

# PRESS RELEASE



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## Fall 2025 Entrepreneur Grant Winners Awarded by Wilkes EDC

**North Wilkesboro, N.C.** — Four local businesses were awarded grants through the Fall 2025 Entrepreneur Grant Program during the Wilkes Economic Development Corporation's (EDC) Board Meeting on Friday, November 21, 2025. Operated by Wilkes EDC with the support of our local government partners, this program supports small business growth and development across Wilkes County. We are able to fund this program thanks to our [LEAP Forward Investors](#), the private side of our funding along with sponsors. Thank you to [Wilkes Community College Small Business Center](#) and [Wilkes Chamber of Commerce](#) for assisting us as sponsors to make this program possible.

This cycle drew 11 applicants, each submitting a video pitch along with a business plan and financial summary, giving judges a well-rounded view of their vision and growth strategy. Four recipients were selected based on the potential impact of funding for their business and the sustainability of their proposed plans. A total of \$14,000 was awarded, supporting the growth and development of these local businesses. Applicants represented a range of industries, including arts and culture, tourism and hospitality, literary arts and retail, and agritourism.

**Bloom & Brush Creative Cottage** — Owned and operated by Rachel Williams and Hollie Royall, Bloom & Brush Creative Cottage is an art studio in downtown North Wilkesboro, at 903 Main Street, offering step-by-step art classes for all ages. They received \$3,000 to purchase a wood laser cutter and engraver, allowing the business to expand both their class offerings and the products they offer. Learn more at [Bloom & Brush Creative Cottage](#).

**Blue Ridge Food Tours, LLC** — Owned by Mya Baynes, in partnership with Jonathan and Jenny Baynes, Blue Ridge Food Tours launched in March 2025. Mya participated in the inaugural [Tory Oak Project](#), a business-pitch initiative at Wilkes Early College that Wilkes EDC has sponsored in part for the past three years. The program gives students an immersive look at local businesses and community amenities and concludes with a business-plan competition. The experience helped inspire Mya's vision for launching Blue Ridge Food Tours, which offers guided walking tours that blend food, history, and culture to connect visitors with Downtown North Wilkesboro's amenities, with plans to expand tours throughout Wilkes County. The business received \$4,500 to purchase a business laptop and for a photography session with Times Treasured Studio to update images on their website. To book a tour, visit [Blue Ridge Food Tours](#).

**The Book Room** — Owned and operated by Erica Marsh and Holly Piotrowski, The Book Room is an independent bookstore located in historic downtown Wilkesboro at 104 Broad Street.

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They offer a wide range of books and unique gifts, with a goal of creating a community hub where book lovers can gather. They were awarded \$1,500 for point-of-sale equipment to help enhance their customer experience. Learn more at [The Book Room](#).

**Growing Faith Farms & Retreat** — Owned and operated by Christina and Joseph Angott, Growing Faith Farms & Retreat is located at 521 Old Orchard Road in Moravian Falls. The business combines agritourism and hospitality to create a meaningful rural experience. They received \$5,000 toward the installation of an above-ground waste system, which will allow them to offer full hook-ups for guests, while also enabling them to host a work camper on-site to assist with guest services, camping, and daily operations. To learn more, visit [Growing Faith Farms & Retreat](#).

Wilkes EDC President LeeAnn Nixon expressed gratitude to this cycle’s judges. “We’re proud that our program maintains an 87.36% success rate, with most participating businesses still active today. That level of success is made possible in large part by our judges. Their expertise in reviewing applications and assessing long-term business viability ensures we continue supporting entrepreneurs with the greatest potential for lasting impact.”

The Fall 2025 Entrepreneur Grant Program judges were: Anna Jackson, Center Director of the Small Business Technology Development Center at ASU; Ariana Williamson, Director of Grant & Strategic Partnership at Wilkes Community College; Taylor Berry, Community Development Director for the Town of North Wilkesboro; Becky Martinez of Insightful Financials; and Thomas Salley, Tourism Director for Wilkes TDA. Special thanks also goes to Laurie Brintle-Jarvis of the Wilkes Community College Small Business Center for her continued support in helping applicants with business plans and financial summaries throughout the grant cycle.

Francisco Martinez, Marketing Manager for Wilkes EDC, commented, “One of the strengths of Wilkes County’s entrepreneurial ecosystem is how many resources are available to businesses. Through this program, we are able to help entrepreneurs access tools, guidance, and support that make a real difference in their long-term success. If you’re interested in supporting this initiative, contact us today to learn how you can become a sponsor of Wilkes EDC’s Entrepreneur Grant Program.”

Robin Hamby, Vice President of Wilkes EDC, has been involved with the Entrepreneur Grant Program since 2015. “We’re deeply thankful for the continued support of our sponsors and community partners. Their generosity allows us to keep investing in local businesses and strengthening the entrepreneurial spirit that drives Wilkes County forward. Ongoing sponsorships make it possible for us to offer the Entrepreneur Grant Program every Spring and Fall, ensuring consistent opportunities for local entrepreneurs to grow and succeed. With this continued support, we can maintain a program that remains a cornerstone of economic development and a catalyst for a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem in Wilkes County.”

Program sponsorships are available at various levels. Sponsors receive recognition through promotional marketing on the Entrepreneur Grant webpage, an announcement in the EDC’s Monthly Activity Report, and special acknowledgment at our Annual Meeting. Interested in

making a lasting impact on small businesses in Wilkes County? Become a sponsor of our Entrepreneur Grant Program today and help foster the next wave of local success stories.

## **ABOUT**

The **Wilkes Economic Development Corporation**, a 501c3 public-private partnership, aims to facilitate the creation of new jobs and capital investment in Wilkes County through the retention and expansion of existing businesses and the recruitment of new businesses. The EDC is located at 213 Ninth Street in historic downtown North Wilkesboro, North Carolina. For more information about Wilkes EDC, visit [www.WilkesEDC.com](http://www.WilkesEDC.com) or contact LeeAnn Nixon at 336-838-1501 or [lnixon@wilkesedc.com](mailto:lnixon@wilkesedc.com).

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