

2024 Year End Report

...showcasing activities and accomplishments of departments and offices within Rutherford County Government.



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RUTHERFORD
EST. COUNTY, NC 1779

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Another year has come and gone, and we would like to share highlights of events, activities, and programming showcasing accomplishments of all County departments and offices.

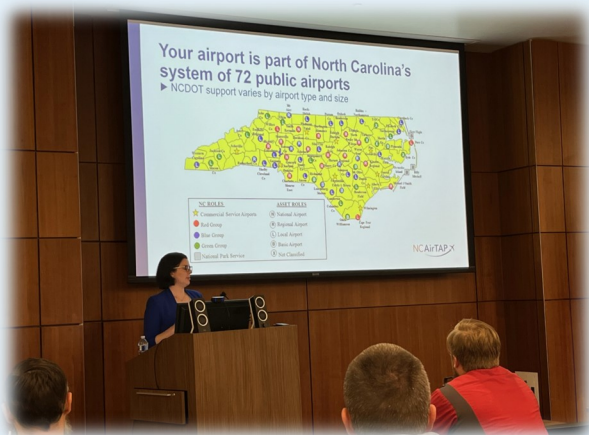
The service from every County employee and the impact on Rutherford County during 2024 has been outstanding. Each department has shown their dedication and commitment to serving and improving the quality of life in our County. Please enjoy each featured County department.

Airport

- Lighting Rehab Project Final Inspection



- Comprehensive Annual Planning Meeting in Raleigh, NC with Chairman Benfield
- Water meter issues resolved with installation of a new meter
- Fuel seal issue on the 100LL fuel truck
- NCairTap class at the Charlotte Douglas International Airport - Speaker: former NCDCA Director Becca Gallas



- GIS training at the Tax Office
- Road repairs where powerline was placed underground for aircraft safety



- March 18th Airport Budget Meeting
- April NCAA (North Carolina Airport Association) Annual Conference



- Hangar door repaired by the Maintenance Department
- NCHART (North Carolina Helicopter Aquatic Rescue Team) training in Lake Lure



- Highway Patrol stopping in for fuel at the RC Airport.



- May 3-4, 2024 Boy Scouts Camporee and Aviation Merit Badge Day



Airport continued

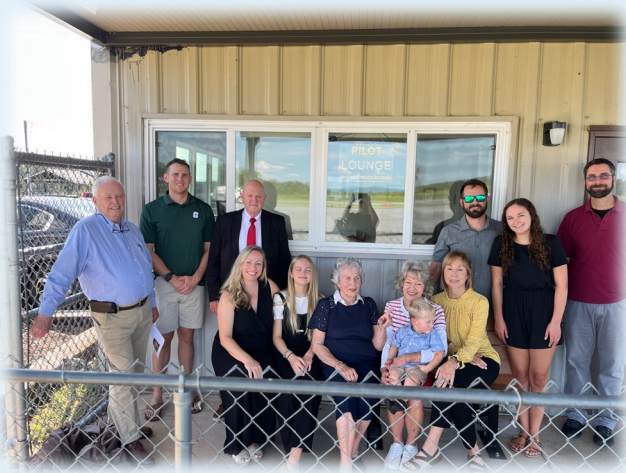
- Runway Obstruction Survey
- Eaton Corporation Executive Jet



- September 27 - October 21, 2024 Helene Rescue/Relief/Recovery Operations



- Bench Dedication Ceremony for Edward N. Washburn - A veteran of the USAF and a graduate of Wofford College, Mr. Washburn served on the RC Airport Authority for almost 20 years.



- Generator training for the new lighting generator
- Newly refurbished Jet-A fuel truck from Titan Aviation Fuels



- NCDOA conducted Hangar Study
- Transient jet taking off from Runway One



- Leadership Rutherford Group Visit
- November 2, 2024 First Annual Open House Fly-In Community Event



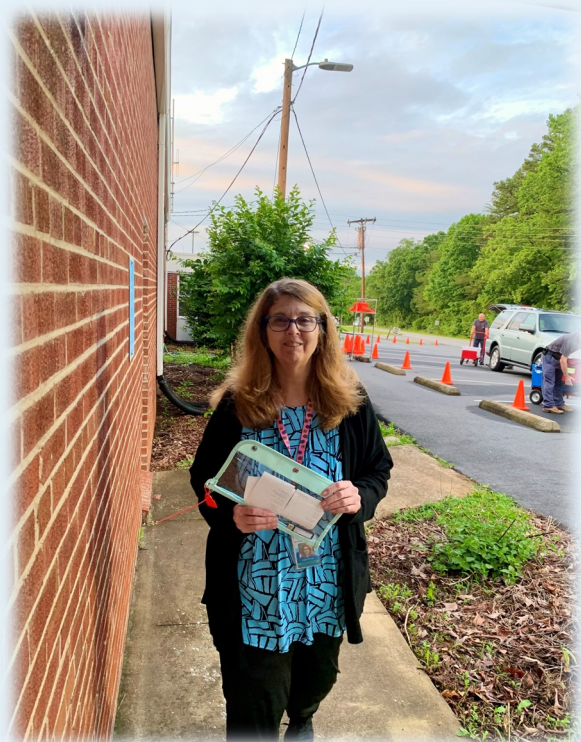
- NCDOA Helene After Action Workshop at the Hickory Airport
- Rutherford County Airport Annual Planning Meeting

Board of Elections

- The Elections Office had a busy General Election with 72.97% turnout. The majority of voters showed up at Early Voting.
- January 31, 2024, Board of Elections Director Dawn Lovelace (left), along with Senior Elections Specialist Clay Randall (right), demonstrated how the new voting machines work for members of the public and press. Dawn explained the process of casting ballots, how they are collected and tabulated. She stated, *"We want to assure the public that elections in North Carolina are secure."*
- In November, all 100 counties conducted a full machine recount in the Supreme Court Associate Justice Seat 6 contest. This required 10 teams of two bi-partisan workers to refeed all 34,802 ballots cast in the election into the tabulators. No significant differences were found.
- November 26, the State Board of Elections unanimously certified the results of the 2024 general election in NC ensuring the ballots of more than 5.7 million voters were counted.
- In December, after the State Board received a request for a hand recount in a random sample of precincts in the statewide election for NC Supreme Court Associate Justice Seat 6, the county conducted their hand to eye recount with no significant changes. The State Board determined there were not enough changes in vote totals in either of the recounts to order a full hand recount of all ballots, and the winner of the race was determined to be Democrat Allison Riggs.
- After a busy season, the board is busy securing all election documents and has begun to process all voter updates and new registrations.
- The Board of Elections office would like to thank all the election workers who have worked tirelessly to make this election a success. (Pictured right: Election workers' training)



- Voting results being delivered to the Board of Elections (pictured left).



- Angela Rhymer bringing voting results to the office (pictured right).
- Early voting began on October 17 and ended on November 2, 2024.
- Election Day was November 5, 2024

Building Inspections

The Building Inspections Department had a productive year with 207 new house starts and 107 mobile homes. Total permit fees were \$626,822, which included 2,774 permits issued. Project cost of all permit jobs came in at \$148,276,976 and total inspections completed were 27,175.

The County inspectors are staying busy doing inspections on new constructions, remodels, service upgrades and HVAC change outs.



Several of our inspectors are still attending classes, taking their state exams, and gaining certifications. Over the past year, Joey Turrubiarte (**pictured above left**) received his Level II Mechanical and Level III Building certifications.

Jeremy Hill (**pictured above middle**) gained his Level II certification in Mechanical & Plumbing.

Connor Hensley (**pictured above right**) gained his Building & Electrical Level I certification.

Caleb Wilson (**pictured left**) gained his Level III in Fire.

Congratulations to these inspectors!

All the credit goes to my staff. I want to personally thank them for the hard work they have put in this year. From Ms. Ruth Sams overseeing the office and all permits issued throughout the year, to Joey who wears multiple hats as the County Fire Inspector and helps Ruth in the office with permitting duties. Inspectors Connor Hensley, Caleb Wilson, Lee Pace and Jeremey Hill have been pushed this year with the number of inspections conducted, and with the effects of Hurricane Helene, which will trickle over to next year. They have been up to the challenge and then some. I could not ask any more of this group.

