



The campaign to preserve Blanton Forest is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Harlan County and all Kentuckians, for the adults who remember Blanton Forest as always being there, and the children who hope it always is.

Those who gaze at this old-growth wonder see more than just a forest; they experience a passage through time to a place where nature has found refuge.

Mountains and ravines fed and sheltered Native Americans, guided the pioneers and tempted the earliest settlers who came to this country in search of freedom and a place to call home.

Blanton Forest is more than a forest, it is a walk through the history and heritage of Appalachia.

If you listen closely to the forest you can hear  
a hopeful whisper, a gentle plea;  
an ancient forest that deserves to be a legacy  
for future generations. Forever.



*Some trees are more than 300 years old and 4 feet in diameter.*



Photo by Pam Spaulding



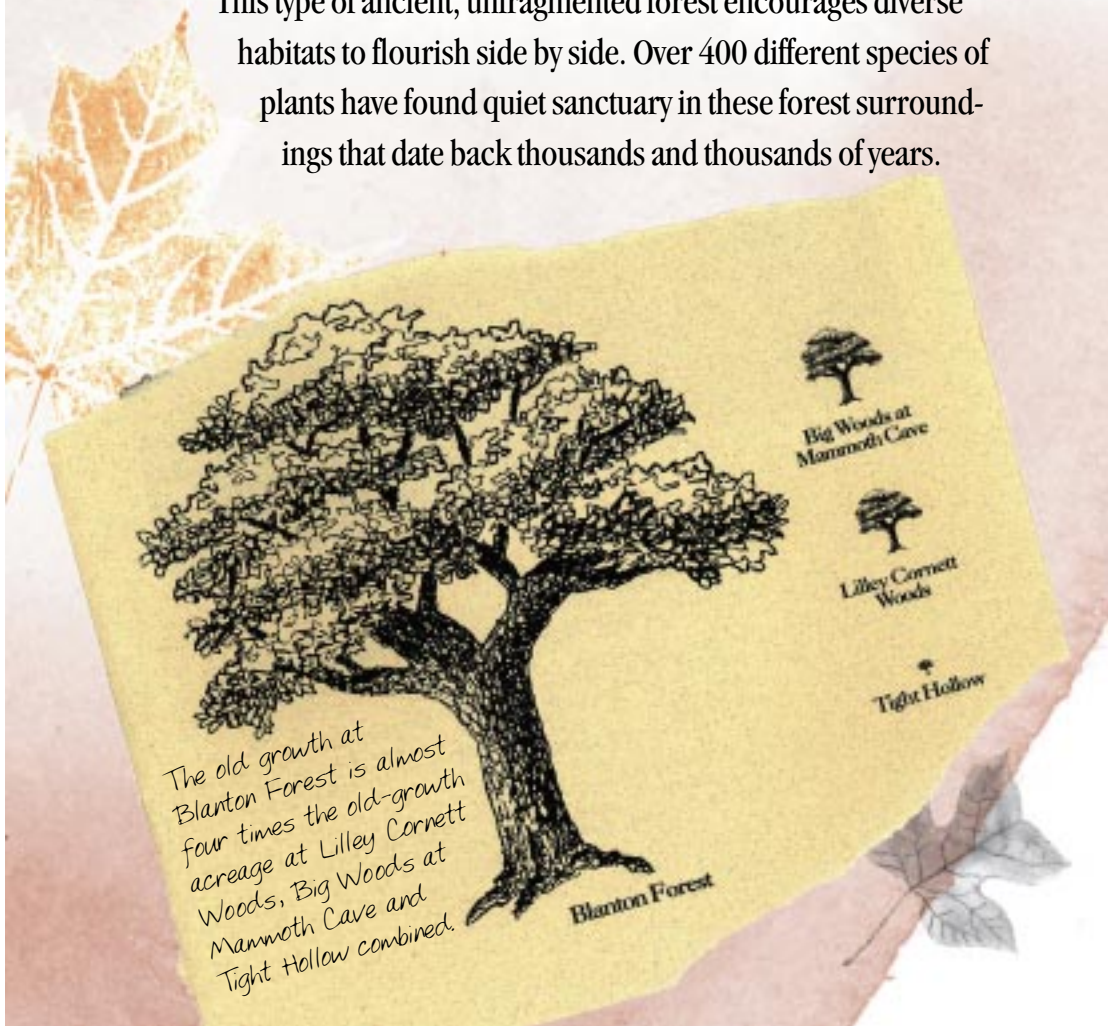
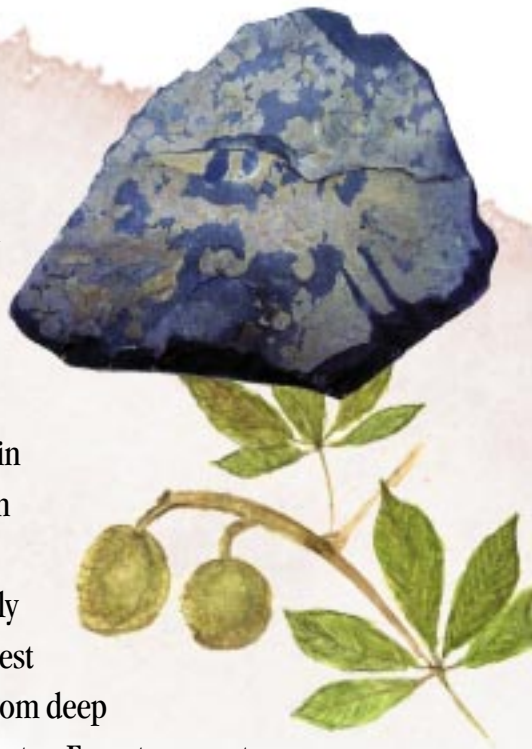
*Have you ever been silenced  
by the breathtaking beauty  
of an ancient forest -  
or marveled at the obstacles  
that a 300-year-old tree  
has had to weather?*



