



Leadership North Carolina Class 32

Environment Session

April 8-10, 2025

Speaker Directory

Ms. Jael Skeffington

Co-Founder/Chief Executive Officer
French Broad Chocolates
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Jael Skeffington, Co-Founder & CEO of French Broad Chocolates in Asheville, NC, believes in using business as a force for good.

Jael's passion for chocolate was born in 2003, when she and her co-founder, Dan, drove a veggie oil-powered school bus to the cacao-rich tropics of Costa Rica and opened a restaurant called Bread & Chocolate. While living there for two years, they visited cacao farms, got to know cacao farmers, and learned about theobroma cacao, the plant from which chocolate is made. Inspired to continue their path in chocolate, they moved to Asheville and founded French Broad Chocolate in 2006.

Guided by a mission to source with integrity and craft with intention, French Broad Chocolate builds meaningful relationships with sustainable farmers and producers and transforms fine cacao beans into craft chocolate in their experiential Chocolate Factory in Asheville, NC. Bean-to-bar to bonbon and beyond means they create not only their artisan chocolate bars, but also a compendium of confections and desserts featuring their chocolate paired with local, fresh, and organic ingredients. Their creations can be enjoyed at French Broad Chocolate Lounge, their destination dessert restaurant; at their Chocolate Factory & Café; or through delivery, with the Asheville experience sent directly to you from frenchbroadchocolate.com. French Broad Chocolate is a Public Benefit Corporation and a Certified B Corp, a third party certification demonstrating a commitment to being people who use business as a force for good. Their chocolates have been recognized with many national and international awards.

Jael serves on the Board of Directors of the Economic Development Coalition in Asheville/Buncombe County and is a founding Board Member and Vice President of Chow Chow, an Asheville Culinary Event, whose mission is to celebrate and enrich the unique foodways of the Southern Appalachian region.

Ms. L. Shannon Swimmer

Director
Cherokee Center
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Shannon received her Bachelor of Arts and Juris Doctor from the University of Kansas and her Master of Science from Western Carolina University. She is a licensed attorney in the state of North Carolina and an enrolled member of the Eastern Band of Cherokees. She was the first female member of her tribe to serve as an Associate Judge for the Cherokee Tribal Court. Shannon is actively involved in her community through participation in groups such as Painttown Community Club, Cherokee Community Club Council, the Yogi Crowe Memorial Scholarship Fund Board of Directors, the EBCI Constitution Convention, and the Gadugi Project Advisory Board. She views her role as the Director of the Cherokee Center as a continued commitment to serve and assist Native communities, as well as an opportunity to foster continued collaboration between the Eastern Band of Cherokee and Western Carolina University.

Bill Holman

Semi-Retired Environmental Leader
NC State Director, The Conservation Fund (2013-2023)
Secretary, NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources (1999-2001)
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Bill Holman retired as Senior Advisor to the Conservation Fund in 2024. He was NC State Director for the Conservation Fund from 2013 – 2023. He also chaired NC’s Land for Tomorrow Coalition from 2013 – 2023. He joined the Board of Directors of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy in 2023.

Holman served as Governor Jim Hunt’s Secretary of the Department of Environment & Natural Resources from 1999-2001 and as Assistant Secretary from 1998-1999. He led Governor Hunt’s efforts to reduce nutrient pollution in the Neuse and Tar-Pamlico Rivers, to protect wetlands, to reduce air pollution from coal-fired power plants and motor vehicles, to conserve one million acres of land, and to recover from Hurricane Floyd.

Holman also served as Executive Director of the NC Clean Water Management Trust Fund (now NC Land & Water Fund) from 2001-2006. The Trust Fund invested in conservation, restoration, and infrastructure projects to protect and restore water quality. The General Assembly increased funding from \$30,000,000 to \$100,000,000 per year during Holman’s tenure.

Holman directed Duke University’s Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions State Policy Program from 2007-2012. He advised state and local officials on water allocation policy, watershed protection, energy policy, and planning for and adapting to climate change.

He graduated magna cum laude with a BS in biology from NC State University in Raleigh in 1978. He completed hiking the Appalachian Trail from Maine to Georgia in 1975. He's a member of the Order of the Long Leaf Pine. He has been inducted into the NC Wildlife Federation's Conservation Hall of Fame and has received many other awards.

