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BECKLEY, WV – *The Forbes OZ 20: Top Opportunity Zone Catalysts*, a partnership between Forbes and the Sorenson Impact Center, have announced a new list recognizing community organizations and Opportunity Zone (OZ) funds that are committed to achieving economic growth in underserved and overlooked communities throughout the country.

“New River Gorge Regional Development Authority is pleased to announce that Opportunity Appalachia is one of the top 20 selected”, said Lisa Gale, Director of Communications. “NRGRDA serves as state co-chair with West Virginia Community Development Hub on the project.”

Opportunity Appalachia is a six-member consortium of partners working to bring OZ investment into Central Appalachian communities in West Virginia, Virginia, and Ohio. The effort is designed to strengthen investable transactions in target rural communities, attracting Opportunity Zone investors to back small businesses and real estate development, leading to more local jobs. Opportunity Appalachia has received funding to support this work from the Appalachian Regional Commission POWER program, the Benedum Foundation, and local partners.

“We are thrilled to be able to bring more financial and technical resources to our region, to help Appalachia secure more investment in important industries, such as manufacturing, IT, downtown development, healthcare, education, food systems, heritage tourism and recreation,” remarked Appalachian Community Capital (ACC) President & CEO Donna Gambrell, whose organization will coordinate the Opportunity Appalachia effort. She added, “We expect to strengthen or help establish more than 20 businesses, which will lead to the creation of more than 700 new jobs, and generate private investments totaling \$7.5 million.”

Jim Sorenson, Founder of the Sorenson Impact Center, said, “We received 113 applications to the Forbes OZ 20, with 62 Funds and 51 communities testing their OZ strategies through a rigorous selection process. The quality and standard of applications

was excellent with communities and OZ funds showing a clear commitment to social impact.”

Upcoming outreach meetings will be held January 13 in Bridgeport, West Virginia; January 14 in Marietta, Ohio; and January 27 in Abingdon, Virginia. These January outreach meetings and ACC web site provide information about how local projects and communities can participate in the Opportunity Appalachia program.

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About New River Gorge Regional Development Authority (NRGRDA)

[New River Gorge Regional Development Authority](#) stimulates the regional economy of Fayette, Nicholas, Raleigh and Summers counties in southern West Virginia through business expansion and retention efforts including an extensive portfolio of financial services, the management of sites for new companies, and serving as a point of access for local service providers which offer a variety of technical assistance for business owners.

About Opportunity Appalachia

[Opportunity Appalachia](#) is led by a six-member consortium comprised of regional and national organizations with expertise in financing and community development that will support local projects to prepare sophisticated investment packets geared toward prospective OZ investors. Opportunity Appalachia partners include: [Appalachian Community Capital](#), [Appalachian Partnership for Economic Growth](#) (Ohio), [Opportunity Southwest Virginia / UVA – Wise](#), [West Virginia Community Development Hub](#), [Main Street America](#), and [Coastal Enterprises – CCML](#).

About the Forbes OZ 20

The Forbes OZ 20 officially launched in the spring of 2019, with applications closing at the end of August 2019. The purpose of this new list is to showcase how large and small investors, as well as rural and urban communities, are pioneering dynamic, equity-minded approaches to the revitalization of distressed communities. By elevating the best examples of OZ work from around the country we hope to showcase the promise and possibilities of the entire OZ landscape.

About Appalachian Community Capital (ACC)

ACC is a 20-member CDFI lending intermediary whose members and their affiliates manage over \$1 billion in assets supporting economic development across Appalachia.