

passionate caring
generous inspiring
welcoming
kind volunteer
tireless community
compassionate
supportive service



 *New River Valley
Leading Lights*

Celebrating Neighbors Helping Neighbors
Recognition Ceremony
April 13, 2023



mentor loving
leader driven
vital enthusiastic
supportive
go-to devoted
joyful



About New River Valley Leading Lights

Since 2009, New River Valley Leading Lights has acknowledged and honored volunteers across the NRV who are making community-changing impacts, culminating in an annual celebratory banquet.

NRV Leading Lights was formed following the events of April 16, 2007, at Virginia Tech. During this time, our community witnessed an incredible outpouring of support from community members who performed extraordinary acts of service in response to the tragedy.

Seeing the importance of volunteers during this time inspired the German Club Alumni Foundation and other community leaders. They created NRV Leading Lights in an effort to recognize the incredible contribution volunteers make to our community every day.

**In this spirit of volunteerism,
we celebrate this evening.**

**We dedicate this night to all those
impacted by April 16, 2007.**



Tonight's Program



Welcome & Introductions

Ann Cassell

NRV Leading Lights Board President

German Club Alumni Foundation Welcome

2023 Leading Lights Recognition

Keynote Speaker

Anthony Wilson

Retired Blacksburg Police Chief

Distinguished Recipients

Robert "Bob" Job High School Award • High School Award

College Awards

Community Awards:

Floyd • Giles • Montgomery • Pulaski • Radford

German Club Alumni Foundation Lifetime Achievement Award

Closing Remarks

A Note from the Board

We owe a debt of gratitude to each of the outstanding volunteers nominated tonight and to all their nominators. Thank you also to each of our organizations for granting us leave to serve with NRV Leading Lights.

Included in this program is a short summary of each nominee that will give you a glimpse into each person's contributions to our community. We hope their stories inspire all of us to get more engaged in service.

Board of Directors

Ann Cassell, President
Montgomery County

Jen Rentschler
Radford University

Rev. Morris Fleischer
Giles County

Tim Rosche, Treasurer
Christiansburg Lions Club

Janiele Hamden
City of Radford

Jill Ross
Pulaski County

Kelly Kaiser
New River Community College

Chris Stafford
Pulaski County

Rev. Bill King, Vice President
Montgomery County

Terrie Sternberg
Pulaski County

Meghan Kuhn
Virginia Tech

Amy Webb
Pulaski County

Ryan Martin
YMCA at Virginia Tech

Terri Welch
Montgomery County

John McEnhill, Secretary
Floyd County

Amanda Winter
City of Radford

Award Selection Committee

Morris Fleischer
Bill King
John McEnhill

Martha Ann Stallings
Terrie Sternberg



2023 *Leading Lights*



* * *

High School

Sarah Harvey
James Riffe
December Ward
Alex Woodward

* * *

College

Sarah Grace Hern
Amber Litterer
Cara Newbill
Madison Webb

* * *

Lifetime Achievement

Dick Arnold
Judith Hess Jones
Drew Smith
Mary Catherine Stout

Community Members

Denise Blakeney
Andrew Buckman
Faye Cofer
Jim Cook
Becky Daniels
Janell Dobbins
Jessie Foster
Larry Greene
Greg Hardwicke
Charles N. Herbert, Jr.
Jan Jackson
Melissa Jarrell
Gunin Kiran
Susan Madison
Lori Marsh
John Ross
Merissa Sachs
Greg Sazonov
Debbie Sherman-Lee
Scott Smith
Lydean Spangler
Clara Taylor
Paul Tremblett



A Special Thank You



This evening was made possible by our generous sponsors and donors.
Thank you so much for supporting NRV Leading Lights!

Special Contributions

The Community Foundation of the New River Valley
German Club Alumni Foundation

* * *

Flood Lights

Table Sponsors (\$500 - \$999)

Blacksburg Breakfast Lions Club
John & Elizabeth Dooley
National Bank
NRCC Educational Foundation
VT Engage

* * *

Spot Lights

(\$250 - \$499)

Richard M. Arnold
Brown Insurance
Buffalo Mountain Zipline
Ann Cassell
Christiansburg Lions Club
Delwyn Dyer
First Bank and Trust Company
Dr. Steve & Cathy Jacobs

William H. King
Managed Growth, Inc.
James McAlister
John McEnhill
Craig E. Nesbit
Tim Rosche
Brian E. Torgersen

Strobe Lights

(\$100 - \$249)

Karen Bibbins

Courtyard by Marriot

Pete & Pat Huber

Memorial Gardens of the New River Valley, Inc.

William C Neely

Minnis Ridenour

William Earle Spruill, Jr.

Terry L. Strock

* * *

Bright Lights (Up to \$99)

Glenn Cochran

Meghan Kuhn

Randy Lundberg

Virginian Leader Corporation

Mark B. Wigginton

* * *

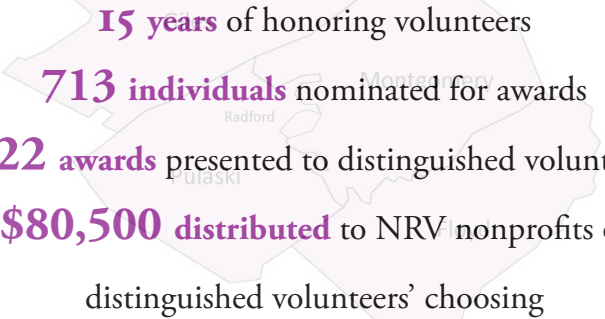
In-Kind Contributions

KymnImages Photography

HazelBea Catering



Our Impact



15 years of honoring volunteers
713 individuals nominated for awards
122 awards presented to distinguished volunteers
\$80,500 distributed to NRV nonprofits of
distinguished volunteers' choosing

We are honored to recognize 35 Leading Lights this year. Tonight, 11 distinguished recipient awards will be given out: two High School, two College, along with Community Members for residents in the city of Radford, the counties of Floyd, Giles, Pulaski, and Montgomery, and a Lifetime Achievement recipient.

