



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

Annual Report 2018-2019



Friends of the Blue Ridge Mountains

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 and sustain our effort.



As my first year as President of *Friends of the Blue Ridge Mountains* draws to a close, I celebrate our organization's accomplishments while acknowledging the many challenges confronting us in northern Virginia.

On the small piece of heaven on the Blue Ridge I call home, I've witnessed the loss of 60 foot tall ash trees, a reduced number of birds once common, too much rain and then too little, raging windstorms, and deforestation wrought by commercial interests on the mountain's summit.

Changing the mindset of people is crucial if we are to take steps in addressing the disconnect between people and nature.

So, I'm pleased to announce that the recipients of the 2019 Friend of the Mountain Award are individuals who teamed together in Loudoun County to influence the minds and hearts of its leaders responsible for crafting the 2019 Comprehensive Plan: the so-called "SWAT" Team comprised of ten members from the Loudoun County Preservation and Conservation Coalition.

The Comprehensive Plan is the blueprint for how growth will be managed here in Loudoun County. SWAT Team members, representing a diverse group of historic and conservation organizations, worked diligently with County officials to alleviate the most egregious sections of the Plan that threatened to develop our rural countryside. Board member Norman Myers represents *Friends* on the SWAT Team.

In what other ways has *Friends* contributed to stewardship and conservation in our region?

The Sleeter Lake Project was announced at our 2018 Annual Meeting and the funds that we raised allowed for the purchase of 21 trees that were planted at our Volunteer Day in April. Funds also covered the cost of a professional landscape plan prepared by Board member James Remuzzi which mapped the entire Park in Round Hill. This project is ongoing and will include more plantings, trail work, invasive plant eradication, and pollinator garden cultivation.

Friends also participated in several Appalachian Trail events in 2019 to celebrate Round Hill's designation as an AT Community. I was invited to speak at an AT event at Bear's Den which focused on the real threats facing this heritage trail, such as proposed gas pipelines over the trail.

Educating young people about the importance of the mountains and its ecosystems has always been an important part of our mission. *Friends* continues to provide college scholarships to students who have demonstrated their commitment to conservation and love of the Blue Ridge. And for the second consecutive year *Friends* has awarded cash prizes at the Loudoun County Science Fair to students doing innovative research on subjects related to the mountains.

What is our agenda for 2020? Certainly participate with County staff on issues pertaining to housing and zoning. Also, Board member and past President Carole Napolitano has wonderful ideas about expanding our education outreach.

Have the stakes ever been higher to "protect, enhance, and celebrate" our planet?

Grateful thanks to all our members who make this possible!

Peter Weeks

President, *Friends of the Blue Ridge Mountains*





Stewardship Committee

The *Friends of Blue Ridge Mountains* Stewardship Committee had a very active 2019. Their signature effort involved an opportunity to enhance a location proximate to the Blue Ridge by developing and implementing a comprehensive natural resource plan for the newly-christened Sleeter Lake Park. In the spirit of one of *Friends'* core principles – partnering with like-minded organizations – Vice President Norman Myers took the lead in collaborating with the Town of Round Hill, Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, Virginia Extension Master Gardeners, and the Virginia Archaeological Society to develop a comprehensive natural resource management plan for the newly-christened Sleeter Lake Park.

Friends contracted with Sustainable Solutions, LLC a natural resource management company based in Shepherdstown, WV, to develop the plan; Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy began work on a native pollinator meadow; Master Gardeners identified the species of existing mature trees and recommended native species to add; and the Virginia Archaeological Society set in motion the prospect of a dig around the old stone farm house on the park property. The final product built upon the initial plans for the park in laying out mid- to long-term improvements – from controlling invasive plants to developing areas for pollinator habitat, native grasslands, shoreline habitat, walking trails, and a woodland wildflower garden. The plan incorporates the proposed trail between Sleeter Lake and Franklin Park currently in development by the Loudoun Department of Parks & Recreation.

Long-term plans for the park include development of a viewing platform, pollinator gardens, picnic areas and benches, fishing pads along the lake, and measures for erosion control. A first round of planting, organized as a community Volunteer Day, took place in April. Future such opportunities to participate in this initiative will be scheduled at subsequent stages of park development.

