

# Mon Forest Towns Partnership Newsletter

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WVU Extension Service

Cowen     Parsons  
Davis     Petersburg  
Elkins     Richwood  
Franklin     Thomas  
Marlinton  
White Sulphur Springs

Volume 2 | December 2020

*Build and maintain an economy that thrives off of recreation, tourism, healthy landscapes, and active land management.*



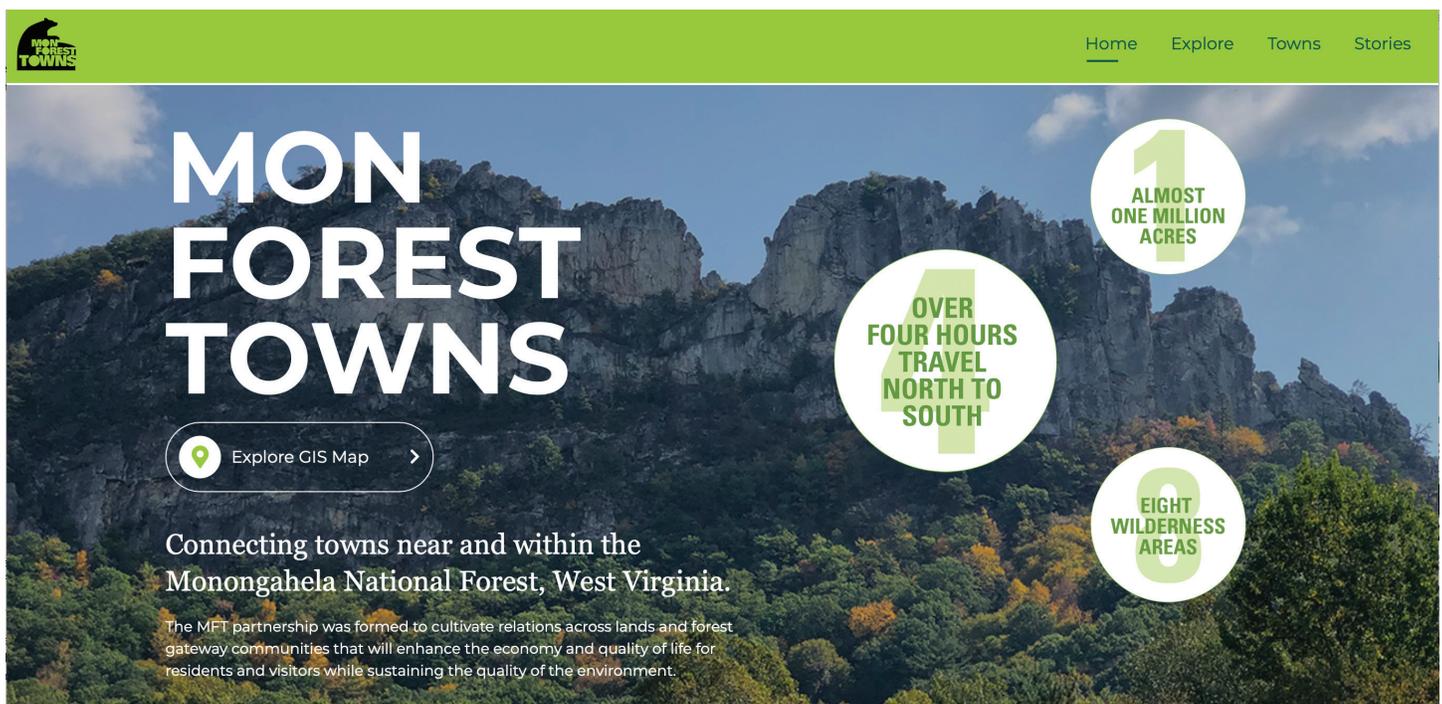
## Mon Forest Towns Partnership Made Official

**The rural communities and partners** that make up the Mon Forest Towns Partnership are working to diversify economic development and to enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors alike. These communities act as gateways to the Monongahela National Forest and are linked to the forest and to each other. While 2020 brought unprecedented challenges, it has remained a busy time for the Mon Forest Towns Partnership. A key achievement was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding that formalized the partnership and allowed us to officially begin working on our shared vision of building and maintaining an economy that thrives off of sustainable recreation, tourism, healthy landscapes, and active land management. By working together, we can contribute to a Forest in which nature, visitors, communities, and economies thrive.

