

JASON ANDREW  
CAMERON BIXBY  
TARA BROSSA  
TREY CASH  
CLINT FONTENOT  
JOE HANEY  
LENNY HICKS  
RYAN HILL  
ANTWAN HORTON  
SAVANNAH JUNKINS  
J. ALEX LEWIS  
BREWER LOGAN  
CHRIS LOIGNON  
MATTHEW MAXWELL  
SHELBY MCCLAIN  
ROB MCINTYRE  
NICOLE MOORE-GETER  
BENTON MOSS  
MATTHEW REDMOND  
ROWEN TODD  
CLAY SCHOSSOW  
BRENT WRIGHT



# Pivotal Players

By Kevin Ellis and Natalie Bradin

**B**lazing a path involves diligence and moving in a direction that has yet to be well traveled. This year's class of *Business North Carolina* Trailblazers includes folks who plotted their course, while also helping create jobs and champion their rural communities.

This year, we received dozens of nominations for trailblazers who live from the coast to western North Carolina. The 23 people work in occupations including hospitality, marketing, entrepreneurship and technology. Several of them did not take traditional routes to owning a business.

One started work at age 14 to raise money to pay for college tuition, and at 21, he owns his business and wins awards for customer service. Another lost his job during the pandemic, and used that time off to start his own business. Another wanted to work in China, so he convinced a global company to modify its policies and give him an Asian assignment right out of college. His two years of experience there broadened his worldview beyond eastern North Carolina.

*Business North Carolina* has created a list of trailblazers for seven years. These are thriving business owners and professionals under the age of 40 who work in cities and towns with fewer than 100,000 residents.

North Carolina's population has trended urban for decades, but the state's rural history remains vital economically and culturally. About 40% of the state's population resides in 80 rural counties, as defined by the North Carolina Rural Center. The rural population of nearly 3.5 million people trails only Texas among the 50 states.

Most trailblazers are working behind the scenes to help make Main Streets across the state vibrant. Some help teach financial literacy to young people, others coach youth sports and serves on his town's elected council. One makes a point to visit elderly residents at nursing homes.

Congratulations to these energetic folks who are making a mark, and thank you to those who made nominations.



## JASON ANDREW

CHIEF OPERATIONS OFFICER  
UWHARRIE BANK

ALBEMARLE

37

Andrew's career at Uwharrie began as a coin roller while he was still in high school. CEO Roger Dick took a chance on him, he says, and "since then, my loyalty to Uwharrie Bank has only grown stronger." He has worked for Uwharrie for more than 21 years and now oversees about 200 employees and operational functions of the locally owned bank that serves four counties with a physical branch presence but has digital customers across the U.S. He considers loyalty to family, colleagues, organization and community as a guiding principle.

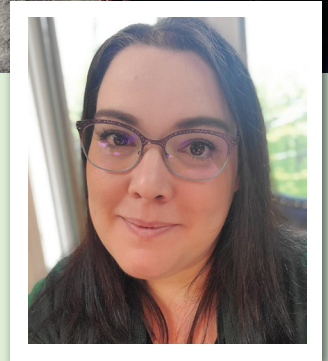
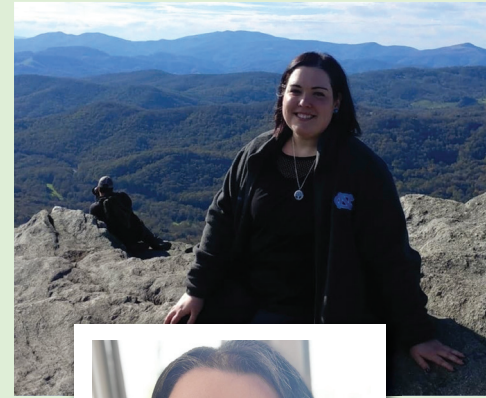
**Education:** Bachelor's, UNC Charlotte

**Key influencer:** My late father, Tommy Andrew Jr. battled health problems but was always positive. He had a remarkable ability to stay optimistic and always had the right things to say to keep me on track, whether personally or professionally. He taught me about resilience, positivity and the importance of staying true to one's values.

