



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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# **Centralina Presents Region of Excellence Awards to Exceptional Community Partners**

*Recipients recognized for positive advancements in our region*

**Please [use this link](#) to view photos, courtesy of Centralina Regional Council.**

**CHARLOTTE, N.C. – October 10, 2024** – Centralina Regional Council (Centralina) announced the recipients of its 2024 Region of Excellence Awards!

Presented annually, these awards recognize individuals, communities and organizations for their outstanding achievements over the previous calendar year in support of Centralina’s mission to expand opportunity and improve quality of life in the nine-county region. The region includes Anson, Cabarrus, Gaston, Lincoln, Iredell, Mecklenburg, Rowan, Stanly and Union counties.

An independent panel of judges selected the award winners. Centralina would like to thank this year’s judges: Larken Egleston (District Director, Congressman Jeff Jackson), Dr. Jaclyn Piatak (Professor, UNC Charlotte), Maria Stroupe (Former Town Manager, Town of Dallas) and Danna Stansbury (Executive Director, Foothills Regional Commission). A separate panel of experts evaluated the Clean Fuels category; judges included Michelle Alfini (Climate Reporter, WSOC-TV), Megan Green (Air Quality Program Manager, Mecklenburg County) and Christopher Facente (Dean of Skilled Trades & Transportation, Central Piedmont Community College).

The award categories and winners are:

- **Cross-Community Collaboration: City of Albemarle**
  - Awarded for demonstrating the value of partnerships across communities to achieve better outcomes for their community.

- Albemarle's Project Next Step is a summer program designed to improve students' access to innovative learning strategies and engage local students in quality, interactive enrichment opportunities with Stanly County Community College. By integrating academic enrichment with real-world experiences, the program was able to broaden the horizons of many Albemarle Middle School students and prepare them for future academic success.
  
- **Cross-Community Collaboration: City of Gastonia**
  - Awarded for demonstrating the value of partnerships across communities to achieve better outcomes for their community.
  - The idea of Gastonia's *Farm to Table - Cultivating Opportunity* began as a social justice proposal that would align three unique organizations for a single cause. The goal was to reduce the barriers to healthy food through community collaboration. Keep Gastonia Beautiful brought together the Gastonia Farmers Market and Healthy Highland/Really Amazing Meals with Soul Kitchen to connect local farmers with a community plagued with food insecurity while educating citizens and local youth on the farm-to-table experience through a variety of educational pieces.
  
- **Local Government Innovation: City of Albemarle**
  - Awarded to governments making optimum use of resources while being innovative and bringing value to our communities.
  - Albemarle's Strategic Plan was developed to make the most of city operations and resources while providing maximum value to residents. Recognizing the need for an innovative way to tie together organizational and financial planning processes, the city created a strategic plan that has measurably increased resident satisfaction, enhanced internal teamwork and better aligned city staff and elected officials.
  
- **Local Government Innovation: City of Gastonia**
  - Awarded to governments making optimum use of resources while being innovative and bringing value to our communities.
  - For some time, the City of Gastonia has been plagued with excessive litter along roadways. To eliminate the issue, the city first turned to the public works department's right-of-way mowing crew to address complaints as they were received. To provide a more permanent solution, Gastonia partnered with Staff 360, LLC, a local temporary staffing agency, to create a "litter crew" solely for the city. With this new team, the city is able to coordinate directly between the litter crew and the mowing crew, increasing the mowing crew's productivity by approximately 300%.

- **Improving Quality of Life: Town of Davidson**

- Awarded to communities across the region that aspire to enable all people with the amenities, services and opportunities they need to thrive.
- In May of 2023, the Town of Davidson Police Department (DPD) announced the implementation of its new co-responder program. The co-responder program is a hybrid model wherein the DPD and a designated clinician collaborate on responding to calls for service. Officers evaluate the nature of the call and whether law enforcement action is appropriate or if the co-responder better fits the needs of the resident. The goal is to ensure a proper response and to provide targeted services, reducing the need for future calls to 911.

