

# 2023 Year End Report

*...showcasing activities and accomplishments of departments and offices within Rutherford County Government.*



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RUTHERFORD  
EST. COUNTY, NC 1779

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289 N. Main Street | Rutherfordton, NC 28139

Another year has come and gone, and we would like to share highlights of events, activities, and programming showcasing accomplishments of all County departments and offices.

The service from every County employee and the impact on Rutherford County during 2023 has been outstanding. Each department has shown their dedication and commitment to serving and improving the quality of life in our County. Please enjoy each featured County department.

# Airport

- Military helicopter en route



- NCAA Conference Pinehurst, NC
- High-speed internet installation through Pan-gea
- School field trips were hosted by Airport
- Late night operations (pictured below)



- Music video filmed at Airport



- Aerial of the Airport



- Runway repainting project through the NCAA Maintenance Program (SPAM) before and after (pictured below)



- Eastside Development Soil Testing



- Office Renovation Completed



- Life Flight



*Airport continued*

- Daily airport traffic



- Airfield Lighting Rehab Project



- Helicopter self-service fueling



- Fuel-Farm repairs

- Sunrise at Airport



- North Carolina Forest Service helicopter (pictured below)



# Animal Control

## 2023 Year-End Review:

- Added an Economizer Unit to Animal Control to help cool and heat the dog kennels.
- Added two new positions, one full-time kennel attendant and a part-time kennel attendant.
- Working to transfer Animal Control operations to the Foothills Health District.
- Worked with the Maintenance Department on necessary repairs to buildings and grounds.
- Staff completed training opportunities throughout the year.

**New Animal Control Facility grading and site. Completion date is scheduled for late 2024.**



# Board of Elections

The Board of Elections Staff had a very busy and productive year. The staff had a lot of time to prepare for 2024 elections. A few highlights from the year include:

- In July, staff and the board appointed Chief Judges and judges for all seventeen precincts.
- Sworn in new Board Member, Hannah, and returning members, Angela Plackis and Georgia Steele Linda Smith and Chairperson Frances Lockwood.
- All staff members attended two in-person conferences in April and August.
- The staff attended several virtual trainings and meetings with the district and state.
- Board of Elections Director Dawn Lovelace was recognized for completing the State Certified Directors exam. Staff members, Angela Rhymer and Clay Randall, were recognized for completing the Certified Elections Administrator exam.
- Filed candidates in December for the 2024 Primary Elections.
- Staff is working hard on training and scheduling workers to help with the 2024 elections.
- Filing for municipalities elections will be held in Mid-July
- Staff is working with the Planning Department and IT for our new office location.
- Early voting for the 2024 Primary will start in mid-February and end first of March with Election Day on March 5, 2024.

# Building Inspections

The Building Inspections Department had a productive year with **182** new house starts and **83** Mobile Homes. Total permit fees were **\$619,683.41**, which included **2,515** new permits. Project cost of all permit jobs came in at **\$155,728,422.61** and total inspections completed were **13,444**.

New commercial projects started including a new Animal Shelter located on Laurel Ave, a new county school bus garage facility located on the old RS Central High School baseball field, and two new set of apartments located on Hilltopper Court in Rutherfordton.

Buildings that were issued a certificate of occupancy throughout the year include: 31,713 SF single-story, 45 unit, assisted living and memory care facility in Lake Lure, 13,000 sq' Riding Arena located on the ICC Campus, Rutherfordton Fire Department satellite facility located on Baber Rd, and the Alpine Coaster located at the Jelly Stone Camp in Golden Valley in June.

Our inspectors are staying busy with new construction which is currently not slowing down. The county inspectors are staying busy doing inspections on new constructions, remodels, service upgrades and HVAC change-outs.

Several of our inspectors are still attending classes, taking state exams, and gaining certifications. Over the past year, Joey Turru-biarte received his Level 1 Electrical and Building Level 2 certifications. Congratulations to Joey as this completes all his Level 1 certifications (pictured above).



Jeremy Hill gained his Level 2 certifications in Building & Electrical (pictured left).

Connor Hensley gained his Plumbing Level I certification (pictured below left).



Caleb Wilson gained his Level 2 in Fire (pictured below right).

Congratulations to these inspectors for a job well done!

All the credit goes to my staff. I want to personally thank my staff for the hard work that they have put in this year.

I would say that 2023 was a challenging year and I don't use that wording often. From Ms. Ruth Sams overseeing the office and all permits issued throughout the year, to Joey who wears multiple hats as the County Fire Inspector and helps Ruth in the office with permitting duties.

My inspectors, Connor Hensley, Caleb Wilson, Lee Pace and Jeremy Hill have been pushed this year with the number of inspections we have conducted. They have been up to the challenge and then some. Could not ask anymore of these fine people.



We wish you all a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

*Director Shane Dotson and staff*

# Communications Center (911)



*As Director of Rutherford County's 911 Communications Center, I could not be prouder of our staff's dedication to their part of Rutherford County's Public Safety Team. I wish to thank all for a great year of enduring tough days and enjoying the good ones, the overtime put in during short staffing, and the duties, and responsibilities taken on above normal duties. Without you all being part of this team, we could not operate as efficiently as we do. I hope to see each one with us for 2024.*

*Thank you,*


*Director Scott Schiefelbein.*

- 911 staff has entered or modified approximately 800 records in the National Crime Information Center's (NCIC) database, which included Missing & Wanted persons, stolen vehicles, articles, guns, protection orders, etc. for Rutherford County Sheriff's Office, Forest City, Lake Lure, Rutherfordton, and Spindale Police Departments.
- As of November 30, 2023, our total call statistics for the year:

JANUARY- NOVEMBER 2023 RUTHERFORD COUNTY 911 EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS ACTIVITY	
<b>911 processed phone calls</b> (98.53% answered within 10 seconds)	<b>50,314</b>
<b>Administrative phone calls</b> (97.08% answered within 10 seconds)	<b>90,749</b>
	<b>Total 141,063</b>
<b>Dispatched Calls for Service Per agency</b>	
<b>Rutherford County Sheriff</b>	<b>45,132</b>
<b>Frest City Police</b>	<b>18,290</b>
<b>Rutherfordton Police</b>	<b>9,965</b>
<b>Spindale Police</b>	<b>12,961</b>
<b>Lake Lure Police</b>	<b>2,580</b>
<b>Rutherford County Animal Control</b>	<b>1,392</b>
<b>Emergency Medical Services (EMS)</b>	<b>14,594</b>
<b>Rutherford County Fire Departments</b>	<b>8,167</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>113,081</b>

- A new dispatcher, Samantha, was hired to become the first AI to help our dispatchers by announcing calls for service for Fire and EMS units in the county. Samantha has helped reduce some of the workload on our staff, and responders are enjoying being dispatched by Samantha (although she is still learning southern street names).
- Rutherford County 911 was one of the first PSAPs in NC this year to have our inspection from the NC 911 Board team to assess our Center's following of the rules, regulations, and laws of Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) in the state. We passed with praises on some of our programs in place. The last time this agency was assessed was in 2018.

### Assessment Findings

Deficiencies	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In reviewing the PSAP operations for compliance with North Carolina law, including Rules 09 NCAC 06C .0200, the assessors identified no deficiencies.</li> </ul>

- We celebrated our staff during National Public Safety Telecommunicator Week in April. We had some fun times during down times.



- We were involved in several hiring events.
- We participated in the Town of Spindale Safety Night Out for Halloween, along with just some good days of visitors and goodies.



# Cooperative Extension

## Livestock Educational Programming



Educational efforts in value-added marketing were continued through networking with the Mountain Cattle Alliance, East Tennessee Cattle Alliance and Shelby Cattle Alliance. Cattle marketed through the Mountain Cattle Alliance alone in 2023 were valued at \$1,250,000. These producers received on-farm visits from Cooperative Extension and educational materials/advice in the areas of animal health, nutrition, animal handling, genetics and value-added marketing.

Numerous phone consultations and site visits were completed with new and beginning landowners who are planning to raise livestock in order to feed their families and/or become involved in production agriculture. This has been a trend since Covid, with new residents wanting to have some control over their food security. While these producers are in the development stage, Cooperative Extension will continue to work with them to help make them successful.

Hosted a bull-breeding soundness exam day for Rutherford County cattle producers at the Rutherford County Livestock Educational Facility. This has a tremendous economic impact on cattle operations due to the potential for loss of calf crop. A total of 13 bulls were tested for breeding soundness with a potential economic impact of \$487,500 in calf crop sales.

