



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Mountain Area Workforce Development Board

Land of Sky Regional Council

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Mountain Area Workforce Development Board recognizes outstanding employers, adult, youth and workforce staff at 2025 Recognition Luncheon on January 15, 2026.

Presenting sponsor was A-B Tech. Silver sponsors were A-American Electric and ERC Broadband. Bronze sponsors were Bayberry Group LLC and Mountain Credit Union. Patron sponsor was Bolton Construction & Service of WNC, Inc.

The program for the event is attached. Photos from the event are available at the following link:
<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1zdtr2HgKPsSQ0RTQcGGXdxQDixszUP30>

NCWORKS NEXTGEN YOUTH PROGRAMS

Tanairi Montecillo-Beltran — Henderson County Innovation High School, OSY

Christian Webb — Goodwill NWNC - Buncombe County, OSY

Anna Ingle — Madison County High School, ISY

John Smith — Goodwill NWNC - Madison County, OSY

NCWORKS BUSINESS PARTNERS IN THE MAWDB REGION

A-American Electric Inc. & Jackson Electrical Contractors Inc. - Blue Ridge Community College

Friday Services — NCWorks Community College - Transylvania County

Bolton Construction and Services of WNC - A-B Tech Community College

NCWORKS ADULT & DISLOCATED WORKER PROGRAMS

Evan Crutchfield — NCWorks Career Center - Buncombe County

Johnny Dorries — NCWorks Career Center - Henderson County

Bethel Robinson — NCWorks Career Center - Buncombe County

MOUNTAIN AREA BUSINESS SERVICES – EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

Mayor Abigail Norton & Town of Hot Springs — NCWorks Recovery Resilience Employer
Craft HR Solutions – NCWorks Work-Based Learning Grant

MOUNTAIN AREA SPECIAL RECOGNITION

Irene Canivet & Barbara Darby — Experienced Workforce Initiative (Asheville 50+)
Devon McCarthy-James — P20 Partnership Award

DEB HOLEBROOKS OUTSTANDING CUSTOMER SERVICE AWARD

Shelby Bilodeau — NCWorks Career Center Madison County

MOUNTAIN AREA EMPLOYER/EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP AWARDS

WNC Futures Factory — A-B Tech Community College
Healthcare Fellows — Blue Ridge Community College, Henderson County Public Schools,
Advent Health Hendersonville, UNC Health Pardee & Henderson County Education Foundation
NCEdge — A-B Tech Community College
Apprenticeship Blue Ridge — Blue Ridge Community College

HONORARY MENTION GO PLACES GRANT

Jacqueline Porter — Outstanding Participant Engagement
Devin Wiley — Outstanding Participant Engagement

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. 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 Recognition Luncheon

January 15, 2025
Mission Health/A-B Tech
Conference Center
Asheville, NC



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network





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

Frontline NCWorks staff and workforce partners who have worked with participants and business partners are being recognized today. 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.

Mountain Area Workforce Development Board is an Equal Opportunity Employer/Provider of Employment & Training Services and is funded by WIOA Formula Evergreen National Dislocated Worker Grant (NDWG) totaling \$313,112.85 and funded by WIOA Title I Formula Adult totaling \$620,508. The total cost of the *MAWDB Annual Recognition Luncheon* is less than \$5,000 with 0% from non-governmental sources and funded entirely with private funds.

Mountain Area Workforce Development Board Recognition Luncheon

Thursday, January 15, 2025

AGENDA

11:30 AM	WELCOME & PLEDGE - Master of Ceremonies - Graham Fields, MAWDB Chair INVOCATION - Chairman Jason Chappell
11:35 AM	LUNCHEON
11:55 AM - 12:00 PM	REMARKS FROM PRESENTING SPONSOR - President, John D. Gossett
12:00 - 1:25 PM	PROGRAM - Nathan Ramsey, Director, MAWDB & Graham Fields, MAWDB Chair

NCWORKS NEXTGEN YOUTH PROGRAMS

Tanairi Montecillo-Betran — Henderson County Innovation High School	Marisela Aguillon
Christian Webb — Goodwill NWNC - Buncombe County	Faith Bischoff
Kreed Smith — Goodwill NWNC - Transylvania County	Parker Utter
Anna Ingle — Madison County High School	Vicki Whitt
John Smith — Goodwill NWNC - Madison County	Laura Blanchard

NCWORKS BUSINESS PARTNERS IN THE MAWDB REGION

A-American Electric Inc. & Jackson Electrical Contractors Inc. - Blue Ridge Community College	Shanda Bedoian
Friday Services — NCWorks Community College - Transylvania County	Jason Chappell
Bolton Construction and Services of WNC - A-B Tech Community College	Debbie Cromwell

NCWORKS ADULT & DISLOCATED WORKER PROGRAMS

Evan Crutchfield — NCWorks Career Center - Buncombe County	Barbara Darby
Johnny Dorries — NCWorks Career Center - Henderson County	Mary Moore
Bethel Robinson — NCWorks Career Center - Buncombe County	Jackie Scottt

