



2021  
**REGIONAL IMPACT  
& ANNUAL REPORT**

Friends of SWVA | 'Round the Mountain | The Crooked Road  
Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation

BREAKS INTERSTATE PARK



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# 2021 - Year in Review

Friends,

Since March 2020, the world has fundamentally changed. We have had to pivot, change our approach in how we do business, and look for new opportunities to sustain the needs in our local communities, region, and state. Over these past two years, we have learned that when confronted with adversity, our region comes together to overcome everything we face.

At Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation (SWVACHF) and Friends of Southwest Virginia, we are focused on being a strong partner to help rebuild our local economy, create stronger cooperation between businesses and local and state government, be an advocate for our local and regional tourism and economic development partners, and exercise leadership and commitment in the Southwest Virginia region.

This Annual Report showcases how the SWVACHF and Friends of Southwest Virginia have contributed to those objectives and to our overall mission to encourage the economic development of Southwest Virginia through the expansion of cultural and natural heritage ventures and initiatives related to tourism and other asset-based enterprises.

*Following is a list of a few of the key initiatives we accomplished in 2021:*

## Partnership and Community Development Initiatives

- Launched four (4) regional planning initiatives that will result in strategic advances for the SWVA Outdoor recreation industry.
  - Cumberland Plateau Outdoor Recreation Economic Analysis and Development Plan
  - Mendota Trail Master Development Plan and Economic Impact Study
  - Mount Rogers Outdoor Asset Analysis & Development Plan
  - Virginia Creeper Trail Conservancy Master Development Plan
- Made significant progress on the following projects within the ARC Power 16 Grant:
  - Completed Appalachian Trail Center Construction Phase
  - Completed the New River Boat Launches
  - High Knob Lake Restoration Projects
- Under contract for the completion of the final three construction projects.
  - New River Center in Giles County, Virginia
  - High Knob Destination Center in Norton, Virginia
  - Haysi River Access in Haysi, Virginia

- Supported the Clinch River Valley Initiative as the group incorporated as a nonprofit organization.
  - Executed on the 2019 Strategic Plan
  - Assisted with hosting first Annual Hometowns of the Clinch Symposium
  - Supported the Clinch River State Park in development and strategic planning

## Marketing Initiatives

- Substantial audience growth of our online audiences during 2021, compared to 2020.
- Digital Assets Obtainment
  - In 2021, we were able to gather a wide variety of digital content assets such as photos and video to aid in marketing efforts and content creation
- Relationship Building: In 2021, we had the ability to travel throughout the SWVA region, working with partners to build our relationships and brand image through the Southwest Virginia Podcast and Virtual Community Visits.

## Cultural Center Initiatives

- Implemented extensive facility improvements, including lighting upgrades, parking lot and landscaping improvements, and roofing maintenance.
- Reopened the Cultural Center to six (6) days a week.
- Hosted the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) Reception in October.
- Launched Christmas in Southwest Virginia – a month-long celebration of the holiday season with special events, photos with Santa, lights, and much more.

## 'Round the Mountain Initiatives

- Saw a 16% increase in membership over the past 12 months.
- Expanded our e-commerce store to feature more than 300 artisan items.
- Had 8 new artisans' jury into the Southwest Virginia Cultural Center

## Crooked Road Initiatives

- New Artist-In-Residence Program - open to heritage musicians living in the 19-county and 4-town region of SWVA. Andrew Small of Floyd, Va. was selected as the inaugural artist and will serve from July 1, 2021-June 30, 2022.
- Heritage Music Fund - Established to support musicians with funding assistance for eligible projects, including recording projects, livestream or virtual performance equipment, marketing, and professional development assistance.
- Musicians Advisory Board - Group of working musicians representing different music styles, ages, and parts of the TCR service region provide input on various TCR programs.

Throughout this Annual Report, you will find more information about each of the initiatives listed above, along with information about who we are, our organization's background, an update on additional projects and initiatives, and tourism and economic development data for the entire Southwest Virginia region.

On behalf of the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation and Friends of Southwest Virginia team and Board of Directors, we are honored to serve our region and the Commonwealth, and we are excited for all that is ahead for Southwest Virginia.

Sincerely,



**Kim Davis**  
Executive Director  
*Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation and Friends of Southwest Virginia*





# Who Are We?

Tucked in the ancient Appalachian Mountains of Southwest Virginia (SWVA) is a vibrant culture of tradition, food, music, and craft. It is a region of spectacular views, abundant outdoor recreation, and rich natural resources. Rooted deep in history, this culture is authentic... distinctive... alive.

Together with the 19 counties, four cities, and 53 towns of the region, Friends of Southwest Virginia [501(c)(3)] and the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation (State Foundation) are building a sustainable creative economy that preserves, protects, and interprets our rich heritage and natural resources, creates jobs, and welcomes both visitors and new businesses to our region every day.

**CULTURAL HERITAGE:** From the route of westward expansion along The Great Road to becoming the cradle of America's tobacco and coal industries, the region has a vibrant and rich place in American history.

**NATURAL RESOURCES:** We are enhancing opportunities for outdoor recreation in our mountains, forests, rivers, and lakes and for the appreciation of the incredible diversity of plants and animals that make SWVA home.

**DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT:** We are revitalizing our downtowns with artisan studios, coffee shops, community centers, gift, specialty, antique shops, and more. There are cultural centers where people can hear live music, find one-of-a-kind treasures, talk to interesting folks, and get a fantastic home-cooked meal.

**ARTS AND CRAFTS:** An integrated organization, the 'Round the Mountain artisan network helps craftspeople build their business, learn new skills, and share their inspiration. The network promotes and markets artisans, studios, craft shops, farms, wineries, and more throughout the region.

**MUSIC:** Another key partner and separate 501(c)(3) organization, The Crooked Road: Virginia's Heritage Music Trail, connects nine major sites and dozens of affiliate venues where the region's unique music can be heard.

**STORYTELLING:** Southwest Virginia had been without a unified brand for a long time. Through a highly detailed branding process, the region is sharing the refreshed brand with the world.

As an introduction to it all, the Southwest Virginia Cultural Center & Marketplace {formerly Heartwood} is a 54,000-square-foot gateway to the region for the world and serves as a visitor center, retail center for local crafts, music venue, and community space.

# Organizational History

Southwest Virginia includes 19 counties, four independent cities, and 53 towns located on Virginia's southern and western border.

Its 8,600 square miles – more than a fifth of Virginia's total and larger than eight U.S. states – are located along mountain ridges and in fertile valleys, with two national parks, 11 state parks, and over 1,000 square miles of national and state forests.

It's where you'll find a culture of music and craft that is authentic, distinctive, and alive. A natural landscape that is breathtaking in its magnitude and scope. A place where the pace of life is slower and people are more friendly. It is also a premier location for outdoor recreation of all kinds.

By capitalizing on the unique qualities of our region, Southwest Virginia utilizes its cultural and natural assets to build a comprehensive, long-term, sustainable economy through a variety of initiatives. The Southwest Virginia Cultural Center & Marketplace (formerly Heartwood), The Crooked Road, and 'Round the Mountain are a few that promote entrepreneurial and employment opportunities.

With the decline of the traditional industries of Southwest Virginia – agricultural tobacco, coal mining, and manufacturing – the Commonwealth of Virginia recognized the need for an organization to lead one aspect of the redevelopment of the region through a new focus on the creative economy. The General Assembly authorized the Foundation in 2008 to serve as this leader and coordinator of the creative economy.

The Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Commission, established in 2008 by the Virginia General Assembly and transitioned to the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation in 2011, works as the lead in developing and coordinating the creative economy in Southwest Virginia. Through a supporting nonprofit, Friends of Southwest Virginia, businesses and individuals help artists, craftspeople, localities, nonprofits, and entrepreneurs mobilize and succeed.

A multifaceted plan identifies the cultural and natural assets of the region; coordinates initiatives, organizations, and venues, engages in cultural and natural heritage toward more efficient operations for all partner organizations; and develops a comprehensive strategy and capital improvements plan to maximize the impact of state investments in this significant restructuring effort.

