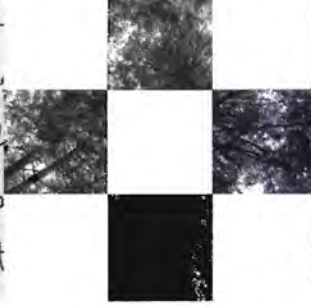




forests slide uprooted
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GOD HAS MADE OF ONE BLOOD ALL PEOPLES OF THE EARTH
BEREA COLLEGE

APPALACHIAN CENTER

Tradition. Diversity. Change.

The view from here: a special issue

by **Chad Berry**
Director, Appalachian Center

When I speak about Appalachia, I often try to convey the diversity of the region. I remind people, of course, about racial diversity, but also about subregional variation, economic difference, and urban-rural dichotomies. I also find two interesting tendencies about people's perceptions about Appalachia. For some folks living in the region, Appalachia is somewhere else. When I lived in East Tennessee, some Knoxvilleians I encountered, for example, conceived of Appalachia as being in Cocke or Grainger counties, but certainly not in Knox County. But for those who are more conscious of place, the heart of Appalachia tends to be where one is or where one was raised. This may be why the expansive boundary defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission is so confounding to some.

Taking these two tendencies into account, we organized a special issue of the Appalachian Center Newsletter around the notion of "The View from Here." I've asked more than a dozen

people, from northern Appalachia to southern, to write personal expressions of what they see as challenges from their view, however they choose to define either "view" or "here." I've also asked them to discuss local solutions.

Inside you'll find concerns expressed about globalization, food, pollution, education, economic decline, unchecked economic growth, technology, and race, but you'll also read examples where local people are proving to be sources of their own solutions, as is the case in the contributions concerning small-town revitalization, unscrupulous surface mining, and the importance of place-dependent identity. These contributions are revealing, moving, and indicative of the regional variation and diversity within Appalachia. In future Newsletters, we'll continue the feature by including at least one "View." I want to thank Rodney Wolfenbarger, our AmeriCorps*VISTA volunteer, for his invaluable help with this issue.

We hope you enjoy these, and we hope all of you remain warm and secure until the Service blooms herald spring. ❖



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The digital divide in Harlan County

The day after Thanksgiving, my sweetheart and I packed up all of our belongings and headed north on the southern portion of the Hillbilly Highway (Route 23) to Kentucky. True to my Appalachian heritage, we left home and migrated for work. Interestingly, though, we migrated to a place in Appalachia that most people leave to find work: Harlan County, Kentucky.

Randal and I are excited about working at the Pine Mountain Settlement School. We were fortunate to both receive jobs here. I visited here on a field trip eight years ago and loved the place. My mother had worked here, briefly, in the early 1970s, and she also has fond memories of the place.

THE VIEW FROM HERE

Cassie M.
Robinson

Randal and I had been forewarned about life in eastern Kentucky. We knew about the tight, corridor-like valleys, the limited access to goods and services that we took for granted in my hometown of Asheville, North Carolina, and the lack of cell phone service and high-speed Internet. Of course, we heard the occasional stereotypical remarks from colleagues and acquaintances about the “backwoods” we were moving into, but we were bid farewell (with promises to come visit) by friends and family who understood why we *wanted* to come to Kentucky. We were excited to move to a place rich with culture and beautiful woods in which to immerse ourselves. We knew that some of the best singers and musicians hailed from Harlan County and that we would live in relative peace and harmony with wild critters such as deer, elk, and rattlesnakes. We were also aware of the complicated relationship between coal and people here. We were prepared, or so we thought.

I like the people here, I don't mind the drive too terribly much, and I love being in the mountains. I don't want to seem spoiled, or too “citified,” but I have definitely missed high-speed Internet!

But I remind myself that it's just the Internet—millions of nooks and crannies jumbled together to provide almost instant access to digitized forms of knowledge from across the world—and not something *necessary* to life such as water, food, a toothbrush, and a good book to read. Still, it can be an important tool in regard to functioning successfully in this fast-paced society. We came to eastern Kentucky to work, and in this day and age and in my field, high-speed Internet is a necessity to work efficiently and well. Grant funds, potential donors, historical data, and professional development opportunities are nestled within the dimensions of the World Wide Web, and dial-up Internet is just not an efficient way to find them.

There have been many attempts to mitigate the effects of the Digital Divide in Harlan County. A project called ConnectKY has had a lot of success in assisting with infrastructure to provide broadband/high-speed Internet access across rural Kentucky. We are currently working with ConnectKY to find a solution for Pine Mountain to enter the digital age, and we are hopeful that we will have a satellite solution for Pine Mountain in the near future.

Cassie Robinson is the new Assistant Director at Pine Mountain Settlement School in Harlan County, Kentucky. She is a graduate of the Appalachian Studies M.A. program at Appalachian State University and the daughter of two Berea graduates.

So, what does “work” mean, exactly?

by Thomas Parrish

Contributing Editor

Some years ago now, I had a small-scale remodeling job done on my house, and when the builder and his team had left the premises for the final time, I found myself with an office piled with furniture and other items of all sorts and a living room with nothing in it at all. Needing help to deal with this problem, I called my friend Dave, who for a long time has bailed me out of situations involving house, yard, painting needs, storm-damage repair, and any other kind of problem that has arisen. In particular, he’s an expert painter, and I recommend him highly.

When Dave came by, he brought with him a teenager whom he introduced as his son Alec—a neat young man with what struck me as an alert air about him. As we set to work—which, on my part, mostly involved staying out of the way—I began to note that when Dave would tell Alec to lift this or move that or do something with the carpet, the boy would either efficiently comply or offer a quiet suggestion that invariably proved a better idea, and to his credit Dave would accept it without any fuss or defensiveness. The job went well.

This experience naturally left me interested in this bright kid and his welfare, and when from time to time I would see Dave I always asked about Alec. A sophomore in high school, he was doing fine, it seemed, till one day his father mentioned that Alec was thinking of dropping out.

“Dropping out?” I know I reacted as if Dave had just told me that Alec was thinking of contracting leprosy purely for the fun of it, but I couldn’t help it. Yes, it seemed that Alec had a girl friend and was showing signs of being serious about it. I tried to indicate tasteful disapproval, and Dave assured me that so far this was really just talk.

But a few months later I learned that Alec had an after-school and weekend maintenance job of some kind, and shortly after that, when Dave came by to fix something or other, he told me that Alec had quit school and gone to work full-time. I found this hard to take. I had hopes for Alec, I said—he was really smart and should graduate from high school and go on to college. If he got an education, he would do well in whatever he took up.

