

# JOURNEYS





## **RECIPE FOR**

# High Rocks **M A G I C**

1. Engage deeply in learning.
2. Develop leadership.
3. Engage with the community.
4. Always, *always* be building health and wellness, from meeting basic needs, to mental health, to healthy and delicious food.

**The High Rocks magic recipe sounds simple,  
but it can and does change the world for the  
better.**





## ***Introducing Program Support Specialist, Brooke Burns***

Before I came to High Rocks I was the Program Coordinator for Pocahontas County Parks and Recreation. My experience in working with the youth, program development, and community engagement led to an interest in transitioning to a greater purpose which brought me here and I truly could not have dreamt up a better organization for myself. In my role as Program Support Specialist I will be involved in multiple programs throughout the organization such as: AmeriCorps, High Rocks

Academy, and Local Foods. I will work alongside an amazing team of talented and caring people to make sure that our programs continue to grow and thrive.

High Rocks is such a valuable asset to Appalachia and I am so fortunate to now be a part of that "High Rocks magic" that everyone talks about! Our work is transforming the lives of youth in West Virginia, not only through programs and opportunities but also by giving them the support, resources, and tools necessary to

go out and face the world as inspired and empowered beings. We believe that by investing in our youth, we are investing in a more equitable and economically successful future for our community and its people. Not only am I passionate about the future of the youth in Appalachia but I also believe that my heart is perfect match for High Rocks and its mission: "educate, empower, and inspire young people in West Virginia".



# **SUSAN'S TOOLKIT FOR HAPPINESS NO. 1**

I was getting a little bored with telling the story of starting High Rocks over and over, so I thought I'd share some habits I've picked up that help me have a happy life as I journey into old age.



**"I got on the horse,  
but I can't get off!"**

The most important one is I actually laugh at myself a lot. Since I live by myself, I sometimes laugh at my own jokes. And the people I really like to hang out with really like to laugh too. Plus, I nominate Kayla Reed and Casey Withers as partners in the self-laugh-a-thon we have going. Why is this important? Because it stops you from taking yourself too seriously. And if you want to be friends with young people, they mostly don't want to hear about your "issues". Also, because if you try to wake up grateful for waking up and for all your family and friends you will feel much better than if you wake up whiney. So, I believe laughing at yourself is self-empowering.

Stay tuned for group empowerment!

Love, Susan



*Susan Burt, the founder of High Rocks, remains a dedicated mentor, advisor, and font of levity for High Rocks' staff and participants.*

## ALUM SPOTLIGHT: TIFFANY ROGERS-M<sup>c</sup>CLURE

**Campfires: Circa 2010, age 13.**

*Susan said, "come as you are."*



I hadn't met my match until I met Susan Burt. Sitting in my school cafeteria, I explained to Susan time and again I was not interested in High Rocks. How could High Rocks benefit me? I've already discovered my voice. When faced with external authority, I have always tended to ask for forgiveness rather than permission. Challenging authority was a hobby of mine. Along with everyone else and everything else in my life, I believed I was "too much" for High Rocks. I am too loud, too opinionated, I talk too much, my brain is a browser with 37 different tabs open, I laugh at my jokes, I'm too passionate, I'm too careless, and I am not afraid of confrontation or authority. However, Susan said, "come as you are." Susan did not accept no for an answer. Susan returned to my school time and again, probably ten times, until I finally agreed to attend New Beginnings camp. Little did I know, Susan changed my life forever.

That summer on that mountain at High Rocks, I was empowered. I was given the resources and environment to discover myself in a way I hadn't previously thought possible. I found power in being "too much." After that summer, I stopped apologizing for who I am. I realized I am a lot, but that only means I have a lot of value. Instead, I learned how to turn my energy into productivity. In two short weeks, I transformed my entire views and opinions of myself with support from my High Rocks family and sisters, who accepted me and valued me for who I was.

Sitting around the campfire on the last night of camp, I took the pledge that ended with "I now am a sister of the High Rocks." Throughout high school and into my adult life, I've deeply valued the everlasting benefits of that sentence. That pledge opened up lifelong empowerment, education, and inspiration to me.

**Career: Circa 2022, age 26.**

*Sarah said, "come as you are."*

I had a deep desire to be a part of something bigger. I wanted to value my career as I had learned to value myself.

I dove back into the High Rocks world head first this year as the Operations Manager.

Once again, High Rocks changed my perspective. I thought I had already received all the resources and was prepared to help others receive the empowerment, education, and inspiration I received as a teenager. I had significant skills and prior experience, but furthering my education was a barrier in my adult life finan-

cially and with being a mother. Once again, High Rocks opened doors that I thought weren't accessible.

I am going into my second semester of college, working as a full-time staff member, sharing time and making memories with my children.