Each distinguished recipient will receive \$500 to donate to a New River Valley nonprofit of their choosing. The Lifetime Achievement recipient will receive \$1,000.



Stay Involved with Us



Nominate a volunteer this fall for the 2023 awards!

Do you know an outstanding volunteer and resident of the NRV who meets the below criteria? *Submit a nomination at leadinglightsnrv.org!*

- Devotes a significant, ongoing amount of time to volunteerism
- Addresses community needs and is making an impact
- Demonstrates leadership and/or shows initiative

Join our Board or become a Community Advisor.

NRV Leading Lights is always looking for new board members. Members serve three-year terms, attend monthly meetings (Sept. - May), and participate on one or more teams (such as fundraising or banquet planning). Advisors have a less formal commitment, lending their expertise to specific projects or teams.

Donate or become a sponsor.

Every donation or sponsorship supports our banquet and awards, and, in turn, our community. *Donations may be made payable to:*

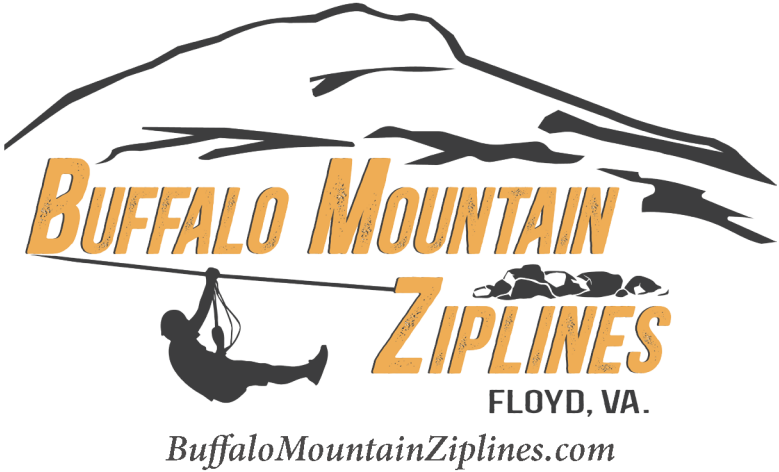
German Club Alumni Foundation
Memo line: NRV Leading Lights
711 Southgate Drive
Blacksburg, VA 24060

Donations can also be made online at leadinglightsnrv.org/donations.

Interested in becoming more involved with us?

Contact us at leadinglightsnrv@gmail.com.

**Congratulations To All
Leading Lights And Distinguished Recipients
Thank You Nominators!**





Keynote Speaker



Anthony Wilson
Retired Blacksburg Police Chief

Anthony Wilson retired as the Blacksburg Chief of Police in the summer of 2022. Anthony, a Blacksburg native, Marine, and Virginia Tech graduate, is a 25 year veteran of the Blacksburg Police Department where he advanced from Patrol Officer to Captain of the Services Division to Chief of Police. He previously served as Blacksburg's Homeland Defense Coordinator, Tactical Commander during the William Morva manhunt and the Virginia Tech shootings, Emergency Response Team Commander and K-9 Unit Commander.

Anthony volunteered with the Blacksburg Fire Department for 30 years and served as Assistant Chief. He founded the No Hokie Left Behind program encouraging students to take care of students and Be Safe Blacksburg, a K-12 community based program recognizing good citizenship in students. Highlights of those programs were the implementation of cell phone charging stations in downtown bars and restaurants, Free Ride Fridays, Fifth Grade Field Day, and Adopt-a-Cop Academy pairing Virginia Tech fraternities with officers as mentors. Anthony initiated the Books to Badges program at New River Community College, offering a college education to Montgomery County students interested in the field of criminal justice. He became the Access to Community College Education (ACCE) program champion in Montgomery County and volunteered as the Community Service Coordinator for ACCE students. He was also heavily involved in the Montgomery County Dialogue on Race initiative. Anthony co-chaired the New River Valley Public Health Task Force during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Anthony is a graduate of the FBI National Academy and the Virginia Police Chiefs Foundation's Professional Executive Leadership School. He received a Medal of Valor, the Virginia Police Chiefs Foundation's Lifesaving Award, the Distinguished Service Award, Meritorious Service Award, and the American Legion Outstanding Law Enforcement Officer award.

In retirement, Anthony is working with Virginia Tech Athletics as a special assistant to the athletic director. He says his favorite title is "PawPaw" to his four grandchildren.



