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Conference Agenda

Monday, October 19

Afternoon

OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES (*separate registration*)

11 am – 3 pm

Golf Outing

Asheville Municipal Golf Course (9 Holes Only)

Outing Sponsor: **CROMWELL ARCHITECTS ENGINEERS**

Noon – 4 pm

Fly Fishing Excursion

Southern Appalachian Anglers

Excursion Sponsor: **ARCO DESIGN/BUILD**

1 – 4 pm

River Arts District Tour and Experience

Local Cloth and Trakside Studios

1:30 – 4 pm

E-Bike Tour of Downtown Asheville

Flying Bike

2 – 3:30 pm

Industry Tour

Asheville IPEX Silver-Line Plastics

2 – 4 pm

Nature Walk

Asheville Botanical Gardens

Walk Sponsor: **NORTH CAROLINA'S SOUTHEAST**

2:30 – 4 pm

Brewery Tour and Tasting

Highland Brewing Company

Tour Sponsor: **DAN GERLACH LLC**

3 – 4 pm

Bean to Bar Factory Tour

French Broad Chocolates

4 pm

Ballroom Foyer

CONFERENCE REGISTRATION DESK OPENS

Refreshments Sponsor: **ELECTRICITIES OF NORTH CAROLINA**

5:15 – 6 pm

Top of the Plaza – 12th Floor

CONNECTOR'S NETWORK RECEPTION

For Board of Directors, Past Presidents, Emerging Executives, New Members, and Mentorship Program

Reception Sponsor: **DUKE ENERGY**

6 – 7:30 pm

Ballroom / Patio

WELCOMING RECEPTION / NCEDA FOUNDATION SILENT AUCTION

Reception Sponsors: **NCINNOVATION • STRATA CLEAN ENERGY • WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY**

Entertainment Sponsor: **CHOATE CONSTRUCTION COMPANY**

7:30 – 11 pm

Wicked Weed Funkatorium

NCEDA AFTER HOURS GATHERING

Karaoke Sponsor: **ECS SOUTHEAST**

NCEDA 2026 FALL CONFERENCE

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Tuesday, October 20

6 – 7 am

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: GROUP RUN/WALK

Meet in the Renaissance Lobby. A 5k route in downtown Asheville has been selected.

7 am

CONFERENCE REGISTRATION DESK OPENS

7 – 8:30 am

Ballroom

NETWORKING BREAKFAST

Breakfast Sponsors: **365 DEGREE TOTAL MARKETING • SESSLER WRECKING**

7 am – 2 pm

Ballroom Foyer

EXHIBITOR HALL OPEN

8:30 am – 12:45 pm

Ballroom

GENERAL SESSION

Candy Basket Sponsor: **NORTH CAROLINA'S ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES**

Productivity Bell Sponsor: **MVP SOUTHGATE**

Pen Sponsor: **HENDERSON COUNTY PARTNERSHIP FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Note Pad Sponsor: **TERRACON CONSULTANTS**

8:30 – 8:40 am

Welcoming Remarks

JULIE PRUETT

Development Manager – Marlboro Development Team

NCEDA Secretary / Treasurer and Fall Conference Committee Co-Chair

DAVID RAMSEY

Vice President of Strategic Relationships – Landmark Builders

NCEDA Board Member and Fall Conference Committee Co-Chair

8:40 – 8:55 am

Board of Directors Update and Lifetime Service Award Recognition

ANDRÉ LENNON

Group Manager – ESP Associates

NCEDA President

8:55 – 9 am

Building Connections: NCEDA 2026–27 Mentorship Program Announcement

JAMES CARTER

Business Retention & Entrepreneurship Manager – Cabarrus Economic Development

NCEDA Board Member and Emerging Executives Chair

EMILY MARTIN

Manager, Economic Development – Duke Energy

NCEDA Emerging Executives Vice Chair

9 – 9:30 am

Building Community Understanding in NC: A New Competitive Advantage

Learn how to build community understanding and alignment as a competitive advantage in economic development. As North Carolina communities compete in an increasingly complex and scrutinized environment, strong community support can help position them to compete more effectively for investment—beyond site readiness, incentives, and infrastructure.

BETH LAND

President & Founder – Land Strategies

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9:30 – 9:55 am

Building a Future-Ready Workforce: Propel NC—Turning Investment Into Opportunity

Gain insight into the latest legislative funding for Propel NC, explore how the investment will shape its programs and priorities, and prepare for future opportunities created by the expanded funding.

DR. JOHN GOSSETT

President – Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College

DR. LAURA LEATHERWOOD

President – Blue Ridge Community College

9:55 – 10:10 am

Building a Future-Ready Workforce: Inspiring the Next Generation of Manufacturing Talent

Discover the story behind “You Can Make It!,” the Henderson County Partnership’s new children’s book introducing elementary-age students to the world of manufacturing and the exciting career opportunities available in the community. Hear how the idea came to life, how the book was developed, and how this creative approach is helping introduce the next generation to manufacturing careers.