This was too much for Dave. Staring at me across the room, past scattered books and papers, he said in a truly indignant tone: “Well, *somebody’s got to do the work!*”

Boy! That was a stunner, a stopper. I didn’t say much. In the first place, I couldn’t, and I think I realized, almost reflexively, how hard it is to transfer an idea from one universe of discourse to another. And, of course, somebody does indeed need to do the work, but what happens when change makes that kind of work obsolete? The world also desperately needs its educated and capable Alecs: somebody has to *create* the work. Why shouldn’t Alec have his chance to do that?

What I think of, though, is people like a car mechanic I knew for years, a man of intuitive genius and great experience, who nevertheless had to retire when the computer age took charge under the hood. He wasn’t unique, of course, and the same thing will happen to the Alecs—unless, maybe, people like my mechanic friend can be induced to share in some systematic way their hard-earned wisdom with younger people doing the work.

Dave doesn’t come by very often, but just two days after I wrote these lines I heard a knock at my front door, and—in an impressive coincidence—there he stood. He suggested that the gutters needed his attention, and I agreed.

“How’s my friend Alec?” I asked, after we had chatted for a few minutes.

Dave smiled. “He’s working every day.” ❧

Make the place your own

When I was much younger, Dad would read to me every night. As I got older, both my parents encouraged my academic pursuits, telling me that my best bet was to get out of my hometown of Beattyville, Kentucky. It seems like, as far as the younger crowd goes, I wasn't the only one to receive this advice.

My hometown is a small place in eastern Kentucky. It was an "oil boom" town during the '60s and '70s, bringing in



numerous jobs in trucking, oil production, and those related to the general improvement of the area. A few pumps still pop mechanically on mountainsides, but many have been silenced—their rusting

skeletons all that are left behind. Main Street is home to a few newer businesses, though some of the shops and places remain empty and many others have seen a cavalcade of owners, businesses, and workers come and go throughout the years. There are only a few dependable jobs in the county: those at the courthouse, within the school system, and at the bank. Young people have taken note, and many are leaving either to further their education or to seek out jobs.

Wonderful, some may say. The youth in the town are bettering themselves! They are bettering themselves, yes, but not the community in which they were raised. When employment of a higher caliber can be more easily found outside their home towns, most of them see no reason to return.

But there is good reason: to better the place itself.

Although Beattyville is a small town, in the hand of young reformers it could again become what it once was: a thriving area that is readily adaptable to change; somewhere where business, youth, culture, and tradition are all equally important; and a "small town" that is culturally and politically aware, whether the culture and politics be down the street or three states over.

As for myself, I plan on returning to Beattyville someday, and not just to visit friends and family but to make it the place I want for it to be, the place I've always imagined it could be. I'd like to make a plea to the youth of Appalachia: return to the place of your birth and childhood. You may say you don't like it there; if so, then challenge yourself to change the aspects of the place you dislike and shape it into what it should be.

Samantha Cole is a first-year student at Berea College considering a major in Appalachian Studies.



THE VIEW FROM HERE

Samantha
Cole

Southern Appalachia: 'Hillbilly chic' seekers and Latino

When you come into Fannin or Union counties in Georgia, the rivers no longer flow south; they flow to the north, draining the north side of the Tennessee Valley Divide. We get radio, news, and most of our weather from Tennessee and North Carolina. We are living in the folded mountains, made by the crashing of the continents. We are the beginning of the Blue Ridge part of the Appalachian chain, which extends from Nova Scotia to North Georgia and Alabama.

The region has been changing with the growth of a tourist economy, which includes retirement villages, gated communities, and second homes to escape heat or cold weather. It is sort of a "back to the land" for the upper middle class rather than the hippies of the '60s. The newcomers today are retirees looking to escape from the metropolitan noise and traffic, seeking clean air and streams; visitors for a weekend away from the city; vacationers looking for nature or

adventure recreation; artists and writers looking for quiet retreats for creative work; and developers ready to provide houses, land, and businesses to meet those desires and dreams.

This has produced both positive and negative results, creating some strain and conflict between locals and newcomers, but also providing opportunities for collaboration. Locals have learned how to survive by providing land—now called real estate—consisting of log cabins with beautiful views from ridge tops or lots by clear, bubbling streams. There is some resentment and feeling that the newcomers want all the amenities of urban life without the problems of traffic and without wanting to pay their fair share of taxes. They also raise land prices so locals can't afford to live on their own land. In search of quiet and solitude, these newcomers bring with them no trespassing signs, fences, and gates, which prevent their participation in, assimilation with, and acceptance of the rural lifestyle.

A rebirth in Hindman, Ky.

When I moved to Hindman in the fall of 1977, it was a bustling little town of 900-plus people. Although there wasn't a red light in the entire county, every building downtown was occupied.

Back then, a trip downtown was an adventure. You could buy quality clothes and shoes at either Maggard's or Conley and Slone's department store, or explore all the possibilities in Buster Sturgill's hardware store. You could pay your last respects to a loved one at one of two

funeral homes, attend either the Baptist or Methodist church, cash a check at Bank of Hindman, pay your taxes at the Knott County Courthouse, fill your prescription at Francis Family Drug, or check out all the goodies at Young's Ben Franklin Five and Dime store. You could also find Ebbadoo or Tobe shining the shoes of some of the

local politicians as they sat on the "liars' bench" swapping stories.

Twenty years later, Hindman had become a very different town. Between 1977 and 1997, most of the businesses had disappeared. Hindman became, for the most part, a ghost town. The courthouse, bank, drugstore, and a few law offices were still in operation, but many of the buildings were empty and falling into disrepair, and even the "liars' bench" got very little use. Like many other small towns, the mom-and-pop stores had been put out of business by Wal-Mart and other chains that set up shop on the outskirts of town.

But an interesting thing happened between 1997 and 2007. A group of Knott Countians bent on revitalizing downtown Hindman applied for and received a Community Development Initiative (CDI) designation from the state. Their extensive proposal was entitled, "Using Our Heritage to Build Tomorrow's Community."

Ten years later, more than \$20 million has been spent on projects included in the CDI proposal. Among these are:



Knott County Opportunity Center

- the new Kentucky School of Craft;
- the Knott County Opportunity Center (which houses a branch of Hazard Community and Technical College, the Knott County Public Library, the Knott County Adult Learning Center, a Community Action Agency Day Care Center, a Morehead State University Distance Learning Classroom, and some county offices);
- the Appalachian Artisan Center, Café, and Studios; and
- a new Hindman Welcome Center and City Hall.

