

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.

First annual McDowell County Expo a success



On Oct. 4 and 5, nearly 700 visitors passed through the exhibits of the first annual McDowell County Expo. The expo, held in the Welch National Guard Armory, featured 68 different vendors showcasing goods and services available in and around McDowell County. Visitors also had an opportunity to attend the job fair, which featured 10 organizations offering job opportunities within the county.

Reconnecting McDowell kicked off the expo weekend with a reception organized by McDowell EDA Director Peni Adams on the evening of Oct. 3. It was attended by local officials, Reconnecting McDowell board members and other dignitaries. The reception featured opening remarks from Gayle Manchin, chair of Reconnecting McDowell; Bob Brown, project manager of Reconnecting McDowell; and Greg Puckett, executive director of Community

Connections. Among the remarks included an announcement from Eloise Elliott, of West Virginia University and McDowell CHOICES, that McDowell CHOICES was awarded a \$200,000 implementation grant to carry out countywide improvements to increase physical activity participation.

Members of VFW Post 1144 from laeger, W.Va., opened up the expo Friday morning with a presentation of the colors, which was followed by a rousing rendition of John Denver's "Country Roads," sung by Fall River Elementary School students. Over the course of the event, McDowell County local residents, as well as visitors from outside the county, had the opportunity to receive a free health screening, register to win various door prizes, and enjoy presentations that ranged from Zumba demonstrations to performances from Mountain View's dance and flag squad.

Clockwise from left:

Fall River Elementary School students perform John Denver's "Country Road"

A National Guard booth at the expo

Gayle Manchin, chair of Reconnecting McDowell

McDowell resident gets a blood pressure screening

The second day of the expo featured a 5K road race and a one-mile walk sponsored by McDowell CHOICES and Reconnecting McDowell.

"The first McDowell County Expo was a great success that shed a positive light on the county," said Peni Adams. "When I asked the exhibitors if they accomplished what they set out to do at the expo, all answered with a resounding 'yes.' The expo is an excellent example of what can be accomplished when everyone comes together for the greater good of the county. I am already looking forward to the second annual McDowell County Expo next year."

Leveling the playing field with laptops for all

This coming spring, every middle school student in McDowell County can look forward to receiving his or her very own laptop, thanks to West Virginia Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin, Connect2Compete and the Reconnecting McDowell partnership.

"These laptops are a way of leveling the playing field so that students in rural Appalachia have many of the same advantages as students anywhere else in the country," said Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers. "Knowledge is power, and laptops and access to the Internet provide a huge boost."

The goal of the laptop program over the next four years is to include elementary and high school students as well. Gov. Tomblin said, "I believe



in Reconnecting McDowell and the potential it has to improve our children's lives. That's why I support this laptop project." Gov. Tomblin is serving as the state's 2013 co-chair for the Appalachian Regional Commission.

The \$236,695 allocated to Reconnecting McDowell for the 875 laptops comes from several sources: Tomblin allocated \$117,750 from the state's share of the Appalachian

Regional Commission funds, and Connect2Compete matched it with \$118,945. Several steps will be taken to ensure students and families have all the tools to properly and appropriately use the laptops, including training. And students should get extra use out of their laptops as a result of expanded broadband in the schools, thanks to Frontier Communications, and reduced rates for wireless

Internet in many county homes, thanks to Shentel Communications.

"The productive partnership between Gov. Tomblin and Reconnecting McDowell is bearing fruit, and the laptop grant is one of many recent examples that puts 21st-century tools in students' hands," said Gayle Manchin, chair of Reconnecting McDowell and vice president of the West Virginia Board of Education.

Fitness center opens up for Southside K-8

On Sept. 18, the National Foundation for Governors' Fitness Councils (NFGFC), led by Jake Steinfeld of "Body By Jake" and West Virginia Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin, officially opened the Southside K-8 Live Positively Fitness Center in War, W.Va. Southside is one of three schools in West Virginia that received \$100,000 for a fitness facility as part of the NFGFC's effort to combat the nation's growing obesity rate among children. The schools were

nutrition. The Southside facility will be used for physical education classes and may also be used by the community.

The ribbon-cutting ceremony took place outside the facility, which is located in the former Big Creek High School gymnasium. In addition to the governor and representatives from the NFGFC, representatives from the Coca-Cola Company, city and county officials, and other McDowell County residents were in attendance. Several Southside students donned blue NFGFC shirts during the ceremony, before venturing over to the facility to try out the new strength training equipment and cardio fitness machines. Southside K-8's principal Flo McGuire sees a lot of opportunity in the new fitness facility. "The Live Positively Fitness Center will enable the P.E. teachers to bump up their level of instruction by providing state-of-the-art fitness tools," says McGuire. "In addition, this grant may help to attain future funding that will be needed to create an after-hours community center in our town."

In a press event before the official announcement, Gov. Tomblin

recognized Reconnecting McDowell for its involvement in the county and its recent ARC grant award, which will provide laptops to all middle school students in McDowell County. The governor touted the achievement, saying "the laptop grant and having new gym equipment go hand in hand."

By the end of 2013, the NFGFC will have donated a total of 26 Live Positively Fitness Centers to schools across the nation. Financial support from the Coca-Cola Company and in-kind support from TuffStuff Fitness Equipment have made these fitness centers possible.



awarded facilities by the NFGFC based on their use of innovative methods to support physical activity and good

Reclaiming the Promise

More than 60 community members attended a town hall meeting in Bradshaw, W. Va. on Oct. 21 to discuss ways they can work together with Reconnecting McDowell to help reclaim the promise of public education and make McDowell County a more livable community. For more information about how you can get involved in these efforts contact Jesse Hogue-Morgenstern at 304-382-3023.

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.