

THE BLUE RIDGE VOICE

SUMMER 2022

GREETINGS FROM THE MOUNTAIN!



A few years ago, I shared my love of quotes and admiration of Brené Brown. In her latest book, **Atlas of the Heart**, she unpacks emotions and experiences with language we can absorb and internalize. **AWE and WONDER, she writes are essential to the human experience.** "Wonder fuels our passion for exploration and learning, for curiosity and adventure. Researchers have found that awe 'leads people to cooperate, share resources, and sacrifice for others' and causes them 'to fully appreciate the value of others and see themselves more accurately, evoking humility.'" She also shares what Ulrich Weger and Johannes Wagemann write, 'Wonder inspires the wish to understand; awe inspires the wish to let shine, to acknowledge and to unite.' **When feeling awe, we tend to simply stand back and observe, 'to provide a stage for the phenomenon to shine.'**

In reflecting back on the glorious summer season we just completed, the phenomenon of summer shone brightly. We were able to welcome all our groups back this summer! To see hundreds of teens and families on campus engaged in fellowship, laughter and growth left me in awe. **As each week progressed, you could watch the eyes of each teen, child and adult shine brighter each day, the troubles the world places on them sluff off and their hearts swell with love and belonging.** It was truly affirming, humbling and uplifting to watch transformations happen each day. This summer taught me that healing and hope lead to resiliency.

"True belonging doesn't require you to change who you are; it requires you to be who you are."
– Brené Brown

Just like those we serve, YMCA Blue Ridge is resilient. **With your incredible support, we propelled forward in our quest for deeper impact through program growth and investing in our platform.** Whether celebrating a centennial with Blue Ridge Leaders' School or launching the inaugural Y Achievers Summit, we are steadfast in our commitment to serving teens. This year, we partnered with a company which measures the social and emotional learning of the teens served. After we complete the pilot phase, we look forward to sharing the impact results. The summer season capstone was the 3rd Annual Family Camp Week. We continue to hone and expand the experience. In fact, you could join us for our Thanksgiving Family Camp!

The investment in our platform significantly impacts our work and propels us forward. Prior to the pandemic, we **adopted this philosophy – we would protect our core of campus, meaning always renovate and revitalize the core; outside of the core of campus, we need to be relevant.** In addition, YMCA Blue Ridge reaffirmed its commitment to youth by expanding our focus on families with the **launch of the Cabin Village Initiative.** We believe the foundation of healthy, well-developed and values-driven young people is family. **The Initiative is about serving families** AND will be the avenue we use to provide families the comfortable and updated amenities that will allow them to grow closer and enjoy quality time together. After quietly working to secure capital contributions, we are excited to have new facilities and venues online.

Kyzer Circle, a beautiful outdoor gathering space, sits to the east of Eureka Hall and just below the Tracey & Tim Sullivan Prayer Garden. It is a fitting tribute to the late Don Kyzer, who was known for his ability to gather people together for fellowship and connection. The second facility online is the **newly constructed 10-bedroom lodge** that cozily sits nestled into the Cottage Circle mountainside behind Heaton Hall. To have the most flexibility, the lodge was designed with a multi-family, multi-group approach. It is a two-level structure that can be sub-divided by floor. Each level has its own entrance and exit, has five bedrooms, plus an open floorplan for the kitchen, living and dining area. The latest projects are on the west side of campus up from Warner Pool and Ware Pavilion. **We completed renovations to a trio of 3-bedroom cottages, now named – Haralson, Purser and Ware.** These quaint 1960s cabins were gutted and revitalized to serve today's family.

The fall season looks promising. A joyful noise will continue to abound as various church groups, retreats and school groups experience the Mountain. A highlight is having the middle school and high school students spend their days on campus exploring the creeks, hiking the trails, traversing the challenge courses, creating art and playing games. No matter the age – **our intent is to create space for connection, learning and growth; to grow confidence and self-worth; to facilitate healing and to inspire hope, wonder and awe.**

We have much to celebrate – lives are being positively impacted, leaders are being nurtured, teens have a sense of belonging and families are being strengthened. THANK YOU for being a vital partner in delivering our mission, purpose and vision. We are most grateful.

