

`Round the Mountain
General membership news release

‘Round the Mountain members are seeing benefits of joining the network of artisans

ABINGDON, Va. – November 8, 2007 – Since becoming members of `Round the Mountain, a network of artisans, agritourism and craft-related businesses in 19 counties and four cities in southwest Virginia, members say they are reaping personal and monetary benefits.

A basket maker tells his quilter friend that since he joined, he’s been getting “calls from everywhere” about his handmade items because he’s now profiled on the Internet. Another artisan, who is a southwest Virginia native and very passionate about preserving the crafts of this region, says that personal involvement with `Round the Mountain has changed her life.

“In just a year we have more than 200 members and each one has a story to tell about how they came to `Round the Mountain and what they are getting out of it,” said Diana Blackburn, executive director, who directs the organization from an office located in the Small Business Incubator in Stone Mill Park at Exit 14 of Interstate 81 in Abingdon.

“One of the most visible benefits for these artisans is an Internet presence,” said Blackburn. “The `Round the Mountain website – www.roundthemountain.org - is opening up the marketplace for these artisans and increasing awareness of their crafts and what’s happening in southwest Virginia.”

For \$20-\$40 a year, artisans, farmers, galleries, studios and others can become members of `Round the Mountain: Southwest Virginia's Artisan Network, a non-profit organization whose mission is to promote sustainable economic development of the region's communities by assisting local artisans with marketing, educational, and entrepreneurial opportunities.

Leading the list of benefits for the annual membership fee is inclusion in a searchable directory on the Round the Mountain website of artisans, galleries, studios, craft shops, farms, craft resources and craft related events in the region. Each member who chooses to participate has one page on the website that includes a description of their work, an image, places where their work can be seen or purchased, contact information, etc. These members also can be spotlighted on the “Featured Member” segment on the `Round the Mountain site.

Additional benefits of the annual membership fee are a quarterly newsletter and a regional craft event calendar, inclusion in regional and state marketing promotions, referrals, networking, educational and leadership (in `Round the Mountain) opportunities, use of the `Round the Mountain logo, and eligibility for jurying for, Heartwood:

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Southwest Virginia's Artisan Gateway, the artisan center to be built in Abingdon near Exit 14, I-81.

Members also are eligible for a menu of fee-based services such as more individualized profile page and participation in the Regional Artisan Trail Network that is under development.

“The `Round the Mountain Regional Artisan Trail Network will be a network of driving trails that will connect visitors to artisan studios, galleries and creative points of interest in southwest Virginia,” said Blackburn. She said the trail network will offer “`Round the Mountain members the opportunity to be placed on the trail and on the interactive web-based trail map of southwest Virginia.

Blackburn said primary focus for membership in `Round the Mountain is:

Artisans – People who make handmade objects without the use of kits, commercial molds and whose primary components are not manufactured. This includes producers of agricultural specialties and farmers who have a direct connection with the culture and heritage of the region.

Craft Related Businesses – This category is primarily engaged in selling, exhibiting or promoting locally made crafts. It can include schools, museums, and cultural/historic sites that have a direct connection to artisan aspects and cultural heritage.

Agritourism Businesses – This category includes agricultural-based businesses, such as orchards, organic farming, roadside stands, vineyards, corn-mazes, or businesses selling food made from local produce.

The `Round the Mountain service area includes Bland, Buchanan, Carroll, Dickenson, Floyd, Franklin, Giles, Grayson, Lee, Montgomery, Patrick, Pulaski, Russell, Scott, Smyth, Tazewell, Washington, Wise, and Wythe counties, and the cities of Bristol, Galax, Norton and Radford.

Those interested in membership in `Round the Mountain can enroll online at www.roundthemountain.org. For more information, contact Diana Blackburn, Executive Director, `Round the Mountain, 851 French Moore Jr. Boulevard – Suite 145 Abingdon, VA 24210; 276.492.2080 or by email dblackburn@roundthemountain.org.
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About `Round the Mountain: Southwest Virginia's Artisan Network: `Round the Mountain was created in 2004, as a result of funding from Governor Mark Warner's Virginia Works Initiative. Recognizing the assets of the 19-county region, Governor Warner announced \$100,000 in Appalachian Regional Commission funds to develop an artisan initiative in southwest Virginia to further develop the region as a major cultural and heritage tourism destination. A group of interested individuals representing state and local government, planning districts, the small business community, arts organizations, economic development, tourism and artisans began the planning process; the organization is operated by a board of directors. Other

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funding partners include Virginia Department of Community and Housing Development, the Virginia Tobacco Indemnification and Community Revitalization Commission, Virginia Commission for the Arts and Virginia Tourism Corporation.

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