

The official publication of the NC Grange

September / October 2022

GRANGE NEWS

2022 STATE CONVENTION



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UPCOMING EVENTS

November 15-19, 2022 National Convention
Reno, Nevada

February 10-12, 2023 Winter Youth Conference
Asheboro, North Carolina

March 16-19, 2023 Family Conference
Kitty Hawk, NC

Cover Image by Jessica Horton of Grangers
touring at the NC State Plant Science
Initiative

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Vice President	David Allen
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Assistant Steward	Wayne Stack
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Chaplain	LaRue Tart
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Youth/Young Adult Director	Jennie Gentry
Junior Director	Emily Hartsell
Community Service Director	Anna Liles
Publications Director	Jessica Horton



The Grange is a grassroots, community service, family organization with a special interest in agriculture and designed to help meet the needs of people, young and old, through a cooperative effort with government and other organizations that also seek the greatest good for the greatest number.

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FROM JIMMY | FARM AID: A NEW EXPERIENCE

I went to the Farm Aid Concert in Raleigh on September 24. This is the first one I have ever attended. The National Grange organizes a booth at the Farm Aid Concerts and because it was in NC this year, some of our members from NC Grange assisted. Several adults and youth worked a youth market selling locally grown fruits and vegetables while others assisted National Grange staff in an informational booth. We talked to a lot of people, and many chose to provide their names and email addresses for further information.

Farm Aid was first organized in 1985 by musicians Willie Nelson, John Mellencamp, and Neil Young, and they hold a concert somewhere in the country each year. According to their website, Farm Aid was formed to help keep family farms in business in addition to supporting strong and resilient family farms. Their annual concert, which brings in big music artists, is held to celebrate farmers and to “come together for change.”

Before the music began, a news conference was held. It was during this news conference that I became quite concerned. At this point I should let you know that Farm Aid has evolved into an organization that supports small farms, many of which are organic growers. During the press conference, I heard farmers as well as musicians heavily criticizing “corporate farming,” greedy agribusiness, use of pesticides, and lack of government support, to name a few. I heard the term “greedy” used several times and some comments were laced with profanity. Many comments were also made about climate change and the role that farmers should have in improving the climate. Much was also said about taking good care of the soil. Some of the concepts presented were great!

I began thinking about “corporate farms!” What are they? No one speaking gave their definition of what a corporate farm is. I assume they are referring to large farms. Could they have been referring to larger family farms that have become incorporated? Maybe they were talking about large businesses that own farms. In North Carolina, I know that Smithfield owns some hog farms, but I also know that they are very environmentally responsible. I know large farmers, whether incorporated or not, that take great care of the land and water while caring about the environment.

The Grange is an organization that supports all farming, conventional, organic, large or small. We believe that there is a place for all. It just concerns me when I hear one type of farmer criticizing another type of farmer! A lot of research has gone into today’s farming. Farmers are the most productive that they have ever been, and we have been blessed with safe and abundant food.



FERGUSON GRANGE

by : Sharon Underwood



Ferguson Grange enjoyed a tour of the WNC Sculpture Center located at Patterson School in Happy Valley, NC, for their August field trip. Director Joe Bigley gave a great tour and program on this unique center which has beautiful, creative sculptures in the park. Sculptures are also housed inside the old Patterson gym. Located on 1,400 acres, the park is open and free to the public from dawn to dusk.



Ferguson Grange donated school supplies to our local Boomer Ferguson Elementary School in August. They were delivered by our President and Community Service Chair, Mike and Clarkie Brown.



TO OUR NEWEST GRANGE MEMBERS!