High School Leading Lights



Sarah Harvey, Radford High School

During her high school career, Sarah has been involved with various local community activities and organizations including tutoring, Book Buddies reading program, Mural Restoration, and Student Council Association. Some of her work includes helping with DIG PINK events doing set up, decorating, silent auction, and clean up; trash pick up in Pulaski County; volunteer babysitting; math tutoring; Bisset Park Cleanup; Bobcat Backpack Program; and more. She even took the time to design and paint the recycling bins while helping with the recycling program. Sarah is a responsible and conscientious student who cares deeply for her community and her school and only wants the best for others. Sarah inspires others by always being involved and going out of her way to make sure things are done correctly and are helpful to others.

* * *

James Riffe, Radford High School

James, a Radford City High School student, is involved with Bobcat Backpacks, Bobcat Theatre Company, New River Theatre Guild, and Joelle Productions. He has been an integral part of Bobcat Backpacks since it began and was one of the first volunteers involved. James was also a leader in Summer Theatre Camp for elementary school students. He has helped with numerous theatre productions and camps. James has also made a positive impact by being a trusted role model for younger kids in his community. He is a proactive volunteer who takes initiative and is making a lasting impact on those around him.

* * *



High School Leading Lights



December Ward, Pulaski County High School

A Pulaski County High School student, December is involved in many activities including Future Farmers of America, Jaycee's bingo, and more. December has been an active FFA member and agriculture student for the past four years and has devoted countless hours to serving her chapter and program. She has dedicated much of her time to help the agriculture program grow. She has managed the school's greenhouses and has organized multiple plant sales spending countless hours watering and fertilizing the plants and then working on weekends at the plant sales. December's major accomplishment has been the nationally recognized Sensory Trail which is an outdoor classroom space that is handicap accessible and is built with the Universal Design of Learning in mind. Most of the exhibits are designed to be sensory friendly and to enhance the senses. She has also worked to preserve the Monarch butterfly habitat through agricultural awareness.

* * *

Alex Woodward, Floyd County

Alex spends two days each week volunteering at the June Bug Center in Floyd. She helps with classes, cleaning, supervision, set up and take down after classes. Alex has made a connection with all of the students by being kind and observant and constantly making sure the students are respectful of each other and the facility. Alex has also inspired her friend to volunteer as part of June Bug's brand new volunteer exchange program, where they volunteer a set amount of hours and can receive free June Bug Center programming. She is also very good at helping keep the facility clean and starts each of her shifts with a cleaning list.

* * *



College Leading Lights



Sarah Grace Hern, Virginia Tech

Sarah volunteers with her Virginia Tech sorority Kappa Delta, Suit-Up, Blacksburg United Methodist Church, and Friends of the Huckleberry Trail. With her sorority, she serves NRV CARES, which is a private, non-profit organization in the area dedicated to protecting children and strengthening families. With Blacksburg United Methodist Church, she recently participated in their Rise Against Hunger event which assembled more than 20,000 food packages for children in a developing country. She also recruited six other students to join her this day. She was a rescue squad member in high school and raised funds to support the purchase and installation of a permanent bench on the Huckleberry Trail in support of Friends of the Huckleberry Trail and the trail's maintenance.

* * *

Amber Litterer, Virginia Tech

Amber, a student at Virginia Tech, has been a loyal volunteer during her college career. She serves with Campus Kitchen at Virginia Tech to divert food from dining centers to Plenty! Farms in Floyd. Amber helps recover hundreds of pounds of food per week that would otherwise be wasted and devotes time and energy to picking up the food, driving it to Floyd, and delivering it to partners that help get food to those who need it. Amber is always eager, outgoing, and generous with time; she has even inspired others to continue with the program.

* * *



College Leading Lights



Cara Newbill, Virginia Tech

Through her work with Boy Scouts of America and Girl Scouts of the USA, Cara, a Virginia Tech student, designed and built two trail kiosks near the George Pearis Cemetery that help hikers and tourists understand where they are and what they are seeing. Two beautiful new kiosks greet hikers and tourists to Pearisburg including the more than 1,000 through hikers from all over the country and world who pass through Giles County on that section of the Appalachian Trail. Taken together, the signs create a welcoming space in a place where through-hikers and section hikers get a taste of Giles County. In addition to that project, she has served on Girl Scout camp staff for Rainbow's End Girl Scout Camp for at least six years. In Boy Scouts, she has served as Senior Patrol Leader, Assistant Senior Patrol Leader, Troop Guide, Junior Assistant Scoutmaster, and Chapter Chief, and currently serves as Vice Chief of Inductions.

* * *

Madison Webb, New River Community College

Madison, a student at New River Community College, began her volunteer service with the Pulaski County Administration Office as a participant with NRCC's Access to Community College Education (ACCE) program. She was tasked with scanning all the active and inactive personnel files into an electronic filing system. Madison took on this extraordinary task and spent more than 1,000 hours sorting, reviewing, and scanning files into a complex system that ultimately negated the need for numerous filing cabinets, creating much needed space. Madison always takes pride in her work and consistently goes above and beyond. She is often called upon by ACCE to be a student representative, and she is always willing to step in. She has earned the reputation as being a volunteer who can take on any task assigned and complete it quickly and efficiently.

* * *



Community Leading Lights



Denise Blakeney, Giles County

For 20 years, Denise has been a tried-and-true advocate for Giles County, which is evident in her service with many organizations including the Giles Arts Council, Giles Democratic Party, Giles Early Education Project, Giles Fund, Giles Summer Lunch Program, her church, and ReNew The New. She is not afraid to step up when a need arises including clean up, delivering baskets to those in need, writing cards, donating money, serving food, making phone calls, driving those who need rides, and so much more. Her energy is only equaled to her humbleness. Denise has advocated for Giles to ensure that the county is given a voice in the New River Valley. Denise gives Giles a brighter face. While she seldom takes on named leadership, Denise finds the leaders, brings them into focus, and supports them in their efforts.

