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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

October 23, 2025

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**Clean Energy Award Winners Reflect Public-Private Support for Clean Energy Across State**

Organizations, businesses, and individuals recognized for significant contributions to expanding clean energy access and development in North Carolina and beyond

**RALEIGH, N.C.** – Today, the NC Sustainable Energy Association (NCSEA) announces the recipients of its annual clean energy leadership awards. Awardees were selected based on their years of commitment to expanding economic opportunities through clean energy for all North Carolinians. Awards were announced in each of the following categories: Women in Clean Energy, Sustainable Energy Business of the Year, Individual Sustainable Energy Leader of the Year, Sustainable Energy Stewardship, Diversity and Inclusion in Sustainable Energy, Lifetime Achievement, Clean Energy and Community Champion, and Legislator of the Year.

“Each year, NCSEA recognizes outstanding contributions and commitments to expanding affordable, reliable, clean energy options throughout North Carolina. The awardees this year exemplify the innovative, resilient spirit that defines North Carolina’s energy ecosystem,” said Matt Abele, executive director of NCSEA. “NCSEA commends each of these awardees for their leadership in helping to ensure North Carolina remains a national leader in clean energy deployment, while maintaining affordable electricity for all.”

**Recipients of the 2025 NC Sustainable Energy Association Clean Energy Awards include:**

*Women in Clean Energy Award: Clary Franko*

Clary, who is chief operating officer of Asheville-based Sugar Hollow Solar, has more than 13 years of leadership experience in renewable energy. She worked at SunCommon in Vermont for more than eight years and helped grow the business to more than 100 people. In 2020, she began work at Sugar Hollow Solar, playing a key role in doubling the company's revenue, leading its B-Corp certification, and scaling the company's commercial and industrial business. Most recently, she helped Sugar Hollow Solar recover from Hurricane Helene. Despite losing its warehouse in the flood, she helped the team get back to full operation within a matter of weeks. She is now helping the company navigate the surge in demand caused by the hurricane, as well as significant legislative changes and tariffs.

*Sustainable Energy Business of the Year Award: Sugar Hollow Solar*

Despite having lost more than \$1 million in inventory to Helene, Sugar Hollow Solar has continued to support their clients' transition to clean energy. The company has maintained 30%



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revenue growth and more than 40% sales growth year over year, proving their resilience in the face of extraordinary challenges. Its systems have produced more than 11 GWh this year alone. The company also established the Repower Western NC Fund to support long-term recovery and resilience in the state by helping individuals, nonprofits, and shared spaces rebuild with clean, reliable energy. Even as legislation changes threatened critical incentives, the company stepped up: co-founder and CEO Doug Ager joined industry leaders in Washington, D.C., lobbying and peacefully protesting on the Capitol steps to advocate for the future of solar and clean energy. The company also led the local charge with remote lobbying and petitioning, sharing it with community partners and clients.

*Sustainable Energy Leader of the Year Award: Shasten Jolley*

Shasten, manager of Greentech Renewables Raleigh, has been a strong advocate for rooftop solar in North Carolina, going significantly above and beyond his daily role at Greentech Renewables to be actively involved in policy efforts at the state and federal levels. Shasten rallied the support of rooftop solar installers across the state to fight for the federal Solar Investment Tax Credit. He also spearheaded multiple events hosted at Greentech's location in Garner, NC, including a press conference by SUN and a roundtable featuring Congresswoman Deborah Ross. Shasten also stepped up in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Helene to volunteer staff time, equipment, and transportation resources to make sure supplies were delivered to communities in need in western North Carolina.

*Sustainable Energy Stewardship Award: John Argentati*

In 2022, John started using his background in software engineering, along with his passion for sustainability and clean energy, to contract with NCSEA to explore and implement improvements to the organization's data practices. John worked closely with staff to optimize the efficiency of our central clean energy database, the Renewable Energy Database (REDB). He also constructed the Sustainable Energy Support Hub, a tool used to visualize REDB and other data sources on digital maps, and provided technical support for the Sustainable Energy Survey that was delivered to more than 33,000 clean energy adopters in 2022.

