

Report: Lack of college grads hurts Letcher County

Increasing the number of Letcher County residents who hold college degrees is the "quickest, most direct way" to improve the county's economic prosperity.

A report released recently by the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education shows that counties with high numbers of college graduates also have high household median incomes, while those with low numbers of college graduates have low household median incomes.

The report shows that the median household income for Letcher County, where only 7.7 percent of the people have a four-year college degree, is \$21,110. That's \$12,652 less than the Kentucky average of \$33,762 per household and \$20,884 less than the U.S. median household income of \$41,994. By comparison, the average household income in Fayette County, where a state-leading 35.6 percent of county residents have a four-year college degree, is \$39,813.

"This report confirms the direct connection between education and quality of life," said Brad Cowgill, interim president of the Council on

Postsecondary Education.

Cowgill made the report's Letcher County findings available recently to Whitesburg Mayor James W. Craft and to other leaders he is calling on to take part in the state's campaign to "Double the Number" of college graduates by the year 2020.

"Kentucky can achieve a sustainable increase in per capita income only by increasing the number of college graduates," Cowgill wrote. "The evidence is indisputable."

According to the "Kentucky Postsecondary Education Profile 2008-10" released by the Council, Letcher County has a per capita income of \$11,984, far below the state average of \$18,093 and the national average of \$21,587. The report says 27.1 percent of the county's residents are living in poverty, a number far higher than the state average of 15.8 percent and national average of 12.4 percent.

The report also shows that:

- 41.5 percent of Letcher County's adult residents do not have a high school diploma or its equivalent. The average of adults without a high school diploma is 25.9 percent. The national average is 19.8 percent.

- 32.9 percent of Letcher County's adult residents do have a high school diploma or equivalent. That's less than a percentage point under the state average of 33.6 percent, and 4.3 percent higher than the national average of 28.6 percent.

- 13.3 percent of Letcher County's adult residents have attended college without getting a degree. The state average for residents who have some college is 18.5 percent. The national average is 21 percent.

- Letcher County needs 2,834 additional bachelor's degree holders to bring the county's average of 7.7 percent in line with the state average of 17.1 percent and the national average of 24.4 percent.

- 4.6 percent of Letcher County's residents have a two-year college degree. The state average for two-year degrees is 4.9 percent. The national average is 6.3 percent.

According to the report, Letcher County residents who take the ACT college entrance exam score an average of 19.2, slightly under the state average score of 20.6. However, a whopping 74.3 percent of county residents who will en-

ter college have developmental needs in one or more subjects. The percentage of Kentucky residents entering college with such needs is 45.9.

The percentage of county residents entering college with developmental needs in mathematics is 67.1, more than double the state percentage of 35.4. The percentage of county residents entering college with developmental needs in English is 50.7, again well above the state average of 26.6 percent.

The report also looks at the number of Letcher County residents who have jobs and in what field those are located. The report says that of Letcher County's total population of 25,277, only 6,428 have jobs. Of those who do hold jobs, 1,382 work in mining or other natural resources; 307 have jobs in manufacturing or construction; 1,191 work in retail, wholesale, transportation, and utilities; 689 have jobs in finance, profes-

sional, or business services; 1,129 work in health and health educational services; 1,281 hold jobs in government service and public education, and 449 work in services related to leisure and hospitality.

In his letter to Craft and other leaders, Cowgill said the Council on Postsecondary Education "takes great pride in the accuracy, timeliness and relevancy of its data."

Of the 5,125 Letcher County residents who do hold college degrees, 1,244 are alumni of the University of Kentucky; 21 graduated from the University of Louisville; 484 got their degree from Eastern Kentucky University; 573 finished college at Morehead State University, and 1,892 were graduated by the Kentucky Community and Technical College System. Those graduating from independent colleges and universities total 899. Five have graduated from Western Kentucky University, four from Northern Kentucky University, and three from Murray State University.

The report found that only five of Kentucky's 120 counties are at or above the national average in the percentage of adults with a bachelor's degree or higher. These counties include Fayette (35.6%), Oldham (30.6%), Woodford (25.9%), Jefferson (24.8%) and Warren (24.7%).

Other key findings of the re-

port show:

- Four counties need less than 500 additional bachelor's degree holders to meet the national average: Calloway (75), Franklin (180), Robertson (246) and Rowan (311).

- Nine counties are above the national average of \$41,994 in median household income including: Oldham (\$63,229), Boone (\$53,593), Woodford (\$49,491), Scott (\$47,081), Spencer (\$47,042), Shelby (\$45,534), Anderson (\$45,433), Bullitt (\$45,106) and Kenton (\$43,906) Counties.

- In 23 counties, 60 percent or more of high school graduates enrolled in a Kentucky college in 2006; the highest college-going rate occurred in Robertson County, where 69 percent of high school graduates enrolled in college. In eight counties, less than 40 percent entered college in 2006.