When a new building is constructed, inspections are a legal requirement in the United States. Regardless of whether a building is residential, commercial, or industrial in nature, proper inspections ensure the safety and structural integrity of the building itself.

Yes, "code enforcement" is often considered a thankless job. While the inspectors play a crucial role in maintaining community standards and safety by enforcing building codes and regulations, they frequently face negative reactions from property owners who are required to make repairs or address violations, even when the issues are necessary to address for the greater good of the neighborhood. The inspectors often receive complaints and criticism even when doing their job properly, but we appreciate their dedication and great service to the County.

We wish you a very Happy New Year!

Director Shane Dotson

Communications Center (911)

Rutherford County Emergency Communications Center had a busy and eventful year. Our staff were put through some very stressful days and events, such as Hurricane Helene, etc. Over the course of this year, we have processed the following analytics:

- We have hired new employees who are excelling in their role with this team - Arthur Sneed, Ashley Kocher Isabella Delagarza.
- We have appointed a couple employees - Brooke Bryant to Shift Supervisor, Bryana Dockery to Assistant Shift Supervisor, Malikka Hutchins to Shift Supervisor, Tina Smith to Assistant Supervisor, and Laurel Messer to Training Coordinator.
- Director Scott Schiefelbein attended the NC 911 Board meeting on December 6, 2024 in Raleigh, and received the Certificate of Recognition for the Rutherford County 911 Center's response to 2024 Hurricane Helene.

As the director, I am very thankful for this team of dedicated employees working each day to help keep Rutherford County safe for all those that live and visit our area. I cannot thank our staff enough and wish for them to continue to be with us through the next year.

Thank you,

Director Scott Schiefelbein

911 processed phone calls (95.62% answered within 10 seconds)	49,079
Administrative phone calls (97.30% answered within 10 seconds)	89,734
	Total 138,813
Dispatched Calls for Service Per Agency	
Rutherford County Sheriff	44,613
Forest City Police	15,923
Rutherfordton Police	10,529
Spindale Police	15,199
Lake Lure Police	1,895
Rutherford County Animal Services	1,638
Emergency Medical Services (EMS)	15,835
Rutherford County Fire Departments	9,938
Total	115,570

Cooperative Extension

Horticulture and Agriculture Extension

Extension hosted a Farmer's Breakfast in February with over 70 participants.



We held a Bradford Pear Bounty event to encourage homeowners to remove their invasive Bradford Pear trees, bring us a photo, and receive a free replacement native tree.

Every two years we host a pesticide and chemical recycling collection day. The NCDCA park in our lot and accept labeled expired insecticides and pesticides. Be on the lookout for another one in 2026.

Eleven new Extension Master Gardener Volunteers graduated from our 14-week course held between January and April. Each summer, Master Gardener Volunteers and our summer intern lead garden lessons at the Grahamtown Youth Camp.

In September we hosted another breakfast for only Women in Ag. Our speaker was Jennifer Badger from Empowering Mountain Food Systems Project.

An outdoor workshop on worm farming, taught by Sallie Smith of Green Hill Worm Farm, was well attended.

Other courses open to the public in 2024 were pesticide recertification class, how to grow herbs, growing cool season cover crops and winter vegetables.



Cooperative Extension continued

The Rutherford County Food Council recently wanted to get all the county's food security organizations together. Pantries and soup kitchens were invited to come to a social to discuss their needs and share information.



We collaborated with ICC's Small Business Center and one of our Agribusiness area specialized agents to offer a half-day workshop, *So, You Want to Be a Farmer?* This was attended by interested property owners, full of questions, who are thinking about diving into agriculture as a source of revenue.

Family and Consumer Science Program

- Extension and Community Association West District Day where we celebrated our wonderful ECA volunteers in the West District.
- Growing and Using Herbs for Culinary and Medicinal Purposes - 22 participants learned to grow and use a variety of herbs for culinary and medicinal purposes.
- Life with Bees class had 8 participants that learned about beginner beekeeping and how to make beeswax food wrappers.



- A variety of canning classes were offered. Everything from strawberry jam to chicken! Cooperative Extension assisted a total of 32 people learn to preserve through boiling water and pressure canning. One participant even went on to win a 1st place ribbon in the Mountain State Fair with her pickled relish.



- Cooperative Extension does a program at our Farmer's Markets during the summer. We accept produce donations and then distribute to participating food pantries in the county. We were able to donate over 625 lbs of local produce to 7 Rutherford County pantries.
- The Homemade Pasta workshop was a huge success with 22 participants.
- Relief work in Rutherford, McDowell and Yancey County post Hurricane Helene. Hundreds of individuals were assisted at distribution sites. 2,600 meals provided through a combination of a soup kitchen that was established in the initial days following the storm as well as at a makeshift kitchen in Pensacola Valley, one of the hardest hit areas in WNC.
- Yeast Bread Class where we learned to make hamburger buns, hotdog buns and artisan loaves of bread.
- Women's Ag Breakfast was a huge success.
- Pantry Meet and Greet Holiday Social brought pantry and 'soup kitchen' volunteers together to discuss challenges and successes they have experienced.



Cooperative Extension continued

4-H Program

Ten youth participated in the district-level 4-H Horse Bowl Contest. The Mixed-Age team placed first and the Junior team placed second in the district competition. Both teams, along with the Senior team, advanced to state competition with 15 youth participating.

The Mixed team placed fourth in the state competition. These teams practiced 2-3 times each week in preparation for this event.

Sixteen youth participated in the state 4-H Hippology contest in Raleigh. Hippology is the study of all things equine-related and has several identification stations (breeds, color patterns, tools tack, equipment, feeds, etc.), along with a team problem. The Junior team placed first overall and in the team problem. Several individuals placed in the top ten in the various divisions of the contest. Numerous practices along with a mock contest were held to prepare for this competition.



STEM

Fourth graders from various elementary schools have participated in school enrichment programs on electricity. They learned about circuits and electrical distribution, as well as safety around electricity. Students from Forrest Hunt and Harris requested lessons on forces and motion. A series of hands-on lessons were taught to allow students to understand the concept of speed, movement, energy, and motion.

Classrooms were able to witness the metamorphic process from a caterpillar larva into an adult caterpillar, then into a chrysalis, then finally into a beautiful adult butterfly. Approximately 100 students participated in this project before releasing their butterflies into the wild.

Summer Fun classes and field trips were held including Babysitting, Linville Caverns, Charlotte Motor Speedway, Fishing, Sewing, Blueberries (harvesting to cooking), Candy Making, and more.



The Magic of Electricity Spin Club met weekly January through March. Ten youth participated in the club where they learned electrical safety, about electrical distribution, basics of circuits, and more.



Eight elementary schools participated in our Fishing Program in the spring of 2024. Approximately 350 youth attended. We also had eleven students from the East High School EC class to attend. Nearly 75% of the students were able to catch at least one fish during their day of fishing. Many students caught their first fish and made memories to last a lifetime (pictured above right column).



Service projects conducted throughout the year included park clean-up with Keep Rutherford County Beautiful, collecting baby clothes for Mosaic Hope, putting out flags for Veteran's Day, planting blueberry plants, making blankets, and collecting and sorting donations for hurricane victims.

Cooperative Extension continued

EFNEP (Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program)

EFNEP offers free nutrition classes to help families and youth cook healthy meals at home, be more active, save money on food costs, and handle food safely. EFNEP works with adults with limited resources in our County and aims to provide hands-on instruction to both youth and adult participants.

For 2024, the EFNEP program has retained its previous partnerships and expanded its reach within our county.

EFNEP has partnered with several RC schools. Due to the hurricane, there was a small gap in programming due to school closures. During that time the EFNEP teacher helped load, translate, and organize donated food at the health department. She also volunteered a full work day to help translate English/Spanish for community members applying for D-SNAP where she helped translate over 50 conversations and forms. There have been 560 Rutherford County students who have participated in the EFNEP Program so far this year and many more classes have signed up for upcoming months.

Youth in our County had the following improvements.

- **Diet Quality** - 85% children and youth improve their abilities to choose foods according to Federal Dietary Recommendations or gain knowledge.
- **Food Safety** - 53% children and youth use safe food handling practices more often or gain knowledge.
- **Physical Activity** - 44% children and youth improve their physical activity practices or gain knowledge.

