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2020: The COVID Year. Moving Forward in 2021!



BRAG Aging Department staff members prepare 700 emergency pandemic bags to be delivered to vulnerable aging adults and persons with disabilities in the tri-county area.

Most people will agree that 2020 will go down in history as one of the most complex, exhausting, chaotic, and “unprecedented” years in history. The global COVID-19 pandemic, political and civil unrest, deadly wildfires and other natural hazard events...and murder hornets; just to name a few (Thank goodness the Bear River Region didn’t have to deal with any murder hornets!).

However, in the midst of it all, some very positive things also occurred in our families, neighborhoods, and communities, such as: much awaited marriages and births; spending more time with families and friends; increased compassion and community service; more effective team work; learning how to use modern communication tools; and more people working from home

(which meant less people driving during rush hour).

At the BRAG offices, things in 2020 were no different. Staff struggled to overcome challenges with service and program delivery and had to adapt to working in a “COVID” environment. Changes were made where it made sense and critical services were still provided to low-income households, seniors, and persons with disabilities. In many cases, the number of people served by various departments were actually higher than in previous years.

Read on to learn more about the services BRAG provided in 2020. As always, please feel free to contact any BRAG department with questions, or to learn more about our programs and services.

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2020 BRAG Services

Housing Authority Update

The Housing Authority continues to administer the Housing Choice Voucher Program; a long-term monthly rent subsidy program. Currently, we have 566 housing choice vouchers allotted by HUD. This means that the program can serve 566 eligible households each month with a rent subsidy. During 2020 the turnover rate of these vouchers was 17%; a slight decrease from the normal 20% yearly turnover rate. While some of the program participants were affected by COVID-19, we still witnessed families moving forward with opportunities to improve their financial circumstances. A total of 666 households received monthly rental assistance in 2020. The total amount of housing assistance paid to landlords on behalf of these eligible households in the Bear River Region during last calendar year was \$2,385,073.

In an effort to help keep our program participants safe and minimize the

spread of COVID-19, in March 2020 the Housing Authority adjusted the way housing quality standard inspections of units were conducted. In the first quarter of 2020, prior to COVID-19 adjustments, 140 units in the Bear River Region were inspected as normal procedures dictated by program regulations.

Once inspection adjustments were implemented, the Housing Authority remotely conducted 87 housing inspections of new units through Zoom, FaceTime, and Duo. All other units of program participants that were inspected in the previous 12 months qualified for a biennial inspection as directed by HUD. Nonetheless, the Housing Authority still made contact with each participant family, a total of 431 households, via phone to confirm that their unit had no life threatening issues. When necessary, the Housing Authority requested maintenance action by the landlord to ensure the unit met housing quality standards.

Recently, the Housing Authority applied for, and was awarded by HUD, five Veterans Affairs Supportive

Housing Vouchers (VASH Vouchers). The VASH Vouchers are specifically designed to serve veterans who are homeless or vulnerable to becoming homeless. The VASH Voucher is essentially a housing choice voucher that offers a monthly rent subsidy but in addition to the rent subsidy, the VASH Voucher participant may receive case management and supportive services from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The Housing Authority is grateful to have the opportunity to work with the VA in the administration of these vouchers as we serve those veterans who have served our nation.

Weatherization Assistance Program

Since 1976, the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP), started and funded by the Department of Energy (DOE), helps low-income individuals and families reduce energy costs and

Weatherization Client Thank You Letter

"We sincerely thank you for all you've done to help our family. We cannot tell you what a difference it has made. We have no ice on the inside of our windows and no wind coming through the doors. The fans work great to take out the humidity, which really helps with the mold issue. We love having a furnace and a water heater that works and keeps things warm (My kids have not been sick as often this winter). Thank you for all your hard work and all you've done to help our family. Our Heating bill went down already, and we've had the warmest winter in 5 years."

-A.Z.



One of the Emergency Home Repair projects BRAG funded in 2020. This couple's bathroom had significant leaks leading to extensive damage to the floor. Now the bathroom is safe, comfortable, and leak-free (Photo: Jeff Kearl).

