

# *Friends of the Blue Ridge Mountains*

Annual Report 2015-2016



## **MISSION**

To preserve, enhance, and celebrate the Blue Ridge Mountains as a valuable resource and treasured space for present and future generations

## **VISION**

The Blue Ridge Mountains stand secure as a national treasure for all time – ancient and sacred space that is maintained as a model of natural and cultural preservation – a free and accessible destination for recreation, discovery, and renewal that inspires others to join us and sustain our effort.

## President's Letter



*I sit down to write this cover note to the annual report with considerable excitement this year. Why? Because the last year has been one of solid, dynamic growth for Friends – our numbers and visibility are increasing, our advocacy efforts have ramped up, we continue to play a leadership role in the Blue Ridge Conservation Alliance, and we have taken a bold step to secure our legacy in the area of encouraging stewardship of the mountain, especially with young people.*

*Let's start with growth. Not only have our general membership numbers steadily climbed, our Board has expanded to include two new members. Our Land Use Committee has also added person-power: as a result of advocacy efforts to protect the mountains, new connections have been formed with individuals who bring excellent resources to that work. And to support the growing needs of our organization we have hired a new part-time administrative assistant with an enlarged role. . . . But our growth is not just about numbers; it is also about an increasing level of engagement on the part of our Board as well as some of our members and donors in response to past successes and new opportunities.*

*Successes. This is one of the promises we made to ourselves nearly ten years ago when Friends began to envision its role in the conservation space in this region. We set the intention of creating successes on a regular basis. This year we were part of a big one: by helping to represent the interests of western Loudoun County and rally the support of local citizenry, Friends was instrumental in shutting down AT&T's application to construct an above-ground facility the length of 4 and a half football fields on the top of Short Hill Mountain -- a project that would have compromised not only the mountain but the quality of life in the surrounding area as well.*

*As for the "bold step"? In response to the offer of a generous challenge grant from one of our members, Friends undertook the process of setting up an educational endowment to honor the memory of one of our founders, the late Jane Pratt. Establishing an endowment was a big decision for a relatively small organization like ours, so our process was very deliberative. We have now officially launched the endowment through the Community Foundation for Loudoun and Northern Fauquier Counties. Having successfully met the challenge to raise matching funds as the basis for the endowment, we will renew our efforts in the coming year to fund the endowment so that it grows the kind of earnings that will help us expand college scholarships to regional high school seniors who have demonstrated a commitment to environmental stewardship.*

*One more item of special note: over the last many years Friends has presented a "Friend of the Mountain" award to the individual or entity who has contributed in the spirit of our mission to safeguard the Blue Ridge in our region. For the first time this year we will recognize three individuals for the citizen activism that each engaged in to galvanize awareness and influence thoughtful decisions in the face of development threats to the Blue Ridge and its foothills.*

*With these highlights as a preview, I hope you will relish the details and images on the pages that follow. And as you peruse this report, know that it is you who make possible the work that we undertake to preserve, enhance, and celebrate the Blue Ridge. Know that you are contributing to something that, if we steward the Blue Ridge well, will, in the words of our vision, allow our iconic mountains to "stand secure as a national treasure for all time." . . . And know that we are deeply grateful for your support!*

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Carole". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left.

Carole Napolitano  
President, Friends of the Blue Ridge Mountains

## *Preserving and Enhancing our Mountains*

- ❖ **Autumn Stewardship Volunteer Day** . . . took place on October 15th, a beautiful fall day, and was a very successful effort on the part of more than 30 volunteers, including scouts from Purcellville Troop 163, to provide much-needed maintenance at Blue Ridge Regional Park. By continuing our biannual efforts to remove invasive species, we were able to reopen a trail and clear around overgrown benches.



- Beyond our on-the-ground work we were able to engage in productive conversations with Karl Mohle of the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority who has been instrumental in coordinating this effort over the past many years re: taking a more strategic approach to partnering our stewardship work on behalf of the park. Our next step will be drafting a stewardship work plan to outline activities for coming years. Projects could/should include trail mapping, trail maintenance, new trail development, the creation of an historical scenic vista, invasive control, road work, tree planting, and signage.



*James Remuzzi (right) briefs volunteers as they prepare to remove invasive species*



*Future stewards of the mountain assist in clearing trails*

- ❖ **The Jane Pratt Blue Ridge Mountains Education Award** was presented to two graduating high school seniors in two of *Friends* focus counties.
- Kaitlyn Boyd, a graduate of Jefferson County High School, and Griffin Hackett, a graduate of Woodgrove High School in Loudoun County, each received a certificate and a \$1,000 scholarship toward their college tuition.



