

SHOWFEST 2025

JANUARY 27-28
Charlotte, NC

COLLABORATE.CREATE.CELEBRATE



**EVENT INNOVATORS
CONFERENCE**



JANUARY 27-28
Charlotte, NC

COLLABORATE.CREATE.CELEBRATE

Collaborate, Create, and Celebrate! We hope this theme inspires and motivates everyone to network and connect, especially at the conference, as we embark on a new year filled with new beginnings.

While at the conference, you will attend educational sessions led by experts in the field, providing a unique opportunity for professional growth. You will also have access to an unprecedented number of first-class supporting members in the exhibit hall. Additionally, talented artists will showcase their incredible skills, and numerous networking opportunities will enable you to connect with fellow industry professionals!

We welcome you to our annual Event Innovators Conference, proudly hosted by the NC Association of Festivals and Events, the ShowFest Conference Committee, the NCAF&E directors, and our sponsors. We look forward to spending time together, networking, and preparing for a fantastic year of festivals and events.

Special Thanks to the 2025 ShowFest Planning Committee!



Roy Brown
Tina Gibson
Theresa Mathis
Caroline Hasty
Julie Beck
Dr. Brianna Clark
Carrie King

Amanda Justice
Amanda Pope
Stephanie McIntyre
Pam Hester
Tom Harrison
Jef Lambdin
Stephanie H. Saintsing

NCAF&E Director – Stephanie Saintsing Naset

JANUARY 27-28
Charlotte, NC

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Conference Schedule at a Glance

Monday, January 27

- 8:30 AM - 10:30 AM **Exhibit Hall Set-Up** *Lakeshore Ballroom*
- 10 AM - 11AM **Ed Session-AI-Driven Innovation: Transforming the Future of Festival and Event Management** *Glenwaters Room*
- 10 AM - 11AM **Ed Session-Sponsorship Synergy: Weaving Partners Into the Fabric of Your Festival** *Lakeview Room*
- 11 AM - 12:30 PM **Exhibit Hall Open-Lunch in Exhibit Hall** *Lakeshore Ballroom*
- 11 AM - 4 PM **Award Room Open** *Welwyn Room*
- 11 AM - 6:15 PM **Silent Auction Open** *Pre-function Area/Lakeshore Ballroom*
- 12:30 PM - 12:50 PM **Entertainment Showcase** *Lakeview Room*
- 1 PM - 2 PM **Keynote: The Future of the Festival and Event Industry** *Lakeview Room*
- 2 PM - 3 PM **Ed Session-Alcohol Risk Reduction Training** *Lakeview Room*
- 2 PM - 3 PM **Ed Session-Building Itineraries for your Town around Key Festivals and Events** *Glenwaters Room*
- 3 PM - 3:45 PM **Exhibit Hall Open-Break in Exhibit Hall** *Sponsored by The InterACTIVE Theater of Jef*
- 3:45 PM - 4:45 PM **Ed Session-Creating Visual Content That Stops the Scroll** *Lakeview Room*
- 3:45 PM - 4:45 PM **Ed Session-Panel Discussion-State of the Industry** *Glenwaters Room*
- 5 PM - 5:30 PM **Association Meeting & Elections** *Walden Room*
- 6:15 PM **Silent Auction Closes**
- 6:15 PM - 10:30 PM **Dinner, Ent. Showcase, & Awards Program** *University Ballroom*

Tuesday, January 28

8:30 AM - 12:00 PM **Registration Desk Open** *Midway Room*

9 AM – 10 AM **Ed Session-Event Energizer: Shifting from Routine to Riveting**
Lakeview Room

9 AM - 10 AM **Educational Session-Roundtable Discussions** *Glenwaters Room*

10 AM - 11AM **Exhibit Hall Open** *Lakeshore Ballroom*

10 AM – 1 PM **Award Room Open** *Welwyn Room*

11AM – 12 PM **Ed Session-Main Street: Driving Downtown Vitality and Economic Growth** *Glenwaters Room*

11 AM – 12 PM **Ed Session-Tourism Trends & Economic Impacts of Festivals & Events: An Update from Visit NC** *Lakeview Room*

11 AM – 12 PM **Educational Session-Working with your Health Department to Ensure a Food-Safe Event!** *Walden Room*

12 PM – 1 PM **Lunch in Exhibit Hall** *Lakeshore Ballroom*



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Full Event Production

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- Vendor Procurement
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- Marketing & Advertising
- Event Staffing

Showcase Artists



The Chain - Fleetwood Mac Tribute



Roy Daye Jr.



