

Tucker County Cultural Tourism Key Informant Interviews
conducted by Doug Arbogast, West Virginia University Extension Service
Spring 2016

Interviews:

- Artspring
- Canaan Realty
- Whitegrass Ski Touring Center
- Tucker County Commission
- Tucker Community Foundation
- Tucker County Cultural District Authority
- The Purple Fiddle
- Blackwater Falls State Park
- Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge
- Ben's Old Loom Barn
- Tucker County Cultural District Authority
- Tucker County Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Tucker County Planning Commission & Friends of the Blackwater
- Tucker County Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Heart of the Highlands
- Friends of the 500th
- Timberline Four Seasons Resort
- Town of Thomas
- Canaan Valley State Park
- Canaan Valley Resort
- Verglass Media
- Bright Morning Inn
- Hellbender's Burrito's
- Stumptown Ales
- Verglass Media
- Big Belly Deli
- Creature Gallery and the Whiteroom Gallery
- Buxton and Landstreet Gallery and Studios
- The Cooper House and The Billy Motel
- Three Castle Antiques
- New Historic Thomas
- Davis Renaissance

Tucker County Culture

We started in 2011 with this walk idea or tour of tucker county arts we call it and we realized that what we were trying to accomplish, to portray this area as an arts destination, not just arts but arts destination, the equivalent of our reputation as being a nature, sports, event destination because we realized that those things were the principle reason that people came here, we figured that the arts could also be an attraction for an additional population of people.

I just think it was that whole demographic that changed from outdoor recreation you just added another facet you added this arts and entertainment end of things and that has connected with people who come up here don't do anything outdoors other than maybe go look at the overlook at Blackwater you know they kind of hang out down at the restaurants and cafés and that kind of stuff so you just added another aspect of tourism

Tucker County continues to change and grow. The ski areas are complimenting the breweries, and the breweries are complimenting the art movement, and the art movement is helping the restaurants, and they're all making it into this unique dynamic of a place to come and experience tourism. The arts wouldn't be as successful if the tourists weren't coming for hiking or biking or fishing. And then now we're an art destination who then come here and discover the arts and say oh goodness look at all of this other wonderful natural attractions to the area.

There's something here I don't know what it is there's a vibe and it's hard to explain but there's a vibe here that people pick up on the people that lived here the old families they knew it and I knew it the first time I moved here there's just a deep-rooted feeling I don't know what it is but at times it's heavy it's that vibe that attracts the kind of people that come here and you're not going to find the suburban mentality or anything like that it's just a deep-rooted kind of energy and its developed this culture of rural really solid people. The culture is just a deep-rooted rural culture it's hard to describe

What we offer is a respite from the city for those people who had enough of of the urban environment and want to get away and you can do that here in a couple of hours from DC and Pittsburgh I think that's gonna be the case in a lot of West Virginia communities where maybe coal mining was there once but the pristine outdoors that's still there and people will come to that

All of these people that live up here and you can get to know them in a weekend it's a small area you can get your hands around it this place is such a small little kernel it's just a teeny little spot of it but it's got all the same qualities of Colorado but in in its own little package it's not obvious to people but people that know it know it and they love it

Everybody has their own little reason why they love this area and it's a lot to do with the simplicity and peacefulness and the honesty of people and straightforwardness of people which is harder to find in this day and age people love just plain old folks that will talk to you and look you in the eye and you can't replace that it's a really safe area here and that makes it easy to bring kids and bring your daughter or your friends and just walk around it just feels very it is it's a very very easy-going safe area and I think that's a calling card one of them.

The communities of Thomas and Davis have and continue to experience the benefits and challenges of developing a sustainable, community-based tourism economy. Successful community tourism development is built on communication, partnerships, a community vision, and a long-term commitment to bring that vision to fruition. The National Rural Tourism Project initiated by the University of Minnesota in 1991 identified five core values for successful community tourism development:

1. Maintaining Authenticity and a Sense of Place
2. Providing a Quality Experience
3. Economic Diversification
4. Obstacles to Opportunities
5. and Shared Benefits and Local Control

Authenticity

Community tourism development maintains a commitment to the community's authenticity and sense of place: it recognizes, preserves, and enhances the community's assets and values, while remaining open to sustainable growth and change.

I think the whole Canaan Tucker County spells more of a natural vacation if you want other amenities there are other areas that have more we have more trails more parks and more wilderness and less maybe restaurants and comedy clubs it spells to the more of the natural crowd seems like it's kind of stayed that way developments been slow here this area is really subtle the beauty of this area is to be found beneath things it's not super super obvious but that's what's neat about this area

I think that one of the things that makes Tucker County very special is that there is a very, very strong sense of place. People are varied, there is very much a sense of pride and a sense of place

I definitely think the cultural experience of them to come up here is crucial through my interactions with our guests and you know when I talked to them about how their stay was I would say that you know what originally was drawing them here certainly would be the outdoor rec. But there's a lot of areas you can do outdoor rec a lot of the common theme that I hear when I'm talking to you is that just that culture of West Virginia hospitality and culture the arts the music you know you hear that a lot about white grass houses just like it's just a unique experience it's that unique cultural experience that the people have when they go there is what they're there for.

People are aware of keeping things authentic. Having small antique shops and breweries and restaurants that are non-chain, people appreciate and want to experience that The closest McDonald's is 20 minutes away. There's no chain hotels and that's what makes us unique. It's true, it's authentic, it's one-of-a-kind, you're not going to find anything else like it,

We've certainly had a lot of former visitors that are now residents they come up and they start a business they know the uniqueness of this area that's why they've moved here I think a lot of those

people you know realize the importance of preserving that uniqueness of this area because that's what brought them here.

I think the area has done really well for the small little bed-and-breakfast's they're the ones now that are like leading the charge why this place is unique and cool and it's not the big players it's been a lot of little small players

It's not good all the time thank goodness because otherwise the place would be crowded all the time you know there's a saying in Tucker County if it snowed anymore none of us could afford to live here. If it snowed a lot more here if the winters were like amazing there was powder every day this place would not be the same people say to me I bet you hate this rainstorm I say I pay taxes in this county I love rain in the winter in a weird way it ruins it but otherwise you end up like Breckenridge and there's a thousand restaurants there and there's not five there's 1000 and there's a million skiers instead of you know it's just so big and bigger is not better necessarily

We have folks coming in from out of the area and they try to capture the essence of Tucker County, and that's hard to do and to me that's the uniqueness of Tucker County, it's that you really can't capture it in one word. It's eclectic, it's diverse, the culture runs deep here, I mean, through generations, it doesn't matter what nook or cranny you visit in this county, you're going to learn something new. It's pretty fascinating, it really is.

There are shared values and those values include love of the land and love of community but also being environmentally aware and understanding your footprint and also thinking about what you can contribute to the community as a whole

The development authority in any county is to promote economic prosperity. For Tucker county, our mission is a little bit different, yes our goal is to promote economic prosperity, but to retain and celebrate our cultural heritage and I think that's something that makes us very special because we focus on both of those.

