Another year has come and gone, and we would like to share some of the highlights of events, activities and programming from each County department. The service from each department and impact on Rutherford County during 2016 has been outstanding. Please enjoy each featured County department.
AIRPORT

The airport continues to grow and develop as a new department within the county government. Serving as a gateway to Rutherford County and North Carolina, we have worked hard to improve the appearance, professionalism, and convenience that is expected from a general aviation airport serving business class jet traffic. In addition to continuing to meet these needs, we take pride in our community involvement. We have mentored several high school students with their class/ senior projects. We host class tours for middle and elementary school students. The airport director was involved with the formation and still mentors in the Thomas Jefferson Aviation Club.

The airport is open seven days a week from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. with only two full-time and one part-time employee. We strive to ensure all aspects of our operation are running safely and professionally, and are proud of how far we have come and look forward to continuing this trend.

BOARD OF ELECTIONS

The Board of Elections office had an extremely busy year in 2016 with elections back to back for approximately the entire year. We had a Primary election in March, a Congressional Primary election in June and a General Election in November. With absentee ballots being sent 60 days before each election, we had very little time between elections to prepare for the next.

- We went from successfully implementing Voter ID to having it thrown out by the courts, from 10 days of Early Voting to 17 days, from no out of precinct voting to allowing out of precinct voting, and from no Same Day registration at Early Voting to again having Same Day registration. In addition, the courts threw in special procedures regarding provisional ballots a week before
the General Election. Through it all we somehow stayed within our budget.

- We had a record number of registered voters this year and a record turnout for the General Election
- The Director spent a large part of the summer working on a panel with the State Board and State IT to develop standards for the new software system that will go out for bid soon.

Student Workers being trained for the General Election.

**BUILDING INSPECTIONS**

The Building Inspections Department has had a fairly productive year with 115 new house starts, along with permitting 18 cell towers, 23 pools, and 2 solar farms. We have taken in $444,775 in permit fees on 2,138 permits with total project costs of $69,062,630. Subsequently, we have conducted 7,298 inspections and completed total commercial plan review for 42 projects.

Congratulations to our past Director, Steve Hill, on his retirement after 21 years of service! Shane Dotson is our new Director. Shane is a Level III inspector and holds certificates in Building, Electrical, Plumbing, Mechanical, and Fire.

Two inspectors were hired over this year, Joey Turrubiarte and Ronnie Martin. It takes approximately five years for a new inspector to be able to inspect anything—that means Level III certificates in all five fields. Once they get a new certificate, they must take continuing education classes each year to maintain it, so they all work very hard!

Certificate of Occupancy was issued to the Tryon Equestrian Center’s International Center. We have been inspecting the International Center since July, 2014, in the absence of a Level III inspector in Polk County. We also finalized the Amethyst Solar Farm on US 221 S.
The mission of the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service-Rutherford County is to provide citizens with research-based educational information in order to improve the quality of their lives. The Rutherford County Cooperative Extension Services are the "extension" arm of NC State and NC A&T Universities to the people of Rutherford County. The department's educational efforts are offered through many different methods and address the needs and issues most important to our citizens. Listed below are a few highlights of the department’s efforts in 2016:

A joint programming effort between Family and Consumer Science and 4-H was our Speedway to Healthy Program. All 4th grade students in Rutherford County spent a day learning about their bodies and making healthy choices when eating. This program is made available through an extensive interactive exhibit in partnership with NC A&T University. Family and Consumer Science also worked with adults in nutritional programming and food preservation.

Livestock Educational programming efforts continued helping producers improve the quality of their operations through numerous programs in marketing, nutrition, pasture management, breeding soundness of bulls and artificial insemination to help them improve their production systems. Rutherford County Cooperative Extension continued to work with producers to co-mingle calves to sell in truckload lots under the Mountain Cattle Alliance. This group evaluated and processed these calves to verify that health and quality issues were addressed in order to market high quality cattle. Data collected was based on weaning weights compared to weekly auction prices and then sale weights/price compared to weekly auction prices. There has also been informal evaluation in the form of feedback provided by producers who are very pleased with the additional profits received from marketing cattle through this alliance. Over 25 producers sold 9 loads of cattle (~700 head) in 2016 valued at $810,000. These calves were sold at premiums ranging from $100-$200/head. At an average of $150/head on 700 head of cattle, that is an additional $105,000 profits back in the pockets of these producers. Using a multiplier of six, there was a direct economic impact of $630,000 to our region. Most of today's generation is a generation or two removed from Agriculture.

Although a rural county, Rutherford County is no exception. In an effort to raise agricultural awareness, with support from local partners, Rutherford County Cooperative Extension conducted a Farm/City program. This program was multi-faceted and reached out to county governmental leaders as well as elementary school students. 4th graders in each school were asked to draw a poster that reflected a "Grow it, Make it, Use it" theme. After posters are complete, staff members go back into each school and give the students a lesson on the importance of agriculture to our everyday lives and announce the poster contest winners in front of their peers. As a result, staff members were able to raise the awareness of over 600 participants.

