



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

CONTACT:

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Land of Sky Regional Council

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Mountain Area Workforce Development Board recognizes outstanding employers, adult, youth and workforce staff at 2024 Recognition Luncheon on Thursday, December 12 at the Virginia Boone Building, WNC Agricultural Center, Fletcher, NC. The program for the event is attached. Special thanks to the West Henderson County High School Orchestra for their performance prior to the recognition ceremony.

NCWORKS NEXTGEN YOUTH PROGRAMS

Skyler Roberts — Henderson County Innovation High School

Garrett Jackson — Henderson County Innovation High School

Jake Folse — Goodwill Buncombe County

Charleigh Smith — Goodwill Transylvania County

Damon Meadows — Goodwill Madison County

Madison Martin — Madison County High School

NCWORKS BUSINESS PARTNERS IN THE MAWDB REGION

Linamar Light Metals — NCWorks Career Center Henderson County

Oskar Blues — NCWorks Career Center Transylvania County

NCWORKS & WIOA ADULT & DISLOCATED WORKER PROGRAMS

Roger Long -- NCWorks Career Center Buncombe County

Rodney Young — Blue Ridge Community College

Brittany Neal — Asheville Buncombe Technical College

GO Places Grant Outstanding Participant Engagement

Shana Baynard — Outstanding Participant Engagement

Reia Freeze — Outstanding Participant Engagement

MAWDB REGIONAL BUSINESS SERVICES – EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

Legacy Bookkeeping — Mountain Area Regional Business Services

Mathis Electronics — Mountain Area Regional Business Services

MOUNTAIN AREA SPECIAL RECOGNITION

AI Summit — Mountain Area Regional Business Services

Karen Sanders — Experienced Workforce Initiative (Asheville 50+)

Henderson County Chamber — Strategic Partnership

Buncombe Co/Asheville Chamber — Career Pathway/Workforce Development Collaboration

DEB HOLEBROOKS OUTSTANDING CUSTOMER SERVICE AWARD

Marc Czarnecki — Mountain Area Workforce Board

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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WIOA Recognition Luncheon

December 12, 2024

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



Mountain Area Workforce Development Board

WIOA Recognition Luncheon Meeting

WNC Agricultural Center

Virginia Boone Building

Tuesday, December 12, 2024

AGENDA

1) WELCOME – 11:30AM Master of Ceremonies- Graham Fields, MAWDB Chair

2) Invocation – Chairman Jason Chappell

3) LUNCHEON – 11:35AM

4) WEST HENDERSON COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL ORCHESTRA – 11:35AM-12:00PM

5) WEST HENDERSON COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL ORCHESTRA NATIONAL ANTHEM –12:00PM-12:05PM DIRECTED BY TIFFANY KING

6) PROGRAM – 12:05 - 1:30PM Graham Fields, MAWDB Chair

NCWORKS NEXTGEN YOUTH PROGRAMS

Skyler Roberts --- Henderson County Innovation High School
Marisela Aguillon

Garrett Jackson** --- Henderson County Innovation High School (Tammy George) Marisela
Aguillon

Jake Folse** — Goodwill Buncombe County (Faith Bischoff) Kristin Kress

Charleigh Smith** — Goodwill Transylvania County (Jordan Marley) Kristin Kress

Damon Meadows** — Goodwill Madison County (Laura Blanchard) Kristin Kress

Madison Martin**— Madison County High School (Vicki Whitt) Stacy Peek

NCWORKS BUSINESS PARTNERS IN THE MAWDB REGION

Linamar Light Metals — NCWorks Career Center Henderson County Shanda Bedoian
Oskar Blues — NCWorks Career Center Transylvania County Jason Chappell

NCWORKS & WIOA ADULT & DISLOCATED WORKER PROGRAMS

Roger Long -- NCWorks Career Center Buncombe County Patrick Williams

Rodney Young — Blue Ridge Community College Mary Moore

Brittany Neal** — Asheville Buncombe Technical College (Carla Crews-McGirt) Jackie Scott

GO Places Grant Outstanding Participant Engagement

Shana Baynard — Outstanding Participant Engagement Gene Ettison

Reia Freeze — Outstanding Participant Engagement Gene Ettison

MAWDB REGIONAL BUSINESS SERVICES – EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

Legacy Bookkeeping -- Mountain Area Regional Business Services Stacy Peek

Mathis Electronics — Mountain Area Regional Business Services Barbara Darby

MOUNTAIN AREA SPECIAL RECOGNITION

AI Summit – Mountain Area Regional Business Services Barbara Darby

Karen Sanders -- Experienced Workforce Initiative (Asheville 50+) Irene Canivet

Henderson County Chamber — Strategic Partnership Graham Fields

Buncombe Co/Asheville Chamber -- Career Pathway/Workforce Development Collaboration Graham Fields

DEB HOLEBROOKS OUTSTANDING CUSTOMER SERVICE AWARD POSTHUMOUSLY

Marc Czarnecki -- Mountain Area Workforce Board Barbara Darby

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

6) CLOSING REMARKS – 1:30 PM

Master of Ceremonies- Graham Fields, MAWDB Chair

MOUNTAIN AREA

Special thanks to the West Henderson High School Orchestra for their performance at today's luncheon.