- **Improving Quality of Life: Town of Indian Trail**

- Awarded to communities across the region that aspire to enable all people with the amenities, services and opportunities they need to thrive.
- In 2021, the Town of Indian Trail received \$12.7 million through the American Rescue Plan Act. Of this amount, \$10 million was used to support non-profits and service organizations throughout the community. Since 2022, the town has assisted numerous non-profits, service organizations, schools and first responders in providing additional resources to residents in Indian Trail and Union County, focusing on the most vulnerable populations, including children, senior citizens and those experiencing food and shelter needs.

- **Clean Cities Award: City of Gastonia**

- Awarded to initiatives that reduce petroleum dependence, improve air quality and expand alternative fuel use and technology.
- In January 2024, the Gastonia City Council approved a 36-month contract to transition from fixed bus routes to an on-demand transit model known as "microtransit." The previous fixed-route system faced challenges such as limited service areas, long wait times, an aging fleet and insufficient access to bus stops. The microtransit service, GoGastonia, promises on-demand, curb-to-curb access similar to rideshare services, aiming to address these issues more efficiently. Like private rideshare services, GoGastonia allows riders to book and pay for trips online using personal computers or mobile devices. Riders are typically picked up at their preferred location and taken to their desired destination, providing a curb-to-curb service.

- **Aging in Action Award: Carrie Black**

- Awarded to those who serve older and disabled adults so that they can age with choice, dignity and independence.
- Carrie Black founded Integrity Home Mobility, Inc. in 2020 after recognizing a significant need while working as a physical therapist assistant in a home care setting. She obtained a general contractor license and merged her healthcare background with construction knowledge to establish a full-service business. The company offers product installation, home modification remodeling, essential home repair services and fall prevention education. Since April 2023, Integrity Home Mobility, Inc. has assisted over 270 clients enrolled in Centralina's aging programs. The services she provides help individuals live safely and independently in their homes, reducing the risk of injury and hospitalization.

- **Aging in Action Award: Council on Aging in Union County**

- Awarded to those who serve older and disabled adults so that they can age with choice, dignity and independence.
- In direct response to the challenges associated with preventable loss of life due to home fires and falls, Council on Aging in Union County piloted a new program dedicated to evidence-based safety strategies specifically aligned with the needs of older adults. Initially endorsed through ARPA funding, the Seniors Living in Place program's success has exceeded the 18-month pilot period and is now established as a permanent resource for older adults in Union County. Older residents can call on the program to help with home repairs and improvements in addition to requesting emergency response equipment.

- **James D. Prosser Excellence in Government Leadership Award: Michael Ferris**

- Awarded to an individual who exemplifies and promotes excellence in government, outstanding leadership and high ethical standards.
- Michael Ferris has exemplified the qualities of excellence throughout his nearly 30 years of service to the City of Albemarle. Mr. Ferris's career is a testament to creative problem-solving, visionary leadership and a deep commitment to ethical standards that has left a lasting impact on both the community and the organization he led. Beginning his tenure with Albemarle in 1997 as Assistant City Manager and serving as City Manager from 2014 until his retirement in February 2024, Mr. Ferris played a pivotal role in transforming the

city from a former textile mill town into a vibrant and modern community.

"We are excited to celebrate the positive impact of this year's Region of Excellence Award winners," said Geraldine Gardner, Executive Director of Centralina. "From individual examples of leadership to innovative local government action, we are proud to lift up examples of great work across our region."

### **About Centralina**

Centralina Regional Council is a public organization that was established to serve the needs of the greater Charlotte region, including Anson, Cabarrus, Gaston, Lincoln, Iredell, Mecklenburg, Rowan, Stanly and Union counties. Its mission is to lead regional collaboration and spark local action to expand opportunity and improve quality of life. The organization is governed by a Board of Delegates, comprised of local government members, and is one of 16 regional councils in North Carolina enabled by the General Assembly. For more information, visit [www.centralina.org](http://www.centralina.org).

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