

RUCKERSVILLE CITIZENS COUNCIL

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Minutes of December 1, 2009 Meeting

Discussion with **Cate Wyatt** and **Shelley Mastran** from **Journey through Hallowed Ground**, and **Jackie Pamerter** from **Greene County Historical Society**.

1) About Journey Through Hallowed Ground

- a) About our speakers – Shelley Mastran is a Virginia Tech urban planning instructor working in Alexandria. She is a direct descendant of General Nathanael Greene, after whom our county is named. Cate Wyatt is president of JTHG.
- b) About the Journey through Hallowed Ground organization – the “journey” covers the area along route 15 from Gettysburg to Monticello, and the surrounding territory. This area includes 9 President’s homes and 13 National Parks. It is rich in history, from native Americans through the colonial and revolutionary period, on through the Civil War and to the present time. JTHG markets historical tourism in this area, to both US and foreign tourists. *(Editor’s note: The only Unesco World Heritage site in the US is Monticello, which gives our area status for overseas visitors.)* 56,000 jobs in the area are related to tourism, and JTHG has helped to increase this tourism. Sources of funding are mainly private donations and government grants.
- c) Current status of JTHG – They are developing a “management plan” which is required to be completed in order to receive federal funds from the National Park Service, which might be up to \$1 million a year for 10 years. The three year Strategic Plan had 5 goals:
 - i) Awareness of the Journey area heritage at the federal, regional, and local levels. This has included acquiring national and state designations (see below) and publication of printed materials, including a National Geographic book “Journey Through Hallowed Ground – Birthplace of the American Ideal” and just recently “Honoring their Paths – African American Contributions”. JTHG’s informative web site is: <http://www.hallowedground.org/index.php>
 - ii) Educational programs for all ages. For example, JTHG offers “summer camps”, called “Extreme Journey Through Hallowed Ground” often through local schools, to explore historical resources in the local area. They had a recent initiative with school children in Harper’s Ferry which involved writing up and filming from a child’s point of view of most interesting aspects of local history, which became part of the Harper’s Ferry National Park interpretive materials.
 - iii) Establishment by Congress of the area as a National Heritage Area, which was accomplished in 2008.
 - iv) Recognition of Route 15 as a National Scenic Byway, which was accomplished on October 16, 2009. This required all the local communities to seek recognition of their sections as state scenic byways first. JTHG’s section of Rt 15 is one of only 99 National Scenic Byways.
 - v) Recognition that surrounding lands are privately owned, and protections to help ensure that there will be no “taking” or regulation by JTHG of those properties. A fund is being established to buy particularly historical properties at fair market value when owners wish to sell and such a purchase is practical.
- d) What JTHG is seeking to accomplish currently –
 - i) JTHG has raised \$500,000 to train 4,000 local visitor center volunteers to assist with the upcoming Civil War Sesquicentennial. Their web site provides lots of information about this program, called the “Certified Tourism Ambassador” program.

