

Old Fort Mountain Heritage Alliance
Board Meeting Minutes
January 14, 2009

Members Present:

Dru Heldman, OFMHA Chairperson, Pinwilz Co. TAAS Gallery
Linda Bunch, OFMHA Secretary
Dean Kanipe, McDowell Tech – Small Business Center
Susie Painter, Painter's Nursery
Sue Glovier – Old Fort Resident
Nancy Jordan, HSMM Grant Writer
Anne Bevan – Local Artist
Gina DeGrechie – McDowell Craft Guild
Carol Price, McDowell County TDA
Ron Johnston, McDowell Craft Guild
Terrell Finley – Mountain Gateway Museum
Ashley Wooten, Assistant McDowell County Manager

Dru called the meeting to order at 3:00 and introductions were made. Dru announced that Kim Lukasiak has resigned as Vice Chairperson and Treasurer from our organization. She has been transferred to a new BB&T branch in East Asheville.

Everyone was also informed that there is a running announcement in the News Bulletin about our meetings every 3rd Wednesday encouraging individuals to join OFMHA. Carol and Linda are planning to meet with the owners of the Mill Creek Inn to solicit their involvement.

TDA – Update – Carol Price

Carol reported that tourism was slow for the end of December and early January. For the first time in 5 years deficits in revenue for the Tourism Authority total approximately \$11,000 for the months of September, October and November. However, some tourism locations are continuing to show a good track record

Carol reminded everyone about the new “Made in McDowell” marketing logo. Representatives of the N.C. STEP (NC Small Towns Economic Prosperity) leadership committees for Marion and Old Fort have recently unveiled the logo which identifies products made or grown in McDowell County. Handmade furniture, handcrafted items, agriculture products and other items may utilize the new logo. A marketing campaign to promote the use of the logo is slated for 2009. OFMHA members are asked to promote this program by referrals to Freddie Killough, director of the Marion Business Association at 652-2215, Susan Pyatt, director of MACA at 652-8610 or Carol Price, TDA at 668-4282 for complete information.

Economic Development News and Updates

Pinwilz Company in Old Fort received a \$100,000 building reuse and restoration grant from the N.C. Rural Center. The grant money will be used to renovate three rundown buildings on Catawba Avenue for use as a restaurant and gallery. The new business, to be located across from Parker Hosiery, will create 10 jobs in Old Fort.

PRC Industries continues to grapple with the roof of the OF Refinishing plant with an expectation of over 1M in expense for repairs.

Pinwilz has launched “The Old Fort Store” in partnership with Parker Hosiery and Pisgah Yarns. Detailed information can be accessed at www.pinwilz.com. The long term goal is to promote local products into new markets through TAAS Gallery and the Pinwilz website.

Department of Corrections Facility - Ashley Wooten shared that another Dept of Corrections facility bringing 250-300 potential jobs to western McDowell County is under discussion at the State level. 125 acres will need to be identified with a decision expected by the end of 2009. The completion of the facility is estimated to be 2 to 3 years out.

McDowell Tech - Dean Kanipe shared that the current economic downturn has forced the state’s community/technical colleges to cut back or eliminate most expenditures. As of 2/1/09 only funding available for payroll through the remaining of the fiscal year. However, some funding may be available to the Small Business Center at McDowell tech for retraining and Dean expects a workshop to be conducted in early March for “Business Successes for tough times.” Governor Perdue expects a \$5B deficit going into 2010.

Grants - Nancy Jordan, HSMM, communicated that the town of Old Fort was awarded in early 2008, a planning grant for the town’s infrastructure (water and sewer). This Plan is to be presented to the Town at the upcoming Board of Aldermen Meeting for their review and approval. It is a twenty year plan. A grant applying for “Safe Routes to School” that includes upgrading sidewalks, lighting, railings etc. is also in process. This project which will benefit all ages is due will be presented to the Town Aldermen. Old Fort has also been awarded a Pedestrian Planning Grant and public hearings will be forthcoming.