Sharon Walker – Edneyville

Barbara Hill – Edneyville

Lynn Swaim – Little Mountain

Ted Martin – Schley

John Hodges – Grantham

Laura Hodges – Grantham

Franklin Lane – Grantham

Melodie Blackmon – Grantham

Malcom Blackmon – Grantham

JoAnn Blackmon – Grantham

Tom Strickland – Mingo

Mike Naylor - Mingo

Betty Naylor - Mingo

William Lee - Mingo

Fred Strickland - Mingo

Julie Strickland - Mingo

Martha Faircloth - Mingo

Ricky Wooten - Mingo

Paulette Wooten - Mingo

L.C. Honeycutt - Mingo

Ella Radcliff – Mingo

Marjorie Naylor – Mingo

Norman Hudson – Mingo

Edwin Wrench – Mingo

Gary Wrench – Mingo

Gary Faircloth – Mingo

Ruth Carr – Mingo

Donald McLamb – Mingo

Karen Dale – Mingo

GRANTHAM GRANGE

by : Joyce Hood

Grantham Grange hosted a candidate forum this fall for the impending mid-term elections this November. The event gave the community a chance to get to know their local candidates and future leaders.



CHAPLAINS CORNER

by : LaRue Tart

STORMS

It's hurricane season. Therefore, we should be prepared with our emergency kits, enough food, water, flashlights, batteries, first aid, important papers in a safe place, fuel in our vehicle, etc., as well as an inner room to stay. By doing so, when the weather forecast of a severe storm warning is issued, we know we are ready. We have to go to the safest place in our homes or buildings and wait it out, "‘til the storm passes over." (Remember that old song?) We must also trust in God our creator to survive the storm and that no damage or injury will happen.

But what about the storms of life that come without a warning? Maybe it's an unexpected death of a loved one or friend, a serious injury, accident, a fire, flood, or devastating sickness. How do we prepare for these storms? In our own strength we lack the resources to meet these challenges, but the Lord will provide a way of what we need. "Sometimes the Lord rides out the storm with us and other times He calms the restless sea around us. Most of all,

He calms the storm inside our deepest inner soul," says Lloyd John Ogilvie. The Bible has 365 verses that say to "not fear, to be not afraid." That's for everyday of the year!

When you face the storms of life, remember who Christ is, the Great I AM. One day when the disciples were crossing the lake, they were suddenly caught in a storm. Then Jesus came walking to them on the water. They didn't recognize Him and cried out in fear, "It's a ghost!" The moment Jesus climbed in the boat with them, the storm subsided (Matthew 14:24-32). On another occasion, Jesus was asleep in the boat with His disciples when high waves began flooding their vessel. Again, they were terrified and awakened Him. Jesus spoke aloud: "Quiet, be still!" and there was a great calm, causing the disciples to proclaim, "Even the wind and waves obey Him," (Mark 4:35-41).

A few years ago, a good Christian friend of mine that I grew up with back in my home church lay

Cont. Page 7



As fall approached, the General Assembly continued to be quiet with the exception of study committees and various other groups that have met. With 2022 being an election year, most returning members have been very busy holding fundraisers and garnering support from their constituents, holding town hall meetings by attending county fairs and other public events. New candidates, of course, have a greater challenge raising campaign funds. It is hard, labor intensive work; however, even with the General Assembly being mostly quiet, there were some pretty interesting things going on in Raleigh as well as on Capitol Hill. Of interest to farmers is the study bill being heard in the NC Forestry and Agriculture and Forestry Awareness Committee. The committee met on September 28 and October 3. Discussion has generally been around the "Right to Repair Study Bill" that has nationally caused dissention between consumers and independent service businesses against manufacturers and dealers. This bill was originally in the 2022 Farm Act, but was removed and made into a study bill after there was so much controversy.

Fall also brings the threat of damaging hurricanes such as Hurricane Ian. North Carolina has taken their share of hurricane hits in the past twenty years, especially in Eastern and Western North Carolina where areas are prone to flooding. Flooding has changed some of our rural counties' economic landscapes tremendously. Thankfully, Ian was downgraded before hitting North Carolina and there was much less damage than first anticipated.

