\*Not available to participate in the program.*

**6) CLOSING REMARKS – 1:30PM**

**Master of Ceremonies- Graham Fields, MAWDB Chair**

***Special thanks to the Clyde A. Erwin High School Orchestra for their performance at today's luncheon.***



*Mountain Area Workforce Development Board is an Equal Employment Employer/Provider of Employment and Training Programs. Mountain Area Workforce Development Board is entirely funded by Title I WIOA federal funds as part of an award from the Employment and Training Administration, US Department of Labor totaling \$1,795,329.*

*Background: Frontline WIOA staff and Workforce Partners who have worked with the participants and business partners recognized today submitted the following profiles. The MAWDB is honored to recognize these individuals and business partners for their achievements and contributions to the Workforce Development System in the Mountain Area Region.*

## **OUTSTANDING NCWORKS NEXTGEN YOUTH PARTICIPANTS**

**Lori Cole**  
**NCWorks NextGen**  
**WIOA Out-of-School Youth Program**  
**Goodwill NWNC-Asheville WFD District**  
**Faith Bischoff, NextGen Career Counselor**

Goodwill's NextGen program is honored to recognize Lori Cole for her accomplishments in the WIOA Out-of-School Youth program. Lori started with NextGen about a year ago. Her first goal was to complete her GED through AB Tech, and she immediately hit the ground running. Her commitment was impressive, and she was able to complete her GED in just three months, especially considering that she was working full time and is a single parent. NextGen was able to support Lori through her GED by sponsoring her practice tests and test fees.

Lori has been working as a janitor for the Pack Library for two years, and while it has been a means to provide for her family, she wants to pursue a career path that is going to be more fulfilling and help her family thrive financially.

NextGen helped Lori explore career pathways by gathering information about various in-demand careers that matched her interests and strengths. After learning more about healthcare, she decided to pursue a license in Phlebotomy. NextGen staff asked her why specifically phlebotomy, and she responded, "I have always had a fear of needles, so I wanted to conquer my fear." That quote pretty much sums up who Lori is as a person. NextGen staff advised her that it would be a big commitment for a few months, and a lot of blood, sweat and tears but that did not deter her in the slightest, and again, she went all in. Through WIOA, NextGen was able to sponsor the classes, uniform, and books she needed for the program so Lori could continue to use her income to support her family.

Lori has not been in a physical classroom since high school and was a little nervous about taking classes again. She tackled the challenge the only way Lori knew how- head on. She passed her summer classes with flying colors and finished her fall classes with a B!

Lori is wrapping up her clinicals at LabCorp, which is why she could not be here today. She's not sure where she will work after she earns her license, but wherever she lands, that employer will be lucky to have her.

NextGen staff asked Lori what advice she would have for a NextGen participant starting out and she said: "Oh the places you will go, if only you believe in yourself!" Lori has been a huge inspiration for staff and is a testament to how far determination, hard work, and inner strength can take one. NextGen staff are so proud of her and wish she could be here in person to receive this recognition but know that she is honored to be recognized for all her hard work.

**Lavendar Mullican**  
**NCWorks NextGen**  
**WIOA In-School Youth Program**  
**Madison County Schools**  
**Vicki Whitt, NextGen Career Counselor**

Lavendar met with NextGen staff shortly after she began to attend Madison High School, where she had enrolled with a limited number of credits. It was believed she could catch up more quickly by completing her classes online at Madison's Velocity Learning Center, which allows students to work at their own pace. It soon became evident how determined Lavendar was to do just that. Not only was she completing her classes at lightning speed, but with the support from the NextGen program, Lavendar gained valuable work experience funded by WIOA as an assistant in the school's weight room.

Although in only eighteen months Lavendar has earned enough high school credits to graduate, she is now taking advantage of Madison's Career and College Promise (CCP) classes. She is currently enrolled in Communications and Anatomy and Physiology classes at AB Tech, where she has already earned six credit hours and has a GPA of 4.0.



Madison County's AB Tech College Liaison says of Lavendar: "Lavendar has worked so hard to get as many college credits as possible and has seen nothing but success in those courses. She should be extremely proud of everything she has accomplished, and I cannot wait to see what her next step is!"

Lavendar is working full time and will continue to take college classes next semester. She is on track to graduate high school in May, after which, she is planning to pursue a career as a Dental Hygienist. Lavendar's determination and work ethic will lead her to succeed at anything she sets out to accomplish.

Madison County Schools and NextGen are proud to recognize Lavendar Mullican as an Outstanding WIOA Participant for 2023.

**Lolita Perez Patishtan**  
**NCWorks NextGen**  
**WIOA Out-of-School Youth Program**  
**Henderson County Public Schools**  
**Marisela Aguillon, NextGen Career Counselor**

Lolita enrolled into the WIOA program facing several barriers in the year of 2021. She was an unaccompanied minor with no support at the age of 16 along with no English language skills.