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.



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 \$1,816,681

OUTSTANDING NCWORKS NEXTGEN YOUTH PARTICIPANTS

Skyler Roberts

NCWorks NextGen

NextGen Out-of-School Youth Program

Henderson County Innovation High School

Marisela Aguillon

NextGen Career Advisor

Skyler enrolled in the workforce program, hoping to get guidance and support on how to get back on track with his academic studies. He had fallen behind and was faced with several challenges that prevented him from continuing with his life goals. As a result of this, it became very difficult for him to have a clear vision of what his future plans would look like. At such a young age, Skyler became unmotivated and struggled with having stable housing that it became his priority to learn how to get into the real world independently.

A few months after transitioning into a new school, Skyler slowly began to regain control of his goals and focused on what he wanted to accomplish. He began to attain work experience through the workforce program and stuck to a consistent schedule which helped him thrive in many areas of his life. Skyler graduated with high academic recognition at his school. This was all due to his hard work, dedication and commitment aside from all his struggles that he experienced. He was even able to graduate earlier than expected.

Thank you for being an outstanding participant of the year in the NextGen Youth program!

Presently, Skyler is attending college at Western Carolina University and has chosen to study Mechanical Engineering with a minor in Art. While juggling being a college student, he is also working for Sema Security as a part time employee.

Skyler has shown excellent perseverance as he continues to work toward his life goals. He has learned to become self-sufficient as he studies, works and lives on his own. All the support received has shown to be a huge part of Skyler's success and we are very proud to hear that he is doing so well for himself. We are so excited for him to reach his goals and watch him enjoy doing what he loves to do.

Thank you for being an outstanding participant of the year in the NextGen Youth program!

Garrett Jackson

NCWorks NextGen

NextGen Out-of-School Youth Program

Henderson County Innovation High School

Tammy George

NextGen Career Advisor

Garrett came to be part of the WIOA program and then got enrolled in the Innovative High School. Before that Garrett had already been to two other high schools in the district. Garrett lost his father just three years prior. Garrett and his father were very close, and he had a very difficult time dealing with his death. This led to Garrett bouncing around to several different schools, trying to find a place he belonged. After the Innovative high school, Garrett choose to transfer to another school in the district and try to finish out his credits. Garrett remained a part of the WIOA program, and the Career Coach continued to work with him on graduating and he graduated in June with his school diploma. After graduating, Garrett decided to enroll in Lincoln College of Technology to become a Heavy-Duty Diesel Mechanic which is a one-year program. Garrett started classes in June and has now completed 4 classes toward his degree. Garrett is balancing working part time on the side while attending classes and gets closer and closer to his degree of being a Heavy-Duty Diesel Mechanic.

Thank you for being an outstanding participant of the year in the NextGen Youth program!

Jake Folse

NCWorks NextGen

NextGen Out-of-School Youth Program

Goodwill Buncombe County

Faith Bischoff, NextGen Career Counselor

Jake Folse was applied to the NextGen program in March of 2023, and he approached the opportunity with extraordinary focus. Within just two months of his enrollment into NextGen, Jake completed his GED—a testament to his hard work and determination. When we talked about career interests, Jake knew that he wanted to pursue law, something that he has been passionate about since he was young. Jake knew his next step was gaining real-world experience. Together, we sought an internship in the legal field, and I helped Jake secure an interview at the District Attorney's office. His commitment and potential were clear, and he was offered the internship on the spot! In only three months, Jake's dedication led to a full-time position at the District Attorney's office, which he happily accepted. Jake has now been there full-time for over a year and continues to excel. He plans to attend UNCW in 2025 to pursue a degree in law, and we could not be prouder of his achievements.

Jake is a shining example of hard work, passion, and the incredible impact of the NextGen program, and we could not think of a better person for this year's Outstanding Participant of the Year award!

