

# VISION



## DEFINING TODAY'S SKILLED LABOR NEEDS

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**Thursday, May 22, 2025**  
*Caldwell Community College & Technical  
Institute - Watauga Campus*

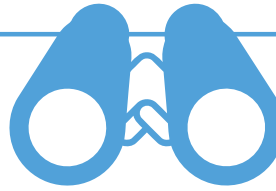


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**FOR A CLOSER LOOK**



*Digital Booklet and Speaker Biographies*



**#VisionNWNC**





# DEFINING TODAY'S SKILLED LABOR NEEDS

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**Thursday, May 22, 2025 | 8:00 AM - 5:15 PM**  
Caldwell Community College & Technical  
Institute - Watauga Campus

**Celebrating its sixth year, Vision Northwest North Carolina brings together thought leaders from across our region to explore current economic development trends. This year, our focus turns to the evolution of the skilled trades and the essential role our workforce development partners play in meeting emerging challenges.**

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The Boone Area Chamber of Commerce is proud to host the 2025 Vision Northwest North Carolina summit on the Watauga Campus of Caldwell Community College & Technical Institute. This state-of-the-art facility provides the ideal backdrop for a program centered on the growing trades industry and the critical role education plays in preparing a workforce equipped for hands-on, real-world demands.

We are grateful to SkyLine/SkyBest and Carolina West Wireless for serving as presenting sponsors, and we thank both businesses for their continued partnership and support of this event since its inception. Additional support is provided by Beech Mountain Resort, DMJPS, Emergency Restoration Xperts, First Horizon, LifeStore Bank & Insurance, New River Light & Power, Rygid AV, and Spangler Restoration.

This event would not be possible without the collaboration of a region-wide team, including the Boone Area, Blowing Rock, Alleghany, Ashe, Catawba and McDowell Chambers of Commerce; Watauga County Economic Development Commission; Appalachian State University; High Country Council of Governments; High Country Workforce Development Board; and the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina. We also extend our thanks to Caldwell Community College and several additional economic development and workforce partners for their support.

We hear about workforce shortages in the trades almost daily — from construction to electrical to HVAC, the demand is growing. Yet it's not always clear which specific skills are most needed or how to build a sustainable talent pipeline. How do we prepare students for trades that are constantly evolving? Can our region meet the workforce demands essential to recovery and growth, especially in the wake of Hurricane Helene?

This year's Vision Northwest North Carolina summit tackles these questions head-on. We're bringing together educators, industry leaders, and workforce professionals who are actively shaping the next generation of skilled labor in our mountain communities. You'll hear from businesses already finding success through work-based learning, from students who are just beginning their journey in the trades, and from institutions committed to training a workforce ready to meet the moment.

You'll leave with a clearer understanding of the shared opportunity — and responsibility — we all have to support the trades as a foundation for housing, infrastructure, and economic resilience across Northwest North Carolina.

Thank you for joining us for this important day of collaboration, discussion, and idea sharing as we highlight wins in our region's trades sector and explore how partnerships between education and industry can drive resilience. Together, we can build a workforce that meets today's needs and sets the foundation for tomorrow's success.



**David Jackson**  
**President and CEO**  
*Boone Area Chamber of Commerce*

**8:00-9:00**

## **REGISTRATION, BREAKFAST & NETWORKING**

*Provided by LifeStore Bank & Spangler Restoration*

**9:00-9:10**

## **WELCOME TO VISION NORTHWEST NORTH CAROLINA**

**9:10-10:00**

## **MORNING KEYNOTE SESSION**

*Sponsored by Carolina West Wireless*

### **Featured Presenter: Dr. Kim Case, MyFutureNC**

To ensure North Carolina remains economically competitive now and into the future, in 2019, with bipartisan support in the General Assembly and a signature from the Governor, the state adopted one of the most ambitious goals in the nation—to have 2 million North Carolinians aged 25-44 hold an industry-valued credential or postsecondary degree by 2030. Dr. Case will provide updates on the programs goals and outreach along with examples of success in connecting industry and education partners within the region.

### **Case Study: Matt Makdad, General Manager, New River Light & Power**

Workforce challenges impact businesses of all types, and those that identify where talent can be sourced have a better chance of avoiding disruptions due to labor transition. Matt Makdad, General Manager of New River Light & Power will share some industry-specific workforce trends along with strategies his team uses to work with local educators to create a pipeline of readily available talent that can be infused into his business quickly.

**10:00-10:30**

## **BREAK & NETWORKING**

*Sponsored by DMJPS*

**10:30-12:00**

## **MORNING BREAKOUT SESSIONS**

*Sponsored by New River Light & Power*

**1 | We Have a Program for That** - Frontline managers need skilled workers, and educators are aligning programs with industry demands. Hear from a panel on emerging programs and effective workforce communication.

- **Krissy Hensley, Director of Clinical Operations, Graystone Eye**
- **Wayne Randall, Director, Blue Cross Blue Shield of NC, Boone Center**
- **Sara Thompson, Program Manager, Catawba County Partnership for Children**

**2| Crossover Skill Sets** - Flexible education pathways are helping students gain transferable skills like welding and CDL that drive wage growth. Hear from a panel on the most in-demand skills and how to spark student interest in today's high-value trade careers.

