



Loyal Jones APPALACHIAN CENTER

Tradition. Diversity. Change.

Rolling the community wheel forward

by Chris Green and Jonita Horn
Loyal Jones Appalachian Center

The word “service” and Berea College’s commitment to Appalachia go hand in hand. On campus, students have all kinds of encouragement and support to serve their community. We call it learning through service, and that is precisely what we do. There is nothing like working hard and knowing that you’ve helped someone else learn, put food on the table, or gain equal protection before the law.

Serving your community is one of the fastest ways to learn about the people around you—and to learn about yourself. Plant a tree, and you may discover that you can nurture life, and at the same time maybe you discover that you don’t really know anything about planting trees. That’s okay! Your neighbor might know plenty about planting trees, and she can help. March or rally for a political issue that matters to you, and you just might find that more people agree with you than you thought.

When you begin to serve and have invested yourself in your community, you cannot help but to care what happens to people you’ve come to know. Whether you start out intending to feed the hungry, change a law, or protect your

neighborhood from extraction, other people around you likely have the same needs, hopes, and goals. Service and activism are two spokes on the same community wheel. Both are essential for moving forward.

This issue of the *Newsletter* shows how that wheel is rolling along. We feature pieces by those who have committed themselves to service in Appalachia and discovered themselves in the process. First comes Beverly May, a Floyd County resident who won Berea College’s 2013 Service Award; next comes Cory Lowery, a student from North Carolina who never imagined he would be helping a community knit itself together by carrying a sign; and we also hear from Ashley Cochrane, the director of Berea’s Center for Excellence in Learning through Service, who shares how Appalachia has “humbled and hooked” her.

If we work together we can make a lasting, positive difference in our neighborhoods, towns, counties, and maybe even the world. It all starts with a heart for service, a love of people and community, and a few good folks who are willing to work.

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"The history of this nation weaving and unfraying of A sewing

Editor's Note: This article is drawn from the Berea College Service Convocation that Ms. May presented in April 2013

by **Beverly May**

Special to the LJAC Newsletter

My aim is to encourage you to think of service as a set of practical skills, learned by watching, listening, and doing—much like piecing together a quilt or patching up a torn but still beloved pair of jeans. You hold the threads that can patch up the social fabric in your hands

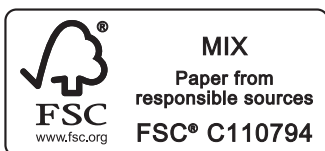


The many faces of Beverly May: speaker, gardener, activist, nurse practitioner and musician.

right now. And in the same way I learned to sew from my mother, you do not have to figure it all out by yourself. There are teachers and guides along the way.

So here is what I understand about the social fabric: it is a blessing we all give and receive every day—of knowing and respecting and feeling a responsibility for those around us and in turn being known, respected and loved ourselves. It is a dense tapestry of bonds between neighbors, family, and fellow citizens, and it is fraught with blessings and commitments, obligations and hopes. When we speak of building community we are also speaking of strengthening the social fabric, weaving together more of the threads that hold people together and allowing none to languish and fail in isolation.

The blessings that a people hold in common can be thought of as their *commonweal*. It is an old word which is the root of



could be told as a continual the social fabric.”

kit

commonwealth. Our commonweal could include clean air, or paved roads, the deciduous forests of Appalachia or the magnificent bounty of a well-stocked public library. No one person owns the commonweal but all benefit from it. The social fabric and the commonweal are not just critical to our *sense* of wellbeing but to our wellbeing itself.

Let me clarify that what I am speaking of here is not the “social safety net”—the notion that there is, in this country, a complex web of programs and services to assure that if our lives go into freefall either from tragedy or just plain bad luck, we will be caught and helped back onto our feet. This is a fiction of course. The social safety net is a

the disturbing trend of removing entities that belong to the public (and remember “public” means you) and placing these in private hands. There are countless examples, but let’s consider that hospitals were once entirely non-profit and administered by communities or religious charities. Since the 1980s, various pressures have combined to force community not-for-profit hospitals to sell to larger for-profit chains or to close their doors all together. In this environment, services for the poor and uninsured are often dropped. A service with a mission of benefitting the whole community shifts to the mission of making money. Reflect for a moment on how many times you’ve seen this happen.



story we tell each other and that our leaders tell us, in order to reassure and pacify us. It is a dangerous notion because it lulls us into thoughtless inaction, and thoughtless inaction is the precise opposite of committed service.

The history of this nation could be told as a continual weaving and unfraying of the social fabric. We can look to the rise of unions, the building of the national park system, the creation of a nationwide system of free public education for children, progress in civil and human rights, the national highway system, and much more as expansions of the commonweal. We are immeasurably richer for what we share together.

But over the last three decades or so, there has been a move to reduce the commonweal, the blessings we all share, and it has largely been successful. By this I’m referring to

When you take the logic of privatization to its logical conclusion, everything has its price, and nothing, including the safety and wellbeing of children, is sacred. And government is reduced from its role as a chief means by which we can take care of one another to a feeding trough for the greedy. I’m not sure if it is in response to this or to further it that we now see the rise of those who see government as the root problem. There is a small minority with a consuming desire to restrict government from administering a fair judiciary or a public system of education, from holding fair and transparent elections, or enforcing the myriad environmental and consumer protections critical to

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Investing in local life and culture as service

Uptight, neurotic, hesitant, and critical are likely apt descriptions of the boy who came to Berea in the fall of 2010, and to an extent they still describe the young man I have become in the year of my graduation. I like to think that I was a good student of contemporary America, which was (and is) characterized by individualism, cynicism and irresponsible self-interest—values I no doubt absorbed despite my self-proclaimed liberalism.

With this image in mind, you might understand how jarring it was for me to be greeted upon my arrival at college by Center for Excellence in Learning Through Service (CELTS) and the Bonner Scholar program, whose reason for being was community service. I met people who, quite unlike me, had already found their purpose in service to others in the community, and the cynic in me was put off by the corniness of it all. Despite the ups and downs of daily life, many of the students and staff who worked at CELTS seemed genuinely invested in their work in the community, whether working with children from local schools, with Habitat for Humanity, or with the college and the town to encourage environmental sustainability.

Like most people, I believed that in the right situation I would be willing and able to lend a hand to someone in need. My first year of service at Berea College demonstrated to me that it wasn't so easy. By working with a team of four other first-year Bonner Scholars to tutor and plan activities for a group of middle-school kids from Berea Community School, I learned that service is hard work and can be emotionally draining. Navigating more than a dozen new relationships while learning about the ongoing setbacks and tragedies of the children who we worked with was frequently harrowing. I often felt like I didn't have what it took to meaningfully improve their situations.

I had to open up and engage with others, confront the reality of their needs, and accept the fact that some problems have no easy solutions. Despite the growth I experienced and the rewards I gained from my first year (lasting friendships and experience), it took me a while to figure out what form of service I would be most comfortable with.

A stroke of good fortune landed me in an Appalachian Studies course with Silas House. I had been interested in political issues for several years, but despite being from near the mountains of western North Carolina, Berea College was where I first heard about mountaintop removal mining. Even though the rampant destruction and pollution within these states is mostly unknown where I am from, the destruction still felt personal. Many of the Appalachian writers I have been introduced to at Berea, including Silas House and Wendell Berry, have spoken of a solidarity among Appalachian people that rises out of a mutual love of the mountains themselves. To me, the mountains around where I'm from are as much characters as places, with their own history and local quirks. The thought of them being leveled was sickening.

My education began in earnest when I accompanied members of House's class to an event called I Love Mountains Day in Frankfort. I remember our group turning a corner and suddenly coming to a crowd of hundreds on a river bank. I can honestly say that I had never seen anything like it before. Protest marches are quite unheard of where I grew up.

For the next few minutes the crowd swelled, and I heard protest songs being played. I stayed off to the edge of the crowd, introvert that I am, taking it all in. I was impressed by the scale. I had always heard that Kentucky was a small state, but I was in the midst of a crowd of over a thousand people. As we walked down Capital Avenue towards the Capitol building, I grinned at the chants and the crowd's greeting shouted towards Mitch McConnell's offices. After the march, the speeches, and the emergence of the occupiers of the

WHAT I'VE LEARNED

Cory Lowery



Students and community members march to the city council meeting to commemorate the two year anniversary of the creation of Berea's Human Rights Commission. The march was organized by the community group Bereans For Fairness.

