

# Introductions



SECTION

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File photo

Fayette County was named for Marie-Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier de La Fayette, the Marquis de Lafayette, a young French nobleman who traveled to England’s colony in North America to support the cause of American revolution. He was made a major general in the Continental Army at age 19. Both Fayette County, West Virginia, along with counties in 15 other states, and the county seat, Fayetteville, were named in honor of the young soldier who urged his country to support the fight for American independence.

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Debra Parker/For The Fayette Tribune

**Trees on mountains, traversed by rippling streams** leading to mighty rivers filling deep gorges and wide valleys, populated by winged creatures, four-legged mammals, various sizes of amphibians and more marked the area now known as West Virginia long before the approximately 300 years of recorded history. Let’s meet the West Virginia from those days which has turned into the home we know today.

# Getting to know West Virginia

By Cheryl Keenan  
THE FAYETTE TRIBUNE

West Virginia, from the time before humans walked its lands, has been a picture of diversity and differences, and is a dichotomy even today.

In its earliest days, before recorded history, the land now known as West Virginia was dichotomous in its appearance because of a geological disturbance which led to “a mountain-building era known as the Appalachian Orogeny,” according to the West Virginia Encyclopedia.

In an article written for the encyclopedia by historians and former West Virginia Tech professors Otis K. Rice and Stephen Brown, the two explained the creation of the land that became one of the nation’s favorite playgrounds in recent years.

“Still evident after some 245 million years are the effects upon West Virginia of a great geological disturbance, a mountain-building era, known as the Appalachian Orogeny. At that time the floor of a portion of a great inland sea, which covered

much of the interior of North America, was forced upward to create the Appalachian Mountains. In time the new land wore down to a large peneplain that tilts gently toward the Mississippi Valley. Natural forces, including erosion and the flow of streams, eventually produced a terrain marked by numerous valleys, rugged hills, and mountains that distinguish the state’s landscape to this day. Immense deposits of coal, oil, natural gas, salt, limestone, and other resources laid down in long-past geological eras have been vital to the economic life of West Virginia in historic times. The huge glaciers of the Ice Age never reached present West Virginia, but they did much to determine the state’s basic drainage patterns, especially with respect to the New, Ohio, and once-mighty Teays rivers.”

The earliest settlers of the area, according to Rice and Brown, were “apparently descended from ‘Old Mongoloid’ stock, or eastern Asians, who cross the Bering Strait from Siberia to Alaska approximately 40,000 years ago.”

Those people became known as Native Americans, or Indians, and evolved through three major cultural stages, according to Rice and Brown: Paleo-Indian, Archaic and Woodland.

“As early as 7000 B.C., Archaic Culture began to appear and continued over the next 6,000 years. A more reliable food supply that included small game, fish, roots, plants, and berries enabled the Archaic people to live in camps, often for long periods of time. Woodland Cultures, including the Adena, Hopewell, and Mississippian, evolved between about 1000 B.C. and A.D. 1700 and were among the most advanced in prehistoric West Virginia. Woodland Indians cultivated such plants as corn, beans, and squash, made pottery, and practiced burial ceremonialism. They left hundreds of mounds and other structures scattered across West Virginia. Among the best known are the Grave Creek Mound at Moundsville, the South Charleston-Dunbar mounds, the Bens Run earthworks in Tyler County, and the Mount Carbon

rock walls in Fayette County,” the historians note in the state encyclopedia, a project of the West Virginia Humanities Council.

By the time European

immigrants entered the area, they “found only a few natives in present West Virginia. By then, the Indians had formed into tribes and warfare was common. Two of the


most powerful groups in the eastern United States were the Iroquois and Cherokee, both of which claimed

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Jodi French-Burr/For The Fayette Tribune

**A forest snail** is captured moving across a mushroom at Babcock State Park.



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parts of West Virginia. They probably forced weaker tribes, including the Shawnee, Mingo, and others, to abandon most of the state.”

Upon the arrival of white settlers in the area, skirmishes between the Europeans and the Native Americans became typical, followed by battles between the English and the French, with the Indians siding with each of the two parties at different times. War became practically a fact of life for everyone living and traveling in the area now known as West Virginia, as Rice and Brown explained in the West Virginia Encyclopedia.

“Although Western Virginians participated in nearly every major battle of the Revolutionary War, for most families the war was a continuation of hostilities with the Indians, who now had British support. In 1777, the Indians broke their neutrality and attacked Fort Henry at Wheeling. Indian raids again became common in most of Western Virginia and continued even after the British surrendered at Yorktown in 1781. The last important Revolutionary War engagement in Western Virginia occurred in 1782 when about 200 Indians besieged Fort Henry. Clashes continued until 1794, when Gen. Anthony Wayne defeated the Indians in the Battle of Fallen Timbers and forced them to give up their claims to lands south of the Ohio River.

“On the eve of the Revolution, avaricious speculators expanded their horizons. They proposed an ambitious scheme for a 14th American colony known as Vandalia, which included most of present West Virginia, southwestern Pennsylvania, and portions of Kentucky. The war prevented the establishment of the colony, and its promoters later attempted to gain approval for a 14th state known as Westsylvania. Congress, however, rejected the plan, and Western Virginia remained a part of Virginia.

“In 1779, the Virginia general assembly passed a land law that had far-reaching effects upon West Virginia, even to the present. The law recognized the rights of original settlers. It also permitted the buying and selling of certificates that enabled speculators, many of whom were from outside West Virginia, to acquire hundreds of thousands of acres of land. Unfortunately, the law did not require land to be surveyed before its transfer. As a result, land claims were often imprecise and provided lawyers with a profitable business for decades in resolving disputes. Among the most baneful effects of the law on the state were the emergence of an enduring system of absentee landownership and arrested economic growth.”

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The historians called absentee landownership “an enduring system,” and it does continue throughout West Virginia today.

The late Louise McNeill, appointed West Virginia poet laureate by Gov. Jay Rockefeller, wrote “The Absentee Landowners,” which was printed in her 1979 collection “Elderberry Flood,” published by The West Virginia Department of Culture and History’s Elderberry Books.

McNeill’s poem stresses the point that, although a majority of the land is owned by those from outside the state, those landowners will never know what the land truly means. It opens, “The owners owned a hundred miles of timber and of coal, The canyon with its dark defiles, But not the cryptic soul.”

Even more recently, in 2013, West Virginia Public Broadcasting created a two-part series titled “Who Owns West Virginia?” The series was based on a study by the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy.

“According to a recent report, the top 25 landowners in West Virginia own about 20 percent of the surface in the state. And perhaps not surprisingly, most of those landowners live elsewhere,” WVPB reported. “The report, released by the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy, is the

first to take a close look at land ownership since the 1970s and it’s created quite a stir.”

WVPB went on to explain: “The top 10 landowners in the state are all based out-of-state.

“The age-old question is: Can we blame the pervasive poverty in West Virginia on absentee land ownership?”

“I think that around the world where you have extractive industry, you often have very poor people,” says Beth Spence who works as a Coalfields Specialist for the American Friends Service Committee. Spence was also the primary writer for the recent land ownership report entitled, ‘Who Owns West Virginia in the 21st Century?’

“I think it’s particularly troubling that we have so many children living in poverty in the state,’ she points out. ‘It’s something we really need to look at and address in terms of what kind of wealth do we have and what kind of needs do we have.’

“Spence grew up in the southern coal fields in Logan County and worked on the Appalachian Land Study Task Force in the ‘70s researching land ownership across Appalachia. She says not a lot has changed since then. Or at least, like many, she was not surprised by findings that so much land is owned by outside developers.”

Author Barbara Rasmussen, who in 2014 wrote “Absentee Landowning and Exploitation in West Virginia, 1760-1920,” published by The University of Kentucky Press, was the author of the West Virginia Encyclopedia’s article on Land Ownership. She, too, agrees the patterns that started long before statehood are still in place to a degree, affecting the state’s day-to-day operations.

“Land-ownership patterns continue to affect the state’s economy,” she wrote in the encyclopedia. “Critics argue that West Virginia property tax policies discourage improvements to land. Unimproved land is not taxed as heavily per acre as improved land is, making land speculation an attractive investment and sometimes keeping land inactive for decades.

“In some counties as much as 70 percent of the land is unimproved and controlled by nonresidents, including the federal government.”

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A number of other news publications have written articles about the phenomena, and, as recently as five years ago, a political movement, West Virginia Can’t Wait, grew from a grassroots level with land ownership as one of its areas of focus.

West Virginia Can’t Wait, coordinated by Stephen Smith, who sought the Democratic nomination as governor in 2020, was a coalition of over 90 candidates statewide who promised to reject corporate funding support and to stand behind unions.

“(Smith) ran on a New Deal for West Virginia, seeking to stir up old passions of miners who took on their bosses,” David Dayen, executive editor of Prospect, wrote on June 10, 2020. “He supported universal broadband, a wealth tax, a Corporate Crime and Public Corruption division of the state police, a new Homestead Act to empower local residents over out-of-state landholders, public negotiation on pharmaceutical prices, legalized cannabis, paid family leave, and more. And Smith built the platform by taking suggestions from across the state and even having his supporters write the position papers.”

The Homestead Act aspect of the campaign continued the long existing focus of absentee landowners.

“Our land isn’t owned by us,” the Homestead Act page on the WV Can’t Wait website (wvcantwait.com) states.

“Vast swaths of West Virginia land are owned or controlled by out-of-state corporations that aren’t invested in the state’s future like West Virginians are. Absentee landowners are rewarded with low property taxes and regulations that reward dilapidated properties.

“Meanwhile, small business owners are stuck, because our tax structure not only takes away their incentive to develop and improve their properties – they are punished for doing so.

WEST VIRGINIA 4C



Jodi French-Burr/For The Fayette Tribune

The trillium, one of the first wildflowers to appear in West Virginia in the spring, is blooming at Babcock State Park in eastern Fayette County.



Courtesy art/West Virginia State Archives

Fort Henry was built in the summer of 1774 near the Ohio River at the present site of Wheeling. “The fort, attacked by Indians twice during the Revolutionary War, was a major defensive outpost in the upper Ohio Valley through the Indian Wars of the 1790s, second only to Fort Pitt at present Pittsburgh,” Phillip Sturm wrote in The West Virginia Encyclopedia (wvencyclopedia.org).




Courtesy photo/WV Humanities Council

Louise McNeill, West Virginia poet laureate from 1979 until her death in 1993, was one of many who addressed the topic of absentee landowners in West Virginia. Her poem, The Absentee Landowners, was published in her collection “Elderberry Flood” in 1979.


A grassroots political movement, West Virginia Can’t Wait, formed in West Virginia in advance of the 2020 primary election. One of the platforms of the group’s goals was the Homestead Act, geared to return control of West Virginia land to West Virginia residents.





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“It’s the oldest story in West Virginia. Our people work hard and pay their taxes, so that someone else gets rich. The people with the least pay the most, and the people with the most, pay the least.

“It doesn’t have to be this way,” organizers stated on the site before offering a plan for improvements:

“Make out-of-state land companies pay their fair share.

“End absentee landownership.

“Ramp up efforts to put vast tracts of land to use for the public and private good of working families.”

. . .

The dichotomy that existed in the area which became West Virginia again reared its head in the 1800s, Rice and Brown wrote for the encyclopedia.

“In the early 19th century, sectionalism began to appear in Virginia. The Blue Ridge and later the Allegheny Front marked a divide between eastern and western parts of the state. Differences between Virginians grew out of their cultural backgrounds, their divergent economic interests, and the overwhelming political influence of Tidewater and Piedmont planters. Friction between the sections intensified over such political issues as expanding the vote, representation in the legislature, and popular election of state and county officials. Ironically, the Virginia constitution of 1776, crafted by leaders who proclaimed devotion to democracy, had a granite-like quality that assured the unavailability of eastern supremacy in state affairs,” the historians wrote.

“Western dissatisfaction led to several attempts to reform the state constitution. The Staunton conventions of 1816 and 1825 and the Constitutional Convention of 1829-30 failed to meet western demands. Some western leaders favored separation from Virginia. The convention of 1850–51 made changes that addressed the political sources of western discontent. Under the new constitution a westerner, Joseph Johnson of Bridgeport, became the first popularly elected governor of Virginia. These successes, however, were overshadowed by economic inequities. The new constitution shifted the tax burden to the west by requiring that all property, except slaves, be taxed at its actual value, and it contained provisions that dealt severe blows to internal improvements favored by the west. Old rivalries between east and west were soon renewed.”

Those rivalries led eventually to the division of the Commonwealth of Virginia, as Rice and Brown further explained.

“In the three decades before the Civil War, slavery was increasingly an issue in the United States. Two prominent Western Virginians took a strong stand on slavery. Henry Ruffner, a Kanawha Countian who served as president of Washington College (now Washington and Lee University), published the Ruffner Pamphlet in

which he attacked slavery as an evil that kept immigrants out of Virginia, slowed economic development, and hampered education. He urged gradual emancipation of all slaves west of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Alexander Campbell, a founder of the Disciples of Christ and president of Bethany College, contended, however, that the North should accept slavery in the South. He supported the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 but believed that runaway slaves should be provided the necessities of food, shelter, and clothing. As tensions over slavery mounted, several churches divided over the issue. The Methodists, who split in 1844, included most of Western Virginia in their northern branch.

“Some well-known abolitionists regarded Western Virginia as useful to their cause. In 1857, Eli Thayer of Massachusetts chose Ceredo for a settlement by 500 New England emigrants who were expected to demonstrate to Southerners that free labor was superior to slave labor. The Civil War led to the collapse of the experiment, and when the conflict ended only about 125 of the original settlers were left. Unlike Thayer’s friendly invasion, abolitionist John Brown in 1859 led a bold raid on Harpers Ferry so alarming to the South that some historians believe it made the Civil War inevitable.

“The election of Abraham Lincoln as president in 1860 exacerbated feelings that led to the Civil War and ultimately to the formation of West Virginia. Following the fall of Fort Sumter and Lincoln’s call for volunteers, Virginia held a convention in April 1861 to consider a course of action. The convention voted 88 to 55 to leave the Union. Of 47 delegates from present-day West Virginia, 32 voted against secession, 11 favored it, and four did not vote. John S. Carlile and other Unionist delegates hurried home and organized opposition to Virginia’s decision. As a result of their efforts, 37 counties sent delegates to a meeting in May known as the First Wheeling Convention. There, Carlile urged immediate steps to establish a new state. Other leaders, including Waitman T. Willey, Francis Harrison Pierpont, and John J. Jackson, preferred to postpone action.

“In June 1861, the Second Wheeling Convention established the Reorganized, or Restored, Government of Virginia at Wheeling. Francis H. Pierpont was chosen governor, and Willey and Carlile were named to the U.S. Senate to replace Virginia’s senators who had cast their lot with the Confederacy. Throughout the Civil War, Virginia had two governments. The Wheeling government supported the Union, and the Richmond government the Confederacy. In August, the Second Wheeling Convention, in its Adjourned Session, took steps to establish a separate state, subject to the approval of voters. On October 24, 1861, the voters of 41 counties approved the formation of a new state and on the same day elected delegates to a constitutional convention, although less than 37 percent of those eligible to vote actually did so. The constitution prepared by the convention was approved by the voters in



Courtesy photo/Washington and Lee University Library Special Collections

**Henry Ruffner, a Kanawha countian who served as president of Washington College (now Washington and Lee University), published the Ruffner Pamphlet in which he attacked slavery as an evil that kept immigrants out of Virginia, slowed economic development, and hampered education. He urged gradual emancipation of all slaves west of the Blue Ridge Mountains.**

April 1862, with the vote taken in unsettled conditions.

