

A Closer Look at Dan River's First Regional Report Card

Dedicated to improve the Dan River Region that will benefit citizens of Danville City and Pittsylvania County in Virginia and Caswell County, North Carolina, three area organizations created the Dan River's first annual report card.

The Danville Regional Foundation (DRF), United Way of Danville-Pittsylvania County, and The Future of the Piedmont Foundation wanted to provide a tool to keep community issues at the forefront, offer a vehicle for the Region's leaders, businesses, organizations and citizens to set action plans in motion to improve education, financial stability, economic vitality, health and civic capacity.

"Knowing where a community wants to go requires a vision, plan, road map, community engagement and regional collaboration," said Starling McKenzie, a DRF Program Officer. "The report card offers a snapshot or benchmark we can measure future progress against."

The Report Card establishes a baseline for the Dan River Region and how it compares to Commonwealth of Virginia and North Carolina trends. These benchmarks will facilitate strategy planning, program design and assessment of progress toward achieving long-term community goals.

"We believe these findings will help citizens understand regional changes, identify new opportunities, and encourage open conversations about how each of us can make the Dan River Region a better place to live, work, play and visit," said Patrick Jinks, President/CEO of United Way of Danville- Pittsylvania County.

"We wanted the Report Card to help citizens become aware of and address community needs," said Linwood Wright, Chairman of the Board for The Future of the Piedmont. "We are making progress."

The Regional Report Card contains active links to statistical sources and is based solely on outside, objective data from independent and government agencies. It will be revisited annually and tracks 21 indicators across

education, financial stability, economic vitality, health, and civic capacity. Here's a summary:

Education

Report Card Findings: The Region's education and civic capacities show incremental progress toward achieving states' averages. However, Danville's early childhood scholastic preparedness remains in the bottom percentile of the state assessment, ranking 125 out of 129.

Action Examples: DRF awarded a \$125,000 grant to the Danville Pittsylvania County Chamber Foundation, Inc. to expand its education grant program and provide additional funding resources for Pre-K through 12th grade educators throughout the Dan River Region to implement new, creative ideas in the classroom. Additionally, United Way, the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation, DRF, the J.T. Minnie Maude Foundation and others continue to partner by leveraging resources for the Smart Beginnings Initiative.

A cross border collaboration between Danville Community College and Piedmont Community College was established to meet the needs of displaced Trade Act workers who lost their jobs to foreign competition. DRF invested \$1.8 million over three years to help educate and offer financial support for travel, health insurance, books and childcare to as many as 340 residents of Danville, Pittsylvania and Caswell Counties. These citizens are returning to work and starting new business ventures.

United Way allocates funds annually to organizations with education components (Danville Church-based Tutorial, Pittsylvania County Book Buddies, and more). For example, nearly 90% of the youth enrolled in Big Brothers Big Sisters realize a GPA increase of one point or better over the course of a school year.

Financial Stability and Economic Vitality

Report Card Findings: The Region's weekly wages and unemployment rates are at odds with state averages, affecting the financial stability of the area.

Actions: The Dan River Region Collaborative was created and invested \$97,000 to provide local green jobs training to certify residential energy auditors. The partnership, led by the Institute for Advanced Learning and Research, offered RESNET training to help certify energy auditors. To date, these classes have resulted in the establishment of two small businesses and 22 certified energy auditors in the Region.

DRF also awarded a grant of nearly \$1 million to the Dan River Business Development Center to expand its virtual operational capacity by providing additional support and resources to help entrepreneurs, who will drive economic transformation in the Region, as well as across the nation.

The BEST (Building Economic Success Together) Initiative, also funded by DRF, has generated hundreds of thousands of dollars in Earned Income Tax Credit for low-income households in our region. BEST partners include United Way, Pittsylvania County Community Action, Virginia legal Aid Society, and the Caswell Senior Center.

Health

Report Card Findings: Community-wide health remains a concern, specifically because obesity and teen pregnancy rates remain higher than the state average. However, the incidences of heart attacks and strokes have decreased significantly more in Danville and Pittsylvania County than the state average.

Actions: As part of its mission to promote community wellness, DRF brought Dr. Ian Smith – founder of "The 50 Million Pound Challenge" and diet expert on VH1's "Celebrity Fit Club" – to speak to a group of 360 people. This is on the heels of a highly successful LIVE HEALTHY 100-Day Wellness Challenge initiated by the Chamber of Commerce's Leadership Southside participants. During this challenge, our region lost over 4,000 pounds of weight, and engaged in over 32,000 hours of physical activity to address obesity.

DRF also awarded a \$541,880 grant to the Martinsville Henry County

Coalition for Health and Wellness to establish, GET FIT, an initiative serving Danville, Pittsylvania County, and Caswell County. GET FIT will promote active, healthy lifestyles, as well as encourage the reduction of risky health behaviors that lead to excess weight. Strategic planning, in partnership with Virginia Tech, is underway, and GET FIT will be located in Danville's historic warehouse district, adjacent to United Way.

United Way provides tens of thousands of dollars each year to impact partners such as the Free Clinic of Danville, Piedmont Access to Health Services, Danville Cancer Association, and Danville-Pittsylvania Community Services' Healthy Families and Oral Health programs which produce positive, measurable outcomes.

Civic Capacity

Report Card Findings: Non-profits were measured by the number of organizations and their respective revenues. Volunteer hours or faith-based activities were not captured.

Actions: To recognize the excellent work of nonprofit organizations through the Dan River Region, DRF established the B.R. Ashby, M.D. Award for Outstanding Community Service for which 19 eligible 501(c) (3) organizations were nominated, Caswell County Parish, Inc. – a private, non-profit organization providing emergency assistance to families and individuals – received the 2010 \$50,000 award. The award will honor a nonprofit each year.

DRF, Duke University and The Harvest Foundation of Martinsville partnered and introduced a Nonprofit Management Certificate program, offering area nonprofit leaders additional guidance and skills that will help them build effective strategies to address the Region's challenges. The first class graduated 23 leaders and the current class has 19 participants.

For more details on the report, visit www.danvilleregionalfoundation.org or www.dpuway.org