Urban & Consumer Horticulture was without an agent for the first half of the year, but the new agent started in July and hit the ground running continuing to assist clients with technical problems and leading the Master Gardener Volunteer program. Both of these kept her tremendously busy as well as working toward planning a successful season at the Rutherford County Farmers’ Market in 2017.
County Manager Steve Garrison and Chairman Bryan King led the session on Government at the Leadership Rutherford event in December. Rutherfordton Town Manager Doug Barrick, Lake Lure’s Manager Ron Nalley, Spindale’s Manager Scott Webber, and Forest City’s Manager John Condrey also led a panel discussion on local government leadership and ways that towns improve the quality of life for residents.

November consisted of numerous meetings and briefings regarding the Party Rock wildfire.

State IT analyst Keith Conover and representatives of a multitude of various internet utility providers attended a county facilitated meeting to discuss high speed broadband services and needs in the rural communities of Rutherford County in October.

In September, Commissioner Michael Benfield was recognized by the NCACC for meeting the requirements for the Practitioner level in the Local Elected Leaders Academy. A Practitioner has completed a minimum of 48 credits of continuing education since becoming a county commissioner.

County Manager Steve Garrison leads a quarterly Department Head meeting involving each County Department.
Discussion luncheon with Congressman Patrick McHenry with County Commissioners and County Manager in July (right).

Manager Garrison delivered an effective PowerPoint presentation touching on strategic planning with goals of improving the quality of life in our towns, county and region at the February Mayor/Manager Quarterly Meeting (below).

County Assembly Day was an opportunity for North Carolina county officials to meet with and hear from state legislative leaders and meet with their state legislative representatives. Our County Manager, Commissioners, Clerk to the Board, Intern student (Alan Toney, Jr.), traveled to Raleigh on Wednesday, May 18, 2016 for this event (left).

The 50th Anniversary Commemoration of the Vietnam War was held at in April to recognize, honor and thank our Vietnam veterans. Commissioner Toney gave a warm and gracious welcome to all and extended a special thanks to the honored guests — our veterans.

Commissioners’ Goal-Setting Retreat, February 25, 2016
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

During 2016, Rutherford County Economic Development had a very successful year with the announcement of one existing industry expansion (CMI Enterprises) and the location of two new companies to Rutherford County, US Precision Construction and Everest Textile. When combined, these three projects plan to create almost 750 jobs and invest upwards of $27 million in the coming years. The Economic Development Department responded to 34 industrial recruitment and expansion prospects throughout the year. In support of 11 industrial companies, 21 grants are currently being administered by our office. Marketing and advertising activities to promote Rutherford County and the Economic Development product continued throughout 2016. Advertisements were placed in Site Selection Magazine, Southern Business & Development Magazine, and EDPNC’s North Carolina Economic Development Guide, and we worked to increase our social media presence across the platforms of Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. The Economic Development team continues their focus on a comprehensive market plan for the Gateway West Commerce Park property, including the Commercial parcels off US 74A Bypass Highway.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES

- EMS launched a new “Fit for Duty” program in 2016. All employees set an annual fitness goal, received a physical, and completed a Fitness Evaluation at the end of the year. A group of employees participated in the 5K Color Run in Asheville in August.

- A new Compliance Plan and Compliance Officer were implemented into the system. Training was conducted with all skilled nursing facilities on medical necessity requirements and employees receive ongoing training on documentation throughout the year.
EMS launched a new Public Awareness Campaign regarding the use of Medical ID on the iphone. Information was distributed through the county, chamber, schools, public safety and local doctors’ offices. EMS also participated in Kids-N-Cops and received an award for Best EMS Unit. In October, EMS supported Breast Cancer Awareness month by stocking all ambulances with pink surgical gloves that employees wore in the field.

A unified mission, vision and values were created in 2016. Survey Monkey has been utilized for both external and internal customer/employee satisfaction surveys. As a result of the internal survey, an Employee Satisfaction Committee was created in order to filter and recommend improvements to the department. Also, a new system was set up where any employee can complement/congratulate another employee on a job well done by broadcasting it department wide.

In April, EMS hosted a NCACC Peer Review. Staff collected operational data and update system maps. Great ideas were shared and the final report was a positive reflection of the work that EMS does every day. Recommendations will be evaluated and assessed regarding implementation in 2017.

EMS provided medical coverage at the Party Rock Fire during the month of November. 2-3 paramedics were on site along with an ambulance and quick response vehicle.