**Cool fact:** I coach my son's baseball team. I didn't realize the enjoyment I would get out of coaching, but it also gives me a chance to have a positive impact on young individuals' lives.

**Organization's biggest success:** Every year when we are able to give 10% of our earnings back to our communities. This commitment to community support and development is a core value at Uwharrie Bank.

**Best place to show off your town:** A tour of Morrow Mountain State Park, then out to either Lake Tillery or Badin Lake hit one of the local wineries, and experience the recent momentum of downtown growth with shops, restaurants, breweries and bars.



## TARA BROSSA

AREA GENERAL MANAGER,  
INSTRUCTOR

POTTEAT HOSPITALITY AND  
CALDWELL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

BOONE

39



## CAMERON LANEY BIXBY

VICE PRESIDENT OF COMMUNITY RELATIONS  
CATAWBA INSURANCE AGENCY

CONOVER

38

Bixby was raised in the family business that was started by her maternal grandparents, David Allen and Raenell Hunsucker, and has worked at Catawba Insurance for nine years. Most of the eight employees were hired by her late father, Tim Laney, who died in 2014. She says they learned from him and she learns from the things he taught them. Bixby says one of the best things about her job is the time she gets to spend in the community, building relationships with people. Her time as chair of the Hickory Young Professionals connected her with others interested in helping grow Catawba County.

**Education:** Bachelor's, UNC Charlotte

**Key influencers:** My grandparents and my parents led by example, and I feel blessed to have had the opportunity to learn different things from each of them. I find myself implementing things they've taught me at such odd times, but they truly made me who I am today.

**Cool fact:** I studied abroad in Australia at Macquarie University, where I worked with 2RRR Radio connecting to new and emerging communities. It was one of the most beautiful places. I went skydiving and whitewater rafting and stayed in hostels, and embraced the culture.

**Organization's biggest success:** We celebrated 75 years in business. We are a third-generation agency that was started by my grandfather. My father and mother bought it from him and continued to grow the agency, with my father being the youngest president of Independent Insurance Agents of North Carolina. They created something amazing here, and we hope to continue making it the best we can.

**Best place to show off your town:** Main Street in the town of Catawba has blossomed with coffee shops, boutiques, live music venues, restaurants, bars and two awesome ice cream shops.



Colleagues say they sometimes play “Where’s Tara” as they try to keep pace with Brossa’s many duties. She has been the general manager of the Hampton Inn and Suites since 2016 and took on the same duties at the Courtyard by Marriott last year. The two hotels employ nearly 90 staffers. Since January 2022, she has taught leadership and business courses to hospitality and culinary management students at Caldwell Community College. She is chair-elect of the Boone Area Chamber of Commerce board, and leads its Workforce Development Committee. She’s also vice chair of the High Country Workforce Development board, which represents Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Mitchell, Watauga, Wilkes and Yancey counties. She cites integrity as her most important trait. “I strive to live and lead above reproach and to do what is right, not what is necessarily easy.”

**Education:** Associate, Rowan-Cabarrus Community College; bachelor’s, UNC Chapel Hill; master’s, Liberty University

**Key influencer:** I worked alongside my mother, Susan Brossa, in my 20s. After more than 50 years in the insurance industry, she is meticulous to detail and provides top-notch customer service. She remains vibrant, cheerful and deeply engaged with every client. For her, it has always been about the people, not just the work.

**Cool fact:** I officiated the wedding of my wonderful friends Jacklyn and Duncan. We merged beautiful traditions from both families’ cultures, and it was an amazing experience.

**Organization’s biggest success:** Our Hampton Inn & Suites received the Conrad Achievement Award for ranking in the top 1% of the brand.

**Best place to show off your town:** Spend a day exploring and hiking Grandfather Mountain, then return to town and enjoy a meal at one of the many locally owned eateries.



