

## LATEST ARC REPORT SHOWS APPALACHIA'S CONTINUED CHALLENGES

The Appalachian Regional Commission recently released its annual report on the state of the counties in the region. Although there seems to be some improvement, the heart of Appalachia (which includes the coal counties of Eastern Kentucky, Southwest Virginia, and West Virginia) are still struggling. One noticeable change in this year's report is that several counties in the Ohio Appalachian region have moved in a negative direction.

The annual report takes into consideration county level data on unemployment, per capita income, market income and poverty levels. Based on this data, counties fall into one of five categories. Those categories are:

- Economically Distressed
- At Risk
- Transitional
- Competitive
- Attainment

Out of 420 counties in the Appalachian region, only 13 counties are considered to have reached the high end of competitive and attainment. The link to the report is below. If you look at the map, the color for the distressed counties hangs on Central Appalachia like a bull's-eye. Those considered distressed rank in the bottom 10% of the counties in the entire nation in regards to economy.

\*All historical reports can be found at [www.arc.gov](http://www.arc.gov).

Unfortunately, this slow progress is all too familiar for families in the region that have

seen their children find job opportunities elsewhere, often leaving the region for good. When this happens, the skills and education they gain are lost to the region, often referred to as the "brain drain."

As a point of transparency, we should mention that our organization recently applied for a sizeable grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission. The program that we have developed (and need funding for) was a comprehensive program to promote economic diversification and tourism throughout the distressed counties in Central Appalachia. We have referred to this program in the past as Appalachia Streaming, and our focus is to showcase the best of each town and county, highlighting destinations for tourism and what opportunities await in those areas for job creation, entrepreneurship, and highlighting why businesses from outside of the region should consider our area for business relocation or expansion.

Getting these grants is a very competitive process. Congratulations to those organizations that received funds and we wish them all well in their endeavors to advance our region. Although we were hopeful in this process, we will not give up on the program. We feel it is incredibly important and would help areas within the region take some very needed steps for their long term goals of economic and cultural viability.

## **Thank You to the Artists and Sponsors of the Celebration of Appalachian Arts!**

We held our first ever art festival, A Celebration of Appalachian Arts, on June 22<sup>nd</sup> in Lebanon, Virginia. We were honored to host nearly thirty local artists that brought

their work to share and sell. We appreciate each of the artists that came out to be with us for the event! This was made possible by the support and donation of several local businesses that sponsored the event and helped to get the word out. Special thanks to those businesses!

Event Sponsors:

**David Mullins Wealth Management**  
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**The Appalachian Authors Guild**  
In-Kind Donation made by **GPM**  
**Investments** (Road Runner Convenience  
Stores)  
**WXLZ 107.3**  
**Eagles Landing Insurance Services**



You can find more photos from this event on our Facebook page. ARC TV also came to film the event and we were able to interview every artist that wanted to participate for the recording that was featured throughout the region on ARC TV. The entire event can be found on their YouTube page.

***S.O.A.R.***  
***Shaping Our Appalachian***  
***Region***

The annual S.O.A.R. convention was held in Pikeville, Kentucky on September 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> at the convention center downtown. Each year this event is hosted by the S.O.A.R.

organization and has countless vendors that set up their displays to showcase business opportunities and technologies that are being used and developed to help shape the future of the Appalachian region in Kentucky.

For those not familiar with S.O.A.R., the loosely affiliated group of organizations came together to promote more regional collaboration with the shared vision of job creation and enhancing innovation and quality of life. Kentucky Gov. Matt Bevin will be the featured speaker at this year's event, which will also include guest speakers Congressman Hal Rodgers and Maj. Dan Rooney, USAF.

There will be more than 90 businesses and organizations set up to showcase this year. In previous years the Foundation For Appalachian Advancement has had a table at this event. However, this year we were not there but plan to participate again at future events.

For more information on this group and the annual event you can visit them online at [www.soar-ky.org](http://www.soar-ky.org).



### Artists Corner

#### **Big Walker Lookout A Stop Along The Crooked Road**

As you travel along the Scenic Byway in Bland County, not that far from Wytheville,

Virginia, you'll pass a spot on the mountain that welcomes all comers with open arms and a unique kind of friendly Appalachian charm that you'd be hard pressed to find anywhere else.

At the Big Walker Lookout you'll find a country store along the scenic driving route at the top of Big Walker Mountain with a view so spectacular that it might just take your breath away...and that is just from the view looking across the mountains from the shade of the area with the picnic table where visitors sit to enjoy the music of featured artists every weekend during the spring, summer and fall. The location features an overlook for those that want to climb to the top of the tower for a view of the mountains as far as the eye can see. On a clear day it seems like you can see forever. It's an especially amazing view when the leaves begin to change in autumn.



Not only do they feature great Appalachian music from musicians around the region every weekend, but they also support authors and craft makers by selling their art in their country store and by having an Appalachian author at the store every weekend to meet the travelers and to sell their work.

When you're traveling the interstate near Wytheville, VA make sure you stop by the Big Walker Overlook! It's more than just a stop along The Crooked Road. It's an experience.



<https://www.facebook.com/BigWalkerLookout/>

## **We Need Your Support**

Our mission is simple. The **Foundation For Appalachian Advancement** (FAA) strives to promote educational opportunities, economic development, and the advancement of our culture, history and heritage through the arts.

We need your help to support this great region! The FAA is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization and your donations are completely tax deductible. Absolutely 100% will go towards the FAA expenses. Operational expenses only include web site maintenance and the annual P.O. Box fee which have always been paid out of pocket. All directors/officers are volunteers, no one is salaried.

We accept Visa and Mastercard on our website or you can donate the "Old Fashioned" way by personal check. Make checks made payable to Foundation For Appalachian Advancement and mail to **P.O.**

**Box 397, Richlands, Virginia, 24641.** Any amount is greatly appreciated!

*Thanks for your support and generous donation! We greatly appreciate it!*

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