

LESLIE ARONOVITZ

Shepherd's Center of Charlotte
North Carolina



If there were a “most trusted guide” for Medicare beneficiaries at the Shepherd’s Center of Charlotte, that distinction would unquestionably belong to Leslie Aronovitz. Since 2013, Leslie has been a devoted volunteer with the Senior Health Insurance Information Program (SHIP), driven by deep compassion and a genuine commitment to ensuring older adults feel confident, supported, and truly heard as they navigate the often-complex world of Medicare.

Leslie began her service by completing SHIP’s intensive training program, which she continues to refresh quarterly to stay current with ever-changing Medicare rules and policies. Her dedication extends beyond her own client work—she has gone above and beyond by assisting with the training of new volunteers, sharing her expertise while maintaining a consistently full schedule of client appointments. Her willingness to mentor others strengthens the program and ensures that SHIP’s high standards of service continue well into the future.

Her passion for protecting older adults from Medicare fraud and misinformation began long before her volunteer service. Earlier in her career, Leslie’s advocacy was so impactful that it brought her before Congress, where she testified before the U.S. Senate Governmental Affairs Committee in June 1997. That same commitment to accuracy, integrity, and consumer protection continues to define her volunteer work today, as she tirelessly advocates for providing unbiased, reliable information to Medicare beneficiaries throughout the Charlotte community.

Leslie’s impact is both profound and measurable. In 2025 alone, she met individually with 325 Medicare beneficiaries, each leaving their appointment better informed and empowered to make sound healthcare coverage decisions. Her service during the most recent Medicare Open Enrollment period was especially noteworthy. Of the 176 client meetings she conducted, 55 resulted in beneficiaries changing prescription drug plans—producing a collective savings of \$106,834. These savings represent far more than numbers; they translate into real financial relief, reduced stress, and improved quality of life for older adults living on fixed incomes.

Beyond her impressive statistics, Leslie is known for her kindness, patience, and ability to connect with people during moments that can feel overwhelming and deeply personal. She listens carefully, explains complex information with clarity, and treats every individual with dignity and respect. Her calm presence and unwavering dedication inspire trust and confidence in those she serves.

Leslie Aronovitz’s tireless service, exceptional expertise, and heartfelt compassion truly embody the spirit of the Donald Owen and Katherine Horridge Smith National Volunteer of Excellence Award through her work with the Shepherd’s Center of Charlotte, she has made a lasting and meaningful difference in the health, confidence, and financial well-being of countless older adults across the community.

RICK ATWATER

Shepherd's Center of Greater Winston-Salem
North Carolina



Rick Atwater is not your average guy. A Vietnam veteran, avid cyclist, Doctor of Physics, husband, father, grandfather, and world traveler, Rick worked as a defense analyst in a physics lab and later retired as an IT systems analyst for companies such as Sprint, Aetna, and GMAC. Upon retirement, Rick wanted to find a way to give back and determined that Medicare or SHIIP (Seniors' Health Insurance Information Program) counseling would be a good place to use his analytical skills to help people understand the complex process and often confusing options. Rick shares that he derives great satisfaction from helping people make the best choices for their health care, assisting older adults in saving money and finding needed services, and supporting Medicare recipients in successfully appealing adverse decisions by their providers.

Rick has been a SHIIP Counselor with the Shepherd's Center for over a decade and is willing to take on the more "complicated" cases. During those ten years, he has counseled more than 340 beneficiaries, contributing over 450 hours of service. It is also important to note that the role of a SHIIP Counselor includes not only counseling but also completing required in-person and online trainings throughout the year. Rick was awarded SHIIP Counselor of the Year by our organization in 2023, and we believe this national recognition is well deserved. In addition to SHIIP counseling, Rick is a volunteer driver for both the Shepherd's Center in Winston-Salem and Kernersville.

HENRY BROADWAY

**Aging Forward Durham
North Carolina**



In the fall of 2023, Henry Broadway and a small team from Temple Baptist Church Durham, joined a Thriving Congregations cohort to explore how design theory can empower local congregations to experiment with ministry ideas for the church and community. Early in the cohort experience, Henry began to identify a need he knew existed but did not know the extent of: transportation for older adults in North Durham, NC. He personally knew a few people who would benefit from a ride to and from medical appointments. The Thriving Congregations team agreed to focus its collective energy on this need as a ministry experiment. While Aging Forward Durham did not officially come together until the following fall, the work toward it began with Henry's passionate appeal for fellow older adults who needed transportation.