I've been to towns where it seems like there is too many tourists in that area and saw my qualify can happen there it can happen here what happened to those places were all of a sudden they were just overrun and it doesn't seem at there's community there at all

It often seems like there is in the sense of community and in the shops that started that the businesses that started there the people that moved their first no longer are really there that's what it seems like

I think a lot of them you know they've been to other places, they been to places that they think are maybe overdeveloped the mountain resort communities, Gatlinburg, (TN), well Deep Creek is pretty nice, but, there's a lot of commercial pressure there, uh, I mean yeah it's a small town when I go to a grocery store in Aspen, or not Aspen, Tahoe with my girlfriend who I thought knew everybody in town, she doesn't know anybody anymore, so I mean here people still know each other and people have reputations you know there's a good community, retirement community there's lots of civic organizations; I think most of those folks that really have a stake here, have some sort of idea in mind about uncontrolled development

I went out on a fishing trip in Colorado and we were in a place I used to hang out a lot 30-40 years ago and I was shocked it's just unleashed tourism and it's ruined and it's just too much. I wouldn't hang out there like is used to. I used to fish there a lot and now they have whitewater trips one right after the other and there's nothing wrong with it unless you keep it under control and it doesn't turn in Disneyland I think a lot of Colorado has. That is the only thing that would concern me uncontrolled growth

This place is unique tons of places to ride a bike but not like Davis and that's what people are going to learn that's what they're going to figure out it's like yeah we rode a trail here and it's all buff we rode a trail here and it's nice and buff and it's a trail is a trail is a trail is a trail and I think that that's people are going to start and they're going to go to these trails and there is going to be a lot of people there so you can come here and you can be challenged and you can get away from everybody and I think that's just a matter of time before that comes

We have this mystique about you want to come and find out what mountain biking is you're going to get it here you can have that feeling like you can out West but you're like wow where am I people will say all the time this looks like British Columbia Vancouver Washington and those of people that aren't from here they have no bias and that speaks volumes

It has to be a benefit because there's also the downside of it. We've seen other areas similar to us and with the tourism been uncontrolled and it just expands wildly and develops things that are not necessarily pro community, it might be pro tourists but not necessarily pro community.

It's a balance when you talk to different people you want to maintain the uniqueness of Davis and the uniqueness of Canaan Valley Fish and Wildlife Service wants to make sure people know about America's best treasure a jewel at the same time you allow too many people in what begins to happen is things begin to deteriorate it becomes commercialized the unique sense of place now diminishes

There is only so much development that really sustains a place and if we get too much it is going to lose its character there's going to be development here, but, you're not going to see uncontrolled development in the valley which is what people want, because believe me the Fish and Wildlife is justified coming into the valley and buying a lot of the big tracts because some of them could have gone for trailer parks and now with zoning you will not see any trailer parks or any kind of industrial development ... you know you can have restaurants, but you can't have rock concerts and go-cart tracks and amusement parks, so it is a little different more environmentally correct vacation for people.

Well you know about Corridor H and you know that's definitely going to have, it already has had an impact on the Valley. I mean you can get here in a lot less time. The road is beautiful and I think as it progresses you're going to see numbers go up even more.

Corridor H, which is that 4-lane highway that's coming this way. It's cut the driving time from DC down, cut it by about an hour. We're starting to see that it's opening up a lot of doors. We're starting to see more day skiers being within that 3, 3-1/2 hours, and it's an easy drive, that's the best part. It's not a mountainous drive. It's good in the fact that it's bringing these people in who are seeing West Virginia, realizing it's not a hard trip, and decide they want to be part of this community.

There is concern about what the new highway is going to do for or do to the area, and the development of second homes, the increased demand on the land, the increased use of the hotel rooms, lodging rooms, the programs that we offer, the interpretative programs, environmental education programs, it's a very real conversation.

Well Corridor H is going to bring more people in here, do we want to look like any other strip mall place in the state

Those that came here for the authentic small town want to keep it the way it is. So it'll be a delicate dance as the highway comes across

The road coming in is a really big deal. To many it's a challenge and to others, it's a real opportunity. So it's how to manage the growth. What everybody loves about Tucker county is just what Tucker county is and that is that it's rural, doesn't have any strip malls, doesn't have many fast food places and it's not that we don't want retail shops and it's not that we don't want fast food places, it's just that we want them to blend in with our environment, we don't want to detract from the natural beauty here we have one traffic light in Tucker county, I'd love to see it stay that way and at the same time we need development and we need some growth to grow our tax base. I don't think anybody wants to see unmanaged growth.

But the things we're thinking we don't want are probably more urgent than what we do want and that is and that's where we need to be proactive that is keeping out chains anything chain stores big-box stores anything that's going to make us look like any other stop on the highway it's a difficult thing to keep out I'd like to see above to see stores that actually feed our community before they actually catered a tourists and create the town that we want to live in and then we can invite people into our world

I do think that the type of tourists I personally want to encourage are the stewards of the outdoors that's what you're talking about people who are concerned about what they leave behind you know what sort of footprint they're making

I think that's what makes the place unique is that it is difficult is not an easy place to live is not an easy place to get out and enjoy yourself as you're recreating but that's why people always come back so we're not necessarily for the masses and I think that's great that will do some crowd control in itself

I don't think there's a deliberate it's only when everybody just kinda went hey look at this thing happening that it was to the point where maybe we should be more thoughtful about how it comes together

I think that there's this idea was slow and intentional growth that is getting now reinforced as we realize we have something that people really gravitate towards and how do we manage this in a way that we want to

And how do you manage it in a way that the people living here are the ones making the decisions about how growth comes about my intent here was to be part of that growth in a way so that the people living here can afford to live here and that they're the ones that profit from the economic growth and that they're the ones that determine what type of businesses they want in this area

I hope that it can grow in a way to support you know some more economic development without changing the face of the land. I hope that it can continue to grow in some sustainable ways. to grow in some ways that will continue to protect the land, protect the people who are here, the county residents that people have chosen to come here to live to protect their way of life while still bringing enough growth to let people do more than eek out a living. I hope it can develop and protect the land, the face of the communities, the face of the towns, and enrich what we know we already have here, which is great natural resources, a great cultural history, a very rich art and music opportunity that's been here and is being redeveloped, we know we need some more development. We know we need some more opportunity, but let's do it in a way that supports the inherent value of this place.

If we aren't intentional the growth is happening at a quick pace and we want to make sure we have control over that change and not outsiders but it's starting to become a little bit urgent in my mind.

Certainly I think there needs to be a cohesion with the area as far as the different organizations and the different towns to get on the same page for you know the development that's coming and in a way to preserve the small town feel they like that kind of small artistic feel of the town and we certainly want to promote growth from tourism but balance that in a matter that we don't lose that feel.

I've talked to many owners business owners about what the new highway could bring I mean it's going to bring the bad with the good or the good with the bad and it's the bad that we need to consider and try to figure out how to contain it a lot of us are focused on local businesses mom-and-pop businesses instead of chains infiltrating our unique community we certainly don't want a McDonald's in our historic district you can at least make them adhere to such historic standards that it doesn't even look like a McDonald's from the outside so yes we need more communication to address concerns like that

Zoning, people don't realize that Canaan Valley has zoning people wanted to put in parks, some people want to put in a water park, some people want to put in trailer parks, things like that. But, because the fought very hard for zoning, we don't have that, we still have a lot of open areas.

There's been zoning regulations in Canaan Valley, the only place in Tucker County that has had those zoning regulations, and that has been as a end concern for some amount of control or oversight of that development. And so there's guidelines about billboards, roadside signs, lighting, how close you can build to your neighbor, there's a group of people across time who have very much recognized the importance of having some kind of plan to guide and control that growth so that it will happen in a way that is compatible with the area that would enhance it, not change it.

A lot of West Virginians think about zoning as a very evil thing but I don't it should be used constructively to create the community that you want to live in that we all want to live in.

Regulations to be in place to protect our natural assets, to, I don't want to say control, but manage, manage growth in a way that benefits nature as well as the populace here from an economic standpoint, and even more importantly from a quality of life standpoint. Economics and quality of life go hand-in-hand. I think when it comes down to it. Our land basis what we need to protect in the future. And we don't want to lose that ability. During the early 1900s, the wholesale destruction of large loss of land have left us in a tough situation restoration is not cheap. We have lands that we can't really do anything with and that's because of legacy disturbances that you know with the right regulations we can avoid.

The community over the years has been talking about growth management schemes and ordinances, we need to take those ideas into a formal regulation, and, ultimately, have someone to implement it We need someone with a paid position and to look after the permitting regulations. For the county, municipals I think would be smart to do

What it comes down to is having the foresight and I think the ordinances in place to control our future, you know related to growth and land developments and not let others control it for us. And I think we can do that through growth management, and zoning and ordinances. I think taking advantage of the corridor H. It's here, taking advantage of that and not losing our quality of life in the process is going to be kind of our biggest challenge.