Sigmon Theatrical

Caleb Sigmon

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and sponsors one
step at a time.

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Stephanie McIntyre, CFE



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Kay K. Saintsing Memorial Scholarship

The Kay K. Saintsing Memorial Scholarship was established in 2005 to honor the late founder of the North Carolina Association of Festivals and Events (NCAF&E). Kay was a leader within the tourism community and highly admired for her commitment to public service. She also founded several other non-profit organizations including the annual Barbecue Festival in Lexington, North Carolina. Under her direction, the festival became one of the largest one-day events in North Carolina and had received numerous, national and regional awards.



Sadly on June 7, 2002, the tourism industry and NCAF&E lost a leader and visionary to a heart arrhythmia; her family received countless cards and condolence letters.

Annually, a \$1000 scholarship will be awarded to a returning student at a North Carolina college or university. Students from all campuses, who meet the requirements, may apply.

We are proud to have awarded a total of five scholarships to deserving students thus far. NCAF&E wishes this award to be made to a student who has serious academic pursuits, who loves learning and who is interested in the breadth of learning in relation to recreation and tourism. The Executive Board of the NCAF&E has established the selection criteria and process for this award by recognizing Kay Saintsing's intentions when she initiated NCAF&E, the criteria is:

- Minimum 3.0 cumulative grade point average, with no grade earned lower than a "C".
- Enrolled as a full-time student at a college or university in North Carolina
- Must have sophomore or junior standing
- Must be returning to his or her home university the next year
- Must be a Parks, Recreation, Tourism or Event Management major
- The recipient must attend the annual ShowFest Conference

"Kay was an outstanding individual who was highly regarded by many for her leadership and hard work both locally and statewide. Those of us in the NC Tourism industry, and many others across the state, will miss her leadership, energy and wonderful attitude on life."

— Lynn D. Minges, Former Director of the NC Dept. of Commerce Tourism, Film and Sports Dev.

The NCAF&E Executive Board will review all essays and applications. The recipient of the scholarship will be announced during the annual Awards luncheon.



Showfest 2025

EVENT INNOVATORS CONFERENCE • EDUCATIONAL SESSION SCHEDULE

SESSIONS - MONDAY, JANUARY 27

SESSION A – 10AM LAKEVIEW

Presented by: Stephanie McIntyre, CFE

SPONSORSHIP SYNERGY: WEAVING PARTNERS INTO THE FABRIC OF YOUR FESTIVAL



Get ready to revolutionize your festival's sponsorship strategy! In this dynamic and interactive session, you'll learn how to go beyond traditional sponsor banners and transform your events into unforgettable experiences for attendees and sponsors alike.

Whether you're a seasoned festival director or new to the industry, this session is packed with actionable strategies that will make your sponsors want to return year after year. Don't miss this opportunity to take your events to the next level—your sponsors and attendees will thank you. Join us and make your festival the must-attend event of the year!

Stephanie McIntyre has been transforming events and building communities across North Carolina for decades. A proud native of the Tar Heel State, Stephanie brings an infectious energy and heartfelt passion to every project she touches. With over 22 years of experience leading the North Carolina Seafood Festival to award-winning success, she has a proven track record of turning events into vibrant, economic drivers that inspire connection and celebration.

As the founder of Staircase Event & Sponsorship Consulting, Stephanie blends her expertise with her love of serving and helping others succeed. She's passionate about empowering festivals and nonprofits to grow, thrive, and build lasting partnerships with sponsors. Her thoughtful, step-by-step approach ensures every detail is designed to elevate your event while creating meaningful experiences for attendees and stakeholders alike. An Award-Winning Certified Event Planner, Stephanie's goal is simple: to make your event a success story—one step at a time.