Henry dove into the project with unparalleled enthusiasm. Temple Baptist Church Durham opened an office for him, and he brought all the materials needed to set up and get to work. He created the action list and began tackling items one by one. Early in 2024, Henry took the experiment live by posting a series of articles and appeals on the social media site Nextdoor. He presented the plan to offer free transportation to older adults in North Durham and asked the question: Who can benefit from this service? Responses poured in from those needing help and from adult children who were driving their parents and said, "I would use this service TODAY if it were available."

Henry, along with support from Temple Baptist Church Durham, presented the evident need and growing vision in the summer of 2024 to a large gathering of people from various North Durham congregations and community members. From that gathering, a small group of interested leaders representing three area congregations agreed to convene as a working team to begin in earnest what is now Aging Forward Durham.

Henry guided the process from the beginning with his visionary leadership and passion. The team followed his lead through all the steps to form the nonprofit organization. On April 1, 2025, Aging Forward Durham launched. A month later, we began taking our neighbors to medical appointments, and the program has grown steadily since.

On Mother's Day 2025, Henry began experiencing tremendous pain due to arthritis. The pain eventually led to hospitalization and then extended time in a rehabilitation center. The Aging Forward Durham board has effectively divided the work Henry had taken on—it has taken six people to carry on his vision and match the energy he exhibited for nearly two years in creating Aging Forward Durham.

Henry has transitioned to an honorary board member and will continue to be listed as the Founder of the organization. The fact that Aging Forward Durham exists and continues to grow is due to his visionary leadership.

DR. CHUCK CHAPPELL

LifeQuest of Arkansas
Arkansas



Dr. Charles “Chuck” Chappell began teaching at LifeQuest in the summer of 1998 and continued each summer until his retirement from 43 years of teaching English and American Literature at the college level, after which he was able to teach throughout the year. His commitment to education, both traditional and lifelong, reflects a deep belief in the power of learning to enrich lives at every stage.

After graduating with honors in English from Hendrix College, Chuck earned a master’s degree and a Ph.D. in English from Emory University. While at Emory, he served as a teaching assistant before becoming an instructor in English at Virginia Polytechnic Institute. In 1969, he joined the faculty of Hendrix College, returning to his alma mater, where he would spend the majority of his academic career. At Hendrix and at LifeQuest, Chuck became a beloved and influential teacher, introducing generations of students to William Faulkner—often through memorable trips to Faulkner’s estate in Oxford, Mississippi—and to other classic writers of American fiction.

Chuck’s impact on students was profound. Upon his retirement from Hendrix College in 2010, former students and colleagues created a “Cheer to Chuck Chappell” Facebook group, which quickly grew to more than 150 members. Alumni and friends shared heartfelt expressions of gratitude, memories, and reflections on the lasting influence of his teaching, humor, and wit.

As a LifeQuest instructor, Chuck embraced the lifelong learning format and philosophy with enthusiasm. In addition to teaching, he served as a dedicated member of both the Curriculum Committee and the Board of Directors, contributing his wisdom, leadership, and unwavering support to the organization.

Reflecting on his experience teaching at LifeQuest, Chuck shared: “No examinations or assigned essays to grade; no class-attendance rosters to maintain; no students showing up solely to fulfill a graduation requirement; no faculty or committee meetings to survive; a room full of curious, articulate, and enthusiastic participants—teaching courses at LifeQuest is a fantasy turned into a reality during my retirement years.”

“Moreover, we volunteer teachers also have the privilege of taking courses ourselves that explore areas of knowledge always appealing to us, but during our years of employment, we did not have the liberty to pursue. In addition, I have also been able to develop new and enduring friendships with many bright and congenial people who also attend LifeQuest sessions regularly.”

Through his teaching, service, and enduring passion for learning, Dr. Chappell has left an indelible mark on his students, colleagues, and the LifeQuest community.

HAL COSTLEY

The Shepherd's Center of Richmond
Virginia



The Shepherd's Center of Richmond is proud to recognize Hal Costley with the National Volunteer of Excellence Award in honor of his extraordinary dedication, leadership, and service. For more than a decade, Hal has been an essential part of The Shepherd's Center of Richmond's mission, strengthening our programs and enriching the lives of older adults across Metro Richmond.

Hal began his volunteer service on January 18, 2010, as a volunteer driver, offering compassionate and dependable transportation to older adults who rely on The Center to reach critical medical appointments. He also served as a handyman for our participants, offering repairs—minor and sometimes major. His commitment to the mission continued when he joined the Client Services Committee in July 2017, contributing thoughtful guidance to ensure our programs meet community needs.

