

\$8 Million of Crippling Medical Debt Relieved in Poorest Regions of Appalachia Thanks to Couple with Close Ties to the Area

Their campaign seeks to raise additional funds/awareness to relieve more of the \$240 million of medical debt in the region

New York, NY – 7/25/19 – The leading nonprofit that relieves medical debt for Americans in need, [RIP Medical Debt](#), announced today that Jim and Sharen Branscome have wiped out \$8 million of medical debt for individuals in Appalachia, one of the poorest and least healthy areas of the US.

The donation will wipe out most of the currently reported medical debt in Eastern Kentucky, Southwest Virginia and portions of southern West Virginia. Those areas cover most of the highly depressed coalfields and the most distressed counties identified by the Appalachian Regional Commission.

Jim is a native of mountain Virginia and both he and Sharen have spent portions of their careers working on/solving major issues in the region. Jim's family members worked in the coalfields and his grandfather died of black lung disease. The couple is hopeful this donation will spur others to join them in wiping out medical debt for disabled coal miners, those living below the poverty levels of the region, and those families and individuals struggling to deal with the devastating consequences of opioid addiction, which [is the worst in the nation](#).

RIP Medical Debt is a nonprofit that buys large portfolios of bundled debt from medical providers and debt sellers on the debt market (for pennies on the dollar) and forgives it. As little as \$1 donated to RIP can alleviate \$100 of medical debt. The debt is removed from credit reports and can no longer be collected on. At this time RIP cannot locate a specific person's medical debt, but instead buys those debts, which are the least likely to be paid.

Jim & Sharen share, "We have been donors to many organizations in Appalachia--from providing scholarships to talented poor students from the region to support for economic development--but we view this effort with RIP Medical Debt to be the most effective way we have found to have direct impact on improving the lives of people in the mountains. Health statistics in Appalachia are among the worst in the country, and medical debt prevents people from getting the care they need to improve their lives. For just a penny

on the dollar, RIP Medical Debt can wipe out debts and clear the credit history for thousands with our donation."

"Financing healthcare is a major crisis in the U.S. This extraordinary act will bring hope to so many people at a time when they need it most and let them know they aren't facing the burden of medical debt alone", said RIP's co-founders, Craig Antico & Jerry Ashton.

The average debt level the couple is wiping out in the targeted counties is \$850. Each individual will receive a yellow envelope the weekend of July 26th from RIP Medical Debt advising that their debt has been paid off. Based on the Appalachian Regional Commission's [map of the region](#), \$240 million of medical debt exists in the area. Jim and Sharen are encouraging other Americans to donate to help even more people in the region. Friends of the couple, journalists William Bishop (author of "[The Big Sort](#)") and his wife Julie Ardery donated \$20K to jump start their fundraising campaign. Bill and Julie were the cofounders of the rural news site, <https://www.dailyonder.com/>. Bill and Jim both wrote on the mountains for the [Mountain Eagle of Whitesbury](#), KY, a weekly famous for its hard-hitting journalism about Appalachia.

To give, visit: <https://secure.qgiv.com/event/revivingappalachia/>

Medical Debt Statistics

1 in 5 people living in the U.S. are grappling with medical debt;
Medical debt contributes to 60% of all bankruptcies in America; and
More than 40% of Americans wouldn't be able to cover an emergency expense of \$400.

About the Branscomes

Jim and Sharen met and married when both of them were working at the Appalachian Regional Commission in 1970. Sharen worked on recruiting health professionals to the region, and Jim developed the agency's youth programs. Jim retired as a Managing Director of Standard&Poor's Investment Advisory Services in NYC. Sharen retired from UPS management where she worked on its international expansion. Jim has written and published extensively on Appalachia, including in the New York Times and the Washington Post.

About RIP

RIP Medical Debt is a nonprofit that buys and forgives medical debt across America. RIP works with individual donors, philanthropists and organizations to purchase medical debt for pennies on the dollar to provide financial relief for those burdened by impossible medical bills. Founded in 2014 by two former collections industry executives, Craig Antico & Jerry Ashton, RIP rose to national prominence on an episode of HBO's "Last Week Tonight" with John Oliver in which RIP facilitated the abolishment of \$15M in medical debt. To learn more visit www.ripmedicaldebt.org

More information on the health data for Appalachia compiled by the Appalachian Regional Commission:

https://www.arc.gov/images/appregion/fact_sheets/HealthDisparities2017/AppRegionHealthDisparitiesKeyFindings8-17.pdf