



JULY 20-24, 2025
UNICOI STATE PARK
HELEN, GEORGIA

Healing the Healers

**NURTURING LEADERS FOR
COMMUNITY IMPACT**





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A Note from Our Executive Director, Allison Gant

HI-DE-HI RIDGERS,

Every summer I look forward to being back on the mountain surrounded by the greatest group of nonprofit leaders.



The 2025 conference theme, Healing the Healers, resonates with so many of us during these uncertain times. This past year has produced new and unique challenges, and

we are stronger when we can face them together. Your presence shows your passion and commitment to your nonprofit mission and affirms hero status to each and every one of you.

Blue Ridge Institute is a unique and special experience which I've been a part of for over 10 years. Board members and I work closely to make this experience supportive and memorable. Our goal is to continually strengthen this organization to fully serve its membership and to honor an almost 100-year tradition.

I hope you find this year's conference especially relevant, and I encourage you to fully engage with your fellow Ridgers, especially our Freshperson class. I am here to support you and your work, so do not hesitate to reach out if I may be of assistance on or off the mountain.

Now—let us all make the most of our Ridger experience as together we Learn, Lead, Renew and GROW to **Heal the Healers**.

Welcome to the Mountain,
Allison Gant, Executive Director

A Note from Our President, Carrie Gerard

I am thrilled to welcome you to our 2025 Blue Ridge Institute: Healing the Healers. It is an honor and privilege to participate in organizing a conference nearing a 100-year tenure! So many of your fellow Ridgers have put in hours of energy and enthusiasm to create this meaningful experience. Let us go forth and Lead, Learn, and Renew.

The theme of this year's conference came quickly to me in early 2024. As the Executive Director of a nonprofit organization, it seemed that we were creeping out of the COVID era. And while procedures and activities were returning back to "normal," it seemed like my team, our volunteers, and I were nowhere near "normal" ourselves.



Past President Christina Delzingaro and President Carrie Gerard celebrating Scarlet Night on Resilient Lady in April 2025

It was a profound reminder that our experiences in time and space impact our leadership and efficacy. And not just our experience of the pandemic, but all of our collective experiences are informing and shaping our leadership.

My hope is that during this week we can explore how recognizing and acknowledging how we have moved through this world, individually and collectively, has shaped our leadership. And we can take away specific tools and strategies to use this knowledge to lead our teams and organizations in a more productive way. Primarily to make a greater impact on our communities.

Let me say an extra welcome to our Freshperson Class of 2025. We are looking forward to meeting you and connecting. If I can assist you in navigating your first Blue Ridge experience, please do not hesitate to introduce yourself. This is a powerful network. And it needs you to be a part of it.

Carrie Gerard, President



Carrie with her family: Brian, Ethan, and Graham

I am thrilled to welcome you to our 2025 Blue Ridge Institute: Healing the Healers. It is an honor and privilege to participate in organizing a conference nearing a 100-year tenure!



LIVING OUR VALUES

The BRI Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility statement drives the organization's annual planning, programming, and recruitment activities.

The Blue Ridge Institute is a family of choice. Our fiercely welcoming annual conference serves as a place to learn, lead, and renew, with opportunities to build connections, make friends, and network with champion colleagues. Quirky "Ridgers" create a safe space for all who attend. We connect throughout the year in various ways with the same intentions as our annual gathering.

As racial inequities and injustices continue, BRI strives to be increasingly intentional with reflective humility to effectively support and engage "Ridgers" and the communities they serve. We reflect the myriad of identities they serve, often rooted in communities of color, abilities, genders, sexual orientations, ages, socioeconomic status, and their intersections that commonly lead to marginalization.

Our organization was founded to create social change. We adamantly condemn injustices and systematic inequities woven into the fabric of our nation. As we move forward as leaders, we are committed to continuing the legacy of community uplift, power sharing, and intentional listening to co-create a brighter, kinder world.

Mission, Vision, and Values

MISSION: To provide learning and renewal to community service professionals in order to create more effective leaders.

VISION: To be the premier network providing learning and renewal at a level attracting the best and brightest community service professionals.

VALUES: Leadership Development, Renewal, Unique Culture and Environment, Family-Life Balance, Tradition, Service.



Official BRI Salutation

Blue Ridge Institute has an official call and response used by members. We use this during official gatherings to greet each other individually or as a crowd attention-getter. This is a way to identify "Ridgers" to each other when in any setting.

GREETING: **HI-DE-HI!**

RESPONSE: **HO-DE-HO!**

2 PM

YLA Guardian/Child Orientation*Dogwood Room (lower level, Building D)*

2-4 PM

Conference Registration Open

3:15 PM

Freshperson Orientation*Fireside A*

5:30 PM

BRI Conference Kick-Off

7 PM

BRI Family Picnic and Outdoor Games

Join us for the BRI welcome picnic—your first official chance to say “hi-de-hi” to friends you’ve not seen in a year! We’ll have a cook-out meal, outdoor games, and rock painting. Be sure to save room for s’mores!

9 PM

BRI After Dark*Outdoor Fire Pit**Rain location: downstairs in main building by the fireplace.*

Informal Ridgers gathering for fellowship and conversation. BYOB and snacks.

All Events Take Place In Masters Hall (3rd Floor of Lodge) Unless Otherwise Noted.



MONDAY SCHEDULE

8:30 AM

Morning Gathering

Grab a cup of coffee and mingle with friends before we start the day with a song led by Tim Griffin.

Morning Session

8:45 AM: Welcome/Announcements

9 AM: Keynote Speaker, Rénee Smith, “Leading with Love in a Time of Change: Healing Ourselves, Our Teams, and Our Workplaces”

10:30 AM: Skill Labs

11:30 AM: Break

11:45 AM: Wrap Up and The News

Skill Labs

Choose 1 of 3 options:

- Caring at the Core: Embedding Values into Board Culture: Beth Ellen Holiman
- Leadership Transition—Is it Worth the Leap?: Carrie Theall
- 5-Factor Wellness for Healing the Healer: Corinne L. Faza

12:30–2 PM

Daily Siesta

Use this time to nourish, rest and renew.

2 PM

Mellow Monday

Join activities planned to help you relax and mellow out as we all settle in for our week at Unicoi.

