



Mayland Community College is Driving Community & Economic Development In Rural N.C.

Mayland Enterprise Corporation, a 501 (C)(3), was created as a unique strategy allowing Mayland Community College to build community development anchors to spur regional economic growth. This strategy allows the college to develop a business model that is both unrestricted by normal educational paradigms and fully integrates education for students.

Dr. John Boyd, President, Mayland Community College

Mayland Community College

Mayland Community College (MCC) is a small rural college serving Mitchell, Avery, and Yancey counties. We are an open enrollment institution with multiple academic and workforce programs. We are located in Western North Carolina and along the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Notable facts about MCC:

- ✓ MCC was founded in 1971.
- ✓ Over \$120K in scholarships are awarded to students each year.
- ✓ Over 80% of students require financial assistance to attend.
- ✓ There are 100+ programs and credentials offered.
- ✓ 100% of students graduated debt free in 2022.
- ✓ MCC was awarded the "Most Affordable Community College in N.C." by www.intelligent.com in 2022.
- ✓ 67% of MCC degrees lead to graduates earning annual salaries of \$50K to over \$100K.
- ✓ 400+ high school students receive college credit at MCC.
- ✓ MCC Foundation has started offering work scholarships that allow students to receive free tuition and fees while working up to 16 hours per week at a \$15/hour wage. The work scholarship students are working for Mayland Community College Enterprise Corporation (MEC) businesses: Anspach Rapid Prototype Center, the Blue Ridge Boutique Hotel, and this coming fall they will work at the Mayland Earth to Sky Park. Eventually, work scholarships will be available at the Three Peaks Enrichment Center. Work scholarship students receive an unprecedented education in developing soft skills while building a resume.
- ✓ The MEC is a unique organization that is separate from the college and the foundation. The Board of Directors consists of the CEO (college president), the CFO (college CFO), and three of MCC's trustees. Upon completion of all projects, profits will be donated back to the College in support of students, faculty, and staff.

Scan the QR code to visit Mayland Community College's website and learn more about our work.



