

# Beaver County Times

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## Organization to promote outdoors recreation in region

By: Bill Utterback  
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A Pittsburgh-based outdoors organization is launching an initiative to lead people toward the trails, roads and waterways of Beaver, Butler and Lawrence counties.

Venture Outdoors — a nonprofit organization that promotes hiking, biking, kayaking, rock climbing and other recreational pursuits, mostly in Allegheny County — is using a \$200,000 grant from the Richard King Mellon Foundation to establish a field office that will provide programming for residents in the three-county area, and bring tourists into the region.

The group intends to open an office in Harmony, Butler County, in June. The office was provided, free of charge, by the Butler County Tourism and Convention Bureau.

"We'll have programming this summer in Beaver County," Sean Brady, the assistant executive director of Venture Outdoors, said. "The rivers and other amenities in the area offer a lot of possibilities. Raccoon Creek State Park is a great resource. The Beaver River is great for kayaking and canoeing. Connoquenessing Creek is an up-and-coming waterway. It's a great place for day trips.

"We're going to do some fun things."

Julie Meier, a Chippewa Township resident who has been an administrator with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Beaver County, has been hired as the director of the field office. She begins next week.

"I have a personal affinity for nature and the outdoors, and I was looking for a way to partner my career experience with my love of the outdoors," she said, identifying herself as a birdwatcher who enjoys canoeing and kayaking. "I'm really looking forward to helping the organization showcase the plentiful outdoor opportunities we have in this part of the state."

This Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Venture Outdoors, through its Pittsburgh office, is sponsoring a nature hike in Raccoon Creek State Park.

Venture Outdoors is also looking at Moraine State Park in Butler County and McConnell's Mill State Park in Lawrence County as key sites for programs.

"We'll be working closely with the tourism agencies in Beaver, Butler and Lawrence counties to help bring people to see the best amenities in those areas," Brady said.

Venture Outdoors' mission statement says the organization "is seeking to transform the Pittsburgh region into a place where outdoors is an integral part of our culture, identity and lifestyle."

Brady said Venture Outdoors, established in 2001, provided more than 500 public programs engaging more than 41,000 people in 2009. He said 80 percent of the club's 6,500 members live in Allegheny County. The organization requires a small fee for many events, and members receive discounted rates. Membership is

not required for most events.

Venture Outdoors, according to Meier, has been providing year-round programming, for children, families and adults, and for various skill levels, and she intends to follow a similar trail.

“The possibilities are almost endless,” she said.