BRITTANY BRADY

President – Henderson County Partnership for Economic Development
NCEDA Immediate Past President

EMILY MARTIN

Economic Development Manager – Duke Energy (formerly with HCPED)

JAKE ROSS

Economic and Workforce Development Coordinator
Henderson County Partnership for Economic Development

SARA SCHMIDT

Director of Industry Relations & Communications
Henderson County Partnership for Economic Development

10:10 – 10:40 am

Networking Break

Networking Break Sponsor: **STRACK INC.**

10:40 – 10:55 am

NCEDA Foundation Silent Auction Countdown and Scholarship Recognition

ANDRÉ LENNON

Group Manager – ESP Associates
NCEDA President

RAUL PERALTA

Senior Vice President – ECS Southeast
NCEDA Foundation Board Member & Silent Auction Committee Chair

CRYSTAL MORPHIS

Founder & CEO – Creative Economic Development Consulting
NCEDA Foundation Board Chair

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10:55 – 11:05 am

Building What's Next: Unveiling the New NCEDA Website

JENN BOSSER

President & CEO – Iredell County Economic Development Corporation
NCEDA Board Member and Marketing & Membership Committee Vice Chair

MARVIN PRICE

Executive Vice President, Economic Development – Greensboro Chamber of Commerce
NCEDA Board Member and Marketing & Membership Committee Chair

11:05 – 11:15 am

Building Industrial Readiness: Strengthening North Carolina's Site Pipeline

Explore how to leverage the expanded NC Selectsite Readiness Program, with insights into the \$25 million investment, changes to the application process, emerging priorities, and what to expect next.

GARRETT WYCKOFF

Product Development Program Manager
Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina

11:15 – 11:45 am

Building Industrial Readiness: Turning Sites Into Opportunity

Navigate the steps to successfully develop an industrial park—from building community and political support to securing funding, gaining site control, completing due diligence, and moving into planning and development. Learn what it takes to advance each stage, what to expect along the way, and where to focus your resources.

DONNY HICKS

Executive Director – Gaston County Economic Development Commission
NCEDA Past President

SCOTT MILLAR

President – Catawba County Economic Development Corporation
NCEDA Past President

11:45 am– Noon

Building the Case for Investment: Insights from EDA

Discover strategies for building stronger applications for investment. Explore what makes a project "investment-worthy," learn what federal funders wish applicants knew, and gain practical insights into what you need to know about EDA funding.

HILLARY SHERMAN

North Carolina Representative – US Economic Development Administration

Noon – 12:10 pm

Building Partnerships for Economic Growth: NCEDA Legislative Update

Explore key economic development wins from the latest legislative session and what they mean for communities across North Carolina, with a focus on the importance of year-round relationships with state legislators and strong local political partnerships.

LEIGH COCKRAM

Director – Rockingham County Economic Development
NCEDA Board Member and Legislative Committee Vice Chair

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12:10 – 12:40 pm

Building Local Political Partnerships: Turning Blind Spots into Bright Spots

Discover practical strategies for building strong relationships with local staff and elected officials—and how those partnerships can help move economic development projects from idea to reality.

CLARK DUNCAN, moderator

Executive Director – Economic Development Coalition for Asheville–Buncombe County
NCEDA Vice President

THE HONORABLE AMANDA EDWARDS

Chair, Buncombe County Board of Commissioners

ZACH WALLACE

Councilmember – City of Marion

Former Vice President of Policy – Asheville Chamber of Commerce

12:40 – 12:45 pm

Close General Session / Move to Luncheon

DAVID RAMSEY

Vice President of Strategic Relationships – Landmark Builders

NCEDA Board Member and Fall Conference Committee Co-Chair

12:45 – 2 pm

Ballroom

LUNCHEON

Luncheon Sponsor: **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COALITION FOR ASHEVILLE–BUNCOMBE COUNTY • NORTH CAROLINA RAILROAD COMPANY**

12:45 – 1:15 pm

Luncheon / Networking

1:15 – 1:55 pm

Luncheon Keynote: Building Leadership with Gratitude

Learn from candid stories of leadership through crisis, loss, and resilience. At the helm of Highland Brewing Company—one of the pioneering craft breweries of the American South, founded by her father, Oscar Wong—Leah shares a deeply personal journey through devastating events and profound loss, and the path toward recovery, peace, and ultimately, joy.

LEAH WONG ASHBURN

Family Owner, President/CEO – Highland Brewing

1:55 – 2 pm

Closing Remarks

JULIE PRUETT

Development Manager – Marlboro Development Team

NCEDA Secretary / Treasurer and Fall Conference Committee Co-Chair

2 pm

CONFERENCE ADJOURNS

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