

ROUGH Transcript from the Nov. 5, 2021, Ascend West Virginia Media Roundtable Zoom Discussion

Note: This transcript is best used when checked with video recording.

Don Smith 3:49

All right, we're going to get started. I everyone, I'm Don Smith, and I am the Executive Director of the West Virginia Press Association and I thank WV Tourism Secretary Chelsea Ruby and Emily Hatfield and the staff for right we're going to be arranged by all that we're gonna stay it's really tight schedule right on time. So I want to put in speaker any city will ask you to I will ask Brad Smith to go ahead and

Unknown Speaker 4:27

do his some comments and introduce he wants to introduce and we will go from there.

Unknown Speaker 4:33

All right. Well, first of all, thank you all for taking the time.

Unknown Speaker 4:38

Today. We're excited to talk to you about ascend West Virginia.

Unknown Speaker 4:42

Brand has gotten a lot of press and in some cases, drawing some questions and so we thought this would be a great opportunity. For us to have a two way dialogue which we're about and also have some questions that you may have that we can perhaps shed more perspective on. Let me first put it into context and then I'll hand it over to Secretary Ruby and Danny Twilley to see if they have any additional color commentary. But I'll start by saying what this program is and how it fits into the broader picture. We all know West Virginia has amazing assets. We have tremendous outdoor resources. We have incredible mountain communities we have really talented people. We also rent out as we live in a world that's rapidly changing around us. There are trends that are happening that we learned through COVID that we didn't realize were happening before COVID And we had to silver is a piece that back our our ultimate opportunity has been to think about our economy and 20% of country. And one of the leading ideas that's come out at work that's been done on behalf of our CP is to think about the rise of entrepreneurialism built West.

Unknown Speaker 5:50

There's been a lot of collaboration in our cities between the private district between people who've lived in West Virginia that moved away and we've all been lean and craft to this broader architecture of how to reset West Virginia's economy to bonus in but also unlock entrepreneurial.

Unknown Speaker 6:07

And what I would tell us

Unknown Speaker 6:12

what is a sandwich a genuine we think taxation free Talent Recruitment Program.

Unknown Speaker 6:21

As historically strategic challenges as our status add a couple of trends that will allow us to reposition ourselves to participate in areas that didn't dissipate in the past.

Unknown Speaker 6:35

What are the historical strategic challenges? We all know we have struggled at times to attract large employers and if our state topography, what if questions about our broadband connectivity, whether the ability to have there been a lot of things historically that got in our way, and that led to a second strategic challenge, which is brain drain, or you come of age and then they find they have to leave the state to go find a career or a job. We don't think those were insurmountable. And in fact, we now have Secretary kept odds in our favor and there are two secular trends mobilizing on with the Senate. The first is the rise of remote work. Going into the pandemic there was already a large number of individuals who are allowed to live anywhere they want to do their job. Coming out of the pandemic that number has escalated to as much as 1/3 of the nation's workforce and that is also complemented with the second secular trend. Rural is becoming the new urban. People are wanting to leave these tall high rises and congested cities with long commutes. They want to live in an area where they can live, work and play. And it's the intersection of those two things that we develop and call us in West Virginia. Based on the practices, communities that have tried this program, we've been able to learn from their successes and avoid their failures. And as you know, we launched this on April 21 was the 50th anniversary of John Denver's iconic release of country roads so it couldn't have been more perfect more serendipitous crystal program.

Unknown Speaker 8:12

I am happy to talk to you about what some of the details are but I will at least give you a high level reaction of what kind of results we've seen. We have studied others who've watched these programs. No one has seen the results that West Virginia has produced. Our goal is over the next five years to attract 1000 remote workers and their trailing spouses significant others partners and family members in West Virginia to make it through new.

Unknown Speaker 8:42

We opened up the first positions in Morgan and now more recently the second the Lewisburg we've opened up connect with 25 to 30 just for that first set of call at 75 odd positions we've had 306,000 people, the website, we have had 11,000 applications. They have come from all

50 states and 77 countries. If we were a university, our acceptance rate of those who have applied to to attend West Virginia and then those who actually get admitted is one of the most equipped university you could ever simply said, everyone would love to be a part of this program. And what's exciting about it is we have individuals who've already come that are on this call today to tell you why they were interested in what their experiences but I won't go on with one blog, dialogue and be happy to be deeper.

Unknown Speaker 9:44

Have anything you want to add to those things

Unknown Speaker 9:50

that

Unknown Speaker 9:54

will follow your lead and do some introductions and then dive into some dialogue.

Unknown Speaker 10:02

So So I'll start off with the introductions. My name is Danny fully I am blessed to be the assistant dean of the Bradley Smith outdoor economic development collaborative at West Virginia University. I have the honor to be part of a great collaborative group that I get to work on the outdoor economy and this is the anchor for that is being able to to highlight what we love about West Virginia.

