



The Alleghany Foundation
RADAR Transit

Since its inception in 1995, The Alleghany Foundation has supported close to 250 programs and special projects in the Alleghany Highlands to help improve the quality of life for its residents. The Foundation seeks to fund programs which foster community partnerships and offer a viable plan for future sustainability. There have been many success stories over the years, and Mountain Express, the Alleghany Highland's public transit system is one of them.



Photo Courtesy of Gavin Dressler, Virginian Review

In 1995, a study by the Fifth Planning District determined that Alleghany County and the cities of Clifton Forge and Covington were in dire need of public transportation for

residents with disabilities, a growing aging population, and a community with a high percentage of low-income families. That's when Curtis Andrew, executive director of The Unified Human Services Transportation System, Inc. (operating under the name of RADAR) developed a six-month pilot study, in conjunction with local service agencies, which addressed the need for public transportation.

After securing an operating grant from the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transit in 1997, Andrews applied for and received a grant from The Alleghany Foundation for \$42,000 to purchase a handicap accessible, 14-passenger van and bus stop signs to officially begin the transport service called Mountain Express. During the first few years, Mountain Express connected passengers to shopping, Alleghany Regional Hospital, the library and a few other public places, four days a week for 50 cents per ride. It also offered special pick up service to passengers with disabilities who lived up to ¾ of a mile off of the fixed route.

“Connecting residents to the community through public transportation is a real challenge for rural areas, and I can't think of a community that was more in need” said Leon Robertson, special projects coordinator for RADAR. “Mountain Express is one of the most successful programs I've seen. Not only does Mountain Express help Highland residents get around, it's also beneficial to the local economy by connecting people with grocery and other retail stores, and places of employment.”

Over the years, RADAR has sustained Mountain Express through grants and state and local funding, expanding to the town of Iron Gate and increasing service to five days a week, 8 hours a day.

Leon Robertson has seen the program grow and thrive and says that in 2008 alone, Mountain Express transported over 13,600 passengers. “We were exceeding capacity. One day last year, our driver transported 110 riders.”

Because of high usage and requests from citizens and local government agencies, RADAR worked to expand routes to more public places, and sought funding through the Commonwealth of Virginia to purchase a second handicap accessible van. RADAR then approached The Alleghany Foundation for a grant in the amount of \$60,000, over three years, to serve as a match for state requested funds in order to help subsidize operating expenses for the second van. This grant was awarded resulting in total funding for this agency in the amount of \$102,044.

“I can’t say enough about how grateful we are to The Alleghany Foundation for their support,” said Robertson. “Since the second bus began operating, we’ve added more stops, many of them important to our residents’ health and well-being.”

Mountain Express now stops at Davita Dialysis Services, the Virginia Employment Commission, Social Services, the Alleghany Highlands Free Clinic, the community college, and more apartment complexes, just to name a few.

“Our ridership has increased by 4%, and we’ve significantly decreased wait time,” said Robertson. “We now have the capacity for 4 wheelchairs, two on each van.” He explains that drivers are trained in CPR, passenger assistance techniques, and defensive driving. “We also have a two-way radio for communicating, which is especially important when transporting the elderly and disabled.”

Though anyone can ride Mountain Express, the program was intended for people in need. Robertson said that this is where the program is really working, and estimates that 76% of adults who ride are senior citizens, and about 2.5% are other residents with disabilities and their escorts, who ride for free.

“The Foundation is proud to be part of this successful program used by so many of our residents, benefiting our businesses, as well.” said Beth Webb, executive director of The Alleghany Foundation. “We look forward to seeing Mountain Express thrive for years to come.”

One of the benefits to the residents is the low fare. Mountain Express still only costs 50 cents one-way to ride; however, with yearly operating cost of \$152,000, and a decrease in state and local funding, van fare will increase to \$1.00 in the fall.

“If it weren’t for The Alleghany Foundation, we would need to increase the fares even more,” said Robertson.

RADAR is a non-profit organization based in Roanoke, operating fifty-five vehicles in the region. Mountain Express provides service to a number of locations in Alleghany County, the City of Covington and the towns of Clifton Forge and Iron Gate, Monday - Friday between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Schedules, routes and a map can be found at www.radartransit.org under Mountain Express, or at any of the route destinations. A fare of fifty cents per trip is charged and must be paid when boarding the van. Exact change is required. Children under the age of six years old ride at no charge.

Individuals who are ADA (American Disabilities Act) certified may request the van to deviate off its route to make pick-ups and drop offs. This distance may not exceed 3/4 of a mile off the route. For more information regarding about the service, applying for ADA status or to make a reservation the day prior, call **(800) 964-5707 Ext. 3 or 4.**

Since its inception, the foundation has granted over \$28 million to the following 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations with the purpose of improving the quality of life in the Alleghany Highlands:

- Alleghany County
- Alleghany County Parks and Recreation
- Alleghany County Public Schools
- Alleghany County Sheriff's Office
- Alleghany County United Fire and Rescue Association
- Alleghany Health District
- Alleghany Highlands Arts & Crafts Center
- Alleghany Highlands Arts Council
- Alleghany Highlands Community Services Board
- Alleghany Highlands Economic Development Authority
- Alleghany Highlands Economic Development Corporation
- Alleghany Highlands Free Clinic
- Alleghany Highlands Genealogical Society
- Alleghany Highlands YMCA
- Alleghany Highlands Youth Soccer Association
- Alleghany Historical Society
- Alleghany Humane Society
- Alleghany Mountain Radio
- American Diabetes Association
- American Red Cross
- Appalfolks of America
- Art Museum of Western Virginia
- Bath County
- Bath County Health Department
- Bath County Historical Society
- Bear Trust International
- Blue Ridge Public Television
- Boiling Springs Elementary School
- Boiling Springs Fire Department
- C.O.P.E.
- C & O Historical Society
- Callaghan Elementary School PTO
- Charles P. Jones Memorial Library
- City of Covington
- Clifton Forge Little League
- Clifton Forge Main Street
- Clifton Forge Nursery School
- Clifton Forge Public Library
- Clifton Forge Volunteer Fire Department

Covington City Schools
Covington Fire Department
Covington Rescue Squad
Dabney S. Lancaster Community College
Diabetes Education Support Group
Falling Spring Elementary School PTO
Falling Spring Fire Department
Falling Spring Rescue Squad
Greater Alleghany Highlands School Health Consortium
Jackson River Enterprises
Jackson river Technical Center

Local Office on Aging
Mill Mountain Theatre
Mountain Soil and Water Conservation District
Mountain View Elementary School PTO
Rockbridge Area Community Services Board
Safehome Systems
Science Museum of Western Virginia
Scott Hill Foundation, Inc.
Sharon Elementary School PTO
Sharon Volunteer Fire Department
Shenandoah Autism Center
Southwest Virginia AHEC
Southwest Virginia Second Harvest Foodbank
Special Olympics
Total Action Against Poverty
Town of Clifton
Forge
Town of Iron Gate
Unified Human Services Transportation System (RADAR)
Virginia Hunters Who Care
West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine
Western Virginia Emergency Medical Service Council