* * *

Andrew Buckman, Floyd County

Andy volunteers as a banjo instructor with the after-school program at the June Bug Center. The Floyd Junior Appalachian Musicians (JAM) program is a Crooked Road affiliated program that teaches students banjo, fiddle, or guitar in the style of old-time music from the Appalachian region. Students can learn fiddle, guitar, or banjo, and all instruments are provided to the enrolled students. Because of instructors like Andy, program tuition is on a sliding scale based on household income to ensure that no family is turned away. Andy inspires 10 or more young banjo players every Monday during the after-school program as well as all the June Bug Center staff and instructors.

* * *



Community Leading Lights



Faye Cofer, Giles County

Often working behind the scenes, Faye has helped sustain outreach and provide her community with emergency assistance, clothing, household essentials, and nutritional needs through her services at Giles Christian Service Mission. She volunteered countless hours handling a variety of responsibilities even through management transitions and facility expansions. Faye's faithfulness has been a model and inspiration for all volunteers and staff, while her kind spirit brings a sense of calm to the sometimes chaotic environment. Faye exemplifies the spirit of sacrificial service, through her generous sharing of her time, energy, and gifts. She has helped countless individuals and families in Giles who suffer under the weight of poverty. Modest in her approach, she never seeks recognition or praise for her efforts. Serving the Mission for nearly a decade, she personifies the spirit of volunteerism.

* * *

Jim Cook, Pulaski County

Jim has served in Pulaski County for more than 40 years through organizations including Daily Bread (both Pulaski and Fairlawn), Dublin Lions Club, Beans and Rice, Free Store, and local community food access locations. Jim also serves in leadership at his church, New Dublin Presbyterian. He is a retired educator and is passionate about helping those who struggle with hunger. He volunteers weekly to pick up excess foods from producers, distributors and grocery outlets and distributes these items to Daily Bread (Pulaski and Fairlawn), Beans and Rice, and the community refrigerators in Dublin and Radford. He works tirelessly to find a use for excess items with those in need. He has been selected as a Melvin Jones Fellow, the Lions Club's highest recognition. He has also been named a Distinguished Humanitarian and Elbryne Gill Fellow with the Lions Club. Because of the support Jim provides, numerous individuals are fed and nourished throughout the local community.

* * *



Community Leading Lights



Becky Daniels, Montgomery County

Becky serves Blacksburg United Methodist Church as a volunteer parish nurse. In this role, she serves by operating the church's medical equipment closet and loaning such things as wheelchairs, walkers, crutches, etc. to people in the congregation or community. She visits the shut ins and those in the hospital or rehab and sends cards to cheer up those who are grieving the loss of a loved one or recovering from a stay in the hospital. She conducts a monthly worship service for senior citizens at Warm Hearth Village. Becky also oversees two Red Cross blood drives per year. She also sings in the choir weekly. Becky volunteers more than 800 hours a year touching the lives of many people in her church and community. She has a heart for the needs of others, willingly jumps in to help where she is needed, and always serves with a cheerful heart and wonderful smile.

* * *

Janell Dobbins, Radford

Janell's volunteerism in Radford has been significant for more than 26 years through her work at Daily Bread Fairlawn, To Our House program, Radford Clothing Bank, Carilion Hospital, Project Linus and more. At Daily Bread, Janell has served in numerous ways including in the kitchen and with clean-up and serving as well as organizing food drives and delivering meals. She has volunteered with the To Our House program that involved area churches providing meals for the local homeless community. For 15 years, she has volunteered with the Radford Clothing Bank hanging and sizing clothes in addition to cleaning up and assisting customers. Janell volunteered for 500 hours at the Carilion Hospital Gift Shop working in the shop and delivering newspapers to patients. Through Project Linus, she donated over 100 handmade blankets to children in need. She has also been involved in mission work outside her local community. Janell also assists at the Necessities Pantry at the Radford Presbyterian Church; this program provides personal care and cleaning supplies to area residents. She has helped to package the supplies and distribute these items monthly since the program began in 2018.

* * *



Community Leading Lights



Jessie Foster, Radford

During her years of service, Jessie has served with Radford City School Board, Radford City Council, Department of Social Services, Radford Fire Department, Radford Heritage Foundation, and many more. She has been a dedicated public servant in Radford for more than a decade and has been a dedicated advocate for children, those in need, families, first responders, and many others in her community. She has helped lead an effort to revitalize and enhance Radford and works tirelessly to advance the needs of its citizens. She has been a strong supporter for Radford education, leading to a major renovation of McHarg Elementary School. She is a light for our community in many ways and has helped to make life better in Radford and the New River Valley.

* * *

Larry Greene, Giles County

At the age of 75, Larry continues to tirelessly serve his community daily without complaint and is always eager to help others. There's a rare day, or perhaps never a day, that he's not doing something service-related; he exemplifies the definition of a volunteer. He has served with Feeding America, Newport Community Board, American Red Cross, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Giles Health & Family Center, Giles County Social Services Board, and the Pembroke Town Council. His service has included delivering food boxes to senior citizens, working the free lunch program, and assisting with blood drives to name a few. Larry doesn't look for recognition or praise of his good deeds; he volunteers with many diverse organizations out of love for the people in his county. Larry has even loom knitted hundreds of hats and scarves, using his own money for materials, to distribute to anyone he thinks might need one or just as a kind gesture. For more than 40 years, his direct service and behind-the-scenes support have likely benefited many of the citizens in Giles County.