Charleigh Smith

NCWorks NextGen

NextGen Out-of-School Youth Program

Goodwill Transylvania County

Jordan Marley

NextGen Career Counselor

Charleigh Smith applied to the NextGen program in 2021 shortly after high school graduation. She knew she wanted to pursue post-secondary education but was not quite sure what to study or how to enroll. She worked with NextGen to complete career assessments, look at different training options, connect to the community college, and create a training plan that would lead to a fulfilling career. Charleigh is bright, hardworking, and we knew she would be a good candidate for a degree from Blue Ridge Community College. We are so proud to announce that Charleigh will be graduating with her Associate's Degree in Business Administration from BRCC at the end of this semester! It is no small feat to earn a degree, but Charleigh did it while also working full time at Kid City USA as a lead teacher. Charleigh's commitment to work and school prove that she is destined for great success. After graduation, she plans to apply for a director position at Kid City to support the growth of the company while also working with children. She is excited for this opportunity that combines her various talents and passions. Charleigh is a beautiful showcase of hard work, perseverance, and determination. We are so very proud to be a part of Charleigh's journey and wish her all the best in her future endeavors!

Congratulations on earning the Outstanding Participant of the Year award!

Damon Meadows

NCWorks NextGen

NextGen Out-of-School Youth Program

Goodwill Madison County

Laura Blanchard

NextGen Career Counselor

Damon Meadows enrolled in NextGen in 2023 when he found himself ready to earn a high school equivalency diploma and pursue post-secondary education. NextGen sponsored the cost of his tests, and Damon earned his high school equivalency diploma in April of 2023. He has always been good with computers and technology and knew that he wanted to pursue a career in Information Technology (IT). NextGen helped Damon connect with Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College to learn more about their IT programs. After learning more about the degree program and careers that it could lead to, Damon chose to pursue an Associate's degree in IT: Systems Security through AB Tech. He started the program in 2023 and is poised to graduate next year with his degree! Damon's NextGen case manager, Laura Blanchard, followed Damon's journey along the way. She sponsored the cost of tuition and books, ensured that he had transportation to class, and provided other resources to support him while he focused on schoolwork. Laura also presented Damon with an opportunity to participate in a paid workplace experience at Givens Estate, where he interned with the IT department. NextGen's paid workplace experience opportunity allowed Damon to earn money while also gaining valuable experiences and skills with experienced IT professionals. Damon earned praise for his work ethic, eagerness to learn, and professionalism throughout the duration of his workplace experience. Damon's degree from AB Tech and experience at Givens Estate sets him up for a long and successful career in IT.

Congratulations on all of your success, and we cannot wait to see what awesome things you do in the future!

Madison Martin

NCWorks NextGen

NextGen In School Youth Program

Madison County High School

Vicki Whitt

NextGen Career Advisor

At the time of her enrollment in the NextGen Program, Madison was a 17-year-old high school junior. She was homeless and had not seen or talked to her parents in several months. She was unemployed but despite her circumstances she was a very motivated student, with a positive attitude and bubbly personality. She was interested in a career in Cosmetology and owning her own salon one day. Through the NextGen Program, Madison gained valuable work experience in an established salon, assisting the stylists in a variety of ways. Madison proved to be an exemplary employee and a wonderful addition to the business.

During her senior year, Madison found out she was pregnant, but that did not deter her from her goals. Committed to her education, she graduated with her class, and a high school GPA of 3.6. In addition, through AB Tech's College and Career Promise Program, Madison earned 16 credit hours and an AB Tech GPA of 3.2. With the support provided by NextGen and her determination to build a better future for herself and her family, Madison is now planning to enroll in the Cosmetology program at AB Tech in Fall of 2025.

Madison is a true testament to resilience, determination and the power of perseverance, proving that with hard work and dedication anything is possible. I have no doubt she will continue to rise above any challenges that come her way.

Thank you for being an outstanding participant of the year in the NextGen Youth program!

NCWORKS BUSINESS PARTNERS IN THE MAWDB REGION

Linamar Light Metals

Outstanding Business Partner

NCWorks Henderson County

Blue Ridge Community College

Shanda Bedoian

Director of Corporate & Customized Training

Linamar Light Metals - a global leader in advanced manufacturing of the industrial and mobility (transportation) sectors - made its home in Mills River in 2015. The facility has grown quickly to employ over 470 full-time employees with continued site expansion as well as new clients and product lines. Linamar is actively engaged with Henderson County Partnership for Economic Development and Henderson County Public Schools in hosting high school guidance counselors and being a tour site for the "Made in Henderson County" workforce development awareness program. In fact, Janel Rowbothan/ General Manager is a "poster child" for the "You Were Made For This" marketing campaign via The Partnership. As well, Linamar works closely with the Henderson County (and regionwide) NCWorks Career Center staff in posting opportunities and vetting candidates. Through these efforts, they were able to hire and retain quite a few highly technical Evergreen dislocated employees. These folks are thriving!

