

# Mountain Promise

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## 2007 Brushy Fork Annual Institute Proceedings

In the company of strangers,  
I took a new look at our world.  
Collectively, we took the view that we  
could in fact change the picture.

Together we designed strategies to create a new vision...

—from the Annual Institute digital story  
(see article on page 7)



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#### Mission of Brushy Fork

For more than one hundred years, Berea College has served the people of Appalachia.

The Brushy Fork Institute carries forward this commitment by working to develop strong leadership in the mountains.

Working with both existing and emerging leaders, we draw on local understanding and vision to help communities build for tomorrow.

# HandMade in America



## Place-based approach strengthens economies

Keynote address by Becky Anderson of HandMade in America at the 2007 Brushy Fork Annual Institute compiled by Rodney Wolfenbarger, AmeriCorps VISTA Volunteer

We are rushing into this age where any product or service that is not place-dependent can be manufactured and made elsewhere. This means that only products and services that are uniquely tied to a region or require a face-to-face interaction are going to provide an economy for us. Tourism is totally dependent on place, offering a distinct experience of a specific place at a particular time. We have begun to consider such ventures for an economy, because everything else is ready to be outsourced or offshored.

During the early 1990s, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce was busy recruiting the automotive industry. BMW had moved to Greenville, South Carolina; Mercedes had gone to Alabama. We were going to be that new Detroit. That new Detroit now exists in the provinces of China, and it is going to continue to be there. All the economic forecasting we had looked at said this industry was going to leave us, and it did.

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Furniture and textiles were once our major manufacturing entities in western North Carolina, and tobacco was once our number one agricultural crop. None of them are here now. These changes have not occurred over a lifetime but rather within the past ten years. To recover from the loss of these industries, we decided to look to the place-based economy and began mining our culture to develop that economy. We did so for two reasons: one, we hoped it would be one that could not leave us once built; and two, we were looking for a way to effect civic change in our region.

The first concern we addressed was how to bring a region consisting of twenty-three counties and 12,000 square miles together? We chose to do so through our culture, working with the handmade object because we had an authentic history of it and—considering we had almost 4,500 craftspeople living in our region—we also had the critical mass to do so. As such, we decided that we would build an economic sector—not the total economy of our region by any stretch of the imagination—but an economic sector around our culture and the culture of the handmade object.

The second point we decided upon was to serve as a myth buster. We were determined that Snuffy Smith, Lil' Abner, and Deliverance would not be the story that was told about who we are and where we live.

Next, we began looking at asset-based community development. We determined that when we got together, when we did our strategic planning, and when we met with the community, nobody could ever say the word "need." Once we started a system of asset-based development, to our great pleasure and joy, the Appalachian Regional Commission picked up on it. Let me share some of our strategies and programs so that you may understand the philosophy and beliefs behind this system.

### **Arts Can Form an Economy**

First of all, if you think anyone believes in the arts as a viable economy, think again. All one has to do is look to our school systems to see that the arts program is the first program to be dismantled

HandMade in America took the place-based approach for two reasons: to develop an economy that couldn't be outsourced or off-shored and to effect civic change in the region.

The \$122 million arts and crafts economy was four times the amount of burley tobacco sales and about half of the total manufacturing wages in western North Carolina.

and the last program to be added. Our first task was to prove that a true economy within the arts did exist. To do so, we conducted a study in conjunction with the School of Business Research at Appalachian State University on

the economic impact of craft production from 1993-94. Our results showed that the handmade object produced \$122 million of revenue in the region during that time. This figure included revenue generated by raw material suppliers, schools of craft, and craft publications, while also accounting for salaries and sales. For the sake of comparison, let us view this figure in terms of our agricultural economy. This \$122 million was four times the amount of the sale of burley tobacco from western North Carolina, and approximately 50 percent of the total manufacturing wages of 11 western counties combined. We called the handmade object "the invisible factory." It did not require a road, a sewer system, or tax abatement. It was there, plugging away, and only required a good educational base.

Upon completing this study, we determined that tourism was our biggest economic factor. We did not have to create a market, but rather needed to increase the existing market and add value to its products.

The craft community was terrified of tourism as an economic strategy—even though it was their baseline economy—due to the manner in which they feared they would be portrayed. Their request was two-fold: show us as we really are and be a myth buster. This included showing how they lived, how they worked, and who they were as entrepreneurs and small business owners. They also suggested that if we could manage to keep them in their studios, making their works, they would be able to maintain and increase their production. The minute the artists left their studios, they insisted, they ceased to earn a living.