# Blanton Forest

Without question, the discovery of Blanton Forest ranks as the state's most significant natural resource find in recent history. No one imagined that an old-growth forest the size of Blanton Forest still existed in Kentucky. At nearly 2,350 acres, it is by far Kentucky's largest and most diverse old-growth forest. From deep mesic hollows to dry, rocky ridges, Blanton Forest supports many forest communities. These include a mixed mesophytic, deciduous forest—so extraordinary there are only two others like it on the planet.

This type of ancient, unfragmented forest encourages diverse habitats to flourish side by side. Over 400 different species of plants have found quiet sanctuary in these forest surroundings that date back thousands and thousands of years.





Blanton Forest embodies the cultural heritage and natural history that is uniquely Central Appalachian. It is a window into long ago. A chance to have what was thought long gone: the opportunity to redefine our relationship with this region's natural resources and become stewards of our ecological past, present and future.



Photo by Pam Spaulding



The forest may look littered with tree snags and decomposing plant life, but it's actually a repository of life-giving nutrients. Slime molds and microscopic organisms accelerate decay and nourish new growth. Some molds for rich





1773: Daniel Boone takes in his first panoramic view of Kentucky while on a hunting expedition. Like many white explorers before him, Boone navigated the Cumberland Gap by following a Cherokee trail.

1790: Population in Kentucky is 73,700—cited from *American Geography* by Jedediah Morse.

1792: February 4, Kentucky is inducted into the union. It is estimated that within its boundaries, Kentucky had 24 million acres of original growth forest.

1800: Kentucky's population grows to 220,955—nearly three times the 1790 estimate.

1819: Harlan County is established as Kentucky's 16<sup>th</sup> county.

1890: Field reports to the Kentucky Commissioner of Agriculture tell of wasteful timber harvests and warn that virgin stands of trees are near exhaustion.

1900: Rural and isolated land in Kentucky can still be purchased for about ten dollars an acre.

1928: Grover and Oxie Blanton purchase the land that will become Blanton Forest.

1973: The Federal Endangered Species Act is passed.

1976: The Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission is formed and tasked with protecting Kentucky's natural heritage.

1992: Blanton Forest becomes one of Kentucky's premier natural resource discoveries.

1995: Half of the old growth of Blanton Forest is purchased and forever protected.

*If these trees could talk - oh the stories they'd tell!*





How is it that more than two thousand acres of pristine forest went virtually untouched for thousands of years?



Photo by Wallins Elementary student

Blanton Forest is sometimes compared to a tropical rain forest because of its rich species diversity and abundance of evergreens.





*More importantly,  
what will we do with  
this "second chance?"*

Marc Evans, an ecologist with the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission, was the first to recognize Blanton Forest's true significance. While conducting a natural areas inventory of Harlan County, he noticed large spreading crowns of old-growth oak, hemlock, poplar and beech, interwoven and uninterrupted like a seamless, verdant patchwork. It was far from conclusive evidence, but enough to warrant further exploration.

What Marc gazed upon was more than anyone ever expected. An immense ancient forest that is both a vibrant, thriving community and an archival treasure. It's a union of past and present, one of the rare places where nature's will has gone unchallenged and unexploited.

