

# SUCCESS STORY



## CABELL AND WAYNE COUNTIES, WEST VIRGINIA

It is said that tourists do not recognize county lines. And that's fine with the folks in Cabell and Wayne Counties in West Virginia. These two counties are the gateway to the western part of the state and officials there recognize the importance of working together to promote the region.

Huntington, in Cabell County, is the second largest city in the state. It has strong urban appeal, with a vibrant downtown, a wide array of eclectic local restaurants and a great local music scene. In 2017, the city was named the \$3 million grand prize winner in the America's Best Communities competition, a community revitalization campaign sponsored by Frontier Communications, DISH Network, CoBank and The Weather Channel.

Wayne County is an off the beaten path destination that boasts the scenic beauty and country charm for which West Virginia is known. It is home to unmatched natural resources, including Beech Fork State Park and Cabwaylingo State Forest. A new recreation area, Rustic Ravines, has beautiful cabin rentals and is working on planned growth.

While their offerings are quite different, the two areas are actually complementary to each other. Their tourism promotion strategies, however, were completely different. Huntington had an active, well-established convention and visitors bureau (CVB), Wayne County was being supported by a volunteer agency that had virtually no income.

In 2016, the Cabell-Huntington CVB invited four of its partners to join together to offer a new summer adventure for kids and families. Two of the attractions, Camden Park and Heritage Farm, were in Wayne County and the other two, Greater Huntington Park and Recreation

District and the Huntington Museum of Art, were in Cabell County. The new venture, titled Funington, provided an outdoor activity for kids and families on every week day in June and July. Each of the four attractions would take the same day every week and provide an activity.

To cover Friday, participants were given a list of other attractions in both counties that would welcome them. Kids and families could take part in summer fun as they explored the outdoors, learned from the past, and got their fill of thrills and chills in the region.

Funington is now in its third year and has grown in popularity and attendance each year. The partnership has shown that it is possible for entities that might otherwise be seen as competitors to work together for shared success.

The partnership has led not only to increased visitation to both counties but also to the Wayne County Commission inviting the Cabell-Huntington CVB to officially represent them in tourism promotion in an effort to ensure they are fully leverage their tourism assets.



## IMPACT STATEMENT

Beyond providing fun, outdoor activities for kids and families, Funington serves as a community connector. "I am really excited about the success of Funington," said Audy Perry of Heritage Farm. "It is yet another example of why Huntington is America's Best Community - five entities working together to make sure kids, families and visitors of all ages have a fun experience. Partnerships of quality organizations staffed with great people make for excellent opportunities for us all."

Tourism is big business in West Virginia. According to the U.S. Travel Association, tourism spending continues to increase year after

year. In 2016, tourists spent \$3.9 billion, supporting 38,790 46,000 jobs and generating \$531.2 million in federal, state, and local taxes. In the region containing Wayne and Cabell Counties, tourism's annual economic impact is more than \$865 million.

Further, West Virginia has found that the tourism economy offers a "halo effect" for out-of-state residents, with positive views on going to college there, starting a career, living in, retiring to or otherwise investing in West Virginia.

