

Mountain Heritage Days 2025

Updated at Jul 16, 2025

Submission Date	Jul 16, 2025
Name of Initiative	Mountain Heritage Days 2025
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Organization Type	Government
Organization Tax ID	56-6001440
Time of Year of Initiative	Peak (April - November)

Describe the timing of the initiative in as much detail as possible (please list key project dates, milestones, timeframes, etc.)

(Credit to writer Dave Russell with The Sylva Herald)

Western Carolina University leaders are making up for no Mountain Heritage Day last year by hosting a multiple-day event this year and into the future. (APPLICANT'S NOTES: This is a signature event for Jackson County/Western North Carolina that occurs annually. The 2025 event will mark 51 years for this tradition.)

WCU has hosted the Mountain Heritage Day festival for 50 years, but the 2024 event was called off due to Hurricane Helene tearing through the region.

The festival will now span an entire week, featuring new programming, like evening faculty-led lectures with hands-on activities, heritage demonstrators on Catafount Plaza, and a Friday night concert at Bridge Park in Sylva, according to Amber Albert, director of the Mountain Heritage Center and co-chair of the festival. (APPLICANT'S NOTE: The Friday night event will generate additional overnight visits to Jackson County. It will also have an overall economic benefit for the community as guests will become patrons for downtown dining and shopping experiences. In addition, the Friday night concert validates evidence of

the partnership between Sylva/Dillsboro and WCU.)

The event will now be called Mountain Heritage Days.

Saturday in the field on the WCU campus is still the big day, with the usual music, clogging, mule and tractor rides, traditional arts and crafts vendors, festival food (including frybread) and more. (APPLICANT'S NOTE: By keeping the Appalachian traditions alive, this enhances the cultural vibrancy of Jackson County.)

"The Friday before that we will be having a concert in Bridge Park," Albert said. "We've been working with the town to get that set up."

Upstream Rebellion is set to take the stage that night.

Planning for the expanded MHD began in January, Albert said.

"We're looking at the next 50 years, how can we adapt to the 21st Century," she said. "Studies post-COVID show that people want more intimate programming for more meaningful experiences. Our goal for Mountain Heritage Days is meet this need, serve our local community, and really lift up the work our faculty and students are doing over a week of programming," she said.

WCU will host a variety of programming during the week, with faculty and staff presenting.

"They'll be sharing their multidisciplinary research on Appalachia in fresh, interactive ways that invite our community to connect more deeply with our heritage," Albert said. "It's a new chapter for the festival, one that honors our roots while embracing new ways to celebrate them."

5K

The Mountain Heritage Day 5K is still on, with registration opening at 1 p.m. Monday, Aug. 25. The 15th annual 5K is Saturday, Sept. 27 before the main MHD event, a family-friendly, chip-timed race for both runners and walkers.

Participants will run through WCU's campus past landmarks, including the Catafount water fountain and Alumni Tower.

Shuttles will take folks to the festival grounds, though it is a short walk.

Historians, educators and preservationists honored

WCU's Mountain Heritage Award winners have traditionally been announced at the festival. It is given "in recognition of outstanding contributions to the preservation or interpretation of the history and culture of Southern Appalachia; or in recognition of outstanding contributions to research in, or interpretation of, Southern Appalachian issues." Award winners are chosen by a special committee of regional and campus representatives.

Vending applications can be found at

www.wcu.edu/engage/mountain-heritage-day/vendors.aspx.

Detailed updates and instructions will be provided as the Saturday event date unfolds.

A full schedule of events will be released in July, posted to

www.wcu.edu/engage/mountain-heritage-day/.

The festival began as a small campus celebration called "Founder's Day" in 1974 to celebrate the late Chancellor H.F. "Cotton" Robinson's inauguration. The festival aimed to preserve and celebrate the rich cultural traditions of Southern Appalachia and combat the negative stereotypes associated with mountain living.

The growing festival was renamed Mountain Heritage Day in 1975 to encompass the mountain communities' traditions, crafts and music.

Over the past five decades, heritage demonstrators and storytellers from all over Southern Appalachia have come to share their pastimes with festival attendees.

The 2024 cancellation marked only the second time in the festival's 50-year history that it did not take place, the first being in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Determined to make up for lost time, WCU leaders have reimagined the event to offer a richer, more immersive experience that blends tradition with innovation, Albert said.

