

Seventh Annual Land Conservation Hall of Fame

Buncombe County's Land Conservation Advisory Board (LCAB) hosted its seventh annual Land Conservation Hall of Fame celebration June 26, 2014 on the campus of Warren Wilson College.

The County Commissioners created the Land Conservation Advisory Board in 2004 to study and promote the use of conservation easements to protect the scenic beauty and viewsheds, so vital to WNC's tourist-driven economy, sources of pristine water, and natural wildlife habitats in the County. Conservation easements are voluntary agreements that landowners enter into with a non-profit land trust or with the County. The landowner agrees not to develop the property in ways that could degrade its conservation values. There are potential tax incentives in recognition of the benefit to the public for permanently protecting the land.

Since 2004, 16,000 acres have been added to the 57,000 acres that were already preserved up to that time.

The Land Conservation Advisory Board held the Hall of Fame celebration to thank landowners who protected their property with conservation easements this past year. Ten families were recognized for placing conservation easements which protected a total of 771 acres. The following were recognized: Ray and Almeta Kirstein; William and Mabel Duckett; the James and Elspeth McClure Clarke Heirs; Will Jeffers and Watalula Farms LLC; Ileana Grams-Moog and the Big Briar Cove LLC; the Lynn Brown Family; James Duncan Work and Lisa Lindberg; Catherine V. Morris; Boyd Hyder; and GD Smith and Janice Smith of Smith Farms, Inc.

David Gantt, Chairman of the County Commissioners, said "We cannot thank these families enough for their remarkable generosity in granting these conservation easements. By joining in the conservation easement effort, they significantly benefit the people of Buncombe County. It is a major gift to the future, both in terms of community and economic growth."

The LCAB works in cooperation with local land conservation organizations such as Riverlink, Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy, and the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy. "Buncombe County has shown incredible leadership by creating the Land Conservation Board and making a strong commitment to preserving and protecting land across our area," said Carl Silverstein, Executive Director of the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy. "Taking steps to protect our farms, rivers, and mountains now is an important step in protecting our economic future and quality of life," he added.

In addition to the Hall of Fame Awards, the LCAB named a 2014 Conservationist of the Year and this year's award was given to Ray and Almeta Kirstein. The Kirsteins were honored for their leadership in preserving more than 132 acres of their farm property, and for their commitment and dedication to protecting land in the Broad River community. "What I love most about this program is that it involves multi-generational agreements and people from every aspect of the community coming together behind a concept that involves forever" said Karen Cragolin, Executive Director of Riverlink and LCAB board member. "While it is always difficult to choose just one award winner to receive the conservationist of the year, anyone who knows the Kirsteins understands their passion and commitment to this important cause and why they are so deserving of this honor," she added.

All of the award winners will have their names added to the Conservation Easement Plaques that are displayed in the Buncombe County Commission Office.



Left to Right: Greg Hutchins, LCAB Chairman; Steve Duckett and Kevin Duckett (accepting the award for their parents, William and Mabel Duckett); and Carl Silverstein, Director of the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy