

# WESPEAKWNC WORKFORCE CONFERENCE 2023





## We're glad you are here.

In 2020 NC State Extension put out a call for applications to the CREATE BRIDGES program. The Mountain West's application stood out from all the others, and as a result we have been working in this region to strengthen what we call the "CREATE" sectors. CREATE BRIDGES is all about championing – through education and incentives – retail, accommodation, tourism, and entertainment businesses and their employees. The WeSpeakWNC Conference is the culmination of over two years of research and planning to give you the help and knowledge you need not just to survive, but to thrive. Your presence here today means you care about the Mountain West region and its people, and we thank you for coming. We are grateful to the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and Harrah's Cherokee Conference Center for hosting this event.

Becky Bowen, CREATE BRIDGES Project Manager

Elissa Hashemi, CREATE BRIDGES Project Coordinator

# WESPEAKWNC WORKFORCE CONFERENCE

*Monday, February 27, 8:30am – 6:30pm*



Full Day for WNC Business Owners, Managers, and Entrepreneurs from the Retail,  
Accommodation, Tourism, and Entertainment Sectors

**8:30 AM,** COFFEE, REGISTRATION AND NETWORKING

**9:30 AM,** WELCOME BY DR. RAY BLANCHARD

Dr. Ray Blanchard is a business consultant and coach who specializes in corporate wellness.

**10:00 AM,** CONFERENCE OPENING BY PRINCIPAL CHIEF RICHARD SNEED OF THE EASTERN BAND OF CHEROKEE INDIANS

Chief Richard Sneed has successfully passed legislation that enhanced transparency, accountability, and economic opportunities for the EBCI. He believes in the unrestricted potential of the Eastern Band and its ability to sustainably meet the needs of its people.

**10:15 AM,** REGIONAL CONVERSATION WITH WESTERN NC ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT LEADERS

Chief Richard Sneed, Russ Harris, Rich Price, Tiffany Henry, and Josh Carpenter will discuss issues affecting WNC business owners and their staff.

**11:00 AM,** WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY SECRET SHOPPER RESEARCH PRESENTATION

Students from WCU present their findings from their semester long Secret Shopper project conducted on 130 local businesses in our sectors.

**11:30 AM,** TALENT JAM INTRO WITH TOM RYAN

Co-Founder and CEO of Supportedly, Tom Ryan will introduce "Talent Jam," which connects businesses in a fun way with the region's labor pool. His intro will tell you how to Prep Your Pitch for New Employees.

**11:45 AM,** LUNCH AND NETWORKING

**1:00 PM,** KEYNOTE ADDRESS: NC SECRETARY OF STATE ELAINE F. MARSHALL

Secretary Marshall will discuss state level programming that addresses entrepreneurship and small business support, including Rural Rise NC.

**1:30 - 2:15 PM,** LOCAL SUPPORT FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES

TSBC at SCC, Sequoyah Fund, Mtn Bizworks, Southwestern Commission – Business Services, NCWorks, Supportedly, WCU's Center for Career & Professional Development will be joining us. Business owners who have used their services will share their success stories.

**2:30 - 3:15 PM,** HOW TO RECRUIT AND RETAIN YOUR EMPLOYEES BY DR. ANNIE WILSON

Dr. Annie Wilson will demonstrate the tools every employer needs to find and keep the best employees.

**3:30 - 4:15 PM,** REFILLING YOUR CUP BY DR. RAY BLANCHARD

Ray uses accelerated learning strategies to open awareness, illuminate purpose, and inspire service to create self-transformation and a culture of care for yourself and for others.

**4:30 - 6:30 PM,** COCKTAILS & NETWORKING

Mix and mingle with other business owners, managers, and entrepreneurs while enjoying your favorite beverage at the cash bar.



# WESPEAKWNC WORKFORCE CONFERENCE

*Tuesday, February 28, 8:30am – 6:30pm*



Full Day for High School and College Students, Employers, Managers, and Incumbent and Potential Employees of the Hospitality, Retail, Accommodation, Tourism, Outdoor and Entertainment Sectors

**8:30 AM,** COFFEE, REGISTRATION AND NETWORKING

**9:30 AM,** WELCOME BY DR. RAY BLANCHARD

**10:00 – 10:45 AM,** TALENT JAM

Jeremy Hyatt will emcee this high-energy and fast-paced Employer and Employee Pitch Event.

**11:00 AM,** WESPEAKWNC SECTOR EXPO

Discover Western NC's Retail, Hospitality, Outdoor Recreation, Entertainment and Lodging businesses and meet the people making it all happen.