To address this concern, we reversed the market. Instead of venturing out to craft fair shows, or whatever it took to get their work out there, we brought

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the market to them by inviting people into their studios. We constructed eight trails consisting of more than 350 sites, among them the craft studios, and began scheduling tours. Our first guidebook sold 25,000 copies in an eight-month period. Our efforts became known as community based tourism, because the community defined their approach.

So how do you bring community together around tourism? We did three things: we visited all of our counties, held three meetings in each, and invited anyone who was willing to host us—and anyone who was willing to come to them.

Once the people gathered, the room was divided between those who welcomed tourism and those who opposed tourists on their roads and in their backyards. Our next task was to find a way to bring these two divisions of the same community together.

Considering we all came from the Bible Belt, we decided to start conversation with that language. We asked, “Where are the sacred places of our community?” That made everyone quit thinking about me and mine and instead consider ours. The next question we put forth was, “Where do you not want visitors?” And finally, we asked, “What would you share with a visitor about the craft culture of your community?”

The results of these efforts have been amazing. During our first three years, studio makers saw a 23 percent increase in income, while shops and galleries enjoyed a 28 percent increase in sales. And now, three guidebooks and 350 new sites later, it is a very standard approach.

But remember, we were there for a civic reason also. When we wrote these guidebooks we wanted visitors to know that the community was home to talented potters, wood carvers, weavers, and blacksmiths as well as share knowledge of the sites they would be visiting. Once this guidebook came out, I received 37 phone

calls from the citizens of the town of Bakersville, North Carolina. Suddenly, four of our smallest towns, who were either not in the guidebook or felt that they did not have a big enough representation, wanted to be more involved.

### Preparing Small Towns for the Tourism Economy

The interest of these small towns presented another issue: How do you prepare small rural communities for tourism? We began with our small town revitalization plan. Of the 13 towns involved across our region, three have only town managers. Generally, these are towns with one main street and one stop light. We used the national Main Street Model, which considers four factors of a town: its marketing capabilities, economic restructuring, existing organizations, and zoning.

First, we go into town for a resource visit, which could last up to eight days in the national Main Street Model. The national model is designed for towns that have 5,000 or more residents and are able to afford a Main Street manager, a city manager, and a town manager.

Considering the size of the towns with which we work, our visits last for two and a half days, during which time we interview everyone in town, including the fourth and seventh grade students in the school system. Our conversation during the resource visit focuses on the community’s assets. People are not allowed to complain. The interview determines what residents view as being great about their town, what assets can be used, and what sites visitors are likely to see first. Once you shift their thinking, people are fabulous at identifying these things.

We try to go in and have the resource team complete a good design. To get the community involved, we always have pie and coffee one night at a gathering place in town. During these gatherings we have the oldest citizen and the newest local

#### A Covenant

In developing their plans, small towns promise to share resources, knowledge and ways to raise money for projects. They become partners across regions.

share their histories and what brought them to—and keeps them in—their communities. We also ask community members to bring family photos to line the walls as a reminder of the history of their town. In addition to the Main Street Model, we added a landscape architect to direct beautification projects, which are among the very first things a community can do and with which anyone can help.

The community is then asked to covenant with each other, again back to that old Biblical concept—a covenant of trust. They focus on community. They covenant that they will share their resources, their knowledge, and their methods of earning money for projects. They select a sister community and become partners across the region.

These small towns have renovated more than 152 facades, remodeled more than 140 buildings, created 14 new parks, greenways and public spaces, and have publicly and privately invested over \$32 million in their communities. The towns have opened 28 new shops and galleries to increase the local market and community members have provided 167,000 volunteer hours.

### **Beyond Tourism**

Now, let us look at the wealth coming into all of Appalachia; whether you believe it or not, it is here. People have discovered we are a beautiful place to live, and they can spend their money in our communities. We recently conducted a wealth study on our region to determine how wealth coincides with our region's economy. The three primary sources of wealth were the medical field, the tourism industry, and housing construction. Capitalizing on this information, we created a source book of architectural elements—products such as lighting, railing, and sinks—that could be provided by our craft community. We distributed this source book to every architectural firm,

building contractor, and major developer in the region to inform them of the resources available in the community. We are now completing a source book for home décor—furniture, table linens, dinnerware, and other items—which will be sent to every interior design firm in our region.