Governor's office (including my professor, much to my surprise), my inner activist, as small and as timid as he was, stirred.

Back at Berea, I asked around about Kentuckians for the Commonwealth (KFTC), the group that had gotten the protest together. Heather Schill, my supervisor at CELTS, told me that a student had worked for them several years ago and said it would be possible for me to do so. Before the semester was out, I met with Carissa Lenfert, the organizer for KFTC's Madison County chapter, and we discussed KFTC's goals, its local issue campaigns, and some of the ways that I could help out. I got the feeling that I lacked a lot of the skills that would make me an ideal candidate, but I was accepted for the job, and would spend my sophomore year in a new form of service.

While individual members of KFTC participate in direct service, the organization's primary goal is grassroots political organizing and activism. Before my work with KFTC, when I heard the words "community service" I thought of volunteering at a soup kitchen and Habitat for Humanity, or helping the poor make it through a tough situation. My work with KFTC made me realize that while these types of service are desperately needed, they do not address fundamental causes of poverty and homelessness. I realized that social-justice organizations like KFTC that fight for the reform of fundamental economic and political wrongs makes them an indispensable community service.

Just as organizations like thrift stores, shelters, and soup kitchens must cooperate with community stakeholders like churches and businesses, grassroots

activist organizations must build alliances with other community groups and constituencies. One of my continuing responsibilities for KFTC has been to photograph and document the activity of members, and one of the first events I attended was a march on Berea's City Hall.

Bereans For Fairness had been formed in response to a widespread community drive for a Fairness Ordinance, which is a law prohibiting discrimination against LGBT residents and employees. In cooperation with Bereans for Fairness, KFTC used its mailing lists and community networks to mobilize a broad crowd of over 400 people (including church pastors and college professors) to march to City Hall and demand the passage of a Fairness Ordinance. While the council has still refused to pass a Fairness Ordinance, the outcry that culminated in the march resulted in the re-establishment of Berea's Human Rights Commission, which continues to work towards a Fairness Ordinance.

Because I had come to understand how difficult it was to make a march like this possible, I was more impressed by this march and its success than the march I attended in Frankfort. Activist groups constantly fight a battle to educate the public, to dispel myths and misunderstandings that are the trade of politicians, and to galvanize political participation. During the Fall of 2012, I joined other KFTC members to register voters and inform them about political issues that impact their lives. While I was reticent to approach strangers to discuss controversial political topics, I never doubted that this work was important, because a public that has

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Humbled and hooked

by **Ashley Cochrane**

Director, Center for Excellence in Learning through Service

I grew up in Virginia at sea level, on flat land near salt water, surrounded by marshes and daily reminders of how close we were to the ocean. The times of high and low tides were part of the nightly weather report on the local news, and seagulls overhead were as common as cardinals in my suburban neighborhood.

I remember enjoying family vacations to the mountains of western Virginia and North Carolina as a child, but I was in my late teens when I developed a swooning crush on the Appalachian mountains. I spent a week each summer volunteering with other members of my church through a faith-based emergency home-repair program that served in central Appalachia. During those weeks, I was mesmerized by the folds of mountains, enchanted by the narrow hollows and winding roads, captivated by the mist that hung among the hills in the early morning, charmed by the towns with houses that climbed up the steep hills, and drunk on the lush green of high summer. I was haunted by the wail of the trains that carried coal from deep inside the hills eastward, all the way to the port at the mouth of the James River where it spills into the Chesapeake Bay by the east end of my hometown.

In college, I spent my summers working with this same organization in southern West Virginia. As I began to learn more about the place that I had idealized, my crush on the Appalachian hills became a love affair. I sought out literature from the region, read about the history, questioned social structures that led to the poverty I encountered, and developed relationships with people whose roots in the mountains went back generations. When the summers ended, I carried my love with me back to college, where I pined moodily for the mountains as I gazed at them in the distance from my apartment's balcony.

It was service work that introduced me to Appalachia, but when I graduated from college, I was restless to explore other ways to effect social change. I spent a year working in Atlanta, Georgia, and I missed the mountains so much that my heart ached. When that year ended, I decided it was time to figure out what this mad passion was about. I sought out and accepted a job as a community organizer with a small, young, grassroots, membership-based organization, and I moved back to southern West Virginia. There, I experienced what it meant to be an outsider to Appalachia—a young, single woman who was choosing to live in a rural community that was not her birthright.



