

SALS Journal

***A publication of the
Southern Appalachian Labor***



Issue 1 Volume 45

Summer/Fall 2023



Housing Moves Forward



Volunteers from the HumanitarianXP group working on the new CoalField Housing homes that SALS is building in Page on the site of the former African-American School donated by the Fayette County Board of Education

By Vickie Smith, Construction Manager

We are finally bringing some great people on board for the many construction aspects of SALS. Welcome aboard! It is still a small group of folks but should be adequate to complete the many projects that have been on hold for some time.

We will have our newly constructed/ refurbished homes on the market for sale, hopefully for a family or person just starting out and moving to ownership versus renting.

To become a homeowner SALS offers an 8-hour housing counseling class. Perfect credit is not required but a 720 + helps speed the process up. If you would like to start the process, call 304-250-7627 or 304-222-1145. Most people who get approved are able to secure a monthly payment in the mid four hundred range monthly that includes taxes and insurance. Our homes are located in Oak Hill, Page, and Beckley. We will also be working on two units in the

Page area of WV-61, close to the local head start school.

Our food pantry is growing in numbers these last several months as food security is an issue for many. Our pantry is usually the first Friday of each month from 2-4 p.m. in Oak Hill and the following Monday in Beards Fork.

We have WV tax credits available for tangible items with values over \$500.00. If you have items that you would like to donate, please call 304-250-7627. We hosted several volunteer groups this year. We enjoyed to seeing and working with everyone. And hope all had a meaningful visit with us.

Many thanks to the various unions, local businesses, groups and individuals that support our programs as it really makes a difference in our ability to serve our community. The pandemic affected our organization in many challenging ways but we are moving forward at this time to help those in need.

Housing Crisis Issues: Trailer Parks Under Attack by Hedge Funds

*by Marcus Wilkes, Secretary/Treasurer & HUD
Certified Housing Counselor*

In at least two trailer parks in southern West Virginia, news media has reported on rent increases affecting dozens of residents. Ownership of those real estate holdings are now reported to be controlled by out-of-state interests intent on making them into cash cows. Some residents have initiated a lawsuit to prevent actions that will make their lives unbearable.

Residents of a trailer park, aptly defined as a mobile home park, packed a courtroom in Mercer County to air their grievances. One resident's position is that the reason he lives in a trailer park is because he can't afford to live anywhere else. Some of their lot's rent payments almost doubled. Many of the trailer parks lack proper maintenance of the property or abandoned units.

These residents can receive some support from HUD that provides legal assistance to low-income tenants at-risk of or subject to eviction by double funding the Eviction Protection Grant Program (EPGP). Children are also caught up in this dispute. West Virginia recently secured almost \$4 million to address and prevent homelessness for more than 10,000 youth. However, advocates wonder whether these funds will be targeted to meet the demands of people living in these trailer parks if local leaders won't represent them.

Three concerns are facing residents when owning their trailers. First, they cannot afford to buy property and move their trailer at current costs of about \$10,000. Secondly, the issue is property ownership, whereby trailers are situated on someone's property and connected to necessary utilities, such as water, sewage, and electricity which brand the trailer to the property. Finally, many corporate limits of counties, cities, and towns have ordinances that prevent single-wide trailers from being set up, with exceptions to trailers grandfathered. So, finding a good location to relocate such a trailer that is affordable and relocating can be problematic. Many are so old that moving them could likely risk them coming apart!

On occasion, men and women released from confinement cannot find appropriate housing other than trailer parks. Their income potential is limited due to incarceration which makes finding housing and adjusting to society more difficult.

Advocates point out that West Virginia is a state whereby there are no price controls on rent. Source of income is a questionable protected right under Fair Housing laws. Individuals can be denied available housing if landlords refuse to take HUD Section 8 vouchers.

West Virginia is identified in a recent news media investigation as having a low rate of home-

lessness, (77 per 100,000 in 2022). However, there may be examples of under-reporting. For instance, incarceration levels are high, and units of government are hard pressed to pay those bills. Will building more or bigger jails be the answer? Many people live in overcrowded single-family and abandoned homes which they occupy as squatters. Recovery treatment facilities also carry a burden for finding homes for their clients, and foster care for children under the age of 18 is sorely needed. Reporting requirements for receiving rental assistance may cause many individuals to hide their residential status among family and friends, or not qualify. Some individuals utilize Greyhound bus options to temporarily relocate and return later.