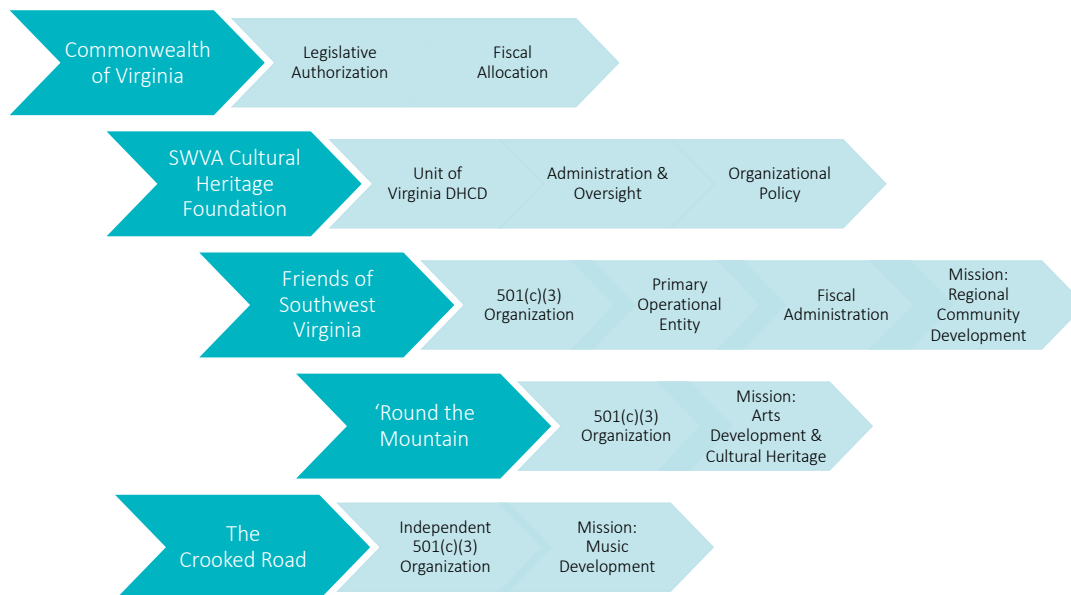
## Key initiatives include:

- Branding and marketing Southwest Virginia to the world as a distinct culture and destination
- Developing and sustaining the Southwest Virginia Cultural Center & Marketplace (formerly Heartwood)
- Expanding outdoor recreation development initiatives and marketing throughout the region
- Planning and implementation of downtown revitalization throughout the region to instill a high quality of life within our communities and promote them to the world for a broad spectrum of economic development opportunities

**DISMAL FALLS AREA, GILES COUNTY**



# Organizational Overview



Four independent but interconnected organizations make up the creative economy of Southwest Virginia.



## The Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation (previously Commission)

was established in 2008 to provide the overarching strategy and direction for creative economy development. The Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development serves as the administrator for the Foundation, employs the key leadership of the Foundation, provides fiscal oversight of state funds, and provides additional support for organizational success. The Foundation operates with a full Board of Trustees made up of Governor-appointed and legislative leadership from throughout the 19 counties and four cities of the region.



## Friends of Southwest Virginia, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, was established in

2011 to operate alongside the Foundation and serve as the primary fiscal and operational body. The two organizations work in tandem under the leadership of a single Executive Director reporting to two separate boards that oversee their individual authorizations. The majority of organization employees, grant development programs, and all operations of the SWVA Cultural Center & Marketplace are housed within this nonprofit.



## 'Round the Mountain (RTM) began in the fall of 2004 when the Virginia Works Initiative

designated funds to develop Southwest Virginia as a major cultural and heritage tourism destination and to begin an artisan and craft advocacy organization. The group received nonprofit status in March 2006. Previously, RTM operated independently of the other organizations, but to reduce overhead costs and better align programs, Friends now staffs the organization under the leadership of the still independent RTM Board of Directors.



## The Crooked Road: Virginia's Heritage Music Trail is an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit

organization founded in 2004 whose mission is to support economic development in Southwest Virginia by promoting the region's rich heritage of traditional music. The organization has an Executive Committee, Executive Board, Board of Directors, and many committees made up of representatives from throughout the 19 counties and four cities of Southwest Virginia.

# SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA CULTURAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS



**Mission:** The purpose of the Foundation is to encourage the economic development of Southwest Virginia through the expansion of cultural and natural heritage ventures and initiatives related to tourism and other asset-based enterprises. These include the SWVA Cultural Center & Marketplace (formerly Heartwood), The Crooked Road, 'Round the Mountain, and other related cultural and natural heritage organizations and venues that promote entrepreneurial and employment opportunities.

Name	Serving As	Community, County	Business / Organization
Senator Todd E. Pillion	Vice Chair, Trustee, Senate	Commonwealth of Virginia	Senate of Virginia
Senator T. Travis Hackworth	Trustee, Senate	Commonwealth of Virginia	Senate of Virginia
Delegate James Will Morefield	Chair & Trustee, House of Delegates	Commonwealth of Virginia	Virginia House of Delegates
Delegate Chris Hurst	Trustee, House of Delegates	Commonwealth of Virginia	Virginia House of Delegates
Delegate Sam Rasoul	Trustee, House of Delegates	Commonwealth of Virginia	Virginia House of Delegates
Mr. William J. Smith	Treasurer, Citizen	Treasurer	Smith Enterprises
Mr. Kevin Byrd	Trustee, Planning District	City of Radford	New River Valley Regional Commission
Mr. Dean Chiapetto	Trustee, Citizen	Floyd	Dean Chiapetto Insurance
Ms. Mary Anne Holbrook	Trustee, Washington County	Washington	United Way of Southwest Virginia
Mr. Duane Miller	Trustee, Planning District	Duffield, Scott	LENOWISCO Regional Planning District
Mr. James (Jimmy) Morani	Trustee, Abingdon	Abingdon	Town of Abingdon
Mrs. Amanda Pillion	Trustee, Commission for the Arts	Abingdon, Washington	Virginia Commission for the Arts
Mrs. Kathy Shearer	Trustee, Round the Mountain	Meadowview, Washington	Artisan & Holston Mountain Artisans
Mrs. Julie Walters Steele	Trustee, Round the Mountain	Critz, Patrick	Reynolds Homestead
Mrs. Linda DiYorio	Ex Officio, Chair - Friends of Southwest Virginia	Wytheville, Wythe	Community Volunteer
Mr. Dylan Locke	Ex Officio, Chair - The Crooked Road	Floyd	The Floyd Country Store
Mrs. Ellen Reynolds	Ex Officio, Chair - 'Round the Mountain	Wytheville, Wythe	Beagle Ridge Herb Farm
Mr. Erik Johnston	Ex Officio, Director - DHCD	Commonwealth of Virginia	Virginia Department of Housing & Community Development
Ms. Rita McClenny	Ex Officio, VTC Director	Commonwealth of Virginia	Virginia Tourism Corporation
Dr. Adam C. Hutchison	Ex Officio - non-voting, President - VHCC	Abingdon, Washington	Virginia Highlands Community College
Mr. David Matlock	Ex Officio, ED, SWVAHEC	Abingdon, Washington	Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center

# FRIENDS OF SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS



### Mission:

- To preserve, promote, and present the cultural and natural assets of Southwest Virginia.
- To work in partnerships in the region to generate economic development through these efforts.
- To provide educational and cultural opportunities for the general public and students of the region.
- To showcase the cultural assets of SWVA at the SWVA Cultural Center & Marketplace.

Name	Serving As	Community, County	Business / Organization
Mrs. Linda DiYorio	Chair	Wytheville, Wythe	Community Volunteer
Mr. John Kilgore, Jr.	Vice Chair	Gate City	Scott County Economic Development Authority
Mr. James A. Baldwin	Past Chair	Lebanon, Russell	Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission
Mr. Fred Ramey	Secretary	City of Norton	City of Norton
Mr. Aaron Sizemore	Treasurer	Marion, Smyth	Mount Rogers Planning District Commission
Mrs. Mandy Archer	Director	City of Galax	Blue Ridge Crossroads SBDC
Ms. Amy Atwood	Director	Marion, Smyth	Virginia State Parks
Mr. Michael Armbrister	Director	Franklin and Patrick	West Piedmont Planning District Commission
Mrs. Shannon Blevins	Director	Wise	University of Virginia's College at Wise
Ms. Jill Carson	Director	Pennington Gap, Lee	Town Council of Pennington Gap Virginia
Mr. Steve Lawson	Director	Big Stone Gap, Wise	Town of Big Stone Gap
Mrs. Amanda Livingston	Director	Chilhowie, Smyth	Smyth County Tourism Association
Mr. Todd Wolford	Director	Wytheville, Wythe	Downtown Wytheville
Mr. Erik Johnston	Ex Officio with Voting Rights, Director - DHCD	Commonwealth of Virginia	Department of Housing & Community Development
Delegate Will Morefield	Ex Officio with Voting Rights, Chair - SWVA CHF	Tazewell	Virginia House of Delegates
Ms. Rita McClenny	Ex Officio with Voting Rights, Director - VTC	Commonwealth of Virginia	Virginia Tourism Corporation

# 'ROUND THE MOUNTAIN

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS



**Mission:** The mission of 'Round the Mountain: Southwest Virginia's Artisan Network is to promote sustainable economic development of the region's communities by assisting local artisans with marketing, educational, and entrepreneurial opportunities.

