

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.

Juvenile drug court helps at-risk students succeed

In 2012, Mercer County Family Court Judge Lisa Clark had no idea the impact she was about to make on the lives of at-risk students in McDowell County, W.Va. With a huge number of drug cases clogging up the McDowell County court system, the West Virginia Supreme Court, a Reconnecting McDowell partner, assigned Clark to preside over the newly created McDowell County Juvenile Drug Court to handle juvenile drug cases in a more timely fashion so that students could receive faster counseling, receive better support and return to school as quickly as possible.

"The opportunity to preside over the McDowell County Juvenile Drug Court has been the most rewarding of my career," Clark says. "To see a young person find what motivates them to change their lives for the better is astounding."

And the results of the juvenile drug court are nothing less than life changing for the students. Since the first case, 12 students have been through the court process, and many see it as a turning point in their lives. They have gone from students who struggled just to attend school and saw no future for themselves to being students of the month, participating in science fairs, developing into varsity athletes, and becoming budding farmers and firemen.

"Each is unique, whether their interests run to farming or football," Clark says. "It is gratifying to watch them find their way through counseling and to watch their families' lives improve."

The juvenile drug court is unique because it focuses on addressing the charges through specialized counseling and rehabilitation so that the students can return to school as quickly as pos-

sible. In most other locations, juvenile drug cases are handled in the regular court system, which is often overwhelmed with cases. Until their case is heard, the students are not allowed to attend school, stifling their education, and can be held in correctional facilities along with adults.

"The McDowell County Juvenile Drug Court shows that by proactively addressing the significant public health crisis and criminal problem of prescription narcotic drug abuse in our communities, we can reclaim the promise of public education to help all children dream their dreams and achieve them," says Bob Brown, Reconnecting McDowell project manager.

Clark will continue to preside over the juvenile drug court and take new cases. "Giving hope to youth who thought they had no options is a gift."

School levy passes with widespread support

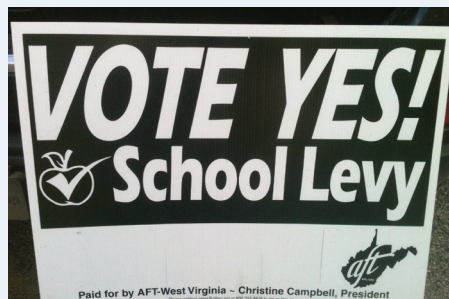
With 14 inches of snow on the ground, McDowell voters trudged to the polls and voiced their support, loud and clear, for the county's public schools. The school levy passed on Feb. 15 with more than 90 percent of the voters supporting it.

"A big thank you to all the voters that came out and supported the levy," says McDowell County School Superintendent Nelson Spencer. "That speaks volumes about the people of McDowell County and what they feel about the educational system that we have."

The funding will go to support a number of school projects and programs, including athletic and band activities, maintenance and capital improvements to school facilities and grounds, and ensuring the safety of the students by having a school re-

source officer at every high school.

"At a time when anti-tax sentiment is rampant in our country, this vote really represents a level of support and appreciation for the impact that a high-quality education can have on a student," says Greg Cruely, president of AFT-McDowell and a teacher at Southside K-8. "I see this as a turning point for McDowell County residents not just hoping for, but believing in, a positive future for their children."



Make a difference—mentor a student!

Reconnecting McDowell is starting a mentoring and internship program for 11th-grade McDowell County students. We are looking for mentors and internship opportunities to help students learn about career and college options. For more information about the program and the mentoring requirements, go to www.ReconnectingMcDowell.org/BroaderHorizons.

Second Time Around Club: Grandparents raising grandchildren



◀ **Second Time Around Club participants at a recent meeting.**

When parents are absent or unable to raise their children, grandparents are often the ones who step in. Raising a second generation brings many rewards, from providing grandchildren a secure place to live to developing deeper relationships and keeping a family together. It also can come with many challenges and major adjustments. To address these issues, McDowell County, with the help of Title I funds, created the Second Time Around Club to provide

GOALS OF THE CLUB

- Provide encouragement to others
- Share and discover resources
- Relieve the sense of isolation
- Learn more about today's changing world
- Planning ahead for college or careers
- Hands-on technology sessions
- Discover ways to improve your grandchild's math and reading abilities
- On-site support for curriculum questions and understanding assessment reports

guidance and support to the many grandparents taking on parenting responsibilities. Any grandparent who resides in McDowell County and is

raising a grandchild is welcome to join and attend the monthly meetings.

"Many things have changed since these grandparents were raising their children—there

was no Internet, cell phones or PlayStations," says Amanda Fragile, director of Title I and Technology for the McDowell County Board of Education. "The Second Time Around Club provides a supportive environment to ask questions and share resources. For example, our most recent meetings included a social media 101 session and a positive parenting training on discipline."

For more information or to attend the next Second Time Around Club meeting, contact Amanda Fragile at 304-436-8441, ext. 251.

Reconnecting McDowell board approves location for Teacher Village

The Reconnecting McDowell board of directors approved a plan to purchase property in downtown Welch, W.Va., on which to build much-needed, affordable housing for teachers and other professionals.

"This is a huge milestone for a greatly anticipated endeavor intended to help retain teachers in McDowell County and to spark economic development," says Gayle Manchin, chair of the Reconnecting McDowell board.

Community Housing Partners, the architecture firm that is designing the housing, presented the board with a few options for a Teacher Village in

downtown Welch. The board chose to enter into a purchase option on the property of the long-closed Best Furniture and Katzen buildings. The partnership will pursue whether to renovate the existing buildings or construct a new building. The housing would include approximately 30 apartment-style units; group areas for teachers to collaborate, work out and relax; and community amenities such as a coffee shop on the street level for the general public. The board also agreed to explore the viability of other housing options throughout McDowell County.

"Reconnecting McDowell made

new housing a key piece of its plan to revitalize the county," says AFT President Randi Weingarten. "A Teacher Village will attract and retain teachers, provide good jobs and encourage more economic development. We are helping this proud community reclaim the promise of great schools and access to the services and programs they need to thrive."

Manchin says the partnership will be working on obtaining financing and expects groundbreaking this spring. Reconnecting McDowell would own the building and hire an outside firm to manage it.

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.