A few more items of interest around NC are as follows:

- The ACC (Atlantic Coast Conference) is a household word in most North Carolina homes. The decision has recently been made to move its headquarters from Greensboro to Charlotte.
- FOCUS Broadband Co-Op in Robeson County will receive a \$24.6 million grant for high-speed internet access to improve the high-speed internet access to Scotland and Robeson Counties.
- Toyota, which has recently announced that it is coming to Greensboro, has invested \$1 Million in education in the Triad. This includes \$500,000 for NC AT&T University.

Medicaid expansion continues to be a contentious subject in the North Carolina Legislature. It is a complicated subject and one that the general public doesn't fully understand. The following article by Claire Donnelly with *WFAE 90.7* is extremely helpful and explains it in a way that is easier to comprehend. Please take some time to read it. As a note, to date, 39 states, which includes DC, have adopted Medicaid expansion and 12 states have not.

For years, Medicaid expansion has been a contentious issue in North Carolina. Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper has supported the measure, while Republican legislative leaders have opposed it. There's been a shift recently, though: Republican leaders now support expansion and a holdup on the measure centers on disagreements over the state's Certificate of Need law.

Expanding Medicaid would provide health coverage to at least half a million additional residents,

according to the state's Department of Health and Human Services. North Carolina is among roughly a dozen U.S. states that have not expanded Medicaid.

Currently, to be eligible for Medicaid, North Carolinians must be below a certain income level. For example, a family of four must earn less than roughly \$37,000 a year. They also must be: pregnant, 65 or older, responsible for a child, blind, have a disability or care for someone with a disability. If Medicaid were expanded, people could qualify for Medicaid based only on their income.

Many Republicans in North Carolina's statehouse, including Senate Leader Phil Berger and House Speaker Tim Moore, were historically opposed to Medicaid expansion. They were primarily worried about the cost — especially about whether North Carolina would be able to fund the expanded program if the federal government stopped funding 90% of it. But in May, Berger and other Senate Republicans announced they would support Medicaid expansion.

"My view on this has changed," Berger told reporters at the time during a news conference. He added, jokingly: "If there's a person in the state of North Carolina that has spoken against Medicaid expansion more than I have, I'd like to meet that person." The state Senate and House this summer each passed separate bills on Medicaid expansion but negotiations hit a snag over part of the Senate proposal that would roll back rules on adding new hospital services. Under the state's Certificate of Need law, or CON law, if hospitals want to add things



like an operating room or more beds, they are currently required to ask permission from the state health department.

The CON law is intended to cut down on competition. Hospital systems say it prevents outside hospital systems from setting up in the state and saturating the market. They also say the law contains prices for patients and reduces duplicative services.

The House, along with the North Carolina Healthcare Association, which represents 135 hospitals, initially said they did not want any

changes to the CON law. Then, last week, the NCHA sent Cooper, Berger and Moore a proposed compromise. They suggested a handful of changes to the CON law, including removing the need for state approval for new psychiatric beds and some outpatient surgery operating rooms. Berger slammed this proposal Monday, telling reporters in Raleigh the association's proposal was "not even close" to meeting his expectations. Berger told reporters he didn't want to "negotiate through the press." Donnelly, Claire (2022, Sept 22). North Carolina Medicaid expansion hits Certificate of Need snag. www.wfae.org.

Don't forget to vote on November 8. You can also vote early, or you can request an absentee ballot from the NC Board of Elections. Below are the websites where you can request this information.

The Absentee Voting portal can be found here: <https://votebymail.ncsbe.gov/app/home>

Early Voting information including schedules and locations in your county can be found here: <https://vt.ncsbe.gov/ossite/>

in the hospital, in excruciating pain with cancer. On that last visit with him in the hospital he was literally crying out for help. After several of us prayed with him, I reminded him about the story in Matthew. I told him that his bed was like that boat, and that Jesus would climb into that bed with him. He was saying to his pain, "Quiet, be still!" As I was leaving the room, I left saying repeatedly, "Jesus is in the boat." Shortly after, he passed away peacefully to his heavenly home. Jesus had again calmed the storm in His way and time.

I, too, have had traumatic storms in my own life: brokenness, persecution, unfaithfulness, financial difficulties, severe sickness, devastating house fire, hurricane damage to property, deaths, and other trying times. We all go through storms in life, caught up in the agitation of things that tear away at our peace of mind, or face fears that rage within our hearts. BUT GOD SAYS: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior..." (Isaiah 43:1-3). Jesus can calm the storm with a word: "Quiet, be still!"

In those times, Jesus went THROUGH the storms with me. "You (the Lord) have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in his distress, a shelter from the

storm and a shade from the heat," (Isaiah 25:4). Never underestimate God's power to work during the stormiest times in your life. I have shed many tears over the years knowing I couldn't handle the storms by myself. I had to ask for abiding presence right in the middle of those trials. But I learned that because I belong to the Lord, I have an anchor; He will be my lasting foundation (Proverbs 10:25). Jesus will calm the waves or ride out the storm with you. Either way, on the sunny days and on the stormy days, by trusting the Lord, He is ever present in your life. This next quote was on a card I had in my Bible, with unknown origin: "God doesn't give us what we can handle, He helps us handle (stand with us, and gets us through) what we are given. In other words, 'God's Grace keeps pace with what we face!'" Amen. Remember, He has already "prepared a place" for you and me with Him, our safe haven. Be ready!

In Memoriam

George Miner*	Edneyville Grange
Mary Veach	Associate Member
Elmo Barnes	Associate Member
Racford Daughtry	Westbrook Grange
Ora Jean Taylor	Westbrook Grange
Shelby Karkner	Corricker Grange
Chad Arrington	Guilford Grange
Hoke Karkner*	Corricker Grange
Snowden Barefoot	Westbrook Grange

* Denotes 50 year member



The letter below was presented to North Carolina US Senator Thom Tillis. This was written in support of 340B Reform which would ensure that low-income North Carolinians get the care they need.

September 26, 2022

The Honorable Thom Tillis
United States Senate
113 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Tillis,

My name is Jimmy Gentry, President of the NC State Grange. On behalf of our Board of Directors and our membership across the state of North Carolina, I am asking you to support our commitment that North Carolinians should have effective and reliable safety nets when it comes to access to healthcare. Therefore, we respectfully encourage you to continue your support of 340B reform to ensure that low-income North Carolinians get the care they need. Currently, the 340B program has and continues to balloon out of control, with many entities taking advantage of the program without returning investment to the communities they serve.

For this reason, the National Grange joined the AIR 340B Coalition (<http://340breform.org>) to foster a dialogue on reforming this valuable program. The NC State Grange joins it national affiliate and calls for the same reform and transparency.

While 340B was intended to make much needed care affordable for vulnerable patients, a lack of transparency and proper regulation allows bad actors to reap the benefits of 340B without assisting low-income patients. We believe reform of 340B will help patients across the country get the care the program was intended to provide.

We thank you for your support of 340B reform, and respectfully urge you to continue your support of putting the program back on solid footing by stopping program abuses and ensuring it benefits patients as intended. In addition to fixing the program through legislative and regulatory reform, we ask you to support the creation of accountability measures to ensure low-income patients benefit from 340B.

Sincerely,
Jimmy Gentry
President, NC State Grange

COMMUNITY SERVICE
by : Sharon Underwood

Thank you to all of our local Granges who participated in this year's state community service project to support schools in our communities and the Tools4Schools program. It all came together at the State Convention in September in which you donated many needed and useful school supplies to support the Tools4Schools program. In your own communities, you identified schools in need to donate to. We would love to hear what you did for these schools.

