

Hall of Honor 2021 Inductees

Dr. Mark J. Poarch

2021 Hall of Honor Inductee

Dr. Mark J. Poarch was born in Lenoir, N.C. on Aug. 24, 1968 to Jim and Shirley Poarch. He graduated from West Caldwell High School in 1986 where he was a baseball and football standout.

Dr. Poarch earned his Doctor of Education and Education Specialist degrees at Appalachian State University, and his Master of Arts in Education and Bachelor of Science in Business Administration at Western Carolina University, where he also had a successful baseball career. Dr. Poarch was chosen as the fourth president of Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute in 2016. He had previously served as Associate Vice President of Student Services, Vice President of Student Services and Executive Vice President. His career in higher education began as an admissions counselor at Brevard College and later at nearby Catawba Valley Community College, where he served in various roles.

His CCC&TI tenure is highlighted by new academic programs, several large construction projects, campus improvements, an emphasis on workforce development, new partnerships, expansion of athletics, and millions in new grant funding. Among the defining projects were construction of the Watauga Campus Student Services Center, creation of the only full-service health clinic of its kind on a community college campus, and construction of two vital workforce development projects – an Electrical Lineworker indoor training facility and the Paul H. Broyhill Center for Advanced Technologies.

Known for his collaborative spirit, Dr. Poarch led efforts to establish partnerships with local governments, schools, private industry, universities, and nonprofit organizations. Those partnerships helped CCC&TI add new programs to meet local workforce needs, provide resources to students, and secure grant funding for expansions.

Dr. Poarch's community involvement includes the NC Association of Community College Presidents, Caldwell County Economic Development Commission, Caldwell Chamber of Commerce, Boone Area Chamber of Commerce, Caldwell 20/20, Communities in Schools, the Foundation of CCC&TI, and serving as a Deacon at Meadowbrook Baptist Church. Dr. Poarch received the Caldwell County Economic Development Commission's Herman Anderson Award in 2019 and was inducted into the Caldwell County Sports Hall of Fame in 2012.

Dr. Poarch and his wife, Tracy, live in Hudson and have three children and two grandchildren.



Neil T. Annas

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Neil T. Annas was born in Caldwell County to Floyd and Theresa S. Annas on March 22, 1956. He grew up in the Sawmills community and attended Hudson Elementary and Hudson High schools graduating in 1974. He also attended Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute.

In 1980 Annas joined his parents at Granite Insurance Agency, Inc. He introduced the organization to the world of information technology and then focused on further developing his personal insurance expertise and business skills to best serve their clients. In 1990, Neil assumed the role of President/CEO of Granite Insurance and served in this role through 2020. During his tenure, the firm grew from five team members to 23, serving clients in 44 states. This developed to be the largest independently owned insurance agency in Caldwell County. After 2020, Annas continued with Granite Insurance team as Chief Financial Officer.

Annas was active in the insurance professional community. He was a board member of the Independent Insurance Agents of North Carolina from 1997 until 2011 and served as its president in 2008-2009. In 2013, the NC Commissioner of Insurance selected Annas to chair the Property and Casualty Agents Advisory Committee. As one to encourage younger generations in his profession, Annas served for over six years on Appalachian State University's Brantly Risk and Insurance Center Board of Advisors, and as a board member and chairman of the IIANC Education Foundation.

In the community, Annas served 39 years with Sawmills Volunteer Fire & Rescue, Inc. This included 25 years as an active firefighter and first responder and the remaining time on the board of directors as treasurer. Additionally, he served on the board of the Caldwell County Chamber of Commerce. He and his wife were active members of Union Grove Baptist Church where he served on several committees.

Annas married Lou Anne Ramsey Annas in 1982. They had two children, Lauren Tilton and Cameron Annas. At the time of this writing, Lauren and her husband Ryan are both clinical pharmacists and have two children, Max and Madelyn Maddie. Cameron is CEO of Granite Insurance, and his wife Tiffany is a realtor. They have two children, Cameron (Cammie) and James (Jak). In their non-professional lives, Neil and Lou Anne enjoy spending time with their family, participating in outdoor activities and pursuing travel adventures.



James W. (Bill) Oxford

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James W. "Bill" Oxford was born in Lenoir, North Carolina. He attended Whitnel Elementary and graduated from Hudson High School in 1966.

Oxford joined the United States Marine Corp in 1967 and served until 1970. After returning from Vietnam, he joined the North Carolina National Guard. He served locally as a Company Commander of the 1450th Transportation Company and Battalion Commander of the now retired 540th Quartermaster Battalion. He retired in 2002 as a Colonel with more than 34 years of service.



Driven by personal conviction and civic responsibility, he continued to promote, preserve, and protect veterans' rights and benefits. He served as a veterans advocate in the American Legion beginning in 1986. During that time, he also held leadership as Post/District/Division and Department Commander.

At the national level, he served on multiple commissions and committees, chairing on two separate occasions. He was elected National Commander of the American Legion and its 1.8 million members at the 101st National Convention in Indianapolis, Indiana in August 2019. That term-in-office is normally one year, but due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Oxford was tasked with serving a two-year term. He is the only American Legion National Commander in its 102-year history to serve multiple years.

He is married to Frances Robbins Oxford, who graduated from Lenoir High School. They have two children (Charles Jamison/ Jacquelyn Oxford Carr, both graduates of West Caldwell High School) and four grandsons (Isiah, Micah, Jagger, and Dawson) who have all attended the Caldwell County Schools.

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George T. Crowell, Jr.

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1929 - 2021

George T. Crowell, Jr., graduated from Lenoir High School in 1947 and then entered the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Prior to leaving for college, he seeded the beginnings of his career at Crowell's Inc. in Lenoir working alongside his father.



He exited college early and returned to Caldwell County to focus on the development of a thriving local business, a commitment that continued for more than 50 years. Some lasting memories include countless times credit was extended to customers prior to the days of "purchasing with plastic." The family-owned business established a foundation that not only provided quality goods but also basic life skills for consumers. It was more common than not to have three generations within a family as loyal patrons.

Many budding families furnished their homes with household items from Crowell's on a payment plan with no finance charge, not until the 1980s when a nominal fee was introduced. Goodwill among customers was the hallmark of his longstanding and renowned family business.

His involvement in the community reflected his professional position of fairness and integrity. He served on the Foundation Board of Directors for CCC&TI and as Chairman from 1982-1985. He also held positions on the Board of Directors of Caldwell Memorial Hospital Foundation, Caldwell County Hospice, Education Foundation Inc. of Caldwell County, and the Board of Directors at Mutual Savings & Loan, Northwestern Bank and First Union National Bank.

For his exemplary business ethics and outstanding leadership, he was awarded the Certificate of Recognition from state Governor James G Martin, the N.C. Governor's Business Award for outstanding contributions to education, and the Caldwell County Chamber L.A. Dysart Award for extraordinary citizenship. He was always humbled and surprised by recognition, insisting that others were more deserving. As a devoted member of the First United Methodist Church, George served as a Sunday School Teacher, usher and chair of the usher committee, and as a member of the Board of Trustees.

From his early years, education was a priority in the home that continued throughout his lifetime. He spent time tutoring and mentoring to students in the school district and nearly all of his posterity are products of the Caldwell County Schools. He and his wife Helen Withers Crowell were married in 1949 and have a wonderful family of two children and their spouses; four grandchildren and their spouses; and four great-grandchildren. He loved nothing more than spending time with his family.