Big Turnout for Volunteer Day at Sleeter Lake Park

Over 35 Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, local Loudoun residents, and *Friends of the Blue Ridge Mountains* Board members came together for Volunteer Day at Sleeter Lake Park. Board member Juanita Tool coordinated the effort on behalf of *Friends* which included providing refreshments for volunteers.

Board member James Remuzzi's company brought the necessary equipment and tools and dug holes in preparation for the planting of 2-inch caliper trees donated by Meadows Farms Nurseries and members of *Friends*.



James instructed participants on how to unbind, loosen and plant the trees correctly using the equipment provided. The trees were planted and the water truck, as well as buckets manned by participants, ensured that the trees received a significant ration of water to get them off to a good start.

In the spirit of advancing our mission to preserve, enhance, and celebrate the Blue Ridge, *Friends of the Blue Ridge Mountains* is collaborating with several other partners including the Town of Round Hill, Loudoun County Master Gardeners, and Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, to enhance an important part of the Blue Ridge Mountains ecosystem bordering the foothills.

Friends is providing the Town of Round Hill with a professional master plan that incorporates the Town's existing Sleeter Lake Park concept plan and corresponding infrastructure. The master plan includes tree-lined walking paths that connect existing and future amenities and will incorporate the proposed trail between Sleeter Lake Park and Franklin Park that is currently funded by Loudoun County.

Round Hill Appalachian Trail Festival

The Appalachian Trail is integral to the Blue Ridge Mountains, and in that spirit, *Friends of the Blue Ridge Mountains* became a sponsor for the first Round Hill Appalachian Trail Festival that took place on Saturday, June 15th, at B Chord Brewing Co. in Round Hill.

The Appalachian Trail Festival celebrated the occasion of the Town of Round Hill having received the coveted designation from the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) as an "Appalachian Trail Community." Supporting the ability of the Appalachian Trail (AT) to thrive is directly aligned with *Friends'* mission to preserve, enhance, and celebrate the Blue Ridge. The AT provides recreational opportunities and resources for day hikes for local residents including the popular Bears Den Overlook; the Blackburn Center is a favorite stopover for through-hikers; and the viewsheds along the AT are part of the iconic landscape the Blue Ridge represents in our region.

The Festival was a joyous occasion and the *Friends* booth provided the opportunity to talk with friendly folks about our mission and recruit new members. The fun and informative event – on a beautiful early summer day – included live music, a talk about the history of the trail, presentations on hiking, a through-hiker panel, lightweight backpacking basics, trail flora and fauna, food trucks and B Chord beer. We look forward to sponsoring the Round Hill Appalachian Trail Festival again in 2020.



Volunteers stand by at Sleeter Lake Park on *Friends* Volunteer Day.



Board member Juanita Tool chats with a visitor to the *Friends* booth at the Bluemont Fair.



2018 Annual Meeting & Member Celebration

After a disappointing last-minute cancellation on the date *Friends'* Annual Meeting & Member Celebration was originally scheduled due to a sudden snow storm that closed roads and rendered the trip to Bluemont Vineyards out of the question, we recovered a few days later to host a most festive event. Members, guests, and the Board of *Friends* gathered at the beautiful Bluemont Vineyard on a mid-November evening to celebrate and recognize conservation work in the past year, and to unveil our newest project. Guests were treated to savories and sweets donated by our generous patron Joanie Wolford of Savoir Fare Limited paired with Bluemont wines and music from Pete Lapp. We recognized retiring board member Jed Schilling as he prepared to move to California. *Friends* was privileged to benefit from his years of work in service to the mountains and his generosity with both his time and conservation expertise. We also recognized Carole Napolitano as she stepped down from her position as Chair of the *Friends* Board. Carole served as president for five years and brought her clear vision and exceptional talent for building connections to the role. We welcomed sitting board member Peter Weeks into the Chairmanship.