Dr. Jennifer Runkle

Environmental Epidemiologist and Research Scientist
NC State's North Carolina Institute for Climate Studies (NCICS)
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Dr. Jennifer Runkle is an Environmental Epidemiologist with wide-ranging experience translating population-based science into action-based solutions for a variety of stakeholders. She is engaged in a range of research projects focused on issues at the nexus of climate and human health. She also supports interagency research activities as the liaison between NOAA NCEI and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Dr. Runkle joined NCICS in November 2014 as a member of the Assessments Technical Support Unit. She was an editor and author for the US Global Change Research Program's report entitled The Impacts of Climate Change on Human Health in the United States, which was released in 2016, and for the NOAA State Climate Summaries.

Her research interests include examining the health effects of climate change and variability, with particular interest in characterizing localized impacts for vulnerable populations such as pregnant women and outdoor workers. She is interested in advancing the science around how social and environmental factors work independently and jointly to influence climate-health outcome associations and using this information to identify community-level pathways to resilience.

Research topic areas include weather-related disasters, coastal community resilience, occupational health and safety, reproductive health, and mental health and well-being.

Dr. Runkle holds an MSPH and PhD in environmental epidemiology from the University of South Carolina and completed postdoctoral training in environmental and occupational epidemiology at Emory University.

Ms. Kirsten Barber

Deputy Director of Communications and Digital Media
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Kirsten is a communications and digital media professional with experience in the digital publishing, marketing, information technology, and public safety sectors. She is passionate about sharing stories of

inspiring individuals and innovative programs. In her current role with the NC Department of Public Safety, Kirsten oversees development and execution of the external facing website, employee resource hub, and social media channels. Her team of nine collaborate with the broader communications team to build print and digital deliverables for the brand. She is also the producer and host of the department's podcast, The Safety Scoop. Since starting with department in 2018, Kirsten has not only managed social media during "blue sky" days but has had numerous roles in the Joint Information Center (JIC) as part of the State Emergency Response Team (SERT) for disasters or activation events, to include Hurricane Florence, Hurricane Michael, Hurricane Dorian, Hurricane Isaias, Hurricane Helene, the COVID-19 pandemic, snow storms, and public unrest.

Kirsten earned her bachelor's degree in English, with a Creative Writing minor, from NC State University in 2013. Early in her career Kirsten freelanced for several media outlets, including the News & Observer, Exit Event (now WRAL TechWire), and Offline Media. She is a certified Real Colors facilitator and enjoys helping people along the path of understanding themselves and others better. She lives in Garner with her husband, son, and dozens of house plants. In her free time, she enjoys gardening, reading, going on outdoor adventures, and trying new recipes.

Mr. Zachary Turner

Climate Reporter

WFAE 90.7 - Charlotte's NPR News Source

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Zachary Turner is a climate reporter and author of the WFAE Climate News newsletter. He freelanced for radio and digital print, reporting on environmental issues in North Carolina.

He has a bachelor's in French and a master's in journalism from UNC-Chapel Hill.

Mr. Travis Klondike

Associate Director, Coastal Dynamics Design Lab

Associate Research Professor, Department of Landscape Architecture & Environmental Planning

North Carolina State University

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Travis serves as the Associate Director of the Coastal Dynamics Design Lab (CDDL) and as an Associate Research Professor in the Department of Landscape Architecture & Environmental Planning (LAEP) at NC State University. His work focuses on helping communities better adapt to natural hazards and climate change by leveraging contemporary methods of geospatial analysis, public engagement, visual narration, and grant-writing as catalysts for public good.

Travis received his Master of Landscape Architecture from NC State University and a Bachelor of Science in Landscape Architecture from the University of Kentucky.

Ms. Monica McCann

Resourceful Communities Program Director
The Conservation Fund
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Monica directs Resourceful Communities, a specialized program of The Conservation Fund that works with community organizations across North Carolina. She leads the Food & Farm Initiative, supporting community groups and small farmers to develop innovative food projects to serve vulnerable populations; the Generational Land Wealth Initiative, to help underserved landowners retain and generate revenue from their land; and the NC Food Hub Collaborative. During her 20 years with Resourceful Communities, Monica has worked to develop, fund, and manage various major initiatives of Resourceful Communities, including the establishment of the first community forest in the Southeast. She is also responsible for program development, fundraising, and evaluation, raising more than \$10 million for direct program services and an additional \$10 million in re-grant funding for rural communities.