“In order to become a state, West Virginia needed the approval of Virginia and a constitution acceptable to the Congress and the president. Since the Confederate government in Richmond would never agree to the dismemberment of Virginia, leaders of the proposed new state turned to the Reorganized Government. Governor Pierpont called a special session of the legislature that approved the request within a week. His role in establishing the state was so crucial that he is regarded as the ‘Father of West Virginia.’

“In the U.S. Senate, a petition that would allow West Virginia to enter the Union as a slave state was referred to the Committee on Territories, of which Carlile was a member. Unexpectedly, for reasons on which historians have disagreed, Carlile, who had previously favored creation of a new state, now included proposals that nearly destroyed the chances for statehood. At this critical moment, Willey offered a compromise to gradually abolish slavery in West Virginia. With the Willey Amendment to the state constitution, the statehood bill passed both houses of Congress. The West Virginia Constitutional Conven-

tion reconvened in February 1863 and accepted the Willey Amendment. The amended constitution was approved by the electorate in a vote of 28,321 to 572. In accordance with a proclamation of President Abraham Lincoln, West Virginia entered the Union on June 20, 1863, as the 35th state.”

The new state struggled through its first years dealing with the remainder of the Civil War and the years of Reconstruction. Divisions continued to exist in the newest state in the Union for several years after its creation, according to the historians.

After 50 years of existence, however, the state was riding an industrial boom.

“In celebrating the 50 years of statehood in 1913, West Virginians looked back with pride upon an era of unprecedented industrial development. The achievement was largely in extractive industries and based upon coal, oil, natural gas, and timber resources, which had lain dormant for millennia. In the late 19th century, state government, whether in the hands of Democrats or Republicans, endeavored to extirpate the bitterness wrought by the Civil War and Reconstruction and to establish a climate favorable to

WEST VIRGINIA 5C



Courtesy photo/Architect of the Capitol

**This statue of Francis H. Pierpont** is one of two West Virginians included in the Statuary Hall of the United States Capitol. The statue of the man known as “The Father of West Virginia” was donated to the National Statuary Hall Collection by West Virginia in 1910.



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“By 1913, annual coal production exceeded 28 million tons,” historians Otis K. Rice and Stephen Brown wrote in the West Virginia Humanities Council’s West Virginia Encyclopedia. “Closely associated with such expansion was the building of hundreds of miles of railroads, including the Chesapeake & Ohio, Norfolk & Western, Coal & Coke, Western Maryland, Virginian, and Kanawha & Michigan lines. Railroad magnates such as Cornelius Vanderbilt, J.P. Morgan, Collis P. Huntington, and others acquired vast acreages of West Virginia land and mineral resources. By the end of the 20th century, major West Virginia railroads, after numerous mergers, were incorporated into such giants as CSX and Norfolk Southern, two of the largest landholders in the state,” the authors stated. Today, coal is still shipped by rail, but some of the once active railroads, such as the old logging line at Cass, pictured, have since become tourist attractions.

WEST VIRGINIA  
FROM 4C

industrial growth. By 1913, annual coal production exceeded 28 million tons. The state achieved first place in the nation in oil production in 1898 and in natural gas output in 1906. Timber production reached its peak in 1909,” Rice and Brown wrote.

“Closely associated with such expansion was the building of hundreds of miles of railroads, including the Chesapeake & Ohio, Norfolk & Western, Coal & Coke, Western Maryland, Virginian, and Kanawha & Michigan lines. Railroad magnates such as Cornelius Vanderbilt, J.P. Morgan, Collis P. Huntington, and others acquired vast acreages of West Virginia land and mineral resources. By the end of the 20th century, major West Virginia railroads, after numerous mergers, were incorporated into such giants as CSX and Norfolk Southern, two of the largest landholders in the state. Also vital to industrial growth was the construction of locks and dams in the Ohio, Kanawha, Monongahela, Big Sandy, and Little Kanawha rivers, their upgrading in the 1930s, and further improvements as the 20th century drew to a close.

“By 1900, West Virginia was clearly on the threshold of major economic and demographic changes. The state still had some 93,000 farms. Nevertheless, migration from rural areas to cities, one of the dominant trends in the nation, was also in progress in West Virginia. By 1994, farm acreage was less than 35 percent of that of 1900. Most were commercial rather than subsistence farms. Three fourths of agricultural income came from livestock, including cattle and calves, poultry, and dairy products. Apples, peaches, and tobacco were important commercial crops.

“By the late 1800s, rapidly expanding industries, especially coal, led to an acute need for labor, and both the state government and individual companies sent agents abroad to take advantage of the ‘New Immigration’ from southern and eastern Europe. They recruited thousands of Italians, Poles, Hungarians, Austrians, and other nationalities, as well as African-Americans from the South. These ethnic groups added greater diversity to the state’s population and culture.

“West Virginia’s rich resources and emerging extractive industries caught the attention of powerful business and financial interests outside the state. Many acquired large amounts of land for a small fraction of its real worth. State businessmen and politicians sometimes became allies of powerful non-resident interests whose activities left both benefits and problems. The new industrial age transformed much of the state from a society of small, independent farmers into one with a class-oriented social and economic structure of newly rich industrial barons at the apex and landless wage-earners at the bottom. Sizable amounts of West Virginia’s wealth left the state, and the land from which it was drawn fell under the heavy cloud of a colonial economy.

“As extractive industries, particularly coal, gained a prominent place in the West Virginia economy during

the first half-century of statehood, capital investment in manufacturing increased fourfold between 1870 and 1900. The Northern Panhandle, Ohio Valley, and Kanawha Valley became major manufacturing areas. Wheeling was the leading industrial city in the state throughout the 19th century. Other prominent industrial centers included Charleston, Parkersburg, Newell, Wellsburg, Benwood, New Cumberland, and Huntington.

“World War I was a major stimulus to industry, especially the manufacture of chemicals. The federal government laid the basis for the industry in the Kanawha Valley by constructing a mustard gas plant at Belle and a smokeless powder plant at Nitro, where a community of 25,000 people sprang up almost overnight. Chemical firms in the Kanawha Valley expanded rapidly in the decades after 1920 and manufactured a great variety of new products, including rubber, plastics, rayon, nylon, and automotive antifreezes. World War II further accelerated the making of chemicals in West Virginia. The Kanawha Valley became one of the chemical centers of the world. By 1970, every Ohio River county except Jackson had at least one chemical plant.

“During the first half of the 20th century, textile, clay-product, glass, and electric power industries grew rapidly. Hancock County manufactured fine chinaware. The state was a pioneer in the development and use of modern glass-making machinery, but it was also known throughout the world for its Fostoria and hand-blown Blenko, Fenton, and Pilgrim glass products. After 1940, electric power production increased by about 2,000 percent.”

The boom began to decline, though, the historians explained.

“By the mid-20th century, mechanization, foreign competition, and emergence of a global economy contributed to fundamental changes in West Virginia industry. Many traditional industries experienced decline. Increasingly, the state was confronted with technological unemployment. Thousands of miners and other workers lost their jobs and left. The population fell from 2,005,552 in 1950 to 1,860,421 in 1960. Further losses occurred in the 1960s and 1980s. Scores of once-thriving mining towns lost so many families that they became ghost towns. In the 1990s, however, the state’s economy showed signs of improvement. Important growth areas included certain areas of manufacturing, such as the automobile and wood-based industries, as well as the service industries, and tourism and recreation. Investments by Japanese, Taiwanese, and British firms attested to an increasing globalization of the state economy. Service industries, including banking and insurance, real estate, and rapidly expanding health care, made up 68 percent of the gross state product. By 1996, the state’s improved economy seemed to be contributing to a reversal of nearly four decades of population losses. In 2010, the state’s population was 1,852,994.

“Industrialization in West Virginia produced conditions conducive to an organized labor movement. As early as the 1820s, Wheeling had a sizable wage-earning class and a labor newspaper. A strong labor movement, however, did not develop until after the



Courtesy photo/WV Tourism

“Also vital to industrial growth,” Rice and Brown wrote, “was the construction of locks and dams in the Ohio, Kanawha, Monongahela, Big Sandy, and Little Kanawha rivers, their upgrading in the 1930s, and further improvements as the 20th century drew to a close.” Coal barges still travel the state’s rivers, although they’re now joined by a number of recreational watercraft.

Civil War. The first important union was the Knights of Labor, founded in 1869. The Knights established a local organization at Paden City in 1877, and within a few years 16 others were founded in the state. The great railroad strike of 1877, the first nationwide industrial strike, began at Martinsburg and ended only by federal intervention. In 1880, the Knights of Labor supported an unsuccessful strike by miners at Hawks Nest in Fayette County. Following these and other setbacks, the union gradually declined.

“In 1881, the American Federation of Labor, made up of crafts of skilled workers, was organized. It advocated an eight-hour day, six-day workweek, higher wages, and job safety and se-

curity. By 1914, the West Virginia Federation of Labor, which was affiliated with the national organization, included 152 local craft unions with 31,315 members. The union was especially strong among iron, steel, and tin workers; transportation employees; and glass workers. Wheeling had more than 40 percent of the union craft workers in the state. Wheeling, Fairmont, Clarksburg, Charleston, Hinton, Morgantown, and Parkersburg had central labor organizations made up of the craft unions.

“The most powerful union in West Virginia has been the United Mine Workers of America. The union was formed in Columbus in 1890 and only

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gradually established itself in West Virginia. Only about half of state miners participated in a nationwide strike in 1894. Union membership declined in 1897 to a mere 206 workers. Between 1897 and 1902, the UMWA enlisted the support of well-known labor leaders from across the nation. They included Samuel Gompers, Eugene V. Debs, and Mary “Mother” Jones. Operators responded with court injunctions, yellow-dog contracts, blacklisting, and heavily armed mine guards. Nevertheless, in 1902 the union, with assistance from Jones, organized about 7,000 miners in the Kanawha Valley. For the next quarter-century, Mother Jones had a powerful influence with miners in West Virginia.

“During the Mine Wars of the early 20th century, some of the most violent episodes in the state’s labor history occurred in the coalfields. In 1912-13, troubles erupted on Paint and Cabin creeks, tributaries of the Kanawha River, when operators refused to renew contracts with the union. Sporadic violence occurred at Mucklow and Holly Grove and caused Governor Glasscock to impose martial law. The strike ultimately ended when Governor Hatfield helped arrange a settlement.

“The great demand for coal and a shortage of labor during World War I produced conditions in which the industry flourished, wages rose, and union membership increased. Between 1919 and 1921, UMWA efforts to unionize the mines of southern West Virginia, particularly in Logan and Mingo counties, were marked by incidents of unusual violence, including the Matewan Massacre, Sharples Massacre, and the Battle of Blair Mountain. Labor suffered major setbacks. By 1924, the UMWA had lost half its members in West Virginia and was nearly bankrupt. Collective bargaining, one of the union’s major goals, remained unachieved.

“The Great Depression, beginning in 1929, proved a catalyst for fundamental political, economic, and social reforms in the United States. In 1932, Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Democratic candidate for president, promised a ‘New Deal’ in handling the nation’s extraordinary economic problems. The National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 (NIRA) gave workers benefits for which they had long battled. It offered an eight-hour workday, an end to yellow-dog contracts, and the right to collective bargaining. After the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that NIRA was unconstitutional, many parts of the act relating to labor were included in the Wagner Act of 1935.

“Under the leadership of John L. Lewis, coal miners made rapid gains in the more benign political environment. The Appalachian Agreements eventually ended unfavorable wage scales, and in 1946 a Miners’ Welfare and Retirement Fund, one of the union’s most important goals, was established. During the 1940s, the UMWA reached the zenith of its political influence in West Virginia when its leaders persuaded Matthew Neely to give up his U.S. Senate seat to run for governor. After 1950, mechanization and automation in coal mining drastically reduced the number of miners and began a long-term and eventually dramatic decline in UMWA membership and influence in the state.

“Historically, mining has been one of the most dangerous industries. Most miners died in individual accidents killing one or a few miners at a time, but major mine disasters occurred at Monongah in 1907, Eccles in 1914, Benwood in 1924, and Farmington in 1968. Another disaster, at Buffalo Creek in 1972, was the result of the collapse of a coal company dam in which 125 people were killed and 17 communities destroyed. The dangers of underground work outside the coal industry appeared in 1932 during the construction of the Hawks Nest Tunnel, which diverted waters of the New River to a hydroelectric plant. Scores of men died of silicosis that might have been prevented had the company taken the proper precautions.

“During the 1960s and 1970s, the actions of both federal and state governments led to improved safety and working conditions. In 1969, the federal government recognized pneumoconiosis, or black lung, as an occupational disease and set up a fund to support afflicted miners. A year later, the state established a Black Lung Fund.

“One of the most distinctive events in the state’s labor history occurred in the early 1980s when workers of the Weirton Steel Company purchased its properties and prevented the plant’s closing. For a time, the new company was the largest employee-owned business in the nation, before suffering serious setbacks at the end of the 20th century. Employee ownership ended when Weirton Steel was sold to the International Steel Group early in the 21st century.

“Political affairs since 1863 have reflected both changes and continuities in life in West Virginia. In the years immediately following statehood, the state was profoundly affected by the problems and tensions of Reconstruction. Partisan politics agitated discussions regarding the location of a

permanent state capital. Republicans favored Wheeling, their center of influence. Democrats wanted the capital in southern West Virginia, where their party was strong. In 1877, the matter was submitted to the voters, who chose Charleston over Clarksburg and Martinsburg as the permanent seat of government. The move was made in 1885.

“In 1871, following the troubled eight years of Radical Reconstruction, the Democratic Party, augmented by disfranchised ex-Confederates and by Liberal Republicans, captured the governorship and the legislature. The so-called Bourbon Democrats often clung to the ideals of the rural South but promoted the development of industry, and their rule coincided with the beginnings of the industrial revolution in West Virginia.

“Party labels in the late 19th and early 20th centuries are not always enlightening. Bourbon Democrats and conservative Republicans shared many of the same ideas and policies, and favored the development of the state’s resources. The political and business relationships between Henry Gassaway Davis, who had enormous power in the Democratic Party, and his son-in-law, Stephen B. Elkins, who after 1894 had similar control over Republican affairs, illustrate the degree to which politics was tied to industrial welfare and influenced by great industrial tycoons. Four governors — George W. Atkinson, Albert B. White, William M.O. Dawson, and William E. Glasscock — are commonly known as “Elkins governors.” Relations between West Virginia industrialists and those on the national scene often brought temporary prosperity and opportunities but in the long run helped move the state toward economic dependency.