Ashley Cochrane



Home to a collegiate chapter of Habitat for Humanity, students help build houses locally and at sites during break service trips.

I also learned about gardening, cooking, and building a strong community, and developing friendships. It was there that my love affair got real. My love was more to the relationship than romance. My love was ways that I could not have predicted. The people and communities I worked with drew me in. They didn't just sit me down hard and educated me, they challenged me. I learned about how people's perceptions are shaped by their past experiences. I realized that change is often ineffective and that any change is challenged by issues like identity, power, and relationship. As the issues like mountain-top removal mining and the barriers to change and inspired by the challenges to make change happen. My developing understanding of the complexities of the mountains deepened and I was hooked.

Two decades later, my family and I are still here, the same as living in the heart of the mountains. We see ourselves as living on "the first ridge of the mountains." For years, I have worked with the Center for Excellence in Learning through Service (CELTs) at Berea College. At Berea College, we focus on community service with academic learning. We are "critical thinkers, reflective learners, and doers near and far."

Through CELTs, and in partnership with other organizations, Berea College students engage in service and mentoring local youth, building affordable housing, and

d: serving Appalachia



Habitat for Humanity, CELTS students
es around the nation during spring

king, living with the seasons, creating
that span age, culture, and geography.
and I came to understand that there
nce. I was wounded and challenged in
he people I came to know and the
and embraced me, pushed me away,
sunderstood me, and nurtured me. I
of me and my actions were influenced
my actions by themselves are
nged by complex layers of history,
e organization I worked with tackled
g and education, I was overwhelmed by
ne courage of those working creatively
g understanding of the confounding
d my love for the place. I was humbled,

live in Berea, Kentucky. It's not the
ains, but we in Berea like to think of
the Appalachian mountains." For ten
r Excellence in Learning through
CELTS we work to combine
ing, in order to prepare students to be
l active members of just communities,

ip with community-based
engage in work that includes tutoring
ordable low-income homes, registering

people to vote, analyzing data about
access to local food, and more. At
CELTS, we want students to understand
that there is a spectrum of strategies for
building community and for addressing
community challenges. Students are able
to learn about these strategies—direct
service, educational outreach, advocacy,
direct action, policy change—by
working alongside leaders in our schools
and local non-profit, governmental, and
advocacy organizations. Through this
work, they are also learning about place.

We partner with the Loyal Jones
Appalachian Center to expose our
students to Appalachian history, current
events, social change leaders, and more.
Structured reflection facilitates the
development of students' understanding
of the complexity of circumstances that
create and perpetuate the societal
challenges that we face. Cycles of action
and reflection also facilitate students in
developing an understanding of the
value of the various approaches to
addressing social issues and the ability to
discern which approaches are most
effective in light of particular
circumstances.

The most exciting part of my work
in CELTS occurs when I learn from the
students who are engaged in
community-based work—when they
share innovative ideas for community
development or connect me with
networks of folks working for positive change in Appalachia. Like a long-term,
committed partner, I find joy and renewed inspiration in discovering new
things about the place I have loved for more than 20 years.

I know that many of the Berea College students I work with will go on to
do the good and hard work of building just and healthy communities in
Appalachia. And some will do this good work in other places in the United
States and the world. I hope that all of them will develop a deep love for the
places they choose to call home. ❖

Ashley Cochrane directs CELTS and lives in Berea, Kentucky, with her family.



Berea College students partner
with locally-based organizations to
learn about and serve in
Appalachian communities. Here,
Kelly Kusumoto, '13, plants a tree
on a mountain-top removal mining
site in eastern Kentucky.

A sewing kit

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public health. Whatever the intent, this has the final result of allowing the powerful and wealthy to proceed without restraint. It wrecks the commonwealth and leaves gashes in the social fabric. That's what we are up against friends. Now let's think about how to do social justice like we mean it.

If it hasn't happened already, it will happen before you know it. A problem or opportunity in your community that you just can't ignore, that tugs at your heart and your intellect, and then becomes your passion. If you have prepared yourself, as you are doing here at Berea, *you will be called*. I have a few thoughts on what happens next.