Highlighting the importance of conservation easements as a means of preserving natural landscapes, the Friend of the Mountain Award was presented to legislators Randy Minchew and Tony Buffington; facilitating organizations including Clarke County Conservation Easement Authority, Land Trust of Virginia, Old Dominion Conservancy, Piedmont Environmental Council; and donors of conservation easements on and around the Blue Ridge in honor of

their work stewarding the environments of the mountains through conservation easements. The centerpiece of the evening was the unveiling of our Sleeter Lake Project, a cooperative effort with the Town of Round Hill, Master Gardeners of Loudoun County, and Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy to develop the Sleeter Lake property as a haven for native species and a conservation teaching tool for the community. Tree prints of original art donated by award winning local artist Jill Perla were sold to help fund the initiative.





Friends Presents Cash Prizes to LCPS Science & Engineering Fair

Friends of the Blue Ridge Mountains presented special awards totaling \$500 at the 38th Loudoun County Public Schools (LCPS) Regional Science & Engineering Fair (RSEF), held this year at Riverside High School in Leesburg. A record-breaking 324 students participated in this event, an increase of over 40 from previous years. The winners of the *Friends* awards project titles included "The Effect of Weather Patterns on the Chemical Distribution of ROCKWOOL Factory Fallout"; "Understanding the Academies of Loudoun's Bodies of Water"; and "Investigation of Microplastics in Loudoun County Farms." An honorable mention was given to "The Effect of a Multi-functional Water Filtration Filter on Water."



Friends awarded cash prizes and certificates to the following students:

First Place \$250

Jennifer Colucci Rock Ridge High School

Isha Kalaga Rock Ridge High School

Second Place \$150

Theodore Kostal Woodgrove High School

Patrick Swisher Woodgrove High School

Third Place \$100

Arleen Martinez Loudoun County High School and Academies of Loudoun

Ria Shah Riverside High School and Academies of Loudoun

Honorable Mention

Abigail Zurfluh Tuscarora High School



Land Use & Stewardship Committee Update

The Land Use Committee took key roles in two important initiatives over the past year. The first was a collaboration with our Stewardship Committee in partnering with the Town of Round Hill and several partners who share an interest in preservation for the sake of further developing/enhancing western Loudoun's newest park in a way that reflects conservation values. (See the feature on Sleeter Lake on page 2.)

The second role involved a dedicated effort in response to the Loudoun County 2040 Comprehensive Plan. Norman Myers, Chair of the *Friends* Land Use Committee, served on the Loudoun County Preservation and Conservation Coalition (LCPCC) "SWAT" Team, organized to address proposed changes in the Comprehensive Plan. (The work of this team, winner of our 2019 Friend of the Mountain award, is detailed in the feature on page 7 contributed by Maura Walsh-Copeland.) One of the contributions that Norman brought to this work on behalf of *Friends* was the following Position Statement:

- Higher density residential zoning is supportable and sustainable where there is existing transportation and infrastructure, as around the Silver Line Metro station.
- Oppose higher densities that create suburban sprawl in the Transition Policy Area
- Encourage land preservation using such tools as Conservation Easements and Transfer of Development Rights (TDRs) as part of a proffer process for increasing density in appropriately located urban centers and for rezoning of commercial and industrial land.
- Support Performance Standards for rural economy uses based on criteria such as road safety standards, lot size, and proximity to other event centers; include noise and lighting standards.
- Support Design Standards for Rural Economy Uses and residential cluster development in the rural and transition planning areas.
- A high priority is the development of trails, creating a green network of corridors for hikers, bikers, horse riders, and wildlife, such as outlined in Emerald Ribbon.
- Support the recommended changes to Envision per the Loudoun County Preservation and Conservation Coalition.

These two initiatives – the Sleeter Lake initiative and participation on the SWAT Team represent the power of partnership and the value of bringing people together who share a cause and can bring diverse expertise to the table. One of the ways the Land Use Committee has done its work is to reach beyond the Board to engage the expertise of others in the community such as Paul Lawrence from the Goose Creek Association; Mike Hummel, land planner with H2 Land; and attorney Lindsay Moler. A second means



of staying connected to both the issues and those who can influence them involves participating in meetings with a variety of constituencies. Examples in addition to LCPCC include: the Loudoun County planning staff; the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors; groups that promote conservation easements; and opponents of the Rockwool Plant in Ranson, WVA.