**NOON,** "YES, CHEF!" DEMO & LUNCH

Watch the behind-the-scenes magic of Harrah's Restaurant Cuisine prepared by Executive Chef Carter Alexander and his team, then taste the results!

**1:30 – 2:15 PM,** THE FOUR PILLARS OF SUCCESS BY DR. RAY BLANCHARD

Dr. Ray Blanchard will help attendees launch their dreams by focusing on the 4 Pillars of Success: Purpose, Vision, Aligned Action, and Persistence.

**2:30 – 3:15 PM,** CONFLICT RESOLUTION BY DR. ANNIE WILSON

Whether it's an unpleasant exchange with a customer or tension between staff, Dr. Wilson will show you how to resolve disagreements so that all parties feel validated and valued.

**3:30 – 4:15 PM,** SOCIAL MEDIA AND MARKETING FOR YOUR BUSINESS BY JESSICA MIZZI

Jessica Mizzi will provide you with the foundational knowledge that you need to get your business marketed!

**4:30 – 6:30 PM,** GOT YOUR BACK BUSINESSES RECOGNITION, RAFFLE RESULTS, COCKTAILS & NETWORKING

Businesses who attended the Got Your Back Business Summit or completed the online Got Your Back Business Academy will receive official recognition. Raffle winners will be announced while having cocktails at a cash bar.

## KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



### **ELAINE F. MARSHALL**

*NC Secretary of State*

In 1996, Secretary of State Elaine F. Marshall became the first woman ever elected to a statewide, executive branch office in North Carolina. Voters re-elected her to a seventh term in 2020. A former teacher, small business owner, and private practice attorney, Secretary Marshall was elected to the NC Senate before rising to statewide office.

Under Secretary Marshall's administration, more than 1.7 million businesses have been formed. She has pioneered e-commerce in government, protected investors and intellectual property owners, and promoted financial capital formation in North Carolina.

Secretary Marshall has been very active in many civic groups in the areas of child welfare, women's issues, and agriculture and small town economic development. She credits 4-H as an important part of her youth and received Lifetime Achievement Awards from North Carolina 4-H and in 2014 was inducted into the National 4-H Hall of Fame .

She holds a B.S. in Home Economics from the University of Maryland and a law degree from Campbell University. She has received Honorary Doctorate Degrees from Campbell University, Lees-McRae College, Meredith College and the Republic of Moldova State University of Medicine. Since becoming Secretary of State, Secretary Marshall has received numerous state and national awards for leadership in technology, government innovation, and women's leadership.

She is married to Jessie Thomas Bunn.



### **DR. RAY BLANCHARD**

*Master Trainer, Consultant, Executive Coach*

Dr. Ray Blanchard is a master international trainer, seminar designer, corporate consultant, and founder of Ray Blanchard Training Systems and Blanchard Consulting Group. He was educated in psychology and education at Washington University in St. Louis and received a Ph.D. from the University of Oregon in education and counseling psychology.

For the last 50 years, Dr. Blanchard has traveled the world, delivering training and consulting programs to more than 200,000 people with lasting impact for success worldwide and has developed or delivered programs for a host of international companies, including TOMMY BAHAMAS, AT&T, the Universiti Pertanian Malaysia Faculty of Economics and Management, and other companies challenged by change on the global playing field.

Dr. Ray Blanchard is an educator and thought leader with global acclaim as a master trainer. One of the select leaders in the transformation space for decades, he is known for his impeccable reputation as a professional. He now serves on the Board of Directors for the esteemed Transformational Leadership Council.

Using his multi-faceted background in training, counseling, consulting, and curriculum design, Dr. Blanchard is the Master Trainer for Life Design Education and is their Chief Curriculum and Programs Designer.

Access Dr. Ray's schedule to book a coaching or consulting call at [www.RayBlanchard.com](http://www.RayBlanchard.com)

## REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT LEADERS



### **RICHARD G. SNEED**

*Principal Chief, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians*

Richard G. Sneed life's work has been one of public service advocating for youth, community building, and cultural preservation. The son of a businessman and former council member, he knows that hard work and a community-centered focus enable collective opportunity. In this vein, he has worked throughout his career to ensure that Cherokee people have equitable access to quality education.

