

Donations & Involvement

Please show your support for the continued publication of this newsletter by donating any amount at the Skyline Bank in Whitetop under the account, “Whitetop Gazette”.

Special thanks to Lisa Blevins and Skyline Bank for their financial contribution that funded the cost for this issue. We also had another very generous contribution by someone who wished to remain anonymous. The tentative plan is to issue this newsletter quarterly, but that may change based on feedback,

funding, and the frequency of new content. If you have news that you would like to be considered for publication, please email them to the editor, Gary Rascoe at WhitetopGazette@gmail.com.

Special thanks for the graphic design by Christina and Brian Rascoe.

Also, thanks to Edith Powers, Emily Spencer, Tom Revels, Ralph Norris, Reny Gambrill, Lisa Blevins, Roy Brittain, Jasmine Franks and Elaine Jacobs for their editorial support, promotion, and content contributions.



Serving the Mt Roger’s Community of Whitetop, Konnarock and Green Cove

Friends of Grayson Highlands State Park

The Friends of Grayson Highlands State Park is beginning to increase their involvement at Grayson Highlands. When COVID-19 began in 2020, the Friends of Grayson Highlands State Park lost members and activities due to circumstances. Now the Friends group is ready to return to life at the park! We will be involved in several events and jobs this year. We hope to bring together new, current, and past members to support the park and enjoy each other’s company at the beautiful Grayson Highlands.

Events that the Friends group will be involved with are:

- Junior Rangers
- Information table at Massie Gap
- Trail repair/clean-up
- Park Facility refurbishment
- More to come!

More information about events regarding dates and times can be found at Grayson Highlands State Park Office or website. Meetings are held on the 2nd Monday of every month. We are updating our Facebook page and will begin to post information about meetings and events there. If you would like additional information, contact Dawn Dolinger via email @mariedolinger49@yahoo.com.

Summer Reading Program & Activities

The Summer Reading Program for Kids and Adults begins June 1st and ends July 31st. All activities are at the Whitetop Community Center. For pre-registration, folks can call the library at 388-2873 or come into the library and register at the circulation desk.

| Date    | Activity                                                                                                                 |
|---------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| June 28 | Darin Handy, Live Animal Show 5:00                                                                                       |
| July 9  | Painting: Children, 3:00, Adults 5:30. Free, must pre-register                                                           |
| July 18 | Build a Bear 3:00 Free, must pre-register                                                                                |
| July 23 | Gold & Gem mining, 11:00 Children only, Free. Hot dog lunch to follow to celebrate the end of the Summer Reading Program |

Mt Rogers Fire & Rescue

Both the MapleSyrupFestival and the Ramp festivals were a big success with about **1100 meals served at the maple syrup festival and 650 meals served at the ramp festival!** The members want to thank all the volunteers that assisted at both festivals; without you, the festivals would not be possible! Our next large event is the 4th of July celebration. Since the cost of the fireworks have continued to jump in price, we are currently accepting donations to help continue the tradition of a fantastic display.

Through the end of May, the Fire and Rescue has responded to the following calls:

| County/<br>Type | Rescue<br>Responses | Fire<br>Responses | Total |
|-----------------|---------------------|-------------------|-------|
| Mutual Aid      | 8                   | 3                 | 11    |
| Grayson         | 36                  | 10                | 46    |
| Washington      | 1                   | 0                 | 1     |
| Smyth           | 6                   | 1                 | 7     |
| EMS             |                     | 35                | 35    |
| Totals          | 51                  | 49                | 100   |

Altogether, volunteers contributed about 400 hours and traveled over 1400 miles! Thanks to all the hard work that F&R puts in to help each of the communities!

MountainNeighbors.com

Roy Brittain and his wife, Kitty, from Konnarock have built a community-focused website aimed at sharing information on multiple topics such as homesteading, gardening, growing healthy food for improved nutrition and potential income from growing native medicinal plants, among many other topics.

A community health program in Ashe County by Ashe Medics revealed many residents struggled with lack of food and safe home environments. Data from Mt Rogers Health District reveals a poverty rate of about 24% among children under 18 years old (defined as an income level of less than \$30,000 for a family of four) in Grayson, Smyth and Washington counties. Since there is a direct correlation between healthy food and good health, one of their main goals is to solve this issue for households in need, not just for children but for the elderly as well.

Roy is a retired minister, writer, skilled mechanic, and a master gardener. He has a large greenhouse and hoop house where he grows a wide variety of plants and vegetables and offers them free of charge. While

not a requirement, if you’re physically able, you may barter some of your time to help with various gardening activities. He plans on helping to communicate and promote various classes starting with gardening but, with others’ help, eventually expanding to hoop houses, welding, and agro-forestry.

