



## **ASCEND WEST VIRGINIA ANNOUNCES INAUGURAL CLASS OF REMOTE WORKERS**

*All applicants eligible for \$2,500 in mortgage assistance, even if not selected*

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Morgantown, WV (September 2, 2021) -- Ascend West Virginia, the nation's premiere talent attraction and retention program, today announced its inaugural class will soon pack their bags for Morgantown, the program's first host city. Founded by West Virginia native Brad D. Smith and his wife Alys, Ascend will provide these pioneers more than \$20,000 in incentives—and a path to 'Almost Heaven.' The program is now accepting applications for its next host city: Lewisburg.

"I'm honored to be the first to welcome this remarkable group to my home state," said Brad D. Smith, Co-Founder of Wing 2 Wing and Executive Chairman of Intuit. "Modern technology and changing assumptions about work are finally liberating large numbers of knowledge workers from the office. When workers have geographic freedom, they look for a place that offers quality of life and experiences that make their lives outside of work more meaningful. In other words, they look for West Virginia! This inaugural class is a key first step in establishing West Virginia a top remote-work destination, and it positions us to attract talented, energetic new residents for years to come."

"In the weeks after we announced Ascend, we were thrilled to receive thousands of superb applications from around the globe," said Co-Founder Alys Smith. "The level of interest in living in West Virginia and working remotely was remarkable, and it allowed us to identify an all-star initial group, one that will thrive personally and professionally while giving back to their new home state. We can't wait to welcome them!"

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### **West Virginia relocation incentive offered to all applicants**

Even if they weren't selected for the inaugural Morgantown class, all Ascend applicants got some good news this morning: an offer of \$2,500 in mortgage assistance if they move to West Virginia. This offer, provided by Ascend WV in partnership with Rocket Mortgage, is available to all 7,500 people who applied to the program earlier this year.

"As soon as I heard how many applications were pouring in, I knew the team had to think bigger. If this many people wanted to live and work in West Virginia, we had to do everything we could to make that a reality," said West Virginia Governor Jim Justice. "I'd like to thank Rocket Mortgage for their partnership in this incredible offer. I couldn't be more excited, and I invite everyone who applied to find your new home among our hills."

Ascend's acceptance rate for its first class was less than 1%, so applicants also were encouraged to resubmit their applications for subsequent classes and/or future locations. The program will welcome more than 1,000 new remote workers to the state over the next five years.

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## Meet West Virginia's newest residents, the first class of Ascend WV

Ascend's first class has a diverse background and will bring a wide array of talents to their new community. Though their work spans industries ranging from technology and healthcare to management and manufacturing, they all share in a love for the outdoors.

The 53 class members hail from as far away as Berlin, Germany, and from 21 different U.S. states and the District of Columbia. More applicants will be coming from California than any other state, and the average annual income of those selected is approximately \$105,000. Many of the new West Virginians are bringing their families with them; a total of more than 110 people will relocate to the Morgantown area when the inaugural class makes its move.

Among those choosing the modern mountain lifestyle found in West Virginia is Quintina Mengyan, who is coming to West Virginia from Chicago, her home for the past 10 years. Quintina, the Director of Customer Experience for Vivid Seats, was one of the first to arrive in Morgantown just last week.

"More than ever before in my life, I'm craving new. New scenery, new experiences, new challenges. Being outdoors and putting my energy towards exploring the earth is no longer something I want for a vacation, I want it every day. Jogs at dawn, appreciating the mountain air and natural trails, afternoon hikes and evenings near a lake with loved ones. Those are things I just couldn't get in Chicago, but things I've quickly learned are the norm in West Virginia."

Joining her will be Matthew Worden, a native West Virginian. Worden, a system architect at Danfoss, whose career once took him away from his home state, says it's a dream to return home. Matthew, his wife and three kids will soon say goodbye to Tallahassee, Florida, and head to the mountains.

"I see an amazing opportunity for West Virginia to become an oasis in the mountains for idea exchanges, incubation, and serenity. As people move away from the coast and large cities, West Virginia makes an obvious destination. The Ascend program represents the needed infrastructure to support the state in taking advantage of this opportunity. My family and I want to help represent this program and bring even more growth, excitement, and adventure to West Virginia."

## Leading remote worker program offers \$12,000 cash and year of free outdoor recreation

The Ascend WV Remote Work Program was made possible by a [\\$25 million gift to West Virginia University's Brad and Alys Smith Outdoor Economic Development Collaborative](#) from Intuit executive chairman Brad D. Smith and his wife, Alys. Together with Governor Justice and his departments of Tourism and Economic Development, the collective team developed the only program in the country that focuses on outdoor-recreation opportunities for talent recruitment and attraction.

"We are committed to retaining and attracting the best and brightest for West Virginia's future," WVU President Gordon Gee said. "This partnership is a wonderfully innovative approach to talent attraction, and it serves as an essential tool in our broader mission to support communities across our state. The inaugural cohort comprises incredibly talented people, and I am thrilled to welcome them to Morgantown to become a part of our Mountaineer family."

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To help participants experience West Virginia's extraordinary landscapes, roaring rivers, and vibrant small towns, the program includes these incentives:

- > **Cash:** \$12,000 cash relocation incentive.
- > **Free Outdoor Recreation:** One year of free outdoor recreation valued at more than \$2,500. The package encourages a healthy work-life balance filled with hiking, ATV riding, ziplining, rafting, rock climbing, golfing, skiing, and more.
- > **Free coworking space:** Remote workers will have modern facilities to stay connected and access to more than \$1,200 in free outdoor gear rentals.
- > **Professional advancement:** The ability to earn remote work certifications through West Virginia University and access to the John Chambers College of Business and Economics entrepreneurship ecosystem.
- > **Networking:** Access to state business leaders through special events and guided excursions to experience West Virginia's abundant outdoor recreation assets.

"We created this program knowing our offer wasn't a one-size-fits-all approach. Our program is unique and tailored to our greatest strength-- outdoor recreation," said Dr. Danny Twilley, Assistant Dean at the Brad & Alys Smith Outdoor Economic Development Collaborative. "We looked for people who aligned with what the state and our program had to offer and wanted to bring their talents to the mountain state. This first cohort will bring new energy and opportunities to the city of Morgantown and make a lasting impact on the entire state."

## Applications now open for Lewisburg, West Virginia

As Ascend West Virginia welcomes remote workers to Morgantown, it is now accepting applications for its next location, Lewisburg, which has been dubbed America's Coolest Small Town.

"Lewisburg is the perfect spot to escape big-city life without sacrificing modern living," said Chelsea Ruby, Secretary of the West Virginia Department of Tourism. "It's a picture-perfect small town with a charming downtown, thriving arts scene, and accessible outdoor recreation. For anyone looking to put down roots in a friendly, sophisticated place with superb quality of life, Lewisburg is a dream come true."

Situated in West Virginia's stunning Greenbrier Valley, Lewisburg is only 40 minutes from America's newest national park—the New River Gorge Park and Preserve—and is home to 203 mountain bike trails, 2,280+ climbing routes, and 138 paddling runs.

Click [here](#) to learn more and begin your ascent to Lewisburg.

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