* * *



Community Leading Lights



Greg Hardwicke, Floyd County

Greg uses his time and specific skill set when he volunteers every Monday on his day off from work for maintenance and repairs at the June Bug. The June Bug Center is a nonprofit and typically does not have funding for maintenance and repairs. Greg keeps the center functioning through his hard work and through his kindness and consideration for others at the center. His exceptional rapport with others at the center encourages everyone to work hard and help others.

* * *

Charles N. Herbert, Jr., Giles County

Involved in numerous organizations in Giles County, Charlie is equally enthusiastic about each of them. He serves with Giles Breakfast Lions Club, Giles Community Garden, Thrive, FOCUS, Giles Youth-Adult Partnership, Giles County Ministerial Association, Christ Episcopal Church, Giles Arts Council, and more. He is especially passionate about working with children and enjoys getting them interested in gardening and yoga. He focuses much of his work on childhood diabetes prevention and promotion of healthy eating by encouraging healthy lifestyles for both children and adults and educating residents about gardening and using fresh foods. Charlie regularly brings fresh vegetables into Giles County for distribution to those in need. He has been the driving force in the Community Garden, managing it since its inception in 2014. Beyond his work with healthy living, he reinforces every day that kindness matters.

* * *



Community Leading Lights



Jan Jackson, Montgomery County

For more than 20 years, Jan has served his community through service at New River Community Action's To Our House (TOH), Montgomery County Emergency Assistance Program (MCEAP), and Our Saviour Lutheran Church (OSLC). At To Our House, a homeless shelter, Jan has help provide meals and has been an overnight volunteer since the onset. He has assisted with set-up, transfer, and off-season storage of supplies. He has led an annual fundraiser through his church for MCEAP and volunteers at the MCEAP Thrift Store, which raises money to assist those in the community needing food, clothing, and financial assistance with rent and utilities. Jan's efforts have impacted those experiencing homelessness by helping to organize shelter services and being on-site to offer support and fellowship. He has also impacted those who are food and housing insecure by supporting MCEAP.

* * *

Melissa Jarrell, Radford

Melissa serves her community through volunteerism at McHarg Elementary School where she serves as Parent Student Association (PSA) president and St. Jude Catholic Church where she serves as an outreach coordinator. She has been on the McHarg PSA for more than five years and has dedicated hundreds of hours to raise money and support the school. The PSA helps with providing new benches on the playground, cleaning and prepping the playground, giving teachers monthly treats of appreciation, providing extra supplies, giving teachers a duty-free lunch monthly, coordinating the Santa Breakfast experience, and coordinating a t-shirt giveaway to increase school pride so every student got a Radford Bobcat t-shirt. She loves the schools with all her heart and takes pride offering her knowledge and services. Melissa is also a member of St. Jude Catholic Church where she coordinates the yearly Christmas Jesse tree gathering, organizing and collecting items to support the local Salvation Army, juvenile detention center and the women/children's center in Radford. She is extremely proactive, organized, and always cheerful.

* * *



Community Leading Lights



Gunin Kiran, Montgomery County

Gunin has volunteered with numerous organizations over the past 30 years. Gunin currently serves on the NAACP Montgomery/Radford/Floyd branch Education Committee and recently served on the chapter's Executive Board. She is serving in her second term as a trustee at the Montgomery-Floyd Regional Library Board. She was appointed President of the League of Women Voters of Montgomery County in 2022. She has served on the Montgomery County Dialogue on Race Education committee for 10 years. She currently serves on the Montgomery County Public Schools Equity, English Learners, and Mental Health Advisory Committees which helps guide the equity work and other areas in the local school division. Her passion has been instrumental in helping move forward the equity work in Montgomery County Public Schools. She volunteers at the Montgomery County Christmas Store, is a board member of the Virginia Tech International Women's Group, and works with Montgomery County ACCE events.

* * *

Susan Madison, Montgomery County

For more than 25 years, Susan's devotion to her community has been apparent through her volunteer service to many organizations including New River Community Action's To Our House (TOH), Montgomery County Christmas Store, and Blacksburg Baptist Church. She has been involved with To Our House through her church where volunteers provide meals for guests and offer on-site support and fellowship. Her commitment has gone beyond direct service, and she is now a member of the policy council, providing valuable input on policies and procedures. Her service is unique because of the connections she makes with guests. Her efforts have impacted the lives of those experiencing homelessness by assisting with the basic need of food, but also by offering compassion and fellowship. She volunteers with the Christmas Store doing whatever is needed to assist. Susan leads by example through her willingness to give of herself and her time to those in need.

* * *



Community Leading Lights



Lori Marsh, Floyd County

Lori sets the bar for volunteerism at her organization, InStill Mindfulness, where she's served for five years. As the chair of InStill, she serves as a teacher and one of the most engaged volunteers. In 2022, she contributed over 200 hours of her time, including all her teaching hours. Through the organization, she promotes service through leading by example and is deeply committed to the core offering of mindfulness. Lori's service and commitment to others is an inspiration to those around her. Mindfulness training has been shown to lead to greater kindness and compassion, as well as addressing stress, anxiety, and depression. Lori is deeply committed to helping InStill Mindfulness achieve a vision of cultivating a mindful world for all.

