

10

Reconnecting
McDOWELL
YEARS

● Aerospace Engineers:
The Next Generation

● 2021 For the
Future Scholars

● Make It Shine
Keystone

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.

10TH YEAR ANNIVERSARY EDITION / VOLUME 2

Celebrating 10 Years of Reconnecting McDowell

It’s hard to believe that a decade has passed since Reconnecting McDowell’s inception. It started as then first lady Gayle Manchin’s idea and has blossomed into a network of more than 100 dedicated partners and staff. Manchin’s idea was to provide comprehensive support to McDowell County Schools to facilitate the district’s move away from state control, and she shared the idea with American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten. Together, they began to lay the foundation for Reconnecting McDowell. In 2011, they signed **a covenant** with the inaugural partners, which laid out the project’s framework. The partners included businesses, foundations, government and nonprofit agencies and labor unions, which committed to provide services, money, products and/or expertise to McDowell. They called on longtime AFT staffer and West Virginia native Bob Brown as well as accomplished strategist Leah Daughtry to help get the project up and running. The foundational strategy for the comprehensive long-term project is that the route to a brighter economic future is through educational improvement. This strategy has been a mainstay, and the school district has continued to be a central partner. These past 10 years of accomplishments have been the result of hard work from partners and staff members and, most important, their unwavering dedication to the people of McDowell County.

To commemorate this anniversary, we celebrate and highlight the progress that has been made in the County.

WHO RAISES THE VILLAGE?

Manchin, former Reconnecting McDowell board chair, often asks, “If it takes a village to raise a child, who raises the village?” It is in this vein that Reconnecting McDowell committed itself to supporting the village. While students were being mentored through our Broader Horizons program, we were also supporting community baby showers,



providing solutions to the housing shortage and the need for internet connectivity. In 2012, Shentel Communications installed fiber optic lines worth \$9.7 million throughout McDowell County to provide more than 10,000 homes with broadband access at a rate as fast as the service in large cities and metropolitan areas. Shentel also priced its internet access at a significantly reduced rate for families in McDowell, starting at \$9.95/month. Additionally, Frontier Communications wired all the schools with fiber optics.

ESSENTIAL PARTNERSHIPS

When the idea surfaced to open literacy centers across the County, it was actualized by the support of partners—like most ideas and achievements. Seven literacy centers in the County were funded and supported by a \$50,000 grant from the Voya Foundation. This grant was the first of two that were used to replenish resources in the literacy centers with books from First Book, which is a nonprofit social enterprise that provides new books, learning materials and other essentials to children in need.

Since 2018, support from the Maier Foundation has allowed Reconnecting McDowell to fulfill its mission by investing in the collegiate careers of young people in the

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FUN IS AT THE HEART OF SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING

Aerospace Engineers: The Next Generation

Inspiring students to learn about science and engineering through fun activities is at the heart of Cate Schlobohm's job. As outreach director for West Virginia University's Statler College of Engineering, Schlobohm creates learning programs for K-12 students around the state and beyond.

Through a partnership with the McDowell County School system, WVU and Reconnecting McDowell, every sixth-grade student in the County got the opportunity to build and fly a glider with a two-foot wingspan—and learn about physics and aerospace engineering in the process. Northrop Grumman, a multinational aerospace and defense technology company with two locations in West Virginia, funded supplies for the gliders. The engineering lesson took place on March 8 at Southside K-8, March 15 at Sandy River, and virtually on March 12 for students attending school remotely.

"We had some great conversations about the engineering design process and careers in aerospace," Schlobohm says. "The partnership we formed and the instruction from professor Chris Griffin and the WVU chapter of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics will help spur a lot of future engineers."



Students from Southside K-8 proudly display the gliders they built.



VOLUNTEERS LEND A HAND FOR NEIGHBORHOOD CLEANUP PROJECT

Make It Shine Keystone

On May 8, Reconnecting McDowell and the Brothers and Sisters of the Patch—a nonprofit group made up of current and former residents of communities in the eastern part of McDowell County—hosted a cleanup in the Cinder Bottom neighborhood of Keystone.

Many people stopped by to help the core group of approximately 14 people to clean up trash that filled 86 large garbage bags, as well as remove larger items such as tires, rusted bicycles and old furniture.

The project was supported by the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection through its Make It Shine program. DEP supplied gloves and garbage bags for the volunteers, hauled the collected trash away, and paid the landfill disposal fees.

A volunteer stops to say hello while helping with the Keystone cleanup.

2021 FOR THE FUTURE SCHOLARS

Maier Foundation and Reconnecting McDowell Award More Scholarships

This year's For the Future scholars are entering a range of career fields—from biological sciences, to computer engineering, to business administration. The Maier Foundation continued its investment in McDowell youth by awarding Reconnecting McDowell a \$40,000 grant. The grant funded \$5,000 in scholarships to six students entering four-year institutions in West Virginia in the fall. It also supported scholars from the previous year who will be entering their sophomore year. This is the fourth year that For the

Future Scholarships have been awarded to County students. All McDowell County high school seniors who are entering a four-year institution in West Virginia in the fall are eligible to apply. Recipients are chosen based on their ability to demonstrate an ongoing commitment to McDowell County, either through community activities, community service, or other involvement with neighbors or community and neighborhood organizations. Meet this year's scholarship recipients:



Hannah Allen
Concord University

HEALTH SCIENCES PRE-PHYSICAL THERAPY



David Cyphers
Marshall University

BIOLOGICAL SCIENCE



James Green
Concord University

BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION



Madison Hairston
Concord University

SPORTS MANAGEMENT



Caleb Lawson
West Virginia University

COMPUTER ENGINEERING



Haleigh Sparks
Concord University

ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF RECONNECTING McDOWELL

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County. Reconnecting McDowell has applied for and has been awarded four rounds of Maier grants that resulted in \$140,000 in For the Future Scholarships to 22 students. McDowell County high school students who were seniors entering a four-year institution in West Virginia were eligible to apply. Each year, the current awardees receive \$5,000 toward their freshman year tuition costs and other expenses, and the previous students receive assistance toward their sophomore year. See current Maier awardees in story on page 3.

REVITALIZING A NEIGHBORHOOD

One challenge facing McDowell that surfaced repeatedly in feedback we received was the dearth of affordable housing and its effect on being able to recruit and fill teacher vacancies. In 2012, the Reconnecting McDowell executive committee voted and approved a plan to purchase the Best Furniture building as well as the attached Katzen building in downtown Welch. This would later allow Reconnecting McDowell to build a housing complex. Thus began a journey that would meet a fair number of obstacles along the way. Original plans to renovate the Best Furniture building had to be abandoned; instead the decision was made to pivot to asbestos removal and demolition of the building. The housing complex would eventually be called Renaissance Village; it is the first multistory building in Welch in more than 50 years. The structure is a mixed-use



Renaissance Village throughout its various stages of construction.

building that houses both commercial space, which seeks to help revitalize the local economy, and residential space. There are two stories of residential space, one story of commercial space, and one that is used for both residential and commercial purposes.

It is our pride and joy to continue to serve the people of McDowell County, alongside our partners, and to help usher in this new chapter.

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



Follow us on Twitter:
[@ReconnectMcD](https://twitter.com/ReconnectMcD)



Follow us on Instagram:
[@ReconnectMcD](https://www.instagram.com/ReconnectMcD)



Like us on Facebook:
facebook.com/ReconnectMcD

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@aftww.org or 304-552-5766).

