



Conceived and organized by The Hub, and hosted at WVU's Media Innovation Center, New Story 2016 brought together a wide spectrum of media professionals for a discussion of innovation and narrative change during this period of transition in Appalachia.

PHOTO BY DAVID SMITH/  
WVU REED COLLEGE  
OF MEDIA

## NEW STORY: CHANGING THE NARRATIVE IN WEST VIRGINIA

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*Brand new in 2016*, New Story: Changing the Narrative in West Virginia was a testament to the importance of an organization like The Hub and its unique ability to bring diverse and disparate groups and people together to share ideas and brainstorm challenges.

The inaugural New Story event at the Reed College of Media in June 2016 brought together, for the first time, many of the key players in the region's media landscape - the journalists, editors, producers, publishers, teachers, freelancers, filmmakers, photographers, digital artists and entrepreneurs that are creating and reshaping the public narrative in West Virginia.

Participants included West Virginia Public Broadcasting, WVU's Reed College of Media, Appalachian Regional Commission, the creators of Weelunk, Appalshop, Elaine McMillion Sheldon, Courtney Balestier, Generation WV, Charleston Gazette-Mail, The Daily Yonder, The State Journal, New South Media, The Observer, The Journal and the Tamarack Foundation for the Arts.

The massive amount of interest in **New Story demonstrated that The Hub's work to encourage collaboration and creativity in regional media is both timely and pertinent.**

And already that labor is starting the bear fruit.

Thanks to a conversation started at New Story, various media and business interests have come together to start a news website in Morgantown. A connection was made between the Reed College of Media's student internship director and local media efforts around the state eager for additional reporting capacity. Partners are discussing a training and employment pipeline for new journalists throughout Appalachia supporting expanded coverage of grassroots community development initiatives. And the Reed College of Media announced a new collaborative digital reporting project. Exciting times ahead.

New Story also dramatically increased the size of the West Virginia Communications Listserv, from 51 members in June 2015 to 158 in July 2016.

## TURN THIS TOWN AROUND: TAYLOR COUNTY BUCKS THE TREND

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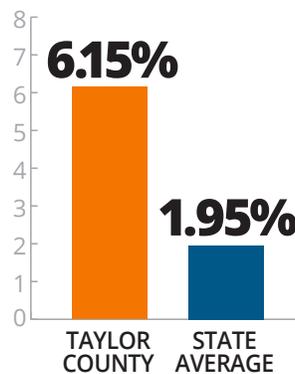


Since its *Turn This Town Around* year in 2014, the city of Grafton continues to demonstrate the positive impacts of an organized local development effort.

The opening of the Main Street Deck in Grafton—a Benedum funded Turn This Town Around mini-grant project that leveraged an additional \$60,000 in city and local business investment—has had an immediate impact on cultural activity and vibrancy in the downtown area.

All Aboard Grafton's launch of First Friday live entertainment, arts and local business events downtown has provided a much needed spark to the local business community and dramatically increased the liveability and appeal of the city.

### NEW BUSINESS GROWTH 1ST HALF OF 2016:



Now, we are seeing the economic benefits that often follow the creation of an inviting local place for entertainment, music and art, and community socializing.

Taylor County, of which Grafton is the largest city and county seat, has seen a 6.15 percent increase in local business growth through the first six months of 2016, with 35 new businesses opening.

The "First Friday" event in Grafton, and the opening of the Main Street Deck, has increased local business traffic.

PHOTO BY ALL ABOARD GRAFTON

### THE FOUR APPROACHES OF THE HUB'S WORK: A KEY

- SC** SECTOR CONVENING
- PC** POLICY CHANGE
- LC** LOCAL CAPACITY BUILDING
- C** COMMUNICATIONS

### OUR STAFF

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- COURTNEY ROARK  
VISTA - WV PHYSICAL ACTIVITY NETWORK COORDINATOR
- MARISSA RUSSELL  
VISTA - STATE OF OUR COMMUNITIES PROJECT COORDINATOR



The people of Whitesville and the surrounding area will soon have access to fresh food and produce, thanks to Dave Hodges and his family, who are opening the Midtown Grocery and Deli in August.

PHOTO BY MARISSA RUSSELL/THE HUB

## IN WHITESVILLE, A LOCAL SOLUTION TO FOOD ACCESS



*When The Hub first* started working with the small community of Whitesville in eastern Boone County in early 2015, we asked the people there to tell us what they'd most like to see happen in their town.

