

John Eric Ellis  
McDowell County

I had the opportunity to interview Ashley Wooten, County Manager of McDowell County. Mr. Wooten has been Assistant County Manager for 12 years. He will start his job as County Manager on September 1<sup>st</sup>. Mr. Wooten, his wife and two kids have called McDowell County home for the past 12 years. Mr. Wooten graduated from the prestigious Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina. He graduated with a degree in Political Science and a master's degree in Public Administration. He pursued a job in McDowell County because of his desire to work with local governments. The County Manager position is appointed by the Board of County Commissioners and the manager serves at their will.

Mr. Wooten enjoys working with the public, but cautions that it is a difficult job. "When you have 5 direct bosses, the county commissioners of McDowell County, and have to please the 45,000 residents it can be a daunting task." Wooten added that the rewards of knowing that he has had a hand in helping the citizens of McDowell County, although thankless, outweighs all the struggles. A normal workweek is a busy one that is filled with lots of various meetings with committees, commissioners and the public. Also the county manager supervises all the county employees.

When asked to describe a successful or rewarding project that he was involved in Wooten told about the very first big project that he was assigned when he first started in McDowell County. He described a project of running sewer lines to the Eastfield Community in Marion. The project was able to hook up over 300 homes to a central sewer system. Wooten added that this would be forever one of his favorite memories from his job because he was able to see first-hand the impact he could have on the local citizens.

In closing Mr. Wooten said that this is the kind of job that you never leave. Driving through the community you are always looking at potential projects and ways to improve the community. Mr. Wooten is looking forward to the challenges and rewards of his new position as he takes over as the new McDowell County Manager.