

QUARTERLY ASCERTAINMENTS / COMMUNITY ISSUES

STATION: WAJR—May, 2021

SUBJECT: West Virginia lays out incentives to lure remote workers.

DISCUSSION:

State leaders and tech giant Brad Smith have touted a program meant to entice remote workers to West Virginia.

Ascend WV offers a relocation package valued at more than \$20,000, which includes \$12,000 cash and a year's worth of free outdoor recreation donated by more than a dozen outfitters from across the state.

Gov. Jim Justice, Tourism Secretary Chelsea Ruby, Intuit chief executive Brad Smith and others introduced the program at a series of events in April.

“We have been the frogs that are now truly proud of their own pond,” Justice said. “People so badly want to come. That, in combination with our broadband efforts, will bring so many people to West Virginia.”

Applications for Ascend WV are now open for the first 50 spots in the host city of Morgantown. Application windows for the program's sister cities of Shepherdstown and Lewisburg will be announced at a later date.

To learn more about Ascend WV, view the full incentive package, and to apply, visit www.AscendWV.com.

The unveiling of Ascend WV comes after the Smiths' transformational \$25 million gift to WVU's Brad and Alys Smith Outdoor Economic Development Collaborative in late 2020. In just six months, the outdoor economic development collaborative partnered with representatives from the Department of Tourism and Department of Economic Development to hone a program that carries out their shared vision.

Smith is a West Virginia native who was born and raised in Kenova. He said West Virginia has natural resources that should be attractive to the increasing numbers of people who are are to perform their work remotely.

“Here we sit. Here West Virginia sits in the middle of this intersection,” Smith said. “We're surrounded by these amazing rivers and these trails and these mountains that once served as walls. They'll get to know our people. They'll find out why we're the kindest people on earth.”

West Virginia has been having a broad discussion about the possibilities for remote workers that's intertwined with trying to improve broadband connectivity across the state.

“West Virginia can be a great place if you're looking to leave the office tower in Manhattan or the officer tower in Chicago or the highrise in Houston,” House Speaker Roger Hanshaw, R-Clay, said today on MetroNews' “Talkline.”

Lawmakers completed legislation Saturday on a broad-ranging bill aimed at improving broadband development in the state. State officials hope increased connectivity will allow more people to work from wherever they want, despite the state's rural nature.

Under that vision, the rural environment would become a draw for people who want to get out of big cities and enjoy outdoor offerings.

The Ascend WV program provides free coworking space where remote workers will have modern amenities to stay connected and access to more than \$1,200 in free outdoor gear rentals for use with family and friends.

DATE: Sunday, May 2nd, 2021

TIME / DURATION: 2:55

GUESTS: WV Governor Jim Justice, Intuit chief executive Brad Smith and West Virginia House Speaker Roger Hanshaw.

MEDIA INTEREST: Morgantown AM – WAJR, Dominion Post, WVAQ, WKKW, WBOY, WDTV, facebook, twitter

YEAR: 2021

QUARTER: 2nd

QUARTERLY ASCERTAINMENTS / COMMUNITY ISSUES

STATION: WAJR—April, 2021

SUBJECT: Bill would allow public school students to repeat Covid affected year.

DISCUSSION:

A bill that would allow students to repeat a year in school and sports because of the impact of the pandemic is moving through the House of Delegates following approval Thursday by the House Education Committee.

The measure, HB 2806, says a supplemental school year would be provided.

According to the bill's language, "Any student enrolled in a West Virginia public school during the 2020-2021 school year may request to use the 2021-2022 school year as a supplemental school year to retake or supplement the courses the student has already taken."

The bill would require county school boards to make decisions by June 30, 2021 on whether the county would offer the extra year program. The bill says requests from parents have to be in to their local school board by June 15.

A county school board could decide against offering the supplemental year as a whole. Decisions on individual cases are not permitted in the bill.

The bill's main sponsor is Del. Mark Dean, R-Mingo, who is also a school administrator.

Some members of the education committee questioned Sarah Stewart, state Department of Education executive director for policy and government relations, about the possible impact of the bill.

Stewart said the bill is silent on many issues but most of the decisions would be made by local school boards.