As with everything growth needs to be managed and that's a part of the cultural district authority it's about that management of knowing what the resources are making sure the knot maxed out developing additional resources compensate for that and adding more resources so you have a general growth you know the whole idea is to grow the pot not try to figure out how to divide the one that's here

Quality Experience

Successful community tourism provides a quality experience for both visitors and residents. Visitors leave satisfied, excited to return, and eager to share their experiences; residents maintain a high quality of life and a positive attitude toward tourism.

So that's one of the secrets of a good business is then you get the same people and you know them and you know them personally and it becomes a relationship actually a friend relationship versus just tourism you actually get to know people and that's a wonderful thing that's one of the advantages of having a small business that's quiet and not rushed and it's not hurried

I get a lot of feedback from people coming in there and said its exactly the same there's a lot the same you end up with a family-run thing and that's a strong value that people they adore that just like you know Chip you know Lori you know so you create this personality it becomes a personal thing and you like people that are going to come down a dirt road at the end of nowhere and spend all of their free time and money at your place and that they're bringing their children and it's safe and it grows and you see these people they just adore your terrain and the food and the whole value system that we represent is now really popular again

If you have a business that makes people feel good and warm and they want to be part of it that's the magic and you can't necessarily there's no formula for that it's just everything that you do equals comfortable I like this place

I love people all people and I thrive around a mix of people personally and I think everybody should because it opens their minds and opens their tolerance level and I feel like that's part of the purple fiddle's job is to help people be more tolerant of people of different races and religions and sexual preferences and colors

Well they hear about us first and once they get here they know when they've heard about it. It's everything the community welcomes them all the creative people in Thomas welcome them and love hanging out with them and talking with them about music and writing songs and it's the outdoors they discover the outdoors while they're here the community supports them by welcoming them to the community

I came here and I just felt welcomed as a community member, not just as a tourist and it was a place where as soon as I came in I thought, I feel kind of comfortable, I feel like I can be myself here. It's kind of a unique, fun place and that sense of you can be yourself here is something that really appealed to me which is funny after living in massive cities like London and New York City, but this place felt really welcoming,

I think everyone up here realizes that they're all you know in this together and you know it's just providing that guest experience is what's going to bring them back and that hospitality and that friendliness. You don't get that elsewhere and I can speak for it with experience of being from the East Coast. You do not get the kind of personal friendly feeling with people you interact with elsewhere.

I think in a lot of ways that hospitality comes naturally from the people of West Virginia and that's just in their nature. Most times they're just friendly, approachable people and that's just the nature of West Virginians but certainly always trying to increase that level of is important as managers too. So you know you're always trying to work on that with your employees and do better but I think a lot of that comes naturally to you know people from.

Diversification

Tourism can be a component of a successful economic development strategy, but cannot, on its own, sustain the entire community, however, the amenities offered by tourism development often entice other industries and workers seeking to relocate further strengthening the region's economic base.

Being a tourism community at certain amenities you wouldn't have in a normal community the size we have the resorts, we have the access to skiing, we have the access to outdoor recreation that wouldn't have been developed, we have the access to foods and more restaurants than would typically predate a community like this. Our project the Highland Food and Farm Market is based on the fact that we have locals here interested in purchasing as well as tourists interested in purchasing so that brings healthier more quality food which brings more food to the local farmers which helps the local communities, so tourism is always an asset, however, there's bad sides to everything and it's about managing that vs the benefits but it's definitely added to the quality of life

We're seeing people being attracted to living in a place like this and every year we're seeing more and more. What often happens is you'll have a person or family come to visit Tucker county for its recreation, for a family reunion, they'll come to see a music act at the Purple Fiddle, they'll come to go skiing at Timberline or Canaan or White Grass and then often times they'll say, I like this, maybe I could live here and so what we're seeing is every year more and more people saying how can I find a way to live here with a highway that takes us straight to Washington, DC which makes it easier also to get to places like Baltimore and --- Virginia and Richmond, we're having more people saying this is a life I could live.

You come here because you're a tourist and then you end up deciding to stay here that is only evident to you if you lived in the city for the last 10 or 15 years or your whole life and then you start seeing what you do have here so that's where the tourism is not just about what happens a memorial day weekend it's about making people become want to become part of the community

It's just a melting pot of a lot of different things going on and a lot of different cultures. I have a colleague that typically says mountains attract hippies, that's just a statement about the personality that you can see coming in here at certain times. it attracts people with a certain lifestyle that they want and they become community members,

I love to mountain bike, cross-country ski, love to be outdoors and was here visiting on a family vacation and saw the building up for sale and that's the end of the story

we gave up our life in Northern Virginia bought the Meyer house bed-and-breakfast and operated it for almost just over 12 years and as of about August 2015 we started a new business venture we opened Stumptown ales which is a craft brewery here in West Virginia we love it here it's a great place we have five kids that have been raised in the area this area is filled with tourism and art and athleticism and it's just an open venue for so many things and that's what keeps us here year after year after year

I'm from the city I'm from Philadelphia and I just wanted to have a little more rural in my world and so when my daughter went to college I came here I just made friends so quickly is the most lovely group of

people here it really is still will to this day stand there that canyon the Blackwater Canyon and think to myself my God I live here I can do this every day

My studio in office I could never afford anywhere in DC or New York or in Baltimore or anywhere else in the East Coast for that matter as far as big-city but I'm able to do the type of work that I would do in the big city and I've had plenty of business here I can market myself to places that would pay more and I would still have a lower cost of living here and a lower cost of operation

they do national accounting and bookkeeping for businesses all over the country and the owner, who had a home up here, realized I could be doing what I'm doing in West Virginia that is the kind of business that we like to see, someone who wants to be here, someone who also wants to invest back in the community, he's providing good jobs, he's supporting our town and a lot of the community activities, especially the arts., ---- Media and it just became the business of the year for the chamber of commerce and so those are the kind of businesses that we really want to bring in and we're seeing more and more of them come in.

We're suffering from a big brain drain in West Virginia and I see tourism as a way of turning that around because it brings in diversity it brings in people who have new ideas and with technology it's easier for them to set up and operate here and to me that's the most important part is not getting the tourists here to spend their money I mean that's important to me but it's a secondary effect of bringing people here who know how to get into a more modern business climate you know the coal mining is gone here and that's a hard hard pill to swallow

What Mark Mino is doing is a good example he's an example of someone that in Thomas so he's hiring these aren't super high paying jobs either these are beginning entry-level account jobs and he trains them and he invests a lot of time into training people they've got a salary they've got Benefits and they become part of the community I don't think it's necessary tourism or coal I think that there are things in between and that we just have to find them

If you focus on the quality of life, if you have the community, have the connection with nature, and you have the environment to support the things that you hold valuable in your life, clean air, clean water, healthy forests. Then, people will want to be here and through that want to be here. They're going to bring their skill sets and they may bring their, their jobs. We need to focus on smaller scale entrepreneurs that want to live here for other qualities that the county already has.

I think we could maybe do a better job about place making. You know making the place where people live kind of as much as it could be through community involvement. Getting people to collaborate with each other to create community spaces for that to happen. We need people who are passionate, impassioned about their communities. There are small towns there interests and through that passion will spread on for a newer ship or turn people on and maybe outsiders and want to bring a job here.

Obstacles to Opportunities

Obstacles to growth are inherent. Successful communities recognize these obstacles, frame them as opportunities, and actively seek solutions for positive economic, social, and environmental outcomes.

