

# NEWS RELEASE

**Spencer B. Merriweather  
III**  
District Attorney

**December 4, 2024**

## **DA Merriweather presents awards to honor service**

CHARLOTTE, N.C. - A woman who took in a baby girl who wasn't her own and, through tragedy, became her adoptive mom, a detective who played a critical role in cold case prosecutions, and an outreach assistant who works with domestic violence survivors were among those honored today by Mecklenburg County District Attorney Spencer B. Merriweather III.

The Mecklenburg County District Attorney's Office hosted its annual awards ceremony today to recognize individuals who have provided outstanding service that advances the mission of the District Attorney's Office, to seek justice and pursue outcomes that provide a safe and vibrant community where every person can live in peace.

In that spirit, before presenting awards today, DA Merriweather called on each of us to reflect again on the heroic sacrifice of those law enforcement officers—Alden Elliott, Joshua Eyer, Sam Poloche, and Thomas Weeks—who gave their lives in service on April 29<sup>th</sup>, as well as those who continue to live lives of service every day. It is in their honor this year, that we are especially reminded to draw hope from the examples of those among us who make our community so much better.

Detective Michael Melendez received the 2024 Above and Beyond Law Enforcement Award, a recognition of local law enforcement members who have exhibited exemplary work in the field and have gone above and beyond the call of duty to ensure that the community is safer and that victims feel more secure.

The 2024 Above and Beyond Citizen Award was presented to Rhamonda Blackmon. This award commends victims or witnesses of a crime who exhibit extraordinary courage and responsibility by assisting in the apprehension of a defendant or participating in the prosecution of a case.



**DA Merriweather provided awards to individuals who have provided outstanding service to the District Attorney's Office and the entire community.**

Safe Alliance's Lindsay Harris received the 2024 Community Leadership Award. This award recognizes a citizen who has demonstrated outstanding leadership within our community for standing up for what is right despite adversity, conflict, or competition.

DA Merriweather presented Bryan Crocker Awards to both Robyn Withrow and Janice Oates. This award recognizes employees of the District Attorney's Office who have worked outside of the courtroom to make the community a better place. The award is named for Assistant District Attorney Bryan Crocker, who dedicated his career to public service. He passed away in 2015 following a battle with cancer.

### **The Above and Beyond Law Enforcement Award: Det. Michael Melendez**

Detective Michael Melendez is a 24-year veteran of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department. The nominator said of Detective Melendez, "He worked particularly hard this year when our team tried two cold cases simultaneously. He ran back and forth between courtrooms for two weeks, bringing evidence for both trials and supporting the ADAs throughout. His efforts over those two weeks helped the [Special Victims Team secure a life sentence](#) for a serial rapist who'd committed his crimes over 30 years ago. While doing all that, he still assisted in preparation for other cases going to trial the next month. He is a professional who does thorough and excellent detective work. He will answer the phone on vacation from a fishing boat. He assigns himself to cases from his old unit to help see them through to trial. It's impossible to overstate how 'above and beyond' committed Detective Melendez is to the work of making our community safer from perpetrators of rape and sexual assault. He is one of the most devoted and helpful detectives that the Special Victims Team has the privilege and the pleasure to work with. He has helped the Special Victims Team secure convictions in multiple cold cases. He comes to every guilty plea and sentencing that he can attend because his commitment to following through on his cases does not end at arrest. He is invested in these cases and supporting these survivors and most of his career has been devoted to this work—hard work to do year after year. The nomination word count doesn't permit a listing of all the ways he has supported our team, made our jobs easier, and made the community safer. He is beyond deserving of this award."



### **The Above and Beyond Citizen Award: Rhamonda Blackmon**

Bree was born in 2016 to a mother who decided she wouldn't or couldn't care for her. That's when Rhamonda Blackmon, a friend of Bree's biological mother, took in Bree and raised her as her own. While living with Ms. Blackmon, Bree was a healthy, happy child. In 2019, Bree's biological mother demanded Bree back. Ms. Blackmon returned her but pleaded that she be allowed to see her at holidays, bring her presents, and take her to Disney World. Bree's biological mother, though, refused to let Ms. Blackmon see Bree. She didn't know how Bree was doing until one day in January of 2019 when homicide detectives knocked on her door. Bree survived, but her biological mother was ultimately convicted of felony child abuse inflicting serious bodily injury; Bree had been severely abused and at the time couldn't hold a pencil, turn the pages of a book, or walk long distances without the aid of a walker or stroller. When DSS contacted Ms. Blackmon in the aftermath of the abuse, she signed up to adopt Bree with no hesitation. Since then, the adoption became official. Along the way, Ms. Blackmon took Bree to occupational therapy, physical



therapy, medical appointments, and learned how to give her all her medicines. The person who nominated Ms. Blackmon for this award said, “I have never witnessed such extraordinary grace as that demonstrated by Rhamonda at the sentencing of Bree’s biological mother, expressing no malice for her, wanting only the best for Bree, who she brought with her that day. Many in the courtroom were in tears, including the judge. Strangers thanked Rhamonda and praised her for her generosity, love, and grace. There is no one more deserving of this recognition.”