The LCPCC "SWAT" Team

In February, 2018 – during the peak workload of the Comprehensive Plan Stakeholder's Committee review – Al Van Huyck proposed the creation of "a SWAT team of a few folks who will agree to immediately review each Chapter... publish a 'Citizen's Response' on our website, directly to the Staff and Stakeholders, BOS, newspapers, and to prepare the public for the May [2018] public input sessions." Responses of "count me in" immediately followed, establishing the formal "New Comprehensive Plan Review Committee of the Loudoun County Preservation and Conservation Coalition." The ten-member SWAT Team representing the Coalition's 50 organizations consisted of expertise ranging from Urban Planning, Finance, Land use and Appraisals, human resources, environmental studies, management consulting, and much more.

Over the next several months, the SWAT Team began to specialize by dividing up the Comprehensive Plan chapters according to each member's subject matter expertise: Gem Bingol and Evan McCarthy for Chapter 2 Urban/Suburban/Transition Policy Areas and Norm Myers for Rural Policy Area; Cheri Conca for Green Infrastructure and Jeff Freeman for Historic Resources for Chapter 3 Natural and Heritage Resources; Al Van Huyck for Chapter 4 Housing; Owen Snyder for Chapter 5 Economic Development and detailed analysis of public input; Dennis Kruse for Chapter 6 Public Infrastructure, Roads and Trails; and Jim Hanna for a detailed Chapter 6 Fiscal Management analysis. The role of the last SWAT member, Maura Walsh-Copeland, was to develop the project plan to keep the review efforts in synch; consolidate input from SWAT and other Coalition member organizations; then create common web and presentation communication for reporting to the Coalition, the public, and the Board of Supervisors.

By the Fall of 2018 the Team was as conversant with the Plan Draft as the County Staff. The Team identified and quantified the public's priorities and summarized the primary issues, points of concern and recommendations for review with each Supervisor and their Aides. At each meeting the information was presented as a TEAM, with each SWAT member ready and able to fill in for each other as required. The goal of these meetings was to educate the Supervisors before their receipt of the draft from the Planning Commission to help them be prepared to make good decisions based on quantification as well as facts and awareness of long-term impacts. While the SWAT Team monitored the Planning Commission's changes to the plan, Gem Bingol led a PEC-mobilized effort to educate the public by way of preparing them for the next round of input.

By the time the final Draft Plan reached the Board the SWAT Team had coded every Policy, Strategy and Action to quantify and recommend changes in a consolidated "pick this, not that" matrix. The SWAT Team's efforts inspired many other Coalition organizations and all seven Mayors of the Coalition of Loudoun Towns (COLT) to "get on board" and add to the matrix, representing almost 80,000 residents throughout the entire County. As the matrix was delivered in April, so was a binder of key information for each Board member to reference during their work sessions that included the public's priorities, chapter summaries and recommendations, and explanation of financial impacts. The SWAT Team continued to provide specific motions for consideration, keeping track of how many were adopted by Staff and the Board. At the June, 2019 Plan final adoption several Board members acknowledged the vital information and assistance provided by the Coalition, with the result that the Coalition has been asked to be a reviewer for the next phase: the 2021 Zoning Ordinance Overhaul.



Blue Ridge Conservation Alliance (BRCA) Update

As the primary founder of the Blue Ridge Conservation Alliance (BRCA), *Friends* maintains an active leadership role in its activities... which, after an extended period of work by the Steering Committee, has focused over the last year on re-engaging a broader audience. In late June the BRCA Program Committee (Tracy Lind, PEC; David Lillard, The Downstream Project; and Carole Napolitano, *FBRM*) convened a meeting at Coolspring to which conservation groups from across the region were invited. In addition to networking opportunities, each organization in attendance had the chance at the beginning of the day to introduce itself using images selected to represent both its proud moments and its challenges. Several presentations were also featured: Dennis Shaffer (ATC) discussed the ATC large landscape initiative; Anne Baker of the ATC introduced ATC's "Wild East" project; Dan Holmes of PEC discussed concerns related to an anticipated increase in solar panel fields; and Tracy, David, and Carole updated attendees on the work of the BRCA Steering Committee as it relates to the structure of the organization and a framework for quarterly BRCA meetings. The latter will be designed to include a variety of types of programming: educational experiences, legislative updates, partner showcases, etc. The first meeting to follow the June event, a partner showcase in September, was facilitated by Iara Lacher, PhD, and Carlyle Howard of the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Center (SCBI) who presented their work on the Changing Landscapes Initiative. The next meeting, on December 6th at Twin Oaks Winery, will combine a legislative update presented by Dan Holmes of PEC with holiday cheer and fellowship.