Conducted a Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) workshop for producers in order to discuss the importance of responsible cattle management. The mission of BQA is to maximize consumer confidence in, and acceptance of, beef by focusing the producer's attention to daily production practices that influence the safety, wholesomeness and quality of beef and beef products.

As the state BQA coordinator for NC, Director Bradley applied for and received two grants to help fund six regional BQA workshops for cattle producers across NC. These were hosted in each Extension District, as well as the NC State Beef Educational Unit. Additionally, the upcoming NC Cattlemen's Conference is focusing their educational efforts around BQA.



## Horticulture Program

A new Horticulture agent started in March 2023. She has been settling into the position with a seasoned mentor from Henderson County.

The Horticulture program reached 99,199 county residents in 2023 through the following efforts, activities, events and projects:

- Ag Literacy – a Farm Bureau sponsored project reading and engaging with 2<sup>nd</sup> graders in each school in the county. Every year is a different book and topic. 2023 was strawberries.
- Grahamtown Youth Camp – one week of garden and greenhouse activities for age 9 to 16
- Kids and Chefs Camp in collaboration with 4H and FCS
- Grahamtown landscape beautification project
- Extension Master Gardener Volunteer activities and field trips: to NC Arboretum, Bullington Gardens, the gardens at Flat Rock Playhouse, class on garden tool maintenance
- Public workshop on Covercrops and gave away grant-provided seed to all 20+ attendees for individual trials throughout the county
- Workshop on herbs: growing and drying
- Great South East Pollinator Census garden party, a collaboration between EMGV and ECA



- Bradford Pear Bounty, Rutherford County's first, to swap out over 150 pre-registered invasive Bradford Pears with North Carolina native trees and shrubs



- Newspaper articles written for Mountain Breeze, Daily Courier, Rutherford Weekly
- Social Media: grew Rutherford County Extension Master gardeners Facebook following from <750 to >880
- Donation Station- collaboration with FCS to arrange farmers market donations directly to local food banks
- Community organization talks given at Haynes Branch Library, Daylily Society, Rumbling Bald Garden Club, 1st United Methodist women's group



*Cooperative Extension continued*

**Family & Consumer Science Program**

Tracy Davis, Family and Consumer Science Agent, retired on September 30, 2023 after a 28-year career with Cooperative Extension.

During her career, Tracy was very instrumental in conducting exceptional programs in foods and nutrition, food preservation, parenting, housing, home economics. She was also a very vital contributor to the Extension & Community Association (formerly known as Extension Homemakers), the Food Council, Community Health Council, and Partnership for Children.

**Cooperative Extension Staff**



**4-H Youth Development Program**

Fourteen youth participated in the district-level 4-H Horse Bowl Contest. The Junior team placed first in the district competition, advancing to state competition in March. They placed fifth in the state competition. The Mixed age group placed Second in the state. These teams practiced 2-3 times each week in preparation for this event.

Twenty youth participated in the state 4-H Hippology contest in Raleigh. Hippology is the study of all things equine-related and has several identification stations (breeds, color patterns, tools tack, equipment, feeds, etc.), along with a team problem. Several of our Rutherford County youth placed in the top 10 individually. Numerous practices along with a mock contest were held to prepare for this competition.

Poultry Contests (Poultry Judging, Avian Bowl Contest, Poultry Shows): The Junior team placed first in the State Avian Bowl Contest. Subjects included avian systems (circulatory, excretory, Youth also participated in Poultry Judging where they had to identify cuts of meat, grade eggs and carcasses, and evaluate laying hens and give a set of oral reason to defend their placing.



Several members of the 4-H Poultry Club participated in the Mountain State Fair poultry contests: standards, bantams, laying hens, and showmanship.



Presentations: Rutherford County hosted the district-wide 4-H Presentation contest at Chase High School in June. Over 50 youth participated from the Western region. Ten Rutherford County youth participated with 8 placing first and 2 placing second. All ten participants advanced on to State competition, with four placing first and four placing second. Presentation topics ranged from horses, poultry science, agricultural safety, and honeybees to cooking with eggs.



Two 4-H youth attended 4-H camp at Millstone 4-H Center in Ellerbe this summer. Campers participated in canoeing, riflery, archery, swimming, drama, and nature activities.

Five 4-H youth and their horses participated in the West District 4-H Horse Clinic in Arden this summer. These equestrians improved their horsemanship skills, stall management, and general horse knowledge.

An 8-week course in Bees and Pollinators was taught to a group of homeschool students. Another 8-week course in was taught to 17 youth on plants, soils, and water quality.

The 4-H Embryology school enrichment program was conducted at in second grade classrooms at Rutherfordton, Pinnacle, Harris, and Forrest Hunt Elementary Schools (approximately 220 students). We provided each classroom with an incubator, egg turner, Candler, fertilized eggs, and curriculum. A guest presentation was also presented where the students learned about poultry and egg production. The special education classroom at Rutherfordton also incorporated a literacy component focused on chickens.

Classrooms were able to witness the metamorphic process from a caterpillar larva into an adult caterpillar, then into a chrysalis, then finally into a beautiful adult butterfly. Approximately 140 students participated in this project before releasing their butterflies into the wild.

### Cooperative Extension continued

A series of 4-H Summer Fun workshops gave youth opportunities to learn new subjects while gaining new life skills. Classes included day camps, field trips (fishing, dairy farm, NASCAR, raptors, etc.), and a week-long cooking day camp. During the week of Kids & Chefs, campers had the opportunity to learn about agriculture, food production, nutrition, food safety, etiquette, as well as prepare and cook a nutritious meal and snack each day, alongside a professional chef.



Fall school-enrichment programs have included courses in Force & Motion and Rocks and Minerals. Fourth and fifth grade students have participated from various schools.

EFNEP (Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program) offers free nutrition classes to help families and youth cook healthy meals at home, be more active, save money on food costs, and handle food safely. EFNEP works with adults with limited resources in our county and aims to provide hands-on instruction to both youth and adult participants.

For 2023, the EFNEP program expanded its partnerships and reach within our County.

- EFNEP has partnered with Rutherfordton Elementary, Sunshine Elementary, Spindale Elementary, Forest City Dunbar Elementary, Chase Middle, REaCH, RS High, and Chase High
- 418 Rutherford County Students have participated in the EFNEP Program
- Youth in our county had the following improvements (Data is gathered through pre and post surveys from participants who have participated in EFNEP classes, the following percentages are our most updated data analysis reports)

#### Diet Quality

90% Children and youth improve their abilities to choose foods according to Federal Dietary Recommendations or gain knowledge.

#### Food Safety

53% Children and youth use safe food handling practices more often or gain knowledge.

#### Physical Activity

62% Children and youth improve their physical activity practices or gain knowledge.

- EFNEP has also hosted food demonstrations for Cliffside Elementary, Haynes Library, Rutherford Library, Norris Library, and for Out of the Ashes
- Volunteers have donated 221 hours to this program valued at \$5,300 dollars
- Participated in Trauma Informed Care Training
- Established partnerships with outreach programs to better assist our community



## County Manager and Commissioners



The County Manager and Commissioners wish each of you a happy and healthy New Year and sincerely hope that 2024 will bring a blessed and prosperous year!