Above all, they said, we need a local grocery store. Since the closure of a grocery retailer in Whitesville the year before, the area has been identified by food access researchers as a food desert.

Eighteen months later, and that seemingly far-fetched dream is now a reality. Having been closely involved in Whitesville's Turn This Town Around activity, local firefighter Dave Hodges and his family, with the enthusiastic support of the whole community, are set to open the Midtown Grocery and Deli in August, in a former carpet store building on Whitesville's main street.

Clearly a product of the crucial community prioritizing, project identification and organizing work of the Turn This Town Around program, the creation of a locally-owned grocery store in Whitesville also highlights another vital and immensely powerful element of The Hub's work—networking. With no business experience, we knew it was critical that the Hodges learned from those who had been successful in a similar venture.

And so we connected them with our friends at the Green Grocer in Alderson, a co-op grocery store that since a crowdfunded launch in 2015 has gone from strength to strength. The folks behind the Green Grocer subsequently became a valuable source of information and advice, helping the Hodges with such matters as how to find good suppliers, and where to buy refrigeration equipment.



## ORGANIZING FOR THE POWER+ PLAN

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*In 2015 the federal government* announced the creation of a new federal program to invest in coal-impacted communities. The POWER+ Plan directs new resources to economic diversification efforts in coal communities, including \$50 million in new funding through the Appalachian Regional Commission in 2016 and 2017.

In order to bring a significant portion of that funding to West Virginia, The Hub saw that vital work was needed to organize

### THE POWER OF CONVENING

**119**

ATTENDEES  
IN-PERSON POWER  
ORGANIZING MEETINGS

**97**

PARTICIPANTS  
POWER CAPTURE  
TEAM EMAIL GROUP

and coordinate business sectors and local leaders. Qualifying projects had to be strategic, aligned and collaborative across sectors.

Over the past 12 months The Hub has connected decision makers and grants directors from the White House, EPA, U.S. EDA, the Appalachian Regional Commission,

and the U.S. Department of Agriculture with business and community leaders in West Virginia, to ensure they have access to the information and resources they'll need to submit competitive POWER grant applications.

Together with the Benedum Foundation and Tech Connect West Virginia, we've taken that convening role one step further, actively encouraging, identifying and fostering creative and collaborative grant proposals we know will have the best chance of success. We are the only state in the region taking this proactive approach.

How have we done this? By getting all these people in the one room. And by connecting them personally, by sharing information online, and by building and utilizing a connected email group for collaboration.

It is labor intensive work. But there is so much at stake for West Virginia that we feel it is an investment of time and energy that must be made.

For if not us, who?

## ON THE FRONTLINES OF THE FIGHT AGAINST BLIGHT

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*Abandoned and dilapidated* buildings plague almost every community in West Virginia.

The Hub continued to respond to growing demand for solutions by coordinating the development of a new funding and technical assistance program—the Property Rescue Initiative - to help remove problem properties.

In partnership with the WV Housing Development Fund, the Northern WV Brownfields Assistance Center and the WVU Land Use Law Clinic, in 2015 and 2016 The Hub created and led a technical assistance program consisting of six free workshops around the state, coaching and a streamlined version of the BAD Buildings Program.

These workshops, at which citizens and local leaders could

learn how to fund and execute a dilapidated building program in their communities, **were attended by 379 people from 100 different communities across 45 different counties, representing 160 organizations.**

Since the workshops, 17 communities have followed up to pursue technical assistance. The Hub is providing direct coaching to four communities in the summer of 2016 to help them create and sustain local teams to engage in the BAD Buildings technical assistance.

By having the staff capacity to conceive, organize, promote and manage the Property Rescue Initiative workshops, The Hub played a key role in creating a lasting, integrated support network for West Virginians trying to fight blight where they live.



The first ever International Yoga Festival in Fairmont in June was one of the new initiatives the West Virginia Physical Activity Network was involved with in 2016.

PHOTO BY  
WWW.WVYOGAGIRL.COM

## GROWING THE WEST VIRGINIA PHYSICAL ACTIVITY NETWORK



*Just 12 months in* and the West Virginia Physical Activity Network has had a measureable impact on helping West Virginians find fun ways to get moving.

Coordinated by a single AmeriCorps VISTA and with support from Hub staff, the West Virginia Physical Activity Network directory, launched in November 2015, has unearthed and developed a directory of 197 physical activity organizations, clubs, community groups and information providers across West Virginia.

