

The Fifth Time is a Charm for Virginia's Arbor Day

By: Jon Lawson

Photos by Gavin Bledsoe

On April 3, Virginia held its fifth Annual Arbor Day Celebration on TECO's Clintwood Elkhorn Mining Company Bearwallow Surface Mine.

The theme of the event was Trees for Wildlife.

Even Mother Nature could not dissuade the record attendance level for this event. Despite howling winds and light showers nearly 450 people came out to plant hardwoods on Virginia's foremost fully Forestry Reclamation Approach (FRA) permit.

The record setting attendance included every sixth-grade student from Buchanan County Public Schools, the Mountain Mission Private School, the Home School Association of Buchanan County, and a visit from the sixth graders from Majestic Knox Elementary School located just across the state line in Kentucky, for a grand total of 350 students.

The agenda included a docket of dignified speakers, tree planting, educational stations, and a hamburger and hot dog lunch.

The educational stations and tree planting species selected were based around the Trees for Wildlife theme. Over 1,000 tree seedlings were planted on the re-graded areas of the site. Bob Paris, geneticist from The American Chestnut Foundation, led one of the educational stations and also donated several backcross chestnut seedlings to plant during the event. This marked the first introduction of backcross seedlings onto an active Virginia surface mine permit.

In the other two stations representatives from Virginia's Division of Mined Land Reclamation spoke to the students about the FRA and wildlife that inhabits the coalfields of Southwest Virginia and how the wildlife benefits from reforestation and early succession habitat.

One might think it is difficult to trump an event of this magnitude and the biggest story of Virginia's Arbor Day is the record attendance, however, you would be mistaken. The record attendance is a side note, at least to one Buchanan County family.

Gene Boyd is the mine site superintendent on Clintwood Elkhorn Mining Company's Bearwallow site.

The Bearwallow surface mine is a pioneer in Virginia's implementation of the science behind the FRA and ARRI's goals. Boyd has been there from the beginning overseeing the operation, including providing on-the-ground direction to keep the mine's soil from being over compacted and making sure the post-mining land use of forest land is achieved. For this reason, he was selected to receive Virginia's ARRI Award and the

Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals, and Energy ARRI Reclamationist of the Year award for his excellent work.

He was presented his awards by Jackie Davis, VA Division of Mined Land Reclamation, Director. To add to the excitement, Boyd's wife, Lisa, a teacher and his son, a sixth grade student in Buchanan County were in attendance. They were very proud of the recognition for his hard work and dedication to the reforestation of mined land in Virginia.

Another spin on this year's event was the student art contest sponsored by the Virginia Mining Association (VMA) that was held to create the Arbor Day logo used on the tee shirts celebrating the event.

Not to be upstaged, Boyd's son, Reed, was announced the winner of the VMA's art contest. Along with seeing his artistic creation on over 450 tee shirts, Reed also won a gift certificate for his work.



(From left) DMLR Director Jack Davis presents Gene Boyd, Clintwood Elkhorn Mining Company, with ARRI Individual Award.



Margie Horton and Bill Bledsoe, Virginia Mining Association, present Reed Boyd (center) with first place award in the VMA sponsored Art Contest.