On Saturday morning of the convention, September 17, we were honored to have guest speakers Keith Poston, President of Tools4Schools, and Lisa Mead, Chief Fundraiser. They shared about the positive impact that this program is having on education in this area, and they gladly accepted our donations.

Much appreciation goes to the staff and volunteers who stepped in to help with this part of the program since Covid unfortunately kept me from attending this year's convention. I received many nice messages and photographs, which I appreciated, so I could still feel part of the event.

I have sincerely enjoyed the opportunity of working with you in the area of community service for the past three years. Baby Bundles and Tools4Schools have been able to help many families because of your generosity. I know you will assist the next community service director as you continue to serve our state. Thank you for your support and this opportunity to serve.



AGENT PRODUCTION AWARDS FOR JUNE-AUGUST

NC Grange has received the agent production report from BCBSNC for the June through August quarter, and we want to recognize the following award recipients for each market segment.

Under 65 Reward Recipients

- Michael D Alessi, Hendersonville, 38 New Members
- Charlie H Roper, Jr, Hendersonville, 30 New Members
- Chip Pruden, Edenton, 28 New Members
- Kimberly R Austin, Monroe, 25 New Members

Medicare Advantage/ Medicare Supplements Reward Recipients

- Kimberly R Austin, Monroe, 20 New Members
- Chase R McKelvey, Bevard, 9 New Members
- Michael D Alessi, Hendersonville, 9 New Members
- Kenneth W Ennis, Coats, 6 New Members

On behalf of myself and the NC Grange, we want to congratulate these agents on their success as well as all of our NC Grange BCBSNC agents on a job well done for the June through August quarter! Together we had a combined 342 new Under65 members and 157 new Medicare Advantage / Medicare Supplement members in this last quarter. The combined sales efforts from all of our agents exceeded both segment challenges issued last quarter. They did this by exceeding last quarter's new Under65 members by 63, and the Medicare Advantage / Medicare Supplement new members by 26.

NC Grange will be repeating the sales award again for the September to November quarter for both market segments. By using the quarter for the sales reward program, all agents are reset at zero each quarter, so the door is wide open for everyone to participate. We would like to see more names added to this list for the next quarter.

NC Grange is also reimbursing those agents marketing the Medicare products for their annual required training, up to a maximum of \$125.00. Reimbursement checks have been sent to agents who have placed the minimum 20 new Medicare Advantage or Medicare Supplement members with effective dates of January 1 through August 1, 2022. We will continue this opportunity for those additional agents who reach that goal by December 1, 2022. We congratulate the following agents that have already placed the minimum 20 new members:

- Crystal Abee, Marion, NC
- Michael Alessi, Hendersonville, NC
- Kimberly Austin, Monroe, NC
- Kenneth Ennis, Coats, NC
- J. Crayton Kale, Lincolnton, NC
- Troy McAbee, Marion, NC
- Patrick McBrayer, Southern Pines, NC
- Chase McKelvey, Brevard, NC
- Beverly Mitchell, Burnsville, NC
- Blake Pounders, Dunn, NC
- Michele Smith, Durham, NC

GOTCHA COVERED
by : Mark Davis

We appreciate all our Grange agents, their hard work, and everything they do to serve their members. For anyone interested in learning more about our insurance products, give us a call so that we can determine how to best serve you and your family.



TOBACCO SETTLEMENT FUND

Settlement funds are available as a result of litigation directed towards the US Tobacco Cooperative, formerly known as the Flue-Cured Tobacco Cooperative Stabilization Corporation. Included in the settlement are heirs of farmers who grew flue-cured tobacco anytime 1967-1973 and 1982-2004, and were members of the Cooperative. A claim form consisting of three pages must be filed by December 12, 2022. For Grange members that may qualify, claim forms are available at the Grange office along with additional information. In addition, the NC Grange has access to an individual that can help complete the claim forms at no cost. Please contact Jimmy Gentry, NC Grange President for assistance at 704-880-3527 or jwgentry@ncgrange.com.