Two primary causes of homelessness are identified as income-based and mental health. Substance abuse is a critical issue which affects the income and mental health of an individual, impacting the family and community. Also, many elderly and disabled homeowners on a fixed income live in old houses that are in dire need of repair. Without proper rehabilitation, many of these individuals are on the verge of being homeless.

Historically, most real property in West Virginia has been controlled by out-of-state interests, such as fossil fuel corporations or real estate investors who utilize the land's value to build wealth. For the most part, many West Virginians depend on these interests to earn an income. Most of the jobs for individuals without skills in high demand must depend on part-time jobs with limited income potential. Many of these individuals live in trailer parks. We depend on them for essential services requiring a dedication that many of us seek to avoid.

Housing remains a critical issue in West Virginia and SALS is doing what it can in our local communities to remediate substandard housing so the owners can continue to have a roof over their heads.

The SALS Journal is published by the
Southern Appalachian Labor School,
a grassroots effort dedicated to social &
environmental justice
and workers rights.

We welcome articles and submissions by our readers.

Send to:

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www.sals.info

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The Sad and the Good

By John David

I share with you both sad and good news.

In regard to sad news, I am sorry to report that Brenda Warrick has passed. Brenda was a key staff member who contributed her heart and soul to making our Regina Three Rivers Apartment project in Gauley Bridge a success. In her memory, SALS has planted a yellow rose bush and placed a plaque on Regina Three Rivers Apartments.

There have been other deaths as well. Vickie Smith lost her sister Sharon who also once worked with us. Helen Lewis, a shining light for social justice in Appalachia, passed away. As did Lee Balliet, a loyal supporter of SALS who coined our name. Ruth also lost her brother, Robert Sanson.

In addition, we regret to report that Ed Travis passed away in August 2020. Ed was President of the UAW local that represented Long-Airdox and Wilcox Machinery in the Fayette County area. When the plants closed, he joined the SALS staff as a worker educator and played a leading role in the SALS Worker Education program with locals in Summersville, Spencer, and many other locations. He is featured conducting a SALS class at the Spencer, West Virginia Kellwood Industries factory in the 1983 documentary film "Bitter Cane", a documentary that came in "second" at the Cannes (France) International Film Festival and also won awards at the Antwerp and Chicago film festivals. The film is available and featured on YouTube. The piece showing Ed with his class is about halfway. Ed was key to making SALS a progressive force for working class people and his common sense coupled with his way sense of humor is greatly missed. His wife Drema is still a loyal supporter.

Another item of sad news is that our YouthBuild program was denied funding. SALS has been a YouthBuild site for nearly a quarter of a century transforming the lives of hundreds of "at promise" youth. No YouthBuild applications from West Virginia and rural Appalachia were chosen. In this regard, I am reminded by the words of the late Harry Belafonte, who lamented that funders fail to fund real change makers and have completely lost sight of what is going on down below in communities. As he noted, "we've become a shadow of need rather than a vision of power."

On the positive side, however, we want to thank the EDA for giving us an opportunity for "Adult Build". While no funds were provided for stipends, EDA did fund the implementation framework. We are also

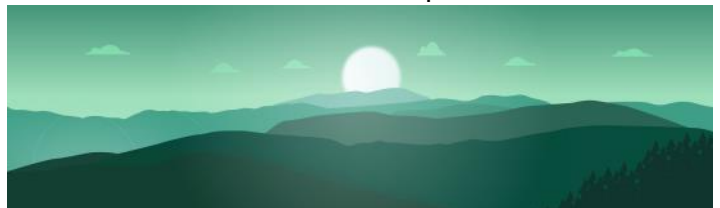


Brenda Warrick's Granddaughter Olivia placing Brenda's ashes under the memorial yellow rose bush planted at Regina Apartments where Brenda resided and which she managed for SALS. Brenda's memorial service was held there to a large turnout on Labor Day.

grateful for repair funds from the Kanawha County Commission, City of Oak Hill, Group Workcamps, the Benedum Foundation, Housing Assistance Counseling, and Truist as well as the volunteers from Group Workcamps, Humanitarian XP, Christian Endeavor, and AmeriCorps.