- ii) They are currently engaged in a project to plant American chestnut and other native trees along the route 15 corridor and surrounding areas as a memorial to Civil War soldiers, and have been in discussions with Virginia Department of Transportation and the Department of Defense, which contacted them expressing an interest in funding the project. A large number of trees have been donated by the American Chestnut Association, which have been developed to withstand Chestnut blight and have survived 30 years.
 - iii) They are working on updating their management plan in order to be eligible to receive National Heritage Area funds. This includes developing recommendations for telling the area's story; involving local people and local, state, and federal government; seeking related economic development; inventorying historic, natural, and recreational resources; and developing a program for implementation, including coordination with National Parks Service.
- e) How might this apply in Greene – Greene might be interested in the following:
- i) Providing a resolution by our Board of Supervisors to join the JTHG partnership. All of our surrounding counties have done so.
 - ii) Becoming involved in the Visitor Center volunteer training program.
 - iii) Providing more information about Greene's history, natural and historical resources, chosen scenic routes, etc, to be included in JTHG's marketing programs.
 - iv) Getting educational programs going for Greene children and other residents regarding local history.
 - v) Being involved in the Chestnut tree planting.
- f) What advantages / disadvantages might this have to Greene? Cate explained the following
- i) **Cost to the locality is zero. There is no local match for JTHG marketing programs or for joining the Partnership.** They are always happy to accept private donation.
 - ii) **There is no regulation of anything by JTHG – they have no regulatory authority whatsoever.**
 - iii) We could get “**on the map**” and receive the **substantial economic benefit of national tourism marketing by JTHG.** All the other counties in our National Heritage Area have web pages on the JTHG web site and tourism loops and sites covered on their map and materials.
 - iv) Local residents are usually pretty enthusiastic, because they see a link between historical tourism and quality of life for residents.
 - v) As we collect money from our tourism lodgings tax enacted this summer (which is required to be spent entirely on tourism development), we might become eligible for a dollar for dollar match from the National Park Service through Journey for eligible tourism projects.
- g) Comments and questions from the group
- i) **Jackie Pamerter** asked what Greene could contribute to the JTHG management plan? **Cate** replied that County residents and government could provide information about what is special about Greene including: ongoing tourism initiatives, scenic areas, historical resources, and trails. **Jackie** also pointed out that the town of Stanardsville provided a letter of support for joining the JTHG partnership, but the Board of Supervisors has not yet provided a resolution. She commented that the formation of the Shenandoah National Park and relocation of families leaves some bitter feeling remaining still today, and that some of the interpretive materials up at Big Meadows are pretty up front on this.
 - ii) **Lori Gore** said one of the relocation temporary housing cabins used when the park was formed still exists near her home off Route 810, which is the only state designated scenic byway in Greene. She asked how to get Greene Schools involved with an education program like the Harper's Ferry summer camp? This might include some history of the formation of the Shenandoah National Park and relocation of families to Greene, which is

one of the unique things about Greene's history. **Cate** replied that the Harper's Ferry school system was really involved, and JTHG needs a partner partly because they cannot do bussing to sites. **Andrea Wilkinson** asked how the program was funded, and if Parks and Rec could offer the program, as they already do summer bus trips using charter or school buses. **Cate** replied that the program was paid for entirely by JTHG – no local match – and that a partnership with Parks and Rec sounded entirely possible.

- iii) **Bill Steo**, who is editor of the Greene Historical Society newsletter, asked how to get Greene County folks to know about all the activities of JTHG and local area history? **Cate** suggested getting people to sign up for the Journey e-mail newsletter and paper newsletter. **Bill** also talked about the historical significance of the chestnut trees, and how they used to be one of the most common American trees. The blight that killed most American chestnuts was also a factor in formation of the Shenandoah National Park, as failure of chestnut harvests in the mountains reduced economic viability of mountain farms. (*Editor's note: Could route 33 median, which provides access to the National Park and passes by our current Civil War reenactment site, be an appropriate location for planting chestnut trees? How about route 29 in the area of our new Visitor Center?*)
- iv) **Sharon Steo** asked if the entire county would have to be part of the JTHG partnership or Heritage area designation, or just part of it. **Cate** replied that the entire county is already part of the National Heritage Area, but if the county became a partner, our community could designate areas to emphasize or Market. **Frank Wilczek** asked how can we get Stanardsville on the JTHG tourism map? **Cate** replied that all the partner localities select their own areas for emphasis in JTHG's tourism marketing efforts.
- v) **Larry Miller** noted that roads off 15, such as parts of route 29, are suggested routes for tourists on JTHG maps, and wonder how these get selected. **Cate** replied that these routes are chosen by the local communities. **Larry** commented that there seems to be a lot of focus on the Civil War, but **Cate** explained that the National Geographic book that was developed in conjunction with JTHG has five chapters, each covering one period of American history. He asked if JTHG is thinking of establishing a center such as the Frontier Culture Museum. **Cate** replied that they are meeting very soon to draft up a plan of what they would like the route 15 corridor to be like in the next 20 years, including creation of a possible institute or "gateway" centers.
- vi) **Jenny Dietzel** commented that the Battle of Stanardsville reenactment and an educational summer program might have some interaction.
- vii) **Barry Barnett** asked what is a "main street program"? **Cate** explained that it is a program to revitalize historic main streets using some funding from the National Historic Trust. **Shelley Mastran** commented that "Preserve America" could also help, and that these programs could be used in addition to the efforts that are already underway by Stanardsville Area Revitalization.
- viii) **John Humphries**, manager of Greene's Visitor Center, asked how he could get materials on JTHG to stock in the Center. **Cate** replied that he should contact Beth Erickson at JTHG, and become a member of their Destination Marketing Organization. She also suggested that he work on getting Greene's Visitor Center volunteers involved in the JTHG training program.
- ix) **Heather Dow** asked if any oral history is being used by JTHG? **Cate** said mainly African American history is being gathered this way. **Heather** asked about local craftsman, such as a Greene resident in his 90's who uses cornstalks to make a variety of items. She suggested assigning a young person to an old person to pass on these oral traditions and document them so they are not lost forever, possibly as part of the "summer camp" program. **Cate** thought this was a great idea. **Margaret Ramsey**, chair of our Tourism Council, commented that Greene's greatest tourism resource is the Shenandoah National

