



CENTRALINA REGIONAL COUNCIL

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Centralina Regional Council Presents Region of Excellence Awards

Nine Recipients Were Announced during Virtual Awards Ceremony

CHARLOTTE – Yesterday, Centralina Regional Council announced the recipients of the Region of Excellence Awards in a virtual ceremony. Presented annually, these awards recognize individuals, communities and organizations for their outstanding achievements in support of Centralina’s mission to expand opportunity and improve quality of life in the nine-county, Centralina region which includes Anson, Cabarrus, Gaston, Lincoln, Iredell, Mecklenburg, Rowan, Stanly and Union counties.

“Local governments nominated an innovative project, program, plan or individual that contributed to significant and positive advancements in the region this past year” said Geraldine Gardner, Centralina Regional Council Executive Director. “The Region of Excellence Awards provides an excellent forum for county and community leaders to learn from best practices and to network with their peers in the region,” said Gardner.

An independent panel of judges reviewed the forty-four applications and selected the award winners. Centralina thanks this year’s judges: Tom Barth, Professor and MPA Director at UNC at Charlotte; Vicki Bott, former Grants Development Director for Centralina; and Michael Johnson, Former City of Statesville Council Member and Former Centralina Chair. A separate panel of experts evaluated the Clean Fuels category and included Michael McDonald, UPS Corporate Automotive and Senior Director Sustainability and Government Affairs; Stephen Whaley, Propane Education and Research Council; and Mike Riley, CNG Business Development Piedmont Natural Gas.

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Centralina Regional Council is honored to announce the 2020 Region of Excellence Awards' winners:

- **Cross-Community Collaboration Award – Mecklenburg County Public Health Community Partnerships During COVID-19**

Mecklenburg County officials began planning early for a public health crisis that would require emergency humanitarian on a communitywide basis. Mecklenburg County Public Health developed community partnerships with representatives from Fire, Police and Medic working in coordination with the City of Charlotte, Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools, area hospital systems, the County's municipalities and the State of North Carolina to ensure continuity of operations and the health and safety of the community. These partnerships facilitated a coordinated response to the crisis and helped mitigate its impact.

- **Local Government Innovation Award – 2020 Virtual Cheerwine Festival**

Attracting more than 100,000 visitors, the Cheerwine Festival is a beloved annual event in downtown Salisbury. When COVID led to the cancellation of the festival last year, Cheerwine and the City of Salisbury moved the fun online by holding a virtual Cheerwine Festival on May 16. The three-hour online event featured live virtual musical performances and an online marketplace for vendors and downtown businesses and Cheerwine raised funds for the Rowan County United Way COVID-19 Relief Fund.

- **Improving Quality of Life Award – Kannapolis Downtown Revitalization**

In 2015, the City of Kannapolis launched a bold plan to purchase the entire 50 acres of downtown from a single property owner. This land purchase was the first step in revitalizing a dormant and vacated business district. The City developed a downtown master plan which would leverage public investment to attract private investment. Over the next five years, the City invested \$113 million with the expectation it could attract more than \$374 million in private investment over the next ten years. Currently, about \$100 million in private investment is already underway which will revitalize the City of Kannapolis, increase commercial and residential development and increase tourism.

- **Clean Cities Award – Charlotte Department of Transportation Strategic Energy Action Plan**

The Charlotte Department of Transportation has completed a number of activities to support their goals in the Strategic Energy Action Plan implementation, including purchasing eight electric vehicles (EVs), proactively installing EV chargers across City-owned properties and working with Chargepoint for public access. They have also trained employees on EV charging protocol and are exploring options with heavy-duty equipment. These actions will reduce greenhouse gases, increase charging infrastructure and create a friendlier EV city.

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- **Aging in Action Award – Shirley Wiggins**

This year's Aging in Action Award will be presented to the family of Shirley Wiggins in memory of her selfless dedication and extraordinary advocacy for the needs of older adults and individuals with disabilities. When COVID began impacting North Carolina, Wiggins led a countywide effort to purchase and distribute masks for long-term care facilities where they were in short supply.

