



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Setting the Record Straight on the Blue Ridge Rock Festival**

It was the second morning of the four-day Blue Ridge Rock Festival, and the plans, though they were put together well, were not being administered correctly. Representatives from various government agencies – including the Virginia Department of Transportation, Virginia Department of Health, Pittsylvania County Public Safety, the County Sheriff, and others – explained the many concerns they had.

After hearing of the logistical difficulties, traffic management failure, and the generally unsafe situation, County Administrator David Smitherman turned to Jonathan Slye, CEO of Purpose Driven Events, and gave him three options:

- (1) The County could shut down the event
- (2) Purpose Driven Events could fix its own problems
- (3) The County could step in and fix the problems, but at additional cost to Purpose Driven Events.

Slye said he would prefer the County take over all logistics outside the venue. Once the County assumed control outside the venue, traffic management and transportation improved, and many public safety risks were alleviated. Yet in recent weeks, Mr. Slye has described a toxic relationship with Pittsylvania County and questioned the nature of the bills that he was provided, despite the fact that, at the time, the County was the only friend he had.

“We've been reserved, up to this point. We've let Mr. Slye create a narrative around these events, but we cannot stand by as untruths are reported as fact,” said Pittsylvania County Administrator David Smitherman. “It's important that our citizens understand how the County rescued this event. In retrospect, we should have cancelled the event because Mr. Slye's company was not performing what they were required to do, and public safety and lives were in jeopardy.”

# PITTSYLVANIA

The logo for Pittsylvania County, Virginia, features the word "PITTSYLVANIA" in a large, bold, blue sans-serif font. Below it, a blue wavy line represents a river or road, leading to the words "COUNTY, VIRGINIA" in a smaller, blue sans-serif font.

COUNTY, VIRGINIA

Beginning Wednesday morning, thousands of campers started arriving for the weekend festival. There was not sufficient coordination of functions like camping, traffic management, transportation, and sanitation. On Wednesday and Thursday, pedestrians were walking multiple miles along R&L Smith and Route 29 – oftentimes in the dark – to reach the remote parking lots and camping areas. Every agency involved was concerned about safety and worried about the possibility of injury.

On Thursday evening it became clear to County staff and the other regulating agencies that the problems – and the traffic management and transportation issues, in particular – were not going to get better. County Administrator David Smitherman and Sheriff Mike Taylor discussed the possibility of shutting the event down – something that they had the authority to do – but ultimately decided that would cause more problems without a viable traffic management plan in place.

That realization that the problems weren't going away led to the Friday morning meeting with Purpose Driven Events and regulatory agencies where Mr. Slye said he would like the County to take over. At his request, Pittsylvania County assumed control of all external operations. The first priority was to secure transportation and fix the traffic management problem.

“Our purpose at this point was to avoid serious injury by improving pedestrian safety. This situation from a public safety perspective was dire,” Smitherman said. Things got markedly better over the next few days. Thanks to buses and drivers that were contracted from Danville and Pittsylvania County Public Schools, things ran much smoother on Saturday and Sunday. People could get to the remote camping and parking lots without walking along R&L Smith Road and Highway 29.

“I appreciate Mr. Smitherman's leadership regarding the Blue Ridge Rock Festival,” said Chris Winstead, Lynchburg District Engineer for the Virginia Department of Transportation. “It is very clear Pittsylvania County took an active leadership role to address the challenges experienced on the ground... and they made it much better for all. Leading up to the event a credible plan was developed collaboratively and yet the overall number of people who arrived exceeded planning projections. In addition, the shuttles struggled to keep up with demand and the contractor responsible for maintenance of traffic struggled to implement the plan. But this was not to be the end of the story. Under County leadership a regional approach to finding solutions pivoted to improve the situation each night.”

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COUNTY, VIRGINIA

Starting Friday morning, Pittsylvania County procured the Danville and Pittsylvania County Public Schools to provide buses and drivers and equipment. Purpose Driven Events requested this help and signed contracts for the service. Smitherman secured vendors to provide the services that Purpose Driven Events was already supposed to have covered.

In doing this work, County staff were working to the direct and sole benefit of Purpose Driven Events, which is why Pittsylvania County billed on his behalf. Other executive-level staff, including the County Attorney, Sheriff, and Community Development Director, also worked to the direct benefit of the promoter and were not personally compensated for their work, but the County did bill for loaning Purpose Driven Events these services.

“Mr. Smitherman came to the festival site because of the issues that were being reported about the inadequacy of the operational management of the festival,” said Mike Taylor, Pittsylvania County Sheriff. “Mr. Smitherman organized local providers, at the promoter’s additional expense, for transportation issues, waste management issues and lighting issues with VDOT and others to get the event back on a manageable footing. Mr. Smitherman maintained a physical presence to help anyway he could to address concerns from our citizens with operational missteps by the promoter’s contractors. County staff had continuous meetings with the promoters and their staff to ensure things were getting accomplished as was promised by Purpose Driven Events as well as requesting input from county and state agencies.”

A few weeks after the event, Pittsylvania County sent invoices for to Purpose Driven Events, and due to public interest in the matter, these invoices were publicly published. The total invoice was for approximately \$337,000, which was for Pittsylvania County and other agencies. Some of these costs were planned - like Public Safety and the Sheriff’s Office, for instance. Other bills, including those for transportation and sanitation services, were unplanned and the result of the emergency shift in control of the festival.

Those bills were paid by drawing from a \$500,000 cash bond that Purpose Driven Events put up before the festival. This bond was also used to remit payment for the meals tax collected at the promoter’s request, leaving approximately \$11,000 that has been returned to Purpose Driven Events.

Next week we will publish a recap of the cancellation of the Blue Ridge Country Festival. Up until now, the County has not shared all details regarding communications with PDE that led to rescheduling.