SESSION A – 10AM GLENWATERS

Presented by: Dr. Brianna S. Clark, Chair Department of Event and Hospitality Management at High Point University

AI-DRIVEN INNOVATION: TRANSFORMING THE FUTURE OF FESTIVAL AND EVENT MANAGEMENT

AI is changing how we manage and run festivals, making it easier and more efficient than ever. In this session, we'll break down how AI can help festival managers with everything from administrative tasks to planning to improving the overall attendee experience. Learn how AI tools can help you make better decisions, save time on repetitive tasks, and understand your audience better. Whether you're new to AI or looking to take your events to the next level, this session will provide practical insights on how AI can simplify your work and make your festivals more successful.



OPENING KEYNOTE – 1PM LAKEVIEW

Presented by: Ira Rosen MA/CFEE

President and CEO Ira L Rosen LLC-Festival and Event Consulting

THE FUTURE OF THE FESTIVAL AND EVENT INDUSTRY



Finding success in the festival and event industry was never easy, but in the post-pandemic era challenges seem to be greater each and every day. Concern about revenues, security, insurance, sponsorship, attendance and countless other issues keep us awake at night. But yet, the industry endures. Why? People need events. This session will explore where we have been and where we are going and how we keep thriving in challenging times.

Ira L. Rosen is the President and CEO of Ira L Rosen, LLC, a consulting firm providing services to the worldwide festival and event industry. He is a highly regarded consultant with decades of global industry experience. Although he has a very comprehensive industry background, he specializes in the areas of event risk assessment, evaluation and planning for festivals and events, and practical strategic development. From 2008 to 2023, he taught many different event management courses at Temple University in Philadelphia and developed their award-winning

Event Leadership Executive Certificate program. Additionally, for over thirty years he owned and operated Entertainment On Location, Inc. (EOL), a full-service event production and consulting company based in New Jersey.

Prior to opening EOL, Ira worked for over seven years with Radio City Music Hall Productions. His production background includes the Super Bowl half-time show, multi-million-dollar parades, major corporate events around the world and tourism development projects for many different organizations.

Ira has spoken at conferences and conventions and has done training programs around the world. He has written and spoken extensively on key industry topics ranging from risk management to sponsorship to the financial and operational management of events. Ira holds Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees from Montclair State University in New Jersey and is a Certified Festivals and Events Executive (CFEE). In 2005, he was inducted into the International Festivals and Events Association Hall of Fame, becoming one of only 70 people in the world to hold this honor. He has also received numerous awards and recognitions from Temple University, the International Live Events Association, and many others.

SESSION A – 2PM LAKEVIEW

Presented by: Charlie Fuller, Vice President of Alcohol Management LLC

ALCOHOL RISK REDUCTION TRAINING



The Alcohol Risk Reduction Training (ARRT) is a training program approved by the North Carolina Alcoholic Beverage Control Commission (NC-ABCC). The training is designed to educate the public on the responsibilities/ liabilities associated with selling and or serving Alcohol in North Carolina and the NC-ABCC Rules and Regulations that apply. Training certificates will be provided.

Charlie Fuller currently serves as Vice President of Alcohol Management, LLC. Charlie recently retired from the NC ABC Commission after 18 years of service. Charlie worked as an Information and Communication Specialist in the Education and Training Division and as a Compliance Office in the Audit Division. Charlie has trained thousands of employees and volunteers in responsible beverage service in North and South Carolina. Charlie has provided alcohol risk management consulting to colleges and universities throughout the state. Charlie was a frequent guest speaker at numerous associations on ABC laws and regulations.

SESSION B - 2PM GLENWATERS

Presented by: Simon Jones, Uplift NC

BUILDING ITINERARIES FOR YOUR TOWN AROUND KEY FESTIVALS AND EVENTS



Your festival or event brings people into your destination to learn about your community and spend money. Visitor itineraries are a way of keeping them in your region for long to learn and spend even more! This session will highlight the components of great itineraries and provide steps & tools to building your own itineraries around your festival or event.