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2020 BRAG Services



An example of a furnace replacement utilizing funds from a newly created program called the Crisis Program. The program provides funding for BRAG staff to repair furnaces for low-income households, and even repair or replace water heaters and air conditioners for seniors, persons with disabilities, or those who have young children.

increase comfort and safety in their homes. Individuals, families, seniors, and persons with disabilities who are making no more than 200 percent of the current federal poverty income level are eligible for help. However, priority is given to seniors, persons with disabilities, households with high-energy consumption, those with emergency situations, and homes with preschool-age children.

Participating households average nearly 35 percent in savings, or approximately \$583 per year, after the completion of weatherization improvements. To apply for weatherization assistance, individuals must submit their application to the BRAG office in Logan or Perry.

The Utah Division of Housing and Community Development administers the program statewide through eight government and nonprofit agencies. Benefits are provided in the form of non-cash grants to eligible households to make energy-efficiency improvements to those homes.

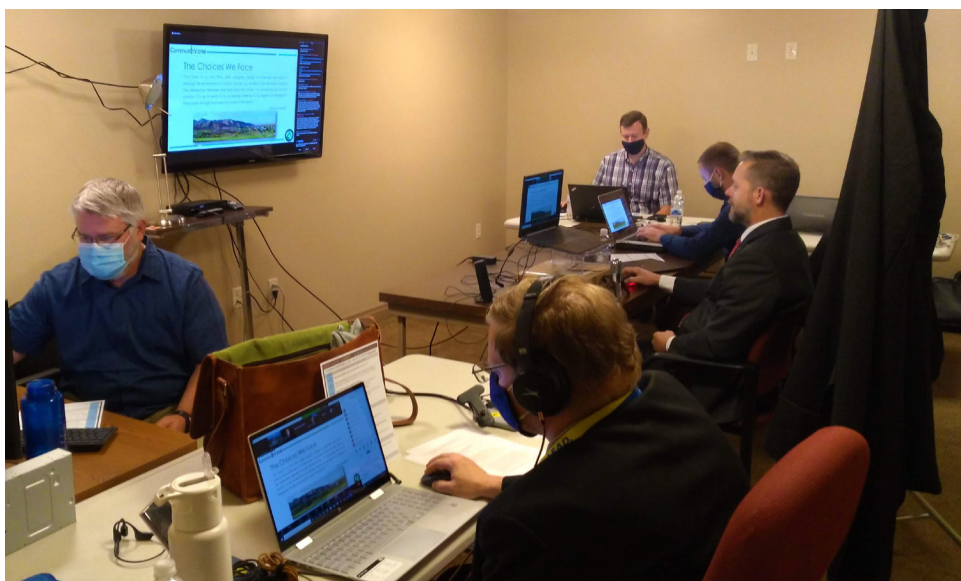
Crisis Program

The Low-Income Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) partnered with the Weatherization Program in the State of Utah to run a Crisis Program that performs necessary repairs to client's furnaces who are making no more than 150 percent of the current federal poverty income level. This has

been vital for many clients as they run into furnace issues in the middle of winter. Clients who are seniors, have disabilities, or have children five years old and younger, are eligible to have their broken water heater or air conditioner repaired or replaced as necessary.

Community and Economic Development

The BRAG Community & Economic Development Department has been busy helping to distribute resources to assist with activities that would have an immediate impact in addressing needs resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. There has been a significant increase in demand for Meals on Wheels program vehicles and appliances, Personal Protective Equipment for first responders and schools, and additional resources for organizations that provide family counselling in these troubling times. We continue to monitor changes in State and Federal assistance programs so that we can help communities respond to pandemic needs in the most efficient and effective ways possible.



The 6th Annual Cache Summit was held virtually for the first time in 2020. It took a larger than usual team of technicians to pull it off, but, overall, the summit was a huge success. However, we are all looking forward to the time when we can enjoy it in person once again. Here's to 2021!

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2020 BRAG Services

We continue to research and disseminate information regarding the impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on our communities. Heading into 2021, C&ED staff will be developing an economic resilience plan in partnership with the Economic Development Administration, part of the U.S. Department of Commerce. This plan will share the lessons learned from the pandemic and help prepare our communities and businesses to survive and thrive in the face of future events.

Regional & Community Planning

BRAG staff is currently working with communities in the Bear River Region to get the recently completed regional Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan adopted by resolution. A new online interactive web-based plan has been created to help each jurisdiction share information on risks and inform decisions from property owners, developers, and local elected officials.