## TREY CASH

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
DIRECTOR  
LENOIR AND GREENE COUNTIES

MAURY

34

Cash has worked in economic development for the two eastern N.C. counties for almost three years. In June, he became Greene County’s first certified economic developer. Working in the family’s tobacco and sweetpotato fields as a youth taught him the value of hard work, resilience and perseverance. He’s a board member of the Boys and Girls Clubs of the Coastal Plain. He co-hosts “The New Economic Developers on the Block” podcast with Stanly County Economic Development Director Elizabeth Underwood.

**Education:** Associate, Wilson Community College; bachelor’s, Western Carolina University; master’s, Grand Canyon University and Fayetteville State University

**Biggest influencers:** Retired Greene County Economic Development Director Harold Thomas taught me the essentials of leadership and how to navigate the complex challenges that arise within a community. My uncle Randy Allen instilled in me the value of hard work and dedication.

**Cool fact:** Since age 16, I have been a volunteer firefighter. This role has helped me make great friends and taught me the importance of community service and teamwork.

**Organization’s biggest success:** Groundbreaking of the new Fleet Readiness Center East complex at the North Carolina Global TransPark in June. This 700,000-square-foot facility is dedicated to the maintenance and repair of military aircraft such as the C-130 and HH-60W, and it will create more than 440 well-paying jobs. This project is a major development for Lenoir County and also benefits Greene County by utilizing its sewer infrastructure.

**Best place to show off your town:** The Ellis Planetarium at the Health and Science Museum in Kinston takes space exploration to the next level. Farmer and the Dail in Snow Hill is more than just a Southern bakery and kitchen. Cutter Creek Golf in Snow Hill is a challenging, perfectly manicured course.



## CLINT FONTENOT

OWNER  
ANGLER ELECTRIC

CHINA GROVE

35

Fontenot worked about 10 years as an electrician before venturing on his own. He credits the pandemic. “COVID was the best thing that could have happened to me,” he says. “I found myself unemployed because everything stopped. That led me to see that I was no longer on that hamster wheel, so I thought, ‘What can I do to improve my family.’” He now has three full- and one part-time employee. About 75% of the work is residential, with the balance light commercial. The company serves the Salisbury, Concord and Charlotte areas. He coaches his 6-year-old son Beau’s football team and says the “Angler” name reflects his love for fishing. “I would fish in a mudhole if I could.” He also volunteers with several addiction recovery groups.

**Education:** Associate, Rowan-Cabarrus Community College

**Key influencers:** My success comes from dad’s work ethic and mom’s entrepreneur spirit. I talk daily with my friend, Bradley Boyd who owns Property Pal, and he helps me avoid some of the problems that would arise from owning a business. I wouldn’t be where I am without his guidance.

**Cool fact:** I’m French-Cajun and my favorite food is boudin, a pork sausage made with rice, vegetables and seasonings.

**Organization’s biggest success:** Doubling last year’s sales.

**Best place to show off your town:** Staton Field, home of the state champion East Rowan High School baseball team.



**JOE HANEY**  
OWNER  
HANEY CPA  
HICKORY

35

As the owner and founder of his accounting firm, Haney assists clients with bookkeeping, taxes and consulting services. He particularly enjoys meeting with new business owners and helping them navigate their finances.

**Education:** Bachelor's and master's, Appalachian State University

**Key influencer:** Joni Berry took a scrawny teenager that was quiet, yet eager to learn and she modeled business leadership. She was a very successful business owner and approached life with a strategic mind. Being in her presence always challenged me and made me always want to be a better person. She was a mix of fierce and tender. Fierce to grow, fierce to excel, but also tender to nurture, tender to care about those in her village. Her almost 20 years of impact in my life have had the single greatest influence in my life. I apply the very principles she taught me, every day.

**Cool fact:** I started driving at 7 on the family farm. I spent most summers back in Kentucky working the family farm. That type of work teaches you real quick what working hard really means.

**Organization's biggest success:** Over the last 12 months, our organization has doubled in size, both figuratively and literally. Two staff members have been added. We moved locations to more than double our space, and we were able to double the volume that we did the previous year.

**Best place to show off your town:** I strategically have placed my firm in the downtown area. It is great to be so close to local restaurants and our newly opened trail system, and to be able to walk out my front door and directly engage with the community.



