From the Executive Director

This has been an exciting and productive year for the Coal Heritage Trail and National Coal Heritage Area as many of the projects we have been working on for the past few years are move toward completion. On June 30, 2008, we were pleased to join the City of Beckley and Congressman Rahall in opening the Rahall Company Store at the Beckley Exhibition Coal Mine. Many years in the making, this project represents an important milestone for the Coal Heritage Trail and the National Coal Heritage Area and will serve as a place from which to send visitors out into the surrounding counties to learn more about southern West Virginia’s Coal Heritage.

Another significant project is the installation of five interpretive kiosks along the Coal Heritage Trail. Working in partnership with the City of Mt. Hope, the first set of interpretive signs were installed in November at the newly restored Graney Park at the entrance to Mt. Hope. This restoration, along with Mt. Hope’s streetscape, creates a welcoming and inviting entrance to Mt. Hope’s historic district. Other signs are scheduled to be installed in early spring.

2008 also saw the inaugural season of the Coal Heritage 5K Run/Walk series sponsored in collaboration with the Wyoming County Convention and Visitors Bureau. Attracting runners from around the state, this series featured four events in Wyoming County with series winners announced at the last event held at Twin Falls State Park. Planning for the 2009 series has begun.

Final approval was given to the addendum to the Coal Heritage Trail management plan to extend the Coal Heritage Trail from Beckley through Fayette County to Ansted. The completion of this corridor management plan allowed us to submit a nomination for National Scenic Byway status to the Federal Highways Administration in December for that portion of the Coal Heritage Trail. Announcements of new designations will be made in summer of 2009.

Thanks to the assistance of our friends at New River Gorge National River, another significant milestone was reached with the approval of the National Coal Heritage Area Management Plan by the Secretary of the Interior.

All of these projects, and many others that are in development, would not be possible without the support and assistance of our two Authority boards and the many partners we have throughout the region. Many thanks to those folks who support our work, assist with projects or care enough about the important history of our region to work to preserve it in their own neighborhoods and communities.

We anticipate the completion of more projects in 2009 and have a few new ones on the drawing board. Visits to the website remain high and requests for information are ongoing as tourists enjoy learning about our heritage and history as they visit with relatives, participate in our outdoor recreation, visit our many fairs and festivals or simply come to West Virginia to relax. Be ready to welcome them and share the story of coal mining and coal culture with our visitors.
Rahall Company Store Opens

The Beckley Exhibition Coal Mine, since opening for underground tours over 40 years ago, has introduced thousands of visitors and local school children to the important story of how coal built West Virginia and helped industrialize the United States. The City of Beckley has been committed to partnering with the Coal Heritage Trail and National Coal Heritage Area to preserve history and make coal themed heritage tourism a success for southern West Virginia. Beginning in 1961 with an authentic underground tour of the Phillips family drift-mine, the Exhibition Mine complex has grown to include a coal camp house, miner’s shanty, coal camp church, superintendent’s house and a coal camp school house. The centerpiece of the master plan for development at the mine complex, the 15,000 square foot visitor and interpretive center, themed as a company store was opened to the public on June 30, 2008. This new center tells the coal heritage story in a thoughtful and compelling manner and complements the re-created coal camp community. In addition to the Coal Heritage Trail and National Coal Heritage Area, others contributing funds to the project included the C.W. Benedum Foundation, the Beckley Area Foundation, the Carter Family Foundation, the City of Beckley, the West Virginia Division of Highways, and the Federal Highways Administration. The strong and continued support of Congressman Nick J. Rahall, II was critical to the success of the project resulting in the dedication of the facility as the Rahall Company Store.

