

The Mutual Pharmacy Comeback

314 WOOD AVENUE, NORTH | BIG STONE GAP, VA 24219



Partnerships, grants and strategic loans helped the revitalization of a well-loved building in Big Stone Gap's downtown. The Mutual Pharmacy building is now home to a locally owned restaurant, office space and affordable apartments.

Like many small rural towns, Big Stone Gap – a former coalfield town located in the southwestern corner of Virginia – has seen its economy ebb and flow.

When Westmoreland Coal Company was operational, Big Stone Gap's downtown was bustling with retail, offices and restaurants. Mutual Pharmacy, which featured a cafeteria-style diner inside and variety store in the basement, was at the center of it all. People went there on dates, on shopping trips and sometimes just to browse and see a friendly face.

A small town hub gets a fresh new start — and a downtown comes back to life.

Town Manager Stephen Lawson grew up in Big Stone Gap and has dozens of fond memories of Mutual Pharmacy. He even had family members who worked there.

“As a child we would go there to not only eat and get a gift card, but for everything,” said Lawson. “It was always an experience.”

When the coal plant shut down in 1995, it put 800 people out of work. The loss of industry greatly impacted Big Stone Gap's local economy, and downtown storefronts shuttered. The well-loved Mutual Pharmacy eventually closed its doors in 2013.



“This project coming through and the remodeling of the building was an opportunity for someone like myself,” said Jordan. “I wouldn’t have been able to do it on my own.”

— WAYNE JORDAN, Owner of Curklin’s Restaurant

Bringing back the heart and soul to Big Stone Gap’s downtown area

“The Mutual (as locals call it) was a big deal downtown,” said Suzie Cradic, Executive Director of Big Stone Gap Redevelopment & Housing Authority. “People just loved it, and we knew that if it didn’t get saved, it would fall into disrepair.”

“The Mutual is the heart and soul of downtown, and I knew that in order to reinvigorate that downtown area we needed to start with it,” said Lawson.

Through sheer determination, partnerships and support from Virginia Housing, which included a \$150,000 Community Impact Grant and generous permanent lending, the Redevelopment & Housing Authority and town put together a three-phased plan to redevelop the building. Plans included a restaurant on the main floor, commercial space in the basement and five affordable apartments on the second floor.

Virginia Housing’s Strategic Lending Officer Wally Robinson has worked with the Redevelopment & Housing Authority since 2019 on the town’s revitalization efforts.

The empty downtown got a boost when an A-lister movie, “Big Stone Gap,” debuted in theaters in 2014. The movie was written and directed by Adriana Trigiani, who grew up in Big Stone Gap, and was based on her 2000 novel, Home of Big Stone Gap. The excitement surrounding the film prompted the Redevelopment & Housing Authority to purchase the Mutual building and help reinvigorate the downtown.

Lawson worked closely with Cradic on the revitalization plans.



Stephen Lawson,
Town Manager

“It’s been great to be a part of this, and we love seeing how the downtown has grown since work on Mutual Pharmacy began,” he said.

Locals Wayne and Tracy Jordan had always dreamed of owning their own casual family restaurant, so when they found out the remodeled Mutual building would have space for a restaurant, they jumped at the opportunity.

“It’s something I’ve always wanted to do,” said Wayne Jordan.

For years, dreams of owning his own place seemed out of reach because of the money needed to build or renovate a new restaurant space.

The Jordans opened Curklin’s restaurant inside the Mutual building in September 2019, and despite the pandemic, have done well.

“The community has been really supportive,” said Jordan.

Following the restaurant opening, a coworking space opened in the basement in 2020, and the five apartments were completed in the spring of 2021.

“There’s a lot of buzz about the apartments, and the coworking space really appeals to the younger generation,” said Lawson.



Wayne Jordan,
Owner of Curklin’s Restaurant



Five Newly Renovated
Affordable Apartments



Suzie Cradic,
Executive Director, Big Stone Gap RHA



**It's pretty exciting.
When you come through
downtown there are cars
everywhere, and that
used to not be the case."**

— SUZIE CRADIC
Executive Director, Big Stone Gap
Redevelopment & Housing Authority