Park, and that the local group “Children of the Shenandoah” could provide oral history material. Some of this history is already being presented at Big Meadows.

- x) **Bob Grassi** asked if JTHG had any materials or presentations that could be passed around to local clubs like Lions, Ruritans, and American Legion. **Cate** said they would like to develop a program for that purpose but the 30 minute program they have now might be too long. **Bill Steo** noted that Virginia Currents public TV program did a segment on JTHG that might serve the purpose or be the nucleus for that program. **Cate** thought that was a great suggestion.
- xi) **Vicky Strauss** asked about the office and staff of JTHG. **Cate** said they are headquartered in Waterford, Va (in Loudoun County) and have five staff members. Vice President is Beth Erickson. They also have a Board of Trustees and National Advisory Board.
- xii) **Swanee Bullard**, who is a Stanardsville resident and Greene Visitor Center volunteer, said she relocated from Loudoun County, and wanted to thank JTHG for all they have done up there. She asked if JTHG had any idea what could be done about the extremely heavy plugged up condition of Loudoun’s heavily trafficked portion of route 15, which makes it less attractive as a tourist route, or indeed for any use. **Cate** replied that relief would require a parallel road network, to allow some local traffic to have alternative routes to stay off route 15. If eventually there is money to do road improvements to route 15, its National Scenic Byway status would suggest parkway type improvements to preserve scenic qualities.
- xiii) **Jenny Dietzel**, who is the Greene Piedmont Environmental Council field officer, asked what has been accomplished to date on the JTHG management plan? **Cate** said a preliminary list of historic and natural resources has been started, but more input from our community is needed. **Jenny** asked if the list could be provided to her so she can pass it on to interested people in Greene, and **Shelley** responded that she would do so. **Margaret Ramsey** asked if she could be provided information on the resolution to become part of the JTHG partnership and **Cate** said she would e-mail it. **Barry Barnett** said that this would be very much in keeping with our current Comprehensive Plan update, which has emphasis on developing tourism. **Andrea** commented that if the Tourism Council and the EDA wanted a recommendation regarding the JTHG to be included in the Comp Plan, they ask soon, as the Comp Plan is getting close to being finalized by the Planning Commission before going on to the Board of Supervisors.

2) About Greene County Historical Society

- a) About our speaker – **Jackie Pamenter** is President of the Greene County Historical Society and a Stanardsville resident.
- b) About the Historical Society – The Society was formed in 1978 to bring together people interested in history, especially the history of Greene County. The Society has two major functions: first, to discover and collect material that helps to establish or illustrate the history of the area, and display those materials; and second to facilitate genealogical research using our 100,000+ person database and numerous family histories. They have a website providing lots of information and links at: <http://www.greenehistory.org/>

- 3) **New business** - The Ruckersville Citizens Council officers presented a request at the November Planning Commission meeting to include a recommendation in the Comprehensive Plan that the RCC be an officially appointed body. This request will be discussed further at the December 16 meeting of the Planning Commission, as part of the Comprehensive Plan discussion that night.

There will be **no meeting on January 5th**, as we generally take the month off for New Year’s weekend. Our next meeting is Tuesday, **February 2nd**. Selection of officers for 2010 will be included.