Volunteers have donated 195 hours to this program valued at \$4,700 dollars, presented at the 2024 NC Shape Conference, established partnerships with outreach programs to better assist our community, received a \$4,000 grant from RHI for program supply needs, and represented our County and district for statewide EFNEP quarterly meetings.

Livestock Educational Programming

- Educational efforts in value-added marketing were continued through networking with the Mountain Cattle Alliance, East Tennessee Cattle Alliance and Shelby Cattle Alliance. Cattle marketed through the Mountain Cattle Alliance alone in 2024 were valued at \$1,500,000. These producers received on-farm visits from Cooperative Extension and educational materials/advice in the areas of animal health, nutrition, animal handling, genetics and value-added marketing.

- Numerous phone consultations and site visits were completed with new and beginning landowners who are planning to raise livestock in order to feed their families and/or become involved in production agriculture.
- Hosted a bull breeding soundness exam day for Rutherford County cattle producers at the Rutherford County Livestock Educational Facility. This has a tremendous economic impact on cattle operations due to the potential for loss of calf crop. A total of 12 bulls were tested for breeding soundness with a potential economic impact of \$487,500 in calf crop sales.
- Conducted a Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) workshop for producers in order to discuss the importance of responsible cattle management. The mission of BQA is to maximize consumer confidence in, and acceptance of, beef by focusing the producer's attention to daily production practices that influence the safety, wholesomeness and quality of beef and beef products. Also presented BQA educational sessions at the NC Cattlemen's Conference.
- Worked with other Extension agents in the west district to hold the WNC Regional Beef Conference in conjunction with the WNC Performance Tested Bull Sale. Educational topics were on winter feeding and breeding seasons for the cow herd.
- Assistance to livestock producers affected by Hurricane Helene has been an on-going activity and will continue well into the winter to get these farmers what they need.



County Manager and Commissioners

The County Manager and Commissioners wish each of you a happy and healthy New Year and sincerely hope that 2025 will bring a blessed and prosperous year!



At the December 2024 Board of Commissioners' meeting, Commissioner Bryan King was elected to continue to serve as board chairman and Commissioner Alan Toney as vice chairman.

In December, Hunter Haynes (pictured below) and Donnie Haulk (pictured below) were sworn in as the new county commissioners.



Commissioner Hunter Haynes



Bryan King



Alan Toney



Commissioner Donnie Haulk

Rutherford County Commissioners, Greg Lovelace and David Hunt, were recognized at the November meeting for their impactful contributions and years of dedication. Many projects were completed under their terms, impactful decisions to help lower unemployment, and numerous other acts of service. Thank you, Commissioner Lovelace and Commissioner Hunt. Your expertise and contributions have made Rutherford County the thriving community it is today.



2024 Highlights and Accomplishments

- Interlocal Agreement Between Foothills Health District and Rutherford County - Foothills Health District assumed responsibility of the management and operation of the Animal Control Department.
- Renovations to Rutherford County Detention Center
- Design work, construction, and renovations of the 145 College Avenue facility
- Expenditure of Opioid Settlement Funds Recipients: Rutherford Regional Hospital, Preferred Choice, and United Way
- Four percent COLA to adjust wages of County employees.
- Approvals for Industrial Developments
- RC Board of Education declared a certain portion of the old R-S Middle School Property as surplus.
- Appointments to Boards and Commissions
- Certificate of Recognition from American Red Cross
- FEMA Public Assistance
- \$25,000 grant from Duke Energy for Swift Water Rescue Equipment

- NCACC Legislative Conference (Commissioner Benfield pictured below left)



- Child Abuse Awareness Month - The commissioners signed a Proclamation at the April Board of Commissioners' meeting declaring April as Child Abuse Awareness Month for Rutherford County. (Pictured left I-r: DSS Director Dee Hunt, Commissioner Bryan King, Family Resources Executive Director Sherry Bright)



- Attended many meetings and various conferences.
- Operation Green Light - The North Carolina Association of County Commissioners promoted an initiative called Operation Green Light which salutes the service of military veterans statewide and across the country by lighting county buildings and infrastructure green from November 4th to November 11th.



- Clerk to the Board of Commissioners Week - A resolution was presented for the Board's consideration at the May meeting to recognize May 4 - 11, 2024 as Clerks to the Board of Commissioners Week. (Pictured I-r: Clerk to the Board Hazel Haynes and Deputy Clerk Kim Aldridge)



County Manager and Commissioners continued

Department Head Christmas Breakfast hosted by County Manager Steve Garrison and wife Tonya.



Chairman Bryan King swears in Commissioner Michael Benfield to Isothermal Board of Trustees
December 17, 2024



County Manager and Commissioners continued

County Manager Steve Garrison, Foothills Health District Director Karen Powell, along with other County staff provided assistance at the community food distribution drive-thru on November 1, 2024.



NC Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) government relations team met with local, state and federal government officials in Morganton, NC on November 8, 2024 to discuss Hurricane Helene recovery efforts and identify top priority needs.



County Commissioners, County Manager, County Attorney, Finance Director, and others gathered for a Budget Workshop on May 20, 2024 to discuss the proposed County budget (pictured below).



Thermal Belt Rail Trail corporate sponsors and other local leaders gathered in Spindale on September 3, 2024 for the unveiling of an artwork exhibit along the trail. TBRT partners have identified areas slated for improvement along the trail and have enhanced by including public art. Several of Rutherford County Manager Steve Garrison's paintings are displayed on the highly-visible section near East Main and Callahan Koon Road. **Pictured** is County Manager Garrison recognized at the ribbon-cutting ceremony for his amazing work.



Emergency Management

2024 has been a year of challenges and triumphs for Rutherford County EMS. Our team has demonstrated resilience, professionalism, and camaraderie throughout the year. Below, we celebrate the accomplishments, milestones, and moments that have shaped our year.

Personal and Professional Achievements

We are incredibly proud of our staff members who have reached significant milestones this year:

- Cody Brackett, Paramedic and Field Training Officer, completed his Tactical Medical Provider certification.
- Luke Jenkins, Paramedic and Operations Supervisor, completed the UNC EMS Management Institute.
- Several individuals completed the Paramedic program through Isothermal Community College after dedicating a year to their education. Some have already earned their state credentials, while others are preparing to test. Congratulations to:

Shana Boggs	Cecilia Libby
Alaina Dunn	Alan Mejia
Reagan Govern	Jordan Radford
Emma Langley	Justin Young

Family Milestones

We celebrated new life this year!

- Ashley Hudson, A-shift paramedic, and her husband welcomed a baby boy in February.
- Tristan Roos, part-time medic, and his wife welcomed a baby boy just days later. Both families are thriving and preparing for their first Christmas with their little ones.

Training and Development

In January, we welcomed Lori Migala as our new Training Officer. Lori has invigorated our training program, helping staff enhance their skills and knowledge. Her dedication is making a tangible impact, and we are grateful for her leadership.

Celebrations and Recognitions

In May, we celebrated EMS Week with our annual picnic and festivities. We were proud to recognize Christian Mooney as our Paramedic of the Year—a well-deserved honor! EMS staff was recognized during the May Board of Commissioners meeting (pictured I-r: Carl McKnight, Kaleb Johnson, Phillip Hill, Lori Migala).



Summer Challenges

The summer months brought intense heat and a busy workload, but our team persevered, providing exceptional care to those in need.

Leadership on Display

Our Assistant Director, Carl McKnight, shared his expertise at two state conferences this year. He presented on leadership, mentoring, and education at both the EMS Administrators summer meeting in August and EMS at Cherokee in October.

Weathering the Storm

On September 27th, our community faced severe weather events that tested us all. The Hurricane Helene response was difficult, long lasting and ongoing. Despite personal hardships, our EMS team rose to the occasion with remarkable courage and commitment:

- Responding in hazardous conditions, even as trees and power lines fell.
- Forming chainsaw teams to clear paths for ambulances.
- Assisting with evacuations, shelter needs, and extended recovery operations.
- Distributing resources and solving emergent issues for the community.

The resilience, teamwork, and sacrifice of our staff during this crisis were extraordinary. Each member played a vital role, and their stories of heroism are too numerous to recount here (pictures on following pages).

To our staff, thank you for your dedication and service. You are the heart of Rutherford County EMS, and we are profoundly proud of you.