In wonder and awe,

Melissa Bailey Logan
Chief Executive Officer
YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly



ANNUAL GIVING

Your Generosity in Action

Project Sanctuary is an organization that serves military veterans and their families at retreats hosted across the country, including three hosted here at YMCA Blue Ridge. Veterans, spouses, caregivers and children are given the opportunity to reconnect and focus on their mental health in a safe, relaxing environment with fully licensed and professional staff. Project Sanctuary's programming addresses the traumatic effects of military service, treating all members of the family at their level of need and enabling the service members to reintegrate into their families and communities. This incredibly important work reflects our core goals – youth development, healthy living and social responsibility – and presents another opportunity to support families through the generosity of our donors. YMCA Blue Ridge is humbled and honored to support this organization and its family retreats.

When teens (ages 12-18) come to YMCA Blue Ridge, they are provided with a character-building, positive and impactful experience that will shape their future. Annual YMCA conferences like the Achievers Summit, Blue Ridge Leaders' School, Christian Values Conference and the Youth Conference on National Affairs provide opportunities for youth in the YMCA movement to stay healthy and active, to realize their full potential and to contribute to a better community.

We are committed to shaping tomorrow's leaders by providing space for young adults to find their voice, their cause and their courage through the **transformational experience of our leadership development program.** Throughout a year, YMCA Blue Ridge becomes home to over 100 college students, including international students, from all over the country and the world who take part in an intentional leadership and training program. By serving in leadership positions and completing internships in the fields of hospitality, business leadership, international studies, recreation management and the culinary arts, the opportunities for learning and growth are exponential. The greatest journey for these young adults is often that of self-discovery – the confidence gained in venturing to a new place, undertaking new challenges and pushing the limits of what they thought they were capable of accomplishing. Learning is growing, and **the leadership development program is fundamentally about equipping staff with the skills, experience and confidence necessary to become engaged and compassionate leaders.**

We believe all who visit the Mountain receive a YMCA experience. **Go Outside, Grow Outside is our outdoor experiential learning program that serves thousands of youth each year.** By far our most utilized initiative that serves the greatest number of young guests annually, Go Outside, Grow Outside gets teens, families and adults outside and active. This program seeks to engage participants in the importance of a deeper connection with the natural world. **Confidence is strengthened and teambuilding skills are enhanced** with challenge courses and outdoor adventure programming. From across the Southeast and right here in our own local community, school groups, conferences and athletic teams rely on Go Outside, Grow Outside to build these critical life skills. In addition, families rely on the program for bonding and quality recreational time with one another, building memories on the Mountain for their generation and those to come.

In August, we led another successful session of summer **Family Camp.** For a week, families gathered to disconnect and spend time together playing sports and family games, creating art, swimming, hiking and most importantly growing together as a family and making memories. **This November 23-26, the Thanksgiving Family Camp will be in full swing providing families a relaxing place to celebrate the holiday.**

We want every child, teen and adult to have a life-changing experience that nurtures their growth, cultivates their faith and builds their sense of confidence and self-worth. We have worked diligently to partner with groups year after year and are blessed to serve all with love and grace. The wide array we serve ranges from youth-serving organizations, churches, human-service nonprofits, public and private secondary schools and colleges/universities. **By partnering with a variety of organizations, we hope to exemplify the heart of Jesus represented through the unity of the body of Christ.**

Give for a Better Us

As a non-profit organization, our Annual Giving Program plays an essential role in providing resources for all to benefit from an experience at YMCA Blue Ridge. **When you contribute, you're taking part directly in changing lives and transforming communities across the country.** Your giving is what makes the Mountaintop experience possible for thousands of people who visit Blue Ridge in all seasons. As we come to the end of an incredible summer, **we're asking you to partner with us by filling out the card included with this issue.**

YOUR generosity will facilitate opportunities and programs that develop character and embolden youth and families for the future. **Every gift matters, and every gift contributes to the impactful legacy we've built together.**



\$27,600
discounted in
support of
Project
Sanctuary



\$346,000
current need

**Your gift
truly changes
lives**

\$228,014
commitments
to date



SOUTHEAST HALL OF FAME

The YMCAs of the Southeast Hall of Fame is hosted annually at YMCA Blue Ridge and provides a forum to recognize YMCA professionals and volunteers who have devoted their lives to strengthening their local community through their devotion and dedication to serving others – **making a positive impact on individuals, on their community and on the YMCA movement throughout the Southeast.**

We are excited to announce the **Class of 2022:**

INDUCTEES

**Reid Ashe, Chuck Harris, Suzanne Mabie,
George Rehnquist and Phil Wortman**

LEGACY INDUCTEES

Claude Whitehead and Earle Whittington

The fifth annual celebration and induction ceremony will be held in Eureka Hall on September 21, 2022.