BRAG staff are also assisting Tooele and Morgan Counties in completing their own hazard mitigation plans. Although not in the Bear River Region, outside counties and regions have been known to contract with BRAG to assist with these and other plans due to BRAG's expertise with these specific types of planning processes. In the past, BRAG helped Tooele County with hazard mitigation planning, and, this past year, assisted Six County Association of Governments with their regional plan, while training staff to complete the plan on their own in the future.

Also in 2020, BRAG CED staff assisted communities with affordable housing planning, GIS mapping and analysis, planning education and training, recreation and trails planning, and a variety of other types of technical planning assistance. One of the more unique events BRAG participated in was the 2020 Cache Summit, devoted to discussing the growth and development of Cache Valley. While held online due to COVID-19 concerns, amazing local and regional speakers, and one from the national planning community (Strong Towns), shared a wealth of knowledge. Well over 100 people registered for the event.

Human Services

The Human Services Department at BRAG is the Community Action arm of the organization. Community action agencies seek to carry out the Community Action Program (CAP), founded in the 1964 Economic Opportunity Act. The role of CAP is to fight poverty by empowering the poor with the resources they need for success. At BRAG, the Human Services department administers programs to combat homelessness, homeless prevention, housing insecurity, utility assistance, help filing taxes, and similar initiatives. BRAG provides targeted assistance aimed at stabilizing households over a timeframe generally extending from one month to up to a year in more complicated cases.

2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic brought a myriad of challenges to the lives of thousands who live in Box Elder, Cache, and Rich counties. Households lost income due to furloughs, shortages, quarantines, and illness. The lives of families were complicated when children had to transition to attending school from home and day care facilities closed. Groups

that already faced significant obstacles, including those escaping domestic violence or experiencing homelessness, found many of the face-to-face resources and programs they relied upon in the past changing to comply with the new reality of protecting staff, clients and the community from COVID-19.

With additional challenges facing our clients, and new clients struggling to make ends meet for the first time as a result of the pandemic, the Human Services Department was able to rise to the occasion. Below are some highlights of changes that were made in 2020:

In 2019 we helped 131 households who were homeless, facing eviction or otherwise had their housing threatened. In 2020, thanks in part to additional pandemic relief funding from the CARES Act, we helped 368 households, made up of 961 individuals, stabilize their housing situation with more than \$725,000 in direct payments to landlords. BRAG staff approved 3,246 HEAT applications, up from 1,967 in 2019, providing more than \$1.7 million in utility assistance. BRAG staff have also strived to make services more accessible by translating applications into



Over 30 hygiene/warming kits were created by the Local Homeless Coordinating Committee to deliver to homeless individuals and families in the Bear River Region as part of the annual Homeless Point-in-Time Count. We would like to thank all of those who donated items and gave of their time to acknowledge and address homelessness.

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2020 BRAG Services



Utah's new First District Congressman, Blake Moore and two staff members, Shari Phippen and Peter Jenks met with BRAG Department Heads on February 10, to learn about services provided by the regional staff to residents and local governments in Box Elder, Cache, and Rich Counties.

Representative Moore is serving on two committees important to Utah – Armed Services and Natural Resources. Blake grew up in Ogden, attended USU and graduated from the University of Utah. He went on to obtain a Master's Degree in Public Policy and Administration from Northwestern University. Blake and his wife Jane have three sons, Max, George, and Winston.

Spanish, hiring multilingual caseworkers, installing exterior points to allow applications to be picked up and dropped off outside of regular office hours, and made applications available online and through fillable pdf's.

There are still many challenges. In 2020, staff faced overwhelming numbers of applications, tax assistance sites closed due to safety concerns and volunteers had to step away to protect their health. In response we have launched a limited program to help with mortgages and another to assist with medical expenses. BRAG ramped up staffing, including increasing emergency rental assistance caseworkers from 2 to 9, adding additional tax assistance staff, and transitioning 4 heat staff from seasonal to year-round positions. These adjustments illustrate BRAG's commitment to fighting poverty in the community and desires to serve; a commitment that extends into the new year. We look forward to the ongoing work of engaging with our community partners to continue lifting up those in need.

