



VIEWS & VISIONS

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Celebrating Appalachian Ingenuity

Audy M. Perry, Jr., Executive Director
Heritage Farm Foundation

Audy M. Perry, Jr. serves as Executive Director of the Heritage Farm Foundation, which operates West Virginia's first Smithsonian Affiliate, the Heritage Farm Museum and Village in Huntington. Established by his parents, A. Michael and Henriella Perry, the award-winning Heritage Farm strives to share Appalachia's proud, rugged past in ways that inspire an emboldened, vibrant future. Extremely active in the community and state, Perry serves as a board member of the Huntington Regional Chamber of Commerce, Cabell Huntington Convention & Visitors Bureau and the West Virginia Archives and History Commission.

Somebody in your family was amazing. They built their own home, grew all of their own food, made their own clothing and were able to protect their family from everything that came against them (or else you wouldn't be here today). The even better news is that you can be that same amazing kind of person by using your ingenuity, hard work and passion – just like they did – to make the world a better place. That is our message.

The mission of Heritage Farms is to tell the stories of Appalachia's proud, rugged past in ways that inspire an emboldened, vibrant future. Heritage Farm Museum and Village in Huntington has been telling the story of our Appalachian roots for over 20 years. The realization of a life-long dream of Mike and Henriella Perry, the Farm's collection includes more than 25,000 square feet of Appalachian artifacts in seven award-winning museums nestled among 800 acres of rolling hills, gentle streams and a lush forest canopy.

Heritage Farms is the first Smithsonian Affiliate in West Virginia and is home to more than 30 structures, including two reception halls for up to 300 people, five log cabin inns, a retreat center that sleeps 40 people and overnight train-caboose accommodations. Artisans and re-enactors bring Appalachian history to life during special Way Back Weekends every Saturday from May through December, when thousands of people from around the world learn about the ingenuity of our Appalachian ancestors and how their lessons still apply today.

If there is a word that sums up all that Heritage Farms is about, that word would be "love" – love for who we are as West Virginians, love for the children of Appalachia, love for the beauty of our home and love for the genius and perseverance



of our people. All too often, the amazing story of the courage, independence and beauty of Appalachia is overlooked. At Heritage Farms, we embrace our history and strive to tell the real story of the incredible people who settled here and built a life with their own two hands.

Travelers today are interested in experiencing the authentic culture of a destination. As West Virginians, we have an incredible story to share with our visitors. Our powerful history, breathtaking natural beauty and world-class outdoor recreation venues are second to none. But what separates us from everywhere else are the incredible people of West Virginia. Warm hospitality, love of place and appreciation for the simple pleasures of life make our residents the best ambassadors. Throughout our state, it is the artisans, river guides, waiters, shop keepers and front-line hosts who make the greatest impact on the tourism industry. This authentic experience is at the core of everything we do at Heritage Farms.

This year, we are launching a new logo and brand for Heritage Farms. Our new tagline, "Celebrating Appalachian Ingenuity," speaks to the positive message of our past that we share through our museums, festivals, re-enactors,

artisans and wildlife facilities. As we grow, we are planning new ways to celebrate our Appalachian heritage.

Currently, we are in the process of building a new nature center with a one-of-a-kind living classroom. The nature center will be a part of our Wild Heritage programming and will focus on our efforts to emphasize the natural history of Appalachia. Our region has a wealth of unique wildlife that goes unnoticed and under-appreciated. The nature center will be filled with reptiles, amphibians and fish that are native to the area. In the middle of the building will be a “living classroom,” where people will have the opportunity to learn about our wonderful Appalachian backyard while surrounded by some of its coolest critters.

We are also in the planning stages of a new adventure park. Phase one of this 65-acre facility will involve West Virginia-themed recreational and adventure attractions that will include a grist mill welcome center, a tree canopy challenge course, climbing areas, water features, tube runs and indoor activity centers. After having learned about our ancestor’s incredible journey over the mountains in years past at the museums, the adventure park will let visitors expand that understanding by tackling the mountain themselves in fun and creative ways.

These and other future educational enhancements are each focused on sharing a true, authentic experience of West Virginia and our Appalachian heritage. The ingenuity and fortitude of our ancestors serves as our inspiration to continue to tell their story in even more unique and engaging ways. If we all celebrate Appalachia with a love for all that it is and all that its people are, tourism to the region will come naturally. West Virginia, somebody in your family is amazing – go tell the world! ♪



Image 1: Celebrating Appalachian Ingenuity; Image 2: Our future learns about our past; Image 3: \$5 Kid's Days every Wednesday all summer.