Hal's exceptional volunteer qualities quickly extended well beyond driving and home repair. He became a Board Member in 2013, and his depth of experience and steady presence soon made him a trusted leader within the organization. As Finance Committee Chair from 2016–2022, and later as Treasurer beginning in 2021, Hal provided strong fiscal stewardship, helping The Center navigate growth, budgeting, and long-term planning with confidence.

In addition to his governance work, Hal brought his enthusiasm for learning to the heart of The Center's educational offerings. He began teaching at Open University in February 2017, engaging students through his thoughtful instruction. His commitment to our lifelong learning programs continued through his service as Interim Education Chair in 2019, where he helped guide course planning and faculty support.

Hal's most visible and influential contributions came through his leadership on the Board of Directors. He served as President of the Board from 2017–2020, leading with integrity, calm, and a deep belief in The Center's mission. His ability to fill vacancies on the board and in committees became renowned—if he asked for help, he was rarely turned down.

He later returned as Interim President from 2022–2023, once again providing steady guidance during a period of tragic and unexpected transition. His willingness to step in wherever needed—often at pivotal moments—reflects his unparalleled dedication. Hal is also an active and dedicated member of the Center's Speakers Bureau, sharing information about our programs and services with organizations and congregations while actively recruiting new volunteers, especially much needed drivers.

In 2024, Hal leveraged a connection through his church to help The Center expand its reach, resulting in the successful launch of a new Open University location. There is not much he hasn't done. Throughout his many roles, Hal has exemplified what it means to be an exceptional volunteer: reliable, generous with his time and talents, and continually motivated by a desire to help others. He even provides gentle back rubs, gracious hugs, and firm handshakes. His service has shaped the direction and impact of The Shepherd's Center of Richmond, strengthening our ability to serve older adults with compassion and excellence.

ROBBIE KOON DEFREESE

Shepherd's Center of Lexington
South Carolina



This year's nominee is Robbie Koon DeFreese. She has attended both the Shepherd Center of St. Andrews and the Shepherd's Center of Lexington. She has participated in the Lexington classes for more than seven years. This is even more impressive when you know that she drives from Little Mountain, South Carolina, to Lexington, South Carolina, to attend sessions—a 60-mile round trip.

She has served as a Board member since 2022. She is an active participant in quarterly meetings as well as a variety of special called meetings.

Robbie can be found all over the Center's facility. She starts her day at the registration table, then moves throughout the building, going in and out of classes to take pictures for our Facebook page. After attending her own class sessions, she helps organize the serving area for lunch and assists in serving nearly 190 attendees each session day. She always stays afterward to help clear the area so it is ready for the next class session.

Robbie also attends nearly every special event we offer. She consistently assists with registration, meals, and any other tasks needed for each event. It is immensely gratifying to have a volunteer who is so dependable, willing, and able to step up whenever needed. She has a warm, welcoming smile for everyone and makes each person feel valued and important.

Robbie has retired from the South Carolina Judicial Office after a career as a court reporter. She has been married to her husband, Dan, for more than 30 years. They have one son and five grandchildren. The grandchildren, along with numerous nieces, nephews, and great nieces and nephews, keep them busy with school and after-school activities. She is active in her church, Mount Horeb Lutheran Church in Little Mountain, and she is also an avid South Carolina Gamecock fan.

RICH DUESTERHAUS

Shepherd's Center of Northern Virginia
Virginia



One cannot really talk about the Shepherd's Center of Northern Virginia (SCNOVA), without Rich Duesterhaus coming up somewhere in the conversation. For nearly 30 years, since our very founding, Rich has been a dedicated leader of the organization and a tireless source of compassion and wisdom.

Rich was part of the founding team of SCNOVA in the late 1990s and served as the chairman of our board of directors for 15 years. He has been a member of the board throughout our history and remains an active participant in our programs, strategic planning, and governance. His extensive leadership experience and calm, thoughtful contributions to our discussions and debates have made him the most trusted and beloved member of our team. We truly cannot imagine SCNOVA without his steady guidance.

The total number of hours Rich has contributed to SCNOVA over the years is difficult to track. It undoubtedly reaches into the many thousands, though his long tenure means many records are now buried in archival materials. Attempting a precise estimate of what is ultimately immeasurable—his integral role in the organization's success—would be unnecessary. He has received every award SCNOVA bestows on a volunteer, including the lifetime achievement honor, the Ed Lowry Award. Even so, these recognitions do not fully capture his essential contributions to the organization's work and service.