2–4:30 PM

Activities Hub Open

Fireside A

Stop by the Activities Hub anytime to play games, join in on a puzzle, do a craft, or jump in on the conversation.

2–3 PM

Yoga

Fireside C

Relax your muscles and your mind through a yoga session led by Ridger Danielle Rottenberg. Danielle will lead us through a gentle-to-beginner Yoga session, followed by Yoga Nidra, which induces a deep state of conscious sleep, allowing for rest, while you remain aware of your surroundings. Feel free to bring a towel or yoga mat if you would like to for your comfort.

3:15–4 PM

Color Walk

Meet Outside Masters Hall

Discover the colors of the rainbow that nature provides on a guided color walk through the Unicoi Forest. Each person will be randomly assigned a color to focus on for the duration of the walk, which will also be a silent and focused time for reflection.

4:30–5 PM

Grown-Up Book Fair

Outside Masters Hall

Join us as we recreate the joy of the school book fair right here at BRI! We'll have a selection of new and lightly used books for you to choose from as you continue to plan for your relaxation for the week.

5 PM

Friends of Bill

Board Room

5:30 PM

Sponsor Meet and Greet

Outside Masters Hall

Stop by the lobby area outside Masters Hall to grab a drink and a light snack. This is the best opportunity to make sure you connect with our 2025 sponsors and thank them for their support of BRI!

6:30 PM

Dinner with Friends Old and New!

Meet up with your group outside Masters Hall

Sign up for a dinner group hosted by a member of the BRI Board of Directors and the Activities Committee. Options will include dinners hosted in Unicoi cabins and at local restaurants, providing a great chance to meet new friends and catch up with those you've known for years. Everyone will need to cover their own dinner cost unless the host shares otherwise.

9 PM

BRI After Dark (Adults Only)

Outdoor Fire Pit

Rain location: downstairs in main building by the fireplace.

VIRTUAL SCAVENGER HUNT

Stop by the Activities Hub any afternoon to pick up your scavenger hunt list. Snap your proof along the way—participants with the highest scores at the end of the week will win a prize! More details will be shared throughout the conference.

Leading with Love in a Time of Change

Healing Ourselves, Our Teams, and Our Workplaces

RÉNEE SMITH

What if leadership could feel more human—more grounded in connection, compassion, and courage? In this hopeful and energizing interactive keynote, Rénee Smith invites us to embrace a powerful truth: Love belongs at work—and especially in leadership. Love, the energy that uplifts and connects, is not a soft sentiment—it's a powerful force, a strategic advantage, and joyful. It's what helps us build trust, foster resilience, and create cultures where people and organizations can truly thrive.

As nonprofit and community leaders, we carry immense responsibility to our teams, our missions, and the communities we serve. And after years of showing up through crisis, change, and uncertainty, many of us are still leading on empty. This conversation is an invitation to reconnect with what sustains us, not just as professionals, but as people.

Drawing from her original research and years of work with public and social sector leaders, Rénee shares a practical, science-backed framework for Loving Leadership—a relational, courageous, and deeply human approach that meets this moment. Through stories, insights, and gentle challenge, she'll help us name what's real, honor our inner wisdom, and step into leadership that heals and serves.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Participants will:

- Understand the neuroscience of fear and love—and how these forces shape the way we lead and experience work.
- Learn the core practices of Loving Leadership to build trust, resilience, and belonging in your organization.
- Explore how to shift from fear-based habits like control, perfectionism, and disconnection to love-based approaches rooted in care, accountability, and inclusion.
- Reflect on what post-crisis leadership requires to sustain yourself and your team with authenticity and hope.
- Gain a simple, practical tool to lead with love in the face of challenge, without sacrificing clarity or effectiveness.



BRI SKILL LABS

BRI Skill Labs, led by experienced Ridgers, provide short, easily digestible sessions for learning tangible skills, tips, and steps to put into immediate action. Many thanks to our presenters who graciously donated their time and talent to bring us these learning opportunities!

MONDAY SKILL LABS

SPEAKER: CARRIE THEALL

Leadership Transition: Is it Worth the Leap?

Location: Fireside A



At some point in our lives as nonprofit leaders, we consider making a change—whether it's to a new organization similar to the one we're already in or to a position in a completely different field. Sometimes we're forced to make a career

change due to relocation or a feisty board of directors. And sometimes we just want to make more money. We will explore ways to make the leap from one leadership position to another with discussion around timeliness, contract negotiations, aligning with a new team, best ways to introduce change, and how to deal with starting all over.

Carrie Theall is the CEO for the Early Learning Coalition of Marion County. She holds a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in library and information studies, both from the University of North Carolina Greensboro. She has also completed a certificate in non-profit management from Duke University. Carrie has been through several leadership transition events in her career and wants to share her experiences to help navigate these often difficult waters.

SPEAKER: BETH ELLEN HOLIMAN

Caring at the Core: Embedding Values into Board Culture

Location: Masters Hall



What if your board's structure, policies, and interactions reflected the heart of your mission? This skill lab is for executive directors ready to lead with intention and center care in board culture. We'll explore how to design values-aligned policies, set expectations rooted in empathy, and create a governance

structure that invites belonging, accountability, and shared purpose. Walk away with practical tools to help your board embody your organization's values—not just support them.

Beth Ellen leads with the belief that mission-driven organizations will achieve their aspirations when fundraising, boards, and operations are transparent, respectful, empathetic, and courageous. She is the lead consultant with The Hive Collective which uses participative methods in all facilitation engagements. The Hive Collective practitioners ensure that every voice is heard and that consensus is the norm.

For over six years, Beth Ellen led Together Women Rise, a powerful community of women and allies dedicated to achieving global gender equality. She has served as the executive director of an emergency shelter for foster children, the American Cancer Society, Reach Out and Read, Norwegian Outdoor Education Center, and Utah Community Associations Institute. She was a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar in Mexico to learn and teach domestic violence intervention in Mexican shelters. Beth Ellen is a Certified Fundraising Executive and BoardSource Governance Consultant.

SPEAKER: CORINNE L. FAZA

5-Factor Wellness for Healing the Healer

Location: Fireside C



5-Factor wellness is a data-driven framework for improving and practicing a lifestyle that can optimize your health and well-being. As employers, leaders of organizations and of organizational cultures, it is our responsibility to create an environment

where health and wellness are valued and supported. Your personal health and wellness, or lack thereof, can have a profound impact on your work and that of the organization you lead.