Name	Serving As	Community, County	Business / Organization
Ms. Ellen Reynolds	President	Wytheville, Wythe	Beagle Ridge Herb Farm & Environmental Education Center
Ms. Sandy Ratliff	Secretary / Treasurer	Abingdon, Washington	Virginia Community Capital
Ms. Martha Biggar	Director	Draper, Pulaski	The Shedio
Ms. Sharon Ewing	Director	Lebanon, Russell	Virginia State Parks
Ms. Sarah Gillespie	Director	Marion, Smyth	Smyth County Chamber of Commerce
Ms. Nikki Hicks	Director	Abingdon, Washington	William King Museum of Art
Ms. Debbie Milton	Director	Lebanon, Russell	Cumberland Plateau PDC
Mr. David McLeish	Director	Meadowview, Washington	Dreamland Alpacas
Ms. Sarah Romeo	Director	Cedar Bluff, Tazewell	Appalachian Arts Center
Ms. Becky Nave	Ex-Officio	City of Bristol	Virginia Tourism Corporation
Ms. Kim Davis	Ex-Officio, Executive Director	Abingdon, Washington	Friends of SWVA   SWVA CHF

# CROOKED ROAD

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS



**Mission:** As the designated trail for the growth of heritage music and music enthusiasts, The Crooked Road is Virginia's beacon for heritage music, engaging musicians, tradition-keepers, and their communities and audiences from around the world to share, inspire, and celebrate the cultural heritage while positively impacting the local economies in Southwest Virginia.

Name	Serving As	Community, County	Business / Organization
Mr. Dylan Locke	President	Floyd, Floyd	The Floyd Country Store
Mr. Jim Baldwin	Vice President	Lebanon, Russell	Cumberland Plateau PDC
Mr. AJ Robinson	Secretary	Tazewell	Tazewell County Tourism & Communications
Mr. David Reemsnyder	Treasurer	Blacksburg, Montgomery	At Large
Mr. Larry D. Yates	Past President	Haysi, Dickenson	Town of Haysi
Mr. John Kilgore, Jr.	Director	Gate City, Scott	Scott County Economic Development Authority
Mr. Jim Archer	Director	City of Salem	At Large
Ms. Emily Brown	Director	City of Galax	City of Galax Tourism
Mr. Richard Emmett	Director	City of Galax	Blue Ridge Music Center
Ms. Leah Ross	Director	City of Bristol	Birthplace of Country Music Museum
Ms. Rita Surratt	Director	Clintwood, Dickenson	Dickenson County Tourism
Mr. David Woodard	Director	St. Paul, Russell/Wise	Heart of Appalachia Tourism
Ms. Bethany Worley	Director	Ferrum, Franklin	Blue Ridge Institute & Museum
Ms. Jackie Christian	Ex Officio	Wise, Wise	VDOT
Ms. Kim Davis	Ex Officio	Abingdon, Washington	Friends of Southwest Virginia
Ms. Becky Nave	Ex Officio	Commonwealth of Virginia	Virginia Tourism Corporation
Mr. Bill Kornrich	Ex Officio	Sneedville; Hancock, Tennessee	At Large

# Creative Economy Impact

## SUMMARY

In response to declining employment in Southwest Virginia’s historically prominent industries, stakeholders around the region are investing in the development of the creative economy. Since the start of the Crooked Road in 2004, travel expenditures in the region have increased from \$648.9 million in 2004 to \$1.16 billion in 2020.<sup>1</sup> Also, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, local tax revenues had increased by 56% and state tax revenues by 53% at the same time. The upward trend in these travel-related tax revenues, pre-pandemic, significantly impact local revenues by increasing meals and lodging tax revenues in the region’s towns.

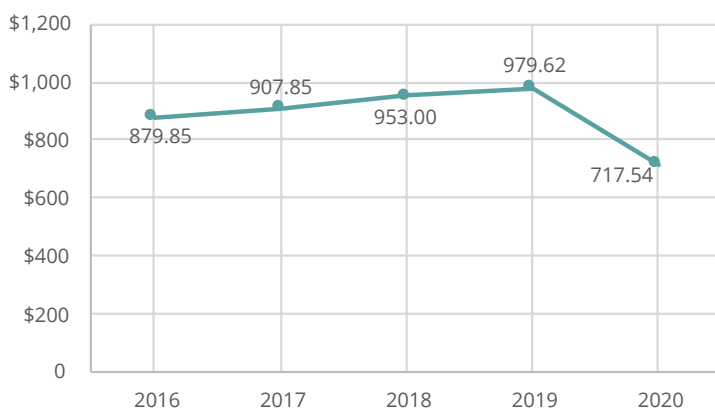
Prior to the pandemic overall employment in SWVA had decreased since 2001, but employment in the leisure and hospitality industry sector had increased by 15%. However, in 2020 employment in the leisure and hospitality industry decrease 20% in 2020.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the past two years, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted visitor spending and travel expenditures significantly. Visitor spending declined by 39.7% in 2020 throughout Virginia, a direct result of the pandemic. Yet, it’s important to note that in 2020 travel became more leisure and family-oriented overall, and spending sectors with more reliance on those segments declined less.

The outdoor recreation industry has grown vastly across the United States, with an estimated **\$887 billion** of annual consumer spending across the nation and **7.6 million jobs**. Southwest Virginia’s numbers alone are impressive, with 10 outdoor companies calling the region home. Furthermore, in 2019 Southwest Virginias spent an estimated \$1.4 billion on outdoor recreation.<sup>3</sup>

Overall, the data suggest that the **creative economy-related outcomes are on a positive trend in Southwest Virginia.**

### 2016-2020 Direct Spending (MILLIONS)



**15%**

Prior to the pandemic employment in the leisure and hospitality industry sector had increased by 15%.

**20%**

In 2020, the Southwest Virginia region experiences a 20% decrease in employment in the leisure and hospitality industry.<sup>2</sup>

**\$1.16 BILLION**

2020 Economic Impact of Travel in Southwest Virginia.<sup>3</sup>

#### FOOTNOTE

<sup>1</sup> Direct, Indirect & Induced Visitor Impact for Virginia Localities, 2020

<sup>2</sup> Direct Economic Impact and Spending Shares by Industries, 2020

<sup>3</sup> Data from the Outdoor Industry Association

# Creative Economy Impact

## IMPACT OF COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the world in many ways, and it certainly has changed the way we travel. Southwest Virginia’s natural and cultural assets have seen increased use, challenging Friends of SWVA and the SWVACHF to have a more focused approach when implementing and developing programs that leverage the creative economy. The organizations have looked at the national trends related to travel and outdoor recreation, as well as the opportunity to leverage SWVA’s cultural and natural assets.

According to Virginia Tourism Corporation’s Visitor Profile for Southwest Virginia, the number one reason visitors travel to SWVA is to visit family and friends.<sup>1</sup> As we all evolve into the new normal in Virginia, traveler trends and patterns will have a direct impact on travel expenditures in SWVA.

The Outdoor Industry Association reported in 2020, 53 percent of Americans ages 6 and over participated

in outdoor recreation at least once, the highest participation rate on record.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, research shows that **57%** of Virginians participate in outdoor recreation activities, and approximately **29%** of these trips happen close to home (meaning within 30 minutes or less).<sup>2</sup> Friends of SWVA see these insights as a path forward for recovery. As an organization, we are addressing accessibility, capacity, and promotion of our creative economy assets, including outdoor recreation.



