

FACT SHEET



Hands Across the Hills

Leverett MA / Letcher County KY

A Cultural Exchange/Dialogue Project, Leverett MA, October 27-29, 2017

What is “Hands Across the Hills”?

Hands Across the Hills is a cultural exchange/dialogue project that brings together two rural communities with differing cultural, social, and political profiles – Leverett, Massachusetts, and Letcher County, Kentucky.

The project will feature two exchange weekends. The first will be in Leverett, October 27-29 of this year, when Leverett will host several representatives from Letcher County. In the spring of 2018 a group from Leverett will participate in a reciprocal visit.

What is the purpose of the program?

This initiative evolved as a response to the 2016 presidential election by a group of Leverett residents who formed an organization called the Leverett Alliance. The group’s goal was to identify ways in which our community could help the country move forward in a positive manner at a time of severe polarization between “red” and “blue” states.

One Alliance proposal was to form a “bridging committee” to create some type of partnership with a community in a different part of the country with a significantly different political and socio-economic profile than our own. The purpose: to discover common visions and respectfully address differences as we move ahead in challenging times.

How did you choose Letcher County, Kentucky?

One of the committee members read an article by Ben Fink, a leader in an organization called Appalshop (www.appalshop.org) in Whitesburg, Kentucky, in the heart of Appalachian coal country. The article was entitled “Democracy in Trump Country: In This Election We Learned Rural People Have Power, Whether We Like it or Not” (you can google the title; it’s a great article).

The article summarizes Letcher County’s response to the election and explains how Appalshop brings together rural people from a variety of backgrounds through music, drama, film, and storytelling. The article concluded with a call for other communities to join in their efforts, and we responded with our exchange proposal. Appalshop responded enthusiastically, and follow-up communications facilitated the forthcoming exchange.

FACT SHEET

What events will take place in Leverett in October?

Cultural activities will include musical performances, a contra dance, participatory drama, and art exhibits. There will be three formal dialogue sessions co-facilitated by project directors Paula Green of Leverett and Ben Fink from Letcher County.

Will events be open to the public?

Certain events, such as the formal dialogue sessions, will be restricted for reasons of numbers and participant confidentiality. However, several events will be open to the public and media. These public events will take place on **Saturday, October 28**, and include the following:

At Leverett Elementary School, 85 Montague Road, Leverett

9:00-11:00 am Community Forum

- *A chance to interact with our guests from Letcher County, Kentucky, and members of the Leverett Alliance Bridging Committee. Learn how communities with very different histories and cultures can work together to achieve common goals.*

11:30-Noon Leverett Community Chorus

- *Songs to celebrate the heritage and folkways of Appalachia and New England*

Noon-1:00 Community Potluck Lunch

- *For admission, please bring a dish to share – “local” fare appreciated*

At Montague Common Hall (formerly Montague Grange), 34 Main Street, Montague

6:00-7:00 pm Community Potluck Dinner

- *For admission, please bring a dish to share – “local” fare appreciated*

7:00-10:00 pm Contra Dance (Requested donation \$10)

- *With The Moving Violations, Ron Blechner, Caller (special guest Autumn Rose Lester on fiddle)*

(Note: To provide context for the weekend, Hands Across the Hills will host a free Appalachian Film Night at the Leverett Library, Monday, October 2, at 6:30 p.m. We will present two 1-hour documentaries about Appalachia.)

Where will the visitors stay?

Members of the bridging committee will host our visitors in their homes, and guests will have free time during the weekend to tour sights in and around the Pioneer Valley.

Who is funding this effort?

We are currently enrolling sponsors and seeking volunteer donations. Please refer to the contact information below if you wish to assist.

CONTACT

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