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Ascend West Virginia

Without a doubt, Appalachia is an economy in transition. We have been through transitions before, and we know that transitions facilitate opportunity. As a Carbide kid, I grew up in the Kanawha Valley when the area was the Silicon Valley of chemistry. The best talent in the world assembled here in the 1950s and '60s, and created tremendous opportunity and prosperity for decades for our state, region, nation and world.

Today, the next wave of innovation, creativity and growth led by hardy mountaineers is unfolding in real time, right before our eyes. Never have I been more excited about the future of our state and region. The opportunities we face are immense. People across West Virginia and the region are seizing these opportunities and creating a bright future, capitalizing on our multitude of natural and sustainable competitive advantages.

Many individuals who are leading us in and through this time of exciting change are authors in this edition of *Views & Visions*. I hope that you will be as inspired by their articles as I am.

We live on a planet whose population will grow from 7.3 billion to 10 billion people over the next 25 or 30 years. This demographic reality sets the backdrop for many of the opportunities and challenges that we face as a species, and as Appalachians. As the population of the planet grows and demands on earth's natural resources increase, tremendous and increasing advantage will accrue to less densely populated areas of the world, and "place" will become more valuable and precious. This all plays right into our hands.

One undeniable advantage of Appalachia is our vast array of natural assets. Our beauty and resources constitute a sustainable and

enduring advantage, and one that we have not fully capitalized on in years past. Looking ahead, we have an unprecedented ability to attract knowledge workers to communities across Appalachia, where access to boundless natural resources and a high quality of life is an ever-present reality. Faced with the opportunity to make a living in Appalachia, literally thousands of people will choose to do so.

This migration of talent to Appalachia is underway and accelerating, thanks in part to visionary leadership. Governor Justice, Brad and Alys Smith, and others recently launched "Ascend West Virginia," a remote worker program which incents talented individuals to move to West Virginia and create community, opportunity and prosperity. Within two weeks of this program's unveiling, more than 160,000 individuals visited the program website, and more than 6,000 people applied to move to West Virginia. Interest has come from all 50 states and 26 countries, creating the largest response to any such program in history. These numbers continue to grow with each passing week. What a validation of all that we have to offer!

Other great and sustainable advantages we possess are our values, our traditions and our culture. We can and should be thankful for these uniquely Appalachian values, because they will create tremendous advantage for West Virginia in the decades to come, just as the authors in this edition note in each of their articles.

Sit back, relax, and join me in getting excited all over again about our future as you read this edition of *Views & Visions*. Then join me in rolling up your sleeves and helping create the future described in the pages that follow. **V**

From Our Managing Partner



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Tom Heywood is Managing Partner of Bowles Rice. He has significant experience in health care, corporate, finance and commercial law, and is an active member of the firm's Government Relations Team.

Heywood serves on numerous charitable and non-profit boards, including the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation, the West Virginia Roundtable and the Discover the Real West Virginia Foundation. He also participates actively in various business and trade associations.