



Bowles Rice

VIEWS & VISIONS

BOWLESRICE.COM

SPRING/SUMMER 2021

A Permanent Vacation to Almost Heaven, West Virginia



Chelsea Ruby
West Virginia Tourism

Chelsea Ruby was appointed the first Secretary of West Virginia's Department of Tourism by Governor Jim Justice in March 2021. Prior to the creation of the new state department, Ruby served as West Virginia's Tourism Commissioner. She leads the efforts to advance tourism development, expand West Virginia's travel and tourism industries, and promote the Mountain State to a broad audience. She previously served the West Virginia Department of Commerce as Director of Marketing and Communications.



Here we are again: West Virginia is making national and international headlines. This time, it's the launch of the nation's premier talent attraction program – Ascend West Virginia. In just a few short weeks, West Virginia has gone from a somewhat unknown location for remote workers to the top pick for so many seeking a better quality of life. Thousands have already raised their hand and said they want to be among those selected to take a permanent vacation in Almost Heaven, West Virginia. And, we couldn't be more excited.

Ascend West Virginia is an extension of the Almost Heaven brand we've created over the last three years. We've been really fortunate to invest so much in our advertising, and folks

around the country – and the world – now know that West Virginia is a top vacation destination.

With Governor Justice's vision and leadership, West Virginia has quickly become a true tourism state. Through our messaging, we've exposed millions to the new West Virginia. Our ads have shown them that the Mountain State is the ideal place for those seeking to escape big cities for the mountains, searching for world-class outdoor recreation and looking for small mountain towns full of culture and the friendliest folks on the planet. And that messaging has been really effective: we've seen monumental increases. The Ascend West Virginia program takes it one step further as we invite folks to take permanent vacations to a place John Denver so affectionately dubbed "Almost Heaven" 50 years ago.

The project has been a truly collaborative team effort. It's the product of state government, higher education, the Legislature, and two



almost heaven



incredibly, incredibly generous donors – Brad and Alys Smith. Brad is a proud native of Wayne County and a graduate of Marshall University who famously went on to reach the highest ranks of the worlds of business and technology, and who has made it his mission to give back to his home state. We're enormously grateful to Brad and Alys as the impacts and the timing of this program cannot be overstated.

When the state joined forces with the team Brad & Alys had set up through the Outdoor Economic Development Collaborative at West Virginia University, the Governor instructed us to assist in any way we could. We immediately identified that our tax structure for these remote employees needed to be modernized, so he announced in his State of the State Address that he'd be sending up legislation to address it. We are extremely grateful for the bipartisan support the bill received and the swift action by both the Legislature and the Governor to get these changes made before the Ascend West Virginia program launch.

We have a real opportunity here, as 37 percent of the nation's workforce are now about to work remotely . . . permanently. We are making it our mission to get them to the Mountain State. I firmly believe that this program can – and will – grow enormously over the next several years as West Virginia becomes the nation's premier destination for remote workers. 