The leadership team at Linamar is most proud of their strategic focus and commitment to internal development of their associates. As a founding member of the Made in Henderson (Mechatronics) Apprenticeship program with Apprenticeship Blue Ridge in 2019 to today, they have sponsored over 28 apprentices across three pathways - Machining Tool & Die, Mechatronics and Industrial Systems with 10 currently in related instruction at the college. Lastly, Linamar is on speed dial with Blue Ridge whereby they send their associates to varied training development courses from leadership to technical training. Linamar Light Metals is committed to being an employer of choice by fostering sustainability and driving growth across every aspect of their operations. Their dedication to responsible practices and continuous improvement ensures that they not only meet the needs of today but also build a resilient future for all."

On behalf of Blue Ridge Community College and the Henderson County NCWorks Career Center, I am proud to nominate Linamar Light Metals as the "2024 Outstanding Partner of the Year for Henderson County". Congratulations!

Oskar Blues

Outstanding Business Partner

NCWorks Transylvania County

Jason Chappell

NCWorks Director

Founded by Dale Katechis in 1997 in Lyons, Colorado, Oskar Blues Brewery launched the craft-beer-in-a-can apocalypse with their hand-canned flagship brew, Dale's Pale Ale. Today, Oskar Blues operates breweries in Colorado and North Carolina, and Dale's Pale continues to be its bestselling craft can six-pack. Oskar Blues is available in the US and many countries around the globe. Oskar Blues is part of Monster Brewing Company, a total beverage company committed to producing superior quality and great tasting beverages that satisfy any occasion.

Oskar Blues Brewery opened its Brevard, NC location in 2012, installing and commissioning the new brewery in an existing warehouse in just 90 days. From the very beginning, Oskar Blues embedded itself in the Brevard and Transylvania County community through donating to local causes, welcoming non-profits into its space, and employment opportunities for those in the area. The onsite taproom features 40+ taps, a covered outdoor space, the CHUBwagon food truck, live music and events. Oskar Blues Brewery in Brevard has grown to a brewing capacity of over 200,000 barrels (6.2 million gallons) annually. It employs just over 100 employees, with the majority working in 24/7 manufacturing operations. Production employees serve in the departments of Brewhouse, Cellar, Packaging, Shipping and Receiving,

Maintenance, and Quality. Oskar Blues Brewery is proud to offer competitive wages, promotion paths, and excellent employee benefits as one of the largest manufacturing employers in Transylvania County.

In the days following Hurricane Helene's devastating pass through Western North Carolina, Oskar Blues Brewery mobilized to immediately donate and deliver more than 10,000 gallons of canned water to the Town of Rosman and Transylvania County fire departments. They also provided hot meals from their food truck and drinking water from the brewery at no cost to community members. Their parent company, Monster Beverage Corporation, quickly followed suit by activating their philanthropic division, Monster Cares, to deliver essential supplies for Brevard employees and their families. Monster Cares also coordinated truckloads of bottled water that Oskar Blues Brewery then delivered to the VA hospital in Asheville along with several pallets of Monster energy drinks for first responders and linemen. Oskar Blues Brewery is proud to be a part of the Western North Carolina community and is committed to its ongoing recovery and resurgence.

For being such an amazing partner, the Transylvania NCWorks Career Center is proud to select Oskar Blues Brewery as its Outstanding Employer.

OUTSTANDING NCWORKS & WIOA ADULT & DISLOCATED WORKER PARTICIPANTS

Roger Long

WIOA Dislocated Worker Program

On-the-Job Training

Patrick Williams

On the Job Training Coordinator

Mr. Long was a part of the shutdown of the Henderson County PrintPack site. He and several others learned about the WIOA On-The-Job Training Program through the Rapid Response information sessions, and Job Fair. He had identified and already entered conversations with The Boys and Girls Club of Henderson County when I met him. Mr. Long is a Navy Veteran, he had identified that he wanted to be able to apply his substantial experience in maintenance to an environment where he felt he could serve again. He was particularly interested in the Boys and Girls Club because of the service it provides to our community's children and youth.

