



Greetings from the Mountain

If you've heard me talk about Hurricane Helene, you've heard me say GRRR – Grace, Gratitude and Grit. Perhaps I should have started with **grief**. The shocking devastation throughout our local community; the catastrophic damage on campus leading to facilities we were unable to save, reopen and/or restore; the staff we had to part with; the months we weren't able to serve hundreds of teens, families and adults. All of it was gut-wrenching and heartbreaking, and it's something that I recently learned is worth sitting in momentarily. Then you must make meaning of what happened and reframe to focus on the positive and focus on action – the next step, the path forward.

GRACE – God's grace for sparing lives on the mountain, ensuring all were evacuated after the storm safely. The grace so many have given us and grace we've had to give each other this last year, especially.

GRATITUDE – heartfelt, face-down humbling gratitude for the depth and strength of support from you. It was (and continues to be) unbelievable and something we don't take for granted - from you, board members, donors, conference partners, community and staff.

GRIT – we've had to exude and how I believe the staff have embraced grit and resilience.

We've paused (briefly) to celebrate our Save & Stabilize and Reopening phases. I'm so incredibly grateful to the staff and corporate partners for their extraordinary work. As we enter 2026, I find that grace, gratitude and grit are essential pieces in our path forward. How will we build on them? What's included as we move forward? We will continue to give praise, to pause and then to propel forward with peace in our discernment and decisions. As we forge ahead, we will remember, restore and reimagine.

REMEMBER – We first implemented the RISE strategy screen for making decisions during the recent pandemic: Return on Investment, Impact, Sustainability, Excellence. It facilitated our thoughtfulness in each step. The progress made over the last year has been amazing! Friends came to volunteer for important projects needed on the campus. We were able to support recovery efforts around the region by hosting disaster recovery groups. Staff pressed in, stretched beyond their job duties, and worked together to move us forward. We have been intentional in every phase and every decision. When assessing how far we've come, herculean is an appropriate adjective.

RESTORE – Restoring Eureka Hall, Thrailkill Auditorium in Heaton Hall and Abbott Hall for use Summer 2026. Plus construct the new Mary Parker Davis Aquatic Facility and hopefully repair the trail system. Our restore phase will have two facets to it – how do we restore the building to functional operations AND then how do we plan for future work to utilize the building to its highest capacity so we can have the greatest impact? This will be true for Abbott, Eureka and Heaton Halls and all future projects/buildings/venues.

REIMAGINE - This is our future. As we look at the campus, we have sectioned into 3 parts - the lower part with the athletic fields, challenge courses and lake; the core of campus and then the upper part of campus which is mainly our trail system. We've engaged outside partners as we envision future growth and impact opportunities with venues, facilities and gathering areas.

I look forward to 2026 with wholehearted joy and expectation. With YOUR help, we can restore and reimagine YMCA Blue Ridge, and most importantly, continue to serve many generations of youth, teens and families with the powerful work that takes place on this Mountain. Because of you, YMCA Blue Ridge is rising strong. I can't wait to see it all unfold.

With much gratitude,



HALL OF FAME

Over 165 guests joined us for the **YMCAs of the Southeast Hall of Fame dinner and induction ceremony** on September 17, 2025. YMCA Blue Ridge is honored to be the home of the Southeast Hall of Fame, honoring individuals who have devoted their lives to strengthening their local community and making a positive impact on the YMCA movement in the Southeast. **The Class of 2025 consisted of 7 individuals** noted for their relationship building, community engagement and innovative ideas. We thank the Hall of Fame committee and this year's sponsors for helping us have an amazing evening of celebration on the Mountain.

Bill and Kaye Carraway

Known as the heart and soul of YMCA Camp Thunderbird, dedicating more than 41 years building a camp community grounded in compassion and purpose. Served as guiding lights for thousands of campers who found not just fun, but direction and belonging. Approached every challenge with care, wisdom, and a shared commitment to doing what was best for each camper.

Nurtured Counselor-in-Training, Resident Camp and Alumni relations programs which became cornerstones of leadership development. Elevated Camp Thunderbird's reputation nationally with a commitment to safety and innovation. Celebrated as legends who helped shape so many lives, both remain beloved figures at camp events.