GRANGERS VISIT RALEIGH

2022 STATE CONVENTION

BY: JESSICA HORTON

The NC Grange met for its 94th State Convention in September at the Sheraton Imperial Hotel in the Research Triangle Park area of Durham and Raleigh. This year, many Granges were represented among over 125 members from across North and South Carolinas. This was the first meeting back in this area since 2019, before the Covid Pandemic hit in 2020.

Grangers began arriving on Thursday for the Sixth Degree practice with Matron, Vinnie Duncan. Friday morning the NC Grange staff arranged for two tour stops in the Raleigh area. The first stop was the brand new North Carolina Plant Science Initiative at NC State University. There the group learned all about the various parts of the building including the research labs, state of the art greenhouse, and the classroom and office space being utilized both by the university and the university private business partners. The front cover showcases the greenhouse on top of the building. The NC Grange is a proud donor of this new facility!

The second stop was to the new Steve Troxler Agricultural Sciences Center. This building is a state of the art laboratory complex. Grangers enjoyed a catered lunch and a presentation by Chief Deputy Commissioner David Smith of the NC Department of Agriculture.

Upon arrival back at the hotel, attendees gathered for the annual awards ceremony in the session room followed by a milk and cookies reception. Many award winners were in attendance, including our Farm of the Year, GerWil Farm from Mooresville; our Law Enforcement Officer of the Year, Bennie Grady from Goldsboro; and Firefighter of the Year, Ryan Yost from Mooresville.

Also in attendance was former NC Grange Secretary Deb Welch. Deb recently stepped down from her role to focus on her health. NC Grange President Jimmy Gentry awarded Deb with a Distinguished Service Award for her years serving the NC Grange.

Friday evening, Grangers gathered for dinner with Blue Cross Blue Shield representative, Bruce Allen and our annual live auction. The auction this year raised \$2,852.50 for the Disaster Relief Fund. Many of our Youth and Juniors also arrived on Friday night. They spent the evening





in fellowship and rehearsing for their session opening drill on Saturday morning.

Saturday morning, Grangers welcomed Lisa Mead and Keith Polston from Wake County's Tools4Schools program. Polston spoke about how the program functions by taking donations, stocking the "store," and welcoming teachers to come in and shop multiple times a year for their classrooms. Grangers from across the state collected school supplies that filled a large SUV for them to take back to the store.

Following breakfast, the Youth and Juniors opened the business meeting with a drill lead by Jacob Roquet of Cape Fear Grange and Abby Gentry of Bushy Fork Grange. The meeting was then presided by Youth President, Baylor Howerton of Bushy Fork Grange. These young Grangers did a wonderful job leading the opening of the business session.

During the business session, resolutions were debated and several elections were held. Mark Hood of Grantham Grange is now serving as Steward; Barden Culbreth of Capitol Grange will continue to serve as Secretary; and John Crawford and Melanie Hudson are both continuing their roles on the NC Grange Board of Directors.

Following the business portion of the meeting, a Youth and Junior luncheon was held to honor all those students who were making wonderful contributions to our organization and their communities. NC Grange Youth Director Jennie Gentry and NC Grange Junior Director Emily Hartsell presided over the lunch, along with members of the Youth Team. Their awards included the Youth of the Year, which went to Asheton Medlin of Bushy Fork Grange, and Junior of the Year, which went to Emma Harrison of St. John's Grange.

On Saturday afternoon, contest judging was completed and Grangers gathered for the showcase of the Sixth Degree. David Allen presided over the degree as President and many candidates were in attendance. Following the degree, Grangers gathered for dinner hosted by GRAIL. GRAIL is a healthcare company that works to detect cancer early and change the trajectory of cancer mortality with care. Learn more about them at grail.com.

Before departing on Sunday morning, Grangers met once again for a memorial service to honor those lost in the last year. Following the service, NC Grange Chaplain LaRue Tart of Grantham Grange led a wonderful worship service.

