

WESTERN PIEDMONT
COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS
NEWSLETTER
JULY 2022



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NEW OPERATING HOURS

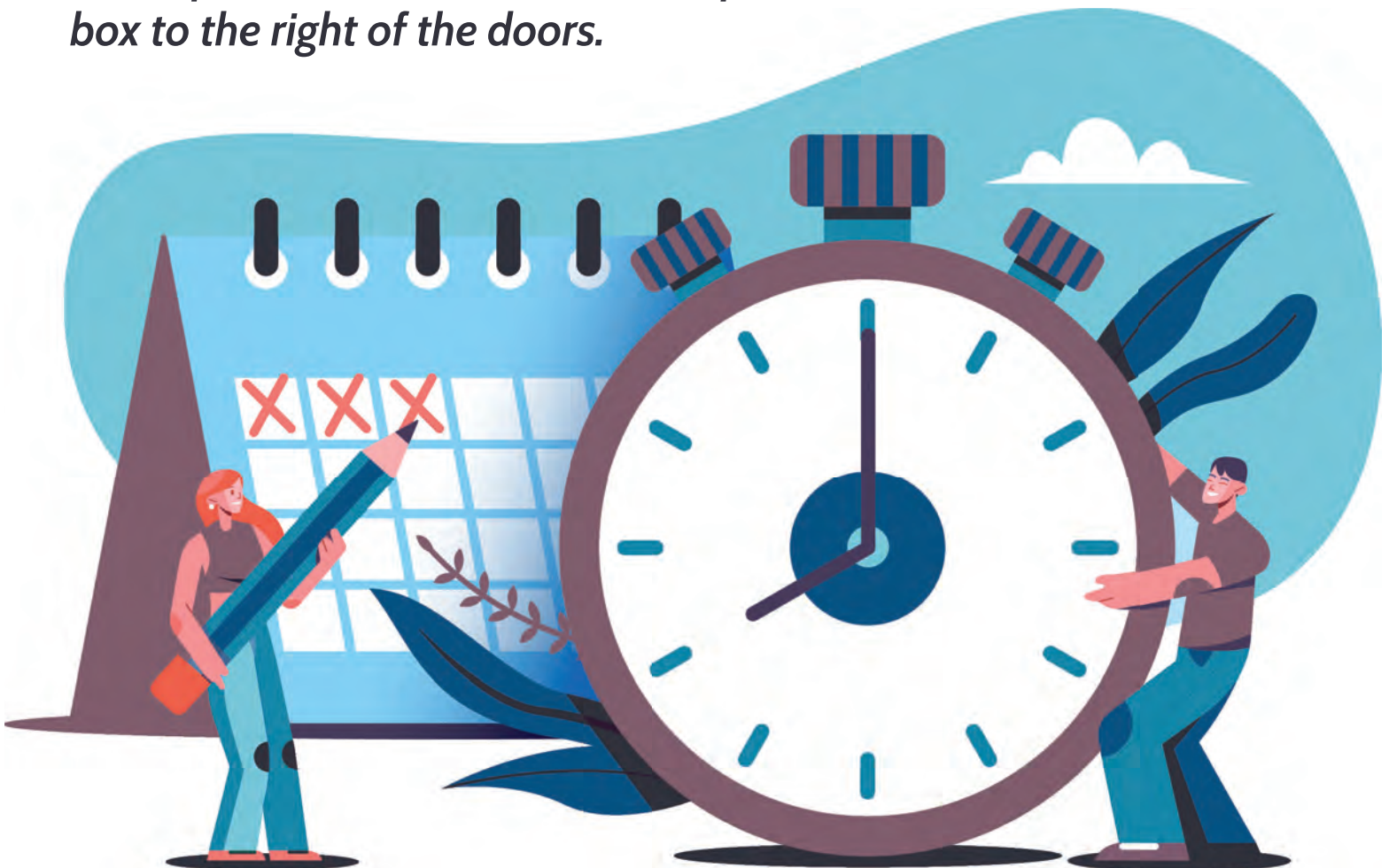
EFFECTIVE AUGUST 1, 2022

THE WPCOG OFFICES ARE CHANGING HOURS OF OPERATION TO:

MONDAY – THURSDAY | 7:30 AM TO 5:30 PM

FRIDAY | 7:30 AM TO 11:30 AM

**If you have documents you need to deliver before or after our operating hours, please leave those in the drop box to the right of the doors.*



Caldwell Leadership Alliance 2022 Graduates

Two WPCOG staff members recently graduated from the Caldwell Leadership Alliance Academy. A dynamic program presented by the Caldwell Chamber of Commerce, the academy is a 17 week program designed to build and enhance leadership skills, provide inside and personal interaction with Caldwell County's government, human services program, education systems, tourism, industry, economic development, quality of life, and much more. Congratulations to Christina Franklin and Matthew Xiong!

Christina Franklin WPCOG Ombudsman

I am grateful that I was given the opportunity to participate in Caldwell Leadership class of 2022. When I first signed up to attend, I really didn't know what to expect. But each week was something new and I found myself excited to attend. Prior to coming to WPCOG I had worked for Caldwell County for 9 years. I thought I knew a great deal about Caldwell County and what it has to offer. I was surprised at the opportunities and resources I didn't know about. Everyone I met while attending the program was excited for the county's potential and growth. Caldwell Leadership was a positive experience for me. If you have the opportunity to attend, take it! And don't be afraid of the fire walk!



Matthew Xiong WPCOG Business Services Liaison

I am honored to be an alum of the Caldwell Leadership Alliance Professional Institute 2022. It was a life changing moment to discover all the great things Caldwell County has to offer. We learned how local governments collaborate to create greater quality of life for all residents in the county. We saw how passionate educators are preparing and equipping the next generation. We toured great businesses that are offering great career opportunities. Most importantly, we learned how to be a leader in our organization and community. Another take away from this experience is that I overcame my fear of walking on hot coal **#firewalkadventures**.



Changes to Bus Routes in Hickory, Conover, and Newton

Article by Brian Horton

Back in 2020, Greenway Public Transportation launched “Catawba Re-Route,” a community-led process to recommend the first potential bus system overhaul in over ten years. Over 100 surveys were collected with many comments requesting expanded service to new destinations, shorter rides, new two-way service, and more frequent service. WPCOG staff helped Greenway develop a cost-neutral plan that reinvests savings from re-routed segments of prior bus routes with little ridership into new service expansion areas. New service areas include new destinations and neighborhoods throughout Hickory, Conover, and Newton. New areas served in Hickory include the SW Hickory Neighborhood Market, Lodge at Hickory apartments, and 26th Ave Dr NE. New two-way service areas in Hickory include Highway 127 in Viewmont, Lenoir-Rhyne Blvd, and Springs Rd NE. New areas in Conover and Newton include shopping and apartments along Boundary St and 321 Business. The resulting bus route changes from this community-led plan started on July 5, 2022.

To learn more, visit the web page at: www.wpcog.org/public-transportation.

Meet Caren Shorthouse, WPCOG Natural Resources Coordinator

Article by Scott Berson

Caren Shorthouse took on a new role this month as the WPCOG Natural Resources Coordinator, in charge of outreach and oversight of the many programs that help keep our water systems healthy, clean and clear.

“My new position will entail a more large-scale approach to watershed protection and management. Some of the project I will work on include stream restorations and grant applications, as well as continuing the stormwater education, outreach, and public involvement programs for contracted cities,” Shorthouse said.

One of her main roles will be coordinating the Water Resources Committee, which is composed of individuals representing local governments, nonprofit organizations, educational institutions and businesses from Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba Counties, and serves as a one-stop-shop for discussing and monitoring water supply and quality issues in the region.