When Lolita learned that she was an American citizen, she made the decision to move to the United States so she could work towards a better future. Not knowing what this was, she left her family with no plans and took only her basic necessities. With high financial constraints, her only goal was to build a better life for herself.

When she arrived in North Carolina, she quickly got a job working in the agriculture business. She knew that this wasn't for her as she worked long hours and never got a chance to work on her goals. She decided she wanted to return to school and learn English. This led to her quitting her job and she began to learn about the process of getting enrolled back in school. With little luck, she began to give up. Thankfully, a friend of Lolita's contacted one of the Henderson County Career Counselors and provided her story. Career coaches quickly worked toward developing a plan that could work for her needs. The NextGen career counselor worked with her and was able to successfully enroll her in the alternative school where Lolita would receive additional support due to her language barriers. Additionally, she was connected with resources in the community so she could get assistance as she returned back to school.

Lolita's perseverance and dedication toward reaching her goals are cause for pride among the NextGen staff. During the time that she was in school, she gained work experience through the WIOA program and later went on to sustaining a part time job at Taco Bell. She was able to keep A's and B's throughout this time and maintained great attendance at school.

Two years later and after many hardships, Lolita will graduate this December with her high school diploma. This is one of her most desired accomplishments as she has battled with many emotions and insecurities along this journey. Presently, as graduation nears, she has already landed a full-time job at Demmel Inc. Her goal to work in the automotive field is in process as she is working at a manufacturing company that focuses on handling automotive products. Her plan is to continue working full time to continue to sustain herself. She also hopes to one day become a mechanic and become proficient in the automotive industry. Lolita will be missed after graduating and leaving the NextGen program, but staff are so excited for her future and the opportunity to continue to learn about the world.

Lolita's quote, "My career coaches give me motivation to learn English and to move forward in my life. They are always checking in on me to make sure I'm okay."

**UPM Raflatac, Inc.**  
**Outstanding Business Partner**  
**NCWorks Henderson County**  
**Blue Ridge Community College**  
**Shanda Bedoian, Director of Corporate**  
**& Customized Training**

UPM Raflatac Inc. creates high-performing, visually compelling label materials that work towards labeling a smarter future beyond fossils through sustainable and innovative products and solutions. UPM offers high-quality self-adhesive paper and film products including label materials, graphics solutions, and removable self-adhesive products. Truly a global player with twelve operations spanning North (with two locations in Henderson County) and South America, Europe, Asia,

Africa and Australia/ New Zealand. Additionally, UPM delivers innovative and more sustainable products through a global network of distribution terminals.

UPM has been a strong manufacturing voice in Henderson County and the region at large for years via its strategic community outreach. The leadership team intentionally works tirelessly to connect and share its presence with many workforce development entities such as Land of Sky, Mountain Area Workforce Development, The Partnership, NCWorks Career Centers, and Blue Ridge Community College.

Just a few of UPMs innovative solutions in today's labor market are:

- Partnering with Apprenticeship Blue Ridge on the Industrial Systems Apprenticeship Program,
- Partnering with the Boys & Girls Club of Henderson County to illustrate the phenomenal careers available in advanced manufacturing,
- Partnering with Mr. Change Agent himself, Philip Cooper on Reentry opportunities,
- Partnering with NCWorks Career Centers in recruiting new hires, and
- Partnering with Pactiv-Evergreen during the closure to hire 12 employees to assist in the coating and finishing operations. The dislocated employees' extensive experience in the paper industry allowed them to quickly integrate into UPMs operations team and make a significant impact!

These initiatives are not only paying off but also paying it forward for the lives UPM is impacting today and tomorrow!

Blue Ridge Community College and the Henderson County NCWorks Career Center, proudly nominate UPM Raflatrac Inc. as the "2023 Outstanding Partner of the Year for Henderson County".

**Transylvania Economic Alliance  
Outstanding Business Partner  
NCWorks Transylvania County  
Jason Chappell, NCWorks Director**

The Transylvania Economic Alliance (TEA) is a public-private economic development partnership that provides professional economic development services for Transylvania County, NC focusing on attracting new job creation and investment to the County. Since its creation in 2014, the Alliance has been directly responsible for over \$120M in new investment in the creation of nearly 400 new jobs including employment within Transylvania County's manufacturing and professional services sectors which combined, have grown by 179% and wages across all industry sectors have increased by nearly 30%.

The Alliance focuses on attracting and retaining industries within a diverse range of targeted industry sectors aligned with Transylvania County's strengths and assets, in addition to partnering with the public and private sectors to advance Transylvania County's long-term economic development success through workforce development.