Left a legacy of excellence, one that continues to ripple through the lives of campers and staff they mentored, many who thrive personally and professionally because of the foundation built under their care. Alumni remember them as steady influences, rooted in the YMCA's Christian mission, who made camp feel like a second home.



Michelle Dudley

Served as a teacher and YMCA volunteer for 40 years. Influenced two generations of teens teaching at Northeast High School and serving as the volunteer advisor for the Hi-Y Club. Described as "warm and loving, yet strong and steady - a rare combination of tough and tender that earns both respect and trust."

Involved hundreds of teens in Y conferences including the Florida YMCA Winter Retreat, YMCA Christian Values Conference, Conference on National Affairs, and most notably the Florida YMCA Youth in Government Conferences. Connected with teens through empathy and compassion, creating a safe environment around the mission and values of the YMCA.

Fostered positive change for teens in her community. Recognized with awards given by the Florida Youth in Government program and the YMCA of Greater St. Petersburg. Surpassed her role as an advisor or facilitator and became a CHAMPION of youth programs and teens.



Cindy Ferguson

Devoted 36 years of service in leadership roles across six states as a transformative leader within the YMCA movement. Committed to strengthening communities and improving outcomes for youth, adults and families. Brought innovation, compassion and excellence to the YMCAs she served.

Dedicated 20-years of consecutive involvement with the Y-Teen Christian Values Conference. Each year, she brought energy and purpose to the gathering of more than 500 high school students, facilitating meaningful activities and leading music programming that inspired leadership development and spiritual growth. Her exemplary service was recognized through the prestigious Paul Grist Award in 1997.

Contributed on a national level through her service on various YMCA of the USA committees. Mentored the next generation of YMCA professionals as a trainer for the YMCA's Career Development Program. Served on the YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly Board of Directors and Mission Impact Committee.



John Mark "Journey" Johnson

Demonstrated commitment, growth and leadership with a successful 35+ year career in Virginia and Tennessee, 27 years as a Y CEO. Exuded authenticity and strong faith, ministering through his work in local, regional and national roles.

Noted for connecting "artful askers" with "joyful givers." Raised \$16 million in Richmond for three new branches and renovations, including for a historic urban branch. Raised \$78 million in Nashville to build an overnight camp, two new branches and numerous renovations. Initiated Bright Beginnings school supply drives and a school system partnership to teach every 1st grader to swim.

Devoted 29 years as a Rotarian and Elder Emeritus, Disciples of Christ. Completed 40 marathons. Created a legacy not just with accomplishments but in how he relates to others, including his beautiful family, friends and those he mentored. Served on Boards of YMCA Retirement Fund, North American YMCA Development Organization and YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly.



Doug McMillan

Dedicated more than 50 years of distinguished service to the YMCA of the Triangle, beginning his journey as a camp counselor and culminating in 29 impactful years as CEO. Expanded the reach of YMCA to seven counties serving more than 200,000 children, adults and families annually. Generated over \$10 million in annual support, significantly strengthening the organization's ability to serve its communities.

Established the Beacon Site in South Raleigh—a unique YMCA branch/public school partnership in a historically underserved area. His strategic vision and unwavering commitment led to a broader revitalization effort, sparking new public housing developments and attracting both commercial and nonprofit partners to invest in the area's future.

Exemplified the values and mission of the YMCA with a servant-leader's heart. Inspired generations of staff, volunteers, and community members through his humility, dedication and faith-driven leadership. Left a legacy that will continue to shape the YMCA of the Triangle and the countless lives it touches.

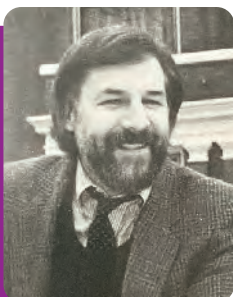


Larry Wooldridge

Brought a huge heart for teens to his first role as YMCA Program Director in 1972. Turned a small innovation grant from the Association into the first ever emergency Y Shelter House for runaway and homeless youth, providing immediate free shelter and support. Believed youth are assets and upstream interventions can promote education and resilience.