Unknown Speaker 10:30

Business hours to do the best how to get our best and brightest to bring the best and brightest. Since I work I get to do on a daily basis.

Unknown Speaker 10:46

Russ, me restaurant with the partnership and pleasure and opportunity to be involved in this program actually for the last two years. So really focusing on the community aspect of it and how the community prepares itself to welcome patina and Shane welcome and help their transition into our community smoothly and effectively and get them plugged in where they need to be. So leave any perspective. We think this is an excellent program. And very excited about working with

Unknown Speaker 11:30

I am the director of spirits at proud Ascender very excited to be in Morgantown. I moved here from Chicago, Illinois and I'm pertaining to expand my experience, appreciate a new place to live and improve my work life balance.

Unknown Speaker 11:51

Well, I'm thinking powers, and I'll say Brad couldn't have picked it up. Sure as close to my situation. native West Virginians have made me

state for a few years. So So when some new nature of the remote work and the Ascend West Virginia program, I was able to bring my wife and three children back to the great State of West Virginia. Now that life a few weeks we've been here in the sphere has been just an outstanding

Unknown Speaker 12:24  
privilege to be part of the first group. There's

Unknown Speaker 12:30  
no I have to find out, too, that I am Chelsea Ruby. I'm the secretary of tourism. And then this has been a specialty. We've been working on 18 months or so. And it has been truly an honor to be a part of it. And now that you know we have folks like 29 and Shane and all the others moving here it's really coming to life and letting us see what it can be those numbers that Brad read off, they're even hard for me to imagine, you know, we've had close to 400 people get on this website to learn and over 1000 people raise their hand and say I want to move to West Virginia. So we're absolutely thrilled if you're asking yourself, what's the connection between remote work and tourism? I'll tell you it's really simple. It's at all the things that make our Spurgeon tourism a great place to live. And my husband and I moved here from Washington DC. About 10 years ago it was an amazing decision. We have a terrific work life balance. We love living here. Our kids don't realize how spoiled they are to have a waterfall in their backyard. I love being able to work on a project to get other people here so thank you all for

Unknown Speaker 13:44  
Donnie and hand it back to you. Well, great. Well I want to open the questions to the media but also Brad anything else you want to add?

Unknown Speaker 13:57  
Do you anything about dying? You're on mute my friend. Oh, see? How about that.

Unknown Speaker 14:05  
Sorry about that. How about investment property?

Unknown Speaker 14:10  
I want to open up the media questions. Is there anything that you are terms of the investment house going out you want to get more of an overview or anything correct you want to talk about I'm sorry, done? Yeah, I think they're out there.

Unknown Speaker 14:26  
Questions. At six and foremost, when we started this program, we wanted to be different from others. Most others are.

Unknown Speaker 14:33  
Tulsa removed as an example in Tulsa, Oklahoma or in Bentonville. They

have a corner of the state they want to go after we started out day one say in 55 counties strong. And while we knew we're gonna host cities, we wanted to create this ripple effect where everyone benefits so if you notice, thanks to Secretary Ruby's work in the sort of ramp with the option to buy and as well as money in your home, it's like when we have a patient and we're in some sort of luxurious beach and we look at our significant other and say someday we're going to live tourism and ascend is bringing those two together. And he's a while we've been telling and we've done something but you even lesser Danya movements

Unknown Speaker 15:24

sorry about that. I was gonna say we're supporting DCC started the Rome efforts, we have put the led by to help market them like Charleston, for example, and they've been benefiting from that. As we're doing the massive marketing campaign on stage opportunity all the other community in addition to using our community radically local development offices, right, to take these kinds of new ascenders into their communities. Say I was asked a what's why not just pay us to stay here? And the answer is what we're doing is we're attracting remote workers who come in and jump their talents, their purchasing power their families, they're spending on our small businesses, their incomes being tax, which helps our aviation and helps us invest in broadband. We are making investments in infrastructure and we call this instead of giving someone fish teaching how to fish but we're also stocking upon we're bringing more efficient to the pond, which is a good news story as well. So I'm really really excited to talk about how to have happen happening already. But what made this whole thing not just on a community or a handful of cities. And so with that, let's see if I can bring up the recent announcement and enhancement West Virginia and the work we're doing there. I know there'll be a lot of questions. I can cover one. How does that help this program?

Unknown Speaker 16:55

Its mission one.

Unknown Speaker 16:58

Mission Critical everything K through 12 education systems are going to build these companies that are residing, why it's important.

Unknown Speaker 17:08

It's important for E commerce and the ability to shop for holidays. It's important for remote work. In fact, when Amazon was looking at headquarters or Toyota thinks about expanding our product family broadband one of the key when we look at what these companies look for the employees of these companies look for it falls into three buckets. The first is you have to have broadband connectivity. You have to have a good education and health care system. And you need to make sure you have affordable or accessible housing. Those things are mission critical. Then the second thing is you need to have vibrancy in your

communities, which is the diversity of restaurants, public and creative arts and things that are going on downtown that make it interesting.