There is no reason to attack any problem alone. You can be certain that you aren't the only one who's concerned, so start by talking to neighbors, friends and family. Don't make assumptions about how people feel about your issue because you might end up very surprised or even a little embarrassed.

Try to avoid the temptation to form a new organization. Lots of new energy and excitement can get squandered in the creation of by-laws, articles of incorporation, and all the other chores that go with getting a new organization off the ground. If it's possible to join an existing group that can address your issue, that move can save lots of unnecessary steps. Align yourself with an organization that doesn't just share your concerns but also shares your values. For starters, I would look for organizations that use democratic principles in decision-making and value inclusiveness.



In response to the Appalachian Land Ownership Study, the Kentuckian Fair Tax Coalition came together in 1981 (left). In 1987, after the Kentucky Supreme Court ruled the broad form deed law unconstitutional, KFTC changed its name to Kentuckians for the Commonwealth (right), and today has more than 8,000 members.

Something else that will be a great boon to you is an organization that is intergenerational. Something magical happens when old and young work together to solve problems. You gain from the experience of those who come before you and they gain from your fresh energy and insights. One of the things that inspired me about Kentuckians for the Commonwealth (KFTC) was the fearless elders I got to know when I was in my 20s.

I'd like to remember just one of them to you: Joe Begley. Joe was from my hometown, but while he was serving in a war plant up north during WWII he met and married a woman doing the same from Letcher County. After the war they settled in Blackey and went to keeping a general store. When strip mining started around him in the 1960s Joe became one of the people who actively confronted the dozers (the Appalachian Group to Save the Land and People). They laid down in front of the dozers, and sometimes went to jail. Because they did not stand by quietly, the 1977 federal Surface Mining Reclamation and Control Act was passed and strip mining was finally regulated.

Joe was among the first to help create a new organization in 1981 which became KFTC and he brought his fearlessness, commitment and powerful sense of

justice to the new organization. Joe had been a deputy sheriff, so he had seen both sides of the jail door and he firmly believed everybody ought to go to jail—that it was a healthy exercise of civic life. I didn't really understand this until I had a ride in the paddy wagon myself. But I can tell you Joe Begley was right. You don't cherish your liberty, or even understand you have it, until you hear the jail door slam behind you.

From Joe and the other wise elders of KFTC I learned another critical lesson. My little life and my halting efforts are just part of a long chain of people who dedicate their lives to social justice. Just like the fiddler who plays an ancient tune, it's not about the fiddler, it's about the music: the fiddler is merely the carrier of something precious and mysterious. This is powerfully reassuring because it means your defeats are not final, your ideas may not be adequate but they won't be the only ideas, and your commitment will endure long after you are resting on the hillside. 🇺🇸

Beverly May won the Berea College Service Award in 2012. From her home in Floyd County in eastern Kentucky on land her family has inhabited for generations, she has successfully fought mountaintop removal mining, started an old-time music school, and served as a nurse practitioner.

Fulfilling the 'Promise'

Caring adults help children learn in the Promise Neighborhood

by **Tennant Kirk**

Special to the LJAC Newsletter

This is the story of Jacob, a fourth grader who was struggling with math, and Christy, the Academic Specialist who helped him. While reviewing student records, Christy noticed that Jacob's grades were getting progressively worse over time. A closer look revealed that all the failing grades were in math. She noticed that he had some higher math scores mixed in with very low scores which brought his average down to a failing grade. She wondered how his ability could vary from week to week. Then she looked at his attendance and a pattern emerged. When Jacob was absent, he received very low scores later that week. Due to Jacob's weak foundation in math, he had difficulty with new concepts. Christy shared her insight with Jacob's classroom teacher, his computer teacher, and the principal. Together, they arranged for Jacob to spend his computer time using a math program which generated a study guide based on the gaps in his knowledge. By focusing on learning these specific math skills, Jacob quickly improved his grades. He ended the school year with an 89 average.

Four students at a different school were so disruptive that their teachers asked for them to be removed from the classroom. With the principal's blessing, Tonya, the Academic Specialist, provided a small group tutoring session for these children. She discovered that they exhibited short attention spans and were easily distracted. She taught them strategies for focusing attention. With her help they learned how to learn in the regular classroom.