In this workshop we will explore each of the 5 factors in detail, discuss the science and recommendations behind each factor, and provide practical tools you can begin to incorporate today to improve your health and wellness!

Corinne L. Faza, MPH, CHES has served as the Executive Director of the Sari Asher Center for Integrative Cancer Care since March 2009. She holds a Master of Public Health degree in health education and behavioral science from Emory University. Corinne is a certified Health Education Specialist since 1996 and is passionate about helping others improve their quality of life through creating healthy lifestyle habits. Corinne has been a Ridger since 2001 and hasn't missed a July gathering yet!

TUESDAY SKILL LABS

SPEAKER: MARGARET BARRETT

Let's Talk About Burnout: Supporting Ourselves and Others

Location: Fireside C



Join this session to explore ways to identify burnout, prevent it when possible, and address it when it happens. Up to 14 participants will receive a complimentary copy of Emily Ballesteros' insightful book, *The Cure for Burnout: How to Find Balance and*

Reclaim Your Life, donated by the author. We'll talk about recognizing burnout in ourselves and pay special attention to ways we can support staff, volunteers, and others in our roles as leaders. Participants will develop concrete strategies to use when they head home from the conference.

Margaret Barrett has served as the Associate Director of the Carolina Center for Public Service at UNC-Chapel Hill for nearly eight years. Before that, she worked in the nonprofit sector for 18 years at the local and international level. In her previous lives as a law student, family law attorney, rape crisis center director, international development grant manager, and suicide crisis line volunteer, Margaret has experienced and witnessed burnout in many forms and is excited to facilitate this discussion.

PANELISTS: JOHN ELBARE, CHRISTINA DELZINGARO, AND GRACE ANNE ALFIERO

Becoming Comfortable with Negotiation and Advocacy

Location: Masters Hall

Master the art of skillful active listening to find the win-win in negotiations and advocacy with Christina Delzingaro, John Elbare and Grace Anne Alfiero.

John Elbare, MBA is currently the volunteer Chair of the Central Florida SCORE Chapter. He previously owned a fundraising and nonprofit management consulting firm. He also worked as a Certified Financial Planner and in a variety of positions in the nonprofit sector.



Christina Delzingaro, MBA is the CEO at Community Access Network in Lynchburg, Virginia. She has over 30 years of success in fund development, organizational capacity-building, and establishing alliances. Values-driven with a commitment to creating an environment that is transparent and exceptionally supportive to donors, staff, patients and the bottom line, Christina is an expert communicator and is a former president for BRI.

Grace Anne Alfiero, MFA is the President and CEO of Arts In Action Consulting Firm and supports several USA-based and international NGOs with grant writing, strategic planning, communications support, and revenue-building projects.

SPEAKERS: DANIELLE SANGITA ROTTENBERG AND SUSAN WATSON

The Art of Self-Care through Mindfulness and Journaling

Location: Fireside A



Danielle and Susan offer a unique skill lab that combines guided meditation, breathwork, and journaling to foster clarity and introspection. Now is the ideal time to reevaluate and reimagine what ignites your passion. You can align more closely with your true purpose by creating space for what inspires you.



Danielle Sangita Rottenberg, M.Ed., has over 15 years of experience in private practice, specializing in bodywork, energy work, and health coaching. She is also a 500-hour

certified yoga teacher with 22 years of experience. Danielle incorporates holistic practices into all her modalities and is passionate about helping people become the best versions of themselves—physically, mentally, and spiritually. She resides in Swannanoa, North Carolina, and has been involved in the nonprofit sector since her early 20s through Co-founding Creative Clay and grant writing with Arts In Action.

Susan Watson is Executive Director of Women's Resource Center in Alamance County, empowering women to design sustainable lives filled with purpose and meaning. Trained as a Life Design Catalyst Facilitator, Practitioner and Coach, she started Delegating 4 Success, LLC, a coaching practice for individuals and entrepreneurs. Susan holds a BA in Women's and Gender Studies from the University of NC at Greensboro.

TUESDAY SCHEDULE

8:30 AM

Morning Gathering

Grab a cup of coffee and mingle with friends before we start the day with a song led by Tim Griffin.

Morning Session

8:45 AM: Welcome/Announcements

9 AM: Keynote Speaker, Dawn Emerick, “The Case for Trauma-Informed Leadership: Advancing Post-Traumatic Growth in the Workplace”

10:30 AM: Skill Labs

11:30 AM: Break

11:45 AM: Wrap Up and The News

Skill Labs

Choose 1 of 3 options:

- Let’s Talk About Burnout: Supporting Ourselves and Others: Margaret Barrett
- Becoming Comfortable with Negotiation and Advocacy: John Elbare, Christina Delzingaro, and Grace Anne Alfiero
- The Art of Self-Care through Mindfulness and Journaling: Danielle Sangita Rottenberg and Susan Watson

12:30 PM

Daily Siesta

Use this time to nourish, rest and renew.

TIMES TBA

Road Trips

Join an afternoon road trip led by a member of the activities committee!

- **Trip #1:** Did you have a Cabbage Patch Doll as a kid? If you did, then you must join the group to visit the Babyland General Hospital in nearby Cleveland. You’ll tour the hospital, meet the newborns, and even witness a “birth.” (Host: Pam Gilliam)
- **Trip #2:** Visit a local vineyard for a wine tasting with a view. The group will tour the winery, enjoy a sampling, and relax to enjoy the stunning views. Specific winery TBD, May have an attendance cost, TBD. (Host: Heather Black)
- **Trip #3:** Nearby Helen is a quaint town that offers the charm of Bavaria in the heart of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Jump on the shuttle provided by Unicoi and head into Helen for a relaxing afternoon as you take in the sights and sounds. (Unicoi Shuttle)

2–4:30 PM

Activities Hub Open

Fireside A

Stop by the Activities Hub anytime to play games, join in on a puzzle, do a craft, or jump in on the conversation.

2–4 PM

Creating a Trauma-Informed Plan

Fireside C

Small Group Skill Lab with Dawn Emerick

7:45 PM

Annual BRI Talent Show

Masters Hall

Do you sing or dance? Write poetry? Play the guitar? Whatever your talent you’ll find no better audience than your Ridger Family! Sign up for the talent show and be ready to take the stage Tuesday night! Audience participation is just as important—so let’s be sure to pack those seats! Following the official program, the mic will be open for karaoke (adults only!).