- The scholarship, established in 2014 in memory of founding member Dr. Jane Pratt, is awarded to graduating seniors who are currently enrolled in environmental studies and demonstrate a clear commitment to stewardship of the Blue Ridge Mountains.
- By way of enhancing the award program *Friends* also provided classroom presentations on the value of mountain ecosystems. Board member Jed Shilling, in partnership with the Mountain Institute, has been coordinating this project to further educate young people and will be looking to bring new Board member Sandi Marra into the program in light of her deep experience with the Appalachian Trail.



*Griffin Hackett and Friends President Carole Napolitano following presentation of his award at the Woodgrove Community Awards Ceremony*



*Jed Shilling, Education Committee member and husband of the late Jane Pratt, at the podium to honor Kaitlyn Boyd at Jefferson County High School*

## ❖ Membership and Development

- Membership in *Friends* continues to grow at an annual rate of 20% for a total of over 140 members in 2016. Sources for new memberships have been strong word-of-mouth referrals on the part of current members and the Board, as well as publicity from events such as Loudoun Earth Day and the Bluemont Fair where volunteers host a display table to spark interest and engage passers-by to share information about our mission and impact.
- As a result of increased administrative support, *Friends* is currently developing an electronic mailing system to better track and inform both members and those who have registered interest in our work . . . with the hope is that the latter will become members.

## ❖ Land Use Advocacy

- One might think that a Comprehensive Plan, crafted by the county (in this case, Loudoun County) would fall into the category of a “best-laid plan” that we could count on to stand firm in the face of threats to the mountains in western Loudoun. Apparently not. Who would have imagined that AT&T would propose a 160,000 sq. ft. facility on top of the Short Hill . . . and that the County planning staff would recommend approval? In opposition to this threatened blight, the Land Use Committee took a leading public role in mounting opposition. In the process, members of our committee formed alliances with other preservation and conservation groups including the Loudoun County Preservation and Conservation Coalition. Together, we became a cohesive and powerful civic action group that engaged members of the Loudoun Board of Supervisors and succeeded in shutting down the AT&T application. As a result, new members joined our Land Use Committee to help with ensuing projects; moreover, a network was created with like-minded organizations and individuals to carry out our *FBRM* goal: preserving, enhancing, and celebrating the Blue Ridge Mountains as a valuable resource and treasured space for present and future generations.

In the process of civic discourse, *Friends* made itself known to the Board of Supervisors, as a voice expressing the respect and love the citizens of Loudoun (not just the west) have for our treasured mountains. As we thanked the Board for listening to us, they thanked citizens for showing up to represent their interests and for caring about Loudoun County.

During the past year members of the committee assisted in obtaining an additional 2,200 acres of conservation easements in environmentally sensitive areas, and initiated the process for another 2,000 acres for the coming year. These same members also played a role in creating the new State Park on the Leggett property in Neersville, approximately 600 acres along the Appalachian Mountains. An additional 200 acres is planned for acquisition.

We anticipate new challenges in the coming year, including a proposal to make proffered open spaces available for what we consider to be inappropriate commercial uses. Another challenge involves our effort to influence performance criteria (e.g., noise standards, minimum lot size, setbacks, terrain, public road access points, etc.) for new special events facilities. With all of these opportunities in mind, we -- members of the Land Use Committee and its allies -- move forward into the next year with a sense of renewed spirit and energy.



*Short Hill Mountain as seen from across the Potomac River along the C&C Canal*

## ***Building Partnerships: the Blue Ridge Conservation Alliance***

Over the last year, *Friends* has played a strong role in helping the Blue Ridge Conservation Alliance (originally known as the Blue Ridge Coalition), still in its early formation, continue to develop its presence and shape efforts that support its growth as a conservation force. *Friends* Board member Mark Shields has assumed the role of Secretary as former *Friends* Board member Marie Uehling and current *Friends* Board President Carole Napolitano have taken on BRCA committee roles.

Marie is now serving on the BRCA Development Committee, the function of which is to raise funds to support the funding of infrastructure such as website development/management, administrative support, etc. Recently the Development Committee submitted a grant application to the Appalachian Stewardship Foundation to fund the development, under the direction of the Downstream Project, of the BRCA Network Portal, an online platform designed to coalesce communications, including action alerts and advocacy, among BRCA member organizations, conservation stakeholders, and the public at large. Although not chosen to receive the award, BRCA will harvest lessons learned from the process and will continue to pursue other funding sources.

