



ANNUAL REPORT

2021

Mountaineer Country

Serving Monongalia,
Preston and Taylor Counties

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A Word from our President and CEO

This past year was a building year for many people in many regards. For the Visit Mountaineer Country Convention and Visitors Bureau (VMCCVB), 2021 was a year well spent. Our organization dedicated a lot of the year to listening — to our partners, our locals, and our visitors — to provide effective, just-in-time information that would position Mountaineer Country to keep moving forward, despite the ongoing challenges facing the hospitality and tourism industry.

As a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that is primarily funded by lodging tax, it was a challenge at times to see the hospitality and tourism industry be so unpredictable due to the COVID-19 pandemic. But, in 2021, thanks to the approval and rollout of vaccines, we were able to welcome back visitors to Mountaineer Country. We were thrilled to see large events, sports, and conference groups return and cheered from the sidelines as our small business owners and Mountaineer Deals partners switched on their “open” signs. The infamous “pivot” truly took form in Mountaineer Country. Only this time, it was in the forward direction.

Going into a new year, our organization is inspired that the tourism economy is being recognized more than ever before. We are proud to continue telling Mountaineer Country’s story and excited to keep serving Monongalia, Preston, and Taylor Counties. Our promise to you is to continue creating resources and fostering an environment that grows our destination — all while owning who we are.

We look forward to what is to come in 2022 and expect it to be nothing short of a comeback year — for our local businesses, our hotels, our guests, our partners, and the hospitality and travel industry — we welcome the challenges and look forward to growing alongside you all.

Sincerely,

Susan Riddle,
President & CEO, Visit Mountaineer Country
Convention & Visitors Bureau

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OUR MISSION

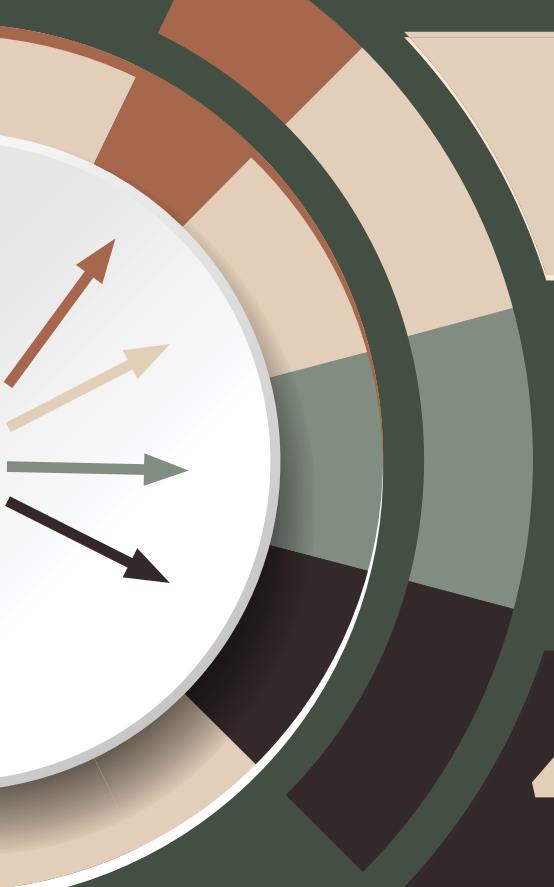
The Visit Mountaineer Country CVB strives to increase the tourism economy by marketing and selling the destination to our guests by “wowing” them and encouraging them to stay one more night and spend one more dollar.

WEST VIRGINIA STATEWIDE TOURISM BY THE NUMBERS



The effects of the COVID pandemic over the past two years have been devastating across the globe. Specifically, the tourism industry has experienced some of the very worst impacts and those entities within Mountaineer Country have mirrored that experience. Despite the challenges, the Visit Mountaineer County CVB has endured and continued to support. Tourism in our area has seen a rebound, particularly in our area during the 4th quarter of 2021. We are hopeful that the upward trend continues throughout 2022 and beyond and our CVB stands ready to assist in every way possible.

