



## Rotary Club of Asheville

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### Rotary Club of Asheville Honors Community Leaders at People of Action Gala



*Caption: The Rotary Club of Asheville honored seven community leaders who embody the Rotary mission of “service above self.” Pictured left to right: David Melton, Dr. Oralene Simmons, Lang Hornthal, Marta Alcalá, Dr. Amy Marietta, Dr. Shannon Dowler, Jeffrey Kaplan, and Eva-Michelle Spicer (Rotary Club of Asheville President). Photo credit: Pat Barcas.*

ASHEVILLE, N.C. (March 7, 2025) – The Rotary Club of Asheville hosted its second annual People of Action Gala on Thursday, March 6, from 6 to 9 p.m. at the Renaissance Hotel in Asheville. The event recognized outstanding local leaders who embody the Rotary mission of “service above self.”

This year’s honorees were recognized in seven key areas of community impact:

- **Peace-Building and Conflict Resolution:** *Dr. Oralene Simmons*, founder and president of the MLK Prayer Breakfast in Asheville, has led the annual event since 1982, growing it to over 1,000 attendees.
- **Disease Prevention and Treatment:** *Dr. Shannon Dowler*, a family physician and public health leader, has worked extensively in STD education and led North Carolina Medicaid’s transition to managed care.
- **Water Sanitation and Hygiene:** *The Asheville Water Resources Department* for its outstanding response restoring potable water after Hurricane Helene. The award was accepted by Water Resources Manager, David Melton, on the department’s behalf.
- **Maternal and Child Health:** *Dr. Amy Marietta* expanded MAHEC’s Project CARA, a prenatal health program for women with substance use disorders, improving birth outcomes and reducing infant mortality.
- **Basic Education and Literacy:** *Marta Alcalá*, Executive Director of Equity for Asheville City Schools, has spent over 33 years promoting literacy, racial justice, and educational equity in the community.



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- **Economic and Community Development:** *Jeffrey Kaplan*, Executive Director of Venture Asheville, has led efforts to create high-growth jobs while raising \$1 million in economic recovery funds and fostering innovation in Western North Carolina.
- **Supporting the Environment:** *Lang Hornthal*, Co-Executive Director of EcoForesters, has helped restore and conserve over 100,000 acres of Appalachian forests through sustainable forestry initiatives.

Funds raised from the event will support the Rotary Club of Asheville Foundation, which provides scholarships, recognizes local teachers and first responders, protects the French Broad watershed, and supports international humanitarian projects in Guatemala, Honduras, and Argentina.

For more information, contact [avl.rotary.gala@gmail.com](mailto:avl.rotary.gala@gmail.com).

**About the Rotary Club of Asheville:** *The Rotary Club of Asheville is a service club of engaged and passionate members who desire to do good in the community and world while honoring shared ethics and core values. The club, which has over 165 members from a wide range of backgrounds, finds ways to help the community at local, national, and international levels. This can involve anything from doing volunteer projects overseas to finding ways to support nonprofits in Asheville and Buncombe County. For more information, visit <https://www.rotaryasheville.org/>.*

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