

**WNC HONORS AWARDS  
COMMUNITY ACHIEVEMENTS & BEST PRACTICES  
November 2013**

Thank you to the rural communities in the mountains of North Carolina for all your hard work, energy and dedication. The following are the achievements and best practices highlighted during the 64<sup>th</sup> WNC Honors Awards luncheon. 62 communities submitted applications and these communities represent over 1,700 volunteers with an impressive 76,000 in volunteer hours for numerous projects and programs. Programs dedicated to beautification, conservation, education, health & wellness, fund raisers or as many of you like to say “fun” raisers, collaborative efforts with government, extension, community colleges, nonprofits and businesses, all in service to your communities. It is because of you that Western North Carolina is such a great place to live, work and play.

**PARTICIPATING COMMUNITIES**

***ASHE COUNTY***

**Riverview** held their annual health fair for screening and testing with eye exams and blood pressure checks, as well as providing a large exercise room and walking trail for those in their community to stay fit. Their dedication to education led them to partner with Wilkes Community College to provide space for GED classes. Their most successful fundraiser was the Father’s Day Pig-Pickin with music on an outdoor stage, cloggers and fun for not just for Dad, but for everyone.

**Todd Ruritan** improves their community while preserving its character as a historic part of North Carolina’s Appalachian culture. Their club has a BBQ the first Saturday of each month from May to October. They purchase produce from local businesses to support the local economy. The Todd New River Festival is their main fundraiser bringing in \$5,000. Their club also celebrated 15 years of roadside clean up and distributed a total of \$25,000 for scholarships over the past 14 years.

***BUNCOMBE COUNTY***

**Avery’s Creek’s** mission statement is “Progressing While Preserving” and they provide a place for recreation, spiritual growth and community life. Their community held a letter writing campaign to raise \$5,000 to operate the Senior Meal Site. Avery’s Creek also served meals to the elderly at the Hills when they were not available through Council on Aging. Their community is currently in the process of collaborating with ABCCM and the Trinity Episcopal Church to form a much needed food pantry.

**Big Ivy** Community provides a balanced approach to providing health and wellness programs for residents has been a goal for Big Ivy. They reopened their medical clinic to provide residents with accessible health care. Last year Big Ivy distributed over 63,000 pounds of food to 679 families. They have partnered with Backyard Bow Pro Hunters to provide venison for food pantry recipients. In addition, they obtained a grant to purchase a garden cart, tiller and 3 self-watering, raised beds to increase their capacity to raise fresh vegetables for their food pantry.

**Buckeye Cove** was facing fiscal and membership difficulties this past year. Like many of our rural communities, they had to face the decision to close their doors or press on to discover new purpose and move forward. Buckeye Cove has started “advertising” who they are and what they do through newspaper notices, mailings, phone calls and emails. They developed an attitude of “just ask” and their request for financial help through a community mailing in February resulted in almost \$3,000. We are very proud they have pressed on with a renewed determination of service.

**Cane Creek** strives to “make their community better” by serving seniors, youth and families. Heavy rains brought down lots of trees in Cane Creek, so volunteers ensured the fallen trees provided wood

for 37 homes. Consistent beautification of their center keeps it in high demand with 63 rentals this past year. This is a 30% increase over the previous year. Cane Creek residents support their local farmers that are producing more small diversified crops.

**Fairview** Community provides space for 37 youth teams through the Fairview Athletic Association, as well as Tabata Boot camp series, yoga and Zumba. Fairview also has an annual Breakfast with Santa and held its 7<sup>th</sup> Fairview Craft and Gift Fair.

**Ox Creek**'s most successful fundraiser is providing a time-keeping station for the Blue Ridge Relay. Volunteers staff this station for 9 hours by managing parking for over 160 team vehicles and adjusting the flow of traffic to help with race safety. In addition, Ox Creek sells baked goods and beverages to those in attendance. Their monthly potluck dinners provide an opportunity for residents to come together to enjoy good food and blue grass music. Their sign board at the front of the community posts announcements, lost & found, as well as children's birthdays to make families feel connected to the community.