\$10 million has also been invested in new infrastructure such as bridges, water and sewer lines, parking lots, and a pedestrian walkway.

turn to page 8

newcomers provide potent change

But the newcomers have also brought skills needed in the schools and community. They are artists, writers, business owners, and community leaders. They bring new ideas and challenges to the political powers, as well as interesting new homes, shops, and food to the community. Add to these changes the other new immigrants—Latino workers—who provide needed labor and new cultural influences through their food, music, and art. In addition to bringing a challenge for the schools, churches, and social services, they also bring a work ethic, ambition, and family support system that are inspiring.

For someone who grew up in Cumming in the 1930s when it was a backwoods, little mountain town, to see it now taken by metropolitan expansion is a shock to me. We live with a growing diversity, with both Latino immigration and Hillbilly chic changing the culture and the image of mountain communities. Just as the first settlers were dropouts from the

plantation society, some of the new migrants to the mountains are also dropouts from the affluent consumer society. They are artists and refugees from urban sprawl seeking better places to live and work. Our challenge is to preserve the best of the mountains, our mountain values, and our lifestyle while incorporating the new creativity these newcomers bring with them.

Helen Matthews Lewis is a sociologist, writer, former professor of sociology and anthropology, and staff member of Highlander Research and Education Center. She has also written about Appalachian issues and community development.



THE VIEW FROM HERE

Helen Lewis

From Black Mountain to Berea:

“Where is *Here*?” I asked myself, just before executing a thesaurus search that gave such words as analysis, belief, examination, inspection, observation, picture, prospect, sight, scrutiny, and vision as synonyms for the word “View.”

“Here”—Berea College—is a tangibly observable entity for me, a bona fide native son of its service area; born and raised Harlan County; at the foot of Black Mountain, Kentucky’s highest peak. After all, “everybody” thinks about Berea College whenever the word Appalachia enters the conversation.

Here at Berea College—described by journalist Rudy Abramson as “the centerpiece of an abolitionist preacher’s attempt to create a utopian interracial community in the Kentucky wilderness”—I see and feel the vitality of the legacies of one the College’s most eminent graduates, Dr. Carter G. Woodson, the founder of African American History Month, and of my mentor, Dr. John B. Stephenson (Berea College president from 1984-94).

Being *here*—at Berea College—is the most auspicious place for me to be, to meet Woodson’s and my own life’s purpose: to teach about, to publish, to serve, and to make known what mountain blacks have thought and felt and done.

Were I the fabled character, Br’er Rabbit, being at Berea is like being thrown into the briar patch. This dyed-in-the-wool Southern Baptist is right at home in a place that does not distinguish my blood from any of the earth’s peoples. Here I can sup on any given day amidst a fertile array of cultures and faiths. Here, on this the “greenest” campus in the Bluegrass, where simple living is emphasized, unlike on many campuses, I don’t have to “look” for students of color.

Here and only *here* could I have had lunch—four times—with critically acclaimed African American feminist writer bell hooks, whom Berea College enticed into returning to her Old Kentucky Home. It was blissful to listen to Silas House and Gurney Norman, and to tap my foot to the shenanigans of the Carol Chocolate Drops. That, all, just in the month of November.

The “View” on the other hand—that which frames the mental pictures I see and what drives my beliefs about the present and the future of Appalachian Studies insofar as where black mountain people are concerned—is a much more complicated and problematic matter.

My view of the bigger picture, of Appalachian and African American Studies and their practitioners, is positive, but I am very guarded and defensive when I see how, on the one hand, the support for the work of

LOOKING FORWARD

If you know of an upcoming event that you feel may be of interest, please contact the editor at the mailing address on page 2, or phone 859-985-3140.

February 17-18: 5th Annual Appalachian Culture Fest, Cincinnati; co-sponsored by the Appalachian Community Development Association and the Cincinnati Museum Center: crafts, music, storytelling, dance and traditional arts. This event takes place in the Union Terminal, 1301 Western Avenue, an architectural wonder whose Art Deco splendors make it richly worth visiting even when it’s not housing a culture festival. To participate, or just to find out more, call 800-733-2077 or 513-251-3378; or write the sponsoring association at P.O. Box 141099, Cincinnati, Ohio 45250.

March 8-9: “Kentucky Crafted: The Market,” a wholesale-retail show for the general public and trade buyers (who can come

on March 6-7 for their own trade days), with more than 300 exhibitors of traditional, folk and contemporary crafts, two-dimensional visual art, musical recordings, books, videos and food products, along with live entertainment and craft activities for children 4-12. The show takes place at the Kentucky Fair and Exposition Center (still in South Wing B), just minutes from the Louisville International Airport. Sponsored by the Kentucky Craft Marketing Program, a state agency, the market serves as a major sales outlet for Kentucky businesses, generating \$2-\$3 million in annual sales. Call 888-592-7238 or 502-564-3757, ext. 4801; e-mail: kyarts@ky.gov.

March 28-30: 31st Appalachian Studies Conference, Marshall University, Huntington, W.Va. Taking up the theme “The Road Ahead: The Next Thirty Years of Appalachian Studies,” the conference will look at “how people (citizens, professionals,

both good views

Appalachian scholars at the major regional research universities has been diminished; and on the other, those of us studying the impacts of race, racial identity, social class, and political struggles (of African Americans, for example) are looked at like dinosaurs. Heaven help those of us trying to do both.

Just recently, for example, journalist Lee Mueller referred to Berea's Sidney Farr as a "beaming white-haired woman with the kind of sweet face normally found on cans of baking powder." His diatribe continued: "the truth is that Appalachia, as a fiddle-playing, horse-plowing culture, survives mostly in the memories of pre-Boomer retirees and nursing home residents. Appalachia has been reduced to a literary genre—a myth kept alive to pump life (and funding) into certain government, academic and non-profit organizations." I have seen the same view taken about the legitimacy of African American Studies many times.

For this very reason, I am warily optimistic about the prospects for Frank X Walker and the work to be seen from the Affrilachian poets; the mission of which is to "continue extolling the Affrilachian aesthetic." Who, thus far, has been systematically extolling the rather undefined and formless Affrilachian aesthetic? How is it distinguishable from other regional genres of African American aesthetic? I couldn't stand to see how Mueller and his types will take this on.

Lastly, I keep seeing the phrase "diversity and compassion fatigue" applied to the work of those who argue for a continuously spirited dialogue on race, ethnicity, and religion in America, let alone when combined in the context of international relations.

I sometimes think some see those of my intellectual ilk as intellectual and political dinosaurs. It is not just because I am a memoirist (in my sixth decade) that I remain tied to the view that a distinctive racial identity and a robust solidarity marks the space—the *here*—where being an African American and an Appalachian scholar intersect. Rather, in addition to that, it is because many among those who say they subscribe to liberal ideals and values have inverted the fundamental idioms of racism. They say they don't discount the black experience; they are just tired of having *their* view drawn to it.

