

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CUTLINE: Lorelei Garnes was the 2024 recipient of SCC's Distinguished Alumni Award.

Nominations now open for SCC's seventh-annual Distinguished Alumni Award

By Hannah Velez, SCC Public Relations Intern

SYLVA – Southwestern Community College is now accepting nominations for the SCC Foundation's seventh-annual Distinguished Alumni Award.

To be considered for the award, nominees must have graduated with either a certificate, diploma or degree from the institution known today as Southwestern Community College and previously as Southwestern Technical College (1979-1988), Southwestern Technical Institute (1967-1979) or Jackson County Industrial Education Center, a satellite of A-B Tech (1964-67).

"We have thousands of amazing alumni throughout and beyond our service area, and we're always extremely impressed by the quality of nominations we receive for this honor," said Dr. Mark Ellison, SCC's Dean of Students.

To nominate a Southwestern graduate, visit SouthwesternCC.edu/award.

Past winners include Kyle Dowling (2019), Dustin Wilson (2020), John Mattox (2021), Jared Ballew (2022), Dr. Rivers Woodward (2023) and Lorelei Garnes (2024).

Dowling was a 2013 graduate of SCC's Emergency Medical Science program before receiving his bachelor's degree at Western Carolina University. Within two years of graduating, he became a supervisor and training officer for Harris Regional Hospital's EMS Department.

Wilson, a 2003 graduate of SCC's Outdoor Leadership program, earned his Ph.D. in Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management from Clemson University. His current role is Tribal Liason Coordinator at Bureau of Ocean Energy Management in Washington D.C.

Mattox, who passed away in January 2021, was a member of Southwestern's first National Park Service - Seasonal Law Enforcement Training program in 1978. He spent 37 years in the National Park Service, starting out as a seasonal ranger on the Blue Ridge Parkway. Eventually, he rose to the title of Special Agent in Charge of the Eastern United States.

Graduating in 2007, Ballew serves as Vice President of Government Relations for Drake Software – one of the nation's leading tax software development companies. A leader in cybersecurity industry, he's the current president of the National Association of Computerized Tax Processors.

Also a 2007 graduate, Dr. Woodward works as a family physician at Blue Ridge Community Health Services in Lake Lure. He served as a physician champion for the North Carolina Medical Society Diabetes Prevention Program, a faculty member for the family medicine residency at the Mountain Area Health Education Center and as an adjunct faculty member at UNC-Chapel Hill School of Medicine.

Garnes, 1996 honors graduate, earned a two-year degree in Business Administration. She went on to obtain a bachelor's degree in Computer Information Technology from Western Carolina University and a master's degree in Digital Marketing and Advertising from Liberty University. She is the founder of Digital Buzz Media, has worked with over 300 businesses and developed over 200 websites.

Nominations for the 2025 award are being accepted through March 1.

In addition to being recognized during commencement, this year's recipient of the Distinguished Alumni Award will be mentioned on SCC's website and social media, will receive an award plaque and \$250 from the SCC Foundation.

The SCC Foundation partnered with the SCC Foundation Faculty & Staff Advisory Council to create the award.

Nomination forms will remain on file for three years for future award consideration. After three years, nominations must be re-submitted.

For more information about the Distinguished Alumni Award, contact Evan Hatch, SCC's Executive Director for Institutional Advancement, at 828.339.4241 or e_hatch@SouthwesternCC.edu.

ABOUT SOUTHWESTERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE ...

Over the last 60 years, Southwestern Community College has served Jackson, Macon, Swain Counties, and the Qualla Boundary in Western North Carolina by providing a wide range of educational options for residents in all stages of life.

SCC has been ranked among the nation's Top 10 community colleges six times in the last 15 years – including a No. 1 ranking in BestColleges.com's listing of the "Best Community Colleges & Trade Schools of 2020."

Through a supportive learning environment, Southwestern offers more than 40 degree programs (including more than 90 credentialing options, 28 of which are offered online) in Health Sciences, Arts and Sciences/College Transfer and Career Technologies.

A variety of community resources - including the Small Business Center, Workforce Continuing Education and Career Services - are also available.

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