* * *

John Ross, Pulaski County

Through his service at the Fine Arts Center for the New River Valley, John gives countless hours of service through board leadership, facility maintenance and renovations, participation in arts education classes as teacher assistant, website maintenance/blogger, and in many other ways. When the pandemic created a cease in normal operations, John used his technical expertise to quickly mobilize and maximize the center's educational and artist support and even gallery operations via digital technology. Through John's creative leadership, the Center stayed strong and well-functioning throughout the pandemic. John was the tireless volunteer who kept the Center exploring new and even better ways of fulfilling its purpose which enabled the Center to reach more children and youth with art education than ever before and helped to support artists in our region in new and refreshing ways.

* * *



Community Leading Lights



Merissa Sachs, Montgomery County

Merissa has served the Salvation Army Post of the New River Valley for more than 15 years. This unit of the Salvation Army has been recognized regionally for its outstanding service to the neediest in our area. She has initiated and managed numerous successful fundraising programs for the Salvation Army. Merissa has also been a key volunteer in their annual Angel Tree program for families, particularly youth, and many other programs for the NRV Post. Additionally, she serves on the YMCA at Virginia Tech Board of Advisors with a personal focus on food insecurity and is active with Downtown Christiansburg, Inc. She supported their new park and volunteered to plant trees and tulips along with the planning and fundraising stages of need. Merissa previously served on Christiansburg Town Council. She is planning on opening a homeless shelter in Pulaski, the “Greater Purpose Shelter,” to house up to six residents. Shelter residents will gain skills necessary to become independent.

* * *

Greg Sazonov, Floyd County

Greg volunteers with Boy Scouts of America Blue Ridge Mountains Council as Scoutmaster, Roundtable Commissioner, and Introduction to Outdoor Leadership Skills Instructor. An Eagle Scout himself, he established the first female BSA troop, Troop 19, in Floyd County in 2019 with five girls and has since grown the troop to 24 girls. At a time when many other scouting units ceased functioning, Greg maintained an active troop through the pandemic by providing opportunities for youth to get outdoors, learn valuable life skills, and be of service to their community. Through scouting, Greg has promoted character development, leadership development, and commitment to active citizenship in the community in his scouts. Greg’s troop has dedicated numerous hours to volunteer service in the community through projects such as participation in the yearly river clean up and decorating the local nursing home for the winter holidays. Greg has gone above and beyond what is expected and made an impact on numerous youth and their families in the New River Valley.

* * *



Community Leading Lights



Debbie Sherman-Lee, Montgomery County

A retired educator who taught for 36 years, Debbie continues to reach out and serve others through her work with Community Housing Partners, Christiansburg Institute, Dialogue on Race, The Community Group and New Mountain Climbers, Virginia Organizing, Montgomery County Christmas Store, Christiansburg High School Leadership, MC-RC-F Chapter of NAACP, 100+Women Who Care, Ashbury United Methodist Church, Appalachian Women of Action, Appalachian Women Rising, Montgomery County Race for ACCE, and the Montgomery County Education Foundation. Notably, she spends countless hours advocating for the Christiansburg Institute and educating others on the importance of preserving local African American history. Debbie's involvement in Dialogue on Race has helped the organization reach out to others about the importance of community action and education about racism in our community. Confronting social, environmental, and economic injustices is at the core of her being. Her willingness to give her time and expertise to so many groups and community opportunities has been an inspiration to others.

* * *

Scott Smith, Montgomery County

For many years, Scott has spent time volunteering with New River Community Action and the VA Cares NRV Reentry Council. Beyond that, Scott accompanies staff entering the Montgomery County jail to provide prerelease services to individuals who will be returning to the community. This helps clients prepare for successful reentry into society. Scott was also instrumental in starting up a transitional living house in Radford in collaboration with probation and parole for individuals who have high barriers, most of which are sexual offenses. Scott and his wife, Melanie, both volunteer on the NRV Reentry Council and serve as co-conveners. They have organized a monthly potluck dinner for members of the Manna House and organized a pastor to come in during the meetings to provide an opportunity for house guests to receive religious opportunities.

* * *



Community Leading Lights



Lydean Spangler, Floyd County

Lydean assists with a computer club after-school program at the June Bug Center where she provides amazing support to the students when they need help. Her responsibilities include supervising the students, assisting them with any questions they have, and helping the instructor with anything they need during class. She is incredible with the kids, and they love having her around because of her dedication and genuine interest in their work. She keeps their club fun and interesting. Lydean's patience and calm demeanor is inspiring to others, especially those who work with children. She is easily approachable, and the students know she is there to help them.

* * *

Clara Taylor, Montgomery County

An inspiration to her community, Clara serves others by collecting donations of new and used children's and baby items and creating bundles for families in need in the New River Valley. Her organization, From Me To You, was created out of her desire to show love and compassion to families and give support to those who need it. The bundles she provides include clothes, toys, food, formula, diapers, and even Christmas presents. Clara's motivation and drive to help families in her community is outstanding, and she even personally delivers these bundles to families in need.