**Rosscraggon Wood**'s primary facility is a nature preserve with the objective of encouraging interest in the natural history of Western North Carolina. They accomplish this through maintaining wildflower gardens and removing non-native plant life. Club programs include topics on wild flowers, birding and forest preservation. With increased use of the Rosscraggon Wood property their Board started the process of reviewing their risk and liability insurance coverage.

### ***CHEROKEE COUNTY***

**Bellview** was recognized for their work implementing a rain garden with native plants, managing a voting precinct, and raising an impressive \$8,000 from their poor man's supper to help residents with medical and funeral expenses.

**Grape Creek** hosted an appreciation dinner on Veteran's Day open to all Veterans in their area. Their community provided a scholarship for a high school senior going to college as well as purchased playground equipment for local children. Their community has Levi Strauss retirees living in their community that donate grant funds from their former employer to help support the center.

**Martin's Creek** has a quarterly trash pick-up as part of the Adopt-A-Highway program. The Martin's Creek Bargain Jamboree raised enough funds to pay for a new heating system for the center. Every month, their community continues to host successful gospel concerts, which have had a positive impact on their community. Their fund raisers were highly successful bringing in over \$40,000 to benefit two residents in great need.

### ***EASTERN BAND OF CHEROKEE***

**Big Y** adopted a zero tolerance for illegal substance activities in their community. Big Y works with Healthy Cherokee to provide education on preventative measures for diabetes, obesity and smoking cessation through cooking classes. Their most successful fund raiser is a silent auction of arts and crafts donated by community members. The Big Y free labor group provided over 2,100 volunteer hours to assist residents with yard work, removing litter and providing grave services.

**Paint Town** celebrated the ground breaking for their new community center, which is scheduled to be completed in 2014. Their Chair, Yona Wade participated in the "Remember the Removal" ride from New Echota, Georgia to Oklahoma. This was a 950 mile, 3 week bike ride. Paint Town participated in the Cherokee Day of Caring by building a porch and planting flowers for a local family.

**Towstring** focuses on preserving their Christian values and multicultural history. They obtained internet this year, which is a much needed service for teachers and youth. Their next step is to obtain computers for their center. Towstring creates calendars with all programs and projects recorded to share with residents in the community.

**Yellowhill** completed an energy audit for a building improvement project and they were able to receive over \$14,000 from the Cherokee Preservation Foundation for upgrades to their facility. Yellowhill held craft classes on stone carving, wood carving, shell art and pine needle basket making. They also planned a skate park competition, corn hole tournament, and distributed Chief's Garden Kits.

### ***HAYWOOD COUNTY***

**Beaverdam** experienced some vandalism and took the steps necessary to encircle the property with boulders to discourage joy riders from being on their premises. They are working with neighboring communities to start a Community Watch program. Beaverdam packed food gift boxes for needy families, distributed healthy packets to the elderly and provided a \$500 scholarship to a worthy local student. Beaverdam provided \$600 to the Community Kitchen, \$200 to Mountain Projects and \$200 to Coats for Kids. Lectures at the center featured information on health care insurance, detecting child abuse, and safety issues.

**North Hominy** focused on making their center safer, so they installed new exit signs with emergency lights, fire alarms and upgraded wiring. North Hominy hosted two blood drives and offered their 1<sup>st</sup> CPR class. They provide a community cookbook as a gift to new families along with an invitation to attend meetings. North Hominy's annual Apple Festival and Craft Fair in October raised \$6,000 and provided an opportunity to enjoy all things apple; homemade apple pies, apple butter, apple jelly along with a country breakfast. This fund raising event provides a significant portion of their outreach program revenue.

### ***HENDERSON COUNTY***

**Crab Creek** collected and distributed boxes of food for seven needy families last Christmas. They have been designated as an emergency shelter by the Red Cross, and their by-laws allow families whose homes have been destroyed to use the center as temporary shelter. Crab Creek teamed up with Upward Community to raise funds to help a local family who had been in a car accident. They participated in Farm City Day, held a Craft Fair & Home Goods Sale, Poor Man's Supper, Spaghetti Dinner, Fall Festival & Cake Walk and a Valentine's Banquet sponsored by the Crab Creek Kids Club.