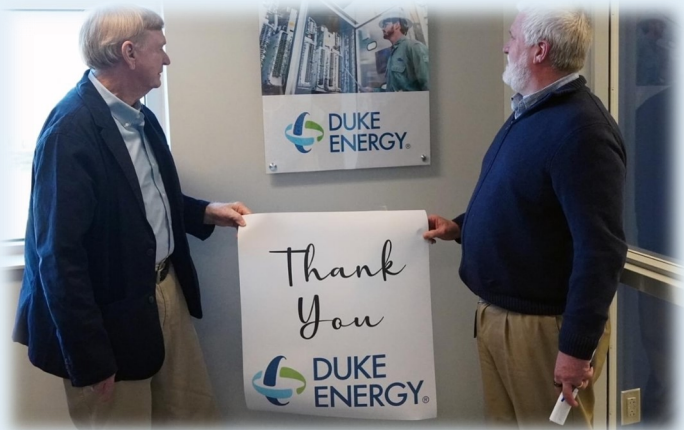
- Public Works and Planning Director Searcy worked with a local company to produce a new flag with the new branded logo.
- The Board of Commissioners held a special meeting to answer questions which citizens had regarding the property revaluation which became effective January 1, 2023.
- Commissioners approved a resolution declaring the intent of the County of Rutherford, North Carolina to reimburse itself for capital expenditures incurred in connection with the acquisition, construction and equipping of a new Rutherford County Schools Transportation and Maintenance Facility from the proceeds of certain tax-exempt obligations to be executed and delivered in calendar year 2023.
- An Agreement for Services with Moseley Architects for a study of the Rutherford County Detention Center's space needs was presented for the Board's consideration. Funds for the study were included in the April 3, 2023 budget amendments. The agreement was approved.
- In April, the Board met with Isothermal Community College Board of Trustees and Rutherford County Board of Education to discuss the upcoming budget.
- A public hearing was held to listen to comments regarding proposed changes to the Library Ordinance which were approved
- The FY 2023-2024 recommended budget included a total general fund budget of \$76,968,817 with a total budget for all funds of \$101,387,083. This was a 2.783% increase over the current fiscal year budget.
- Solid Waste Director James Kilgo advised that Rutherford County entered into a contract with Republic Services in January 2020 for hauling and disposal of municipal solid waste. Due to Republic Services' hauler implementing a 26% increase in hauling charges that took place September 1, 2022, Republic requested an increase of \$4.76 per ton or an 11.22% increase to be effective January 1, 2023. The Solid Waste staff worked with Republic Services, and the Board approved an amendment to the contract at the November 7, 2022 meeting to reflect a \$2.38 per ton increase on January 1, 2023. In order to cover the increase in the Solid Waste Budget, the hours of operation at the convenience centers were reduced along with other expense line items. Director Kilgo presented a proposed second amendment increasing the disposal fee an additional \$2.38 per ton effective July 1, 2023 for a total of \$47.15.
- Public Works and Planning Project Manager Aubrey Clay presented bid tabulations from Upland Architects for the new Animal Control Facility.
- County Attorney Richard Williams presented a resolution approving the Security and Private Building Access Policy which was for the purposes of providing for the security and privacy of public visitors; providing for the security and privacy of County employees and officers; providing for the confidentiality of such information as may be authorized or required by law; minimizing potential disruptions to the intended function of County buildings and facilities; and minimizing potential disruptions to the work of County government.
- In June, the recommended Rutherford County budget for Fiscal Year 2023-2024 was approved.
- The North Carolina General Assembly approved legislation which changed the general elections for each of the municipalities located in Rutherford County from odd-numbered years to the general elections held in even-numbered years. Subsequently, no elections would be held during the odd-numbered years in Rutherford County except for members of the Cliffside Sanitary District Board. This would be an avoidable expense for the County.
- The Board approved a resolution that would require the election of the Cliffside Sanitary District Board to take place in even numbered year and at the same time as County Officers.
- Charter Communications gave an update at the October Board meeting and started with the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) through the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in December, 2020. This was a \$20.4 billion grant available across the country. Charter aggressively participated and won 5,668 locations. The federal offset funding was \$6,901,931 with six-year build window.

County Manager and Commissioners continued

- Operation Green Light - The North Carolina Association of County Commissioners promoted an initiative called Operation Green Light which would salute the service of military veterans statewide and across the country by lighting county buildings and infrastructure green from November 6 to November 11. A resolution supporting Operation Green Light in Rutherford County was approved (pictured right).
- The Rutherford County Board of Commissioners at their June 7, 2021 meeting entered into a Joint Cooperation Agreement for the Home Investment Partnership Act with the other counties in the Council of Government (McDowell, Polk, Cleveland). The County agreed to undertake housing assistance activities pursuant to the Home Investment Partnership Program. McDowell County was designated as the lead agency. A Memorandum of Understanding was presented which would provide authority for each entity to undertake or assist in essential community development and housing assistance activities. It would also allow towns and counties to be able to receive additional dollars to make home repairs and correct some of the blight which exists.
- The Board authorized the County Manager and the County Attorney to negotiate terms and conditions of a Memorandum of Understanding for Home Investment Partnership Act Home Investment in Affordable Housing with Foothills Regional Commission.
- The County Manager and the County Attorney were authorized to negotiate terms of an interlocal agreement between Foothills Health District and Rutherford County to be signed by the Chairman for the management and operation of the Animal Control Department services.
- In December, the Board approved fire service boundaries and insurance district boundaries causing insurance costs to decrease for citizens in certain districts.
- Exempt Personal Leave Policy was approved.
- Foothills Health District environmental health fees were approved for Rutherford County.



Isothermal Community College named one of the bays in the Walter H. Dalton Engineering Technologies and Workforce Development Building in recognition of Duke Energy on December 12, 2023. Jim Hutchins, chair of Isothermal Board of Trustees, and Jeff Williams of Duke Energy unveiled a photo outside the new Duke Energy Bay (pictured right).



Jeff Williams of Duke Energy talked about the valuable partnership between the company as ICC President Margaret Annunziata, County Manager Steve Garrison, and Program Instructor Steve Hollifield listened (pictured below).



### Time Capsule Sealing Ceremony

In 2019, Foundation Forward partnered with Rutherford County to construct and dedicate the Charters of Freedom settings at the County Courthouse. Due to the coronavirus outbreak, the Time Capsule Sealing ceremony was delayed, but eventually rescheduled and was held Monday, December 4, 2023 on the courthouse lawn. Items were placed in the vault of the center setting, and the planned opening for the capsule will be on the 300th anniversary of the signing of the Constitution on September 17, 2087.

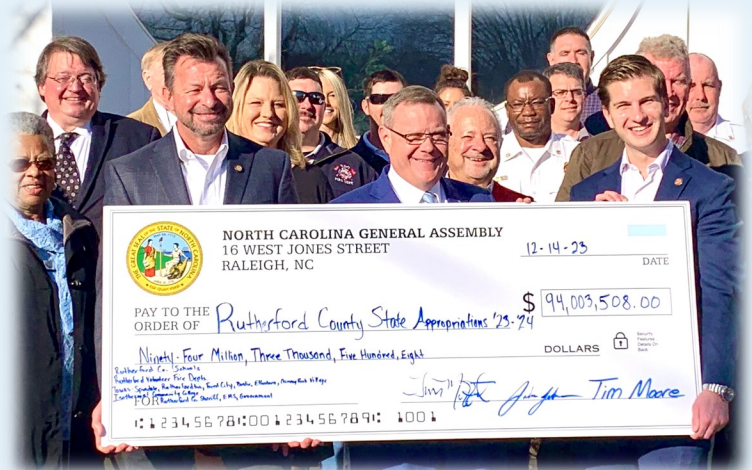


County Manager Steve Garrison attended the Gateway Wellness Foundation Christmas event on December 18, 2023. **Pictured below:** Gateway Wellness Foundation board member, Leon Godlock, and County Manager Steve Garrison



### State Legislators Check Presentation Ceremony

On December 14, 2023, County leaders and community partners gathered at the County Administration Building as Speaker of the House Tim Moore, Representative Jake Johnson, and Senator Tim Moore presented a check for the more than \$94 million that was successfully included in the State biennium budget for the various community partners that was passed this year.



## Economic Development

Several County departments, including Commissioner Michael Benfield, attended the Chamber of Commerce Christmas event at Isothermal Community College on December 14, 2023. (Pictured right to left: Jessica Keever and Birgit Dilgert (Economic Development), Kim Aldridge and Hazel Haynes (Governing Body), Commissioner Benfield, along with other guests.)



### HISTORY

Following an Industrial Development Tax Election held Saturday, May 23, 1959, the Rutherford County Board of Commissioners formed the Industrial Development Commission. The original commission members were appointed May 25, 1959. The Rutherford County Economic Development Commission served the county well for several decades.

Rutherford County Economic Development Corporation 501(c)(3) and Rutherford County Economic Development Association 501(c)(6) have each been officially designated with tax exempt status by the IRS. As of July 1, 2017, Rutherford County Economic Development is fully functioning as a public-private entity.



### MISSION STATEMENT

To alleviate unemployment and underemployment within, and stimulate the economic development of Rutherford County and its several municipalities by fostering and promoting business and industry, developing commerce and trade, and inducing the location of manufacturing, assembly, and commercial enterprises in Rutherford County.

# Emergency Management

## Year to Date Stats

- 14,993 responses – not including stand by
- 9,861 patients transported
- Average response time 10:49
- Busiest days in 2023 were Mondays and Wednesdays
- Busiest months were July and August
- Transported over 7,000 patients to Rutherford Regional ED and over 500 to Cleveland Regional. Most were transported routine.

