

VISION



DEFINING TODAY'S SKILLED LABOR NEEDS

VOICES BEHIND THE VISION *Meet the Speakers*





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Defining Today's Skilled Labor Needs



Featured Presenter

MORNING KEYNOTE SESSION

Dr. Kim Case

Regional Impact Manager, MyFutureNC

Kim Case is the Regional Impact Manager for myFutureNC, serving North Carolina's Northwest Prosperity Zone, with a career rooted in public education that began with 19 years of classroom teaching. Her work spans from early childhood to postsecondary education, with leadership roles including principal, instructional facilitator, and Coordinator of Innovation and Online Education for Caldwell County Schools, where she partnered with businesses and educational institutions to enhance student engagement and workforce readiness. Kim is actively involved in community and state organizations supporting youth and education, including Communities in Schools, the Rotary Club, and the Educational Innovation Network NC. She co-developed the Educational Innovation Framework and is a certified District C coach and OWL ambassador. Holding advanced degrees from Appalachian State and Gardner-Webb University, she continues her commitment to lifelong learning with certification in Trauma & Resilience from Florida State University. Kim lives in Lenoir, NC, with her husband Phil, enjoying time with their family on Rippetoe Farm.



Case Study Presenter

MORNING KEYNOTE SESSION

Matthew Makdad
New River Light and Power

Matt Makdad became general manager of New River Light and Power (NRLP) effective February 1, 2024, after serving as the utility's engineering supervisor since 2017.

In this role, Matt is responsible for overseeing the operations of NRLP, ensuring safe and reliable electricity is provided to the nearly 9,000 commercial and residential customers within the public power utility's territory in and around Boone, including the App State campus. Matt leads a motivated team of highly skilled lineworkers, technicians and support staff that includes business officers, customer service representatives, billing, mapping and communications.

Prior to joining App State in 2017, Matt served in various engineering leadership roles as an Air Force Civilian at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in Goldsboro, North Carolina, for 21 years.

Matt holds a Bachelor of Science in electrical engineering from The Pennsylvania State University, a Master of Business Administration from Appalachian State University and is a registered North Carolina Professional Engineer



Morning Breakout Session

WE HAVE A PROGRAM FOR THAT

Krissy Hensley

Director of Clinical Operations, Graystone Eye

Krissy Hensley, Director of Clinical Operations at Graystone Eye, offers 16 years of comprehensive healthcare experience. Her career began with a diploma in dental assisting from Forsyth Technical Community College and includes significant experience within a large hospital system, where she held operational leadership roles in both home health and a multi-specialty medical group spanning two states and five counties. Throughout her career, Krissy has observed firsthand the vital role of community college degrees and diplomas in building a skilled healthcare workforce, with many of her colleagues in both direct patient care and administrative leadership having started their journeys through this pathway. Possessing a Master of Healthcare Administration and a Bachelor of Science degree in Workforce Leadership and Development, Krissy is a passionate advocate for investing in community college and high school students to foster successful futures within the healthcare industry.



Morning Breakout Session

WE HAVE A PROGRAM FOR THAT

Wayne Randall

Director, Blue Cross Blue Shield of NC, Boone Center

Wayne Randall serves as the Center Manager at the new Blue Cross NC Center in Boone — a community-focused concept designed to promote healthier lifestyles through collaboration with local businesses, nonprofits, healthcare providers, and residents. With over 30 years of experience in the service industry and over ten years in management with Blue Cross NC, Wayne brings a strong background in customer service, leadership, and community engagement. Committed to making a positive impact in the High Country, Wayne looks forward to building meaningful partnerships and supporting the health and well-being of the Boone community.



Morning Breakout Session

WE HAVE A PROGRAM FOR THAT

Sara Thompson

Program Manager, Catawba County Partnership for Children

Passionate educator with a diverse background in public school and museum education. Currently serving as the Director of Camp and Family Programs at the Catawba Valley YMCA, orchestrating engaging events and overseeing summer camp initiatives. Proven success in program development, event coordination, and virtual engagement. A dedicated advocate for hands-on, project-based learning, I bring a unique blend of skills to create transformative educational experiences.



Morning Breakout Session

CROSSOVER SKILL SETS

Dr. Stacy Buff

**Vice President, Workforce Development,
McDowell Technical Community College**

Stacy Buff serves as the Vice President for Workforce Development at McDowell Technical Community College in Marion, NC. He is married with two children. Stacy currently holds the position of President for the North Carolina Community College Adult Educators Association for 2023 and 2024. Stacy has also served on the McDowell Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors for the past four years, holding every officer role during his tenure.



Morning Breakout Session

CROSSOVER SKILL SETS

Gary Hudson

Program Director, Welding Technologies, CCC&TI

Gary Hudson is the Director of Welding Technologies at Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute. Originally from Casar, NC, Hudson earned his initial welding credential at the U.S. Army Transportation School at Joint Base Langley-Eustis Virginia.

Hudson is an American Welding Society (AWS) Certified Welding Educator and an AWS Certified Welding Inspector. Prior to joining the faculty at CCC&TI, Hudson spent more than 25 years as a professional welder and fabricator.