Unknown Speaker 17:52

And then last but not least, you have to have something distinctive and this is where no one can match. I don't care what function anyplace else in the country in the mountains, climbing the mountain communities and the people of West Virginia. We have an unfair advantage. All we have to do is open up and welcome them in is the bias which is why it's been several stories to the governor and for the legislature and for everyone in the state of Oregon that you bring with Stephen, our papers and we'll go to Charles John.

Unknown Speaker 18:27

But first even sure you're on all the sex briefings I'm old hat at this Yeah, Steve out and I'll probably have at least one other question but I'll hold that till everyone else gets through their questions but I will open it up with this and West Virginia can be a little stubborn in our ways when it comes to our economy. I'll be one of those are certainly going to have to size economy particularly over the last decade.

Unknown Speaker 18:59

You see the seeds of what you're with us and the seeds that you planted not only with a sense but some of the other projects you've done business incubator and down in Marshall some of the work you've done in Mercer County and Bluefield, but specifically with a sense, you see some of these seats bearing fruit either in the long term, or do you see so like kind of examples and you talk to a few about utility animals with the level of interest in a sense, do you think that this is going to bear fruit a lot sooner than then what maybe you thought that it would have as far as really kind of bringing people to the state and proving the image of the state and really helping grow the economy. Thank you.

Unknown Speaker 19:46

Yes, first of all, David thank you and I'm sorry, my regular job which lets you know when my daughter's simply to probe on me which is great. So I will start by saying it is absolutely a key ingredient to us building the next chapter of our economy and let me explain what is really powerful about this approach relative to historical approaches of trying to have economic development by attracting an employer and employer can be a wonderful single double or triple or maybe even a home run and then if you look at economic cycles, they can start downsizing or in some cases get acquired and then move out of state and then we're completely left with no one. What remote work does and a SAN is it diversifies that by bringing in employees from multiple companies, in fact, we're represented by several dozen with the first 50 A centers and what happens is we all know and I can tell you he's

the CEO of fortune 500 company companies.

Unknown Speaker 20:44

So as soon as employees start to say, I want to live in West Virginia for these reasons, and then other employees hear about their fellow employees. They don't want to go to potentially these companies say Wow, am I always wanting to live in West Virginia? Maybe I should open a satellite office there, but it's not just going to be one pharmaceutical company. It's going to be dozens of companies. The other thing we've noticed happened, Steven is if you look at these other remote worker programs, we give these tools access to a co working facility, that state of the art and they have the ability to form friendships with individuals from other companies and those friendships turn into business ideas, and eventually they say hey, why don't we start something ourselves right here in downtown Morgantown or downtown Lewisburg and it creates new businesses and jobs. So I think this gives us an ability to not only the talent from multiple companies, but his company's interest in West Virginia and also have this individuals began to create companies on their own and that's really the flywheel effect. I'll talk about Okay. I want to do first first question from Charles telegram.

Unknown Speaker 21:52

Alright, this is Charles Young, just talked about making the five county effort but it is currently you know, limited to these host cities. Can you talk about the process of scaling that up? And then how do we, you know, make the more rural parts of the state accessible and how do you convince somebody from Chicago to move to McDowell County Thank you. Yeah, thank you, Charles. Two great question. All starts with not being one of our 55 counties may have a host city in it, that all of our 55 counties will benefit from the statewide narrative that we're telling and the energy and the buzz that's coming in and one of the things we built for all the ascenders is we have a country road tour, where they get taken around as part of a social event on a monthly basis to visit all parts of the state. And so right off the bat, what you're going to have is people who are going to be visiting different parts of the day, spending money they're experiencing different parts of the state, but also County and in our community. There will become resource that will help us with our broadband and our infrastructure. So right off the bat, there's sort of this ripple effect. The second is going to happen in addition to the narrative and kind of touring the entire state, is we have this community readiness playbook. Where we're working with all the individual mayors, and those are interested to say, how do I strengthen my community? And we're giving them the ability to say, here's how you can build yourself up and be distinctive. And then last, but not least, what I would say is we're making investments in infrastructure that go throughout the state. So we're helping develop trail systems. We're helping develop these co working facilities and that impacts everyone.

Unknown Speaker 23:28

But we can offer in addition to that, as we do the marketing, I mentioned Charleston routes. We had North Marion County, we had Huntington one of people reached out and said hey, we're kind of going outside of the sand market you on our websites. If you go to the website, you can click on there and 1500 to 2000 Ligue, one finance city that only needed 20 positions.

Unknown Speaker 23:51

Now, here's the last easy already drawn on Charles, this is the most we did We never wanted anyone to lead this process brokenhearted. And so we introduced something called the West Virginia know, which is thank you 360,000, almost 400,000 for coming to the website and for him admitting an application. And if you weren't selected, we didn't then do a personalized video, we give you an opportunity to roll over your application. We send you a package of West Virginia flot wildflower seeds you have West Virginia in your own little backyard. And then we also give you access to Rocket Mortgage who's a partner to gives you a \$2,500 discount. If you want to go ahead and get your \$2,500 discount on your guests

Unknown Speaker 24:41

who were not accepted to the program have already taken Rocket Mortgage up on that and they're moving the website.