A photograph of a person standing in a forest, with a large, textured, greenish-grey shape in the foreground. The photo is tilted and has a white border. The person is standing on a rocky path, surrounded by dense trees. The background shows a hazy, mountainous landscape. The photo is pinned to a light green background with a string.

Photo by Pam Spaulding





Photo by Pam Spaulding

Native Americans  
called this  
mountain range  
"Appalachia" which means  
endless mountains. To a  
traveler in search of food  
and shelter, they  
probably appeared  
that way.





Deep in Blanton Forest,  
ancient rhododendron  
thickets and fragile mountain bogs  
provide nature's narrative—chronicling every-  
day occurrences and extraordinary phenomena.  
Magnificent beech, poplar, hemlock and oak  
trees stand like sentries as they did some 200  
years ago, witnessing early explorers rough the  
wilds and forge through the Cumberland Gap. Spear  
points found near Sand Cave attest to much earlier visitors,  
some 8,000 years prior to the Anglo pioneers.

Blanton Forest is the thirteenth largest old-growth, hardwood forest  
in the eastern United States. All others have been partially timbered  
or completely destroyed. In Kentucky, less than one-half of one  
percent of the land remains in its natural unaltered state, and that  
number is declining. This trend is not reversible, but it can be halted  
by concerned Kentuckians and others who are willing to help  
protect this last great place, now and forever.



Photo by Don Harker

*The slow release of water from the  
moss during drier times helps  
keep the habitat wet enough to  
support organisms that depend  
upon wetlands.*



*There is still much about nature we cannot comprehend, but we are certain of one thing: we should not destroy what we cannot create.*



Blanton Forest supports several thriving and distinct forest communities, each boasting a unique interpretation of its natural inheritance.

Sunlight floods the mountain bogs to nourish lush carpets of sphagnum moss, vibrantly colored meadow phlox and shoulder-high cinnamon ferns. The federally-threatened blackside dace finds its refuge in the cool, clear waters of Watts Creek, which wind deep in the forest interior. Mountain rosebay and laurel blossoms prefer the drier, rockier soil that is prevalent on the south side of Pine Mountain.



*Watts Creek*

Photo by Pam Spaulding





*Blackside dace*

*federally  
threatened  
since 1987*

*Once lost...*

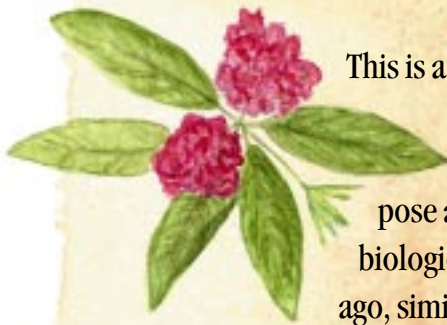
But there is much more to an ancient forest than its headline species. Old growth forests—those that have never been logged or altered by human hands—offer a rare glimpse into the rich biological diversity of a forest ecosystem. These forests are environmental barometers that monitor and forewarn of the effects of human activities. If we can learn more about how nature responds to these changes, perhaps we can also learn how to protect our vulnerable forests and restore ecological balance to environmentally-distressed areas.

*How do you place a  
value on what  
would have been learned  
by walking  
through an  
ancient forest?*

*You need about 500 full-sized  
trees to absorb the  
carbon dioxide produced  
by a typical car  
driven  
12,500  
miles?*







This is a critical time for the preservation and stewardship of Blanton Forest. Even seemingly benign activities like hiking pose a threat to its complex and interdependent biological communities. A mere hundred years ago, similar forests blanketed the Appalachian region. More than *95 percent* have already been damaged or degraded. Blanton Forest represents one of the few ancient forests of its kind—considered both globally outstanding *and* critically endangered.



Who is involved?

*Talk about adaptable. The jock in the pulpit actually changes its sex from time to time and is capable of donning female flowers, male flowers or no flowers at all.*

Kentucky Natural Lands Trust (KNLT) is spearheading the effort to protect Blanton Forest and ensure its future for generations to come. KNLT is a nonprofit organization committed to protecting and raising public awareness of our diminishing natural lands, the majority of which are in the possession of private landowners. KNLT works with landowners to find an economically feasible way to protect their land for all time. To accomplish this, KNLT relies on private donations, grants and corporate contributions to raise funding and heighten the awareness needed to protect these lands. KNLT's efforts to preserve Blanton Forest have the support of statewide environmental and community groups including the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission, the Kentucky Cabinet for Natural Resources and Environmental Protection, MACED (Mountain Association for Community Economic Development), The Nature Conservancy, the Harlan Revitalization Association and concerned Harlan Countians.