In 2023, the Alliance was proud to partner with local manufacturers, Blue Ridge Community College, and Transylvania County Public Schools to introduce a mechatronics apprenticeship program designed to create a link between students and local careers. The program is also designed for adult learners and other members of the public to develop basic, foundational skills to enter the manufacturing workforce and accelerate their career growth. The program plans to begin recruiting apprentices in 2024.

For its outstanding work in attracting new job creation, investment into Transylvania County, NCWorks Transylvania County is pleased to select the Transylvania Economic Alliance as its Outstanding Employer of the year for 2023.

**Elderberry Health Care  
Outstanding Business Partner  
NCWorks Madison County  
Stacy Peek, NCWorks Coordinator**

Elderberry Health Care, located in Marshall, NC was established in 1989 to serve the long-term care needs of Madison County and the surrounding communities. Today they care for a wide variety of individualized healthcare needs. They provide three distinct levels of care; assisting seniors who need minimal support in their Assisted Living program; providing around the clock nursing care in their Skilled Nursing Unit; and transitional rehabilitation services for post-operative patients like orthopedic knee and hip replacements.

Well-respected and long known for their skilled nursing and assisted living services, Elderberry is also recognized as a market leader for their transitional rehabilitation program. Through their trademarked "Home in Just 10 Days"™ approach, patients requiring rehab after a hospital stay are returning home quickly and safely. Providing quality and consistent services in healthcare requires adequate staffing. As with most employers in healthcare, the ongoing labor shortage has made maintaining adequate staffing levels very challenging.

In 2022 the N.C. General Assembly appropriated funding to support the growth of registered apprenticeships for youth aged 16 to 25. When the opportunity to participate in the Registered Apprenticeship Youth Expansion Grant program became available, Elderberry was eager to explore the possibilities. After working through the process with AB Tech Work-Based Learning and ApprenticeshipNC staff they became the first Madison County employer to enroll in the apprenticeship expansion program through this newly designated funding. They now have a total of 5 registered apprentices, three Certified Nursing Assistants and two Registered Nurses. Currently, Elderberry has the most registered apprentices in Madison County under this funding.

Elderberry Health Care is a very supportive community partner. They demonstrate their support by routinely participating in the career fairs at NCWorks Madison, posting jobs and interacting with the Nursing Assistant classes at the Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College (ABTCC) Madison location by serving as a clinical site. NCWorks Madison appreciates what they do and the services they provide to our community and looks forward to their continued success.

## **OUTSTANDING NCWORKS & WIOA ADULT & DISLOCATED WORKER PARTICIPANTS**

**Timothy Underwood**  
**WIOA Dislocated Worker Program**  
**On-the-Job Training**

**Mountain Area Regional Business Services**  
**Barbara Darby, Assistant Workforce Director &**  
**Business Services Lead**

Upon release from prison in January 2023, Timothy Underwood had many challenges but was fortunate to be met by people with lived experience to help him reenter the community. Timothy was ready for change and was willing to accept help and follow through with everything asked of him. Philip Cooper, with Operation Gateway was incarcerated with Timothy and was aware of Timothy's readiness for change and commitment to serving God. Philip met with Timothy and assisted him with housing, a support group, and connecting him with supportive services. Additional assistance came from Gene Ettison, United Way of Rutherford County, who helped him develop his resume, obtain work documents, develop a transportation plan, prepare for job interviews, and get connected with a recovery coach in Asheville.

Within 4 weeks of reentry, Timothy was ready to pursue employment in manufacturing. He was referred to Barbara Darby of the Mountain Area Workforce Development Board for a potential On-the-Job Training (OJT) position at East Fork Pottery. He interviewed and was hired through the OJT Program as a dislocated worker on 2/20/23 and completed 760 hours of training on June 25, 2023, as a production generalist. The workforce board's supportive services policy provided work clothes and other safety items needed for Timothy's work, which helped him a great deal. Within a few months of employment, Timothy used the Operation Gateway company vehicle to obtain his driver's license. He then purchased a car in May 2023, which was a huge step toward independence. He enjoys learning and he

hopes to advance at East Fork Pottery, LLC. He is known for his positive attitude and is well liked by his co-workers. He is also the Minister of Social Enterprises with Deep Time Coffee, where he preaches the Good News and builds connections with the recovery community.

East Fork Pottery is a living wage and second chance employer with two locations in Asheville. The company proactively hires individuals with barriers to employment and is known for their family-friendly culture and positive work environment. Every week employees sit down together to share a healthy meal that is prepared on-site. Upon a site visit, Timothy showed Barbara Darby and Marc Czarnecki the area in which he worked and explained the processes of producing high-quality ceramic dishes. To "get ahead" and transition to independent housing, Timothy has a part-time job roasting coffee in the River Arts District. He has goals and is actively "working a plan" to create a better life for himself.

