

Rural Up celebrates summer internships across Eastern Ky.

News Release

Rural Up is celebrating another successful summer of work-based learning, connecting 71 students with paid internship experiences through partnerships with 35 employers across five Eastern Kentucky counties: Bell, Clay, Harlan, Perry, and Rockcastle.

Through this work-based learning, students gain hands-on experiences that help bridge the gap between education and future careers. The Summer Work-Based Learning Program provides students with opportunities to explore career pathways, develop professional skills, and build confidence while contributing to local businesses and organizations throughout the region.

Before beginning their internships, students participated in orientation sessions designed to prepare them for success in the workplace. These sessions focused on professional expectations, communication, workplace readiness, and other essential skills to help students begin their internships with confidence and a stronger understanding of what it means to be a successful employee.

Throughout the summer, students also participated in professional development opportunities that complemented their on-the-job learning. By combining real-world experience with intentional skill development, Rural Up helps students strengthen the skills employers value while encouraging them



PHOTO SUBMITTED

Students from Bell County participate in professional development training as part of Rural Up's 2026 Summer Internship Program.

to explore future education and career opportunities.

Employer partners played an essential role in creating these experiences by serving as mentors, sharing industry knowledge, modeling professionalism, and providing guidance throughout the internship experience. With nearly one employer partner for every two student interns, students benefited from meaningful workplace connections and individualized support from professionals invested in their success.

“Work-based learning is about much more than placing students in internships or cooperative education,” said Tina Wei Smith, Executive Director of Rural Up. “It’s about creating opportunities for students to discover their strengths, build confidence, and connect what they are learning in the classroom to future possibilities - right here in our region. We are grateful for the employers, schools, mentors, and community partners who continue to invest in Eastern Kentucky’s students and

workforce.”

Since launching its work-based learning efforts, Rural Up has placed and supported more than 150 students through career-connected learning experiences while partnering with more than 70 employers across Eastern Kentucky. These growing partnerships demonstrate the power of collaboration between education, industry, and community organizations to create meaningful opportunities for students while helping build a stronger regional workforce.

Rural Up’s year-round work-based learning programs, which include internships and cooperative education experiences, are supported by an Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) POWER Grant, matched by the Kentucky G.R.A.N.T. Program, and strengthened through partnerships with schools, local employers, and community organizations across Eastern Kentucky. Additional support from the Spectrum Digital Educa-

tion Grant has helped provide digital literacy training and industry-recognized credentialing opportunities for student interns, equipping them with essential technology and workforce skills. Funding from the Steele-Reese Foundation has further expanded Rural Up’s impact by supporting the organization’s Work-Based Learning efforts in Pike County, helping create additional paid internship opportunities while increasing access to mentorship, professional development, employer partnerships, and career-connected learning experiences for local students.

As Rural Up looks ahead, the organization remains committed to expanding career-connected learning opportunities, strengthening partnerships with employers and schools, and preparing more young people for success through meaningful experiences that benefit both participants and the communities they call home.

Trees and human health

By Steve Roark
Cumberland Gap National Park

No one can deny that we humans like to see nature. It’s why we set aside land for city parks, national parks, and greenways. It’s why we get our fingernails dirty planting trees and flowers in our yard. And I don’t think anyone would dispute that being in a forest or quiet natural area has a calming effect. Some recent research is verifying that there is a relationship between the natural environment and improved health outcomes. Science guys love to hang impressive titles on things, and in this case enjoying nature is receiving “spatial emotional stimulus”.

A scientist named Ulrich was among the first to see if they could put some hard data on this, so he did a study of patients recovering from surgery. He found that those patients in a room with a natural view required less pain medication than those with a view of a brick wall. Another study in England found that exposure to “greenness” reduced mortality, especially from cardiovascular-related illness. In Tokyo, a study

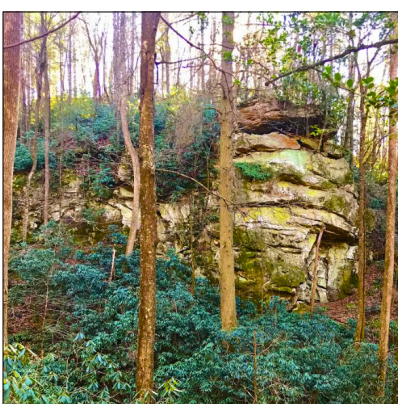


Photo of forest scene courtesy of Steve Roark

of senior citizens found a positive association between survival rate and access to walkable green space. In Holland, those living in greener areas were less likely to be diagnosed with 15 of 24 health issues examined. Another study showed that walking in a forest reduces heart rate and lowers cortisol levels (a hormone released by the body when stressed out).

One study came about because of a forest health issue. Emerald ash borer had hammered trees in Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio from 2010-15. Our ash had the same the borer attack that killed most of them, but ash was a major component of forests up north, and so the visual impact

was much greater. A science team did a study that compared human mortality rates before and after the ash borer killed trees and negatively impacted the natural scenery. The study focused on cardiovascular and lower-respiratory-tract illnesses because they are the first and third most common causes of death in the U.S. Results suggest that the widespread death of ash trees led to an increase in mortality from these two illnesses.