**MISSION**
To Provide Excellent, Compassionate Care on Every Call

**VISION**
To Be Recognized By Other Agencies as a Leader of Excellence in EMS

**VALUES**
A RCEMS Employee Shall Exhibit: Integrity, Professionalism, Respect, Compassion, Knowledge, Loyalty and Reliability

- Total Calls: 9,839 (8,485 Emergency Calls and 1,354 Non-Emergency Calls)
The Finance Office had a busy 2016 year supporting the County Departments and Management. The Office received the Certificate of Achievement for Financial Excellence in Financial Reporting this summer for the 2015 Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR). This was the twenty-seventh consecutive year the office has received this prestigious award and has submitted this year’s CAFR for consideration.

Another exciting moment for the office was this December, following a periodic review by Fitch. Rutherford County was upgraded one notch on the following ratings: Issuer Default Rating (IDR) to AA from AA-; General Obligation Bonds (GOs), Series 2008 to AA from AA- and Limited Obligation Bonds (LOBs), Series 2011 to AA- from A+. This positively reflects the continued prudence of management to maintain adequate fund balance levels above the County’s 20% of general fund spending during the recent recession and the County’s low long-term liability burden.

The Office continues to work closely with the Manager and Public Works developing the Capital Facilities and the Vehicle Replacement Plans. The annual audit has been completed for the County and the Tourism Development Authority. Both reports are available on the Finance Office’s webpage. In 2016, the office also processed almost 17,000 invoices for the departments and payroll for over 650 employees during the year.

With a small team, the director is quite proud of her team’s professionalism, hard work and dedication they contribute to the office each day.
• The approval of funding for the Emergency Services Training Facility was a highlight for this year. This has been in the planning stages for many years and now we are working with an architect to complete the design work for the live burn building and other training props to be located on the property behind Isothermal Community College. We hope to see this project completed by late fall of 2017.

• Additionally, funding was approved to purchase 800MHz radios and equipment to enhance our fire communications system across the County.

• The reorganization of a Firefighters Association was completed this year. We just received notification that the Rutherford County Fire/Rescue Association has been approved for their 501c(3) designation by the Internal Revenue Service. This is important to our fire service to be able to complete some projects including expansion of the firefighter’s memorial monument.

• Frankie Hamrick was hired as the new Assistant Fire Marshal and Assistant Emergency Management Coordinator.

• Our largest event this year has been the response to the Party Rock fire. This fire resulted in 5,906 acres burning in Rutherford County. Many County departments, State agencies and some 174 fire departments from across the state provided assistance in the efforts to protect 189 structures in Rutherford County. The outpouring of support from the community providing supplies and other vital necessities was tremendous and is appreciated by all our emergency responders.
HUMAN RESOURCES

2016 has been a very busy year for Human Resources. We once again saw change in some Management/Supervisor positions. The following is a list of positions that have been filled:

- Promoted Shane Dotson to Building Inspections Director
- Hired Susan Hall as Veterans Director
- Rachel Thomas elected as Register of Deeds
- Lydia Waddell promoted to Detention Administrator
- Don Cason named TDA Director
- Contracted with former Rutherford County Economic Developer Tom Johnson to serve in an Interim Manager role for the Economic Development Department

- Due to several retirements for January, we have the following vacancies to fill: Operations Manager for Maintenance and Sheriff’s Department Captain.

One of the biggest highlights for us this year has been our move. The Board of Commissioners graciously extended their office space for our use. The Human Resource Department moved to the first two offices on the back hall which has provided for privacy and space for operations.

ACA reporting continues to be a time consumer. The HR Specialist works diligently with the State to ensure compliance with deadlines and accuracy of reporting.

The HR Department along with the County Manager and Attorney began working with Becky Veazy on the Personnel Policy updates last year and as of now the County Attorney has the updates for last looks.

A long awaited pay and class study was begun in October with the approval of the Board of Commissioners. We are very appreciative for their support. The MAPS Group has been meeting with employees and has a projected complete date of February 2017. We are excited to see what the results of the study will be.

This year we had NCACC hold several worker’s compensation training sessions for management; as well as, partnered with ICC to hold Customer Service, Leadership, and Management training. The HR Department also created a library of training videos and books that is open to department heads and supervisors.

HR staff was fortunate to have the help of a summer intern, “Little” Alan Toney. Alan was a great help with several projects. He was tasked in working with the HR Director to create a Supervisor Performance Evaluation form that is being used this year. Alan graduated from Gardner Webb University in December.
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

IT spent the majority of 2016 working on infrastructure improvements to increase productivity and performance to all departments. We also spent a great deal of time troubleshooting a performance problem with the virtual desktops as we continued the conversion of physical to virtual throughout the county. Below are a few of the highlights:

- IT restructured how we distribute the workload in our department as well as rolled out a new work order system called SysAid. Director Jai Doherty noted, “I have been very pleased with the progress of both changes and acknowledge the challenges that we still face in working out the bugs. I appreciate everyone’s open mind and patience while we adjust to the changes.”

