

Wyoming County

Wyoming County, West Virginia was founded in 1850. The county is a hidden gem that lies within the rugged Appalachian Mountains. Wyoming County offers various opportunities due to its history, natural marvels, and community, providing a source of economic development for those with motivation and drive.

Wyoming County's history of coal and its mining offers economic opportunity still today, although not as much as it did during the coal boom. Once an extremely abundant natural resource, coal dominated the economy in Wyoming County. Now, the resource has started to diminish, leaving behind traces of its impact. The roots of the county are stained with coal dust; the resource affected, and still affects, most of the residents of Wyoming County. Back when coal dominated the economy in Wyoming County, it "ruled how and where most of its inhabitants worked and lived" (Brooks). Seeking a better way of life and living, people with motivation migrated into the area to chase their dream of having money, and coal made this possible for many. While the work was difficult and dangerous, it provided a means of survival for the miners and their families. They were driven to excel at all costs. Remnants of coal camps, tipples, and mines no longer in use offer

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an attraction for tourists to visit. The remnants of the past spark an interest in tourists. They show a look into the past. Although Wyoming County may not have much to offer in comparison to other areas, its natural resources offer a wide range of opportunity then and now.

The coal industry in Wyoming County sparked a new industry to form: the railroad. Remnants of the railroad system in Wyoming County are still apparent today, offering an insight into its once rich past to tourists. The railroad industry formed and flourished within Wyoming County during the flourishing of coal mining. This was due to the need for a faster, more efficient way to transport the coal. This boom in the railroad “engulfed Wyoming County as early as 1868 and continued for several decades” (“Coal Industry” 2016). The rise and fall of coal mining and the railroad are synonymous with each other. Because coal mining was booming, it caused the railroad to form and be booming as well. When coal mining started to decline, the railroad industry in Wyoming County also started to decline. Some lines of the railroad were proposed to be built to aid in the transportation of coal but never actually got built.

One instance of this is the proposed Oceana and Clearfork Railroad by a few motivated Pennsylvania businessmen. The railroad would have been “entirely within the boundaries of Wyoming County” (“Coal Industry” 2016). This would have greatly benefitted Wyoming County economically, but the railroad was never built. This, ultimately, was a missed opportunity for Wyoming County. The people already had the drive to succeed and make the area prosper, but missed opportunities such as this one decreased the motivation in the county.

Another proposed railroad to be built was from the Virginian and Western Railway Company. Because the coal and railroad boom positively affected Wyoming County, these proposed railroad lines would have created even more job opportunities and boosted the economy and drive within the county. It is easy to imagine “how the building of one of these early proposed

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railroads might have actually affected the early growth, development, and economy” of the area (“Coal Industry” 2016). The economy during this time was already booming, but these proposed railroads may have increased the long-lasting benefits on the economy in Wyoming County.

Railroad construction creates a demand for jobs, attracting people to come live in the area in hopes of a better life. This also creates a higher demand for coal because it can be transported in higher quantities to more locations. The decline in the coal and railroad industry caused the population within Wyoming County to decline as well, but the remnants of the past offer an attraction to tourists to help benefit the economy.

A decline in population necessitates a new means of economic growth and opportunity. These can be found within what is already available in Wyoming County: its history and natural features. The railroad history within the county offers attractions to tourists wishing to explore the area. The Caboose Museum, located in Mullens, a town in Wyoming County, “houses a collection of memorabilia from local residents” (Brooks). Museums such as this one offer an excellent source on historical information for anyone wishing to learn more about the railroad history in Wyoming County. The Wyoming County Historical Museum resides in Oceana, another town in Wyoming County. In order to “preserve history, the museum collects, preserves, and interprets the historic and prehistoric heritage” of Wyoming County (“About Us” 2010). Museums, like those aforementioned, provide a source of attraction. While tourists are in the area looking at these museums, they will also visit local shops and stores, boosting the economy in the area. In small counties like Wyoming County, they need all the help they can get.

Knowing the history of the area provides tourists with a deeper understanding of the area and makes them feel a connection towards the natural beauty and history of Wyoming County.

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The natural marvels within Wyoming County offer opportunities and economic development. One example is Twin Falls State Park. Excellent for all ages, Twin Falls State Park offers something for everyone. It is set on a "high, wooded ridge in the rugged mountains of Wyoming County" ("Twin Falls" 2020). While visiting the park, a person is able to immerse themselves in the natural beauty of Wyoming County. The park offers biking trails, hiking, an 18-hole golf course, cabins, a lodge, campsites, a pioneer farm, and much more. Features like Twin Falls State Park provide a reason for tourists to visit Wyoming County. Sparking interest in tourists with the natural beauty of the county is easy, but creating activities and visitation spots is vital in maintaining their interest. If tourists had nothing to do while visiting the county, then they would not be interested in staying nor returning. The natural beauty of Wyoming County provides the opportunity for economic development to maintain an interest in the county.

The natural beauty of Wyoming County attracts tourists to the area, providing a means of economic opportunity. The Hatfield-McCoy Trail System offers an attraction to tourists from all over the continent. Part of the Hatfield-McCoy Trail System, the Pinnacle Creek Trail System offers "direct connections to the ATV-friendly towns of Mullens and Pineville," both of which are located within Wyoming County. Catering directly to the needs of trail riders, Wyoming County offers a unique experience that makes tourists feel as though they are home ("Pinnacle Creek" 2020). The trail riders bring economic gain into Wyoming County; they stay in local accommodations, eat at local restaurants, and shop at local stores and businesses. Wyoming County and its residents with pride for their community take advantage of the natural marvels within Wyoming County in order to make it a better place to live and an attraction to tourists. Offering services and goods that cater to the interest of tourists ensure their happiness and increases their likelihood of returning. This, in the long run, benefits the economy of Wyoming

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County. Those with busy lives or anyone who just wants to revel in the natural beauty of Wyoming County makes it an excellent spot for visitation. Wyoming County is a “friendly, welcoming tourist destination for nature lovers, outdoor adventurers, and anyone who is looking to get away from it all” (“Pinnacle Creek” 2020). Expecting to be relaxed and amazed with the natural beauty of Wyoming County, tourists are not disappointed. When tourists are pleased with their visitation and experience, they will be more apt to revisit another time. Ensuring long-time visitors greatly benefits Wyoming County, giving a reason to the residents to be motivated to develop the area.