It is only fitting that he now receives the highest national recognition offered by Aging Forward.

CAROLYN RUDLEY

Shepherd's Center of Greenbrier Valley
West Virginia



Carolyn Rudley, a Pennsylvania native who has called Greenbrier County home since the early 1970s, has been nominated by Shepherd's Center of Greenbrier Valley as their Donald Owen and Katherine Horridge Smith National Volunteer of Excellence Honoree, a distinction that recognizes individuals whose lifelong dedication to service has made a lasting impact on their communities. A retired educator with 35 years of service as a teacher and special education professional, Carolyn has spent her life advocating for inclusion, compassion, and opportunity for people of all abilities and backgrounds. Her professional career laid the foundation for what has become decades of meaningful volunteer leadership.

Over the years, Carolyn has served in numerous volunteer roles that reflect both the breadth and depth of her commitment. For many years, she co-led a Jewish support group working with inmates at the Federal Prison Camp in Alderson, West Virginia, offering connection and spiritual support. Her resume also includes work with the local nonprofit agency Gateway Industries, contributions to the Greenbrier County Health Alliance as a board member, executive committee member, and ambassador for the disability community. A long-time volunteer usher at Carnegie Hall and Greenbrier Valley Theatre, Carolyn demonstrates her belief that service can take many forms.

Perhaps most notably, Carolyn has been a cornerstone of the Shepherd's Center of Greenbrier Valley, where she has volunteered for 25 years in a wide range of capacities. Her roles have included board trustee, committee member, Gwen's Meals preparer, and special events volunteer, where you will most often find her warmly welcoming attendees. Known for her ability to connect people with need, Carolyn frequently uses her extensive network to recruit engaging presenters and supporters for Shepherd's Center programs. Her creativity is unmatched, and her collaborative spirit fuels high-caliber programming that empowers and enriches the lives of older adults in the Greenbrier Valley.

Those who work alongside Carolyn describe her as quick to give a compliment, deeply collaborative, and a true team player. Her warmth and encouragement help create welcoming spaces where volunteers and participants alike feel valued.

Carolyn herself speaks passionately about the mission of Shepherd's Center and its alignment with her personal values: "The mission of Shepherd's Center is what all religions have in common: the responsibility to do good and help others. Shepherd's Center of Greenbrier Valley definitely practices this 365 days a year. They are a diverse and inclusive group of individuals who have created a warm and supportive family. I am grateful to be part of this organization. In these recent difficult times, as a Jewish individual, the spiritual support and strength given have been irreplaceable."

Carolyn Rudley's nomination as a National Volunteer of Excellence is a fitting tribute to a lifetime devoted to service, inclusion, and community building. Her legacy is not only measured by the organizations she has strengthened but by the countless lives she has touched through kindness, advocacy, and unwavering commitment to uplifting her community.

ALLAN SCHNEIDER

Aging Forward Central Texas
Texas



Allan Schneider embodies the spirit of service that Aging Forward Central Texas strives to cultivate in every community we touch. His life's journey—shaped by military discipline, technological expertise, global compassion, and a deep commitment to helping others—has made him one of our most dedicated and impactful volunteers.

Allan's professional path prepared him remarkably well for the work he now pours himself into. As a Non-Commissioned Officer in the United States Marine Corps, he learned leadership, resilience, and the importance of serving with integrity. Later, as an Information Technology Consultant and Specialist for the San Marcos Independent School District, he developed the technical skills and patient problem-solving that now benefit so many older adults in our community.

Allan's contributions to Aging Forward Central Texas are as varied as they are essential. He serves on our Community Advisory Council, offering thoughtful guidance and a steady voice as we grow. Each month, he volunteers with the HOPE Program of the San Marcos Public Housing Authority, helping address food insecurity by distributing non-perishable items to residents who rely on this support. His presence is consistent, compassionate, and deeply appreciated.

Perhaps one of Allan's most transformative contributions is his work with our Tech Tutors Program. As its developer and ongoing consultant, he meets one-on-one with older adults who need help navigating their smartphones, laptops, tablets, and other devices. He also supports college students who volunteer with us, stepping in when they encounter questions beyond their experience. Through this program, Allan helps older adults stay connected, confident, and less isolated—an impact that cannot be overstated.