## Accomplishments and Activities

- Completed interior remodel to EMS Station One.
- Added O-TWO full-function ventilators to each front-line ambulances financed by COVID funds.
- Completed purchase and installation of the Stryker power load systems for all ambulances. This was grant funding through the AFG grant process.
- Administrative reorganization was completed with appointments of new EMS Director Kaleb Johnson, Assistant EMS Director Carl McKnight, and Operations/Compliance Officer Phillip Hill.
- Over 10,800 individual training hours were obtained by our technicians, including eight that went through paramedic training in 2023. They will be new paramedics starting in January 2024.
- Added a few new faces to our full-time roster in 2023:

Diamond Logan - EMT  
 Chris Beheler - EMT  
 Wes Stewart - Paramedic  
 Dustin Stewart - Paramedic  
 Kenneth Steele - EMT  
 Hannah Monteith - EMT  
 Allison Tucker - AEMT  
 CiCi Libby - EMT



## Top Five Responses for 2023

- Sick Person
- Falls
- Transfers
- Breathing Problems
- Traffic Accidents

## Age Breakdown of Patients

Pedi Ages	Total
A - Neonatal	9
B - Infant	69
C - Toddler	51
D - Early Childhood	120
E - Middle Childhood	118
F - Early Adolescence	333
G - Late Adolescence	162
H - Adult or No Age Entered	13313



## Finance

The Finance Office had a busy 2023 year supporting the County Departments and Management. The office received the Certificate of Achievement for Financial Excellence in Financial Reporting this year for the 2022 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR). This was the thirty-fourth consecutive year the office has received this prestigious award and will submit this year's ACFR for consideration when the report is complete. **Pictured left to right back row:** David Hunt, Greg Lovelace, Michael Benfield, Alan Toney; **middle row:** Wendy Hardin, Frank Shaffer, Holly Kever, Angela Ezell; **front row:** Bryan King and Paula Roach)



The 2023 annual audits will be completed this month for the County and the Tourism Development Authority. In 2023 the office also processed almost 15,000 invoices for the departments and payroll for over 675 employees during the year. The Office continues to work closely with Public Works/Planning to update Vehicle Replacement and Capital Facility Plans. Our team has also had additional responsibilities as a result of COVID-19 – FEMA reimbursements, ARPA reporting, State Appropriation SCIF grants, and other programs as a result of the CARES Act and funds related to the American Rescue Plan.

Mid-October, Wendy Hardin retired and we are excited to welcome Janet Searcy to our team. With a small team of only five employees, the director is quite proud of her team's professionalism, hard work and dedication they contribute to the office each day.

## Fire Marshal

### 2023 Responses and Highlights

475 total responses with the following highlighted:

- 72 fire investigations
- 2 fatal fires
- 1 Emergency Operation Center activation
- 36 special events (town festivals/events, statewide drills, local drills, and special funerals)
- 14 missing persons
- 78 resource requests
- 10 conferences/forums



2023 'In Action' Photos



# Human Resources

## From the pen of Director Debra Conner:

This year has been a busy and productive year for Human Resources. Workforce availability has increased and the County has filled many open positions. Rutherford County is extremely blessed to have committed and exemplary employees, and we appreciate your hard work and dedication to the County.

We welcomed new part-time staff, Amy Hamrick, to the HR team this year (**pictured below**). She will be handling most of the Worker's Compensation claims and learning the benefits process. Amy is also Administrative Assistant for the Legal Department, County Attorney Richard Williams.



Director Debra Conner and Analyst Brooke Watson attended School of Government's *Creating Great Local Government Workplaces* seminar.



## Congratulations to 2023 Retirees

Phyllis Matheny (Revenue), John McBrayer (Sheriff), Todd McDaniel (Detention), Jeune Coffee (Detention), Tony Bumgarner (Solid Waste), Carol Sullivan (DSS), Adrienne Wallace (Sheriff), Gaziemae Roxie Toms (DSS), Wendy Hardin (Finance), Christine Williams (DSS), Robert Nelson (Transit), Leslie Tolley (DSS), Alan Hardin (Sheriff), and Tracy Davis (Cooperative Extension).

## 2023 Duties and Accomplishments

Worked with departments, Finance and County Manager to implement FY2023-2024 budget.

Debra Conner served as president of the HR Association for 2023 and Brooke Watson served as vice president.

Debra Conner served as chair of JCPC Allocation Committee and Monitoring Committee.

Worked with NCACC to sponsor several training courses.

Worked with ICC to offer in-house supervisory and department head level training courses.

Attended monthly JCPC meetings

Entered payroll information for over 700 employees each month.

Implemented 3% Cola increase and multiple budget changes.

Continued training and implementation of SHP website changes.

Implemented longevity pay November 2023.

Performance reviews for all departments

Implemented 2023 United Way contributions and conducted 2024 United Way campaign.

Completed SHP 1095 information for all employees and open enrollment changes.

Continue to attend yearly training for Personnel Law, FMLA, FLSA, and other functions that impact the services provided by the department.

Updated emergency contact information for all employees.

Attended NCACC Regional meetings.

HR assisted in a restructure of EMS leadership. We congratulate Kaleb Johnson, Carl McKnight, and Phillip Hill in their new roles.

Continued to advertise and recruit new employees.

Updated HR Training Library

Attended several Chamber of Commerce events.

Worked closely with County Manager, County Attorney, Animal Control Director and Health Department as the Foothills Health District took over the operations of the Animal Control facility.

Completed EEO4 report

Met with Workers Comp auditor for annual review.

Attended Job Fairs.

Hosted two successful blood drives.

Once again, the Human Resource Department was recognized by Josh Dobson, NCDOL, for 19 years of safety.

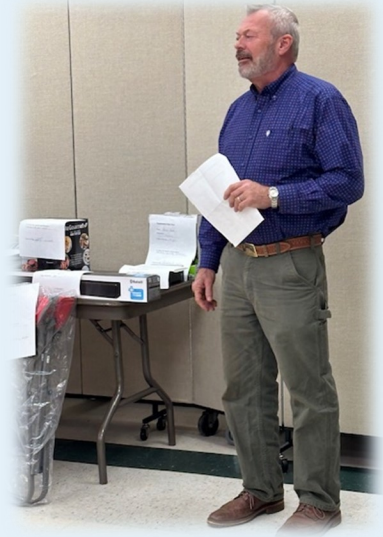
Recognized County Government veterans.

CONGRATULATIONS AND THANK YOU TO 2023 TENURE RECIPEINTS

(Photos on following page)

5 YEAR	NAME	DEPARTMENT
	Jennifer Garcia	Communications
	Jimmy Brown	Detention
	Megan Parris	Detention
	Jeff Lynn	Fire Marshal
	James Hewitt	Maintenance
	Henry McKinney	Maintenance
	Rebecca Johnson	Revenue
	Crystal Pendleton	Revenue
	Andrew Greenway	Sheriff
	Mason Jolley	Sheriff
	Shannon Kennedy	Social Services
	Sheila Singleton	Social Services
	Lauren Wilson	Social Services
	Tiffany Gibbs	Solid Waste
	Robert Martin	Solid Waste
	Melvin Hall	Solid Waste
10 YEAR	NAME	DEPARTMENT
	Chasity Toney	Communications
	Megan Logan	Detention
	Kayla Wynn	EMS
	Angela Ezell	Finance
	Aubrey Clay	Maintenance
	Brian Gooch	Sheriff
	Tim Lowery	Sheriff
	Zach Atkins	Sheriff
	Carla Beeler	Social Services
	Pam Henson	Social Services
	Stefanie Melendrez	Social Services
	Jeff Melton	Social Services
	Christie Snyder	Social Services
	Emily Wells	Social Services
	William Higgins	Soil and Water
15 YEAR	NAME	DEPARTMENT
	Jessica Quinn	Communications
	Mary Pintuff	Detention
	Kenneth Odom	Library
	Amanda Watson	EMS
	Brandon Ellenburg	Sheriff
	Andrew Millard	Sheriff
	Greg Osborne	Social Services
20 YEAR	NAME	DEPARTMENT
	Elaine Sprouse	Detention
	Paula Roach	Finance
	Anna Lane	Revenue
	Rhonda Ruppe	Social Services

# 2023 Tenure Reception





# Information Technology

Information Technology worked on a variety of projects this year. We completed software, hardware and infrastructure upgrades and provided support to all County departments. Below are a few of the highlights from 2023:

- Jai Doherty, Vicki Edwards, and Jim Yorke attended the North Carolina Local Government Information Systems Association conference in Wilmington, NC **(pictured left and below)**.