The reasoning for all this is that contact with the natural environment decreases stress, increases physical activity, and improves air quality. Whereas stress, no exercise, and poor air quality are, of course, unhealthy. I personally think it goes deeper than that, and that we are hard wired to enjoy green spaces, and it messes with us when we don’t get doses of it on a regular basis. So use this as an excuse to get out there and enjoy being outside more. We are blessed with a beautiful area to live in, so take advantage of it and give yourself a good dose of spatial emotional stimulus. Information for this article came from the science paper: The Relationship Between Trees and Human Health, by Dr. Geoffrey Donovan and others.

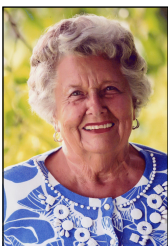
OBITUARIES

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Deadline for print publication:

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Edith L. Asher, 98



Edith L. Asher, 98, of Pineville, passed away peacefully on Friday, August 14, 2026, at the Middlesboro Nursing & Rehabilitation Center. She was born in Fourmile on December 17, 1927, a daughter of Lillie Carmony Lester. She graduated from Lone Jack High School in 1945, with subsequent degrees from the Kentucky School of Cosmetology in 1946 and Kentucky Business School in 1964.

Edith was a remarkable member of the community where her involvement extended beyond her work. She was a former member of the Pineville Utility Commission, Bell County Tourism, Southeast Kentucky Tourism, and Supervisor of Group Sales for Kentucky State Resort Park System until she retired in 1994. She was a member of ASTA and represented Kentucky in Washington DC, American Folk Festival, she represented Kentucky in Montreal, Canada, and Palm Springs, California. She was appointed to the Consumer Advisory Boards, Sole Worker for donations for 7 large outdoor lights for the Pine Mountain State Resort Park, organized swimming classes for those at Clear Creek Baptist Bible College, and hosted the Jaycee International President in 1960. She was a Kentucky Colonel, Kentucky Colonette Career Service Award for 30 years. Belonged to the Wendell Ford Society, on the Reception Committee for the Cumberland Gap Natural Historical Park Tunnel Dedication, House of Representatives Citation, Education Institute 1989-1993, Governor's Staff for the Kentucky Derby for 15 years. Instrumental worker for "The Book of Job" for 20 years, helped with Boys and Girls Scouts, member of the Pineville Jr and Sr Women's Club, Garden Club, and Salvation Army. Edith went with mission groups to Israel, Egypt, and Costa Rica, and served on the Democratic Executive Committee for Bell County. She was the Chair of the Kentucky Mountain Laurel Festival in 1973, worked in festival service since 1947, also served as a director until 2011, when she became an honorary director.

Edith was a believer in the Baptist Faith, becoming a Christian at the age of 10, a member of the First Baptist Church in Pineville since 1945 and later, First Baptist Church in Middlesboro.

Edith is preceded in death by her mother, Lillie Carmony Lester; brothers, Glen Harold Lester and William Henry Lester; sister-in-law, Ruth Lester.

Edith is survived by her son, David Michael Asher and wife, Cassandra; daughters, Georgiana A. Shelby and husband, Roy, and Sharon A. Goodin and husband, Joey; grandchildren, Penny Alexander, Shawna Lowe, Timothy Asher, Alyson Wiggins, Adrienne Jones, Beth Shelby, Rebecca Shelby, Amie Goodin, Evan Goodin, Jonathan Goodin, and Maredith Goodin; great-grandchildren, Elayne Shelby, Luke Wiggins, Maddux Wiggins, Amelia Jones, Mallory Jones, Zoya Goodin, Leon Goodin, Kentucky Anne Christy, and August Christy; nieces, Linda Hillegass, Wanda Noyer, Sandra Brown, Cathy A. Woolum, and Susan A. Hall; nephews, William "Bill" Lester and Matt Asher; special cousin, June Correll; loving caregivers, Rose and Amy; and a host of other relatives and friends.

Funeral services will be at 3:00 PM on Saturday, August 22, 2026, at the Arnett & Steele Funeral Home. Honorary Pallbearers will be John Turpin, Daniel Mongiardo, Brandon Smith, John Combs, John Slusher, Colby Slusher, John Widner, and James Miracle.

The family would like to thank Dr. Martha Combs-Woolum for her many years of loving care of our mother.

In lieu of flowers, the family suggests that donations be made in Edith's honor to the Kentucky Mountain Laurel Festival Foundation, Pineville Senior Citizens Center, First Baptist Church of Middlesboro, or to a charity of your choice.

The family will receive friends on Saturday from 12:00 PM until the funeral hour at the Arnett & Steele Funeral Home and Cremation Center in Pineville, which is honored to serve the Asher Family.

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