Jane Pratt & Jed Shilling Blue Ridge Mountains Education Award

For the 6th successive year, *Friends of the Blue Ridge Mountains* awarded a college scholarship to a deserving high school senior who has studied environmental science and demonstrated commitment to on-the-ground stewardship of the mountains. This scholarship was inaugurated in 2014 as the Jane Pratt Blue Ridge Mountains Education Award to memorialize Jane, one of the founders of *Friends* and someone who had dedicated much of her career to working with mountains and mountain peoples. So far, students at three high schools in two counties have been awarded scholarships. This year, upon the death of Jane's husband, Jed, who had carried Jane's legacy of mountain work forward, the *Friends* Board voted to rename the award The Jane Pratt & Jed Shilling Blue Ridge Education Award to honor Jed as well.

This year's recipient of the scholarship, presented at the senior awards night event in late May, is Katie Akin of Loudoun Valley High School (LVHS). Katie was nominated by her environmental studies teacher, Liam McGranaghan, who has served as a most helpful liaison and advocate for this award at LVHS over many years. Katie's application highlighted her role in initiating the "Green Team" which has restored recycling at LVHS and runs a project to collect plastic bags that will be converted into a bench for the school. Katie began her studies at UVA-Wise this fall with the intent of double-majoring in environmental studies and public policy as a way of leveraging her ability to make a difference and help find solutions for issues such as climate change and overpopulation; her plan is to transfer to UVA - Charlottesville in her sophomore year. The love that Katie has for the Blue Ridge is most evident in the closing lines of her application essay:

"The Blue Ridge mountains are what make home home to me. You can find a suburban town anywhere in the United States, but what makes Purcellville home is a low-lying stretch of blue in the distance, the intoxicating smell of a temperate forest in bloom, and hills and ridges that make life here anything but flat."





In Memoriam Jed Shilling

This past spring we lost someone who has been at the core of *Friends'* work over the past 5+ years. Jed Shilling, recently retired *Friends* Board member, died of complications of ALS in California where he had moved last December to be close to his daughters and their families.

As the spouse of Jane Pratt, a founding member of *Friends*, Jed enjoyed a long association with our organization. After Jane's death in 2013, Jed memorialized her by taking up her causes including becoming active with the Mountain Institute and joining the *Friends* Board. Jed regularly represented *Friends* at meetings of the Loudoun County Preservation and Conservation Coalition, served as a *Friends* judge at the Loudoun County Science Fair, and co-chaired our Education Committee which allowed him to take a lead role in the process of awarding the Jane Pratt Blue Ridge Education Award to high school seniors who had demonstrated a commitment to environmental pursuits.

Jed was many things. He was a kind and gentle spirit – the proverbial gentleman and scholar. He was eager to lend a hand... or volunteer for a shift at our Bluemont Fair booth... or put up funds to spur an initiative. And he was resilient in the face of challenges. Despite the rapid progression of his illness, Jed carried on till the end, even traveling with his family to Australia over the December 2018 holidays.

We will treasure Jed's memory. And we will carry forward his legacy.





Friends of the Blue Ridge Mountains

Annual Income Statement and Financial Statement



9/1/2018 to
8/31/2019

Income

Membership Fees	\$4,929.46
Special Event Income	\$1,725.00
General Funds	\$1,204.71.
Sleeter Lake Project	\$5,536.07
Jed Shilling Memorial Fund	\$3,295.00
Jane Pratt Education Fund	\$1,500.00
Merchandise	\$405.00

Total Income	\$18,595.24
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Expenses

Administration	\$5,749.94
Fundraising Expenses	\$3,320.31
Membership and Development	\$3,292.01
Land Use (Sleeter Lake Project)	\$2,915.75
Science Fair	\$500.00

Total Expenses	\$15,778.01
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To learn more about *Friends...* and to join or donate, visit www.friendsofblueridge.org.