Photo by Pam Spaulding

*An average tree in a mixed forest cleans about 13 pounds of O<sub>2</sub> a year — enough to meet the breathing needs of a family of four.*

### **The making of Kentucky's largest nature preserve.**

The campaign to protect Blanton Forest will go down in history as the most ambitious natural lands preservation effort ever undertaken in Kentucky. It could well be Kentucky's last chance to legally protect this invaluable ancient forest.

Under the Blanton Forest Preserve design, 6,700 total acres are to be protected. The 2,350 acres of old growth will remain undisturbed. The remaining 4,350 acres will serve to buffer the old-growth tracts from outside disturbance. This

buffer area will also provide for public access and an environmental education center—or living laboratory—to instill pride and respect for the forest in its future custodians.







## Campaign to preserve Blanton Forest goals:



### **Preserve the most significant natural lands discovery in Kentucky.**

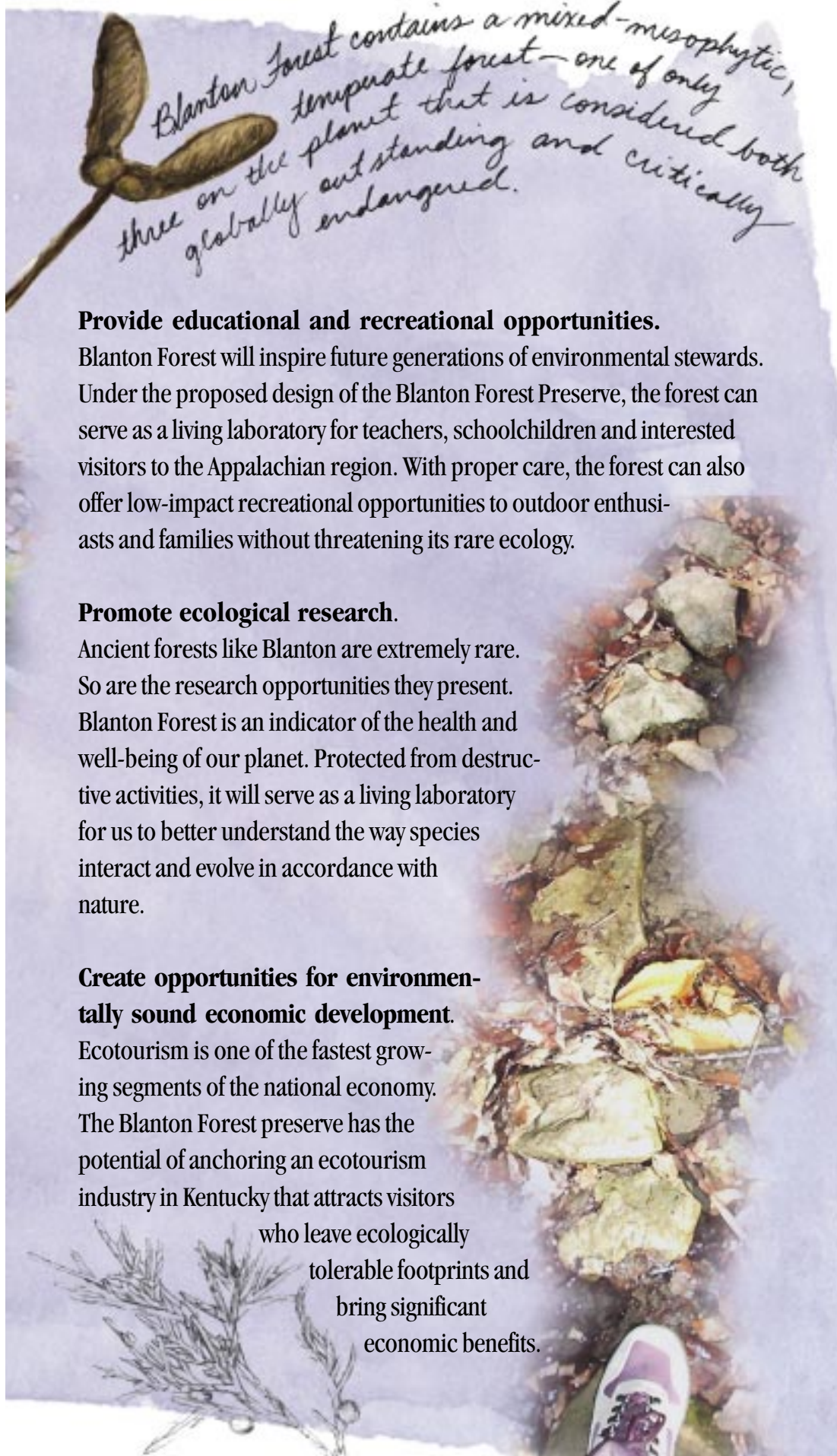
The campaign to preserve Blanton Forest offers an unparalleled opportunity to preserve Kentucky's *last significant* old-growth forest—one of our nation's last great places. Only one tract of Blanton Forest is currently protected in any way. The majority of the forest is very vulnerable to outside disturbances and both willful and inadvertent destruction.