MOUNTAIN AREA BUSINESS SERVICES – EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

Mayor Norton & Town of Hot Springs — NCWorks Recovery Resilience Employer	Stacy Peek
Craft HR Solutions – NCWorks Work-Based Learning Grant	Barbara Darby

MOUNTAIN AREA SPECIAL RECOGNITION

Irene Canivet & Barbara Darby — Experienced Workforce Initiative (Asheville 50+)	Ellen Westbrook
Devon McCarthy-James — P20 Partnership Award	Emily Nicholson

DEB HOLEBROOKS OUTSTANDING CUSTOMER SERVICE AWARD

Shelby Bilodeau — NCWorks Career Center Madison County	Stacy Peek
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MOUNTAIN AREA EMPLOYER/EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP AWARDS

WNC Futures Factory — A-B Tech Community College	Nathan Ramsey
Healthcare Fellows — Blue Ridge Community College, Henderson County Public Schools, Advent Health Hendersonville, UNC Health Pardee & Henderson County Education Foundation	Nathan Ramsey
NCEdge — A-B Tech Community College	Nathan Ramsey
Apprenticeship Blue Ridge — Blue Ridge Community College	Nathan Ramsey

HONORARY MENTION GO PLACES GRANT

Jacqueline Porter — Outstanding Participant Engagement	Nathan Ramsey
Devin Wiley — Outstanding Participant Engagement	Nathan Ramsey

1:25 PM	REMARKS FROM SILVER SPONSORS - Steve Newman & Patrick Graves
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1:30 PM	CLOSING REMARKS - Melissa Wright & Graham Fields
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OUTSTANDING NCWORKS NEXTGEN YOUTH PARTICIPANTS

Tanairi Montecillo-Betran

NCWorks NextGen
Out-of-School Youth Program
Henderson County Innovation High School
Marisela Aguillon, NextGen Career Advisor

Tanairi (Tana) entered the workforce program to receive support in helping her navigate her barriers. She was facing several challenges that became too much for a young teen to handle.

Tana lost her dad at a young age and was committed to helping her mom move forward with life. Being the oldest in the family, Tana felt the responsibility to help her mom in different aspects. She had two younger brothers who she had to help raise while her mom was working to provide for them. Her responsibilities took such a big toll on her life that she felt the need to stop attending school.

When the workforce case manager intervened, she helped her create goals and set up a plan to graduate from high school. She participated in the workforce program to gain work experience which helped her gain extra income while attending school. Tana worked so hard that she met her graduation requirements and even became a mid-year graduate. All through this time, Tana had such positivity and commitment and even narrowed down that her dream career goal was to become an educator one day.

Presently, Tana is enrolled at Blue Ridge Community College working towards a career pathway in education. She is determined to become a teacher specializing in mathematics. Additionally, she was selected for a scholarship by a local church to support her educational goals. She also works part-time while continuing to help her mom. I am very proud of her success and can see a bright future for her as she continues to help others. She is an example of a responsible community member and can see great things coming her way.

I am pleased to recognize Tana as **Henderson County's Outstanding NextGen Out-of-School Youth Participant**.

Christian Webb

NCWorks NextGen
Out-of-School Youth Program
Goodwill NWNC Buncombe County
Faith Bischoff, NextGen Career Advisor

Christian's journey is nothing short of inspiring. Growing up in foster care Christian faced significant challenges as a young father. Christian's path was far from easy. At 17, after moving back in with his father, life quickly became unstable, leading him to drop out of school and spend the next seven years without housing, often living out of his car. During this time, he worked when he could and battled substance use but never lost the hope of building a better life.

At 24, Christian made a life-changing decision: to leave his past behind and create a future he could be proud of. Determined to reconnect with his daughter and become a positive role model, he enrolled in A-B Tech's GED program, secured stable housing with his brother, and joined the NextGen program. With a clear goal of pursuing a career in welding, a craft he loved in high school, Christian committed himself fully. This past summer, he began a work experience with Samoa Corporation in Weaverville, gaining hands-on skills and proving his dedication. In the fall, he enrolled in A-B Tech's welding program, sponsored by NextGen, where he continues to thrive academically and professionally.

Christian's resilience, motivation, and unwavering optimism make him truly deserving of this recognition. His story reminds us that with determination and support, barriers can be broken and dreams achieved.

We are honored to celebrate Christian as **Buncombe County's Outstanding NextGen Out-of-School Youth Participant**

Kreed Smith
NCWorks NextGen
Out-of-School Youth Program
Goodwill NWNC Transylvania County
Parker Utter, NextGen Career Counselor

maturity, and an unwavering commitment to his future. After excelling academically and athletically, Kreed entered the workforce as a landscaper but soon realized he wanted to pursue a long-term career. Through the guidance and support of the NextGen program, he discovered the Electrical Line worker Academy at Cleveland County Community College. NextGen sponsored and funded his tuition, covered the cost of the required work boots and tools, assisted with communication and enrollment, and paid for housing so he could successfully complete the program. With this support, Kreed secured a spot in the Academy and moved to Shelby on his own to begin the Academy's intensive 10-week training.

