

# SALS Journal

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

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## A Busy, Helping Year at SALS!

My name is Joe Webb, and I have the honor of serving as an AmeriCorps Volunteer In Service to America (VISTA). I am excited to share some updates about the ongoing initiatives and activities at SALS, a place that has been dear to my heart for many years. As I prepare to start my fifth term as an AmeriCorps VISTA and first year as a certified housing counselor, I reflect on my journey with this organization, which began as an AmeriCorps State member many years ago. I am also proud to serve on the board of SALS.

One of the key projects I'm currently involved with is utilizing a federal grant to address accessibility and housing options at the Historic School in Oak Hill. This location is where our low-powered FM radio station, 106.5 WAGE, broadcasts, raising community awareness and fostering connections. Additionally, I also collaborate with a dedicated group of volunteers on various projects, including our monthly food bank, which provides essential supplies to local families in need, alongside ongoing building repairs and upgrades to ensure our facilities are safe and welcoming.

At SALS, we are constantly seeking support to fuel our mission through foundation, federal and state grants, community funding, and generous donations from various organizations and individuals who share our vision. John and Ruth, remarkable members of our team, dedicate countless hours to identifying funding opportunities alongside our staff at the Kincaid office. We could not achieve our goals without the unwavering support of our local county commission, city councils, small business owners, other nonprofit organizations, and individuals who contribute in various ways to sustain our work.

I would like to welcome our newest board member, Amanda Hammons, whose dedicated efforts have positively impacted many in her community. It is inspiring to witness her momentum grow. James Birt is another person I would like to mention. James not only supplies fresh produce from Hillbilly Harvest for our food pantries and communities but is also the founder of Housed-Up. This nonprofit improves housing access for individuals in our area.



*A volunteer installs siding on a local residence as part of SALS housing rehab program,  
photo courtesy of Beckley Register Herald*

We are also addressing several long-standing construction projects that have been on hold, including much-needed repairs for individuals in our community facing hardships. We diligently prepared for the volunteer groups that arrived this summer, bringing hope and support to those in need. Artie and many others on our team worked tirelessly to identify individuals requiring home repairs assistance while also preparing our facilities and vehicles for the volunteer groups. I would like to acknowledge Lisa and Vickie, who play a crucial role in helping people navigate the application process for assistance and assessing projects, ensuring that everyone who qualified received the help they need.

*Continued on Page five*

# How Can I be a SALS Volunteer? I live in El Paso!

by Callie Weston

Those of us who were in the Peace Corps find it easy to connect with each other years later. If nothing else, it is interesting to hear what shape our lives have taken since then. SALS Director John David and I were in the Peace Corps in Ghana in the mid-sixties. But when I first saw his name in a group text, I realized we had not known each other and asked him what he was doing now.

"SALS? I asked. What is that?" Thus began my education on what the Southern Appalachian Labor School does, what needs it meets, and how they make it easy for anyone who is interested to take an active role in the work they do.

The ability of SALS to respond to emergencies was the first thing that stood out to me. I had previously related to John the story of my parents' role in the founding of Black Mountain College in NC in the early 30s. Then, immediately after the enormous damage caused by Hurricane Helene in the Asheville area in September 2024, this is how I described the response taken by SALS and others in WV. What follows is excerpted from a letter I wrote to David Silver, author of the recent book "The Farm at Black Mountain College"

"When the multiple news stories about the disastrous hurricane began, John and I kept each other posted. The work he does in WV, as founder and volunteer director of SALS (Southern Appalachian Labor School) involves rehabilitation and rebuilding of housing largely through faith & volunteer organizations whom they schedule to send young and old volunteers throughout the summer.

SALS also identifies and meets other needs in WV (though not unique to that state) resulting from generations of low wages, poorly-funded education, unsafe working conditions and the repeated thwarting of coal miners attempts to unionize.

Recognizing the need in Black Mountain, John and his wife made a donation specifically directed to recovery work getting started there. John also solicited help from the police chief in Fayette Co WV who joined with him in rounding up donations of clothing and other useful items to send to people in Buncombe Co. SALS itself, and in collaboration with another group called Hope Appalachia, sent out word to many individuals in WV who then contributed through them. I contributed to this group as well and two days ago received a thank you

letter from them describing the heavy equipment they were able to buy to open a mile long road going up a mountain to rescue an ill man trapped inside. I had not until then really grasped the extent of the damage. SALS showed me what is possible. I continue to support their work in WV

Editors Note: This year-end newsletter is a call for support for this on-the-ground effort to make survival possible for many in the West Virginia hills. SALS is a registered non-profit and all donations are tax deductible. Anyone can become a supporter by going to [www.sals.info](http://www.sals.info)! People helping people is how many things get done without having to wait for our leaders to figure it out...



