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**For Immediate Release Contact**

**December 22, 2020** **Kathy Cosco, 304.634.5465**

**2021 POWER of Performance Honorees, one Small Communities, Big Solutions Advocate, Four #WVSolutions Seekers Student Rising Leaders & one Educator of the Year honoree announced**

*Honorees from Cabell, Wayne, Logan, Putnam, McDowell, Mercer, Fayette and Berkeley counties*

Six recipients were honored with Power of Performance Awards and one was awarded the Small Communities, BIG Solutions advocate last month to recognize their efforts to change lives, put people to work and revitalize their communities. The awards were presented as part of last month’s Third Annual Small Communities, BIG Solutions Conference, which showcased West Virginia successes and highlighted what is working across the state’s 21 most southern counties. The honorees received a customized, glass award designed by a local artisan.

The conference, which is organized by the Alliance for Economic Development of Southern West Virginia (Alliance), West Virginia Community Development Hub and Coalfield Development, took place virtually from Mon., Nov. 16 through Fri., Nov. 19.

In addition to these awards, four students were presented with a new award, the #WVSolutions Seekers Rising Leader Award and one #WVSolutions Seekers Educator of the Year was awarded, during the first statewide #WVSolutions Seekers Student Leadership Conference on Fri., Nov. 20, which is also organized by the three organizations.

**“I am always amazed by the honorees’ talent and passion for our state,” Sara Payne Scarbro, the Alliance’s Operations Council Chair, said. “There are power performers, student leaders and inspiring educators in every community and we had an amazing opportunity to highlight just a few of them. I look forward to continuing these awards next year, because it is important to highlight the doers and celebrate their successes. Indeed, they are helping to build stronger West Virginia communities.”**

**2021 Power of Performance Award Categories and Recipients***Southern West Virginia Leaders*

***Changing Lives***

The Minority Health Institute, which is operated by Dr. Anthony Woart, Dr. Georgiana Logan and LaDawna Walkter-Dean, was recognized with a Changing Lives award for the organization’s work to improve an protect the health and well-being of racial and ethnic minorities.

Also recognized in the Changing Lives category was Misty Martin, founder and program director of Marie’s Recovery House, a federally recognized sober living and treatment facility for women in Wayne. Martin engages the local community in the recovery process, which helps the women participating in the program to achieve their goals of sobriety improving their lives.

***Putting People to Work***

Dan Conant, president and founder of Solar Holler in Huntington, was recognized in the Putting People to Work award category. Solar Holler’s 40 employees have brought affordable solar electricity and family-sustaining jobs to West Virginia communities. In addition to residential installations, the company has installed panels for churches, libraries, schools and other community organizations.

Todd Cope, CEO of CentraApp was also recognized for his organization’s efforts in the Putting People to Work category. CentralApp trains people in technical skills and works to connect companies in need of tech talent with qualified workers from throughout the Appalachian region. Cope resides in Putnam County.

***Revitalizing Communities***

Melissa “Missy” Nester, publisher and owner of the Welch News and Pineville Independent Herald, was recognized in the Revitalizing Communities category. Nester was recognized because of her investment in the two community publications and her commitment to deliver local news as well as showcase positive events and the beauty of southern West Virginia.

Also recognized in this category was Kristin Dial, Executive Director of Coalfield Health Center, which serves more than 3,000 residents in Logan, Boone, Lincoln, Mingo and Wayne Counties. Dial is a founding member of the Wild Wonderful and Healthy Logan County initiative, which is a collaborative of entities implementing a community health plan to create a healthy workforce and increase economic development.

**“These awards are to honor the unsung heroes who are working every day to better our state,” Stephanie Tyree, West Virginia Community Development Hub’s executive director said. “We hope to inspire others to make an impact in their own communities.”**

***Small Communities, Big Solutions 2021 Advocate***

The Small Communities, Big Solutions 2021 Advocate Award was presented to Jim Spencer, Executive Director of the Bluefield Economic Development Authority. The award recognizes Spencer for helping Bluefield, Princeton and Mercer County achieve Opportunity Zone designations, securing grants to help develop shovel-ready sites to increase investment opportunities, developing entrepreneurial programs and his role in helping Bluefield land Intuit’s Prosperity Hub, which will bring between 200 and 500 jobs to the city’s downtown.

**2021 #WVSolutions Seekers – Rising Leader Award Recipients***Statewide Student Leaders*

A new award for high school and college student leaders was introduced at this year’s first student leadership conference. Four students who have a passion for West Virginia, are active in their communities, have unique ideas or projects and show qualities of a rising leader in the Mountain State received #WVSolutions Seekers – Rising Leader awards. Each student received a $250 scholarship made possible by Kroger, a customized, lighted award designed by RCBI and a certificate.

***2021 #WVSolutions Seekers – Rising Leader awards:***

Mitch Lehman is a student at West Virginia Institute of Technology and a young entrepreneur who is making a difference for the youth in the Beckley area. Mitch is working with the Piney Creek Watershed to create a safe educational climbing area. He believes that this area can be a steppingstone into the outdoors for many youth who never has experienced the wonderful recreation West Virginia has to offer. Lehman resides in Fayette County.

Brooklynne Hanshaw is a Junior at Huntington High School and is a loving advocate for making positive change in her hometown. She is actively involved in the “Love your Block” Campaign sprucing up community spaces in the West Huntington Area. She is youth leader for United Way’s Prevention Empowerment Partnership addressing the issues and dangers of vaping. She as co-authors a quarterly newsletter, “Voices of Youth” that focuses on substance prevention.