Coal Heritage Trail Interpretive Center

The Coal Heritage Highway Authority and National Coal Heritage Area Authority were pleased to begin managing the operations of the Coal Heritage Interpretive Center located in Bramwell, WV beginning with the summer season. The official opening of the Interpretive Center coincided with the annual Spring Home Tour on May 10, 2008. The Interpretive Center, located in the reconstructed Bramwell Trail Depot, is open seven days a week and welcomes visitors with historical exhibits about the Town of Bramwell and the surrounding coal communities throughout the Pocahontas Coalfields. Newly installed interpretive signage in the courtyard area provides additional information and encourages visitors to enjoy the Bramwell Walking Tour. The Interpretive Center also houses a gift shop featuring West Virginia made products and provides regional travel information for visitors. A rack card and new Coal Heritage brochure, available in the spring, will be used to promote the Center to visitors.

Coal Heritage Trail Kiosks Near Completion

After a year of research and design, the new Coal Heritage Trail Interpretive Kiosks are under construction and scheduled for final completion in early spring of 2009. Located at strategic points along the Coal Heritage Trail, the interpretive panels focus on telling the story of the development of the coal industry throughout southern West Virginia, engaging visitors in learning about our industrial heritage. Sites where the kiosks will be located are Bramwell in Mercer County, Ashland in McDowell County, Twin Falls State Park in Wyoming County, and Sophia in Raleigh County. Funded by a National Scenic Byways Grant, design on the project was completed by the Walkabout Company of Wheeling, WV and construction is being done by the Glen Company of Charleston. PB Americas was responsible for landscape design and fabrication of the signage was completed by Pannier Graphics. Historical research was done by Dr. Michael Workman.
2008 Coal Heritage Awards Presented

The Coal Heritage Highway Authority and the National Coal Heritage Area Authority were pleased to present the 2008 Coal Heritage Achievement Awards to individuals and organizations within the National Coal Heritage Area for outstanding work in preserving and promoting southern West Virginia’s coal heritage. This year recipients include: Fred Powers of Bluefield for his dramatic presentation Buried Alive: A Coal Miner's Story. Mr. Powers developed his one-man theatrical presentation based on his personal experiences as a coal miner in McDowell County and from the stories he has collected from other miners in the region. The Community of Bramwell is honored with the Coal Heritage Achievement Award for Excellence in Marketing for the newspaper article Grand Manses of Coal Wealthy West Virginia, an earned media piece that first appeared in the Washington Post and was then featured in numerous newspapers throughout the east. After many years, many meetings, and a lot of planning, the new visitor’s center at the Beckley Exhibition Coal Mine, the Rahall Company Store, was opened to the public on June 30, 2008. For this work, the City of Beckley and the Beckley Exhibition Coal Mine are the recipients of the 2008 Coal Heritage Achievement Award for Interpretation. When Daniel and Elisse Clark first saw the former Empire Coal and Coke Company’s Miner’s Clubhouse located in Landgraft in McDowell County, the building had been devastated by flooding that left 4 feet of mud and muck throughout the building. For his work in restoring this historic structure to its former grandeur, Dan Clark is the recipient of the 2008 Coal Heritage Achievement Award for Historic Preservation. The recipient of the Coal Heritage Award for Research and Documentation, Pauline Haga, is known throughout the region for her work in chronicling the history of the southern West Virginia Coalfields. The author of numerous books and articles containing information about the coal mining past of the Winding Gulf Coalfields, Ms. Haga has also documented the history of the neighboring New River, Coal River, and Kanawha Coalfields in her Tribute to the Coal Miner Se-
ries. Recognized this year as a Beacon of the Coalfields, Mr. Buford Hartsog is the recipient of the Nick J. Rahall Award for his lifelong dedication to preserving and sharing our rich coal history. Mr. Hartsog has toured local schools sharing our history with numerous school children, volunteered for many years at the Youth Museum of Southern WV and the Exhibition Coal Mine, and supervised the development of the reconstructed school house and accompanying exhibits so children and adults would better understand life in a coal camp. Mr. Hartsog sat on the original advisory board for the development of the National Coal Heritage Area and was a member of the Coal Heritage Trail Association, an organization that began the development of the Coal Heritage Trail.