Having grown up in Wolfstown, on the Qualla Boundary, he values being rooted in a community that honors family, culture, and progressive thinking. After graduating from Cherokee High School in 1986, Richard Sneed served in the United States Marine Corp for four years. Father of five children, Breanna, Richie, Mattilynn, Katrina and Samuel, Sneed earned his degree from Universal Technical College in Phoenix, AZ, and holds a North Carolina Teaching License in Industrial Arts.

In 2015, Sneed was called to formalize his commitment to public service and was elected Vice Chief of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI). On May 25, 2017, he was officially sworn in as Principal Chief of the Eastern Band and subsequently re-elected as Principal Chief on September 5th, 2019.

Chief Sneed's administration is dedicated to exercising the EBCI's sovereignty, including growing relationships and partnerships, in part, through his service to the WCU Cherokee Center Advisory Board, United South and Eastern Tribes (USET), and the Cherokee Preservation Foundation Board of Directors. Chief Sneed has recently been elected as the Vice-Chairman of the Center for Disease Control's Tribal Advisory Committee.



### **TIFFANY HENRY**

*Director of Economic Development, Jackson County*

Tiffany Henry is the Director of Economic Development for Jackson County. In this role Tiffany works with many businesses, providing them with information, tools and support to locate and expand in Jackson County. Tiffany is a dynamic, team-spirited, results-oriented professional with a goal of providing clients with the tools they need to be sustainable and successful. Tiffany was previously the Director of Southwestern Community College's Small Business Center, an organization focused on increasing business success. Over those eight years she assisted with the startup of over 165 businesses with the creation of more than 1,260 jobs and the retention of over 1,100 jobs throughout Jackson, Macon and Swain Counties.

Tiffany is a proud, born-and-raised Jackson County native and Western Carolina University Catamount, holding her bachelor's degree in Business Administration and Law. She and her husband own and operate 828 Custom Printing and 828 Escape Room in Sylva, NC. She is a Class XXV graduate of the Rural Economic Development Institute with the North Carolina Rural Center, and is a certified trainer in REAL Entrepreneurship.



### **JOSH CARPENTER**

*Director, Mountain West Partnership*

The Mountain West Partnership is currently led by Josh Carpenter, who has a strong background in economic development. Before he started as Director at MWP, Josh served as Economic Development Director in Cherokee County (four years), Planner and Economic Development Director for Graham County (two years), and most recently as Existing Industry Expansion Manager at the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina. Over his six years at EDPNC, Josh supported new and existing businesses as they expanded into Western North Carolina. In this capacity he was partially responsible for the creation of 1,800 jobs and close to \$600 million in new investments.



## **RICH PRICE**

*Executive Director of Economic Development and Regional Partnerships, Western Carolina University*

Rich Price was named as Executive Director of Economic Development and Regional Partnerships at Western Carolina University in March of 2021, after serving as Director of Economic Development for Jackson County, NC for the previous seven years (2013- 2020). During his tenure with WCU he has also served in the interim role of Chief Marketing and Communications Officer. Mr. Price's primary responsibilities are connecting WCU to economic development opportunities and matters across the State of North Carolina, and specifically within the Western portion of the State, ensuring that his alma mater has a prominent seat at the table to create economic well-being.

In addition to his current role, Rich also serves as the Chairman of the Board of Directors for the Mountain West NC partnership, a regional collaboration of Economic Developers and Educational Leaders representing the seven western-most counties in North Carolina and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. He also serves as a member of the Executive Committee of the Southwestern Workforce Development Board, and as a member of both the EDPNC Advisory Council, and the UNC System Economic Transformation Council. Rich is an alumnus of Western Carolina University where he received his Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration in 1988, with dual concentrations in both management and marketing. He and his wife Susan reside in the Whittier community in Northern Jackson County.



## **RUSS HARRIS**

*Executive Director, Southwestern Commission*

Russ Harris is the Executive Director of the Southwestern Commission. The Southwestern Commission is the regional council of governments for the seven western counties in North Carolina, the towns within those counties, and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. The Southwestern Commission seeks to improve the quality of life in the region. This is accomplished through the work of its three departments which are the Area Agency on Aging, Workforce Development, and Community and Economic Development. Prior to becoming the Executive Director in 2021, he served as the Director of Community and Economic Development of the Southwestern Commission for five years. During his time with the Southwestern Commission, he has focused on expanding broadband access and addressing the region's housing shortage.