* * *

Paul Tremblett, Floyd County

Paul has volunteered for the June Bug Center in Floyd for many years as a STEAM instructor in after-school programs and summer camps. Paul's service has had an enormous impact on the students enrolled in his classes. During his seven years of service, Paul has served over 200 students in the New River Valley. Through his dedication to STEAM education, Paul has inspired his students and colleagues every day. His generosity of service is truly an asset to the Floyd community and the students he helps.

* * *

Lifetime Achievement Leading Lights

Dick Arnold, Montgomery County

Dick has consistently served his community in a variety of roles since returning to Blacksburg more than 20 years ago. Dick was co-founder of NRV Leading Lights and served as President of the Board of Directors for many years. He is an active lay member of the Blacksburg United Methodist Church, where he has spoken about his mission work many times, served on several committees, including Missions and the Church Council, and as a lay reader at worship services. He was President of the Blacksburg Sports Club from 2001-2005 and immediate past president from 2005-2009. He was the first Vice President for University and Community Relations as a member of the German Club Alumni Foundation Board and also served on the Centennial Scholarship Awards Selection Committee. Dick is also a former President of the Board of Directors of the Virginia Tech Monogram Club. He also served as a member of the VT College of Engineering's Committee of 100 and as a member of the Industrial & Systems Engineering Department's Advisory Board.

He lives out a life of service to others daily, and anyone who knows him is aware of his commitment and steadfast leadership to organizations that matter not only to him but to this community. Dick's volunteer leadership has made a difference to every organization he has been a part of. After playing a key role in founding NRV Leading Lights, the organization grew to recognize more than 500 volunteers under his leadership and continues to annually celebrate volunteer service across the New River Valley. As President of Blacksburg Sports Club, he significantly expanded the membership of the organization and substantially increased the level of giving to the athletic departments of both Virginia Tech and Blacksburg High School as a result. His service on numerous scholarship committees has helped to provide many deserving students with educational opportunities. Finally, his work as a lay member of the Blacksburg United Methodist Church continues his long track record of work in the mission field. His mission work has directly improved the lives of individuals here in the NRV and across the world.

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Lifetime Achievement Leading Lights

Judith Hess Jones, Montgomery County

Judith has poured decades of volunteerism into her community over the last 40 years through her work with numerous organizations including AARP Blacksburg Chapter, Lifelong Learning Institute at Virginia Tech, P.E.O. International, Virginia Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), Southwest Virginia Veterans Cemetery, Blacksburg Presbyterian Church, Montgomery County School Board, Virginia Master Gardener Association, Montgomery County Christmas Store Board: Assistant Treasurer 2012-2019, New River Friends of the Roanoke Symphony, NAACP, and others.

The quality and extent of her work is exceptional, and she seeks no recognition for her outstanding volunteerism. Her decades of volunteer accomplishments are both wide and deep and includes volunteerism at local, regional/state and national levels. Her work has created regional, state and national policy that helps and serves others. As an example, during her service as a school board member, she proposed and championed the use of weighted grades for students enrolled in Advanced Placement courses. The proposal was adopted and remains in effect today. Judith is a great ambassador for the New River Valley. When she undertakes a task, she does it willingly with enthusiasm, and always completes it in a commendable way.

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Drew Smith, Montgomery County

Drew currently serves as the Fire Chief of Blacksburg Volunteer Fire Department. He has risen through the ranks holding the positions of firefighter, Lieutenant, Captain and Assistant Chief. He has devoted many hours over the years in training to better himself and stay up-to-date on fire related issues and in teaching such classes to incoming volunteers. Drew has served as a volunteer firefighter since 1995, he has dedicated his life in service to protect life and property within the Town of Blacksburg and Montgomery County. He has provided countless hours of being on call as a volunteer firefighter to serve the town and county in time of need. Serving in his current role of Chief he spends many volunteer hours not only answering calls himself, but in recruitment and training of new firefighters, handling the daily administrative tasks, assisting in the maintenance of the fire training grounds, attending many meetings of committees he is assigned to, and ensuring the maintenance and operation of the fleet of fire trucks and responder vehicles. Drew works hand in hand with the administrators for the Town of Blacksburg and Montgomery County to ensure he and his department are providing the best services possible for their citizens.

Drew spends many volunteer hours either taking classes to better himself or teaching classes to train firefighters from not only his organization but many neighboring departments as well. He assists in recruitment efforts to bring in more volunteers to ensure there are enough people to fulfill the roles needed to effectively handle a fire scene and protect life and property. In most of those roles he has been the first on scene of any call for service for a fire, motor vehicle accident, fire alarm, hazmat spills, and more. He is actively “on call” 24 hours a day, seven days a week, all while working a full-time job as a Deputy Sheriff.

Lifetime Achievement Leading Lights

Mary Catherine Stout, Pulaski County

Mary Catherine has devoted countless hours of service to numerous community organizations during her more than 60 years of volunteerism. Some of those organizations include the Pulaski County Library System, New Dublin Presbyterian Church, Pulaski County Courthouses Exhibits Committee, The VA250 Commission--250th Anniversary of American Independence, The Pulaski County American Evolution 2019 Committee, The Pulaski County World War I & World War II Commemoration Committee, Lifelong Learning Institute at Virginia Tech, Lions Club, Ruritan Club, Wilderness Road Regional Museum, Boy Scouts of America, American Red Cross, and the Southwest Virginia Veterans Cemetery, just to name a few.