- **Dr. Stacy Buff, Vice President, Workforce Development, McDowell Technical Community College**
- **Gary Hudson, Program Director, Welding Technologies, CCC&TI**
- **Dr. Tammy Kowalczyk, Director of Accounting & Sustainable Business, Walker College of Business, Appalachian State University**

**3 | Skills for Storm Recovery** - Hurricane Helene has created long-term demand for skilled workers in areas like land restoration, septic installation, and infrastructure repair. Hear how education and industry partners are responding with targeted programs and preparing for future workforce needs.

- **Derek Buchanan, Wheels Contracting, Inc**
- **Aimee Fink, Executive Director, Lansing's Bridge to Recovery**
- **Jennifer Greene, Director of Public Health, AppHealthCare**



**12:00-12:45**

**LUNCH & NETWORKING**

*Provided by Watauga County Economic Development Commission*

**12:45-2:20**

**AFTERNOON KEYNOTE SESSION**

*Sponsored by SkyLine/SkyBest*

**Featured Speaker: Lt. Governor Rachel Hunt**

Lieutenant Governor Hunt will focus on tackling the child care and early childhood education crisis in North Carolina and champion strong investments in community colleges to bolster workforce development. These priorities will support the Lieutenant Governor's vision of making North Carolina a better place to live, work, and raise a family. Together, these priorities make up Lieutenant Governor Hunt's Future-Ready North Carolina plan.

**Featured Panel Discussion: Connecting Educators with Today's Skilled Labor Needs**

Our region is among the State's leaders in regularly connecting workforce development and industry partners, to ensure educational attainment strategy meets the current need for skilled laborers. Learn how these partnerships work, and how conversations about new businesses, expanded operations, and retraining can drive quick changes to what is offered from a workforce training standpoint in communities throughout the region. We'll examine the success of these pathways from the viewpoint of students, educators, and industry representatives.

- **Dash Biles, Valle Crucis Middle School**
- **Chelsea Eldreth, CTE Teacher, Valle Crucis Middle School**
- **David Shack, Science Teacher, Valle Crucis Middle School**
- **Travis Eason, Electrical Trades Instructor, Ashe County High School**
- **Ty Little, Ashe County High School / Wilkes Community College**
- **John Anglin, Business Development Manager, BRANCH**
- **Rob Howard, Lecturer, Building Science, Department of Sustainable Technology & the Built Environment**

**2:20-2:30**

**BREAK & NETWORKING**

*Sponsored by ERX Emergency Restoration Xperts*

**2:30-3:00**

**GUIDED WALKING TOURS**

The North Carolina Community College system has been investing in facility upgrades across the state, helping to meet the evolving training needs of today's workforce. We'll break into small groups for a guided tour around the new \$6M renovation of the of the expanded Occupational Training Building on the CCC&TI Watauga Campus. Get a first-hand look at the technology that is guiding student learning and success, see lab space that provides exposure to real-life work simulations for students, and see examples of workforce pipelines that are benefited from CTE feeder programs, enroute to a four-year degree. We'll also have staff from the other institutions throughout the region that can discuss workforce training options closer to your specific community.

**3:00-4:00**

**NETWORKING RECEPTION**







## About Dr. Kim Case *MyFutureNC*

**Featured Presenter**  
***Morning Keynote Session***

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.



## Matthew Makdad *New River Light and Power* **Case Study Presenter**



## Morning Breakout Sessions

Pictured left to right: Krissy Hensley, Wayne Randall, Sara Thompson, Dr. Stacy Buff, Gary Hudson, Dr. Tammy Kowalczyk, Derek Buchanan, Aimee Fink, Jennifer Greene



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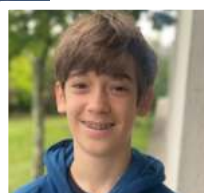




## About Lt. Governor Rachel Hunt

**Featured Speaker**  
*Afternoon Keynote Session*

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 Panelists

*Connecting Educators with Today's Skilled Labor Needs*



Pictured left to right: Dash Biles, Chelsea Eldreth, David Shack, Travis Eason, Ty Little, John Anglin, Rob Howard



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# BUILDING THE FUTURE, TOGETHER

The Boone Area Chamber Foundation and the Watauga Economic Development Commission are two essential arms of the Chamber's work—supporting initiatives that strengthen our **workforce, infrastructure, and regional economy**, both today and for years to come. Through long-term strategies and collaborative partnerships, they help advance the people, businesses, and places that shape the future of our region.



## ABOUT THE BOONE AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE FOUNDATION

The Boone Area Chamber Foundation is a 501(c)3 arm of the Boone Area Chamber of Commerce, established to support long-term economic development initiatives that benefit the High Country. From workforce housing and childcare access to disaster recovery and small business support, the Foundation exists to champion community resilience and sustainable economic health. Funding raised through the Foundation has supported child care tuition relief for families, business resiliency grants post-Hurricane Helene, and other key programs that help our region recover and grow stronger. Learn more at [boonechamber.com/foundation](https://boonechamber.com/foundation).

## ABOUT THE WATAUGA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

The Watauga Economic Development Commission (EDC) works to ensure the long-term economic vitality of Watauga County. Focused on strategic issues like workforce development, infrastructure investment, housing, and access to quality childcare, the EDC serves as a convener and connector—bringing together business, education, government, and nonprofit leaders to align around shared priorities. Through this collaborative work, the EDC supports the creation of jobs, cultivates entrepreneurship, and fosters the conditions for inclusive, community-driven growth. Learn more at [boonechamber.com/watauga-economic-development-commission](https://boonechamber.com/watauga-economic-development-commission).

# VISION





# NOTES



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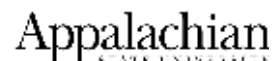
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