Unknown Speaker 24:47

And so whether it was those host cities or someplace else, they fell in love with our story and that's going to fit all communities. So that's kind of over trying to help the rural communities community readiness playbook shaping a whole new narrative, getting people to come in and live here and then ultimately West Virginia. No one wants to live in.

Unknown Speaker 25:08

Thank you, Brian. It's this is such a big program that everything overlaps and everything is related. So we kind of bounced from topic to topic, but I did want to check with Danny.

Unknown Speaker 25:17

I did want to check with ADA and Russ to see if they can give any more details they want to add anything on the infrastructure developments in Morgantown and Lewisburg started us off and this is a key elements about how we can make that longer out of just this excess that we had in West Virginia and continuing to expand that narrative as a great place to work, live and play. And one of the ways that we did this very early on was recognizing that there even though we have been blessed with great typography, we have some great outdoor assets to build on, we still have to click access to that we have to lower the barrier of entry and make it accessible. And so one of the ways that

we can do that is by looking at you know, we have the highest density of whitewater than any other state in the country. We have some of the best rock climbing in the entire east coast, which then makes us one of the top places in the entire country to come and ply. We know we have some machine we know what the Hatfield McCoy trails down another part we have to do to improve. And one of the things in in town. We are partnered with national Mountain Bike Association, we've developed a multi purpose amendment power trail, and we have we're developing trails throughout access. That is true.

Unknown Speaker 26:43

When we brought him in, and they started looking at health health systems. Here. He said that, you know, it's relatively complex, right because we're trying to do it connected to communities and neighborhoods and schools and hospitals but that's the value added more trails. Closer to home because the research supports that when people have access to trails in their mental well being.

Unknown Speaker 27:07

When we started looking at doing that, they started you know, kind of route from down in the desert. And they said do you have an opportunity, particularly in Morgantown to do something that almost no other place in the country could do in a way that we can connect when we do that, that all of a sudden becomes a very compelling narrative of Ross.

Unknown Speaker 27:32

We received an ember trail accelerator grant. We were one of only eight projects selected.

Unknown Speaker 27:40

Same idea, how do we lean into and improve what we have by creating more and more access to it? Because great work we know more people are coming to this state to visit to play in our great playground. And so we need to continue getting access, continuing to give them more options. And when they do that, from inside our communities. They will start in the community then they stay in the community and they send in the community. So all in all, I'll come to a recreation infrastructure will help with you know, track the Quintino chain, doing that it will help them as well in continuing to drive that and continue to you know, this levels and then finally, it's gonna help with how well both mental and physical if anything we did this last year in those

Unknown Speaker 28:36

areas of entry to our from our community or by where people live. That's really what we're trying to do. So we're also doing that with trails, but we're also looking at how do we do that to our rivers. We have some of the great rivers in the country. How do we create access to those? How do we create access to our wonderful rock and so people

can climb and you know if we can ever catch up to the river, the Hatfield McCoy trails are doing and lead in their way. So that's kind of how we're thinking about our outdoor rec infrastructure process. Finally, to be very clear, we're not just doing that in Morgantown and Lewisburg, we're supporting other communities and we're doing this in three ways. We're doing project development and management. We're providing technical assistance, so helping them study some of the lessons and designers or rec infrastructure as part of it, and then we're also doing education, training and workshops as well to the rising tide

Unknown Speaker 29:36  
that we're gonna have

Unknown Speaker 29:44  
simply we've made the economic development one of our key pillars over economic elements.

Unknown Speaker 29:50  
So, first and foremost is awaken the community. One understand the assets to have we need more connectivity around that. So you'll hear connectivity mentioned our community and many different facets, you know, whether it's a trail a mile off from the neighborhood to how do we connect neighborhoods into the downtown, so I think it's really create this great awareness in our community to have a better place and we're working with

Unknown Speaker 30:23  
businessman today to try leaving samples of how that can work is not a program for you.

Unknown Speaker 30:34  
They're there to assist, very important that the community engage and participate in companies and community leadership so that we can get the room together. So this can be not only impact on the short run but sustainable throughout the community as we continue to grow and try to do new things here in Morgantown, Amman County, so they're open and they're when he says you know, the work with everybody. They don't know how he's doing it by frankly, but he's all equipped place. They really live and breathe this and, and so for each community out there I encouraged to, to grab a hold and plan and turn and participate. So that decision of this program and the whole outdoor economic development truly can be doubled and tripled.

