



Excellence Award Winners 2026

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The North Carolina Association of Festivals & Events is excited to announce the winners of the 2026 ShowFest Excellence Awards. The winners were unveiled during the ShowFest 2026 – Event Innovators Conference, which took place at the Hilton Charlotte University Place Hotel on February 16-17, 2026. Attendees at the conference included festival and event planners, as well as supporting members who provide goods and services to the industry. This awards program recognizes and honors festivals and events that occurred during the 2025 calendar year.

Congratulations to our winners!

Overall Awards

Event of the Year:	The Autumn Leaves Festival – Mount Airy, NC
Director of the Year:	Christine Patterson w/Bands, Brews & BBQ & Classic Christmas – Mooresville, NC
Supporting Member of the Year:	Staircase Event & Sponsorship Management/Stephanie McIntyre
Sponsor of the Year:	deBotech/Bands, Brews & BBQ Festival – Mooresville, NC
Volunteer of the Year: (Tie for 2026)	Melissa Kilpatrick w/NC Pickle Festival – Mount Olive, NC Jocelyn Drawhorn & Clarisa Blackwell w/NC Whirligig Festival – Wilson, NC
Rising Star of the Year:	Best Dam Food Festival w/City of Tega Cay, SC – Tega Cay, SC
Event Associated with an Event:	ChristmasVille After Dark w/ChristmasVille Rock Hill – Rock Hill, SC

Best Outreach Program: Community Holiday Light Show w/City of Danville – Danville, VA

Best Children’s Program: ChristmasVille Rock Hill – Rock Hill, SC

Event Awards

“Andy Smith” Exhibitor Award: Chat Creatures/Dorne Pentes & Kevin Blanchfield – Charlotte, NC

Best Supporting Member Website: Staircase Event & Sponsorship Mangement/Stephanie McIntyre

Best Non-Print Media: Fuquay-Varina Haunted Trail – Fuquay-Varina, NC
for TV, Radio, Billboard or PSA

Photo of the Year: National Black Bear Festival – Plymouth, NC

Best Social Media: National Black Bear Festival – Plymouth, NC

Best Sponsorship Packet: NC Whirligig Festival – Wilson, NC

Best Event website: NC Whirligig Festival – Wilson, NC

Student Choice Award: Eagle Stuffed Animal by NC Freedom Festival – Goldsboro, NC

Promotional Awards*

Best Merchandise – variety of items, including but not limited to pins, ornaments, cups, give away items, clothing (excluding t-shirts), etc...

Small – Apron by Pickles, Pigs & Swigs – Mount Olive, NC

Medium – Corn Hole Boards by NC Blueberry Festival – Burgaw, NC

Large – Canvas Print by Ocean City Jazz Festival – North Topsail Beach, NC

Best Brochure - tri-fold, bi-fold, color or black & white

Medium – Duck Jazz Festival w/Town of Duck – Duck, NC

Large – Historic Morganton Festival – Morganton, NC

Best Print Media - printed includes newspaper ad, magazine, billboard, flyers, handouts and additional print items such as programs, invitations, calendars, etc... (excluding brochures)

Medium – Community Holiday Light Show w/City of Danville – Danville, VA

Large – Ocean City Jazz Festival – North Topsail Beach, NC

Best Event Poster - promotional or fine arts image

Small – Pancake Breakfast Fundraiser w/NC Blueberry Festival – Burgaw, NC

Medium – OceanFest – Surf City, NC

Large – Lexington Barbecue Festival – Lexington, NC

Best Event T-shirt - includes one and multi-color printed shirts

Small – NC Blueberry Festival Chili Cookoff – Burgaw, NC

Medium – Mullet Festival w/Swansboro Festivals – Swansboro, NC

Large – National Black Bear Festival – Plymouth, NC

*Event categories are based on overall operating budget, not attendance.

- Small – festival overall budget of \$25,000 or under
- Medium – festival overall budget of \$25,000 - \$149,000
- Large – festival overall budget of \$150,000 or above