## Website Launch [www.monforesttowns.com](http://www.monforesttowns.com)

**We did it!** The Mon Forest Towns website was launched! Have you seen our new home page? We designed it just for you. Be sure to check it out at [www.monforesttowns.com](http://www.monforesttowns.com). The website introduces the Mon Forest Towns (MFT) Partnership and provides detailed information on what the region has to offer. The site features an asset map so you can explore all the recreation opportunities and tourism amenities. From hotels and restaurants to mountain biking trails and boat launches, the asset map is an immense resource for residents and visitors alike. **Each Mon Forest Town** has their own individual page with visitor information, photos, and links to their official websites and social media pages. Featured stories spotlight some of the unique opportunities available in and around the communities. Like the Partnership itself, the website will continue to develop and grow in the coming months.

*Home page of the new web site designed by Kofi Opoku*



Below: Mon Forest Towns logo decal and button



## West Virginia's First Ride Center Receives Silver Designation

In October, the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) announced the newest recipient of their IMBA Ride Center™ designation was the Snowshoe Highlands Ride Center located in Pocahontas County, West Virginia. The ride center was awarded the Silver-level designation, meaning that the area meets specific trail, services and mountain biking experience criteria that elevates the overall mountain biking experience above the average destination and offers a variety of single track riding for all levels of riding abilities. **Mountain biking** and mountain biking facilities can bring an array of benefits to rural communities. They leverage communities' natural assets to create places that are attractive to visitors, businesses, and both new and current residents. Specific, documented benefits include health benefits for local users, increased tourism and economic development opportunities, and benefits to the local environment. In the US, an estimated 50 million people (20% of Americans 16 and over) mountain bike. **The announcement** comes just one year after the Ride Center's Bronze-Level designation and is the result of an immense amount of hard work, much of it done by partners of the Mon Forest Towns including the Pocahontas County CVB,

Snowshoe Mountain Resort, Poca Trails, USDA Forest Service, WVU Extension Service, the Town of Marlinton, and others. These partners hope that the Snowshoe Highlands Ride Center can serve as a guide for other communities in the region that may be interested in achieving this designation.

## Creative Placemaking—Fostering Diverse and Resilient Economies

**Creative placemaking** can be described as residents using arts and culture to tell the story of what's unique about a place, drive economic development, improve quality of life, and inspire hope for their community or region. Does that sound like a perfect fit for our Mon Forest Towns? Members of the Central Appalachian Network believe that it has an important role to play in the region's transition towards more diverse, resilient economies. And we couldn't agree more! **This summer**, the Mon Forest Towns Partnership was awarded funds by the Central Appalachian Network through a mini-grant program that is part of their Creative Placemaking efforts in the region. The awarded funds have been used to design and produce promotional materials for the partnership including decals, bumper stickers, window clings, and branded materials for sharing our story at special events.



**Additionally**, funding was received

for a trip to Pennsylvania to meet with members of the PA Wilds Partnership to discuss their branding and merchandising operations and how the Mon Forest Towns can potentially use this regional brand to financially support the Partnership's operations. Working across state lines with a similar outdoor recreation tourism partnership is a testament to the efforts being made by the Mon Forest Towns Partnership to continue to grow and strengthen the region. Due to the current pandemic, this meeting will be held virtually in the coming months using Zoom. We look forward to learning ways to engage local artists as we work to use the arts to bring people together, communicate ideas, and contribute solutions. What an exciting opportunity!

Arts and culture have long been a way to bring people together under a common vision, whether to celebrate and keep traditions, reach people in new ways, or even to inspire change. Creative placemaking celebrates the diversity of cultures and livelihoods that have defined the character of a place in the past and the present.



monforesttowns.com invites you to

# White Sulphur Springs— your adventure starts here and continues...

MON FOREST TOWNS

White Sulphur's billboard on I-64

## More Signs—Putting Our Towns on the Map

We know how much our towns have to offer, but we want to make sure that others do too. We have been focused on raising the visibility of our towns and are working to direct travelers to our region by working on signage projects. Town Representatives and community members have been working with graphic designers from West Virginia University to develop signage projects ranging from interstate billboards to interpretive signage to in-town wayfinding signs. Though the signage projects throughout the towns have been varied, the design team at WVU (lead by WVU Graphic Design Professor Eve Faulkes) have developed them using the Mon Forest Towns branding to make sure they all have the same look and feel. The ability of the design team to blend the Towns' individual brands and logos with the Partnership's branding will give users a consistent and connected experience as they travel throughout the Mon Forest Towns. Funding for these projects was provided by the Benedum Foundation which provides grants to support specific initiatives in the areas of Education, Economic Development, Health and Human Services, and Community Development.

