

# 2024 Brownfields Awards

September 12, 2024



*The WV Brownfield Awards recognize the hard work and achievements in brownfields redevelopment from across the state. These awards recognize individuals and communities who have made major contributions to the redevelopment of brownfields in West Virginia.*

## Brownfields Visionary

The **2024 WV Brownfield Award for being a Brownfields Visionary** recognizes an exemplary individual or organization that has shown innovation and vision in the redevelopment of brownfields with major statewide impact. The Brownfields Visionary Award is not given annually but in years when an especially exemplary individual or organization arises. This year the recipient of this award is **Joseph Nowak of the Environmental Protection Agency**.

It is hard to imagine a non-West Virginian who has advocated harder for brownfield redevelopment in the state than Joe Nowak.

But before he found his love of brownfields and West Virginia, Joe graduated from Penn State University with a degree in mechanical engineering and a minor in math and started his career at Pennsylvania Shipbuilding as a test and troubleshooting engineer. As the shipyard entered closure phase, he transferred to US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), holding various mechanical and civil engineering project management positions in Operations, Engineering, Construction, and Planning Divisions as well as the Corps' Marine Design Center, responsible for marine vessel, civil, military, and environmental projects. In addition, he served as Mission Manager/Specialist for Emergency Power under several FEMA natural disaster events in the US and Puerto Rico.



In December 2004, Joe joined the EPA Region 3 Brownfields Program as a Project Officer on detail from the US Army Corps of Engineers, only formally converting to an EPA employee in November 2016. In this role, he managed assessment, cleanup, and revolving loan fund grants, and oversaw targeted brownfields assessments. Most impactful for brownfields in West Virginia, he served as our State Lead.

Over the course of those twenty years as a Project Officer and State Lead, Joe helped to manage at least \$18 million in grants to approximately 30 grantees, was involved in more than fifteen targeted brownfields assessments and countless hours and products of technical assistance to communities across the state. Joe witnessed the birth and growth of the Brownfields Assistance Centers, helping to support brownfield education and the promotion of EPA brownfield resources from our start in 2006 through today. In more recent years, he has served as the Project Officer and critical resource as the Brownfields Assistance Center at WVU took on the mantle of technical assistance provider for all of Region 3.

A key area of focus for Joe since 2009 has been West Virginia's Northern Panhandle, which offers a small snapshot into the economic impact his support and guidance has had at the community level. Since 2009, EPA has invested over \$6 million into projects in Brooke and Hancock Counties, which has in turn leveraged over \$417 million in additional public investment and another \$630 million in private investment. That means that for every \$1 invested by the EPA in those sites, another \$99 in private investment and \$66 in public investment has been leveraged.

The impact of Joe's dedication, education, and advocacy on behalf of brownfield redevelopment and our communities cannot be overstated. The landscape of our work, as well as literal landscapes of our communities, would not look the same without his hard work, and his impact will be felt throughout the state for decades to come.

## Community Engagement

The **2024 WV Brownfield Award in Community Engagement** recognizes partners or communities who have demonstrated an exceptional commitment to community engagement, working closely with communities to identify and implement redevelopment priorities. This year the recipient of this award is **Mike Huff of the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection**.

Mike Huff has been the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection's (WV DEP) videographer in the Public Information Office for nearly 13 years. In that time, he served in the roles of public information specialist and executive producer of WV DEP's public affairs program, Environment Matters. He also provides graphic design for agency brochures, publications, reports, and presentations. Mike has received several awards at WV DEP, including the Employee of the Month Award in April 2022 and the Reward and Recognition Award in October 2014 and again in May 2020.

During his tenure, Mike has created hundreds of videos for WV DEP's Environment Matters program and 30+ videos showcasing brownfields sites in WV DEP's Brownfields Assistance Program and Voluntary Remediation Program. He has additionally attended several WV Brownfields Conferences and created videos highlighting these events as well. The Environment Matters YouTube channel has amassed nearly half a million lifetime views.

