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## Nonprofits win stimulus funds for community efforts

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A few nonprofit organizations in Henderson County have been able to apply for and receive stimulus funds for community projects.

The biggest recipient so far is Western Carolina Community Action, which received about \$3 million, according to Executive Director David White. The funds have gone to diverse projects, from helping build greener communities to updating medi-

cal data software and retaining positions for people working with children.

### WCCA

"We've received approval to spend \$3 million," White said. "Most of that has come into Head Start and Early Head Start programs."

More than 160 children, 120 infants/toddlers and 40 preschoolers will be affected by stimulus funds through Head Start and

Early Head Start programs in Henderson, Transylvania and Polk counties. White estimated the agency, which organizes the programs, added or retained 45 employees, either full time or part time.

A center in Polk County is slated to open in March with room for 16 infants and toddlers. The facility at Balfour Education Center, which allows parents to attend

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school while their children are watched over, has expanded.

Early Head Start is designed to help children younger than 3 and their parents with health, mental health and parenting resources. There are 13 sites that offer either Head Start or More at Four, Early Head Start or a combination of the programs in Henderson, Transylvania and Polk counties. Mills River Elementary is a new site for Head Start/More at Four, and Dana and Bruce Drysdale elementary schools opened sites this year.

Another \$377,000 of stimulus money came from a community services block grant, which helped WCCA's Housing to Self-

Sufficiency program. The program added a few new case workers:

"We've already enrolled 30 families in that program," White said.

The idea is to help families with housing issues. The program aids families in finding housing, or in the case of homeowners about to be foreclosed on, to retain their house. The program directs the families to training for new skills, so people can either find work or better employment. White added they hope the families can find work with benefits. The goal is to have 15 successes from the 30 families, although "we're aiming for all 30," White added.

### Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy

Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy organizes the

AmeriCorps Recovery Project Energize for Western North Carolina. The project consists of 12 members.

Funding of \$183,304 came from a state commission, which was a matching grant. The agency raised an additional \$63,330 from the community for a total of \$246,634.

The project consists of 12 members who work in the community promoting weatherizing or education about conservation and energy efficiency.

There is one member in Henderson County, and the others are in Buncombe, Madison and Haywood counties.

Kimberly Brewster, operations director for CMLC and the AmeriCorps Project Energize program director, explained the members for the Energize program are working in the community. An event

will be at 6:30 p.m. Friday at El Centro.

"Casey is coordinating training of several Spanish-speaking volunteers in the application process for the free Weatherization Assistance Program, in order to positively impact low-income Spanish-speaking families in need of weatherization assistance," Brewster explained in a release for the event.

"There's another project we're involved in," added Kieran Roe, executive director for CMLC. "We have a property we purchased in Flat Rock, along Mud Creek, called the Oklawaha bog."

CMLC received about \$300,000 from two federal stimulus grant sources to rehabilitate and restore the bog, which is home to the bunched arrowhead, a native wild flower.

The plant is only found in one other county, in Greenville County, S.C. The site was formerly a farm field.

"We're trying to restore that bog to its natural state," Roe said.

The agency is working with local contractors to do work. They are accepting bids and working to find a design engineer to create the best plan for the site.

They are working on making a request for bids for removal of invasive species as well.

### Blue Ridge Community Health Services

In total, Blue Ridge Community Health Services received \$1 million in stimulus funds through two grants.

The first grant of \$350,684 was used to hire another full medical team including a primary care physician, a physician's assistant and a medical assistant.

The agency currently has 60 full-time employees and works as a medical home for many people without insurance in the county.

According to executive director Jennifer Henderson, since Jan. 1 the agency has seen 5,609 people.

The center had projected that number would be 1,200. Of the 5,609, about 3,800 were uninsured.

"It really has made a difference," Henderson said.

In 2009, the center saw around 16,000 patients in more than 50,000 encounters. Henderson estimated about 60 percent of patients coming into the center are uninsured.

Before adding the additional medical team, "we were unable to serve about 15 patients a day," she said.

A second grant of \$738,250 was awarded for capital improvement. The agency will be adding an electronic health record program and is working

to convert paper records to this new digital format. It will help with efficiency within the agency, tracking patients, improving care and communication.

"It really helps to track patient and improves care," Henderson said.

The agency, which also operates the school-based health centers, plans to open a fourth at Hillandale Elementary in August. Currently, centers are located at Bruce Drysdale Elementary, Apple Valley Middle and North Henderson High.

"As a community health service, we're missioned to find the health needs in the community and meet the needs," Henderson said.

### Boys and Girls Club of Henderson County

The Boys and Girls Club of America was able to secure stimulus money at the start of the stimulus fund program.

Local clubs were able to apply to the national organization, with the Henderson County club receiving about \$42,000, according to Kevin Lauritsen, executive director for the local club.

"All I know is, (the money) came at a critical time for us in 2009," he said.

When budgets were being slashed, the club was in jeopardy of losing a full-time position and two part-time positions.

The funds have helped to retain all three of those positions. Though the funds won't last forever, Lauritsen said it has bought some time for the club to find an alternate source for the fund.

"We're still getting busier," he added. "There are still more kids."