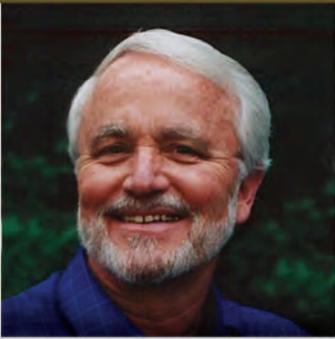




# VIEW*S* & VISIONS

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## Small Towns, Big Opportunities

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TAG Galyean is an award-winning Master Designer™ with a history of architectural, landscape and interior design expertise acquired at leading, independent luxury resort hotels in America. He serves as President of the Lewisburg Foundation and was central to the 1990's renovation of Carnegie Hall in Lewisburg, West Virginia and to bringing the Greenbrier Valley Theatre to downtown Lewisburg. Galyean is Founder and President Emeritus of Smooth Ambler Spirits, Co-founder and Brand Manager of the West Virginia Great Barrel Company and President of the Greenbrier Valley Aquatic Center.

Small towns in Appalachia can succeed in attracting regional tourism. As a matter of fact, we can point to several examples of such success in this very magazine! Regional tourism helps support town merchants, restaurants and other small businesses, which in turn improves the quality of life for residents and enhances new business development. It's an endeavor with the potential to showcase, produce and/or export quality products and services while promoting a global reputation for good living.

There are big opportunities for small towns throughout the region. Every community must identify its own strengths and opportunities for growth, and pair a clear and realistic vision with consistent commitment and support over time. For example, take the experience and history of Lewisburg and the Greenbrier Valley.

The Greenbrier Valley has many natural assets and has long been a desirable location on the Appalachian frontier. But in 1980, with I-64 promising to take traffic and commerce off of Route 60 and The Midland Trail, citizens formed the non-profit Lewisburg Foundation to collaborate with merchants and city government in a comprehensive effort to enhance and promote the town of Lewisburg as a destination town. The community began positioning itself as being in the hospitality business: friendly, cute, well-maintained, diverse, interesting and convenient.

While attracting tourists with historic preservation, beautification efforts and the arts, Lewisburg also created a more robust community by learning that businesses develop in places where people want to live. The quality of life in the Valley has attracted growth in the form of retail shops, galleries, restaurants and bars, downtown apartments and hotels. These merchants have in turn and over time created, organized and promoted a number of annual events, including the





*Downtown Lewisburg, West Virginia*

Taste of Our Towns (TOOT) Festival, the Lewisburg Literary Festival and the West Virginia Renaissance Festival. These events and others bring thousands of visitors to the town throughout the seasons.

Efforts such as these have led to numerous awards and accolades for the area. In 2011, Budget Travel magazine named Lewisburg the “Coolest Small Town” in America. In 2018, Vogue reinforced the designation with a write-up of its own, recognizing the town as the “coolest in West Virginia.” Lewisburg has even been honored as one of America’s Dozen Distinctive Destinations by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, winning its population category for “America in Bloom” in 2015.

In recent years, manufacturing has chosen the Valley as its home, including businesses such as Smooth Ambler Spirits Company, named the Best Craft Whiskey Distillery in America by USA Today; the Greenbrier Valley Brewing Company, with its six flagship beers, two seasonals and ever-changing small batch brews; and, coming soon, the Great Barrel Company, a state-of-the-art cooperage. These three ventures alone represent a private investment of over \$70 million and employ over 150 folks in good, local jobs. They also help further enhance the reputation of our region by attracting new groups of visitors and shipping out top quality products to a global clientele. A friend in England called me recently to say that Smooth Ambler has put Greenbrier Valley, West Virginia on the

world atlas. BAM! Good for us. Good for West Virginia.

This hasn’t all happened overnight. But we started by building on what West Virginia already had in its possession. Knowing that the economics are fragile, we continue to commit every day. Greenbrier Valley has many given assets and several homemade ones. For instance, we are currently in the process of raising the funds to build and operate a first-class aquatic center that will add a great amenity to the Valley and become another model for other Appalachian communities. The opportunities are out there, you just have to make the best of what’s around you! ♪