We look forward to seeing members at Family Conference this spring back at the Outer Banks!







Rolling Ridge Riding Awarded Blue Cross NC's First Medicare Agent Community Impact Grant

Application Opens in 2023 for Future
Quarterly Grant Opportunities

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina (Blue Cross NC) awarded its first quarterly Medicare Agent Community Impact Grant to Rolling Ridge Riding, in Reidsville, North Carolina. Operated by Mark Davis of NC Grange and his wife, Kathryn, a pediatric physical therapist, Rolling Ridge Riding is a free, therapy-based horseback riding program serving children with disabilities. It's a place where parents find a support system, and children who are differently-abled develop friendships, self-esteem, and skills to help them accomplish new things.

Fran Gary, Blue Cross NC Senior Vice President for Government Markets, recently met Mark and Kathryn and was immediately moved by the mission of the couple's Rockingham County non-profit.

Rolling Ridge Riding

In 2000, Kathryn was working with a patient who was struggling to walk and knew the girl needed something more. Having read about equine-assisted therapy, Kathryn invited the family out to the farm to see if this form of therapy

could make a difference. After three successive Saturday rides on Honey, the farm's boarded horse, the girl began taking some steps in her walker.

Other parents of children receiving therapy at the clinic saw the girl walking and wanted to know how this breakthrough had happened. The girl's family told the other parents about Kathryn and Mark's farm and the "magical horse." That's when the phone started ringing off the hook.

Kathryn told Mark, "What parent wouldn't go to the moon and back to help their child accomplish these types of achievements? We have to continue offering this service to these parents and their children." Rolling Ridge Riding was established. The non-profit now serves up to 60 special needs children and their families during a typical riding year.

"Seeing a need, making a difference, focusing on diversity, equity, and inclusion...it's what Rolling Ridge does. And it's what we're doing every day at Blue Cross NC as we work to make health care more accessible for all North Carolinians," said Fran Gary, Senior Vice President of Government Markets for Blue Cross NC. "As a company, and as individuals, this Medicare Agent Community Impact Grant allows us to listen to what inspires our agents and helps us better understand local needs. We're striving to be better, do better, and honor the service leadership of our agents and how local organizations serve and impact their communities."

Since Rolling Ridge Riding was established, it's estimated that volunteer licensed physical, occupational, and speech therapists have provided more than \$3 million in free therapy to children throughout North Central North Carolina and South Central Virginia. Rolling Ridge Riding offers two programs:

Therapy Rides

Held each week, from spring through the fall, participants receive therapy, as well as a basic education component, on horseback from licensed therapists, educators, and a host of volunteers, often from Rockingham County Schools, who volunteer their time. Children with cerebral palsy, spinal bifida, developmental delays, autism, genetic/congenital birth defects, and neurological disorders have learned to sit up, walk, and even talk. Some autistic children who don't talk at school begin talking while on horseback.

Equestrian Team

The equestrian team is made up of special needs individuals, ages 7 and up. On Saturdays, the team learns to ride and competes in adapted classes in horse shows, like 4H and other open shows in Rockingham County.

Rolling Ridge Riding is accomplishing what it was built to do, which has become a gathering place where everyone comes together to form a positive community. The non-profit depends solely on donations, fundraisers, and grants, and has no administrative costs or staff salaries. Blue Cross NC is thrilled to support agent Mark Davis and his wife, Kathryn, who are extremely dedicated to the important work being accomplished at Rolling Ridge Riding.

"We are thrilled, honored, and humbled to receive the initial awarding of the Medicare Agent Community Impact Grant for Rolling Ridge Riding," said Mark Davis, who has worked with Blue Cross NC products for the past 23 years. "To have this kind of support for our small non-profit is huge. Kathryn and I were shocked when the award was announced and having Fran and her team come to our annual fundraiser a few weeks later to present the check was just over the top. With Fran and her team at the helm, Blue Cross NC agents have a very bright future, and I am truly excited to see what the future holds for us!"