- Jai Doherty and Vicki Edwards attended Human Resources training courses at the County Administration Building.
- Trained Tripp and Ethan in department functions and activities and cross trained all helpdesk analysts.
- Attended demos and meetings for new software/hardware solutions for several departments.
- Performed upgrades to the operating systems of our existing server infrastructure and upgraded the hardware components.
- Firmware and configuration updates for 214 NOS zero clients.
- Upgraded software applications for departments.
- Upgraded our desktop virtual environments to provide more resources for the user's virtual desktop experience.
- Implemented the Meraki Dashboard to better manage and monitor our network. We have also brought in the first of the Meraki devices such as network switches, wireless access points, and cameras.



- Deployed new systems for Identity Management and Security.
- Worked with Social Services, Veterans Office, and Register of Deeds to migrate their software and data to cloud hosted solutions.
- Desktop Support deployed laptops to mobile DSS workers and deployed equipment for Medicaid Expansion.
- Assisted with deploying the Digital dispatcher for 911.
- Began conversion of in-vehicle equipment to cellular tablets for EMS.
- Helped Fire Marshal with automated radio programming deployment.

- Deployed equipment for new County Legal Dept.
- Upgraded the branch libraries with new computer for remote supportability.
- Upgraded Revenue to newer zero clients.
- Upgraded the My Senior Kiosks to newer equipment.
- Deployed cloud solution software for Detention medical staff.
- Assisted with deploying new rounds tracking solution for Detention staff.
- Began conversion to cellular MCTs for Road Patrol officers.
- Installed in-car printers in officer vehicles.
- Installed new Meraki switch and cabinet in the Sheriff Dept for the new intercoms in the female section of the jail.
- Started upgrading mobile devices and switched carriers from Verizon to First Net for several departments.
- Performed software patches and updates as needed on all computers and laptops.
- Prepared and auctioned several lots of decommissioned equipment on GovDeals.
- Added and replaced cameras in several locations.

**Happy Holidays from the IT Department!**



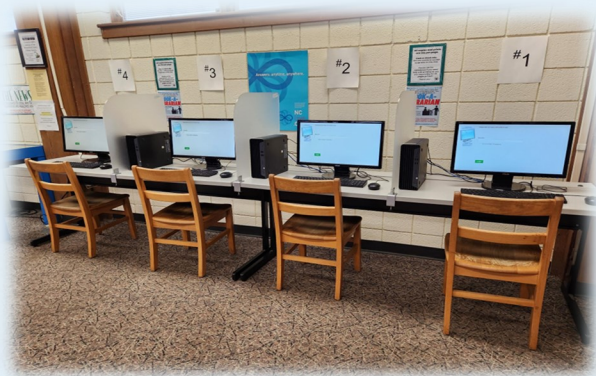
# Library

## RCLS 2023 Summary:

We won a statewide award! The Rutherford County Library System accepted an award from the North Carolina Public Library Directors Association in November 2023 for Outstanding Public Relations for our "Follow Francis" program, which focused on various local locations and organizations this year! (Pictured l-r: Amber Saint Clair, Outreach and Marketing Coordinator and Director April Young)



Thanks to a grant from the State Library of North Carolina and the Federal Institute of Museum and Library Services, The Rutherford County Library System was able to replace all of the public computers at all three branches. Part of our "Addressing Digital Needs" project, 18 new desktop computers and nine new laptops were purchased for both public use and to offer technology classes to patrons.



RC Library also received two grants from the Carolina Foothills Foundation. The first grant purchased four new tabletop digital readers for patrons to access digital materials and the second grant covers the total cost of materials for the new bookmobile, which is scheduled to be delivered in late February early March!



2023 saw the Library offering two exciting new opportunities to our patrons: blood pressure kits and ZOOM passes! Blood pressure kits can be checked out for two weeks. We also partnered with the municipal libraries or Rutherford County to provide ZOOM passes, which allows patrons to "check out" free one-day passes to various attractions in the region.

Beginning with the big Summer Reading Program Kickoff at Forest City POPS, we had another exciting and successful summer reading program. We can't wait for 2024!



## Programs...just to name a few:

- A prominent Bigfoot investigator visited Mountains Branch Library while simultaneously streaming to our other branches.
- We had our second annual Fiction-to-Fabulous Fashion Show.
- We held a presentation about the history of Cliffside with record attendance, and learned from Dr. John Quinley, former docent of the Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site, about Carl Sandburg through images, quotes, and visual and audio recordings.
- Monthly bilingual story time and a monthly Hispanic heritage program, called iCelebra!.
- Twice a month, we hold a sensory story time, designed for children with autism or other sensory concerns.

## Clubs

- Crochet Club
- True Crime Club for adults
- Dungeons and Dragons for teens
- Cross-stitch Club
- Writing Club for adults
- Crafting Club



We thank all of our patrons and everyone who has partnered with us this year to bring fun and educational programs to the citizens of Rutherford County. See you next year!



# Public Works and Planning

## 2023 Significant Accomplishments of the Public Works and Planning Department

### Renovation Projects:

- EMS #1
- DSS Exterior stucco
- Upgrade flooring throughout Cooperative Extension
- DSS Kitchen upgrade
- DSS Medication expansion offices reconfiguration
- Court CRAVE and WAVE grant and implementation
- Public defense: Create cubicle office addition and CRAVE/Wave
- Solid Waste: replumbed Transfer station and maintenance bay
- County Administration Office Building parking lot repaved and sidewalks repaired (**pictured above**)
- Detention kitchen floor resurfaced (**pictured right**)



### Capital Projects:

- Plans and construction initiated of a new leading County Animal Control Facility that will increase capacity and improve functionality for daily operations. **Pictured below:** Soil and sewer line portion of the new Animal Shelter
- Plans and construction documents of a new Consumer Services facility at 145 College Avenue (former grocery store)



### GIS/Planning:

- 268 survey plats reviewed
- 464 new property addresses issued
- Completed fire inspections for Union Mills and Rutherfordton (substation)
- Katie Doherty was awarded the Most Cartographic Map for her Rutherfordton fire map
- Served as NCPMA president (**pictured right**)
- Participated in the NC Secretary of State, Land Records Division, Summer workshop series. Presented at seven different workshop locations across the state during June and July.



## Register of Deeds

- Started electronic recording of Assumed Business Names.
- Continued use of electronic death registration system through Vital Records (NCOVR).
- Received additional grant funds from the State for preservation of historical records. Several new binders were ordered to replace old, deteriorated deed books.
- Hosted NCARD District 1 meeting August 1. The meeting was held at the County Administration Building and lunch was catered. District 1 discussed hosting the annual NCARD conference in Fontana Dam, NC in September 2024.



- The ROD staff participated in a door decorating contest at the courthouse (**pictured right**).
- The ROD office maintains all vital records for the County. The records processed and filed this year are as follows:

Birth Certificates –150  
Death Certificates - 861  
Marriage Licenses Issued- 394

WE WISH EVERYONE A  
MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR



## Revenue Office

Shannon Hamby, Chasity Baynard, Jeanette Devore and Jill Sims all passed their test for Personal Property Appraisal and Assessment from the NCDOR (pictured right).

Loretta Newton competed all her classes and is now a Certified Assistant Tax Collector (pictured below).



Richard and Kayla (Revenue) Johnson welcomed a precious baby girl to their family on July 27, 2023....Natalie Rose Johnson (pictured below).



Lois Shuford earned the CMS (Cadastral Mapping Specialist) Designation from IAAO (pictured below left).

Congratulations to PFC Jacob Shuford, son of Lois Shuford (Revenue Department) on his graduation of Army National Guard Basic Training on December 1, 2023 (pictured below right).



## Senior Center

The Senior Center received numerous grants and funding sources this year:

- \$333,555 Block Grant to assist with Home-Delivered Meals, Congregate Meals, Transportation, and Senior Center Operations.
- \$160,937 ARPA Funding. This funding will be divided between Congregate, Home-Delivered Meals and Senior Center Operations. This funding can be used through September 30, 2024.
- \$14,791 General Purpose Funds for Senior Center improvements and enhancements.
- \$100,000 from NC DOT to allow the Senior Center to contract with Rutherford County Transit to continue providing transportation for seniors in Rutherford County to the Senior Center.
- \$40,000 from RHI Legacy Foundation to supplement Home-Delivered Meals
- \$25,440 from United Way of Rutherford County to help supplement Home-Delivered Meals.
- \$12,391 from NC (DOI) Department of Insurance for (SHIIP) Senior Health Insurance Information Program.
- \$4,557 from NC DOI for (MIPPA) Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act.