Unknown Speaker 31:28  
I just want to add two things, because I think when to recognize and this was came right from Brad and Elise, doing that flywheel effect and 55 counties strong. We said, Hey, we have a chance to either go out and pay other talent to come in and build our recreation infrastructure out or do exactly what this program is doing. Let's

bring bring some of the best people in the world here. And so what we're doing is bringing we were able to recruit, they call them the professor of trail building. Rich Edwards, who's been doing this for over 20 Some years for the International Mountain Bike Association and we said well come here and join us in this. He has seen trails, transform communities and ready to form communities all over the world. And he said, I believe that we Virginia, and so he loved him, and it's joined us. We're also going to be working to hire an outdoor community development coordinator. And that person is to do exactly what we're trying to do is get out and support communities to big get 55 counties strong. And then the final thing I think, to make sure we recognize is when you overlay all of our assets, we compare those two iconic communities that have tremendous successes in both business development, entrepreneurship and tech places like Boulder places like Boise places in Utah, northwest Arkansas, western North Carolina, we can cook our assets are as good if not better than a lot of those communities. So this is a pipe dream. It's just a matter of working the system continues to bring the best people to bear to help us do this. Sorry for coming back after the fact. But I think it was really important making sure that we're trying to bring their best talent that let's do this. Thank you.

Unknown Speaker 33:19

Brandon Lee lease and and shopping wells, changing the image I wanted to give you a call on our views you identify your and your templates from the department on modern newspaper.

Unknown Speaker 33:37

And I just had a quick question sort of related to that.

Unknown Speaker 33:40

But Will there really programs through example encourage more students from outside of West Virginia or the Appalachian area?

Unknown Speaker 33:48

You know, Connor as we talk, a lot will affect benefits. The Interstate.

Unknown Speaker 33:54

So a lot of generation are the ones that are driving the centrist in rural and outdoor sustained ability and beautiful experience in their apartment or their dorm room. Live every day. And so we have really been excited and impressed by just how many people are programming come sort of generation and budgets and universities. I think more people are going to see a narrative of West Virginia that they might not have imagined. I will say one of our gifts and one of our persons were the most humble people there are. Our curses were the most humble people that there if we didn't have John Denver writing the songs 50 years ago, people would have beautiful this place was when you say almost heaven. Well now with this ascend programming thing to see

where life is. I did not know that was Virginia. Yes, I do believe it's going to benefit Marshall and WVU and all of our colleges and technical schools throughout the state.

Unknown Speaker 34:50

Right, Steven Alan, I logged in again, another follow up question. Go ahead, Steven.

Unknown Speaker 34:57

Obviously, you're active with this program through WVU.

Unknown Speaker 35:02

But also, as everyone knows, the point you were just selected as the enterprise social diversity. I know martial sometimes is web.

Unknown Speaker 35:14

Virtual. Luckily my wife ever come to the realization but being both universities in this way do you see a way for both universities doing more projects such as sand and in similar economic development projects?

Unknown Speaker 35:35

Other and sharing some of these goals improve Astana Marshall universe and Wu have been working together I follow it in Jerome Gilbert, and and view sort of the journey of the state at this point, but these are for both to work together the duty side of things. Thank you. Yes, the event not only do I see it as an opportunity as a necessity, and it's not just those two universities, the brass pieces, the portfolio.

Unknown Speaker 36:04

We have such opportunity, but we have not all play our part in the orchestra. As I've said many times when others are its education, we need an orchestra conductor achieves a Sabbath if we're all playing the same music, then we're going to basically entertain the rest of the world with all of its beauty. And so I think it's not only important, and I think I think it's necessary and point it's already happening. President Gilbert president he been working closely together. President he has become a really good friend of mine as handing over and we decided, even though I wear a ring from one school, that we were going to be a benefactor to the other school to show the rest of the state that this is about us as a team.

Unknown Speaker 36:52

Okay, great. Thank you. Great answers. Now, Brad, I want to go to you and Elise and and Shay about how this program has been.

Unknown Speaker 37:03

De how before have you come across? Yeah, Don, I'm going to actually hand it over to Tina. And Shane. As Mark Twain once said, You never asked the actor How would you ask the audience? In this case, they are

two wonderful individuals who opted in so perhaps we'll start with Quintain and ask her to share her perspective.

Unknown Speaker 37:24

Thank you.

Unknown Speaker 37:26

So first off, I feel the opportunities for remote work, really do expand beyond your four walls and we've all really seen that over the last 18 months with everything that has changed in the world. And specifically, me coming from Chicago I was in a 618 square foot apartment with my boyfriend who also worked from home and my 80 pound dog so very, very cramped.

Unknown Speaker 37:51

Changing that coming here. I can be in nature within minutes of closing my laptop.

