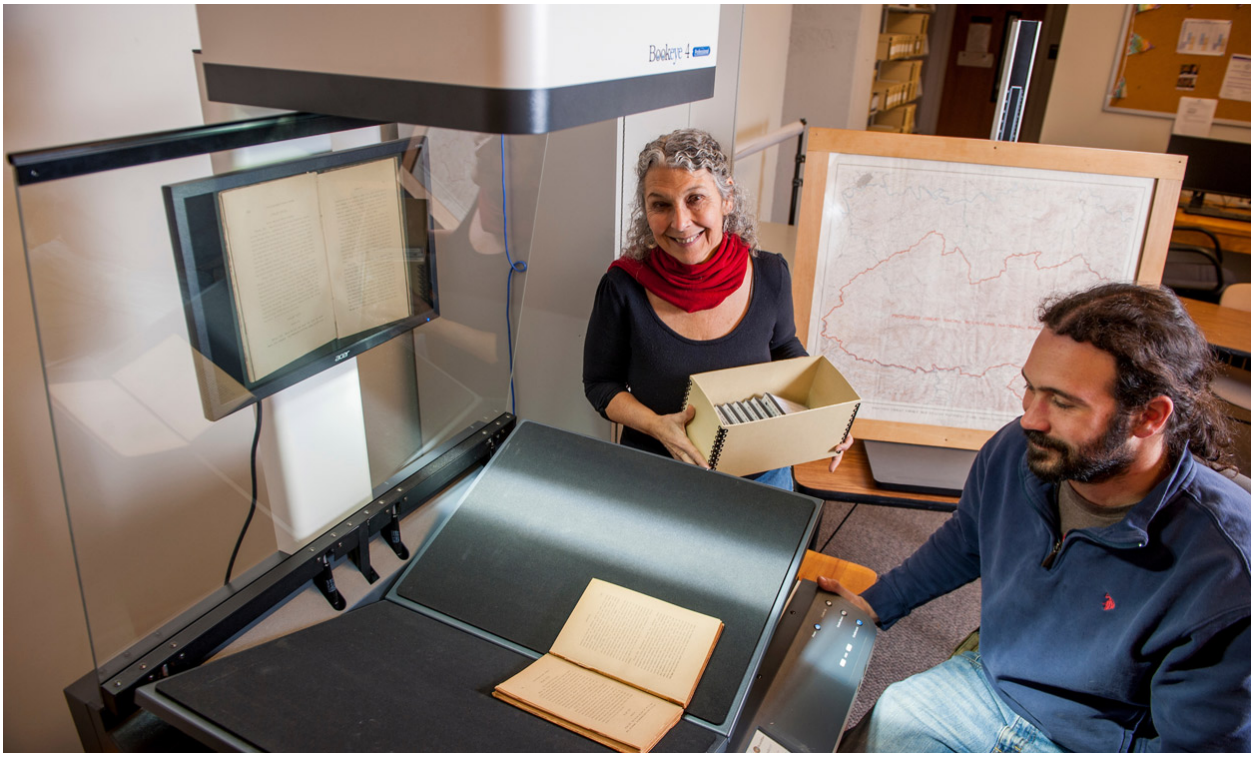
Darnell Farms is the recipient of the 2024 organizational Mountain Heritage Day Award for its commitment to and promotion of Appalachian agriculture. An active, multi-generational farm located in Bryson City, the farm produces 100 acres of strawberries, pole beans, sweet corn, pumpkins, squash, a variety of tomatoes and much more.

Nate Darnell, affectionately known as “Nate the Farmer,” along with his sister Afton Roberts, own and operate the family-friendly farm and offer several festivals throughout the year as well as special events and activities for various organizations in the area. The Darnell family offers educational field trips to the farm, sharing information about farm life, methods used to raise their crops and how be good stewards of the land.

The Darnell family has been involved in Mountain Heritage Day for many years, with Nate Darnell bringing an antique tractor and trailer to give rides to excited festival goers throughout the day of the festival. The Darnell family also donate hundreds of pumpkins each year for fall-themed photo props.

This year’s individual Mountain Heritage Day Award recognizes Anna Fariello and posthumously Crystal Cauley.



Anna Fariello (center) is the one of two recipients of the individual Mountain Heritage Day Award.

Fariello's career in cultural preservation spanned more than 30 years in both Virginia and North Carolina. She began her career at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts before teaching at Radford University and later Virginia Tech.

Fariello came to WCU's Hunter Library in 2004 as an established curator focusing on Southern Appalachian preservation. Fariello worked to create protocol for digitally archiving collections as well as curating six digital collections herself. She served as visual art editor for the Encyclopedia of Appalachia as well as chapter author for the Handbook of Appalachia, a guidebook for educators wanting to incorporate regional studies into their curriculum.

Upon retirement from WCU in 2016, Fariello had overseen 30 local, federal and state grants as well as curated more than 40 exhibits and presented more than 50 conference papers on material culture, digitization and her work with diverse communities. Fariello continues to share the rich culture of the region, writing 10 books as well as numerous book chapters and articles.

Cauley, who passed away unexpectedly at the age of 44 in June of this year, was a native of Hendersonville who represented a deeply-rooted commitment to her community through her creative ventures and advocacy. Cauley was a dedicated activist, preserving the rich heritage of her community and considered a force behind addressing issues of cultural equity and preservation and celebration of African American history in the region.

Cauley was the founder and owner of Black Business Network of WNC, founder and CEO of Black Business History Collective of Henderson County and co-founder of the African American Parent Alliance, birth doula and beloved Sunday School teacher at Agape World Outreach. Cauley was recognized locally and regionally for her work many times, including being the recipient of the 2021 Wilma Dykeman Award for Writers of Color.