I take nothing for granted, but I am happy to be *here*, at Berea College, where my *view* is a good one, like it is at the top of Black Mountain.

Bill Turner is the current holder of the NEH Chair in Appalachian Studies at Berea College.



THE VIEW FROM HERE

William
Turner

students, scholars, educators, artists, activists, etc.) are responding to the 'next generation' of challenge and change in Appalachia"; novelist Silas House will be the Friday keynote. For information, contact Mary K. Thomas at Marshall University: 304-696-2904; mthomas@marshall.edu.

April 20-25: Spring Dulcimer Week, Augusta Heritage Center, Davis and Elkins College. Veteran Patty Looman and new faces Anne Lough, Sam Rizzetta, and Linda Thomas will offer instruction (beginning, intermediate, intermediate/advanced) in the hammered dulcimer; Maureen Sellers, Jeff Sebens, and Karen Mueller (novice/beginning, advanced beginning, intermediate/advanced) will teach mountain dulcimer. (Instruments will be available for loan or rental.) You can also receive tutelage on the autoharp from Les Gustafson-Zook. Every afternoon, participants can enjoy performances by guest artist Ralph Lee and

resident instructors, and on Friday evening there'll be a big evening concert. For full information, write the Augusta Heritage Center, 100 Campus Drive, Elkins, W.Va. 26241 or phone 304-637-1209; www.augustaheritage.com; e-mail: augusta@augustaheritage.com.

April 24-27: 21st annual MerleFest, Wilkes Community College, Wilkesboro, N.C. An acoustic jamboree featuring the Doc Watson guitar championship and the Merle Watson bluegrass banjo and mandolin contests, along with numerous other events. The list of performers includes Ralph Stanley and the Clinch Mountain Boys, the Alberti Flea Circus, Marty Stuart and His Fabulous Superlatives, Ricky Skaggs and Bruce Hornsby with Kentucky Thunder, Rhonda Vincent and The Rage, Ryan Shupe and The Rubber Band, and an array of other notables from far and near, including, of course, Doc Watson himself. For details, phone 800-343-7857; www.merlefest.org.

Steering Homeward

At 5:30 Thanksgiving morning, I set out from Lexington, Kentucky, heading home for the holiday. Driving south along I-75 and 25E, I try to envision the next stretch of the road ahead before it comes into view, imagining how I might describe it to someone unfamiliar with the area. *Here are the kudzu'd cutaways of Pine Mountain where broad, white icicles hang in the wintertime. There are the gray, bushy-backed mountains rising through the fog of morning. This ridge—these rusted, red autumn hills of the Cumberland Mountains—gleams golden during summer's daybreak. And here, in this basin four miles in diameter, is my hometown.*

THE VIEW FROM HERE

**Rodney
Wolfenbarger**

Middlesboro, Kentucky, sits just inside the Cumberland Gap and is believed to have been built inside a meteor crater created some 300 million years ago. Like many areas of Appalachia, this town, historically dependent on the mining industry, has been in decline for decades. Mines have shut down, shops have closed, and workers have hit unemployment lines.

At home, while preparing the holiday dinner, my mother informs me of local happenings. Between obituaries and family ailments, she mentions that the hospital workers in town are on strike and that there are rumors of another factory closing in a neighboring community. My brother tells me production has once again slowed at the small furniture plant where he is employed and this is the second week he has been without work. I am reminded both why I left and—this is a new thought to me—why I should return.

During my stay, my nephew, who has just begun kindergarten, climbs into my lap and pretends to read a storybook he has mostly memorized. As I listen, I am already planning his future. He will be the second in our family to attend and graduate college. He is yet undecided about a

career—a robot, genius, or farmer, he says. I could do a lot of good here, I think. Surely this town needs teachers.

On my return to Berea, I detour through the mountain communities, skirting the hollows where our family cemeteries are located and where my great-grandparents were raised. At one dilapidated cabin, I wrestle with my frustration at trying to recall details of stories to which I should have listened more carefully as a child, and I struggle with wanting to connect with a past that is now partly interred with my ancestors there in the family plot. I am embarrassed that many of the names on these tombstones, where marked, are foreign to me, and already little more than ghosts.

Upon turning eighteen, I had resolved to leave Middlesboro without ever looking back. The mountains were to blame for the poverty, and the poverty was to blame for the problems associated therewith. I hated feeling as though I was trapped down inside some big crater, and I was going to have a hell of a time climbing out. In search of opportunity, you had two choices: either set out north toward Lexington and Cincinnati, or south on your way to Knoxville. Regardless of which direction you chose, one thing was certain: you were either going to have to go over a mountain or through one to get to where you were going.

Lately, I have developed a different view of these hills. Instead of focusing on problems, I make an effort to recognize promise. The exclusion these mountain walls engender also works to preserve. And most importantly, here I feel most myself, both at ease and at home. George Moore once wrote that “a man travels the world over in search of what he needs and returns home to find it.” That distance and the perspective it provides can be important, and in my case has been essential. It is exactly that roaming that eventually steers us homeward.

*Rodney Wolfenbarger is an AmeriCorps*VISTA volunteer currently serving at the Appalachian Center at Berea College.*

Hindman

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While it will take some time before Hindman is back to the bustling little town it once was, it has clearly come back to life. The resurgence of energy

and dedication to building on our heritage has brought hope. Those of us who have been part of this effort are proud of what has been accomplished. We are committed to making Hindman a place where artisans thrive and where people come to partake in the rich cultural heritage of the region.

Mike Mullins serves as executive director of the Hindman Settlement School, a position he has held for the past 30 years. Among the honors he has received in recognition of his work is an honorary Doctorate of Letters from the University of Kentucky for his years of service to the Appalachian region.

Urban Appalachians in Greater Cincinnati

The Urban Appalachian Council's Research Committee recently hosted a community-wide workshop to discuss issues in three

areas—education, health, and employment.

Committee Chair Debbie Zorn notes that “the workshop identified much that is working for urban Appalachians in Cincinnati,

but it also identified needs for additional or more focused efforts in research, advocacy and services.” This article discusses what isn't working for Appalachians in greater Cincinnati—and what is.

The Cincinnati Public Schools are floundering, offering few learning opportunities for Appalachian students, many of whom are clustered in schools designated “academic emergencies” by the state. Consequently, the dropout rates (described locally as pushout rates) in Appalachian neighborhoods are extraordinarily high.

Environmental pollution affects many of Cincinnati's Appalachian neighborhoods, particularly the children living in them, while the aging migrant generation is increasingly affected by elderly diseases. Targeted enforcement is pushing the drug trade out of the central city into second-ring Appalachian neighborhoods, increasing exposure to drug addiction, overdoses, gunshots, and STDs.