In August 2021, Tourism Economics conducted a forecast study for Virginia Tourism Corporation regarding the impact of COVID-19 on the Virginia travel and tourism industry. The analysis was done both at the state and regional level.

This data suggests that economic recovery has already begun and reports that Virginia will approach normalcy in the second half of 2021 with a full recovery of visitor spending in 2023 or 2024.<sup>3</sup>

### OUTDOOR RECREATION

Additionally, research shows that **57%** of Virginians participate in outdoor recreation activities, and approximately **29%** of these trips happen close to home (meaning within 30 minutes or less).<sup>2</sup>

### FAMILY & FRIENDS

According to Virginia Tourism Corporation’s Visitor Profile for Southwest Virginia, the number one reason visitors travel to SWVA is to visit family and friends.<sup>1</sup>

### ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Data suggests that economic recovery has already begun and reports that Virginia will approach normalcy in the second half of 2022 with a full recovery of visitor spending in 2023 or 2024.<sup>3</sup>

**FOOTNOTE**

<sup>1</sup> Virginia Tourism Corporation Travel Data & Profiles  
<sup>2</sup> Data from the Outdoor Industry Association  
<sup>3</sup> COVID-19’s Impact on Virginia’s Visitor Economy - Tourism Economics

# Creative Economy Impact

## HISTORY AND TRENDS

The outdoor recreation industry is booming in Virginia. Fifty-seven percent of residents participate in outdoor recreation each year, with approximately 29% of residents taking outdoor recreation trips within 30 minutes of their homes. Southwest Virginia residents spend an estimated \$1.4 billion on outdoor recreation

each year, with fishing, off-roading, and camping being the most popular outdoor activities. And it's not only Virginians who are taking advantage of the beautiful region. Out-of-state visitors spend \$6.42 billion annually on outdoor recreation in Virginia.<sup>4</sup>



# 57%

Fifty-seven percent of residents participate in outdoor recreation each year

# \$1.4 BILLION

Southwest Virginia residents spend an estimated \$1.4 billion on outdoor recreation each year.

# \$6.42 BILLION

Out-of-state visitors spend \$6.42 billion annually on outdoor recreation in Virginia.<sup>(4)</sup>

### FOOTNOTE

<sup>4</sup> Data from the Outdoor Industry Association

<sup>5</sup> Data from *The Economic and Fiscal Impact of the Artisan Industry in Virginia*, CHMURA Economics and Analytics

<sup>6</sup> Analysis Total Full-Time and Part-Time Employment by County Data - Bureau of Economic Analysis.



# Creative Economy Impact

## HISTORY AND TRENDS

Due to regional and state-wide efforts, the Virginia Artisan Trails networks have offered a unique opportunity for visitors to connect with creative artisans, craft venues, vineyards, farms, breweries, local restaurants, and cultural points of interest. These

efforts have led to a thriving artisan industry as well. In 2020, the Virginia Artisan Industry created 11,958 jobs, attracted 699,320 travelers, and generated \$15.6 million in state tax revenue while yielding a total economic impact of \$527.2 million.



Due to the increase in the outdoor recreation and artisan industries, Southwest Virginia has seen a **slow, upward trend of employment in the creative economy sectors of arts, entertainment, and recreation.**



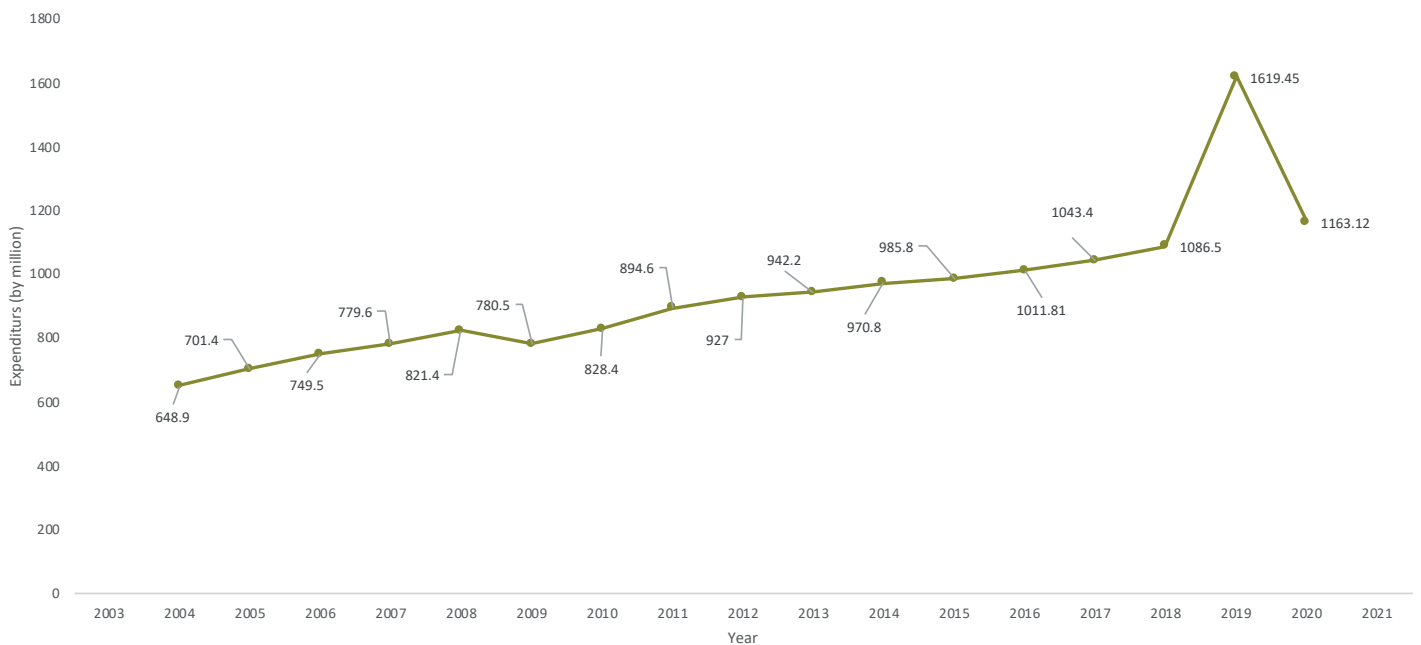
# Creative Economy Strategy

## TOURISM

The development of the creative economy in Southwest Virginia is tied directly to tourism and travel. Creative economy businesses and attractions draw in tourists, which has a large economic impact on the region. With a population density of only 75 persons per square mile, bringing in outside dollars to support the economy is essential for growth.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, from 2004 – 2019, travel expenditures in Southwest Virginia grew by \$469 million with travelers spending a total to \$1.69 billion in 2019.<sup>1</sup> However, in 2020, travel expenditures decreased to \$1.16 billion due to the pandemic.<sup>2</sup>

*Travel Expenditures in Southwest Virginia*  
(MILLIONS)



**FOOTNOTE**

<sup>1</sup> Economic Impact of Travel in Virginia, 2019

<sup>2</sup> Economic Impact of Travel in Virginia, 2020

# Creative Economy Strategy

## THE COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMY

As the economy in Southwest Virginia began its rapid transition from tobacco, coal, and labor-based manufacturing in the early 2000s, the Commonwealth of Virginia worked to identify each area of economic development capable of advancing the economy. This combined work of multiple organizations forms the comprehensive economy.

A complete economy is balanced between all areas of economic development, from agriculture and manufacturing development to small business and tourism development. Friends of Southwest Virginia and the associated organizations focus on developing the creative economy as part of the larger economic development efforts of Southwest Virginia.



## OUR FOCUS: THE CREATIVE ECONOMY

The Creative Economy is defined as innovative business development techniques finding success based on the novel, imaginative qualities that no longer rely on the limited resources of land, labor, and capital.

We develop and promote place-based and unique experiences through working in the lenses of community, tourism, and economic development.