Allan's service extends far beyond Central Texas. Since 2010, he has spent portions of nine summers teaching English to Chinese public school English teachers, bringing an international perspective and a generous heart to communities across the globe. His humanitarian work includes construction projects in Guatemala and support for orphaned children in Kazakhstan. His understanding of "neighbor" is expansive, compassionate, and beautifully lived.

Allan Schneider is more than a volunteer—he is a role model. His "neighbors helping neighbors" philosophy stretches from Texas to China, from Guatemala to Kazakhstan, and into every space where someone needs a hand, a teacher, or a friend. Aging Forward Central Texas is stronger, kinder, and more connected because of him.

JIM S.

Shepherd's Center of Webster-Kirkwood
Missouri



Jim S. is the kind of volunteer who quietly changes lives, one relationship at a time. Since joining our organization in 2022, Jim has devoted four years of service to ensuring that older adults in our community remain independent, supported, and socially connected. His commitment goes far beyond fulfilling volunteer duties—Jim brings compassion, presence, and genuine care to every interaction.

Jim's primary role has been providing transportation to medical appointments. He can be counted on to volunteer to drive every week, and he understands that it's so much more than just a ride. Jim is a friend and conversation partner for our passengers. Most recently, Jim joined our team of drivers, helping with our new enhanced medical transportation program, which entails driving clients to appointments that require additional time and attention. He willingly adjusts his schedule, gives unhurried support, and ensures the older adult never feels rushed or alone. Time and again, Jim has volunteered to assist those with special needs, demonstrating exceptional empathy and an instinctive understanding of how to support individuals with dignity and respect.

Beyond transportation, Jim made a lasting impact through grocery delivery services. When this program was discontinued, Jim did something remarkable—he continued to stay in touch with the older adults he had come to know well. These relationships had grown into genuine friendships, and Jim recognized that connection mattered. To the older adults he serves, Jim is a hero without a cape—showing up consistently and offering kindness in ways that truly matter.

Jim is conscientious, reliable, and always willing to go above and beyond. He works seamlessly with staff, communicates proactively, and ensures every detail is handled so everyone feels truly taken care of. Staff and those we serve know they can count on Jim to step in with calm confidence and heartfelt dedication.

STEVE WALKER

Shepherd's Center of St. Andrews
South Carolina



"Who knew that Adventures in Learning would offer us so many mysteries to solve!" —Steve Walker

If this were a newspaper article, the headline would be "Walker Saves Shepherd's Center."

When the COVID pandemic hit in early 2020, all three Shepherd's Centers in our area closed. But our Center rallied and quickly developed the capacity to offer classes via Zoom—thanks to the tireless work of Steve Walker, then a member of our AV team. Steve gathered several members willing to teach themselves about Zoom and prepared them to teach others. He studied, he analyzed, he coached, he trained, and he even made a series of videos to show others exactly what to do. During that summer, Steve's team trained our members on how to navigate Zoom, and we were back in business for Fall Session.

And Steve—teacher, problem-solver, innovator, and Energizer Bunny—not to mention member of the Board and of Adventures in Learning—had just begun. Steve's leadership at that critical moment typifies his commitment to the Center's missions. His 30-year background in analysis with the Department of Mental Health and his extensive training in Sociology have made him that rare person who sees both the big picture and the tiniest details. His knowledge of Center workings is so deep that he's busy developing solutions before most of us even know there is a problem.

As we have returned to in-person classes, Steve has assumed chairmanship of the AV committee and overseen development of hybrid classes, which are offered onsite and broadcast simultaneously on Zoom. These hybrid classes allow us to serve members in more than five other states and 11 counties in South Carolina, plus homebound members here in Columbia. Currently, Steve is exploring new and better ways to record classes directly, rather than using Zoom.

As Chair of AV, Steve maintains an array of equipment, including laptops, TVs, microphones, and Bluetooth speakers, each with its own quirks. He even brings in his own equipment as needed. To cover AV needs for our lunches and community gatherings, Steve has taught himself the vagaries of the mixing board, overhead projector, microphones, and speakers in our host church's parish hall. On top of all that, Steve is our primary photographer for such gatherings, and his photographs rival those of most professionals. It's no wonder that his classes are eagerly sought by our members and that our session brochures often feature his photos on the cover.

Steve created our YouTube channel, where he posts recordings of all Zoom classes for our members to view at their leisure. He maintains the growing catalog of those recordings dating back to 2020. Steve is quick to shy away from applause when we try to thank him. Instead, he quietly hurries on to the next task and the next person who needs help. Steve Walker is a treasured mover, shaker, and essential presence in our Center—our very own Renaissance Man.