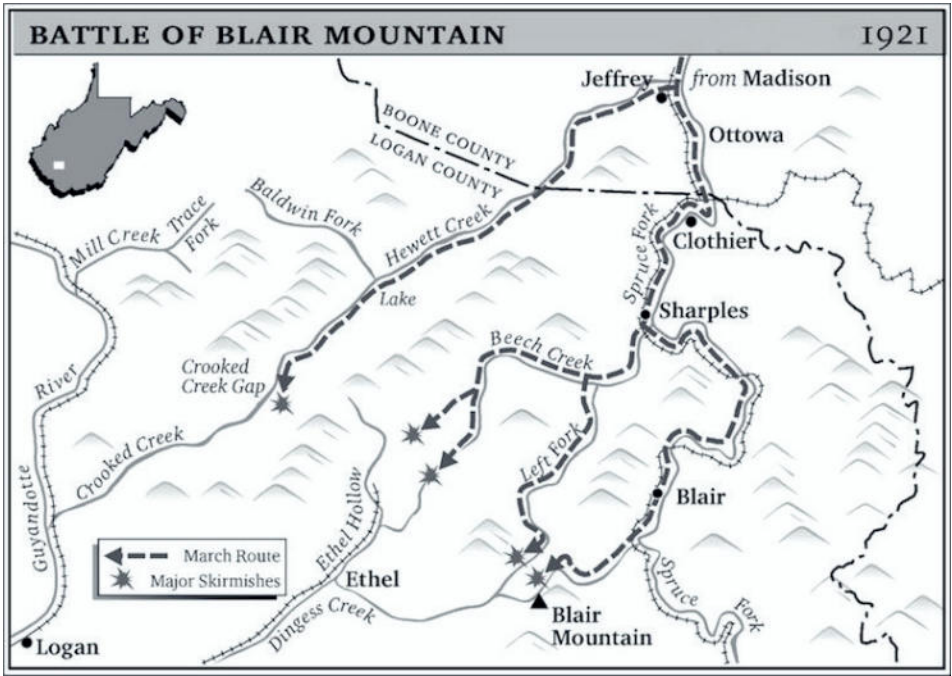
“Concerns over unbridled industrial exploitation of both natural and human resources, as well as government neglect of many vital services, helped set the stage for the Progressive Movement in West Virginia. From 1900 to 1920, progressive ideals were at the center of state affairs. Although the movement transcended party lines, the greatest gains were made during the tenure of the Republican governors, particularly Henry D. Hatfield. One student of the period observed that at the end of the Hatfield administration West Virginia had as much progressive legislation as any state in the nation. Except for the Cornwell administration (1917-21), Republicans continued to control the governorship until 1933.

“Like many other Americans, West Virginians were beguiled by the prosperity of the 1920s. In 1924, when John William Davis of Clarksburg received the Democratic nomination for president of the United States, West Virginia nonetheless gave its electoral votes to incumbent Republican Calvin Coolidge, whom they associated with the good times. Republican administrations in West Virginia during the 1920s were conservative, and the laissez-faire philosophy of government and economic affairs was the order of the day.

“The Great Depression brought wide-scale unemployment, with thousands of people reduced to penury, and proved to be a watershed in American and West Virginia history. Laissez-faire doctrines fell before the activist philosophy of Roosevelt’s New Deal, which projected an expanded role for government in economic, social, and cultural matters and allowed the Democratic Party to regain control over national and state affairs. The New Deal and the measures taken by Governor Kump and the legislature brought new hope to economically distressed West Virginians. Through such agencies as the National Industrial Recovery Administration, Works Progress Administration, Public Works Administration, Civilian Conservation Corps, National Youth Administration, and others, unemployment diminished and the economy improved. The easing of the Great Depression paved the way in West Virginia for a new Democratic era that continued into the 21st century. The period following World War II witnessed troubling new economic problems in West Virginia. The unsettled conditions, along with the popularity of Republican President Dwight D. Eisenhower, interrupted Democratic trends in the state and helped Republican Cecil Underwood capture the governorship in 1956.

“While state politics have normally had little impact on the rest of the nation, the West Virginia primary of 1960 attracted national interest when it became a battleground between John F. Kennedy and Hubert H. Humphrey for the Democratic nomination for president. Kennedy’s landslide victory in West Virginia proved to be a turning point in his campaign for the presidency.

“During the 1960s, policies of the federal government exerted major impact upon conditions in West Virginia. President Kennedy’s New Frontier and President Lyndon B. Johnson’s War on Poverty pumped millions of federal dollars into the state. Among the most important new federal agencies was the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), established in 1965. Although it helped develop health-care centers, and supported vocational training, erosion control,



The Battle of Blair Mountain was just one of many clashes between coal miners and coal mine owners during the labor movement in the early part of the 20th century.



Mine disasters have marred West Virginia's history, according to Rice and Brown. “Historically, mining has been one of the most dangerous industries. Most miners died in individual accidents killing one or a few miners at a time, but major mine disasters occurred at Monongah in 1907, Eccles in 1914, Benwood in 1924, and Farmington in 1968. Another disaster, at Buffalo Creek in 1972, was the result of the collapse of a coal company dam in which 125 people were killed and 17 communities destroyed,” they wrote in the West Virginia Encyclopedia. The aftermath of the Buffalo Creek disaster is pictured.



Explosions, roof collapses and the like weren't the extent of disasters affecting underground workers. “The dangers of underground work outside the coal industry appeared in 1932 during the construction of the Hawks Nest Tunnel, which diverted waters of the New River to a hydroelectric plant. Scores of men died of silicosis that might have been prevented had the company taken the proper precautions,” Rice and Brown wrote.

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FROM 6C

and other projects, four-fifths of the ARC budget was devoted to construction of highways. At the close of the 20th century, more than 300 miles of Appalachian Corridor highways had been completed in the state.

“Since the 1960s, one of the most significant changes in West Virginia government has been the emergence of a strong chief executive. The Modern Budget Amendment of 1968 made the governor responsible for preparation of the state budget. In 1970, the Governor’s Succession Amendment permitted a governor to serve two consecutive terms. These amendments have led to a sharp increase in the influence and prestige of the governorship. Unlike other branches of state government, which have been dominated by Democrats, the governor’s office since 1968 has alternated between Republicans and Democrats.

“Leaders in both parties were deeply concerned about the condition of the state’s economy. Economic improvements were sometimes made at high costs to the environment, and government officials sought ways to balance economic gains against environmental concerns. One controversial issue was strip mining, which liberals maintained must either be abolished or strictly regulated. Young John D. (Jay) Rockefeller IV, who came to rural Kanawha County as a social worker in the 1960s, endeared himself to liberals by boldly advocating the abolition of strip mining. Following the energy crisis of 1973 and his election to the governorship, Rockefeller became a proponent of regulation rather than abolition. By the early 1990s, continued complaints over the destructive practices of coal operators led to threats by the federal government to take over regulation of surface mining in West Virginia. The actions of Governor Gaston Caperton and the legislature, which appropriated more funding for the employment of additional state inspectors, averted federal actions. By the late 1990s, mountaintop removal, the most profitable and arguably the most damaging form of surface mining, had become common and led to sharp public

debate.

“Public demands for greater access to education, health care, and other services produced rapid growth in both the size and costs of state government. In an effort to streamline administration, Governor Caperton reorganized the executive branch under seven ‘super secretaries,’ each responsible for several formerly separate agencies. His action, however, aroused criticism that another layer of expensive bureaucracy had been established.

“In recent decades the state’s governors, congressional representation, and other officials have made concerted efforts to promote economic development, including foreign investments. Sen. Robert C. Byrd, known nationally as an authority on Senate history and the U.S. Constitution, won federal appropriations in excess of \$1 billion and brought numerous federal projects and facilities to West Virginia. By the mid-1990s, the state’s economy bore signs of improvement although some ground was later lost in the recession that followed the national boom of the late 1990s. Between 1988 and 1997, the state budget more than doubled, rising from about \$3.3 billion to approximately \$7 billion.

“As the 20th century slipped away, West Virginians could reflect upon the great changes that it had brought. The automobile, radio, motion pictures, television, computers, and other inventions had opened vistas little dreamed of when the century began. It had brought new opportunities for education and self-fulfillment, recognition of human rights for all people, and ever-increasing prospects for more people to share in the blessings the state had to offer. As always, however, problems remained. West Virginians had deep apprehensions about the future. Their concerns included the quality of education; the availability of health care, especially for children and the elderly; environmental matters; threats to cherished traditional values; and fears that the nation might not have in the future the prescience or the strength to manage the responsibilities of world power.”

Rice, Otis K. and Stephen W. Brown  
“History of West Virginia.” e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia (wvencyclopedia.org). 24 January 2024. Web. 25 March 2024.



File photo

**Fayette County, Virginia, was formed** by the General Assembly of Virginia on Feb. 28, 1831. Its territory was carved from Kanawha, Nicholas, Greenbrier, and Logan counties. Parts of Fayette were taken to create Raleigh County in 1850 and Summers in 1871, according to author Lou Athey in the West Virginia Encyclopedia. The county seat, first placed in New Haven on the north side of the New River, was moved to the south side of the New to Vandalia (now Fayetteville) in 1837.

Let’s meet Fayette County

Editor’s note: The following introduction to Fayette County, West Virginia is reprint-ed with permission from e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia, a project of the West Virginia Humanities Council.

Fayette County is located in south-central West Virginia, north of Beckley. Its land area is 668.7 square miles, and its 2020 population was 40,488. Named for the Marquis de Lafayette, Fayette County was formed by the General Assembly of Virginia on Feb. 28, 1831. Its territory was carved from Kanawha, Nicholas, Greenbrier, and Logan counties. Parts of Fayette were taken to create Raleigh County in 1850 and Summers in 1871.

The county consists of a high plateau bordered on the east by Sewell Mountain and on the west by the Kanawha Valley. Flowing from southeast to northwest, the New River segments the county with its deep gorge, joining the Gauley to form the Kanawha River at Gauley Bridge.

The remains of prehistoric settlements have been located, notably between Armstrong and Loup creeks. Indian trails and campsites along New River and its tributaries yield information about movement of the natives. The Paint Creek val-ley was a thoroughfare for Shawnee raiders traveling to and from the eastern settlements, and it was along this stream that Mary Draper Ingles was carried from Virginia into captivity in Ohio in 1755. European settlement came in the late 18th century, largely along the rivers.

The county seat was first set in New Haven on the north side of New River, but was moved to the southside town of Vandalia (later Fayetteville) in 1837. In its first census, Fayette County in 1840 had 3,924 residents. On the eve of the Civil War, the county had 5,997 residents in 1860, 271 of whom were slaves. Residents divided on the issues severing the state and nation, and the ensuing warfare caused great destruction in the county. Robert E. Lee commanded in Fayette County in the fall of 1861. Strategically located Gauley Bridge saw repeated action, and the locally decisive Battle of Fayetteville was fought in fall 1862. The Confederate Thurmond’s Rangers were among the local units operating in the area.

The building of the Chesapeake & Ohio Railway (C&O) through the New River Gorge, completed on Jan. 29,

FAYETTE COUNTY 8C



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### FAYETTE COUNTY FROM 7C

1873, opened the rich New River coalfield and a new industrial era. Many mining towns were built in the gorge and on the plateau, bringing boom times. The population jumped from 6,647 in 1870 to 60,377 by 1920, but Fayette remained rural with no town exceeding 2,500 people. Fayette was the leading coal producing county in West Virginia from 1888 through 1903, when it yielded to McDowell County.

Building the railroads and working the mines intensified demand for labor. Southern and eastern Europeans and African-Americans from the southern states migrated into the county. Their cultural influence on the county remains. Christopher Payne of Montgomery was the first African-American elected to the state legislature, in 1896, followed in 1902 by James M. Ellis of Oak Hill. In 1942, Camp Washington-Carver opened as a state 4-H camp for African-Americans, the first of its kind in the nation.

Accompanying the rapid industrialization were disastrous mine explosions such as those at Red Ash (1900), Rush Run (1905), and Parral (1906), and protracted labor strikes in 1902 and 1912-13. The most devastating industrial disaster, one of the worst in the nation's history, occurred during the building (1930-35) of the tunnel to harness the hydroelectric power of New River at Hawks Nest. More than 700 men, the majority of whom were black migrants, died of silicosis.

The development of towns depended upon geography and the economy. The mountainous eastern section of the county had no large towns; Fayetteville was the town center of the plateau south of New River until the growth of Oak Hill and Mount Hope in the 20th century. Towns in the western section of the county developed as Gauley Bridge and Montgomery grew on the banks of the Kanawha River. The northside plateau town of Ansted, incorporated in 1891, became prominent in the industrial period.

The C&O's New River main line provided the county's economic lifeline. Inhabitants of New River Gorge, now almost empty of residents, outnumbered those living on the plateau during the coal heyday. Thurmond, a town in the gorge, boomed as a coal-shipping rail center, and Sewell was once offered as a new site for the county seat. The unique town of Kaymoor sprang up, with Kaymoor Bottom located on the gorge floor and Kaymoor Top on the rim of the gorge. The Kaymoor mine was located on the mountainside in between.

With coal in decline after mid-century, towns disappeared and the

population fell from its 1950 peak of 82,443. Road construction helped to move Fayette County away from the gorge and the railroad located there. Although the earlier James River & Kanawha Turnpike (1825), the Giles, Fayette & Kanawha Turnpike (1848), and later secondary roads served the county well, late 20th-century arteries linked Fayette to the expanding interstate highway system. The West Virginia Turnpike (Interstate 64-77) traverses western Fayette County. Busy U.S. 19 (Appalachian Corridor L) runs northeasterly through the county, crossing the spectacular New River Gorge Bridge, the county's chief landmark.

As of 2022, Fayette County's largest employers were, respectively, the county school system, Contura Energy, Walmart, Montgomery General Hospital, and WVA Manufacturing.

Fayette County's rushing streams and rugged terrain, which once hindered development, are major assets in the tourist industry. Whitewater rafting on the New and Gauley rivers offers excitement to both beginning and experienced rafters. Rock climbing, mountain biking, hiking, and fishing attract visitors. In 1978, the National Park Service established New River Gorge National River and began expanding outdoor recreational opportunities in the area. In December 2020, it was redesignated as the New River Gorge National Park and Reserve. Older state parks such as Babcock and Hawks Nest also remain popular.

Fayette County has had its share of colorful, powerful, and notable people. The Civil War years pitted Confederate William D. Thurmond against Unionist James C. Montgomery, and brought forth the financier, philanthropist, and county sheriff, Morris Harvey. Leaders in the industrial era included such powerful figures as Joseph L. Beury, John Nuttall, "King" Samuel Dixon, William H. McKell, George W. Imboden, William Nelson Page, and others. "Pistol" Nell Walker of Sewell, the longest serving female legislator (1940-62), gained fame by disarming a bank robber in the Winona National Bank. Mount Hope resident and double amputee Okey L. Patteson served as governor of West Virginia.

In addition to Fayetteville, the county's leading towns are Montgomery, Oak Hill, Ansted, Mount Hope, and Gauley Bridge. The WVU Institute of Technology, a state-supported school established in Montgomery in 1895 as the Montgomery Preparatory School, became the West Virginia Institute of Technology in 1941. In 2015, the school was relocated to Beckley.

Athey, Lou "Fayette County." e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia (wvencyclopedia.org). 29 September 2023. Web. 22 March 2024.



Debra Parker/For The Fayette Tribune

**Fayette County**, in spite of the major U.S. Route 19 corridor that crosses the Plateau and New Haven areas of the county, is criss-crossed with quiet country roads. As of the July 1, 2023 Census estimate, the county has 39,072 residents, down from 46,039 following the 2010 Census.

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# Introductions



## SECTION D

Andrew Donaldson/For The Fayette Tribune

**In the early years of human activity** in what is now known as Fayette County, from Native American hunting parties to the exploration and early settlement of white immigrants from Europe, the natural geography of the area, with features ranging from deep and fast-flowing rivers, waterfalls, mountains and cliffs, made travel difficult. In recent years, however, those geographical wonders have played an important role in the state's economic landscape. From the first West Virginia-based whitewater rafting company opened in Thurmond in 1968 to the recent creation of the West Virginia Waterfall Trail, Fayette County's tourism industry is booming.



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# RESIDENTS, VISITORS INVITED TO GO CHASING WATERFALLS



Courtesy photo/WV Tourism

**Sandstone Falls is the largest waterfall in the New River Gorge National Park & Preserve.** Spanning over 1,500 feet wide, this large series of falls is divided by a collection of small islands. In an effort to get those who spend much of their time online into the outdoors, the West Virginia Tourism Department created the West Virginia Waterfall Trail which features 40 waterfalls around the state. Thirty percent of those waterfalls are in Fayette County. Read about those falls on 3D. Who knows? You might be spurred to become a Waterfall Wanderer.