# **BUSINESS RESOURCE PROVIDERS**



## **LINDA LAMP**

*Business Services Representative, Southwestern Commission*

Linda Lamp is a NC native hailing from the middle of the state, Burlington NC. She graduated from UNC-Chapel Hill with a major in Communications and after college followed a pathway of service. This led to a career in the nonprofit sector working in administrative roles to executive director and everything in between. She has worked for charities like the Methodist Home for Children, Asheville Humane Society, and both Make-A-Wish Foundation Chapters in NC. She came west to Asheville in 2000 to start a regional office for Make-A-Wish and in 2005 accepted a director position with WNC Communities to focus on rural community development, agriculture, and forestry projects. In 2018, she worked with the Southwestern Commission's Workforce Development Board to develop workforce strategies, manage the incumbent worker training program, and secure grant funds to benefit businesses and individuals in the southwestern mountain region.



### **CHRISTINE LAUCHER**

*Strategic Partnership Manager and Southwestern Regional Manager, Mountain BizWorks*

Christine Laucher is the Strategic Partnership Manager and the Southwestern Regional Manager with Mountain BizWorks, a nonprofit Community Development Financial Institution. Mountain BizWorks' mission is to build a vibrant and inclusive entrepreneurial community in Western North Carolina by helping small businesses start, grow, and thrive. Christine supports the entrepreneurial ecosystem in rural counties, and lives in Hendersonville with her family.



### **ADAM RAY**

*Center for Career and Professional Development, Western Carolina University*

Adam has been an employee of Western Carolina University since 2016. He began as an Assistant Director of Undergraduate Admissions working specifically with Transfer students and then, in 2019, transitioned to recruitment aligned with First-Year/Freshman students. In his current role within the Center for Career and Professional Development, Adam conducts employer outreach strategies and assists employers in their conversations with students through on-campus events.



### **LISA MORRIS**

*NCWorks Career Center Manager, Haywood, Jackson and Swain Counties*

Lisa Morris is the NCWorks Career Center Manager for Haywood, Jackson and Swain Counties. She's a graduate of Western Carolina University and started out her career serving in social work positions with work first, child support, and supervising reemployment programs. Her 20 years of experience in workforce development provided the background needed to lead three regional NCWorks Career Centers. She currently serves on the boards for Haywood County CTE and State of Franklin. She helps businesses tap into free services provided through NCWorks including recruiting, screening and matching talent, Veterans services, hiring events, labor market information, skills based training, Work Opportunity Tax Credit, Federal Bonding and more.



### **RUSS SEAGLE**

*CEO, The Sequoyah Fund, Inc.*

Russ Seagle is the CEO of The Sequoyah Fund, Inc., a Native CDFI serving the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and surrounding rural communities in Western North Carolina. The Sequoyah Fund provides small business start-up and expansion capital, housing rehab loans, auto loans, credit builder loans, and training and consulting services to small businesses, nonprofits, and tribal departments. Russ has owned multiple businesses since 1995. He has been a small business consultant, trainer and professional speaker since 1999. He holds a BSBA in Marketing from Appalachian State University and a MBA from Western Carolina University.



### **SHARON OXENDINE**

*Business Development Director, tenBiz*

Sharon Oxendine is a proud First Nations woman from the Lumbee Tribe in NC. Sharon has a strong background in diverse communities and strong relationships in the business community across Western North Carolina. Sharon is a Business Development Director with Small Business Center at SCC. Sharon has over twenty years dedicated in the business development field and CDFI industry. She has over twenty-eight years of non-profit experience. Sharon works across the state of NC with Small Business Centers and focuses on business counseling, consulting and seminars. She provides guest counseling and seminars for Southwestern Community College SBC and works closely with its director, Marne Harris.





## **TOM RYAN**

*Co-founder/CEO, Supportedly*

Tom Ryan has a mission to improve the world through entrepreneurship and has dedicated nearly three decades to developing his vast capabilities in this area. His diverse background as a serial entrepreneur, startup advisor, angel investor, and SME operator makes Tom a force in the world of entrepreneurship. Tom's latest project is disrupting the billion-dollar product startup and crowdfunding space as an investor in and Chief Investment Officer of Enventys Partners, a leading product acceleration company. He is also the founder and General Partner of the Start100 Fund, a seed-stage angel investment fund, and co-founder of Supportedly, an organization dedicated to empowering entrepreneurs. Above all, Tom is dedicated to empowering the next generation of entrepreneurs by helping them turn their visions into realities and sustained value.