Recruited community partners to serve as doorways to services. Project Safe Place was born and continues today in YMCAs with expanded services for teens in vulnerable situations. Today, there are 20,000 Safe Place "doorways" to services in 40 states. YMCA Safe Place was recognized with a Daily Point of Light Award in 1991.

Served many roles in 31 years but never was far away from serving vulnerable youth. Led international programs for the YMCA, including camp counselor exchanges and teen/young adult overseas exchanges, working with Louisville Sister Cities.



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BUILDING WITH RESILIENCE



We are so thankful for your support – because of you, we've made significant progress just a little of a year after the storm! Weatherford Hall rooms have been reorganized to house more people and will soon have air conditioning installed. Two bridges that provide main access to our property are rebuilt, allowing safe access to campus.

Know that your donations ensure YMCA Blue Ridge is here to serve many more generations of youth, teens and families. We consider each repair and restoration an investment in the future of YMCA Blue Ridge. While being mindful of cost, we assessed the needs of the buildings and campus infrastructure implementing necessary, sustainable updates. Electrical work in Blue Ridge Center was done to meet current building codes and HVAC systems were modernized. With the advice of experienced engineers, infrastructure repairs focused on implementing mitigation efforts for future storms and landslide stabilization efforts decreased the likelihood of further slope failure.

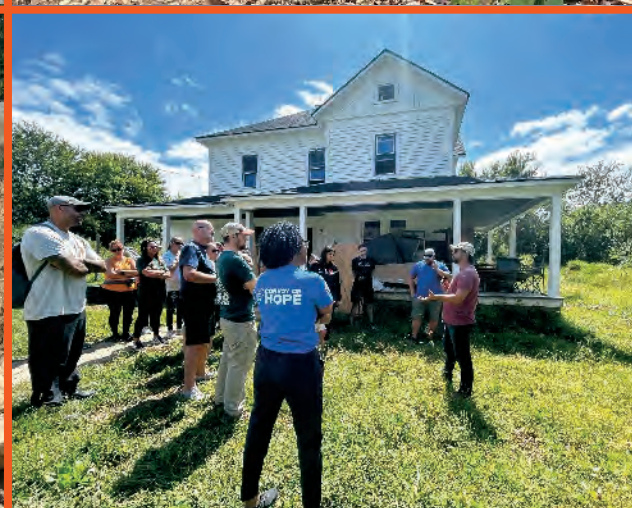
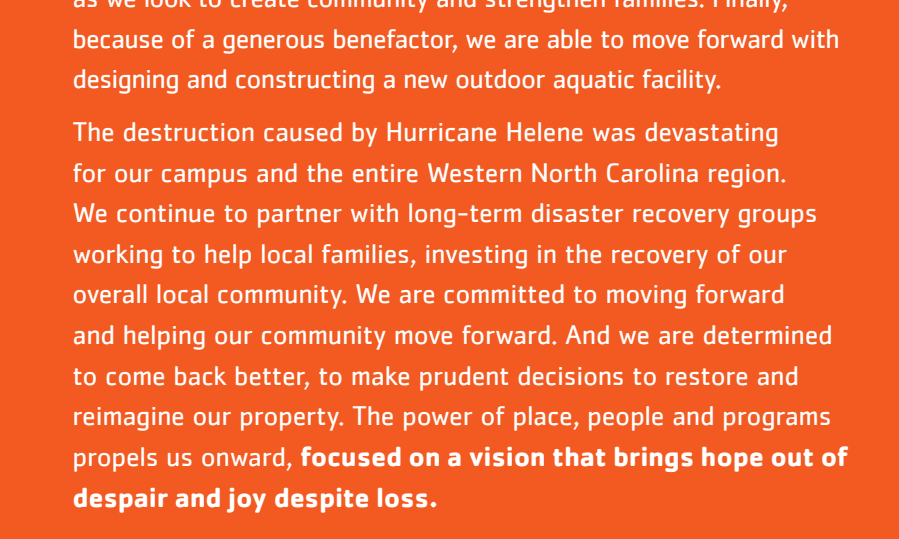
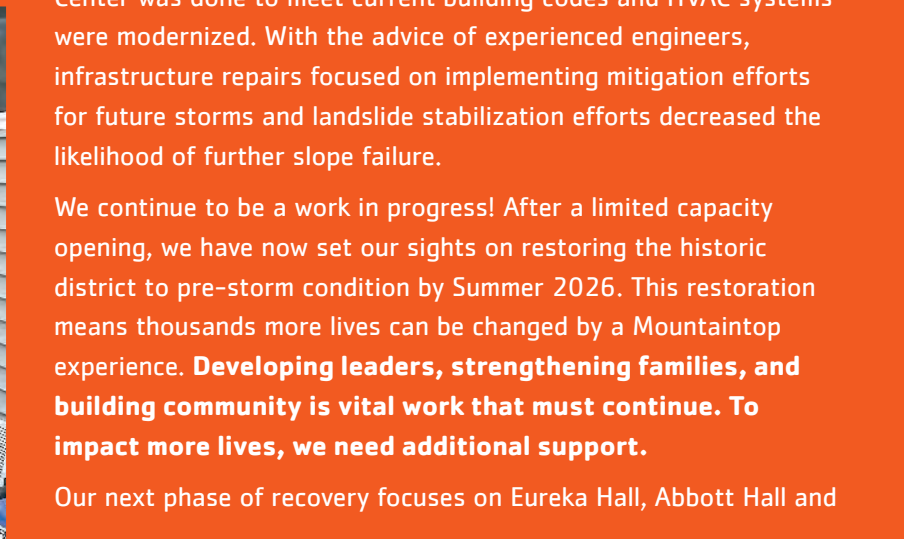
We continue to be a work in progress! After a limited capacity opening, we have now set our sights on restoring the historic district to pre-storm condition by Summer 2026. This restoration means thousands more lives can be changed by a Mountaintop experience. **Developing leaders, strengthening families, and building community is vital work that must continue. To impact more lives, we need additional support.**