Bear River Area Agency on Aging

The Aging team at Bear River Area Agency on Aging has had an exciting 2020. Staff have eagerly addressed new challenges that have come with COVID-19 while striving to keep clients safe, stable, and content. Isolation has been a plague to our elderly during this crisis, and case managers are reaching out to clients on a weekly basis to reassure them that they are not alone.

The Aging team has delivered to clients and many other seniors in our Tri-County area; "Isolation Packets" that include activities for mind stimulation and entertainment; "Community Card" activities to encourage reaching out to others; over 700 "Pandemic Emergency Bags" for those who live at home and may not be able to get emergency supplies due to COVID restrictions. Our remarkable Senior Centers have also helped in the distribution of 600 bags.

As Aging staff have navigated the unusual events of 2020, they have maintained stellar audit reviews from all existing programs. The **Alternatives program**, where staff assists clients from 18 years and older who meet financial eligibility and score high enough on the risk assessment, is growing rapidly.

The **Caregiver Support Program** has maintained its incredible productivity through personal case management as well as virtual meetings and well-attended virtual support groups.

The Waiver programs, **New Choices and Aging Waiver**, have continued to grow and provide critical support to clients with the greatest needs, both at home and in facilities.

The **Ombudsman** supported 1,253 clients living in the 25 Assisted Living Facilities in our area.

The **Senior Health Insurance Program (SHIP), Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP), and Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers (MIPPA)**, continues to provide counseling and education about Medicare and Medicaid, Senior Fraud Prevention, and Elder Abuse to clients across the tri-county area. These programs are also strongly supported by the local Senior Centers.

Veterans Services connects Veterans with needed resources while the **Veteran-Directed Home & Community Based Services (VD_HCBS)** provides Veterans of all ages with support to remain independent in their own homes.

The **Cache County, Brigham City, Bear River Valley & Rich County Senior Centers** have all exceeded expectations by providing much needed meals to those with the greatest needs, even though the centers closed due to COVID-19. Many classes have been reinvented in order to find better ways to reach out to clients utilizing a virtual platform, to help seniors continue to participate in activities, and feel like they are part of the community.

Area Agency on Aging Services

- The Aging Waiver, Alternatives and VA Self-Directed programs assisted 200 frail older adults and/or disabled clients under 60 years of age with a disability, to remain independent in their homes
- Case management through the New Choices Waiver program provided excellent care and support for 86 clients (age 65+) housed in assisted living facilities in the tri-county area
- 383 Caregivers received over 1,000 hours of individual assistance, education counseling, and group support through the Caregiver Support Program
- On-site services, including individual counseling and support was provided to 36 seniors in their Senior Apartment Complex in Brigham City
- Information and Assistance to obtain V.A. benefits was provided to 251 Veterans by Bear River Area Agency on Aging's Veteran's Service Officer
- The Medicare Benefits and Health Insurance programs provided services to 1,350 individuals
- Group presentations to 2,657 people provided further information about these programs. Media events reached out to 8,670 contacts
- The tri-county area has 25 long-term care facilities with over 1,000 residents. The Ombudsman program provided Advocacy Assistance to resolve conflicts and provide support to residents
- The Area Agency on Aging supported and assisted with funding to Cache County Senior Center, Bear River Valley Senior Center, Brigham City Senior Center, and Rich County Senior Center. These centers served over 2000 unduplicated older adults
- The total estimated unduplicated count of persons served through services supported by the Older Americans Act Title III (not including caregivers) is 4,477

Housing

- Provided on-going rental assistance to 666 low-income households totaling \$2,385,073
- Inspected 658 dwelling units to ensure housing quality standards
- Awarded 5 veteran-related housing vouchers by HUD
- Provided funding for 10 emergency home repairs
- Provided financial assistance to 47 first-time home buyers
- Owned and managed 28 affordable housing units in Tremonton City and 15 units in Brigham City
- Performed 22 lead-based paint inspections
- Sold 3 Crown Homes to income-qualified families

Weatherization

- Inspected and weatherized 44 homes of lower-income families to reduce utility bills and conserve energy
- Replaced 28 furnaces, 10 refrigerators, 16 water heaters and 15 air conditioning units in the 44 weatherized homes
- On an emergency basis, responded to 43 calls which resulted in 20 furnaces replaced, 11 furnaces repaired, 11 water heaters and 4 air conditioning units replaced
- 2,204 tri-county area homes have been winterized since inception of the federal program in 1976