We also want to express a special thanks to Hal Lawrence at Regina Three Rivers Apartments. He has donated a tool shed, various equipment, and office equipment in order to enhance the project. As we all Age in Place, it is important to pay tribute to those at SALS who have contributed their life to SALS. In this regard, it is with gratitude and respect that we recognize the retirement of Kathryn South. Like many with SALS, Kathryn came to SALS from West Virginia Tech and played many roles with YouthBuild and the Black Lung movement. She reflects on 2022 & 2023 in a separate column.

As we reflect on our ability to be a Force for Good, we are reminded by what Arthur Ashe, tennis player and social activist, advised, which was "Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can" For the youth in line seeking a new direction in life and for the hundreds on our list who need food, clothing, and shelter. This is what SALS is all about and what SALS works to accomplish!



Reflections on Work at SALS

By Kathryn South

The summers of 2022-23 were hot and steamy. With all that is going on in the world this last fall and winter plus the war in the Ukraine, what we do is a ripple but we try to keep our programs as normal as possible with folks doing double jobs due to our smaller work force.

Meals were provided for children in the area for part of the winter going into spring, and now we are following up with Summer Food deliveries to five locations. Beards Fork was opened up for children to attend a home-grown version of Energy Express without AmeriCorps mentors, but we make do with what we have and the summer VISTAs did a great job of filling that role. Thank you to all the folks who applied and completed the assignments for this year's goal of keeping children fed and giving them reading material to keep up those test scores.

Volunteers began arriving in June and worked on several sites, expanding our service target area a little to include the community of Page. This is the third year for the Humanitarian XP group, and we appreciate all they did for the folks who could not do the repair work on their homes themselves. Last year about 10 to 12 houses were painted, and a wheelchair ramp was built for a lady in Robson. We always get more orders for these ramps than we are able to fill. The cost of materials is also a major issue, and the lack of supplies makes the job of doing these projects much harder.

The Summer Foods Program allowed us to provide meals to children 18 and younger in Beards Fork, Bridgewater Place in Montgomery, Gertrude Apartments in Smithers, Collinwood Park in Oak Hill, and Pine Knoll in Oak Hill. We average about 30 to 45 meals a day in these areas. Other groups are helping with feeding seniors and others who may need a little extra help with the high cost of food and folks who must decide whether to buy food or buy gas or pay utility bills. Lots of folks are struggling to make ends meet who are on fixed incomes, so anything that SALS and churches, or local folks, can do to help their neighbors is greatly needed and appreciated.

Last October and this Spring, a church group from Beckley was looking for a place in the area to provide families with much needed home goods and appliances. These items were donated by other businesses throughout the state and neighboring Virginia. About 60 folks showed up on a warm Saturday morning to take part in the giveaway, enjoy a meal, and get to meet their new friends.



All who attended the Easter Egg Hunt at our Beards Fork Community Center had a great time!

Last Christmas, the church group wanted to do something for the children in this area by providing some toys, clothing, books and food to assist folks with providing much needed resources to make this time less stressful for struggling families. Folks showed up with a large truckload of toys, shoes, coats, books and food and crafts for the kids to enjoy while spending time enjoying the gifts that were provided.

Currently we are hosting the Humanitarian XP group for another summer. We expect over 14 youth and adult leaders each week for about 9 weeks. While here, the youth will be doing some minor repairs and possibly a wheelchair ramp during their time here. We also will be providing summer meals for the group and four sites in the area. So, this is looking like a busy summer again in the coalfields of Fayette County.

Editors note: Kathryn and I were two of the original SALS staffers who helped move from our burned out office in Chelyan into renovating the then empty Beards Fork grade school into a community center. She's newly retired and the current SALS crew wishes her the best in her new journey!

Back Again!

by Barbara Painter

I have really enjoyed being back at the Southern Appalachian Labor School to see old co-workers and meet new ones as well see and meet old clients! I have missed it.

I have been busy assisting tenants at the Heritage House in Beckley (Raleigh County) and filling out necessary forms for them and locating the services that they so badly need! They just smile when I pull in with a car full of donated pizzas since so many cannot afford that luxury. One service that there are always many requests for is food and/or clothing.