**Edneyville** honored the memory of two moving forces in their community by naming the center's meeting room the "Davidson-Davis" room. In addition, a memorial garden was established and named after Margaret Davidson at the cottages she rented to visitors. Edneyville donated school supplies, purchased computer chairs and gave \$200 to the elementary school. Edneyville donated items to MainStay, toys to Toys for Tots, personal hygiene items for the military and made Valentines for Vets. Edneyville collaborated on a new project called the Henderson County Education History Initiative. Club members collected information, pictures, artifacts and conducted interviews to obtain details about all the small schools that formed the Edneyville Union School which evolved into today's area school system. This endeavor culminated into an event with 300 people to enjoy speakers, pictures, and displays on Edneyville's educational history.

**Upward** contacted teachers at the local school system and were able to provide school supplies and food for children in need. They also held two benefits; one raised \$2,800 for a mother battling

cancer and \$3,500 for a young mother and her infant son that suffered extensive injuries from a car wreck. Upward's Facebook Account generated over 30 groups interested in renting their facility.

### ***JACKSON COUNTY***

**Caney Fork** removed old carpet from their center and replaced it with oak laminate, painted the metal roof and replaced old toilets. Their annual BBQ with music and cakewalk attracts over 300 people and continues to be their most successful fundraising event raising \$2,000. This event involves over 800 hours of community effort over two days. Caney Fork also sponsored a tour of art studios for three of their local artists.

**Pumpkintown** worked with the Sheriff's Department to paint the interior of their building. They provided the paint, supplies and food and the Sheriff's Department provided inmate labor to complete the job. Pumpkintown made a generous contribution of \$1,000 to the Broyhill Children's Home, along with donations to Savannah Help Ministries.

### ***MACON COUNTY***

**Clark's Chapel** has a mission to provide leadership; educational programs and projects that help make their community a better place to live. Clark's Chapel works with their Fire & Rescue Department to have free blood pressure checks twice a year. The community has been active in the support of the fire department for 34 years and their annual fundraiser in May raised over \$10,000. Clark's Chapel also collected over 3,000 pounds of food for CareNet and constructed entrance ramps for the handicapped.

**Cullasaja** spends a great deal of their time on preserving the Old Salem Church. The Old Salem Church is an important piece of history for many Cullasaja residents and leaders. This year they received a certificate from the National Historical Society. In addition, Cullasaja leads efforts in litter pick up, as well as beautification.

**Holly Springs** successfully petitioned the county for \$35,000 to begin renovations and improvements to their center. This has resulted in a new kitchen, new bathrooms and a pantry. Club members assist the elderly with tax preparation and worked with the local school to provide clothes, food and toys to families in need. Their community yard sale, ice cream and covered-dish dinner were successful opportunities for fellowship. Holly Springs is finishing up the application for their building to be added to the National Historic Register.

**Nantahala** adopted a section of Wayah Road which is a major entrance to their community. Their community's "Miles to Go" program continues to be helpful by providing funds to families facing unusual medical travel expenses. The club provided a \$500 Nantahala Senior Class Service Award, a \$100 gift to the High School English Department for books and a \$120 contribution and labor to aid the school in establishing signage for Nantahala School. Their community also sponsored a Meet the Candidates session, held a Veteran's Appreciation Dinner and worked with County Commissioners on developing a public beach on the lake for recreation.

**Otto** is being honored for participating in roadside clean up efforts, holding exercise classes for their residents, creating a quilt square and establishing a Facebook page. They are working to establish a list of local charities that have current programs in place. Once the list is compiled it will be circulated to help area neighbors. They are also creating a local business directory to distribute to local residents.

**Pine Grove School Community** held informational programs on disaster plans, mosquito borne diseases, Diabetes' menu planning and flu shots. Their community provided space heaters to

members without heat last winter, as well as collected blankets for CareNet. Pine Grove School Community provided transportation services to the elderly for medical appointments. Their community raised funds for the local K-9 dog unit to be recognized.

