

2026 Recipients

Champion for Aging Award

The Champion on Aging Award is given at the discretion of the Board of Directors of the NC Coalition on Aging. It recognizes outstanding contributions of North Carolinians who demonstrate an extraordinary commitment to advancing aging issues or makes positive contributions to improve the lives of older adults through their advocacy and policy work.

Ann B. Johnson



Ann served 23 years as the Executive Director of the Durham Coordinating Council for Senior Citizens. In this role, she started the first senior center in public housing in North Carolina in 1968 and the first adult day care program in the southeastern US in 1973. She was a leader in the aging provider network in the state as well as on the national scene, particularly in the development of standards for adult day care programs and senior centers. She was a board member of the National Council on Aging (NCOA) for eight years and Chair of NCOA's National Institute of Senior Centers. The NC Division of Aging's Institute for Senior Center Management is named in her honor. Key highlights of her contributions to aging in our state included serving on the Governor's Advisory Council on Aging (she was

a long-time chair) under five governors, representing North Carolina as a delegate to three White House Conferences on Aging, and providing leadership for the formation of the Coalition on Aging. She passed away in 2014 at the age of 94.

Linda Pearce Thomas



In 1981, Linda founded Elderhaus, an adult day program in Wilmington, as a community-based alternative to facility based care. What began as a program with four participants in one county expanded under her leadership into services in multiple counties. Linda served as Executive Director and later Chief Executive Officer of Elderhaus for 32 years. One of her most significant contributions was establishing Elderhaus as the state's first Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) site in 2008. Also, her tenacious advocacy efforts were critical in laying the foundation for the

expansion of PACE services across the state. Linda used her influence as a respected aging advocate and community leader to elevate conversations about aging, caregiving, and community responsibility particularly on the numerous boards and advisory groups she served on including the UNC-Wilmington Board of Trustees (she was elected as Chair in 2012). When Linda died in 2023, the Wilmington newspaper noted that she was remembered as a "moral compass" for the community.