



Bowles Rice
VIEWS & VISIONS

BOWLESRICE.COM

SPRING/SUMMER 2021

Relocating to West Virginia: A Teachable Moment



Chris Fussell
McChrystal Group

Chris Fussell is President of McChrystal Group, a premier leadership and management consulting firm founded by General Stan McChrystal. A former Navy SEAL Officer, he is co-author of *New York Times* bestseller *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World* (with General McChrystal) and lead author of *Wall Street Journal* bestseller *One Mission: How Leaders Build a Team of Teams*.

In 2012, I closed the chapter on my active-duty military career. Since the late 1990s, I'd been an officer in the U.S. Navy SEAL Teams. During my time in uniform, I had the honor to work with incredible teammates in some of the most contested regions around the world. I was grateful for every minute of my career, but, in 2012, I knew it was time to focus more of my time and energy toward my wife, who had stood by me through years of deployments, and our two young children.

We made the decision to move to Washington, D.C., and have spent the past nine years growing a management consulting firm. But the changes and challenges of 2020 afforded my wife and I the opportunity to reconsider how we were approaching life after the military. Life in uniform had taught us to manage uncertainty and to pivot quickly when new opportunity presented itself. While 2020 was certainly chaotic, we also saw it as a chance to live differently, to raise our children in a different type of America and to experience a culture we'd been drawn to for many years.

We have been coming to Fayetteville, West Virginia for over 20 years. I started rock climbing here in the late '90s, and we purchased a small home, for getaways, in the early 2000s. In time, we developed local friends, a deeper understanding and admiration for the community, and a love for the Appalachia that extends well beyond any one activity.

So, when the conditions of 2020 put so much of us into a remote-work status, my wife and I considered a major shift. We sold our home in D.C., bought a permanent residence on the edge of the New River Gorge, and are now proud to call ourselves some of West Virginia's newest residents.

As you can imagine, opinions and responses to our move abound. When people ask why, the easiest answer is that it affords us great access to the outdoors. And we are, indeed, fortunate to have world-class outdoor sports at our fingertips here in Fayetteville. But we see that as an additive reason to our decision to move here full-time, not the primary factor.

Our children are 10 and 12. They've spent their early years living in the middle of a very busy city; a place we all still love deeply. But we knew the time was right to immerse our children in a different type of culture and community, a place where people are tied together by a love of family, a connection with their environment and a constant willingness to help a neighbor.

Over the Christmas holiday, our family was on a drive towards the Monongahela National Forest. It was starting to snow, and the sun was setting, when I noticed that the pressure was going down on our front right tire. We turned around and pulled up to a gas station. Explaining my situation to the woman at the counter, she handed me a hose from behind the counter and said, "just plug this in around the side of the building and take all the air you need."

Meanwhile, my wife was on the phone looking for someone that might be able to patch a tire. Like many new West Virginians, we'd learned the lesson of one-lane roads and picked up a nail.

"We don't do patches," said a voice on the other end, "but here's the number for a garage near you that'll help you out."

A few minutes and a mile later, we were at Jay & Jay's Auto, where a sole attendant, William,



spent twenty minutes sorting the problem, then had us patched up and back in business.

When I said my thanks and reached for my wallet, William told me, “oh, you don’t owe me anything,” he said, “we just like helping people out.” It was all I could do to convince him to take a \$20 for his time.

As we drove away and back towards our destination, the kids were intrigued by the drama and quick resolution of the situation. My wife sensed a teachable moment and said, “Kids, that’s why we live in West Virginia. Those two folks were looking out for us, only because they see it as the right thing to do for people. Neither wanted a dime, and either could have looked the other way. This is a special place.” They nodded, having seen one of countless lessons that West Virginia has to offer.

So, when people ask me, *why did you move to West Virginia*, I tell them it’s simple. This place is full of people who can help us teach our kids how to be good citizens, how to care for others, how to respect their environment and how to develop a sense of grit. You can’t put a price on that.

West Virginia has all we need to help teach our children: the people to show the way, the places of beauty as backdrop and the stillness of time for the lessons to sink in.

I’ll often hear people talk about the challenges facing West Virginia, but my wife and I have quickly come to understand a deeper truth about this place. Of course, there are problems, just like any place in the country. But West Virginia also has what most places don’t: neighbors you can count on, a real sense of place and a culture built on grit. We can’t imagine a better place to raise our kids, and we’re grateful to be here. ▼