For 48 years, she has been a member of the Friends of the Library serving several terms as their President and Vice President, and as the Friends State Representative for Southwest Virginia. She worked very hard to promote the building of the Pulaski County branch library in Dublin. For more than 60 years, Mary Catherine has served New Dublin Presbyterian Church in many leadership positions, including Youth Moderator of Abingdon Presbytery, Elder, Vice President of the Church Women, and more. Known as the "History Keeper" in Pulaski County, she frequently invites people into her home for a history room tour and a presentation about area history. By sharing her talents and volunteering with homemaking and crafting demonstrations, she has enriched lives and promoted creativity. Mary Catherine has never been too busy to help another individual or get involved in a project that enhanced her native beloved Pulaski County and New River Valley. She exudes enthusiasm and shares it with those around her, encouraging others to join in the efforts; Mary Catherine has led by example and inclusion.

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Past Leading Lights Distinguished Recipients

High School

Taylor Hawkins, Floyd
 Jessica Shelburne, Pulaski
 Connor Moran, Christiansburg
 Aaron Miller, Radford
 Olivia Hodge, Blacksburg
 Rebecca Kay Stephens, Giles
 Laura Froggard, Blacksburg
 Anna Keppel-Benson, Blacksburg
 Jessica Vance, Blacksburg
 Marie Stump, Christiansburg
 Ben Webster, Snowville
 Neha Hudait, Blacksburg
 Megan Talarek, Blacksburg
 Hannah Shuff, Narrows
 Mackenzie Farmer, Pulaski
 Clay Jennings, Blacksburg
 Lacy Bailey, Auburn
 Anna French, Christiansburg
 Brianna Moser, Narrows
 Grace Trent, Narrows
 Thai Yuvanavattana, Floyd

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College

Kyndal Stakes, Virginia Tech
 Sydney Curtis, Virginia Tech
 Kelly Berry, Virginia Tech
 Elizabeth Domann, Virginia Tech
 Austin Larrowe, Virginia Tech
 Chelsea Hall, Virginia Tech
 Ryan Brock, Virginia Tech
 Analise Adams, Virginia Tech
 Victoria Sarbin, Radford University
 Matthew Johnson, Virginia Tech

Stephanie Connelly, Virginia Tech
 Hunter Cole, NRCC
 Olivia Obertello, Virginia Tech
 Clendal Brown, NRCC
 Tanah Patel, Virginia Tech
 Danielle Kassel, Virginia Tech
 Addison Levy, NRCC
 Grace Ankeney, NRCC
 Jarrett Holmes & Erica Martin, Virginia Tech
 Aaron Howard, NRCC
 Abigail Ridpath, NRCC

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Community Members

Susan Sutterer, Floyd
 Ann Goette, Eggleston
 Diane Blair, Pulaski
 Jean Umberger, Radford
 Scott & Mendy Sink, Blacksburg
 Barnett Carr, Blacksburg
 Susan Icove, Floyd
 Donna & Doug Martin, Newport
 Ben Crawford, Blacksburg
 Melvin Robertson, Christiansburg
 Nancy & Bill Hudson, Fairlawn
 Keith Nunn, Radford
 Todd Fitch, Christiansburg
 Molly McClintock, Christiansburg
 Dr. Steve Jacobs, Blacksburg
 Mary Susan Vehorn, Radford
 Col. John Getgood, Floyd
 Doris Hendrickson, Radford
 Kim Schwenk, Blacksburg
 Jerry Higgins, Radford
 Rebecca Rees, Blacksburg



Past Leading Lights Distinguished Recipients

Lindsay West, Blacksburg
Phyllis Albritton, Blacksburg
Pat Ballard, Christiansburg
Mary Ann Hinshelwood, Christiansburg
John McEnhill, Floyd
Dr. Nelda Pearson, Radford
Margie Vitale, Christiansburg
Karen Cronin, Shawsville
Fran Rooker, Radford
Rador Vaden, Blacksburg
Vickie Spangler, Floyd
Lynn Hill, Giles
Archie Boothe, Pulaski
Penny Sweet, Radford
Janne Mathes, Blacksburg
John Galbraith, Blacksburg
Travis Cantrell, Floyd
Rodman Freeman, Giles
Daniel Grubb, Pulaski
Kelly McPherson, Blacksburg
Janiele Hamden, Radford
John Hess, Christiansburg
Rhonda Whaling, Blacksburg
Sharon Thompson, Blacksburg
Rebecca (Becky) Weeks, Floyd
Travis Sparks, Giles
Sally Warburton, Pulaski
Dr. Daniel Kelly, Radford
Elizabeth Warriner, Floyd
Hope Harrell, Pearisburg
Darla Bray, Blacksburg

Martha Ann Stallings, Blacksburg
Kathryn Daily, Radford
Jean Woods, Floyd
Morris Fleischer, Giles
Teresa Cassell, Blacksburg
Vern Simpson, Blacksburg
Harriet Berry, Pulaski
Garnie Dishon, Radford

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Lifetime Achievement

Catherine Vaughn Pauley, Floyd
Don Mullins, Blacksburg
Meryllyn & Dave Armstrong, Dublin
Dr. George Smith, Shawsville
Tom Sherman, Blacksburg
Carol Smith, Draper
Dave Roper, Blacksburg
Bill Ellenbogen, Blacksburg
Susan Icove, Floyd



 New River Valley Leading Lights

 @LeadingLightsNRV

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