Finally, we are working with the state of North Carolina on the revival of the furniture and textile industries for very small lot manufacturing consisting of as few as 20-30 units of a product. We have metalsmiths making individual knobs, pulls, handles and drawers for furniture. We are working with three textile firms where weavers work in a factory setting, employed as the research arm, where they conduct tests with organic cottons, wools, ewe fibers, natural selection fibers, and bamboo. Another textile firm manufactures medical clothing for burn victims, weaving medicine into the cloth's fiber. Our new partner in this venture will be the North Carolina Biotech Center.

### **The Story of Spruce Pine, NC**

In closing, I have a story to share about a down-and-out town that turned things around by developing an economy around a children's book. Meet Spruce Pine, North Carolina. They lost 97 percent of their manufacturing base in a two-year period, all furniture and textile entities. They hired a retired school teacher to be head of their Chamber of Commerce. She determined that they would never develop an economy without a strong educational base, considering they had one of the lowest graduation rates in the state. So the first thing they formed



Becky Anderson shares a copy of *Year of the Perfect Christmas Tree*, a children's book that spurred the economy in Spruce Pine, NC.

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was an education foundation, from which they developed an economic commission.

A citizen of the town, Dr. Gloria Houston—author of several children’s books and a Caldecott Medal winner—was so distressed about her hometown that she offered them one of her books, *The Year of the Perfect Christmas Tree*, to use at their discretion. Her books had sold 7 million copies worldwide.

The first year she was their guest at the Chamber’s dinner, and they held a Christmas parade in her honor. It was somewhere in the second year that they really began to think about a variety of economic strategies focused on the book. They decided to give a copy of this book to every person who had been laid off in the furniture and textile industries—with instructions to use their experience from working in these industries to consider product designs that reflected the look of the book.

HandMade in America worked with them to design a series of collections—furniture, Christmas ornaments, children’s toys, food, clothing, and whatever else we could come up with. We had a consultant who had worked with Calvin Klein and Ralph Lauren come in and teach us how to develop collections.

Halfway through the first year we were submitting products and teaching others how to price and assemble items when the community members decided they needed a place to sell their goods. This town had so many closed buildings it wasn’t hard to find an empty storefront.

We had enough money to hire for one day the person who does Macy’s Christmas windows. He sent us a planogram, a design layout, and the colors for the rooms. When he flew down, I picked him up at the Asheville airport and said, “I know you are used to that New York City traffic, but I have news

for you. We have to go 52 miles in forty minutes.” He was about as green as a tree when we got there. In one day we put the shop together, and it did look like a Macy’s Christmas window. It was fabulous. That first year we had 34 products with which to start.

Soon thereafter, we received a call from the White House asking if Spruce Pine would be the theme of the 2006 Christmas season, producing 200 hand-blown glass balls and 150 snowflakes to decorate trees in the East and West Wings. They also invited us to come to the White House to hear Mrs. Bush read Dr. Houston’s book to the children as a kickoff to the holiday season.

Suddenly, Spruce Pine was the center of national attention with the story being covered by CNN, Fox News, and *USA Today*. HGTV even produced an hour-long television special. Like that, this little town came back to life, having built its economy around a children’s book. Last year, their sales totaled \$300,000.

The wonder woman who heads this up called me one day and asked if I could listen. I asked what I was listening to. She was on the street with her cell phone and said, “People are whistling down Main Street again. It doesn’t get any better than this.”

Afterwards, we went back and asked the citizens to tell us why they did what they had done. Leroy Ledford put it best. He wrote, “It has been said that our best must leave to find jobs and build careers, I take exception to that. I think it can be said that the best and the brightest must stay and find a way to make a difference and a living.” I think he has the right philosophy.



Learn more about Spruce Pine’s project at  
[www.homeofthepperfectchristmastree.org](http://www.homeofthepperfectchristmastree.org).

Learn more about HandMade in America at  
[www.handmadeinamerica.org](http://www.handmadeinamerica.org).

*The hard work of igniting passion*

## **Carpetbag Theatre keeps the fire going**



The Carpetbag Theatre Ensemble performed their original play *Between a Ballad and a Blues* during the 2007 Annual Institute reception.



by Beth Curlin Weber  
Brushy Fork Staff

**“Wonderful!  
Eye-opening!!”**  
a participant comment  
about Carpetbag Theatre

Syncopated rhythm, storytelling, laughter and a sprinkle of tears stoked the fire of the 2007 Brushy Fork Annual Institute thanks to the Carpetbag Theatre (CBT) Ensemble, a theatrical performance group based in Knoxville, Tennessee. You might even say they shook things up.