Congratulations Timothy for being an Outstanding OJT Participant.

**Jamis Gaughan**  
**WIOA Adult Program**  
**On-the-Job Training**  
**Mountain Area Regional Business Services**  
**Barbara Darby, Assistant Workforce Director &**  
**Business Services Lead**

In early 2023 Jamis Gaughan discovered Brian Boggs Chairmakers on YouTube and was fascinated by the craftsmanship of the company's chairs and furniture products. At the time Jamis was living and working in Daytona, Florida, assembling furniture for a furniture



company, and constructing wooden musical instruments through his side business, Jamis Gaughan Luthiery. Jamis' career dream was to work in the woodworking industry, creating high-end, custom-designed wood furniture. Brian Boggs Chairmakers seemed aligned with his interest and so he applied for a position through the company's online ad.

Melanie Boggs, Owner, learned about the Mountain Area Workforce Board's OJT Program through Small Business Technology and Development Center and called Barbara Darby in February 2023 to get more details. They explored the possibility of hiring through the On-the-Job Training Program (OJT) if Melanie could find the right person. She did and Jamis and his wife moved to Asheville for the OJT opportunity. Jamis was enrolled in WIOA in March 2023 and completed 1040 hours of OJT in September 2023. The training position and company culture was a great match for Jamis' interest and woodworking skill set and he trained in chair fabrication and assembly. To the position he brought many transferable skills in woodworking construction and repair, critical thinking, problem solving, quality control, and production efficiency but there was much to learn.

His trainer, Brian Boggs, a master furniture designer, and maker with 40+ years of experience and numerous

patents and international awards, provided Jamis with 1040 hours of training in the intricacies of the company's complex chair making processes. Making the chairs on exhibit today involves knowledge of wood varieties and their characteristics, wood steaming and bending, assembly, and preparation for finishing. Using Brian's custom fixtures, tools, wood kiln, steamer, and processes, Jamis has amassed an incredible amount of knowledge and new skills that has made him an integral asset to this company. He is continuing his training at a higher level through the Workforce Board's Work-Based Learning Grant Program.

When asked, Jamis says he loves Asheville and his job and is very appreciative of the opportunity made available to him. Melanie and Brian are thrilled to have such a great employee who loves learning and perfecting his craft in woodworking. The OJT Program has helped the company recover from the impact of the Covid Pandemic when they had to lay off several employees. Recently they were able to hire another person through the OJT Program supported by National Dislocated Worker Emergency Grant funding.

Mountain Area Regional Business Services congratulates Jamis on an incredible trajectory at Brian Boggs Chairmakers and is pleased to recognize him as the Board's Outstanding OJT Participant.

**Dameion Fenton**  
**WIOA Dislocated Worker Program**  
**AB Tech Community College**  
**Samantha Justice, WIOA Case Manager**

My name is Dameion Fenton. I'm an engineer! I worked at Continental Automotives for over 15 years. That's where I started my educational journey, but that was cut short. Unfortunately, the company relocated, and I was among the many laid off.

I am smart. I'm innovative, I'm a self-motivated worker. My skills in engineering come naturally; however, I didn't have the degree to match my skill set. Then, WIOA picked me up and it's been increasingly helpful in supporting my goals and completing what I started.

I had the pleasure of working with Samantha, my WIOA case manager, for the past year and a half. She's provided constant (sometimes nagging) (lol) support and advice, advocating when I didn't even know I needed it. WIOA removed all financial barriers and has been an imperative resource in my process of obtaining my degree at AB Tech.

I graduated with my associate degree in mechanical engineering. I've already obtained a well-paying job in the field. Now, my skill set is verified. Obtaining a college degree has opened doors, giving me the advantage of allowing employers to see my intellect, innovation, and work ethic on paper.

Thank you, WIOA, for being an essential part of my engineering degree and future career.

**Brian Spreng  
WIOA Dislocated Worker Program  
NCWorks Henderson County  
Jason Chappell, NCWorks Director**

As with everyone's life, Brian Spreng's life was turned upside down with the pandemic in 2020. Brian and his wife had just given birth to a son soon after the shutdown. During the pandemic, their landlord sold the apartment they called home, and the three were forced to move in with Brian's parents. At this time Brian was working part time, while his wife was job searching. Due to the burden of rising prices, and dwindling work, he knew it was time for a change. Advertisements for trucking jobs caught his interest and he decided to investigate further. Initial research revealed that this was a career out in the world in a way he hadn't been since my son was born and the pandemic forced everyone inside; that freedom appealed to him. He always enjoyed driving and had investigated the different types of truckers and their earning potential and found that local trucking jobs can both pay well and allow you to be home with your family every night. He wanted to try it, but the up-front cost of CDL training was an obstacle. He wasn't willing to contract with a company that might send him over the road after training.

