

# NC Rural Center

## Helping the “middle of nowhere” become the center of the universe

The NC Rural Center opened its doors in 1987, with a mission to develop, promote and implement sound economic strategies to improve the quality of life for rural North Carolinians. It serves the state’s 80 rural counties with a special focus on individuals with low-to-moderate incomes and communities with limited resources. Priorities include workforce development, infrastructure, rural health, manufacturing, Rural Day, faith community, small towns, disaster recovery, small business development, microenterprise lending, food and agriculture, and leadership development.

### Partnering with SkyLine/SkyBest

Guided by this mission, the NC Rural Center developed a strong partnership with SkyLine/SkyBest. Patrick Woodie, President of the NC Rural Center, says, “The 80 counties in which we work encompass the entire North Carolina footprint of SkyLine/SkyBest. As a member-owned cooperative, SkyLine/ SkyBest has a mission that’s very complementary to ours, to make life better for the people and communities they serve in northwest North Carolina.”



Patrick Woodie, Edward Hinson, Brent Keith

Woodie adds, “Rural broadband is one of the top advocacy priorities of the NC Rural Center. They provide the kind of broadband infrastructure in their service area that we’d like to see in all of rural North Carolina. SkyLine/SkyBest deserves credit for being aggressive and making the long-term investments needed to deliver such a robust network. As a native of northwest NC, a customer of SkyLine/SkyBest and a former Alleghany County Commissioner, I understand better than most how deep their commitment is to their service area. High Country towns are in a better development position because of rural broadband from SkyLine/SkyBest.”

Across the state, the NC Rural Center is advocating for affordable, accessible and sustainable broadband solutions for rural counties. “We tend to avoid the one-size-fits-all response to broadband expansion, knowing that every community is different and a successful solution in one place cannot always be replicated in another,” he notes.

### Highlights of 2018

The NC Rural Center wrapped up its ambitious Rural Road Trip in 2018, after visiting all 80 of the state’s rural counties and speaking with more than 1,600 rural community leaders. One of the top priority issues cited by folks on the ground was the need for broadband access, affordability and adoption.

Woodies says, “Rural broadband expansion continues to drive our policy agenda and our work across the state. Without broadband, rural communities are at a disadvantage in education, health care and economic development.”

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- Patrick Woodie, NC Rural Center President



Patrick Woodie, NC Rural Center President, and Kim Shepherd, SkyLine/SkyBest CEO

In 2018, the state of North Carolina launched the GREAT program (Growing Rural Economies with Access to Technology). The NC Rural Center has been advocating for this broadband infrastructure funding model since the launch of its Rural Counts policy agenda in 2016 and applauds the state’s leadership in passing funding for the GREAT program.

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Another highlight of the past year was the continued expansion of the NC Rural Center’s leadership development programs, which work with rural leaders to help them get the training, resources and support they need. “Our flagship leadership development program, the Rural Economic Development Institute (REDI), helps rural leaders examine their community and region through a comprehensive, community economic development lens, by developing the tools and skills needed to create a collective vision and build the capacity to implement that vision. To date, REDI has trained nearly 1,200 rural leaders throughout the state,” Woodie notes.



Kim Shepherd, Edward Hinson, and Patrick Woodie

### Plans for the Year Ahead

Four key areas of the NC Rural Center’s work in 2019 will be:

- Rural Advocacy – The next Rural Day event will be held on March 26. This annual gathering of rural advocates from across the state helps people learn about the critical issues facing rural communities and hear directly from our state’s elected leaders about their vision for rural North Carolina.
- Leadership – The NC Rural Center will work to enhance its flagship leadership development program (REDI) and better deploy its regional leadership training (Homegrown Leaders).
- Thread Capital – Its new Resilient Recovery Loan is designed to meet the extended challenges faced during a business’s recovery from a natural disaster, including mitigating for future disasters, repairing physical damage and recouping significant economic losses.
- Faith In Rural Communities – This program will continue to work with rural churches, often one of the most trusted anchor institutions in their communities, to be better prepared and equipped to address the pressing economic issues facing their local communities.