Mountain Stream RV Park - Ron Johnston reported that business was good for 2008. The reservation trend for 2009 shows tourists staying for longer periods of time.

Painter’s Nursery – Susie Painter - 2008 was the best year in their 36 years of business. Their hours for 2009 are set to be W-S from 9-4.

Broadbanding – In support of our newly elected government administration’s goal of deploying a modern communication infrastructure and to take advantage of proposed funding from the Federal or state government, Scott Swickle of Swickle Technologies and Dru are researching ways to bring broadbanding to our area. Obama and Biden are promoting communities to embrace broadbanding and internet access to ensure that every American, regardless of economic status, has access to the internet. It is believed that every community in America can get true access to broadbanding through a combination of reform of the Universal Service Fund, better use of the wireless spectrum, promotion of next-generation facilities, technologies and applications, and new tax and loan incentives. Internet Broadbanding will allow internet access to enable regular us of world wide educational opportunities for all McDowell county students.

A proposed Federal Technology Plan will bring subsidies for phone carriers to be given to only those carriers offering both regular phone service and internet broadband to rural areas. To date, carriers offering merely phone service have been able to claim subsidies from the so-called Universal Service Fund, giving them little incentive to roll out broadband.

Dru and Scott are contacting local POA organizations, interested community individuals and businesses to assist in a feasibility study for the county.

Community Happenings

New Senior Center - Ashley Wooten, Assistant County Manager, reported that the new Senior Nutrition Site facility will have a grand opening in March – date to be determined. The expectation is that this new facility will serve as a community center as well as for seniors.

Mountain Gateway Museum – Terrell Finley

The museum has also been affected by the economy. Visitation is down and up to 7% budget reductions for the upcoming fiscal year have been predicted. The budget cuts may negatively affect the Blue Ridge Tradition summer programs. Carol Price mentioned that perhaps the TDA could assist in funding. Pioneer Day is still planned for April 25th.

McDowell Craft Guild – Gina DeGrechie

The Craft Guild has met with the Chamber regarding Oktoberfest. The plans are to grandfather in all past participants and initiate more specific qualifying guidelines for artists and crafters going forward.

Old Fort Mountain Hometown Christmas - Sue Glovier informed the members of the success of the Old Fort Mountain Hometown Christmas event. The local Extension Club raised \$1200 through their dinner sales and all of the funds are designated for the town. Other activities included wagon rides and visits to Christmas Open Houses.

Old Fort Friends of the Library book sale - Nada Carroll reminded everyone that this annual event is slated for March.

Design Committee Update - Susie Painter

Susie Painter, Linda Bunch, Carol Price and Terry Wilson will be presenting OFMHA plans for placing pots for trees and plants in various locations throughout Old Fort as a part of our beautification project at the Town Meeting on January 26th. All members were encouraged to attend the meeting in support of Carroll Miller's suggestion of requesting \$600 in funding with the town's commitment for watering the plants.

OFMHA Priorities

Articles of incorporation - Carol Price advised everyone that she, Linda Bunch and Dru continue to work on the Articles of Incorporation and paperwork for obtaining OFMHA's 501-C-3 status. The fee for a business license with the State is \$25.00. By-Laws also need to be completed. Ron Johnston offered to be of assistance as he has recent experience in the application process for the McDowell Craft Guild.

Membership – We need to continue to grow our organization to ensure our on-going success. To this end all current members are requested to make a concerted effort to recruit local individuals and businesses to join OFMHA. Please refer interested individuals to our website www.downtownoldfort.org.

Election of New Officers – As Kim has resigned, and OFMHA's officers have not changed since the inception of the association, the appointment of new officers needs to be addressed. Anyone willing to serve as Chairperson, Vice Chair, or Treasurer should contact Dru Heldman.

Next Regular Meeting

The next regular OFMHA meeting will be Wednesday February 18, 2009 at 3:00 p. m. at the Depot

Respectfully Submitted by: Linda Bunch, OFMHA Secretary
February 5, 2009