- **James D. Prosser Excellence in Leadership Award (Small Community) – Lesley “Tug” Deason**

Mr. Lesley “Tug” Deason, the Town of Stanley Parks and Recreation Director, is a passionate and tireless advocate for public parks for his community. From campaigning to save a local school gym from being torn down to helping the city purchase their own city park, Deason is relentless. He raised more than \$1 million dollars in grants and donations for the park and generated grassroots support from citizens by having yard sales, hot dog sales, raffles, pageants and other fundraising events.

- **James D. Prosser Excellence in Leadership Award (Large Community) – Dena Diorio**

Few leaders in the history of Mecklenburg County have faced the challenges that Dena R. Diorio has during her career as County Manager of the largest county in North Carolina. She led Mecklenburg County's COVID-19 response, spearheaded the Intergovernmental Policy Group, created the COVID 19 Business Leaders Task Force, launched the Community Resources Center to bring County Social Services to residents where they live. Additional accomplishments include convening The Leading on Opportunity Task Force out of which the County created the MECK Pre-K Program. Diorio is a true leader who has earned the trust and respect of the residents and business community through her collaborative, transparent work style. Working with the Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners, she keeps residents safe and healthy while supporting a thriving business community.

- **COVID-19 Resiliency Award – Remote Learning Center at E.E. Waddell Community Center**

When Albemarle Parks & Recreation (APR) staff learned that educating children would not happen in classrooms due to COVID-19, they rallied together to create options to help support the community, including the development of the Remote Learning Center (RLC) at E.E. Waddell Community Center. Staffed by APR, the RLC provided children with a support system for education, social growth and physical activity in the remote learning environment and focused on children who were at risk of falling behind without the structure, resources and support they would get in the classroom.

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- **COVID-19 Resiliency Award – Mecklenburg County COVID-19 Policy Group**

The Mecklenburg County COVID-19 Policy Group was formed in response to the pandemic last year. Chaired by the Mecklenburg County Manager, the Policy Group included the Charlotte City Manager, six town managers in Mecklenburg County, Director of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Emergency Management, Charlotte Mecklenburg School Superintendent, CMPD Deputy Police Chief, Charlotte Fire Chief, CEO of MEDIC, Mecklenburg County Sheriff, Chief Medical Officer of Atrium Health, Chief Clinical Officer of Novant Health, Mecklenburg County Public Health Director, Trial Court Administrator, Joint Information Center (JIC) and the Director of Mecklenburg County Board of Elections. The Policy Group’s goal was to ensure a comprehensive approach to managing the pandemic and responding to community needs for testing, vaccinations and mask distribution.

- **COVID-19 Resiliency Award – Town of Davidson COVID-19 Business Support**

Like so many communities across the country, COVID-19 upended the way business and community matters were handled for the Town of Davidson. In response, the Town, led by Economic Development Manager Kim Fleming, quickly initiated collaborative communication between Mecklenburg County, the Town of Davidson, businesses and the local community to gather meaningful input on priorities for businesses to reopen safely. As a result, Davidson businesses were able to adapt their business models and be more resilient in the face of unprecedented change.

COVID-19 challenged all of our communities and businesses, so we also wanted to give a special **COVID-19 Resiliency Recognition** to the following recipients for their work during the pandemic:

- Cabarrus County Vaccine Transportation
- Comfort Call Collaborative in Union County for combatting social isolation in senior citizens
- John Lewis, CATS CEO for his swift action to maintain a safe and effective transit system
- Masks for Gastonia Initiative
- Mount Holly Small Business Emergency Loan Program

“The pandemic changed the way we do business and required flexibility, collaboration and innovation to ensure continuity of services,” said Commissioner Bobby Compton of Mooresville, Chairman of the Centralina Regional Council Board. “We are proud to recognize how these individuals and communities responded during one of the most challenging times in our nation’s history.”

For more information about Centralina Regional Council, please visit www.centralina.org.