9 PM

BRI After Dark (Adults Only)

Outdoor Fire Pit

Rain location: downstairs in main building by the fireplace.

Don’t be surprised if you spot a painted rock peeking out during your time at Unicoi. These little works of art have been hidden throughout the center for you to find and enjoy. If you find one, feel special—it’s yours to keep!

VIRTUAL SCAVENGER HUNT

Stop by the Activities Hub any afternoon to pick up your scavenger hunt list. Snap your proof along the way—participants with the highest scores at the end of the week will win a prize! More details will be shared throughout the conference.

The Case for Trauma-Informed Leadership

Advancing Post-Traumatic Growth in the Workplace

DR. DAWN EMERICK

The workplace is not immune to trauma. Studies show that 70% of adults experience at least one traumatic event in their lifetime, and workplace stress has been directly linked to serious health conditions, including cardiovascular disease and burnout. We also spend approximately 80,000 hours across the course of our lives working. Our brains are wired for connection, yet poor leadership, toxic work environments, high-pressure demands, and unresolved trauma within the workforce impair decision-making, relationships, and overall well-being.

In this powerful keynote, Dr. Dawn Emerick, a pioneer in the movement and a leader in trauma-informed systems and organizational change, shares why trauma-informed leadership is not optional—it's essential. With a mission to reach 1 million trauma-informed leaders, Dawn offers critical insights into:

- **The Neuroscience of Trauma and Leadership:** How trauma rewires the brain and affects leadership decision-making.
- **The Power of Self-Care and Healing:** Why leaders must model resilience and prioritize their own wellbeing to support others.
- **Building a Trauma-Informed Workplace Culture:** Practical steps to create psychologically safe spaces that foster post-traumatic growth instead of burnout.

Through real-world examples and actionable strategies, this keynote equips leaders with the “Do No Harm” framework, guiding them toward a more ethical, compassionate, and high-performing workplace. Join Dawn in transforming leadership, shifting workplace cultures, and unlocking the full potential of teams by integrating trauma-informed practices at every level.

Your leadership matters. It's time to lead with knowledge, care, and impact.



WEDNESDAY SCHEDULE

8:30 AM

Morning Gathering

Grab a cup of coffee and mingle with friends before we start the day with a song led by Tim Griffin.

Morning Session

8:45 AM: Welcome/Announcements

9 AM: Keynote Speaker, Maame Afon Yelbert-Sai, "Leading with Heart—Healing, Joy, and Transformative Leadership"

10:30 AM: Facilitated Table Discussions

11:30 AM: Break

11:45 AM: Wrap Up and The News

12:30 PM

Daily Siesta

Use this time to nourish, rest and renew.

Whatever Feels Good Wednesday Activities

Check out the many activities offered by Unicoi, including ziplining, ax throwing, hiking to Anna Ruby Falls, or a swim in the lake. Ask for more information at the Unicoi Registration Desk, or feel free to ask a member of the Activities Committee.

2-4:30 PM

Activities Hub Open

Fireside A

Stop by the Activities Hub anytime to play games, join in on a puzzle, do a craft, or jump in on the conversation.

2-5 PM

Individual Massage Sessions

Available by appointment only with Danielle Rottenberg, who has 15 years of massage experience. Achieve the

ultimate in relaxation when you add a private massage complete with aromatherapy and hot stones to your week. Danielle will consult with you to identify the area of focus for your 30-minute massage session. \$55.00 per session (plus gratuity). Limited sessions available. Danielle will be available at check-in on Sunday afternoon for you to book an appointment. Pre-payment is required.

VIRTUAL SCAVENGER HUNT

Stop by the Activities Hub any afternoon to pick up your scavenger hunt list. Snap your proof along the way—participants with the highest scores at the end of the week will win a prize! More details will be shared throughout the conference.

2:30 PM

Afternoon Hike

Meet Outside the Ballroom

Grab a water bottle and lace up your hiking shoes! Join Owen O'Neill and Karis Engle for a group hike on one of the many trails at Unicoi.

2:30 PM

Bess the Book Bus

Parking Lot

Bess the Book Bus will be parked in the lot near the ziplines to share the love of reading with kids through a book fair. Stop by with your kids to show Jenn Frances and Bess the Book Bus some Ridger love!

3 PM

Poker Tournament

Activities Hub

Join Chris Steed and Friends for the Annual BRI Poker Tournament in the Activities Hub.

3 PM

Frame Your Future with a Vision Board

By the fireplace, in front of the Activities Hub

As we round out our week, take some time to think about the future and create a roadmap for achieving your personal and professional goals by creating a Vision Board! This workshop, led by Ridger Susan Watson, will start with a guided, reflective time to help you create the vision of a future filled with purpose and meaning. Use provided materials to create a personalized board to serve as a visual representation of your dreams and aspirations.

2-5 PM

Relaxation Room

Provided by Steve Turner

Fireside C

3 PM

Set-up for President's Ball

Help wanted!

6:30 PM

President's Ball

Jammie-Palooza: Bevvies, Banter, and Bedwear

Leading with Heart

Healing, Joy, and Transformative Leadership

MAAME AFON YELBERT-SAI

The world is changing rapidly, and so must we. Leadership today demands more than strategy—it calls for wisdom, compassion, and connection. We must move beyond transactional relationships and embrace transformation, rewire our mindsets, and return to the wisdom of Sankofa—learning from our past to shape a better future.

But to lead and heal others, we must first heal ourselves. Healing the healers is not self-indulgence; it is an essential necessity. Our well-being fuels our well-doing. When we cultivate joy, set healthy boundaries, and lead with empathy, we create spaces where people feel seen, valued, and inspired.

Unprocessed trauma is passed down, but transformation is a choice. We must break cycles, nurture healing, and lead with intention. Relationships matter, and every season of our lives calls for us to show up fully—rooted in care, courage, and authenticity.

Let us step forward as leaders who not only change the world but also sustain ourselves in the process. When we lead with heart, we don't just inspire change—we ignite a movement of healing, connection, and joy.

The time to evolve is now. Let's rise together.