"I'm not sure whether or not they'd be employing new teachers to cover the additional students that enrolled," Stewart said. "Certainly they would be included under state aid (the state aid formula) and there would be additional funding."

The committee amended the original bill adopting age requirements for playing sports already in place under West Virginia Secondary Schools Activities Commission rules. A second amendment would require the student to attend the same school during the repeat year. A third amendment makes the program available for next year only.

"We don't want this to go on for perpetuity. It would just basically be next school year," Del. Ed Evans, D-McDowell, said.

Stewart said the state Department of Education hasn't fielded many calls from parents interested in their child adding a year of school.

"I am not aware of requests made to continue another academic year. I have heard conversations and I don't know the volume about staying another year to compete in athletics," Stewart said.

The bill is also silent on how many courses have to be taken or what a student's GPA would have to be to play sports for another year but Stewart said the bill does give the SSAC rule-making authority where many of those questions could be answered.

"I think that that could be fleshed out given the rule-making authority given to the SSAC," Stewart said.

The bill next goes to the House Finance Committee for consideration.

DATE: Sunday, April 4th, 2021

TIME / DURATION: 2:15

GUESTS: Sarah Stewart, state Department of Education executive director for policy and government relations and Delegate Ed Evans, D-McDowell Co.

MEDIA INTEREST: Morgantown AM – WAJR, Dominion Post, WVAQ, WKKW, WBOY, WDTV, facebook, twitter

YEAR: 2021

QUARTER: 2nd

QUARTERLY ASCERTAINMENTS / COMMUNITY ISSUES

STATION: WAJR—June, 2021

SUBJECT: Celebration of Gene Vance Jr. and Armed Forces Day.

DISCUSSION:

The annual tribute of a Morgantown hero once again took place during Armed Forces Week.

Gene Vance Jr. Day was celebrated in West Virginia as local bands as well as state officials played a part in a virtual celebration paying tribute to not only an American and West Virginia hero, but military personnel as well. The virtual ceremony also commemorated the 10th Anniversary of the official declaration of Gene Vance Jr. Day as part of Military Appreciation Week.

"Essentially to honor and pay tribute to all of our American soldiers and their allies presently serving, veterans who have fallen and those severely wounded, having sacrifice much protecting American values and our way of life," explained Gene Vance Jr. Foundation Chairman Michael Minc, who started the tradition ten years ago in honor of his late brother-in-law.

Gene Arden Vance Jr. was a Morgantown, West Virginia resident who graduated from WVU about a year before serving in the War in Afghanistan as a members of the West Virginia National Guard. On May 18, 2002, not long after being deployed, he was shot and killed while trying to save fellow servicemen who were on the frontlines. Vance's memory and courage, is commemorated through the annual event that started as subtle tribute to a Morgantown native into something much more.

"We're very honored to have leaders from military bases that carry the Vance Day Memorials across the country," said Minc describing how far away Vance's memory is recognized. "States like California, Texas and from Afghanistan, that's essentially how this day has evolved," he said.

The celebration of Gene Vance Jr. Day, has grown since it's inception ten years ago. What originally started as a small ceremony that would include a few words of Minc, Morgantown officials, and other members of the military, has turned into a full day event with local live music and several other tributes to military and first responders. Saturday, several live local musical acts such as The Davisson Brothers Band, Ona and Cody Clayton Eagle performed.

"Senator Manchin, Senator Capito, Governor Justice, General Austin Scott Miller, who is the Commander of the United States Army and Nato Forces in Afghanistan, Major General James A. Hoyer, who is the director of the COVID-19 Joint-Interagency Taskforce," said Minc listing those who spoke to those watching on-line.

"It was just a phenomenal event and we ask everybody to please go to the Gene Vance Jr. channel on YouTube or our website genevancejr.org to relive the events" said Minc.

DATE: Sunday, June 6th, 2021

TIME / DURATION: 2:35

GUESTS: Gene Vance Jr. Foundation Chairman Michael Minc

MEDIA INTEREST: Talk of the Town – WAJR, Dominion Post, WVAQ, WKKW, WBOY, WDTV, facebook, twitter

YEAR: 2021

QUARTER: 2nd