Mike earned his degree at The Ohio State University in photography and graphic design and then his Regents Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts at Marshall University. Additionally, Mike has served as an adjunct instructor at Ohio University - Southern Campus and as a visiting instructor for an afterschool program at Fairview High School. Before working for WV DEP, Mike was an award-winning videographer and editor at WOWK-TV for 18 years and an executive producer at WSAZ-TV for 8 years.



Unintentionally and as a result of his excellent work, Mike has been a brownfields superhero, promoting brownfield redevelopment and community engagement through his camera lens for many years. His brownfields videos include projects around the state that have taken years to finish, including projects like Interwoven Mills in Martinsburg, the Penn-Wheeling Closure, Huntington's new fire station, the old Oakland School in Smithers, and the Shepherdstown Library. He weaves the brownfields narrative in each of his videos with intention and care, sharing stories that show why brownfields matter. A meaningful sentiment Mike shared in the opening for one of the brownfields videos was, "You may look at this and just see a vacant lot, but look past the dirt clods and the weeds and you'll see what city leaders in Wheeling see - possibilities." Mike Huff truly has engaged and inspired many communities throughout West Virginia and beyond.

## Economic Development

The **2024 WV Brownfield Award in Economic Development** recognizes a project or community partner that has demonstrated excellence in economic development on one or more brownfield sites. This year there are two recipients in this category: **The Staats Hospital Building, restored by Tighe Bullock and Gresham Development LLC., and the Prichard Hotel, restored by Cornerstone Community Development Corporation, which is led by President Nikki Thomas.**

### *Staats Hospital Building*

The former Staats Hospital building was built in 1922 and remains a landmark property in the Historic District of Elk City. Located at 303 Washington Street in Charleston, the building was designed by John C. Norman, Sr., a prominent Charleston resident and West Virginia's first registered African-American architect. The Staats Hospital building boasts a long history and was, for many years, the commercial heart of Elk City. It originally housed a movie theater, retail establishments, and a lodge hall before being converted into a hospital. In 1982, Staats Hospital closed when the Kanawha Valley Memorial Hospital moved to a new 170-bed facility nearby. The former hospital was slated to become a parking lot, which would have left a gaping hole in an otherwise intact historic streetscape that boasts a number of significant late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century buildings.



The building was purchased in 2016 by developer and Charleston native Tighe Bullock. Tighe transformed this site with the support of his development company, Gresham Development, LLC. The property was at risk structurally from water infiltration through a leaking roof and open windows. Additionally, the upper floors had been sealed for over 20 years because of asbestos and lead paint contamination. Tighe worked closely with the Brownfields Assistance Center at WVU for years to assess and remediate the environmental concerns. After discussions of restoration with the Charleston Urban Renewal Authority (CURA), Tighe established a public/private partnership that included a \$230,000 secured loan from CURA, as well as a \$155,000 loan from the First State Bank of Charleston, a matching grant of \$78,000 from the West Virginia Historic Preservation Office, and another matching grant of \$20,000 from CURA to restore the roof. Through a New Markets Tax Credit allocation and their New Markets Loan Program, WesBanco Bank Community Development Corporation has invested \$3,900,000 into the project which is anticipated to impact over 70 full-time employees in addition to benefiting an expected 7,700 low-income persons annually through its primary tenant, Legal Aid of West Virginia (LAWV).

LAWV, a statewide non-profit organization providing legal and advocacy services for low-income families, will move to new offices located in the historic Staats Hospital building by 2025. Their space will feature three floors and a mezzanine level. This dedicated space will allow LAWV to provide legal services to West Virginia's most vulnerable citizens and to administer their statewide programming. This move will upgrade LAWV's ability to offer services in a more visible and accessible manner. It will also offer the opportunity to share space with community partners. Plans for the rest of the renovated Staats Hospital building are yet to be determined, but residential and additional commercial uses have been discussed.

Tighe's efforts in redeveloping the Staats Hospital building are among many he has endeavored upon. Tighe is a (re)developer, commercial contractor, and lawyer in West Virginia, who has spent the last 20 years restoring historic buildings and providing mixed use space for local businesses and tenants. Tighe has helped create over 100 new permanent jobs through more than 20 businesses, while restoring 15 historic buildings in Charleston. His efforts and expertise have resulted in the continued existence of a historic landmark that will continue to serve the Charleston community.