As companies move or downsize, employment is increasingly difficult for some urban Appalachians to find, engendering a whole new generation of Appalachian migrants looking for work. Unionized workplaces and employee benefits are disappearing, while low educational attainment inhibits some Appalachian workers from getting high-tech, “New Economy” jobs.

Urban Appalachians are providing their own solutions to these problems while contributing to the cultural vitality of the city through arts programming and a major festival featuring Appalachian music, dance, and handcrafts.

AppalPAC, a local political action group, regularly vets candidates for school board, city council, and county

commissioner, seeking to educate and endorse political leaders who will respond to Appalachian needs. AppalPAC has endorsed tax levies benefiting education, mental health, and senior citizen programs. Chairman Michael Maloney says, “The issues we are most concerned about are jobs, education, housing, and equal treatment of all citizens.”

Dropouts are working toward GEDs (and in some cases, associate degrees) in community-based schools across the city. In one neighborhood, Appalachian women have used participatory research to document the health needs of women and children, and they sponsor an annual Health Fair that includes mammography, diabetes diagnoses, and blood-pressure testing.

Many urban Appalachians are taking advantage of the state's community college system by participating in quality vocational education programs. Meanwhile, progressive unions such as the Service Employees International Union are attracting many urban Appalachians now working in service-sector jobs.

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Back to the Future

My “View from Here” takes me back. It takes me back to Haywood County, North Carolina, where I was raised. I'm writing a book on Appalachian heirloom fruits and vegetables for Ohio University Press, and I'm having to go back to do that. I'm going back to visit and interview people who have shared their seeds and stories with me during the last thirty or so years. And yes, some of them are my relatives. Most of the people I'm interviewing are in their forties and nineties, but I'm also visiting a few who are either in their seventies or younger. The sad fact is that old-time gardeners and seed savers are in

short supply, and there are too few young ones.

I'm interviewing seed savers and gardeners who are on a first-name basis with the Great Depression, when family gardens often provided almost all of the food for large families. I'm interviewing people who saw the problems being caused by genetic manipulation decades before the public generally became aware. I'm hoping my book will assist the rest of the country in seeing that the traditional people of the southern Appalachian Mountains, with all of our “quare”

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**THE VIEW
FROM HERE**

**Bill
Best**



THE VIEW FROM HERE

Ashley
Long

"Don't come back because there is nothing here."

I live in a small Appalachian community called Rose Hill, Virginia. It is a cozy little place with an outstanding view of glorious mountains and valleys. The air is clean and the water is fresh. The people are mostly modestly living folks who love both their families and their religion. During troubled times such as death, fire, or sickness, these people know they can count on their small community for support. We have been blessed with rich culture, music, and religion. However, we have not been blessed with material riches.

Like many communities in the region, outsiders and insiders have almost forgotten the lower tip of Lee County. Our economy lacks both jobs and opportunity. Residents have been given a choice of becoming a coal miner, a teacher, or a health care professional. Those who go to college to pursue other professions are forced to move out of the region to find jobs in their fields. Many out-migrate to regional cities such as Kingsport, Knoxville, and Lexington. I am convinced we have some of the best and the brightest right here in the lower tip of southwest Virginia, but many students who could come back and start a small business or improve the current local government are encouraged to leave the region. I recall a high school teacher telling my class to get an education, but "don't come back because there is nothing here." I remember thinking how devastating that was to hear. I love this area. My family is here, my

church is here, the White Rocks are here, and there is no other place I would rather be than right here.

I agree with the statement that Lee County is not flooded with opportunity for our young or older children, but it doesn't have to be that way. I often wonder what positive impact the addition of a youth center for our children to attend after school and during the summer might have on our community. Could we offer adult classes in parenting and drug abuse? Doesn't that create opportunity for the children and residents who are in need of jobs? Would that help address our drug problem? What type of income would a farmers' market bring to the struggling farmers of my region? Could our elected officials do a better job of representing the voters? Couldn't the state government offer better incentives for people wanting to start small businesses? And if they do, is our local government doing a good job of letting these opportunities be known? Could current local business owners who are established and surviving pay their employees better? Many don't realize they are only as prosperous as their community, and that better compensation for their employees would result in a more motivated workforce and a more enriched community. I love my home. I love my people. We don't ask for handouts, but sometimes we need a helping hand.

Ashley Long is a senior at Berea College majoring in Appalachian Studies.

LOOKING FORWARD

Please check www.berea.edu/ac for more updates.

May 1-3: 18th annual Boxcar Pinion Memorial Bluegrass Festival, Raccoon Mountain Campground (just off I-24), Chattanooga, Tenn. Since this is a campground, you might want to bring your sleeping bag and get in the spirit of the occasion. Festival musicians will perform all three days from midday to ten or eleven o'clock; the lineup includes the Country Gentlemen, Bobby Osborne, Illrd Tyme Out, the Dailey Vincent Band, and numerous other notables; the memorable Dismembered Tennesseans will of course reassemble themselves and show up. You can get full details from Cindy Pinion at 706-820-2228; www.boxcarforeverbluegrass.com.

May 9-11: 39th annual Appalachian Festival, Coney Island, Cincinnati (Mother's Day weekend), sponsored by the

Appalachian Community Development Association, with music, dancing, storytelling and crafts galore. Information from 513-251-3378.

May 23-25: Ole Time Fiddlers and Bluegrass Festival, Fiddler's Grove Campground, Union Grove, N.C. Held every year during Memorial Day weekend, the festival, which dates back to the 1920s, is the oldest event of the kind in North America. It's also a colossal affair, bringing together some 50 old-time and bluegrass bands. This year will see the usual band competitions, and in the grand finale, artists will vie for the title "Fiddler of the Festival." We also note that you'll encounter individual junior and senior competitions not only in fiddle but in banjo, harmonica, and other instruments large and small. If you show up a day early, you'll find jam sessions already going on. Information: 704-539-4417;

Impact of industry on local water supply

Northern Appalachia seems to be almost mysterious in Appalachian texts and discussions. Once you go north of the Kentucky and West Virginia borders, the region seems to stop. I come from that area north of West Virginia called Ohio. I was born in Parkersburg, West Virginia, in 1989, and I moved across the river to Ohio—about ten miles away—four years later.

The area that I grew up in sits beautifully along the Ohio River and includes the Muskingum and Little Kanawha rivers, which feed into the Ohio. The entire Parkersburg-Marietta metropolitan area has a population of around 200,000 people. The city of Marietta is a tourist's dream, boasting historic hotels, a beautiful confluence of two rivers, and many riverfront shops. It also hosts the acclaimed Sternwheeler Festival every September. To many this seems like an ideal place to raise a family and settle down.

