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America's Best Communities competition announces the eight finalist communities in the \$10 Million prize campaign

These eight communities were awarded \$100,000 to continue implementation of their revitalization plans; top three winners will be announced in April 2017

DURHAM, N.C., April 27, 2016 — The America's Best Communities (ABC) competition, a \$10 million campaign that has inspired small towns and cities to pursue innovative solutions for revitalization, today announced its eight finalists at the ABC Summit in Durham, North Carolina. Each of the eight finalists received a \$100,000 prize grant from competition sponsors Frontier Communications, DISH Network, CoBank and The Weather Channel. This funding award will empower the finalists to bring their new economic revitalization strategies to life.

The eight finalists stretch across the country: Chisago Lakes Area, Minnesota; Darrington/Arlington, Washington; Huntington, West Virginia; Lake Havasu City, Arizona; Madison, Indiana; Statesboro, Georgia; Tualatin, Oregon; and Valley County/Meadows Valley, Idaho were selected as finalists and will now continue their journey toward earning the competition's \$6 million in top prizes.

"America's Best Communities prize campaign challenged small towns and cities across the country to dream big and pave their own way to a brighter future," said **Maggie Wilderotter, former CEO of Frontier Communications**. "More than 350 communities answered the call, and now eight remain in the running. In these determined, hardworking communities, people from all walks of life came together to successfully reimagine their future and reinvigorate their community. And in the end, we all win, because the wealth of creative ideas coming from this contest will be implemented and shared with communities across the country."

In the competition's quarterfinal round, 50 communities — from the pool of over 350 participants — were awarded \$50,000 in seed money to develop a Community Revitalization Plan and each was paired with a major corporation that served as a strategic adviser as part of the competition's Adopt-a-Community Program. From this class of 50 quarterfinalists, the 15 with the best plans — those with the most innovative ideas being effectively executed — were named semifinalists this past January.

This week, the 15 semifinalist communities gathered in Durham for the ABC Summit, each pitching their proposal to a panel of expert judges and outlining why their plan has the greatest potential to jumpstart redevelopment and generate sustained revitalization.

In a surprise announcement, Frontier also awarded \$25,000 to each of the seven communities that did not advance into the finals. This means all of the communities will return home with funding to continue implementing their plans.

“By providing a hand up to communities in need, this competition has helped small towns and cities lift themselves up by their bootstraps and live their own American dream,” said **Vince Gill**, spokesperson for the competition and country music legend. “Music has always provided people with an escape from the difficulties they face. That’s why I’m proud to be working with America’s Best Communities to help our neighbors in rural America not just escape their challenges, but tackle them head on.”

Frontier, DISH, CoBank and The Weather Channel teamed up to sponsor America’s Best Communities to inspire communities to transform their local economies and improve the lives and livelihoods of their citizens. By crowdsourcing new ideas to revitalize rural America, this campaign has helped identify innovative solutions that can serve as roadmaps to economic revival for other small and medium size communities across the U.S.

In April 2017, the top three communities making the largest impact and fostering long-term growth will be selected as the grand prize winners. The first-place community will receive \$3 million and the second-place community \$2 million, and \$1 million for third.

“These eight finalist communities have demonstrated the ability to think long-term and create a path forward to make their ideas a reality, an approach that we value at DISH as we serve our customers, many of whom reside in small towns and rural communities,” said **DISH EVP Brian Neylon**. “This competition is helping to invigorate communities, injecting new resources and energy where needed, and we look forward to seeing these plans become reality.”

“The value that rural America brings to every American is deeply underappreciated,” said **CoBank CEO Bob Engel**. “The high quality of life in this country has everything to do with the 15 percent of people who call rural America home. Whether it is safe, nutritious, affordable and abundant food, or reliable and affordable power, everyone in this country owes a debt of gratitude to rural America. So it is deeply gratifying to see the great ideas for revitalization and economic development that have been generated by the ABC campaign.”

“These communities have been through a lot, from overcoming economic decline to recovering after natural disasters to combatting unemployment. It has been inspiring to see local leaders and residents of these communities put those challenges behind them and instead focus entirely on how they can best restore and grow their hometown,” said **Dave Shull, CEO of The Weather Channel**.

To explore the communities’ revitalization strategies and for additional information on the competition, please visit www.americasbestcommunities.com.

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