Meditation and Celebration



Morning Session

9:30 AM: Welcome/Announcement

9:45 AM: Keynote Speaker, Steve Turner, "Meditation and Celebration"

10:45 AM: Freshperson Graduation

12:30 PM

Farewell Until Next Year!

The world is LOUD, and we all need the tools to make it just a little quieter... Join us for an immersive experience where sound and meditation converge to create a space to connect—with ourselves and each other.

We will use hand pans, chimes, and other quiet instruments to offer a relaxing sound bath that flows into a guided visualization designed to quiet the mind. From this quiet and contemplative space we will slowly build the energy together, and gently take the group into a drum circle to celebrate the conference and the lasting connections created.



Steve Turner started Giving Tree Music 25 years ago. He began as a drum maker and performer, and found that the best way to sell the drums he was making—was to encourage people to play them together.

Since then, he has traveled the world bringing drums, percussion, and joy to anywhere and anyone who would let him.

He has shared drum circles with schools, hospitals, special needs groups, churches, mosques, temples, corporate groups, jails and more!

Over the last five years, he has developed a new program, both online and in person, to share tools and learn how to quiet the noise and practice intentional mindfulness and meditation at home.

While parents and guardians participate in conference sessions, the Youth Leadership Academy (YLA) provides a dynamic and nurturing space for registered participants ages 4–14. Led by a dedicated team of YLA counselors, this week-long camp fosters confidence, leadership, self-awareness, and fun—helping to shape the next generation of changemakers.

We extend our deepest gratitude to the incredible YLA counselors who have generously volunteered their time, energy, and hearts to this year's Youth Leadership Academy. Your

commitment to developing young leaders is both inspiring and invaluable. Thank you for making this vital part of the conference possible—and unforgettable.

2025 YLA Counselors: Tessa Danielson, Micchella Derteano, Brian Flannery, Harper Hulburt, Pax Turner, Sequoia Turner, and Lexi Zayas.



FAMILY INVOLVEMENT: Ridgers are warmly encouraged to bring their entire families, including YLA participants, to all designated “Family Friendly” events throughout the week.

DROP-OFF AND PICK-UP GUIDELINES: YLA participants may be dropped off up to 15 minutes before BRI sessions begin and must be picked up no later than 15 minutes after sessions conclude. This guideline also applies to the President’s Ball.

2024-2025 BRI Board of Directors

OFFICERS

President: Carrie Gerard
President-Elect: Susan McGrath
Past President: Julie Smithwick
Secretary/Treasurer: Chris Steed

CHAIRS AND CHAIRS-ELECT

Program Chair: Caroline Goins
Program Chair-Elect: Grace-Anne Alfredo
Activities Chair: Heather Black
Activities Chair-Elect: Holly Furr
Strategic Engagement Chair: Edward Perry
Recruitment Chair: Lakesha Benson
Retention Chair: Susan McGrath
Marketing Chair: Dave Parker
Development Chair: Rich LaPratt
YLA Chair: Patty Dissell
YLA Chair-Elect: Sarai Melendez
Scholarship Committee: Owen O'Neill
DEIA Co-Chair: Mary Reaves
DEIA Co-Chair: Maria Martin
Past-President Representative: Heather Adams

AT-LARGE

Sean Bryant
Ben Bullock
Brittney Frazier
Marisel Losa
Amanda North
Lila Anna Sauls
Britney Sink

Thank you, board members, for your service and leadership! Please contact Allison Gant if you would be interested in serving on our board and helping shape the BRI of tomorrow!

2024-2025 COMMITTEE VOLUNTEERS

Activities

Heather Black, Chair
Holly Furr
Pam Gilliam
Shaun Scott
Jenn Frances

Development

Richard LaPratt, Chair
Shanteny Jackson
Wyndi Patterson
Lawrence Clermont
John Elbare
Anne Walker

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility

Mary Reaves, Chair
Maria Martin, Co-Chair
Lawrence Clermont
Mike Young
Brittney Fraizer

Finance

Chris Steed, Treasurer
Karis Engle
Anne Walker
Christina Delzingaro
Ben Bullock
Robert Rains
John Elbare
Amanda North
Scott Badesch

Governance

Julie Smithwick, Chair
Mary Reeves
Owen O'Neal
Britney Sink
Brittney Frazier
Ben Bullock
Lekesha Benson
Carrie Gerard
Susan McGrath

Marketing

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To each of our donors—thank you. Your generous gifts, given from your hard-earned resources, play a vital role in sustaining BRI and empowering the growth of emerging leaders. Your support matters deeply. We see you. We value you. We are truly grateful for you.

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We honor and remember the Ridgers whose service, dedication, and presence touched our community. Their contributions will not be forgotten.

We also hold space in our hearts for any Ridgers we may have lost this year whose passing we were not aware of.

Their legacy lives on in the spirit of this community.

IN MEMORIAM 2025

*Gene Foster
Nancy Giles
Irene Burnette (BRI President 1975)
Susan Williams*

In anticipation of the Blue Ridge Institute's 100th anniversary in 2027, we are launching the 1927 Society to recognize Ridgers who have arranged an end-of-life gift for BRI. If we had respectfully asked each of our members for the past century to consider an end-of-life, BRI would surely have a large endowment by now. Recognizing this, we are asking you to give serious consideration to arranging such a gift for the future. Here's why:

- It is easy to do; you simply fill out a form and return it to your financial institution. You can often do this online.
- It costs you nothing now. You are donating a small portion of whatever is left at the end of your life, usually in your 401(k), 403(b) or IRA.
- You will be recognized as a member of the 1927 Society
- You will be setting a good example as a Ridger who strongly supports the mission of BRI and wants to help perpetuate it into the future.
- You understand that these gifts will add up over time and provide a substantial boost to the financial sustainability of BRI.
- You want to express your appreciation for the benefits you received from BRI and you want to pass that experience along to future generations of leaders.

For further information and to enroll, please contact:
Allison Gant, Executive Director
Blue Ridge Institute
336-269-9577
info@blueridgeleaders.org



THANK YOU 2025 SPONSORS

On behalf of the entire BRI community, we want to extend our deepest gratitude to our sponsors. Your generous support makes it possible for community service leaders to gather at the BRI Conference for growth, renewal, and inspiration. Because of you, this experience becomes a reality—and because of this experience, lives and communities across the country are being transformed. We are truly grateful for your belief in our mission and your investment in those who serve.

