Catch the Spirit of Appalachia: Award Winners – The Reporter

Another nonprofit organization created to "encourage youth to cherish their heritage and creativity, and inspire connections with all cultures" was recognized for almost 25 years of fulfilling that mission in the region. Catch the Spirit of Appalachia was originally formed by sisters Amy Ammons Garza of Sylva and Doryel Ammons Cain of Tuckasegee when they began visiting elementary schools to tell and illustrate seven generations of family stories about the region, and more. Now the organization's board of directors supervises and promotes the activities of poets, authors, artists, performers and broadcast producers in communicating the rich heritage of Appalachia.

"Five years ago, they began sharing a program called "Stories of Mountain Folk" on radio WRGC 540 AM, which WCU's Hunter Library is archiving," Belcher said. "And now the organization continues its outreach through a multimedia website, www.spiritofappalachia.com."

Scott Philyaw, director of WCU's Mountain Heritage Center, honored one of the festival's own volunteers, former WCU staff member Lila Buchanan, for her many years of service to Mountain Heritage Day, presenting her with the annual Eva Adcock Award. Buchanan, who handled the festival's budget for many years, continues to volunteer even after her retirement to help administer activities such as the chainsaw competition. Adcock, for whom the recognition is named, was a WCU music professor who added festival traditions of square dancing and shape-note singing to its activities and passed away in 1999.

Philyaw and Trina Royar, festival coordinator, were pleased with the day's events. "The weather was gorgeous," Royar said. "The turnout was excellent."

Joe Deitz, one of the Deitz Family performers at the festival, concurred on a post to its Facebook page: "One of the best Mountain Heritage Day festivals we have attended. We have attended 39 of them."

For more information on Mountain Heritage Day, go online to www.MountainHeritageDay.com or call 828-227-7129.