- The County Administration server room had the core network equipment upgraded from 1 gigabit (Gb) to 10 Gb. The VMWare hosts supporting the departmental server environment had their operating systems upgraded as well as their network cards upgraded to 10Gb. The older VMWare hosts that support the virtual desktop environment were replaced with four state of the art servers and their storage was moved from a fiber attached SAN to VSAN (virtualized storage on drives located inside the new servers). This solved the performance problems that plagued us for so long.

- 911 had its network switches upgraded as well as a new UPS that is large enough to hold their entire environment while the generator is powering up and coming online.

- The fiber connecting Revenue, Building Inspections, Sheriff, Detention, and the Courthouse was replaced with new fiber that supports the new 10Gb network speed.

- The DSS server room had the core network upgraded to 10 Gb. The VMWare hosts supporting the departments server environment had their network cards upgraded to 10Gb. A new cabinet was installed in preparation for the new 911 backup center to store its servers. In preparation for the DSS virtual desktop deployment, four state of the art servers with local drives for VSAN were purchased and are ready to be installed.

- The rollout of virtual desktops continues. Several departments have been fully converted like Building Inspections, the Commissioners, Revenue, Airport, Solid Waste, Soil & Water, Veterans, Assistant to the County Manager, and EMS. Several are underway including the Sheriff, DSS, HR, and the Library. Now that we are firing on all cylinders, the rollout should pick up speed in 2017.

- The VOIP phone system project has come to an end and we are getting ready to sign off on the project. Although the project was rocky to say the least, Peter did an awesome job isolating the users of the system from almost all of the backend problems that had to be figured out.

- As we end 2016 our focus is on our security camera system. We have grown faster than expected and our server has struggled to keep up, at times pulling performance down for our departmental production servers. We have purchased a new physical camera server to move the existing cameras to, isolating them from our other virtual servers. We are at that point where we cannot add any new cameras without a second and third server to share the load. Please keep this in mind during budget time if you are planning on asking for new surveillance cameras for your facilities.
With the help of Dr. Robert Burgin, the library completed a five-year strategic plan focusing on empowering our community to Read, Connect, Explore, and Share. Part of the five-year plan involved changing the operating hours of the libraries to better serve the public.

Our Youth Services Librarian provided outreach programming throughout the school year to all the Pre-K classes throughout the county.

Presented library program offerings to groups and other non-profits. Presentations were presented at Golden Valley Community Club, Gilkey School Community Center, Whitehouse Community Club, various Lions groups, Leadership Rutherford, Rutherford Life Care, and the Senior Center. Trivia days and adult coloring sessions are conducted at several off-site locations.

Rutherford Woodworkers Association and the Rutherford County Visual Artists Guild donated six “Little Libraries” to the library. With the help of the County Maintenance department all six little library boxes were placed in locations across the county.

Second year of free Summer Maker-Camp for ages 8-13. Ten students attended four weekly Maker-Camp sessions at the County Library.

Through grant funding provided by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act as administered by the State Library of North Carolina added a selection of educational tablets for all ages to each of the libraries.

Added Vox children’s books for circulation. Vox books are audio-enabled books. Each book has an audio reader with complete narration permanently attached inside the front cover. It’s ready for listening directly from the book — no CD, no computer, no tablet. There are several fiction and non-fiction titles to choose from for check-out.

With funding provided by a Duke Energy Endowment Grant, STEM based interactive summer programming at the new Haynes Branch Library was presented. In addition to programs, the library started circulating STEM kits for check-out first at Haynes Branch and then through all branches.

Mountains Branch began circulating Hiking Backpacks containing materials with information about birds, trees, leaves, and local hiking guides. These backpacks were purchased with grant funding provided by the Hickory Nut Gorge Foundation.

Library staff provided library cards to students at Lake Lure Classical Academy and East Rutherford High School allowing students to access research databases through the County Library system.
PUBLIC WORKS AND PLANNING

- Created Rutherford County’s Capital Facility Plan (CFP)
- Planned and organized capital improvements for all of the county owned facilities.
- College/School/County Facilities Planning
- Successfully implemented Rutherford County’s Community Project Grant program. Community Project Grants for FY2015-2016 were awarded by Commissioners and monitored by Planning Dept. Grant for FY2016-2017 have been awarded and are currently in progress. Applicants have until June 30, 2017 to complete their projects.
- Facilitated NCARTS Grassroots Grant Program for Rutherford County.
- Oversaw the Grey Rock development throughout construction. The project is near completion following the removal of the super silt fence.
- Queens Gap development successfully completed paving Phase 2 and 3, and the road construction of multiple additional phases. The project should be complete by the end of 2017.
- Worked with Solid Waste to help create their enterprise CFP.
- Prepared for and facilitated monthly Planning Commission Meetings
- Actively involved in Rutherford County’s Comprehensive Transportation Planning (CTP) process.
- Involved in Rutherford County’s Transportation Advocacy Planning.
- Worked along with Boomerang Design and the Sheriff’s Department on the Detention Center renovation Project.
- Worked along with Communications and the Sheriff’s Department in preparing for the construction of a Backup PSAP.
- Worked with multiple departments and Lime Energy to help reduce many facilities energy consumption.
- Facilitated and monitored the warranty needs for the new Foothills EMS station and Haynes Library.
- Retired the Operations Manager, Roger Wilson with 30 years of service.