How many people do you know that can say, "I love my job, I love my co-workers, I love going to work?" I can say that. My current career at High Rocks has allowed me to rediscover my passion and life goals while accomplishing great things with great people.





# A NEW LAW

## AmeriCorps Tuition Waiver Bill: *A year of school for a year of service*

*High Rocks owes much of its growth and success to the AmeriCorps members and alumni that have been integral to our programming since our first AmeriCorps VISTA placement in 1999. In honor of these dedicated individuals, High Rocks led the charge to pass a historic bill [SB 228] this year in the West Virginia Legislature; WV is the first state in the country to provide tuition waivers for current and former AmeriCorps members to attend West Virginia state institutions of higher learning. This waiver is worth the remaining cost of tuition and fees after all state and federal financial assistance for which the student is eligible has been applied. This powerful new tool is a springboard to help current, former, and future AmeriCorps members earn a degree or skills certification during or after their service.*

### **To be eligible, students must:**

- Have applied and been accepted at a West Virginia State Institution of Higher Education;
- Have filed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and accepted all offers of state and federal financial assistance for which the student is eligible (student do NOT have to accept student loan offers or work-study assistance);
- Have accepted the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award;
- Have successfully completed their term of service in West Virginia as defined by their AmeriCorps program and consistent with the regulations of the Corporation for National and Community Service;
- Have provided their Certification of Service Letter to the state institution of higher education as documentation of at least 600 hours of completed service.



# AmeriCorps



**If you have served, are serving, or want to serve as an AmeriCorps or VISTA member, please contact us at [info@highrocks.org](mailto:info@highrocks.org) to find out more!**

# BREAKING NEWS

## POWER SKILLS CERTIFICATION: BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS AND PATHWAYS

***“It’s something anybody can do; you just have to be willing to put in a little bit of effort!”***

**—Caleb, Tech Express Crew**

West Virginia is losing population faster than any other state in the country. Our young people are our greatest resource and our most valuable export.

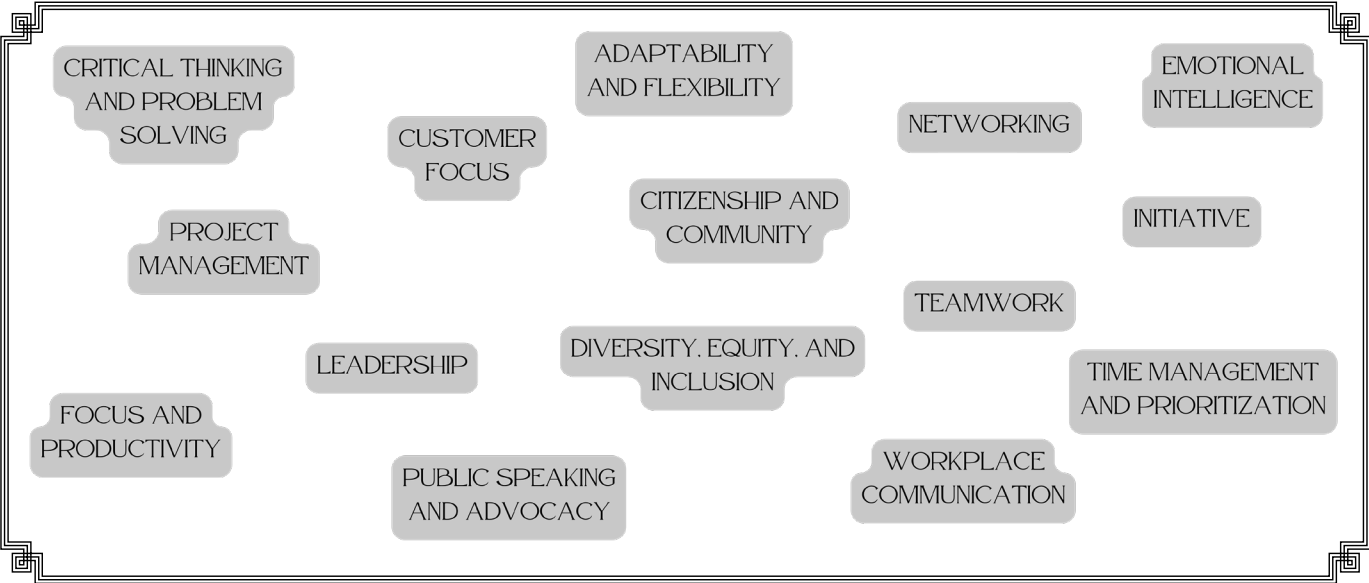
We partner with industry leaders and employers around the state. They report similar feedback: it’s a challenge to recruit and retain workers. Retention is much easier if employees already live in WV, but recruitment of those individuals is a challenge because the majority of young people in WV leave the state upon graduation, feeling there is no opportunity here for them. It’s a terrible catch-22. Students want and need to be exposed to real hands-on challenges

and careers and employers need more candidates to deepen the hiring pool.