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# Fayette cascades headline West Virginia Waterfall Trail

A dozen waterfalls in Fayette County represent 30% of the state Department of Tourism’s online-to-outdoor initiative

By Andrew Donaldson  
FOR THE FAYETTE TRIBUNE

“As long as I live,” wrote naturalist John Muir, “I’ll hear waterfalls and birds and winds sing.”

The man who, in many ways, was the instigator of America’s national parks would be right at home then in America’s newest national park in West Virginia. The New River Gorge National Park and Preserve is home to several waterfalls, and adjacent to many more.

The New River’s winding northward path in West Virginia has Sandstone Falls — the largest falls on the river — at the southern end before cutting into the gorge and turning into the Kanawha just past Cathedral Falls in Gauley Bridge, one of the tallest waterfalls in the state.

West Virginia has water in abundance, with at least 200 waterfalls of various descriptions, from the wide and tall to the seasonal and hard to find. Capitalizing on the age of tourist spots needing to be “Instagram Ready” for folks to discover and share on social media, the West Virginia Department of Tourism launched a plan to get the online folks outdoors in the state. The West Virginia Waterfall Trail highlights 40 cascades across the state. Once folks sign up, the trail offers an online guide, signage on site complete with QR codes, an online “passport,” and prizes earned for so many visits.

Fayette County alone represents 30% of the West Virginia Waterfall Trail. Want that sticker that represents completing three check-ins and three waterfalls found? You could do that in Babcock State Park alone in a couple of hours.

Desire the ever-popular metal water bottle that comes with 10 check-ins? Traversing New River Gorge and Upper Kanawha River along US Route 60 could see that accomplished in a day. Of course, this being West Virginia, the signage with the QR codes and check-ins comes with the disclaimer that if you cannot get reception, you can do so later when not so deep in the wild and wonderful.

While famous waterfalls like the widely published image of Glade Creek Grist Mill are present, the West Virginia Waterfall Trail brings attention and deserved recognition to lesser-known sites. Places like Dunloup Falls, tucked away near Thurmond, mostly missed by the tourists floated by unawares for decades since the National Park Service took control. Butcher’s Branch Falls near the Kaymoor site in the New River Gorge has been known to rock climbers who go past it — in fact, the signage on the trail still says “climbers access” — but worth a visit in its own right. While competing, and often losing, to the throngs that pass through Hawks Nest State Park for the view from the canyon rim, heading down the Cliffside Trail and veering left a tad will bring you to Turkey Creek Falls.

While several of the waterfalls require a hike and maybe some scrambling to find, two of the most visually impressive wonders of the waterfall trail are not only directly on the roadside but nearly within sight of each other. Bookending the great wide birthing of the Kanawha River as the Gauley River and New River merge along US Route 60 in Fayette County are Cathedral Falls in Gauley Bridge and Kanawha Falls in Glen Ferris/Kanawha Falls a bit downstream. Whereas the towering Cathedral Falls tumbles home from over 60 feet in height into a curving, wide rock area that feels like a natural stone church, Kanawha Falls stretches the entire width of the river in various shelves up to 15 feet high and divides the river across a maze of rocks. The two variations on waterfalls, one vertically impressive and the other horizontally breathtaking, viewed together are the perfect contrast to how water and nature shape each other over the centuries in different, but spectacular, ways.

Getting the internet-curious and social media-obsessed outside into the wild and wonderful is a winning strategy that recognizes the need for tourism and the ready supply of natural wonders West Virginia possesses. Things like the West Virginia Waterfall Trail are smart, innovative ways to promote that, and Fayette County is blessed with more representation on the trail than any other area.

As the National Park draws increased crowds to the area, state and local initiatives like the waterfall trail are important to emphasize that the farther from the beaten paths you go in West Virginia,



A West Virginia Waterfall Wanderers sign marks Cathedral Falls, at Gauley Bridge, one of the stops on the state’s Waterfall Trail. The water of Cane Branch cascade 60 feet over sandstone and shale cliffs into a natural bowl-like space. A path and monstrous boulders both allow visitors to walk all the way to the bottom of the falls.




Kayakers walk across the natural rock path at Kanawha Falls searching the perfect spot to plunge over the falls. Kanawha Falls, which cross the Kanawha River between the communities of Kanawha Falls and Glen Ferris, are located less than two miles from where the New and Gauley rivers form the Kanawha at Gauley Bridge.




Westerly Falls is a charming, short-dropped waterfall spanning Paint Creek in Fayette County. With water plummeting from 5 to 7 feet high, Westerly Falls is one of the more subtle yet dynamic falls in West Virginia.

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# West Virginia Waterfall Trail

Editor’s note: To learn more about the West Virginia Waterfall Trail and how to sign up to be a Waterfall Wanderer, visit <https://wvtourism.com/west-virginia-waterfall-trail/>

**Sandstone Falls, Sandstone** — Found within the nation’s 63rd national park, Sandstone Falls is the largest waterfall in the New River Gorge National Park & Preserve. Spanning over 1,500 feet wide, this large series of falls is divided by a collection of small islands. Take a quick walk along the boardwalk to view the rushing waters that carved out this slice of Almost Heaven – and continue your adventure in this area known for its wide variety of wildflowers. The scenic views at this falls are ADA accessible.

**Glade Creek Grist Mill Falls, Clifftop** — Beneath the historic grist mill at Babcock State Park, water rushes to form the Glade Creek Grist Mill Falls. With a short stone pathway leading you to the beautiful cascades, these falls are a photographer’s dream – and one of the most photographed spots in West Virginia. Mark your calendar for a visit in fall, when this scenic spot transforms into a leaf-peeper’s paradise.

**Big Branch Falls, Hinton** — Big Branch Falls call the New River Gorge National Park & Preserve home, flowing through a dense canopy of green and blanketed wildflower forest. This cascading wonder has an 8-foot drop that spans out across bedrock to create the perfect heavenly backdrop. To find this scenic wonder, begin at Brooks Falls Parking Area before crossing the road to find the start of the Big Branch Trail, which will take you on a 2-mile loop, passing by the falls.

**Turkey Creek Falls, Ansted** — Cascades descend through the cliffs and boulders of the New River Gorge National Park & Preserve to form Turkey Creek Falls. With an 8-foot drop flowing over staircase rocks, the falls can be enjoyed with a short hike through Hawks Nest State Park. Begin your trek by the Hawks Nest gift shop and navigate to

the nearby Cliffside Trail, hanging left along Turkey Creek. Tread carefully in and around this falls — as it is known to be quite slippery.

**Drawdy Falls, Peytona** — Keep your eyes peeled to be sure you catch a glimpse of the stunning Drawdy Falls in Boone County. Sitting just off Route 3, these falls are a perfect pair, reaching 6 feet in height. Surrounded by rock shelves, these falls pour into Drawdy Creek — creating the perfect roadside oasis for you to stop and enjoy. Get an up-close view by parking across the road at Drawdy Falls Roadside Park and carefully making your way back over towards the falls.

**Coonskin Grotto, Charleston** — Tucked away in Coonskin Park just outside the capital city is a hidden waterfall known as The Grotto. These short cascades – spilling into a shallow cave, shaded by a sandstone overhang – are best enjoyed after a good rainfall. Make your way past the stone monument at the trailhead, hang a left on Alice Knight Memorial Trail and follow the red blazes for about a third of a mile before arriving at this unique structure. You’ll want to watch your footing on this rocky, sometimes narrow trail, but (once you arrive) you’ll find this treasure is the perfect nook to relax while chasing waterfalls.

**Dunloup Falls, Thurmond** — Found near the abandoned mining town of Thurmond is a hidden waterfall – Dunloup Falls. These flowing cascades stumble 20 feet across a sandstone ledge, capping the falls for a view worth seeking out. Catch your first glimpse from a roadside parking spot along Thurmond Road, before making the quick scramble down to the creek bed for the perfect view.

**Seneca Creek Falls, Job** — Located in the Monongahela National Forest, Seneca Creek Falls is one of Pendleton County’s most secluded spots. Hidden at the base of the highest point in WV, Spruce Knob, this waterfall is a nature lover’s dream. The cool waters

and large rocks make it a picturesque location, with several beautiful camping spots nearby. Be sure to come prepared for a 5-mile hike along Seneca Creek Trail, passing several creeks to reach these breathtaking falls.

**Falls of Hills Creek, Hillsboro** — A crown jewel of the Monongahela National Forest, the Falls of Hills Creek are hidden off of the Highland Scenic Highway, just 5 miles west of the Cranberry Mountain Nature Center. Consisting of three cascading falls, the Falls of Hills Creek is surrounded by lush, green foliage and blooming rhododendrons in spring. The Falls of Hills Creek Trail will take you along a 1.3-mile out and back trek, moving lower towards the last falls in a series of pathways and wooden stairs. An ADA accessible boardwalk provides views of the first falls.

**Mill Creek Falls of Hawks Nest, Ansted** — Mill Creek Falls can be spotted while hiking along the Hawks Nest Rail Trail. With waters falling in a 20-foot drop, these falls are the largest of several found along the trail. This beautiful spot offers gorgeous views all year round, so your one-mile hike to this treasure will be a treat no matter when you pass by.

**Glade Creek Falls, Beaver** — Found along Glade Creek Trail within the New River Gorge National Park & Preserve, Glade Creek Falls creates a spectacular view with its picturesque cascades rushing over sandstone ledges. There’s no wrong way to tackle this gorgeous hike with its plunging mountain waters that make it a favorite destination in Almost Heaven, found just 1 mile upstream of Glade Creek Campground.

**Valley Falls, Fairmont** — Created by the dark, rushing waters of the Tygart Valley River, Valley Falls is intertwined between rock faces at 10-foot drops. Popular with kayakers searching for adventure, these stunning cascades are spectacular to see and hear with a front-row seat to the action easily found within Valley Falls State Park. Views of this beautiful cascade are ADA accessible.

**Upper and Lower Falls of Holly River, Hacker Valley** — Nestled within a cove of rhododendron and lush greenery, the Upper and Lower Falls are each a stunning sight to behold in Holly River State Park. Start your adventure on Pickens Grade Road before turning off into a parking lot where you can view the Upper Falls and set out on a trek to the Lower Falls. If you are looking to get up close and personal with this series of waterfalls, they can also be accessed along Potato Knob Trail.

**Oglebay Falls, Wheeling** — Slip into your water shoes, park along Falls Drive and carefully make your way across the shallow stream and up wooden steps to the viewing platform to catch a glimpse of these cascading waters. Or start your waterfall hunt at Schrader Center, following the 0.8 mile out-and-back Falls Vista Trail to enjoy all that Oglebay Falls has to offer. Oglebay Falls is picturesque with its unique double drop that flows over a moss-covered floor. Walk right up to these stunning falls to experience the beauty of the Northern Panhandle.

**Mill Creek Falls of Kumbrabow, Hutonsville** — Within the woods of the Kumbrabow State Forest, Mill Creek Falls is a hidden gem of the Allegheny Highlands. Standing at just 20-feet tall, this small cascade pools into the mountain streams that lie below. Perched within West Virginia’s highest forest, Mill Creek Falls is also a popular swimming hole and fishing spot for anglers. Once you are in Kumbrabow State Forest, follow the signs to a parking area just off the road, where you can access the wooden steps down to Mill Creek Falls.

**Kanawha Falls, Kanawha Falls** — Easily viewable from scenic Route 60, just below the junction of the New and Gauley Rivers, Kanawha Falls awaits. Though these shelves are short, the falls stretch out along the length of the Kanawha River, creating an impressive sight.

WATERFALLS 6D

## WATERFALL TRAIL FROM 3D

the more there is to discover and explore. And in this era of social media, sharing those pictures, memories, and experiences not only makes for a good Instagram post, but helps tell the world about the wonderful places and people of West Virginia.

As long as the reception holds up, that is. But don’t worry, West Virginia has a hill to raise you up and get you better reception close by, wherever you may be chasing waterfalls.

Tribune columnist Andrew Donaldson is a native of West Virginia, a widely published writer, media commentator, and host of the Heard Tell program.



Courtesy photo/WV Tourism

**In the heart of the New River Gorge region find Finn’s Falls.** Begin by entering ACE Adventure Resort and following signs to Waterfall Trail. Traverse this trail for around a mile until its splits off to Finn’s Falls Trail, which will quickly take you right up to these majestic falls. With a picnic table and bench nearby, you can take in the view of this outdoor beauty while enjoying the relaxing sound of flowing waters.

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# The Fayette Tribune

proudly recognizes United Way of Southern WV for the important work they do to support the organizations that help our community.



Terry Poe, executive director of the Lillian James Learning Center, receives a check from Trena Dacal, Executive Director, United Way of Southern West Virginia.



Sherrie Hunter, UWSWV Board Member, Trena Dacal, UWSWV Executive Director, and Zack Statler (far right) UWSWV Board Member, present a check to Cathy Heft of the Just For Kids Advocacy Center.



Marcia Smith and Shelby Warden of Beckley Dream Center, receive a check from Trena Dacal, Sherrie Hunter and Karen Ewing of United Way of Southern West Virginia.



Jack Tanner and Tammy Trent of Raleigh Co. Commission on Aging, receive a check from Trena Dacal, Trina Epperly and Lori Cuthbert of UWSWV.



Beckley Health Right received support from UWSWV. Pictured are Lori Cuthbert, UWSWV Financial Administrator; Debra Vaught, BHR Pharmacist in Charge; Michelle Smith, BHR Clinical Support Specialist; Trena Dacal, UWSWV Executive Director; Tammy Smith, BHR Lead Practitioner; and Ella Wayne, BHR Clinical Support Specialist.



Lisa Davis, Executive Director of Helpful Harvest Outreach of Mercer & Summers Counties, receives a grant from Trena Dacal, Executive Director, United Way of Southern West Virginia.



Trena Dacal, Executive Director, UWSWV, presents a grant to Jim McClanahan, Executive Director of Mercer County Fellowship Home.



Beth Sizemore, Program Director for Child Protect of Mercer County, receives a check from Trena Dacal, Executive Director, UWSWV.



Tim Howard and Ceretha Cline of Food For Body and Soul receive a check from Trena Dacal of United Way of Southern West Virginia.



Lesley Woodrum (second from left) of Summers Co. 4-H, receives a grant from Jessica Schueler Rubin (far left) UWSWV Board Member, Trena Dacal, UWSWV Executive Director, and Karen Ewing, UWSWV Board Member from Pendleton Community Bank.



Trena Dacal of United Way of Southern WV presents a check to Raleigh County Community Action Association Executive Director Crystal Alonso.



Raleigh Co. 4-H received grant from United Way of Southern West Virginia. Pictured are Lexi Zilinsky and Barbara Little, both of WVU Extension, Trena Dacal, Trina Epperly and Lori Cuthbert, all of UWSWV.