Seasonality & Low-wage jobs

I think one of the biggest challenges in running a tourist business is the seasonality we can be just overwhelmed with people on certain weekends and then we can be very slow and it's hard sometimes to keep your employees motivated managing a business when there's money coming in and then there's no money coming in I think it's a big challenge for someone when they first start which is why a lot of businesses start and fail or at least they have in the past because you have to really manage your money very well

The main challenge is the roller coaster ride of traffic flow because tourists only tend to travel on certain times of the year and when they're not traveling then it's really hard to survive until the next time the tourists come you got to be really good at planning ahead and saving for your future dry months and I've been here 14 years and I still haven't figured out that roller coaster ride it's all about taking the peaks of the roller coaster and saving for the dips and leveling out leveling it out a little bit and it's really really difficult. Tucker County is the perfect place and we still have struggled for 14 years.

I'll try to talk everybody out of it especially tourist businesses because of the roller coaster ride of cash flow of tourists. It's a huge headache I would be less stressed if the purple fiddle was in Pittsburgh or Morgantown where there's a constant flow of people with money you're not dependent on the holidays and good weather it's amazing how much just a sunny day will double your business and then all of a sudden you don't have enough staff working

I tell them any businesses open to Canaan, I tell them you have got to build in down time, because there's two seasons here, winter and summer and in the fall, after the leaves are gone until the snow really comes, that's a slow time, same thing in the spring, once the snow goes until the greenery happens and schools are out and people can travel, then that's a slow time too so anytime you have a business you have to build in those slow times

The growth to me should include more businesses that can sustain themselves on a year-round basis I think that our businesses are not open seven days a week year-round is because I just can't afford to do it so somehow there has to be a mixture of businesses coming in that can stay open thereby bringing in more people at times where it can feed off into the businesses that were all in

Hours of Operation

We got to get better at our consistency of hours and being open there's too many businesses that just open on the weekend or close if the weather is bad or close if somebody's sick the amount of customers coming to Tucker County will help make the number of hours businesses being open increase it's a back and forth so things aren't ideal yet but you can often go down the street in Thomas and

there's lots of businesses that are closed but more and more businesses are staying open longer periods of time so it's a slow-growing process

They're not open midweek, they're only open on a weekend. And that's a struggle for the tourists that come up. they'll travel then instead of in the prime season and they'll come and things will be closed, which is another hard thing because it's not you know probably as cost effective for them to be open full time then.

Employees

The management company, is U.S. Hotels Regency we operate the state park. We just manage the park for the state of West Virginia. They hire us to do that. So the vast majority of employees work for U.S. Hotels, our payroll number of employees ranges from about 150 up to 275, 300 when we get into ski season. During the winter we're the largest employer in the county. We pay a good wage, and our full-time employees are all benefitted, which is a good plus. So they have the option of 401K. They have the option of healthcare insurance, life insurance.

At Blackwater Falls we had twenty seven full time state employees we have anywhere from sixty to eighty hour employees at any given time. We are one of the larger employers in the county especially when you're talking into in the tourism industry

A lot of our employees there at the park have been there for years I think they take pride in sharing you know the jewel of Tucker County with people that are from out of the state or are from out of the area we have family generations that have worked at Blackwater Falls. a lot of people they grew up going to the park. They grew up because both parents worked at Blackwater Falls state park so you know they grew up around the park their entire life and now, you know they're adults working there and bringing their kids to the park. It's a unique thing.

I think many of the locals old-time locals have learned that a lot of the jobs are fairly low-paying and their seasonal and they may not be year-round it's very hard to get ahead it's very hard to plan and support a family

I would say the biggest downside to running a business in this town is the lack of employees so we have plenty of tourists that come I think there's plenty to do if you like the outdoors but as far as finding enough people to work because this is a tiny little area and very few people live here

The hardest part is probably finding the appropriate personnel the employee base is rather limited here

Keeping them enough hours and money to keep that to keep their bills paid because as an owner you have to look at the responsibility you have to your employees as well as the one they have to you if they can't make it up here

We are not able to serve all of the people that want to eat at our restaurant you can open another restaurant in town but you need employees to work there

There's not much infrastructure there's not much industry there's not many jobs and the jobs that are here are grabbed hold of and held onto and there's a lot of service industry you know if you want to be

in the minimum wage thing it's fine and so those are the people that are coming here that are happy these kids that are just waitresses but they're happy for now and that's what you want to see you want to see a happy population of service people

It's very helpful to find college students to work because when they are out of school and need some extra money that's when Tucker County is getting an influx of business and we need extra help

I just like to see more able-bodied people moving to Tucker County and they're coming but they tend to work three jobs at a time three different jobs at a time to get by so it's a strenuous situation sometimes for everybody but it takes some time and we're figuring it out. I don't see a lot of full-time jobs coming to Tucker County or any area with tourism as their main business

One of our biggest problems honestly is staffing. We can't get enough employees. I need 25 employees right now and I can't get them. I have two management positions opened right now. So we're trying to get a grassroots effort by starting with the school system, that way we try to keep the kids in the community.

I mean we need maintenance people. We need lawn care people. We need food and beverage people we're not like some industrial business you know that starts people out at 12, 13 dollars an hour, but you can work your way up to that. We've promoted three shining stars within a six-month period and brought them up to supervisors. That's the advantage, of the hospitality business cause it is like a community, it's like a family. So we think that's a good thing and those employees do too.

Employee awareness of tourism assets

We were going to take our shuttle buses, take the employee out of work and tour Tucker County, you know, and call the different businesses, let them know we're coming, 20 or 30 employees. We'd feed them and just let them see what's here. Most of our employees are from here or Randolph County, primarily Tucker, but it's kind of interesting, they really don't know what's around them. So we wanted to show them and let them meet people and let them experience it. People got on the bus and we took them here to Davis and we took them up to Thomas and let them explore. And then we got them back on the bus and then we took them back to Canaan.

I like to think of our employees as being guides. We need to guide people, and that's something we're trying to work. People come and they'll say oh there's nothing to do. Well wait a minute, and then you can start rattling off stuff of things to do that in a lot of cases will take up an entire day. But someone needs to tell them that, show them that.

Affordable Housing

We have some really nice houses that people take care but we've got a lot of rundown abandoned houses people have inherited and they want to sell for a lot of money some day and just holding on to them in these houses are deteriorating I mean there's some really serious kind of housing issues there's a lot of programs too in West Virginia to help small towns there's loan programs and grant programs and revitalization programs and all that but we've never been involved in those things as a community and were hoping we can tap into some of those resources

We have a lot of state park employees those aren't highly paid people so you know you have a house that's falling apart and you don't make a lot of money and it's really hard to keep it up and keep it nice so we're looking into how we can help people

The people that make this place so special, the reason why this place is so special, is because the person who serves you coffee, the person that is at the gas station, the person that teaches your children, they live here, and to have safe, reliable, affordable housing for those people that give this county its' soul

You need to have broadband for our communities to survive and thrive here. It has to take place and the other thing is housing. If we don't have good, mixed housing, housing where somebody can actually raise a family or live in this community, this community will die and you see that. You see these once thriving tourist based economies that are now kind of soulless because nobody has that connection to the town, the people who have the connection to the town can't afford to live there anymore

We have a lack of a housing stock here so our employers are challenged to have enough employees because they can't find affordable housing here. Canaan Valley has housing but if you're a teacher or if you work in the tourism industry, it might not be cost effective for you to live in the Valley. Thomas, Davis, Hendricks, Hamilton, Parsons are all wonderful communities to live in, but there's just no housing stock so that's a challenge

Infrastructure and Public Services

There are a lot of hills and mountains here, so it is not easy with programs such as cell phone service, or ambulance service to get over those hills, so these are challenges which ... they're challenges especially because they're not going to be solved overnight and that makes it exceptionally difficult

Emergency services and medical services in the county is a struggle

There are a few things that I really wish we had, one of them is strong, reliable broadband. Not only is it a need to have in a community such as this, as well as strong, reliable cell phone service. Cell phone services and broadband, they are a need to have and they are expected by everyone who comes into this community and so if we don't have that, it's not only going to keep us from bringing people into the community, but it's also going to unfortunately push people out when they get too big and they need more broadband,

Well I think in Canaan Valley, we would probably benefit from having some sort of health care center.