How New Cancer Detection Technologies Will Benefit Rural Americans

By Jeffrey M. Venstrom, MD

Chief Medical Officer, GRAIL

GRAIL This year, an estimated 1.9 million Americans will be diagnosed with cancer and over 600,000 will lose their lives to the disease, according to the American Cancer Society.¹ But cancer does not affect everyone equally. In rural parts of the country, a person is significantly more likely to die of cancer than someone living in a metropolitan area.² And while this may be partly explained by demographics – rural areas tend to have older populations with more underlying health conditions – it is also an issue of access to treatment and preventative care. For example, only eleven percent of oncologists in the U.S. practice in a rural area and people living in these regions tend to have to travel further to obtain care.^{3,4} This leads to diagnoses at more advanced stages when treatment is more difficult and has a lower chance of success.

As a physician and researcher, I've spent a good part of my career working to address this gap and have witnessed the science come a long way in recent years. Today, new cancer screening technologies are enabling early detection for dozens of different cancers, using a simple draw of blood. By analyzing small fragments of tumors found in a person's bloodstream, these tests are able to identify the presence of cancerous cells and predict where the cancer may be located with a high degree of accuracy. Known as multi-cancer early detection – MCED for short -- these tests are meant to complement and significantly expand upon existing screening methods. The result could be a dramatic transformation in cancer care to the benefit of everyone – especially rural Americans, with a simple blood draw.

Currently, only five types of cancer have commonly available screenings – leaving too many cancers with no means of being detected early. These include some very deadly forms of the disease, like ovarian, pancreatic and stomach cancers. In fact, more than 70 percent of cancer deaths are due to those with no recommended screening test.⁵ And while the screenings we have today are vital for cancer prevention, some of these procedures – like colonoscopy and mammography – can be invasive and require a specialist. For people living in rural

areas, this means driving dozens of miles each way to get screened, one-at-a-time, for each type of cancer that we have a screening test for.

Help is on the way. MCED tests, including the Galleri® test made by GRAIL, are starting to become available to consumers through a doctor's prescription. And the FDA is in the process of evaluating them for broader utilization. For rural Americans, the power of these simple blood tests is the ability to put them to use in practically any clinic or care setting. Moving forward, it will be essential to ensure that the tests are accessible to those at greatest risk of cancer diagnoses, such as older adults with the highest rates for cancer. Congress can help by passing the Medicare Multi-Cancer Early Detection Screening Coverage Act (H.R. 1946⁶ / S. 1873⁷) that will create the pathway for this type of screening to be covered by Medicare for rural beneficiaries.

Living in a rural area shouldn't consign someone to a greater cancer burden. MCED screening holds tremendous promise for closing the urban-rural gap in cancer outcomes, with a simple blood test.

[1] American Cancer Society. Cancer Facts & Figures 2022. Atlanta: American Cancer Society; 2022.

[2] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. New CDC Report shows deaths from cancer higher in rural America. July 6, 2017.

[3] American Society of Clinical Oncology. 2021 Snapshot: State of the Oncology Workforce in America. JCO Oncology Practice (2021) 17 (5): 249-249

[4] Longacre, C.F., Neprash, H.T., Shippee, N.D., Tuttle, T.M. and Virnig, B.A., Evaluating Travel Distance to Radiation Facilities Among Rural and Urban Breast Cancer Patients in the Medicare Population. The Journal of Rural Health, (2020) 36: 334-346

[5] Hubbell, E., Clarke, C.A., Aravanis, A.M., Berg, C.D., Modeled Reductions in Late-stage Cancer with a Multi-Cancer Early Detection Test. Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers and Prevention. (2021) 30 (3): 460–468.

[6] <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1946>

[7] <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/1873?s=1&r=43>





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