

Fit. Green. Happy.®



CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY 2020

THE TEAM

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
THE YEAR THAT WAS...?	5
FIT	5
GREEN	6
HAPPY	6
SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY	7
INSIDE OUT, OUTSIDE IN	8
THE OUTDOORS BELONG TO EVERYONE, EVERYONE BELONGS OUTDOORS	9
MARSHMALLOW CONVERSATIONS	11
NOUNS	12
PEOPLE MATTER	12
OUR PEOPLE	13
PLACES MATTER	15
(REAL) THINGS MATTER	16
IDEAS MATTER	16

INTRODUCTION

Along with the rest of the world, 2020 and COVID-19 challenged us as no other year. We saw our core business melt by 80%.

Still we learned things. Our eyes told us that people heeded the universal health advice to head outdoors during this pandemic. Families walked, played ball, jumped rope, rode bikes, and paddled together. People did Fit.Green.Happy.® without knowing the name.

Our long-time strategic partner, Maryville College, noticed the same uptick in Fit.Green.Happy.® interest. Faculty urged students to get outdoors and be active. And the campus community responded..

The college welcomed a new President who immediately challenged us to think beyond the campus community and better utilize our location in East Tennessee. We started to think more broadly about not only our immediate community but also our place in Central Appalachia and the role of Fit.Green.Happy.®

All of this taught us that Fit.Green.Happy.® "had legs". We started to imagine Fit.Green.Happy.® as a more independent part of Mountain Challenge that would be solely dedicated to social responsibility. We started with giving it its own separate and distinct website (fitgreenhappy.com) where Fit.Green.Happy.® could be explained and accessed more easily and accurately. We also successfully earned another fully registered trademark - Outdoors is Medicine®.

So read on to find out what we did in 2020 and discover our our hopes for the future as Fit.Green.Happy.® finds its legs.

THE YEAR THAT WAS...?

Fit.Green.Happy® is well-suited to become the face of our corporate social responsibility efforts because of its capacity to speak volumes about big ideas and reach more people than Mountain Challenge alone. It is a dynamic entity that keeps expanding by the day as we learn about new opportunities to explore and pursue. This year alone, we've seen Fit.Green.Happy® grow by leaps and bounds. Here's a roundup of what we've been up to this year.



FIT

Per usual, 100% of our staff has committed to maintaining an active lifestyle. Yet none of us would call another a gym rat or identify as part of the Pelaton cult. Even before Covid-19 forced most fitness facilities to close across the country, we introduced "No Gym Required" to get people moving without any gym equipment necessary. Our fitness director designed several customizable workouts that can be done circuit-style, running/walking, and indoors/outdoors with minimal equipment. The point is to move intentionally at least three hours a week, and having a "No Gym Required" workout makes that pretty simple.

We are proud of our high recycling rate (we still are able to divert more than 90% of our waste stream from ending up in the landfill), but recycling should still be avoided if possible. It's always better to move up the supply chain and just stop buying things. Reuse what you have, and then repurpose it for something else. That's why we're moving beyond recycling and pledging to buy less stuff, buy higher quality stuff, and ultimately have stuff that lasts longer. Less, better, longer.

Also in the green space (see what we did there?) is our continued emphasis on the health benefits of being outside. We are so convinced by the evidence behind how being outside is good for us that it led us to our newest trademark, Outdoors is Medicine. Embodied in this phrase is our commitment to taking seriously the idea that the outdoors can be assessed and prescribed just like medicine. Medical professionals are touting the benefits of spending time outside for a plethora of chronic diseases, both mental and physical. Our intention is to use this trademark to give a name and a program to this important connection. More to come, so stay tuned.

HAPPY

We'll admit, happiness has been hard to come by in 2020. So much so that joy itself has become a sort of radical act. But we're OK with being radical. This year, we've devoted our attention to simple, radical acts of joy. Things like recess for adults. Yes, recess. Like playing outside with whatever is there, which may be a soccer ball or a stick or swing. And making an effort to spend more time engaged in intentional, tangible experiences outside (or at least outside of a screen).

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY



It's becoming more evident that private businesses and organizations (both big and small) must play a larger role in the civic arena when it comes to advocating for environmental, social, and racial justice issues.

Our social responsibility efforts are now entirely devoted to providing education, access, and resources to help people get fitter, greener, and happier. For us, that means concentrating Fit.Green.Happy® into its own entity with its own focus, separate and apart from Mountain Challenge. It's its own noun now.