"Western Carolina University is excited for the changes coming to the Mountain Heritage Days festival this year, including an extension of the

festival from one day to a week full of activities,” Chancellor Kelli Brown said. “Exciting craft demonstrations paired with insightful presentations will continue strengthening our community and this lovely place we call home.”

(APPLICANT'S NOTES: The week of events enhances the cultural vibrancy of Jackson County by keeping the Appalachian traditions alive. WCU's University Marketing and Communications Office designs the strategic marketing approach each year and spends approximately \$12K in promoting the event.

Traditionally, the program has generated approximately 15K patrons/guests. We are confident that this event has generated overnight stays, as well as sales for local shops and eateries.

In 2022 the JCTDA performed a demographics report which stated the following take-aways: "A greater percentage of visitors from out-of-state in 2022 compared to 2021" and "Increased spend both against average previous periods and last year. This growth can partially be attributed to increases in average visitor spend at hotels and attractions." The results compared the attendance to a WCU home football game.

This initiative has the support of local businesses in Jackson County such as McNeely's Store & Rental who sponsors the Chainsaw Competition, Andy Shaw Ford who sponsors the Classic Car Show. Other sponsors include: Pepsi, Bear Lake, First Bank, Republic Services, Leaf Filter, Andersen Renewal, Wards Plumbing, Bolton Construction, Kate and Joe Sam Queen Family Foundation, The Sylva Herald, WRGC, Catamount Travel, Verizon, Aramark, WCU Bookstore, and Jackson Paper.)

See attached comprehensive marketing approach (2023). We had a marketing plan in 2024 – I do not have on file and 2025 - that we did not get to execute due to Helene.)

Describe your initiative

The MHDs festival provides an entire week of various activities which include music, dance, food, crafts and other means of traditional Appalachian entertainment. This event which was created in 1976 was an invitation from then Chancellor Robinson to the local community to come to campus. This initiative continues with Chancellor Brown at the helm to provide a free festival which is a fall-time favorite for families who wish to spend time with their children who are attending WCU.

This grant could fully fund the providing of bio-stations/hygiene stations for the comfort of all visitors on Saturday; or, assist with the free-to-the-public concert at Bridge Park in Sylva on Friday night.

Describe what previous experience applicant has in successful execution of similar endeavors

This event has been successfully executed over the last 50 years (excluding 2024 - Helene). In 2020 (COVID) we did record Mountain Faith and streamed/posted for viewers to enjoy.

Website

www.mountainheritageday.com

Social Media Channels - paste URLs below

<https://www.facebook.com/MountainHeritageDay/> 

Amount of Funds Requested?

5,000

Date Funds Needed

Sep 12, 2025

Give a narrative description of how this project will increase tourism and visitation in Jackson County

Year after year, the MHDs festival brings in 12K-15K guests/patrons. This festival is unique due to the demonstrators of traditional Appalachian crafts, story-telling, games, etc. which draws a large crowd.

If this initiative has occurred before, what is new that differentiates it from prior years?

The 2025 event will be like no other! MHDs has expanded activities over the week prior to the big festival day which is on the last Saturday in September. We will have a field day for elementary school children to come to campus and participate in traditional Appalachian games and crafts. We will have a faculty-led outdoor adventure with a ginseng hike on the WCU trail system. We have faculty-led seminars on Appalachian traditions. We will have demonstrators during the lunch hour(s) at the Catafount for students. The event layout has been redesigned to include more areas of our beautiful campus. The grande finale will be inside the Bardo Arts Center with a concert. One thing that will remain the same is that it is a free event for everyone.

What is your advertising and marketing plan for your initiative?

Based on prior years goals.
Paid Media
\$12K = total anticipated
\$8,500 = digital/radio ads
\$3,500 = print ads
(billboard ads not included)

Breakdown

Digital Ads – Google Search, Google Display, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube

Billboards – Static and Digital

Smoky Mountain News

The Sylva Herald

Mountain XPress

Laurel of Asheville

iHeart and WKSF-FM

Our State email newsletter

Blue Ridge Public Radio

Our State full-page ad

Digital ads generated:

- 2.8 million impressions
- over 6k link clicks
- Google Display ads and Facebook/Instagram ads performed the best. See the attached PowerPoint for a more detailed breakdown of results for each digital platform and targeting.