Promise Neighborhood, a program of Berea College Partners for Education, provides an Academic Specialist to each of the 11 elementary schools in the Promise Neighborhood territory (Owsley, Clay, and Jackson Counties). The program's overarching goal is to provide support for positive educational outcomes from Cradle to Career for *all* children in the target area.

Elementary Academic Specialists function as consistent, caring adults who work to help young



Promise Neighborhood



Fourth graders Shelby Campbell, Kolby Gabbard, and Trevor Bishop doing reading on Study Island with Promise Neighborhood's Academic Specialist Kendra Combs, a 2012 Berea College graduate.

children acquire the academic foundation to be successful in school. Using an Early Warning System, they systematically monitor grades in core subjects, attendance, and behavior. Research indicates that these factors predict school success and ultimately high school graduation. Chronic absence, such as missing more than ten percent of the days in kindergarten, increases the likelihood that a child will be a struggling reader by third grade. A struggling reader in third grade is much less likely to graduate from high school. When students show signs of risk, Academic Specialists determine the right intervention that each one needs to get back on track. Together they provide an array of services from homework help and tutoring to career exploration.

Academic Specialists build bridges for educational opportunity. In addition to remedial services, they provide activities that are preventative in nature. They collaborate with Family Engagement Specialists to share student progress with parents. They collaborate with teachers and other school personnel to align Promise Neighborhood activities with classroom objectives. They even welcome students to school in the morning with a smile.

Positive relationships and timely interventions change the life trajectory for children at risk of school failure and turn the curve toward graduation and a successful career. Caring adults, like Christy and Tonya, help children understand that their zip code need not limit their life choices. Promise Neighborhood Academic Specialists help fulfill the promise that all children can achieve the American dream. ✕

Tennant Kirk is Academics Project Director for Promise Neighborhood, a partnership between Berea College and Clay, Jackson and Owsley counties designed to help every young person travel from cradle to career through an educational pipeline supported by family and community. To find out more, visit www.berea.edu/esp.

Investing

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no knowledge of its problems and interests cannot make informed decisions about who or what can best serve those interests. While many voters appreciated the chance to sign up and to discuss the issues, many were also apathetic. Knowing the importance of issues like taxation, mountaintop removal, disenfranchisement of felons, and discrimination, then having someone tell you that they don't care one way or another can sting even more than a hostile response.

My role as a kind of in-house journalist for KFTC (attending events and key political actions to photograph the activities and write about them for a blog or a newsletter) has given me a ground-level view of KFTC and its role in Berea. As much as any service group or church, KFTC is inseparable from the fabric of the town, and its events are as much about community building as they are about political action. The members I have met come for many different reasons: students like me come to try out political activism, other individuals of conscience come to crusade for a particular set of issues, while still others joined to improve the town that they live in. Far from strategy meetings or phone banks (although successful activism requires these from time to time), I have mostly reported on dances, folk concerts, and pie auctions. KFTC's embrace of local culture is essential to its mission. Much direct service keeps individuals from crumbling into despair, poverty, or homelessness. Similarly KFTC acts to preserve the social fabric that holds the community together. By investing in local life and culture, KFTC shows that the traditions and connectors that bind Berea and other Kentucky towns together are worth preserving in the face of the ruin caused by greed, political corruption, and environmental destruction.

Before I arrived in Berea, service and activism were more ideas to me than anything. Without a personal stake in the work I was doing, it was difficult for me to take risks or to work for what was an admirable cause. The more I have invested myself in my work, however, the more the personal stake I was missing revealed itself.

In my work as a first year Bonner, my peers became friends, and over time my work became an



ABOVE: Artists from around the country donated artwork to help raise money for KFTC's efforts. These posters were placed in the Berea Arts Council. **BELOW:** KFTC members (including this article's author, left) registering voters at Berea's annual Spoonbread festival.



attempt to do the right thing for both them and the children we were working with. My work with KFTC also allowed me to establish relationships that I have come to value, but more than that, it introduced me to a valuable way of life and a community that deserve to be defended tirelessly.