One of the people who has benefited from this help is Nickolus Barr, who has a YouTube Channel (Discover Appalachia) of his own where, among other topics, he demonstrates homesteading concepts. For Nickolus, Mountain Neighbors is about building a community that is increasingly connected to each other. He notes, “The process of creating a community is important to me because, like many others, I search for a place in my community. Being a native to Konnarock, this project is exciting not only to see, but also to be a part of the makings of bringing the community together.”

In the ideal world, Kitty and Roy would like to serve as a model where others would have hoop houses and share their garden yields with those in need. Roy will share how he received the components for his hoop house at no cost through a grant program of USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Services. Kitty and Roy are incorporating a community directory of services in order that people can hire locally; and a directory of community resources: businesses, non-profit organizations, churches and government agencies. Their website is new and will be updated regularly. You can visit them at MountainNeighbors.com

Keep Whitetop and the Surrounding Communities Beautiful

Let’s keep Whitetop beautiful for ourselves and for the tourists that travel here from every state in the nation as well as around the world. If you visit the Railroad Café, be sure to look at the map of the United States that has pins designating where visitors have traveled from. Let’s do our best to show pride in our community.

restore the remaining rock portion of the building, repair and upgrade the playground, and add other opportunities for both locals and visitors to enjoy.

Small improvements have already been made. Last summer, volunteers pitched in to clean out the shop building and in late May, grant funding obtained by the county helped pave the walking trail that winds in front of the school.

“We are pleased the support that has been shown to this project and we hope to create something the community can really be proud of,” Powers said.

The group, comprised of volunteers, hopes to hold a second community clean-up day in the coming months to remove debris from the rock building left behind from the demolition of the brick portion of the school.

Those who wish to keep up with the happenings at the old school can do so by following the Mount Rogers Folklife Center on Facebook. Those interested in becoming involved with the project or who would like to get text or email updates on events can private message the page.

Open community jams are planned for the second and fourth Sundays of each month, weather permitting, until it’s too chilly.

Blue Ridge Discovery Center

We are very fortunate to have the BRDC in the midst of our community. It has a very interesting history which will be written about in a future issue. Located at 6402 Whitetop Rd (Route 600) where it intersects Konnarock Rd, it’s also very close to the Konnarock Community Center. The building has been completely restored and the team has continued to add outdoor spaces as well. Their mission: “BRDC inspires curiosity, discovery, and stewardship through the wonders of the Blue Ridge. They offer a wide variety of events for people of all ages. Our granddaughters have

attended summer camps there over the years and it has been a great experience. One of the programs they offer is called a Rally, and a local resident has offered his thoughts after attending it:

BRDC - Spring Naturalist Rally

The Mount Rogers Spring Naturalist Rally celebrated its 50th year of welcoming visitors to our beautiful mountains. These "naturalists" are more than mere nature enthusiasts; they are passionate, dedicated individuals who often favor eco-friendly transportation instead of the safari-ready vehicles and ATV’s. They are both knowledgeable and eager to learn more, and they bring their children to share in the wonders of nature.

We are honored to host them and grateful that our facilities can accommodate the growing community of nature lovers. Welcome to our community!

So, what exactly is the "Rally" about? There are two key aspects. First, it’s the diversity of interests among the participants. Botanists attend sessions on geology, while nature artists share their techniques with hikers and bikers of all ages—from professors to fifth-graders. The event attracts a wide array of experts, so many ...ologists, that you might need a dictionary to keep up. And let’s not forget the many enthusiastic laypeople who join in. It’s a fantastic mix of individuals!

Second, the "Rally" is also a passionate call to action for conservation. These mountains are incredibly important—they are our home. The rich biodiversity we enjoy here is under constant threat. Other places work tirelessly to re-establish what we often take for granted. We are indeed a privileged group to have such natural splendor at our doorstep.

As a resident, I deeply enjoy these events, volunteer, and participate. I get to reconnect with familiar locals and meet visitors from all over. It recharges my commitment to nature conservation and ignites my enthusiasm anew. Let’s all rally together!

**Friends of Whitetop Library**

The Friends of the Whitetop Public Library encourage folks to stop by the library to check out the new books, magazines, DVD’s and CDs. Keep checking back for information on the upcoming 2024 Summer Reading Program for all ages.

**Whitetop Community Center**

Bingo – First Three Saturdays of the month  
Live Music – The fourth Saturday of the month.

**Feeding Southwest Virginia**

On the third Monday of the month (weather permitting) volunteers help distribute food at the Community Center to qualified families. If you would like to help, please show up about 1:30.

**Literature Corner**

In this section of the Whitetop Gazette, as space allows, we will add short poems or writings by local writers. The following is a gold medal winning poem won in a poetry contest on Allpoetry.com by Roy Brittain.

**Heaven can wait**

"Home is where the heart is."  
That's not the way it always is.  
My heart is in eternity  
where love is in infinity.

