

MEDIA RELEASE

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News for Immediate Release

Local Entrepreneurs Compete for \$3,000 in Grants at Wilkes Community College Pitch Night

WILKESBORO, N.C. – December 4, 2025 – The Wilkes Entrepreneur Network hosted the *Wilkes Entrepreneur Network* on Wednesday, December 3, 2025, celebrating local innovation and entrepreneurship.

This shared community event was led by the Wilkes Community College Small Business Center and the Wilkes Economic Development Corporation and was funded by Weave: The Social Fabric Project. The event took place at the WCC-Window World Hall and featured eight entrepreneurs competing for three \$1,000 entrepreneurship stipends made possible through Weave’s support.

The evening highlighted diverse business ideas from both new and existing local business owners across Wilkes County. Each participant presented their vision to a panel of distinguished judges: Gary Daemer, Founder and Owner of InfusionPoints; Cindy Thompson, President of the Wilkes Chamber of Commerce; Brewer Logan, Founder and Owner of Verenovo Energy; and Jessica Hendren, VP Financial Inclusion Leader at Truist Bank.

Participants in the competition were:

- **Julie Baird**, The Understudies Production Company, Inc.
- **Theja Dzieszkowski**, Epicurious? Teas & Spices
- **Doren Tripp**, Tripp’s Mercantile
- **Pam Edwards**, Navigating Autism, LLC
- **Victoria Villalpando**, Let’s Talk About It
- **Jodi Province**, Jodi Province Counseling Services, PLLC
- **Barbara Cason**, Late Bloomers Flower Farm
- **Paula Horton**, C’est-la-Vin Wine & Provisions

After careful deliberation, the judges awarded the three \$1,000 grants to:

- **Barbara Cason**, Co-owner, Late Bloomers Flower Farm
- **Jodi Province**, Owner and Founder, Jodi Province Counseling Services
- **Doren Tripp**, Manager, Tripp’s Mercantile

"The Wilkes Entrepreneur Pitch Night was definitely a little intimidating at first, but the growth of our farm is worth a few minutes of discomfort. The experience of preparing and pitching our business turned out to be incredibly valuable—it helped us focus on the key parts of who we are and what we want the community to know about us. After going through the process, I feel much more confident representing our company and sharing our story," said Barbara Cason, Co-owner of Late Bloomers Flower Farm.

The competition required participants to complete two Small Business Center seminars, two hours of one-on-one counseling, and develop a comprehensive pitch deck—demonstrating their commitment to building sustainable businesses.

"Our Small Business Center exists to champion local entrepreneurs, and pitch nights like this are one of the best ways we can do that by providing both capital and hands-on support as they grow their ideas into sustainable businesses" said Laurie Brintle-Jarvis, Director of the Wilkes Community College Small Business Center.

About Wilkes Community College

Wilkes Community College, a member of the North Carolina Community College System, is a public, two-year, open-door institution serving the people of Wilkes, Ashe, and Alleghany counties and beyond. Established in 1965, WCC has a proud history of meeting the educational, cultural, and workforce needs of our community. As we look to the future, Wilkes Community College provides programs, resources, and services that create quality educational, economic development, and cultural opportunities. WCC aspires to be an effective, learner-centered institution and a dynamic learning organization, preparing students for success in a changing world.

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Recipients Left to right: Jodi Province, Barbara Cason, and Doren Tripp



Judges Left to right: Brewer Logan, Gary Daemer, Cindy Thompson, and Jessica Hendren



Participants Left to right: Julie Baird, Pam Edwards, Doren Tripp, Barbara Cason, Theja Dzieszkowski, Victoria Villalpando, and Jodi Province. Not Pictured: Paula Horton