These are significant accomplishments in addition to the daily routine maintenance of 250 vehicles, 33 facilities, the parks and grounds of all county owned properties, and multiple additional projects in the planning process.
REVENUE DEPARTMENT

The Revenue Department completed the final phase of our tax software upgrade to NCPTS in 2016 and are now fully implemented in all areas of the office. In addition to the new tax software, we also rolled out a new GIS (Geographical Information System) website and public website for property appraisal information. We are finding that the new sites, to which we have links on the main County website, are offering a lot of functionality and efficiency for county employees as well as the public at large.

Beginning in October 2016, Rutherford County Revenue and Wampler Eanes Appraisal Group entered into a partnership to complete our 2019 County-wide Reappraisal Project. Appraisal staff is currently in the field in the County collecting market and property data.

The Revenue Department saw the retirement of another longtime employee. Debbie Hill retired effective December 16, 2016. Debbie was our E911 Address Technician and had over 20+ years of experience. We have some large shoes to try and fill. We wish the best of luck to Debbie with all her future endeavors.

We have some new faces in Revenue and are pleased to welcome the following new employees: Monica Cochran – Real Property Appraiser, Maryann White – Business Personal Property Appraiser, Resa Thompson – Assistant Collector, and Stacy Kempster – Customer Service Representative.

Other highlights for 2016 include Sherry Lavender, Revenue Director, being nominated by her peers and receiving the position of Secretary on the North Carolina Association of Assessing Officers (NCAAO) Executive Board at the Fall Conference held in Greensboro in November. Sherry is excited to represent Rutherford County and Western North Carolina at the state level.

SENIOR CENTER

- The Rutherford County Senior Center received a first-time grant of $70,363 from the NCDOT which will allow the Senior Center to contract with Rutherford County Transit to provide transportation to seniors in Rutherford County to the Senior Center daily. We received $50,000 from the RHI Legacy Foundation for Home Delivered Meals again for 2017. We also received $12,000 from the Community Foundation of WNC People in Need Grant late in 2015. This grant allowed us to provide pre-packaged meals on the weekends during the winter months to the home delivered meals participants.

- Senior Games: We had 136 total participants and 92 participants in the sporting events, and of these, 34 were first-time participants. Nine seniors represented Rutherford County in the NC State Senior Games in September. Three seniors were first place winners in their division. Pictured on page 15: Balloon Release at the Opening Ceremony for Senior Games

- We received and awarded 65 sets of vouchers from the Seniors Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program to eligible participants. These vouchers are for local produce at the Farmer’s Market.
• We received $445 for the purchase of fans from the Duke Energy Grant. We purchased a total of 31 fans in the summer, which were mostly distributed to the home delivered meal participants.

• There were 678 contacts made during the Medicare Part D annual election period.

• AARP Tax-Aid Foundation Program served 799 tax-payers.

• FY 2015-2016 meal statistics are as follows:

  **Home-Delivered:**
  31,898 meals served (Also served an additional 4,165 pre-packaged meals with the People in Need Grant)
  131 daily average meals served
  238 different participants were served throughout the year

  **Congregate Meals:**
  41,641 meals served
  171 daily average meals served
  714 different participants were served throughout the year

• Senior Center Director, **Angela Ezell (pictured left)**, graduated from the Ann Johnson Institute for Senior Center Management on April 28, 2016. This is a three-year certificate management training program, initiated by the North Carolina Division of Aging and Adult Services, designed for senior center managers and leaders.
This year the Detention Center was able to send five staff member to the NCJAA Conference. This annual event provides training to officers and administration on skills required for the job, tips on how to manage the stress of the job, and a forum to discuss and brainstorm on ways to solve issues that occur within the Detention Centers. 

The Detention Center has also made a change to their uniform which resulted in officers being provided with new uniforms. We were able to purchase two bullet and stab proof vests for our transport officers.

It has been a tough year for staff with two suffering major illness. The officers from all walks of law enforcement banded together and sold t-shirts. As a result, we were able to give each officer $500.00. What a Christmas blessing it was to give to them to help with mounting medical costs.

Administration of the Detention Center, in conjunction with the Sheriff’s Office, Building and Planning Department, and the County Manager have worked tirelessly on ways to improve the efficiency of the Detention Facility. Companies were researched and quotes obtained to implement these measures which will begin in 2017. Be watching for new and existing changes in the upcoming year.

