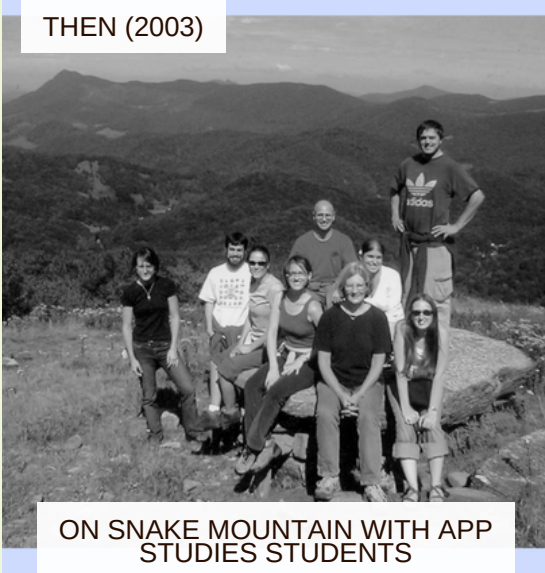


PAT BEAVER

FORMER DIRECTOR OF APPALACHIAN STUDIES AT
APPALACHIAN STATE UNIVERSITY

THEN (2003)



ON SNAKE MOUNTAIN WITH APP
STUDIES STUDENTS

A BRWIA Profile Written by Tathel Miller

It's quiet where we have gathered--Dr. Patricia Beaver and I. And we sit here with open files in the University Archives of Appalachian State. Our hands are steeped deep in history as we open each file and read the words--some we personally wrote--some penned by others. And we whisper and smile, 'Look what I found. Oh yes, I remember that.' The ink--dried long ago tells the story of an organization which now celebrates twenty-years of change, growth, prosperity, and the true grit of a few women who refused to accept, 'it can't be done.'

While serving as the Director of Appalachian Studies at Appalachian State University in 2002, Dr. Beaver was invited by Sue Counts, then the Watauga County Cooperative Extension Director to join Farm-City committee. The purpose of the committee was to celebrate the connections between townspeople and local farmers. Dr. Beaver's willingness to serve on this committee along with experiences in her Appalachian Culture and Social Organization class as well as her professional research led to her becoming an integral part of a small group of women who said, it's time to do more for our women farmers and thus began the humble beginnings of Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture (BRWIA).

"In 2002, Sue Counts invited me to join the Farm-City team, celebrating the ties between local farmers and townspeople, culminating in an awards banquet," Dr. Beaver explains "It was a great committee, lots of fun, a great event and I got to know Sue. I stayed on the committee for several years and enjoyed working on it with Sue and others.



"That same year Diane Price, then an MA student, joined the ANT 5120 (Appalachian Culture and Social Organization) class. Diane had the Farm at Mollie's Branch. Together with graduate student Ruthie Blakeney, they did their research and presentation on historical and contemporary agriculture in Watauga and Ashe counties."

As more research proved the need for better resources, education and support, the circle of concerned women grew larger working together to form BRWIA and ultimately being awarded the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation grant--the organization's first large grant.

"In my own local research, I encountered a number of women who were farmers on their own, an exception to the standard farm family practices," says Dr. Beaver. "I gave a talk on women farmers at one of the early BRWIA conferences. We were also seeing the last days of sheep farming, as well as the demise of the tobacco industry. We were witness to the struggles and sometimes successes of small sustainable farmers and the beginnings of local CSA's.

“Diane’s grant writing and collaboration with Sue Counts, Hollis Wild, Judi Starns, and I, and other women interested in supporting local women in agriculture, resulted in a successful submission of the proposal from the Center to the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation,” explains Dr. Beaver. “The \$30,000 grant to support Women in Agriculture spawned partnerships with other organizations, workshops, and creation of an official non-profit organization, Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture. The early workshops we did were exciting and full of good information, with networks across the region and the state, particularly resource people through NC Extension Services. By 2005 BRWIA had hired a part-time employee, using funds from the Conservation Fund Resourceful Communities Program.”

Dr. Beaver is very grateful for being a part of the beginning of BRWIA and the work that has been done over the years. She is especially appreciative for the leaders of today who have connected with the past and continue to build on the strong foundation that was built in the early years.

“I am excited by the way young people have joined hands with the elders of the organization as BRWIA has grown into a dynamic and vibrant organization, serving farmers year-round and customers with healthy food through the markets, the brilliant Food Hub, and myriad educational activities.”
- Pat Beaver, 2023



“I am proud to have been in a position to support the launching of BRWIA, and to have had a hand in the beginning of this amazing organization,” Dr. Beaver says. “I am proud to have supported women in agriculture with this vision for what could be. (And) I am excited by the way young people have joined hands with the elders of the organization as BRWIA has grown into a dynamic and vibrant organization, serving farmers year-round and customers with healthy food through the markets, the brilliant Food Hub, and myriad educational activities.”

A humble and powerful voice for many over the years through her work and research, Dr. Beaver continues to serve on committees and boards for several local organizations. And she is enjoying her retirement years with her grandchildren, writing, gardening, and traveling.

“I retired from the university at the end of 2014, and have been enjoying my 3 grandchildren, traveling in the US and abroad, serving several local organizations, writing, and gardening,” Dr. Beaver adds. “My husband grew up on a farm in Virginia, and we always put in a large garden. I have lobbied successfully for raised beds and now have 8, surrounded by a deer fence. Though we will travel a lot this summer, four are planted and I am waiting to see if my pitiful asparagus survives.”