Our next phase of recovery focuses on Eureka Hall, Abbott Hall and

Thrailkill Auditorium in Heaton Hall. We are committed to preserving the look and feel of our historic buildings; while also ensuring damages are repaired and upgrades promote a better experience. Eureka and Abbott Halls serve youth and are critical to assuring all young people can return in 2026. Eureka Hall, our oldest building, provides the iconic breathtaking view of the mountains and its porch and lobby are favorite places of many. Infrastructure repairs on roads and bridges will continue around campus as well.

We have an opportunity to reimagine our campus and strategically plan better ways to serve future generations. Future phases will center around land design and building improvements. Having smaller contemporary spaces remains a priority as we look to create community and strengthen families. Finally, because of a generous benefactor, we are able to move forward with designing and constructing a new outdoor aquatic facility.

The destruction caused by Hurricane Helene was devastating for our campus and the entire Western North Carolina region. We continue to partner with long-term disaster recovery groups working to help local families, investing in the recovery of our overall local community. We are committed to moving forward and helping our community move forward. And we are determined to come back better, to make prudent decisions to restore and reimagine our property. The power of place, people and programs propels us onward, **focused on a vision that brings hope out of despair and joy despite loss.**



WELCOME HOME!



Youth, teens and families experienced the magic of the Mountain this summer despite the devastation just 9 months prior. On a sunny Saturday, June 14, teens from Leaders' clubs throughout the country came for the first session of YMCA Blue Ridge Leaders' School. **Their arrival marked our official reopening since the hurricane, a partial reopening at 40% capacity.**

The lead-up to our partial reopening required an "all hands-on deck" approach with our President & CEO, Melissa Logan

referring to it as the "spring sprint." Hundreds of volunteers helped clean, paint and assemble and organize furniture. Bridges were opened just days before the arrival of buses. The new kitchen still needed to pass inspections, so we had to use outside catering the first week of forward-facing operations.

The restart was strategically planned. **We resumed operations with limited space and services,** focused on one or two groups at a time, and gave extra time in between groups to clean and set up. Hiking trails were closed, areas with continuing construction were roped off, and Eureka Hall was not the central gathering place it usually is.