During the program, Kreed completed a demanding series of certifications, including his CDL, truck-driving training, flagger training, and ultimately his Electrical Line worker Credential. His dedication quickly stood out—so much so that a company contacted his instructor requesting an interview. Kreed impressed them immediately, and within a week of graduation, he was attending orientation for his new full-time position as an electrical line worker. As our community witnessed Helene and its' aftermath, this field requires tremendous courage, resilience, and skill. Kreed embodies all of these qualities, making him a truly deserving recipient of this award.

Congratulations Kreed! We are pleased to recognize you as **Transylvania County's Outstanding NextGen Out-of-School Youth Participant**.

Anna Ingle
NCWorks NextGen
In-School Youth Program
Madison High School
Vicki Whitt, NextGen Career Counselor

Anna was enrolled in the WIOA NextGen program at the beginning of her sophomore year of high school. Having experienced the challenges of foster care, she had faced obstacles that would discourage many, but instead of allowing these barriers to define her, they have done just the opposite. These challenges have motivated her. Anna's journey is an example of perseverance and the impact that support and opportunity can have on a young person's life.

Since her enrollment in the WIOA program, Anna has had the opportunity to participate in work experience in a variety of areas. Through WIOA services, she has developed valuable career skills, explored new pathways, and built confidence in her ability to achieve long-term goals. She has demonstrated commitment to her education and is now excelling in school, maintaining strong grades, and consistently setting high academic expectations for herself. In addition to her high school courses, Anna is enrolled in online classes through A-B Tech's Career and College Promise program. She has a high school GPA of 4.2, and an A-B Tech GPA of 4.0, and has 15 college credits to date. Anna is on track to graduate this spring and is interested in pursuing a career in criminal justice and criminal psychology.

For her dedication and outstanding progress, we proudly recognize Anna Ingle as **Madison County's Outstanding NextGen In-School Youth Participant**.

John Smith
NCWorks NextGen
Out-of-School Youth Program
Goodwill NWNC Madison County
Laura Blanchard, NextGen Career Counselor

John was referred to NextGen by a staff member at the SPARC Foundation in March 2024. When he came to us, he was 19 years old and navigating the justice system, under-employed and trying to provide for his younger sister. After the recent loss of his mother, he and his sister were staying with his aunt. His dream was to move beyond his justice involvement, earn his CDL, buy a truck, and become self-sufficient.

After enrolling him in NextGen and resolving his court case, he began his CDL training. He sailed through the online portion, however when he went to start the driving portion he didn't pass his drug screen, and his progress came to an abrupt halt. His training provider offered him the option to complete substance abuse classes (SAP) and pay the required fees to continue his training. Unfortunately, he was unable to pay the fees and therefore, unable to continue. After talking to the CDL training provider, I found out he had up to a year to complete the training at no additional cost if he completed the SAP classes and paid the fees. I encouraged him not to give up and to focus on setting aside some money for the classes, but with living expenses being a priority it proved difficult. I reached out to him regularly to encourage him but didn't receive any response for several months.

Finally, in December 2024, after another attempt to connect, he responded enthusiastically, letting me know he was ready to make it happen! We contacted the training provider and worked with their compliance officer to negotiate the situation, and in January he was able to complete his SAP classes. By February he was able to pay the fees and get his temporary CDL permit and resume his CDL Training. By the end of March, he had completed his training and earned his CDL! John has since secured a full-time job driving a truck for a family member's company. He is currently putting aside money to buy his own truck so he can become self-employed and accomplish his dream!

Congratulations John on receiving **Madison County's Outstanding NextGen Out-of-School Youth Participant Award**.

NCWORKS BUSINESS PARTNERS IN THE MAWDB REGION

A-American Electric Inc & Jackson Electrical Contractors

Kris Wilson, Patrick Graves & Blake Therrian - AAE

Joe Jackson, Ross Jackson & John Klinge - JEC

Outstanding Business Partner

Blue Ridge Community College

Shanda Bedoian, Director of Corporate & Customized Training

A-American Electric Inc. and Jackson Electrical Contractors exemplify what it means to be true workforce development partners - investing not only in skill-building, but in people, purpose, and the future of the electrical trade.

Jackson Electric (JEC), a family-owned business rooted in exceptional service, professionalism, and reliability since 1999, first partnered with Apprenticeship Blue Ridge (ABR) in 2021. Together, they envisioned a pathway to nurture the next generation of electricians. That vision became reality in Fall 2022 with the launch of the Inaugural Electrical Apprenticeship Pathway – an extensive 6 semester/ 6000 OJT hour program – that is built on mentorship, education, and opportunity.