Simon is the founder of NatureScapes (www.nature-tourism.com), a company dedicated to enhancing the long-term sustainability of natural land-&-seascapes as well as the people, places and cultures connected to them --- through tourism. Simon also co-leads the UPLIFT North Carolina program (www.UPLIFTtourism.com).

For the last 20+ years Simon has worked with governments, NGO's and businesses to plan and develop immersive and engaging nature and cultural-based tourism experiences around the world. His experience includes tourism destination planning, product development and storytelling, working with organizations such as National Geographic and The Smithsonian Institution as well as groups like The World Bank, the US Forest Service, and others. Most recently Simon's experience includes designing and co-leading the UPLIFT tourism program that provides a comprehensive suite of tools, trainings, professional development and mentoring to rural and small-town tourism business, sites, attractions, festivals and destinations in North Carolina. He has also recently completed the development and implementation of an online workshop series on tourism product development, itinerary building and storytelling for Native American tribes in Virginia and Montana. Simon has a Masters of Tourism Administration with concentration in Sustainable Destination Management from The George Washington University School of Business.

SESSION B –3:45PM LAKEVIEW

Presented by: Michael Gross, BG Digital

CREATING VISUAL CONTENT THAT STOPS THE SCROLL



Tips for designing eye-catching graphics, creating viral-worthy reels, and curating visually compelling feeds. Insights into photography and video editing tools to make festival content stand out.

Michael is an east coast, crab loving, Marylander. When he wasn't eating crab cakes and watching football, he was working on his first business at the age of 17. With 20 year's experience in sales & marketing and a collective team experience of over 250 years' there are few situations BG Digital has not experienced when it comes to Digital Marketing. The world wide web is always evolving making online presence a never-ending game that can make or break a business. From websites to SEO to Social media to paid advertising, Michael has proven techniques that have helped over a 1,000 businesses out rank their competition and increase overall engagement.

SESSION B –3:45PM GLENWATERS

STATE OF THE INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSION

Join us for an engaging panel discussion featuring industry professionals as they explore the latest trends and topics shaping the festival and event industry. This conversation will examine innovative practices and event organizers' challenges, offering valuable insights and expertise from experienced leaders.

KEYNOTE Showcase Performance : WILLIAM NESMITH brioLIVE Entertainment



It's no secret that William Nesmith's got a passion for crafting pop hits. From inspiring ballads to bubbly bops, he uses his impressive vocal range and unique registers to paint a spectrum of emotions.

William is a Carolina native, MBA grad and classically trained pianist. His music comes from a real place, full of true experiences and raw feelings. He seems to evoke an enduring optimism—even in his darkest songs while taking listeners on a ride they'll never want to get off.

Since 2018, Nesmith has played hundreds of shows with an acoustic set of popular covers and fun original tunes (while wearing party sunglasses). He's the 2018 Nashville Songwriters Association International (NSAI) Songwriter's Standoff winner and the 2020 Doodad Farm 60-second songwriting contest winner. He also placed 2nd in four categories in Yes Weekly's "The Triad's Best 2020" (Best Musician in the Triad, Best Songwriter, Best Vocalist, Best Piano Player).

SHOWCASE EMCEE: CALEB SIGMON IMAGINE Music Group



CALEB SIGMON is a producer, director, and performer based out of Charlotte, NC. With credits ranging from national tours (Journey to Oz) to directing for television (Life in the Carolinas) and teaching in the classroom (UNC School of the Arts), Caleb's career has taken him across America, sharing his passion with millions of people.

Alongside his wife, Katy, he operates SIGMON THEATRICAL, an interactive and immersive production company, collaborating with nationally recognized theatre companies, partnering with communities, and empowering students in the classroom.