New Team Members

This year, we were thrilled to welcome several talented individuals to our team:

Trevor Justice, Paramedic	Kaytlin Galloway, EMT
Alaina Dunn, EMT	Mary Piercy, EMT
Kelly Fiore, EMT	Evan Cross, EMT
Caroline Puett, EMT	Erika Jones, Paramedic
Abbie Hollifield, EMT	Sydni Watson, EMT
Audra Pittman, Paramedic	Wade St. Laurent, Paramedic
Reagan Govern, EMT	Tina Toney, Paramedic

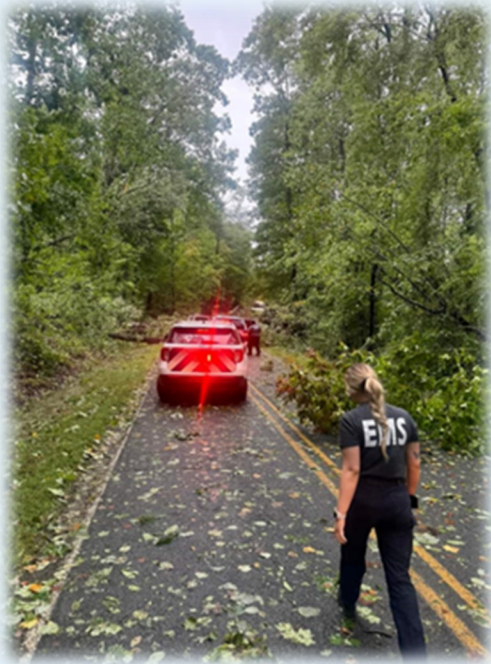
Looking Ahead

As we prepare to welcome 2025, let us take a moment to reflect on all we have accomplished and be grateful for the team of which we are a part. Together we are stronger, and together we will continue to serve our community with excellence. Thank you all for your hard work, resilience, and dedication. Here's to another year of growth and success for Rutherford County EMS!

EMS ran almost 16000 calls for service in the last year. This is a 12% increase over last year and our break down is below: The top five are highlighted.

EMD Complaint	Details
Sick Person	2642
Falls	2021
Transfer/Interfacility/Palliative Care	1861
Breathing Problem	1164
Traffic Accident	1152
Chest Pain (Non-Traumatic)	899
Unconscious/Fainting	690
Psychiatric Problem/Abnormal Behavior/Suicide Attempt	413
Unknown Problem/Person Down	409
No Other Appropriate Choice	406
Hemorrhage/Laceration	362
Heart Problems/AICD	320
Stroke/CVA	317
Convulsions/Seizure	307
Abdominal Pain/Problems	293
Overdose/Poisoning/Ingestion	278
Traumatic Injury	262
Assist Invalid	260
Diabetic Problem	250
Cardiac Arrest/Death	243
Standby	163
Allergic Reaction/Stings	133
Assault	127
Medical Alarm	75
Headache	67
Pregnancy/Childbirth	53
Stab/Gunshot Wound/Penetrating Trauma	38
Choking	37
Heat/Cold Exposure	32
Animal Bite	26
EMS Special Service	23
Altered Mental Status	19
Back Pain (Non-Traumatic)	16
Burns/Explosion	15
Fire	13
Eye Problem/Injury	11
Well Person Check	9
Drowning/Diving/SCUBA Accident	4
Vomiting	4
Automated Crash Notification	3
Airmedical Transport	2
Carbon Monoxide/Hazmat/Inhalation/CBRN	2
Healthcare Professional/Admission	2
Pandemic/Epidemic/Outbreak	2
Electrocution/Lightning	1
Industrial Accident/Inaccessible Incident/Other Entrapments (non-vehicle)	1
Nausea	1

Emergency Management continued



Finance

The Finance Office had a busy 2024 year supporting the County Departments and Management. The office received the Certificate of Achievement for Financial Excellence in Financial Reporting for its annual comprehensive financial report (ACFR) for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2023. **Pictured left to right back row:** Commissioner David Hunt, Commissioner Michael Benfield, Vice Chairman Alan Toney, and Commissioner Greg Lovelace; **front row:** Chairman Bryan King, Finance Director Paula Roach, Janet Searcy and Holly Keever.



The 2024 annual audits will be completed in the upcoming month for the County and the Tourism Development Authority. In 2024, the office also processed almost 15,000 invoices for the departments and payroll for over 675 employees during the year. The Finance Office continues to work closely with Public Works/Planning to update Capital Facility Plans. Our team has also had additional responsibilities as a result of ARPA reporting, State Appropriation SCIF grants, and other programs as a result of the American Rescue Plan, construction of the new School Transportation and Maintenance Facility, and most recently, Tropical Storm Helene - FEMA programs, including debris management and other FEMA reimbursable expenses incurred by the County.

Fire Marshal

The Rutherford County Fire Marshal's Office and Emergency Management has had a very busy year with fire investigations, Emergency Operation Center activation (Hurricane Helene), special events (town festivals, statewide drills, local drills, and special funerals), missing persons, resource requests, conferences and forums.



Human Resources

From the pen of Director Debra Conner:

This year has been a busy and productive year for Human Resources. Workforce availability has increased and the County has filled and retained most open positions.

2024 Duties and Accomplishments:

- Worked with County departments, Finance and County Manager to gather requests for FY2024-2025 budget.
- HR Director served as president of the HR Association group for 2023/24. Served as president for HR Onboarding/Safety Coordinator 2024/25.
- Attended monthly JCPC meetings.
- HR staff assisted with administrative duties during Hurricane Helene and assisted the Airport during this time. Worked alongside County Manager and Finance Director to implement a one-time overtime payout for Exempt staff that worked long and continuous hours during Hurricane Helene recovery.
- HR Director served as Chair of the JCPC Allocation Committee and Monitoring Committee.
- Worked with NCACC to sponsor several training courses such as Defensive Driver training, Sexual Harassment training, Leadership, Worker Comp Rules and Regulations, and OSHA Standards.
- Continue to attend yearly training for Personnel Law, FMLA, FLSA, and other functions that impact the services provided by the department.
- Worked with ICC to offer inhouse supervisory and department head level training courses.
- Implemented the Personal Exempt Leave for exempt employees.
- Entered payroll information for over 700 employees each month.
- Implemented 4% COLA increase and multiple budget changes.
- HR staff attended trainings on the change over to Aetna from State Health Plan.
- Implemented longevity pay November 2024.
- Performance reviews for all departments were completed.
- Implemented 2024 United Way contributions and conducted 2025 United Way Campaign.
- Completed SHP 1095 information for all employees and open enrollment changes.
- Updated emergency contact information for all employees.
- Served on Opioid Settlement Funds Committee.
- Attended NCACC Regional meetings.
- Updated HR Training Library.
- Attended several Chamber of Commerce events, as well as several job fairs.
- Completed EEO4 report.
- Met with Workers Comp auditor for annual review.
- HR received Safety award for 20th Consecutive year (**pictured below**).



- HR staff was recognized by the American Red Cross.
- Attended webinars: "Future of Public Sector Retirement and NC Plans Employee Corner" and "Supervising Employee Terminations to Mitigate Post-Termination Risks & Financial Legal Liability".
- Human Resources Department worked closely with County Manager, County Attorney, Animal Control Director and Health Department as the Foothills Health District took over the operations of the Animal Control facility.
- Attended local Job Fairs.