Social Media

- Leading up to Sept. 22-27 - organic posts to all WCU social media channels
- Post event - create a Facebook event

Communications

Inside WCU

- Place as an event leading up to Sept. 22-27
- Place as an article in Inside WCU

Stories

Written by WCU Comms

Anticipated Sponsor promotions

- Sylva Herald Insert (included in The Sylva Herald the week of the event)
- Football program one, full-page ad for the home game before festival
- WRGC – event announcements and one interview
 - 1 Spotlight Carolina interviews
 - Social media
 - Radio
 - TV

Do you agree to acknowledge the 'Jackson County TDA' in materials as required? Any releases or ad placements should have a statement that "the event was made possible, in part, by the Jackson County TDA." Print ad placements, where/when possible should include the JCTDA logo.

Yes

Total anticipated cost of initiative 250,000

Total funds your organization will provide toward total cost? suppliment costs

Detail funds requested from other sources and note commitments or anticipated receipt of funds from other sources Sponsorships anticipated: Pepsi, Andy Shaw Ford, Bear Lake, First Bank, McNeely's, Republic Services, LeafFilter, Kate and Joe Sam Queen Family Foundation, Andersen Renewal, Ward's Plumbing, Jackson Paper, The Sylva Herald, WRGC, Catamount Travel, Verizon, Aramark, WCU Bookstore

Please upload your detailed budget, including event or initiative expenses and revenue. You can attach a spreadsheet (Excel), PDF, or Word Document.

Anticipated Attendees from Jackson County: 6,000

Anticipated Attendees from outside Jackson County: 6,000

Anticipated overnight stays generated: 300

How did you determine audience/attendance numbers and where do they come from? Different methods have been used in past several years. Estimating from filled parking spaces/deck the use of hand counters have both been used. Geofencing.

How will you measure success of your initiative? Random short surveys will be implemented.

Upload any supporting documentation for your application here:

Is there anything else you'd like to add? I will be emailing the supporting documentation. I have attempted uploading several times; however, the system simply closes down.

Signature:





Mountain Heritage Day Digital Report

SEPTEMBER 2022

Summary

Campaign	Flight	IMPs	Link Clicks	CTR	CPC	CPM
Facebook-Instagram	9/6 – 9/23	765,142	852	0.19%	\$1.27	\$2.35
Google Display	9/6 – 9/23	1,790,169	4,601	0.26%	\$0.43	\$1.04
Twitter	9/6 – 9/23	98,910	548	0.55%	\$2.17	\$12.04
YouTube	9/6 – 9/23	131,686	319	0.17%	\$5.42	\$8.31

Facebook-Instagram – 9/6 -9/23

Target	IMP	Reach	Link Clicks	Link CTR	Link CPC	Link CPM	Total Eng.	Eng. Rate
60-mile radius-Asheville	476,108	309,505	772	0.16%	\$1.36	\$2.21	74,401	15.63%
Knoxville-Hickory West	224,630	149,312	283	0.13%	\$1.77	\$2.23	34,721	15.46%
Jackson County	64,407	38,320	361	0.56%	\$0.69	\$3.88	15,727	24.42%
TOTAL	765,142	466,817	1,416	0.19%	\$1.27	\$2.35	124,849	16.32%



Google Display – 9/6 -9/23

Target	IMP	Link Clicks	Link CTR	Link CPC	Link CPM
60-mile radius-Asheville	928,109	2,183	0.24%	\$0.46	\$1.08
Knoxville-Hickory West	570,486	1,801	0.32%	\$0.28	\$0.87
Jackson County	291,574	617	0.21%	\$0.56	\$1.18
TOTAL	1,790,169	4,601	0.26%	\$0.43	\$1.04



YouTube – 9/6 -9/23

Target	IMP	Link Clicks	Link CTR	Link CPC	Link CPM	Video Views 25%	VCR (100%)
60-mile radius-Asheville	73,434	157	0.11%	\$5.73	\$6.51	77.27%	53.46%
Knoxville-Hickory West	43,894	80	0.10%	\$6.25	\$6.13	78.27%	54.15%
Jackson County	14,358	82	0.29%	\$4.27	\$12.30	76.38%	50.57%
TOTAL	131,686	319	0.17%	\$5.42	\$8.31	77.31%	52.73%