December 5, 2023, we were honored to have Dena King, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of North Carolina come to the center with her team to talk about preventing scams that target senior citizens. **(Pictured below: Director Tammy Aldridge, NC U.S. Attorney Dena King, and Activities Director Barbara Hill)** Dena played "Fraud Bingo" with participants to help them retain some of the warning signs. We are thrilled to have this partnership and plan to have them here every year. **(Also pictured below: Fred Hudson, Law Enforcement Coordinator, Eric Frick, Federal Prosecutor and Elder Fraud Coordinator)**



**Senior Games:** We had 132 to participate in Senior Games of which 71 were first time participants. This is a record number of first-time participants and shows the tremendous growth the Center has experienced. A total of \$5,968 was raised through sponsorships and Torch Club.



Senior Center continued

The Senior Center received and dispersed 105 sets of vouchers from the Seniors Farmers' Market Nutrition Program to eligible participants. These sets vouchers were valued at \$50 a set (total value \$5,250), to be used at the Farmer's Market. We held several Pop-up Markets at the Center to allow participants the convenience of purchasing fresh vegetables and fruit while here at the center.



We received \$598 for the purchase of fans from the Duke Energy Grant. We purchased a total of 41 fans in the summer, which were distributed to seniors 60 years of age and older who had a home situation where a threat to health and well-being existed.

SHIIP- Senior Health Insurance Information Program: We have two amazing SHIIP Volunteers who spend countless hours helping Medicare Beneficiaries and a third who performs data entry. For calendar year 2022 our counselors saved Medicare Beneficiaries \$901,876, counseling 1,277 people. A huge shout out to Amideus & Monica Athougies and Lynn Reinhardt for all they do all year to help Medicare Beneficiaries!

Our Partnership with Second Harvest Food Bank and the Commodity Supplement Food Program (CSFP) is still going strong. CSFP is a federal program administered by the NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Food Distribution Division for NC residents aged 60 and older. The food items are provided by USDA. The program provides a monthly box of food designed to supplement the nutritional needs of low-income senior citizens. We are distributing 120 boxes per month. We distributed 1,467 food boxes this year. We have distributed 10,187 food boxes to low-income seniors that live in Rutherford County since July of 2018.

**Meal totals for fiscal year 2022-2023**

**Home-Delivered:**

47,451 meals served

191 daily average meals served

280 different participants were served throughout the year

**Congregate Meals:**

31,885 meals served (see breakdown below)

25,961 lunches served in dining room

384 lunches served through the drive thru line (Dec. 19-22, 2022)

5,540 lunches served at Ellenboro Meal Site

132 daily average meals served

580 different participants were served throughout the year



SHIP Volunteers



Office Staff



Exercise Instructors



Ellenboro Site Manager

# merry christmas

FROM RUTHERFORD COUNTY

Senior Center



Meal Drivers



Kitchen Staff



## Social Services

- Emily Wells shared information about Medicaid Expansion on WCAB radio.



- Dee Hunt, DSS Director, is selected to present the agency's LINKS special collaboration program at the 2024 Benchmarks Conference in Cherokee.
- DSS workers gathered at the future site of their DSS Foster Home. DSS was awarded a grant from Dogwood Trust to build a home where displaced kids can feel safe and be in a home-setting.



- DSS Foster Care and Adoptions represented in the Forest City Christmas Parade this year (pictured below left Angela Black and Felicia Hodges).
- We welcome new employee, Chasity Ervin, F&C Medicaid (pictured below middle).
- Mary Beth McKinney was promoted to IMC III. Congratulations, Mary Beth (pictured below right).



## Soil and Water

One of the most exciting things that has been in the works and is continuing to move forward is working with Trinity Christian school to provide them with an exploratory class every week on Environmental and Agriculture related topics. We are helping the school find the funds to bring compost bins and raised beds to the school to provide them with more outdoor education opportunities.



Farmland Preservation worked with Foothills Regional Commission to complete the Farmland Preservation Plan. The Farmland Preservation Plan then went on to win the NADO Impact award.

In the month of October Soil and Water hosted around 450 students throughout the county at Isothermal Community College for conservation Field Day (pictured below left).

Soil and Water is hard at work using StRAP funds to clean up streams in the county and are moving on to the next step which is dam inspections to check the integrity of the dams that we maintain in the county. Through this grant, Rutherford County has also been able to buy drones to help map out and identify streams and possible issues that may arise from them.

Soil and Water board member Shannon Buckley was selected for the 2023 North Carolina Forest Association Distinguished Service Award. Shannon worked in the Forest industry for 43 years and is now enjoying his retirement (pictured below right).





## Solid Waste

Material	Weight
MSW/Household Garbage	48,070.75 tons
Construction/Demo Debris	13240.14 tons
Metal	1134.18 tons
Recycle	2921.10 tons
Electronics/TV	43.52 tons
Yard Waste	671.50 tons

- Solid Waste staff and friends celebrated the retirement of Tony Bumgarner after 25 years of service (pictured in blue shirt).
- Recycled 84 trailer loads of tires. Total tire weight was 1,071.42 tons.



- Sold 1,134.18 tons of metal.



- Recycling presentation at ICC Conservation Field Day



- Transfer Station replaced back wall on both MSW and recycle sides.
- Updated leachate system at Transfer Station by installing a new manhole and drain lines.



Solid Waste continued

- New storm water drain installed at the Scale House
- Normal operation has continued in the recent expanded Construction and Demolition Cell.



- Annual State inspection of Transfer Station with no NOVs
- Spring and fall well water testing completed
- Quarterly gas well monitoring completed
- Attended NC SWANA Conference in Cherokee, NC.

**Convenience Centers**

- Fixed drainage problem
- Updated building at Hollis Center (pictured right)
- Trees removed at Gilkey Center due to storm damage (pictured below)



- Painted curbs and upgraded signage at Green Hill Center (pictured below)



# Tourism

2023 was a busy, yet successful year for the TDA. Occupancy tax receipts continue to grow year over year. The future for Rutherford County is optimistic.

## Promote Tourism Master Plan Success and Collaborations

As Rutherford Bound continues to move forward, we have continued to work closely with our marketing group, The Agency. The Agency's focus is to promote Rutherford Bound, and its cause, to the citizens of Rutherford County and surrounding areas. The Agency manages the campaign's social media and facilitates our current television broadcast contract with VYVE and our billboard advertisement with Headrick Outdoor Media. The TDA continues to work with C Teddy Consulting to help maximize funding opportunities with foundations and industry. Destination by Design continues to be the TDA's greatest asset in moving Rutherford Bound, and its many capital projects, forward. Their team works closely with each town, and project lead, to create site plans, grant opportunities, etc. In 2023, the TDA facilitated the filming of several project videos as well as videos for "case for support" and "occupancy tax review". Destination by Design also runs the main Rutherford Bound webpage where detailed descriptions of each project are continuously updated. The TDA, its Strategic Plan Committee, Board, Tourism Advisory Committee, and Rutherford Bound Partners are continuously working to make Rutherford County a better place to live, work and play, with many great things planned for the upcoming months and years. Rutherford Bound and the TDA just celebrated 5 years with 9 completed projects, 14 projects in process and \$21 Million in funds raised. This is a great accomplishment and represents Rutherford County being Bound Together, Building Tomorrow.



## Tourism Plan Implementation and Funding:

The Community Foundation of Henderson County continues to serve as Rutherford Bound's 501c3. The Community Foundation focuses on community-oriented organizations and their causes to promote the successful fund management of campaigns such as ours. There is a public donation portal at [RutherfordBound.com](https://RutherfordBound.com) where donors can make a tax-deductible donation in any dollar amount they choose, as well as choose which specific project they would like their donation to be applied to. The TDA currently has one donation kiosk installed in Chimney Rock. The donation kiosk includes a QR code that takes them straight to the website to help facilitate the donation process. The TDA has also placed donation boxes and informational brochures at checkout counters in 15+ businesses in the community. The brochures talk about individual projects as well as providing a place to donate. The TDA staff continues to attend various events throughout the community year after year. The goal for staff attending these events, is to raise awareness for Rutherford



Bound and help educate local citizens on our goals for this implementation plan. At these events, staff shares information about the funds we have raised, the various projects in each community, and what is planned for the future in Rutherford We have plans to continue this outreach in the upcoming year

## Maximize Tourism Occupancy Tax Receipts:

With new cabins and lodging sites gradually coming online, the tourism occupancy tax receipts continue to exceed prior year. In 2023, the TDA worked closely with the Rutherford County Finance department to ensure that we are monitoring STR compliance to the best of our ability. The TDA director has also worked closely with surrounding counties to track their occupancy tax growth and how it related to Rutherford County. In 2024, the TDA plans to review different programs that can further the compliance standards of occupancy tax.