In 2023, A-American Electric Inc. (AAE), founded in 1981 by a Vietnam veteran and grown from a small family business to one of the region's leading contractors, joined forces with JEC and ABR to elevate the program even further. With over 100 employees each, both AAE and JEC have demonstrated their shared passion for developing people and serving communities. Their collaboration has transformed the Electrical Apprenticeship into a model of workforce excellence across Western North Carolina. Each Fall a new cohort is launched with over 70 apprentices participating since 2022.

Both companies embody the belief that building people first strengthens businesses, families, and communities. They have cultivated a culture where experienced professionals invest in the next generation, passing along real-world expertise and lifelong lessons. Through their partnership with ABR, classroom learning and field experience are seamlessly bridged, producing craftsmen of character - individuals who are not only competent but "Powered to Serve." Together, **A-American Electric Inc. and Jackson Electrical Contractors, Inc.** have set a new standard for partnership, workforce development, and community impact. Their shared dedication to purpose-driven training and servant leadership make them truly deserving of the: **2025 Henderson County Outstanding Business Partner of the Year Award.**

Friday Services
Outstanding Business Partner
NCWorks Career Center Transylvania County
Jason Chappell

Friday Services is a privately held North Carolina corporation that began in 1980 as Girl Friday Services under Debbie Wilson. The business was later purchased by Diane and John Modaff in 1987 and operates today under Dave and Lynda Modaff. Friday Services is a full-service employment agency dedicated to helping the businesses of the Western North Carolina region thrive by bringing the right people to the right job - every time. It operates as an independent business and is not affiliated with any franchise organization. All the company's business functions, including sales, service, and administration, are managed and processed by the company's staff members.

For many years and in many different ways, Friday Services has been an invaluable partner with our NCWorks Career Centers especially in Henderson and Transylvania Counties. During the last several months, Friday Services has made a greater impact connecting with our mutual job-seeking customers. This partnership has made great strides especially in the Transylvania NCWorks Career Center.

During each scheduled monthly recruitment event, multitudes of job seekers have been able to connect with immediate employment, which is desperately needed by our job seeker and business customers. This two-way communication and ease of operations between NCWorks and Friday Services has helped large numbers of job seekers in our Transylvania County area. Friday Services has been and continues to be dedicated to providing services to businesses and job seekers alike in our region.

For this and so many other reasons, it is our privilege to recognize Friday Services as this year's **Outstanding Business Partner for the Transylvania County NCWorks Center** at Blue Ridge Community College.

Bolton Construction and Services of WNC
Outstanding Business Partner
A-B Tech Community College
Debbie Cromwell, Director of Work-Based Learning

As VP of Bolton Services, Mark truly lives the company motto: "Do Better. Be Better. Bolton." He leads by example and invests in his employees' futures, expanding apprenticeship opportunities, offering 401k matches, and providing paid schooling and training to help staff advance in their careers.

His commitment to community runs just as deep. Each year, he supports local schools and youth programs—from the Woodfin Elementary 5K to youth baseball teams—and champions education as a pathway into the trades. He works to bridge employers and community colleges to create accessible apprenticeship pipelines. Mark was 100% instrumental in helping A-B Tech create a successful HVAC apprenticeship.

Mark also gives generously of his time and expertise. He serves as, "Western NC Chapter of PHCC –current title is Local Chair, AB Tech Advisory Committee for HVAC and Apprenticeships, Haywood Community College Construction Skills & Tech Advisory Committee, WCU Construction Industry Advisory Council participates in the Woodfin Business Association and represents the trades at the state level through the Josh Stein Governor's Council on Apprenticeship and Workforce Development. 2020 Business North Carolina - Small Business of the Year 100 Years in Business this year, and on the cover of WNC Business Magazine to mark the occasion.

He also applied for and won a \$20K grant due to business losses during Helene (mainly due to continuing to pay staff even though they couldn't work). The decision was made to use that money to cover pro-bono residential plumbing and HVAC projects related to Helene damage and reconstruction.

In every role, Mark is driven by a simple, steady purpose: to strengthen his company, support his employees, and uplift his community. In November, Bolton honored our veterans by donating a portion of every service ticket to the Independence Fund, a non-profit that supports and rehabilitates catastrophically wounded veterans.

It is our honor to recognize Bolton Construction and Services of WNC as **A-B Tech's Outstanding Business Partner of the Year**.

NCWORKS ADULT & DISLOCATED WORKER PROGRAM

Evan Crutchfield

**NCWorks Career Center Buncombe County
Dislocated Worker Program On-the Job Training**
Barbara Darby, Assistant Director/Business Services Leader

Immediately after Hurricane Helene struck Western NC, our local economy took a big hit and with so much uncertainty, many jobs were cut across the region. Evan was laid off from his job due to Helene and for several months struggled to find employment. With experience in the brewing industry, Evan wanted his next move to land somewhere uniquely in that industry but in an adjacent category where he would develop new skills.

He had inquired at Devil's Foot Beverage but at the time following Helene, Devil's Foot could not hire him directly. Ben Colvin, CEO & Founder of Devil's Foot Beverage, thought that Evan was a prime candidate, so he referred him to the WIOA On-the-Job Program. As a dislocated worker, Evan was eligible for the On-the-Job Training Program.