Unknown Speaker 37:57

Work life balance isn't week diversity anymore. I can want my lunch break and explore so I feel that this program, this state really just welcomed me with open arms and that the floodgates of opportunities just just were wide open. And not only were those opportunities arising it was ascend West Virginia, that program that's empowering me to do these things. That I wasn't able to do elsewhere. Something always felt missing where I was before it Chicago was amazing. I just felt that there's something missing in life. And here I'm empowered to do whatever. And specifically the sun West Virginia program for example, a couple of weeks ago, I wanted to go kayaking. We have the outdoor rec center that we have access to. I have never strapped anything to the top of my vehicle before and the Southwest Virginia team literally came with me and showed me how to do it. They brought me to the lake and amazing things and empowered me. So I went back the next weekend and to get myself so this approach is just just it's overall empowering with the opportunities exactly like Brad said, they're not just showing up, showing us the fish and the opportunities in the water but they're helping us be involved and engaged teaching us how to do things, and just really, again, empowering us.

Unknown Speaker 39:23

Hey, that's a tough act to follow there. But what I will say is, you know, so three or four years ago, you know, in the Northern Virginia area same situation as continued their small living area five of us in a small house and life a little bit and my wife and said hey you know let's let's try some stuff like hey, let's go whitewater rafting. And so I went whitewater raft and then or anything like that before. What's that second?

Unknown Speaker 39:57

We did Via Ferrata at Nelson. COMM The blades there. He's like, what's

next? And then what that expanded into was, you know, people seeing pictures on social media and these are our friends and our friends are saying hey, let's do this. So they're getting experience. And so they are friends who are different businesses, they're getting this experience our customers they're seeing as well. And so over over that three or four year span, you know, we hosted numerous numerous people in events like this, whether it's Chimney Rock on the Appalachian Trail where you look over the valley, people are just amazed at the beauty that they can see here in West Virginia. And that continues to expand. Now that we are back in West Virginia. We're getting the same sort of requests from people on Hey, when are you going to let me spend the night at your house so so it's been a super great experience

Unknown Speaker 40:55

thank you once they shared the outside perspective, but what really was interesting to me at the center's when they were asked how their experience was going so far. Their mind was I feel like I've been baptized 10 times.

Unknown Speaker 41:10

You can't replicate that anywhere else but West Virginia. That's a beautiful statement of how we're being freed from the outsiders who are coming in. Right Thank you very much. Want to go now for me to mark Curtis? Or mark? Just wait.

Unknown Speaker 41:26

Yes for Curtis with the next Star TV network of seven stations serving West Virginia. Just an aside, I moved here six years ago. I've lived all over the seven state I've lived in. I am so happy to get West Virginia. I absolutely love it here. I love my job and love the people the beauty. I've never been happier in my life at the age of 62 years old. So a couple of questions for good weekend. So John, Morgantown in 2013.

Unknown Speaker 41:56

If they all been filled that like if we can get an exact number of how many of these positions have been filled in when we might start bringing in more people. I deliver a search today and I'd like to ask our guests they might the two senators who moved here might be able to answer this as well. I did something on the internet today cost of living comparisons you can find these calculators. If you lived in New York City and you moved to West Virginia your cost of living drops by 64%. If you lived in Washington DC like I both did, your cost of living moving here drops 44% For Quintino insane how much of that was a factor how much of the economics drove there? Money will go a lot farther, your rent down or allow you a much bigger apartment or a house. How much did the money factor into this any longer there that this is the best place for me to attend today. Started is when I'm ending in

Unknown Speaker 42:55

Chelsea want to give some tips on the first descendents but also the number who came with them. So trailing spouses and family and then we can get a little bit of an insight into this next cohort.

Unknown Speaker 43:05

Yeah, so we have you know, the first cohort for Morgantown will be 53 Not all of them have moved We are hoping that everyone will be getting the COVID system early. Winter is when we hope to get them there. But again, it's all about that opening that red carpet and that Western model is helping them here. as they transition. We found just about 2.1 people are moving or per center held that isn't counting our furry children as container talked about, but it is counting everyone and so what we have found is marking a more specific question for you. Often times these individuals and chain and quarantine or examples will bring bring their talented spouses or significant others with them. They're partners with them. And so it's not just singular and we open up you know are a lot of our events to you know the families and the partners because we are welcoming them as a family to the mountaineer family to the Western family.

Unknown Speaker 44:17

Or with the Morgantown cohort mark I'm going to add a couple of colors and turn it over to Quinton and Shane on the second part of your question on the cost of living. One of the things that's very interesting as call it roughly 110 people for the first 50 32.1 to Danny, the average income of the individual, not the surviving spouse is worth \$105,000 So they're moving in that has purchasing power, spending income which is powerful and so for 24 people already homes 12 purchase 12 are renting and then thanks to the creativity a second Ruby we also have our b&b special you can come out and kind of visit West Virginia and decide if you want to stay or not. And we've already had four people removed after coming in and doing the Airbnb thing. So we're getting the job and trailing spouses and also getting these Airbnb programs and those that are coming in as well. So lots of exciting things going on in terms of statistics when Tina and Shane cost of living how that factored into your

Unknown Speaker 45:30

answer short on that one. Definitely a cost of living difference between here and downtown Chicago but for me more heavily weighed on my quality of life and they would have here though it was a fair I would say the top priority list for me it was more so quality of life and experience.