I have also been busy with the food pantry. The website at the Mountaineer Food Bank must be checked several times a day in order that we do not miss any of the free food made available and hoping there will be fresh fruits and vegetables. Folks are really excited to get these items because fresh and nutritious food is so expensive. We thank the Mountaineer Food Bank for its support, and we thank our donated food arrangements with Little Caesars and several Sheetz locations. There is a lot of paperwork involved as well as daily and quarterly reports. Monthly inventory is also required. I am also training to be an intake worker for the Dollar Energy Fund to help families keep up with their utility bills. I really enjoy assisting families! Also want to extend a BIG Thank you to all of our Mature Workers that pitch in and help, and to all our volunteers!

Making A Difference

by Holly Manley

Hi, my name is Holly Manley and I work at the Southern Appalachian Labor School's Kincaid Office. When I first started at SALS I began as a YouthBuild Volunteer. Now I help in the office by typing letters, making spreadsheets, and preparing grants and proposals. I also help give food to low-income families from our food pantries. It is very fulfilling work.

Accounting

Tracy Patrick

Hello, I'm Tracy Patrick and I've been with Southern Appalachian Labor School for around 5 years. I've recently been coordinating with our accounting team to learn how to use QuickBooks and I have learned so much. I've also been working with

others on our summer volunteer program that works on houses for elderly, disabled and low-income families to have their houses worked on. I also help organize and give out food to low-income families from our food pantries, which is one of the highlights of my job.

Hello VISTA!

by Jackie Coleman

It has been my extreme pleasure to work with some great local volunteers for the past two years. I had no idea of the changes that being a VISTA member allowed me to be a part of. We have accomplished so much in such a short period of time. I was able to recruit a team of local volunteers who have given tireless efforts in the projects I have been involved in. I have spent many hours planning and researching methods of tackling solutions to some of the problems that face SALS. I have trained several volunteers in the principles of the methods for tackling and successfully performing tasks that solve a few of these issues. Learning to organize volunteers and having a common concrete goal has been the key lesson I have learned.

I am most happy with the work done on the Beards Fork dorm. The volunteers, with the help of a few SALS employees, have whipped the "blahness" of the dorm into a warm comfortable atmosphere. There has been a complete painting of interior walls, hanging of motivational posters and plaques, curtains hung, renovation of bathroom facilities, floral arrangements added and the general beautification of the building. I am certain that future volunteers will find it much more appealing and relaxing.

SALS Offers Summer Accent Education Express

The Southern Appalachian Labor School is again offering a summer Accent Education Express program in Fayette County.

According to SALS director John David, the need is critical since the impact of the pandemic slide coupled with summer academic slide is significant. Media articles have noted that recent test results showed "a precipitous decline in student achievement" during the past year in West Virginia.

In a major New York Times article, Dave Goldstein wrote that "about a third of children in the young grades are missing reading benchmarks, up significantly from before the pandemic". In Virginia, a student found that early reading skills were at a 20-year low, data that researchers called "alarming". The researchers found that children from low-income families have fallen the furthest behind. Goldstein

stated that “children who read poorly are more likely to drop out of high school, earn less money as adults, and become involved in the criminal justice system.”

The SALS program was from June 19 to July 25, 2023, from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. at the SALS Community Center in Beards Fork, which has an animal farm, high tunnels for growing vegetables, walking track, and playground. The program was free and offered a daily nutritious meal. Transportation was provided along WV 61 between the Valley and Plateau areas in Fayette County. The program primarily focused on students entering first through sixth grade and provided free books. Older youth, community members, and parents were welcomed as helpers. The program is designed to ensure youth are learning, eating well, and having fun in a safe, secure environment during the summer.

Focusing on the Big Picture

by Joe Webb

I am an AmeriCorps Volunteer In Service To America (VISTA) and would like to update you on what's been happening at the Southern Appalachian Labor School (SALS). I have been a long-time friend of SALS, a former AmeriCorps State member and am currently finishing up my work at SALS. I'm still working with our low-powered FM radio station 106.5 WAGE. I'm also working with many volunteers on numerous projects, including our monthly food bank and building repairs and upgrades.

