

Stay Connected with McDowell

McDowell County is an American story that deserves a new chapter—one filled with promise, with goodwill, with the type of shared commitment that offers solid reasons to believe in a brighter future. Be a part of this historic partnership and show your support for McDowell's children and the greater community by joining the effort at www.reconnectingmcdowell.org.

Reconnecting McDowell Achieves Significant Accomplishments in First Year

- **Broadband Internet service** to all McDowell County public schools and 10,000 homes through a \$9.7 million investment by Shentel Communications.
- **4,500 free books** provided to McDowell County children through First Book.
- **New band instruments** valued at \$30,000 for Mount View High School from the VH1 Save the Music Foundation.

These are just a few of the accomplishments achieved through the Reconnecting McDowell initiative launched just one year ago—and there is so much more to come.

Reconnecting McDowell launched on Dec. 16, 2011, as a comprehensive, long-term effort to make educational improvement in McDowell County the route to a brighter economic future.

Nearly 40 original partners from the business, foundation, government, non-profit and labor sectors committed to the collaborative effort to seek solutions to the county's complex problems. There are now more than 110 partners and friends, which gives you a sense of the interest and impact that Reconnecting McDowell is generating.

Many state and local businesses and organizations are Reconnecting McDowell partners, including Grace Bible Church, Pioneer Community Bank, Southern Highlands Community Mental Health Center and the West Virginia National Guard. The National Guard works in the county in many ways, from providing disaster relief and school-based anti-drug programs to promoting economic development.

"I take a lot of hope from the reaction of the high school students I meet who see many opportunities for them and their communities because of Reconnecting McDowell," says Col. James Runyon of the West Virginia National Guard. "They see Reconnecting McDowell making big, positive changes, as well as inspiring them to get involved to make



Students at Mount View High School participating in an online Spanish class.

their county more livable." Col. Runyon is a member of Reconnecting McDowell's Jobs and the Economy subcommittee and is assisting Peni Adams of the McDowell County Economic Development Authority with a comprehensive SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis to help county businesses and nonprofits work together more effectively and efficiently, and to improve the business culture in the county.

One of those McDowell students willing to roll up her sleeves is Phyllis Waldron, a senior at River View High School. At a recent student roundtable convened by the U.S. Department of Education, she noted that "you can't complain about what you don't have, if you don't give back." Several other high school students echoed that sentiment and said they want to return to McDowell County after attending college to start businesses, health clinics and serve as role models for younger students to stay in school and graduate. The students also noted that teacher and school staff turnover has been hard on them during their school years and that this problem must be addressed.

Many people, not just students, point to the long-standing teacher shortage and high staff turnover rate in McDowell as an impediment to school improvement. Combating this problem will require multifaceted solutions that focus on housing, transportation and technology. "Reconnecting McDowell is still exploring all possibilities to cre-

ate a teacher village and other high-quality affordable housing options; establishing a teacher-in-residence program in partnership with Concord University; and increasing recreational, dining and shopping choices for all residents of McDowell County to attract and retain a robust teaching corps," says Bob Brown, project manager for Reconnecting McDowell.

The work has just begun

Here are some of the projects that Reconnecting McDowell partners are continuing to implement:

- **McDowell County Innovation Zone:** Thanks to legislation passed unanimously by the state Legislature, McDowell public schools will have the flexibility and authority to use cutting-edge strategies to raise academic achievement. The legislation calls for community-based decision-making on programs and budgets to best fit the needs of schools, students and educators.
- **Teacher-in-Residence Program:** In 2013, McDowell schools will be able to participate in this program to fill open teaching positions, while attracting well-prepared local teachers to the county schools.
- **Family Literacy Centers:** Centers with books from First Book and reading tips for parents will be established in 10 locations throughout McDowell, including schools, early childhood education centers and a WIC center.