Singsong call and response chants such as “Hard work. . . That’s what we do. Though it may not look like work to you!” echoed through Annual Institute meeting rooms during plenaries. Other pulsating harmonies of “We are the ones we have been waiting for. We are the ones. We are the ones. . .” were used as a background soundtrack for the Annual Institute digital story created by the CBT.

The CBT Ensemble opened the Institute at the Tuesday night reception at Boone Tavern with their latest original performance piece, *Between a Ballad and a Blues*. It is the story of musician “Louie Bluie” (the late William Howard Taft Armstrong) and

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his band. At the Institute, the performance was a “work in progress” that has been two years in the making. It will be premiered March 20-23 at the University of Tennessee Carousel Theatre in Knoxville.

Actor-singer-musicians Bert Tanner, Marquez Rhyne and Starr Releford, re-enacted the life and times of “Louie Bluie” and his mates, Ted Bogan and Carl Martin and their trials and tribulations as African-American blues musicians in the South. The three young men met in their teens, singing on the streets of Knoxville in the 1920s then touring together through World War II and the civil rights days.

Louis, Carl and Ted were following their love of music and family musical traditions as well as their love of storytelling. Armstrong was from Lafollette, Tennessee; Bogan, a native of Spartanburg, South Carolina; and Carl Martin, from Big Stone Gap, Virginia.

Linda Parris-Bailey, the author of the musical play and CBT executive/artistic director since 1974, said that the story appealed to her because it reflected the diversity of the region. In coal mining communities, Italians, Germans, Polish and other immigrants lived together in a mixture of cultures.

“Howard’s story also really fits our mission of telling untold stories. Despite two documentaries about Howard and his cultural role, people still are unaware of his musical legacy and his contributions to country and traditional music,” she said.

The CBT Ensemble was composed of other actors and musicians playing guitar, harmonica, mandolin, and other instruments. Parris-Bailey, Linda Hill, and Lygia Simmons performed with the group.

“One of the best techniques used for helping participants interact I have ever seen.”  
—Annual Institute participant

Dorothy Bennett was another troupe member.

### **Three Trains Running: A Digital Story**

At later plenaries, CBT explained the process of digital storytelling through a device known as *Three Trains Running* that featured a Story Track, Image Track and Sound Track. Involving the audience in making a digital story about the Institute, the Three Trains theme ran throughout plenaries. At the closing plenary, an unedited version was shown, along with examples of digital stories CBT has made in other communities.

“The Three Trains Running idea was perfect. It gave meaning to the madness of the Appalachian’s struggle for dignity and worth,” one of the participants wrote in an Institute evaluation.

“Making digital stories goes back to our mission of helping groups find ways to express issues. . . it’s a way for communities who are disenfranchised to have a voice,” Parris-Bailey said. “Digital stories are a way to talk about what’s happening in the nation. [The storytellers] learn a great deal and learn to tell others. Women in recovery, for example, tell their stories and use the storytelling process to work through issues and have a vision for outcome. Digital stories show the healing power of art and they also forge a sense of community.”

“It’s not a new technology, but we are trying to spread it to the underserved population where it hasn’t been before. You need equipment and trainers with skills. Some people have a talent for pulling stories out of people, others for putting them together, narrowing them to one story and writing

Participants join in Carpetbag Theatre’s unique approach to enhance learning through music and motion.



it down, editing, so that it can be heard and useful,” Parris-Bailey added.

“You can use still photos, clippings, video; the story needs to take you someplace—it carries you on a journey,” Marquez Rhyne told the participants in one of the Institute sessions. Marquez also told the crowd how important sharing information is in a community—and an important way to learn. “Group knowledge is always better than the individual. You ask someone at the grocery store how something tastes, you share recipes, kids share experiences on the playground—we learn this way best.”

### History of Carpetbag Theatre

Carpetbag Theatre is a community based, non-profit, professional theatre company dedicated to the production of new works. The group develops new scripts primarily through collaboration and improvisation of writers, artists, dancers and musicians. It is one of the few tenured African-

*“This is another example of how to run sessions and meetings—keeping people active; they demonstrated some great tools.”*

*—Annual Institute participant*

people racism, classism, sexism, ageism, homophobia and other forms of oppression. It serves communities by returning their stories to them with honesty, dignity, and concern for the aesthetic of that particular community, helping culturally specific communities re-define how they organize.

The company works in partnership with other community artists, activists, cultural workers, storytellers, leaders and people who are simply concerned, creating original works through collaboration in a style based in storytelling and song.