Further research led to the option of supported training through the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and the dislocated worker training program at NCWorks Henderson County located on the Flat Rock campus of Blue Ridge Community College. He contacted the center, asking questions about the process to qualify for training support. Brian found the process of applying for the grant and meeting its reporting requirements was straightforward, but completing CDL training was not.

CDL certification requires not only classroom education and behind-the-wheel training, but also medical clearance. Brian was born with two potentially disqualifying medical conditions, peripheral neuropathy, and a heart condition, and while the first had only mild effects the second had been surgically cured. However, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration needed convincing. It took five months of doctor's appointments and hounding their staff to process the required documents to finally get his medical clearance, but once he did, the rest of his career transition went smoothly.

Brian completed his behind-the-wheel training in three weeks, got his CDL two weeks after that, and took a job delivering for Pepsi two weeks after that. The learning curve at Pepsi has been steep, but now he earns a good salary with benefits. His family's finances are finally moving in the right direction, and they hope to soon be able to afford to move out of his parents' house. Brian stated he couldn't have made this progress without the help of the WIOA program, and he shared that he is tremendously grateful to all those that have made this possible including the honor of being selected as BRCC's outstanding WIOA participant for the year.

For his dedication and commitment, NCWorks staff are honored to recognize Brian Spreng as the NCWorks Henderson/Transylvania County Outstanding participant for 2023.

**Brenda Hicks  
WIOA Adult Program  
NCWorks Madison County  
Stacy Peek, NCWorks Coordinator**

Brenda has been interested in truck driving for most of her adult life. However, when she got married and started a family it did not seem practical for her to pursue this interest. She worked various other jobs and even worked in the transportation industry as a shuttle driver, but truck driving remained a strong career interest.

In 2016, Brenda's life changed forever, and it seemed like her entire world was falling apart. Over a 9-month period Brenda's mother passed away, her marriage ended, and she tragically lost her 17-year-old son to gun violence that took place outside the door of her home. At this point, Brenda, and her daughter, who was 15 at the time, were faced with an uncertain future and she knew she needed to create more stability for their lives. She desperately wanted to get her daughter out of their current environment and provide opportunities that would improve her future. Over the next six years, she worked consistently but struggled to provide the financial stability that she desired for her daughter. She did not want to just survive, she wanted to create a safe and stable environment that would allow them both to thrive. In 2022, she

heard about the Truck Driver training program partnership between Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College and TransTech. She decided this might be the opportunity to make the changes she hoped for.

She enrolled in the Truck Driver Training Program with financial support from the WIOA Adult program. Even though this would be a short-term training program she would still need to provide for her daughter, so she used her saved "leave" and worked weekends to attend the course. She successfully completed the program and began her job search in May 2022. She initially entered employment with a local company but began searching for a better opportunity once she gained experience. She began driving a dedicated route for Midwest Logistics Systems in December 2022. This route allows her to be back home every day, which has always been a priority for her. As she advances in the field, she has been given opportunities to develop additional skills and responsibilities like training new drivers.

When asked about the training, she is quick to say, "it changed my life." It has given her the opportunity to make the changes she had hoped for and establish herself in a career field with many possibilities for advancement. NCWorks Madison staff are inspired by Brenda's hard work, commitment and dedication and are honored to recognize her as an outstanding participant.

**Kita Bowman**  
**WIOA Title III - Wagner-Peyser**  
**NCWorks Buncombe County**  
**Irene Canivet, Employment Specialist**

When Kita's previous job ended, the Department of Employment Security required that she attend a meeting at NCWorks. At that meeting, Kita learned of the many resources available at the NCWorks Career Center and she decided to use those resources to the best of her ability. Challenged by some technical issues as she navigated online job applications, she willingly attended more than 40 hours in the Career Lab where she learned about the technical aspects of managing online job applications. Once she mastered online applications and resumes and learned new computer skills, she regularly came into the Resource Center at NCWorks and worked diligently ahead on her own to find meaningful work. For all the nine months, through the ups and downs of the roller coaster ride of job search, Kita persevered.

Kita developed a job search plan for herself, attending workshops that she believed would help her gain better job search skills. She attended the Back to Work 50+ workshop, a workshop designed to help 50+ workers use the newest job search strategies. She also attended the Interviewing for Success workshop to develop her interviewing skills. Kita signed up for Custom Guide, a self-paced tutorial program where she was able to learn and improve workplace office skills using Microsoft Office.