In March 2025, Evan began training as a marketing assistant and production crew member at Devil's Foot. His trainers included Ben Colvin and Arnaldo Alvarex, VP of Sales, and his training plan of 1,040 hours spanned both production processes and marketing to support sales. As a quick study, he learned how to mix and create beverages, to operate and maintain the brewing and canning lines, and to develop marketing and sales strategies for Devil's Foot's market segment. Evan completed his training on September 11, 2025.

Per Ben, "Evan is a stellar employee and team member. He is a leader and not only does his job but steps in and helps others when needed. His talents have contributed to streamlining processes and acquiring new customers." Following Hurricane Helene, Devil's Foot became a distribution center for water, food, and other supplies. Evan was there volunteering with team members, sometimes working 12-hour days and distributing over 16,000 gallons of drinking water, food and supplies for several weeks. This is a testament to his work ethic and his commitment to his employer and community. Evan loves working for Devil's Foot where he has found everyone to be kind, patient, and professional. He is especially thankful for the opportunity to train and grow his career.

I am pleased to present Evan Crutchfield with the **NC Works Outstanding On-the-Job Training Participant Award**.

Johnny Dorries

**NCWorks Career Center Henderson County
Dislocated Worker Program**
Mary Moore, Career Advisor

Johnny Dorries grew up as a typical child. He was an honor-roll student who was active in sports, and who helped take care of his younger brothers. After his family moved to South Carolina in 1986, he was introduced to marijuana laced with PCP at age 13, which led him into a cycle of drug use and trouble. Within a year, he was sent to juvenile detention, and by age 25, he received a 30-year prison sentence.

Prison forced Johnny to face the person he had become. The hardest part was losing loved ones and realizing the harm his choices had caused others. Determined to change, he turned to faith, exercise, and education. He earned his GED, completed carpentry classes, and worked a small job where he paid taxes, fees, and saved what he could. He lost his father in 2015 and his mother just two weeks before his release. Reentry was overwhelming and he didn't know how to use a phone, navigate the internet, or handle bills. With no support system in place, a few close friends helped him find his way, including providing rides and basic guidance. Two months after his release, his younger brother was killed in a motorcycle accident.

A major turning point came through Terri, a longtime friend who moved from Florida to help him rebuild his life. She guided him through getting his driver's license, opening a bank account, learning technology, and connecting with NCWorks and A-B Tech. Two years later he married Terri on May 25, 2025.

With WIOA support, Johnny completed the CDL program at TransTech. He was hired by Southern Concrete, sometimes driving the same truck his father once drove. His boss, Kevin, held the job for him during a three-week delay in finalizing his CDL. Today, Johnny has his own home, his own vehicles, has a job he loves, and a positive future with his wife. He is deeply grateful, especially to his WIOA case manager, Mary Moore, and strives every day to be a better man than he was yesterday.

It is a pleasure to recognize Johnny with the **NCWorks Outstanding Dislocated Worker Award.- NCWorks Henderson County**.

Bethel Robinson
NCWorks Career Center Buncombe County
Dislocated Worker Program
Jackie Scott, Career Advisor

From the outset Bethel exhibited a determination that refused to be satisfied by anything other than success. Her energy and faith remained exemplary throughout the duration of her training. She faced incredibly difficult and challenging times. Although there were tears shed, she refused to quit. In the face of adverse situations, Bethel's response was continual declaration to herself and others, reminding everyone, "God's got me, I'm not going to give up, and I've come too far for this to stop me."

The WIOA program foundationally exists to help individuals rebuild and rise. Sponsorship of Bethel was witnessing the WIOA mission in action and having the funding through the NDWG to assist her. Bob Marley correctly stated, "You never know how strong you are until being strong is the only choice you have." Bethel's tenacity and resilience is something we can all learn from.

The NDWG supplied financial support, while A-B Tech, Goodwill, and other community partners rallied to provide wrap-around services and assistance. With this support, Bethel proved that given an opportunity to achieve what faith and determination can achieve. Bethel did what only she could do—she refused to be denied success. Her perseverance was a reminder, as Nelson Mandela denotes, "It always seems impossible until it's done," Bethel's journey is truly an inspiration for us all.

I am honored to recognize Bethel Robinson as our **NCWorks Outstanding Dislocated Worker Participant - NCWorks Buncombe County NC.**

MOUNTAIN AREA BUSINESS SERVICES – EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

Mayor Norton & Town of Hot Springs
NCWorks Recovery Resilience Employer
Mountain Area Workforce Development Board
Stacy Peek, Coordinator, NCWorks Career Center - Madison

On September 27, 2024, the Town of Hot Springs endured one of the most devastating natural disasters in its history. Days of relentless rain caused the French Broad River and Spring Creek to overflow, unleashing powerful surges of mud, debris, and water that swept through the town. Businesses, homes and critical infrastructure were significantly damaged or destroyed.