Unknown Speaker 45:52

I'll back that up with a very similar story. I mean coming from the Northern Virginia area.

Unknown Speaker 45:59

Get a little bit smaller home for a little bit higher price. So the sorts of right wing gym just after I came here

Unknown Speaker 46:10

but again, that wasn't necessarily the defining factor in it right. It was one step to be able to get back instead of the concrete jumble was the biggest biggest piece as well as you know, with the family, my older son had seen them before. had anything like it and to be able to run around out now in the yard and play with the 10 to 12 neighbors. Anytime they amazing.

Unknown Speaker 46:41

Great Machine.

Unknown Speaker 46:45

Secretary Ruby to just hear how this fits into the state's tourism and other plans. And Brad's here about wings the wings Foundation, Windows 10 with first chip Chelsea, can you tell us how this is all fitting in with the state's plans and tourism plans?

Unknown Speaker 47:04

Yeah, sure. So if you don't actually go back in time before send was on the table. So about four and a half years ago, when I came into this position over the tourism department.

Unknown Speaker 47:16

We really, really weren't sure where to go. I remember sitting at the governor's inauguration and I'm going to talk about tourism and tourism and tourism and kind of having a little bit of a pit in my stomach thinking gosh, I hope we can grow these numbers as fast and as quickly as he wants to.

Unknown Speaker 47:32

And we have been able to and part of the reason that we have is because we have six months, really researching figuring out what was going wrong. Why are all the states around us growing in tourism and we're declining?

Unknown Speaker 47:45

We went into it honestly thinking that what we were going to find this the reason people weren't coming here is because they had negative impression of the state. What we found was surprising and the opposite. They didn't have negative impressions of the state. They had no impression of the state. We weren't even on their list of top 20 States to visit. They didn't consider us a vacation destination. So going backwards here. You know at that point, nobody was thinking about us. You know just last week Lonely Planet who's one of the global leaders in tourism named us the second best destination in the world behind excellence and I'm okay with that. We were thrilled. And so we've seen all these things build up to get where we are today. So

there have been a lot of different things. I've got a great team here. We do a lot of marketing. There's so many different things. I've worn you all out with initiatives that we've taken here over the last four years, but I'll tell you that they're adding up and if we take this approach to this, we can ask for a place not out of unnecessary tourism, but also a top remote work destination. So it's all part of it. It's the same plan. It's all about out there. It's about that record for almost seven years mostly lovingly coined, it's about convenience stores, right so if you guys can't tell I'm so excited about this

Unknown Speaker 49:13

changes they're going to give us two months ago or 10 years and they'll offer recognition and elevating the status of the state.

Unknown Speaker 49:26

As you would your you had to have.

Unknown Speaker 49:32

Gonna use TSN for

Unknown Speaker 49:37

every company that I've served or sit in a room with is dealing with remote work and hybrid work and trying to think about how they're going to keep their employees excited and engaged. What's happening right now across all Fortune 500 companies, as sun says had been replaced with the ability to live anywhere they want.

Unknown Speaker 49:55

These are indicators. So I can say that right now ascend fits into the decision making process of employees and many companies and it puts West Virginia front and center as an opportunity to diversify and increase our economy. And that for me gets me super excited. Right? The wing going foundation. Do you want to touch on that? We want questioning coming but I want to that in first? Yeah, I'll give you the cliff is my wife and I founded this program or foundation in 2016. Basically, angels playing way under one another very much a West Virginia story. It's focused on things greater Appalachia, things education, entrepreneurship, and the environment our natural resources. And not only includes the state of West Virginia we provide first, first in the family full ride scholarship to universities. We also have supported the K through 12 school system. So our public school teachers we flash fund their request for school supplies so they can actually do the things they want to do with their students. We support Dr. de Bello back at Mingo. County. We support local programs like heritage farm and Huntington. We just paid to help build out the trails at the Huntington museum of arts for children who are visually and have auditory disabilities. So anything we can do to try to build education, entrepreneurship and the environment in the state of West Virginia, and a sand of one I wanted to do for your question.

Unknown Speaker 51:30

But this is crucial to the Dominion pose to us real quick to guard I too am a recent transplant to more Morgantown and West Virginia more broadly, most recently from the Chicago area.