SALS is still in the process of becoming one of the biggest solar projects in Fayette County, but had to do some roof repairs first. The solar project will take place at our Historic Oak Hill School. We hope to continue efforts on going green at our Beards Fork Community Center and our Regina Three Rivers Apartment complex as well.

SALS is always busy trying to get support through federal and state grants, community funding and donations from different organizations as well as folks who want to help us continue our good work. John David spends countless hours working to find these opportunities with the help of folks at our office in Kincaid.

We always appreciate support from our local city councils, county commission, small business owners, other non-profits and individuals who help secure funding for us to maintain and continue our good work. I would like to thank the City of Oak Hill for helping us get a roof on our auditorium at our His-

toric Oak Hill School, Don Williams and Café One Ten staff for their support of our efforts over the years and Active Southern West Virginia (ASWV) for helping us to improve our workspace through their wellness programs and mini-grants. All of those I have not mentioned who have helped us and our community in any way, thank you for your efforts. To those who have supported the Southern Appalachian Labor School (SALS) through your contributions and donations, please know you are appreciated!!

This year I had the pleasure of working with Active Southern West Virginia (ASWV) again. ASWV provides structure and support for a multi-year approach to increase physical activity and wellness to our whole area by hosting events that get you moving. They continue to utilize our Historic Oak Hill School to host weekly exercise programs. We also participated in promoting mental health and activity breaks during our workday to help alleviate stress and promote a healthy workplace. Their community-based physical activity programs and self-management education programs are making a difference throughout Southern West Virginia.

We are still working on some construction projects that have been put on hold for years, including repairs for some folks in need in my own community. We had been preparing for volunteer groups that arrived this summer. Artie and many others work tirelessly in efforts to locate folks in need and to prepare the facilities and vehicles that we use to host these groups. I also would like to mention Lisa who deals with so many folks helping them navigate the application process to receive assistance. We hosted the Humanitarian Experience (HXP) group again from June until July. They assist our community by performing service projects like painting, building wheelchair ramps, and other much needed construction projects. Doing Good by Being Good is their motto. We also welcomed back Christian Endeavor (CE) another Faith based group that has come to our area for multiple years to assist in housing repairs during July and worked in the area surrounding our Historic Oak Hill School, Empowering Youth in Ministry is their motto.

Finally, we welcomed the return of Group Work Camps, who have been with us for decades doing hundreds of repairs primarily in the Upper Kanawha Valley. These groups bring a much-needed moral boost to us and the community. I look forward to another wonderful year. A lot of good work has been done to help southern West Virginia families, but there is a lot more to do. Hope all is well with you and yours and peace be with you.



Take action on Black Lung rules at www.blacklungkills.org

A Rule to Prevent Black Lung is Available

Editorial - Beckley Register Herald, Aug 24, 2023

That we are well into the 21st century and yet have no Mine Safety and Health Administration rule to regulate silica dust in coal mines, is preposterous. Crystalline silica, of course, is a leading cause of pneumoconiosis, or black lung, a dust-induced scarring lung disease that leads to the death of about 1,000 miners each year. And, yet, it is preventable.

Data from Black Lung Clinics across Appalachia, reported by National Public Radio (NPR), and studies by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) have all come to the same conclusion. The occurrence of pneumoconiosis and complicated massive pulmonary fibrosis is being diagnosed in unprecedented numbers.

Yes, there is a resurgence of black lung among coal miners, who are being diagnosed at younger ages than their predecessors due to mining low coal and increasing the amount of silica-rich sandstone they have to dig through to reach what remains.

A proposed rule would put in place a separate exposure limit for silica dust, cut the maximum exposure limit to 50 micrograms per cubic meter for a full shift and create an “action level” for when exposure comes at 25 micrograms per cubic meter for a full shift.

But the proposal has weaknesses. There isn't a proper enforcement mechanism written out or penalties for operators who fail to comply with it. The rule also wouldn't change sampling procedures to track exposure levels. And the solution proposed in the rule for unsafe conditions — requiring respi-

rators for workers where levels are elevated — is unfeasible.

At a recent hearing in Beaver conducted by the Mine Safety and Health Administration, every person who spoke was in support of strengthening the rule to protect miners, but not just from silica dust exposure. Retaliation by mine operators for speaking out about dangerous conditions, too, was also an issue.