Sigmon Theatrical designs and produces bespoke stage shows, interactive parades, and live entertainment for large-scale festivals, parades, and events across the Southeast, and produce the televised opening number for the Novant Health Thanksgiving Eve Parade. They produce high-energy entertainment in the professional sports industry and create turn-key mascot and character programming, design, and development for teams, municipalities, and corporations across the southeast.

Evening Showcase Performances

ROY DAYE JR. IMAGINE Music Group



Based out of Statesville NC, Roy Daye Jr. has been entertaining audiences in the Carolinas, Florida Keys, Scottsdale, Arizona and more with his own one-man band show for years. Versatile in all genres of music, Roy can custom design sets that suit the vibe of your festival or event. This master musician's sound is a much fuller sound than just a solo performer through his unique set up and works well on a main stage or an intimate setting. In addition to his acoustic solo show, his R&B band Cookie have been performing in the Carolinas since 1997. In recent years you can find Roy and Cookie as the house band for "Couched" with Carson Kressley airing on The Design Network.

CAROLINE KELLER brioLIVE Entertainment



Caroline Keller and her band are storytellers at heart. Timeless melodies and thoughtful, reverent lyrics draws the listener in and transports them to another time and place making each performance more of an experience.

Caroline says their main goal with their songwriting is to be "Authentic". Authentic to themselves and authentic to their audience. Strong songwriting and musical prowess brings the songs to life whether it is in a small, intimate venue or on one of the many larger stages that the band has performed on during its career.

Caroline has been pursuing her dream of being a Country music artist from a very early age. She made a name for herself as a Country Gospel singer starting when she was sixteen. She recorded three albums and topped the Country Gospel charts, with four songs ranked in the top ten.

2025 Showcase Artists

PRODUCTION PROVIDED BY:
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Evening Showcase Performances (continued)

THE CHAIN (FLEETWOOD MAC TRIBUTE)

IMAGINE Music Group



America's most authentic Fleetwood Mac Tribute Band~The CHAIN recreates the stage and sounds of the supergroup's biggest hits while looking the part, with Stevie Nicks' solo efforts and a few deep cuts added into the mix. All members playing & singing live, no tracks.

BLACKWATER BAND

Self-Represented



The Blackwater Band is dedicated to live performance and making every event a party experience. The Band is in our fifteenth year and based out of Clarkton, NC. We play Top 40, Blues, Funk and Country. With our band members' diverse backgrounds, we guarantee our patrons quality entertainment up and down the east coast.

RUNAWAY TRAIN

Self-Represented



Runaway Train is based in the Greensboro/Winston-Salem area and comprises seasoned musicians who have all worked as sidemen for national artists. Runaway Train covers the gamut of musical genres, including 70's/80's Rock, Mo-Town, Beach, and Country, playing everything from Boy George to George Jones. As a unit, Runaway Train has not only performed hundreds of shows as their own but have also been the backing band for National artists Marty Raybon (lead singer of Country Super Group Shenandoah) from 2012-2015, T Graham Brown (multi-award-winning 90's Country Artist with 4 #1 singles) from 2015-2018, Wade Hayes (90's Country award-winning artist) from 2021 currently still performing with. Runaway Train also works with American Idol Season 11 alumni Chelsea Sorrell. Runaway Train brings to the stage the ease and comfort of performing as the members have all performed live from every venue possible, from local Honky Tonks to the stage of The Grand Ole Opry.

THE PHOEBES

brioLIVE Entertainment



Born of the pandemic, the Phoebes Band started their journey in March 2021 at the Blumenthal Performing Arts Presents Queens of the City at City Square.