### **Protect biodiversity.**

Mixed-mesophytic forests are the most diverse temperate forests in the world, and they are critically endangered. The 2,350 acres that comprise Blanton's old-growth tracts support species diversity and interdependent habitats that are found nowhere else in Kentucky. Blanton Forest is one of the few remaining healthy places that naturally sustains its forest communities. Shouldn't it stay that way?







*Blanton Forest contains a mixed-mesophytic, temperate forest — one of only three on the planet that is considered both globally outstanding and critically endangered.*

**Provide educational and recreational opportunities.**

Blanton Forest will inspire future generations of environmental stewards. Under the proposed design of the Blanton Forest Preserve, the forest can serve as a living laboratory for teachers, schoolchildren and interested visitors to the Appalachian region. With proper care, the forest can also offer low-impact recreational opportunities to outdoor enthusiasts and families without threatening its rare ecology.

**Promote ecological research.**

Ancient forests like Blanton are extremely rare. So are the research opportunities they present. Blanton Forest is an indicator of the health and well-being of our planet. Protected from destructive activities, it will serve as a living laboratory for us to better understand the way species interact and evolve in accordance with nature.

**Create opportunities for environmentally sound economic development.**

Ecotourism is one of the fastest growing segments of the national economy. The Blanton Forest preserve has the potential of anchoring an ecotourism industry in Kentucky that attracts visitors who leave ecologically tolerable footprints and bring significant economic benefits.



*Funds raised to  
preserve Blanton  
Forest will go to:*

**Land acquisition:** The Blanton Forest Preserve design includes a total of 6,700 acres. This includes the 2,350 acres of old growth and buffer lands necessary to protect the ancient forest. Previous fund raising efforts proved successful to purchase and protect half of the old growth of Blanton Forest—the only available property at that time. The Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission has since negotiated options to purchase the balance of old growth forest and a significant buffer zone. It is extremely important that the money is raised to purchase these options before they expire.

**Stewardship fund:** A permanent stewardship endowment will be established to generate the income needed to protect and preserve the forest for years to come. This fund will provide for active management and protection for the rich and diverse forest communities. The endowment will be invested for growth and security by the board of directors of the Kentucky Natural Lands Trust.



Photo by James Archambeault

*The great white trillium appears  
to blush under the rays of  
the warm spring sun.*





Photo by Wallins Elementary student

*Our economy depends on a healthy ecosystem to supply resources and materials - but also to purify the air and water, recycle waste and maintain the beauty of nature.*

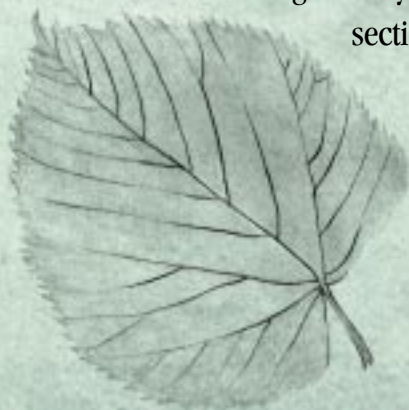
*Nothing great was  
ever achieved without enthusiasm.*

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Preserving Blanton Forest is a once in a lifetime opportunity—one that relies on all of us to help forever protect one of our last truly natural places. A campaign of this size depends on large gifts from lead donors. It requires thoughtful contributions and the support of everyone who has come to appreciate our natural world by observing its wonders.

Your participation will do more than help save an ancient forest. It will help guarantee Blanton Forest as a living legacy—bridging our history, our heritage and our hope for the future.

Please consider your contribution carefully. Gifts of cash, appreciated assets or securities will be gratefully received. All gifts are tax deductible under section 501(c)(3) of the IRS code.



*Blanton Forest*

Toll-free: 877-367-5658

[www.blantonforest.org](http://www.blantonforest.org)





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