Having left, I wish that I wanted to return. I am bothered by the fact that industry has taken advantage of this beautiful valley, as it has much of Appalachia. The industry here isn't coal, though; it's chemical and production plants, which supply the core of the area's jobs. Although these industries employ thousands, they are also slowly poisoning the area.

In 2001, local residents realized that our drinking water supplies were filled with perfluorooctanoic acid, also known as C8. At the time, no one had any idea what this chemical was or why we should care. It turned out to be one of the key ingredients in the production of Teflon. A class-action lawsuit was then filed that included my water system. Officials tested the wells of my water system—

literally directly across the Ohio River from DuPont Washington Works located in Washington, West Virginia—and found that we had wells with C8 levels as high as 50 and 78 parts per billion. Officials said we were routinely receiving 2 parts per billion in our water. Consequently, the wells were soon shut down.

This chemical, we are told, has been emitted from the plant for over fifty years. Problems arise from the fact that our area suffers from high cancer rates and many other health concerns. The lawsuit has since been settled and large sums of money have gone toward the study of the harmful aspects of this chemical. Additionally, everyone in the water system was given the option to have blood testing completed as part of the study. Participants received \$400 for both their sample and for completing a questionnaire.

My area is sick, and everyone who lives here knows it. I hope future progress will be made to reduce the pollution currently found in the area. The Little Hocking Water System now has a carbon filter system in place that will supposedly remove the C8 from our water and make it safe to drink, yet—following the installation of the filter—C8 is still present.

Lane Sulfridge is a first-year student at Berea College considering a minor in Appalachian Studies.



THE VIEW FROM HERE

Lane
Sulfridge

www.fiddlersgrove.com; e-mail: info@fiddlersgrove.com.

June 9-13: Blue Ridge Old-Time Music Week, Mars Hill College, Mars Hill, N.C. In a "relaxed and supportive environment," you can spend a week in banjo, dulcimer, or other sessions, guided by an array of expert mentors. More information from www.mhc.edu/oldtimemusic or at 828-689-1646.

June 1-21: Summer session, New Opportunity School for Women, Berea, Ky. Successful applicants (up to 14 per session) to this popular program for low-income women 30-55 spend three weeks learning about jobs and how to get them, and also about themselves and what they can do. The school offers career counseling throughout the year and also puts on a number of workshops that are open to anybody; the school has now produced 513 graduates locally, plus 33 from the new

North Carolina center (at Lees-McRae College, Banner Elk, N.C.; for information, check out www.lmc.edu/NOSW; phone, 828-898-8905). There's no tuition fee, and room and meals are provided as well. You may apply if you're a high school graduate or have a GED certificate or are actively working on a GED. **The deadline for applications is April 1.** For full information, contact Jan Gill, executive director of the school, at 204 Chestnut Street, Berea, Ky. 40403, or phone 859-985-7200; www.nosw.org.

June 13-14: Appalshop's 22nd Seedtime on the Cumberland Festival of Mountain Arts, Whitesburg, Ky., featuring a variety of performing artists. Information as time progresses from Appalshop, 306 Madison St., Whitesburg, Ky. 41858; phone, 606-633-0108; www.appalshop.org. e-mail: seedtime@appalshop.org.

Tennessee Frontiers: Three Regions in Transition, by John R. Finger, a volume in the Indiana University Press's continuing series called *History of the Trans-Appalachian Frontier*, is currently available (\$19.95). The basic book in the series is *Trans-Appalachian Frontier*, the classic account by Malcolm J. Rohrbough, which tells the story from the establishment of the first Kentucky settlements to the closing of the frontier. A newly revised edition is available at \$27.95.

Music of Coal: Mining Songs from the Appalachian Coalfields, a CD-book package, is in the running for various awards. Two years in the



making, it contains 48 songs addressing various aspects of coal mining history and culture, including black lung, union organizing, environmental impacts, and the contribution of coal to the national economy. The accompanying book contains detailed liner notes with striking historical photographs. According to Jack Wright of Ohio University, who produced the CDs and wrote the liner notes, the musical collection is a hybrid of old and new songs—some previously recorded, others produced specifically for this project. If you want a copy, visit lpoj.org and click on *Shopping*.
—Thomas Parrish

Old and new, young and old

Jackson County, Kentucky, is not just some arbitrary political division, at least not in the same way that is Hamilton County, Ohio—the place of my birth. Hamilton County is a capriciously partitioned piece of land encompassing Cincinnati and some other



THE VIEW FROM HERE

Alexander Gibson

southern portions of Ohio, while Jackson County is more than that: it is a people—a commonality—with loyalties and rivalries, successes and failures, common dreams, and even common enemies. Jackson County is nestled between the more suburban populations of Madison County to the north and Laurel County to the south. Thus, Jackson County finds itself a relative to the suburban, yet with a single Dairy Queen and a lonely Subway, Jackson County is a confused uncle—struggling to keep up with the times.

The lack of social capital in Jackson County is probably its greatest challenge. Due to a lack of industrial and technological enterprises, the County folks are forced to live the agrarian lot or migrate—mostly to the North—for labor. That lack of enterprise also provides little incentive for the educated to remain, and they often leave Jackson County to seek jobs elsewhere. The remaining County is one that is made up of mostly older folks and disabled people, and the economy reflects that reality. We have a few Dollar Stores, Save-a-Lots, pharmacies, clinics, and churches, without a single youth “hang out.”

However, the solution to Jackson County’s lack of youth involvement/

retention has little to do with a “hang out.” As stated earlier, Jackson County is a culture, a mindset, a tradition. All of the family that I know lives here, was born here, and probably will die here. Such is the mentality of the elders in the community. However, the youth are growing up quite differently. The youth—like me—do not feel comfortable here. Jackson County is the type of place that is not only old in its median age, but it is also old in its ways. Jackson County is a place where academia is not commonly respected, rap music is despised, BET and Comedy Central are excluded from the cable package, and Bible study on Sunday is a ritualistic pilgrimage for youth. Such a “clash of civilization” can be seen across the globe—the *Los Angelization* of the youth verses the struggle for the elders to maintain tradition. What is needed is a common ground on which both divisions can meet, and then true progress will occur.

While development is the key for any economically depressed community, when social capital is not present a “Marshall Plan” of government assistance is a bandage rather than a solution. What is desperately needed is the incorporation of youth into the governance of the community in such a way that they feel they have a stake in success. Furthermore, the school system must begin to pay serious attention to curricula and ask the essential question, “Are we doing our best in preparing our youth to eventually take on our jobs?” Jackson County is a tough sell for the BlackBerry/iPod youth of today. However, it is possible that the elders could one day coexist with the youth. All that is needed is a forum and a will.