- Career Day at REACH



Hosted the following events:

- Flu Vaccine Clinic
- American Red Cross Blood Drive
- 401k seminars online
- Retirement seminars
- Tenure Award Reception
- Colonial open enrollment
- State Health Plan enrollment
- Delta Dental open enrollment
- CEC open enrollment
- United Way Campaign

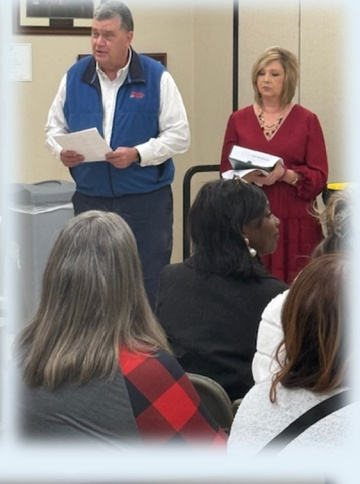
Congratulations to 2024 Retirees:

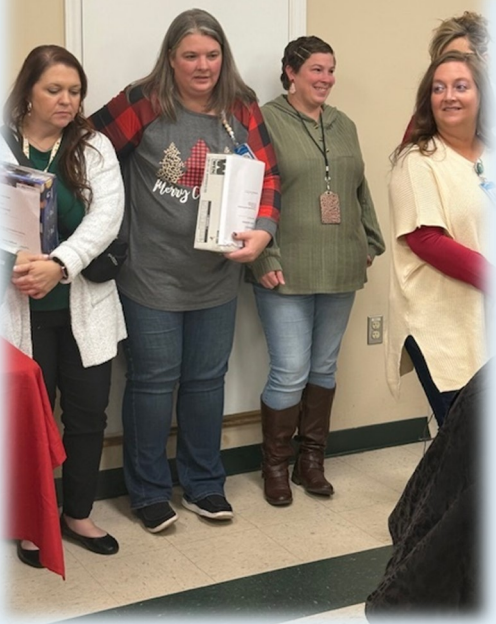
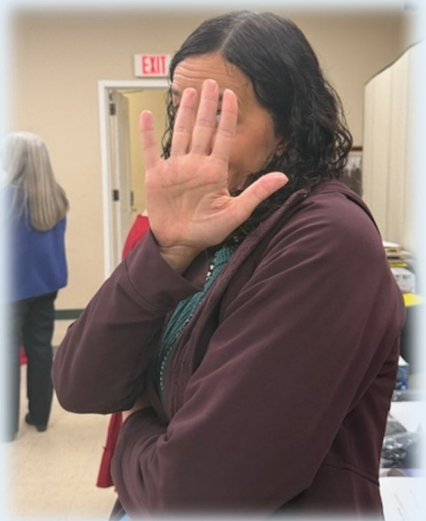
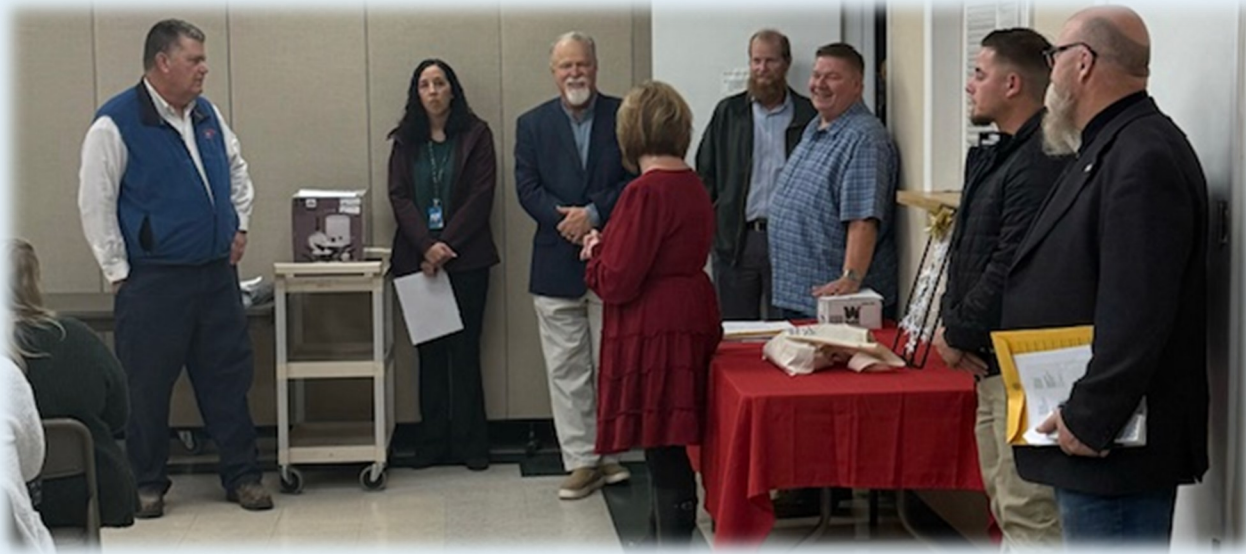
- Greg Walker (EMS)
- Joseph Hunt (DSS)
- Mary Pintuff (Detention)
- Jill Hutchins (DSS)
- Tim Culler (Maintenance)
- Steve Webb (Revenue)
- Frank Ensley (Senior Center)
- Johnny Garland (Solid Waste)
- Revonda Herring (DSS)
- Roy Laughter (Sheriff)
- Lois Shuford (Revenue)
- Jim Upton (Sheriff)
- Terri Mitchell (Senior Center)

2024 Tenure Reception

5 YEAR	NAME	DEPARTMENT
	Devon Raisch	Airport
	Brandon Friend	Detention
	Bryan Smith	Detention
	Christian Mooney	EMS
	Christina Short	EMS
	Cody Brackett	EMS
	Kenneth Steele	EMS
	James Laughter	Information Technology
	James Yorke	Information Technology
	Chasity Baynard	Revenue
	Terri Mitchell	Senior Center
	Billy Wall	Sheriff
	Hunter Haynes	Sheriff
	Jessica Alexander	Sheriff
	Victoria Atkins	Sheriff
	Ashleigh Earle	Social Services
	Ashley Thompson	Social Services
	Brittany Givens	Social Services
	Megan Bridges	Social Services
	Whitney Miller	Social Services
	Charles Davis	Transit
	Mary Mock Higgins	Transit
10 YEAR	NAME	DEPARTMENT
	Lindsay Chapman	Communications
	Tina O'Rourke	Register of Deeds
	Susan Toney	Senior Center
	James Mode	Sheriff
	Wilmer Chavez-Perez	Sheriff
	Elaine Conner	Social Services
	Alicia Holland	Social Services
	Amie Jolley	Social Services
	Katelyn Rumpfelt	Social Services
	Pamela Rhom	Social Services
	Stephanie Mashburn	Social Services
15 YEAR	NAME	DEPARTMENT
	Debra Hollifield	Detention
	Jordan Ray	Sheriff
	Jillian Hoyle	Social Services
	Mary (Kandi) Bridges	Social Services
	Michael Thornton	Social Services
	Pamela Price	Social Services
20 YEAR	NAME	DEPARTMENT
	TJ Boykins	Detention
	Jai Doherty	Information Technology
	Rachel Thomas	Register of Deeds
	Angela Black	Social Services
25 YEAR	Stephanie Long	Library
30 YEAR	Debra Conner	Human Resources
Recognized by County Manager Steve Garrison for 10 YEARS	Michael Benfield	Governing Body
	Bryan King	Governing Body
	Alan Toney	Governing Body

2024 Tenure Reception continued





Information Technology

Information Technology worked on a variety of projects this year. We completed software, hardware and infrastructure upgrades and provided support to all County departments. Below are a few of the highlights from 2024.

- Jai Doherty, Jim Yorke, Tripp Richardson and Ethan Harris attended the NCLGISA (North Carolina Local Government Information Systems Association) conference in Wilmington, NC.
- Attended demos and meetings for new software/hardware solutions for several departments.
- Performed upgrades to the operating systems of our existing server infrastructure and upgraded the hardware components.
- Upgraded software applications for departments.
- Upgraded our desktop virtual environments to provide more resources for the user's virtual desktop experience.
- Performed software patches and updates as needed on all computers and laptops.
- Prepared and auctioned several lots of decommissioned equipment on GovDeals.
- Added and replaced cameras in several locations.
- Upgraded computer and printer hardware at 911 Communications and other departments.
- Assisted in deploying a new 1200 Aero ADS-B plane tracking system for the Airport.
- Worked with Elections preparing the hardware and software for the Presidential Election.
- Helped set up hardware for the Library bookmobile.
- Modernized our Windows 10 deployment to the newest version build.
- Upgraded software for the Interview Room System at the Sheriff's Office.
- Facilitated the hardware installation and implemented a remote solution for the DSnap event for DSS at Isothermal Community College.
- Facilitated EOC migration to the Senior Center for a larger response to the Hurricane events.
- Participated in quick response to county wide system outages during Hurricane Helene.
- Expanded the computer system at the Airport to assist in hurricane relief efforts.

Happy Holidays from the IT Department!