We have better healthcare services in this county than we've had in 40 years in terms of accessibility and availability, but we're still challenged, we don't really have 24/7 coverage on the weekends when so many of our tourists are in the Valley or wherever they are in the county, so that's a challenge.

Basic things like an emergency squad fully serviced there's just not enough in the wintertime when you have the skiers go on all your advances are tied up all day long just they're going from the Valley to some hospital another it really puts a lot of pressure on the services in the county we are not the infrastructure the County is pretty rough

Probably one of the bigger breakdowns is our emergency services and there's no pharmacy up here no real hospital in the county. The closest emergency rooms are Oakland or Elkins these are a lot of things that are limiting and I don't if the tourism dollars will make up for that to where you would have that or you'd have to have an expansion of your population and everything.

One of the things that right now would prevent us from growing a whole lot with people owning up here is lack of services, primarily hospitals, clinics.

Internet

One of the other big issues is Internet if the place doesn't have high-speed Internet which is at least 10 Mb per second then it's very hard to run a business very hard to go to school and do online anything and that's vital for any community that's in a rural area to connect to the outside world. if you want to run a web business or photography business you have to be able to connect to the Internet and if you're not connected to the Internet it's like not having power

Rural communities if they want to bring visitors they want to bring tourism it's an infrastructure they need to build out because the people come to visit are expecting that

That's really important is getting good solid Internet service because that's what drives everything now it seems

Restaurants

You'll hear the biggest complaint one of the big complaints you'll hear is that there's really not a lot of choices in restaurants I mean there are a lot of restaurants over in Thomas you're not going to find any place to eat after 5 o'clock at night so they kind of lack in that

I think we need a little more food we often send people to Davis for food especially on weekdays you know we have good food here this is not always available restaurants are packed, packed on busy weekends

Community Calendar

This calendar situation is good for tourists it's also good for people that live here because there's always so much going on and you would never know it if you'd just drove through Davis right now what are you going to do this weekend while G I don't know there's this that and the other like nobody knows me it's like crazy you would never know that there is always so much going on here a lot of people don't recognize how awesome it is you can't just watch a marketing video and believe that that's all there is that doesn't even that starts to scratch the surface

I think what we need is the lack of cohesive calendar I think if there was one general space for everything to be listed I think there is a cohesive spot where everybody could list their events and point of contacts and everything like that so people don't have the click on three different calendars to figure out who's doing what where it's just really hard to kinda get a really cohesive view of what's going on in the county whether it's in Davis or Thomas

I think we could definitely do, do more to collaborate and where we overlap kind of, manage our time and energy better. It seems like there's some redundancy there. Having more community members involved, a bigger volunteer base, more, more paid positions, as well, to help facilitate some of these, you know, questions and logistics. For example, creating a community calendar to organize events and for tourists and for community members. There's no one-stop-shop for that information. If we could unify those resources I think we'd be more effective in getting our message out, and getting people together. So, logistics like that are something that we can do better in.

By having a community calendar, it provides the tourist with information but it also provides us locals with the same information and so we can help guide tourists into the right, you know the right areas, the right place to go the right things to do, I think we're missing the mark and we're missing a big opportunity by just having a centralized location for all the information to then market from, so each area and each group isn't reinventing the wheel. If we can all come together and find that unified marketing strategy,

Shoulder season events

The tourism driven opportunities that we have here are seasonal. It's difficult to plan a budget where you have income around a couple of months of the year or where you really depend on the success of a given holiday weekend. So I think the challenge for that overall success of this area would be to add depth to what we're already doing to extend the reason to be here, the reason to come and visit and explore and spend money throughout the year rather than just over the winter holiday weekends, the few really well-received events that are scheduled over you know 4th of July and Memorial Day weekend, but to expand beyond that so that there's viable stuff to do throughout across the whole year, or more of the year.

Some thoughtfully developed special events that would be in those you know times when there's not already something, as well as you know midweek opportunity. So that there's plenty to do, plenty to draw people to the area on a more consistent year-round basis.

Well, There's a lot of people talking about offering events for the down season and more of that is going to start happening in Tucker County more and more tourists come every year to participate in the art spring it's an arts festival that's in downtown Davis and Thomas and even Parsons and there's live music on the street and gallery openings and all kinds of art shows and it's really a great festival and we need more festivals such as that for the slower months so a festival in June a festival in mid-May or late April or a festival in late October or mid-September more of the same festivals would help level out the roller coaster ride of tourist flow and bring the troughs up a little bit and that would help a lot

Events on the shoulder season will be helpful. Second home residents that are here but don't live here full time, but they come and participate in those things. You need to have something that's going to keep people here for one or two nights because not everything is open. And hopefully if it became as successful as Memorial Day weekend everybody will automatically be like no, no, no we can't go on vacation or close that weekend. We need to be open that weekend because we know that event is going on and it'll be successful.

Signage

What about signage make sure we have proper signage to tell people what's here.

I think the biggest thing I could see you would be some shared marketing and better signage for all of us to help the tourists get around and those of the two things if we all work together that would help everyone

A lot of people would like to see signage and maybe have some uniformity with the, with that signage. So, we have kind of a general theme and consensus amongst, you know, amongst all the various entry points to the community.

Beautification

I think that there was also a lot of small steps that were taking that actually make huge changes there were picnic tables that were put in down on the rail trail, trash cans were put down there you it really changes the perception when people are walking down the street see this like useable of space that is functional trash cans up and down the street those things they can to signify that the community cares about the town and that resonates with both community that live here and people visiting Tucker County

Cottrill's Opera house

I've always felt that that opera house is the key to the cultural district in the county and if that were to be finished that would be the focal point for everything The funds to do that that opera house just are not available anymore as long as we can get it functional and usable it would just be a driving force for everybody in the county

Retaining youth

One thing I've seen that's difficult in the small areas you know is kids growing up here that have no reason to stay you know if they're not directly involved in the tourism or food service there's not much else for them after they graduate to have things that they could do to bring them back as professionals

Creating identities

I feel that Thomas's identity as an arts town with something that was purposefully done some artist move there and they decided Thomas they wanted that to be there identity and they created that and it's brought in more artists Davis I don't think has purposefully tried to have an identity

I think where the Renaissance group has probably a great opening is to be that unified voice when it is going to and look say we have a community that we can make something of it's worth the state investing in us first it needs to be finding that identity deciding what because there's a lot of great history here you know in general there's a small microcosm of everything that's happened in this country in this county from environmental events logging coal industry etc. rise and fall capturing that

identity and then for the organization to be able to unify that into a voice to present to the state to say we can be a little gem for you we just need the investment to smooth our edges

Indoor Activities

Maybe some indoor activities if somebody were to develop something like that because there's really nothing to do here when it's 30° and raining. That will keep people out they really won't come here on those weekends so up here. Our motto is there's no such thing as bad weather its bad clothing.

Our biggest struggle right now is rainy season. We don't really have a whole lot of indoor activities. Just staying up with up-to-date technology, some of our establishments don't take credit cards.

Family activities

We have so many other opportunities for families to come here and enjoy and get away. And, you know, reconnect with each other having one more, you know, activity with, for a family would be nice.

Shuttle service

I hope somebody embraces Uber. I think it would do well. if somebody gets a nice little minivan and does two drop-offs, three drop-offs to the Fiddle or different areas in town and make yourself available I think it'll do well.

One of the things we talked about is running a bus from Canaan to Davis, Thomas, to Blackwater as a regular thing you know people could pay to ride the bus and we'll take them, even take a guide

Capitalizing on History

Helping the promotion and development of you know the cultural and historical features that we have here. That's probably something that could be developed a little bit more the historical aspect is a another draw to another group of visitors the history of the mining, the logging, and the railroads everything in this area that was pretty unique to this area certainly is an aspect that could be developed more.