In 2009, Hudson was tapped as a temporary fill-in for an instructor on leave and has been part of the program ever since. Hudson now has 16 years of experience in instruction at CCC&TI and has helped hundreds of students earn skills and credentials for high-wage jobs throughout the region.

When asked what keeps him motivated and passionate about teaching, Hudson is quick to say it's all about the students. "I wanted to pass along the skills that I have learned but more than that, I want to help them succeed. Watching them as they figure out a skill or get past a challenge is a great motivator. In my 16 years as an educator, I can honestly say, there's never been a day that I didn't want to be in the classroom, helping students learn and ultimately, helping them be successful."

When he isn't in the welding shop, Hudson can be found outside golfing or gardening and spending time with family including wife Susan, their three children and three grandchildren.



Morning Breakout Session

CROSSOVER SKILL SETS

Dr. Tammy Kowalczyk

Director of Accounting & Sustainable Business, Walker
College of Business, Appalachian State University

Dr. Tammy Kowalczyk is a Professor of Accounting at Appalachian State University. She teaches predominantly in the area of financial accounting and Sustainability Accounting. Her research interests have been predominantly in the area of judgment and decision-making in accounting environments, and in taxation, but current research is primarily focused on sustainability accounting. She enjoys spending time outdoors with her husband and son, is an avid runner, and loves being a mom. She holds a Ph.D. from Texas A&M University, an M.B.A. from the University of Texas at Austin, and a B.B.A. from St. Edward's University.



Morning Breakout Session

SKILLS FOR STORM RECOVERY

Derek Buchanan
Wheels Contracting, Inc

As Owner and Operator of Wheels Contracting, he proudly continues the legacy started by his father, Donnie “Wheels” Buchanan, who founded the company in the early '80s as a custom home and grading business. Construction has been part of his life from an early age, working alongside his father on project sites. The company remains a family affair, with his father and relatives still key to its success.

With over 25 years of hands-on general contracting experience, he has expanded into land development and sales, driven by a passion for construction and land transformation. Collaborating with skilled professionals, he has built lasting relationships with team members and clients alike.

Faith and family are central to Wheels Contracting, reflected in his partnership with his wife Erin and their two children, Stone and Mica. Outside of work, he enjoys spending time at the lake and with friends and family.



Morning Breakout Session

SKILLS FOR STORM RECOVERY

Aimee Fink

Executive Director, Lansing's Bridge to Recovery

Aimee is a native North Carolinian, currently residing in Lansing with her husband, JT, and twin daughters, Kaelyn and Parker. Lansing is near and dear to her, as she grew up playing in Big Horse Creek, spending time with family at her great uncle's cabin. Those fond memories of Lansing were forever enshrined upon getting married to her husband in 2010 at Old Orchard Creek, which is home to her uncles. The generational legacy will now continue with the Fink family, recently purchasing farm land and residence in Lansing.

Engage with and support your community; appreciate the cultural differences it fosters; cultivate sustainability. These are foundational elements in Aimee's continued personal and professional pursuit. Aimee studied Intercultural studies at Columbia International University, and spent time abroad missioning in Romania, where her love of people and an inclusive community are rooted.



Morning Breakout Session

SKILLS FOR STORM RECOVERY

Jennifer Greene

Director of Public Health, AppHealthCare

Jennifer Greene, native of Watauga County, currently serves as the Health Director at Appalachian District Health Department –a public health agency serving Alleghany, Ashe, and Watauga Counties and federally qualified health center serving Alleghany and Ashe Counties. Greene began her tenure as Health Director on December 1, 2017 after serving as Interim Health Director since November 9, 2017 and Deputy Director since 2016.

In her role, Greene works alongside the AppHealthCare staff team, Board of Health, Partners in Public Health Board, and community partners to fulfill the department's mission of promoting safe and healthy living, preventing disease, and protecting the environment.

Greene joined Appalachian District Health Department in 2004 and has served multiple roles since that time. She has led multiple community driven initiatives designed to create more opportunities for healthy living and led efforts to expand clinical services to include behavioral and dental healthcare services and achieving Patient Centered Medical Home recognition by the National Council on Quality Assurance (NCQA).

Greene has earned multiple accolades in her public health tenure including being recognized by the North Carolina Public Health Association as a Watson S. Rankin Award recipient for outstanding contributions to public health in NC as well as the Southern Health Association's Charles G. Jordan Memorial Award for contributions to public health in the southeastern region of the United States.

Greene received her undergraduate degree in Health Promotion from Appalachian State University and Masters in Public Health degree from the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH) accredited program at Des Moines University's Osteopathic Medical School. She currently resides in Boone, NC with her husband and two children and spends her free time outdoors and being involved with her local church and community organizations.