Carrie Gerard, President and Allison Gant, Executive Director

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GREET SPONSORS \$1,500**

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INSTITUTE

“Healing the Healers”

“YOU MUST BE THE CHANGE YOU WISH
TO SEE IN THE WORLD.”

-MAHATMA GHANDI



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Evergreen Life Services' mission is to serve, provide for and champion individuals with disabilities.



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Healers

www.alstonwilkessociety.org

The Two Bit Circus Foundation
and
Griffin Education
are counting our blessings in 2025.

GriffinEd is now part of the Two Bit Circus Foundation, bringing arts-based STEM education to more K-12 schools than ever! Check out our amazing STEAM offerings at: www.TwoBitCircus.org

Our latest music (and the old stuff too) is streaming free right now at:
www.GriffinEd.org

Laugh and learn with hilarious (but peer reviewed) songs about astrophysics, biochemistry, and that weird stain on your lunch tray.

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CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURES

Our beautiful mountain setting offers some alternative adventure options that you are also welcome to take part in as small groups or solo, either instead of or in addition to the BRI Activities:

Waterfall Viewing

Gather a group and carpool to the Anna Ruby Falls Visitors Center and enjoy the 1/2-mile paved walk up to the observation decks for amazing views. This activity is great for families and all skill levels.

Lake Hiking Trail

Look for many different species of plants and animals that call Unicoi home. This activity is perfect for ages 5 and up. 2.4 miles. Difficulty level: Moderate, due to heat and rolling hills.

Tour Downtown Helen

The Chamber says come enjoy a "bustling alpine village set against a scenic backdrop of mountains, forests, and riverbanks, where you'll enjoy colorful shops and the heavenly aroma of authentic German fare."

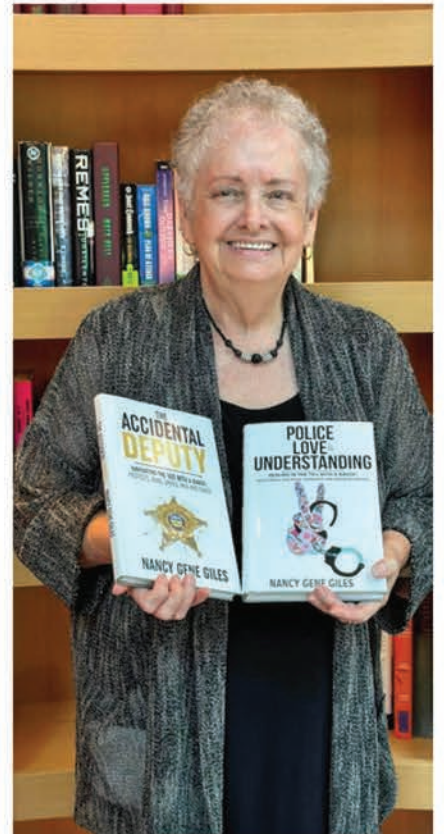
Unicoi Adventures

In addition to the on-your-own options, Unicoi offers several activity options hosted by park staff (fees may apply). Gather a group of Ridgers, guests and youth and enjoy some "facilitated" time in nature! Self-register, pay applicable fees and confirm times/options at the Unicoi Adventures Office on the 3rd floor of the Lodge. Activities include: Screaming Eagle Aerial Adventures, axe throwing, archery and air gun range, paddleboarding and fly-fishing classes.





**We love you,
Nancy Giles!!
Your Evergreen
family**





CELEBRATING 50 YEARS AS A RIDGER

We love you Dr. Anne Osborne Kilpatrick!



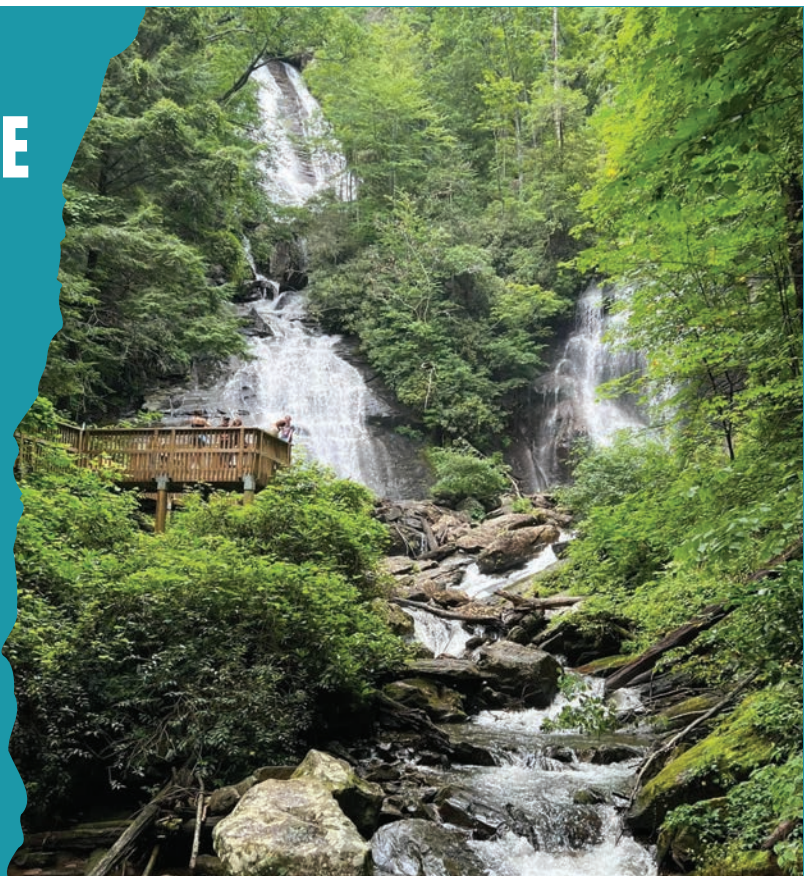
Congratulations on a job well done, Carrie Gerard, BRI President 2025!

– BRI Past Presidents

BECAUSE THOSE WHO HEAL OTHERS DESERVE HEALING TOO.

We, friends of BRI President Carrie Gerard—including EACM board members, volunteers, and staff, book club friends and nonprofit colleagues—unite in support of the BRI's *Healing the Healers* conference.

We celebrate the **amazing** individuals who come to be renewed and uplifted at BRI and we wish you the very best for a transformative week!