## Organizations Receiving Grants & How The Funds Will Be Used

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<b>Beckley Dream Center</b>	Food, Utility Assistance, Baby Pantry, Summer Feeding
<b>Beckley Health Right</b>	Clinical, Dental, and Pharmaceutical Programs
<b>Big Creek People in Action</b>	Education, Literacy
<b>Bland Ministry Center and Dental Clinic</b>	Utility Assistance and Food Pantry
<b>Camp Royal</b>	Camp Scholarships
<b>Catholic Charities West Virginia</b>	Emergency Assistance and Food Pantry
<b>Center for Christian Action</b>	Fuel Assistance Program
<b>Child Protect of Mercer County</b>	Utilities and Supplies
<b>Fayette County Emergency Food</b>	Food Distribution
<b>Food for Body and Soul</b>	Food
<b>Gabriel Project of West Virginia</b>	Basics for Babies
<b>Helpful Harvest</b>	Food Pantry
<b>Hospice of Southern West Virginia</b>	Bereavement Camp
<b>Just For Kids Child Advocacy Center</b>	Program Support
<b>Lillian James Learning Center</b>	Maintenance and Upkeep
<b>McDowell County Commission on Aging, Inc.</b>	Senior Nutrition Program
<b>Mercer County 4H Leaders</b>	Camp Scholarships
<b>Mercer County Fellowship Home Recovery</b>	Housing
<b>Nicholas County FRN</b>	Nutrition Support
<b>Raleigh County Commission on Aging</b>	Home-Delivered Meals
<b>Raleigh County Community Action Association</b>	Housing
<b>Raleigh County 4-H</b>	Camp Scholarships
<b>Stop Abusive Family Environments Inc.</b>	Transitional Housing Facility
<b>Stop the Hurt</b>	CAC
<b>Summers County 4H Leaders Association</b>	Camp Scholarships
<b>Summers County Council on Aging, Inc.</b>	Transportation Services
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## WATERFALLS

### FROM 4D

Kanawha Falls provides the perfect backdrop for a day of fishing or canoeing in Almost Heaven.

**Muddy Creek Falls, Albright** — Home to the historic Virginia Furnace, Muddy Creek is a roadside park along Route 26 that can be found on the National Register of Historic Places. While the furnace is an impressive heritage site, it also boasts rapids known as Muddy Creek Falls. With a small parking lot along with access to a picnic area, the falls offer a stunning snapshot when the water is running just right.

**Finn’s Falls, Oak Hill** — In the heart of the New River Gorge region find Finn’s Falls. Begin by entering ACE Adventure Resort and following signs to Waterfall Trail. Traverse this trail for around a mile until its splits off to Finn’s Falls Trail, which will quickly take you right up to these majestic falls. With a picnic table and bench nearby, you can take in the view of this outdoor beauty while enjoying the relaxing sound of flowing waters.

**Elakala Falls, Davis** — The gorgeous Elakala Falls is a series of four waterfalls found within Blackwater Falls State Park. With waters stained from hemlock and red spruce needles, these falls boast a distinctive red hue that pours over staggered rock steps. Beginning right by the Blackwater Falls Lodge, the Elakala Trail is your route to enjoy these gorgeous falls — and be sure to look down, as your path will take you directly above the first falls along a wooden bridge.

**Cathedral Falls, Gauley Bridge** — Cathedral Falls is one of the tallest and most scenic waterfalls found in Almost Heaven. This natural wonder sits at 60 feet tall, with waters plunging over sandstone and shale cliffs. Cathedral falls is both beautiful and easy to access — visible from Route 60 and with a designated parking area. Follow the short roadside path to get up close and personal with this mountain wonder.

**Campbell Falls, Camp Creek** — Well-known for its picturesque backdrop, Campbell Falls can be found within Camp Creek State Park in the mountains of Mercer County. With a multitude of shelves, all 15 feet of these cascades pour into an oval pool — the perfect location for fishing or swimming in warmer weather. Start on Camp Creek Road, before stopping at a small pull-off and following a short path to this roadside beauty.

**Brush Creek Falls, Athens** — Brush Creek Falls roars along a tributary of the Bluestone River — standing at over 30 feet tall in Mercer County. Start at the small parking area and take the Brush Creek Falls Trail a quarter mile before reaching this scenic cascade. To make a day of your adventures, pack a picnic lunch to enjoy before exploring the nearby Camp Creek State Park.

**Marsh Fork Falls and Black Fork Falls, Mullens** — Twin Falls Resort State Park is home to two seasonal waterfalls that give the park its name — Marsh Fork Falls and Black Fork Falls. Found in the rugged mountains of southern West Virginia, these falls can be viewed from the 1-mile Falls Trail loop within the park. Marsh Fork Falls and Black Fork Falls tend to dry up during the warmer months, so be sure to visit them after a little rain or in the spring and winter seasons.

**Falls of Pendleton, Davis** — The Falls of Pendleton stumble over a moss-covered cliff within the lush Blackwater Falls State Park. This majestic beauty is found where Pendleton Run tumbles into the roaring Blackwater River, creating the perfect backdrop for an afternoon of adventure. Enjoy views of this cascade along the Pendleton Trace Trail, hanging left towards Pendleton Lake — keeping in mind that a trek

directly down to the falls will be steep and treacherous. If you don’t have your hiking boots at the ready, you can also view the falls across the Canyon at a roadside overlook.

**Butcher Branch Falls, Glen Jean** — Butcher Branch Falls tumbles down a tiered sandstone wall, creating a series of picturesque cascades. Trek about one mile on Butcher Branch Trail from Kaymoor parking area. When the path forks, you’ll want to hang a right onto the offshoot labeled “climbers’ access.” This steep trek down a series of rocky switchbacks will include some minor scrambling — simply follow the sound of the tumbling falls past the rockface, popular among climbers, to find your way. A hidden gem in the New River Gorge National Park & Preserve, these falls are worth the trip for any true waterfall wanderer.

**Mash Fork Falls, Camp Creek** — Home to Camp Creek State Park, Mash Falls lies within the forest of Mercer County along Mash Fork — which empties into Camp Creek. Standing at 8 feet tall, this outdoor gem plunges over a sandstone ledge and is located next to the parking area. Take a short walk on the gravel road, and you’ll discover a second waterfall. Reach the perfect viewing platform as you travel Mash Fork Falls Trail — arriving at the optimal vantage point.

**Whitaker Falls, Monterville** — Whitaker Falls is a small series of cascades surrounded by stunning greenery perfect for your Instagram feed. Located within Randolph County, this waterfall is secluded enough for the perfect outdoor escape. You can easily catch a glimpse of Whitaker Falls as you drive along Valley Fork Road — but you will want to stop and soak up this view.

**High Falls of the Cheat, Gladys** — Winding through Shavers Mountain in the Potomac Highlands off Route 44, the High Falls of the Cheat is one of the Mountain State’s most distinctive waterfalls. Though these falls are short in height, their signature feature is an impressive width, with cascades roaring across the mountainsides over a horseshoe bend of rocks. Find this spot along the High Falls Trail, which provides a beautiful — yet challenging hike.

**Westerly Falls, Westerly** — Westerly Falls is a charming, short-dropped waterfall spanning Paint Creek in Fayette County. With water plummeting from 5 to 7 feet high, Westerly Falls is one of the more subtle yet dynamic falls in West Virginia. Even during extended droughts, water flow is strong and full of life. Lower water levels mean higher chances of exploring the waterfall from incredible perspectives — making this site a favorite among those seeking a new adventure. Tackle the short and moderately steep walk from the roadside pull-off to creek level for a closer view.

**Pipestem Falls, Hinton** — With a 30+ foot drop on Pipestem Creek, Pipestem Falls is a hidden gem located along Route 20, approximately 11 miles south of Hinton. Follow the wooden steps by the pull-off and let the roaring waters guide the way, as the summer leaves hide the falls from the road. This unique falls is the perfect addition to any road trip through beautiful southern West Virginia.

**Parkinson’s Waterfall, Bethany** — Nestled in Bethany College’s leafy and historic campus, this waterfall is a familiar feature to students and a delightful surprise for visitors. Make your way along Campus Drive until you come upon a trailhead sign near the Steinman Fine Arts Center, marking the Waterfall Trail. The Waterfall Trail and Sutton Trail form a loop that is approximately one mile long. You will also find yourself amid Parkinson Forest, an old-growth forest teeming with sugar maples, American beeches and several white oak trees that are over 200 years old.

**Blackwater Falls, Davis** — One of



Courtesy photo/WV Tourism

**Mill Creek Falls can be spotted** while hiking along the Hawks Nest Rail Trail at Ansted. With waters falling in a 20-foot drop, these falls are the largest of several found along the trail.

Almost Heaven’s tallest waterfalls, Blackwater Falls cascades a plunging 57 feet. This impressive falls is named for the distinct amber color of its waters, dyed by the tannic acid of fallen hemlock and red spruce needles. Along the Gentle Trail of Blackwater Falls State Park, you can soak up a scenic view like no other. Snap a picture at one of the most photographed sites in West Virginia with this birds-eye view of Blackwater Falls. The Gentle Trail is ADA accessible.

**Mann’s Creek Falls, Danese** — Enjoy stunning views of the many layers of cascading waters at Mann’s Creek Falls in Babcock State Park. Begin your journey at the Narrow Gauge trailhead located on the service road below the park’s campground. The splashing of the tiny, but mighty, plummeting falls makes for a soothing experience after getting some steps in on the Narrow Gauge Trail.

**Loopemount Waterfall, Frankford** — Located near mile-marker 8.1 on the 78-mile Greenbrier River Trail, the Loopemount Waterfall is a hidden gem within a thick, peaceful forest. Park near the Harper Road trailhead and trek two miles north along the lush rail trail to find this Greenbrier County gem. This spot’s wide water flow is the strongest during the springtime, but you can discover a gentle stream during the warmer months. Surround yourself with the fresh air and enjoy one of the most remote waterfalls in Almost Heaven.

**Falls Mill, Falls Mill** — Just off U.S. Route 19 on Pleasant Hill Road in Braxton County is a photogenic and wide cascade spanning the entire width of the Little Kanawha River: Falls Mill. Embrace the view from the roadside overlook to catch a truly panoramic snapshot of this expansive waterfall. After viewing the falls, relax and enjoy the day at the nearby picnic shelter.

**Sugar Camp Run Falls, Clifftop** — Sugar Camp Run Falls is one of a handful of beautiful waterfalls at Babcock State Park. Water rushes between several angular boulders, creating a unique flow — especially after heavy rainfall. Also fondly known as Babydog Falls, West Virginia lore has it that this waterfall is a favorite spot for the Governor’s English Bulldog. Parking in the historic Glade Creek Grist Mill lot provides easy access to the Old Sewell Trail. Let the scenic trail guide you to this natural beauty and become one with the serenity of Sugar Camp Run Falls.

**Little Whitestick Falls, Beckley** — Uniquely located minutes away from downtown Beckley and the Beckley Exhibition Coal Mine, Little Whites-

tick Falls is worth a visit for all waterfall enthusiasts. To access the falls, take Stanaford Mine Road in Beckley and drive a quarter-mile to enter Piney Creek Preserve (there is a pull-off nearby). Wildwood Trailhead and Waterfall Hollow Trail are on the right. Take the stone steps at the Wildwood Trailhead and follow the Waterfall Hollow Trail for about 100 yards. The trail was formerly a coal mine bench and makes for a mostly flat walk. As the trail forks, this reveals Little Whitestick Falls at the confluence of Little Whitestick Creek to your left. While you’re here, you can also explore the peaceful Cranberry Creek Cascades on the right.

**Tucker Falls, Core** — Located at Mason-Dixon Historical Park near Morgantown, Tucker Falls is a 14-foot hidden gem. This charming little park borders the Mason-Dixon line, making Tucker Falls one of the most northern waterfalls in Almost Heaven. Take a stroll along the banks of Dunkard Creek on Green Trail and cross over to Orange Trail for a combined one-mile walk. As you approach this Monongalia County cascade, your ears will pick up its soothing water sounds tucked away at the end of Orange Trail.

**Cranberry Creek Cascades, Beckley** — Cranberry Creek Cascades is a natural treasure in the downtown Beckley area. To access the falls, take Stanaford Mine Road in Beckley and drive a quarter-mile to enter onto the Piney Creek Preserve entrance. Wildwood Trailhead and Waterfall Hollow Trail are on the right. Take the stone steps and make your way onto the Waterfall Hollow Trail. This trail is a former coal mine bench — making the 100-yard walk relatively flat. You will be greeted by two separate waterfalls at the Little Whitestick Creek and Cranberry Creek confluence: Cranberry Creek Cascades on the right, and Little Whitestick Falls to the left. Your walk is almost completed when you hear the relaxing sound of layering cascades gushing over the slippery rocks of Cranberry Creek.

**Flanagan Branch Falls, Clifftop** — Flanagan Branch Falls is tucked away on the Old Sewell Trail at the beautiful Babcock State Park. To start your adventure, park near the historic Glade Creek Grist Mill and begin your moderately challenging waterfall trek on the Old Sewell Trail. Watch the water glide over the smooth river rock and gradually spread out from a narrow peak. Flanagan Branch Falls is another reason to visit one of Almost Heaven’s most beautiful state parks.

Courtesy West Virginia Tourism

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Courtesy photo/WV Division of Natural Resources

The West Virginia Division of Natural Resources has awarded a \$6.7 million contract to the March-Westin Company, Inc. of Morgantown to construct a new Tomblin Wildlife Management Area Visitor Center and Elk Viewing Platform in Logan County, according to a press release earlier this year from the office of Governor Jim Justice.. The state’s reintroduction of elk started in 2015, according to wildlife writer Larry Case, a longtime employee of the WVDNR. Case wrote in a 2021 article in Outdoor Life that the last sighting of a wild elk in the Mountain State prior to the program’s beginning was in 1875.

# Construction to begin on state’s first Elk Visitor Center

## STATE-OF-THE-ART FACILITY WILL ENHANCE ELK MANAGEMENT AND PROMOTE WILDLIFE TOURISM IN WEST VIRGINIA

CHARLESTON — The West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (WVDNR) has awarded a \$6.7 million contract to the March-Westin Company, Inc. of Morgantown to construct a new Tomblin Wildlife Management Area Visitor Center and Elk Viewing Platform in Logan County, according to a press release from the office of Gov. Jim Justice.

Construction on the new facility will begin this spring with an anticipated opening in 2025. This state-of-the-art facility is expected to draw in thousands of new visitors who will witness the majesty of the elk herd while contributing significantly to the local economy and supporting ongoing elk management efforts.

“I’m excited to announce that this project is getting started because it will allow even more people to experience the awe-inspiring sight of our elk herd,” Justice said.

“West Virginians have embraced these majestic creatures, and this new facility will ensure their continued success while boosting tourism and economic development in Logan County.”

Funding for the project comes from \$2.5 million in Abandoned Mine Lands grants awarded by Gov. Justice, along with \$2.1 million from the West Virginia Department of Economic Development and an additional \$2.1 million from hunting and fishing license funds.

The elk viewing tower will provide an elevated platform for enhanced viewing areas and a level viewing area that will be accessible for those with limited mobility. The adjacent visitor center will complement the elk viewing tower with more than 2,000-square feet of displays, conference facilities, offices and other amenities for visitors, volunteers, researchers and staff. There will also be more than 500-square feet dedi-

cated to the history of the elk program and the reclaimed mine areas where they have been introduced.

Aside from the visitor center, the new facility will feature 3,300-square feet of space designed to meet the unique needs of managing and supporting West Virginia’s growing elk herd, including a lab with an enlarged exterior door and overhead crane system for handling elk, five large equipment bay doors, research facilities, labs, and storage for supplies and equipment.

“This facility will not only provide unparalleled opportunities for the public to connect with nature and witness our majestic elk herd but also plays a crucial role in our ongoing efforts to restore and manage elk populations in West Virginia,” WVDNR Director Brett McMillion said.

“Thanks to the generous support from Gov. Justice, our state and the contributions of our hunting and fishing communities, we are able to bring this project to life. We believe this initiative will serve as a beacon for wildlife enthusiasts, researchers and tourists alike, offering a unique window into the beauty of West Virginia.”