Gary Hairston, president of the National Black Lung Association, spoke at the hearing and said he had spent almost 28 years in coal mines before being diagnosed with black lung at the age of 48. It was an open secret then as it is now, he said, that if workers truthfully report results or attempt to blow the whistle on fraudulent practices, they will lose their jobs. Oftentimes, he said, those jobs are the best paying in their region. Unemployment isn't an option.

But strengthening the proposed rule would at least give miners the same protections that have been afforded to workers in other industries for nearly half a century.

And once the protections were in place, more would be encouraged to step forward to speak the truth about what is happening in their mines and operators would be held accountable.

MSHA has to get this right. One miner, one family, is too many to have to deal with the consequences of black lung. **This can be Fixed!**



Black Lung Association President Gary Hairston at a 2019 hearing before the House Committee on Education & Labor / Sub-committee on Workforce Protections where Gary and UMWA President Cecil Roberts testified about the importance for a silica dust standard.

Opinion.

EDITOR: J. DAMON CAIN • email: dcain@register-herald.com

OUR OPINION ♦ THUMBS UP AND DOWN

FRIDAY, JULY 14, 2023

We are giving thanks to Christian Endeavor and others for sending teams of workers to assist the Southern Appalachian Labor School in rehabbing homes at eight different locales, including Oak Hill, Kincaid, Page, Mount Hope and Beckley.

As reported by Steve Keenan of The Register-Herald last week, a contingent of 70 people, primarily youth and young adults from Pennsylvania churches, formed a multi-denominational collaboration.

But Christian Endeavor wasn't the only group pitching in to improve people's homes. Dr. John David, SALS director, said 230 individuals with Group WorkCamps rehabbed houses in the Kanawha Valley from Marmet to Gauley Bridge the week before last. Some 25 houses and families were served or completed, with a total of 6,420 hours worked. Also, Humanitarian XP is in the midst of a nine-week cycle of bringing in 16 volunteers weekly to help refurbish local houses. Its final week in the area will be July 29-Aug. 5.

Some people are all about themselves. Others are a good deal more humble, willing to put aside their own concerns to attend to the needs of the less fortunate. Two thumbs up to Dr. David, to SALS and to a cast of home improvement volunteers. You all make us proud.



United Mine Workers of America

CECIL E. ROBERTS
INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENT



TELEPHONE
(703) 291-2420

UNITED MINE WORKERS' HEADQUARTERS
18354 QUANTICO GATEWAY DRIVE, SUITE 200

Triangle, VA

22172-1779

June 27, 2023

John David, Director
Southern Appalachian Labor School (SALS)
PO Box 127
Kincaid, WV 25119

Dear Director David:

Please find the enclosed donation to the Southern Appalachian Labor School (SALS) for \$500 from the United Mine Workers of America. This donation is to assist with the building of the display cases at the Oak Hill school. Keep up the good work and May God Bless You, the Southern Appalachian Labor School, and the individuals whose lives you improve through your selfless efforts.

Sincerely,

Cecil E. Roberts

cc: Brian Sanson, International Secretary-Treasurer
Brian Lacy, International District 17 Vice President
Jerry Kerns II, Region II Director

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Yes, in these difficult times I understand the importance of an organization like the Southern Appalachian Labor School. Enclosed is my contribution to keep your essential work on track and moving forward.

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SALS engages in solicitation to support the Southern Appalachian Labor School. WV residents may obtain a summary of our registration and financial documents from the Sec. of State, State Capitol, Charleston, WV 25305. Registration does not imply endorsement.

Over the rainbow

FIFTY YEARS ago, Dr. Abdul Mirza, at Montgomery General Hospital, suggested that a group of us form the West Virginia Rainbow Coalition. Those who came together were black lung champion Helen M. Powell, human rights activist Steve Rutledge, West Virginia Institute of Technology student Marcus Wilkes — who later became mayor of Northfolk, in McDowell County — me and several others.

I was selected as chairman. Nationally, the Rev. Jesse Jackson led the Rainbow Coalition. I represented West Virginia on the board. Both Powell and Wilkes later served as board chairs of the Southern Appalachian Labor School.