## *Cornerstone Community Development Corporation*

The Prichard Hotel was once home to the Presidential campaign of then Senator John F. Kennedy and has hosted many figures of note, another being Gene Autry. Originally built in 1926, the 13-story hotel located on the corner of 6th Avenue and 9th Street in Huntington, WV, had become dilapidated and was condemned. Without intervention, this once beautiful and iconic building would have been demolished. President of Cornerstone Community Development Corporation Nikki Thomas and her team saw the deteriorating former Prichard Hotel in downtown Huntington and envisioned its potential as a strong, contributing community asset. Cornerstone utilized an EPA Brownfields Cleanup Grant to remove asbestos materials, lead-based paint, and mold from the structure prior to initiating the redevelopment phase. After conducting the initial cleanup, investors were eager to support Cornerstone's vision for the site.



Along with multiple funding partners, Cornerstone is additionally utilizing state and federal historic property tax credits to meet their funding needs. Downtown Appalachia, funded by multiple federal agencies, supported a full mechanical electrical plumbing analysis and assessed the project's cost of redevelopment.

The Prichard Hotel project is a \$50.8 million dollar investment that has created over 200 jobs and will provide living accommodations and resources for senior citizens. The upper floors have been converted to senior citizen housing, totaling 108 residential units. The lower floors will be dedicated to a Geriatric Center for Excellence in partnership with the Marshall Health Network, as well as additional healthcare and community-based services. These services will include Hospice of Huntington, which will utilize space for a medical day center for aging adults and The Metro Area Agency, which will utilize space for a resource and referral center to create accessible resources for disabled seniors.



Cornerstone President Nikki Thomas was instrumental in every step of this massive undertaking, working with individuals, private entities, and state and federal funding agencies for over 10 years to transform this historic structure. The Prichard Hotel project would never have come to fruition without Nikki's leadership and hard work.

The project's groundbreaking was celebrated streetside on February 6, 2024, with approximately 300 attendees. Renovation is currently ongoing and expected to be completed in late 2024.

## Local Leadership

The **2024 Local Leadership Award** recognizes a neighborhood, city, or county leader with a strong commitment to brownfield redevelopment. This year's recipients are the **Richwood Dreamers of the City of Richwood, WV**.

Stacy Thomas, Cecil Ybanez, Dawn O'Dell, Jourdan Deitz, and Amy Baker make up the inspiring and dedicated group of volunteers known as the Richwood Dreamers. The Dreamers share a passion for Richwood and strive to achieve positive progress for their city. The core team formed in February 2023 through participation in the Building Resilient Economies in Coal Communities Action Challenge through the WV Community Development Hub and the National Association of Counties. Richwood was the only city represented in the program's first cohort and the only volunteer-based crew.

The Richwood Dreamers established the following intention statement to guide their work:

Because of the uniqueness and resilience of its people and the natural beauty of its setting, Richwood has the potential to be a prosperous community on many levels. Richwood's blend of Appalachian heritage and history, inclusion and kindness, makes it a welcoming place that feels like home. To share that sense of home and attract more population to Richwood, we will become more self-sufficient and investor ready while revitalizing the downtown, enhancing our outdoor recreation opportunities and building our arts presence. We will diversify the workforce, improve communication and marketing, be accountable to participate as individuals, engage the community and inspire future generations.



Part of the core team's work is to build connections with partners and funding sources for Richwood projects. The Richwood Dreamers have support from multiple partners, including the City of Richwood, Richwood Area Chamber of Commerce, the Brownfields Assistance Center at WVU, New River Gorge Regional Development Authority, Summersville Convention & Visitors Bureau, and the USDA Rural Partners Network. They also hosted a class of West Virginia University students that toured the Milltown Grade School and other parts of town to provide possible design concepts.

The Richwood Dreamers have additionally collaborated with Downtown Appalachia: Revitalizing Recreational Economies (DARRE) program across several projects. Some initiatives that were supported by DARRE funding include a housing and remote worker study conducted with their partner, an architectural analysis of the Milltown Grade School, an architectural analysis of the G.C. Murphy Building, and working to build a capital stack for financing the G.C. Murphy Building. As a result of their energy and work, The Richwood Dreamers' G.C. Murphy Building was one of seven projects selected to participate in the Opportunity Appalachia program, which provides additional resources and access to federal funding.