Many other projects are on the horizon to help improve McDowell County's education system, community services and economic prospects. Stay tuned and get involved. By working together, we can make McDowell a better and easier place to live, work and grow. As AFT President Randi Weingarten said at the Reconnecting McDowell launch: "McDowell County is an American story that deserves a new chapter. Given the challenges, being conventional won't be good enough. We will be flexible, creative and entrepreneurial, and will take risks."

Reconnecting McDowell Partners and Friends

American Federation of Teachers	DonorsChoose.org	McDowell County Commission on Aging	Tug River Health Association Inc.	West Virginia Department of Education and the Arts
West Virginia Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin	Edvantia	McDowell County Economic Development Authority	United Food and Commercial Workers Union, Local 400	West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources
Gayle Manchin, vice president of West Virginia Board of Education	Edwards Educational Services	McDowell County Juvenile Drug Court	United Mine Workers of America	West Virginia Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management
AFL-CIO Housing Trust	Epsilen	McDowell County Redevelopment Authority	U.S. Department of Agriculture	West Virginia Education Association
AFT-West Virginia	FACES	Mountaineer ChallenNGe Academy	U.S. Department of Education	West Virginia GEAR UP
Alliance for Excellent Education	First Book	New River Community and Technical College	U.S. Rep. Nick Rahall	West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission
Alpha Natural Resources	Frontier Communications	Office of Management and Budget/Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs	U.S. Sen. Joe Manchin	West Virginia Housing Development Fund
Appalachian Power Arch Coal	Globaloria	Ohio-West Virginia State YMCA	U.S. Sen. Jay Rockefeller	West Virginia National Guard
Benedum Foundation	Grace Bible Church	Pioneer Community Bank	Vera Institute of Justice	West Virginia PTA
Bluefield State College	Harvard University—Advanced Leadership Initiative	Preston Scheffnacker Properties	Verizon	West Virginia School Boards Association
BlueGreen Alliance	Highland Community Builders	Rahall Appalachian Transportation Institute	VH1 Save the Music Foundation	West Virginia School Service Personnel Association
Bowles Rice McDavid Graff & Love	Highmark West Virginia Inc.	Reba Honaker, Mayor of Welch	Wastewater Treatment Coalition of McDowell County	West Virginia Sen. H. Truman Chafin
Building America Community Development Enterprise	Hope Community Development Corporation	Robert C. Byrd Center for Rural Health	West Virginia AFL-CIO	West Virginia Sen. John Pat Fanning
Catholic Charities West Virginia	Human Resource Development & Employment Inc.	Save the Children—U.S. Programs	West Virginia Association of Student Councils	West Virginia Sen. Robert Plymale
Children's Home Society of West Virginia	Human Resource Development Foundation	SEIU District 1199	West Virginia Board of Education	West Virginia State Police
Christian Community Development Association	Huntington Area Food Bank	Share Our Strength	West Virginia Bureau of Senior Services	West Virginia Supreme Court
Cisco Systems Inc.	IBM Corp.	Shentel Communications	West Virginia Center for Professional Development	West Virginia University
City of Welch, West Virginia	Joe Ford, Mayor of Iaeger	Silver Lining	West Virginia Council for Community and Technical College Education	West Virginia University School of Journalism
Coalition for Community Schools	KaBOOM!	South Central AFL-CIO	West Virginia Delegate Clif Moore	Widmeyer Communications
College Board	Kellogg Company	Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College	West Virginia Delegate Mary Poling	World Wide Workshop Foundation
Communications Workers of America	Marshall University's June Harless Center for Rural Educational Research and Development	Southern Highlands Community Mental Health Center	West Virginia Department of Commerce	WV FREE
Concord University	McDowell County Board of Education	Stop the Hurt Inc.	West Virginia Department of Education	Youth Enrichment Services
Council of the Southern Mountains	McDowell County Commission			
Dolly Parton's Imagination Library				

Want to get involved or learn more?

For more information about Reconnecting McDowell or to find out how you can get involved, contact AFT-West Virginia staff member Debra Elmore at delmore@aftwv.org or 304-552-5766.