Mr. Long completed a 1040-hour (6 month) OJT plan that included utilizing the CDL program offered by Trans Tech at AB Tech. I would like to recognize both the participant and employer in this case. Working in childcare is a different world that takes special people and was a much different work environment than anything else Mr. Long's professional experience. I observed what I consider to be the ideal interplay between participant and employer in terms of working together to make Mr. Long successful while not ever losing focus that the children and youths' needs came first. I know that it has made an impact on Roger, and I know he has made an immense impact on the Club's ability to operate, serve, and grow.

Thank you for being an outstanding participant of the year for the On-the-Job Training Program!

Rodney Young

WIOA Dislocated Worker Program

Mary Moore

Career Advisor

Rodney Young was laid off when the Printing Company he worked for, PrintPack, closed down in December 2023. He learned about the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act National Dislocated Worker Grant program during the Rapid Response and came to NCWorks Henderson County to learn more. He met with his WIOA Case Manager, Mary Moore, who assisted him in getting enrolled in WIOA and exploring his options. Rodney's dream has been to become a Commercial Driver's Licensed Truck Driver for many years, his family has run a business providing wheelchair accessible transportation and he learned at an early age to love driving and being on the road. He was very interested in working with the big rigs.

Rodney attended the Truck Driver Orientation at Asheville Buncombe Technical College and met the requirements for the class. He started the training in April, 2024 with online courses. His case manager supported him with the online courses to ensure he was able to complete them. She also provided access to the Metrix Learning skills course and Youtube Videos to reinforce the concepts and enhance his learning opportunities when he struggled with the course.

Once he completed and passed the online portion, Rodney started with the hands-on driving training at Transtech. "The first day was a lot" since they covered pre-trip inspections and the second day they actually took the trucks out to the driving range. He was excited and learning so much, it was a good experience, and he enjoyed learning to drive. His group encountered some scary moments when they came upon the results of a police chase with a murder suspect that ended with a fatality, it served to remind them all how serious of a job they are engaged in.

Rodney completed the Commercial Driver's License program and graduated with his North Carolina Commercial Driver's License permit Type A and earned his Hazardous Materials Endorsement in August and receive his license in September. With a new resume and job search support, Rodney began applying for jobs in the area. Hurricane Helene hit and roads were closed, bridges were gone, and the area was devastated so Rodney's job search was delayed until the area began recovery. Currently Rodney is working at a small waste removal company, Exterior Care Hauling, Inc, to get his six months of "on the road" experience that larger corporations require, he is driving big dump trucks and enjoying the role. Rodney looks forward to getting into big rigs next year and knows the road will take him any place he wants to go.

Thank you for being an outstanding participant of the year in the National Dislocated Worker Grant!

Brittany Neal

WIOA Adult/Dislocated Worker Program

Carla Crews-McGirt
Lead NCWorks Coordinator

Brittany has been receiving WIOA National Dislocated Worker Funds since Fall 2023 to pursue an A.A.S., Medical Office Administration at A- B Tech Community College. When I met Brittany, she indicated she already had an A.A.S., Medical Laboratory Technologies from A- B Tech Community College and was not able to get funding through financial aid. Luckily, WIOA was able to assist her. With this assistance and case management, she has been able to work PRN (as needed) with the local hospital, take care of her children financially, pursue her degree as a full-time student at A-B Tech with tuition and books paid for. Brittany has numerous times, mentioned how WIOA has been life changing for her in that she is debt free from school loans, and this degree will open door to numerous employment opportunities in the healthcare setting that will be feasible with being a single parent and the possibilities of working remote. Throughout her four semesters, she and I have been working closely on meeting her needs to be successful in this program and meeting family needs.

Thank you for being an outstanding participant of the year in the WIOA program!

Shana Baynard

GO Places Grant Outstanding Participant Engagement

Gene Ettison

Go Place Grant Coordinator

GO PLACES would like to celebrate the incredible achievements of Shana Baynard, a standout participant in GO PLACES. Shana has had a truly transformative journey, earned certifications, and built the skills needed to excel in her chosen career. She has completed her Community Health Worker Certification for North Carolina, Peer Support Certification, Wrap Training, CPR, Mental Health First Aid, and many more.

Shana has been a participant in the NEXT GEN program and gained invaluable work experience with funding provided by WIOA and DOL programs supporting individuals experiencing homelessness and substance use disorder. She joined GO PLACES seeking a career change but was uncertain about her path. With her family history of substance use disorder, Shana felt a deep desire to make a difference. Through her hard work and dedication, she discovered her calling at Safe Shelter.

Today, Shana is thriving in her new role Community Health Worker Lead and is now employed full-time and supervises a team of three community health worker interns. Her leadership and compassion have already impacted many lives, and we could not be prouder of her accomplishments.