This year’s parade grand marshals: Rutherfordton Police Department. Rutherford County Sheriff Office, and Spindale Police Department. A special thank you to our great Law Enforcement officers for the work they do to protect our community and allow us to have a safe holiday season.
Rutherford County DSS was one of ten counties selected to be part of the state audit of the Medicaid program as directed by Senate Bill 14, Session Law 2015-7. The purpose of the audit was to determine whether county departments of social services accurately and timely determine Medicaid eligibility for Medicaid applications, Medicaid re-enrollments, and presumptive Medicaid applications. Although the purpose of the audit was to evaluate state practices, we were pleased that of the ten counties Rutherford had the second highest accuracy and timeliness rates of the counties tested. Accuracy and timeliness rates ranged from 1.2% to 24.8% and 0.8% to 24.8% respectively.

The Child Care Subsidy Program was transitioned from Social Work Services to the Income Maintenance Division, as was Medicaid Transportation. We have worked over the past several years to build capacity to house programs in the appropriate division in order to streamline services and provide them in the most efficient manner.

In July 2016, the Able Bodied Adult Without Dependent Children (ABAWD) Program was implemented in Food and Nutrition Services. This policy had been suspended for several years due to the economic downturn. This effected many FNS consumers, as an ABAWD is subject to receiving FNS for a 3-month time limit within a 36-month period unless meeting ABAWD FNS work requirements or meeting an exemption from ABAWD requirements. We have partnered with the HRD Department at ICC and NC Works to offer monthly job search skills training for DSS consumers to help increase their employability. As part of a partnership between the NC Division of Social Services and the Community College System, Rutherford DSS has partnered with ICC to provide a training program for new and potential Income Maintenance Caseworkers. This is a two-phase course that is consistent across the state. Students who successfully complete the program at ICC will be guaranteed an interview with Rutherford DSS; earn the transportable credential recognized across the state at all 100 NC DSS offices; gain core knowledge, skills and abilities for successful transition to working within the state NCFAST system; and be eligible to apply for Income Maintenance Casework positions throughout the state.

The agency was one of 12 local DSS’ selected to participate in Trauma-Informed Leadership Training. Three staff members will lead this effort and become trauma champions, and lead us to become a trauma-informed agency. This entails learning how to help families deal with and heal from emotional trauma sustained from abuse and neglect and other life changing events. This will pave the way to improve outcomes for both children and families, and reduce staff turnover.

The agency received a $100,000 annual grant for three years to develop a Community Response Program. This is an attempt by the state to improve child welfare through the use of prevention focused, evidence based programs, designed to identify, address and correct risk factors which if not resolved have a greater potential to develop into issues resulting in child abuse and neglect. Participant families are identified primarily through the CPS in-take screening process when a report is screened out, or through social workers who have closed cases but the families would benefit from being introduced to resources that could prevent future abuse and/or neglect and Child Protective Services intervention. The CRP is completely voluntary and based on a collaborative effort between the family, DSS, and community partners.

The agency was selected to participate in Attachment and Biobehavioral Catch-Up (ABC) Learning Community. ABC is a brief intervention for caregivers of young children (ages 6-24 months) who have experienced early adversity, such as abuse, neglect, and disruptions in care; and funded by the Center for Child and Family Health. While this is not a new program, it is a new treatment approach that will enhance the CRP Program.
The agency completed its second Employee Satisfaction Survey in July. There was a 77% response rate, compared to 80% in 2015. Goals for improvements were developed based on the 2015 survey, identified from the lowest scored areas. However, both years all categories, with the exception of one, fell above the average range for satisfaction. Over the year prior to the 2016 survey the agency worked hard to develop better training and supervisory strategies, and to improve employee morale. All of the lowest rated categories rated higher than last year which is very encouraging. Overall, the survey indicated that most employees are satisfied with their work environment and that much improvement was made over the past year. The same survey will be administered in 2017 in order to compare data over a three-year period.

Adoption and Foster Care Licensing Staff participated in Mayfest in Rutherfordton, and information was shared about the adoption and foster parenting process in an effort to recruit more foster parents in our county (pictured left).

### SOIL AND WATER

The North Carolina Agriculture Cost Share Program (NCACSP) is a voluntary state government program to reduce the delivery of agriculture non-point source pollution into the waters of the state and therefore improve water quality. For the Program Year 2016 the District was allocated $49,089.00 for Best Management Practices (BMP’s).

The Ag. Cost Share Technician has spent time on a stream construction jobsite on Cleghorn Creek. North State Construction has been there stabilizing stream banks and putting structures in-stream to control future erosion to surrounding farm land.
The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Partnering Agency

Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) received 4 Contracts for $118,092 for the program year. These contracts installed conservation practices to improve water quality, decrease soil erosion, improve soil condition, benefit/improve domestic animals’ health and condition, improve/increase water quantity, improve plant condition and quality, and benefit and improve fish & wildlife habitat.