Alexander Gibson, a long-time resident of Jackson County, Kentucky, was born in Cincinnati, Ohio. He is a senior philosophy major at Berea College.



Bringing Down the Mountains, by Shirley Stewart Burns (West Virginia University Press). This new book offers fresh proof that the law of unintended consequences never sleeps. In 1990 amendments to the federal Clean Air Act sent mining companies looking for coal that would enable them to meet the new standard for allowable pollutants. Since

southern West Virginia had ample deposits of desirable low-sulfur coal, American Electric Power and others moved in and set to work. From the point of view of the air, things improved, as they were supposed to.

But two undesirable results came with the deal. Employers used fewer miners, not more, and that was due to the other result: the companies stepped up their use of mountaintop removal (MTR), which offered the quickest and cheapest way to claw the coal from the earth, partly because it needs fewer workers than more traditional methods of mining.

In MTR the heavy lifting is done by the innocuously named dragline, which is actually a monster of an earth-moving machine that may stand twenty stories high. Before it can do its work, the area to be mined is stripped of all trees and other plants and the accompanying topsoil. After it has performed, leaving the top of the mountain, the "overburden" is used to regrade another mined area or is dumped into the head of a hollow. In the 35 years since this method of mining began in West Virginia, the author tells us, the southern counties have seen a steady decline in employment and a reciprocal rise in environmental degradation.

The book bears the subtitle: "The Impact of Mountaintop Removal on Southern West Virginia Communities." Ironically, the coal industry that once created flourishing villages and towns is now destroying them. The communities in these coal counties are more and more turning into ghost towns, says Burns, who believes it's important to document their existence. In her book, which is based on a dissertation but fortunately doesn't read like one, Burns looks not only at the communities but at the coal giants and the methods by which, both historically and right now, they have worked and are working their will, with the aid of all the usual political suspects.

Jack Spadaro, formerly the embattled chief whistleblower of the National Mine Health and Safety Administration, praises Stewart's "most comprehensive" account of the people's attempt to fight back at the onslaught on their environment. More specifically, Katie Fallon of Virginia Tech makes a neat point: the book is "a wake-up call not only for southern West Virginians, but for anyone who uses electricity generated from coal"; e.g., the person writing this review or is reading it. Well!

—Thomas Parrish

Mountaintop removal in West Virginia

It is an honor to know Maria Gunnoe. Maria is a community organizer for the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition (OVEC). In October, U.S. District Judge Robert C. Chambers ruled in favor of OVEC and other organizations regarding the environmental effects of mountaintop removal operations in the Bob White area of Boone County, West Virginia. The judge ruled that proposed mountaintop removal operations and the accompanying valley fills violated both the National Environmental Policy Act and the Clean Water Act. If the proposed valley fills were constructed, a total of 5,750 feet of stream channel would be lost. Chambers also found that Gunnoe and her family, who live immediately downstream of the mining operations, would be "certainly and permanently affected by the loss of streams and forests."

THE VIEW FROM HERE

Jack Spadaro

Maria and her family have endured years of damage from the mining operations upstream of her home near Bob White. Landslides, blasting, and several floods caused by excessive runoff from the mountaintop removal operations have made it difficult for her and her family to continue living in the home that was passed down to her by her grandparents and parents. Rather than giving up and leaving the area, she has chosen to stay in Boone County and work with OVEC to help others faced with similar challenges in the coalfields of West Virginia and adjoining Appalachian states. Maria has shown amazing courage and resilience in her struggle to protect her home and family and the homes of other residents of the coalfields.

Judge Chambers' ruling stated:

The public citizens have an interest in maintaining environmental quality in the places they choose to live. The public has an interest in ensuring the safety and health of all its members. The public has an interest in ensuring the integrity of the biological and ecological systems. And, the public has an interest in seeing beautiful landscapes preserved for posterity. A denial of this injunction may have a negative effect on all of these interests.

For more information regarding the Chambers decision and other issues related to mountaintop removal coal mining, contact OVEC at www.ohvec.org.

Jack Spadaro is the former Director of the National Mine Health and Safety Academy. He has been an advocate on behalf of coalfield people in the areas of mine health, safety, and the environment since 1966.

Appalachian New York

A year ago, western New York was abuzz with talk of what Eliot Spitzer's election as governor would mean for the economy of Upstate New York. The speculation echoed a main theme of the gubernatorial campaign, established in a speech delivered to a Manhattan audience on March 17, 2006. "If you drive from Schenectady to Niagara Falls, you'll see an economy that is

devastated," Spitzer said. "It looks like Appalachia. This is not the New York we dream of." Spitzer's comparison focused attention upon economic conditions in "Upstate" and generated a series of proposals to address the troubled economic conditions throughout much of the state.

Although there is no agreed-upon definition of Upstate New York, Spitzer's zone of devastation

encompasses most of the state except for New York City. His comparison with Appalachia sparked intense discussions about Appalachian New York.

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) classifies fourteen of New York's counties as Appalachian. These counties are predominantly rural and hilly, stretching along the state's southern border with Pennsylvania through the so-called "Southern Tier." While much of New York State suffers from a long-term economic slump, its Appalachian counties

are in worse shape. Deindustrialization, the erosion of jobs in extractive industries, and the general malaise characterizing much of rural America combine with high taxes to perpetuate economic stagnation and out-migration. The ARC classifies all of New York's Appalachian counties as "transitional," the agency's mid-range category between "distressed" and "attainment." The rate of growth in upstate counties is below the average for Appalachia as a whole. For example, the population of Upstate New York grew at less than 1 percent during the 1990s, while population in Appalachia grew by 9 percent.

In 2006, Eliot Spitzer spoke of bringing together the "two New Yorks," of bringing prosperity to the economically devastated "Upstate" region. Talking about economics won Spitzer a majority of the votes in Upstate (which broke with tradition to vote for a Democratic candidate; Spitzer won all but 3 of New York's 62 counties outright), but he has done little to revive the upstate economy. Upstaters resent the electoral power that Downstate has and argue that they subsidize downstate prosperity while their own problems worsen. The view from Northern Appalachia, at least from New York, is marked by a lagging economy and continuing sense of despair.

Penny Messinger is a native of West Virginia but has lived in western New York since 1998. She is currently an assistant professor of history at Daemen College.

THE VIEW FROM HERE

Penny
Messinger

Photo: Justin Leslie

LOOKING FORWARD

Please check www.berea.edu/ac for more updates.

June 8-14: 31st Appalachian Family Folk Week at the Hindman Settlement School. As always, this year's session will be a total immersion in traditional music, dance, and other aspects of Appalachian culture, and you can come by yourself or bring the whole family. For full details, write the school at P.O. Box 844, Hindman, Ky. 41822, or call 606-785-5475; e-mail: info@hindmansettlement.org; www.hindmansettlement.org.