**Upper Cartoogechaye** was recognized for their programs on food safety, nutrition, avoiding heart disease and Diabetes, as well as tapping into social media through their own Facebook page. Their Airing of the Quilts event provides an opportunity to showcase heirloom and new quilts. Their annual Halloween party is always a big hit with the adults.

## ***MADISON COUNY***

**Greater Ivy** held a country breakfast the fourth Saturday of each month to give residents an opportunity to catch up on community news. We are honoring Greater Ivy today for organizing and meeting with the leaders of eleven area churches to create the Beech Glen Community Coalition. The intent of the coalition is to hold fundraisers to meet local needs. To date they have raised \$14,000, as well as bringing their community closer together. They also supported the efforts of an eagle scout to create a Veteran's Memorial and hold a dedication ceremony at their center.

Severe storms flooded **Revere-Rice Cove** this past summer and in spite of this difficult disaster, the community accomplished a great deal. They hosted the Spring Creek Literacy Project, which is a free summer program with learning and enrichment opportunities for girls in grades 6-9. They also provided tutoring in reading and math for local students. Revere Rice Cove established a Memory Wall to preserve memories of residents in the community who served in the military. The Exxon Foundation awarded them \$500 for volunteer work done at the center by the Kraft family. Revere Rice Cove also serves as a polling place for voting to the Madison County Board of Elections.

**Spring Creek** is a part of the Appalachian Barn Project, which is a project started by the Extension Office to identify old barns, write history of them, publish the story in the local newspaper to encourage maintenance of the barns. The idea has grown from a County concept to a regional idea. The First Stage Youth Theater, a one week summer class for children under the leadership of a local drama teacher, is in its 6<sup>th</sup> year and continues to see great success. Spring Creek also conducted a fresh food market, held an Easter Egg hunt, sponsored a bee keeping training and held painting classes for adults.

**Upper Laurel** offers a free breakfast to attract new members and this has increased their membership significantly over the summer. Their Fall Apple Butter Festival continues to be successful. Upper Laurel plants flowers and picks up trash to keep their community beautiful and clean. Speaking of clean, Upper Laurel has been recognized by the State for 25 years of service to the community by picking up litter on roadways. They raised over \$3,500 through a Christmas Dinner with gifts for the Ebb's Chapel Firefighters. Upper Laurel is proud to be a part of the annual Wolf Laurel benefit for Hospice of Madison County, which is the largest fund raiser in their county.

**Walnut** has established a fitness room equipped with exercise equipment and exercise videos, as well as created a walking club to help residents stay healthy. Walnut has developed cooking and sewing classes for youth in their community to learn basic skills. They have organized a community choir to sing at nursing homes, church and school reunions. Walnut residents participated in the Polar Plunge to benefit Special Olympics.

## ***POLK COUNTY***

**Pea Ridge** was recognized for their "No Breakfast, Breakfast." Instead of providing time, raw material or money to have a typical all-you-can-eat breakfast each community member made a monetary donation. Pea Ridge supports the Boy Scouts and stepped up to help two neighbors that

experienced house fires, and they continue to offer an academic scholarship to college students from their community.

### ***RUTHERFORD COUNTY***

The **Ellenboro Woman's Club** has a Super Striver program to recognize local elementary students who work consistently throughout the school year. Their club is always proud to provide a scholarship of \$200 to a graduating senior. Their most successful fundraiser was the Valentine 12 chocolate rose boxes. Club members melted chocolate into molds, wrapped them in red foil, placed them on rose stems and placed the roses in a decorated gold lined box. Ellenboro Woman's Club prepared sandwiches and snacks for the bicyclists in the Cycle North Carolina Mountains to the Coast. Their information booth at the Colfax Free Fair is a great way to get the word out about their club.

**Pearidge Ruritan** participates quarterly in the Adopt-A-Highway program. Their hot dog luncheon on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July offering free hotdogs, chips and drinks continues to be popular opportunity for fellowship. The Pearidge Ruritan Club works to increase their numbers through membership drives and using the FRAN principal of asking friends, relatives, associates and neighbors to participate in club activities.