**LENNIE HICKS JR.**  
BRANCH NETWORK PLANNING ADVISER  
PNC BANK  
ROCKY MOUNT

35

Hicks started his career with PNC almost a dozen years ago as a teller in Williamston. He now ensures that PNC's physical branches in the Carolinas and Florida meet the needs of customers. That includes adding branches where needed and ensuring low- and moderate-income areas are served. Hicks says his work requires adaptability to the changing banking industry. He also has a passion for teaching financial literacy, especially among middle school and high school students and groups affiliated with the Y Achievers. Last year, Hicks completed the Consumer Bankers Association's course in banking fundamentals.

**Education:** Bachelor's, Chowan University; master's, Liberty University

**Key influencers:** Katy Harris and Terrence Johnson, both of PNC Bank, pushed me to higher levels by offering me stretch assignments and advocating for me throughout my career.

**Cool fact:** I find cooking to be peaceful. I love seeing my family and friends enjoy something I have either grilled or smoked.

**Organization's biggest success:** PNC will invest \$1 billion in our branch network. We will renovate nearly 1,200 existing branches and open 100 new locations by 2028.

**Best place to show off your town:** Rocky Mount Mills is a nice hangout spot with several breweries and restaurants right on the Tar River.





GarverUSA.com



## Leading the charge

For nearly two decades, Rob McIntyre has served his home state as an infrastructure water engineering expert, earning him a well-deserved spot as one of Business North Carolina's 2024 Trailblazers. Congratulations, Rob!

**Rob McIntyre, PE**  
*North Carolina Water Infrastructure Team Leader*



## RYAN HILL

**RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT MANAGER**  
**FOCUS BROADBAND**

SHALLOTTE

33



The Brunswick County native has been with Focus Broadband, formerly Atlantic Telephone Membership Corp., for more than two-and-a-half years and took his current role in January. He is a liaison with the building community as Focus expands in a 10-county region. The company has more than 360 employees. He also assists with the children's ministry at First Baptist Church of Shallotte.

**Education:** Bachelor's, UNC Greensboro

**Key influencer:** My grandfather, James Junior Johnson, was my idol. His leadership and care for his family showed me what it truly meant to be a man. People still speak highly of him years after his passing, which speaks about the legacy.

**Cool fact:** I love to cook. It started when I was much younger and watched my grandmother in the kitchen. She would eventually run me out for asking too many questions.

**Organization's biggest success:** Expanding to many rural areas in North Carolina through grant funding has allowed Focus to provide those who are unserved or underserved with high-speed internet. We will soon have more than 70,000 broadband subscribers.

**Best place to show off your town:** After visiting one of the many beaches surrounding Shallotte, it's only right to go and grab some legendary Calabash seafood.

## ANTWAN HORTON II

**STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND INCLUSION COORDINATOR**  
**BEAUFORT COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

WASHINGTON

36

Horton is a member of the Washington City Council and has worked for the local community college for three years. His office is a hub for activities and programs that enhance the overall student experience.

**Education:** Bachelor's, N.C. Central University

**Key influencer:** My grandfather, affectionately known as Chief, is the embodiment of perseverance and dedication, always driven to provide for his family. His strength and determination are a guiding light for our family, and through the generations, he continues to encourage us to rise above and strive for greater achievements.

**Cool fact:** I have an adventurous side.

**Organization's biggest success:** We're making our campus an inclusive environment where everyone can thrive.

**Best place to show off your town:** Washington's historic museums offer detailed exhibits and artifacts that illustrate the region's cultural heritage, significant events, and notable figures, collectively enriching our understanding of our past.



**SAVANNAH JUNKINS**  
**PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT AND DIRECTOR OF**  
**INTEGRATED BEHAVIORAL HEALTH**  
**CAROLINA FAMILY HEALTH CENTERS**

TARBORO

38

Junkins has worked for seven years at Carolina Family Health Centers. She oversees multiple programs, program development, grant writing and administration and personnel management.

**Education:** Bachelor's, West Virginia University; master's, Chatham University

**Key influencer:** My CEO, Dr. Laura Owens, patiently teaches me to be a better manager. She also supports me in developing new ideas for programs to serve our patients, even when those ideas are unconventional.