— Craig Walker, Board Chair



38 members

Working to create a positive economic impact by increasing tourism spending

\$8+ million

Dedicated to marketing and promoting WV destinations annually

\$10 million+

Spent in public-private investment in Department of Tourism's co-op advertising program

4,000

Lodging Partners represented by CVBs

CVBs are directly involved in contributing \$4.7 billion in visitor spending in the state of West Virginia.*



*Resource: Dean Runyan Travel Impacts study 2020

Scan the QR code above for most up-to-date travel research from Department of Tourism.

CVBs are not-for-profit organizations primarily funded by their local governments, usually through a portion of the hotel occupancy tax. Their mission is to promote the long-term development and marketing of a destination, focusing on group sales, tourism marketing, and service. As the tourism marketing arm of the destination, the CVB is responsible for creating public awareness about its destination and securing the meeting and event business that feeds this economic engine of the region.

Ultimately, travel and tourism enhances the quality of life for a local community by providing jobs, bringing in tax dollars for improvement of services and infrastructure, and creating an environment that grows attractions like restaurants, shops, festivals, and cultural and sporting venues that cater to both visitors and residents alike.

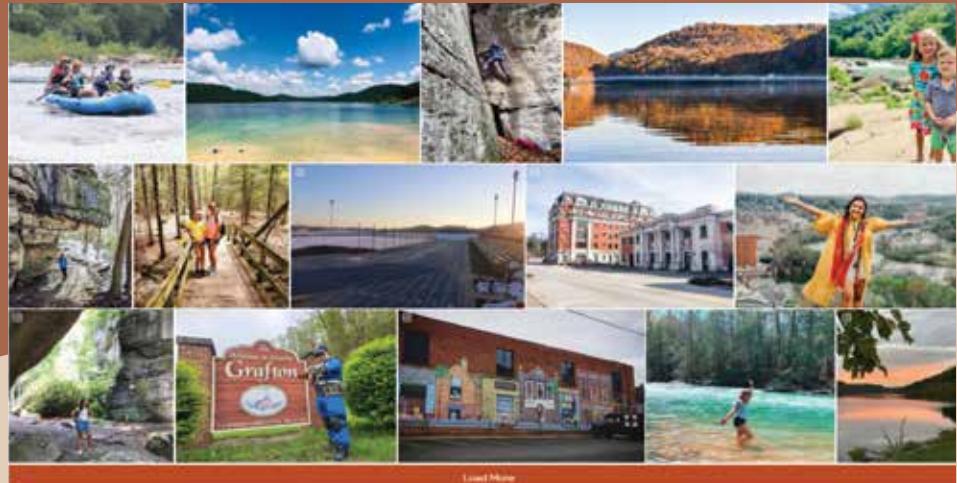
Proof is in the Progress

The hospitality and tourism industry experienced a time of decreased traffic in 2020 due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, *almost every industry did*. People were still interested but knew it was in their best interest to follow state and local guidelines to help slow the spread. In response to this slow period, the VMCCVB developed new strategies and tools to engage audiences who would begin traveling again in 2021. Through consistent messaging and visitor-focused offerings, the organization steadily built numbers back up to pre-COVID-19 levels.

We rebounded.

Working in collaboration with the Chamber and CVB for the Mountaineer Deals partnership and short story filming has been great! Andrea & Hannah were professional in explaining how everything would work, setting up filming and editing out all my blunders! Kristy helped push my message out to everyone and several people have mentioned they had seen the video and made a trip in to visit. I love being in business in Preston County!

—Laura Dulaney, Owner
Big Sandy Brewing Company



Plan Your Trip for a Chance to Win!

Mountaineer Country Free Trip Planning App

A huge win for Visit Mountaineer Country CVB in 2021 was the planning, development and launch of its official trip-planning app. Using the VisitWidget software, an interactive itinerary builder, the app pulls in all of its data from our website, VisitMountaineerCountry.com. Through the app, users can explore a pre-planned day trip, create their own itineraries, and browse hundreds of unique business listings. From launching on June 2, 2021, through the end of the year, the app received more than **2,276 downloads**.

