



ANNUAL REPORT 2022

A RISING TIDE LIFTS ALL BOATS

A message from Terri Dennison, Executive Director

Dear Chamber Members, Elected Officials, and
Bladen County Businesses,

Jonathan Langston, the 2022 and 2023 President of the Elizabethtown—White Lake Area Chamber of Commerce often reminded me of this saying as we planned our programs and initiatives this past year. Based on our Strategic Plan, that was introduced at last year's Annual Meeting, we challenged ourselves to think a little different, to create more partnerships, and to recognize trends and plan appropriately. Working with town and county leaders, we got involved in discussions and projects that will result in a brighter future for not just Elizabethtown and White Lake but all of Bladen County.

What follows is a report on projects, partnerships and accomplishments this year. I hope this gives you a glimpse of how we are embracing the concept of working together in new and fascinating ways. I would love to hear your thoughts and concerns. Please feel free to contact me at 910.862.4368.

Terri





_HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE FILLED OUT OUR SURVEY FOR THE CHANCE TO WIN THIS BASKET FULL OF LOCAL ITEMS. ONE BASKET WAS AWARDED AT EACH FESTIVAL:

- DUBLIN PEANUT FESTIVAL
- NC GRAPE FESTIVAL
- BEAST OF BLADENBORO
- PORK & BEATS

BUSINESS PROMOTION

The Elizabethtown - White Lake Area Chamber of Commerce held several events in 2022 to highlight our members to visitors and residents including the White Lake Water Festival, Christmas at the Farmers Market (4 Saturdays) and Ribbon Cuttings.

We also had a presence at every major festival in the Fall to hand out our Guide & Membership Directory and to answer questions about the area. A survey was conducted amongst festival attendees so we could gather emails and do a demographic study.

To attract more people to our festivals, we worked with Visit NC to make sure the major festivals were listed and promoted through the state website and media relations.

And finally our Downtown Committee organized a 5-month radio campaign called "Experience Elizabethtown" with over 850 commercials airing on The Cross 100.9. The commercials promoted coming to Elizabethtown with a focus on a different merchant. Overall 7 merchants participated in the campaign.

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

LEADERSHIP BLADEN IS A PARTNERSHIP OF BLADEN'S BLOOM-IN', BLADEN COMMUNITY COLLEGE, BLADEN COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM AND THE CHAMBER



In 2022, the Chamber along with our partners, brought back the Leadership Bladen Program as a result of strategies identified in both the County Strategic Plan and the Chamber's Strategic Plan. During the seven-months program, twelve participants got an in-depth view of various county and local businesses and agencies from a tour of manufacturers, to understanding how the county budget is created and learning about impacts on our local farmer. They talked one-on-one with many of Bladen County's current leaders. Participants studied the qualities that make an effective leader, analyze individual leadership roles, and develop personal leadership styles and skills. All participants discovered new challenges and opportunities and are looking forward to taking a the role shaping the future of our community and region.



**Our State Magazine—
March 2022**



**Carolina Travelers—
Holiday issue. 4 page story
on Christmas in Bladen**

MOTHER NATURE'S PLAYGRUND NOT JUST A PROMOTION BUT BRAND DEVELOPMENT

In the last few years, we have branded all the outdoor assets and attractions in the area under the concept of "Mother Nature's Playground." For a brand to be successful, it has to be memorable and people need to start talking about the experience.

Are we there? Well, we are getting there. The fact that we were one of the first southeastern NC places to be asked to be part of the Year of the Trail is testimony to the great trails and outdoor experiences in Bladen County.

