



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FAYETTE COUNTY AWARDS MORE THAN \$1 MILLION TO LOCAL TOURISM ORGANIZATIONS AND BUSINESSES

Uniontown, PA - Recipients of the 2024 tourism grants were announced Dec. 11 at the State Theatre Center for the Arts in Uniontown. GO Laurel Highlands Executive Director Ann Nemanic said the grant committee received 70 applications this year. Fayette County Commissioners Dave Lohr, chairman, Vince Vicites and Scott Dunn approved 55 of those applicants, doling out \$1,020,673, the largest grant cycle in the history of the Fayette County Tourism Grant program.

The purpose of the grant program is to increase visitation, enhance the visitor experience, and increase overnight stays in Fayette County. A percentage of the county's room tax is allocated to a grant program specifically established to support the county's tourism assets.

GO Laurel Highlands is the administrator of the grant programs, overseeing the documentation process and compliance with guidelines. Grants are subject to audit each year and disbursed at the direction of the grant committee designated by each county.

"The commissioners have recognized how important everyone here is, and (that) their businesses and organizations are an integral part of economic development toward Fayette County," Nemanic said.

Those selected will have until Dec. 31, 2024, to utilize the funds.

Commissioners thanked all involved in the grant program, including GO Laurel Highlands and the Fayette Chamber of Commerce, as well as the State Theatre for hosting the announcement.

"There's so many people, so many moving parts to this," Lohr said. "I know you'll put the money to good use and that Fayette County will keep on growing because of your efforts."

Vicites, too, said he believes the program will continue to flourish, calling his support of the hotel tax that funds the grants "one of the best decisions I've made" during his tenure as a commissioner.

"It keeps growing, and I think it will continue to grow," Vicites said. "Our plan is working, and thanks to all of you. You're a part of the plan."

Dunn said county officials want to continue to promote tourism in Fayette County by supporting the development of assets such as the Sheepskin Trail, a spur of the Greater Allegheny Passage.

"As we build more trails, more people are going to be here, we're going to have more tourists," he said. "We're going to need more things for them to do, more places for them to stay, and more food for them to eat."

Several of the grants awarded went to organizations focused on maintaining, repairing or developing the Great Allegheny Passage, including a \$24,500 capital grant awarded to Dunbar Borough for the construction of a pavilion along the side of the Sheepskin Trail.

“It’s great because Dunbar has a lot to offer,” borough council President Jason Bartholomai said. “There is a lot of history in Dunbar, and to attract more people to our town is a really great thing. To have more availability and opportunities for the folks here will help to continue to attract tourism.”

Bartholomai said the borough plans to combine the funds from the tourism grant with other grant monies it has received recently to build the pavilion. Ground is expected to be broken on the pavilion in the spring, and Bartholomai said it will benefit not only those who use the trail, but also borough residents.

“It’s in our park, where the Sheepskin Trail runs through it, so it will benefit everyone from the baseball team to anybody using the trail to the fire department – lots of uses,” he said.

This year marks the first time Dunbar Borough has received a tourism grant from the county.

Another first-time recipient is The Barre Room, a specialty dance boutique in Uniontown which supplies all types of dancewear and shoes, as well as customized merchandise. The store received a \$4,462 marketing grant to help boost its social media presence, as well as develop its online market.

“I’m just very honored and very excited to be able to advertise more on social media and reach more of my customers,” owner Crystal Bogorae said. “A lot of my customer base is in West Virginia – Morgantown, Fairmont and even a little more south; just different families to bring to the area.”

The Barre Room is the only supplier within a 200-mile radius for some specialty services.

“I have customers who will travel two hours to get pointe shoes fitted,” Bogorae said.

She said she has recently begun hosting more in-store events to draw in customers, so getting the word out is even more important.

To view a complete list of Fayette County tourism grant award recipients and their projects, visit www.golaurelhighlands.com/grants.

To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.fayettecountypa.org.

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