LEADERS' SCHOOL: 100 YEARS

A History of Leadership

“There is no other body of men quite so essential to the success of the YMCA as members of the well-established and properly organized Leaders Club.” This statement from the first official Leaders’ handbook was prescient in its observation of the importance that the Leaders Club – and by extension the Blue Ridge Leaders’ School – would have to the YMCA.

Ira Matheny served as the first Dean of Leaders’ School, the same position that we now call School Director. Established in 1922, the program was originally designed for YMCA volunteers over 18 years old who possessed a high school diploma. The curriculum included basic leadership, gymnastics, aquatics, sports skills, principals of group work, history and organization of the YMCA and teaching methods.



The School’s second director was **Paul Grist**, who took the position in 1932. From the late 1930s until 1944, the school did not operate. When it returned in ‘44, it was headed by a new director: **Colquitt Clark**, who had been one of only 20 Leaders from seven YMCAs to attend the School in 1924. He would serve as the director until his retirement in 1971.



1951
Enrollment was for male leaders ages 12-18

1955
First year female leaders attended

1957
Attendance was divided between:
Juniors
Intermediates
Females

Counselor program begins



At the conclusion of the 1995 session Thrailkill’s successor, **Kevin Dean**, was announced as the fifth director. Under his leadership, the School embraced new technology and the program grew to over 650 leaders annually.

Steve Tarver, who currently serves as the President and CEO of the YMCA of Greater Louisville, served as the sixth director of Blue Ridge Leaders’ School from 2007 until 2016. Through his “relentless pursuit of excellence,” he grew the School to over 900 teens and volunteers. This set the stage for **Greg Hall**, who became the seventh – and current – director in 2017, to establish a two-session format in which attendance would be divided between a June and July session of the School.

Each and every Blue Ridge Leaders’ School director had a unique impact on the School’s growth and evolution, building on those that came before and inspiring those who would follow. **The dedication of the School’s leadership has defined its legacy: creating and guiding future leaders.** Teens take what they’ve learned at Leaders’ School with them into their adult lives, often becoming career leaders in the YMCA, and pass along their knowledge to future generations.

The foundations built and improved upon by Blue Ridge Leaders’ School’s directors, staff, counselors and leaders have allowed the program to persist and thrive for an entire century. **With committed leadership and amazing volunteers, there is no doubt that Blue Ridge Leaders’ School will continue to impact lives for centuries to come.**



Blue Ridge Leaders’ School July 2022 Session

LEADERS' SCHOOL: 100 YEARS

A Legacy of Impact

**Kevin
Dean**



1987 – Present



When I was in my twenties working for the Y, I learned a lot about what kind of an impact the Y could have on teens outside of just playing sports. **There were other ways the Y was impacting and could continue to serve teens.** Two things from my time as Leaders' School Director that I emphasized were that true Leaders Club work has to be rooted in physical education and that **service work is not about you – it's about your commitment and dedication to that kid, or that family, or that cause.** Hopefully you think "I've got to show up. I've got to be there, not for me, but for that person who could benefit from me being there. The magic of Leaders' School is the kids coming together with some common purpose, a common reason and a common background.

The most valuable thing I learned was developing my personal values and my own mission statement. It just so happened that a lot of what aligned for me was also important to the YMCA as an organization. People who work for the YMCA are such an anomaly in that they care so much about the work they're doing. **I think the underlying message of Leaders' School is warm, welcoming, encouraging and inclusive.** You can be any race, any gender, any age in the teen division and the School has something to offer you. **The level of excellence the School brings is never compromised because there is a team of people who always have the betterment of the School and the teens we serve in mind.**

**Kendra
Fuentes**



2005 – Present

As a teenager, Leaders' School gave me the confidence to be in front of others. As I grew through BRLS, I learned presence and poise which helped me every day back at my local Y. I wouldn't have done that without the people at Leaders' School loving on me and teaching me. As School Director, I've learned that everyone can serve. The kids today have a perspective that I continue to just be in awe of. Teenagers serve others, and if you open up they serve you as well. Whether it's the hundreds of adult volunteers who serve, the generous alumni who donate and serve through their gifts or the senior leaders who serve at their local YMCA – **what I'm learning is that the Leaders' School is, at its essence, about service to others.**

