

YOUNG PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR AWARD FINALISTS

Brandon Pennington

Executive Director, Harlan Tourist and Convention Commission

Brandon Pennington was born and raised in Harlan County, the son of a coal miner. He left Harlan with aspirations of living in a large city working in corporate marketing, but the call of the mountains drew him back home, where he has undertaken the work of promoting his hometown and building a more sustainable economy for generations of Harlan Countians to come. Taking his position as Executive Director of Harlan Tourism at the age of 22, his 14 years of experience in the industry represent an impressive career and a bright future ahead. He is tireless in his efforts to support his community and uplift our Commonwealth as a whole. He resides in Harlan with his husband, A.J., and their two Siberian Huskies, Poseidon and Bo.



Why Should This Nominee Be Recognized as Kentucky's Young Professional of the Year?

When Brandon took on the role of Executive Director of Harlan Tourism in 2012, Harlan County was entering a critical time in its history. The rapid decline of the coal industry had left the community without an anchor industry to rely on. Brandon was part of a group of local visionaries who pivoted the community's economic efforts to tourism. Brandon's skilled marketing brought one of Kentucky's smallest cities to the forefront in adventure tourism. Over the 13 years of his tenure at Harlan Tourism, he has continued to build on that momentum. Under his leadership, the Harlan Tourism Commission's budget has doubled. The commission's impact has also increased as Brandon has developed over 30 new annual events to increase visitations to the community. His creativity in marketing has been recognized statewide by the over 40 Traverse Awards he has won for his projects as well as collaborative projects. In addition to his destination marketing duties, Brandon manages a staff of 10 professionals and oversees the operations of the Historic Harlan Museum and The Harlan Center. According to the most recent numbers, tourism had an over \$38 million impact in Harlan County, with over \$20 million of that impact within the City of Harlan. His talents and passion for his community are not limited to his role at tourism. He is the former co-coordinator of Relay for Life. He currently serves on the Advisory Board for the Boys & Girls Clubs of Appalachia, acts as co-coordinator of the Poke Sallet Festival, works as the president of the Harlan County Chamber of Commerce, and has recently been invited to join the Pine Mountain Settlement School Board of Trustees. Locally, Brandon has been awarded the Harlan County Chamber of Commerce President's Award and Harlan County Chamber of Commerce Lawson Hoskins Dedication Award.