Brooklyn Johnson a Junior at Cabell Midland High School and has had a substantial impact on her community starting at an early age. During the refugee crisis of 2014, Brooklyn’s bake sale for the cause raised more than $300 from her driveway. Brooklyn has only continued to make a difference as an active member and leader, in many clubs and extracurricular activities During the Pandemic she has worked tirelessly to create solutions to continue to reach her peers concerning substance misuse as well as sewn and donated more than 200 masks.

Melanie Jimmerson is a Senior at Martinsburg High School and is active in finding opportunities to expand her knowledge on ways to grow West Virginia’s economy. Melanie was the only West Virginian among 19 students selected this year throughout the Appalachia Region to be a part of Appalachia Entrepreneurship Academy. Along with a team of her peers have the opportunity to create a business that will further progress economic growth of in the Appalachia region.

**“In a year as tough as 2020, the many problems facing our communities can feel totally overwhelming,” Founder and CEO of Coalfield Development Brandon Dennison, said. “However, learning from these leaders is truly inspiring. They are leading the way and showing us that West Virginians are master problem-solvers."**

***2021 #WVSolutions Seekers Educator of the Year***Ben Eng is an Assistant Professor of Marketing and Entrepreneurship at Marshall University’s Lewis College of Business. He is also the Co-Founding Director of the Innovating for Impact Center for Entrepreneurship and Business Innovation (iCenter). Ben has spread design thinking, the cutting-edge innovation technique popularized in Silicon Valley, throughout Southern West Virginia. Through grants from the WV Department of Education and the Appalachian Regional Commission, Ben has taught Design for Delight (D4D), Intuit’s version of design thinking, to Career and Technical Education (CTE) students in many counties in West Virginia.

More than 600 participated throughout the two conferences. To learn more about the conference agenda, planning committee, partners and sponsors, please visit [www.wvsolutions.net](http://www.wvsolutions.net).

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**Kathy – I am unclear what photos you have for this…**

**Photo captions:**

**Image \_\_\_\_\_: Power of Performance Awards, designed by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ were presented to seven recipients as part of the third annual Small Communities, Big Solutions Conference, which was virtual.**

**Image \_\_\_\_\_: The #WVSolutions Seekers Award, , designed by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ were presented to four recipients as part of the third annual Small Communities, Big Solutions Conference, which featured a one-day conference targeting high school and college students.**

About the conference partners:

**Alliance for the Economic Development of Southern West Virginia**

*The Alliance is a joint venture among West Virginia's 10 southern colleges and universities to better connect the educational resources and workforce training offered in southern West Virginia to promote the region, eliminate redundancies and share best practices, improve the quality of life for area residents, create jobs, keep West Virginia's talent pool in the state and revitalize southern communities. The Alliance partner institutions include: Bluefield State College, BridgeValley Community and Technical College, Concord University, Marshall University, Mountwest Community & Technical College, New River Community and Technical College, Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College, West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine, West Virginia State University and West Virginia University Institute of Technology. The Alliance is focused on a 21-county area, including Boone, Cabell, Clay, Fayette, Greenbrier, Kanawha, Lincoln, Logan, Mason, McDowell, Mercer, Mingo, Monroe, Nicholas, Pocahontas, Putnam, Raleigh, Summers, Wayne, Webster and Wyoming counties and represents more than 30,000 students.*

**West Virginia Community Development Hub**

*The West Virginia Community Development Hub mobilizes residents from all over the state to spark transformational change and progress in their communities. Hallmarks of the organization's work are to spur on fresh momentum where little exists; to unite the forces of groups that have not considered - or even resisted - collaboration in the past; and to champion new, and sometimes unexpected, leaders. Over the past year, The Hub has worked directly with 21 communities across the state and 40% of West Virginians were positively impacted by Hub-related projects. More information about The Hub’s work and impacts over the past year is available at* [*wvhub.org*](https://linkprotect.cudasvc.com/url?a=http%3a%2f%2fwvhub.org&c=E,1,ku7PDloEPXDA60lprj4_uijL6udWvIx3T09eUPkLNM3L3zqVBq1LtoLY5Nx7uVvwNiIRuLsdjx0j1wcvFsbYkF7cv0lfwL0FSPWBjNXv8TTlQ_XTlovbyh7ctA,,&typo=1)*.*

**Coalfield Development**

*In 2009 volunteers started to address concerns about housing in Wayne, WV. It was quickly realized that traditional charity was not nearly enough to address the deep, generational challenges we face. After intense community engagement, they pioneered a relationship-based, holistic approach to on-the-job training. Unemployed and underemployed people were hired to construct green affordable housing. Today, they have grown into a family of social enterprises working throughout the region as a leader in the building of a new economy during the wake of the coal industry's rapid decline. They have created more than 100 on-the-job training positions, more than 500 professional certification opportunities, redeveloped more than 150,000 square feet of dilapidated property, and successfully launched five new businesses in real estate development, construction, wood working, agriculture, and artisan trades - industries based on local assets and having real viability in the Appalachian region. Coalfield Development operates as a family of five social enterprises. A social enterprise is a business that combines the compassion of the nonprofit sector with the efficiency of the for-profit sector.*