“The current role is primarily educational,” Shorthouse said, “But I am hoping to expand that capacity so elected officials and other concerned people can voice their thoughts about water restoration projects that we can assist on in the future, and local government can become more involved in watershed protection.”

A typical day for her may include reaching out to organizations to set up stormwater education events, checking creeks or riverbanks for possible clean-up events, attending trainings and information briefings about upcoming grants, and writing and following up on grant applications for restoration projects.

“I track outreach numbers and coordinate with city officials as well as COG staff to ensure NPDES permit completion. I also am slowly starting to work on the Air and Water Quality conferences in October by looking for possible topics and speakers,” she said.

“We have an abundance of water here in our region, and with this comes a lot of responsibility. We all need water to survive for various reasons, and the cleaner it stays, the more the systems work together without being diminished - the more we can have healthy and thriving communities. Water is essential to life and by planning for the resource, we can ensure the vitality of our region for years to come.”



Affordable Connectivity Program

Article by Abigail Fleri

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) recently rolled out its Affordable Connectivity Program. This \$14 billion program is aimed at helping low-income households by providing subsidies for internet service. Households that are eligible for the program may receive up to \$30 per month, or if they reside on qualifying tribal lands \$75 per month, for broadband service. Additionally, when a household member purchases a digital device through a participating provider, they are eligible for a one-time \$100 discount. In North Carolina alone there are nearly 100 participating internet service providers including Verizon, Carolina West Wireless, and AT&T. A full list of participating providers can be found at fcc.gov/affordable-connectivity-program-providers.



Affordable Connectivity Program
Helping Households Get
Access to Broadband

Find out if you qualify and how to participate. Visit: fcc.gov/ACP

Households that have an income level at or below 200% of the federal poverty guidelines and/or participate in any of the programs listed below may be eligible for the Affordable Connectivity Program.

- Federal Public Housing Assistance, SNAP, SSI, WIC, Medicaid, Veterans Pension or Survivor Benefits, Free and Reduced-Price School Lunch Program
- Tribal specific programs: Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance, Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, Tribal Head Start, Tribal TANF

Enrolling in the Affordable Connectivity Program consists of two steps. First, interested parties will go to AffordableConnectivity.gov to apply online or to print out an application. Then, eligible households must contact the participating internet service provider of their choice to select a plan and have the discount applied to their bill.

For more information on the Affordable Connectivity Program, eligibility requirements, and how to enroll visit fcc.gov/ACP.

WPCOG Assists Local Governments in Receiving Rural Transformation Grants

Article by Paul Teague

WPCOG staff assisted one area county and three area municipalities that have been awarded a total of \$3.3 million in Rural Transformation Grants through the N.C. Department of Commerce.

The localities include:

- **City of Newton** - \$900,000 for Downtown Revitalization
- **Town of Valdese** - \$850,000 for Downtown Revitalization
- **Alexander County** - \$650,000 for Downtown Revitalization
- **City of Hickory** - \$900,000 for Community Enhancement



NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT of
COMMERCE

The announcements were made through N.C. Gov. Roy Cooper's office. WPCOG staff helped the governments to develop and complete applications for the competitive grant process. The grants do not require local matching funds.

Workforce Development Board - Success Stories

Article by Donna Gilbert

Grace's Story

Grace came to NCWorks Caldwell in 2019 to first earn her Nurse Aid I certification. She wanted to earn a stackable credential that would help her get into a competitive workforce at the time. Grace originally wanted to enter nursing, but after some job shadowing and career advising, she felt that Medical Assisting was a better fit. Now, Grace has found employment as a Medical Assistant at Novant Health in Charlotte! Congratulations, Grace, on all your hard work!

"I first heard of WIOA in my introduction to health sciences course at CCCTI, and I am so thankful I went to speak to someone about being sponsored. The WIOA sponsorship helped me attend school by providing funds for books, uniforms, credentialing exams, and tuition reimbursement. I chose to enter the Medical Assisting program because I knew I wanted to gain an Associate's Degree to continue my education but wanted to earn a degree to help me reach my goals and be competitive in today's market. Kaleigh and everyone at the Caldwell office have always been encouraging and so wonderful, and they have given me something that can never be taken away."