INSIDE OUT, OUTSIDE IN

Nearly all experts agree that outside is the best place to be during a global pandemic of a virus that thrives in indoor environments with poor ventilation. We've always believed that things are better outside, so we see this as an opportunity to get folks to rethink activities and events that traditionally take place indoors and ask "How can we do this outside?" On the Maryville College campus, that means setting up tents for makeshift outdoor classrooms and meeting spaces. In the Maryville community, it means holding church services, weddings, and other community events outdoors. Where hosting events outdoors isn't possible (because of unsafe weather, for example), the next best option is to make the indoors more like the outdoors. This means opening windows, surrounding spaces with plants, and using natural lighting.



THE OUTDOORS BELONG TO EVERYONE, EVERYONE BELONGS OUTDOORS

Mountain Challenge's mission is to provide safe, high-quality, outdoor experiences designed to change the world for the better, one person at a time. For over three decades, we've lauded ourselves as doing just that and more by taking the approach that companies have a responsibility to be good citizens. We've gone to great lengths to become more environmentally sustainable and encourage folks from all walks of life to get outside and be active. Our student staff represents a broad cross section of the Maryville College student body from across all academic disciplines and is comprised of mostly women. However, we are not immune to the systemic racism that plagues nearly all institutions in our society, including in the fitness, environmental, and outdoor sectors. Addressing systemic racism is an integral part of social responsibility, and it is our obligation as a corporate citizen to face this reality and do our part. Here are some, but not all, actions we plan:

- Work internally with our staff to support Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) as well as LGBTQ+ people through education and training pertaining to those communities and Fit.Green.Happy®
- Educate and understand the benefits and challenges of communicating Fit.Green.Happy across other kinds of demographic divisions, particularly the rural / urban / suburban divide.
- Develop a strategic plan to guide Fit.Green.Happy® decisions and programming that emphasizes the importance of including the BIPOC and LGBTQ+ communities.
- Partner with other organizations and community leaders to increase access to our services for BIPOC and LGBTQ+ through Fit.Green.Happy® programming

We also realize that's not enough. This is why Fit.Green.Happy® is so conceptually important--it doesn't necessarily mean going on a hike or a trail run in the middle of the mountains. It means whatever it means to you.

"Fit" may mean following along with an online yoga video inside your small apartment. Or it may mean taking your dog for a walk. Maybe it even means taking the stairs instead of the elevator. It's whatever moving your body means to you.

"Green" may mean having a small succulent or cactus on your desk. It might mean noticing the dandelions growing in the cracks on the sidewalk. Or maybe it means filling your plastic water bottle a few extra times before tossing. It's whatever the environment means to you.

"Happy" may mean playing an online board game with friends and family who are far away. Maybe it means cooking a homemade meal. Or maybe it means listening to your favorite song on repeat. It's whatever settles your soul.



MARSHMALLOW CONVERSATIONS



Each of these components together create more than the sum of their parts, and with each intentional action, regardless of how big or small, we believe Fit.Green.Happy® can bridge racial and cultural differences and bring more people together. To further that end, we intend to invite diverse campus groups for a front porch rocking chair session or a backyard s'mores chat about what Fit.Green.Happy® means to them. We want to know, for example, in what spaces does a Black person feel safe to be fit? How does a Latin person value the environment? Do men and women conceive of happiness in the same way? We hope that by asking these questions (and getting some answers) we can better understand how Fit.Green.Happy® is a tool to becoming fitter, greener, and happier. Together.

NOUNS

If we have learned anything in the last year, it's that nouns are important. People matter. Places matter. Real life things matter. And ideas certainly matter (a lot).

PEOPLE MATTER

As a society, we already had a screen problem, and now it's unavoidably worse due to the global Covid-19 pandemic. Most of us are now all too familiar with the ubiquitous boxes of faces that populate computer screens. Whether for school, work, or pleasure, our connections with other humans are now largely virtual. They are paltry and pitiful substitutes for the real thing, and we can feel it. We don't like it. And we shouldn't. Humans are wired to be social. Our ability to connect and cooperate with other humans is a huge part of why we've been successful as a species. And while we may not any longer literally depend on each other for protection or survival the way our ancestors did, gathering together is part of our shared history. It's how we mark momentous occasions, both celebratory and solemn, how we share meals, music, culture, art, and--perhaps most importantly--how we learn from each other. So it's no surprise that being isolated has led to a cascade of negative side effects and behaviors. From skyrocketing rates of loneliness, depression, and anxiety to increasingly divisive political rhetoric, physical isolation is clearly taking its toll on our mental and emotional health. All of which has led us to realize the importance of face-to-face interactions. How meaningful it is to sit close to someone. To give them a hug, or even a high-five. We're increasingly optimistic that once we can safely gather together again, people will choose to come together in person. We will choose to put away screens and instead show up for one another in the flesh. Because people matter.

