

Reconnecting McDOWELL

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.

● **JC Mercantile
Comes to McDowell**

● **Students to Receive
'For the Future' Scholarships**

● **Broader Horizons
Alum Spotlight: Faith Poore**

THE BRIGHT COLORS ON THE MOBILE MARKET TRUCK MAKE IT HARD TO MISS

Go Growcery Project Finishes Its First Year

In 2019, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Local Food Promotional Program awarded Reconnecting McDowell a three-year \$250,000 grant to help develop the Go Growcery Market Project, which features a mobile farmers market that visits several McDowell communities, two senior centers and various McDowell County schools.

Local growers provide the produce for the mobile market, and high school students are employed to assist the project. The McDowell County Youth Producers Association builds relationships with local farmers who then sell into the market structure. With the first year completed, the project is off to a promising start. The mobile market began selling local produce such as pumpkins, apples and fresh vegetables last fall. The market will be able to take senior vouchers, WIC vouchers, and SNAP starting this spring.

"We have seen this project really take off in a short period of time," says James Russell, a foodshed coordinator with the West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition, a key Go Growcery partner. "In fact, demand exceeded supply by the end of the first year, and we are busy planning for a bigger and better growing season in 2021."



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—James Russell, foodshed coordinator, West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition

In addition to the mobile farmers market, the project will implement agritourism activities that will promote and consequently bolster the economic and health impact of the Go Growcery market. Complementary events, such as nutrition classes and tastings sponsored by the West Virginia University Extension Service, will also

be held in the coming year. Over the project's three-year span, it is expected to return \$125,000 in sales to local growers and small producers in the community. Follow the Go Growcery's Facebook page at bit.ly/gogrowcery for updates and its weekly location schedule.

Renaissance Village Celebrates Exciting Progress

Renaissance Village, Reconnecting McDowell's multiuse building in Welch, houses both commercial and residential space, and the project continues to make great strides forward. The building-out process of the first and second floor interiors has begun. JC Mercantile, a cafe and store (see story below), will occupy the entire first floor. The second floor will have a mix of commercial and residential space, the latter

of which will consist of two bedrooms only. The third and fourth floors consist of one- and two-bedroom apartments. A one-bedroom unit rents for \$625 per month, and the two-bedroom units are priced at \$825.

For inquiries about renting the remaining apartments, contact Whitney Bishop, the property manager, at 304-890-1805.

'IT REMINDED ME OF HOME AND MADE ME BELIEVE IN THE VISION FOR MCDOWELL'

JC Mercantile Comes to McDowell

JC Mercantile, a store that specializes in selling Brazilian coffee and local handcrafted items will soon call Welch home. The shop will be on the first floor of Renaissance Village in downtown Welch and is expected to open in April. JC Mercantile's flagship store, located in Greenup, Ky., is owned by Jason Crum. A native of Kentucky, Crum heard about Welch from a former colleague in the steel industry, where he worked for 22 years. So when he saw an online post from Jason Grubb, the business development specialist for the City of Welch, about wanting to bring a cafe to McDowell County, Crum decided to look into the opportunity. He contacted Grubb and with an invitation from Mayor Harold McBride, Crum made the trip to McDowell with his family. "I found myself falling in love with McDowell on my first visit there," Crum says. "It reminded me of home and made me believe in the vision for McDowell."

County residents can expect the store to mirror much of what it is known for, but it will be tailored to the community's needs. There will be local artisan items, Brazilian coffee that will be roasted on site, as well as breakfast, lunch and dinner fare. JC Mercantile has begun to survey local residents about the types of merchandise they would like to see in the store. Based on current responses, the store will carry a number of outfitter and everyday clothing items. If you are a McDowell resident and would like to provide feedback, you may do so at bit.ly/jcmcdowell.

JC Mercantile also hopes to launch its Warrior Cafe project in the County. The project, which was launched in Kentucky, works with elementary students to set up student-led cafes in their schools, and teaches the children the foundations of running a business. Crum meets with the students to come up with metrics, calculate overhead costs, projected sales, and profit and loss. The students undergo a formal interview process so Mercantile can decipher which jobs best fit each student; all students are assigned a job. JC Mercantile provides the coffee, and the students are able to sell to teachers and parents; the students get to keep the profits, which are used for trips or other classroom activities.