Human Services

- Provided crisis assistance to 368 low-income households
- Helped 3,246 low-income families pay winter utility bills
- Provided funding to 11 human service agencies
- Prepared 1,042 income tax returns for lower income families using 87 volunteers
- Housed and supported at least 55 homeless families and 131 homeless individuals

Economic Development & Job Creation

- Promoted heritage tourism and products in 7-county area through bearriverheritage.org and business contacts
- Served with the Cache Valley Economic Development Alliance and Box Elder Economic Development Alliance boards
- Helped develop investment prospectuses for Opportunity Zones in Box Elder and Cache Counties
- Administered the Business Expansion and Retention (BEAR) program for Cache County
- Contacted 38 businesses to assess needs and offer assistance
- Updated the regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy
- Developed an Economic Recovery and Resilience Plan to mitigate current economic distress and prepare for future pandemic events including immediate technical assistance to businesses
- Organized a regional coordination team to advance local business community participation in the Utah Inland Port Authority satellite system

Community Development & Planning

- Assisted in planning and funding infrastructure projects
- Provided community planning technical assistance to various local governments, and coordinated planning efforts among Box Elder, Cache, and Rich Counties
- Coordinated transportation services for seniors, persons with disabilities, and low-income families and individuals; and completed a draft of the regional Human Service Transportation Coordination Plan
- Assisted cities and counties with housing affordability planning
- Assisted local governments with planning for trails, and began facilitating planning processes for Mantua and Honeyville
- Completed a regional plan for natural hazard identification and mitigation in the Bear River Region, the Six County region, and began working on plans for Morgan and Tooele Counties
- Completed a regional plan to address homelessness
- Coordinated distribution of \$1.5 million in Community Development Block Grant emergency coronavirus relief funds to local communities and non-profit service providers

In General

- Facilitated intergovernmental cooperation and collaboration
- Provided an efficient shared regional staff
- Brought state and federal resources to the area to meet local needs

Roger C. Jones
Executive Director, BRAG

BRAG Hits "50" in 2021!

Many things have changed since 1971, the year that nine county commissioners created the Bear River Association of Governments. In 1971:

- Richard Nixon was President of the United States.
- Calvin Rampton was Utah's Governor.
- The War in Vietnam was in the news daily (and I was there).
- A gallon of gas cost 40¢ and you could buy a postage stamp for 8¢.

The tri-county area including Box Elder, Cache, and Rich Counties has seen many changes as well. The combined population of all three counties in 1971 was 74,000 compared to 193,400 today, a 161% increase.

In 1971, Thiokol Chemical Corporation and the Intermountain Indian School were major employers in Box Elder County; Sears, J.C. Penneys, and Low Cost Drug were the places to shop in Logan and Cache; and recreationists and developers were discovering Bear Lake.

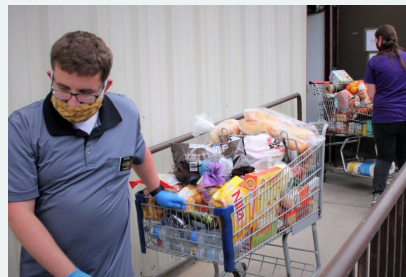
When BRAG was first organized, it was done so through the direction of local governments. Regional organizations were seen as a way that various housing, human and aging services could be administered to disadvantaged populations. Regional associations were also being created to address planning and economic development needs at a local and regional level. Shared resources and staff have proven to be a fiscally responsible way to provide critical services for citizens and local governments in the Bear River Region.

So Many To Thank

Living through 2020 has not been easy for any of us and there are so many to thank: the health care workers; first responders; teachers who had to teach remotely; parents who became instant teaching assistants at home; staff at our local health department; restaurateurs who had to adapt or quit; the scientists and all involved in getting the vaccine to us in record time and so many more.