In the face of this disaster, the people of Hot Springs demonstrated extraordinary strength, compassion, and unity. Volunteers, local organizations, town administration and residents worked side by side to clear debris, support displaced families, and begin the long process of rebuilding. Their collective spirit became the foundation of recovery.

Recognizing the immense needs of the community, the Town of Hot Springs applied in January 2025 to serve as an employment site for the Disaster Relief Grant Employment Program, funded through the Mountain Area Workforce Development Board, the NC Department of Commerce's Division of Workforce Solutions, and the US Department of Labor. Melissa Wright, Workforce Operations Director, reached out to Mayor Norton immediately to help the town navigate the devastation and secure support through the grant. Until temporary staff could be hired, Mayor Norton handled recovery efforts on her own. Through this program, temporary employment opportunities were created to support clean-up and humanitarian efforts following Hurricane Helene. Through this initiative, three dedicated individuals were hired to serve the town:

- Project Manager – Leading disaster recovery and community rebuilding projects.
- Non-Profit Services Coordinator (Relief) – Organizing food, water, clothing, and supply distribution.
- Non-Profit Services Coordinator (Resources) – Connecting families and businesses with recovery assistance and support programs.

Their knowledge of the community and commitment to service allowed the Town of Hot Springs to take on projects and provide services that would not have been possible otherwise. More than a year after Hurricane Helene, challenges remain, but the progress achieved is remarkable. With recent announcements of additional infrastructure funding and the unwavering dedication of its people, the future of Hot Springs shines brightly. We thank Mayor Norton for her leadership, and devotion to the community of Hot Springs. Their efforts validate what can be accomplished when compassion and determination guide the path forward.

We proudly recognize Mayor Norton and the Town of Hot Springs as our **NCWorks Recovery Resilience Employer.**

Craft HR Solutions
Excellence in Workforce Development
NC Works Work-Based Learning Grant
Barbara Darby, Assistant Director/Business Services Leader, MAWDB

In October 2023, the MAWDB received a grant from the NC Department of Commerce to assist small businesses in addressing the continued impact of COVID-19. These funds came from a federal stimulus package, the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

The purpose of the NCWorks Work-Based Learning Grant is to assist small businesses in addressing employee skill gaps through training and credential attainment and in so doing, increase the stability, growth, and competitiveness of the business. The Mountain Area Workforce Board has used these funds to award grants of up to 25K per business to support incumbent worker training. To date, our board has awarded grants to 42 businesses totaling \$329,911. The grant program is open and will close in October 2026.

Special recognition is given today to Drew Pollick and the staff of Craft HR Solutions for the business's outstanding achievement in training and credentialing. Craft HR Solutions, based in Asheville, NC, provides HR services to small and mid-sized organizations. The consulting business helps businesses develop policies, practices, and programs for making improvements that are people-centered and results-driven. The depth and breadth of their services requires that staff have recognized credentials and a broad knowledge base in leadership development and HR competencies.

In early 2024, Craft HR Solutions was poised for growth and found that they were at capacity for delivering leadership training, with only one certified facilitator. Work was getting bottlenecked, and they needed additional credentialed staff to support business growth. In March of 2024, Craft HR Solutions received an NCWorks Work-Based Learning Grant award of \$24,980. With these funds, three staff members completed facilitation training through the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) and were CCL-certified. In addition, three staff members completed Hogan Assessment training for administering and interpreting three core personality-based assessments and were Hogan-certified. These added credentials will allow the business to grow its professional services and differentiate them from others in the HR space. The business estimates that through expanded service offerings and efficiency gains, there will be increased revenue generation of approximately \$100,000. These outcomes demonstrate the power of upskilling employees to accelerate organizational growth.

Thank you to Drew for utilizing the grant in such a great way to increase the knowledge and skills of your staff and position Craft HR Solutions for continued growth. We appreciate your leadership and the due diligence of your staff. Congratulations!

I am pleased to present Craft HR Solutions with the **Excellence in Workforce Development Award**.

MOUNTAIN AREA SPECIAL RECOGNITION

Irene Canivet & Barbara Darby

Outstanding Experienced Workforce Initiative Leaders (Asheville 50+)

NCWorks Buncombe County

Ellen Westbrook, EWI Founder

Launched in 2017 as a pilot through Age Friendly Buncombe County, EWI is an NCWorks-Asheville program recognized by NC Commerce as a “Best Practice.” It engages adults 50+ along the workforce continuum seeking to use their skills and talent through volunteerism, stipend-based training, and employment. Following the departure of its founders, Irene Canivet, NCWorks-Asheville assumed full leadership in 2020, joined by Barbara Darby of the Mountain Area Workforce Development Board in 2021. Together, they have driven EWI’s success—planning Lunch & Learns, networking events and job fairs that have served hundreds of 50+ clients.