"The Phoebes Band (RTP, NC) were launched into the spotlight by Kingfish reposting their cover of his 2019 Grammy-nominated version of the classic, "Hey Joe", The Phoebes Band are one of the newest bands in the Southeast. Performing the perfect mix of Rock & Blues, they always represent." -The Piedmont Blues Organization

In May 2021, The Phoebes Band performed at the 35th Annual Carolina Blues Festival: Carolina Soul, joining the line-up with legends Roy Roberts, Johnny Rawls, Darryl Johnson, Penny Smith, and 2021 Jr. Bluesman Award winner Brendan Hinch. WINNER OF THE WRAL 2024 VOTERS CHOICE AWARDS: BEST LOCAL BAND OF THE TRIANGLE, WINNER OF THE BANDS AND CLUBS OF THE TRIANGLE 2024: HOUSE BAND (BEST LOCAL BAND OF THE YEAR) AWARD

CAROLINA RHYTHM MACHINE

Self-Represented



Carolina Rhythm Machine (CRM) is an 5-piece band located in the heart of the Triad area in North Carolina. The diverse experiences of the members of CRM make us unique. Our members have played music all over the country, from the east coast to the west, but all of them have returned to their roots in the Carolinas, the original home of Beach music.

We perform your favorite Beach, R&B, Southern Rock, and Country from the 60's and 70's as well as current hits. Carolina Rhythm Machine is composed of many great longtime musicians.

Trade Show Exhibitors

Stop by and find out about the wonderful goods and services that our trade show exhibitors have to offer to make your event shine!

They are on hand during these times:

Monday, January 27

11 am - 12:30 pm Lunch in Exhibit Hall

3 pm - 3:45 pm Break in Exhibit Hall

Tuesday, January 28

10 am - 11am

12 pm -1pm Lunch in Exhibit Hall

EXHIBITORS (as of 1/20/24)

BlackWater Band

BrandSpeed

BrioLIVE Production & Entertainment

Captain Jim Is Magic

Carolina Balloon & Décor

Carolina Rhythm Machine

Ceemi Agency Inc DBA BG Digital Group

Coastal Connections Marketing

Dakota Fox Entertainment

Don Ellington Sound Service

Earp Entertainment Services

Eventeny

Imagine Design & Production Services, Inc

IMAGINE Music Group

M4media

Mark Lippard Entertainment

Palatial Potties LLC

Pyrotecnico Fireworks, Inc.

Rachel Screen Printing

Ragland Productions, Inc.

Rick Hubbard Entertainment

Rivermist Music Group LLC

Rob Westcott Magic

Runaway Train

Specialized Sound & Light

Stafford Entertainment & Talent

Staircase Event & Sponsorship Management

The InterACTIVE Theater of Jef

Thank you to our Sponsors!



Showfest 2025

EVENT INNOVATORS CONFERENCE • EDUCATIONAL SESSION SCHEDULE

SESSIONS - TUESDAY, JANUARY 28

SESSION A - 9AM LAKEVIEW

Presented by: Ira Rosen MA/CFEE

President and CEO Ira L Rosen LLC-Festival and Event Consulting



EVENT ENERGIZER: Shifting from Routine to Riveting (hands-on workshop)

Event producers are often focused on the questions of “What we are doing” and “How we are doing it.” This hands-on session will explore the “why” we do events focusing on our stakeholders’ needs. This will be a hands-on workshop exploring the beginning stages of The Event Canvas™

SESSION B - 9AM GLENWATERS

ROUNDTABLE SESSIONS

Join us for engaging and informative roundtable sessions covering a wide range of topics related to festivals and events. These sessions will provide a platform for discussion and the exchange of ideas and experiences among industry professionals.

SESSION B - 11AM LAKEVIEW

Presented by: Andre Nabors and Ashton English with VISIT NC

TOURISM TRENDS & ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF FESTIVALS & EVENTS: An Update from Visit NC

André Nabors has served as the Partner Relations Manager for the Visit North Carolina (formerly North Carolina Division of Tourism, Film & Sports Development) since 2010. Visit NC a unit of the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina (EDPNC), supporting sustainable efforts to market and promote the state’s natural, historic and cultural resources; and provide assistance to communities, non-profits, and tourism related entities for development to improve tourism product and visitation across North Carolina. In December of 2012, Tourism was charged to oversee the NC Certified Retirement Community Program to encourage retirees and those planning to retire to make their home in North Carolina.