Acquiring Funding

Where I'm going to go paint my building and I'm going to go fix my windows and I'm going to go do all this but it all cost money and time I don't have time to paint the front of my building right now for it would be nice if there was like some mechanism to where if the town says okay he would like to make these improvements is are some place in the state of West Virginia where you can reach out to and say hey would like some funds all the stuff takes money and I don't know where that money comes from I don't think can be expected to come from the people that live and work here because it's tough it's tough

Another big challenge that Tucker county and many West Virginian counties face is that we have based a lot of our budgets that are outside our control, a lot of the county budget, for the entire county, is based on coal severance tax, well that coal severance tax has been dropping dramatically.

There's lots of challenges money is the main thing the lack of money for infrastructure you know for doing things that really need to be done tearing down old buildings getting infill structures the challenges are really monetary mostly be had a lot of money you could do a lot of things if you don't you just plug away at it and try to get it done as best you can

All we do is support them the best we can we try to encourage them and help them try to help whatever their needs are try to help them out we try to get them financing for their businesses

There's a lot of challenges of running the park. A lot of our facilities are older or you know our classic cabins were built in the 50s, lodges built in the 50s, has its challenges in the maintenance and the upkeep challenges that go along with staffing to get all the work you get done

Certainly something that would make it easier is funding and you know budgets are always tight it's always a challenge to you know do all that with the limited resources.

The Canyon Trail

When the rail trail gets fully developed from Thomas it will be a beautiful trail between Thomas and Parsons and on to Elkins we're talking 10-15-20 years before the influx of tourism gravitates down the mountain because of the rail trail and other activities to where Parsons starts to offer things that tourists are looking for

If that rail trail was done from Thomas to Hendrix that would be millions of dollars a year revenue coming in here

Mountain Biking

So now we have identified the things that we need to do better we know we have one of the most beautiful places there are in existence to ride a bike is not necessarily the easiest place to ride a bicycle so we know that we lack beginner true beginner terrain and we also lack built obstacle terrain that what current mountain bikers look forward to like the wooden ramps the jumps some of the more progressive mountain biking is what we lack so in identifying that we know what we want to do better and we are also working on really trying to bring the awareness to Tucker County and how wonderful our biking still is and always has been

the potential is as much as we want to make of it really and are only hindrances are land that we can build and how we can build and what that entails and that's our only real hindrance otherwise it's just staying organized like I said meeting the right people creating the right relationships with the landowners and moving forward and also just communication too letting people know were here

What I see for Davis it becoming as important as Canaan Valley would be the skiing is Davis is to hiking mountain biking fishing you can walk right from your car in Davis and go do all those things. Those that know identify it as that but you know and it is identified as a recreation area so to speak but not as on the caliber as say Fayetteville is to white water rafting or Pisgah in Asheville is to mountain biking so the potential is there absolutely people know but there's so many good places to ride now so that's a challenge but with the brewery's growing and coming in and the restaurants coming in and a little more

variety and we need more there's no doubt about that on that context but that will us think that will assist in getting people here again

We want to take one step at a time establish our trails better, we need to establish our signage better, do a little maintenance where needs to be done and continue on that particularly developing that intermediate - beginner trail system and identifying it and making it available to people in those little steps establishing our festival establishing our communication with the local landowners getting all that established before we really start to market the place nothing worse than getting a bunch of people here and then we haven't taken care of the fundamentals.

Walking trail in Canaan Valley

A trail between Canadian Valley in Davis that would go next to the river that we go next to the national wildlife refuge and so it may happen and needs to happen there needs to be some trails that connect some of the properties in the Valley or a boardwalk for people to walk on after dinner some there's no real good place for everybody to walk in the Valley and you know if the trail next to the river I used to before the developed public service district and started treating sewage in the Valley I said will you just put a line from the lowest sewage treatment plant next to the river to get clear to Davis and on top of it but the bike trail for the walking trail I don't know whether that's feasible anymore because of the treatment there but yeah I think that's the biggest thing I see is a place for people to walk older people a level place them in certain people have places to walk but generally and there's a few places that of the refuge but you know if you're an older person they want to pay boardwalk or something or be the center of town are along the river some just something that was easy-going

Timberline Resort

I'd like to see improvements at Timberline ski area the owners of the ski area they are going to have to decide to make improvements. The skiing is good there, the facilities are okay but they really need to boost their numbers by making some improvements. In Canaan Valley everything at Canaan is brand-spanking new and they are a force to be reckoned with and so Timberline is going to have a harder time competing with them if they don't make some improvements and also competing with other skis areas in the East.

Shared Benefits and Local Control

Community tourism development is most effective when the community speaks with a shared voice. Partnerships, dialogue, and recognition of the community's varied interests and attractions encourage local ownership and support for development and marketing initiatives. By working toward shared goals government, business, and residents can create synergies that benefit the entire community.

People come to bat for you there's a really strong sense of family once you move up here for six months you kind of become brothers and sisters that's the great sense of community and great sense of kind of a family up here

When somebody needs something, the support you have in this community is unlike anything I've ever seen, I mean, neighbors help neighbors.

You need to have the community want to work together, and then you need to make it work we have a community in Tucker county that wants to work together. We have competitive businesses that realize that they're stronger together collaborating. We have different government and county offices that realize if we work together on a project, we get more bang for our buck

The population here has to work together because there's limited money and there's limited human power limited voice so we have to obviously get along with each other try to think strategically

I think Tucker County as a whole works together better than a lot of other counties I think we have some good leadership and I think there are a lot of hard-working people trying to coordinate some efforts

It's huge to have a community foundation. Not just in terms of the programs and the projects that they support, but just to witness the impact of local philanthropy how everyone through this whole region has gotten engaged in local philanthropy, there's hardly anyone in this community that I know of that hasn't been engaged in some level, whether it's through volunteering or whether it's through ---- financial support or materials or supplies and have that kind of grass roots support and to see how its launched this foundation to the level that it is, is quite amazing,

I think one of the biggest challenges working in a rural community like this is something I would call hero leadership, so a lot of great things happen in a small place like Tucker county due to a few heroes, right, we also refer to it as same 10 people. The challenge with that is that you only need to lose one person in a community, you can really take a big chunk out of our whole community. The other challenge with being a community which is based on a few heroes is that some of those heroes get burnt out, so capacity is a big challenge.

We're very fortunate for the grants that we have received and the hardworking community members that have put in blood, sweat and tears and work into it all, but I'd like to continue to see that happen and to keep that growth happening, I'd really like to see that next generation step up and take it on, because it is all of the same people working hard right now, but we need to keep that momentum going. They can't do it all by themselves.