Irene Canivet (Chair) is known for her compassionate coaching and expertise in job-search strategies and helping mature workers overcome barriers and regain confidence. Her leadership has sustained strong collaboration among the committee’s planning team and workforce partners. Barbara Darby, with nearly 30 years in workforce development, brings vision, creativity, and business connections to EWI. She has a gift for transforming ideas into meaningful events and bringing them to life with precision and enthusiasm. Both Irene and Barbara don’t just ‘talk the talk’—they consistently ‘walks the talk,’ leading by example. They use their strengths to foster collaboration among organizations that keep EWI’s services relevant to the 50+ community.

EWI continues to innovate and provide impactful programming for the 50+ community. The initiative’s upcoming event, “From Idea to Income: Your Small Business Journey” is a half-day free seminar at Land of Sky on February 3, 2026, led by small business consultant Gary Heisey.

Congratulations to Irene & Barbara, **Outstanding Leaders of the Experienced Workforce Initiative (Asheville 50+).**

Devon McCarthy-James

P20 Partnership Award

Emily Nicholson, Director, P20 Council

Devon McCarthy-James, Associate Outreach Director for the College Foundation for North Carolina (CFNC), has demonstrated outstanding leadership and had far-reaching impact on college access, career exploration, and workforce readiness efforts across Western North Carolina. Covering an expansive 13-county region, she consistently delivers exceptional support to educators, youth-serving organizations, community partners, and families as they navigate the increasingly complex journey toward postsecondary education and credential attainment.

CFNC is a critical statewide collaboration—rooted in the NC State Education Assistance Authority, Pathways, and College Foundation Inc.—that provides free, high-quality resources to help North Carolinians plan, apply, and pay for college. Devon’s contributions are both wide-reaching and deeply strategic. She regularly develops and leads regional trainings, convenings, and professional development opportunities for K–12 and community-based educators, equipping them with cutting-edge, research-informed college-going practices. She also conducts presentations across the region to build public will around postsecondary attainment and the value of education in strengthening our workforce pipeline.

A defining strength of her leadership is her data-driven approach. Using regional indicators such as college applications, FAFSA completion, and the Residency Determination Service, she identifies underserved areas and then develops targeted outreach plans to close access gaps. The scale of Devon’s impact is extraordinary. To date, she has directly supported 5,170 high school seniors across 13 districts: Cherokee, Graham, Clay, Macon, Swain, Jackson, Haywood, Madison, Buncombe, Transylvania, Henderson, Polk, and Rutherford. Because of her relentless focus on college application days, financial aid nights, community fairs, kindergarten readiness programs, future pathways events, and even creative outreach opportunities like employee wellness days and back-to-school bashes, these counties collectively secured \$5,778,000 in Pell Grant funding for the c/o 2025 students, which serves as a transformative investment in students’ futures and the region’s economic mobility.

Her partnership with the Land of Sky P20 Council has been particularly transformative. Her expertise and collaboration have strengthened our collective effort to close the region’s credential gap and align educational opportunity with workforce needs. Together, we have launched impactful, first-of-their-kind initiatives—including a FAFSA Sweepstakes with A-B Tech—that have driven meaningful increases in student engagement and financial aid completion. In every facet of her work, Devon exemplifies excellence, innovation, and commitment to expanding opportunity for Western North Carolina’s future workforce. Her leadership doesn’t just support the region—it elevates it.

I am honored to present Devon with the **P20 Partnership Award**.

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.

Shelby Bilodeau

Deb Holebrooks Outstanding Customer Service Award

Stacy Peek, Coordinator, NCWorks Career Center - Madison

Shelby is very deserving of the Deb Holebrooks Customer Service Award for many reasons. Her kindness, honesty, and a personable nature makes clients who visit NCWorks-Madison feel comfortable and valued. These qualities foster strong, lasting relationships and are at the heart of excellent customer service and essential for successful workforce development services.

Shelby consistently goes above and beyond to assist job seekers, employers, and coworkers. She is always willing to serve where needed, whether connecting clients with employers and community partners, assisting with job searches, or stepping in to support her coworkers. She exemplifies the spirit of service and teamwork in every aspect of her work. Her unwavering commitment to assisting our customers is clearly evident and reflects the core values of NCWorks. Shelby is truly an asset to the NCWorks Madison office, and this recognition honors her dedication to service, excellence, and community impact.

It is my pleasure to recognize Shelby Bilodeau as the recipient of the **Deb Holebrooks Outstanding Customer Service Award**.