Below left: One of seven interpretive signs 24"x 48", that go on to tell stories of Cowen

# MON FOREST TOWNS PARSONS

- VA CLINIC

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- SENIOR CITIZENS CENTER

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- HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Left: One of eight wayfinding signs for Parsons, now a model for other towns.

## Marketing Committee—Another Milestone Achieved

In September of 2020, the Mon Forest Towns Board established its first official committee. The Marketing Committee is comprised of community leaders and county tourism officials and is chaired by Pocahontas County CVB Director Cara Rose. Each committee member brings unique marketing experience and a wealth of knowledge to share. Their role is to develop and hone innovative ideas and provide feedback on marketing activities that will help generate more interest in visiting the Mon Forest Towns Region. **The Marketing Committee** is an advisory committee to the Mon Forest Towns Board and was heavily involved

in the rollout of the Mon Forest Towns website and social media. They have also helped to identify the creation of the first Mon Forest Towns promotional materials that will be available soon. As the Partnership continues to grow over the coming months and years, the Marketing Committee will play a central role in how it connects with and is perceived by the residents and visitors of the region. Thanks to all who are serving on this important committee!

A SMALL TOWN KIND OF AMAZING

# OWEN | B&O TRAIN DEPOT

MON FOREST TOWNS

The Cowen B&O Railroad Depot was the center of community life beginning in 1889 until the last passenger train pulled away from the depot in May 1968. The Cowen Fire of 1911 completely destroyed the building, but it was rebuilt in less than 30 days to serve as the only financial institution in town, allowing insurance claims to be telegraphed out and money for re-building to be wired into the town.

Throughout the two years everything from sheep to automobiles, psychics, movie film reels and houses came and went from the depot. Soldiers left for training and deployment from the depot in both world wars. The depot stands as a reminder of Cowen's rich railroad history and of the many lives it touched by this community fixture.

This is a replica that goes a 1/2 of the way behind the photo above and placed to look over at the whole sign area.



## More Signage to Promote the Mon Forest Towns

**Two additional Mon Forest Towns projects** received funding through the Secure Rural Schools Program managed by the USDA Forest Service. The first project aims to improve signage on the Monongahela National Forest and within the ten Mon Forest Towns. The project includes funds for two large entrance signs to welcome visitors when they pass into the boundary into the Forest. Each of the Mon Forest Towns will receive an additional \$1,000 to put toward the design and/or production of their priority signage projects related to the Mon Forest Towns Partnership. Funding will also be used to develop retractable banners focused on the partnership that will be located at the Seneca Rocks Discovery Center and Cranberry Mountain Nature Center to help reach even more visitors. The second project is centered on the newly developed **Mon Forest Towns Birding Trail** which will go live in the spring of 2020. Funding will be used to fabricate signs for each stop along the birding trail, as well as four interpretive signs that will explore how the health and active management of the Monongahela directly affects populations of native Neotropical migrants that depend on the Forest for breeding. The birding trail will connect each of the four Mon Forest Towns in the southern portion of the region to each other and to fantastic birding destinations. Keep your eyes open for more information on the Mon Forest Towns Birding Trail, the new Forest entrance signs, and many other signage projects that will be springing up soon!

## “Gateway” Signs have Arrived

**With the signing of the MOU** and the official beginning of the Partnership, many towns have already installed welcome signs that designate them as Mon Forest Towns. Look for these “gateway signs” as you travel throughout the Mon Forest Towns. Each sign has been personalized by the town with artwork depicting featured recreation activities available to visitors, as well as the tourism amenities and services offered by the town. The customization of these gateway signs allows towns to showcase what is unique to their communities while also providing a consistent brand across the Partnership. We hope you’ll plan a day, weekend, or week to visit all of the Mon Forest Towns!



*Ribbon cutting for the installation of the Mon Forest Towns gateway sign in Petersburg, WV.*



## The MFTP Welcomes Chris Tinney

**The Town of Richwood** has elected a new Town Representative, Chris Tinney. Chris has lived her entire life in Richwood and loves her community. She is a 5th grade teacher at Panther Creek Elementary in Nettie, WV. And, she loves all outdoor activities including hiking, running, and walking her dog. We are so excited to have Chris join our board.