I was amazed that such a tiny town had such fine art and the Highlands market bringing in local produce and then so much great live music so I stay because of the sense of community that is here and also the excitement of a developing community this place just felt really exciting because it seemed like a lot of things were happening at once all these different little bursts of energy everywhere and it was really fun and I want to be a part of it

Davis Renaissance

Davis Renaissance committee the primary goal is to help beautify and make the town of Davis a little more attractive a little more curb appeal a little more umph to itself the community needs to kinda be a little more vibrant about it and so one of the things that were going to start doing one of the first projects we are going to start working on is getting trash cans on the streets of Davis we're going to all have a collective uniform look throughout the town prettying up the town a little more to make it look a little more welcoming just kind of you know spruce it up a little bit

Davis Renaissance is about trying to develop a community identity where people come to a place not just driving through a bunch of buildings and streets but there's actually a community there

New Historic Thomas

Got to have a civic group that's really out there beating the bushes getting grants you know designing projects doing stuff like that the town can't do that stuff you don't get much done except picking up the trash and reading the water meters and keeping the sewer and water plant running and that's about it so anything else that gets done is done by usually by other people other groups in the group like new historic Thomas which is basically their mission is to improve the town and do what they can they do the projects they raise the money they do the work and that's very necessary

The new historic Thomas organization is a nonprofit community organization that was founded in the 90s it's a really great group of volunteers that really care about the community and want to see the downtown especially revitalized to make you know visitors and residents stay in Thomas really an all day event they can go to the galleries and the eateries and then go hop on the trails is our goal. We try to stay in tune with our constituency with our residents and many of our residents happen to be very creative

We're very lucky to have a nice group of young people you know really really like where they are and are making a contribution towards where they are

Friends of the 500th

We have what's called Friends of the 500th which is a support group that Canaan Valley national wildlife refuge uses to advocate for habitat management for outreach for supplemental income that we need or resources that we need to get the job done we are trying to do our best to reach out to the community to be a part of this community and not just be the federal government

Friends of the 500th is the volunteer group supporting the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge. It was established, shortly after the refuge was established. the formation of the refuge was a somewhat

contentious issue in this community the recreational use of the land here has always been very valued and there was you know the idea that when it came under government control that maybe those you know public access to the public lands would be restricted. We want to help insure that there are public uses that go hand-in-hand with the public land as it becomes refuge property. The Friends' mission is to support the refuge, to insure public use, public access to public lands. And within that it's protecting natural resources and protecting cultural resources and providing environmental education opportunities. So we've always thought that wise stewardship and sustainable use would come through people having a vested interest and through education and through access.

the Friends has supported the refuge through all kinds of volunteer hours, to help run their visitor's center, to establish a bookstore, to do environmental education programs, to lead you know public bird walks and wildflower walks and as well as history-themed topics. And an offshoot of the Friends group where there was a committee that was a history committee, the Tucker County Highlands History and Education Project, and we did lots of oral histories with folks in the area linking the people and the land, the land and the people, making sure they were always connected as they always had been.

We've had really good volunteer participation. There's always more need than there is people's time to go around, but for an area like this where the permanent population is so small there's a lot of people that give a lot of time and we have a lot of folks who are either second homeowners here or who just love the area that routinely volunteer for a specific project.

Artspring

Art Spring is an organization now, as well as a festival, as an organization we're dedicated to supporting the art's community itself by providing services to them, but then the second step to that is to make sure that the general public knows that that's going on and that they see the benefit of that in the community and appreciate it and are proud of it. If we can achieve those two things, if we can be a service to our community itself and a service to the general public, then that's a vigorous arts community that's an indigenous characteristic of this place and that will draw people to come, draw tourists to come.

That's our role, to be concerned about the roles that the arts play in economic development and tourism because an organization, we believe it's the arts drive that people will see as a reason to come here, and that will be a key piece of the economic development of the area. We're not asking artists to do something because that's what tourists are interested in. They do something because they do it for their own reasons and we help make that a center of attention for tourists so that they're coming here to see something that's a genuine development here, not just created as a tourist attraction, I think there's a distinction

Bike Association

So we have a lot of professionals now who are in their mid-30s to 50s who have children and kids and we are establishing this community that is outdoor recreation based well dynamic of course we have arts and the music but a lot of folks are coming in and seeing the value in the biking and their kids are seeing the value and it gets everybody excited and wanting to keep pushing forward for the things we love to do

There's probably 25 core local mountain bikers it's a very small very very very small group of us that are part of the IMBA club and who are part of the Tucker County trails is a lot and do that trail work there's five or six guys on the Tucker County trails or six or seven of us that are board members on IMBA chapter that are establishing the relationships with the local landowners establishing the relationships with the business owners in trying to propel mountain biking so that we can grow that and what are we looking for out of it? We just like riding our bikes we just want people here to enjoy what we do that's really what it comes down to

The festival has brought people that have never been here from very far away. establishing that word-of-mouth I mean that's more important than anything what's been incredible to me is the amount of people that are never been here before and they come here for four days and they get the royal treatment while they're here and that word-of-mouth is you can't beat that in the festival has also established a relationship of sorts with the town. mountain biking that has been a great catalyst to establish ourselves and show that we are professional as well we care about the community just as much as town Council the mayor and the community does and just representing ourselves very well giving very good positive a positive message about Tucker County as a whole but Canadian Valley Davis area

Businesses working together

I try to communicate with the other business owners in my community a lot you will see things like the brewery having live music but there live music is from 5 to 7 PM prior to our live music at 8:30 or you'll see the white room gallery have a big party where they're exhibiting it's an exhibit opening and the exhibit opening and the refreshments and the party will be from 6 to 9 so to that the people can walk down the street to the party at the purple fiddle we try to stay aware of what is happening in the community and not step on each other's toes because after all there is a limited amount of people that come to town on any given day and we want to share in those customers and we've always done a really good job of that

We're all trying to grow the customer base in Tucker County together and together we create a bigger attraction for Tucker County and we can't do it by ourselves and so we've got to cooperate in order to build that customer base together

Beer is trendy and hot right now. Everybody wants to try them. We have like 7000 residents in our community and we have three breweries. Not a lot of people can say that instead of making it a competition against each one they work together. Same with the art galleries, instead of trying to make it a competition they work together. I love seeing that, that sense of pride in community and you know not trying to beat each other out but how can we make each other successful.

Connection between residents and tourist businesses

We also try to make sure that there's a nice connection between our residents and our tourist focused businesses because that's how we keep residents here, that's how we make the soul of our community, is that the residents feel like they can also participate and be part of what these tourist businesses have to offer, and again it helps our tourist businesses be ambassadors for the rest of the community,

That's something that we need to work on on both sides, making sure that our residents feel like these tourist opportunities are for them as well and for our tourist businesses to make sure that they make their offerings to our residents, the more we have that connection, the stronger our community is.

Resorts being part of the community

The state park often is looked upon in my opinion like an island. we're really putting a lot of effort into reaching out, working with the vacation rental companies, working with the restaurants, we try to open the doors to let people know we're here, the local community know we're here, use us. And it's working. We're getting relationships.

We do want to push our people out and go see these other places, if we were able to push them to let's say Thomas, they'd fall in love with that place. They'd fall in love with Davis with all the restaurants up here. And they're just two cool towns with two different histories Snowshoe is trying to artificially build what we already have here, which was a community. They had their village with shops and things. Well, we already have that except its natural and it's historic.

We work with different landowners we work with chip Chase who owns white grass we integrate with him to do interpretive walks trying to educate people about Canaan Valley national wildlife refuge about red spruce habitat about endangered species such as cheat mountain salamander

They're looking for the kind of slower pace laid back type of attitude and feel that you get when you're up here. I don't think they're looking for Ferris wheels and water slides.

Certainly the guests at Blackwater Falls are here for the whole experience they're definitely here to get the whole experience, go drink a beer at the brewery on Friday night, go to see a band that's at the purple fiddle Certainly venturing out from the park.

If all resorts operate, you know, bring them here, keep them here. The four walls. You know, keep them within the four walls. This doesn't work here, we're a small community we have to be a part of the community and we have to market the community,

They come, they ski, they have lunch. They go out, they go to the little, they come here to Stumptown, they experience Davis, Thomas, Tucker County, Elkins, you know, and once they experience that, you know, the next time they come back, they stay longer. You know, a skier will ski two days. You know, a person that loves this area will come for three or four, or a week. the idea isn't, is to not just bring them in for a day of skiing. So, to make them stay you know, bring them in for a week, make them home owners and make them, you know, a voice for our community, to go to their friends and say, you know what, I had an experience and I can't wait to go back.

We're all coming together and, you know, if we can work together and become unified in in one area that leads to future growth.

Heart of the Highlands Trails System

All the ---- land, we all work together, of course the few state parks, we're neighbors so we work hand in hand together all the time. the heart of the highland trail system, they're working on a ---- trail that connects all these public entities, so you know there is a lot of cooperation between all these different agencies and groups and interests to just get everything in our ----.