Justice and the WVDNR announced the January that 17 new elk had been transferred to the Tomblin WMA, bringing the state’s growing elk population up to 127. A second transport of 23 elk took place in February.

All 40 elk scheduled to be released this year were transported from the Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area in Kentucky. Partner agencies involved in the capture and release include the West Virginia Department of Agriculture, the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.



Courtesy photo/Governor’s Office

Governor Jim Justice earlier this year announced the construction of a new Tomblin Wildlife Management Area Visitor Center and Elk Viewing Platform in Logan County. Justice and the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources kicked off a program in 2015 to reintroduce wild elk back into the Mountain State.

### About the Elk Restoration Project

The WVDNR launched its Elk Restoration Project in 2016 with the release of 24 elk acquired from the Land Between the Lakes. Since 2018, the WVDNR has introduced 57 elk (15 from Kentucky and 42 from Arizona) to the Tomblin Wildlife Management Area in Logan County.

To raise awareness about its elk restoration project, the WVDNR has offered guided elk tours in Logan County where participants can learn more about the history of elk in West Virginia and get a chance to see elk in a natural setting. Tours are offered in September and October each year and often sell out.

To learn more about the WVDNR’s elk restoration program, visit WVdnr.gov/elk. To download a copy of the WVDNR’s Elk Management Plan, visit WVdnr.gov/publications-and-guides.



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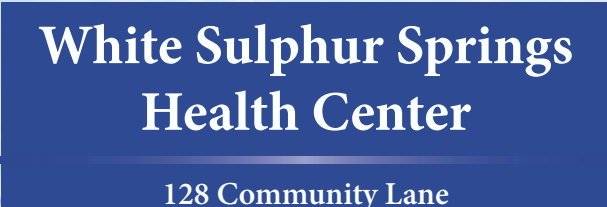
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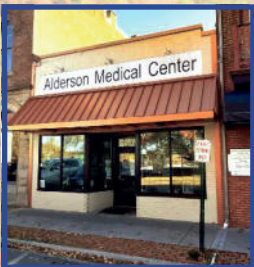
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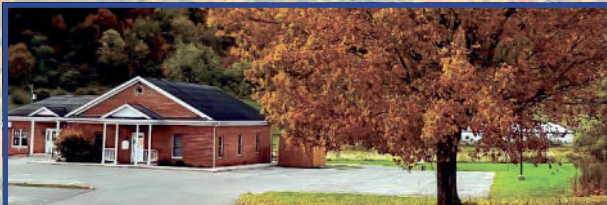
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# Introductions



Steve Keenan/The Fayette Tribune

## SECTION E

Since the New River Gorge National River was redesignated as the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve in early 2021, a number of improvement projects have been completed or are under way at the park, including major updates at the Canyon Rim Visitor Center, pictured. The designation has also led to a lot of changes throughout Fayette County and the region, including a large increase in the number of visitors.





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# RISING NUMBER OF VISITORS BECAUSE OF NATIONAL PARK DESIGNATION BRINGS CHANGES TO CANYON RIM



Steve Keenan/The Fayette Tribune

Since the 2020 redesignation of the New River Gorge National River as the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve, growing numbers of visitors are being introduced to the park, the New River Gorge region, the state of West Virginia and all it has to offer. In January and February this year, the Canyon Rim Visitor Center at Lansing was shut down while extensive upgrades were made. New permanent exhibits were installed inside the center, focusing on the NRGNPP, as well as the Gauley River National Recreation Area and Bluestone National Scenic River. Outdoor art exhibits also were added to the visitor center, which reopened on March 2. The official ribbon-cutting and reopening of the visitor center was held March 21. “It was a good time that this came about,” Dave Bieri, district supervisor, said last week. “Our visitation has gone up so much in the past few years since we got our redesignation. With our national river, we were seeing 340,000 or so coming through Canyon Rim Visitors Center. Last year, we hit 495,000 visitors here. So, with the visitors coming through here rapidly increasing like that (the new exhibits are a plus).” For the complete story, see page 3E.

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Steve Keenan/The Fayette Tribune

Travelers stopping by Canyon Rim Visitor Center examine one of the center’s new exhibits.

Jodi French-Burr/National Park Service

The flora, such as these Virginia bluebells, and fauna of the New River Gorge region is also highlighted in a new exhibit at the Canyon Rim Visitor Center.



## CANYON RIM

FROM 3E

mining. There will be a little bit about the significance of coal mining in the exhibit, and then you’ll find an explorer panel that gets you to go to Nuttallburg or somewhere you can learn more about that.

“Same thing with Thurmond. You can read a little bit about why the railroad is important to this area, and then it will guide you to go down to Thurmond and see it for yourself.

“It’s the jumping-off point to know where you can go anywhere in the park to take a deeper dive into any of these topics.”

Other area parks are not left out of the equation, Bieri explained. “We also wanted to better focus on all of the parks in the area besides New River Gorge,” he said. “Besides the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve, we also manage the Bluestone National Scenic River and the Gauley River National Recreation Area, so we wanted to feature those parks as well.”

The exhibits feature some interactive components. “We tried to not go too high-tech on (the new exhibits),” so they wouldn’t be too disturbed by power outages in the area, he said. “People have been definitely watching the videos.”

A particular popular item of interest has been a replica of a coal mine entrance with some mining equipment and a coal car, he noted.

“It was a good time that this came about,” said Bieri. “Our visitation has gone up so much in the past few years since we got our redesignation. With our national river, we were seeing 340,000 or so coming through Canyon Rim Visitors Center. Last year, we hit 495,000 visitors here.

“So, with the visitors coming through here rapidly increasing like

that (the new exhibits are a plus).”

Also, the timing of the work allowed the new exhibits to reflect the change to national park status from the original national river status.

“It’s great to finally have it all here,” Bieri said.

Among those exploring the new exhibits on March 19 was a couple from South Jersey, Katie Zalan-Korossy and Charlie Smith.

“This is our first visit to West Virginia,” explained Smith as the couple paused while viewing exhibits related to local railroad history and the region’s flora and fauna. “It’s been on my bucket list, especially the bridge. I’m also here for Thurmond, the abandoned town. That’s a couple of things I’ve always been interested in visiting.

“Me and Katie like to take trips for our birthday week, and we decided on West Virginia.”

The couple celebrates birthdays five days apart.

“What sealed the deal for coming here was seeing the Bridge Walk, because that’s just a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity,” Zalan-Korossy said. “So, I started looking for places to stay. We ended up staying in Webster Springs, and we just kind of branched out from there. I think, what, we’ve hit about 10 counties since we’ve been here. Going to Bear Town, Droop Mountain Battlefield, Cranberry Glades, Lewisburg, Lost World Caverns ...”

“This is just spectacular,” she said of the Canyon Rim Visitor Center. “It’s nice to see the antiques and a lot of nice history behind it,” Smith added.

By Tuesday, Zalan-Korossy and Smith had already enjoyed a busy birthday week in West Virginia, making stops throughout the area. A highly-anticipated, first-time excursion with Bridge Walk was on the agenda for Tuesday afternoon.

Email: [skeenan@register-herald.com](mailto:skeenan@register-herald.com); follow on Facebook

# TRAVEL: YESTERDAY AND TODAY



Courtesy photo/USA Cycling

The 2024 USA Cycling Pro Road National Championships will be staged May 14-19 in Charleston. Competitions will include the individual time trial (10.4 miles), criterium (1.0 miles), and road race disciplines (13.1 miles for Elite/U23, and 9.0 miles for junior).

## Road cycling national championships slated for Charleston in May

The 2024 USA Cycling Pro Road National Championships will re-introduce the Kanawha Valley to high-level bicycling competitors late this year.

Over the years, Charleston and the Kanawha Valley have hosted several national-class biking events.

The USA Cycling Professional Road National Championships is USA Cycling’s premier annual road event and will serve as a qualifying event for the U.S. Olympic Team in 2024 and 2028, according to a press release.

Participants will be pursuing their dream of wearing the stars and stripes jersey of the USA Cycling national champion. Professional men and women cyclists, and, new in 2024, up-and-coming racers in the 17-18 and 19-22 age groups, will compete on the roads of downtown Charleston in May.

Competitions will include the individual time trial (10.4 miles), criterium (1.0 miles), and road race disciplines (13.1 miles for Elite/U23, and 9.0 miles for junior).

For more on the race courses, events and other information, visit <https://roadnats.usacycling.org/pro-road> or <https://charlestonwv.com/usa-cycling/>.

...

Charleston Area Medical Center has been chosen as the official medical provider for the prestigious event.

CAMC’s doctors, nurses and other clinical professionals will be along the race courses providing exclusive medical care to the riders.

“CAMC has cared for the most critically injured patients in West Virginia for more than 52 years,” said Glenn Crotty Jr., MD, CAMC president and CEO. “We are proud to serve as the official medical provider of USA Cycling during its events in Charleston.”

According to a press release, CAMC — a level one trauma center — will staff a large medical center in downtown Charleston and several smaller care stations along the race courses.

Additionally, CAMC doctors, nurses, medics and others will be a part of the caravan following riders during the races to provide necessary emergency care during the races.

“An event of this magnitude takes a lot of collaboration among willing partners,” said Tim Brady, president/CEO of the Charleston Convention and Visitors Bureau.

“From the initial conversation, CAMC was eager to pitch in and help make these races a success. This speaks volumes about their feelings for our community.

“We’re grateful to have CAMC as our medical partner in 2024 and beyond.”

Established in 1972, CAMC is a nonprofit, 1,138-bed, regional referral center made up of seven hospitals: CAMC General Hospital, CAMC Greenbrier Valley Medical Center, CAMC Memorial Hospital, CAMC Plateau Medical Center, CAMC Charleston Surgical Hospital, CAMC Teays Valley Hospital and CAMC Women and Children’s Hospital; CAMC Cancer Center (with three locations: Beckley, Charleston and Hurricane); the CAMC Institute for Academic Medicine; and the CAMC Foundation.

For more information, visit [camc.org](http://camc.org) or [vandaliahealth.org](http://vandaliahealth.org).

— Steve Keenan

## EGNOR MONUMENTS

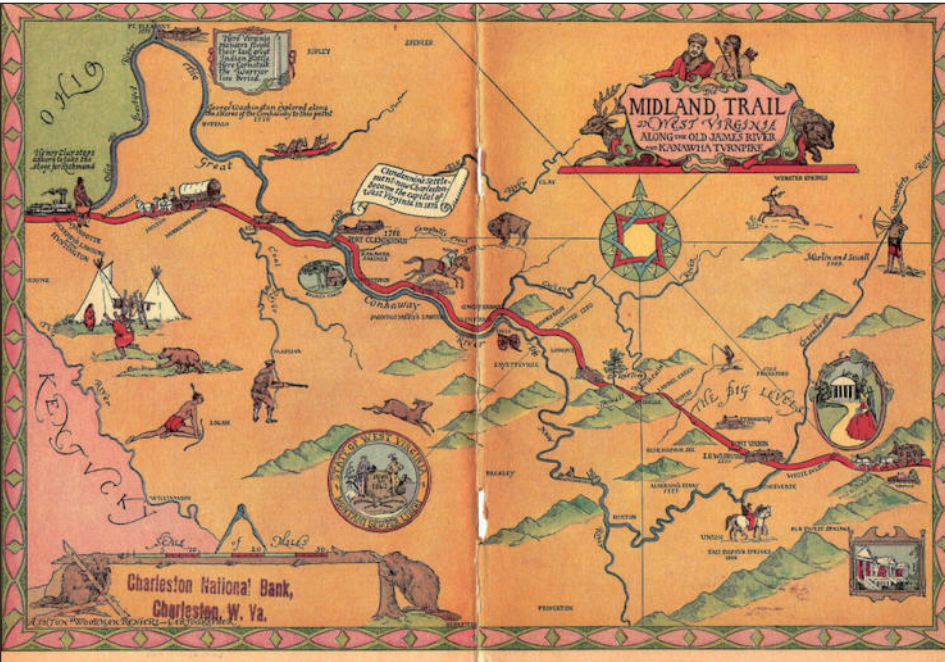
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James Casto/Quarrier Press

**This Midland Trail map** shows the highway following “Along the James River and Kanawha Turnpike” and the Great Conhaway River. It is reprinted from the West Virginia Encyclopedia. The highway, now known as U.S. Route 60 travels east-west through Fayette County.

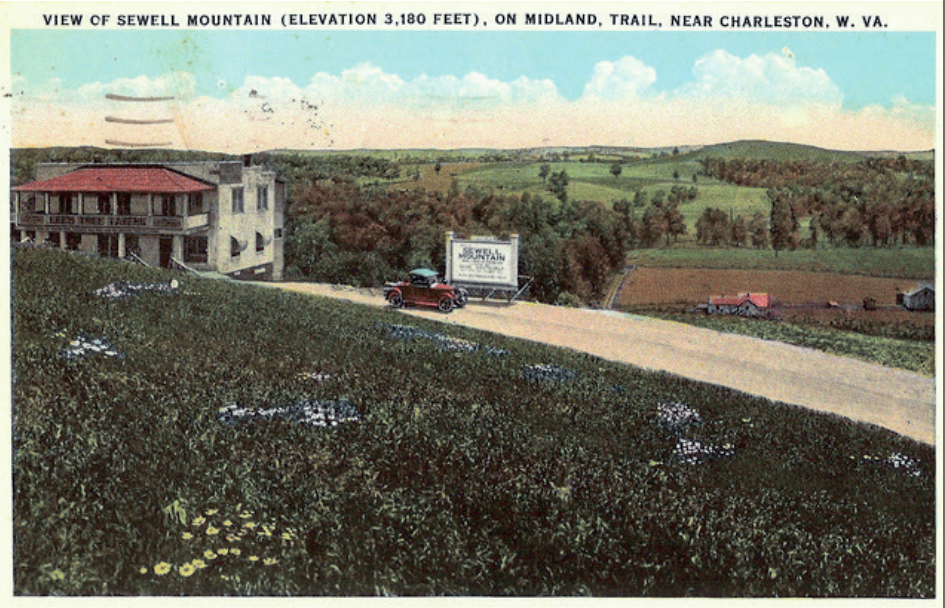
# Traveling the Midland Trail

The Midland Trail is the national east-west automobile route constructed in the 1930s, designated as U.S. 60 and crossing the center of America from the Chesapeake Bay to the Pacific Ocean. In West Virginia, the Midland Trail was the first state-maintained highway. In 1988, the section from White Sulphur Springs to the state capitol was designated as West Virginia’s first state scenic highway. In 2000 this eastern portion of West Virginia’s Midland Trail was designated a national scenic byway, and the state designation as a scenic byway was extended from the state capitol to the Kentucky border at Kenova. This route has an ancient beginning as a buffalo trail and was later used by Indians. In 1774, Gen. Andrew Lewis used it to march his 1,000-man army from today’s Lewisburg to Point Pleasant, where he defeated Chief Cornstalk. In 1824, a private Virgin-

ia company upgraded the route into the James River & Kanawha Turnpike. After 1873, the turnpike fell into disrepair because the Chesapeake & Ohio Railway had been completed from the Chesapeake Bay to the Ohio River. The Midland Trail carried only local traffic during the era of fast and comfortable railway travel. In the 1930s, it was paved and reborn as a national highway after the American Automobile Association asked federal authorities to develop a national highway system. Today the Midland Trail is a tourist destination and historic travel route representing the “Golden Age of the American Automobile.” Rowe, Larry L. “Midland Trail.” e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia (wvencyclopedia.org). 20 September 2023. Web. 26 March 2024.



