



RETURNING & RETAINING TODAY'S WORKFORCE

MAY 25, 2023

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PANEL DISCUSSION: CREATIVE CREDENTIALS

KAREN BARNES

INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR | NC TECH PATHS



A Winston Salem native, Karen's been an entrepreneur since grade school when she picked vegetables from her dad's garden and sold them around the neighborhood from her red wagon. Prior to founding Agile City in 2020, Karen worked as the founder of a non-profit entrepreneurial support organization; co-founder of an applied artificial intelligence firm; founder of her own marketing and communications consulting firm; and strategic lead for several advertising agencies working with Fortune 100 clients, including ConAgra Foods, MillerCoors, Johnson & Johnson, Steelcase, Georgia-Pacific, Toshiba, Hanes, General Mills, Lowe's Home Improvement and Boeing. She's worked on household brands including Colgate, Orville Redenbacher, Bounty, Miller Lite, Cheerios, and Pringles. She's also consulted with numerous startups and founded the Venture Winston Grants, a startup grant competition that awarded \$450,000 in funding.

As part of her work with Agile City, she's now serving as the Interim Executive Director at NC Tech Paths, a non-profit dedicated to creating tech talent pipelines through education, job placement and spaces. In its first year, NC Tech Paths has trained and placed 45 rural, remote tech workers and created more than \$1.8 million in direct economic impact.

Karen has a master's degree in journalism and public affairs from The American University, and a bachelor's degree in English Literature from Hollins University. When she's not starting companies, building communities, or digging into strategies, you can find her outside with her wife and dog. She also loves to travel, draw, play golf, eat cheeseburgers and hike.

PANELIST TOPIC: EMERGING PROGRAM LINKING PARTICIPANTS TO HIGH-WAGE JOBS IN THE TECH SECTOR





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PANEL DISCUSSION: CREATIVE CREDENTIALS

DR. MIKE MCKENZIE

VICE PROVOST OF ACADEMIC PROGRAM
DEVELOPMENT & STRATEGIC INITIATIVES |
APPALACHIAN STATE UNIVERSITY



Dr. Michael (Mike) McKenzie has been at Appalachian since 2018. Originally serving as Dean of the Cratis D. Williams School of Graduate Studies, in July of 2019, he was appointed as Vice Provost for Program Management and Strategic Initiatives. Prior to coming to Appalachian, Dr. McKenzie served in a variety of roles at Winston-Salem State University. At WSSU, Dr. McKenzie was previously a department chair, an associate dean, an interim associate provost, director of the honors program, and chief research officer.

His vice provost duties include space management, program offerings, development of new programs, program modalities and other duties as assigned by the provost.

Dr. McKenzie received his B.S in Athletic Training from Appalachian State, his M.S in Exercise Biochemistry from the University of Florida, and his Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro in Exercise Physiology. He also completed a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Maryland School of Medicine. Finally, he has been recognized as a fellow of the American College of Sports Medicine (FACSM) and served as president of the Southeast Chapter of ACSM.

PANELIST TOPIC: STRATEGIC GOALS OF THE APP STATE HICKORY CAMPUS AND ITS TIE TO PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES





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PANEL DISCUSSION: CREATIVE CREDENTIALS

RICK SHEW

ASSOCIATE DEAN OF BUSINESS & CAREER
SERVICES | CALDWELL COMMUNITY COLLEGE
& TECHNICAL INSTITUTE



Rick Shew has been employed with Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute for 13 years. He holds a Master of Science degree in Strategic Leadership from Mountain State University.

Rick currently serves as the Associate Dean of Business and Career Services. In this position, he provides vision and leadership for areas of apprenticeships, work-based learning, career services, short-term training programs in advanced manufacturing, and the Small Business Center. He promotes and implements comprehensive training, professional development and continuing education that is customized to meet the needs of business and industry partners within Caldwell and Watauga counties. Rick also serves as Mayor Pro-Teem for the Town of Hudson. His prior professional history includes serving 20 years as President/CEO of RJS Enterprise Inc.

PANELIST TOPIC: DEEPER CONNECTIONS BETWEEN BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY THROUGH SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND WORK BASED LEARNING





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PANEL DISCUSSION: CREATIVE CREDENTIALS

DR. KATIE WALL

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR & PROGRAM
COORDINATOR | LEES-MCRAE COLLEGE:
OUTDOOR RECREATION MANAGEMENT, SKI
INDUSTRY & BUSINESS INSTRUCTION, AND
WILDERNESS MEDICINE & RESCUE



Dr. Katie Wall is an Associate Professor and Program Coordinator at Lees-McRae College. She oversees the Cycling Studies, Outdoor Recreation Management, Ski Industry Business & Instruction, and Wilderness Medicine & Rescue academic programs. The outdoor academic programs at Lees-McRae College are grounded in the School of Business and Management. The program focuses on industry certifications, emphasizes experiential learning through expeditionary travel and student-run initiatives, and prioritizes networking and engagement opportunities with industry professionals.