OUR PEOPLE

Taking care of our people, our staff, our partners, our participants, has always been a top priority for us. So when the coronavirus forced us to effectively shut down, our first task was to make sure our people were OK. We took steps to ensure our staff could get paid and that our student staff could transition to distance learning. We then turned to the college community, sending out reminders to keep moving and to get outside, even as it felt as though the ground was spinning beneath our feet. Then we brainstormed about how we could still provide high-quality, safe outdoor experiences for participants. We did research and sought advice from institutions and scientists all across the country. This led us to introduce "small batch" activities, which allowed us to serve participants looking to come play with us. By limiting group size, implementing social distancing and mask-wearing measures where appropriate, and deploying rigorous disinfecting techniques, we were able to serve people.





We also utilized Fit.Green.Happy as a way to engage individuals rather than groups by creating a Fit.Green.Happy membership program piloted with incoming Maryville College students. The membership allowed students to earn academic credit by spending at least three hours per week being active outdoors, participating in at least one "beyond recycling" green activity, and engaging in at least one intentionally positive behavior that increased their wellbeing and happiness. Students who successfully documented these experiences were eligible for earning credit. Not only is this a safe way to encourage physical activity and time outside during an uncertain time, but it is also a way for each person (and for us) to learn and appreciate different ways to stay active and be outside. And during the fall semester, we expanded our open trip options to incorporate safer activities that don't require additional logistical arrangements and which take advantage of our unique location in Southern Appalachia (grape jelly making, anyone?). Even in a global pandemic, we still are out to change the world, one person at a time.

This summer also saw a transition to a new Maryville College president. We are excited about what's in store for Maryville in the years to come and are also grateful for his support of us and what we do. In a renewed commitment, Mountain Challenge and Maryville College have agreed to continue working together to foster opportunities and enhance the learning experiences of students as well as our surrounding community.

PLACES MATTER

Selling property, as any good real estate agent will tell you, is about three things: location, location, location. For many years, we never explicitly talked much about our location in East Tennessee, other than to laud the mountains in which we played. In recent years, though, we have given considerably more thought to the importance of being where we are--Appalachia. Appalachia carries with it a load of connotations, some of which lean on its exquisite natural beauty and others on its reputation for being poor and ignorant. Stereotypes notwithstanding, Appalachia is an incredibly special place with an increasingly bright future led by young people who have chosen to embrace the region's dense historical and cultural legacy while exploring new opportunities to diversify and expand economic and social outlets. Battling a fragile economy based on extractive industries like coal and natural gas, many small towns in Appalachia are choosing instead to turn to outdoor recreation, tourism, and the arts to drive economic change in the region. Not only does this diversified approach lead to preservation of history, culture, and the environment, but it also creates more and better paying jobs. It's not a panacea (as economics based solely on tourism also suffer from volatile booms and busts), but it's a step toward a fitter, greener, and happier future.



(REAL) THINGS MATTER

The pandemic has made it painfully clear that electronics and screens are a pitiful (and arguably harmful) substitute for real, tangible things, people, and experiences. It's become evident that we need to interact with things that don't do things on their own or for us--that is, things that require manual labor and problem solving skills. Adults tend to refer to these as "hobbies," but really they're like toys. So whether you like to engage in DIY crafting, cooking, gardening, model airplane building, or knitting, it's important to make time to play with your favorite toys and activities. Away from screens and things that artificially buzz.

IDEAS MATTER

It's no accident that we're headquartered on a college campus. We cannot overstate the importance of surrounding ourselves with dreamers, thinkers, and studiers. Creativity and innovation abound all around us, and we're happy to be both the instigator and the recipient of all kinds of ideas, from the bold to the subtle. But we know that ideas only go as far as the passion and grit to make them happen. Luckily, then, we are also a staff of doers. Some of our biggest (and most radical) ideas have now become trademarked programs, including what has become Mountain Challenge's flagship social responsibility arm, Fit.Green.Happy. This year, we added Outdoors is Medicine to our budding intellectual property bounty to further solidify the growing body of evidence that supports the health benefits of the outdoors. We have plenty of other ideas stemming from these coming down the pike, so stay tuned!



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