Title of the Story: Waterfall Safety

Destination Name: (include any state, province or region)
Explore Brevard, Transylvania County, NC

Country: United States

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Nomination Category: (Please check the boxes that indicate the focus of your story)
☐ Culture & Communities
☐ Environment & Climate
☐ Nature & Ecotourism
☐ Islands & Seaside
☐ Immediate responses in dealing with the COVID-19
☐ Post COVID-19 recovery
☒ One of the 17 SDGs* (if yes, which one) GOAL 3: Good Health and Well-being

*The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. The 17 SDGs are integrated—that is, they recognize that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability. What are the Sustainable Development Goals? [https://www.unsd.org/post2015/sustainable-development-goals.html](https://www.unsd.org/post2015/sustainable-development-goals.html)

For further information on Tourism for SDGs: [http://tourism4sdgs.org/](http://tourism4sdgs.org/)

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Issues faced
Thanks to its unique geology and climate, Transylvania County, North Carolina is home to the largest concentration of waterfalls in North America, some 250 in all. These waterfalls represent a key attraction for visitors. Unfortunately, there are multiple dangers associated with waterfalls that can include injury and death. Tragically, Transylvania County experienced six waterfall fatalities in 2016.

Methods, steps and tools applied
That tragic toll was the impetus for the creation of a waterfall safety campaign initiated by Transylvania Always, a sustainability committee founded by Transylvania County Tourism in 2017, with support from leadership at Pisgah National Forest, DuPont State Recreational Forest, Gorges State Park, Transylvania County EMS and Mission Health, the region’s largest healthcare provider.

In 2017 & 2018, Transylvania Always hosted Waterfall Safety Days that generated extensive coverage by radio, TV and newspaper outlets. The committee also distributed waterfall safety cards and waterfall safety posters at several visitor centers throughout the area and created new waterfall safety signage at Sliding Rock. Additionally, Pisgah, DuPont and Gorges installed new warning signs in key areas.

Following the first year of the program, Transylvania Always recognized that there would be an ongoing need for awareness and education regarding this public safety threat. The committee also learned through Mission Health that just 26% of waterfall injuries are from out-of-state visitors. As a result, Transylvania Always broadened and intensified its effort and recalibrated its message to reach visitors and residents alike.

Additional signage, a more robust social media presence and two powerful videos about the dangers that exist around waterfalls have been added to the communications mix. Transylvania Always also secured the waterfallsafety.com url and is using it to amplify the waterfall safety message to the wider world.

Key success factors
Collaboration was one of the key components to the success of the program. Transylvania County Tourism received strong buy-in from the leadership of Pisgah National Forest, DuPont State Recreational Forest, and Gorges State Park. Mission Health, after learning about the program, volunteered time and resources to elevate the issue and publicize its importance.

Local media outlets also embraced the campaign and provided extensive coverage that raised awareness both locally and regionally.

**Lessons learned**
Transylvania Always learned that efforts like these require on-going support and diligence. It is not enough to have a one-year program aimed at waterfalls safety. Transylvania Always is committed to supporting waterfall safety as an integral and permanent part of its messaging, and that includes reviewing its efforts and results on a regular basis, refining its waterfall safety message when appropriate and continually looking for the most effective communication tools to effectively reach its target audiences of both visitors and local residents.

The action plan for on-going support of the waterfall safety initiative includes regularly scheduled meetings with public land managers (Pisgah National Forest, DuPont State Recreational Forest, Gorges State Park and Headwaters State Forest) to refine and develop new tactics to battle waterfall deaths and injuries. Further, Transylvania Always is conducting on-going meetings with a wide variety of outdoor recreation partners to integrate efforts as a way to amplify the messaging.

Visitor education was the #1 priority identified by these outdoor recreation stakeholders at a Transylvania Always Symposium conducted in February of 2020. As a result, in addition to waterfall safety, Transylvania Always has developed a comprehensive “Leave It Better” campaign aimed at reducing litter in our forests and waterways.

**Results, achievements and recognitions**
In 2018, there was only one waterfall related fatality, and in 2019 there were no waterfall-related fatalities in Transylvania County. Pisgah District Ranger Dave Casey said, "While I can't prove it, I am certain that the waterfall safety initiative is the primary reason for the decrease in injuries and fatalities." Furthermore, Transylvania County Tourism shared all of its Waterfall Safety resources and expertise with other western North Carolina destinations that also have significant waterfall assets.

**Additional references**
Waterfall Safety Newspaper Coverage:


https://apnews.com/dbe9778140474fdd8a7edefc40c3835c

Waterfall Safety Video #1
https://vimeo.com/336653936

Waterfall Safety Video #2
https://vimeo.com/288211509

Waterfall Safety URL & Tips
http://www.waterfallsafety.com

Sliding Rock Kiosk Art (Three 3’ x 8’ panels)
https://www.dropbox.com/s/eb6w3y0i8owo2pu/SlidingRock-Kiosk-lores.pdf?dl=0

Waterfall Safety Cards (Series, Standard Busine Card size)
https://www.dropbox.com/s/5r5z9uhhsn5duhp/WaterfallSafetyCards.pdf?dl=0

Field Notes E-Newsletter (distribution 20,000+)
https://t.e2ma.net/webview/l4uebb/12cc3bf1b610c8ba0f9f5e0ccbf1fcb9f

Waterfall Safety Facebook
https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=373778883232220

Leave It Better Campaign News

Leave It Better Videos and Posters
https://explorebrevard.com/Leave-It-Better/