**Union Mills** was recognized for holding a blood drive, donating food to the local soup kitchen, help with a summer reading program, donating books to the local library and raising funds through the Belk's Charity Day, as well as their annual Halloween Festival.

**Whitehouse** held a BBQ and auction, as well as five breakfasts to raise an impressive \$4,600. Their community also participates in recycling, litter pick-up and senior meal sites. Members are teaching craft classes that have been successful in bringing residents together, as well as attracting new members. Whitehouse works with local churches and other clubs in scheduling and promoting events.

### ***SWAIN COUNTY***

**Whittier** implemented a community garden and collaborated with Extension to offer classes on beginning gardening, food preparation and preservation. During these economically difficult times, Whittier finds this to be a worthwhile effort to help residents learn to grow and store their own food. They also offered line dancing and square dancing for fun, exercise and to maintain traditions.

### ***TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY***

**Cathey's Creek** is in the process of making their center more energy efficient by insulating the ceiling and installing new windows. Cathey's Creek is committed to meeting kids on their turf, sharing life with them and loving them unconditionally. They do this by working with Young Life and Wild Life youth groups as an outreach to get area students to learn about their community and each other.

**Dunn's Rock** was honored for the second year of their homework club for youth to provide a safe alternative to returning from school to an empty home. Students are encouraged to work hard to receive incentives like a party or a field trip to a local farm. They also offer complimentary meal tickets to new community residents.

## **WATAUGA COUNTY**

**Deep Gap Ruritan** responds to the various needs of the community through paying for fuel, electric bills, groceries and medical bills for those in need. Their club supported youth by contributing \$2,500 in scholarships to 4 local students. Deep Gap sponsors the Turkey Trot to provide food for the homeless, assists with Red Cross blood drives and participates in road side clean ups. Their most successful fund raisers are the annual steak supper with a raffle and parking at ASU football games which have raised over \$14,000.

## **COMMUNITIES OF PROMISE**

These 16 communities were chosen because of the initiatives implemented by the community that show promise and can be replicated around the region.

**Balsam Grove** in Transylvania County is creating an app for both Apple and Android operating systems for the Balsam Grove cookbook. They will be offering three sample recipes for free and the entire cookbook can be purchased for \$5. Their most successful fund raiser is a monthly blue grass jam session and dinner which has netted approximately \$5,000. This year, Balsam Grove worked with their local library to digitize all of their scrapbooks. This was a labor of love that involved weekly trips to the library to preserve their community history. Their community offered financial assistance to families under emergency situations even offering their yard sale inventory to help with household goods free of charge. Balsam Grove also held a blood drive.

**Big Cove** in Swain County and with the Eastern Band of Cherokee submitted successful legislation to Tribal Council to establish the “Ko-La-Nv-Yi” overlook on the Blue Ridge Parkway. Their community received a grant from the Cherokee Preservation Foundation to hold cultural education classes for youth, as well as adults. The classes have included topics on traditional sewing and foods with over 250 in attendance. This has been a cooperative effort with local Extension offices, the Cherokee Boys Club and the Snowbird Community. Their community hosted their 2nd Big Cove Day to celebrate their culture with stickball players, traditional games and craft vendors. They worked with the Cherokee Runners to bring back the Moccasin Run to their community. Big Cove also held a volunteer appreciation dinner with door prizes to take time to appropriately thank their volunteers for a great year. Big Cove has estimated well over 10,000 volunteer hours for these programs and their community labor group.

**Brasstown** Community Civic Center from Clay County is well underway in upgrading their kitchen to a Certified Commercial Community Kitchen. They have hosted a week-long certification class on proper canning and preserving techniques to enable local farmers to preserve their products for resale to help the local economy. Their community is located on 4 acres of maintained green space on which they have planted a variety of berry bushes, grapes and fruit trees to share with residents. They have hosted a tree-grafting seminar, small farmer initiative groups, Soil & Water and US Forest conservation workshops, as well as a monthly Organic Food and Product Co-op. Brasstown currently hosts two participants in the State of Franklin program, which provides skilled training to citizens aged 55 or older, that need to re-enter the job market.