### WVPAN STATS

**197**

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY ORGANIZATIONS AND RESOURCES

**11**

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY CATEGORIES

**60**

COMMUNITIES ACROSS WEST VIRGINIA

The Directory spans 11 different activity categories, from walking and biking to yoga, rock climbing and square dancing, in 60 communities statewide.

Driven by a core mission to share success stories and inspire others to replicate them, in the past 12 months, the West Virginia Physical Activity Network has published 44 online stories

highlighting local physical activity initiatives, garnering 4,206 page views.

This strategy of exploring what's possible and what's working across the state has already translated to a number of new programs and initiatives. The work of the West Virginia Physical Activity Network was key to:

- ▶ The launch of West Virginia's first "Walk With A Doc" program, in Parkersburg.
- ▶ The first ever International Yoga Festival in Fairmont, June 2016 (above).
- ▶ The launch of Fitness Fridays at the Grafton Farmers Market.
- ▶ The inaugural West Virginia Bike Summit, April 2016.
- ▶ The creation of the Gratitude Walking Group, Harrison and Marion counties.
- ▶ Hosting the first Northern Region Try This gathering, April 2016.

## HUB READERSHIP: RAISING AWARENESS ACROSS THE STATE



*The goal* of the Legislative Hubhub when we launched it in January 2015 was to give community development related policy proposals a greater public profile, drowned out as they were in a crowded legislation session by traditional media coverage often dominated by "louder" issues.

2015 demonstrated there is an urgent demand for that coverage. In 2016, we expanded that audience to a whole new level.

There were 33,971 page views of The Hub's legislative and community development content during the 8.5 weeks of this Legislative session, more than double the amount of content views during the 2015 session (15,565). This remarkable growth in content views describes a growth in audience, which in turn represents an increase in the awareness of community development-related policy in West Virginia.

The next phase in this policy and communications campaign is to leverage this growing readership to further secure The Hub as a leading voice on community development in West Virginia, and continue building citizen

awareness and involvement in the policy-making process.

*In January 2015*, The Hub set itself the goal of increasing public coverage of readership of community development-related news and successes.

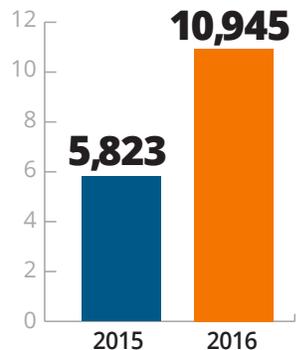
We've had extraordinary success in this area, thanks to a content strategy combining The Hub's blog, email list, social media feed and those of our partners.

From a starting point of between 250 - 900 page views a month, in 2015 The Hub's site received an average of 5,823 unique page views per month.

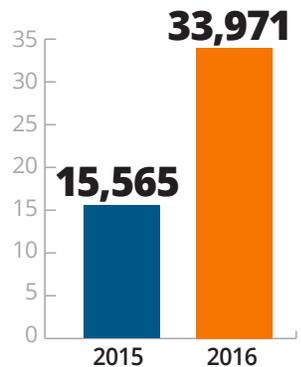
In 2016, that number has almost doubled, to an average of 10,469 unique page views per month. Those these are not just statistics. What they represent is that more West Virginians are receiving and sharing news about community development success stories, and what resources and support systems are available to them.

That's narrative changing.

**WVHUB.ORG PAGE VIEWS PER MONTH:**



**LEGISLATIVE HUBBUB READERSHIP:**



## STRENGTHENING THE ABANDONED PROPERTIES COALITION



*The effectiveness* of the the Abandoned Properties Coalition (APC) has long been hamstrung by a lack of capacity to grow and coordinate the coalition.

But, since The Hub secured an AmeriCorps VISTA to fill that role, APC has been reinvigorated by new

members, new policy proposals, and the creation of a working organizational structure around key issues.

APC-generated online outreach highlighting potential creative solutions to the scourge of abandoned buildings has created and galvanized a new community of more than 600 West Virginians focused on the issue.

It was this network that provided the APC with its first group of Community Advisors, to determine what is needed for communities to address blight and abandonment.

These new recruits grow APC's reach into dozens of communities across West Virginia, and grow the coalition's capacity and influence. **(CONTINUED PG. 7)**

## BY LOCAL: SOWING THE SEEDS OF CHANGE

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*The remarkable story* of Marsha Shonk and her seed donation program is a wonderful illustration of the transformative role AmeriCorps VISTA often play in communities in need.