Previously, Monica served in the Peace Corps as a Natural Resources Volunteer in Ecuador. Monica holds an M.S. in City and Regional Planning and a B.S. in Public Health from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The Honorable Zeb Smathers

Mayor
Canton, NC
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Mayor Zeb Smathers was first elected as the Mayor of Canton in 2017. He assumed a regional leadership role on the issue of flooding following the devastating flooding resulting from Tropical Storm Fred and again in response to Hurricane Helene. He also became a fixture on local and national media programs for leadership concerning the sudden closing of Evergreen Packaging, Haywood County's manufacturing hub and source of 1,100 jobs, in 2023.

Mayor Smathers and his team are committed to a comprehensive, bipartisan vision that allows Canton to bring about a future of new ideas and possibilities without losing what made the town special . . . her people and history as a "Milltown."

Ms. Jennifer Bennett

Government and Community Relations Manager

Duke Energy

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In 2023 Jennifer Bennett was named Duke Energy District Manager serving Buncombe, Haywood, Madison, Mitchell, Yancey, and Avery Counties. The District Manager serves the State President's organization in Government and Community Affairs. In this role, Jennifer's primary responsibilities are issue management for government officials and leadership, as well as community leadership organizations. She works across Duke Energy's departments, including generation, power grid operations, real estate, etc. As District Manager, she also manages community relations and philanthropic investments. Prior to her current role, Jennifer was a Project Manager in the Water Strategy, Hydro Licensing, and Lake Services group at Duke Energy. In this role, Jennifer was responsible for managing regulatory compliance, the development and operations of recreational access and facilities as well as managing historic properties associated with the Upper Catawba – Wateree, Walters, Nantahala Area, Keowee-Toxaway, and Bad Creek Hydroelectric Projects. Jennifer is an alumna from Western Carolina University and holds a Master's degree in Parks, Recreation, & Tourism Management from NC State University. Jennifer is a native of North Carolina and currently resides in Asheville, NC, with her husband and two small children where they spend their free time on the trails or rivers enjoying the outdoors.

The Honorable Maggie Ullman

Council Member, Asheville City Council

Founder and Principal, Ullman Consulting

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With a distinguished career in sustainability, philanthropy, and municipal leadership, Councilwoman Maggie Ullman currently serves on the Asheville City Council, where she chairs the Environment and Safety Council Committee and contributes to key economic, policy, and human resources initiatives. As the Founder and Principal of Ullman Consulting, she has led strategic planning efforts for national philanthropic coalitions, climate action networks, and sustainability-focused organizations.

Previously, Ullman held leadership roles at the ClimateWorks Foundation, where she coordinated international climate philanthropy efforts, and co-founded the Southeast Sustainability Directors Network, strengthening sustainability collaboration across the region. Her tenure as Asheville's Chief Sustainability Officer saw the launch of the first climate action program in the South, leading to a 17.65% carbon footprint reduction. Through a career spanning public service, nonprofit leadership, and climate advocacy, Ullman remains committed to driving impactful environmental and policy solutions.

Mr. Nathan Ramsey

Director, Mountain Area Workforce Development Board
Land of Sky Regional Council
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Nathan is the Director of the Mountain Area Workforce Development Board with Land of Sky Regional Council serving Buncombe, Henderson, Madison, and Transylvania Counties. Prior to this role he was a Business Services Representative for the North Carolina Department of Commerce. Nathan served in the North Carolina General Assembly representing House District 115 from 2013 to 2014 and as Chairman of the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners from 2000 to 2008.

Nathan grew up in Fairview in Buncombe County; he is a graduate of AC Reynolds High School, UNC Asheville, and the University of Tennessee College of Law. He is a member of the NC State Bar. Nathan is married to Robin, and they live on the family dairy farm.

Ms. Elizabeth Biser

President, Biser Strategies
Secretary, North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (2021 – 2024)
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Elizabeth Biser is the President of Biser Strategies LLC, an environmental policy consulting firm. Governor Roy Cooper appointed Biser to serve as Secretary of the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality in June of 2021, where she served until September 2024. She was the first woman confirmed to serve as DEQ Secretary.