This community has given me a confidence and a sense of purpose that has allowed me to do things that are difficult for a neurotic, introverted person like me. Confronting an elected official, enduring apathy or hostility from voters, or even shouldering some of the grunt work of activism is easier when you know that people you care about are depending on you and that your efforts are joined by the efforts of many others, all doing what they can to protect and strengthen a community that they love. ❖

Cory Lowery is a Berea senior majoring in Sociology. After graduating from Berea, he plans to pursue a graduate degree in Sociology.

Around the world in Appalachia



Growing up in rural Yancey County, North Carolina, I often took walks down to Prices Creek, which ran at the bottom of my driveway. I would sift through the silt to find shining flecks of what my dad told me was called “mica.” I would return home with fistfuls, most pieces no larger than a small skipping stone.

A drive through the next county over, Mitchell County, may at first glance seem like just another town surrounded by waves of Blue Ridge Mountains. But there are train tracks running parallel to the road and the tree-covered landscape changes suddenly to the exposed rock of an open pit mine for mica and quartz. The gem-mining tourist attractions in the town of Spruce Pine are an indication that this is a mining area, but North Carolina has little coal.

The Spruce Pine mining district produced quartz used in the manufacture of every computer chip in the world in 2009, according to the BBC. I have lived 18 years in this particular region and I have passed by the open mines plenty of times. I even knew that they were mining quartz and mica, but I did not realize that many electronic manufacturers around the world depended on the wellspring of mineral resources from what I considered an obscure place. My encounter with the “Made in Appalachia” exhibit clued me in.


The *Made in Appalachia: Beyond Cabins, Crafts, and Coal* exhibit in the Loyal Jones Appalachian Center Gallery displays Spruce Pine quartz and mica specimens, along with many other well known products—ranging from carpet to copper to Little Debbie snacks—that are, unbeknownst to many, from the Appalachian region. One has only to walk through the exhibit to see the diverse skills and stories that come together in this collection.

It is interesting to note how heavily a product will influence its locality, from the population to the name of a town. Some towns are in existence only because of the product, as seen in the aluminum production story of Alcoa, Tennessee. In some areas, the resources have named the towns, like in Saltville, Virginia.

Just as quartz has effects that reach much farther than North Carolina, so do many other Appalachian products. For example, marble quarried in north

Georgia is used in such familiar national landmarks as the Lincoln Memorial, which is just one of the many ways that Appalachia travels outside of itself.

On the flip side, Appalachia brings the outside into itself. The diversity of items produced in this region indicates an even greater diversity among the hands that produced them. Many glassmakers in West Virginia were from France and Belgium. Early salt furnaces in the 1800s typically used African American slave labor. Oak Ridge, Tennessee—the “Secret City” in Appalachia for producing nuclear material for atomic bombs during the 1940s—drew in workers, primarily women, from the immediately surrounding mountains. The Birmingham, Alabama iron factories used convicts and employed previous agricultural workers. With all of these different people, products, and skill sets, Appalachia became a cultural melting pot.

This cultural spectrum is brought to light in the *Made in Appalachia* exhibit, which is part of a multi-year project of the Loyal Jones Appalachian Center to expand the general perception of the Appalachian region. The Center is engaged in diversifying the artifacts collection, the majority of which are examples of the folk culture (brooms, quilts, woodwork, etc.). Such cultural items have become the region’s logo, but a browse through *Made in Appalachia* will quickly erase that generality in the mind of a visitor. Rather than primarily consisting of isolated, wholly self-sufficient homesteads, Appalachia has a transnational character and impact. The Center is expanding its teaching collection beyond the region’s iconic objects to capture this transnational attribute so seldom associated with Appalachia. Maybe recognizing where a Coca-Cola bottle, snack cake, collection of marbles, or piece of mica came from will help us see this side of Appalachia, too. 

Caroline Hughes, is a sophomore English major and works as a Curatorial Assistant in the Loyal Jones Appalachian Center.

WHAT I'VE LEARNED

Caroline Hughes



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From Fall 2013

Top Left: After a taping of *Head of the Holler* with Silas House (host), Betty Lou Sarafin (audience member), and Detroit musicians Bernice and Rev. Robert Jones.



Bottom Left: Berea College's Folk Roots Ensemble performing at the Celebration of Traditional Music

Right: Andy Brown back stage in the Green Room before performing with the Folk Roots Ensemble at the Celebration of Traditional Music.