Randy's Story



Randy has been with the NextGen program since high school and has recently completed his Associate in Applied Science Degree in Turfgrass Management Technology. During his last semester at Western Piedmont Community College, Randy applied for an internship position with the Carolina Panthers in Charlotte! During the Spring semester, Randy balanced his school schedule, work schedule, and travel to and from Charlotte. Since he graduated from WPCC in May 2022, he has accepted a full-time position with the stadium as an Assistant Sports Field Manager! Randy now lives in Charlotte and is looking forward to continuing his career with the Panthers! Way to go, Randy!

Take a Step to Prevent Falls

Article by Sarah Stamey

According to the National Council on Aging (NCOA) falls are the number one cause of injury and fatal injury among older adults. While the facts may be alarming, there are evidence based programs available in your community that can help reduce the risk for falls.

While there are many factors that can contribute to a fall, there are also measures that can be taken to reduce the risk of falls such as wearing proper footwear and evaluating the fall risk that are in our homes. The Area Agency on Aging partners with local community agencies such as the senior centers to provide programs such as A Matter of Balance, Tai Chi for Arthritis and Falls Prevention and Walk with Ease.

A Matter of Balance is an evidence-based program that recognizes the risk of falling but also highlights real-world coping strategies to reduce the fears of falls. In the workshop, participants will be able to shift their thought about falls to see that falls can be controllable. Throughout the Matter of Balance workshop, participants will have an opportunity to establish realistic goals to increase their physical activity. The workshop will provide each participant with exercises that focus on balance and strength that can be done in the comfort of your home. A Matter of Balance also works with participants to change their view about falls and provides ways that older adults can reduce their risk for falls.

Tai Chi for Arthritis and Fall Prevention is recognized worldwide for its overall health benefits. Focusing on three main principals which include movement control, weight transfer and integration of mind and body, Tai Chi works to increase balance and in turn, reduce falls. The movement control principal in Tai Chi encourages slow, smooth, and continues movements so that participants can increase their internal muscle strength without causing too much tension on their bodies and joints. The second principal, weight transfer, allows participants to focus on weight transfer with each step therefore helping improve overall mobility, coordination, and balance. The integration of body and mind, as the third principal, encourages finding a balanced connection between their mind and body. With a balanced mind and body, participants are able to focus on relaxation and continue to build confidence as they gain strength.

Walk with Ease is a group-walking program that encourages participants to start walking and stay motivated to keep active. During the six-week program, participants meet three times a week as a group. Each session starts with a health education session followed by stretching exercises then to a 10 - 35 minute walk.

There are also great resources available online. If you feel you or a loved one are at risk for falls you can complete Free Falls Check Up by visiting www.ncoa.org. You will answer 12 short questions and receive a score. That score will help indicate if you are at risk for falls.



If you are interested in any of the falls prevention workshops, contact Aging Specialist Sarah Stamey at 828-485-4216 or find more information online at www.wpcogaaa.org.

Golden LEAF Foundation Rural Internship Initiative

This year, Golden LEAF launched the Rural Internship Initiative to provide Golden LEAF Scholars attending a college or university in North Carolina with professional work experience related to their career field in a rural North Carolina community. You can learn more about the opportunity at [Golden leaf Scholarship Rural Internship Initiative](#). Students are able to intern in a wide range of settings including businesses, governmental entities, and nonprofits. Golden LEAF funds the interns through a temporary staffing agency but it is up to each site to manage and supervise the intern.

Golden LEAF Scholars are responsible for identifying a site to complete their internship. To support this process, Golden LEAF is gathering information from entities who are interested in hosting an intern next summer (2023).

The interest form and additional information is available at this [link](#). Entities must be located in a [qualifying county](#).





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