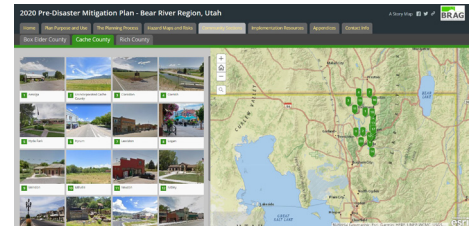
I especially want to thank the many BRAG staff members who worked tirelessly to help hundreds of impacted families with rent, mortgages, and utility payments and various agencies with personal protective equipment; vehicles for food pantries and senior centers and more.

- Roger



Top: Workers at the Box Elder Food Pantry (Photo: Cache Valley Daily). Middle: COVID testing at the North Cache Valley Instacare in Hyde Park (Photo: Herald Journal). Bottom: Lucas Martin, BRAG's Human Services Director assists a client.

BRAG Completes 2020 Regional PDMP Update



In May of 2020, a canal below Cutler Dam breached, sending mud and debris flowing into the Bear River (Photo courtesy of Box Elder County Emergency Management).

In December of 2020, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) approved the 2020 Bear River Region Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan, allowing for adoption by local governments.

Through adopting the plan, cities, towns, and counties become eligible to apply for various federal funds for implementing strategies to reduce potential losses of life, property, local infrastructure, community amenities, and critical natural systems.

The plan includes analyses which were used to determine potential losses for each community from a variety of natural hazards, and documented risks to each jurisdiction. Hazards identified in the plan include:

- Air Quality
- Alluvial Fans
- Avalanche
- Climate Change
- Dam Failure
- Drought
- Flooding
- Geologic Faults
- Insect Infestation
- Landslide
- Liquefaction
- Pandemics*
- Problem Soils
- Radon
- Seiche
- Seasonal Population growth
- Severe Weather
- Steep Slopes
- Tornado
- Wildfire

*Due to the unexpected arrival of the COVID-19 virus in 2020, pandemics were not adequately addressed in this plan.

For more information, contact Zac Covington at zacc@brag.utah.gov, or 435-752-7242.

Governing Board Members and Staff



Craig Buttaris

Craig has served on multiple BRAG boards since 2015, totalling 6 years of service, and served as the Governing Board Chair in 2018. He was recently appointed as the new state

Commissioner of Agriculture and Food by Governor Spencer J. Cox, and will sadly be leaving the BRAG family.

Craig served in the State Legislature from 1997 to 2006, as a Cache County Council Member from 2008 to 2014, and most recently as the Cache County Executive until his appointment to the Governor's Cabinet.

He is a lifelong resident of Cache County, spending most of his career as a dairy farmer before becoming the County Executive. He and his wife, Shara, have 3 children and 9 grandchildren. We wish Craig all the best as he serves the Utah agricultural community!



Karl Ward

Karl lives in Logan with his wife Kathryn. They raised their six children in Cache Valley and are blessed with eighteen grandchildren.

Karl received BS and MBA degrees from Utah State University. His

working career has been in the finance arena. He was an adjunct professor of finance at USU for twenty-five years and retired as a banker from Zions Bank after thirty-nine years.

He has been active in the community having served on the Logan City Planning Commission for thirteen years and the Logan City Council for four years. He is currently serving as a member of the Cache County Council and serves on several boards including The American West Heritage Center, the Logan Economic Development Committee, The Logan/Cache Airport Authority Board, The Governing Board of Bear River Association of Governments, and other committees.



Tara McBurney has been a Case Manager with the Aging department since November 2019. She moved to Logan in 2007 from Los Angeles, California for the beautiful Utah mountains. She graduated from USU with a bachelor's degree in Social Work and obtained her SSW license in 2017. She loves to spend time with her 9-year-old daughter, listen to vinyl records, read, hike, and play with a beloved pet rabbit, Oreo.



Matt Starley grew up on the Wasatch Front and loves to ski, hike, mountain bike and backpack in our local mountains. He attended graduate school at Utah State University earning degrees in Landscape Architecture and Bioregional Planning. He works here at BRAG in the Community and Economic Development Department where he hopes to promote greater connectivity between our local communities and the natural landscapes that sustain them.



Jaynine Thompson was born and raised in New Jersey, and moved to Cache Valley in 2017. With extensive sales and business development experience, and a background in social work, she is currently in the process of earning her bachelor's degree in social work. Jaynine considers herself a "huge gamer" and enjoys live-streaming video games and increasing awareness on homelessness and homeless prevention resources.

Please submit articles or ideas to
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