We congratulate Shana on an incredible year of growth and success!

REIA FREEZE

GO Places Grant Outstanding Participant Engagement

Gene Ettison

Go Place Grant Coordinator

We are thrilled to also celebrate Reia Freeze, the very first GO PLACES participant, who has been successfully engaged with the program for an impressive year and a half! Reia's dedication and hard work has led to extraordinary achievements, including earning her EDU119 Early Childhood Development Certification and her Community Health Worker Certification for North Carolina.

During her time with GO PLACES, Reia has gained valuable work experience working with adolescent children at Irene Wortham Childcare Center and now currently HOME: A West Asheville Hub supporting individuals experiencing homelessness and substance use disorder. Initially, she joined the program seeking a career change and chose to explore child development. However, Reia's journey revealed a deeper desire—to impact lives more broadly and GO PLACES supported her in this shift.

Today, Reia is thriving in her role with Safe Shelter, where she is employed full-time.. Her dedication to making a difference is truly inspiring, and her dedication to those that are unhoused is already creating meaningful change.

We congratulate Reia on all her accomplishments! Her journey is a testament to perseverance, growth, and the power of helping others. We could not be prouder of her

MOUNTAIN AREA REGIONAL BUSINESS SERVICES – EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

Legacy Bookkeeping

Outstanding Workforce Business Partner

NCWorks Madison County

Stacy Peek

NCWorks Coordinator

After going through two layoffs, Kasey Rigsby decided to ensure her career by starting a bookkeeping business. Legacy Bookkeeping, Inc. was founded in 2018 by Kasey Rigsby of Marshall, NC. Kasey had a one-person operation for one year and in 2019 added several team members. Some of the team members were hired for their ability to work from home because they had small children or had mobility challenges. This inclusive approach contributed to the business's growth and success. The client base of Legacy Bookkeeping, Inc. saw a remarkable expansion from 2 clients to 49 and Kasey now employs 11 remote workers who live in 3 different counties.

The business' values are anchored in trust and integrity with a commitment to handling clients' finances as if they were their own. They deliver top-tier bookkeeping services for small to mid-size for-profit and non-profit organizations with a focus on customer satisfaction and improving profits margins. Going forward, they plan to expand services to non-profit organizations. To do so, Kasey realized the need to upskill her employees in Excel and Bookkeeping and applied for the ARPA Work-Based Learning Grant. A grant award of \$6,564 in December 2023 allowed 11 employees to enroll in on-line Microsoft Office Suite training through Miss Excel. The 70 hours of training allows staff to progress at various levels and at their own pace. Loretta Terry, Operations Manager, allows staff to train during their workday and has seen improvements in efficiency and accuracy in data handling. The training has also enhanced problem-solving skills and boosted confidence in using the software.

With commitment to employee development, Kasey and Loretta noticed gaps in their employee's understanding of fundamental accounting principles. These gaps were hindering their capacity for financial reporting, particularly in payroll management, tax regulations, deduction calculations, and compliance requirements. Legacy received a second ARPA grant of \$7,917 in May 2024 to certify 11 employees as Certified Bookkeepers by the American Institute of Professional Bookkeepers. This 72-hour self-study course will prepare the trainees to sit for the bookkeeping certification exam. The certified bookkeeper designation will elevate the overall competitiveness of the business and qualify the employees for potential promotions leading to wage increases.

On behalf of the MAWDB we are pleased to present the Outstanding Business Partner Award-Madison County to Legacy Bookkeeping, Inc.

Mathis Electronics

Mountain Area Regional Business Services

Outstanding Workforce Business Partner

Barbara Darby

Assistant Director Business Services

Mathis Electronics is a circuit board design and assembly house that has been in business in Asheville for over 40 years. In 1980, Ed Mathis, the founder, was working for his father as an elevator technician. He noticed a growing demand for elevator circuit board repairs and opened a repair service. After several years Ed started assembling circuit boards to increase profitability. Over the past 40 years the company's primary focus has been on the elevator and escalator industry.

After Covid-19, Mathis Electronics saw a steep decline in orders and realized that they needed to diversify and upskill their production and management employees. In 2023 the company began looking to expand into other industries. This required becoming certified in IPC STD-001H Soldering. They received an ARPA grant of \$5,825 to train and certify five workers in soldering. The training provider, CBH Solutions, LLC, brought in specialized equipment and the training was provided in-house in both English and Ukrainian. Mathis Electronics had recently hired an individual through the Catholic Church Diocese of Asheville and sought to accommodate the new hire by providing a manual in her native language. All five employees passed the hands-on certification exam on July 14, 2023.