## Continue to Grow and Develop Relationships with County, Town, State Representative, and Stakeholders

The TDA values the time and relationships it has with the County Commissioners, municipalities, Visit NC, State Legislation, and stakeholders. The TDA attended many local meetings to provide updates on tourism and continued to present a quarterly update to the County Commissioners. The TDA held its Spring coffee talk on June 6<sup>th</sup> and its Winter Coffee Talk December 5<sup>th</sup>. The TDA staff also attended various conferences and meetings across the county and state to maintain personal professional relationships.

## Hospitality Program for Rutherford County

There was no work completed on a hospitality program for Rutherford County in 2023, however the plan for 2024 is to begin conversation with Isothermal community College on what a potential partnership could look like.

## Tourism continued

### **Implement TDA Marketing Plan:**

In 2023, the TDA continued their contract with The Agency Marketing Group. The marketing plan for this fiscal year included continued use of commercials, new social media content and the use of influencer marketing. In addition to the marketing plan, the 2023 travel guide made its debut in May of 2023. The 2023 travel guide had a big outdoor and trail focus with 2023 being named the "Year of the Trail" for the state of North Carolina, by VisitNC. In the Spring, a large photoshoot was completed to accommodate a need for updated content for digital and print ads, as well as updated social media content. In the Fall, a photo and video shoot was completed to compile assets that we would be able to use to showcase fall in Rutherford County as well as update the photo library for digital and print assets. Closing out 2023, a Christmas shoot is planned that will allow us to market Holidays in Rutherford County in the future as well as showcase Rutherford County's one and only "Miracle Bar" (Chimney Rock Smoke House). In 2023, the TDA marketing committee approved to begin selling website ads through DTN, a 3<sup>rd</sup> party partner through the VisitNCsmallTowns.com website host, Simpleview. Throughout 2023, six contracts have been completed for website ads with more in the works as we head into 2024.



### **Implement Trails and Itinerary Program:**

In 2023, the Rutherford Trails Collaborative worked through their priority list for the funding granted by the TDA to implement new trails and begin the planning process for potential/future trails. Several trails were designated as state trails. 2023 was named by VisitNC as the "Year of the Trail". The Rutherford Trails Collaborative hosted a special year of the trail month in September, which the county commissioners named "year of the trail month" through a signed proclamation.



### **Grow Community Programs/Events:**

The TDA continues to support festivals and events through a grant application which is approved and voted on by the TDA's marketing committee. Throughout 2023, sponsored events included: Earl Scruggs Music Festival, Hot Nights Cool Rides, Lake Lure Dance Festival, Lake Lure Music Festival, Lake Lure Olympiad, Hilltop Festival, HNG Gala, Hometown Holidays, FAB, and the county's farmer's markets. The TDA accepts applications for events that market to visitors over 50 miles away and draw in overnight visitors to the county.



### **Develop Rutherford County as a Destination for Events/Competition**

In 2023, the TDA was a sponsor for Cycle NC and the Jet Ski Association. Both of these events brought a variety of demographic of visitors to the county for a full weekend for each event. The TDA has plans to sponsor events similar to these as they are presented for Rutherford County.

### **Relocate to Rutherford County:**

The Relocate to Rutherford County program continues to be a program that needs attention for Rutherford County. The committee was put on hold during 2023. However, the TDA director met with the Economic Development Commission and the Rutherford County Chamber of commerce to discuss a future program of work. A more detailed review will continue in 2024.

### **County-Wide Wayfinding Monitoring Program/Kiosks/County-Welcome Signs:**

Installation of all Wayfinding signs has been completed. The program now consists of a once-a year check on the county signs that the TDA will be responsible for maintaining and replacing if needed in the small municipalities, while the larger municipalities are responsible for their own maintenance. In 2023, the TDA reviewed a new gateway signage program with the county and looked at other new signage opportunities for the future that would help direct visitors to attractions, and trails.

### **Research and Develop Rutherford County Agri-Tourism Program:**

In 2023, the TDA continued to fund Rutherford County's placement in the VisitNC farm app. The TDA also supported the Lake Lure Farmer's Market, The Rutherfordton Winter Market, as well as Rutherford County Farmer's Market in Forest City. Also in 2023, the TDA began its partnership with People 1<sup>st</sup> Tourism(P1T). The goal of P1T is to partner with microentrepreneurs to help them share their stories and co-create local experiences. 3-4 experiences have been created each month since July which has helped to expand agritourism throughout Rutherford County.



### **Strive to Develop RCTDA to Be One of the Leading Rural Tourism Development Organizations in the State of North Carolina:**

The TDA Board and staff are proud of their accomplishments in 2023. We will continue to strive and grow our programs and strive to be economically feasible in all that we do. We want to be one of the leading rural tourism development organizations in the state of North Carolina, with our focus on making Rutherford County Tourism the best that it can be.

Tourism continued

**Enhance and Develop Welcome Center Presence in Lake Lure:**



In 2023, staff at the Welcome Center greeted over 60,000 guests to our county. Rutherford County has an abundance of activities to offer, which continues to bring guests from both near and far. With more to offer guests with each coming year, the amount of people visiting our county continues to grow. Throughout the year we've had several ongoing projects such as continued landscaping, indoor and outdoor signage updates as well as holiday decorating. We hope that by providing a welcoming space with pertinent information, guests will enjoy our county and remember their time spent visiting here. At the TDA we strive to retain a positive and active presence in our county. By staying up to date on tourism related information and retaining strong community relations, we're able to provide guests with accurate and relevant information when they are visiting.

**Rutherford County – Keep Rutherford County Beautiful:**

In January of 2023, Keep Rutherford County Beautiful became an affiliate of Keep America Beautiful and was inducted on January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2023. In addition, as always, Earth Month was a very big month for Keep Rutherford County Beautiful. Earth Month was celebrated with Pawns in the Park, Tot Story Time, RecycleBots, Fiction to Fashion, attending the ICC Science Expo, and attending Heritage Day at Sunshine Elementary. In May, KRCB showcased it's cause to the kindergartners at TJCA grammar school and hosted the RC Chamber window to showcase all the accomplishments to date. The Spring litter sweep led to a collection of 647 bags from DOT, 226 bags from Paid Pick-up, and 218 bags from 141 volunteers. The 2023 litter bowl led to a grand total of 6,120 lbs of trash collected with the winner of the litter bowl being East High School with a collection amount of 2,070 lbs.



**Develop/Promote Historical Tourism Sites in Rutherford County**

The TDA holds a seat on the Historical Preservation Committee for Rutherford County. The TDA works with the committee to determine historical assets for the county and discuss how they can be further developed.



**Provide TDA Staff with Education Opportunities:**

The TDA staff has the ability to further their education opportunities through the attendance of conferences and classes that are held throughout the region. In 2023, the TDA staff members attended various conferences such as: the Visit NC 365 conference, the DIY Tourism Marketing conference, the VisitNC Agritourism Conference, the NCTTC conference, the NCTIA conference, the NC Main Street Conference, as well as other various conferences and meetings across the state and region. Also, the Marketing, and Project Administrator, Taylor Hardin was a graduate of the Leadership Rutherford class of 2022-2023. Kayley Smith, the Welcome Center Supervisor, is currently enrolled in the 2023-2024 Leadership Rutherford Class. The TDA is always seeking new opportunities to continue their professional development.

# Transit

## General Information:

- Hours of Operations: 6:30am–5:00pm (M-F)
- 26 vehicles
- Thirty employees (10 full time, 20 part time)
- Transit covers all operating costs from Transit revenue
- Operate utilizing tablets and automated scheduling software on all vehicles
- Weekly out of county transportation includes: Asheville, Charlotte, Gastonia, Spartanburg, Hendersonville, Columbus, Shelby, Marion, Hickory, Morganton, Winston-Salem, Durham

New Drivers: Lynn Grant, Terri Stewart, Ronnie McGinnis, Shannon Lancaster, Charles Cundiff, Frankie Tate, Bill Schappert, Marese Rather, and Ron Epley. Retired: Bob Nelson, and Frank Plichta.