Friends of the Blue Ridge Mountains is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Taxpayer ID Number 22-3970963

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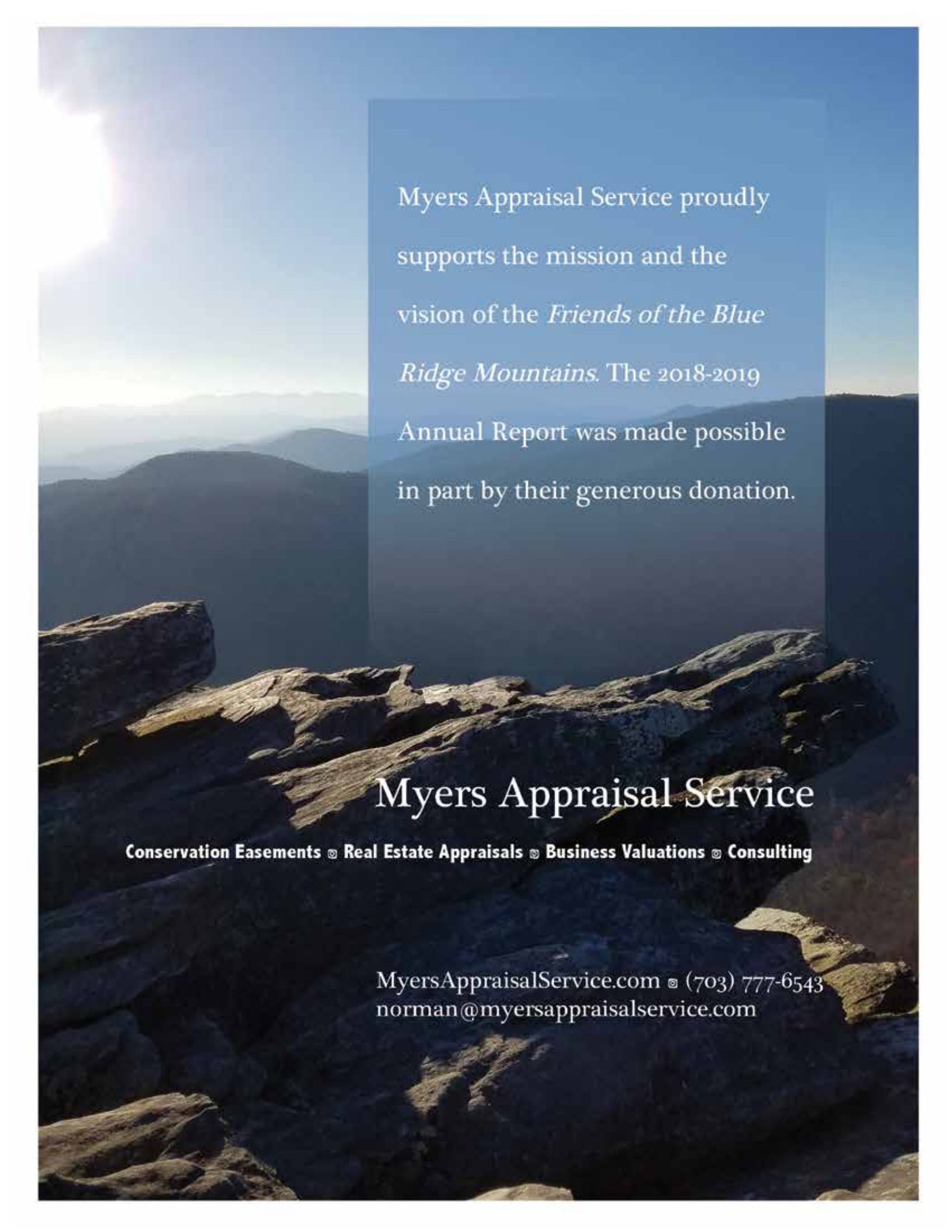
September 1, 2018 to August 31, 2019

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Vickie Apperson Fuog
Jill Beach
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Joan Berardo and James Hannah
Gem Bingol
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