In August of 2023, she was elected by her peers to serve as President of the Environmental Council of the States (ECOS), the national nonprofit, nonpartisan association of state and territorial environmental agency leaders.

As DEQ Secretary, she oversaw the state agency whose mission is to protect North Carolina's environment and natural resources. The organization has over 1600 employees located in offices from the mountains to the coast and administers regulatory and public assistance programs aimed at protecting the quality of North Carolina's air, water, and land, its coastal resources and fisheries, and the public's health.

Under Elizabeth's leadership, DEQ developed the Action Strategy for PFAS and took proactive steps to prepare public water systems for federal drinking water limits. She has led DEQ's efforts to propose state groundwater and surface water standards to reduce the amount of PFAS entering the environment and ensure residents are not paying the entire cost of cleaning up PFAS contamination. Additionally, she has been an outspoken advocate of ensuring the entire lifecycle of PFAS is addressed, recently petitioning the Environmental Protection Agency to list four PFAS compounds as Hazardous Air Pollutants.

She successfully oversaw the implementation of over \$6.5 billion in state and federal investments to improve water and sewer infrastructure in communities throughout the state. She led the effort to ensure that the historic funding helped the communities that needed it the most, which resulted in 2000 homes being connected to public water for the first time.

Previously, she served as the Vice President of Policy & Public Affairs at The Recycling Partnership, and the Government Relations & Policy Advisor of Brooks, Pierce, McLendon, Humphrey & Leonard, LLP. She holds a Bachelor of Arts and a Master of Public Administration from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Class 32 Environment Session Planning Committee

The following members of LNC Class 31 make up the planning committee for the Class 32 Environment session.

Erin Crouse *Orange*

Field Representative, Southeast Region

The Conservation Fund

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Erin Crouse was born and raised in WNC and has spent most of her adulthood in the Triangle. She currently works at The Conservation Fund, where she collaborates with state agency, local government, and nonprofit partners to acquire land for conservation. Erin is passionate about land use and bringing people together toward common goals. Prior to joining the Fund as an employee, she worked closely with the Fund as a consultant and AmeriCorps member and in different roles with other nonprofits and local government. Her biggest accomplishment during this time was the development of Good Hope Farm in Cary, a teaching farm that supports beginning farmers, preserves farmland, and connects the community to local food.

Erin attended NC public schools and received her B.A. in English from UNC-Chapel Hill and M.S. in Natural Resources from NC State. She is a NC Certified Environmental Educator and loves getting outside and sharing the outdoors with others. Erin has a long history of local government involvement and advocacy, including as a former Chair of the Chapel Hill Parks, Recreation and Greenways Commission. Outside of work, Erin sings soprano with the Choral Society of Durham and serves as Treasurer for the Friends of Chapel Hill Parks, Recreation, and Greenways. She lives with her husband Jason and cat Mary in a house on the outskirts of Chapel Hill, where she enjoys knitting, gardening, reading fiction, and sewing.

Dr. Kathie Dello, Session Co-Chair *Wake*

Director of North Carolina State Climate Office/State Climatologist

North Carolina State University

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Kathie is the State Climatologist and Director of the North Carolina State Climate Office at NC State University. She lives in Downtown Raleigh.

Kathie is a more proficient climate scientist (long-term) than meteorologist (short-term). This is evidenced by her decision to move to Raleigh in the summer of 2019, right before a 10-day streak of 95°F temperatures, the second longest on record here in the City of Oaks.

She never has her rain jacket when she needs one. 10 years in Oregon prior to North Carolina means she has not only a distaste for umbrellas (it's a thing), way too many Birkenstocks, and wants to know if you can put more hops in the beer. Don't judge her too harshly. Misguided fashion choices aside, she also picked up her PhD while at Oregon State University. In her time in Corvallis, she developed a deep love for community-led climate science research and outreach. She has always been connected to the

environment, but she really thrives when helping folks understand their climate risks and is motivated by public service. She has spent a lot of time thinking about how to most effectively communicate climate science, and she works with local and national media frequently. She finds North Carolina an interesting and vibrant place to do the people-centered work that she likes to do.