Mother, Grandmother, adventurer, entrepreneur,
storyteller, author, and dear friend to everyone she met.

We at Evergreen Life Services are far richer for having
known and loved Nancy Giles.

Nancy took this picture of the sun rising on the Red Sea during one
of her many adventures traveling the world after she 'repurposed.'



THE BLUE RIDGE INSTITUTE

A Legacy of Learning, Leading and Renewal for Service Executives

In 1927, a group of 56 dedicated people from throughout the southeast, from what has come to be known as the field of social welfare or human services, came together at a YMCA Camp in the mountains outside of Asheville, NC. They had a vision of a learning experience that would help to build leadership and professional skills, and also provide for private and public agency leaders to learn from each other.

From that first two-week session, little could they have imagined that what they were doing was setting in motion an institute that nine decades later has touched the lives of thousands of community service executives throughout the United States.

It is difficult to imagine how these pioneers were able to sustain this fledgling organization as it grew over the years. In 1927, there were private agencies tending to the needs of a growing population of urban dwellers responding to the industrialization of business. These new urbanites from the countryside, coupled with immigrants coming from all over the world, were filling the employment needs of our growing economy. But this great expansion was creating social problems that cities and communities surrounding them were ill prepared to address.

The early attendees were truly pioneers in this emerging profession. And yet, before the Blue Ridge Institute had fully gotten its foundation into place, the country went through the Great Depression. Since that time, the Institute has weathered WWII, Korea, Vietnam, and Desert Storm conflicts. Through a national Polio epidemic and the COVID-19 pandemic, the Civil Rights Movement, landing on the moon, varying hem lengths and hair styles, invention of the TV, the internet and the cell phone, the Blue Ridge Institute has convened in person or virtually every year but one.

The essence of Blue Ridge is its unique blending of professional and personal growth that occurs within this annual gathering of engaged and committed community service professionals. At the end of each conference, we leave knowing we have been part of something powerful and inspiring, and we know it will be there for us next year. As we bid one another adieu, we go forth with the complete fulfillment that comes from having been a part of something that is profoundly good.

That Little Old Red Shawl

BLUE RIDGE INSTITUTE ALMA MATER

*Oh, that little old red shawl,
That little old red shawl,
That little old red shawl my
mother wore.*

*It was tattered, it was torn,
It showed signs of being worn,
That little old red shawl my
mother wore.*

Judge Walter Criswell, second President of the Institute, enjoyed this little song and thought it would help promote fellowship and community if sung at the Institute. Everyone seemed to like the words and tune so it was adopted as the official Institute song. Mrs. Arthur Jones, wife of the 6th BRI president, made a real red shawl to be worn by each president. It can be seen in each of the group photos every year. The song is usually sung by gathering in a circle, holding hands, and swaying. The song and the shawl remain firmly a part of the BRI tradition, passed on each year.



