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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 Trackside 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 Participants
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**

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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
Economic Development Manager– 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

Tuesday, October 20

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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Tuesday, October 20

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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Tuesday, October 20

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

THE HONORABLE 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 Company

1:55 – 2 pm

Closing Remarks

JULIE PRUETT
Development Manager – Marlboro Development Team
NCEDA Secretary / Treasurer and Fall Conference Committee Co-Chair

2 pm

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