Library

Wow, what a year! We've had over 45,000 people visit our libraries, ask over 9,500 reference questions, and make over 21,000 copies. We've had 1,200 preschool story time attendees, and just over 1,800 visits to our Makerspace area!

We offered 296 children's programs, with about 2,900 attendees. The adult programs had 2,400 attendees, with 299 adult programs offered! We're actively working to increase our teen/young adult programming, and we're happy to say that our attendance for these programs increased by over 100% this year.

Approximately 354 people attended clubs (like crochet, true crime, and cross-stitch), and our volunteers worked just over 350 hours. For people who couldn't get to us, we reached 1,580 people during outreach programs at schools, adult/senior care centers, and community events!

We checked out 47,680 items in our libraries and bookmobile this year (this does not count ebooks and e-audiobooks)! Our most popular title was Holmes, Marple & Poe by James Patterson, in case you were wondering, followed closely by The Women by Kristin Hannah.

We're also so proud of our new bookmobile, which has already made over 190 stops since first hitting the road in July. We've been to schools, community centers, senior living facilities, parks, and church parking lots, and already checked out over 1,200 items!

Okay, enough numbers. I like words better. Thank you to everyone who came by one of our branches this year, whether it was to attend a program, apply for a passport (we've done over 860 of those so far this year), check out a blood pressure kit, send a fax, or just use the Wi-Fi. We appreciate all of you!

I also want to take the time to thank my coworkers. We love our job and we love the libraries, and it shows. We are so excited about all of the amazing resources we're working to provide our community in 2025, so stay tuned!

Amber Saint Clair

Outreach and Marketing Coordinator




Bookmobile in the Rutherfordton & Spindale Christmas Parade

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hobbit hole

"in a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit..."

teens are invited to county library on wednesday, jan. 8th at 4:30pm to create and decorate hobbit hole doors, precious!




REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED!



www.rutherfordcountylibrary.org
County Library // 828-287-6115


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SNOWMAN STEM



Tweens and teens ages 8-14 are invited Haynes Branch on Monday, Jan. 13 at 4:30pm to learn about physical and chemical changes with an exploding snowman!

Registration is required.




www.rutherfordcountylibrary.org
Haynes Branch // 828-288-4039

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2025

The Women of the Vietnam War

Join us at Mountains Branch on Thursday, January 23rd at 6:00pm to listen to Vietnam War nurse Cathie Solomonson share her story.



Cathie also served as the National Volunteer Coordinator for The Vietnam Women's Memorial Project!



www.rutherfordcountylibrary.org
Mountains Branch // 828-287-6392

Public Works and Planning

2024 Significant Accomplishments of the Public Works and Planning Department

The staff in the Planning and Maintenance Department considers it a privilege to serve Rutherford County and pray that each of our elected leaders, colleagues, families and citizens are blessed with a joyful 2025!

The following bullet list is a snapshot of some of our significant accomplishments this year in addition to the daily routine of Planning, GIS, Maintenance, Garage, E911Addressing, Groundskeeping and more.

- Animal Control facility engineering/design work and construction **(pictured right)**
- 145 College Ave former grocery store) building acquisition, engineering/design work and renovation via legislative funds **(pictured below right)**
- Architectural Design and Engineering for the addition of 4th courtroom
- Soccer Complex design and construction in partnership with RHI Legacy
- Detention Center facility improvements, expansion, renovations and updates
- Acquisition and planning the renovation of the old R-S Middle School 6th grade building and cafeteria for use and occupancy of the Sheriff's Office
- Two new Broad River paddle trail parks along Hwy 221 and 221A
- Design and RFQ process to upgrade two restrooms and lab in the Health Department
- Design and construction RFQ process, groundbreaking and construction of the DSS Lighthouse in support of foster children
- Repaved parking lots at the Maintenance/Garage facility and Rutherford Center.
- GIS completed fire inspections for Forest City, Cliffside, Bills Creek, Green Hill and SDO.
- Katie Doherty (GIS) was awarded the Famed Lightered Knot award at the 2024 NCPMA Fall Conference. She also participated in the NC Secretary of State, Land Records Division, Summer Workshop Series at five locations across the state and served as co-chair of the Working Group for NC Seamless Parcels under the Statewide Mapping Advisory Council (SMAC) and the Geographic Information Coordinating Council (GICC). Katie was nominated as the NC Property Mappers Association rep to serve on the LGC.
- Started the GIS ArcPro conversion project with Avineon.
- Three major replacement projects of rooftop HVAC Units, DSS, Detention and Rutherford Center
- DSS replacement carpet throughout Buildings A & B.
- Evans Building offsite storage new roof and gutters
- Fire alarm panel replacement projects at Senior Center and Rutherford Center
- Hurricane Helene cleanup and restoration of County properties, parks, and trails **(pictured right)**
- Replaced backup generator serving Detention.
- Partner with EDA to Market lots at Gateway West
- 268 survey plats reviewed.
- Completed 1,468 work orders and the Garage, completed 1,312 repairs.
- 464 new property addresses issued and 24 new private drives created and named for E911.



Register of Deeds

Records processed and filed this year are as follows:

- Birth Certificates – 150
- Death Certificates - 835
- Marriage Licenses Issued- 382

- Register of Deeds started offering credit card use as another form of payment. This has never been done in the office and it has been a very successful payment option.
- Continued use of electronic death registration system through Vital Records (NCOVR) and started retrieving birth certificates from the same portal offered by NCOVR.
- Received additional grant funds from the State for preservation of historical records. Vital records binders have been ordered to replace older binders. There will be future projects in the office so that restoration and preservation efforts can continue.
- District 1 hosted the annual NCARD Conference in September and it was held in Fontana Dam, NC at the Fontana Village Resort. There are 17 counties in our district, and we all came together to work toward a successful conference. The turnout was great, and everyone enjoyed an informative conference with a beautiful mountain backdrop (pictured left).



- The Register was sworn in on the morning of December 2, 2024 to begin her new term. The ROD staff was also sworn in. Senior Resident Superior Court Judge J. Thomas Davis administered the oaths (pictured above right).
- The ROD office maintains all vital records for the county. Data entry is done daily to ensure information from old births, deaths and marriage licenses is available online in the ROD index. All vital records data is now available starting from 1970 to present day.

WE WISH EVERYONE A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR!



Senior Center

Grants and Funding Accomplishments

The Senior Center secured \$573,188 in grants and funding this year, which included:

- \$355,107 Block Grant for Home-Delivered Meals, Congregate Meals, Transportation, and Senior Center Operations.
- \$14,800 General Purpose Funds for improvements and enhancements.
- \$100,000 NC DOT Grant to fund Senior Center transportation through Rutherford County Transit.
- \$85,735 in Meal Program Supplements:
 - \$40,000 from RHI Legacy Foundation
 - \$20,000 from Gateway Wellness
 - \$25,735 from United Way of Rutherford County
- \$16,948 from NC DOI:
 - \$12,391 for SHIIP (Senior Health Insurance Information Program)
 - \$4,557 for MIPPA (Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act)
- \$598 Duke Energy Grant used to purchase 31 fans for seniors in need.

Program and Service Highlights

Partnership with Robotics Team 5727 - Monthly sessions teaching seniors how to:

- Use smart devices and simplify smartphone settings.
- Navigate delivery services (DoorDash, groceries, medications).
- Master FaceTime and stay connected digitally.

Seniors highly value this intergenerational collaboration.

Senior Games

- 131 participants (44 first-timers).
- Raised \$5,363 through sponsorships and Torch Club.



Farmers' Market Nutrition Program

- Distributed 100 voucher sets valued at \$5,000 to eligible seniors.

SHIIP - Senior Health Insurance Information Program

- Assisted 1,388 Medicare beneficiaries, saving them \$982,095 collectively.
- Acknowledging outstanding volunteers: Amideus & Monica Athougies, and Lynn Reinhardt

Second Harvest Food Bank Partnership

- Distributed 1,406 food boxes through CSFP this year.
- Total distributed since 2018: 11,593 boxes

Fan Distribution Program

- Distributed 31 fans to seniors aged 60+ at risk due to heat-related health concerns.



Senior Center continued

New Bicycle Program for Seniors

- Purchased eight bicycles and helmets using ARPA funds.
- Seniors use the bikes to ride on Rails to Trails, promoting fitness and outdoor recreation.