### 1. Community Development:

- Connect assets to a community's core
- Facilitation and community capacity building

### 2. Economic Development:

- New business development connectivity and assistance

### 3. Tourism Development:

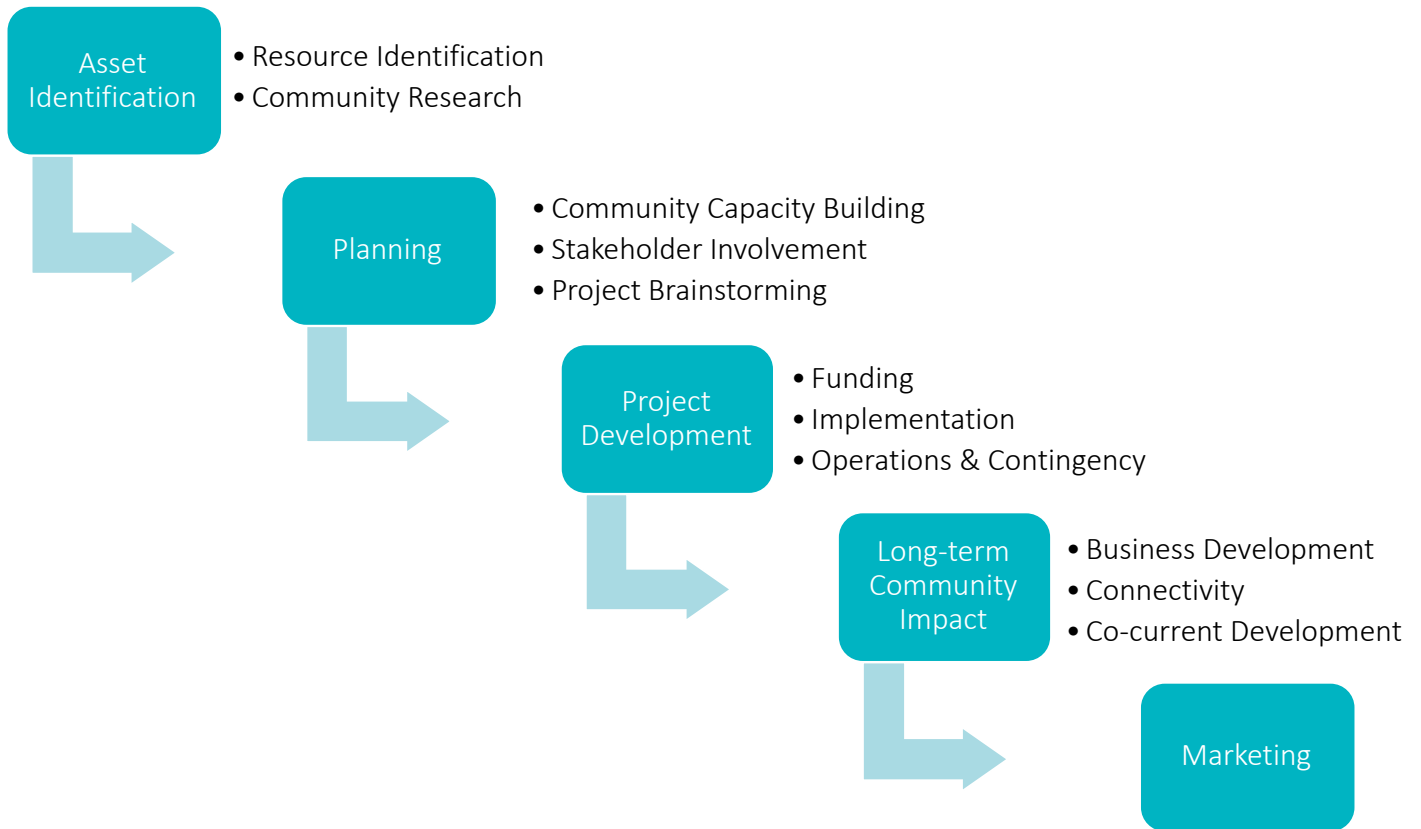
- Product development and planning
- Market and promotion through SWVA



# Creative Economy Strategy

## HOW?

The process to develop the creative economy of a community consists of identifying assets, planning, and capacity development, project development, long-term impact development, and marketing.



*Goal: Balanced Communities*



# Creative Economic Development

## CAPACITY BUILDING AND ENGAGEMENT SPOTLIGHT

Due to the momentum built by community-based cohesive initiatives across the region, there has never been a better time than now to develop and connect recreational infrastructure within the 19 counties and four cities of Southwest Virginia. The vision of collaborative working groups and funding partners is charting a course based on sustainable solution-based thinking that serves as a platform to build pride of

place, creative thinking, and develop a culture of entrepreneurship in the region.

Over the last year, the development team has worked closely with federal, state, and local partners to build capacity, activate communities, and complete asset development projects in the creative economy sector. Below we will feature some of these partnerships and the development successes of the past year.

### *AIR Institute: Air Shift and Evolve*

In Partnership with Virginia Tech and the Reynolds Homestead, "The AIR Institute provides rural and under-resourced communities with programming that inspires new connections and ignites the creative economy. Creative people expand business skills, businesspeople get more creative; they learn to collaborate, adapt, and thrive together." (Air Mission) Friends of SWVA has been a proud partner and trained facilitator in the cohort, offering support and workshops across the region.

as creatives and work together to design projects that would make their community a better place to live. The participants are divided into small groups, and over two days they identify a project that would make their community a better place. Evolve is the second workshop of the AIR Institute programs. The course is a six-month business planning bootcamp to help individuals fully develop their business model and entrepreneur skills, and share their ideas with a cohort of individuals.

AIR Shift Workshop is a three-day program led by trained facilitators to help community members grow

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## Community Capacity Building & Engagement

### *Community Builders: AmeriCorps VISTA*

Friends of Southwest Virginia and UVA-Wise have partnered to expand the Community Builders program through the work of AmeriCorps Vistas. Southwest Virginia has welcomed two AmeriCorps Vistas that will

add capacity in the areas of Community development, Clinch River Ecological Center, RALLY SWVA programming, and creative economy support.



# Community Capacity Building & Engagement

## *Clinch River Valley Initiative*



As the Clinch River Valley Initiative (CRVI) looks forward to its second decade of service, it can claim many signature accomplishments. The hometowns of the Clinch program, increased access to the Clinch River, new branding and signage, expanded environmental education programs, and the creation of the new Clinch River State Park are but a few of CRVI's many successes.

Over the last three years, the Director of Outreach and Partnership has facilitated monthly meetings with the CRVI Steering committee and bi-yearly public meetings and conventions of the CRVI Transition team. These meetings have not only served as a platform for

updates on CRVI business but also as an opportunity for partners to connect and share best practices and successes during the months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**CRVI Transition Team:** The Transition team has taken on the responsibility of executing the 2019-2023 CRVI Strategic plan, sub-action committees have been created in the areas of Finance, Development, and Communications. These teams have developed a fundraising strategy, drafted by-laws, written job descriptions, held community conversations, and have incorporated as a nonprofit.

# Community Capacity Building & Engagement

## Forest Recreation Outdoor Group (FROG)

Forest Recreation Outdoor Group, or FROG. This is a group of more than 30 organizations that have come together with a shared interest in the region's economic, educational, physical, and mental well-being, as well as the role the Jefferson National Forest plays in providing recreation opportunities for the region's residents and visitors. This group's formation stemmed primarily as a result of witnessing the Clinch Ranger District's struggles to maintain its existing recreation sites and respond to project proposals, including more trail connectors and interpretive signs.

The district was requesting help to better understand the region's priorities so it could better focus its limited resources, and the district's willingness to engage and discuss these issues was a big part of what brought the city, towns, and counties into the fold. In the past, this partnership was nonexistent, but through the creation of FROG, the region's communities have come to a better understanding of the challenges facing our Forest Service district. The FROG group's mission is to have a "collective impact" in providing ideas and resources to enhance recreation opportunities in the High Knob region, including strengthening the connections among the communities that surround the national forest and the infrastructure needed to maintain and grow recreational opportunities here. This includes trail maintenance and development, maintaining campgrounds and recreation areas, hunting and fishing access, and habitat, among other uses.

Through the creation of FROG, the region's communities have come to a better understanding of the challenges facing our Forest Service district.



## High Knob Enhancement Corporation

The High Knob Enhancement Corp is the regional champion of the High Knob Master Plan. Director of Outreach and Partnership attends the High Knob enhancement meetings and facilitates conversations with working groups to help execute the master plan. In 2021, a wayfinding steering committee came together to address signage challenges in the High knob footprint. The work will continue into 2022, uniting agencies with key contacts to identify solutions to regional wayfinding.