*Diversity and Inclusion in Sustainable Energy Award: Sara Nichols*

Sara, energy and economic development program manager for Land of Sky Regional Council in Asheville, has a large focus on community service. Prior to Hurricane Helene, Sara was working to implement programs designed to bring broadband internet to underserved communities throughout western North Carolina. After Hurricane Helene, Sara spearheaded the Helene recovery with microgrids by helping to form a strong coalition of organizations bringing financial and equipment resources to the region. Sara and her team at Land of Sky Regional Council are now also managing the \$5 million Department of Environmental Quality microgrid grant to ensure these funds are allocated to vulnerable communities in need all throughout western and eastern North Carolina.

*Lifetime Achievement Award: Paul Braese*

Paul, who is the sustainability, efficiency and resilience services manager for the NC



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Department of Adult Correction, has dedicated 36 years to transforming public sector operations through energy and water efficiency. He oversees more than \$50 million in annual utility consumption and has led groundbreaking initiatives that save millions of dollars each year. Paul led the largest energy efficiency project in North Carolina government history, a Guaranteed Energy Savings Performance Contract projected to save \$60 million over 20 years. This project represents the most guaranteed savings of any state corrections initiative in United States history. It also includes the most solar installed in a Guaranteed Energy Savings Performance Contract and the first public, utility-owned solar Power Purchase Agreement in North Carolina. His strategic use of Electric Utility Credit and Opt-Out rebates has generated \$6 million in cost avoidance over four years, with all savings reinvested into further efficiency efforts. His leak detection and repair program has recovered \$500,000 in bill credits and achieved \$200,000 in annual cost avoidance, saving hundreds of thousands of gallons of water. Paul's career also includes leadership roles in higher education, serving as director of facilities at Warren Wilson College for nine years and building systems engineer at UNC Asheville for more than thirteen years, where he championed energy-efficient infrastructure.

*Clean Energy and Community Champion Award: Sierra Nevada Brewing Co.*

Sierra Nevada hosted NCSEA's 2025 AMPlify Appalachia event, donating the space and staff time, and aiding with the bands, ticketing, registration, and food and beverage options. The event raised nearly \$35,000 for western North Carolina hurricane relief. The brewery is the epitome of sustainability and clean energy: Across both brewery locations, Sierra Nevada boasts the largest solar array in craft beer with a total of 2.6 megawatts (MW). The 600 kilowatt (kW) solar array installed in Mills River, NC, provides about 6% of the facility's electrical demand. The brewery also purchases renewable energy credits (RECs) to offset the electricity it still needs to purchase from the grid and leverages its partnership with organizations such as NCSEA to advocate for the expansion of clean energy programs. Sierra Nevada reports that its energy efficiency and heat recovery programs in Mills River have led to a 50% energy cost savings when benchmarked against a standard brewhouse.

*Legislator of the Year Award: Sen. Thom Tillis*

Sen. Thom Tillis has demonstrated consistent leadership in advancing policies that strengthen North Carolina's clean energy economy while ensuring long-term energy resilience. Throughout his career, he has built a reputation for bipartisan problem-solving and for championing pragmatic solutions that support both economic growth and environmental responsibility. Sen. Tillis stood up for North Carolina's solar industry during the Build Back Better negotiations, recognizing that solar energy is a cornerstone of the state's economy and workforce. His advocacy ensured that the voices of North Carolinians working in clean energy were heard at the highest levels of government, reinforcing North Carolina's role as a national leader in solar deployment. Sen. Tillis has also supported legislation that expands opportunities for renewable energy development, energy efficiency, and advanced energy storage, helping to attract billions in private clean energy investment to North Carolina. His focus on grid reliability and national security reflects his understanding that clean energy and modernized infrastructure are essential to both economic competitiveness and national resilience.



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This year's award winners were recognized in-person at the 2025 Making Energy Work conference in Raleigh. This year's conference was attended by hundreds of clean energy influencers and leaders from across the country, and featured several keynote speakers including Joe DeCarolis, former administrator of the U.S. Energy Information Administration; Neil Chatterjee, former chairman and commissioner of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission; Susan Monroe, director of national engagement of the Chambers for Innovation and Clean Energy; and Kevin Martin, CEO of the Carolinas Utility Customers Association.

NCSEA extends congratulations and sincerest thanks to our members and the 2025 award winners.

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**About North Carolina Sustainable Energy Association**

North Carolina Sustainable Energy Association (NCSEA) is the leading 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that drives public policy and market development for clean energy. Our work enables clean energy jobs, economic opportunities, and affordable energy options for North Carolinians. Learn more about NCSEA, our mission, and our vision at [www.energync.org](http://www.energync.org).



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