**Carson** Community in Macon County was able to provide nutrition classes to Hispanics in their community by using a local interpreter this year. Youth in the community were treated to a hike and picnic to Rufus Morgan falls. The youth also participated in a 30-hour famine project to collect canned goods for the local food bank. At the beginning of the school year, Carson held a Family Fun Day with food and festivities to distribute school supplies to local school children. Their Paul Bunyan project supplies firewood during the winter months to residents in need. The Carson Community organizes an educational tour each year. This year, they went to Wisconsin Dells to visit an Amish Village for a tour of the Lost Canyon and learned about the art of making cheese.

**Cedar Mountain** in Transylvania County is known as the “Gateway to DuPont State Forest.” They worked with the Carolina Mountain Conservancy to purchase 58 acres for efforts to form a national wildlife refuge of mountain bogs. Cedar Mountain hosted the Muddy Sneakers program which consists of expeditions for 5<sup>th</sup> Graders to get kids outside of the classroom to explore science in a natural setting. End of year test scores showed a marked improvement in science skills, which proved this program is a valuable learning tool. Zumba classes, yoga and hiking along with cooking classes round out the Cedar Mountain health initiatives. Cedar Mountain held a fairytale tea party for ladies, young and young-at-heart to dress up in favorite party clothes. In addition, their community hosted Assault on the Carolinas, a gourd painting party, puppet camp to build marionettes and a bridge club. Their community also received a significant emergency services grant to upgrade radio equipment for emergency responders.

**Center** Community in Madison County is embarking on a new endeavor called “Community School.” This is a teacher’s co-op dedicated to using community members as faculty and offers classes in clogging, painting, photography, ballet, yoga, sewing and the art of making quilts. This program allows residents to learn from within their own community. Center offers the “Welcome to our Community Electronic Newsletter” to provide valuable information to new residents on local and county services. This has been a valuable addition to their website, newsletters and Facebook page. To provide assistance in finding employment, Center advertises available jobs in the area, as well as posts courses available at AB Tech and keeps the computer lab with high speed internet open free of charge for those seeking jobs online.

**Cowee** Community Development Organization from Macon County is dedicated to preserving the heritage, quality of life and beauty of their community. They worked with the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area to fulfill a grant they were awarded for beautification and welcome signage. One of the primary highlights from their year was their 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Cowee School Celebration. This was held to celebrate the successful 7-year-long transition of the Cowee School to a community heritage center. This center will be the hub of activity in Northern Macon County thanks to their hard work and dedication. Cowee celebrated 25 years of participating in the State-wide litter sweep campaign. They also participated in the Macon County Heritage Quilt Trail and purchased equipment for a certified kitchen.

**Gilkey School** Community from Rutherford County received grant funds to make the necessary upgrades of a new roof, windows, handicapped ramp, bathrooms, loading dock, wiring and plumbing to their center to be able to open a much-needed food pantry to serve area residents. They have applied for a Facebook grant to establish a basic computer skills course and provide access to computers to give students a place to access information after school hours. The Gilkey School “All Class Reunion” continues to be their signature event with a BBQ and blue grass music.

**Leicester Community** in Buncombe County has great success providing free dental care, once a year to residents by hosting the NC Baptist Men’s dental bus. This year, they coupled this with an opportunity to partner with Mission Health, the Council on Aging and the Council for the Blind to offer a variety of screenings, tests and information for a complete health fair. Leicester joined with their local school system to offer a bookmobile program twice a week during the winter for preschool age children. The Leicester Welcome Table offers a free lunch every Wednesday and has served over 5,820 people. An impressive 6,657 volunteer hours were spent on the welcome table, food distribution and many other programs like a rabies clinic, a school supply drive and a new roof for their center.