Most of all, throughout her job seeking journey, Kita continued to persevere on her own, with support from staff at NCWorks when she requested help. Some job seekers are eligible for programs that provide supportive training and case managers who provide continuing support throughout their participation, but that wasn't available for Kita. However, she continued to ask for and receive support from staff as she needed it- all the time maintaining a cheerful attitude, a willingness to ask for assistance, and then use the recommendations staff provided.

Along with learning and developing new skills, she also attended multiple Employer Events hosted at the NCWorks Career Center. Employer Events provide an excellent opportunity for job seekers to meet and speak directly with employers. Kita's hard work paid off. One of those Employer Events was for the Charles George VA Medical Center. Center staff believes the VA made a very wise decision when they hired Kita.

Kita's openness, cheerfulness, dedication, and grateful attitude are at the heart of her success. After obtaining her job, Kita sent a thank you note to the entire NCWorks Career Center staff and that unique act meant a great deal to everyone. Kita's determination deserves recognition, and NCWorks staff want to thank Kita in return because it is rewarding to know that her efforts, along with assistance from staff, led to her success.



## **MOUNTAIN AREA REGIONAL BUSINESS SERVICES – EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT**

**Western Carolina Sewing Company  
Outstanding WIOA Business Partner  
Business Accelerator Grant Program  
Mountain Area Regional Business Services  
Barbara Darby, Assistant Workforce Director &  
Business Services Lead**

Western Carolina Sewing Company (Sew Co) is an industrial sewing manufacturing company based in Asheville, NC's River Arts District. The company was established in 2010 and currently has 19 employees. Libby O'Bryan is the Owner and Executive Director. Sew Co. contracts with brands needing professional product development including design, patterns, and prototypes and provides cut and sew production for small batch volume. The company has a reputation in domestic manufacturing for quality and design discernment. Their mission is to preserve the skill of sewing in the US manufacturing economy and provide a workplace where employees earn a living wage.

Sew Co. received a grant award of \$8,200 in January 2023 and trained two employees in Digital Pattern Making. The training was provided by a pattern maker/designer with 30 years in the industry. The employees progressed from production sewer to more advanced technical positions, which increased Sew Co.'s capacity for higher-margin earnings and increased the trainees' earning power. The trainees learned to digitize hand-drafted patterns into CAD software, develop patterns using CAD, apply grade rules to create sizing variants of the digital patterns, create "markers" with the pattern pieces for efficient cutting of the patterns, and manipulate, mark, and check accuracy of

patterns. Bailey, one of the trainees, "loves learning new technology that builds on my existing knowledge. I feel way more relevant in the workforce with these new skills."

Sew Co. is a leader in the textile industry in WNC. They are a founding member of the Carolina Textile District, which works collectively to lift up the regional textile industry. In collaboration with the Carolina Textile District, Sew Co. helped develop an industrial sewer training program that is offered through A-B Tech and Blue Ridge Community College. With a strong commitment to sustainability and transparency, Sew Co. recycles all textile waste and utilizes a model of radical financial transparency among their staff to ensure that employees understand the company's finances and their impact on the health of the organization. Sew Co. is applying for a Work-Based Learning Grant that will provide additional training in Open Book Management, and they recently hired a dislocated worker through the OJT partnership with the Southwest Workforce Development Board supported by National Dislocated Worker Grant funds. Libby states, "We are so grateful for the support from the Mountain Area Workforce Development Board to help train, educate and empower our workers to preserve the skill of sewing. Thank you for seeing our work as essential!"

Mountain Area Regional Business Services staff is pleased to recognize Western Carolina Sewing Company as an Outstanding Business Partner for providing incumbent worker training through the Business Accelerator Grant. We appreciate their engagement with the workforce system. Congratulations to Libby and her team!

## **DEB HOLEBROOKS OUTSTANDING CUSTOMER SERVICE AWARD**

*MAWDB Administration recognizes our WIOA Frontline Staff for their contributions to the region's Workforce Development System. This recognition is awarded in memory of Deb Holebrooks, Career Coach, NCWorks Career Center-Asheville.*

**Mary Moore  
Deb Holebrooks Outstanding Customer Service Award  
NCWorks Henderson County  
Jason Chappell, NCWorks Director**

Although Mary has only been with the Henderson Co NCWorks Career Center a short time, she has had a long career in Workforce Development across the state. From her first day at Blue Ridge Community College, Mary has sought out ways to better serve others in an impactful way. She truly has a heart to serve others and is one of the most customer-minded individuals that I have had the pleasure of working with. This applies to both our external customers and our internal



partners as well. Because of her outstanding Customer Service, it is my pleasure to recognize Mary Moore as a recipient of the Deborah Holebrook's Outstanding Customer Service Award.