MOUNTAIN AREA EMPLOYER/EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP AWARDS

WNC Futures Factory

A-B Tech Community College

Nathan Ramsey, Director, MAWDB

The Western North Carolina Futures Factory, a 70,000 square-foot advanced manufacturing innovation facility, will increase economic opportunities and leverage higher education research to make sure our region has the talent needed for the advanced manufacturing and high-tech jobs of today and the future. This effort is more than just a brick and mortar facility. Futures Factory will function as a seamless platform – applied laboratory, pilot plant, demonstration stage, and training center – where ideas advance from concept to commercialization and workers move from classroom to high-skill careers. Futures Factory is a collaboration among our region's six Community Colleges and six campuses in the University of North Carolina System. The level of collaboration between K12 schools, Community Colleges and the UNC System is unprecedented and is emblematic of what an employer and educator workforce partnership can be. Although this award is being conferred to A-B Tech, the recognition is for the regional collaboration that the Futures Factory represents. Economic modeling projects the Futures Factory will catalyze 1,100 additional manufacturing jobs across the region and will result in job gains of 2,747 of which at least 500 are classified as high-wage positions paying at least 130% of average median compensation. Futures Factory is projected to scale to 40,000 learners each year by 2035 and will add 100,000 industry-recognized postsecondary credentials. Futures Factory will create stackable credentials through the North Carolina Community College System. A-B Tech, Biltmore Farms LLC, Economic Development Coalition of Asheville-Buncombe, NC Innovation, NC Community College System and the UNC System have made commitments to ensure the Futures Factory is a success.

Healthcare Fellows

Blue Ridge Community College, Henderson County Public Schools, Advent Health Hendersonville, UNC Health Pardee, & Henderson County Education Foundation

Nathan Ramsey, Director, MAWDB

Henderson County Public Schools, Blue Ridge Community College, AdventHealth Hendersonville, and UNC Health Pardee have joined together to establish Healthcare Fellows. High School students will have the opportunity to earn a free education in a healthcare pathway at Blue Ridge Community College and graduate with a guaranteed job at AdventHealth Hendersonville or UNC Health Pardee. Healthcare Fellows program is designed to remove financial barriers, provide mentorship and hands-on experience, and retain talented healthcare professionals in the region. Fellows complete dual-enrollment coursework while receiving support from both academic and clinical mentors. Healthcare Fellows take advantage of the NC Career and College Promise program where high school students can receive college credit for their studies while they are a high school student. NC Governor Josh Stein says "NC has the 8th worst nursing shortage in the nation, and rural communities don't have enough access to primary care, behavioral health, and dental services. After Hurricane Helene, it is inspiring to see how public schools, community colleges, and employers come together to innovate and create new opportunities for students."

NCEdge A-B Tech Community College

Nathan Ramsey, Director, MAWDB

Through the NC Community College System's NCEdge Customized Training Program, for the past decade, A-B Tech NC Edge has established itself as a leader in customized training, particularly in the Western and Northwestern regions. In the 2025 fiscal year, it ranked #4 among the 58 colleges, despite the challenges posed by Hurricane Halene, and has consistently maintained a strong presence in the top 10 over the years. North Carolina's customized training program is nationally recognized as a tool to help existing and expanding business and industry to meet their talent needs. Through the NCEdge network of 58 community colleges serving all 100 counties in our state, training experts work closely in partnership with employers to tailor programs to meet specific needs. The goal of customized training is to support job growth, technology investment and productivity enhancement. In 2025, during the state's fiscal year, the Nationwide NC Edge program supported 319 workforce development projects that benefited nearly 850 companies and provided skills training to over 30,000 individuals. These initiatives created approximately 16,000 new jobs and facilitated \$16 billion in capital investment.

NCEdge directed \$7 million toward job-growth projects, engaging more than 14,500 individuals at 177 companies, allocating \$2.17 million to 112 productivity enhancement projects, benefiting over 6,700 trainees. The program also supported more than \$730,000 for technology-focused training, helping nearly 1,500 workers operate new equipment and systems. A-B Tech supported many local companies in the past year with customized training including Arcadia Beverage, BorgWarner Turbo Systems, Burial Beer Company, Eaton, Fedup Foods, GE Aerospace, Jacob Holm Industries, Kefkott, New Belgium Brewing, Pratt & Whitney, System Logistics.

Apprenticeship Blue Ridge Blue Ridge Community College

Nathan Ramsey, Director, MAWDB

Apprenticeship Blue Ridge began in 2019 and has expanded to include eight sector tracks: Advanced Manufacturing, Automotive, Business & Banking, Early Childhood Education, Healthcare, and Skilled Trades. Apprenticeship Blue Ridge is a registered apprenticeship program through ApprenticeshipNC and the US Department of Labor. The program began with the 'Made in Henderson County' mechatronics engineering pathway to address local manufacturing needs and has grown to include a network of over 70 employers and multiple career pathways. As of 2025, more than 400 apprentices from Western North Carolina and beyond have been served to date through the program, benefiting from strong partnerships with economic development agencies and local chambers of commerce. Apprenticeship Blue Ridge represents the very best of collaboration between employers, education, and economic development. Apprentices receive hands-on instruction and academic learning tuition-free at Blue Ridge Community College, leading to industry-recognized postsecondary credentials up to an associate's degree. Apprentices are paid through on-the-job training allowing apprentices to earn while they learn. They receive wages that increase with their skill level, tuition-free education, and a rewarding career pathway. Apprentices complete the program debt-free and are able to support themselves and their families with a good paying job in a high-demand career with a local employer.