Seeing many people out of work and wanting to help improve their community in some small but measurable way, Marsha, a VISTA for the Turn This Town Around town of Whitesville, asked seed companies for donations of seeds. **The project garnered over \$13,000 worth of seeds**, which were spread far and wide in Whitesville and donated to food banks, community groups and others.

Things are now green and growing there.

But that is not where the story ends. Marsha wanted to share the fruits of her labor. And so the remaining seeds are now on their way to Ripley, a fellow Turn This Town Around community, through Marsha's VISTA colleague in Ripley, Joshua Donohew.

As seed donations continued to pour in, Marsha saw more opportunities to do good. In the days following the devastating floods at the end of June, Marsha began working with impacted communities to donate seeds and begin local food growing programs.

Both Marsha and Josh were placed in their respective communities by The Hub's excellent VISTA program.

It's great to see the Turn This Town Around teams collaborating. Marsha's seeds will be helping Joshua's food project in Ripley. The phrase "seeds of change" is taking on a whole new meaning at The Hub!



After securing more than \$13,000 in donated seeds, AmeriCorps VISTA Marsha Shonk, right, distributed the seeds to organizations in need.

PHOTO BY MARSHA SHONK

### (CONTINUED FROM PG. 6)

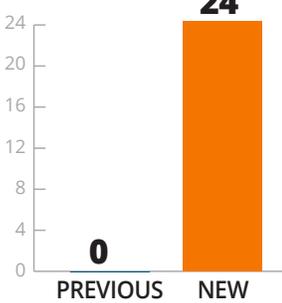
That increased capacity has already translated into legislative action. APC members were involved with introducing four bills during the 2016 legislative session. Those bills made progress, but fell short of final passage.

However, five policy working groups have already begun work on creating five new

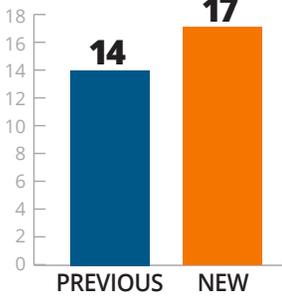
legislative proposals for the 2017 session. These five proposals will seek to:

- ▶ Change the definition of a "high rise" in local codes to encourage adaptive reuse;
- ▶ Reform WV's tax foreclosure system;
- ▶ Enable on-site citations statewide;
- ▶ Increase state historic tax credits for income producing properties;
- ▶ Attach tax liens to the property owner rather than the property.

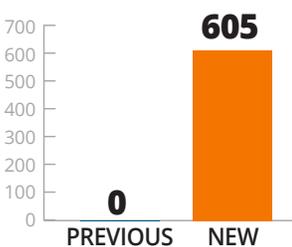
## NEW APC COMMUNITY ADVISORS:



## ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS:



## NEW ONLINE APC CONTENT GROUP:



The Hub's Christina Hunt and Amanda Workman at the 2015 Hatfield McCoy Marathon in Matewan.

PHOTO BY THE HUB.

## BEING THERE: THE HUB'S WORK IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES



*In addition to reaching and serving* more communities across West Virginia through the power of communications, The Hub continues to also expand its physical presence in these communities.

We have seen that there is often no substitute for being there in person, and The Hub takes that need very seriously, and commits the staff time to working face-to-face with the communities that need help whenever we can.

That relationship also involves continuous follow up and support, via email, phone and subsequent site visits, connecting community members with resources and opportunities around the state, and serving as a guiding mentor and advisor as needed.

**Over the past year, we have expanded the number of communities we have worked in directly by six.** Thanks to both new and existing funding sources, The Hub was able to devote staff time to serving the communities of Pineville, McDowell, Hamlin, Madison, Alderson and Piedmont.

## FUNDS LEVERAGED THROUGH BENEDUM'S SUPPORT OF THE WV HUB

- ▶ \$100,000 federal EDA planning grant to run an economic diversification planning program in five southern coalfield communities (May 2016 - April 2017)
- ▶ \$200,000 federal USDA RCDI grant to provide phase II support to Downtown Appalachia communities for downtown revitalization, building redevelopment and small business development (Fall 2016 - Fall 2017)
- ▶ \$135,000 contract from the WV Housing Development Fund to coordinate technical assistance and community outreach for the Property Rescue Initiative (Oct. 2015 - Oct. 2016)