

WINTER 2020

# JOURNEYS



High Rocks

[WWW.HIGHROCKS.ORG](http://WWW.HIGHROCKS.ORG)

DREAMERS AND DOERS

# GROWING THROUGH CHANGE

## MEET OUR NEW FULL-TIME STAFF



### **KEVENEY BAIR: HUB CAFE PROGRAM MANAGER**

Originally from Winchester, VA, Keveney and her husband, Luke, moved to his WV family farm in 2004. After graduating from Virginia Tech in English, Keveney worked for various non-profit organizations for over 15 years in administration and management. Having grown up on an apple orchard, her childhood set the stage for her love of farming and good food. This led her and her family to cultivate and raise vegetables, herbs, heritage pork and eggs on their farm for over 10 years. In 2015, Keveney launched Redwing Soup, which she operated for 5 years. She is excited to be part of High Rocks and to continue to serve her community and especially the younger generation.

### **MISSY CAREY: HIGH ROCKS FOR GIRLS PROGRAM COORDINATOR**

Missy received a M.A. in Secondary Education from West Virginia University in 2006 and focused her studies by doing her own classroom research. She has over eight years of teaching experience. Missy loves to travel and has taught in many different places including West Virginia, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Hawai'i, California, and Spain. Missy is overjoyed to be back in her home state of West Virginia working with the High Rocks team to promote the High Rocks mission. Missy spends most of her leisure time outside. You can always find her roaming the mountains or paddling a stream on the weekends.



### **CASEY WITHERS: RUBY GROW FARM MANAGER AND OPERATIONS MANGER**

Casey grew up in Edray, WV, and graduated from Pocahontas County High School. After high school he earned a B.S. degree in Environmental and Energy Resources Management at WVU. In 2016 Casey headed west to spend the next three and a half years in Oregon and Washington. There, he helped manage a national visitor use monitoring program on public land, covering 11 National Forests. Now that Casey is back in the Mountain State, he is excited to be home around his family and to help serve and grow the communities of Appalachia.

*For more information on the High Rocks programs found in this newsletter visit [www.highrocks.org](http://www.highrocks.org).*

# FINDING THEIR WAY

GABRIELLA GILL, HIGH ROCKS ALUM, CAMP INTERN, HUB CAFE BARISTA, FIRST2 PARTICIPANT

ISABELLA HURLEY, FIRST2 PARTICIPANT, CAMP INTERN



Picking plump blueberries in a sundress; sitting in the beating sun being able to grab tiny morsels of life from full of bushes can make anyone feel so small. Grabbing each small berry was a learning moment, the ripe fruit taught that even the little things count.

Throwing pizza crust into the air back and forth with co-workers, listening to old rock songs, telling stories about our pasts and how we have become the people we are today taught me how to bond with others with more than just words.

Digging holes in the ground to plant delicate seeds to later harvest. We counted our chickens before they had hatched, we were hopeful. Some of the seeds really struggled, so we gave them extra love and care. I learned that even the simplest things need help growing.

Saturday nights with the interns, all gathered together in the school house, watching movies projected on a small screen. We all sat in silence, painting, cutting out shapes, and just taking in the smell of the fresh afternoon air. Sitting on the ground, connecting with one another, and grinning ear to ear because we were together, even if we didn't speak to one another. Smiles really do go such a long way.

Long walks, back and forth from the Lodge to Susan's house consisted of deep thoughts, long moments of silence, and uncomfortable hands resting in pockets. Out of breath, walking slow, but conversations that could make you feel as if you had finally found a home.

Mentors who want nothing but the best for you, and push you to grow, even when you aren't ready or when you're uncomfortable. They know that you are capable of growing, and see so much in you when you can't see all the incredible things you have to offer. - Gabriella Gill

When I first came to High Rocks I was at a low point. I faced a lot of challenges before coming to Hillsboro. I always thought life would get better, but I would never be better. I didn't think of personal growth or myself in anyway.

Now, when I look in the mirror I know who I am, what I want for myself and I am happy. I worked at The Hub and Ruby Grow often, but the most impactful thing is my growth as a person. High Rocks isn't a place that you choose; it chooses you.

This network has changed my life and I'm not a camper, I'm just an intern. I have found respect, love, to be kind and embrace myself in everyway possible. Christine, Janet and Loryn have changed my life by the constant support and guidance thru the last few months.

I wish I had the opportunity as a child to be at this camp because the impact and growth I have gotten from this camp in two and a half months is amazing. - Isabella Hurley

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# BREAKING OUT OF HER SHELL

JORDAN MEANS, FIRST2 PARTICIPANT, CAMP INTERN



High Rocks has been a major contributor in allowing me to conquer the unknown in the world around me, helping me build resilience and overcoming challenges.