Kathie was born in upstate New York. She is generally mediocre at a whole host of outdoor activities but likes them anyway. Her newest thing is taking her inflatable paddleboard out on a local lake and leaving her phone (and all those alerts) behind. She prefers the mountains to the beach, but she's glad that North Carolina has both (and beautiful ones, at that). She is curious and open to new experiences.

Venu Ghanta, Session Co-Chair *Wake*

VP, Regulatory Affairs and Policy

Duke Energy

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Venu Ghanta serves as vice president of regulatory affairs and policy for Duke Energy. In this role, he manages the company's presence in all North Carolina regulatory matters before the North Carolina Utilities Commission (NCUC). He provides leadership and direction in the development and implementation of public policy that is in the best interest of the customers and communities served by Duke Energy.

Previously, Ghanta served as vice president of federal regulatory affairs for Duke Energy, leading and directing the company's development and advocacy of federal regulatory policy. In this role, he also led the establishment of the company's first-ever environmental justice principles.

Prior to coming to Duke Energy, he worked for nearly a decade at the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), where he received the EPA Gold Medal for Exceptional Service and the EPA Science Achievement Award. He was also selected to serve as special assistant to EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson from 2010-2012.

Ghanta previously worked in the medical device industry, where his work resulted in multiple patents and publications. From 2001-2004, he served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Nepal and Namibia.

He received a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering from the University of Michigan, a master's degree in chemical engineering from the University of California at Berkeley, and a master's degree in environmental sciences and policy from Johns Hopkins University. He currently serves on the board of directors of Advanced Energy. Ghanta resides in Cary, NC, with his wife and two daughters.

Jennifer Howard *Wake*

SVP, Director of Operations

Dogwood State Bank

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Jennifer Howard is the SVP, Director of Operations at Dogwood State Bank. She is experienced in leading highly effective teams across multiple departments including loan operations, deposit operations, fraud, and information technology. She was instrumental in the acquisition of Sound Bank and rebranding to

Dogwood State Bank. She is known for developing initiatives that lead to operational excellence and profitability gains.

In her previous role with Square 1 Bank, she led the highly efficient loan operations and core systems support teams that serviced a loan portfolio with a growth rate of 18% year over year. She was a key leader and contributor in successfully taking the bank public in 2014 and acquisition sale in 2015.

Jennifer holds a Bachelor of Science from East Carolina University.

Carolyn Keith Mecklenburg

President and CEO

Keith Consulting Group

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Carolyn is the President and CEO of Keith Consulting Group, with over 20 years of experience advancing sustainable building, engineering, and energy industries. She has led high-profile public-private partnerships and nationally recognized federal initiatives, driving business success and innovation.

Previously, Carolyn served as Chief Engagement Officer & Director of Communications for CLEANcarolinas at UNC Charlotte's Division of Research, focusing on offshore wind supply chains and grid resiliency. She also played a key role at UNC Charlotte's EPIC, organizing the university's first renewable energy conference and supporting the Steps4Growth workforce development program.

An entrepreneur and LEED Accredited Professional, Carolyn co-founded The EcoLogic Studio, a consultancy providing sustainability and energy solutions across the western US and Mexico, including major projects for the US Navy and Marine Corps. She has also led workforce development initiatives that bridge industry and academia to address critical skill gaps.

Carolyn began her career in New York as a line producer in advertising and film, managing corporate films, documentaries, and national TV commercials. Fluent in French and having lived in France and Mexico, she is a strong advocate for bilingual education and maintains a deep interest in geopolitics.

Greg Lahrman Wake

Senior Director, Operational Excellence

Martin Marietta

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Greg has a variety of cross-functional and cross-industry experience, leading people and driving continuous improvement. He is a versatile, bilingual professional with international experience ranging from startups to corporations. Greg is strategic and action-oriented and enjoys developing solutions to solve business challenges as well as managing teams to deliver exceptional performance. He thrives while working in diverse, cross-functional, creative environments where team members collaborate to design and build solutions.

He is originally from Cincinnati and has also lived in New York City, Michigan, Houston and now Raleigh for 5 years. Greg is married and his wife is from Colombia . . . the country (with an "o," not a "u"). He has two boys (Nico - 16 and Dilan - 12) and two dogs (Sparky-mutt-7 and Cori-white husky-3). He enjoys

most sports and exercise related activities including golf, soccer, and biking, and he has spent significant time coaching youth teams.