But, my feet are on the ground,  
well...most of the time;

soaring with the raptors above,  
bobbing around with the doves.  
The pungency of the forest,  
dampness in the breeze;  
in summer a green canopy;  
beautiful sunsets, winter sees;  
the grass - 100 feet tall trees.  
Cabin perched upon the steep

mountain where bears in winter sleep;  
our fireplace flaming, crackling, glowing;  
a toddy, a book, a footstool, and chair  
will soon give way to open windows;  
birds raising families and singing.  
Down by the tumbling creek,  
dark, rich earth gives birth to our  
garden. Our bees just starting  
to venture forth, cleaning house,  
preparing for the harvest, like us.  
Our home is a kaleidoscope,  
changing as the moments turn  
from future, to present, to past.  
The unrealized becoming reality,  
the beauty we could never create,  
harmony sung by every flora and fauna;  
heaven's going to have to wait!

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**Other News from Konnarock**

Ervin and Willie Ellis of Ellis Brothers Builders have a new YouTube channel to feature videos on mountain homesteading, timber framing, beekeeping and maple syrup making from their homestead in Konnarock. Their channel is called Ellis Brothers Builders on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/@ellisbrothersbuilders9658>). Enjoy their stories and adventures as they grow their homestead!

**Konnarock Community Center**

The Konnarock Community Center hosts a breakfast from 7:30 to 9:30 on the first Saturday of the month. As a new event, they are hosting a community yard sale on the same day that goes until 2:00. There are no fees to participate and registration is not required – just show up! Park on the grass and set up along the walking spath. It is hoped that people that have breakfast will stroll over to the field behind the Community Center. They just ask that you set up and clean up since those services

aren’t provided. The building will remain open for bathroom use. If you need any more information contact Carolyn Cheek at 276-388-3549. You can also go to their Facebook page to learn about other events as well. When on Facebook, search for Konnarock Community Center. They also host a meeting on the second Monday of each month at 7:00 which is open to the public.

**Mel Leaman Free Clinic**

Located at Emory & Henry College, 601 Radio Hill Rd in Marion, the clinic’s mission is “To enhance community well-being by providing free, compassionate, comprehensive, and high quality health care services to the underserved of Smyth, Grayson, and Washington Counties. They serve about 950 patients annually through 5,400 patient visits and dispense over 10,000 prescriptions annually with a value over four million dollars.

Some of the services provided are basic such as wellness visits, checkups, treatment for colds and flu, urinary tract infections, diabetes and high cholesterol but they also provide women’s health services and treat for chronic conditions such as depression and anxiety, behavioral health, lab testing, diabetes, physical and occupational health rehab along with limited access to dental care.

To qualify for these free services, you must be:

- A resident of one of the three counties
- Uninsured
- Over the age of 18
- Have a photo ID
- Have proof of household income. Note patient must be living at or below 300% of the federal poverty level. For 2024:

| Family Size | Poverty Guideline | Three times the Guideline |
|-------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| 1           | \$15,060          | \$45,180                  |
| 2           | \$20,440          | \$61,320                  |
| 3           | \$25,820          | \$77,460                  |
| 4           | \$31,200          | \$93,660                  |

Patients seen by appointment only, M-F 9:00am – 5:00 pm. Closed on weekends. For more information or to make an appointment, call 276-781-2090 or visit [Melleamanfreeclinic.org](http://Melleamanfreeclinic.org)

**A group of Mount Rogers School alumni is breathing new life into the historic school**

Convened last year, the group got the OK from Grayson County leaders to put together a planning committee to brainstorm ideas and get feedback from the community on the use of the old school. That effort saw the inception of the Mount Rogers Folklife Center, a hub for Appalachian traditions with a goal of preserving local culture—particularly that of local old-time music. With the Center also planned to act as a Visitor Center, the group envisions a venue for old-time music lessons, instrument making classes, beaucoup jam sessions, and local and regional performances.

Although still in the planning stages—and despite the current disrepair of the buildings—the Folklife Center has already hosted a number of events on the school grounds, including open community jams, a Folklife Fall Fest and a “Holler-ween” event.

Most recently, the center held its first Spring Rendezvous, a trading post type event traditionally held in the spring to allow folks to trade their goods and replenish their stores for the year. With vendors from both Grayson and surrounding counties, as well as some from neighboring North Carolina, attendees had an array of local crafters to visit. Children were also eager to enjoy pony rides provided by Rock Springs Pony Rides and meet a variety of critters in the care of area wildlife rehabilitator Darin Handy.

“We had a fantastic turnout,” said Edith Powers, who heads the group. “The kids especially seemed to have a great time riding ponies and seeing exotic animals.”

A long road remains ahead, but moving forward, the group hopes to work with the county to