

Western Carolina Emergency Network Accepts 2025 ReadyCommunities Partnership/CCROA National Service Award for Collaboration to Augment Local Response



Through a Mutual Mission Developed by Community-Based Volunteer Leaders and Entrepreneurs Who Organized to Provide Critical Supplies to Those in Need During the Initial Response to the Hurricane Helene Crisis

WASHINGTON - June 4, 2025 - [PRLog](https://www.prllog.com) -- Western Carolina Emergency Network (WCEN <https://westerncarolinaemergencynetwork.org/>) entrepreneurs and volunteer leaders accepted a 2025 ReadyCommunities Partnership/CCROA National Service Award on June 2, 2025 in the Hendersonville, NC district congressional office of Hon. Chuck Edwards (NC-11).

In response to the destruction and deaths caused by Cat 4 Hurricane Helene which struck NC on September 27, 2024, a broad-based volunteer team quickly formed as WCEN to manage donations and distribute critical supplies such as food, water and fuel in the disaster zone. During the early response, WCEN founder Chris Larsen said, "When someone gets knocked down and you're standing - it's your job to somehow help." Congressman Chuck Edwards said the damage was unprecedented across Western North Carolina and prepared a special report for the attention of President Donald J. Trump (2025 April) detailing the region's needs for recovery

<https://edwards.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/edwards.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/rep-edwards-report-to-the-president-hurricane-helene-recovery.pdf>

WCEN quickly built its volunteer network with contacts from local churches, disaster nonprofit organizations, truck drivers, a helicopter team, fuel haulers, and medical care, logistics, heavy equipment, and agricultural experts eventually moving all communication and coordination to the Signal app. Local churches were vital to identifying those most in need to support both community and organizational needs.

Two weeks into the recovery, fuel was critically needed for deliveries and rebuilding. In response, the initial WCEN fuel drivers included Austin Livengod, Aaron Andrews, Brian Penrod, Chase Parsons, Chris Barker, Christy Sowers, Dan Jones, Jacob Kost, Jon Higdon, Nick Dahlenburg, Noel Billings, TJ Frost, Walt Waggoner, and West Caudle who immediately agreed to make the deliveries. WCEN fuel volunteer coordinator Rhonda Jean said, "If it wasn't for these drivers we wouldn't have achieved such success."

Co-sponsored by the non-partisan Corporate Crisis Response Officers Association (<https://www.ccroa.org>)

& the Community Institute for Preparedness, Response, and Recovery (CIPRR), the 2025 ReadyCommunities Partnership National Service Award was co-presented by Dr. Rosalie J. Wyatt, MBA, National Director for the ReadyCommunities Partnership/CCROA and Connor Brown, a representative for Chuck Edwards (NC-11). CCROA board director Cynthia H. Thornton (<https://www.kw.com/>) co-sponsored the reception and advisory board member Jouni Keravuori (US Army, ret., <https://valor.militarytimes.com/recipient/recipient-146140/>) co-hosted the event.

Dr. Rosalie J. Wyatt remarked, "WCEN is remarkable in that it formed so quickly as a *mutual mission* with local and volunteer community leaders to restore and fortify their community in crisis." WCEN organization volunteer founders included Kristen Engard (Marketing), Rhonda Jean (Fuel Coordinator), Chris Larsen (Founder), Becca Ross (Supply Chain), and trustees Crystal Suazo and Mindy Toole.

Rachel Lepine also represented Congressman Chuck Edwards (NC-11) in the Hendersonville, NC office by hosting approximately twenty award ceremony attendees including volunteer WCEN organization founders and family members, and fuel delivery drivers.

Since 2007, RCP/CCROA National Service and Sacrifice Awards https://www.ccroa.org/showarticle_awards.php have acknowledged volunteers, responders, and organizations for their extraordinary service and contributions to the resiliency of America's strategic communities in the first 72 hours of a large-scale or national crisis. Overall, the National Service and Sacrifice Awards help support community development through collaboration and foster a culture of resiliency for economic and national security. ReadyCommunities Partnership is a non-partisan initiative and project of CCROA and CIPRR. For additional information or to donate, please visit <http://www.ccroa.org> or email drjwyatt@ccroa.org.

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Source	CCROA
City/Town	Washington
State/Province	District of Columbia
Country	United States
Industry	Non-profit , Energy , Security , Business , Government
Tags	Leadership , Community resiliency , Crisis Response , Fuel Delivery , Collaboration , Hurricane Preparedness , Western Carolina , Best Practice , Survival , Entrepreneurship
Link	https://prlog.org/13080492



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