Twitter— 9/6 -9/23

Target	IMP	Reach	Link Clicks	Link CTR	Link CPC	Link CPM	Total Eng.	Eng. Rate
60-mile radius-Asheville	56,459	20,781	390	0.69%	\$1.79	\$12.38	1,243	2.20%
Knoxville-Hickory West	42,451	16,304	158	0.37%	\$3.11	\$11.58	543	1.28%
TOTAL	98,910	37,085	548	0.55%	\$2.17	\$12.04	1,786	1.18%

Western Carolina University @WCU · Now
Enjoy one of the top 20 events in the Southeast at WCU on Saturday, September 24! Live entertainment, 130+ food and craft vendors, family-friendly activities, an interactive kids area, and demonstrations celebrating the Southern Appalachian mountain culture, and much more.



www.wcu.edu
Mountain Heritage Day 2022

Promoted

BUSINESS REVIEW

Mountain Heritage Day | SEPT 2023

Holly Cook - WLOS



META | Facebook & Instagram

IMPRESSIONS 341,181	FB: 227,449 IG: 113,732
ALL CLICKS / CTR 7,860 / 2.30%	FB: 6,788 / 2.98% IG: 1,072 / 0.94%
LINK CLICKS / CTR 3,242 / 0.95%	FB: 2,272 / 1.00% IG: 970 / 0.85%
ENGAGEMENT 4,461	FB: 3,051 IG: 1,410
COMMENTS / SHARES 45 / 211	FB: 42 / 192 IG: 3 / 19



YOUTUBE

IMPRESSIONS

132,045

VIEWS

83,576

100% VIEWED

83,842

VIEW RATE

63.29%

CLICKS / CTR

27 / 0.02%

- There were 132,045 impressions served with 27 clicks.
- The click-through rate was 0.02%, It is below the target 0.05% CTR, but is better than 0.03% CTR.
- 83,576 videos were viewed & 83,842 of those were viewed to completion.
- Charlotte, NC was the top geotarget with 33,511 impressions & 8 clicks. Spartanburg, SC was second with 3,097 impressions & 1 click.



AUDIENCE EXTENSION DISPLAY

IMPRESSIONS
145,508

TARGETING
Audience: 72,750
ReTargeting: 72,758

CLICKS
337

TARGETING
Audience: 182
ReTargeting: 155

CTR
0.23%

PACING
+1.86%

- There were 145,508 impressions served with 337 clicks.
- The click-through rate was 0.23%, it exceeds the target 0.05% CTR.
- This campaign paced at 1.86% and met the goal.
- Charlotte, NC was the top geotarget with 32,617 impressions & 84 clicks. Asheville, NC was second with 10,018 impressions & 19 clicks.

MOUNTAIN HERITAGE DAY 2023
SATURDAY, SEPT. 30 WCU, CULLOWHEE, NC

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
MOUNTAIN HERITAGE DAY 2023
SATURDAY, SEPT. 30
WCU, CULLOWHEE, NC

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
MOUNTAIN HERITAGE DAY 2023 SATURDAY
SEPT. 30
CULLOWHEE, NC

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
MOUNTAIN HERITAGE DAY 2023
SATURDAY
SEPT. 30
WCU, CULLOWHEE, NC

AUDIENCE EXTENSION VIDEO

IMPRESSIONS

92,279

TARGETING

*Audience: 46,189
ReTargeting: 46,090*

VCR

90.14%

TARGETING

*Audience: 31
ReTargeting: 30*

VIEWING HOURS

357.63

CLICKS / CTR

61 / 0.07%

PACING

+0.30%

- There were 92,279 impressions served with 61 clicks.
- The click-through rate was 0.07%, which exceeds the target 0.05% CTR.
- 357.63 viewing hours with a 90.14% average video completion rate that is above the benchmark of 70%.
- This campaign paced at 0.3% and met the goal.
- Charlotte, NC was the top geotarget with 20,433 impressions & 13 clicks. Asheville, NC was second with 5,780 impressions & 5 clicks.



GEOFENCING DISPLAY

IMPRESSIONS

141,259

CLICKS

388

CTR

0.27%

- There were 141,259 impressions served with 388 clicks.
- The click-through rate was 0.27%, which exceeds the target 0.05% CTR.
- Sylva, NC was the top geotarget with 81,037 impressions & 240 clicks. Cullowhee, NC was second with 60,182 impressions & 148 clicks.

MOUNTAIN HERITAGE DAY 2023
SATURDAY, SEPT. 30 | WCU, CULLOWHEE, NC