**The entrance to Babcock State Park** is at the Midland Trail's intersection with State Route 41. The park offers its visitors 4,127 acres of serene yet rugged beauty, a fast-flowing trout stream in a boulder-strewn canyon, and mountain vistas to be viewed from several scenic overlooks. The park, which opened in 1937, was built as a Depression-era public works project, with the main facilities and trails constructed by the young workers of the Civilian Conservation Corps.



**The caption on this vintage postcard**, postmarked 1934, shows the summit of Sewell Mountain on the Midland Trail and describes it as “near Charleston, W.Va.,” although in fact Charleston lies roughly 50 miles to the west. In 1861, Union and Confederate forces both bivouacked on the mountain, though no battle erupted there. It was here that General Robert E. Lee first saw his treasured horse, Traveller, later purchased by Lee for \$200 in Confederate currency.



**Hawks Nest, the site of Hawks Nest State Park**, is a peak on Gauley Mountain near Ansted overlooking the New River Gorge. The cliffs rise above the New River, providing a breathtaking view of the river and the wooded hillsides below. John Marshall, chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, visited the area in 1812, and for a time the cliffs were known as Marshall's Pillars. When the James River & Kanawha Turnpike was constructed in the 1820s, the rocky formation overlooking the gorge became a popular stopping place for travelers. Hawks Nest gets its name from the hawks that ride the thermals between the high cliffs.

# Early European settlers followed trails established by Native Americans

When the first Europeans came to North America, they soon became aware of a network of pathways extending from the Gulf Coast to the Great Lakes and everywhere in between. These pathways, or Indian trails, served as a means of interaction between Native American groups in various cultural regions. The remnants of trails that once crossed what is now West Virginia are links along these major Indian thoroughfares. There was a long-distance trade network in place throughout North America for thousands of years. Marine shell and native copper were traded between the Great Lakes region and the Gulf Coast as early as 6000 B.C. In the Ohio Valley, copper ornaments and marine shell beads have been found at Adena mounds dating from 400 to 200 B.C. Many of the routes used by these early groups were still in use when the first European settlers arrived, and frequently these same routes became major highways. Some are still in use today. In the 1920s, William E. Myer, working for the Bureau of American Ethnology, began a study of colonial period Indian trails in the Southeast. Myer died before his work was published, but his efforts produced a map illustrating regional interaction pathways, several of which span West Virginia. Most of the regional trails also have local names. The Great Indian Warpath was one of the most important north-south trails in eastern North America. The route originated in the Southeast, in Creek territory, and extended north through eastern Tennessee, where it split into the Ohio Branch and the Chesapeake

Branch. The Ohio Branch continued through southwestern Virginia, to the New River, then along the Kanawha River to the Ohio River, where it met other important trails and continued north to Lake Erie. The portion of the trail that followed the Kanawha River is also called the Kanawha or Buffalo Trail. The Midland Trail, U.S. 60, part of which was also the Kanawha Trail, follows the course of another old Indian trail from the Kanawha Valley to Virginia. The Chesapeake Branch of the Great Indian Warpath proceeded north through the Valley of Virginia. This route, also called the Warrior Path, passed through present West Virginia for only a short distance in the Eastern Panhandle, where it paralleled modern Interstate 81 and U.S. 11. There were numerous other Indian trails throughout Western Virginia. Many followed the river valleys, including the Paint Creek Trail, the Big Sandy Trail, the Guyandotte Trail, the Coal River Trail, and the Little Kanawha Trail. The Scioto-Monongahela Trail connected Lower Shawnee Town, in Ohio, to the Monongahela Valley and proceeded north into Pennsylvania. U.S. 50 now parallels its approximate course. The Seneca Trail was another important north-south route that began in Seneca territory in New York and stretched south through Pennsylvania into Western Virginia, through the Tygart and Greenbrier valleys, to the New River. U.S. 219 parallels the main branch of the Seneca Trail in West Virginia. Spencer, Darla S. “Indian Trails.” e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia (wvencyclopedia.org). 26 October 2010. Web. 26 March 2024.



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Courtesy photo/WV Tourism

**The New River Gorge Bridge**, known by most travelers as simply one more part of a well-kept highway system that allows them to reach their destinations with little trouble, means much more to residents of Fayette County and its surrounding area. With the completion of the New River Gorge Bridge, local residents wanting to travel from Lansing to Fayetteville faced about a 45-minute trek into the New River Gorge, across what is now known as the Tunney Hunsaker Memorial Bridge and back out of the gorge. Today that journey is slashed to about a minute. Aside from the conveniences brought to travel, the bridge has also become a West Virginia icon, chosen to represent the state on the state quarter and earning its own postage stamp. The bridge has become the site of the largest one-day festival in West Virginia and also serves as a site for brave adventurers to cross the catwalk under the bridge, nearly 876-feet above the New River.

## New River Gorge Bridge makes incredible difference in local travel

The New River Gorge Bridge in Fayette County is one of West Virginia’s best-known landmarks. At 876 feet above the riverbed, the bridge is the third-highest in the United States. Until 2003 it had the world’s longest single-arch steel span.

Local residents had long recognized the need for improved transportation in the New River Gorge area. Until the New River Gorge Bridge was constructed, traveling from one side of the gorge to the other took 45 minutes or more.

The establishment of Appalachian Development Highway System, a program of the Appalachian Regional Commission, made the New River Gorge Bridge project possible. In 1967, the West Virginia Road Commission hired the engineering firm Michal Baker Jr., Inc. to design an 11-mile section of Appalachian Corridor L, including a bridge to span the gorge. Engineers considered three different bridge designs

before selecting the steel arch design.

Construction began in the summer of 1973. In June 1974, the first steel was positioned over the gorge by trolleys operating on 3,500-foot cables strung between 330-foot towers on each side of the gorge. The arch and deck of the bridge were constructed as a truss. The arch was designed to support most of the gravity load, and hanging beams connecting the deck to the arch below were built to carry lateral loads. The bridge was built by the American Bridge Division of U.S. Steel. Construction took more than three years.

The length of the New River Gorge Bridge is 3,030 feet, and the arch length is 1,700 feet. The width of the deck is 69 feet, four inches. The bridge weighs 88 million pounds (44,000 tons), including 44 million pounds of steel. The arch alone weighs more than 21 million pounds. A special steel, designed

to rust to a durable, attractive finish, was used to avoid the need for repainting.

About 30,000 people turned out for the dedication of the bridge on October 22, 1977. The \$37 million project completed the last link of Corridor L (U.S. 19), reducing to one minute the driving time across the New River Gorge and providing a popular shortcut between Interstate 79 near Sutton and the West Virginia Turnpike north of Beckley. From 1979 to 1994, traffic along the shortened route nearly quadrupled to more than 10,000 cars and trucks daily. By 2009, nearly 26,000 vehicles crossed the bridge each day.

Annually, on the third Saturday of October since 1980, the bridge has been closed for Bridge Day, West Virginia’s largest one-day festival. Pedestrians are permitted on the bridge on Bridge Day, and rappellers and parachutists from around the world come to test

their skills.

The National Park Service operates Canyon Rim Visitor Center just north of the bridge on U.S. 19, introducing tourists to the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve and offering a fine view of the soaring structure. Since 2010, special tours have allowed visi-

tors to walk the catwalk under the deck of the bridge while secured by safety cables.

In 2005, West Virginia residents voted to have an image of the New River Gorge Bridge on the state quarter, and in 2011, the bridge was featured on a U.S. Postal Service stamp. On August 14, 2013, the bridge

was added to the National Register of Historic Places for its achievements in engineering and for its contributions to transportation.

Sonis, Larry “New River Gorge Bridge,” e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia (wvencyclopedia.org). 27 June 2023. Web. 22 March 2024.

File photo

**Crews move the last steel beam** into place on the New River Gorge Bridge. Construction on the bridge began in the summer and 1973 and the dedication ceremony was held Oct. 22, 1977.



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# Introductions



## SECTION

F

Debra Parker/For The Fayette Tribune

“This is why we say Almost Heaven WV,” local photographer Debra Parker of Mamaw’s House wrote on her Facebook post late last summer. More and more people from around the world are discovering what Fayette countians and West Virginians have always known. Several publications, ranging from USA Today and a wide array of additional newspapers to National Geographic, Time and Outside magazines, have profiled and recognized the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve as a must-visit location. As the West Virginia Tourism Department says, “Find Your Own #AlmostHeaven.”

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Steve Keenan/The Fayette Tribune

Tyler Bragg, left, Oak Hill GIS director, and Josh Sapio, the city's parks and recreation director, stand at the Needleseye Park trailhead in February.

# Outdoor recreation, activities are big focus in Oak Hill

**By Steve Keenan**  
THE FAYETTE TRIBUNE

OAK HILL — As 2024 marches on, more and more activity will be seen at the city's Needleseye Park and on the local recreation scene as the push for expanded outdoor recreation projects widens, officials say.

In mid-February, bids were sought for a contractor to perform work on about 7 miles of soft surface trails at Needleseye Park, according to Tyler Bragg, the Oak Hill GIS director. In a legal notice for the project, the City of Oak Hill, in partnership with the New River Gorge Regional Development Authority, sought qualified natural soft surface trail builders to construct 7 miles of shared-use and bike-only singletrack at Needleseye. The preferred completion date for the work is by November 2024. The deadline for submission of quotes was March 11.

"There's definitely a lot going on," Bragg said in a February interview. "It's really a focus on

outdoor recreation recently, from not only on a local level but at the state level and the national level ... We've really got a lens on outdoor recreation right now, so we're just trying to take advantage of that."

The soft surface trail work is a continuance of efforts to expand Needleseye for use by hikers, bikers, climbers, bird watchers and others since the city acquired the nearly 300-acre site from Berwind Land Company in 2017.

In 2021, the Fayette Trail Coalition developed a soft surface trails master plan in collaboration with several other organizations. Needleseye Park is a component of that plan, along with Wolf Creek Park, Fayette County Park and Fayetteville Town Park.

"FTC is very excited by the momentum on implementing the soft surface trail that we finalized in 2021 in collaboration with WVU's Outdoor Economic Development Collaborative," Abbie Newell, president of the Fayette Trail Coalition,

said in February. "There has been a tremendous amount of effort done to get this far and we truly appreciate how hard the City of Oak Hill has worked to make this happen. They have had a vision for Needleseye Park for a long time and we are pleased to partner with them on the trail component."

"In the next year we hope to see the multi-use trails built and the community be able to enjoy them. Beyond the Needleseye project, we hope to have the opportunity to work with the City of Oak Hill on any future trail projects."

Bragg said the recent advertised work will primarily be geared at constructing trails inside Needleseye. "With the construction, that provides a very feasible connection to the Rend Trail down in Minden," he said. One of the trails will present the chance for short connectivity between Needleseye and Rend, which is on National Park Service property.

Josh Sapio, Oak Hill's

parks and recreation director, stressed that the trails will be multi-use trails.

"There's been a lot of trail design work that's happened, and trail flagging, and there's been trailhead development," said Bragg. Workshops have also been staged with the primary stakeholders to discuss trailheads, parking and other issues.

"Several months ago, we secured engineering services from Thrasher Engineering for the final design of the trailhead," said Bragg. A conceptual plan has been

finalized, and the process has moved into the construction drawing phase.

Tree clearing for the trailhead was expected to be completed by the end of March, involving 0.5 acres of land being

NEEDLESEYE 3F



An 18-hole disc golf course will be among the many amenities offered at Needleseye Park.



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NEEDLESEYE

FROM 2F

cleared for an expanded parking lot at the trailhead. As far as trailhead construction, Bragg said an anticipated completion date wasn’t firm earlier this year, but “we hope as we approach next fall we’ll be pretty close to completion.” According to Sapio, a restroom facility with ADA capabilities, as well as a trailhead kiosk, are in the plans, too. A pavilion has been erected onsite. Sapio said that currently a blue blazed single-track trail that advances into the western territory of the park, beginning at the parking area, is in operation at Needleseye. “Currently blazed, in existence and being used. Multi-use. We are seeing people bike on it,” he said. Also, an 18-hole disc golf course is being completed at the park. The course is in existence and being used some now, although it was not fully complete in late winter. As of mid-February, there were 18 baskets in place, throwing lanes were cut and being finalized, and work was ongoing on installing the concrete tee pads. At the time, 10 were in place, with 16 more to go and “hopefully that work gets done this spring,” Sapio noted. Bragg estimated an overall spring or summer completion of the disc golf course. “The months ahead will hopefully be busy months,” he said. Rock climbers, original explorers of the land about three decades ago, have remained active at Needleseye. “Climbers are certainly out there,” said Sapio. “They were the probably the first ones to experience the park back in the ‘90s. They are certainly out there now, and putting up routes and advertising those routes via the Mountain Project.” Sapio also said that Bragg is compiling a map of the entire cliff system with route names. Bragg estimated between 20 and 30 recognized routes at this point and “probably more.” He said it’s very likely there are numerous routes of which city officials aren’t aware. The aim is to secure historical information, route names, etc. “Climbers are telling us that there are probably easily a couple hundred routes that could go in there,” said Sapio.

• • •

As the warmer months approach, several projects are planned by the Oak Hill Parks and Recreation Department. Among the activities will be hiking events, a kids naturalist program, a rails-to-trails day and a fun day at Russell Matthews Park, according to Sapio. Below is information on some of the activities:

- Join the city for a hike at Needleseye Park from 1 to 4 p.m. on Saturday, April 13 and Sunday, Aug. 4. A professional guide will lead participants on an interpretive hike into the park to explore the Needleseye Boulder and other notable rock features. A round-trip hike over moderate terrain will be approximately 2 miles. Closed toed footwear, appropriate clothing, water and snacks are encouraged.
- Celebrate Trails Day on the White Oak Rail Trail on Saturday, April 27 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Meet at the train depot.

The parks and recreation department and the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy will sponsor the event. Activities that day will include trash pickup, a 2-mile fun run for all ages, a free bike maintenance station, a group bike ride and food trucks onsite.

- A Kids Naturalist Program will be held at Needleseye Park from 1 to 5 p.m. on Saturday, June 22 and Saturday, July 20. Children ages 5-12 accompanied by family members or guardians are invited to take part in the free program.
- Fun in the Park Day at Russell E. Mathews Park in Harlem Heights will be staged on Saturday, July 13 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. There will be hot dogs, ice cream and fun and games.

According to Sapio, an active recreation committee is meeting monthly in the city. For more information on the upcoming activities, visit <https://oakhillwv.gov/> or <https://www.facebook.com/p/Oak-Hill-Info-100064764034679/>.

Meanwhile, work on city park improvements according to the city master plan has continued in recent months, although there was somewhat of a break in construction during the winter, Bragg noted.

“The project’s going to run a little later in the year this summer than we originally anticipated,” he said. Park construction completion is expected by the end of July and “definitely before fall,” Bragg said. And, work by the American Ramp Company on the new skate park is expected to begin this spring and will require about two months for completion. “We’re hoping for mid- to late-summer,” Bragg said.

In recent months, city crews removed rail track around the park area, and they have also performed

NEEDLESEYE 4F

Debra Parker/For The Fayette Tribune

Bouldering, rappelling, and climbing, such as this pictured above in the New River Gorge, are being enjoyed at Oak Hill’s Needleseye Park.

Steve Keenan/The Fayette Tribune



Josh Sapio and Tyler Bragg walk down the Needleseye Trail.



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**Steve Keenan**/The Fayette Tribune

**Aaron Kemlock, left, Josh Howell, Jason Wilkinson and Andy Kees are the new owners** of Bridge Haven Golf Club near Fayetteville. The club has been rebranded as Bridge Haven on the Gorge. They purchased the 18-hole course in late 2023, and a ribbon-cutting/member day is planned in early April to welcome the public.

