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Three Communities Crowned Winners of “America’s Best Communities” Competition and Receive Millions for Revitalization Plans

***Huntington, Lake Havasu City, Statesboro bring home grand prizes, earn
“America’s Best” title following three-year competition***

***Sponsored by Frontier Communications, DISH Network, CoBank and The Weather
Channel, \$10 million program inspires revitalization in Rural America***

DENVER, Colo.; April 19, 2017—Huntington, West Virginia; Lake Havasu City, Arizona; and Statesboro, Georgia were named the top three in the America’s Best Communities competition, a \$10 million community revitalization campaign sponsored by Frontier Communications, DISH Network, CoBank and The Weather Channel.

Launched in September 2014 to inspire revitalization and growth in small towns and rural communities across the country, America’s Best Communities challenged local leaders to bring their neighbors together to envision a stronger future and build a strategy to improve lives and livelihoods. It has served as a catalyst for positive change by awarding seed funding to help communities turn their exceptional ideas from vision to reality.

Grand prize: \$3 million – Huntington, West Virginia

Huntington is poised to become a gateway for revitalization in the Appalachian region, as it executes its Huntington Innovation Project (HIP) Plan, which aims to transform distressed neighborhoods, where the old manufacturing and coal-sector economy has declined, into hip hubs for advanced manufacturing, innovative makerspaces and entrepreneurial incubators, healthcare businesses and green community improvements.

Second place: \$2 million – Lake Havasu City, Arizona

Lake Havasu City will accelerate its Vision 20/20 plan, which focuses on five pillars: economic development and job creation, education and workforce talent, tourism and place development, water preservation and management, and community engagement. Combined, these strategic initiatives are designed to jumpstart economic growth.

Third place: \$1 million – Statesboro, Georgia

Statesboro’s revitalization plan focuses on The Blue Mile, an underdeveloped stretch of Main Street that connects its downtown to the Georgia Southern University campus. The strategy aims to reclaim the area as a safe, desirable place to live, regain its economic health and restore its historic identity.

About 350 communities entered the competition. The field was narrowed to 50 in the quarterfinals, 15 in the semifinals and down eight finalists. Communities advanced in the competition based on the effectiveness of the revitalization plans developed, fine-tuned and implemented over the course of the three-year competition.

The eight finalists gathered this week in Denver, Colorado, the home of sponsoring companies DISH Network and CoBank, to present their revitalization strategies and share progress made in

achieving new growth. Following the presentations, the top three were announced during the America's Best Communities Grand Prize Ceremony.

“When we launched America's Best Communities, we hoped to inspire revitalization in small towns and cities across rural America. As we celebrate the culmination of the campaign, it feels like a dream fulfilled,” said **Maggie Wilderotter, former CEO of Frontier Communications and the catalyst behind the competition**. “After three years of hard work, and from a pool of about 350 communities, three communities have earned the title of ‘America's Best’ — and we're thrilled to extend our congratulations. With hard work and determination, they have forever changed the trajectory of their communities. The America's Best Communities prize grants they've secured will help them continue on the path to prosperity.”

“We've served rural America during our entire 36-year history, and we've been proud to be part of this effort to inspire innovation in rural communities,” said **DISH President and Chief Operating Officer Erik Carlson**. “We hope each community's story and revitalization strategy will serve as inspiration for other rural towns that seek to pursue their own positive change.”

“These communities have developed innovative ideas that can be emulated in other rural areas to jumpstart growth, jobs and economic resurgence,” said **Robert B. Engel, retired CEO and Senior Advisor, CoBank**. “As a financial institution dedicated to supporting America's rural economy, we commend all the ABC participants for the enormous efforts they have made and the leadership they have shown in bringing their vision for a better future to reality.”

“In covering major weather events across the nation, The Weather Channel has told memorable, compelling stories; often about small, rural towns which are often impacted the most by weather. We are inspired by revival stories of the small towns and cities that competed in America's Best Communities,” said **Dave Shull, CEO of The Weather Channel**. “They've faced tough times, but they refused to give in. They saw an opportunity to improve their community, and they worked hard to make it happen. Congratulations to all of the communities that entered this competition.”

“When I'm on tour, I travel across America's heartland. I've visited some of the hardest-hit small towns, and I've gotten to know the people who call those places home,” said **Vince Gill, ambassador for the competition and country music legend**. “They're hardworking, resilient people, and America's Best Communities has proven that when opportunity presents itself, rural communities will rise to the challenge and find innovative ways to create a better future for themselves and their neighbors.”

During each phase of America's Best Communities, the best strategies — those with the most innovative ideas being effectively deployed — were advanced to the next round and awarded funding to accelerate implementation. In April 2015, 50 quarterfinalists were awarded \$50,000 each. Then, from the field of 15 semifinalists, eight finalist communities were presented with \$100,000 prize grants, with the remaining seven receiving \$25,000 to initiate their plans.

Throughout the competition, from its start through the grand prize round, an independent panel of judges reviewed and scored communities' proposals based on an objective set of criteria to select winners.

The eight finalist communities that gathered in Denver included:

- Chisago Lakes Area, Minnesota
- Darrington/Arlington, Washington

- Huntington, West Virginia
- Lake Havasu City, Arizona
- Madison, Indiana
- Statesboro, Georgia
- Tualatin, Oregon
- Valley County, Idaho

By crowdsourcing new ideas to revitalize rural America, the campaign has helped identify innovative solutions that can serve as roadmaps to economic revival for other small and medium-sized communities across the U.S. The competition's organizers are encouraging local leaders across the country to view the communities' revitalization plans, which are available publicly at the America's Best Communities website.

For more on the competition, visit www.americasbestcommunities.com.

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