Covid-19 left me without any jobs, internships, or fellowships in which I could make an income for the summer. Being a first-generation college student, having a paid internship or job over the summer is pertinent for me to be able to make ends meet during college.

When I was left worried and distraught, my First2 coordinator, Samantha Mitchell, helped me to get an intern position at High Rocks. I had heard about High Rocks a few times through First2, so I immediately took the position not knowing what to expect.

When I arrived, I was welcomed with lots of love from all the staff and interns. During my time here, I have gained a plethora of life lessons including leadership, time management, and flexibility skills.

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Transitioning young individuals into powerful leaders in their communities is a major goal of High Rocks, and I have watched them successfully provide the environment to allow everyone to be leaders, including myself.

Students and interns always have the space to speak up, and they are encouraged to do so. Learning how to have a voice in today's society is pertinent, especially if you want to make a change. High Rocks has also allowed me to gain time management skills, which will help me be successful in my future endeavors.

With juggling many tasks and jobs, I learned how to use my time wisely. With learning how to manage my time, flexibility was another aspect I obtained; with Covid-19, things were always changing. Every day was a new adventure. Understanding how to navigate everything after C-19 hit was very difficult but having the support of High Rocks behind me helped a lot.

Learning how to use my voice and learning to jump over any obstacles that come my way will help me to be resilient. As I grow older, I realize while the journey to reach my goals will be difficult, considering that I am at a disadvantage compared many other students, I know I cannot accept failure as an option. I will turn my setbacks into comebacks.

That once scared, little girl in the corner of the room is going to break out of her shell and conquer the world, and High Rocks has been a major encouragement for me to continue striving to do this.



Since 2018, High Rocks has been one of five anchor partners in the development of the First2 Network. The First2 Network includes High Rocks Educational Corporation, the WV Higher Education Policy Commission, Green Bank Observatory, Fairmont State University, and West Virginia University, and is funded by the National Science Foundation. The First2 Network (First2) is a grassroots effort in West Virginia that aims to improve the college enrollment rate and success of undergraduate STEM students, with emphasis on rural first-generation students through their first 2 years of college. At the core of our shared vision to improve student STEM success is the assumption that the students themselves should be co-creators of the solutions. For more information visit [www.highrocks.org](http://www.highrocks.org) or [www.first2network.org](http://www.first2network.org).



# MANAGING MIXED EMOTIONS

ANONYMOUS, HIGH ROCKS ALUM, CAMP INTERN



This summer wasn't what I expected in the best way.

I signed up for my internship in early January, while on break from college. I had known I wanted to come back to High Rocks the minute I left the summer before.

So, with my best friend beside me, we readied ourselves for a taxing yet rewarding summer. Not two months later, the entire world fell apart. I spent the following two months with my family self-isolating, frantically switching from Zoom class to Zoom class, and hoping that summer would be different.

The news that we weren't having an in-person camp both broke my heart and gave me a sigh of relief. Since the beginning of the year, I've been in fear or catching and passing That-Which-Will-Not-Be-Named, but I hated how this summer would be different for all of the participants in High Rocks, something that was potentially so extremely important to so many people just wasn't happening this summer.

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TIME THAT I'VE WALKED  
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VALUED.

The next two and a half months managed to be a blur, while also dragging as slowly as they possibly could. I remember very little that we actually did, but I remember more about the feelings I felt.

- Anger and resentment - at my coworkers, at my workload, at my country.
- Sadness - for High Rocks participants, for everyone suffering, for my family who I agreed not to visit while I was here.
- Stress - over my workload, over my school, over going out in public even when I took every precaution.
- Fear - for my coworkers, for my family, for my High Rocks family, for myself.

To me, High Rocks is a space that radiates positive energy, but I was feeling uncertain, negative feelings.

But, I also felt pride. In the span of six months, High Rocks had managed to stay open and provide for not only the community but for themselves. In a new world where job stability is uncertain, this group never had to worry about where their next paycheck was coming from. I never once worried about having to be put out of my service.

High Rocks managed to continue to feed families in the community, over 8,000 meals to the community since Covid began. While camp didn't meet in person, High Rocks still provided its participants with summer workshops and activities over video chats and phone calls. Every camper received so many different activities and materials for workshops in boxes that were delivered. Every participant that was contacted this summer received some sort of camp love and a chance to continue to learn and grow in a nurturing environment.

I felt love. There has never been a time that I've walked into a High Rocks building and did not feel loved and wanted and valued.

I felt gratitude. In a world that is starting healthcare fire after political fire after actual fire, High Rocks has continued to look out for its staff and its participants. As long as High Rocks is around, I and many others know we will have an army behind us.

This summer, High Rocks provided me with an opportunity. An opportunity for a stable income, an opportunity for housing, an opportunity to serve my community in an uncertain time.

