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# The Outdoor Economic Development Collaborative



**Brad Smith**  
Intuit

Brad D. Smith is the former CEO of Intuit, a global, cloud-based product and platform company. He currently serves as Intuit's Executive Chairman of the Board of Directors. With his wife Alys, he co-founded the Wing 2 Wing Foundation to advance education and entrepreneurship in Appalachia where individuals and communities have been overlooked and underserved.

*"Country Roads, take me home to the place I belong – West Virginia . . ."*

John Denver's iconic song is known and sung all around the globe. The words stir memories in those who have lived in West Virginia, while producing a familiarity and longing in those who have not. An exciting new program called The Outdoor Economic Development Collaborative invites former West Virginians to return home and aspiring West Virginians to adopt these mountains as their own.

What makes West Virginia so familiar, yet so unique? I believe the answer lies in three things – our culture, our people and our natural environment.

## Our Culture

Dating back to our earliest days, the state's rugged topography tested the willpower of most people. God created a special individual when He created West Virginians – men and women who choose to blaze trails instead

of follow paths. Over time, our culture has developed into a unique blend of compassion and courage. Compassionate enough to assure strangers that should their transportation ever break down in these hills, someone will be kind enough to stop and crafty enough to fix it. Courageous enough to be the first to volunteer to run towards danger. Ours is a culture that does not mistake kindness for weakness.

## Our People

Angela Duckworth, the pioneering psychologist and best-selling author of the book "Grit," defines grit as a combination of passion and perseverance for a singularly important goal. In her book, she presents scientific evidence identifying grit as the single biggest predictor of success in any profession or life pursuit. Winston Churchill understood this as he famously declared "success is the ability to go from failure to failure without losing your enthusiasm." The Silicon Valley understands it as well, seeking to invest in the people behind the start-up before the idea, since 90 percent of start-ups fail on their first idea. Grit is the key to success, and it is in the DNA of every West Virginian, passed down through our mountaineer heritage.

## Our Natural Environment

Our mountains, valleys, rivers, streams and trails are unparalleled in their splendor, and are even more special when transformed into artistic variations over four evenly balanced seasons. They serve as the muse for artists to paint, songwriters to sing and outdoor enthusiasts to seek for inspiration. They also serve as the perfect setting for a quality of life that many people dream about – a setting where they can live, work and play.

We should all be proud to be from West Virginia and, as we look ahead, we should be increasingly



**Photo Caption** Brad and Alys Smith atop Seneca Rocks in Pendleton County, West Virginia.





## **“What makes West Virginia so familiar, yet so unique? I believe the answer lies in three things – our culture, our people and our natural environment.”**

optimistic about our future. We have reached a strategic intersection that opens an exciting new chapter for our state – an intersection where our most valuable assets connect perfectly with four important trends that are shaping the world around us:

- 1) The first is a shift in our state’s focus and investment towards entrepreneurial pursuits – coming at a time when 75 percent of all new jobs are being created by start-ups and 75 percent of the next generation desire to start their own business.
- 2) The second is a shift to experiential learning, inspiring in our youth the desire to learn entrepreneurial skills through new educational approaches such as the WVU Science Adventure School for middle school students, the Simulated Workplace in our high schools and Silicon Valley’s Design

Thinking techniques being taught at Marshall University – all coming at a time when neuroscientists have determined that children born after the invention of the iPhone have developed neurologically in ways that benefit greatly from these new approaches to learning.

- 3) The third is a shift to remote work, a secular trend that was well underway prior to COVID-19 – post-COVID projections suggest as many as 40-50 percent of the S&P 500 workforce will be empowered to work remotely, taking their jobs, their talents, and their purchasing power to local communities.
- 4) The fourth is a generational shift in geographic preferences, with rural becoming the new urban. Recent studies reveal a vast majority of young adults working in urban environments are now seeking to move to rural

settings, with data that shows for every individual moving into the San Francisco Bay Area, 2.9 are leaving. The ratio for New York is roughly equivalent at 2.2.

With these four defining trends, West Virginia is strategically positioned in the middle of this intersection. Innovative approaches in our education system are being implemented to produce entrepreneurs. Our mountains, rivers and trails no longer serve as walls, but rather as welcome signs as “rural becomes the new urban.” An alignment of interests is underway as proud West Virginians are coming back and giving back, elected leaders from both sides of the aisle are aligning on common priorities, and our major universities are working together as partners.

All are leaning in to *seize this moment*. One of the outcomes is the recently announced Outdoor Economic Development Collaborative. The objectives of this collaborative are clear:

- To inspire our youth to learn the skills required to participate in an entrepreneurial economy, while instilling in them a sense of pride for where they live, reversing the brain drain of generations who have felt the need to leave West Virginia to build a career.
- To invite others who already possess these skills to choose West Virginia as their new home through our remote worker program.
- To invest in our infrastructure, preserving the natural beauty that surrounds us while strengthening the communities and their economies along the way.

If we execute well, the combination of these efforts will create a flywheel effect that will redefine West Virginia as the “Start-Up State.” This will enable us to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 44



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

**Brad Smith**

## **The Outdoor Economic Development Collaborative**

take our destiny into our own hands, starting our own companies, recruiting employees from other companies to move here and work remotely, bringing with them their jobs, their talents, their families and their purchasing power to strengthen our communities and our economy – all while investing in our outdoor recreational assets and preserving our natural environment along the way.

As the saying goes, “if your dreams can be achieved alone, you aren’t dreaming big enough.” The Outdoor Economic Development

Collaborative is the product of a village – our Wing2Wing Family Foundation, West Virginia University, the Governor’s office and a host of others, all working together, studying the lessons learned from others who have tried similar programs, and codifying what is needed to build a successful new chapter in West Virginia. While the program will begin in select communities that possess the necessary assets proven to be critical to be successful, the end goal is to ensure the entire state benefits – 55 counties strong.

The Outdoor Economic Development Collaborative is just one of the many initiatives that is charting a new course for our state’s future. Together, we’re investing in our talented people and natural assets to create a competitive advantage that cannot be easily matched, with a goal to accelerate the next chapter in our great state’s history . . . becoming the “Start-Up State.”

Our time has come. Let’s do this! 