Greg is very interested in helping the Hispanic community as well as advocating for children who come from backgrounds of adversity and trauma. His interests also include a variety of topics such as personal finance, real estate, and entrepreneurship.

Steven Martin, Program Chair *Wake*

President & CEO

Constellation Quality Health

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Steven is the President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) for Constellation Quality Health. An experienced and empathetic leader, Steven previously served as a Vice President within Atrium Health's Quality Division. His responsibilities included the comprehensive oversight for accreditation, medical staff services and quality, Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act (Patient Non-Discrimination), and the Insurance and Payor Quality of Care Complaint process.

He served as a member of the Joint Commission's Health Systems Liaison Advisory Council and as Deputy for the COVID-19 Surge Operations Leadership Group at Atrium Health. His additional prior leadership roles include Vice President for Business Development/Senior Consultant at Courtemanche & Associates, Inc., and Director of Quality Management at Carolinas HealthCare System. Steven also served as a Hospital Surveyor with The Joint Commission.

Steven holds a Master's in Health Administration from the Medical University of South Carolina and a Bachelor of Science in Biology from Wofford College. His credentials include Fellow of the American College of Healthcare Executives (FACHE) and Certified Professional in Healthcare Quality (CPHQ). He is an alumnus of Leadership North Carolina Class 31 and serves as the LNC Class 32 Program Chair.

Tyler McLauchlan *Buncombe*

Architect

Clark Nexsen

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Tyler lives in Asheville, NC, with his wife and daughter and their two dogs. He has been in Asheville for almost 10 years and moved to the area from Raleigh for his current position as an architect with Clark Nexsen.

Originally from Roanoke, VA, Tyler attended James Madison University for industrial design, then went on to NC State University to graduate with a master's degree in architecture. Through a job offer he relocated from Raleigh to Asheville in 2014. Taking a position in the western part of North Carolina was naturally an easy decision having grown up in the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Tyler's architecture career is a cornerstone of his relationships and community in the Asheville area. Through his work he has found place and identity that reaches further than the professional space. From 2015-2019 he was an executive committee member for the local chapter of the American Institute of

Architects, which became a platform for volunteering and involvement in other local organizations.

One of his current favorite hobbies is mountain biking in the Pisgah National Forest with his young lab Duke Dog. Which we should clarify, is named after the James Madison University “Duke Dog,” Go DUKES!

Melanie Taylor Durham

AVP, Healthcare Strategy, Planning, and Performance
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When Melanie was a child, her family immigrated from Jamaica to Miami, FL. While she now calls Durham, NC, home and embraces southern living, as an immigrant, she has always identified with the rich diversity of people and cultures around her. After graduating from Pennsylvania State University, Melanie embarked on a career path which led to her current role as Associate Vice President of the Healthcare Division’s Strategy, Planning, and Performance department at BlueCross BlueShield of North Carolina (BCNC).

One of the highlights of Melanie’s 15 years with BCNC is the delivery of Blue Premiere, a value-based care model that aligns providers and the company to the goal of helping patients receive better, more affordable, more coordinated care. Since its inception in 2019, this program has created nearly \$650M of cost savings and medical quality improvements. This program deeply connected with Melanie’s personal values—making a difference in the lives of the people you love.

Melanie’s baking is legendary among friends and family; especially her Jamaican Rum Cake—a family recipe passed along. But her deepest passion is for dog rescue. Whether it’s fostering, fundraising for a local rescue, keeping a friend’s pup, or taking care of her own, there’s always a steady stream of dogs in her home. Melanie’s perfect day includes having a dog curled up beside her to shower with love. Her brother-in-law often jokes that if he’s reincarnated, he wants to come back as one of Melanie’s dogs.

La'Meshia Whittington Wake

President/CEO
The Whittington & Staley Consulting Group
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A Royal Descendant of the Kingdom of the Happy Land, a post-emancipation Afro-Indigenous settlement nestled deep within the Appalachian Mountains of North and South Carolina, La'Meshia Whittington, has maintained the traditions of her people, namely her grandmother, Philanthropist Rebecca L. Staley, by serving the people.