**Cool fact:** I played softball for a few years in college. I was a left-handed pitcher, which served me well since pure skill would not have gotten me through.

**Organization's biggest success:** In December 2023, Carolina Family Health Centers received a \$5 million gift from philanthropist MacKenzie Scott. The gift will be used to further CFHC's mission to provide accessible and affordable healthcare with excellence, where patients come first.

**Best place to show off your town:** While my company's service area encompasses three counties, I am primarily located in Tarboro, a mile away from historic Princeville. My favorite spot in downtown Tarboro is the restaurant On the Square. The location is lovely, and the food is delicious.

**J. ALEX LEWIS**  
**VICE PRESIDENT**  
**MSS SOLUTIONS**

LUCAMA

37

Lewis has 16 years of financial and industrial construction experience and has been with MSS Solutions for more than two years. The company has eight offices in North Carolina and South Carolina, and it works with construction and renovation companies on mechanical, HVAC, controls, fire alarm, security and plumbing systems for commercial and industrial buildings. Lewis also works with high school and college students in mock interview programs, trades classes and resume reviews.

**Education:** Bachelor's, East Carolina University

**Key influencer:** My grandfather taught me the importance of relationships, learning, and giving back. He also taught me the importance of having vision for tomorrow and having the grit to get there.

**Cool fact:** I have a love for music and enjoy playing the guitar and singing.

**Organization's biggest success:** We have seen tremendous growth over the past two years. We have invested heavily in technology, infrastructure, and most importantly our people. Our Raleigh team has grown from 12 to more than 110 employees in that timeframe.

**Best place to show off your town:** My family's farm. It is a great place to get away and enjoy the outdoors while spending time with my family and friends.



**CHRIS LOIGNON**

**OWNER**  
**FLEET FEET - GREENVILLE**  
 GREENVILLE

38





**BREWER LOGAN**  
**FOUNDER & CEO**  
**VERENOVO ENERGY**  
 NORTH WILKESBORO

32

Logan founded Verenovo Energy three years ago. The company's focus is turning waste wood from sawmills into a substance called biochar, which enhances soil health and stores carbon. Verenovo promotes sustainable agriculture by integrating its technology into building materials to reduce environmental harm.

**Education:** Bachelor's and master's, Appalachian State University

**Key influencer:** I rely on a team of mentors, each specializing in different areas. In graduate school, my principal investigator was Dr. Darren Seals. He taught me how to ask the critical questions and develop a practical way of addressing them. Additionally, he was instrumental in shaping my work ethic and desire to continually challenge myself.

**Cool fact:** I serve as the CFO of a nonprofit in Boone that focuses on men's recovery from addiction. It is a yearlong Christ-centered counseling program. I am assisting in deploying a \$950,000 grant to build a new campus.

**Organization's biggest success:** Verenovo received investor funding and a \$300,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

**Best place to show off your town:** Driving to the top of Brushy Mountain Road and looking over the largest western county in the state. It is spectacular. We also have great biking and hiking trails, and Kerr Scott Lake is a great place to spend time.

Loignon has been a franchise owner for seven years, and his running-shoe and apparel store serves eastern North Carolina. He has donated more than 500 pairs of shoes to local youth over the past two years, along with \$35,000 as part of Fleet Feet's community partner program. He was the Greenville-Pitt County Chamber's 2023 Small Business Leader of the Year. The store has nine full-time and 11 part-time employees.

**Education:** Bachelor's and master's, East Carolina University

**Key influencers:** Jesus Christ first and foremost. The ultimate servant leader. I would also say Dr. Seth Brown is a key leadership mentor of mine. He spends time with me each month, teaching me and pushing me to grow as a servant leader and an individual.

**Cool fact:** I played a lot of soccer growing up, including in an invitational tournament in Hawaii.

**Organization's biggest success:** We had 75% staffing turnover last year, with some key leadership positions needing to be filled as well as hourly employees. Our motto for the transition period was "Setting the Standard." We hired strategically, trained with purpose, held high standards and now have the best team culture we have ever had.