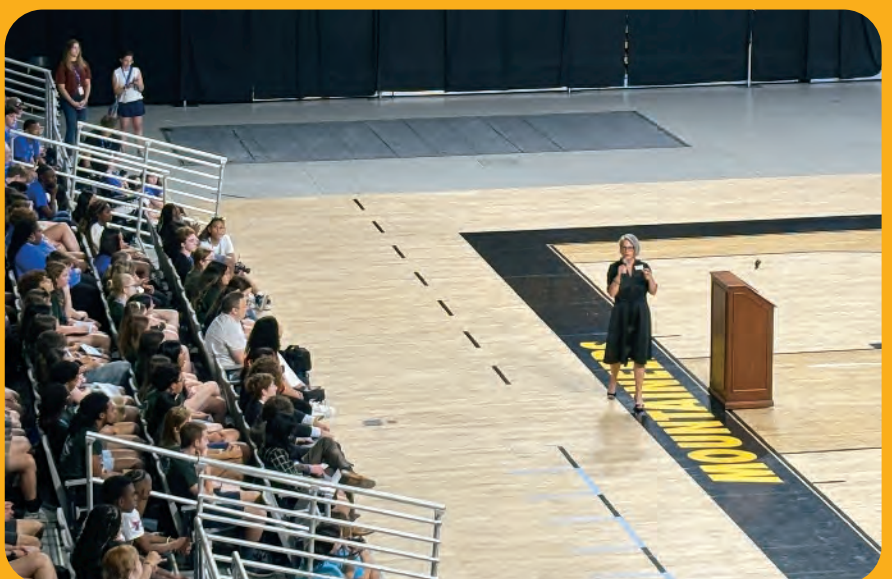
Yet, everyone was so gracious, thankful and happy to be back. The joyful fellowship and laughter of summer gave new life to our ravaged campus and re-energized weary staff. Teens hugged new and old friends; families connected over smores by the lake. Groups gathered in the amphitheater, athletes competed and then worshipped together, and adults mentored. Leaders pushed listeners to think differently, commit to community and engage in authentic relationships.

Many aspects of our summer were not the same. **However, the important things – smiling youth, teachable moments, friends made, community built – were very much the same.** Almost 3,500 guests with 47 partners joined us this summer, each one impactful, with eyes to the future.



HOME SOON. BUT NOT YET.

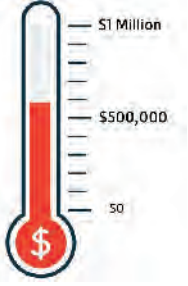
To those who couldn't make it back to the Mountain this summer – we missed you all! Some who temporarily relocated their meeting place to other locations in Western North Carolina still invited Melissa to welcome them and give an update. A huge gush of gratitude for the invitation – we can't wait to do it in 2026, on the Mountain. To all of you who dropped by, shared our story or sent notes, your presence, while incomplete, was most welcome.



ONE MILLION DOLLAR CHALLENGE!

We are so thankful to **Stuart Weidie and The Blossman Companies!** Blossman Gas is matching up to \$1 million dollars in donations! Every pledge or donation made after July 1, 2025, to support our restoration will be doubled by their generous challenge. Donate today to help us reach our goal!

We are so thankful to all who have donated so far! Coming in our February issue – a recognition list for all our 2024 and 2025 donors!



Stuart Weidie, President & CEO, Blossman Gas and YMCA Blue Ridge Board Member; Melissa Bailey Logan; and Karen DeBlieux, Board Chair



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We have a new addition to our Advancement team!

We are so pleased to announce Ryan Graham as our new Vice President of Advancement! Suzette Armatas, current Vice President of Advancement, is excited to pass the leadership baton to Ryan as she transitions to a remote role closer to her family and new grandchild in Florida. Suzette will continue her important role in YMCA Blue Ridge’s development work, remaining an integral part of the team as the Director of Development.

Ryan is no stranger to YMCA Blue Ridge – he attended Leaders’ School as a teen which sparked his now 30-year YMCA career, prompting many visits to the Mountain over the years. He joins us from YMCA of Greater Charlotte where he has worked for the past 19 years, most recently as the Associate Executive Director of Programs with Brace Family YMCA. Ryan looks forward to partnering with Suzette and the Advancement team as they work to raise the philanthropic support needed to restore and reimagine YMCA Blue Ridge.

Thank you for your continued support!