Carole is in the early stages of creating a BRCA Stewardship Committee. The first step was to convene a meeting of interested BRCA members in August to explore options for developing a public offering related to stewardship practices. The most viable option, in the spirit of broad outreach, appears to be designing a series of interactive events, drawing on the resources BRCA represents (or has access to), to engage local community members in understanding the concept of personal property stewardship and learning simple stewardship practices that property owners can employ to support biodiversity and sustainability in the ecosystem of which the Blue Ridge is a part. Preliminary conversations are currently underway to consider topics, identify presenters, design related activities, and explore prospective venues and sponsors.



*Jed Shilling (FBRM), Norman Myers (FBRM), and Emily Southgate (VA Native Plant Society) at a BRCA meeting in Harpers Ferry, WV*

*Joe Coleman (Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy), Mark Shields (Blue Ridge Watershed Coalition), and Marie Uehling (Appalachian Trail Conservancy) attend to the remarks of Mike Kane (PEC), Chair of BRCA*





## Celebrating Our Mountains

- **2015 Annual Meeting** . . . The culminating activity of our year is our annual meeting, held in the late fall, to honor our members and reflect on the year in review. For our 2015 meeting we chose The Blackburn Center, just off the Appalachian Trail in Round Hill, VA. Attendees were treated to a guided trail walk before partaking in our traditional home-cooked chili dinner and chicken soup prepared by FBRM members. Chris Dematatis of Land Trust of Virginia presented a highly informative powerpoint with maps detailing the results of LTV's research to identify conservation values on the Blue Ridge. Out-going *Friends* vice president Marie Uehling was honored for her many years of service on the Board. The annual "Friend of the Mountain" award was presented to Potomac Appalachian Trail Club in recognition of their longstanding work through volunteer efforts, education, and advocacy to protect the Appalachian Trail-- with attention to conserving the natural landscape and respecting historical and cultural features -- and adjacent lands along the Mid-Atlantic section of the Blue Ridge Mountains. PATC President Richard Hostelley accepted the award. Traditional mountain music was provided throughout the evening by the Just Left Band.
- **Bluemont Fair** . . . For the fifth consecutive year *Friends* hosted an exhibit at the Bluemont Fair in September in front of our office in the heart of the village. Numerous fair visitors stopped by to learn more about our work on behalf of the mountains. Bluemont is located in the foothills of the Blue Ridge in western Loudoun County



*Friends Board members Sandi Marra (left) and Rebekka Prinz chat with a visitor to our display*

## *Annual Meeting Highlights*



*Attendees learn about the Blackburn Center from PATC member and current Blackburn Center caretaker, Chris Brunton*



*Rebekka Prinz, Chair of the Celebrations, Communications & Outreach Committee presents the Friend of the Mountain award to Richard Hostelley, President of the PATC in recognition of the PATC's work to protect the mid-Atlantic section of the AT*



*Dinner is served! Friends Secretary Deb Snyder tends to two main dishes*



*Friends President Carole Napolitano shares highlights of the previous year*





*Guest speaker Chris Dematatis, President of the Land Trust of Virginia, chats with an attendee*



*Retiring Vice-President Marie Uehling is honored*



*The "Just Left" duo provides mountain music for the event*

## *Planning for our Future: Friends Launches Educational Endowment*

In 2015, *Friends* received a gift and a challenge. The gift was the generous offer, from a longstanding member of *Friends*, of seed money in the amount of \$5,000 to start an endowment for the sake of ensuring that we could fund, over the indefinite future, the Jane Pratt Blue Ridge Mountains Education Award, a scholarship program inaugurated in 2014 to memorialize founding member, the late Jane Pratt. The challenge was that if we could match the initial \$5k, the donor would add another \$5,000. We were both excited and a bit daunted – not at the prospect of generating the matching funds, which we did quite handily – but at what might be involved in setting up an endowment, including the decision to put aside monies in perpetuity.

Over the next many months we pursued a course of due diligence: becoming educated about endowments; weighing the pros and cons of this kind of investment; and seeking counsel about the prudence of taking this step. Those preliminary steps led us to the Community Foundation for Loudoun and Northern Fauquier Counties as an institution well-suited to hosting an endowment for an organization like *Friends*. Working with Amy Owen, Executive Director of CFLNF, we assessed various endowment vehicles, made the decision to go forward, and crafted a document, over several iterations, that best meets our needs and offers the greatest flexibility in working with disbursements.