**Best place to show off your town:** East Carolina University is a beautiful campus. I love me some Purple and Gold!



**MATTHEW MAXWELL**  
**PRINCIPAL/FOUNDER**  
**THE NANTAHALA GROUP**

HIGHLANDS

38

Maxwell started his company a year ago to consult with healthcare groups on guidance concerning investment acquisition and value chain optimization. He also launched WhenToScreen.com, a free service to educate people about health screening. He previously worked as an executive for Alcanza Clinical Research, which he says emphasized inclusivity in clinical trials. He is a board member of Together We Can, which supports foster families in Macon County.

**Education:** Bachelor's, University of Georgia; master's, Texas A&M University-Commerce; and master's, University of Alabama.

**Key influencer:** My mother's confidence and my father's high standards.

**Cool fact:** I love to pick up trash on the beach.

**Organization's biggest success:** Getting off the ground and serving multiple clients.

**Best place to show off your town:** Waterfalls.



**SHELBY MCCLAIN**  
**APPRENTICESHIP COORDINATOR**  
**N.C. COMMUNITY COLLEGES SYSTEM**  
 LINCOLNTON

32

McClain has worked for more than three years partnering with employers to establish apprenticeship programs that build a skilled workforce across an eight-county region. She services close to 100 apprenticeship programs. The program challenges employers to look internally at their training practices to find improvement, with a goal of increasing retention and creating a more well-rounded workforce, she says. When not working, she visits local nursing homes or assisted living centers. “It’s shocking how few visitors these individuals receive. There’s so much wisdom to be gained from these individuals that will be lost with their generation. Adopt a grandparent and you’ll realize the amazing impact it will make on your life,” she says.

**Education:** Bachelor’s, Piedmont University; master’s, Brenau University

**Biggest influencer:** My late grandmother, Majorie Peoples Wynn, raised three children on her own, completed a graduate degree and was a cancer survivor. She was a passionate teacher whose influence lives on through her students.

**Cool fact:** My 4-H archery team of three placed fourth for the senior level stage competition when I was in high school.

**Organization’s biggest success:** Expansion into healthcare and early childhood education sectors to address workforce shortages and create job opportunities in these critical sectors.

**Best place to show off your town:** A hot dog at City Lunch. The atmosphere captures the appeal of a small town and stewardship in the community.

McIntyre leads infrastructure projects that ultimately supply communities with clean water. Some communities he’s helped include Mount Gilead, Mount Pleasant and the Kannapolis Crossing water and sewer project in Rowan County. Garver operates in 19 states, including the Carolinas. McIntyre serves on Albemarle’s Planning and Zoning Board and the Historic Resources Commission. He previously served on the boards of Stanly Atrium Health Foundation and Stanly Community College Foundation. He is active with First Presbyterian Church. McIntyre says one of his most valuable traits is loyalty, which allows him to build trust and relationships with co-workers and clients. He also coaches youth sports.

**Education:** Bachelor’s, NC State University

**Key influencer:** My high school basketball coach, Al Andrew, taught me and many others the value of hard work and the importance of teamwork, honesty and integrity. I went on to serve as his assistant coach at Albemarle High School for eight years.

**Cool fact:** I am an avid outdoorsman and conservationist. I enjoy spending time outdoors with my family fishing, hunting and hiking. I also enjoy learning about land management activities and preserving land for future generations.

**Organization’s biggest success:** I’ve had the privilege of playing a role in growing Garver’s client base throughout the Carolinas and exposing those clients to Garver’s water and wastewater design team. Our work also includes stormwater, master planning and streetscape projects.

**Best place to show off your town:** Albemarle is a hidden gem. Our downtown has a wonderful social atmosphere. There are farm-to-table restaurants such as Courthouse Tavern, Albemarle Sweet Shop for pastries and Uwharrie Brewing for locally crafted spirits. Albemarle is also abundant with natural recreational areas such as Morrow Mountain, Lake Tillery and many public parks.

