

Reconnecting McDOWELL

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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.

Women of Steel Raise \$5,000 to Help McDowell Children Attend 4-H Camp

SUMMERTIME is fun time for many McDowell children who will be attending 4-H camp thanks to the \$5,000 donation raised by Women of Steel committees all across West Virginia.

When Karen Shipley and Heather Anderson, staff representatives with the United Steelworkers (USW) union, heard that many children in McDowell County could not afford to attend summer camp, they decided to embark on a mission to help as many as possible enjoy the fun, camaraderie and learning experiences that camp offers.

"I never dreamed that we could raise this amount of money," says Shipley. "We never had a dollar amount in mind. Our goal was simply to help as many kids as we could to experience the fun and friendship of summer camp, while building their skills to become young adults."

Women of Steel is a program started more than 20 years ago to motivate and educate women within the USW to become more active in their union and communities. When Shipley and Anderson reached out to Women of Steel committees across West Virginia, they were overjoyed with the outpouring of generosity and support they received from their union brothers and sisters, as well as from their USW District 8 Director Ernest "Billy" Thompson.

Anderson says she and Shipley had originally thought they would be able to sponsor four or five kids. Instead, they are helping more than 50 children attend the weeklong residential and day 4-H camps run by the West Virginia University Extension Service.

Kids come together at camp

Donald Reed, a WVU Extension Service agent, organizes the 4-H summer camps in McDowell County. "I cannot say thank you enough to the Women of Steel," he says. "You have truly made 4-H camp a reality this year in McDowell County."

The 4-H camp in McDowell has a day program for kids ages 5-12, and residential (overnight) programs for younger kids ages 9-12 and older kids ages 13-18. The theme of this year's camp is "Green Brick Road," which focuses on the 4-H tradition of courage (exploration), heart (generosity), head (clear thinking) and home (belonging).

Campers come together to learn new skills, such as archery, cooking and photography. The older campers have an opportunity to discuss teen issues, including drug abuse, relationships, money management and planning their futures. Healthy lifestyle and STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) classes also are offered at camp.

In total, 90 McDowell children will attend the 4-H camp this summer.

Generosity begets generosity

The Women of Steel's efforts inspired other union members to get involved as well. Together, the Monongalia-Preston Labor Council, the Southwestern Labor Council, the Marshall-Wetzel-Tyler Labor Council and the Marion County Labor Council

contributed \$600 to defray McDowell 4-H summer camp fees.

Reed notes that the McDowell County 4-H Leaders Association and other local funders also helped raise money for the camp. Thanks to all of the donations, Reed was able to expand the 4-H camping program to include two more weeks of day camp for ages 5-12.

"It is so true that the combined efforts of all of these groups have made camp possible this year. Without them, I would be at a loss to pay the bills because most of our kids simply can not afford the camp fees," says Reed. "The great thing about camp is that, for this space of time, 'kids are just kids'—no labels. We have a high return rate to camp, so we must be doing something right!"

Shipley says her summer camp fundraising efforts are "the most rewarding thing I have ever done."



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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.



Oct. 4-5 – Welch National Guard Armory

Come to the McDowell Expo!

- Find out about **community services** and **job opportunities** in McDowell County.
- Take part in **health screenings** and hands-on demonstrations.
- Enjoy **live entertainment** and **fun activities** for the whole family.

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