



THIS WEEK'S PROGRAM

September 6, 2022

2022-2023 Board Members

President William Bradley

Pres Elect Edwin Peacock

Past Pres Carol Hardison

Secretary Kim Brattain

Treasurer Patrick Baker

Exec Sec Christine Cipriano

Directors 2021-2023

Ann Clark

Ellison Clary

Jesse Hite

Warren Kean

Vanessa Stolen

Directors 2022-2024

Will Barnhardt

Glenn Bouley

Margaret Donovan

Laura Little

Mark Norman

Diego Ramon

Robert Shaw

Membership Terri DeBoo

Foundation Joe Morris

Programs Elly Clary



Keva Walton, CEO, Mecklenburg County Alcoholic Beverage Control Board

by **Elly Clary**

CEO Keva Walton emphasized that the Mecklenburg County Alcoholic Beverage Control Board realizes spiritous liquor is addictive. The board spends heavily to combat substance misuse, he said.

Mecklenburg ABC reinvests 16 percent of annual profits in alcohol education, Walton told Charlotte Rotary. That is more than double the 7 percent the state requires.

The board co-funded in 1957 what became Anuvia, the chemical dependency center. "It's still a vital partner of ours," Walton said. A 1996 wellness grant "set in motion a process to invest in non-profits who do substance misuse education," he said. Invested so far: \$100 million. An expansion of community wellness granting is contemplated.

Mecklenburg ABC is celebrating its 75th anniversary and Walton highlighted significant milestones, starting with the 1947 voter decision to establish the board. It was mandated as self-funding and tasked to reinvest profits. The board has funneled more than \$475 million to the city of Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, the Public Library of Charlotte-Mecklenburg, alcohol education, and law enforcement.

An important year was 1978 when Mecklenburg voters approved liquor-by-the-drink. Calling it "transformative," Walton said "hospitality and tourism

are vital for our economy.”

Besides retail sales in its 31 stores, Mecklenburg ABC supplies mixed beverage customers – bars, hotels, and restaurants throughout the county.

For fiscal years during the height of the Covid pandemic, sales to mixed beverage outlets declined markedly, Walton said, while sales in retail stores soared. Total gallons sold increased from more than 1.75 million in 2019-20 to over 2 million in 2021-22.

Heightened consumption coupled with national supply chain woes and Covid among Mecklenburg ABC workers caused periodic shortages of some popular spirit brands, Walton said. Such problems occurred throughout the United States, he added. Examples are stores in Kentucky sometimes short of a popular bourbon and California stores limiting bottles of tequila per customer.

The local board encouraged distributors to send product directly to Mecklenburg County, bypassing the NC Alcoholic Beverage Control Commission warehouse in Raleigh, and hired drivers to make liquor pickup runs to the state capital, Walton said.

Mecklenburg ABC still needs more employees, Walton said, and is aggressively recruiting. He closed by listing more than a few modernization, innovation, and customer engagement actions. The NC General Assembly has eased beverage delivery regulations as well as rules for consumption in private clubs. Further, online ordering and curbside or in-store pickup will start sometime this year.

Additionally, Walton said, Mecklenburg ABC will benefit from enhanced technology and computing as well as added analytics capacity. He also mentioned more employee training and innovations in mixed beverage sales.

*A recording of the program is available here: <https://vimeo.com/747461905>
The speaker's introduction begins at 29:59 minutes.