**Peak Creek Ruritan** from Ashe County believes the community is the backbone of the American way of life. This past year, their club participated in litter campaigns and provided volunteers for the annual water screening project. They offered programs on hunting safety, a new 211 Assistance Line,



effective landscaping, Imagination Ashe (a preschool reading program) and Junior Appalachian Music. Peak Creek has great success with their pancake breakfast and indoor yard sale, where they give buyers an opportunity to decide how much to pay for the meal and yard sale items. Peak Creek utilized the US Post Office “door to door” mail service to advertise fundraisers. The “door to door” system reached over 1,000 postal patrons in their surrounding area and continues to have successful results. Peak Creek was awarded the “Volunteer Organization of the Year” by the Ashe County Commissioners. This award significantly increased their visibility in the county.

**Shiloh** Community in Buncombe County has a pavilion at their community garden where they have planted fruit trees, flowers and vegetables to help educate residents about healthy eating, the value of organic gardening and invite members to harvest without cost. Shiloh supplements the income of a part-time gardener and a Community Outreach Liaison Intern to maintain this valuable program. Shiloh received a grant in partnership with the YMCA to support their plan to improve the health of residents by implementing a Diabetic prevention program and to include a pedestrian assessment of their community. This assessment will help folks to map out routes to walk for exercise, convenience and safety. A partnership has been established with Habitat for Humanity. It started as fixing area houses and building a new garden shed, but has developed into a working partnership with community activity planning.

**Snowbird** Community is part of the Eastern Band of Cherokee and is located in Graham County. Snowbird has the complete package on health & wellness. They held a weight loss challenge as an incentive for residents to lose weight, coupled with yoga classes to get fit and informational sessions on how to remain healthy. The Indian Education Program received a grant to hold a summer camp focused on heritage crafts such as beadwork, quilting, river cane mats and dream catchers. Another grant was obtained to teach youth how to speak the native Cherokee language. These language lessons culminated in a play done entirely in Cherokee. The Snowbird Language Initiative is working on a planning grant to develop a new Language Immersion School. Snowbird’s 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual “Cancer Sucks” Softball Tournament raised \$8,500 to benefit 5 residents in Graham County who are battling cancer.

**Spring Mountain** Community in Buncombe County promotes a “Better Health through Exercise” initiative by maintaining a paved walking track, holding weekly yoga classes, sponsoring a workshop on healthy food preparation and holding a fun walk/run on April Fool’s Day. The run/walk was their first attempt to conduct an organized event around the popular daily activity of running, walking and riding on their community track. Their annual August picnic was the highlight of their year with over 100 attending the pot luck and square dance. A “Duck for a Buck” was introduced with children, of all ages, donating \$1 to enter a rubber duck to race down Cane Creek. Spring Mountain provides Senior Luncheon Days to give senior members an opportunity for a healthy meal and social interaction while offering care givers a respite for the afternoon. Their community provides a bulletin board at the center for residents with small, home-based businesses to post information on products for sale to the public.

**Unaka** Community in Cherokee County has great success in pursuing grants to open up many opportunities for their community. A matching grant from Glaxo Smith Kline was used to purchase an industrial grade propane range, as well as a vertical warming oven. This preparation along with 6 months of additional upgrades to their facility allowed them to authorize the creation of a satellite Senior Citizens Center to provide hot lunches, educational opportunities and fellowship. In addition, a local resident was hired and trained to manage their new senior program. In collaboration with Tri-County Community College, Unaka provided a basic computing class to include training on tablets. These classes allow Unaka to provide education to residents who cannot afford the 40 mile round trip to the college campus. In addition, the classes help provide an opportunity for residents to become more attractive to potential employers in the county. Unaka created a Fiscal Advisory

Committee to work on budgeting issues over the coming year and to develop a budgetary reserve plan for the longevity of their community.