*Donated pizzas are part of the food distributed by SALS during the government shutdown of SNAP benefits. Local need is year 'round!*

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We welcome articles and submissions by our readers.

Send to:

Gary R. Zuckett, Editor,

SALS Journal,

POB 127 Kincaid, WV 25119.

Phone 304-250-7627

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## Director's Report

By John David

This past year has been both impressive and depressing.

On the positive side, people who needed help with habitable housing were blessed with 487 wonderful volunteers thanks to Group Workcamps and Humanitarian XP.

Thirty houses/trailers were repaired in the Upper Kanawha Valley and several accessible ramps were built in Fayette County. In addition, a recently donated house in Montgomery was worked on extensively. A late grant from the Bernard McDonough Foundation and contributions from several loyal donors were very helpful.

On a second front, the Feed & Read Program went well at various sites and, not surprisingly, food pantry distributions have increased. Support from the United Way of Southern West Virginia, Kanawha Co. Commission/McDonough Foundation, The Greater Kanawha Valley Foundation, Beckley Area Foundation, and WV Department of Education was helpful.

SALS also received supplies from Little Caesars, Dollar General, and Sheetz in Beckley, Oak Hill, Smithers, and Dixie, as well as municipal support from Oak Hill, Mt. Hope and Montgomery. The biggest disappointment was Fayette County Schools, which reneged on a promise to assist us. In addition, our long-serving successful Energy Express program was unexpectedly blacklisted for life by West Virginia University for no provided rea-

son even though people come forward daily thanking us for providing educational services for people in the persistent poverty remote areas that we have served during the past twenty years. All reviews and many articles about our program were extremely positive.

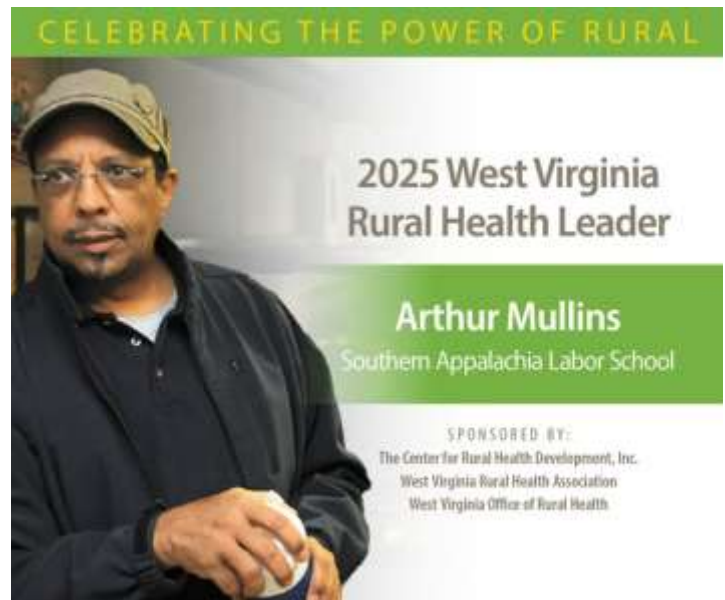
Clearly, the biggest asset at SALS is our staff. All are significantly underpaid or, as I do, provide voluntary services. They contribute passion and daily demonstrate unbelievable dedication to helping low-income, disabled and elderly families struggle to survive during these extremely difficult times.

Many have devoted their entire lives to our mission as we commemorate our 50th anniversary. Appropriately; our anniversary theme will be what Mother Jones taught us. We need to "Pray for the Dead and Fight Hell for the Living".

Thank you for your help in keeping us alive. The entire SALS Family values your continued support.



*Above left picture: We hosted a visit by key national and state AmeriCorps VISTA personnel this Fall. They included Jillian Winters from St. Louis, Angela Rodriguez from New York City, Nova Adams from Philadelphia, and Heather Foster from Charleston. They are here with John David in front of the Historic Oak Hill School. While here, the team viewed SALS new Coalfield Housing homes in Page. The houses, on the site of the former African-American school in Page, are designed to be a modern version of 'Jenny Lind' coal camp houses that still dominate rural communities in southern West Virginia.*



## Artie Receives Health Leaders Award

The Center for Rural Health Development is proud to honor Arthur "Artie" Mullins, for his ongoing contributions to health and well-being across West Virginia.

For over a decade, Artie has directed the Feed and Read Summer Program provided by the Southern Appalachian Labor School. Each summer, the program serves 1,500–2,000 children, providing free, healthy lunches. The program operates in low-income areas throughout Fayette County. In addition to meals, children receive free books to promote literacy.