Social Media by the Numbers

The VMCCVB used social media as a way to keep in touch with visitors and locals, providing just-in-time things to do. At the end of 2021, the VMCCVB had:

28,720 Facebook Followers

6,318 Twitter Followers

7,070 Instagram Followers

Insight: The VMCCVB also saw a 103% increase in Visit Preston County Facebook page followers due to a giveaway series partnership with Blueprint Communities Kingwood and the Preston County Commission.



VisitMountaineerCountry.com

The VMCCVB's search-engine optimization (SEO) continues to show its power. The organization frequently fields calls from visitors all over the state looking for attractions, events, and things to do. With help from Blaine Turner Advertising, the VMCCVB tracks trending keywords and acts on them accordingly, making the organization a top website on search engines. In 2021, the VMCCVB welcomed more than **225,000 users** to its website — **87.4% of which were new users**. Through non-paid strategies such as social media posts and website content, the VMCCVB sourced **69.33% of those organic users**.

User-Generated Content

The VMCCVB has utilized CrowdRiff, a user-generated content (UGC) software since 2019— to view and source photos from visitors and locals who take photos around Mountaineer Country. Once rights have been received, the VMCCVB can use their photos, for marketing initiatives. In 2021, the VMCCVB sourced 123 UGC pieces.

Sharing Mountaineer Country's Best

Being a local in Mountaineer Country, it's impossible for the famous Mountaineer spirit to not become a part of the personal brand. It's even more difficult to not share our destination with others. The VMCCVB was fortunate to share Mountaineer Country in 2021, and proud to serve counties that recognize and prioritize the utmost hospitality.

We made a lasting impression.



I worked with Visit Mountaineer Country in the summer of 2021. To say it was one of the best partnerships of my career to date would be an understatement! Their team was beyond organized, and their love for what they do in promoting the region's tourism industry shines in their words and actions. I can't recommend them enough. Book an adventure to Mountaineer Country ASAP — you won't regret it!

—East Coast Contessa



Influencers

In 2021, through the WV Tourism Cooperative Advertising program and VMCCVB social media, the organization hosted three travel influencers. Each influencer had a different itinerary with key Mountaineer Country stops and experiences. From shopping, to dining, to outdoor activities, the influencers documented their adventures from their point of view, sharing the area's endless opportunities to explore with their thousands of followers.

High-Profile Giveaways

Giveaways continued to be a key traffic driver for the VMCCVB. They attract visitors to the area and provide them with customized, tangible experiences. In 2021, the VMCCVB hosted:

**14 Giveaways
including items from
50+ Mountaineer
Deals Partners**

Mountaineer Deals

These tourism business partners help the VMCCVB showcase the best and brightest of Mountaineer Country. In 2021, the VMCCVB continued the Mountaineer Deals program successfully, despite the challenges of 2020:

**99%
of Partners Retained**

**37
New Partners Added**

Group Sales

Several conference and sports groups chose Mountaineer Country to host their events. Because of this, the VMCCVB team coordinated lodging and other hospitality accommodations for 84 groups, contributing to our “one more night, one more dollar” mission. Through group contacts and other sales and marketing initiatives, the VMCCVB

connected with visitors from all over the country and added 59,900 contacts into its Customer Relationship Management platform, Sharpspring.



In the Communities We Serve

While visitors are the VMCCVB's primary audience, the organization makes it a point to be involved in the communities it serves. The VMCCVB firmly believes in being "better together, so we try to act on any chance we have to support community initiatives that help grow the local economy. While some of the reduced bandwidth challenges from 2020 carried into 2021, the organization was grateful to be out in the community, championing tourism and forming relationships at the local level. **We connected.**



The Monongalia County Commissioners are ecstatic with the success of the Tourism Advancement Fund. The collaboration between the Visit Mountaineer Country CVB and the County Commission continues to develop projects that benefit our local community and drive the tourism economy by attracting out-of-town guests. We look forward to working together on future projects.