High Rocks for so long was there for me, I knew that I could always turn to them for advice, opportunities, or even just a hug when I needed it. I am forever grateful for this family for being a constant in a changing world.

# RECEIVING SUPPORT

FATIMA IRFAN, FIRST2 PARTICIPANT, AMERICORPS MEMBER



I'm proud to be part of the First2 Network and humble to be a mentor for college students in STEM fields who are first-generation and underrepresented in STEM.

I'm grateful to Dr. Fultz for inviting me to the first First2 Network conference in 2018 at Stonewall Jackson Resort, when First2 Network received a \$7.3 million grant from the National Science Foundation to increase STEM retention and graduation rates in WV.

Only two students attended the first First2 Network conference, and I am grateful to be one them. I was surprised and amazed by the First2 Network conference, which is a student's voice-led organization. It provides support to STEM Students with their challenging STEM journeys in all ways possible across West Virginia.

Every year, different STEM professionals, nonprofit organizations, and NSF leaders gather to find new ways to teach, evolve the methods to communicate that work best for students, what changes students want in the Network, and learn about leadership and research experience can enhance students' success in STEM.

After meeting STEM professors across WV, I suggested increased office hours, check-ins with the students, and conveying things to help the student. Speaking my voice made me feel important as a student in an adult's world. As an underrepresented Asian woman in STEM, First2 Network helped me navigate college life with unlimited support. I felt empowered and inspired by meeting different people.

I'm thankful to First2 Network for giving me the opportunities to grow as a STEM leader and scholar. I served as the First2 Network Internship planning coordinator and Research mentor at West Virginia State University's first immersive site in 2019.

As a senior in college, I felt empowered to mentor the upcoming freshman for college life. I made sure to convey all the information to my best to first-year students. I remember my freshman year having no idea about GPA, financial aid,

tutoring and advising.

I immigrated to the United States in October 2015, and started college in January 2016 at Anne Arundel Community College in Arnold, MD, which required me to commute for three hours in my freshman year. I used my circumstances to motivate me and make the best of them. I used the bus as my study spot. It inspired me to study harder when I saw people from all walks of life; learning about people, observing their hardships and daily struggles kept me motivated to continue working harder to help these people one day. I moved to Charleston in 2017 and transferred to West Virginia State for my bachelor's in Biology.

As a permanent resident of the United States, I wasn't eligible for a NASA scholarship to continue my research during the school year, but First2 Network made it possible. First2 Network offers research opportunities during summer and academic year to do research in the STEM field that is very beneficial for STEM majors. The research allowed me to get hands-on science experience that helped me in my STEM classes too. It also taught me patience and critical thinking.

First2 Network gave me the opportunity to mentor students and be a Student Director. As a Student Director, I gained networking, professionalism, and experiences. First2 made me more confident in my abilities and better at leadership. With the support of my parents, professors, and First2 Network, I was able to graduate on time with Summa Cum laude honors with my Bachelor of Science in Biology in December 2019.

In January 2020, I started my first job after graduation as a Research Assistant because of the experience I had gained working in a research lab because of West Virginia State University and First2 Network.

I'm currently serving as a High Rocks AmeriCorps for First2 Network as an advocate and mentor for student voice across West Virginia. In my current role, I get to meet students from different campuses every week.

I'm grateful for the impact First2 Network had on my success. I'm ready to give it back.

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**FIRST2 NETWORK HELPED  
ME NAVIGATE COLLEGE  
LIFE WITH UNLIMITED  
SUPPORT.**

# GROWING MORE THAN SEEDS

NATHAN TAWNEY, RUBY GROW FARMER



Overall, this experience of seeing plants go from seeds to harvestable crops to table has been absolutely amazing and truly getting the experience of being a young farmer is so fulfilling morally and it's something that I'll more than likely use in future and hopefully pass on the knowledge I've gained in the near future.

Ruby Grow itself is a wonderful program and I'm beyond thankful and blessed to be a part of it!

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My experience as a High Rocks Ruby Grow farmer has been exciting and definitely worthwhile. I personally have gained a lot of knowledge and have developed new skills in terms of farming and differentiating plants.

For the last month we've been discussing the idea of totally upscaling our production to hopefully reach our goal of \$10,000 worth of kale sales. We've also concluded that in order to reach our goal, production would have to be 20 cases per week for the 30 weeks, and for each individual case it would be \$18. Each case holds 12 bunches of kale and each bunch would consist of 6-8 leaves.

As of late we've shifted our focus from kale onto another leafy green by the name of lettuce. We have done a mixture of direct planting/sowing and starting them in trays.

Let us prepare the transplants!