Specifically, they need hires that can think creatively and use multi-disciplinary problem-solving, and they need employees with strong essential/people skills and strong teamwork skills. Years of camp have taught us how to build confidence, creativity, interpersonal communication, teamwork, and leadership – the Power Skills our industry partners report they need badly and are increasingly rare. These are also the skills that West Virginia’s young people **want** to cultivate to increase their competitiveness as job applicants and to empower them as young leaders.

High Rocks is developing a Power Skills training course and certification. We will implement a pilot program this year that is virtual and awards a digital credential upon the individual’s completion of the course.

If you are interested in Power Skills training and certification for yourself or for your team, contact us at [info@highrocks.org](mailto:info@highrocks.org).



## Introductions: New Staff

# Leah Deitz-Jackson

From newspapers to community action, Leah Deitz-Jackson brings grants, program development, and marketing to High Rocks. A Greenbrier County resident, Deitz-Jackson is passionate about forging new paths to support future generations in West Virginia. She joins the team as the new Development Director and is excited to help secure the future for all that High Rocks does for West Virginia's young people.

"I believe in the High Rocks mission," Deitz-Jackson said. "I am a West Virginia native and support causes that empower our youth.

As a mother, I want my daughters to feel they can conquer their wildest dreams, not despite where they are from, but because of it."

Deitz-Jackson has a teenage daughter and four-year-old twin girls. In her previous career role, she worked close and personal with homelessness and drug misuse disorders, which plague southern West Virginia. One of the prevailing themes that Deitz-Jackson found in this line of work was that those experiencing both homelessness and drug misuse all suffered setbacks in childhood that, as adults, they were ill-equipped to

overcome. For this reason, she believes that reaching young people early in life and teaching them the skills to succeed is crucial to changing the narrative for southern West Virginia.

"Getting to the root causes of these issues is the only way forward," she explained. "Our young people are desperate for hope and a voice. Otherwise, the future is remarkably bleak. I want a bright future for my girls, to effectively do that means creating a bright future for all young people in southern West Virginia."



(above: Leah's daughters; Meadow, Mya, & Maizy)



# Arron Seams

Arron Seams joined the staff in late September bringing a background of civic engagement, nonprofit leadership, entertainment, and food & beverage experience. Seams has lived in Lewisburg for most of his life and recently completed his Regents Bachelor of Arts from West Virginia University.

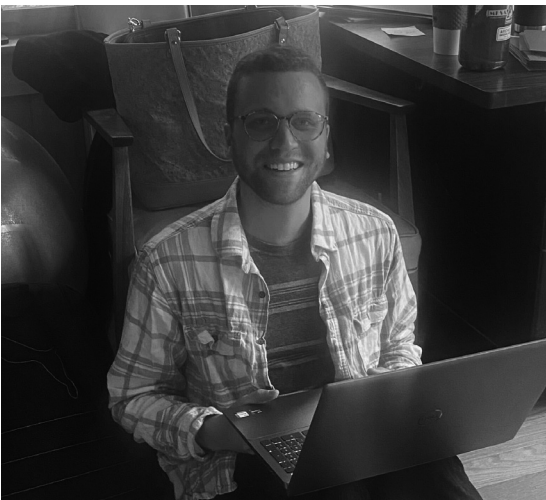
"One of the things that I value about High Rocks," Seams said, "is the commitment to creating pathways and making connections that increase young West Virginians' access to success. There were twelve-and-a-half years between earning my high school diploma and my college degree. Rather than following a

typical path or timeline, I figured out a balance of community and public service, employment, and education that allowed me to develop in a unique way. High Rocks sees the worth that unique pathways have; it's exciting to be part of that sort of work."

Before coming to High Rocks, Seams served as an AmeriCorps member with the WV Strong Resiliency Team, which helped coordinated local flood recovery efforts following the catastrophic flooding in the Mountain State in 2016. More recently, Seams worked as a theatre artist, designing props and sounds for live events and shows aimed at enriching the lives in

the region through the arts. These previous experiences reinforce the deep community-based connection that Seams feels is aligned with High Rocks' values.

"The mission and programs at High Rocks are people-focused and transformative. I'm excited to have joined a team serving a vital purpose to collaborative networks throughout the state. Specializing in marketing, outreach, and data at High Rocks gives me an opportunity to tell the organization's story – sharing its lessons, best practices, challenges, and successes with a wider audience."





## ***Introductions: New Staff***

# **Stephen Jackson**

Stephen Jackson moved to West Virginia from Missouri after graduating from the University of Central Missouri with an M.A. in Speech Communication. He has a background in teaching, working with small businesses, and working with teens who come from a disadvantaged background or are in treatment for substance use.