June 16-July 25: 27th annual Hindman Settlement School summer tutorial program for "children with learning differences/dyslexia." The program accepts 50-55 students, in recent years including a limited number from outside the school's service area; scholarship assistance is available. See Hindman contact information for June 8-14.

June 22-27: Ninth annual Mountain Dulcimer Week, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, N.C. This is the show of which one enthusiastic participant said a few years ago: "If you can go to only one mountain dulcimer workshop, this is the one"; you can't do much better than that! Those who come to learn have access to more than 25 course instructors—including Dulcimer Week founder Lois Hornbostel, Larry Conger, Paul Andry, John Huron, Linda Brockinton, the one and only Betty Smith, and many others, all of whom deal with pretty much everything having to do with dulcimers. High points are the evening concerts. For more information, contact Bobby Hensley: Hensley@email.wcu.edu.

July 6-August 9: Swannanoa Gathering, a series of week-long workshops held on the campus of Warren Wilson College, outside Asheville, N.C. Guided by a gigantic and varied staff, jamboree begins traditional song and fiddle weeks (July 6-12),



THE VIEW FROM HERE

Walter Davis
and
Bill Fields

We need to put nostalgia aside

We hear discussions of Appalachia in the past tense as if no one lives here now. Nostalgia for a “simpler time,” for a romanticized history and culture distracts us from the present. It leads us to accept the destruction of both the land and the lives of its people. It stifles honest dialogue. Who is Appalachian, what is the region’s place in the world, and how can we generate wide-reaching solutions?

A local television station in Knoxville sponsors a “Mission to Appalachia,” collecting presents from local folks to send to mountain communities. Lost is the fact that Knoxville *is* Appalachia. Nobody seems to see the irony of a mission to Appalachia from Appalachia. It makes the poor the “other” and feeds stereotypes of mountain folks, making them the objects of sympathy rather than people we liken to ourselves. The poor and the middle class, the missionary and the missioned to, the giver and the recipient—all Appalachian. But images are crafted outside, still defining roles imposed upon us. We need to get beyond the crippling attitude of Appalachia as a mission field for charitable work. We need to see the region and its broad diversity of people as the source of our own solutions, solutions growing from partnerships with one another.

We are handed endless lists of the “others” responsible for our woes: someone else is to blame. Not “me” voting against school taxes. Not the corporation that laid off the workers while making unprecedented profits. Not the government official who fails to enforce reclamation laws or water quality standards. Not the developer who buys local governments. Not the local governments that in turn allow developers to tear away hillsides to build McMansions on land unable to support such buildings—while low- and modest-income people find less and less affordable housing or living-wage jobs.

The undersigned are not “not-in-my-backyard” people. We want good jobs and economic development. We want growth but growth that preserves the land, encourages communities, and promotes justice. In the past, Appalachians have been manipulated to act against our own self-interest. We have been divided by fear. We remain, however, optimistic. We are a people who have stood up against powerful forces before and pushed back.

Nostalgia has to be put aside. Looking back to the good ole days in Appalachia blinds us to the present. In searching for a folk art ideal that is long gone (if it ever really existed), we miss the potential of the present. Failing to see the diversity and potential of the people themselves numbs us to accept the seeming inevitability of our condition. We can honor the past, but we need to be honest about the present and act to allow for a future.

Walter Davis is the Executive Director of the National Organizers Alliance based in Washington, DC. Bill Fields works as a program manager for Samaritan Place, one of less than 20 elder shelters in the country.

proceeds through Celtic music (July 13-19), old-time music and dance (July 20-26), guitar and contemporary folk (July 27-August 2) and dulcimer (August 3-9). You can sign up for as many classes as there are hours in the day, but the staff suggests that you make sure you “want all you take.” “The worst part about the gathering,” a student once complained, “is that there are only 24 hours in the day and three of them are wasted sleeping”; gathering@warren-wilson.edu; www.swangathering.org.

July 6-August 10: Augusta: An array of workshops in music, crafts, dance and folklore, spread out over five weeks—Cajun/Creole; blues and swing; Irish, bluegrass and more; Augusta Heritage Center, Davis and Elkins College. The summer will be celebrated by the three-day Augusta Festival (August 8-10), with music throughout the day on Saturday and a full-bore concert in the evening. For full details, refer to contact info. for April 20-25.

Cincinnati

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Summing up the situation, Urban Appalachian Council Executive Director Maureen Sullivan says: “Urban Appalachians, like their kinfolk in the region, continue to draw strength from their culture and their community. For generations, when faced with a need that wasn’t met, Appalachians ‘made it, made do, or did without.’ Their tough self-reliance continues to the present, and their resilience gives hope for the future.”

Phil Obermiller is a member of the Urban Appalachian Council’s Research Committee in Cincinnati.

Back to the future

continued from page 9

ways, just might be ahead of the curve with respect to diet, nutrition, and values, even.

Our national obsession with cheap food—augmented by the unholy alliance of universities and food, feed, seed, and chemical conglomerates (the university/industrial complex)—has given us foods that are wrecking our health. As some of the seed company catalogs boast, their “beans are grass-like”—to be picked by machines long before the protein (seed) appears. Tomatoes have been “supplemented” by flounder genes to preserve what little flavor might have been a part of them, which wasn’t much to start with considering that they are bred for long-distance shipping, later gassed to add color, and still expected to have a 35-day shelf life. Soybeans have been genetically modified to have a “terminator gene” that makes it necessary to buy seed stock each season from the major

seed companies. The list goes on and on, *ad nauseam*.

With so many people refusing to buy tough and tasteless fruits and vegetables (instead buying processed foods or eating primarily at fast-food restaurants), we are being treated to a younger generation succumbing, as early as elementary school, to type-2 diabetes, rickets, obesity, and other degenerative disorders.

Gardening has almost disappeared in many areas, and skills once taken for granted have almost become lost. Children who could be active helpers in gardens, or even have their own gardens, are instead either being treated to a steady dose of TV and video games or Ritalin and other mood-altering drugs to treat a host of newly named disorders.

It’s hard to be definitive in a short article, but many of our problems could be solved if appropriate measures were taken.



Here, two of Bill’s granddaughters, Sarah and Anita Best, shell goose beans.

I suggest beginning by bringing older gardeners to schools to assist students (and teachers) in developing school gardens, letting elementary school students learn to prepare fruits and vegetables from those gardens for meals, and letting them also learn how to preserve foods using some of the tried and true ways of generations past. Let’s go back to the future.

A life-long farmer and gardener, Bill Best serves as a speaker for various gardening and food groups throughout the country.



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