Professor La'Meshia Whittington is the President and Founder of The Whittington & Staley Consulting Group (The WSC Group), she is a Governor appointee, a professor, and the Founding President of Democracy Green, an environmental justice and pro-democracy reform nonprofit birthed in Hurricane Florence's floodwaters, alongside her co-founders, her mother, Executive Director Sanja Whittington and her brother, Environmental Justice Associate, Robert Whittington, Jr.

Professor Whittington is the Eco-Architect. She is a disruptor of harmful systemic inequities that burden

frontline and marginalized communities-of-color and low wealth populations. La'Meshia is a visionary on the underground railroad of eco-liberation and systems change to remove the oppression of legacy pollution and harmful policies in Black communities, to remove health inequities created in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities targeted for waste. She champions the autonomy and sovereignty of powerful communities across the US South and the Global South.

Professor Whittington has assisted communities in receiving federal funding for water infrastructure, including recently a \$13.2 million award to develop clean water infrastructure for the first time in the history of an unincorporated Black community. She has supported the direct movement of over \$75 million to communities across the US South since the global pandemic. La'Meshia was the 2022 ABC11 Climate Change Hero, featured in ABC6's Our America: Green Guardians, and chosen as a Grist50 Fixer. Presenting Professor La'Meshia Whittington, the Eco-Architect.

Dr. Kim Winter Jackson

Dean & Professor

Western Carolina University

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Kim K. Winter is Dean and Professor in the College of Education and Allied Professions and serves in the superintendent role for The Catamount School (UNC-System lab school) at Western Carolina University. She is an experienced higher education administrator skilled in accreditation, assessment, curriculum development, enrollment and personnel management, budget and finance, as well as partnership development and advocacy. During Winter's tenure as dean, college scholarship dollars have tripled, a 2.5 million dollar endowment was created to support a new distinguished professorship in early literacy, and a 5 million dollar estate gift was secured in support of the School of Teaching and Learning. Dr. Winter's research expertise includes the induction and retention of teachers, preservice teacher analysis and reflection on teaching, performance-based assessment in teacher education, and middle grades teacher preparation. She has remained an active scholar since becoming a full-time administrator and has secured external grant funding in excess of 3.7 million.

Dr. Winter's teaching expertise includes higher education organization and administration, middle level curriculum and instruction, language arts and disciplinary literacy methods, young adolescent development, English Learner methods, and young adult literature. Volunteer service in North Carolina includes the State Board Education Literacy Task Force, the Teaching Fellows Commission, the Early Learning & Literacy Impact Coalition, the New Teacher Support Program Advisory Council, the Task Force on Trauma-informed Practices (part of the NC Center for Resilience and Learning, a center housed at the Public School Forum of NC), and as co-chair of the UNC System Education Preparation Advisory Group. Winter has also served on many committees within the Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE), and as an accreditation reviewer for the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). Dr. Winter holds a baccalaureate degree in Applied Learning and Development from The University of Texas at Austin and a master's and doctorate in Curriculum with a specialization in English from Indiana State University. She has taught in public schools at the elementary and middle school levels in both Texas and Indiana.

Tres Wooldridge Cabarrus

Senior Director of Product Line Management

Corning

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William Wooldridge is the current Senior Director of Product Line Management for Corning's Optical Connectivity division, headquartered in Charlotte North Carolina. His full career, from internship to present, has been with Corning. He is a graduate of Virginia Tech with a Mechanical Engineering degree and Arizona State University with an MBA. William has called Virginia, Arizona, and North Carolina home over the years but plans for Charlotte to be his final move.

William spent most of his career in manufacturing plants (fiber optic cables and components) serving in roles such as engineering, production supervisor, quality manager, plant operations/engineering manager, and plant manager before moving into multiple product line management roles after completing his MBA. In the Chief of Staff role he is experiencing a higher level view of the business that will be used for perspective in future career moves.

William has been married for 24 years to his wife, Kim. Together they have two sons, Kendall and Tyson. He is passionate about the promotion of DE&I and believes we all benefit when we teach others to understand our differences. William is on the Board of Virginia Tech's Department of Mechanical Engineering and has recently volunteered for the Board of Shining Hope Farms, which uses equine-assisted activities to provide therapy to veterans and others striving to reach their full potential.