# Community Capacity Building & Engagement

## *Opportunity Southwest Virginia*

Opportunity Southwest Virginia is piloting the way for the region to align resources, highlighting opportunities for entrepreneurs, supporting their efforts, and expanding the spirit they bring to their communities. Through collaborative partnerships, the initiative is working to rally existing and emerging economic and community development efforts to create thriving

entrepreneurial communities that will accelerate progress for both new and established ventures. The coalition of 25 small business support and community development organizations was formed in 2012 to champion the Blueprint for Entrepreneurial Growth & Economic Prosperity in Southwest Virginia.



## *Rally SWVA*

Real Action Leadership Learning is building community leadership capacity and reinforcing collaborative, entrepreneurial communities across the region. A strategy of the Opportunity SWVA initiative, Rally SWVA is an action learning mini-grant program that engages community leaders in working together to make their community a better place for small businesses.

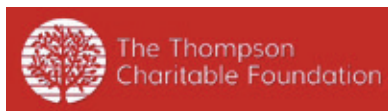
Monthly Opportunity SWVA brings leaders together to leverage the Real Action Leadership Learning (Yay) RALLY program. RALLY is a community capacity and leadership development program. Rally round seven and eight is serving the communities of Pound, Bluefield, and Christiansburg in leadership and community development initiatives.

# Community Development

## REGIONAL PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Friends of Southwest Virginia continues to serve as a regional collaborative tool for communities to unite individual projects into large-scale regional initiatives. This unification into multi-jurisdiction projects provides strength in seeking federal and state resources for community, economic, and tourism development. The following projects are underway across Southwest

Virginia and are administered by Friends of Southwest Virginia as part of large-scale regional collaboratives. Thank you to the agencies, organizations, and foundations that have provided funding for organizational operations and special projects over the years, including 2021.



LEE COUNTY, VIRGINIA

# Community Development

## REGIONAL PLANNING SPOTLIGHTS

Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization (POWER)

### POWER 16: *Building Appalachia Spring Construction*

#### Complete

- Appalachian Trail Center: Construction Phase
- Haysi to Breaks Trail
- High Knob Lake
- New River Boat Launches
- Stony Creek Park

#### In Progress

- Haysi Riverwalk
- High Knob Destination Center
- New River Center



### POWER 18: *Bridge Builders Interstate Collaborative*

Building Powerful Economic Diversity and Sustainability within Appalachian Communities will craft a community-driven identification and planning process to expand current collaboratives within the 19-county, four-city footprint of Friends of Southwest Virginia beyond Southwest Virginia to maximize previous investments to develop natural and cultural assets. Combined with work underway from previous Power and ARC investments and a strong network of local, regional, and state partners, this planning project would contribute to generating a diverse and

sustainable economy for Central Appalachia through natural and cultural asset planning and development without regard to the political and funding barriers of interstate development. The proposed work aligns with ARC Goal 4: strengthen Appalachia's community and economic development potential by leveraging the Region's natural and cultural heritage assets. Project activities support ARC Action Objective 1: preserve and strengthen existing natural assets in support of economic opportunities that generate local and regional benefits.

## AREA DEVELOPMENT LEE & WISE COUNTY

### OUTDOOR ACCESS

- Developing six access points to the Powell River in Lee County and two access points to the Pound River in Wise County
- Constructing two pump track parks in Big Stone Gap, Va.
- Conducting an Outdoor Recreation Assessment for Pound, Va.

This strategy for development in multiple sites will draw visitors to the region as a whole rather than a specific destination and have a larger economic impact.

# Regional Planning

## SOUTHWEST ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RECREATION CLUSTER DEVELOPMENT, CONNECTIVITY, AND SUSTAINABILITY

- Cumberland Plateau Outdoor Industry Master Plan
- Mendota Trail Master Plan and Economic Impact Forecast
- Mount Rogers Regional Connectivity plan
- Virginia Creeper Trail Master Plan and Economic Impact Modeling



## CUMBERLAND PLATEAU OUTDOOR INDUSTRY ASSESSMENT

Through a grant awarded to Friends of SWVA from the Thompson Charitable Foundation and the Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission, the organization engaged Vermont-based outdoor asset analysis firm The S.E. Group to oversee the Cumberland Plateau Outdoor Economy Asset Analysis and Development Plan, which includes Buchanan, Dickenson, Russell, and Tazewell counties. The S.E. Group is a planning firm that works with recreation tourism communities across the country to help create extraordinary experiences in their region.

A multifaceted plan identifies the cultural and natural assets of the region; coordinates initiatives, organizations, and venues engaged in cultural and

natural heritage toward more efficient operations for all partner organizations; and develops a comprehensive strategy and capital improvements plan to maximize the impact of state investments in this significant restructuring effort.

A primary goal of the project is to identify new economic opportunities and encourage smart investment in the recreational tourism assets of the region. Plan deliverables will include guidance for local residents interested in starting new small businesses that leverage existing assets, as well as a development prospectus for potential resort developers to create a new draw to the region.

# Regional Planning

## MENDOTA TRAIL MASTER DEVELOPMENT AND ECONOMIC FORECAST

Friends of Southwest Virginia has received \$118,000 in Master Planning and Economic Forecast funds from the Appalachian Regional Commission and Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission to develop a comprehensive master development plan and economic forecast. The master development plan will assess the existing rail corridor and trestles and provide a strategic approach for the completion of the 13-mile trail connecting Bristol to Mendota. The plan will include cost estimates, community engagement, and marketing and communications plan, and project the economic impact of the completed trail. This plan will be a guiding document for the Mendota Trail Conservancy to complete construction and maintain the trail.

The Mendota Trail is a 12.5-mile-long rail-to-trail that will link Bristol, Va. with the Mendota community. The Mendota trail corridor is unique because of its railroad history and natural assets that include a beautiful gorge, an area that is remote, scenic, and within one of Virginia's high-value ecological cores. While grassroots progress has been made in building sections of the trail (up to 6.2 miles to date), this comprehensive master plan has been developed to help craft a unified vision of the Mendota Trail.

The Mendota Trail Master Plan identifies key elements and priorities for improvements and provides design for placemaking and specific amenities, such as trailheads. Over 17 trestles on the trail are in need of or have been repaired and are a major priority for opening the remaining sections of the trail.



MENDOTA TRAIL  
RIBBON CUTTING

## MOUNT ROGERS REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY PLAN

Friends of Southwest Virginia is partnering with the communities of Mount Rogers Anchor Area to develop an Outdoor Recreation Master Plan. Building on an outdoor recreation plan done in 2017 by Arnett Muldrow. It provides a regional overview that highlights regional assets and gaps, an analysis of national and regional markets, and proposes strategic areas and

next steps for further exploration. The research team - comprised of experts from Virginia Tech's Center for Economic and Community Engagement, Arnett Muldrow Consulting, and Hill Studios is drawing from existing data and planning documents and 32 interviews with town, county, and state government leaders.

# Regional Planning

## VIRGINIA CREEPER TRAIL MASTER PLAN AND ECONOMIC IMPACT MODELING

Friends of Southwest Virginia has partnered with the Virginia Creeper Trail Conservancy to complete a Master Plan and Economic Impact Model. The master plan will outline strategies for addressing the organizational structure, maintenance issues, conservation opportunities, GIS collection, and develop a model for collecting and analyzing the economic impact of the trail. This plan will serve as a guiding tool for the Virginia Creeper Trail Conservancy and provide a strategy for sustainable operations of the trail.

The purpose of this plan is to assist the Virginia Creeper Trail Conservancy (VCTC), the nonprofit partner to the trail, to envision VCTC's work supporting the trail for the next 10-20 years. Critical to the success of this plan is input from VCTC's partners. This plan will look at VCTC's work through the lens of five pillars. It will help prioritize and strategically align VCTC's work with its partners. This plan was developed by Equinox, a firm specializing in outdoor recreation, based out of Asheville, NC.

### *Mission of the Virginia Creeper Trail*

To unite and facilitate a collaboration of trail managers, the community, and volunteers to foster a cohesive trail experience. VCTC will steward, enhance, and maintain a safe and quality experience for the trail through advocacy, outreach, a directed stewardship strategy, financial support, and synergistic relationships.

### *Vision*

The Virginia Creeper Trail Conservancy unites a trail into a one-trail, world-class experience that showcases rural Virginia's beautiful natural and agricultural landscapes, its historic trestles, many trail-side amenities, and vibrant trail-based businesses and towns that are essential to its experience.