Then came 1984 and 1988. Jackson was a presidential candidate. In West Virginia, Arley Johnson, who later served in the state Legislature, and I were the state co-chairs of the Rainbow Coalition. Jackson flew into Beckley. He spoke at a Montgomery church. We took him into the coal mine at Montcoal, where miners Mike Browning and Kenny Dickens were shuttle car operators.

Mike and Kenny were inspired to become West Virginia Tech students during our new effort to get coal miners, including current United Mine Workers union president Cecil Roberts, to earn college degrees. Mike became a union official and Mine Safety and Health Administration instructor while Kenny became an attorney, and both served as adjunct faculty in the Industrial Rela-



tions/Labor Studies B.S. degree program at West Virginia Tech.

Jackson spent the night in Arnett, and then I took him on the winding road from Whitesville across Spruce Mountain to Minden, the contaminated PCB town. Minden still had a functioning elementary school with a principal named Gary Hough, who is now superintendent of Fayette County Schools. Jackson spoke to a packed crowd of students and community residents organized by Concerned Citizens to Save Fayette County, led by Larry Rose. Jackson was a popular candidate and garnered a surprisingly large percent of the vote in the West Virginia Democratic Party primary.

In 1989, as a tribute to International Labor Day, Jackson returned to Appalachia to join striking UMW coal miners against Pittston in Wise, Virginia, and performed his flag-waving, foot-stomping magic to "Keep Hope Alive."

In 1994, Dr. Leonard Nelson, legendary and late former president of the West Virginia Institute of Technology, summoned me to his Old Main office. He decided to retire and wanted Jackson to speak at his final May commencement.

At commencement time, Jackson was in Germany visiting the concentration camps that Black soldiers had

helped liberate. We flew him to Charleston, I dashed to the airport and we both climbed into a half-doored helicopter thanks to a local mining equipment company. We landed next to the Vining Library at the head of the waiting commencement procession ready to march up to and onto Martin Field. Jackson gave an outstanding commencement address to hundreds of graduates, their families and my colleagues, with the theme that "You are somebody."

Jackson was tentatively scheduled to be in the area a year ago but his appearance was cancelled because of the pandemic and health issues.

It is now August 2023. The Rev. Jackson is 81 and uses a wheelchair. The once-fiery orator has a soft, barely understandable voice. He has announced that he is stepping aside as president of the Rainbow PUSH Coalition. In his closing speech, he whispered a message of inspiration: "I am somebody," he said. "Green or yellow, brown, black or white, we're all perfect in God's eyes. Everybody is somebody. Stop the violence. Save the children. Keep hope alive."

It has been a long journey over the rainbow. Through the Rainbow Coalition, Jackson has made a difference for many. It is now up to the upcoming generation to come together and continue the crusade to make the difference that is desperately needed today and in the future.

John David is a Gazette-Mail contributing columnist.

SALS Journal

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HOMEOWNER RELIEF FUNDS NOW AVAILABLE

The Southern Appalachian Labor School (SALS) wants to get the word out that WV homeowners meeting certain income qualifications, and having financial hardships, may qualify for up to \$28,800 in tax-free support from a program through the West Virginia Housing Development Fund (WVHDF).

According to WVHDF special programs manager Jessica Greathouse, this program, called the West Virginia Homeowners Rescue Program, can help distressed homeowners with mortgage payments, utilities, taxes, insurance, homeowners association fees, and other expenses.

Greathouse reports that up to \$35 million is available in West Virginia from WVHDF. An application portal is available at www.wvhomerescue.com and direct help can be provided from the WVHDF.

As an example, Greathouse noted eligibility requirements for a family of four in Kanawha County can make more than \$90,000 and still qualify for the program. An application may take 25 or 30 minutes to complete online before being submitted to the WVHDF.

Marcus Wilkes, Housing Counselor with SALS, reminds us that, to commemorate one year of operations, the WVHDF declared April 2023 as Housing Stability Awareness Month, and June was National Homeownership Month.

For further information, contact the West Virginia Housing Development Fund 1-844-542-0035, visit their webpage at www.wvhdf.com/housing_stability or contact SALS at 304.250.7627 or sals@citynet.net.