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OPPORTUNITY

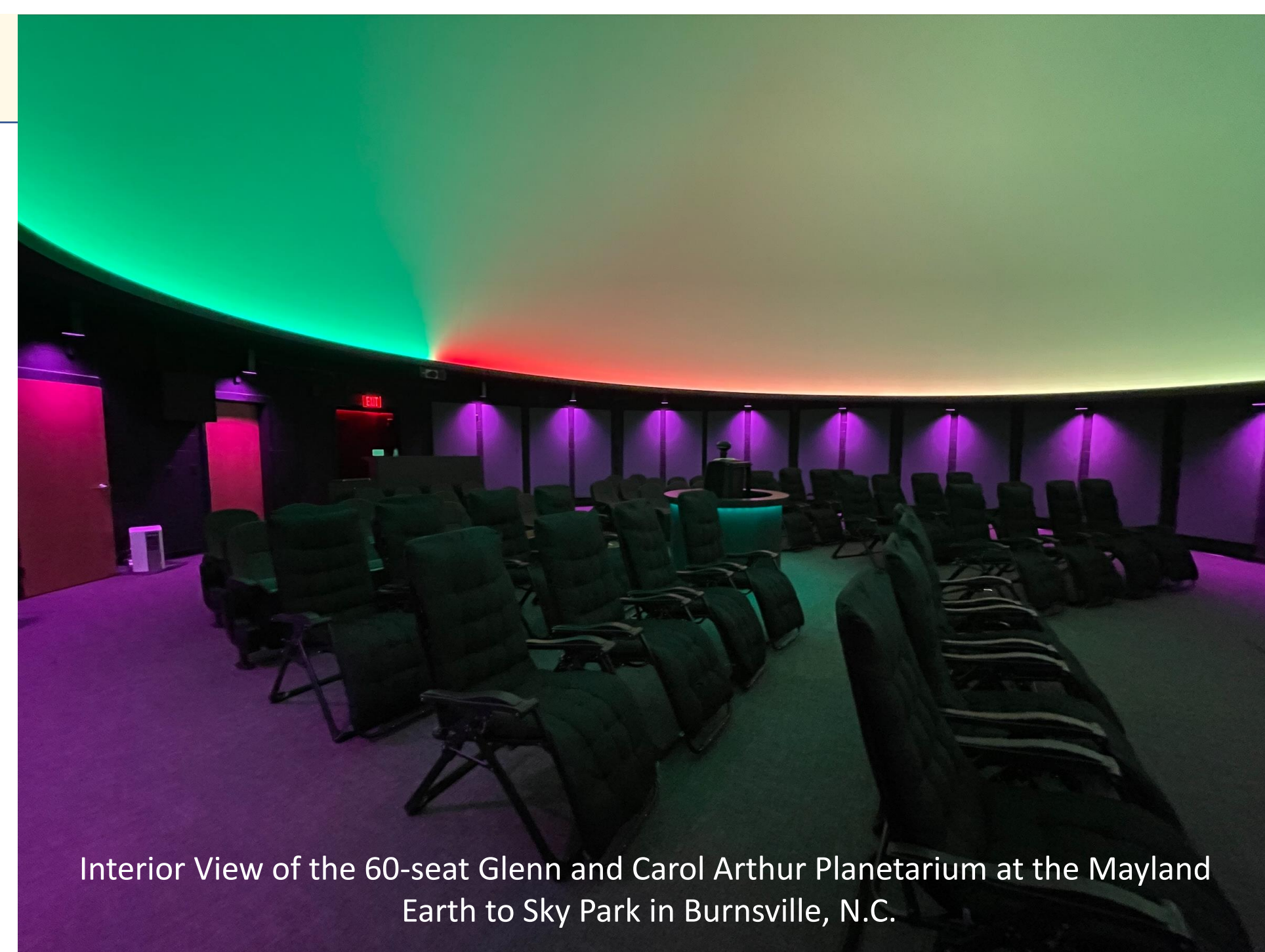
The local community of Spruce Pine, N.C., seemed to be in a sinking spiral. Businesses were closing or moving away, many downtown stores had been destroyed by a fire years earlier and never rebuilt, and other storefronts were closed. Mitchell County Commissioners approached Mayland Community College (MCC) for assistance in offering opportunities within the town. In the heart of Spruce Pine was an abandoned 60,000 SF coliseum and a deteriorating school that was converted into a 32-room hotel in the 1980s and had been closed for several years. MCC had also just taken over a failed nonprofit location with deteriorating facilities that was located on an old landfill on the border of Mitchell and Yancey counties. How could a small rural college like MCC help reinvigorate the community and region? How could we afford to do what was necessary to help the community thrive? College leadership met with community members to hear ideas and researched what other communities had done to rebuild. With this information, MCC developed a vision to create a regional destination point and founded the Mayland Community College Enterprise Corporation (MEC) to be the platform to reach that vision. The vision incorporated the business aspect of MEC with the educational needs that it would take to reach that vision. The vision serves the college by creating a new source of revenue; it serves the community by creating both sources of entertainment and destination points for tourism. Finally, it was an opportunity to help rebuild the school-age and workforce populations that have steadily declined since 2000.



A mural around the exterior of the Arthur Planetarium at the Mayland Earth to Sky Park is part of *The Good of the Hive* project by internationally known artist Matt Willey.

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

The three counties MCC serves, Mitchell, Avery, and Yancey, vary greatly. Avery County is mostly a second home and tourist-based economy. It supports a large summer home population while also having a large low-income local population. It has a significant agricultural base in Christmas trees. Yancey County has a larger, but still small, industrial base made up primarily of two industries. Mitchell County, which lies between Yancey and Avery, was hit the hardest when the furniture and textile industries went offshore and has never fully recovered. Over the past 20 years all three counties have declined in population, particularly in the school-age group. High school head counts are roughly half of what they were in the 1980s. The 65 and older population has grown by 45% and is the only demographic that has grown. MEC's initiative is in Mitchell and Yancey counties, but also impacts Avery County. It is intended to help keep families in our area while also bringing in tourism as an economic driver.