Mullins plays a hands-on role, supervising meal preparation and program operations to ensure every child has access to the healthy food and learning opportunities they deserve. His leadership ensures that children in Fayette's rural communities have access to essential nutrition and educational resources, supporting healthier and more thriving futures.

Artie's dedication reminds us that improving health care access is not just about systems—it's about people working together to make lasting change. #WVRuralHealth #RuralHealthLeadersMonth #RuralHealthLeaders

## Volunteers Help SALS Work its Mission

*By Vickie Smith, Construction Manager*

I always start my article off not knowing where to begin. I guess my problem is that compared to earlier years in my venture with the nonprofits world full time starting in 1994, things are much slower over the last decade. For many reasons, far too many to mention in any one article.

I felt back then that SALS had unlimited potential but things took some down turns over the many years. I will leave it at that for now.

This past year we have built a couple new homes, repaired many including 30 in the Upper Kanawha Valley, and helped many with handicap ramps. As always we meet incredible local people along the way. They are appreciative of any help they can get as they age in place.

SALS has two completed affordable houses for those that may qualify. One is a two bedroom all electric home built with 2x6 exterior walls for energy savings, and beautiful porches with handicapped ramps as well as stairs. Its in a convenient location next to Head Start on Route 61 in the Page-Kincaid area.

We've had volunteers staying with us in the dorms at the SALS Community Center in Beards Fork for 10 solid weeks. They are lovely young people with huge hearts and giving to our community. We love and appreciate all the help and love they spread to our area. Thank you each and every one.

We also had 280 volunteers for a week in the Upper Kanawha Valley. They stayed at Riverside High School.

We're already signing up volunteer groups for next summer! Group WorkCamps now has 350 registered.....and HXP will be back with 175 in 2026.

As most of you know, we run food pantries in both our locations and receive many calls for food. We receive very little to give but we do our very best with what we do have. Hundreds of families are in need of food for their families. Many call and can't get to us as they have no transportation or their vehicle is broken down. We do our best to provide food for them.

With that being said our head food pantry gal Barbara has been out of service for a while due to illness and is finally getting back to us. So any prayers you could spare would be greatly appreciated at this time.

Our organization has had its share of health issues for the few of us that are hanging in there to keep our vision alive. May all have a blessed New Year that is healthy and prosperous!



## SALS Provides Meals and Books to Children During the Summer

*(Press Release to media last Spring to get the word out)*

SALS announced their sponsorship of the federally funded Summer Food Service Program as part of its Feed & Read initiative.

Lunch is open to all children, ages 18 years and under, who would like to participate. Free books with a site-based reading component will also be provided.

Meals will be served at the following sites: BridgeWater Apartments in Montgomery; Gertrude Apartments in Smithers, Collin Wood Trailer Park Oak Hill; Pine Knolls Apartments at Oak Hill, and SALS Community Center at Beards Fork WV.

Meals and books will be provided Monday through Friday from June 16, 2025 through August 8, 2025. We will be closed June 19th and June 20th in observance of Juneteenth and West Virginia Day. And closed on July 4th in observance of Independence Day.

A nutritious meal is important for children to learn, play and remain active during the summer months. Remember, Hunger Doesn't Take a Summer Vacation and Reading is Fundamental! Last summer, the Feed & Read program served 1000 meals! For more information about the SALS Summer Program, please call Artie Mullins at (304)779-2280

SALS desperately needs funds to make this program work since expenses such as fuel, utilities, books, insurance, and perishable nutritious food/milk must be purchased. Contributions are tax deductible and can be mailed to SALS, P.O.Box 127, Kincaid, WV 25119 or given via PayPal at [www.sals.info/donate](http://www.sals.info/donate). All help would be greatly appreciated!

## ***SALS Was Busy, continued from page one***

We were excited to host the Humanitarian Experience (HXP) group again this year from June to August. They assisted our community with volunteer service projects such as painting, constructing wheelchair ramps, and other essential construction on homes in need. Their motto, "Doing Good by Being Good," reflects the spirit of giving that drives their impactful service. Additionally, we again hosted Group Workcamps, a non-profit organization that connects youth with service opportunities through organized work camps focusing on home repair for those in need. Their mission is to help people grow closer to God by serving others. Organizers have found that serving those in need also facilitates personal spiritual growth. Both of these groups help bring a vital sense of hope and encouragement to our area, and I look forward to next year being filled with meaningful collaboration. Until next time, keep on keeping on.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to Kanawha County Commission/McDonough Foundation and the cities of Oak Hill, Mt Hope and Montgomery for their invaluable support of our summer programs, Feed and Read. I am also grateful to Ryan and Yarrow, along with the staff at Burrito Bar, for hosting our volunteer groups and providing them with such a wonderful experience. Thank you. Additionally, I want to thank Don and the staff at Café One Ten for providing a place to also host groups. A big shout out to local talent Randy Gilkey for performing for our volunteers over the years.