In September 2023, Mathis Electronics realized that to keep their customers and to bid on other contracts, they needed to become ISO 9001:2015 certified. They received an ARPA grant of \$19,076 to begin the 91 hours of training delivered by NC State Industry Expansion Solutions. The trainees include senior management, operations, engineering and purchasing staff. ISO training is very technical, requires extensive documentation and will take several months to complete. Upon completion, Mathis Electronics will use a third, unbiased party, to do a company audit of all their internal processes. The audit will determine if they will be granted the ISO 9001:2015 Certification. Getting the ISO 9001:2015 Certification will be a crucial component of growing their business.

On behalf of the MAWDB we are pleased to present the Outstanding Workforce Business Partner Award-Buncombe County to Mathis Electronics.



MOUNTAIN LOCAL AREA SPECIAL RECOGNITION

AI Summit

Mountain Area Regional Business Services

Outstanding Workforce Business Partner

Barbara Darby

Assistant Director Business Services

In May 2023, with “Chat GPT” a buzzword, the Mountain Area Workforce Development Board held a “Chat GPT Forum” at UNCA to get the pulse on the use of Artificial Intelligence and its implications for education, workforce training, and economic development. This event was energized by our special colleague, Marc Czarnecki. It was a successful event with 50 attendees from workforce partners, higher education, small business, and the entrepreneurial community.

In August 2023, UNCA's Social Sciences newsletter featured a new course being offered by the Business Department by Dr. Nana Harrison, Associate Professor of Business. I called Dr. Harrison to learn more about why he was incorporating AI into his instruction. That conversation laid the groundwork for the formation of a planning team involving four higher education institutions, the private sector, and MAWDB/LOS staff. The first Annual AI Summit took place on May 30, 2024, at Blue Ridge Community College. The Summit drew 150 attendees including public and private sector businesses, educators, college students, workforce professionals, and the general public. The agenda included distinguished keynotes along with local talent.

This event would not have been possible without an engaged planning team that met twice per month for eight months to plan and execute this event. This multi-talented, creative group of technology professionals dedicated countless hours, especially in the final weeks leading up to the event. This event exemplifies partner engagement and has been noted by NC Commerce and other workforce boards in the state. The planning team recently met on November 20 and December 2, to begin planning the AI Summit 2025.

I would like to recognize all the planning team members for their contribution to this event: Dr. Nana Harrison/UNCA; Steve Newman/ERC Broadband; Steven Young/BRCC; Dan Rickert/BRCC; Peter Kennedy/A-B Tech, and Dr. Yanjun Yan/WCU. In addition, I would like to thank Dr. Leatherwood and Blue Ridge Community College for serving as host and the technical assistance of Steven Young, Chief Information Officer at BRCC.

On behalf of the MAWDB we are pleased to present the Outstanding Workforce Business Partner Award to the AI Planning Team. Dr. Harrison and Dr. Queen will make comments on behalf of the planning team.



Karen Sanders

Outstanding Business Partner

NCWorks Buncombe County

Experienced Workforce Initiative of WNC

Irene Canivet, EWI Facilitator

The Experienced Workforce Initiative 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 fulfill our mission, we depend on the talents and efforts of individuals and organizations to see the value of 50+ employees and then actively support them. These volunteers deserve recognition, and we are thankful that the Mountain Area Workforce Development Board helps us honor them.

The Experienced Workforce Initiative would like to present our 2024 Certificate of Recognition to Karen Sanders for Outstanding Achievement in Support of the Experienced Workforce Initiative.

Here are just some of the reasons we chose Karen as this year’s award winner:

- Since 2018, Karen has actively participated in the planning and delivery of numerous EWI events, beginning with the 2019 Asheville 50+ Job Fair & Symposium; to numerous Lunch and Learns from 2020 to 2023; and, continuing in 2024 through the EWI employer outreach initiative in the “Helping the Helpers” workshops.
- Karen participates in other community organizations to support the 50+ community, including the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at UNC Asheville, where the goal is to enable members to thrive in life’s second half. One of her teaching contributions helps 50+ participants learn strategies to navigate our complicated healthcare system.
- Karen exemplifies the EWI mission in her dedicated efforts in developing the Elder Nurse Corps, a WNC initiative covering 9 counties (Buncombe, Henderson, Macon, Jackson, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Transylvania, and Haywood

counties) to support registered nurses (RNs) ages 60+ to transition successfully from an active nursing career to become advocates and supporters helping with the nursing and health care needs of our communities.

