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## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Land of Sky Regional Council Leadership Awards December 4, 2024, Board of Delegates Meeting**

Land of Sky Regional Council's Annual Awards were conferred during the Board of Delegates Meeting on December 4, 2024. The Robert G. Parrish, Sr. Intergovernmental Relations Award, the Charles H. Campbell Regional Leadership Award, and the Robert E. Shepherd Excellence in Local Government Award were presented by the Council. In addition, there were fourteen Extraordinary Public Service Awards and two Land of Sky Hero Awards conferred this year.



*Figure 1 – Matthew Wechtel accepts the Robert G. Parrish, Sr. Intergovernmental Relations Award from Erica Anderson, Deputy Director of LOSRC*

**The Robert G. Parrish, Sr. Intergovernmental Relations Award** is given in honor of the late Council Chairman and first Mayor of Fletcher. It is presented at the discretion of the Council's Executive Committee to an elected or appointed official who has made significant contributions to improving intergovernmental relations. This year, the award was presented to the Madison County Board of Commissioners Chairman, **Matthew Wechtel**, for his contributions to the Land of Sky region and the State of North Carolina. Mr. Wechtel played a key role in the water system cooperation between Madison County and Weaverville in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene.



*Figure 2 - Brownie Newman poses with the Charles H. Campbell Regional Leadership Award alongside Buncombe County Commissioner Terri Wells*

**The Charles H. Campbell Regional Leadership Award** was named for four-time Council Chairman and long-time Brevard Mayor, who himself received a national award for regional leadership in 1977. The award was dedicated in 1983 to annually honor an outstanding contributor to the betterment of Western North Carolina and the Land of Sky region. This year, the award was presented to Buncombe County Board of Commissioners Chairman, **Brownie Newman**, for his commitment and leadership over the course of his 21-year career as an elected official, the last eight of which have been dedicated to leading our region's largest county.



*Figure 3 - Debra D. Campbell poses with the Robert E. Shepherd Excellence in Local Government Award alongside Sandra Kilgore, Asheville Vice Mayor*

**The Robert E. Shepherd Excellence in Local Government Award** is presented at the Council's discretion to a local government professional who has shown great leadership in improving governance and service delivery, especially in the areas of regional cooperation and collaboration. Dedicated in 2016, this award honors Land of Sky Regional Council's first Executive Director of 30 years. This year's award was presented to Asheville City Manager, **Debra D. Campbell**, for her dedication and diligence to aiding the citizens of the City of Asheville. Ms. Campbell was an essential contributor to hurricane recovery and response efforts, especially in restoring the city's water system, which was decimated by the storm.



*Figure 4 - Sandra Kilgore receives an Extraordinary Public Service Award from Nathan Ramsey, Executive Director of LOSRC*



*Figure 5 - Dr. Jennifer Hensley receives an Extraordinary Public Service Award from Tristan Winkler, Regional Transportation Planning Director at LOSRC*

### **Extraordinary Public Service Award**

This year, the Council bestowed this award upon six outstanding local officials as well as eight local radio stations that played vital roles in responding to Hurricane Helene. **Abigail Norton**, Town of Hot Springs Mayor, was recognized for her commitment and leadership as the town navigates rebuilding after being utterly devastated by the storm. **Sandra Kilgore**, Vice Mayor of the City of Asheville, was acknowledged for remaining a steadfast advocate for cooperation across the Land of Sky region. **Dr. Jennifer Hensley**, City of Hendersonville Council Member, was recognized for her leadership of the French Broad River Metropolitan Planning Organization. **Jasmine Beach Ferrara**, Buncombe County Commissioner, was commended for leading countless regional initiatives, including a focus on early childhood education. **David McNeill**, Assistant Transylvania County Manager, was honored for overseeing emergency services for the county and for his essential efforts in hurricane response. **Patrick McHenry**, Congressman for NC-10, was recognized for his years of commitment and service to our region as a representative on Capitol Hill. Land of Sky Regional Council is proud to honor each of these individuals and is grateful for their years of public service and dedication to our region.





*Figure 6 – Representatives from WART 95.5 FM pose with their Extraordinary Public Service Award alongside Maureen Copelof, Mayor of Brevard*



*Figure 7 – Representatives from iHeart Media Asheville pose with their Extraordinary Public Service Award alongside Maureen Copelof*

Local radio stations played critical roles in information sharing during both the immediate and long-term aftermath of Hurricane Helene. With limited or no internet access and cell service after the storm, radio stations served as primary information hubs for residents across Western North Carolina, providing updates and resources that saved lives. Land of Sky Regional Council proudly recognized the following radio stations for their service during such critical times: **iHeart Media Asheville** (stations include **WWNC 570 AM**, **WKSF 99.9 FM**, and more), **Blue Ridge Public Radio**, **WHKP 107.7 FM/1450 AM** (Hendersonville), **WTZQ 95.3FM/1600 AM** (Hendersonville), **WSQL 102 FM/1240 AM** (White Squirrel Radio – Brevard), **WGCR 720 AM** (Anchor Broadcasting Network – Pisgah Forest, **WHBK 1460 AM/95.9 FM** (Marshall), and **WART 95.5 FM** (Marshall). Land of Sky Regional Council is deeply grateful for each of the Extraordinary Public Service Award recipients and their outstanding contributions to our region.

### **Land of Sky Hero Award**

**Battalion Chief Tony Ray Garrison** and **Major Michelle Lynn Elliott Quintero** were both honored with the Land of Sky Hero Award for their bravery, heroism, and lifelong commitment to serving others. Battalion Chief Garrison proudly served the Fairview Fire Department and Garren Creek Fire Department and exemplified an unwavering love for his community. He passed away at the age of 51 due to injuries sustained while assisting others during Hurricane Helene, embodying the courage and selflessness that he led with his entire life. Major Quintero honorably served the Madison County Sheriff's Office for seventeen years and was widely seen as a maternal figure, including for the juveniles held at the Madison County Detention Center, whom she worked with closely. Major Quintero passed away at the age of 48 during Hurricane Helene but has left a lasting impact on countless lives of others. Land of Sky Regional Council proudly honored Battalion Chief Garrison and Major Quintero for their selflessness and lifelong service to the people of Western North Carolina.



*Figure 8 - Jon Beck is awarded The Order of the Long Leaf Pine by Drew Christy, Director of North Carolina Governor's Western Office*

**The Order of the Long Leaf Pine** is the highest possible honor granted by the Governor of North Carolina. The award is reserved for individuals who have made significant contributions to the state and their communities through exemplary service and exceptional accomplishments. This year, Land of Sky Regional Council's own, Jon Beck, received The Order of the Long Leaf Pine. Mr. Beck has over 30 years of experience in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and environmental, land use, and brownfields planning. He has been instrumental in developing GIS methodologies, data responsiveness, and accessibility for local governments throughout the state and, particularly, across Western North Carolina. An expert in data analysis and mapping, Mr. Beck started the region's stormwater inventory program to map and identify conditions of the system, enabling real-time information updates to local governments to help inform critical infrastructure decisions. Additionally, he was a founding member of the Mountain Regional GIS Alliance, providing an information sharing forum for GIS professionals, and was a key member of the Regional Brownfields Initiative. Prior to his 30+ years of government service, Mr. Beck proudly served his county in the U.S. Army until 1988. Land of Sky Regional Council is proud to congratulate Mr. Beck on this outstanding achievement and is grateful for his many years of exceptional service to our state and region.