André formerly held a similar position with the West Virginia Division of Tourism, where he provided marketing, research, communications and other types of assistance to communities, attractions and CVBs throughout West Virginia. In that role, he worked to develop the state’s first African-American Heritage Guide identifying cultural and historic attractions, as well as foster its Civil War Trails program. André also worked on several projects such as Scenic Byways, Rail to Trails, National Coal Heritage Area, Freedom Trek II and III, Governor’s Black History Month Kick-Off program, and the Booker T. Washington Institute at WV State University. Before moving to North Carolina, André was convention sales manager for the Charleston (W.V.) CVB, where he covered the markets of sports, military, group, fraternity and also managed the Charleston Sports Committee. He began his career in tourism in June 1992 with the West Virginia’s Parkways Authority Welcome Centers as a travel counselor and manager. André is a Travel Marketing Professional (TMP) through the Southeast Tourism Society Marketing College program and has over 20 years of experience in the tourism industry.

(Continued)

SESSION B - 11AM LAKEVIEW

Presented by: Andre Nabors and Ashton English with VISIT NC

TOURISM TRENDS & ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF FESTIVALS & EVENTS: An Update from Visit NC



Ashton English has been the Tourism Data Specialist at Visit North Carolina (formerly the NC Division of Tourism, Film and Sports Development) since 2022. Prior, she worked in various tourism positions ranging from food and beverage, resort management and commercial accommodations. Ashton worked on a USDA/NIFA funded research project studying the impact of virtual agritourism experience on children's agriculture literacy at NCSU. Ashton received her M.S. Communication and Information (2023) from the University of Tennessee Knoxville and her B.S. in Parks, Recreation, Tourism Management from North Carolina State University (2021).

In her current role at Visit NC, Ashton provides strategic direction and oversight of the organization's research program and works closely with the entire team to implement initiatives that help guide marketing decisions to support tourism to and within North Carolina. Ashton also manages Visit NC's CRM platform to support the tourism industry and communicate effectively with staff, stakeholders and community members as well as market to consumers.

Ashton is also a sitting board member on the Southeast chapter of the Travel and Tourism Research Association. Which includes twelve states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia. She has also served advisory committees such as North Carolina State University department of Parks, Recreation, Tourism Management. Ashton has achieved many certifications such as Natural Restaurant and Lodging certifications, American Hotel and Lodging Education Institute-guest services professional.

SESSION B – 11AM GLENWATERS

Presented by: Elizabeth (Liz) H. Parham, CMSM

Director, NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center North Carolina Department of Commerce

MAIN STREET: Driving Downtown Vitality and Economic Growth



An update from NC Main Street and Rural Planning Director Liz Parham on progress in 2024, a forward-looking forecast for 2025 and beyond, and the pivotal role of festivals in fostering growth.

Liz Parham has worked for more than 37 years in the field of downtown revitalization and rural economic development. She serves as the director of the NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center at the North Carolina Department of Commerce, where she leads a team that manages the Main Street Programs, Rural Planning Program, the Rural Transformation Grant Fund – Downtown Revitalization category, and the Rural Downtown Economic Development Grant program. Parham is a certified facilitator who conducts strategic economic development planning, provides robust training and educational opportunities in

downtown revitalization, provides technical assistance for project and program development, and manages federal and state funding for downtown districts in North Carolina. Under her leadership, the Center also facilitates the largest statewide downtown revitalization conference in the United States. Prior to her current position, she worked for downtown revitalization nonprofit organizations in Sumter, South Carolina, and in Chapel Hill, Greensboro, Lenoir and Lexington, North Carolina. Liz is a Certified Main Street Director from the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the National Main Street Center and is Certified in Nonprofit Management from Duke University. She has a passion for downtown commercial architecture, small businesses, and the assets of rural North Carolina.

SESSION C – 11AM WALDEN

Presented by: Lillian Koontz, MPA, REHS Health Director Davidson County

WORKING WITH YOUR HEALTH DEPARTMENT



It's important to ensure the safety and enjoyment of all attendees at your event, particularly with regards to food service. Working with the local health department to ensure that each food vendor is following all guidelines and regulations is an essential step. This will not only help ensure the safety of attendees, but also allow you to focus on delivering a memorable experience for everyone involved.