## **MOUNTAIN LOCAL AREA SPECIAL RECOGNITION**

**Michael Horvath**  
**Asheville Hotel Group**  
**Outstanding Business Partner**  
**NCWorks Buncombe County**  
**Experienced Workforce Initiative of WNC**  
**Irene Canivet, EWI Facilitator**

The Experienced Workforce Initiative (EWI) brings together community organizations and individuals with a mission ***“to support & promote the engagement of adults age 50+ along the workforce continuum, including volunteer work, stipend-based training, entrepreneurship, and/or part-time and full-time employment.”*** To fulfil this mission, the EWI depends on the talents and efforts of individuals and organizations, particularly employers, to see the value of employees ages 50+ and then actively support them. These volunteers deserve recognition, and the staff appreciates that the Mountain Area Workforce Development Board provides a forum to honor them.

The Experienced Workforce Initiative would like to present its **2023 Certificate of Recognition** to **Michael Horvath of the Asheville Hotel Group** for **Outstanding Achievement in Support of the Experienced Workforce Initiative.**

You may have heard of people who, “walk the walk” and Michael is the total representation of that phrase through his leadership and support for the EWI community. Here are just some of the reasons Michael has been selected for this honor:

- His use of the On-the-Job Training program through the Workforce Innovation Opportunities Act (WIOA) to assist hiring dislocated workers, experienced workers, and workers with barriers to employment.
- He is an active member-company with Inclusive Hiring Partners.
- He is a Mountain Area Workforce Development Board Member (MAWDB) and participates on the MAWDB Work-Based Learning Committee.
- He participates in many types of employment and career events and presentations, from the WNC Career Expo and other job fairs, to recording a YouTube video for a CareerQuest segment for Goodwill.

He has actively participated in the “meet the employer” discussions with 50+ participants in the Back to Work 50+ program, where participants learn what employers are looking for and they ask candid questions about possible employer age bias. Michael's good nature, supportive attitude and excellent advice are perfect to help participants understand that there are employers open, willing, and eager to hire experienced workers.

**Meet the Geeks**  
**Steve Newman, Past President & Acting VP**  
**Mountain Area Outstanding Workforce Partnership**  
**Marc Czarnecki, Mountain Area Business Services**

Meet the Geeks (MtG) is an all-volunteer not-for-profit that was formed in 2005 as a tech-centric meet-up interest group. The group has grown to 1900+ members spanning Western North Carolina (WNC). The group's focus is on supporting the tech community in WNC by creating comfortable networking opportunities, developing partnerships in education and government, furthering professional development, and ensuring gainful employment. MtG's board set goals to build a network of IT professionals spanning the various local business sectors to promote cross-pollination of ideas supporting personal, professional, community, and economic growth. Currently MtG hosts monthly meetings that provide educational, networking, and job-referrals. Meeting information is available at: <https://meetthegeeks.net/>.

Steve Newman, Mountain Area Workforce Development Board member and past President of MtGs, engaged technology professionals within and outside of MtGs to champion the development of the MAWDB's IT Career Pathway. From 2020-2023, the board's workforce staff and the IT Pathway Planning Team met and constructed the framework for career paths in infrastructure, software development, and customer service. A cohesive team of MtGs members, Blue Ridge Community College staff, A-B Tech staff, the Carolina Cyber Center, and Guided Compass, provided input and feedback. On May 10, 2023, the NCWorks Commission certified the IT Career Pathway as the workforce board's fourth career pathway, which serves as an advising tool for NCWorks staff, career counselors, and educators.

To support the goals of MAWDB, Meet the Geeks promotes the business services of the board including the On-the-Job Training and Incumbent Worker Grant Programs along with services provided by the NCWorks Centers. Their members participate in the bi-annual WNC Career Expo, smaller job fairs, and coach individuals who are looking for technology jobs. Currently, several MtG members are helping plan the AI Conference that MAWDB plans to host on May 30, 2024, at Blue Ridge Community College's Conference Hall.

MAWDB is honored to recognize MtG for their outstanding Workforce Partnership for the development of the board's certified IT career pathway.

**Vannoy Construction**  
**Brian Walker, Vice President**  
**Regional Strategic Sector Workforce Partner-**  
**Construction Career Day**  
**Mountain Area Workforce**  
**Development Board**  
**Graham Field, MAWDB Chair**

Vannoy Construction started as Vannoy Roofing in 1952 in Jefferson, NC. Owners Jim and Wilma Vannoy established and succeeded in business based on their character and reputation for doing good work, being service minded, and treating people well. Together they epitomized the company's values refer to as the 4H's – Honor, Humility, Hospitality, and Hustle. Due to the company's commitment to service, in 1963 the company became a licensed General Contractor and continued its steady growth. Their sons, Mark and Eddie Vannoy, joined the company in the 70's, adding capacity and a heavy highway division.

