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# Southeast region leaders recognized in Business North Carolina's 2023 Power List

ELIZABETHTOWN, NC – North Carolina's Southeast is celebrating a number of board members, local developers and partners who made the Business North Carolina 2023 Power List thanks to their leadership in supporting economic development.

"North Carolina's Southeast is thrilled to work with so many successful, influential leaders in our 20-county region," said NCSE president Steve Yost. "Our area is comprised of many great professionals dedicated to growing our community. This list is only a fraction of the inspiring people that make southeastern North Carolina an incredible place to live and work."



North Carolina's Southeast board member **Evan Kleinhans** made the 2023 Power List thanks to his work in agriculture. Kleinhans is the CEO of AgCarolina Farm Credit, a member-owned enterprise that is part of the Farm Credit System. AgCarolina has about \$3 million in loans to more than 6,000 members. Kleinhans says the highlight of his career has been being able to provide constructive credit and financial services to grow the success of AgCarolina's members.

**Robert Van Geons**, president and CEO of Fayetteville Cumberland Economic Development Corporation landed a spot on the 2023 Power List for his work in growing the Fayetteville area's economy. Van Geons also serves as the chairman of the Local Developers Advisory Group. Since 2017, Van Geons has helped attract more than \$600 million in new investment pledges. For industry newcomers, Van Geons encourages professionals to lead with empathy and always look for the next great innovation.



Local developer **Scott Satterfield** also made the list for economic development. Satterfield graduated from UNC Wilmington and is now the CEO of Wilmington Business Development. In his nearly 20 years of leadership, Satterfield has played a major role in bringing more business to the area. He says the highlight of his career was recruiting GE's Nuclear Energy Division Headquarters in 2003.

Focus Broadband CEO **Keith Holden** was recognized as part of the power list for his work in the media and communications industry. Holden began his leadership at Focus in 2018 and is overseeing its continued expansion. The member-owned communications services company recently expanded into Pender County and has since received a \$24.6 million grant to extend its services into Robeson County.



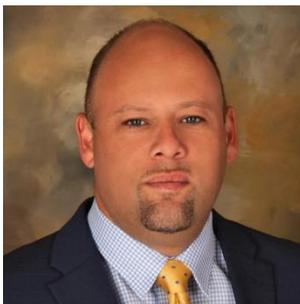
Duke Energy's director of economic development, **Andrew Tate**, also made the 2023 Power List. Tate is the former vice president of the N.C. Railroad Company. He now leads a team of five senior managers as the electric utility company lends a hand in major economic development recruitments. The UNC Chapel Hill graduate advises industry newcomers to listen with intent and act with purpose as they enter the world of economic development.

North Carolina Ports Authority executive director **Brian Clark** also made the Power List for his work in transportation. Clark is a U.S. Merchant Marine Academy graduate. He began his leadership at the authority in January 2021. Last year, U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg appointed Clark to the Maritime Transportation System National Advisory Committee.



**Carl Warren**, president and CEO of the North Carolina Railroad Company made the 2023 Power List thanks to his work in transportation. Since 2020, Warren has led the company as it oversees a 317-mile rail corridor. The company also invests in local development projects. Warren says a key industry change he believes is on the horizon is a focus on operating practices and safety.

**Gene McLaurin**, chairman of the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina, was recognized for his work in economic development. McLaurin, who lives in southeastern North Carolina, is also the president of Swink-Quality Oil, a petroleum products distributor. McLaurin has previously served as mayor of Rockingham state senator for District 25. In the next five years, he expects to see a larger transition to renewable energy and a more diverse workforce.



**Aaron Thomas**, CEO of Metcon, is also on this year's Power List. He credits his late grandfather with his success in life after he start mentoring Thomas at just 10 years old. Thomas started his general contracting firm in 1999 which has since completed more than 700 projects and become one of the state's fastest growing major contractors. Thomas also serves on the executive board of the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina. His advice for incoming professionals is to learn to be the best builder they can be, as true builders are a "dying breed."

**Chris Chung** is the CEO of the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina and was named in the Power List thanks to his work in economic development. Chung has played a key role in major wins including Toyota Motor and other corporate investments. During his tenure at the EDPNC, Chung has helped secure a more robust incentives program by working with lawmakers. When asked what changes he expects to come to the industry, he says economic development has started seeing the workforce more greatly impacted by housing, childcare and transportation.



**Melissa Smith** made the 2023 Power List for her work in economic development. She has been in the industry for 25 years. Since 2020, she has served as the vice president of business recruitment and development for the EDPNC. Smith worked to help the state gain 174 projects last year, including the \$4 billion VinFast auto factory in Chatham County and a \$1 billion Eli Lilly drug plant in Concord.

NCSE's president **Steve Yost** also made the Power List. Yost has led NCSE since 2009, working to promote our 20-country region stretching from the Uwharrie Mountains to the Atlantic Coast. He has previously worked as a senior developer and regional manager for the N.C. Department of Commerce's southeast region. Yost says his advice to professionals entering the industry is to think and act strategically and pay attention to detail.



*A public-private partnership headquartered in Elizabethtown, N.C., North Carolina's Southeast's mission is to "provide strong economic development leadership in southeastern North Carolina through innovative marketing and collaborative regional initiatives that will support the creation of new jobs, generate capital investment and secure new business locations." Member counties include Anson, Bladen, Brunswick, Columbus, Craven, Cumberland, Duplin, Hoke, Jones, Lenoir, Montgomery, Moore, New Hanover, Onslow, Pender, Richmond, Robeson, Sampson, Scotland and Wayne. For additional information, visit [www.ncse.org](http://www.ncse.org)*