In particular, his work as a case manager at Academy Programs cultivated a passion for working with young people.

"I am passionate about helping young West Virginians see their potential in the way West Virginia saw mine."

Jackson has been able to connect the dots of

his various experiences by joining the High Rocks team as the coordinator for the WV Jobs Network.

"Regardless of what someone sees as their path today, that does not mean it is the only way forward. Creating a true path that works for everyone and meets them where they are at is what this is all about."



## **HIGH ROCKS STAFF AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

*(\* High Rocks Alum)*

SARAH RILEY, **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

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LEAH DEITZ-JACKSON, **DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR**

KARLINE JENSEN, **BUSINESS MANAGER**

KEVENY BAIR, **HUB CAFE MANAGER**

AMBER MCCLURE\*, **HIGH ROCKS ACADEMY MANAGER**

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SAMANTHA MITCHELL\*, **FIRST2 STUDENT COORDINATOR**

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STEPHEN JACKSON, **FEDERAL PROJECTS MANAGER**

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ARRON SEAMS, **MARKETING OUTREACH & DATA**

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DADE LEMANSKI\*, **WRITER & CAMP CHEF**

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### **PRESIDENT EX-OFFICIO**

Moniefia (Mo) Maitland\*

John Norman

Anita Snyder

Sharon Vance

Courtney Susman

Kim Beard

### **HONORARY MEMBERS**

Bill Lenherr

Jolie Lewis\*

Sean Brain

Katherine Thompson

Tily Stanley\*

*We know that for many of our youth, they need to earn money to support themselves and their families. They have to have money for clothes, books, transportation, housing, and food. These practical needs often drive the choice between enrichment programs, including unpaid internships, and bagging groceries for a real paycheck.*

*High Rocks has been working hard to create earning and learning programs where young people help run businesses, programs, and even state-wide networks for systems change, and they earn a decent wage while doing so. They can earn while they are learning to grow as thinkers, as leaders, as dreamers, as doers.*

## EARNING & LEARNING AT HIGH ROCKS



The Hub Café provides amazing bagels, gorgeous drinks, after school and community workshops, and live music and other special events. Our baristas not only serve drinks and become bakers, they also help steer the direction of the business.



The Youth Advisory Board and Junior Counselors. These older campers work as paid expert consultants to work directly with our board of directors and to mentor our younger campers.



Tech Express is a home-grown Genius Bar that offers computer repair, tech support, and e-waste recycling to the community. Tech Express takes the tough out of tech.





Ruby Grow is an organic vegetable production farm. Our Ruby Growers get their hands dirty learning farming and business skills, while growing plump fresh veggies for youth programs, local schools, food pantries, and others in our community.



The First2 Network works with first-generation and under-represented college students who are majoring in STEM. These students work with faculty, staff, administrators, industry, and other partners across the state to make systems change so that we can double the graduation rate of students in STEM.



AmeriCorps members earn a living stipend while serving their community mentoring youth, growing healthy food, and enriching the lives of those around them. This service year provides valuable personal and professional growth while building a strong experience resume.

# PARTICIPANT VOICES



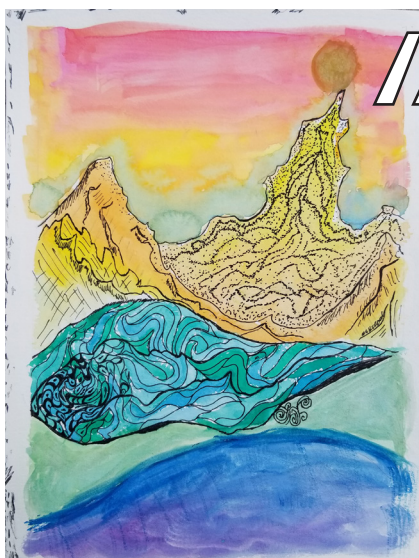
“I wish to be able to better the world around me by being a welcome presence but also by sharing positive messages of change through my art and through the voice I have in the world.”

**“I will take away knowledge of what I want to do with life. I will always hold the memories close to my heart.”**



“I will take away respect from this experience — respect for myself, others, and the world around me. I will also take away many skills I didn’t have before, such as building a mini rocket out of vinegar and baking soda and making pie charts.”

// *When I grow up (my dream) I want to help kids learn. And I would like to help autistic kids to learn too.”*



// *I can learn how to graduate with the major of my dreams and help everyone else to make their life work out.”*

“I hope to go to college and be able to live a stable comfortable life to be able to take care of people and give my parents a comfortable retirement if they need the extra help for it.”



“One dream that I have for the world is for people to become more accepting of each other. Throughout life we are taught that everyone is different and unique. If everyone is different, then how can you choose to dislike some people who have a shred of difference from you? It doesn’t make sense. If people would take this into account and not be as hateful towards each other, I think that the world would be a much better place.”