**Greg
Hall**



1978 – Present



I'll never forget stepping off of the bus and being like, "What did I sign up for?" There was one honor leader in particular, Bianca Morrison, who was so kind to me. She really took me under her wing and made me feel like I really belonged there. **It was this sense of belonging, like "This place is for everyone – the Y is for everyone."** Something I've taken from Leaders' School is to make sure that I'm creating a space for people to feel welcome and included and their voices can be heard. Blue Ridge gave me space to feel empowered and to share my thoughts and ideas. Being selected as an honor leader was the most validating experience I've ever had. **It taught me that being authentically you and bringing your ideas to the forefront can get you far in life.**

**Gloria
Nlewedim**



2009 – 2020

Leaders' School is a place for people to develop their leadership, and with that comes achievement, and with that comes self-esteem. When I came through, I had my doubts about fitting in, but I learned things which allowed me to grow in the YMCA as a part-time staffer and continue to love the work today. **My organizational skills and self-confidence are clearly rooted exclusively from Leaders' School, and that is my testimonial.** As School Director, the leadership team pushed the limits of what could be accomplished. **It was about a relentless pursuit of excellence, and we defined excellence as an extraordinary commitment to the ordinary.** It's about learning, it's about resilience, it's about knowing that everything is not for everybody, but everybody has a thing for them.

**Steve
Tarver**



1964 – Present



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Cabin Village Initiative

We aspire to exponentially grow our impact in youth development. To do so, we are focusing on families – strengthen the family, we strengthen the child. We know when family ties get stronger, youth are confident and have a sense of belonging. **Our project is to provide lodging and programming purposely for families that builds an intentional path for families to grow, creating generational impact.**

Phase 1 of the Cabin Village Initiative is a \$5 million capital investment divided into four stages over a five-year period for construction (2019–2023). **The emphasis is to create a path for families to grow with us** and includes constructing multi-generational lodges and renovating small-to-midsize cabins. We will construct one 10-bedroom lodge, one 16-bedroom lodge and one 4-bedroom cabin in addition to renovating three 3-bedroom cabins. All in all, this campaign is pivotal because it enhances engagement with small, large, and multi-generational families and provides a 50% occupancy growth (increasing from 60 to 113 kids and adults) **enabling us to serve 12,000 more people per year.**

Our buildings are the platform and vehicle for this life-changing work. This campaign will have tremendous impact – it fortifies our new program, Family Camp, increases our capacity to serve and diversifies our revenue streams. To date, we've secured \$3,800,000 in commitments, including 100% board participation totaling \$1,275,891. Our goal is to complete fundraising by December 2022, and we will move forward with construction and/or renovations as individual facilities are funded (2019–2023).



Cabin Village will open an exciting new chapter of impact at Blue Ridge, enabling us to provide amenities beyond our traditional style housing so that we can serve not just groups, teams and retreats but **families who want the opportunities to disconnect from the world, reconnect to each other and create memories.** By providing families a place to come—to instill values, to bond and rest, and to grow alongside other strong, mission-minded families—we will maximize our impact over time (and with greater depth) in the areas of youth development and healthy living. **In short, this investment will deepen and transform the way we serve, support and strengthen families and youth.**



Challenge Grant

In January, we were awarded a \$500,000 Challenge Grant. When we raise an additional \$700,000 in capital commitments, a Friend of Blue Ridge will close out the \$5 million capital investment. Once achieved, we will construct a 16-bedroom lodge and a 4-bedroom cabin: thereby we will complete Phase 1 of the Cabin Village Initiative. **We hope you will join us on this endeavor.**

Your commitment to the Cabin Village Initiative will facilitate transformational changes in the lives of young people and families.

JOIN US THIS THANKSGIVING

Our Thanksgiving 2022 Family Camp will take place from November 23–26.

Families will enjoy games, holiday crafts, cooking activities, campfires, on-campus recreation and more.

Join us by registering today!

For more information and to register, visit blueridgeassembly.org/family-camp.



Did you know you can give to the Blue Ridge Annual Giving Program just by shopping on Amazon? Using the same login information as your regular Amazon account, sign into smile.amazon.com and choose **Young Men's Christian Association Blue Ridge Assembly as your charity of choice. Every time you shop through Amazon Smile, 0.5% of your total purchase will be donated to our Annual Giving Program. Just make sure to do all your Amazon shopping using the smile.amazon.com URL – it's that easy to give!**



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