**ROB MCINTYRE**  
**N.C. WATER INFRASTRUCTURE**  
**TEAM LEAD**  
**GARVER**  
 ALBEMARLE

38





## SHAWANNA NICOLE MOORE-GETER

**FOUNDER & CEO**

**COUNSELING WITH A PURPOSE**

KERNERSVILLE

40

Moore-Geter started Counseling With a Purpose in 2017. She has more than 15 years of experience in helping people manage and cope with mental health issues. She describes her life mission as teaching clients to identify setbacks, and empower them to overcome such challenges.

**Education:** Bachelor's, Winston-Salem State University; master's, N.C. A&T State University

**Key influencer:** My professional supervisor guided me through my learning curves when entering my profession. She lived authentically and modeled how this involves being true to one's self rather than constantly trying to meet external expectations.

**Cool fact:** I have been on TV several times and participated in a reality show for entrepreneurs.

**Organization's biggest success:** Being awarded a Minority Business Enterprise Grant from the city of Winston-Salem.

**Best place to show off your town:** Downtown Winston-Salem.



Image: Triad Business Journal



## BENTON MOSS

**CEO & OWNER**  
**SIMMONS & HARRIS**

ROCKY MOUNT

31



Simmons & Harris is a real estate firm with more than 100 years of history. He is the broker-in-charge of the property management and commercial brokerage divisions and has been involved in projects that top \$500 million in value.

**Education:** Bachelor's, UNC Chapel Hill

**Key influencer:** The late Charlie Munger was a famous California investor Warren Buffett partner and author of "Poor Charlie's Almanac." It is one of the greatest compendiums of writing for learning about human psychology, business and life in general.

**Cool fact:** I played classical and jazz piano for 13 years.

**Organization's biggest success:** Substantial growth in organization's headcount and revenue.

**Best place to show off your town:** Jack's Restaurant at Rocky Mount Mills.



**MATTHEW REDMOND**  
PRESIDENT/OWNER  
RAYMER OIL  
STATESVILLE

37

Redmond has worked for Raymer Oil for nine years, a company started by his grandfather. His family had one convenience store in 2014, 10 a year later, and now has 39 in 11 N.C. counties. The convenience stores are branded as Fast Phil's or Run-In. Raymer added eight Coffee House diners in 2018, then bought its first IGA grocery store in 2019. It now owns eight. The company employs 750 people. Redmond says his faith has helped him "take any bad circumstance and continue to work through any problem in both my personal and business life."

**Education:** Bachelor's, Appalachian State University

**Biggest influencers:** Grandfather, Jack Raymer, was responsible for fostering my interest in business and taught me so many lessons that I still use today. My parents also set a great example of maintaining a strong work ethic and following through until the job gets done.

**Cool fact:** I love to play pickleball. It provides the perfect break from a stressful day.

**Organization's biggest success:** Raymer Oil Co. continues to be a growing enterprise. I am most proud of my team and their ability to continue to absorb new acquisitions.

**Best place to show off your town:** Statesville has an awesome downtown. Start with dinner at one of our local restaurants, followed by a stroll around the town.

**ROWEN TODD**  
PRESIDENT, FOUNDER  
MOUNTAIN VISTA WASHING AND  
PROPERTY SERVICES

BOONE

21



**CLAY SCHOSSOW**

NEW MEDIA CAMPAIGNS  
CO-FOUNDER, PARTNER  
CARRBORO

38

A Cleveland native, Schossow came to UNC Chapel Hill at age 18 and has stuck around. With 20 employees, New Media Campaigns is a digital agency that works with Fortune 50 companies, international advocacy groups, local nonprofits and funded startups. Clients include law firms, higher education institutions and construction and engineering firms. Schossow didn't know what YouTube was when he cofounded the company, but he credits his curiosity with gaining understanding and an ability to help clients build an online strategy. He volunteers at the SECU Family House in Chapel Hill and at his daughters' schools.

**Education:** Bachelor's, UNC Chapel Hill

**Key influencer:** My grandpa modeled how to treat everyone with respect. He also told me, "Start your own company, if you can, so you won't be at the whims of other people." I took that advice and helped start NMC while still in college. I've never had a full-time job anywhere but here.