Thank you, Karen Sanders – for generously sharing your talents with, and on behalf of, the Experienced Workforce Initiative, and for your leadership and support of experienced workers! Congratulations!

Thank you, Karen, for all that you do, and congratulations!

Henderson County Chamber

Strategic Regional Partnership

Mountain Area Workforce

Development Board

Graham Fields, MAWDB Chair

Henderson County Chamber of Commerce Education Committee mission is “To ensure the emerging and workforce have the skills or opportunity to gain the skills to meet the employer needs of Henderson County.” Graham Fields, Assistant to the CEO at Advent Health Hendersonville, leads the committee and works with staff members Amy Muniz, Operations Manager and Bob Williford, President. Partners include local businesses, Henderson County Schools, Blue Ridge Community College, Mountain Area Workforce Development Board, College Foundation of NC and others. This committee supports the Junior Leaders program, Henderson County Schools Teacher of the Year, Apprenticeships, and more. The leadership demonstrated by the Henderson County Chamber of Commerce to meet local education and workforce needs is a best practice any community can learn.

Buncombe County Government and the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce

Career Pathway/Workforce Development Collaboration

Mountain area Workforce

Development Board

MOUNTAIN AREA

Graham Fields, MAWDB Chair

Buncombe County Government and Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce partnered to establish “Accelerate Buncombe” which is focused on training individuals for high paying, in-demand careers. Utilizing funding from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), Accelerate Buncombe offers paid training for individuals to pursue these careers. This program helps participants earn a postsecondary credential and connects them with a high paying career with local businesses. Many individuals are unable to enter postsecondary education as they need to earn money to support themselves and their families. Accelerate Buncombe helps remove this barrier to higher education and a better job. Participants receive support and case management from a Community Health Worker employed in partnership organizations Land of Sky Regional Council, YMI Cultural Center, Housing Authority of the City of Asheville and Operation Gateway. Accelerate Buncombe is helping local employers meet their workforce needs and increasing economic opportunity. It is an innovative approach to address skill gaps and grow our local economy. It is a good return on investment for taxpayers and employers by lifting up those who have often been left behind.

Congratulations to Buncombe County Government and Asheville Area Chamber!

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.

Marc Czarnecki

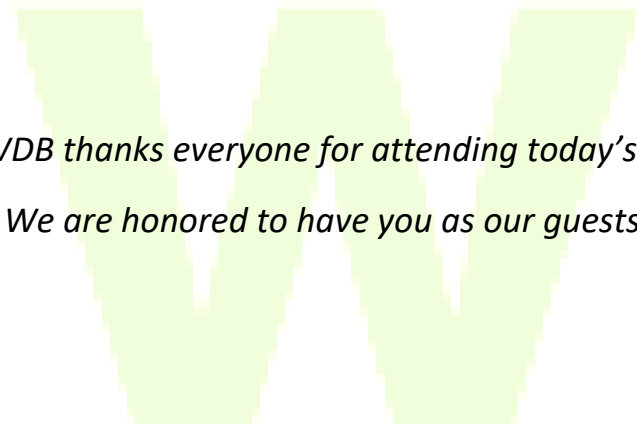
Deb Holebrooks Outstanding Customer Service Award Posthumously

Barbara Darby

Assistant Director Business Services

Mark Czarnecki served as a Business Services Representative for the Mountain Area Workforce Development Board. He unexpectedly passed away on July 26, 2024. Marc was an inspiration to us all. He always had a smile, and he had a contagious laugh. He helped lead Construction Career Day, Experienced Worker Initiative, our first AI Summit and much more. Marc was passionate about technology, and he was always learning about new ways to help others. Before his passing Marc was learning to be a ChatGPT expert. He was involved in many local organizations like “Meet the Geeks” and “AVL Digital Nomads.” Marc worked in rural and inner-city communities with the same energy and passion as everyone mattered to Marc. He did not care about your title or position; he cared for you as a person. Marc helped promote digital literacy in Madison County and other places throughout the region. He taught us many lessons. We should be lifelong learners. Leadership is not about the title you hold; everyone can be a leader. That no gesture is too small, Marc made each of us feel special and loved. He helped far more people than we ever knew about. And kindness is something that should be shared with all. Marc never said a bad word about anyone. He faced some serious challenges in his life, but he never let the obstacles he faced impact his attitude. We are heartbroken about Marc’s passing.

With all the utmost respect and love on behalf of the Mountain Area Workforce Development Board, we are pleased to present the Deb Holebrooks Outstanding Customer Service Award to Marc Czarnecki and his family.



The MAWDB thanks everyone for attending today's luncheon.

We are honored to have you as our guests.

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