Interior View of the 60-seat Glenn and Carol Arthur Planetarium at the Mayland Earth to Sky Park in Burnsville, N.C.



Aerial view of Three Peaks Enrichment Center, located in downtown Spruce Pine, N.C.

STRATEGY

MCC's overall strategy was to create a unique atmosphere that would draw people here. The first strategy was to create a Rapid Prototype Center within the newly constructed Anspach Advanced Manufacturing School in Burnsville, N.C. The centerpiece of this strategy was student interaction with industry and community members, which provided access to our advanced technology, including a 3D metal printer. The results were faster production times and lower prototype costs for the customer and valuable soft skills and training for MCC students. The next strategy was taking over a failed non-profit operation just outside of Burnsville, N.C., and building the world-class Earth to Sky Park, a certified Dark Sky Park by the International Dark Sky Association. It started with construction of an observatory that houses the largest public telescope in the Southeast. Next we built a uniquely designed 60-seat planetarium, thus creating the first IDA location in North America with both entities. We are currently renovating two buildings into Child Discovery Centers and adding specialty gardens. The final strategy was to renovate a deteriorating coliseum and an adjoining hotel in the heart of Spruce Pine, N.C. The town of Spruce Pine and Mitchell County gave initial investments to begin work on the hotel. We leveraged those funds to get additional dollars while also leveraging limited state funds to pursue grant funds. We created a partnership with the YMCA, which will provide athletic facilities and pools inside the coliseum to a population that would otherwise not have that access. The centerpiece of the coliseum will have a 2,000-seat event space that will bring large crowds into the area. The college is also adding community-related programs into the coliseum to include cosmetology (completed), massage therapy, a culinary program, and a Resource Center for Entrepreneurs (completed). The hotel has 32 rooms that are fully open. Construction is underway with an outside dining area including firepits, restaurant, and bar. The MCC Foundation offers work scholarships to students to work at the front desk, and we are integrating hospitality and culinary training at the restaurant and bar. A foot bridge over the river and railroad tracks joins this complex with the center of Spruce Pine.



Rendering of landscaping at the Blue Ridge Boutique Hotel, located in downtown Spruce Pine, N.C.

OUTCOMES

Upon completion of the projects, the following outcomes are expected:

- A community impact of \$20-25 million per year is projected, with an increase of tourism financial impact by 20% per county.
- See growth in the school-age and workforce populations.
- Expand college programming to include programs that provide support to our initiative.
- Expand the work scholarship program that offers full scholarships to students who work up to 16 hours per week at a \$15/hour wage.



Visitors to the Bare Dark Sky Observatory at the Earth to Sky Park can have a two-hour stargazing experience looking through the Sam Scope, the largest public telescope in N.C.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Maintaining open communication with the local governments helped to keep them informed; a better communication plan for local citizens would have helped offset misinformation on social media.
- Maintaining open communication with the internal college faculty and staff was critical to keeping them informed about the benefits of the community development projects to the long-term growth of the college.
- The importance of identifying use of profits to faculty, staff, and students and how they will benefit from those profits.
- While this is a MEC initiative, it takes full integration with the college and the college's foundation to be successful.
- It would have been beneficial to recruit a business advisory group early in the project; this would add a more business savvy group that better understands how to operate businesses outside of the normal realm of higher education.

NEXT STEPS

- Final campaign for the competition of the Earth to Sky Park is underway. Once completed, it will be fully operational.
- The final construction of the hotel and restaurant is scheduled for completion in summer 2023.
- The Three Peaks Enrichment Center, including the YMCA construction, is ongoing with total completion scheduled in 2026. However, the first large event within the coliseum is scheduled for summer 2023.
- Continue working with the town of Spruce Pine and other towns in our area to improve the downtown area to make it more pedestrian friendly.
- Continually update data to show the full return on the investments made by the MEC within the communities we serve and the college.