**Cool fact:** I am one of the co-owners of North Carolina's oldest restaurant, Carolina Coffee Shop. A group of UNC alums bought it together about seven years ago to help save and revitalize it. It has been a lot of fun as both a project and an opportunity to contribute back to Chapel Hill.

**Organization's biggest success:** We helped a global brand consolidate 16 different websites into a single overarching web presence. In the yearlong project, we led teams around the world in a discovery process, built out a strategy, and then worked to design and build the final product.

**Best place to show off your town:** An ideal Franklin Street Day: Carolina Coffee Shop for brunch, Top of the Hill for happy hour, Lantern for dinner. All quintessential Chapel Hill experiences that put you in the middle of the action downtown.



Todd cleaned his first window at age 14, with a goal of earning money to pay tuition at Appalachian State University. He's been in business for six years and has eight full- and two part-time employees serving N.C.'s High Country. The Boone Area Chamber named Mountain Vista its Startup Business of the Year in 2020 and its Outstanding Customer Service Award winner in 2023. Todd was a recipient of the group's "4 under 40" award in 2024. He credits part of his success with his desire to be kind and considerate of others. That includes providing employees with flexible hours and daily, free healthy lunches. He volunteers with Appalachian Voices, a nonprofit working to help transition rural Appalachia away from fossil fuels and toward renewables. In 2022, Mountain Vista grossed \$250,000 and served 273 homes and 50 businesses monthly. In 2023, it nearly doubled its size and is on track for double-digit growth this year with expansion plans for surrounding counties.

**Education:** Dual degrees from Watauga High School and Caldwell Community College.

**Biggest influencers:** I'm fortunate for my parents' support, but we would not be here today without the promotion, advice and mentorship of the Boone Area Chamber of Commerce team. It started with a free one-year membership, which helped me gain traction while learning how to run a business.

**Cool fact:** I teach plant and tree identification to kids at Buffalo Cove and other summer camps. I have been making rope out of plants, tools out of stone and can start a fire by rubbing sticks together. Teaching those primitive living skills help others experience the Appalachian mountains, the second-highest biodiversity in the world.

**Organization's biggest success:** In 2023, we added a van and two full-time employees to keep up with demand. At this year's International Window Cleaning Association competition in Galveston, Texas, I won the medley and technique categories, while our lead tech, Izzy Smeltzer, won the women's speed cleaning.

**Best place to show off your town:** Drive anywhere on the Blue Ridge Parkway and you can see why people live here.



**D. BRENT WRIGHT JR.**  
**PRESIDENT & CO-FOUNDER**  
**5050 STORAGE PARTNERS**  
**AND STORMARK SELF-STORAGE**

MOREHEAD CITY

38

Wright was an entrepreneurship and business development major in college. He co-founded 5050 Storage Partners about 10 years ago with Vice President Joshua Davis. The company owns and manages more than 7,000 self-storage units across five Southeastern states and the Philippines under its StorMark Self-Storage flag. The company works with investors to identify, acquire and optimize self-storage assets, and he has completed more than \$200 million in self-storage transactions. Wright enjoys inshore fishing or heading out to the Gulf Stream in search of tuna, mahi or billfish. He is also active in the children's ministry at One Harbor Church.

**Education:** Bachelor's, UNC Wilmington

**Key influencer:** Bob Rippy, the owner of Jungle Rapids Family Fun Park in Wilmington, was my mentor in college. He helped me formulate my ideas from thoughts to action. Getting started can be the hardest thing, and it was for me.

**Cool fact:** I studied in Beijing my junior year at UNC Wilmington, and then persuaded Caterpillar to send me there to work in China for two more years after I graduated. I lived in an apartment complex that housed 60,000 people and traveled a good bit. I learned the culture and expanded my worldview beyond eastern North Carolina.

**Organization's biggest success:** We've made some great key hires over the past 12 months. Finding employees who have talent in their respective field is one thing, but then finding employees who also align from a cultural standpoint is very difficult.

**Best place to show off your town:** Get on the boat. The Crystal Coast is just amazing, and the water really puts into perspective the beauty of the area.