# Bridge Haven on the Gorge looks ahead to future

**By Steve Keenan**  
THE FAYETTE TRIBUNE

There's "never a bad day at the golf course," says Josh Howell.

Howell and some of his longtime golfing buddies now own a golf course and look forward to spending some more quality time on the links while also operating the course from the business end.

The corporation they formed to oversee the operation is Stripe Show Golf Inc. (two of the partners, Howell and Jason Wilkinson) are sports referees. "That's kind of how we came up with that name," said Howell, the president of the corporation.

"We all four played together all the time," he said. "We're good friends, and it's something that we talked about, not being serious but 'hey, it'd be cool.'"

Howell says he's been a Bridge Haven member since 1995. "I worked here right out of high school for three or four years while I was in college," he said. "I kinda grew up here."

Partner Aaron Kemlock has been a member since the club opened in 1992. "Aaron and I worked here together," said Howell.

The Stripe Show ownership group includes:

• Howell, who is president of the corporation and will primarily oversee the operations and activities of the greens crew. He is married to Amanda Howell, and they have two children, Isaiah and Isabella.

• Wilkinson, the corporation vice-president who will oversee primarily the online presence and marketing of the course. A club member for three years, Jason is married to Kerry-Ann Wilkinson. He has one daughter, Indiya Lawson.

- **Andy Kees** will serve as the secretary and will oversee operations and activities of the clubhouse. He has

been a Bridge Haven member for six years. Andy is married to Amber Kees and they have two children, Kendrick and Kamren.

• Jodie Kemlock is the Stripe Show treasurer and will oversee the golf course's finances. She is married to Aaron Kemlock, who has 11 Bridge Haven club championships to his credit, including 2023. They have three children, Brandt, Blake and Brynne.

Once mainly a pipe dream and the source of simple clubhouse chatter, the proposition to purchase the course grew more serious as time went on, according to Howell.

"The golf course wasn't actively for sale," he said. "But, we just got together and came up with a number and approached the owners."

They originally weren't interested, he said. Eventually, the men began talking more in earnest with owners Gerry, Margaret and Terry Hildebrand.

"At that point, it became real," Howell said. The entire purchase process took about eight months, he noted, with the sale being finalized on Dec. 21.

"They've been great throughout the whole process," Howell said of the Hildebrands. "They've been very helpful."

Bridge Haven on the Gorge, located at 295 Browns Road, Fayetteville, is an 18-hole course.

“We’ve got some projects planned,” Howell said. “We like the layout of the course, we always have. But there’s just a few things we want to do as far as toughening up the course, if you want to play it tough.”

"So, we're going to add a set of tees. Black tees, we're going to try to add 300 or 400 yards to the total yardage of the course. Now, it's 6,200 from



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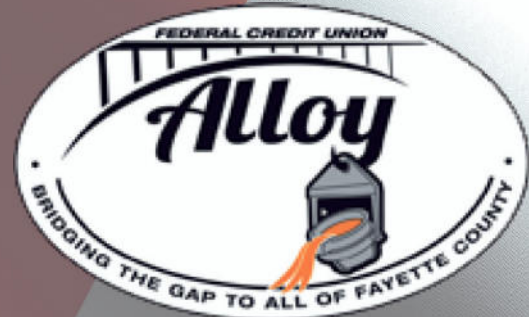


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Scott Abbott/For The Fayette Tribune

Josh Howell, left, Andy Kees, Aaron Kemlock and Jason Wilkinson posed for a photo at Bridge Haven last fall.



Scott Abbott/For The Fayette Tribune

The Bridge Haven on the Gorge family is shown.

## BRIDGE HAVEN

### FROM 4F

from the blue tees, 5,900 from the white. We'll try to bump it up to 6,500 for the black tees (par 70)."

"What we would like to do is be able to host West Virginia Open qualifiers, West Virginia Amateur qualifiers, things like that," he said. The course isn't currently set up to do that, but the planned work "is hopefully going to get us there."

Bridge Haven will host a West Virginia Golf Association Senior Series event on Aug. 14.

The club will continue to host its club championship, and also being considered are member-member and member-guest tournaments.

"I would like to hold a two-day event (possibly called New River Gorge Open or New River Gorge Invitational) and try to bring in some of the best amateurs in the state," Howell added. That could possibly occur in August or September. "We play in all the Amateur events, so we have a lot of friends that would come and support us."

Local high schools, WVU Tech and Concord University also utilize or plan to utilize the course for either practice or matches. Ten or so charity events such as scrambles are held at Bridge Haven annually, as well as 5-7 other tournaments, he said.

What changes are in the future? According to an information sheet provided by the owners, all current lifetime memberships will be honored.

Howell said there will be "improvement in tee boxes, bunkers, driving range, as well as more variety in regards to tees and pin placements. Hopefully, we're going to try to put all the money back into the golf course."

Memberships for 2024 will be considered family memberships. Up to five family members will be allowed on the membership, including two adults and up to three children. The family members must reside in the same household, and the children must be enrolled in higher education or be 18-and-under.

Membership payments are due by April 1.

Annual dues will be \$400 for returning members and \$500 for new members. Driving range balls won't be included in membership dues package, but an annual range plan will be available for \$100 per membership that allows up to two buckets per day per member.

While the new owners say they realize the prices equate to a small increase in the current pricing, they stress that some new additions will "offset those costs and

enhance your playing and membership experience."

That includes a variety of areas, such as the club not charging a fee for using a credit or debit card for clubhouse purchases; tee times being blocked off in certain windows on weekends and holidays for members and their guests who are renting golf carts; golf cart rental prices and Senior Day prices not changing for 2024; verified first responders, law enforcement, teachers, military and out-of-town (30-plus miles) memberships will be offered a 10 percent discount and range plan discount; and numerous other perks.

The course is open daily "any day over 40 degrees," Howell said. During the summer, tee times start at 7:30 a.m. and the course remains open until dark. "Right now, we basically play it by ear for the weather, usually 9:30 to 10," Howell said of spring tee times.

An April 6 member day will serve as a grand opening, he said. Members play for free, and cart fees won't be charged. There will be food for everyone, and the sessions will run from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 2 to 6 p.m.

Bridge Haven membership in 2023 was in excess of 200, and "we hope to increase on that," said Howell. "Golf is growing."

"It's pretty cool," he concluded. "We are pretty excited."

"I'm a lowly basketball referee, now a golf course owner."

For more information, call 1-304-574-2120 or visit <https://bridgehavengolf.com/>.

. . .

Below is a brief club history as taken from the club's website:

"Bridge Haven Golf Club opened in 1992 under the guidance, design and management of Mike White and Roger Flint. Mike, a local golf legend, grew up in Raleigh County and played on multiple professional tours around the world, including the PGA Tour. His success on the South African tour led to his nickname 'King White.' Roger was a local businessman who managed the course for nearly two decades and oversaw the expansion of the course from nine holes to 18 holes in 1995. Mike is generally credited with the design of the front nine, while Roger is credited with the design of the back nine.

"Being silent partners, essentially since the opening of the course, Gerry and Terry Hildebrand took over the day-to-day operations nearly 15 years ago and provided a solid management style that allowed the course to weather the difficult economic conditions in the early and mid-2010s. While many golf courses closed through-

out the United States, and several closing in Southern West Virginia, Bridge Haven continued to flourish.

"In the summer of 2023, the Hildebrands entered into an agreement to sell the golf course and that transaction came to fruition

in December 2023 when the new ownership group completed the purchase transaction. The new ownership group is no stranger to golf, and no stranger to Bridge Haven."

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Steve Keenan/The Fayette Tribune (2)

Author/photographer Mark Romano, right, listened as Goldie Webb revealed some of her memories in 2019. Webb is one of the crucial figures in the “One Lives One Dies” storyline.

# Photographer/author helping honor the past

By Steve Keenan  
THE FAYETTE TRIBUNE

Mark Romano is among those who realize it’s not wise to allow those who came before us to exit into history without acknowledging them.

Over the past several years, Romano — a Cowen-based photographer and author — has crafted a series of books chronicling letters and interactions between two World War II soldiers and their families, girlfriends and others. The first book of the series was entitled “One Lives One Dies.” The series received its genesis when Romano was given “a box of dusty old letters found in a corn crib,” he said in the past.

Along the way, partly as a means to finance the film he wants to make to help bring the books to life, Romano has embarked on a series of county historical photo books. The first offering along those lines, “A Pictorial History of Mercer County,” was published recently and is currently available for purchase at several Mercer County locations. The two planned pictorials next up will cover Webster and Greenbrier counties.

From the three pictorial books, Romano says his aim is to generate some of the necessary funding for a movie planned based on “One Lives One Dies.”

In the first book based on the correspondence, eight of the nine soldiers from the Landisburg/Danese community that were killed in action during World War II and the beginning of the Korean War, were related, Romano said.

“One Lives One Dies” features 33 chapters. “These two solders (Junior Smith and Bud Webb) write home to their loved ones and they talk about

people they meet along the way.

“We go into details of about 15 other soldiers (most West Virginians, but also hailing from other states). They all have their own characteristics.”

Their stories are told through actual journals, letters, interviews and photographs.

The first book was published in February 2022 on Amazon.

Hershel “Woody” Williams, a World War II Medal of Honor recipient for his service with the United States Marine Corps, provided a testimonial for the book. It read as follows: “This book is down-to-earth reading on real life. It will recall many memories of those living in the times of great anxiety of hardship. To those never experiencing war and sacrifice, the book will give a sense of the real meaning of freedom and loyalty to America. It is easy reading and easy to understand, as well as historical. I recommend it and encourage its reading.”

A chapter of the book is also dedicated to recollections from Williams on his military career.

“This would make a great TV series, sort of like M\*A\*S\*H\*,” Romano said.

The second book in this series was titled “One Loves.” One of the subjects, Goldie Webb, turned 100 right before the book was published, and she passed away the next week, Romano explained. “She was able to see the book based on her and her fiancé at the time, Bud (Webb),” he said.

“Goldie is really the heart of the story, but it’s really between these two men,” Romano said. “She played music, she was in a band, she painted, she worked at the clothespin factory,

HONOR HISTORY 7F



Goldie Webb sits in her home in 2019 with marks depicting family members' growth landmarks in the foreground.

## AccessHealth moves to new location for Fayette clinic

FAYETTEVILLE — AccessHealth is excited to announce the relocation of its Fayette clinic to a new, more accessible location, aimed at providing enhanced healthcare services to the residents of Fayette County. The move underscores AccessHealth’s commitment to improving community health outcomes and ensuring convenient access to quality care for all.

The new Fayette clinic, located at 5493 Maple Lane, Fayetteville, WV, will offer an expanded range of medical services, including primary care, preventive screenings, immunizations, chronic disease management, and behavioral health services. The larger facility will accommodate more patients and provide a comfortable environment for consultations and treatments.

AccessHealth remains dedicated to fostering a culture of wellness and

promoting healthy lifestyles within Fayette County. The new clinic’s strategic location will make it more convenient for residents to access vital healthcare services, promoting overall well-being and improving health outcomes across the community.

Patients can expect the same compassionate care and personalized attention that AccessHealth is known for, delivered by a team of experienced healthcare professionals dedicated to making a positive difference in the lives of their patients.

The relocation of the Fayette clinic is part of AccessHealth’s ongoing efforts to expand its footprint and reach more communities with high-quality healthcare services. By investing in modern facilities and strategic locations, AccessHealth aims to create lasting impacts on community health and well-being.

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New River Health (NRH) opened its comprehensive health services facility on Mall Rd. in Oak Hill in the fall of 2022, which followed new sites at Summersville and Smithers.

Started in a Scarbro storefront in 1978, NRH was part of the UMWA’s push to help increase health care accessibility to miners and their families.

From five employees to 175 staff members, NRH serves patients in Raleigh, Nicholas and Fayette County, and has built a reputation for quality care and community advocacy.

CEO John Schultz describes NRH as a ‘hometown’ business. “Employees are part of a family-oriented organization, where we try to ease patients’ apprehensions, respect their challenges, and care for them holistically.”



**Dr. Jodie Posey-Bucks, OB-GYN**

Originally from St. Mary’s, Dr. Posey-Bucks earned her BS in Biology prior to attending the WVU School of Medicine, where she completed her residency in Obstetrics and Gynecology.

Board certified in Obstetrics and Gynecology, Dr. Posey-Bucks started at New River Health Oak Hill and Summersville in October. Although specializing in women’s health, she has a keen interest in helping puberty age girls and young women.

Why New River Health? “I love NRH provides for all patients’ needs. We have family medicine, pediatrics, women’s health, behavioral health, dental, Xray, lab, and more, all in one convenient location. It’s great to work among providers, who collaborate to get patients the care they need.”

In her spare time, Dr. Posey-Bucks enjoys camping, hiking, and traveling with her family.

“I also enjoy landscape and wildlife photography, which I try to incorporate into our many adventures. Sometimes my children are the ‘wildlife’ in my pictures.”



**Cassie Wilson, FNP-BC**

During a introductory LPN program, I witnessed the birth of a baby. That experience hooked me. After I graduated from Bluefield State University with a BSN, I went on to Marshall University, where I earned my master’s degree as a nurse practitioner.

My medical experiences are varied, but taking care of women’s needs throughout the stages of life is relatable to me. I look forward to completing my women’s health nurse practitioner (WHNP) certification.

My clinical interests include:

- Contraception care & management (IUD, Nexplanon)
- Well-woman exams (breast & cervical cancer screening)
- Perimenopause & Menopausal issues
- Prenatal & postpartum care (national certification: outpatient obstetrics)

“My passion is caring for women throughout the stages of their life from adolescence to menopause. As a native of West Virginia, I will stay close to home, caring for friends and family.”



**Kara “Shae” Criswell, PA**

With compassion as vast as her experience, Shae welcomes children of all ages at NRH Oak Hill.

Sinceher 2019 graduation from the UC Physician Assistant program, Shae focused on pediatrics after experience in family and emergencymedicine, women’s health and internal medicine. In addition to a long list of honors and awards, Shae volunteers in her community.

Working first for NRH in school health,she moved into pediatrics at NRH OakHill this fall.

Shae welcomes new patients and sees children for sick and well visits, vaccines, ADHD diagnosis and treatment, early vision screenings for infants, and continual care, treatment and follow-ups.

The eldest of six, Shae says taking care of children comes naturally to her.

“Pediatrics has always been a passion of mine. I could not imagine a career in anything else.”

**New River Health – Medical Sites**

<b>Oak Hill</b> Oak Hill 497 Mall Road Oak Hill, WV 25901	<b>Sophia</b> 302 West Main Street Sophia, WV 25921	<b>Smithers GATEWAY Center</b> 2 Greyhound Lane, Smithers, WV 25186	<b>Summersville</b> 315 Fairview Hgts. Rd. Summersville WV 26651
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**New River Health - Pharmacies**

New River Health Pharmacy 217 W. Maple Ave./Fayetteville Open M-F Open to the Public	New River Pharmacy Smithers-GATEWAY Next to Valley PreK-8 Open M-F Open to the Public	New River Health Pharmacy 302 West Main St./Sophia Open M-F (NRHA patients only)	New River Health Pharmacy 497 Mall Rd. / Oak Hill Open M-F (Open to the Public)
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**New River Health - Dental Offices**

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**New River Health - School Health Sites**

- Coal City Elementary School
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- NRP/OHM
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  - Oak Hill High School
- New River Intermediate
  - Summersville Middle School
  - Nicholas County High School

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