The Wyoming County Economic Development Authority (EDA) provides many economic opportunities for the area. The EDA helps boost morale and motivation among the residents of Wyoming County. In order to develop the economy, the EDA works with people “to bring [...] resources together to ensure the highest possible return” on any investment (“Welcome to” 2019). This helps the residents currently living in the area and also attracts new business to form. A great economy is important in forming a developed, beneficial place to live. The promise of prosperity and aid motivates business owners to move to Wyoming County, benefiting the economy. The Economic Development Authority’s main goal is to provide a prosperous and resilient economy for the area. Organizations such as this one provide new jobs and opportunities. The EDA in Wyoming County “has lent over \$9 million” to aid in the development of the economy (“Welcome to” 2019). They recognize the importance of economic development and what it means to residents and tourists, especially in a small area like Wyoming County. Wyoming County needs as much help, motivation, and drive as it can get to boost the economy.

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Wyoming County has a disadvantage compared to other areas, but its current businesses and citizens have the possibility to make the area into a better place. The people just need the inspiration to try. Motivation and drive may be hard to find and rouse up due to the poverty levels in the county. Wyoming County has a poverty rate of 21.7% (“Wyoming County”). This rate has, over the years, gone up. A higher poverty level relates directly to a diminished economy. Between 2017 and 2018, the population decreased by 1.89%: from 22,130 people to 21,711 people. The increasing poverty level, diminished economy, and the population decrease all affect each other in their causes and effects. Their causes are all due to one another. After the downfall of coal in Wyoming County, the economy and attitudes of the people suffered.

The people in Wyoming County have lost hope in their community, economy, and lives, causing them to either leave the county in hopes of prospering elsewhere or turn to another means of escape in Wyoming County, but this issue can be resolved to form a new thriving economy once again using what is already available within the county. Many people within Wyoming County turn to drugs and the abuse of drugs as a means of their escape. From 2010-2014, “Wyoming County was rated No. 1 in drug overdose deaths in the state” (Brooks 2020). Filled with apathy, the residents of Wyoming County feel like they have no other option besides drugs. Many residents believe they deserve nothing better and either leave, causing the population drop, or they turn to drugs, unwilling to improve the area. The bust of coal and the railroad caused this problem within the county because it was most of what the area had to offer. Feeling defeated, the people in Wyoming County believe that the county’s economy cannot ever be great again. This, though, is not the truth. If the residents of Wyoming County were willing to work together, the area can become something great once again. One solution starts with the parents in Wyoming County. They need to, overall, start caring more and providing an example

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for the younger people. When children see that the older people in their lives have no hope and do not care, they mimic their attitudes. This can be resolved if parents start paying “attention to everything their children are doing” (Brooks 2020). This includes, but is not limited to, who they spend their time with, where they are going, and what they are doing. Providing a better source of discipline starts at the home and has a ripple effect into the everyday lives and futures of the younger generation. A generally better attitude and outlook on life will spark a change within Wyoming County, but the older generation needs to ignite this change for the younger generation. Many young people are constantly around negativity in Wyoming County, necessitating a means of change. When the majority of people have a happier, more positive attitude, the economy will then begin to change for the better, also. People will be more driven and motivated to work together to make Wyoming County an overall better, more enjoyable area. When people from other areas visit and view this positive, thriving area, they will be more apt to want to be a part of it. This causes an increase in population, rather than a decrease, and a flourishing economy. By using what is already readily available in Wyoming County- people- a positive change can begin to transpire.

The community in Wyoming County needs a source of positivity in order to spark an economic boost. Because the change relies heavily on the younger generation, they need a reason to make a change and have an overall more positive attitude. This change can start not only in the home with the parent, but also within the school environment. In Wyoming County schools, a positive school environment is said to be a top priority, but it may not always be put into action.

The Board of Education believes in “nurtur(ing) each child to reach his/ her potential” (Wyoming County 2021). While this may be their goal and intention, it is not executed to its full extent, as shown in the ratings of the schools in the county. This can be solved by instilling

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motivation in the students in order to create a more positive community. The schools in Wyoming County have a ranking of four out of ten, making it rank in the lower fifty percent in West Virginia public schools (Public School Review 2021). This also mirrors the state of the economy in the county. If the school system was better and excelled more, then more people would move to the area to give their kids a better learning environment and opportunity. A more positive and less apathetic attitude among the residents of Wyoming County, especially in the younger generation, would solve most of the problems within the school. When students care about their future, life, and community, it has a chain reaction among other factors such as the economy. All of these factors are associated among each other. A negative attitude causes a negative economy and environment, while a positive attitude causes a positive economy and environment. Wyoming County's economy has the criteria for economic development, but the community needs to work together in forming a positive, more driven environment to succeed.

Wyoming County, located in West Virginia, has the potential for a developed, booming economy, similar to what it was in the past. The county has many opportunities to achieve this using what is already readily available within it. The history of Wyoming County provides a precedent to achieve greatness in the present and the future. Small changes in attitude and motivation will start the beginning of greatness for Wyoming County.

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