**Rutherford Watershed Commission** and Staff conducted Watershed dam inspections and maintenance on 19 flood control dams on Second Broad River and also updated the Emergency Action Plans for all of the Watershed dams.

**Education:** Conservation Field Day was held for county 5th grade students on October 21, 2016 at Isothermal Community College. We hosted around 500 students and 25 teachers from 9 county schools. The students rotated around 10 stations for a conservation lesson about the NC Forest Service, Rutherford County wildlife from Chimney Rock State Park, soil erosion from the Farm Service Agency, Soils from Division of Soil & Water, Recycling from Rutherford County Schools, Vermacomposting from Cooperative Extension, Livestock from the ICC Ag. Business Technology Department, Air quality from the Division of Air Quality, and Forestry Products from Gilkey Lumber Company.

District Staff worked with the Cooperative Extension Service and other agencies to promote the Farm City Week program and meal and the Farm City Week poster contest for Rutherford County 4th Grade students. The theme for the Farm City poster contest is “Grow it…Make It…Use It” to show the importance of farms and cities working together. FFA students from each High School presented a lesson in the art classes at each elementary school. Awards were given at an assembly at each of the 12 schools to present a lesson on the Importance of Agriculture in our Everyday Life. A Farm City meal and program was held at Chase High School. The Farmland Documentary was watched and discussed with questions and information from the audience. Invited guests included County Officials, Agriculture related businesses, board members and organizations, School Official representatives, and business owners and media.

An Outdoor Environmental Learning Center (OELC) Grant from the NC Foundation for Soil & Water for Sunshine Elementary was installed and completed in November 2016. The OELC included a concrete pad, a Cover and seating to use for outside lessons.
SOLID WASTE

- Added recycling compactor at Shiloh Convenience Center using a state grant to cover the receivers, concrete work, electrical, installation and the cost of the new service for recycling anti-freeze. Grant totaling roughly $14,484.00.
- Built a new building at the landfill using a state grant to recycle items that contain mercury such as light bulbs and thermostats. Grant totaling $24,000.00.
- Added a new section of grounds maintenance at the airport. Continue to receive compliments on the work performed. Removed majority of the trees from the property.

TOURISM

The 2016 year has been a good year for Tourism in Rutherford County. The ground work for the future of Tourism has been laid in 2016. The year started off with the TDA staff moving their business office to the Woodrow Jones Building on Main Street in Rutherfordton (pictured left). In the meantime, the TDA has used the building to host a variety of coffee talks and informative meetings. The TDA opened their second county Welcome Center inside the Woodrow Jones Building in September, all while adding a dirty dancing mural inside the Welcome Center in Lake Lure. Also the Tourism Occupancy Tax continues to grow with a 15% increase over 2015. In November, the TDA launched the "Time of Your Life" toolkit for all stakeholders to use in their business. The TDA staff is currently in the process of having the phrase trademarked.
The TDA Board of Directors approved, in the 2016-2017 budget, funding and implementing a County-Wide Tourism Strategic Plan. The planning process included the formation of a true tourism advisory committee made up of over 30 Rutherford County leaders. The advisory committee and the TDA board met on October 12, 2016 for their first tourism workshop. This workshop developed expertise and knowledge and led the way for the TDA board to hire Destination by Design from Boone, NC to perform the Tourism Strategic Plan. This process and plan will set the future of tourism over the next 20 years and assist Rutherford County in its vision to become more of a destination market.

In April, the TDA approved the hiring of Simpleview to develop and redesign the TDA website. Simpleview is an industry leader in Tourism Web Design. They have developed over 300 destination marketing sites. The new website will help Rutherford County in its efforts to become a destination market.

The TDA Board also approved the Counties Wayfinding Master Plan and funding. This program will provide tourist and citizens directional information in and around Rutherford County. This program not only provides consistent information to our guests, but it also provides a unified effort and vision for the entire county to work together on developing and improving tourism in our county.

In addition to the Wayfinding Master Plan and Funding, the TDA Board approved Information stands to be placed in the individual towns. This project is at its halfway completion with the remainder of the information signs to go in the ground in 2017.

The TDA Vacation Guide was approved and printed for distribution in April. The vacation guide is being distributed in Welcome Centers throughout the state plus mailed to visitor inquiries. The vacation guide provides our visitors and guests with county wide information on things to see and do in Rutherford County.

Rutherford County was fortunate to have some notable recognitions in 2016. First, the Town of Rutherfordton received the honor of "2016 NC Rural Small Town of the Year" award in North Carolina. Forest City won the "Number One Christmas Town Near Asheville" for the second year in a row by Romantic Asheville. Last but not least, Lake Lure/Chimney Rock received the "Best Lake/Mountain Town". Rutherford County is proud of all of our small towns.