Transit recognized 13 drivers that went the entire year of 2022 without any at-fault incidents or accidents. These 7 drivers represent 46 years of cumulative safe driving. Pictured below: Pete Bridges, Mary Mock-Higgins, Bill Morris, Rhonda Williams, Michael Shipp, Christy Dysart, and Scott Davis, along with Operations Manager Jeff Hill. Our drivers represent almost 400,000 miles for the year with most of these miles local. The 2023 safe driver awards will be given out in January 2024.



**RAISE Grant:** The County and the towns of Rutherfordton and Spindale have been awarded a multi-million dollar Raise Grant. This is a Federal Grant given to towns and communities for the improvement and betterment of streets to help improve access for motorists and pedestrians and to spur economic development along those streets. The plan is a major road improvement from Maple St. in Rutherfordton along Charlotte Rd and through Spindale to Oakland Rd. Transit will move four (4) of our Tri-City Xpress bus shelters to be located along this improved roadway with actual pull offs from the roadway to a bus stop with a bus shelter. This will provide a much safer boarding point and improve our visibility as these 4 stops would be on a busy corridor between the towns.

**Ridership:** Transit is seeing pre-pandemic ridership levels rise once again. The Tri-City Xpress had a peak month in March 2023 at 3,197 riders. It was at 2,000 a month prior to Covid.

Transit received a \$40,000 NCDOT Operating Grant for FY 23-24. This is a new grant that became available to assist in the growing costs of fuel, vehicle maintenance and personnel costs.

Capital investments included three new bus shelters installed at DSS, the Health Department and the Foundation at ICC. Transit was also able to replace their office copier, some office furniture and create a new driver's break area with a NCDOT capital grant.



*Drivers Christy Dysart and John Massey enjoying the new driver's break area.*

**Training opportunities included:** Kyle Connor, Transit Specialist completed the NC Transportation Leadership Development Program which included two weeks of class time at NC State. **Monthly safety training included:** defense driving, wheelchair securement, HIPAA rules and compliance, first aid and CPR certifications, post-accident emergency procedures, radio communication, sudden brake failure, tire blowout procedure, suspicious packages, gunman/hostage situations, illegal drugs and alcohol random testing, fire extinguisher use, Title VI, distracted driving, ADA sensitivity, blood borne pathogens, and customer service. The Operations Manager also completed annual drive along assessments of every driver.



*Kyle Connor, Transit Specialist completed the NC Transportation Leadership Development Program*

Transit continued

Several key services that Transit provided this year include, free employment transportation to county residents going to work inside the county, free transportation to anyone going for cancer treatments or needed a ride to the grocery store or food pantry, and free transportation to Grahamtown every Thursday to allow citizens access to the Atrium Health Bus and the food pantry at the Grahamtown Community Center. These services were made possible through a \$25,000 grant from the RHI Legacy Foundation.



**Free Transportation to Grahamtown**  
**Thursdays from 10 am - 4 pm**

The Atrium Health Bus and Grahamtown's food pantry are both available on Thursdays.

Call **828.287.6339** to schedule a ride with Transit.



Transportation is free through December 31, 2023. Service may be extended based on demand.

Transit Director Kerry Giles had the opportunity to be a part of the NC Public Transportation Association's legislative delegation to Washington DC. Director Giles and her colleagues met with NC Representatives, both Senators and/or their staff, plus the FTA to further gain support for rural public transportation. Legislators were thanked for supporting the recent \$20 million federal RAISE grant awarded to Rutherford and Spindale that will include 4 dedicated bus stops and shelters for the Tri-City Xpress route. Funding was made possible through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Further attention was given to the importance of employment transportation to assist our citizens in getting access to jobs in our community.



*Transit Director Kerry Giles speaking with Congressman Patrick McHenry's senior legislative assistant*



*Transit Director Kerry Giles speaking with Senator Ted Budd and staffers*

Transit completed a comprehensive wage analysis as part of the FY 23-24 budget submission. Transit was able to provide an increase in driver wages to be more competitive in hiring drivers. Routes and services had to be reduced in 2023 due to lack of driver availability. Services are now back to regular hours.

Transit Advisory Board was thrilled to add several new members this year including Jill Miracle and Cedric Banks. Our other members include: Clark Poole, Diane Dickerson, Frankie Hamrick, John Jarrett, Kandi Bridges, Susan Hall, Suzanne Porter, Tammy Aldridge, and Alan Toney II.



**Year End Statistics:**

Transit improved route efficiency in 2023 by providing more trips, with fewer miles.

	2022	2023
<b>Total Miles</b>	392,990	383,791
<b>Total Trips</b>	49,261	55,439
<b>Total Unduplicated Passengers</b>	692	697



## Veteran Services

The Veteran Service office had a very busy year. Our partnership program completed it's sixth year continuing to grow and help us serve the veterans of our county. We continued to have our monthly socials on the third Thursday of every month.

We continue to help veterans by giving out food on a regular basis and as needs arise. This year we have partnered with the Marine Corp League to give out substantial food boxes monthly to veterans and their families.

Jennifer and Susan completed CEUs for continued accreditation through the North Carolina Department of Military and Veteran Affairs. In April, Jennifer attended the Spring joint conference of the NCDMVA and the North Carolina Association of County Veteran Service Officers.

Susan attended the NCACVSO fall conference held in October at Harrah's Hotel and Casino in Cherokee, NC. While in Cherokee, Susan and fellow CVSO, Mollee from Burke County, went to the Cherokee Indian History Museum (pictured right). There was a tribute hall to veteran Charles George whom the Asheville VA hospital is named.



In September, we held our 7<sup>th</sup> annual End of Summer Bash. Veterans were served pizza, pasta, and desserts. Approximately 100 were in attendance. Every veteran received a T-shirt and drawings were held for prizes donated by community businesses. (pictured right).



Jennifer graduated in May from Lees McCrae University with a Bachelors degree in Human Services. Congratulations, Jennifer (pictured left)!



In August, the County Commissioners recognized former POW Bailey Gillespie, who passed away in April, with a resolution by presenting it to his widow, Joy Gillespie. Sadly, Mrs. Gillespie passed away this past October (pictured right).



American Legion 74, Marine Corp League and DAV provided turkeys and hams for our Thanksgiving and Christmas meal boxes. We have also had food donations from the DAR, Facebook, DAC, the American First Action Committee and Realtors of Rutherford County. Thanks to all of our partners for all that you do to help us help veterans.

The veteran service office assisted Rep. Chuck Edwards and his staff with the ceremony presenting county veteran Michael Haynes with his medals, a certificate of recognition and an American Flag that had flown over the Capital Building in his honor (pictured left).

At the November Commissioners meeting, the Commissioners declared the week of Veterans Day, November 6-11 as Green Light for Veterans week. All offices, businesses and citizens were encourage to light their buildings green to show support for our veterans.

The VSO presented the film "The Veterans Battlefield" that was produced by the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners. This film shows the struggles that veterans face in today's society. Approximately 25 were in attendance.





*Veteran Services continued*



The VSO welcomed new staff member Pat Stetler in August. Pat has been a wonderful addition to our office. **(pictured left)**.

The VSO partnered with ICC Small Business Center to hold a presentation to veterans about community resources that are looking to start a business. The Vet Center was also a partner. Kevin from the Vet Center **(pictured right)** and Jennifer **(pictured below right)** did presentations about services offered in Rutherford County.



Jennifer spoke at a meeting of the local chapter of the DAR the week of Veterans Day. She highlighted a brief history of the military and how VSOs serve veterans in the community.



We had a wonderful Christmas party for the Veterans on December 13th. Approximately 100 attended and each veteran received a gift bag.



We continue to help veterans find and apply for benefits. Sometimes the road is long and hard to navigate, but we will not give up. So far in 2023, new claims won to include monthly pay and back pay are at 2.5 million dollars. This does not include established claims being paid. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!





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**County Manager**  
*Steve Garrison*

**County Commissioners**  
*Bryan A. King, Chairman*  
*Alan Toney, Vice Chairman*  
*Michael Benfield, Commissioner*  
*David Hunt, Commissioner*  
*Greg Lovelace, Commissioner*

**County Office**  
*Hazel Haynes, Clerk to Board*  
*Kim Aldridge, Deputy Clerk*  
*Richard Williams, County Attorney*

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