Lillian Koontz began her public health career with the Davidson County Health Department in 2007 as an Environmental Health Specialist. Since 2016, she has served as Local Health Director for Davidson County. Throughout her career she has placed high value on engagement and advancing the public health system through professional organization involvement and leadership. Lillian has held numerous Public Health Leadership roles throughout her career starting in 2008 with the officer slate of the West Piedmont Environmental Health Section then moving to the NCPHA Environmental Health Section to now serving as President of the NC Association of Local Health Directors. She received an

undergraduate degree in Environmental Studies/Biology with a minor in Chemistry from UNC-Wilmington and a Master's in Public Administration from Appalachian State University.

PAINTING RAFFLE - SUPPORT WESTERN NC

Each year the NC Whirligig Festival hosts the interactive artist, Dan Nelson, to paint several large scale, oversized, vivid acrylic images of the festivities or Wilson milestones. He refers to them as abstract realism. The inclusion of live art has been a tradition of the festival since it's inception 20 years ago. Nelson engages with the audience and attendees look forward to seeing the final result.

The paintings are then often gifted to sponsors or supporting organizations, or auctioned off the following year. As the festival was gearing up for 2024, hurricane Helene devastated the western Carolinas and east Tennessee. The Whirligig Festival decided to have the annual paintings be something to support western NC and use the finished product in a way that could assist a NCAF&E festival member that had to cancel their event. Dan Nelson created the image seen here to celebrate all the rescue teams and the beautiful mountains. He included the dove as a symbol of hope and an incorporated an individual being assisted with her dog – which was inspired from actual photographs in the after reports.



The painting size is 5 ft x 6 ft. ShowFest attendees can buy a **\$5 raffle ticket** to win the painting or purchase an **arm length of tickets for \$25**. The painting will be on display at ShowFest in the Scholarship Silent Auction area. Help us support fellow festivals and western NC! All ticket sales and donations will go to support a cancelled festival. Additional donations will also be accepted. The painting and donations will be presented on the last day of the ShowFest conference. *#Wncstrong #NCWhirligigFestival Dan Nelson: dannelsonart.com*

Excellence Awards

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The ShowFest Excellence Awards are a long standing tradition of highlighting the best and brightest of festivals, events and associates across the Carolinas. Our full membership is dedicated to identifying the professionals that raise the bar and provide outstanding examples. We also use this program as a way to set new goals and standards for the profession. We can all learn from each other and give a hardy round of applause to those who distinguish themselves with great work. While many of the award categories lend to self-nomination, we encourage all planners and associates to take a wider look within our membership and submit nominations for other members who are leaders, do outstanding work and deserve recognition. Size Distinction: Small = Festival Overall Budget of \$25,000 or under / Medium = Festival Overall Budget of \$25,000 - \$149,000 / Large = Festival Overall Budget \$150,000+

2025 AWARD CATEGORIES

- Event of the Year
- Director of the Year
- Betsy Rosemann Volunteer of the Year
- Sponsor of the Year
- Supporting Member of the Year
- Rising Star Award
- Event Associated With An Event
- Best Children's Program
- Best Community Outreach Program
- Andy Smith Exhibitor Award
- Best Press Kit
- Best Non-Print Media



- Best Event Photo
- Best Sponsorship Packet
- Best Event Website
- Best Supporting Member Website
- Best Festival Social Media
- Best Merchandise (small, medium, large)
- Best Brochure (small, medium, large)
- Best Print Media (small, medium, large)
- Best Event Poster (small, medium, large)
- Best T-shirt (small, medium, large)
- Student Choice Award



2025 Excellence
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Hilton Charlotte University Place Floor Plan



Legend

-  **Midway** (Registration & auction winner's pick-up location)
-  **Welwyn** (Awards display)
-  **University Ballroom/Suites**
-  **Lakeview**
-  **Walden**
-  **Glenwaters**



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