Across all of these projects, what remains the same is the group of passionate community leaders who are championing the efforts. The Richwood Dreamers volunteer their time to serve Richwood because of their dedication to and belief in their community. The Richwood Dreamers' hard work and determination has and will continue to uplift and improve their community.



## Outstanding Career Service

The **2024 Outstanding Career Service Award** recognizes a professional who has made significant contributions to the field of brownfield redevelopment and to individual projects over the course of their career. This year's recipient is **Jeffery Lusk of the Hatfield-McCoy Regional Recreational Authority**.

Jeffery Lusk is the Executive Director of the Hatfield-McCoy Regional Recreational Authority in Man, West Virginia. The Authority is a multi-county economic development agency in charge of managing the over 1,100-mile Hatfield-McCoy Recreational Trail System in southern West Virginia. These trails utilize thousands of acres of former surface mine lands, a type of brownfield unique to Appalachia and common in southern West Virginia. Jeffery and his team have played a vital role in bringing major economic development into this part of West Virginia, utilizing more brownfield property acreage than any other person or entity in the state.

With trail ridership increasing year by year, the recreational economy within the Hatfield-McCoy Trails network has continued to grow. Local attractions like campgrounds, restaurants, and overnight accommodations have expanded throughout the region as a result of that growth. Jeffery's leadership and hard work have been significant factors in achieving this success, and his use of former mine land properties are playing a dynamic role in the process.

Jeffery has worked as an economic development and business financing professional for over 28 years. He is a certified economic developer and certified community developer, and he has obtained the designation as an economic development financing professional.

He currently serves as the Governor's appointed Chairman of the West Virginia Tourism Advisory Council, Chairman of the Partner Community Capital Board of Directors, and Chairman of the Region 2 Planning and Development Council Board of Directors.

Jeffery's formal education includes a master's degree in public administration from Marshall University and undergraduate degrees from Penn State University and West Virginia University Institute of Technology. He currently resides in Charleston, West Virginia.



### **Redevelopment Partner**

The **2024 Redevelopment Partner Award** recognizes an individual, organization, agency, or other institution that has demonstrated a strong commitment to brownfield redevelopment and worked closely with the Brownfields Assistance Centers to facilitate redevelopment across the state. This year's recipient is **Stacy Thomas of the West Virginia Community Development Hub.**

Stacy Thomas is a steadfast champion of rural communities, navigating a journey that began in her hometown of Richwood, WV. At the West Virginia Community Development Hub (The Hub), Stacy is a catalyst for transformation, empowering communities to leverage their unique strengths and resources. Her role as a community coaching programs director involves hands-on guidance, equipping local leaders with the tools to affect meaningful change.

Initially departing her hometown for Concord College to pursue a bachelor's degree in hospitality and recreation management, Stacy ventured into diverse professional roles. Eventually, she returned to her roots and the one-stoplight-town she grew up in, discovering her true calling in community development.

In her role at The Hub, Stacy works directly with communities across the state, helping them define their priorities and implement solutions to achieve their goals. Often, those goals include redevelopment of brownfields such as former industrial sites, downtowns, and commercial and multi-use buildings. Stacy collaborates with community teams, elected officials, partners, and practitioners to connect projects to available and necessary resources, often encouraging an initial call to the WV Brownfields Assistance Centers for a Phase I environmental site assessment.

In her work, Stacy has been involved in redevelopment projects throughout the Mon Forest with large-scale projects in Petersburg, Elkins, Franklin, Parsons, White Sulphur Springs, and Richwood, as well as communities in other parts of the state including Montgomery, Smithers, and Oak Hill. Stacy stated, "Every community wants to be a vibrant community with a thriving downtown; they just need assistance connecting to resources and funding to realize those goals. I'm grateful for the opportunity to help communities navigate finding and implementing those resources."

Stacy Thomas is well known for her immense dedication to her work. She serves as a lifeline for communities in need, eager to guide them through their redevelopment journey and support their efforts for as long as it takes.