The TDA Board and staff is committed to enhancing Rutherford County Tourism and making tourism the best that it can be.
Transit went Fare Free this year on our Deviated Fixed Route. In doing so, we saw a 45% increase in ridership. This has been a tremendous benefit to the citizens of Rutherford County. Transit was even able to obtain several video testimonials from riders on the impact Transit has had on their lives.

Transit held two days of specialized training on emergency evacuations and defense driving. Drivers had to practice dragging dummies, climbing out of escape hatches and master a specialized driving course. Drivers also reached a goal in 2016 of over 250,000 safe driving miles with no incidents or accidents of any nature.

Grocery service was also expanded to include free daily shuttles to Stainless Ministries, Walmart, Aldi’s, J’s Salvage and Save-A-Lot. Plus, Transit received a $25,000 RHI Legacy Foundation Grant to assist in the transportation costs to pantries and medical appointments.

Transit employees developed a unified mission, vision, values and goals. This information has been converted into a banner that is hung at Transit and is reviewed at each monthly safety meeting. We also began conducting Customer Satisfaction surveys to determine areas that can be improved. Each quarter, goals are reviews to determine success and areas that need more improvement. Results are provided to NCDOT and as a result of NCDOT’s performance based funding, Transit received a 40% increase the state funding for FY 17-18 thru FY 21-22 and was recognized as one of the best run and most efficient transit agencies in the state.

Transit went through several NCDOT audits in 2016 including a Federal Compliance Review to ensure compliance with FTA regulations, a Title VI Policy review regarding civil rights, a Drug & Alcohol Testing Compliance Review, and a DHHS Medicaid Site Visit Audit for enrollment into NC Tracks. Transit passed all audits with flying colors.

Transit was honored to provide transportation services during the Party Rock Fire in November. Transit provided daily drivers and vehicles for the evacuation of citizens and shuttling of firefighters to different staging areas.

- Total Miles: 504,118
- Total Local Trips: 57,541
- Total Out of County Trips: 3,359
- Total Number of Unduplicated Passengers: 1,158
- Total Revenue: $887,375

In celebration of our 25th Anniversary at Transit we are going FARE FREE for 25 Days. From October 1 - October 25 there will be No Charge to ride our Fixed Bus which runs from 8:00 am-5:30 pm and goes from Rutherford Regional Medical Center all the way to the Food Lion in Forest City. Service is available Monday - Friday.
FREE GROCERY SHUTTLE SERVICE

Monday: Aldi’s
Tuesday: Stainless Food Pantry
Wednesday: J’s Salvage
Thursday: Save-A-Lot
Friday: Walmart

There is no cost to ride. Shuttle runs daily in the mornings. Schedule is subject to change based on level of ridership and funding.

Call 287-6142 to Schedule a Ride

MISSION
To Drive Citizens Towards Possibilities

VISION
To Be a Recognized, Efficient Resource That Citizens Want to Use

VALUES
A Rutherford County Transit Employee Is:
Safe, Honest, Accountable, Dependable & Respectful
The Department of Veteran Services had an intern from Gardner Webb University, Megan Hoyle, work with us over the summer of 2016. The veterans loved Megan and she loved them. She helped with file organization, filled in while Beverly and Susan were at trainings, researched topics to help develop veterans’ claims and started our new partnership program.

In September, we kicked off our monthly social event “Coffee and Conversation”. We have had four and plan to continue this as a monthly event in the future. It is held every third Thursday of each month from 9:00 -10:30 a.m. The December social was also our Christmas social and was held from 9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. We have a special guest every month. The socials are averaging between 25-30 veterans each month with a few more being at the Christmas social. This program is organized by Beverly Wellborn, CVSO, which include advertising the event, securing donations and setting up for the event. We are excited to be able to offer this event each month to the veterans of Rutherford County.

Our big project of the year was developing and implementing our Community Partnership Program. Many area businesses have agreed to support this program by becoming a donation partner or a discount partner. As a result, we are able to plan events and better show the veterans of Rutherford County that we truly appreciate and support them for their service and sacrifice for our freedoms. The partners are listed below.

2016-2017 Community Partnership Program

Donation Partners
PLATINUM: Drop In Stores
SILVER: Smith’s Drug
BRONZE: Carolina Chiropractic Plus
DAV Post 25
Edward Jones-Andrew Tisdale
Harrelson Funeral Home
Hospice of RC
Insurance Service Assoc.
Pool Supplies Unlimited
BASIC: American Dairy Goat Assoc.
Anglers Choice
Lutz Oil Company
ADVERTISING: Daily Courier
Isothermal Comm. Coll.
Rutherford Weekly
WCAB
DONATIONS: American Legion Post 74
Burger King
Davis Donuts
Food Lion-Rutherfordton