To everyone else who has contributed to our efforts and the community, your support is deeply valued and appreciated.

*A volunteer from one of the many groups who came to help with local home repairs screws a support onto steps leading up to a new deck for a local resident. Photo courtesy of Steve Keenan*



## **SALS to Welcome Housing Volunteers**

*from an article By Steve Keenan [skeenan@register-herald.com](mailto:skeenan@register-herald.com)*

An influx of volunteers is poised to arrive in southern West Virginia to help refurbish homes for low-income, rural families.

According to John David, Volunteer Director of the Southern Appalachian Labor School (SALS), SALS hosted 450 volunteers in 2025 and will host nearly 600 in 2026 to help provide habitable housing for families in Fayette and eastern Kanawha counties.

HumanitarianXP volunteers will start arriving in June 2026 with nearly 17 volunteers each week for 10 weeks, according to David. They will reside at the SALS Community Center in Beards Fork and primarily serve residents of Fayette County. SALS will be one of four sites within the United States for HumanitarianXP in 2026..

In early July 2026, , Group Mission Trips (GMT) will be in West Virginia, , according to David. In 2025, Group Mission Trips brought about 275 volunteers for a one-week stay, and repaired approximately 30 dilapidated houses and trailers. In 2026, GMT will bring over 400 volunteers and is expected to work on nearly 50 homes.

GMT volunteers and their supervisors reside at Riverside High School and will primarily serve the Upper Kanawha Valley. In 2025, SALS was one of 12 national sites for GMT, according to David. In 2026, SALS will be the only GMT site in West Virginia.

Volunteers have traveled here for years to help repair local homes for residents, and David is appreciative of their efforts, as well as of the efforts and support of the local community and SALS representatives.

"To all who are making this difference possible, thank you," he said in a correspondence.

## **Hope in Action: Raleigh County Rallies Around Recovery, Prevention, and Community Empowerment**

***By Amanda Hammons, SALS board member***

As a Raleigh County, WV, resident and SALS board member, I am grateful to serve in many roles to help bring our community together! Working alongside many community leaders, recovery advocates, and volunteers, we come together with renewed purpose as Raleigh County continues to fight against substance use, uplift those in recovery, and address the continued needs of the unhoused and underserved. Recent events and initiatives across the region are sending a powerful message: recovery is possible, prevention is key, and no one is alone.

### **"Keep Writing Your Story"**

Keep Writing Your Story was a heartfelt, family-friendly gathering centered on the themes of prevention and recovery. It brought individuals and families together to share their journeys, support one another, and reinforce the importance of continued advocacy. With personal testimonies, resource tables, and local agencies present, the event highlighted how every person has the power to change the narrative of their life — one story at a time. Whether someone is early in recovery or has been walking that path for years, the event reminded everyone that their story matters. Prevention efforts, especially among youth, were also a major focus, with an emphasis on education, awareness, and community-based solutions such as hobbies in skating and art. This July event was hosted by the Beckley Day Center at the Beckley Freedom Skate Park

### **Sophia House: Cleaning Up for a Clean Future**

In June, as part of the board for SALS, I aided in a connection to the Sophia Hope Center to navigate some volunteer youth in the cleanup of a house in Sophia, WV. Meanwhile, progress continues at The Sophia House — a developing recovery and education-focused facility in Raleigh County. The Hope Center volunteers recently gathered for a clean-up day, preparing the space for future programming aimed at helping rebuild their lives through recovery, stability, and empowerment.

The clean-up marked more than just the beginning of renovations. It symbolized a new start for many in the future of Raleigh County who will one day call The Sophia House a safe place for healing and growth. The facility is expected to play a vital role in long-term stability efforts in the area, particularly for those facing unique challenges on their path to wellness.

### **WV Goes Purple Campaign: Raleigh County Declared September 2025 as Recovery Month**

As a Raleigh County Resident and a person in recovery during August, I was motivated by the WV Hope

Dealer Project to aid in the local saturation of the color purple and state-wide support of those lost to OD and those who stand in recovery.

In a powerful show of solidarity, the Raleigh County Commission issued an official proclamation declaring September 2025 as National Recovery Month, aligning with the statewide WV Goes Purple campaign. The campaign raises awareness about substance use, encourages prevention initiatives, and celebrates those living in recovery.