*—Tom Bloom, President
Monongalia County Commission*

Goodwill City Ambassadors

For 6 years, the VMCCVB has worked with the Goodwill City Ambassadors (GCA) group to provide visitors with positive experiences while they are in town. Members of the GCA volunteer at events, greet visitors at WVU football games, and more. With the unpredictable safety challenges imposed by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, many ambassadors were hesitant to resume regular volunteer work. The VMCCVB staff and partners from the Mylan Park Aquatic Center worked with the GCA to drive courtesy shuttles before and after six WVU home football games to ensure guests continued to have a seamless, pleasant gameday experience.

Ascend WV

The Brad and Aly Smith Economic Development Collaborative (OEDC) attracted thousands of interested applicants to Mountaineer Country after announcing its Ascend WV remote-worker program. While only 53 applicants were accepted to make the move, the area had more people looking at it than ever before. To welcome the new Morgantown residents, the VMCCVB provided welcome packets to each remote worker to set them up for success as new locals. The packets included essential Mountaineer Country items from the VMCCVB's Mountaineer Deals partners.

Advocacy

Two major accomplishments for the VMCCVB in 2021 were the appointments of President and CEO Susan Riddle as treasurer to both the West Virginia Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus (WVACVB) and the Mountaineer Trail Network Recreation Authority (MTNRA).



Monongalia County Tourism Advancement Fund

With the return of events to Mountaineer Country, the Monongalia County Commission recognized the need to offer financial support to host events and drive visitors to our destination. The Commission designated \$150,000 to Monongalia County Tourism Advancement Fund (MCTAF). The VMCCVB facilitated the process, and from July through December 2021, the MCTAF provided:

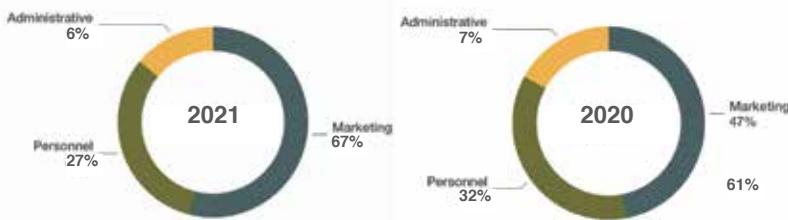
**\$153,054 in awards granted,
16 events, 37,000 Visitors Est.
8,050 Hotel Rooms Est.
\$877,450 Hotel Room Revenue Est.**

Financial Statement of Activities

Years ended December 31, 2020 and 2019

Revenue and Support	2021	2020
Hotel occupancy tax	\$1,391,217	\$909,566
Pass-through grant revenue	77,088	-
Paycheck protection program	68,146	-
Advertising, guides, and events	-	9,009
Service revenue	155	64,981
Other revenue	494	5,194
Interest income	75	31
Total revenue and support	\$1,537,175	\$988,781
Expenses		
Program services	\$1,04,0311	\$961,110
Managerial and general	119,094	124,475
Total expenses	\$1,159,405	\$1,085,585
Change in net assets without donor restrictions	377,770	(96,804)
Net assets without donor restrictions - beginning of year	301,526	398,330
Net assets without donor restrictions - end of year	\$679,296	\$301,526
ASSETS		
Current Assets		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$464,659	\$109,514
Prepaid expenses	22,919	-
Accounts receivable	224,725	127,158
Accounts receivable - other	-	1,366
Total current assets	712,303	238,038
Property and equipment:		
Furniture and equipment	78,488	78,488
Leasehold improvements	193,204	193,204
Vehicles	20,764	20,764
Less: accumulated depreciation	(137,245)	(115,443)
Net property and equipment	155,211	177,013
Total Assets	\$867,514	\$415,051
LIABILITIES		
Current liabilities		
Accounts payable and accrued expenses	94,625	100,463
Accrued wages and compensated absences	20,681	13,062
Deferred revenue Mon Co. Tourism Advancement Fund	72,912	-
Total current liabilities	\$188,218	\$113,525
Net assets:		
Net assets without donor restrictions	679,296	301,526
Total net assets	679,296	301,526
Total liabilities and net assets	\$867,514	\$415,051