JC Mercantile is excited about coming to Welch and eager to open its doors to McDowell County residents.



McDowell Students to Receive 'For the Future' Scholarships

For the fourth consecutive year, the Maier Foundation has pledged support of McDowell County students by awarding \$40,000 to Reconnecting McDowell to fund student scholarships. The \$5,000 scholarships will be given to five graduating seniors entering four-year tertiary institutions in West Virginia to help cover the

cost of tuition. For the Future Scholarships recipients are selected each year based on their community service and involvement. Reconnecting McDowell will also award \$2,500 to the previous scholarship winners as they start their sophomore year.

PEACE OF MIND FOR AREA FAMILIES

Project Lifesaver Set to Launch in McDowell

In October 2020, the McDowell County Sheriff's Office approached Reconnecting McDowell about launching Project Lifesaver. It is a nonprofit, public safety organization that provides first responders and caregivers with a program designed to protect and, when necessary, quickly locate individuals with cognitive challenges who are prone to wandering (e.g., those suffering from Alzheimer's disease or individuals on the autism spectrum).

"Given McDowell County's rugged terrain, variable climate and low population density, safety of these residents is a concern," says Sheriff James Muncy. "The Project Lifesaver program represents an ideal solution for at-risk people who become separated from their caregivers. The combination of tracking technology and training for first responders will

offer families peace of mind and could, quite literally, save lives."

Based on data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Autism.org and McDowell County Families Agencies Children Enhancing Services (FACES), there are roughly 326 people on the autism spectrum and 405 suffering from Alzheimer's disease and other age-related dementia in McDowell. The latter figure is expected to increase to more than 1,300 over the next several years given that 23 percent of the County's population is over age 65.

The Sheriff's Office will run the program, and McDowell County FACES, the local Family Resource Network, will identify potential individuals and get them enrolled in the program once it is up and running. Funding for the initial phase of the project has been provided by FACES, the West Virginia University Center for Excellence in Disabilities, and Reconnecting McDowell. The funding will be used to cover training costs, purchase transmitting devices that will allow emergency personnel to locate residents, as well as purchase receivers that will communicate with the transmitting devices. The transmitters that are worn by at-risk participants each emit a unique frequency that first responders' receivers can use to locate the individual.

Sheriff Muncy will work with Project Lifesaver instructors to host a training session in Welch for first responders from a local fire department and EMS, in addition to Sheriff's Office deputies. The initial phase of the project is scheduled to be up and running this spring with an expansion planned to start later in the year.

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—Sheriff James Muncy,
McDowell County Sheriff's Office

BROADER HORIZONS ALUM SPOTLIGHT

Faith Poore Returns to Teach in McDowell Schools

Faith Poore has always loved children and wanted to have a career that allowed her to work with them. Poore attended Concord University and majored in sociology with an emphasis in criminology. She envisioned herself working with Child Protective Services, but after graduating in December 2019, the opportunity to teach in McDowell County presented itself, and Poore decided to take it. She

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is in her first year of teaching in the Head Start program at Welch Elementary and has been working both virtually and in person, while navigating the challenges of teaching during a pandemic. "I enjoy watching the kids learn and grow together throughout the year," Poore says. "The kids are loving it and really learning, but they just don't get the interaction and socialization with the other kids. I have learned that you have to go with the flow." The novice teacher has fallen in love with the profession and the opportunity it provides her to positively impact her students' lives and development. Poore believes this is where she belongs and sees herself teaching for a long time.



Faith Poore proudly shows off her classroom at Welch Elementary.

Let's Connect

Follow Reconnecting McDowell on social media to receive the latest updates and news. We share information on webinars, job-training opportunities and upcoming community events. We also highlight our partners and their work in McDowell County and the state.

Social Media



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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 Debra Elmore (delmore@aftwv.org or 304-552-5766).