Unknown Speaker 51:44

Great place to be and obviously as one of the first host cities we are the most likely to see the immediate benefits of this parameter. I am curious though hearing you say you know that this is meant to be a 55 County strong program and with the ultimate objective of having 1000 members, what is the timeline to reach that objective? And are there any kind of benchmarks that we can look outward to ensure that we are moving towards that thank you. Yeah, thank you, Chris. And we're delighted that you love Oregon town and was one of the remote workers in the first few years. We're going to do that with two hosts. Now we've been answering city number four number coming up pretty soon and we also realized that our math was off. We had thought of 1000 being workers and forgot about the trailing spouses partners to their children. So you just think about what we already have 50 threes produced 110 plus we have the Airbnb program bringing people in in the West Virginia no bringing people in and I think 1000 is ultra conservative. So I think we will see 1005 years and I think you're seeing much and the team has done reasonably comic impact. And right now I can tell you it is grossly underestimated if you focus on what Tulsa and others have done. This is hundreds of millions of dollars a day. So that's how I would say mile markers are Stay tuned for the third city which is Shepherdstown to actually get up and running. And then just watch, roll in

Unknown Speaker 53:20

everyone questions on Marshall, do we right right in the new echo and I stand there coming in there for one of our newspapers in state possibly that when they're moving it backwards. So we're excited that you know other people are hearing about the home and it's great. And then Marshall in full disclosure, my daughter Abby just graduated from high school, and she's in her first job as an elementary teacher. So I wish that we get out there.

Unknown Speaker 53:50

So please, Brett, take it you took the marshal job. I think maybe some of our media will have some questions. But your thoughts about being back in West Virginia and being at Marshall. Thank you for taking these. It's wonderful Don prep revelation Hall, and I need to pay it forward for all those people who invested in me so the generations University plus our collaboration with university universe, problems and all the other souls greater opportunity on a Franklin Delano Roosevelt's bed. We can't always interview the future and that's what I want my chapter to be right.

Unknown Speaker 54:30

From day one question on the information we brought up before we sign off and I know I pushed you past right limit you from another group questions or anything? I see Charles Sanda Could you talk a little about this initiative with the role you just took on your bet to become you know, CEO, other major company and margin University. You do that to the best of your ability while making sure their program can become

Unknown Speaker 55:08

first of all, as a team sport, Secretary clearly and and you have a whole bunch of other people, this time have a lot of movement and we have a family office at Wayne Wayne foundation. We're also having that kind of day to day.

Unknown Speaker 55:25

So I will continue to continue to be a rainmaker on behalf of our state I'll continue to bring connections from the Silicon Valley. I have them around the world, but my job will be margin University and service to help in the state when and that's what we're going to be doing.

Unknown Speaker 55:41

Right questions you can put in your hands. Does anybody else? I think.

Unknown Speaker 55:50

I think Brad, of course and in the entire payment. I'll mark that mark, please. Good. Oh, he's a political reporter. I gotta, I gotta throw politics into this. Before we go. Look, there was a very concerted effort in the state legislature, especially driven by Governor justice to greatly reduce for the tax here in West port that in how much of an incentive if you could attract people from New York State, for example, which has one of the highest state income tax taxes in the nation.

Unknown Speaker 56:26

Half of what it is now will be down to zero eventually, there seems to be a real mood in the legislature to get rid of our state sales tax. I'm just wondering, again, you support that and like be a driver it figure into the economics of all this. It's been very well received in Florida. Tennessee, New Hampshire and Texas and other states. So go, Mark, I'll provide an answer and then see if others want to add, I think it's wonderful that our state and our governor are looking for every possible way to make our state attractive to those who have an existing community. And I think there's a lot of efforts going on that.

Unknown Speaker 57:01

We're doing with a lot of other pieces of data.

Unknown Speaker 57:05

I'll say that without the production or the elimination of personal income tax, if you look at where the ascenders are coming from the states with the most applications happened to be New York, Florida, California and Texas. And so everyone said people were fleeing New York to go to Florida and California to get a Texas or California or those states are fleeing to come to West Virginia. So we're active already without that change. And I think it's awesome that our leaders and our legislatures, legislators continuing to push to say, what else can we do? So I'll leave it there instead of for or against. I think it's anything in forward momentum will be helpful.

Unknown Speaker 57:43

Anybody else want to?

Unknown Speaker 57:45

We're good, Chelsea?

Unknown Speaker 57:47

I'll just say briefly, one thing that I think has really come out since this program was launched in April is an overwhelming statewide support, not just for remote work, but also for outdoor recreation for improving communities. We have done dozens of calls with say, again, I may not be one of the first cities in the Senate, but I wanted to figure out how can I improve my county or my municipality? So we've worked lately to build a toolkit to help but I can't underscore the support that we've received from the top down. I've been instrumental in this the legislature last year to make it better for remote workers. Every county commissioner, every mayor that I've talked to every city manager, everyone has been so supportive. It was add that you know, we're all looking for what can we do to improve West Virginia and we've got a lot of folks helping do that effort. Right. Thank you, Chelsea.

Unknown Speaker 58:46

Housekeeping that all that Brian Yes, I think close out for the media. We will sit share them in for everybody. We will share the video and the transcript will also be on whatever you press on. We're already taping Trump trouble downloading so that'll be available. There'll be the video this the trans thing and the media kit. And I want to thank you, everybody, we say closing before we finish up my very, thank you. Thanks for meeting.

Unknown Speaker 59:16

Thank you, everyone. Thank you. And with that is up and we're off before 2 p.m. Great job, everybody.