



For Immediate Release

8/26/2021

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Coalfield Development Labor Day Event Officially Kicks Off Fort Gay High School Revitalization Project

Since 2011, Wayne County community leaders have been collaborating on a comprehensive vision for revitalization in the Town of Fort Gay. This effort is called New Day in Ft. Gay. The cornerstone of the plan is renovation of the old Fort Gay High School building, an historic structure on Main Street. In 2014, the group petitioned the Wayne County Board of Education to donate the property so it could be preserved and leveraged for community and economic development purposes. The board made the donation in 2015 and fundraising then commenced in order to fund renovations. In total, more than 200 volunteers have committed more than 2,000 hours to preserving this beloved building, keeping it as well maintained as possible, and supporting its rebirth.

The New Day in Ft. Gay team selected Coalfield Development to serve as Project Lead. Coalfield is a 501(c)3 social enterprise headquartered in Wayne and serving most of southern West Virginia. It has a unique model of hiring local people to learn trades on-the-job as they help rehabilitate unique and historic but dilapidated properties.

Coalfield announced recently that it has raised more than \$2 million from multiple funding sources and will begin construction on the old high school building this year. Funding sources include private match from the organization itself, a loan from Summit Bank, and grants from Federal Home Loan Bank of Pittsburgh, U.S. Department of Labor, and Cabell-Huntington-Wayne HOME Consortium, and West Virginia Department of Arts, Culture.

On Friday September 3 at 4:00 PM, leaders and team members from Coalfield along with representatives from the town of Fort Gay, Housing Authority of Wayne County, Wayne County Economic Development Authority and the Wayne County Community Services Organization will gather to celebrate the official start of the old High School's renovation. Members of the public are invited to attend.

Nick Guertin, the Coalfield staff person immediately responsible for the project, explains, "The immediate focus of phase one construction will be affordable housing in the second story of the structure. Coalfield, serving as the developer and general contractor, will help bring eight new units of

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affordable housing for seniors to the community. Construction will be undertaken in a manner that preserves the important historical character of the building and maintains its unique design. Coalfield will also employ its innovative on-the-job training program for local residents interested in learning construction and building trade skills.”

The next phase of the project, on the ground-floor level, will create community space for new businesses, town offices, and job-training classrooms. The gymnasium and stage area will also be available for community events as well as for Town Council meetings.

Coalfield Development Founder and CEO Brandon Dennison further says, “The best part of all is that local people will be hired to build out this space. We hire people who face barriers to employment according to our 33-6-3 model: 33 hours of paid work building this space, 6 hours of higher education, and 3 hours of personal development. So this project is a major job creator, and it’s also a chance for people to change their lives for the better.”

The organization hires many young people out of high school vocational programs. Tolsia High School, just minutes away from Ft. Gay, has been the number one place of recruitment for the organization since it was founded in 2010. Many of that school’s graduates will be leading the construction process.

Fort Gay Mayor Joetta Hatfield thanked the commitment and dedication of the staff and crew at Coalfield Development for seeing the project through: “I am beyond excited and proud to announce that renovation on the old Fort Gay High School will be starting very soon. This means so much to our community. The building has and always will be the focal point of our town. It once housed the high school and middle school and will now serve our community in so many other capacities. It’s been a long time since we’ve seen life in our beloved building and now it’s actually going to happen,” she added.

Coalfield Development is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization headquartered in Wayne, West Virginia focusing on rebuilding the Appalachian economy through social enterprise creation, job training, and community-based real-estate development.

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