## **WORKSHOP SPEAKERS**



## **DR. ANNIE WILSON**

*Assistant Professor of Psychology, Western Carolina University*

Annie Wilson is a long time local to Western North Carolina and is dedicated to this community and to helping our people flourish. She is an assistant professor of Psychology at Western Carolina University and an independent personnel consultant through M&W Consulting. As an Industrial-Organizational Psychologist, Annie has expertise in employee retention strategies and is committed to providing data-driven personnel consultation to help regional businesses thrive, small and large. She is excited to share some evidence-based recruitment and retention strategies as well as some de-escalation tactics with regional business owners and employees.



## **JESSICA MIZZI**

*Marketing Manager, Western Carolina University*

Jessica Mizzi was born and raised in New York. She has always known the value of hard work and grew up with a passion for anything that allowed her to express her creativity. After earning her BA degree in Creative Writing at St. Thomas Aquinas College, she began her career at Penguin Random House in NYC and later transitioned to become a Marketing Manager at Audible.

When COVID-19 changed the world, Jessica decided to uproot her life and move to Winston-Salem, NC. It was there that she met her soon-to-be-husband, and together, they moved to the mountains that they now call home. Jessica currently works at Western Carolina University as Marketing Manager, overseeing social media and paid advertising efforts for the university. She's also attending WCU as a MBA student and recently received two globally-recognized marketing certifications from the Digital Marketing Institute and American Marketing Association.



## **CARTER ALEXANDER**

*Executive Chef, Harrah's Cherokee Casino and Resort*

Carter Alexander grew up in Chattanooga and spent a great deal of time eating fresh and locally grown items at his grandmother's house. He was also fortunate to that his grandmother, who was Welsh, was an avid baker and enjoyed eating her homemade pies, cakes, custards and other treats.

Carter has been in the industry for 30 years and has won competitions and awards for his food. He has also made television appearances representing local municipalities and restaurant groups for local festivals, competitions and restaurant promotions. He is working on incorporating the Harrah's Code Green initiative by using as much locally sourced, organic and sustainable products as possible, getting back to his roots in his grandmother's kitchen. He has developed menus using his local connections for a new 100,000 sq ft convention center, Wicked Weed Brew Pub, and Guy Fieri's Kitchen and Bar. He partnered with Gordon Ramsay's North American culinary team to develop a brand new and unique concept, Gordon Ramsay's Food Market, featuring local southern cuisine.



## **JEREMY HYATT**

*Secretary of Operations, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians*

A Tribal citizen of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI), Jeremy Hyatt grew up in the Birdtown Community of Cherokee, NC and now resides in the Little Savannah community of Jackson County with his wife, Manu.

After earning a BS in Anthropology from Western Carolina University in 2000 he moved to Durango, Colorado where he directed resort outdoor adventure programming and guest services for multiple properties. Upon his return to WNC, Hyatt was recruited to participate in the Cherokee Development Program through Harrah's Cherokee Casino where he worked as a departmental manager until 2009. He then served as Governmental Affairs Liaison for the Office of the Principal Chief. In 2013, he was named Director of Natural Resources and Construction, overseeing environmentally sustainable development for the EBCI. In 2015, Hyatt was promoted to his current position as Secretary of Operations, which expanded his oversight responsibilities to include many of the EBCI's utilities and Public Safety programs.

Hyatt is an active Board Member of the Cherokee Historical Association and the Growing Outdoors Partnership. Most recently, his passion for the outdoors led him to spearhead the development of the Fire Mountain Trails, which opened in 2017. This project is heralded as one of the Southeast's premier mountain biking and hiking trail systems and foremost examples of environmentally sustainable economic development for tribal nations. Hyatt is a vocal advocate for strong regional partnerships, infrastructure modernization, eco-tourism and small business.

## **WCU SECRET SHOPPERS**



## **AARON GOTTLOEB**

*Entrepreneurship Graduate, Western Carolina University*

Aaron Gottloebe is a recent WCU graduate from the school of business. He majored in Entrepreneurship and minored in Economics. In the future he will be joining the Peace Corps to teach English and work in Economic Development.



## **KAITLYN KENNEDY**

*Student, Western Carolina University*

Kaitlyn Kennedy is a sophomore at Western Carolina University, and is working towards a BSBA in Innovation, Leadership, and Entrepreneurship. Kaitlyn is also a member of the Brinson Honors college and is completing an honors diploma and a degree in Cultural Awareness from the Degree Plus program. Growing up with a single mother, she plans to use these degrees to develop nonprofits to help community members in need.



## **GAGE COMEAUX**

*Student, Western Carolina University*

Gage Comeaux is a senior at WCU who graduates in May of this year. He is majoring in Entrepreneurship and plans to stay in the Sylva area to own and operate a food truck.