# Regional Product Development

Together with the 19 counties, four cities, and 53 towns of the region, Friends of Southwest Virginia has worked to build a sustainable creative economy that preserves, protects, and interprets our rich heritage and natural resources, creates jobs, and welcomes both visitors and new businesses to our region every single day.

## Damascus Trail Center

### Project Complete

Friends of Southwest Virginia and the Town of Damascus partnered on a POWER 16 project to construct a 2,100 square foot education and welcome center. The Center features a hands-on training facility, 2,100 square feet of exhibits, and regional visitor information. The mission of the Damascus Trail Center is to empower new users, stewards, and communities; to educate through exhibits, interpretation, and programming; and protect the A.T. and its landscape by being a hub for outdoor recreation and conservation stewardship. In 2022, The Town of Damascus will welcome the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's first purpose-built visitor center.

"The center plays a key role in Damascus as the center-point for our downtown — a gravitational core,"

— *Garvin Blevins*  
 Director of Planning of the  
 Mount Rogers Planning  
 District Commission



# Regional Product Development

## High Knob Lake

The Norton/High Knob Lake Restoration is a project funded through a 2016 Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) POWER grant. This project aims to restore the lake and its beach to their original condition and make it more attractive for visitors and area residents. Project activities include the dredging of sediment from the lake and cleanup and restoration of sand to the beach area, as well as refurbishing entry trail areas. The property will be owned by the U. S. Forest Service. Work on the lake was completed in June of 2021.



"Thanks to this funding and partnership with the Norton Industrial Development Authority and Friends of Southwest Virginia, long-term deferred maintenance along the shore of the George Washington & Jefferson National Forest's High Knob Lake has been addressed. Forest visitors should have an enhanced experience, including improved visual quality of the site, when visiting the High Knob Recreation Area. We expect visitation may increase, and as a result, fee revenues to increase. Those revenues would be reinvested back into ongoing maintenance and improvements of the Forest's recreation assets, contributing to the sustainability of the Clinch Ranger District's recreational offerings."

*- Michelle Davalos, District Ranger*  
Forest Service

George Washington & Jefferson National Forests, Clinch Ranger District



# Regional Product Development

## *New River Boat Launches*

### Project Complete



The Ingles Landing at Eggleston along the New River Water Trail in Giles County adds to the public access points in the region. Giles County now has 13 public river access points. This project was completed with support and partnerships from VDOT, Friends of Southwest Virginia, New River Valley Regional

Commission, Appalachian Regional Commission, Giles County, and many more. The Ingles Landing is named for the frontier woman, Mary Draper Ingles, whose story connects the communities along the New River throughout our region.

## *Tazewell Trails*

As we look back down the trail of accomplishments, we see visible results from developments in our region - more hikers and kayakers, talk about new trails, and people themselves, including children in the woods, finding peace and inspiration. We've inspired new businesses to open here, rediscovered assets like the Clinch River, and are working to

expand a world-class network of existing trails. New trail development continues while generating local buy-in and relationships generated with landowners. We've created a buzz about recreational tourism and encouraged support businesses like Airbnb rentals to open. This grant lit the fuse for adventure tourism in our beautiful piece of Central Appalachia.

# Southwest Virginia Cultural Center



## Vision

- To serve as the gateway to our region by highlighting Southwest Virginia, its talented people, and its creative economy.
- To generate new economic impact while maintaining our organization's financial stability.
- To set an industry standard for tourism, injecting the WOW factor at every turn.

Moving into the post-COVID-19 pandemic era brought renewed enthusiasm to the mission of the Cultural Center. Taking advantage of the downtime, we were able to focus inward on the mechanics of the Center and make necessary improvements and upgrades essential in setting us on the right path.

These include:

- Lighting upgrades throughout the galleries reflecting an increased focus and appreciation of our artisans and the talents exhibited.
- A renewed commitment to consistent and quality Southern hospitality to the artisans and our visitors.
- Upgrades and enhancements were made to preexisting security measures on the exterior of the facilities to ensure a more pleasant experience for all our visitors.
- Collaboration with local agencies set a standard of excellence for our events.

Thanks to our incredible foundation, the team at the Cultural Center is excited to be moving forward and ready to make the center a true destination spot, a place on everyone's bucket list!

The Cultural Center has been mindful to follow the CDC COVID-19 guidelines through the 2020/2021 pandemic. We have asked our guests and employees to:

- Follow social distancing protocol
- Follow mandates on masks or face covering
- Utilize sanitization stations now in place

With a renewed interest in our facility, we have enjoyed an increase in venue rentals and events. As we navigate the culinary world in this post-pandemic era, we are utilizing outside caterers and our in-house talents. We are confident we will achieve a consistent and high standard that we can utilize going forward.



## Get involved with the SWVA Cultural Center Artisans:

- Join 'Round the Mountain today! Visit [www.JoinRTM.org](http://www.JoinRTM.org) to join today and start experiencing the benefits of this world-class artisan network!
- To sell in the facility, members must pass the bi-annual jury process.

### Communities:

Interested in getting your brochure or community information displayed and marketed in the Visitor Center? Reach out to our Visitor Center staff at [visitorcenter@FriendsofSWVA.org](mailto:visitorcenter@FriendsofSWVA.org)

### Musicians:

Music is coordinated by The Crooked Road. Contact [admin@thecrookedroad.org](mailto:admin@thecrookedroad.org)

## Venue Rentals & Special Events

2020 and 2021 have been challenging for retail sales and venue rentals at the SWVA Cultural Center. In 2021, the Cultural Center reopened six (6) days per week and began hosting venue rentals and events again.

Interested in holding a special event at the facility? Contact us at [events@FriendsofSWVA.org](mailto:events@FriendsofSWVA.org)



# 'Round the Mountain Marketing & Programming



## 'Round the Mountain Overview

'Round the Mountain: Southwest Virginia's Artisan Network is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote the sustainable economic development of the region's communities through the development of the unique regional art and craft as an economy. The organization works to assist local artisans as entrepreneurs with marketing, educational, and entrepreneurial opportunities.

## 'Round the Mountain & Friends of Southwest Virginia Partnership

On July 1, 2018, Friends of Southwest Virginia formally assumed management of the programs of RTM. The staff at Friends of SWVA now oversee the development of the artisan trails throughout SWVA, artisan membership sales and member development, marketing of RTM and regional arts initiatives, and, most importantly, partnership development among the arts community, individual artisans, other regional co-ops, galleries, and arts stakeholders in this region. Friends of SWVA and RTM have worked together for years within the arts community, but this exciting new partnership is taking the relationship between the two organizations to a new level for the benefit of all of SWVA.

## Jury

'Round the Mountain holds a jury twice a year. The Spring 2021 Jury was canceled due to COVID-19. Fall Jury, held in October of 2021, had eight artisans participate. Members of RTM are welcome to submit their work to jury in order to sell in the SWVA Cultural Center & Marketplace, sell on our e-commerce platform, and access wholesale opportunities. Members submit work to be juried by a blind panel of fellow artisans; if accepted, work may be displayed and retailed at the SWVA Cultural Center & Marketplace.

## 'Round the Mountain Statistics

**Total Members - 182**

**Artisans who juried into the Cultural Center - 172**

### Members by Medium

- Clay - Listing was updated to Pottery / Ceramics - 12
- Fiber - 34
- Glass - 7
- Graphic Design - 1
- Jewelry - 14
- Leather - 3
- Literary - 7
- Metal - 11
- Mixed Media - 9
- Natural Materials - 10
- Two-Dimensional - 25
- Wood - 32
- Basketry - 2
- Other - 3

### Members by Community

(number of artisans)

- Bland - 0
- Bristol - 10
- Buchanan - 2
- Carroll - 3
- Dickenson - 3
- Floyd - 15
- Franklin - 4
- Galax - 3
- Giles - 3
- Grayson - 4
- Lee - 8
- Montgomery - 12
- Norton - 1
- Patrick - 6
- Pulaski - 2
- Radford - 1
- Russell - 9
- Scott - 4
- Smyth - 16
- Tazewell - 12
- Washington - 29
- Wise - 7
- Wythe - 8

# 'Round the Mountain Marketing & Programming



## Special Event

### Made in Southwest Virginia Event

In November 2021, 'Round the Mountain hosted a special Made in Southwest Virginia event that featured over 17 local and regional artisans. The artisans provided live demonstrations of their work throughout the Southwest Virginia Cultural Center galleries. This family-friendly event allowed visitors to learn how our Southwest Virginia artisans create their work and gave them the opportunity to engage with the artisans.