PAST PRESIDENTS



1927-1938
Arthur Guild



1939-1940
Walter Criswell



1941-1942
Florence Adams



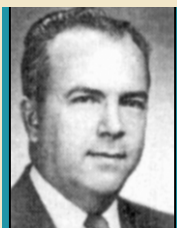
1943-1945
Sherwood Smith



1946-1947
Fred Huffman



1948
Arthur Jones



1949
Olin LeBaron



1951-1952
Lester Robb



1953-1954
Ruth Shiffmann Bescherer



1955-1956
Harold Weekley



1957-1958
John Strohecker



1959-1960
William Leap



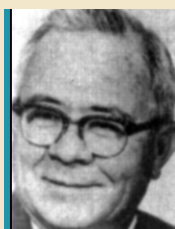
1961
George Rice



1963
Helen Lewis



1965
William Kaufman



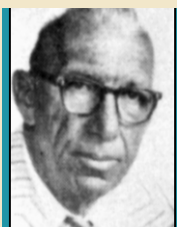
1966-1967
Charles Fruit



1968-1969
KC Latimer



1970-1971
Mary Free



1972
Martin Barnes



1973
John Needham



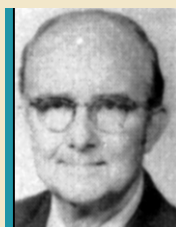
1974
Eugenia Dobson



1975
Irene Burnett



1976
Ashton Brisolará



1977
Paul Parks



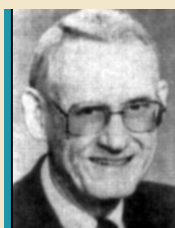
1978
Edwin Cotten



1979
Elizabeth Gower



1980
Dwyer Sump



1981
Tommy Perkins



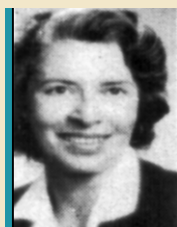
1982
Myles MacDonald



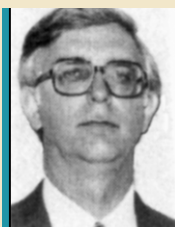
1983
Joe Medlin



1984
Charles Fleming



1985
Wanda Phibbs



1986
Wayne Davis



1987
Leo Dees



1988
AG Spizzirri

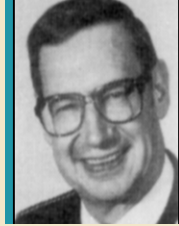


1989
H Gene Herrell

PAST PRESIDENTS



1990
Marcia Parker



1991
Lt. Col. John Mikles



1992
Cecil Hayes



1993
Phil Acord



1994
William Knowles



1995
Harrison Reardon



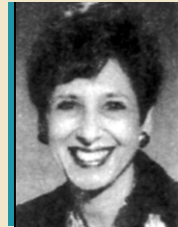
1996
Jay Childress



1997
Larry Betts



1998
Edward Garrison



1999
Nan Selz



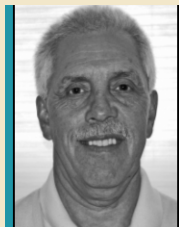
2000
Leon Matthews



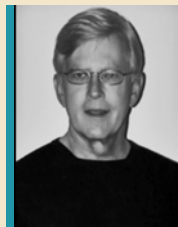
2001
Ann Osborne Kilpatrick



2002
Robert Reifsnyder



2003
Ricardo Perez



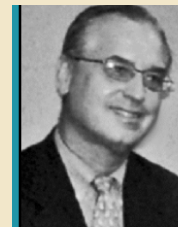
2004
James Oliver



2005
Terry Tolan



2006
Gwen Monroe



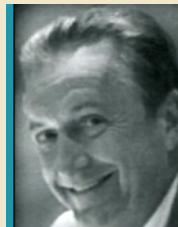
2007
Jim Morrison



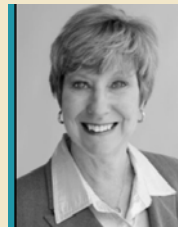
2008
Louise Burgess



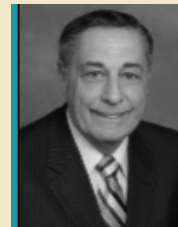
2009
Ronald Logsdon



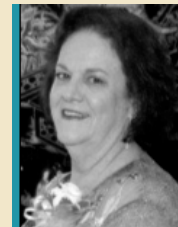
2010
Joe Tolan



2011
Mary Jo Monahan



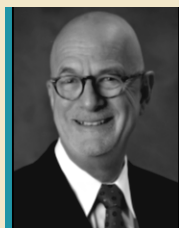
2012
Paul D'Agostino



2013
Sara Faircloth



2014
Patrick Jinks



2015
Tim Ervolina



2016
Eileen Coogan



2017
Sue Buchholtz



2018
Venita Garvin



2019
Andrea Smith



2020-2021
Heather Adams



2022
Carrie Hepburn



2023
Christina Delzingaro



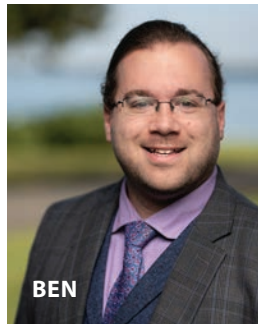
2024
Julie Smithwick



CHRIS



CARRIE



BEN



LILA-ANNA



LEKESHA

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Chris Steed, Editor in Chief
and Lord High Executioner

Carrie Theall, Senior
Investigative Reporter
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Extraordinaire

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Robert's Rules Enthusiast

Lila-Anna Sauls, Senior
Investigative Reporter and
BRI's Ambassador to the
State of Georgia

Lekesha Benson, Junior
Investigative Reporter and
BRI Homecoming Queen

Some background on one of BRI's most treasured traditions: In BRI's early days, our 'home' at the Blue Ridge Assembly in Black Mountain was remote. No phones. No radios. No TVs. To keep up with happenings of the outside world, one Ridger would go down "the hill" into town each day and buy a newspaper. While the group gathered for breakfast, he or she would relay the news of the day by reading aloud.

In the 1960s, Charlie Fruit, a United Way executive from Charleston, SC, began presenting a "news segment" along with several collaborators as a part of the Institute's morning proceedings. Wayne Davis and our beloved Sara Faircloth followed in Charlie's footsteps.

The tradition flourished...now not only including topical references to the news and critiques of our speakers...but also thinly veiled insults and good-natured ribbing aimed at Institute members. Our current news team works to keep the tradition going with their signature brand of sarcasm, hyperbole, and a little bit of nastiness.

Today...nearly 70 years after its inception...the Blue Ridge Daily News is here to analyze. To inform. And most of all...to make you laugh.

For our Freshpeople, there are 5 things you need to know about the News:

FIRST... we always report the truth as we know it. If we don't know it, we'll make it up. Think of us as the original FAKE NEWS.

SECOND... if you have a thin skin and are easily offended...let one of us know. We will make fun of you anyway, but at least we'll be prepared for your hurt feelings.

THIRD... if you're looking for fair and balanced... you're out of luck. The BRI news team is decidedly unfair and famously unbalanced.

FOURTH... we only pick on the people we love. So if you're mentioned in one of our reports, it means we like you.

AND LASTLY... most importantly...our investigative journalists do not now, nor have they ever, answered to anyone!

If you're looking for fair and balanced... you're out of luck. The BRI news team is decidedly unfair and famously unbalanced.

BRI 2026

In a world where change is often sparked by the loudest voices, This IS My Inside Voice will celebrate the transformative power of intentional, values-driven leadership.

My vision for BRI 2026 is that we will together explore how advocacy and resistance can be both deeply personal and profoundly communal —anchored not in shouting over others, but in steady conviction, courageous action, and unapologetic purpose.



Through our workshops and Skill Labs, we will examine and expand the many ways Ridgers use our “inside voices”—our lived experiences, moral clarity, and strategic thinking—to challenge systemic barriers and advance equity for those we have collectively committed our professional lives to serving.

We'll uncover how resistance can be quiet yet powerful, and how advocacy can (and likely must) start within before it ripples outward to shift policy, mobilize support, and uplift our communities.

Join us as we amplify leadership that is grounded in integrity and resilience. Together, let's explore how nonprofit professionals can lead movements for justice not just through protest, but through practice—and how using our “inside voice” may just be our most radical act of all.

—SUSAN MCGRATH, BRI 2025 PRESIDENT-ELECT

SAVE THE DATE:
JULY 19–23, 2026 AT UNICOI
STATE PARK AND LODGE!



SCAN ME

Scan to Fill Out the Conference Survey!

We hope you will take some time to reflect on your experience and provide some feedback. Your input is critical for the board and conference planners to understand what worked well and how to plan and improve future conferences.

The survey should take no more than 10-15 minutes to complete. The responses, which are confidential, will be compiled and presented in the aggregate.

BLUE RIDGE NEEDS YOUR HELP!!!

BRI is adapting to the needs of our members while continuing to provide growth, renewal, and connection through our annual conference, and your contributions help us achieve that goal!!

The Blue Ridge Institute is a thriving professional development organization nearly 100 years in the making! Your Board of Directors continues efforts to grow and sustain the organization for future generations of community service leaders.

Consider becoming a **Sustaining Donor** by signing up for a monthly, quarterly, or annual recurring gift of at least \$120 a year. Will you contribute to our annual goal through recurring giving and become a Sustaining Donor?

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- Open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, the Unicoi Restaurant offers a variety of fresh food sure to satisfy any craving
- Coming with a large group? Unicoi has you covered. Our highly skilled sales team will work with your specific needs that offers a package with great pricing on accommodations meals, and experiences unique to Unicoi.



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