PANELIST TOPIC: USING LOCATION AND UNIQUE EXPERTISE TO SERVE THE WORKFORCE NEEDS OF THE REGION





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PANEL DISCUSSION: EMPLOYER-LED LEADERSHIP

AARON DAWSON
SENIOR DIRECTOR OF WORKPLACE DEVELOPMENT | THE INDUSTRIAL COMMONS, MORGANTON



Aaron Dawson is the Workplace Development Senior Director for The Industrial Commons where he leads efforts to create and sustain worker engagement programs through open-book management and worker committees in manufacturing plants interested in shifting to a more democratic and millennial-friendly culture. He also assists in Cooperative Development for The Industrial Commons enterprises and employee ownership transition for businesses thinking of selling to their employees.

He has 15 years of experience as a worker-owner at Equal Exchange, a Fair Trade Massachusetts company specializing in the sourcing and distribution of coffee, tea and chocolate. For ten of those years, Aaron held the role of Customer Service Manager, overseeing a team of 12. He has many years of experience participating in and facilitating worker committees and developing ideas, policies and practices that create a positive and supportive work environment. In addition, he was elected to serve on Equal Exchange's Board of Directors for six years and was Chair of the Board for one of those years.

Aaron holds a Masters in Management, Cooperatives and Credit Unions from St. Mary's University in Halifax, Canada. He served on the Board of the US Federation of Worker Co-ops for four years and served as the Board Treasurer for the Democracy at Work Institute for six years. Aaron is a certified coach with the Great Game of Business.

PANELIST TOPIC: EMPLOYEE OWNERSHIP AS MOTIVATION AND A BUSINESS SUCCESSION STRATEGY





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PANEL DISCUSSION: EMPLOYER-LED LEADERSHIP

CASSIA DOWDY
DIRECTOR OF HUMAN RESOURCES | DESIGN
FOUNDRY



Cassia Dowdy is a native of St. Louis, Missouri (GO CARDINALS!). She and her husband Richard moved to Hickory in 2009 and have three boys, 11, 9, and 7. She began her HR career in 2007 supporting retail sales and manufacturing. She is currently the Director of Human Resources at Design Foundry, an upholstered furniture manufacturer with over 270 associates.

Cassia is passionate about maintaining the “human” side of HR, and takes great pride in serving and loving others well. She believes culture trumps everything, and is THE secret sauce to any business success. It’s all about the people. Take care of them, serve them well, and provide a sense of community and everything else falls into place.

She currently serves on the Board of Directors for Safe Harbor, Catawba County United Way and the Catawba County Science Center.

PANELIST TOPIC: WORKPLACE CULTURE AND EMPLOYEE ONBOARDING





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PANEL DISCUSSION: EMPLOYER-LED LEADERSHIP

SHANE FOX
TOWN MANAGER | BLOWING ROCK, NC



Shane Fox is serving his fourth year as Town Manager of Blowing Rock. A 2001 graduate of Appalachian State University with a BSBA in Accounting, Fox spent the first fifteen years of his career as an Audit Manager and Consultant for Martin Starnes and Associates. In 2015, he was named Executive Director of the High Country Council of Governments, a position he held for three years. He spent two years as Deputy County Manager of Cleveland County, NC, prior to taking his current post in Blowing Rock, NC. Effective June 7, 2023, Fox is set to begin a new position as County Manager for Alexander County, NC.

PANELIST TOPIC: CHILDCARE OPTION FOR TOWN OF BLOWING ROCK EMPLOYEES





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PANEL DISCUSSION: EMPLOYER-LED LEADERSHIP

TALIA FREEMAN

DIRECTOR OF MARKETING | BEECH MOUNTAIN
RESORT



Talia Freeman is a native of Boone and passionate about the strategic growth of the High Country. She serves as Director of Marketing for Beech Mountain Resort and is a member of the senior leadership team. She works to attract customers by developing effective marketing strategies that drive business growth. She oversees all media buys and ad placements to promote and increase company visibility, while creating and executing events.

During her tenure at Beech Mountain Resort, Talia has helped grow one of the area's most recognizable attractions into a 365-day-a-year tourism destination. She has developed the Beech Mountain Summer Concert Series into one of the region's top music events. She's also earned several awards for content and event creation, including the annual Run for Buns, which has raised well over \$100,000 for the Colon Cancer Coalition.

Talia earned a Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies from Lees-McRae College, where she also works as an adjunct professor and served as President of the Alumni Board of Directors. She was awarded the college's 2023 Sullivan Award, recognizing an employee's nobility of character and excellence of service.

Earning an MBA from East Tennessee State University, Talia currently serves as the Chair of the Board of Directors of the Boone Area Chamber of Commerce. She dedicates her spare time to volunteer efforts with numerous local organizations.

PANELIST TOPIC: HOUSING EFFORT FOR RESORT EMPLOYEES