- In 16 counties, 30 percent or more of the population are living in poverty. Statewide, 15.8 percent of Kentuckians live in poverty, topping the national average of 12.4 percent.

To view the full report, visit the Council's Web site at <http://www.cpe.ky.gov/info/county>.



Roy Sturgill II, right, is seen in this family photo with wife Susie, 7-year-old daughter Brooke, a first-grader at Cowan Elementary School, and 9-year-old son Kylar, a third-grade student at Cowan. A report released this week by state mine safety officials says Sturgill, 29, would not have been killed in a surface mining accident if proper steps had been taken to make sure a berm used to keep rock truck drivers from rolling over a slope had been maintained properly.

Officials: Rock truck driver not at fault in mine accident

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tires made contact, "allowing them to climb the berm before the left side tires made contact." The report says no steps were taken to repair the berm even though a Cumberland River Coal foreman visited the site 15 minutes before the accident. The report also says that "nothing in the toxicology screen" conducted on Sturgill "indicated it was a contributing factor to the accident." Sturgill's blood was tested for 11 types of drugs.

As a result of the accident and investigation, Cumberland River Coal has received six notices of non-compliance. The notices charge that:

- the berm at the dump location was not adequate.
- the foreman in charge did not ensure that work was being done in a safe manner.
- the pre-shift examination was not recorded in a suitable record book.
- a record book of hazardous conditions and repairs to mining

equipment was not provided.

- no record of newly-employed miner training had been completed and maintained at the mine site.

- no record of work assignments had been completed and maintained at the mine site.

The report says that recommendations for better safety have been made and discussed with Cumberland River Coal officials. Those include recommendations:

- that dump berms shall be of adequate size and constructed of material capable of restraining a vehicle to prevent over travel.

- that work areas shall frequently be visited by a certified foreman to ensure work is being done in a safe manner and hazardous conditions are corrected.

- that procedures shall be established and reviewed with all employees concerning the construction and purpose of dump berms. Rock truck operators shall be instructed on proper dumping procedures concerning contact with berms.

- that seat belts shall be worn by equipment operators at all times. The report says Sturgill's seat belt wasn't buckled when he was thrown from the cab of the truck, but investigators couldn't determine whether Sturgill wasn't wearing the belt or whether the belt's buckle separated during the accident.

- that when work is performed after dark, dumping areas shall be illuminated in a manner which will not hinder the vision of the equipment operator.

Investigators also found that Sturgill was still conscious when fellow workers went to his rescue. The 29-year-old father of two died of internal injuries after being airlifted from the scene.

Sturgill was employed by Bates Contracting & Construction Inc., a Whitesburg firm which had a contract to supply workers to Cumberland River Coal. The investigation makes no mention of any wrongdoing on the part of Bates Contracting and Construction.

County attorney's office says it will prosecute those who litter

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or tolerate. Back then we did not have the advantage of county-wide garbage pick-up. We do now and we must use it."

Hubbard said that persons convicted of violating litter laws may be fined up to \$500 and sentenced to a year in jail.

Ex-band teacher pleads guilty to felony charges

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mitting the same crimes on 37 separate days between February 13, 2003, and November 8, 2003.

A third indictment charges that Pike committed the same crimes on two days in June 2004. All 46 felonies allegedly occurred while the boy was less than 16 years old.

The 12-count misdemeanor indictment charges that Pike committed fourth-degree assault

roadways of our beautiful county is a serious crime," he says in the letter. "Even more discouraging is the reality that those who throw litter from their cars do not appreciate the lack of respect they show for themselves and for everyone else traveling our roads.

"There is a social cost in that

everyone's life is less than it could be because we have to look at ugly, disrespectful, sorry litter (garbage)," Hubbard's letter adds. "There is an economic cost in that the litter must be removed. Men and women have to be paid to pick up after adults who intentionally break the law and show a total lack of pride in our beautiful mountains. This attitude must change."

Hubbard says there simply is no excuse for anyone in Letcher County to litter.

"To me it seems so simple to put your litter in a bag until you get home and then put it in the garbage can where it belongs," his letter says. "All the service stations and restaurants have trash cans that make it easy to clean out our cars when we fill up our tanks and/or our bellies. Our litter and garbage must end up in the landfill not on the sides of the roads. If it does not, we are all to blame for sitting back and allowing it to happen."

New Jenkins football coach is introduced to board members

By WILLIAM FARLEY

Members of the Jenkins Independent Board of Education had the opportunity to meet newly hired varsity football coach Lincoln Bentley and his wife Stephanie at the board's March board meeting this week. Superintendent John Shook introduced Bentley to the board and Bentley outlined his plans for future success.

Bentley told the board he plans to implement a mentorship program for grade school players where a high school player acts as a sponsor to players in grades three through six. Bentley said the older player will stay in touch with his younger counterpart and make sure his grades are kept up. He said he believes this will help keep Jenkins students in the system as well as promoting continuity in the program.