Cooking Classes for Seniors

- Implemented cooking classes this year using ARPA funds.
- Purchased small cooking appliances, utensils, and food ingredients to support hands-on learning.
- Seniors loved the program, sampling recipes they created, and have requested more classes in the future.



Emergency Operations Center (EOC) Activation

- From September 29 through October 20, 2024, the Senior Center was converted into the Emergency Operations Center (EOC).
- Staff provided critical support, including meals and logistics to those assisting with rescue, cleanup, and EOC operations.
- On October 14, we reopened for senior participants while the EOC continued operating in the dance room.
- Full reopening, including exercise classes, resumed on Monday, October 21.
- A special acknowledgment to our incredible Senior Center staff for their adaptability and commitment during this time.



Meal Service Totals (FY 2023-2024)

Total Meals Served: 83,431

- **Home-Delivered Meals**
 - 48,632 meals served.
 - 203 daily average meals.
 - Served 333 participants throughout the year.
- **Congregate Meals**
 - ◇ 34,799 meals served (breakdown below):
 - ⇒ 28,061 lunches served at the Senior Center dining room.
 - ⇒ 6,738 lunches served at Ellenboro Meal Site.
 - ◇ 145 daily average meals
 - ◇ Served 599 participants throughout the year.

This year, the Senior Center made tremendous strides in serving our seniors through innovative programs, community partnerships, and efficient use of funding. We look forward to building on this success in the coming year.

Social Services

Congratulations to Chris Williams (left), Jill Hutchins (right), Revonda Herring (below left), and Joe Hunt (below right) on their 2024 retirement!



Director Dee Hunt (front row, second from left) graduated from Leadership Rutherford, a program that identifies, engages, and empowers diverse community leaders to use their skills and energy in service to benefit Rutherford County, North Carolina.



Social Services continued

The 2024 World Elder Abuse Awareness Day Event was held at the RC Senior Center on June 17th.



Foster parent recruitment efforts are in full swing. If you know anyone who is interested in becoming a foster parent, please contact the Department of Social Services at 828.287.6165.

Several of the DSS staff attended the Social Services Institute held in Hickory this year.



housing

2023 Priorities

- Community Revitalization
- Deeply Affordable Housing, Senior Housing and Supportive Housing
- Workforce Housing through Impact Investments
- Housing Needs Assessment for Counties/Municipalities

Everyone deserves a stable home. We work with partners on the local, state and federal levels to create more safe shelter, affordable home rentals and home ownership for all.

"We're grateful to be able to minimize trauma by offering children a safe, comfortable bed while awaiting placement. Dogwood not only provided financial support but also offered valuable guidance, resources and expertise that were instrumental in making a positive difference for those we serve."

— Delores Hunt, director, Rutherford County DSS

With a pressing need for more licensed foster parents in WNC, foster children are facing placement delays. Many county Departments of Social Services (DSS) are scrambling for support — sometimes opting to place young people in hotels or even resorting to putting sleeping cots in county office spaces to provide temporary shelter. In 2023, Dogwood made \$14 million in investments to address this challenge, partnering with government agencies, foundations and nonprofit organizations in Clay, McDowell, Rutherford and Swain counties to create emergency transitional housing. One such home in Rutherford County is now under construction just steps from the county DSS facility, providing a safe, stable and secure place for young people to reside while awaiting permanent placement. The home will also provide young people and families with a safe space for visitation and reunification meetings.

Social Services continued

Thank you to everyone who participated in fundraiser for Kim Callahan.



Groundbreaking ceremony for the Lighthouse at Building D



Leon Godlock was elected as Board Chair during 2024.



Soil and Water

2024 has been a year of growth for Rutherford County Soil and Water. The education department has successfully been able to expand into classrooms throughout the County. A total of 40 lessons have been taught on a variety of topics ranging from pumpkins, composting, soil properties, water quality, recycling, as well as teaching about different careers that one might have in Natural Resource Conservation. These lessons were taught all the way from preschool to high school age students.



One big milestone for employee Kayla Upton, Education Specialist (**pictured above**) was completing her Bachelor of Science degree in Agriculture Education.

Rutherford County Soil and Water hosted a meeting for Farm and Forestry landowners that allowed the Soil and Water Foundation, Farms Forever, Foothills Regional Commission and Foothills Conservancy to talk about Conservation Easement. There were about 30 people in attendance.



Rutherford County Soil and Water and Foothills Regional Commission worked together to roll out the Farmland Trust Pilot Program. Between 6 to 10 recipients will be able to receive funding to get their farmland into trust through a grant from the division of Farmland Preservation through North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. This program is important because it helps owners to talk about the succession of their farms while keeping larger groups of land together and not have to worry about splitting up the land into parcels.

Through the devastation that came with Hurricane Helene came the realization that farmers needed help fencing. Brandon Higgins was able to secure a grant from the Soil and Water Foundation providing a post driver for tractor or steer, T-post driver, and a trailer for towing the equipment. Rutherford County, along with six other counties, have been designated as host counties to share equipment with all other adjoining counties and citizens in those counties. This equipment package was placed in the areas determined to be hardest hit by Hurricane Helene.

In programs that Soil and Water offers, \$45,000 has been allocated to help farmers in the community with fencing, wells, water tanks and pipeline. With STRAP fund, \$147,618.74 has been spent to have inspections done on PL-566 Watershed Dams, debris removal on Cleghorn and Cathys Creek, with anticipation of Big Camp Creek to be started in the coming year. On top of normal STRAP funds, we are expecting to have more funds to help for stream cleanup due to Hurricane Helene.

Solid Waste

Material	Weight
MSW/Household Garbage	35,391.18
Construction/Demo Debris	8,643.18
Metal	1,171.73
Recycle	2,748.69
Electronics/TV	33.42
Yard Waste	954.95

2024 Activities and Events

- Reece Beaumont attended the Isothermal Science and Tech Expo to teach 6th graders about landfill implementation and operations.



- Auto-lock doors were installed at the Scale House for added security.
- New signage installed to assist with speed limits, pricing, and directions around the facility.



- Replaced metal on side of Transfer Station and added an additional door to allow for more thorough cleaning.



- Purchased a Bobcat Utility Vehicle for more efficient travel while monitoring Landfill operations, gas/water wells, boundaries, and leachate manholes.



- Director James Kilgo and Angie Wright attended the NC SWANA Conference in Wilmington, NC in September.
- After Hurricane Helene, Solid Waste quickly reopened and the process of cleaning up began...even with no power.



- In October, Solid Waste received approximately 2,172.11 tons of yard waste and storm debris. Southern Disaster Recovery then came in and assisted with picking up brush, grinding the debris, and hauling it to be mixed with dirt and used as cover for the C&D Landfill.



Solid Waste continued

- Solid Waste has implemented a new safety program/team to ensure employees are operating as safely as possible. Safety uniforms and/or safety vests are now required for employees and volunteers.



- Bollards were installed to prevent damage to building and fence.



- Installed new roofs at Danielstown and Shiloh Convenience Centers.



- Front lot was repaired with concrete pad at Solid Waste.



- New power unit installed at Danielstown Convenience Center.



- Finished interior remodel at Hollis Convenience Center and installed new Heat/AC unit.

Tourism

The 2024 calendar year was a busy, yet successful year for the TDA. Occupancy tax receipts continue to grow year over year. However, Rutherford County and Tourism experienced devastation with Hurricane Helene on September 27th. The TDA, with the backing of Rutherford Bound, has created a new brand of 'Back to Beautiful' and is optimistic for the future.