On October 20th, we made the endowment official with a signing ceremony and a check to the Community Foundation in the amount of \$17,500 to open the fund. Our goal now will be to increase the amount of the endowment many times over, through aggressive fundraising, so that earnings become sufficient to fund the award of multiple scholarships each year to deserving high school students in our region who have demonstrated a commitment to environmental stewardship.



*Left to Right: Jed Shilling, Amy Owen, and Norman Myers witness Carole Napolitano (seated) sign the Community Foundation endowment document*



## ❖ Plans for 2017-18

- The Celebrations, Communications, and Outreach Committee is committed to extending outreach on behalf of *Friends* and the Blue Ridge Coalition, and to exploring opportunities to increase our presence and activity in focus counties other than Loudoun (e.g. sponsoring an educational event in another county with a partner organization). In addition to annual events associated with the Bluemont Fair and our Annual Meeting, the Committee is looking to host a booth at the Watermelon Park Music Festival, a September event on the banks of the Shenandoah River in Clarke County. We also plan to exhibit at Earth Day Loudoun, typically held in the Spring. Beyond planning events, our committee will continue to publish our newsletter, will explore ways to increase our presence on social media, and is in the early stages of putting together a survey to learn more about the interests of our members.
- By way of making strides in our goal of fully funding for our newly-established educational endowment, the Board, under the leadership of our Treasurer, Peter Weeks, will consider launching a capital campaign during the second quarter of 2017.
- The Stewardship Committee will pursue strategic conversations with the Virginia Regional Park Authority to develop a longer-term approach to stewardship of the Blue Ridge Regional Park and to investigate options for expanding access to the park.
- A joint effort for all Board and Committee members will be planning our milestone celebration as we mark our 10th anniversary in 2017.



# *Friends of the Blue Ridge Mountains* Annual Income Statement and Financial Position

12 months ending 8/31/16

## Revenue

Endowment Fund	\$8,535.00
Membership Fees	\$3,555.83
General Funds	\$1,084.38
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$13,175.21</b>

## Expenses

Administrative Services	\$1,375.71
Credit Card and Bank Fees	\$42.17
Insurance	\$508.00
State Fees	\$36.95
<b>SUBTOTAL Administrative Expenses</b>	<b>\$1,962.83</b>
Printing Supplies	\$428.39
Event Supplies	\$541.06
Membership & Development	\$73.41
<b>SUBTOTAL Fundraising &amp; Marketing</b>	<b>\$1,042.86</b>
Jane Pratt Education Scholarship Awards	\$2,000
<b>SUBTOTAL Program Services</b>	<b>\$2,000</b>
<b>TOTAL Expenses</b>	<b>\$5,005.69</b>
<b>TOTAL NET ASSETS</b>	<b>\$21,785.32</b>

## Thanking our Generous Donors

*Friends of the Blue Ridge Mountains* is grateful for the financial contributions of all members. We wish to offer special recognition to the following individuals, businesses, and organizations for their generous support above membership level between September 1, 2015 and August 31, 2016.

Jill Beach  
The Bryant Crane Charitable Fund  
Lucinda B. Emmett  
Donna Evers  
Goose Creek Friends Meeting  
Paula & Joseph Kerger  
Carole & Stephen Napolitano  
Maria Nicklin and Furyworks Productions LLC  
John D. Shilling  
Al & Betty Van Huyck

## Board of Director Members (as of August 31, 2016)

Carole Napolitano, *President*  
Norman Myers, *Vice President; Chair: Land Use Committee*  
Deborah Snyder, *Secretary*  
Peter Weeks, *Treasurer; Chair: Membership and Development Committee; Co-Chair: Education Committee*  
Kurt Johnson  
Sandra Marra  
Megan Miraglia  
Rebekka Skinner-Prinz, *Chair: Celebrations, Communications and Outreach Committee*  
James Remuzzi, *Chair: Stewardship Committee*  
Mark Shields  
John "Jed" Shilling, *Co-Chair: Education Committee*



Front left to  
front right:  
Sandi Marra,  
Peter Weeks,  
James Remuzzi,  
Deb Snyder,  
Carole  
Napolitano,  
Mark Shields,  
Norman Myers,  
Rebekka  
Prinz. Absent:  
Kurt Johnson,  
Megan Miraglia,  
Jed Shilling

To learn more about *Friends* . . . and to join or donate, visit [www.friendsofblueridge.org](http://www.friendsofblueridge.org)

*Friends of the Blue Ridge Mountains* is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

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