The gist of our mission is to connect those trails that exist on all the public lands here in Tucker County and be able to kind of present the trail system as a whole instead of as all these multiple parts. to get those public land managers to be able to work together and meet some of the other stakeholder needs that have been identified.

In the end everybody is receptive to the idea we've been able to make some giant strides forward in you know working together and reaching ideas and plans that everybody can be receptive to and fully support.

We have a little tagline "connecting trails, connecting people." bringing in public stakeholders and other interested entities you know community groups and private people and business owners to be able to look at connecting people that way was a new and challenging idea.

What we've been able to accomplish by having all of those interested parties sitting at the same table month after month is far greater than anything we you know could've done without their support, without their input. through doing that it's easy to keep your eye open for new opportunities, to be able to tie things together. And I do think it's a great platform for the arts community, the music community, the history, folks interested in history to be able to do that and to do it with the appropriate public land or private land folks that would have resources to contribute, not just dollar resources but land resources and idea resources. through that same approach that all of the aspects of tourism and development of the county would benefit from.

That's what's so important you have an open mind not afraid to listen to other people just hopefully gain an understanding of what's better for the community not what's better for each individual person but what's better for the whole community.

Conclusion

The communities of Thomas and Davis have experienced success and challenges with tourism development. The key elements of tourism – a diverse attraction base; quality products and services; effective marketing, and strong partnerships do not guarantee success without a long-term vision, a plan and a commitment throughout the community to make it work.

I think the common vision for Tucker county is that we want it to be a better Tucker county people in Tucker county want us to focus on what makes us special, we don't want to be like our neighboring counties, we don't want to be like another outdoor town out west or another tourist town down south

I envision Tucker County being what Vermont is to New York. I would like to see Tucker County be that to DC'ers where they come, they escape, they enjoy the area but they take care of it. They appreciate the beauty and are willing to invest in the community, not just come here and play and leave but really understand what we're trying to do and preserve this area as a tourist destination

Being able to enjoy your environment because it's, it's healthy and productive, and diverse, and, you know, your community is striving to improve itself and being inclusive and collaborative I think is really important. And so far, Tucker County has, has been just that.

My vision for this place also includes a place where people can raise their family and where the kids that are raised in this area have a huge range of options as their growing up to learn new ideas and have new experiences and I see that as being available through the arts and through all the physical opportunities recreation opportunities that they have here

I just want to help ensure in a very small way that I can that this is a wonderful place to live for all the residents that the quality of life is high and that we exceed expectations of our state that have often been put on us and our kids have education opportunities and creative opportunities outdoor opportunities and that there's plenty of affordable housing I want people to be able to afford to live here, afford to take advantage of all the creative and other opportunities in the county that's my hope

I think my vision for this area is that I don't want to see it changed too much I am so scared that we are going to get a McDonald's or a Sheetz in our town what we had then does not exist anymore and it is not ever coming back were not ever getting back the logging or the mining so why not embrace what we have we have a beautiful area so let's how do we bring the whole community not just the businesses on William Avenue together to create you know something that everyone can come here and enjoy and everyone that lives here enjoys

I would say my vision for Davis this kind of a modern day Norman Rockwell painting it's just the piece of America that used to be seen and understood and enjoyed

I think there needs to be a bit of a vision just because I think things could get out of control there again the common vision we're talk about zoning and getting building codes and things like that that way you don't just have rampant development with high-rises and things like that and I just don't think a lot of

the governing bodies are really aware of the potential of what I think the increased tourism that I see is going to have on the county

You can't come in here with a pie-in-the-sky vision and think you're going to get anywhere because you're going to get shut down real fast things move very slowly up here change comes slow and hard

I think we're getting to where there's going to be a common vision. It just seems to be more united as we go on down [the road]. I've been here like 16 years and it's just like it's amazing how many people really, really care about what happens in Tucker County.

Is there a common vision for the future of Tucker County? I have to say, we're working on it. we've realized that there are many visions and many parallel visions of where Tucker County is going, and we made a concerted effort during the last year to make an art's round table, so we are working on a more unified vision for where we're going,

The Menaw? Valley in Washington it's just this side of the mountains from Seattle a very similar set up to what we have here they revitalize they went back to their history of a western town the old one room schoolhouse has been turned into a brewery you know they reclaimed all of their historic buildings that were still there and modernized them you know use them for what is there today they also have a great outdoor space they capitalize on with their white water rafting they've got one of the premier cross-country ski areas where the US ski team practices but they did that by getting all of these organizations that we're talking about together and unifying them like what do we want our town to be from what I understand it took a good 10 years of planning to get everybody on that page and get the state behind everything they did.

It's kind of hard of sometimes for a visitor to get a good feel for all these different kinds of places that they can go to all there's a lot of things going on but there's not necessarily a unity to the whole thing

I think it's important that everybody be at the table to have that dialogue so that Davis knows what Thomas is doing, what Parsons is doing, what Hendricks is doing so that there's some continuity and consistency and some agreement that this is what's best not just for your community, but for the entire county, I think the process as evolving over time but the process is in place and we encourage everyone in the community to be part of that process.

If there was an individual or an organization that wanted to take on that lead role as part of their business to coordinate effort to put us all together cohesively that would be fantastic

The CVB they are directly required to market the county and they are limited in development work based on their bylaws basically it's also based on their funding source which is hotel motel tax

The development Authority it's designed to look at industrial development

Nobody was developing the background to develop the assets that we could then market so that was the whole purpose of the cultural district authority being formed we realized okay there is a gap here we need to fill that gap and this is how we are going to do it. We are the first one that's countywide that's because the uniqueness of the county that's the whole thing is not just a community thing for Thomas and Davis thing a Parsons thing there's a whole combination with it that has to be added together to add to the whole district taking one part of it would not be justified to the others

As far as we know, we're the only county --- cultural district authority in the country, so we're a unique animal and we're moving slowly through the process to establish ourselves, and if that's purposeful, we need to understand our role, we need to make sure that we are engaged in all of the groups in the county who make up the culture of Tucker county, it goes everything from outdoor recreation to the historical spectrums to the arts and crafts to the food, the farms, the coal mining so you know trying to embrace all of that and trying to capture it, any visitor coming into this county understands the wealth of culture here, that's a daunting task,

Whether its grease to make the wheels go through or a bridge to make them both talk to each other that's our purpose

Part of those resources are controlled locally and part of them are not part of them are owned by outside individuals that are private as well as government there's different roles. It's about how to preserve it and keep it going without damaging it and having them for future generations that's the whole point of the cultural district authority were not a private development organization were not just a government agency and preserving we're that intersection where both need to be for growth

What I see is a really core important part for it to sustain itself is just to continue to develop the identity of a highly impressive and diverse arts destination I want it to be you have to take a day or two to see all of the art it's kind of like nothing that I've really seen in such a rural area I can't imagine spending half a day walking through galleries and then walking straight out the door into a national forest and then you know wandering through that and then turn around and coming back and going into music venue it would be exactly what I were looking for if I didn't live here fortunately I do

You get into these moments where you think, this is so perfect I don't want it to ever change and that's kind of frightening because change will happen so I feel so fortunate to be here at this time and sometimes I'm worried that it won't be the same forever, but if we do it right, the future will be pretty cool too.

The elements of our culture, you could use any number of adjectives to describe it, but I still don't think you can put a finger on it. I think you just have to live it, you just have to be part of it, you have to understand to take the good with the bad and it all comes together. I personally don't want to define it, I just want to enjoy it.

This area is bound for glory it always has been we've lived here for three and a half decades it's just been almost perfect it's been awesome our kids have never been no crime there's basically no problems around here I tell people from Washington I say I have very little stress in my life we've been really lucky it's been a dream it's almost been a dream come true