Bringing tourists to our area has both a direct and indirect impact on our local economy and services. From 2020 to 2021 (the latest figures available), we saw an increase in tourism spending. This translates into additional tax revenue for the county and towns to provide services. It means more money in the pocket of small business owners so they can support other small business owners—think about the merchant who uses a local accountant, doctor, builder and dry cleaner.

| TOURISM IMPACTS ON BLADEN COUNTY IN 2021 | |
|---|------------------------|
| Increase of 54.3% over 2020 | |
| Visitor spending | \$56.95 Million |
| Number of employees in tourism industry | 248 |
| Payroll | \$10.4 Million |
| State Sales Tax Receipts | \$ 2.5 Million |
| Local Tax Receipts | \$ 1.9 Million |
| Economic Impact of Travel on North Carolina Counties 2022 | |

NEW BUSINESSES & RIBBON CUTTINGS

SEVERAL NEW BUSINESSES
OPENED OR EXPANDED THIS
YEAR AND THE CHAMBER WAS
THERE TO CELEBRATE.

TIPSY TOAD GALLERY (Jan.)
ABOVE & BEYOND WELL-
NESS & MED SPA (Jan.)
SPEECH SOLUTIONS (March)
SWEETER THAN HUNNY
(April)
COASTAL HORIZON MOBILE
CARE UNIT (April)
G.H. WHITE MEMORIAL
HEALTH & EDUCATION CEN-
TER (May)
THE PEOPLE'S EMPORIUM
(June)
THE MERMAID CASTLE (Oct.)
W.A.R.M. (Oct.)

Ads and Activities that support the promotion of Mother Nature's Playground:

Print

2022 Guide & Membership
Directory (15,000 copies)
2022 Calendar of Events
2022 Fall Calendar of Events
Advertisements
2022 North Carolina Visitor
Guide—1/8 p ad
Seasons Magazine—4
issues—1/2 p ad
USA Today "Go South"
Traveler Editions 4 issues
Our State - full p—May
Our State - 1/8p—Dec.

Radio

The Cross 100.9

Billboards

White Lake Drive
Hwy 87

Public Relations

Media Mission with Visit NC

Future programs

Through contacts and conversations in the last year, the Elizabethtown—White Lake Chamber of Commerce was instrumental in helping to bring two state initiatives to Bladen County in 2023. Watch your monthly newsletters for updates:

- UPLIFT Tourism Strategies Plan
- Creating Outdoor Recreation Economies (CORE)



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**Terri Dennison,
Executive Director**

**Heather Norton
Assistant**



2022 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Jonathan Langston, White Lake Holiday Resort - President
Marcia DeAndrade/Todd Lyden, Bladen County Community College
Lane Greene, Bladen Builders Supply
Christian Fisher, the Hilton Companies
Jake Wonble, Goldston's Beach/ the Grand Regal
Denise Taylor Bridgers, Lu Mil Vineyard/ Taylor Productions
Maurice Williams, Whimsical Forist & Gifts
Chloe Roberts, Campbell Oil
Leon Cromartie, Cromartie Enterprizes

Ex-offio Directors

Anne Beyer, Farm Bureau Insurance - Past President
Mayor Sylvia Campbell/ Dane Rideout, Town of Elizabethtown
Mayor Golston Womble/ Sean Martin, Town of White Lake
Chairman Ray Britt/ Greg Martin, Bladen County Commissioners
Chuck Heustess, Bladen's Bloomin'/ Bladen County Econ. Dev.
Dr. Amanda Lee, Bladen County Community College

The Mission of the Elizabethtown – White Lake Area Chamber of Commerce :

To speak for the business community; supporting economic growth and educational resources, and to enhance the overall quality of living by partnering with diverse organizations in and around Elizabethtown, White Lake and all of Bladen County.

OUR FOCUS AREAS:

BUSINESS PROMOTION: promote member businesses to encourage local support and business sustainability.

BUSINESS ADVOCACY: Advocate for local business issues that affect profitability and sustainability.

RESIDENT/ EMPLOYEE RECRUITMENT: Develop strategies in recruit workers and residents to Bladen County.

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP: Advocate and support the efforts of local governments to address pressing community needs.

TOURISM PROMOTION: Promote Elizabethtown – White Lake Area as a year-round destination.

CHAMBER SUSTAINABILITY: Reposition the Chamber to meet broader community needs and develop new revenue streams