### Official Representatives for the Mon Forest Towns:

- Cowen **Kent Walker**
- Davis **Andy Snyder**
- Elkins **Taira Landavere**
- Franklin **Ciara Warner Lambert**
- Marlinton **Sam Felton**
- Parsons **Dorothy Judy**
- Petersburg **Bob McCalley**
- Richwood **Chris Tinney**
- Thomas **Erika Smith**
- White Sulphur Springs **Bruce Bowling**

**The Mon Forest Towns Partnership says goodbye to Resource Assistants, Clinton Gabbert and Talia Schwelling. Thank you for your year of service! We wish you the best and are so grateful for all of your dedication, passion, and hard work.**

## Good Work

**Since December 2019,** Resource Assistants Talia Schwelling and Clinton Gabbert have worked under the supervision of members of the Mon Forest Towns Liaison Committee to collaborate directly with the ten Mon Forest Towns and their partners on the official formation of the Partnership. They have been instrumental in helping to establish a firm foundation for the Partnership, helped lead several town-specific projects, rolled out our social media presence, and so much more. As their one-year terms come to an end, their roles in the Partnership will be taken over by two AmeriCorps Members working with the USDA Forest Service through a partnership with the Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area.



## Introducing New AmeriCorps

**Kristen Stanford** will be working with the six North Zone towns of Davis, Elkins, Franklin, Parsons, Petersburg, and Thomas. **Emily Culp** will be working with the South Zone towns of Cowen, Marlinton, Richwood, and White Sulphur Springs. Kristen and Emily have already begun their work and have jumped into helping the towns with their signage projects, integrated efforts to partner with the HubCAP program, and working to familiarize themselves with the towns and their community members. We are looking forward to working with Kristen and Emily as the Partnership continues its exciting next steps!

## North

**Hi, I'm Kristen!** I'm from Savannah, GA and recently graduated from Valdosta State University with a Bachelor's in Biology and a minor in Environmental Studies. I love traveling, art, and being outdoors. I hope to do great work here with the Mon Forest Towns Partnership and look forward to working with everyone!



## and South

**Hi, my name is Emily!** I grew up in Chattanooga, TN and attended Sewanee: The University of the South where I received a bachelor's degree in Natural Resources and a minor in International and Global Studies. My passions include biking, hiking, caving, and geologizing. I'm incredibly excited to explore West Virginia and I look forward to working with the Mon Forest Towns Partnership!



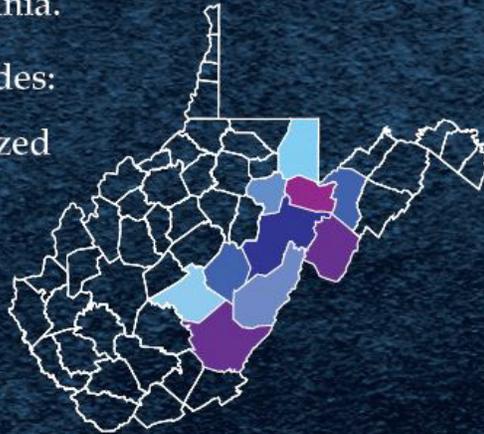
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The Mon Forest Business Initiative offers business advice and funding assistance for professional services to any businesses located within the 10 counties of the Monongahela National Forest region of West Virginia.

Our program includes:

- Free, customized one-on-one coaching
- Group coaching/training
- Access to professional third-party resources and expertise
- Support and guidance in securing start-up or expansion loans



# MON FOREST BUSINESS INITIATIVE

## PROGRESS REPORT

### Types of Businesses Served

Yoga, Restaurants, Event Planning, Specialty Retail Shops, Galleries, Value-Added Food/Farm, Art, Environmental Consultant Firm, Axe Throwing Bar, Retreat Center, Trail Builder, Outdoor Education Organization, Campground, Spa, Hardware, Winery, Woodworking, Salon, Healthcare, Hatchery, Knife-making, Florist, Vacation Rentals, Coffee Shop, Downtown Building Redevelopment, Market, Outdoor Magazine, Bike Shop, Distillery, Outdoor Outfitter, XC Ski Resort, Lodging, Ice Cream Shop, Daycare, and etcetera.

### Examples of Third-Party Consultants Contracted

Web design, marketing planning/design, risk management planning, architecture/design, accounting, QuickBooks training, legal advising, workers compensation pool creation, photography, e-Commerce set up, trademarking advising, logo design/branding, label review, and building design.



## Businesses Served

115

## Jobs

## Created/Retained

99

## Communities Served

27

## Businesses Served

## During COVID

48

## Loan \$C Iosed

\$1,466,400

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