Featured Speaker

AFTERNOON KEYNOTE SESSION

Lt. Governor Rachel Hunt

Rachel Hunt, North Carolina's 36th Lieutenant Governor, brings a lifelong commitment to public service, education, and family. An attorney and small business owner, she founded Hunt for College, LLC to help families navigate the college admissions process. After pausing her legal career to focus on raising her children, she spent over a decade volunteering in Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools and serving on community boards such as the League of Women Voters and Lillian's List. In 2018, she was elected to the NC House, defeating a four-term incumbent, and was re-elected in 2020 before winning a seat in the NC Senate in 2022. Rachel's leadership reflects a legacy of service inspired by her parents, Governor Jim and Carolyn Hunt, and her dedication to making North Carolina the best place to live, work, and raise a family.



Featured Panelist

CONNECTING EDUCATORS WITH TODAY'S SKILLED LABOR NEEDS

Chelsie Eldreth

CTE Teacher, Valle Crucis School

Chelsie Eldreth has been teaching Career and Technical Education (CTE) in Watauga County for about 10 years, all of which have been at Valle Crucis School, with the last 7 years also at Bethel. She teaches at Valle Crucis each morning and Bethel in the afternoons. Chelsie holds an undergraduate degree in Advertising and Marketing and a Master's Certificate in Middle and Secondary Education: Curriculum and Instruction, both from Appalachian State University.

She is married to Jason and they have two children, Kylie and Easton. Watauga County offers a strong CTE program, allowing students to take CTE courses each year of middle school, including Exploring Technology (6th grade), Intro to Business and Leadership (7th grade), and Career Exploration (8th grade). At the high school level, a wide range of CTE classes and pathways are available. Chelsie enjoys assisting students with their transition to high school and course registration. She welcomes questions and looks forward to supporting students' learning journeys.



Featured Panelist

CONNECTING EDUCATORS WITH TODAY'S SKILLED LABOR NEEDS

David Shack

7th & 8th Grade Science, Valle Crucis School

David Shack is the 7th and 8th Grade Science Teacher at Valle Crucis School in Watauga County. Known for his hands-on, inquiry-based approach to science education, he co-developed the "Science PALS" program, which pairs middle school students with younger learners for collaborative lab experiences. In 2022, he received a Bright Ideas grant from Blue Ridge Energy for his "Trout in the Classroom" project, enabling students to study aquatic ecosystems through daily monitoring of a live trout habitat. Shack's work exemplifies a commitment to experiential learning and community engagement in STEM education.



Featured Panelist

CONNECTING EDUCATORS WITH TODAY'S SKILLED LABOR NEEDS

Travis Eason

Electrical Trades Instructor, Ashe County High School

Travis Eason is the Electrical Trades Instructor at Ashe County High School, where he leads students through hands-on training in electrical systems, safety protocols, and industry certifications. With a strong background in the electrical industry, he brings real-world experience into the classroom, preparing students for careers in the skilled trades. Beyond teaching, Eason is the owner and founder of Excel Electric Service, Inc., a local electrical contracting business, which allows him to provide students with practical insights into the profession. His commitment to workforce development and experiential learning makes him a valuable contributor to regional discussions on skilled labor needs.



Featured Panelist

CONNECTING EDUCATORS WITH TODAY'S SKILLED LABOR NEEDS

John Anglin

Business Development Manager, BRANCH

John Anglin is the Business Development Manager for Branch, with nearly 20 years of experience in development and construction. Over the past 15 years, he has led daily business operations, focusing on exceptional service and support. His broad expertise spans finance, HR, sales, marketing, project management, IT, and public utilities, offering a well-rounded view of today's industry challenges.

John serves on the Mayland Community College Board of Trustees, High Country Workforce Development Board, and as Vice-Chair of Freedom Life Yancey. He's also active on several industry committees including the Carolinas AGC Legislative Committee and the WNC Construction Career Day Planning Committee.

He enjoys family time with his wife and four children, supports local nonprofits, serves on his church board, loves the outdoors, smoking meats, and attending sporting events.



Featured Panelist

CONNECTING EDUCATORS WITH TODAY'S SKILLED LABOR NEEDS

Rob Howard

Lecturer, Building Science, Department of Sustainable
Technology & the Built Environment, Appalachian State
University

Rob Howard is a Lecturer in Building Science in the Department of Sustainable Technology & the Built Environment at Appalachian State University. He brings over two decades of experience in sustainable construction and high-performance building design to the classroom. Rob holds an M.S. in Technology with a concentration in Building Science from Appalachian State University, a Renewable Energy Technologies Diploma, and a B.A. in Religious Studies from North Carolina State University.

He is a North Carolina Licensed General Contractor and holds multiple professional certifications, including RESNET HERS Rater, BPI Building Analyst and Envelope Professional, and NAHB Master Certified Green Professional. His work has included service on the EEBA Board of Directors and participation in the NREL Energy Efficiency in Permanent Modular Construction initiative. Passionate about educating the next generation of building professionals, Rob emphasizes real-world application, energy efficiency, and sustainability in all aspects of his teaching.

Featured Panelists

CONNECTING EDUCATORS WITH TODAY'S SKILLED LABOR NEEDS



Dash Biles
8th Grade Student,
Valle Crucis School



Ty Little
Ashe County High School /
Wilkes Community
College

Not Pictured
Hayden Kelley
Student, Department of Sustainable
Technology & the Built Environment,
Appalachian State University

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