2024 Annual Review

- Promote Tourism Master Plan Success and Collaborations
- Tourism Plan Implementation and Funding



- Maximize Tourism Occupancy Tax Receipts
- Continue to Grow and Develop Relationships with County, Towns, State Representatives, and Stake holders

- Implement TDA Marketing Plan
- Implement Trails and Itinerary Program
- Grow Community Programs/Events



- Develop Rutherford County as A Destination for Events/Competition
- Relocate to Rutherford County

- County-Wide Wayfinding Monitoring Program/Kiosks/ County Welcome Signs
- Research and Develop Rutherford County Agri-Tourism Program
- Enhance and Develop Welcome Center Presence in Lake Lure
- Rutherford County - Keep Rutherford County Beautiful
- Develop/Promote Historical Tourism Sites in Rutherford County



- Provide TDA Staff with Education Opportunities - In 2024, the TDA staff members attended the following conferences: Visit NC 365 Conference, VisitNC Agritourism Conference, NCTTC Conference, NCTIA Conference, NC Main Street Conference, STS Conference, as well as other various conferences and meetings across the state and region. The DIY Tourism Marketing Conference as well as the Outdoor Economy Conference were postponed until 2025 because of Hurricane Helene. In 2024, Welcome Center Manager, Kayley Smith, was a graduate of the Leadership Rutherford class of 2023 -2024. Elizabeth Randall, the Administrative Coordinator, is currently enrolled in the 2024-2025 Leadership Rutherford Class. The TDA is always seeking new opportunities to continue their professional development.
- Strive to develop RCTDA to be one of the leading rural Tourism Organizations in the state of NC

Transit

In 2024, Rutherford County Transit met the growing demands of its community while maintaining financial stability and increasing service efficiency. With steady revenue growth, expanded Medicaid transportation services, and a strategic response to emergencies, Transit continues to be a cornerstone of support for Rutherford County residents. Through leadership, innovation, and dedication, Rutherford County Transit exemplifies excellence in public transportation.



Hurricane Helene Emergency Response and Recovery

- Successfully evacuated over 100 people from the Lake Lure/Chimney Rock area immediately following the hurricane, including high-risk evacuations managed directly by Transit staff and emergency personnel.
- Transit drivers returned to duty despite personal hardships, navigating treacherous roads and continuing evacuation efforts in the days following the storm.
- Delivered meals to seniors and provided transportation for citizens to food distribution sites, ensuring essential services were maintained for the most vulnerable.
- Loaned two Transit vehicles to the National Guard during their deployment in Rutherford County to aid in disaster response efforts.
- Director Kerry Giles served as the County's Public Information Officer, managing communications, providing timely updates, and supporting families searching for loved ones.



Staffing Enhancements

- Welcomed new part-time drivers: Jeannette Meyers, Rhonda Rhyne, Terry Lindsay, Angela Guffey, Tammie Harrill, and Tina Searcy.

- Rehired experienced drivers Bill Humphries, Kim Harrison, and Frankie Tate to meet growing service demands.

Leadership Initiatives

- Implemented daily 10-minute staff meetings to improve communication, address priorities, and resolve ongoing issues.
- Recognized 14 drivers with Safe Driving Awards, representing a combined 73 years of accident-free service, including Bill Morris and Rhonda Williams for 15 years of zero at-fault accidents.



- Fostered morale and team cohesion through events like the annual Thanksgiving lunch and Employee Appreciation Week.

Operational Improvements

- Restored Tri-City Xpress routes to near-normal operations, making adjustments to meet community needs, such as aligning schedules with Isothermal Community College (ICC) class times.
- Conducted a comprehensive route study to evaluate rider destinations and bus stops, preparing for a public hearing to discuss proposed changes.
- Partnered with DaVita Dialysis, DSS, and Pisgah Legal to help dialysis patients apply for Medicaid expansion, ensuring consistent and reliable transportation to medical appointments.

Awards and Honors

- Received the NCPTA 2024 Rural Transit System of the Year Award for exemplary service.
- Director Kerry Giles was elected to the NCPTA Board of Directors.



- Transit Specialist Kyle Connor graduated from the Transportation Leadership Development Course and presented at the NCPTA Conference.

Legislative Advocacy

- Director Giles traveled to Washington, D.C., with the NCPTA Legislative Delegation to secure Hurricane Helene relief funding and advocate for rural transit support.
- Participated in a legislative reception in Raleigh, meeting with elected officials to emphasize the importance of investing in rural transit systems.



Safety and Training

- Conducted monthly safety training on various topics, including ADA sensitivity, emergency procedures, defensive driving, bloodborne pathogen cleanup, and human trafficking awareness.
- Performed random drug and alcohol testing throughout the year to ensure compliance and safety standards.
- Completed annual ride assessments for all drivers, maintaining operational excellence.

Infrastructure and Equipment

- Introduced new vehicles, including lift-equipped vans, center-aisle vans, and LTV buses, replacing aging fleet equipment to improve reliability and rider comfort.
- Updated vehicle branding with new graphics to enhance public visibility.



Financial Growth and Program Expansion

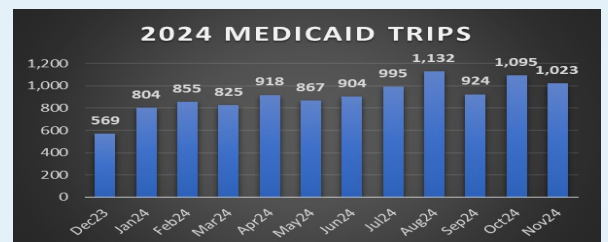
- Increased Medicaid revenue by partnering with Modivcare to become the primary provider for all Rutherford County Medicaid trips starting in September 2024, significantly increasing trip volumes.
- Secured a \$25,000 RHI-Legacy grant to resume transportation for groceries and cancer treatments.
- Launched a 60-day free transportation pilot program to help residents establish stable employment by providing transportation to work.

Community Engagement and Collaboration

- Partnered with ICC to explore transportation options for students and promote services through targeted advertising.
- Collaborated with contract service agencies to transition riders from fixed routes to demand-response services, improving flexibility.
- Worked with Rutherfordton and Spindale on the federal RAISE grant to improve transit access along the corridor between the two towns.
- Highlighted a passenger on the Tri-City Xpress and his dog Emma who both ride Transit to work at Walmart as greeters.



ANNUAL STATISTICS	2024	2023
Total Miles	464,759	383,791
Total Trips	56,968	55,439
Total Unduplicated Passengers	841	697



Veteran Services

Our partnership program completed its eighth year and is continuing to grow and help us serve the veterans of our County. We have our monthly socials on the third Thursday of every month with guest speakers at most meetings. Also, the veterans always enjoy sharing good conversations.

We continue to help veterans by giving out food on a regular basis and as needs arise. This year we have partnered with the Marine Corp League to give out substantial food boxes monthly to veterans and their families.

Jennifer and Susan completed CEUs for continued accreditation through the North Carolina Department of Military and Veteran Affairs. Susan attended the Spring joint conference of the NCDMVA and the North Carolina Association of County Veteran Service Officers at Atlantic Beach. Jennifer attended the Fall conference of the NCDMVA that was held in Cherokee, NC.



A veteran in the community found the certificate for the Medal of Honor given to the family of Bryant Womack in an old house. The RCVSO worked closely with the office of Patrick McHenry to find the proper way to get this back to his family. A ceremony was held in partnership with Isothermal Community College on 10/28/2024 to get the certificate and other memorabilia back to his family. Patrick McHenry, Tim Moore, David Hunt and Margaret Annunziata assisted with welcoming the family and other guests, and returning this certificate back to the family.

On September 21st, we held our 7th Annual End of Summer Bash. Veterans were served pizza, pasta, and dessert. Approximately 75 veterans were in attendance. Every veteran received a tee shirt, and drawings were held for prizes donated by community businesses (pictured below).



Pat completed training to become an accredited VSO with the North Carolina Department of Military and Veteran Affairs. She passed her test and can now do more to serve the veterans.

American Legion 74, Marine Corp League and DAV provided turkeys and hams for our Thanksgiving and Christmas meal boxes. The American Legion donates food each week to the food pantry. We have also had food donations from the DAR, DAC, and Realtors of Rutherford County. Thanks to all of our partners for all that you do to help us help veterans.

We had a wonderful Christmas party for the Veterans on December 11th. Approximately 60 attended and each veteran received a gift bag (pictured right). The local DAR chapter "adopted" two families and provided them with an abundant Christmas.



We continue to help veterans find and apply for benefits. Sometimes the road is long and hard to navigate, but we will not give up. So far in 2024, new claims granted, to include monthly pay and back pay, are at 3.6 million dollars.



County Manager
Steve Garrison

County Commissioners
Bryan A. King, Chairman
Alan Toney, Vice Chairman
Michael Benfield, Commissioner
Hunter Haynes, Commissioner
Donnie Haulk, Commissioner

County Office
Hazel Haynes, Clerk to Board
Kim Aldridge, Deputy Clerk
Richard Williams, County Attorney

Rutherford County
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