We had taken several plant starter trays and put soil in them and we had read on the seed package that the seed needed to be a 1/8th of an inch under the soil, so in turn we had taken a small stick and made the holes and planted the seeds, of course upon completing that we lightly watered them.

Merely three weeks later our first tray is showing promising results. In terms of numbers we discussed that we could plant roughly 100 trays of 72 heads of lettuce and make a marginable profit. Likewise, with the kale it would be \$18 per case of headed lettuce. We'd have to harvest 18-19 cases per week for 30 weeks as well.



*The High Rocks Ruby Grow program is dedicated to the memory of Ruby Burns and her son, Ralph Burns. Ruby Burns passed away in December 2017, at which time, Ralph donated land to High Rocks to support a youth local foods program in Hillsboro, WV, in her name. Ralph Burns passed away at age 52 on Sept. 6, 2020, after a courageous battle with cancer. Ralph's passing still weighs heavily on us, and we remember him daily and thank him for his contributions to the High Rocks, gifts that will keep on giving in the years to come.*

# REDEFINING SUCCESS

JACK STAUNTON, HIGH ROCKS HUB BARISTA AND TECH EXPRESS TECHNICIAN

I'd never expected I'd be here today. In all honesty, I wasn't too sure where I'd be when I was younger. Though it's just as honest to say that not a lot of kids really did. I knew that I wanted to be a writer for films and I knew the school I'd be going to: RIT for film production in 2020. It was shaping to be an important year for me.

Well, here we are.. 2020 ended up being an important year for me and a lot of others who were caught off-guard by the virus and a wild political climate. These things changed the lives of everyone and I was no exception. The pandemic and other factors ended up causing me to defer my acceptance to RIT to the next year, though I don't plan on going now. I had been living in Pittsburgh for most of my life, but I ended up having to stay in West Virginia due to more factors.

On top of it all, I'd been hit by a spike of depression as I was in a place where my life couldn't move forward. I was coasting at this point, floating through life like I was on a lazy river.

Without the work to keep me going through the summer, both from a lack of school, and lack of inspiration in my writing, I always felt like a step behind, but I felt like I'd be able to get there eventually. That way of thinking soon started to show cracks in its foundation. I'd need a job, new plans for a college, and to focus on developing a portfolio in addition to keeping up with my own life where I'd done little to do so before. This was on top of the fact that my emotional state wasn't the best, I was in a state where I didn't really have any people, and in a town that was wildly different from the city I used to call my home. It was a scary time for me.

Looking back, I still remember bits about my interview for the job, mainly my expectations going in. I knew a small bit about High Rocks and AmeriCorps, and my family had ordered meals from The Hub, so I understood their role in the community. I'd help in the kitchen, packaging foods and even making drinks on occasion. As an Eagle Scout, I spent time serving my neighborhood back in PA so I was interested in dipping my toes into my second home here.

In my research, I also came across the second High Rocks Hub business that piqued my interest, Tech Express. As I'd recently been helping my friends build their computers, I thought it would be interesting to get a deeper look into the functions of computers and how I can teach others to fix theirs with that knowledge.

The prospect of helping others really brought me back to the real world in a time where I was just slipping away into video games and depression.

My hours weren't ideal but they gave me time to get my life sorted out where I could and help my family keep the house clean amongst other chores. Best of all is that they were very flexible with these hours as 3-4 hours a day became 5-6, and I was given time off for times I'd need therapy. It wasn't until I'd started working when I found out about the kindness of the people there.

Beyond my desire to save money and to get some schedule in my life, the community at the Hub has helped me more than I'd ever expected. Any friends I had before I came to stay in Lewisburg I could only communicate with online. The addition not only of physical people, but people that were kind and accepting and more like me than I anticipated really helped me feel at home. My supervisors are nice and transparent, they express where they have troubles and really open it up to everyone to step in and give advice or help out where they can. Their stories with AmeriCorps and the Hub, the people they've met, their troubles and escapades will always be inspiring to me. I've enjoyed having the more mature audience that I can talk about some of my more complex stories with. Most of all, my coworkers, the baristas. Whether it's entertaining jokes and conversation during and after every bagged meal; our trips, spills and stumbles while we deliver our meals; the cool down talk over the notable events of the day as we mop up the floors; In any case, they've been a joy to work with.

It makes people happy to know that they can get a community like this but it's also great to appreciate where it helps you out in your own life beyond the heightened mood. I've better accepted my position in life and I (slowly but surely) am able to use my time more wisely for the betterment of my future. I'm overall happy and find anticipation in the coming months as the Hub and Tech Express grow, I know the people at High Rocks better, and my life moves forward, this time by my own steps.



*The High Rocks Hub is a youth center and community cafe, run in partnership with youth participants. Tech Express is a computer repair and tech coaching business. Both programs train and employ young people in business and leadership.*