Purple lights, ribbons, and community activities spread over Raleigh County in September, signaling a united front in the battle against addiction and a deep commitment to supporting families affected by substance use disorders. The proclamation is more than symbolic — it's a promise that Raleigh County is standing up for its people and investing in long-term solutions. Raleigh County is not just observing National Recovery Month; it is living it. And through ongoing collaboration, compassion, and courage, the story being written here is one of hope.

### **Beckley Day Center: Beacon for the Unhoused and Under-Resourced**

As the current Chair and a Director of the Beckley Day Center, I aid in supporting the center in its efforts to support the growing need for those impacted by poverty and substance use.

In the wake of the recent closure of the local homeless shelter, the Beckley Day Center has stepped in to meet critical needs for individuals facing housing instability and poverty. Offering daytime shelter, meals, access to hygiene services, and connections to vital resources, the Day Center has become a lifeline for many who have nowhere else to turn.

The Center continues to serve as a crucial hub for compassion and community, helping residents regain their footing and connecting them with paths toward housing, employment, and stability. As the region works toward longer-term solutions for homelessness, the Beckley Day Center is ensuring no one is forgotten in the meantime.

### **Community, Compassion, and Commitment**

Each of these initiatives — from the empowering message of Keep Writing Your Story to the hands-on work at The Sophia House, to the purple glow of recovery awareness, and the unwavering service of the Beckley Day Center -- reflects a community that is stepping up, leaning in, and believing in change.



*www.ConstructingChangeAndBridgingGaps.com*

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**304-465-4246 phone/fax**  
**304-250-7627 or 304-300-1731**

Holly Manley	VISTA
Jackie Coleman	VISTA
Nick Gates	VISTA
Joe Webb	VISTA
Steve Fitzgerald	VISTA
Casey Eagle	VISTA

Joe Webb	Chair
Barbara Painter	Secretary/Treasurer, bobbie761957@gmail.com
John David	Director, jdavid@citynet.net

**Regina Three Rivers Apartments**  
Debbi Heldman, Manager

Vickie Smith	Construction Manager vickielsmith1958@gmail.com
Gary Zuckett	Health/Economic/Enviro Justice garyzuckett@gmail.com
Artie Mullins	Community Center artiemullins@earthlink.net
Ruth Lanham	Administrator madelinelanham44@gmail.com
Lisa Manley	Housing Specialist lisacmanley@hotmail.com
Joe Webb	Housing Counselor mr.joewebb@gmail.com

## Jan Young

Barbara Painter, Artie Mullins, Ruth Lanham

## Doris Laura

Joe Mario

Ruth Lanham, Joe Webb  
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***Contributions to SALS are Tax deductible: Mail to SALS, POB 127, Kincaid, WV 25119***

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## ***SALS Journal***

POB 127, Kincaid, WV 25119



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### **SALS Mobilizes to Help Large Turnout *National Guard aids food effort***

*By Steve Keenan, the register-herald, November 13, 2025*

OAK HILL — The West Virginia National Guard assisted with recent food pantry distribution efforts in the state, including a stint of service with the volunteers and staff at the SALS Historic Oak Hill School on Friday, Nov. 7.

The Southern Appalachian Labor School mobilized its staff alongside the WV National Guard to provide food to low-income, hungry families on Friday at the SALS Historic Oak Hill School's Helen M. Powell Food Pantry. Food was provided by generous donors and the Mountaineer Food Bank through a special state initiative, according to a SALS press release. Barbara Painter, the SALS food coordinator in Oak Hill, said that 480 people were served, which marked a 60 percent higher increase than normal.

SALS held a second distribution on Monday, Nov. 10 at the SALS Community Center in Beards Fork, according to Artie Mullins, who is the SALS food coordinator at Beards Fork.

John David, the longtime volunteer director of SALS, says hunger is a major problem which impacts health, mortality and workforce availability. As a result, SALS is "doing its utmost to provide food to low-income families impacted by the SNAP cutback, with special emphasis on children, elderly or disabled in rural coal camp communities," he said.

"Today, we've got enough food, and if the need arises, we can go ahead and do another one (distribution)," Painter said Friday as volunteers and Guard members prepared for the families to stop by the pantry. She reiterated David's concerns, saying she is especially worried about the children and the elderly

receiving proper nutrition during a time of crisis.

Painter acknowledged the National Guard's assistance on Friday. "They see the need and, like everyone else right now, they worry about basically everybody, but the children, wanting to be sure the children eat," she said.