**Upper Hickory Nut Gorge** in Henderson County was recognized for 25 years of service to protect and enhance the environment in the State's Adopt-A-Highway program. They go the extra mile by participating in litter sweeps, as well as utilizing Swat-A-Litterbug cards to report violators. Upper Hickory Nut Gorge also works with the Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy and the Barnwell family to protect land and water resources on Little Bearwallow Mountain. These efforts pay off for the Bearwallow Beast 5 K Trail Run, one of the most challenging races in the Southeast featuring a 1,300 elevation gain within 3 miles. They continue to have success with older traditions like their monthly community dinners, that have been going on for 55 years, or 15 years of their popular summer productions like "Gloria's House" put on by the Hickory Nut Players, to their more recent endeavors like the Labor Day GertonFest and their Pancake Breakfast for the Annual Sale on the Trail, which is a 19-mile yard sale that runs the length of the gorge from Gerton to Lake Lure.

**Walnut Creek** Community in Madison County continues to get closer to their goal of breaking ground on a new community center with 3.5 acres in hand. Plans are underway to purchase a remaining parcel of 2 acres and obtain approval on a septic system and preliminary site plan. Aside from this, Walnut Creek has had a busy year with fall and spring litter sweeps, their neighborhood watch, a barn quilt project, petitioning the NC DOT to maintain roadsides, submitting requests for disaster relief from area flooding and a free flu shot clinic in conjunction with providing transportation to seniors for the annual health fair. Their community held seminars on living wills, trusts and estate inheritance laws this past year. The 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the Annual Oscar & Lucille McDevitt Memory Health & Wellness Walk was highly successful with over 150 participants. Walnut Creek plans to actively assist community farmers on decisions that could have an impact on their rural community with informational sessions on the NC Farmland Preservation program.

### **COMMUNITIES OF DISTINCTION**

These two communities were chosen because of their years of working together to assess, develop, and implement strategies to address community issues, as well as having numerous diverse programs to benefit community members.

**Bethel Rural Community Organization** in Haywood County has a Historic Preservation Committee that collected seven historic drawings, photographs and paintings of the community, some of which were from the mid to late 1880s, to make into prints available to sell to the public. They established their own historic marker program to honor sites in their community that are not eligible for a State marker. Lenior's Creek Devon Cattle Farm was added as the third historic marker this year. This property is the oldest continuing farm with the longest continuing herd of cattle in Haywood County. This is done in conjunction with a historic education program at local schools for youth to learn about their own local community history. BRCO's diligent efforts to preserve farm and forest land have facilitated the assignment of over 1,300 acres in voluntary conservation easement in Haywood County. Bethel was instrumental in getting the Buy Haywood program off the ground several years ago. They continue to support this market development project to promote high-quality county farm products with financial contributions, as well as hosting public presentations. Bethel joined forces with the Lion's Club to facilitate eye examinations of 580 elementary students. BRCO led the effort to jointly produce a brochure with six other communities to inform the public about the significant role of community organizations in their county. Bethel has in impressive 112 partnerships to succeed with the 93 different projects and programs serving the residents of their community and county.

**Fine's Creek Community Association** in Haywood County has over 300 hours of volunteer work in painting, repairing the roof, replacing windows after vandalism and replacing plumbing continued

the renovation efforts on their center. The old Fine's Creek School is a spacious facility with lots of potential for new enterprises. Fine's Creek received a grant from Grace Episcopal Church for additional improvements on their value added kitchen. This Level I certified kitchen has been a great economic development project and is being used by Fines Creek Fine Foods, LLC to produce Max Patch Gourmet Pepper Butter, along with apple butter, strawberry lavender and ginger peach syrups. The kitchen also serves as a classroom site for Chef Ricardo, formerly of the Lomo Grill, to provide cooking classes. The community also received grants from the North Carolina Arts Council and the Haywood Tourism Development Agency to support the 16<sup>th</sup> Fines Creek Bluegrass Jam. This annual fund raiser not only shares the great tradition of mountain music and dance, but continues to provide scholarship funds for every qualifying youth in their community that aspire to attend college. FCCA supports area artists by providing space in their center for a working artist's studio and gallery. In addition, they donated leftover coal from the old coal-fired boiler to a local blacksmith who teaches and demonstrates this heritage skill. Fine's Creek is examining a new idea to support a program on cultural heritage through a certified clogging dance program.