Bentley also told the board he believes that high school football can be a rallying point for small towns and said he has seen a very solid interest in football in Jenkins. He recalled his high school playing days at Fleming-Neon in his senior year when his team was 10-1 and "the whole town was painted purple and gold." Bentley said that kind of support means a great deal to high school players, but it means a great deal to the community as well. He also told the board that grades would be a priority with him and that in early meetings with players he has emphasized taking care of business in the classroom.

Bentley said interest in the program is high and he has been contacted by a number of students and parents about participating. He said he was particularly pleased with a solid veteran offensive line that will form the core of next year's offense.

"I've never had a collection of big, athletic kids like this, big kids who can move, all at one

place," said Bentley. "It's a line coach's dream. The offense will be designed to take advantage of that line."

Bentley told the board the team has established hosting a playoff game as its goal for next year. Because there are only four teams in the district, each team is automatically in the playoffs, but the teams with the best records play host. He also said he has met with football boosters who have expressed an interest in selling ads for the football field. Superintendent Shook said that up until now, only the cross-country team and the cheerleaders have sold ads. Bentley said he would see that both groups get a portion of whatever ads the boosters sell as well because they are non-revenue producing sports.

In other business, Superintendent Shook told the board that planned roof repairs have finally begun after cold weather had delayed Bri-Den, the roofing contractor for the system, from beginning for several months. Elliot Contractors, which is doing floor and ceiling repairs, is about halfway through its work, said Shook. He said tile has been placed in the library at Burdine and carpet has been laid in the library at McRoberts and Jenkins Middle High School. Shook also said that since the weather has been more cooperative, roof work on the Burdine Elementary School is almost complete and is proceeding at McRoberts Elementary. When both elementary schools are finished, work will commence on the Jenkins High School roof.

In other board business:

- Director of Pupil Personnel Harvey Tackett reported that overall attendance through March 14 stood at 92.4 percent. Tackett also told the board the system has picked up seven new students, five in the elementary schools and two in the upper grades.

Letcher Co. roads are included in a new map promoting Appalachia

Two routes through Letcher County are included in a new driving-tour map of the Appalachian region developed by National Geographic and the Appalachian Regional Commission. The map features 28 suggested routes, all reflecting the diversity of the 13-state region that stretches from southern New York to northeast Mississippi.

The routes through Letcher County call for visits to scenic areas such as Bad Branch Falls, near Oven Fork on the headwaters of the Cumberland River, and the Lilley Cornett Woods at Linefork. More nationally-known staples such as the Blue Ridge Parkway through North Carolina and Virginia are also included.

The routes through Letcher County include all of U.S. 23 and portions of U.S. 119. One is labeled the Kentucky Artisan Heritage Trail. The other is the Country Music Highway.

National Geographic was paid \$80,000 by the commission to develop the new map, which will be distributed to 865,000 subscribers in the April issue of *National Geographic Traveler*. It also is available through the commission and state tourism offices.

"Appalachia in a lot of ways is one of our most important re-

gions," said Keith Bellows, the magazine's editor. "This is kind of travel ground zero. The idea that you can drive it and see those nooks and crannies of our past, they're all there."

The commission estimates tourism as a more than \$29 billion industry in the region, employing more than 600,000 people.

Economic woes have led more people to travel within the U.S. than abroad, sticking with getaways closer to home. And despite rising gas prices, Bellows said traveling, even by car, will not slow.

"The truth is we're all going to travel," Bellows said. "We love it. We can't help ourselves. It's something that we absolutely love to do and I suspect that no matter how expensive it gets, we're going to want to explore our own backyard."

In Virginia, drivers can take a trip on the Crooked Road, the state's heritage music trail along the western slope of the Blue Ridge Mountains to the coalfields region. The three-day, 253-mile trail features stops in historic towns like Abingdon and Clintwood, and takes visitors to the Floyd Country Store and the Rex Theater.

One of western New York's

trails, called "Native Sons and Daughters," features sites from the million-year-old stones at Rock City Park in Knapp Creek and the Lucy-Desi Center in Jamestown, where comic Lucille Ball grew up.

A drive through northern Alabama takes visitors on a half-day, 22-mile birding trail of 50 roadside stops to spot eastern woodland birds and waterfowl.

Pennsylvania travelers can take a tour along the "Art Thrives on Route 45" trail through the central part of the state and the "By-Way of the Arts" along Route 15. Motorists can make a pit stop at Bullfrog Brewery in Williamsport and browse antique shops and farmers' markets along the rest of the trail.

A trek through central and southeast Ohio takes gives visitors the option of two trails, one exploring wildlife and history, the other along a tour of barns painted with quilt patterns.

On the Net:
Visit Appalachia: <http://www.visitappalachia.com>
ARC: <http://www.arc.gov>
National Geographic: <http://www.nationalgeographic.com>
This report was compiled from Associated Press and Mountain Eagle reports.