## Marketing Overview

2021 was a year to tell the stories behind 'Round the Mountain and its artisans to spread awareness about the organization and its mission. During the year, we worked towards building a new inventory system from the ground up, restructuring the e-commerce process, and working towards building our membership.

## E-Commerce

The e-commerce platform underwent a facelift in early 2021 to provide a more user-friendly shopping experience and make changes to reflect expanded artisan categories. Friends of SWVA continued product photography and weekly uploads of new products to the shop.

## Artisan Feature Events

2021 also marked the return of events featuring 'Round the Mountain Artisans in order to increase both awareness and sales of our artisans.

Made in Southwest Virginia, our first annual artisan demonstration event, was a tremendous success which included over 250 visitors, 18 live artisan demonstrations, and thousands of dollars in sales. This event was both pivotal and foundational for future artisan-featured events.

## Media Mentions & Promotional Press

Media efforts to continue promoting 'Round the Mountain and our artisans were strong in 2021. With the ability to do remote interviews via Zoom, many broadcast spotlights were conducted live from the Cultural Center and featured various artisan works as we showcased our regional artisan network.

We also began distributing more frequent press releases to notify local and regional media outlets about happenings within the 'Round the Mountain organization to share with the public.

## Artisan Communications

Along with working to build a better inventory and e-commerce system, we also developed a more strategic means of communication between our staff and artisans. Artisans now rotate on a quarterly basis to be better informed about their sales, inventory, and membership details. Communication is a vital piece of the success of 'Round the Mountain.

# Regional Marketing & Branding

## Southwest Virginia Community Visits

In 2021, Friends of SWVA worked with partners across the SWVA region to determine local community needs and develop strategies to better understand our region.

During these visits, we had the opportunity to develop itineraries with community partners to gather resources for current and future marketing efforts. These resources included promotional photography and videography to be added to our digital asset management system.

## Digital Asset Management System

One common need we noticed from partners was the access to digital marketing materials such as photography and videography. During our community visits, we worked with partners to gather resources that were lacking from our archives, as well as theirs.

This project resulted in the collection of more than 5,000 digital assets to be used by Friends of SWVA for marketing and development purposes, as well as the allocation of sharing these resources to our regional partners.



## Stories from Southwest Virginia Podcast

Started in 2020, the Stories from Southwest Virginia Podcast continues to be a catalyst for regional partners to share their stories on a digital platform behind a reputable brand. The podcast has allowed Friends of SWVA to share history, music, arts, culture, and business stories.

The podcast continues to grow in size, reaching an audience far beyond Southwest Virginia.

[anchor.fm/storiesfromswva](https://anchor.fm/storiesfromswva)

## Southwest Virginia Virtual Visits

Also conceived in 2020 as a response to COVID-19 shutdowns, the virtual visit series on YouTube has been an incredible success for our partners. These visits allow current and future guests to explore various areas of the Southwest Virginia region from the comfort of their own homes.

These visits also aid with telling the stories of SWVA and give our visitors ideas for their next trip to the region.

# Regional Marketing & Branding

## Southwest Virginia Media & Advertising

Along with monthly newsletters and frequent press releases, Friends of SWVA has taken unique approaches to local and regional televised media segments. With the allocation of Zoom-based interviews, Friends of SWVA is able to do remote segments from within the region. This has allowed Friends of SWVA to showcase more of our beautiful region to a vast audience.

Friends of SWVA has also been working with state and multi-region publications to promote our 19-county, 53-town, and four-city region. These ad placements are strategic to our regional marketing plan and will provide helpful representation to our region across a multi-state area.

## Regional Representation at the SWVA Cultural Center

In order to better serve our region and make the Southwest Virginia Cultural Center a more seasoned visitor center, we offer free space within the Cultural Center to regional partners to sell their merchandise and promote their destinations. This regional merchandise program will coincide with our regional artisans from 'Round the Mountain, as well as brochure offerings from our localities.

MARKETING STATISTICS	
Communities Visited	35+
Assets Collected (Photo & Video)	5,149
New Website Visitors	35,000+
SWVA YouTube Views	267,847
SWVA YouTube Subscribers	+790
Combined Facebook Follows	41,896+
Combined Instagram Follows	15,460+
Virtual Visits Filmed	25
Podcast Episodes Recorded	17



# The Crooked Road

## 2021 IN REVIEW

The Crooked Road: Virginia's Heritage Music Trail serves the Southwest Virginia region through supporting and promoting traditional music and musicians and generating economic impact. Since its designation as Virginia's Heritage Music Trail by the Virginia General Assembly in 2004, this 330-mile-long driving route has connected visitors with nine major music venues and over 50 affiliated venues and festivals. Each partner showcases the region's incredibly rich heritage music traditions.

Major venues of The Crooked Road span the Southwest Virginia region and include Blue Ridge Institute & Museum at Ferrum College, Floyd Country Store, Blue Ridge Music Center, Galax Old Fiddler's Convention, Rex Theatre, Southwest Virginia Cultural Center & Marketplace, Birthplace of Country Music Museum, Carter Family Fold, Country Cabin, and the Ralph Stanley Museum.

**The Crooked Road region is also home to some of the greatest names in American music - the Carter Family, the Stanley Brothers, Jim and Jesse McReynolds, and The Stonemans.** The musical history and vibrant scene of heritage music in the region attract visitors from across the U.S. and from other countries to experience unique musical traditions that have had a profound impact on American music and the American story.

During 2021, The Crooked Road added new initiatives to directly benefit local musicians and communities. These included the first **Artist-In-Residence program**, which was open to heritage musicians living in the 19- county and four-town region of SWVA. The selected artist serves as an ambassador for The Crooked Road in the following capacities: produce an original piece of music or a new interpretation of an existing traditional piece of music for The Crooked Road use, conduct workshop/master classes, virtual lessons, and participate in concerts. **Andrew Small of Floyd, Va., was selected as the inaugural artist and will serve from July 1, 2021-June 30, 2022.**

A **Musicians Advisory Board** was created to provide input on various TCR programs. This is a group of working musicians that represent different music styles, ages, and parts of the TCR service region.

One of these projects includes a new **Heritage Artist Directory**, which will feature approved musicians and bands on the Crooked Road website. This will also serve as a virtual booking reference for people interested in the region's heritage artists.

The **Heritage Music Fund** was also established. This fund supports SWVA musicians with assistance for eligible projects up to \$500. Eligible







projects include recording projects, livestream or virtual performance equipment, headshots, website design, and professional development assistance.

Marketing outreach continued at the International Bluegrass Music Association's conference in conjunction with tourism partner Virginia Tourism Corporation and tourism partners across Southwest Virginia. The Crooked Road Jams from the Southwest Virginia Cultural Center & Marketplace were livestreamed, and TCR continued social media postings of events happening at major and affiliated venues and festivals. The Crooked Road also featured heritage music performers at Bristol's Rhythm & Roots Reunion, highlighting regional acts to the festival audience.

**The Crooked Road on Tour program** held events at out-of-region venues. In 2021, these performances included The State Fair of Virginia, with Ralph Stanley II & the Clinch Mountain Boys as the Main Stage performer and Jim Lloyd, Martha Spencer & Larry Sigmon, Five Mile Mountain Road, Mac Traynham, and The Crooked Road's Artist-In-Residence, Andrew Small with Ashlee Watkins.

In addition, The Crooked Road has a music educational component through the **Traditional Music Education Program** (TMEP). TMEP has supported **Junior Appalachian Musician** (JAM) programs in the region and has reinforced the overall partnership with JAM. The Youth Music Festival and monthly Youth Music Series concerts will resume in 2022.

For 2022, The Crooked Road will also be looking to offer professional development opportunities for musicians and help identify music industry resources to emphasize SWVA as a unique place to live and work for heritage music.



(276) 492-2400  
One Heartwood Circle  
Abingdon, VA 24210

Partner Website: [friendsofswva.org](http://friendsofswva.org)  
Consumer website: [visitswva.org](http://visitswva.org)



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*A different side of Virginia*