Over the past 30 years, Vannoy Construction has continued to take the character of the 4H's and the "grassroots builder" mentality to grow a large, but very special company. They have offices in Asheville, Jefferson, Charlotte, and Winston-Salem, NC and Anderson, Greenville, and Charleston, SC and Lynchburg, VA with annual revenue of 800+ Million. Vannoy Construction has become one of the leading commercial builders in the Southeast and beyond. They are a recognized leader in Healthcare, Education, Commercial, Adaptive Reuse, Retail, Hospitality, Industrial and Civil/Highway markets. Locally they have formed strong partnerships and built for organizations such as Mission Health, Pardee Hospital, Advent Health, Jabil Healthcare, WCU, UNCA, AB Tech, Blue Ridge Community College, Buncombe County and Schools, Henderson County and their Public School System, Ingles Markets, Pulliam Properties and many more.

In 2018, the Mountain Area Workforce Development Board hosted a small construction job fair at the WNC Ag Center. There was interest from employers and educators for another event. In 2019, the workforce board decided to support and help expand the Construction Career Day (CCD) held in Haywood County that had begun in 2006 under CTE Director, Alesea Glance. Christy Cheek, retired CTE Director for Buncombe County Schools, helped make the connection with Brian Walker, Vice President of Vannoy Construction. Brian was eager to get involved and Vannoy Construction was the presenting sponsor for the CCD events in March and October of 2019. No events were held in 2020-2022 due to Covid. Resuming in March of 2023, CCD drew 55 exhibitors and nearly 800 students from 18 school districts in WNC. At the lunch program, a recent WCU graduate and project manager with Vannoy Construction motivated students with her story about the non-traditional career path she had taken and loved.

Planning is underway for CCD 2024, scheduled for April 29 - May 1 at the Smoky Mountain Event Center; and Brian is leading the outreach and sponsorship team to ensure broader participation of construction and trades companies. Vannoy Construction has committed funds and will be the Presenting Sponsor for CCD 2024. With Brian's connections in the industry and passion for encouraging high school students to consider construction and skilled trades as a career path, anticipation of another great event is anticipated.

Mountain Area Workforce Development Board appreciates Brian and Vannoy Construction for their generosity and engagement with Construction Career Day and is pleased to recognize Vannoy Construction for outstanding work as a Regional Strategic Sector Workforce Partner – Construction Career Day.

**MB Haynes Corporation  
Outstanding Registered  
Apprenticeship Programs  
Mountain Area Workforce  
Development Board  
Graham Fields, MAWDB Chair**

MB Haynes Corporation is very deserving as the inaugural recipient of the Mountain Area Workforce Development Board Employer Registered Apprenticeship Award. MB Haynes Corporation is one of the largest employee-owned companies in Western North Carolina. They have one of the oldest, active in-house apprenticeship programs in North Carolina. They also rank in the top 10 of all employers in North Carolina for the number of registered apprenticeships.

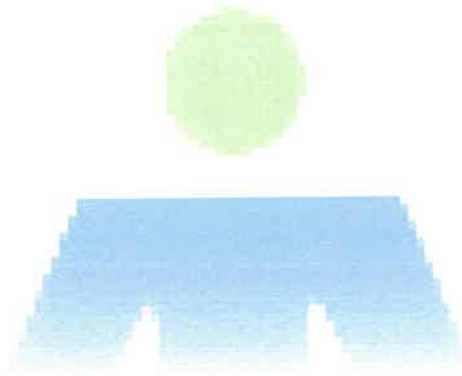
MB Haynes has apprenticeship programs in the following areas: Electrical, Overhead Electrical Distribution, Underground Electrical Distribution, Traffic Signal Technician, HVAC Service, Sheet Metal Fabricator/Installer, Pipe Welder-Fitter, Plumbing and, the newest starting in 2024, Low Voltage Technician. During 2022-2023, 140 members of the MB Haynes team are registered apprentices.

MB Haynes began with the Electrical Apprenticeship program in the 1950s when the original owner's son, "Gump" Haynes, recognized that workers needed to be trained in a better way. Other than a few years in the 1970s when the program was conducted through AB Tech, the program has remained entirely in-house with in-house teachers, many of whom have been through the program themselves.

Since 2008, HAYNES Electric has participated in the North Carolina Association of Electrical Contractors annual Apprenticeship competition. During that time, apprentices have won five first-place finishes, four second place finishes and five third place finishes.

MB Haynes Corporation has been honored with two apprentices receiving the Outstanding Registered Apprentice award for North Carolina given by ApprenticeshipNC and MB HAYNES Corporation has twice been awarded Outstanding Registered Apprenticeship Program by ApprenticeshipNC.

**MOUNTAIN AREA**



*The MAWDB thanks everyone for attending today's luncheon.  
We are honored to have you as our guests.*



**MOUNTAIN AREA**