These award winners were presented with a specially designed award featuring a Welsh miner’s lamp at a luncheon held at the White Oak Country Club in Oak Hill as a part of the Preservation Alliance of West Virginia’s Annual Conference held November 6-8. Attendees at the conference learned the newest strategies for preserving special places and enjoyed visits to Thurmond, the Whipple Company Store and an evening reception in historic downtown Fayetteville.

AmeriCorps*VISTA

The Coal Heritage Highway Authority is proud to continue its partnership with the Corporation for National and Community Service as a VISTA umbrella sponsor for the southern West Virginia counties. We continue to provide assistance to community organizations and projects throughout the region by placing AmeriCorps*VISTA members with them and to provide committed citizens with opportunities to serve their communities. In addition to our year round VISTAs, this year we also placed 14 summer associate VISTAs with various community projects. These students also received education awards totaling $14,000 to assist them with continuing their education. Brittany Bauer, a three-year AmeriCorps alumni, manages our VISTA project and also searches for ways to bring other community service opportunities to the communities we serve.
Update on Marketing

Under the direction of Rachel Booth and Richard Bullins, the Coal Heritage Marketing Plan continues to be implemented. Key activities for 2008 included the development of a newly designed website which contains a wealth of historical and travel information designed to share our rich history with the traveling public. Debuted in September, the website saw 15,355 hits by the end of the year with an average of 5.6 pages viewed by each visitor.

The development of a new brochure was also a top priority. The brochure was completed just in time for the 2009 travel season and is now being sent to visitor centers, Convention and Visitors Bureaus and Welcome Centers for distribution to the public. Print ads for the 2009 season are also being placed. The Coal Heritage Trail advertise jointly with West Virginia’s other scenic byways in the state travel guide and also advertises in various other travel publications throughout the southeast region.

Display of our Coal Heritage Exhibits is also an important part of our marketing campaign and thousands of visitors to the West Virginia State Fair were offered the opportunity to dig their own piece of WV coal at the Coal Heritage booth. Plans for 2009 call for more print media, a Coal Heritage presence on the social networking sites, a brochure for the National Coal Heritage Area and a promotional card for the Coal Heritage Interpretive Center located in the Bramwell Depot.

New Coal Heritage Trail brochure is released. Request your copy by email at info@coalheritage.org.

Coming in 2009

- **2009 Miners’ Celebration**
  Raleigh County Convention Center, July 22-24
- **Play Ball! A Celebration of Coalfields Baseball**
  Tamarack, May 9
- **Bramwell Spring Home Tour:** May 9
- **Bramwell Christmas Home Tour:** December 12

Our Partners in Preservation and Promotion

- WV Dept. of Commerce
- WV Division of Highways
- Congressman Nick Rahall
- WV Legislature
- Education and the Arts
- WV Division of Tourism
- WV Division of Culture and History
- National Park Service/New River Gorge National River
- WV Humanities Council
- Mercer County CVB
- New River CVB
- Logan County Development Authority
- Paint Creek Scenic Trail
- Golf Preservation Authority
- WEGRO
- RAIL
- Town of Bramwell
- City of Mt. Hope
- City of Beckley
- City of Bluestield
- Town of Ansted
- McArts
- McDowell County EDA
- Travel Beautiful Appalachia
- Impact Reality
- Senator Robert C. Byrd
- Senator Jay Rockefeller
- Twin Falls State Park
- Town of Sophia
- WV DEP/Abandoned Mine Lands Program
- Concord University
- City of Welch
- Town of Kimball
- Historic Pocahontas
- CCC of West Virginia
- Southern WV CVB
- Wyoming County CVB
- Fayetteville CVB
- WV Parkways Authority
- Kimball War Memorial
- Southern Brownfields Assistance Center
- MSTC
- 4C EDA
- Wyoming County EDA
- Lewis House in Oak Hill
- Preservation Alliance of WV
- WV Association of Scenic and Historic Byways
- Town of Matewan
- City of Williamson
- Central Appalachian Empowerment Zone