

Garrett County, Maryland

A Community Holding Hands to Bridge Its Divide

Tucked between Pennsylvania and West Virginia on the far western edge of Maryland's panhandle, rural Garrett County (population 29,460) is a study in contrasts. Driving along one of its few main roads on a cool summer day, one passes fast-food restaurants and aging strip malls, small family farms, a big box store. Then a valley opens up on either side, bathed in Appalachia's green beauty.

Up at Deep Creek Lake, in the heart of the county, multimillion-dollar

homes and fast-multiplying condos fuel a more than \$300 million tourism economy. Meanwhile, many county residents work seasonal and low-wage jobs at tourist-friendly restaurants, hotels and resorts, and the county faces a child-poverty rate of 19 percent, compared with 14 percent of all Maryland children. Dependent on industries such as health care, light manufacturing and farming, in addition to tourism, Garrett County's median household income is about two-thirds the state average.

Left: Garrett County, Maryland, a rural Appalachian community bordering Pennsylvania and West Virginia, is tackling poverty through education, housing, and jobs.

Right: Brantley Lantz, 5, reads on the Learning Beyond the Classroom Bus. The bus travels throughout the county offering educational opportunities for children and youth and healthy food for families.





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– Jim Hinebaugh, County Commissioner

To address the challenges and bridge economic, cultural and health divides, Garrett County has capitalized on a deep-rooted strength: Everyone seems to know everyone, and neighbors care for each other and band together. That community spirit has brought about a robust, data-driven health planning process focused on reducing disparities in housing, education, employment, income and health care so that all residents can thrive. This small town spread across farmland and country roads has found a way to enable every high school graduate to attend community college for free and has raised \$4.9 million to build a cancer center in its county seat.

The county’s health planners have drawn in the most vulnerable residents—including those struggling with intergenerational poverty, chronic disease, and housing instability—county leadership, and health care and social services

partners. They are encouraging participation and tracking progress using an online planning tool, MyGarrettCounty.com. The multifaceted collaborative effort has earned the county a 2017 Culture of Health Prize.

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Above: Jim Hinebaugh, County Commissioner, played an instrumental role in the development of Garrett’s full scholarship program for county residents.

Below: Maria Friend, Director of Early Care Program, visits with Sonya Kisner and her daughter Catherine Ann Kisner in their home as part of Healthy Families Garrett County.