### **Community Leadership Award: Lindsay Harris**

Lindsay Harris has served in her current role as an Outreach Assistant and Intern and Volunteer Coordinator for Safe Alliance since August of 2023. Her heart for Domestic Violence work shines through her work within our community. She spends her days assisting victims of intimate partner violence. Recently, Ms. Harris was accompanying a client through the process of obtaining a 50B, a Domestic Violence Protection Order. Ms. Harris met the complainant, a survivor of Domestic Violence, outside of courtroom 4110. The survivor was pregnant and in addition to having to navigate the complexities of the 50B process, she was also experiencing symptoms of pregnancy. Ms. Harris sat with the young woman until it was time for her to testify, then she brought the victim into the courtroom. Immediately after entering the courtroom, Ms. Harris noticed something was off. Being a mother herself, she noticed subtle signs that the woman was struggling. The survivor stated she was having acute pain and became ill and passed out. Ms. Harris called an ambulance upon the victim’s request, got water for her, and remained with her, comforting her through what was surely one of the worst days of the woman’s life. The woman was alone and scared, so Ms. Harris decided to ride in the ambulance with her and remained with her at the hospital. This is one example of the true, genuine care that Ms. Harris has for victims and survivors. She is a kind person who does not shy away from uncomfortable situations where she can make a difference.



### **Bryan Crocker Award: Janice Oates**

Janice Oates is a member of the District Attorney’s support staff who works with the Violent Crimes Team. In her over 20 years with the DA’s Office, Ms. Oates has made an impact not only on support staff but ADAs who’ve worked with her throughout their time here. Former District Attorney Peter Gilchrist encouraged her to begin her volunteer work with the Greater Enrichment Program of Charlotte in 2011. GEP serves at-risk elementary-aged children in the community by providing a quality after-school enrichment program. The person who nominated her for this award said, “When you ask Ms. Janice about her work with GEP, she speaks with passion, dedication, and most of all love. She calls the children she serves, ‘her babies’ and proudly shows off photos of them. These children are part of an underserved population in Mecklenburg County who may need a little extra attention and mentorship. Ms. Janice has been the perfect person to fill this role for them. She’ll often share stories of kids she’s seen blossom into ‘butterflies’ thanks to the nurturing she’s provided. Ms. Janice keeps up with the kids she’s seen come through the program and she never forgets a single one. She also works with a local group called The Villagers that provides reading comprehension tutoring for children. Ms. Janice recognizes the need for children to have a loving and supportive village, particularly children who are living in difficult situations.



Several years ago, her dedication to children led her to write a children’s book titled *The Bubble Lady*. She has been a bright light at the end of the tunnel to many children who may be experiencing personal hardships at home. Her tireless spirit to nurture, uplift, and support has had a profound impact on the children of Mecklenburg County and make her the embodiment of the Bryan Crocker Award.”

### **Bryan Crocker Award: Assistant District Attorney Robyn Withrow**

For nearly 20 years, Robyn Withrow has gone over and beyond looking out for this office in ways that no one else has. From building maintenance to managing staff while still handling case law, ADA Withrow has never ceased to put this office first. From every staff member in our office, to countless victims, witnesses, and even defendants, ADA Withrow has always put others first and gone out of her way to help. ADA Withrow has been known to reach—into her own pocket—literally—to make sure people who had to interact with the court system had what they needed. A certified financial coach, ADA Withrow’s door is always open to help anyone who may be seeking advice on how to better plan for their financial future or steer them through a financial hardship. Last year, she made sure we were ready as could be for a transition to e-Courts, despite the many challenges, just to ensure we could do our jobs as best as possible. ADA Withrow also volunteers to represent our office at expunction clinics twice a year and leads a regular session of the DA’s Exploring program, during which she speaks with students about her time, before joining our office, working as a defense attorney representing an inmate who was on death row. ADA Withrow is always giving of herself and has consistently gone above and beyond the scope of her job description to serve any and everyone, no matter who they may be. She is a servant leader to her core. One of the multiple people who nominated ADA Withrow for this award said, “It is my dream to one day be an ADA and I can only hope that I will be half as genuine as she is. Robyn would probably want to divert the spotlight somewhere else, which is exactly why I believe she deserves this recognition.”



*Note: For more information about the District Attorney’s Office, visit [www.charmeckda.com](http://www.charmeckda.com). For updates and other information, follow @CharMeckDA on [Facebook](#), [X](#), & [Instagram](#).*

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