

sync[®] NEWS & OPPORTUNITIES FROM N.C. COMMERCE



(L-R) Lumbee Tribe Chairman Harvey Godwin, Jr.; N.C. First Lady Kristin Cooper; and N.C. Commerce Chief of Staff George Sherrill at the I-95S Welcome Center last Wednesday (Aug. 8)

North Carolina's Welcome Centers Celebrate 50th Anniversary and Launch Sweepstakes

North Carolina's Welcome Centers, the state's friendly and helpful gateways for travelers and a key economic engine for the tourism industry, celebrate their 50th anniversary of service this month with a series of celebrations and a sweepstakes to enable visitors to take part in this important milestone.

Last Wednesday (August 8), the Welcome Center anniversary ceremony took place at the Interstate 95 South Welcome Center in Rowland. **North Carolina First Lady Kristin Cooper** greeted attendees and offered keynote remarks. **North Carolina Commerce Chief of Staff George Sherrill** recognized Welcome Center managers and staff from all nine locations. The ceremony included cultural performances by members of the Lumbee Tribe and remarks from **Lumbee Tribe Chairman Harvey Godwin, Jr.** and **N.C. Representative Charles Graham**.

The event also launched the N.C. Welcome Center 50th Anniversary Sweepstakes. Travelers stopping into any of the state's Welcome Centers between now and October 31, 2018 will have the chance to win one of three prize packages, just by



Helping to celebrate the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) partnership in Pembroke were, (L-R): John Lowery, N.C. Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) regional operations director; Mark Edmonds, DWS chief operating officer; John Savage, U.S. Department of Labor regional administrator; Lumbee Tribe Chairman Harvey Godwin, Jr.; Archie Barrow, director of veteran employment service at DWS; Lane Dyer, state director of the Veterans Employment and Training Service at the U.S. Department of Labor; Victor Glover, deputy director of veteran employment services at DWS; and Raymond Hunt, DVOP specialist.

Lumbee Tribe Celebrates New Partnership with N.C. Commerce to Serve Veterans

A new partnership between the Lumbee Tribe and N.C. Commerce's Workforce Solutions division aimed to help veterans find jobs was announced August 2 at a ceremony in Pembroke. In what **Lumbee Tribe Chairman Harvey Godwin, Jr.** called "a first for Indian Country across America," a Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) specialist will now be based specifically within the tribe, providing a new level of attention and service to local military veterans.

No other American Indian tribe in the country enjoys such an arrangement.

Federally-funded DVOP specialists develop job and training opportunities for veterans with significant barriers to employment, especially those veterans with service-connected disabilities. There are 50 such full-time specialists stationed throughout North Carolina, many of them based at NCWorks Career Centers.

"This is a great, historic day not only for the Lumbee tribe, but also for the state of North Carolina," said **Archie Barrow, director of the veteran employment service for the**

signing into the Welcome Center guest registration system during their visit. The North Carolina Department of Commerce is partnering with Visit North Carolina and the Greenville-Pitt County Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Heart of North Carolina Visitors Bureau and the Haywood County Tourism Development Authority to offer the sweepstakes.



Managers from the state's nine Welcome Centers joined the celebration on August 8.

On August 1, 1968, the first of North Carolina's nine Welcome Centers opened two miles from the Virginia line on Interstate 85. A second facility, located along Interstate 95 North, opened to the public in September of 1968. Today, a total of nine Welcome Centers are in operation.

At each Welcome Center, nationally-certified travel counselors extend hospitality to visitors and offer personal customer service in modern facilities. Staff distribute the Official North Carolina Travel Guide, the Department of Transportation's state map as well as marketing publications for thousands of tourism-related businesses and attractions.

"The Welcome Centers play a crucial role in our state's tourism industry," said **Commerce Secretary Anthony M. Copeland**. "From the Great Smokey Mountains to the Outer Banks, North Carolina offers an abundance of attractions for visitors to explore. The Welcome Centers' seasoned travel counselors welcome guests into our state and help them make the most of their time here."

The state's Welcome Centers serve many people each year. A total of 9,418,982 people stopped by the Welcome Centers in 2017. Last year, the top five origin states for travelers, excluding North Carolina, were Florida, South Carolina, Virginia, Pennsylvania and Ohio. The nine facilities also served nearly 10,000 international travelers during 2017. The Welcome Centers' travel professionals assisted visitors from Palau, Zimbabwe, Luxembourg and other distant countries. The top five origin countries were Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, China and Australia.

Since opening in 1968, an estimated total of more than 300 million visitors have stopped at one of the centers, nearly the population of the United States.

In addition to serving recreational travelers, the Welcome Centers support people in times of distress, including displacements due to natural disasters. In 2017, thousands of evacuees entered North Carolina when Hurricane Irma forced one of the largest evacuations in national history. In response to the influx, Welcome Centers along the South Carolina border

Workforce division and a United States Army veteran, said at the ceremony. "They say 'Army leads the way,' but in this case, North Carolina leads the way." Barrow added that not only tribe members, but any veteran who visits the center, will be served by the program. He said that the philosophy behind the effort is to "never leave a veteran behind."

The new DVOP specialist at the Lumbee veterans' center will be **Raymond Hunt**, a member of the tribe. Hunt is a 29-year veteran of the Army, who retired at the rank of Master Sergeant. He is also an alumnus of Robeson Community College. Of his new mission, Hunt said, "I'm excited to pay it forward, after so many people helped me throughout my career."

"We are proud to work with the Lumbee tribe," said **Mark Edmonds, chief operating officer for Workforce Solutions** and a fellow Army veteran. He said Hunt "will be collaborating with employers and other agencies, and he will be connected to the NCWorks system to help bring together the resources that veterans need."

More information on Commerce's [services for veterans is available online at nccommerce.com](#).

N.C. in the News

- [Commerce Secretary Promotes Readiness for Jobs](#) (*The Pilot*) - Southern Pines - August 8
- [Thank you for your service: Bunker Labs RDU's vet entrepreneur work earns awards](#) (*WRAL TechWire* - August 2)
- [Luggage brings hope](#) (*The Daily Herald* - Roanoke Rapids - August 1)

About Us

SYNC is North Carolina Commerce's electronic newsletter for local government officials, private-sector allies, state policy makers, and other economic development leaders. We offer unfiltered details about new economic development projects and events, useful news about your peers, and opportunities to synchronize with statewide programs and tools in order to advance economic development in your community. [Send your story ideas to the editor.](#)

extended their hours of operation to answer questions about transportation and accommodations. North Carolina residents, businesses and churches volunteered to provide food and water outside the facilities.

"Hurricane Irma sent many evacuees northbound on Interstate 95 seeking shelter until the storm passed," said **Kat Littleturtle, manager of the Interstate 95 South Welcome Center**. "Our Welcome Center remained open until 8:00 pm helping the travelers with directions and making reservations."

Funding support for the Welcome Centers comes from the North Carolina General Assembly, which enables the state to provide this important service to both visitors and North Carolina's tourism industry.

The program was originally operated by the Travel and Promotion Division of the N.C. Department of Conservation and Development and maintained by the State Highway Commission. Today, the North Carolina Department of Commerce, the North Carolina Department of Transportation and Visit NC support the Welcome Centers.

For more information about North Carolina's Welcome Centers, visit nccommerce.com/tourism/programs-services/welcome-centers.

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