Visit Mountaineer Country CVB Performance



Tourism Industry Best Practices:
40% Marketing 40% Personnel 20% Administrative



Board of Directors 2021-2022

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:

Craig Walker, Chair

Kerry Gnik, Vice Chair

Aly Goodwin Gregg, Secretary

Alex Miller, Treasurer

Leah Carbone, Lodging Chair

Mark Cestari

Justin Reedy

BOARD MEMBERS:

Robbie Baylor

Ann Berry

Angie Blankenship

Steve Blinco

Tom Bloom

Terri Cutright

Frank DeMarco

Lyn Dotson

Jean-Manuel Guillot

Terry Jackson

Bill Kawecki

Patty Lewis

Michael McGovern

Christian Miller

Mark Nesselroad

Russ Rogerson

Don Smith

Sheila Westfall

Deanna Williams

Keli Zinn

At the end of 2021, 88% of the VMCCVB's board was actively using the Boardable platform. Frequently, non-profits and especially large boards, struggle with board attendance and meeting quorum. Meeting attendance for the VMCCVB's board was over 80%.

VMCCVB Tourism Partners

All Aboard Grafton
American Bus Association
Arthurdale Heritage, Inc.
Arts Council of Greater Morgantown
Brad and Alys Smith Outdoor
Economic Development Collaborative
City of Grafton
City of Kingwood
City of Morgantown
City of Shinnston
City of Westover
Friends of the Cheat
Greater Bridgeport CVB
Main Street Kingwood
Main Street Morgantown
Marion County CVB
Monongalia County Ballpark
Morgantown Area Partnership
Monongalia County Commission
Monongalia County Lodging Properties
Mon River Trails Conservancy
Morgantown Area Paddlers
Morgantown Municipal Airport
Morgantown Farmers Market
Mountaineer Trail Network
Mylan Park Foundation
Mylan Park Properties
Preston County Chamber of Commerce
Preston County Commission
Preston County Lodging Properties
Preston County Parks and Recreation
Pricketts Fort Memorial Foundation
Public Relations Society of America
Rails-to-Trails Conservancy
Southeast Tourism Society
Taylor County Commission
Town of Bruceton Mills



Town of Star City
Town of Granville
West Virginia Association of
Convention and Visitors Bureaus
West Virginia Association of Fairs and
Festivals
West Virginia Botanic Garden
West Virginia Civil War Trails
West Virginia Hospitality and Travel
Association
West Virginia Humanities Council
West Virginia Department of Tourism
WV Small Business Association
WVU Alumni Association
WVU Athletics
WVU College of Business and
Economics
WVU Mountaineer Parents Club
WVU Reed College of Media
WVU Visitors Center
WVU Libraries

Tourism advertising in West Virginia has proven to be a strong investment

For every dollar spent on tourism advertising, the state yields \$8 in state and local tax revenue and \$106 in direct traveler spending. Without this tourism-generated revenue, each household in West Virginia would have to pay an additional \$720 a year in state and local taxes.

*Source: 2018 Dean Runyan Associates,
"West Virginia Travel Impacts" Report.*

Visit Mountaineer Country does an exemplary job of both promoting and selling Monongalia, Preston, and Taylor counties. Susan and her team go above and beyond in all that they do. Their data-driven approach to marketing and sales has paid dividends in recent years. We look forward to continuing our partnership with Visit Mountaineer Country in the coming year.

*— Chelsea Ruby,
Cabinet Secretary,
West Virginia
Department of Tourism*

WEST
VIRGINIA™



For more information
regarding Monongalia, Preston
and Taylor Counties, go to
VisitMountaineerCountry.com.