Founded in 1969 and chartered in 1970, CBT was a local response to a national movement towards

American professional theatre companies in the South, according to their website at [www.carpetbag.org](http://www.carpetbag.org).

The multigenerational company gives artistic voice to the issues and dreams of who have been silenced by

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### ***An Excerpt from the Annual Institute Story Track***

I have a digital camera. Each time I press the shutter,

I can make a **different** photograph...

I can **refocus** the attention of the viewer so that he or she can

**see things my way,**

**get a different view.**

I can adjust the photo so that we can see **extraordinary results in ordinary places.**

**In the company of strangers,**

I took a **new look** at our world.

Collectively, **we took the view** that there are actionable items

that could in fact **change the picture.**

**Together** we designed strategies to **create a new vision....**

To see the full digital story of the 2007 Annual Institute, visit Brushy Fork's web site at [www.brushyfork.org/annualinstitute.asp](http://www.brushyfork.org/annualinstitute.asp).



# Lessons from *Hammin' and Jammin'*

by Donna Morgan, Brushy Fork Staff

Becky Anderson jams with participants during the Hammin' and Jammin' session, while David Sawyer, Linda Parris-Bailey and Peter Hille wait to share their thoughts.

*In our communities, good conversation often takes place over coffee and food, and the 2007 Annual Institute was no exception. We held a new session that provided an opportunity for conversation among several plenary presenters and track leaders and participants, while we enjoyed ham biscuits and coffee (thus Hammin' and Jammin'.) From this conversation arose several lessons about practicing community development. Thanks to Becky Anderson, Vaughn Grisham, Linda Parris-Bailey, David Sawyer and all the participants who contributed to this conversation.*

## **1 Fire in the belly** **Successful communities have people willing to make investments, sacrifices and walk the talk.**



*Vaughn Grisham: [Community development] is incredibly hard work. It begins with an individual who simply will not fail, who says, "This is going to happen." They organize their lives in a way to make it happen.*

When Vaughn talks about getting the "right" people involved in community development, he describes people with a fire in the belly for the hard work of community development and the skills to get the job done. Successful communities must have these people, he said, making sacrifices and organizing their lives in a way to make the vision for the community happen.

Based on his years of studying communities, he says he has seen great talent and dedication. "What overwhelms me is just how bright the people are," Vaughn explained. "What they are NOT is organized," he continued. "[In your community], only you can do the organizing. . . . You have to make a commitment of finding one other person who believes and have them find one other person who believes and begin to connect."

Vaughn compared the process of connecting people to making a quilt. "It's not seamless," he said. "It has all sorts of colors and textures and sometimes it's not even pretty."

Also, community developers must adopt a sense of urgency, he stated. So much gets done during a crisis because it forces a sense of urgency that is not artificial. Urgency propels community development; otherwise, the energy simply dissipates or gradually seeps out.

“There are communities that are going to die,” insisted Vaughn. “If it gets to a point—and there is a point where they will tip the other way—it’s over; turn out the lights!” Somebody has to get up every day with the thought that reviving this community is the most important thing in the world.

In addition to time, people must be willing to invest financial resources in their communities—and Vaughn insists that these resources must come from within. “You have to put your money in it,” emphasized Vaughn. People need to move beyond looking for outside grants to fund their work, he said. “It won’t go unless you put in your own money, your own time, your own energy.” This is what it means to have the fire in the belly.

But one fired-up person is just the beginning.



## 2 Never too many chiefs Successful communities have a critical mass of leaders.



*Vaughn Grisham: “I hear people talk about too many chiefs, and there may be such a thing, but strong communities are full of leaders. Don’t be afraid of that; you need a lot of leaders. In one of the communities where I work, I can identify more than 600 key leaders...”*

So Vaughn Grisham believes that communities must have a number of leaders undertaking multiple projects. But what can you do to help create this critical mass of people and get them moving in the same general direction for the community?

Vaughn continued to describe what he often sees in communities. “One of the things I’ve found in my research in all these communities, these leaders come in pairs. There has been no exception. They all come in pairs because you need somebody else when you are down and you can’t do it by yourself. Then these pairs form other pairs, it’s true. But you need some colleague to help and support you.”

Vaughn also pointed out that bringing new ideas into a community can be difficult if too few people are involved. “What I find in doing my own leadership training,” continued Vaughn, “is that organizations send one or two people for the intense three weeks of training. These people go back with the fire in the belly and they are ready to go. Everyone else says, ‘Geez, I wish they hadn’t gone to that workshop. They want to change everything. We just want to do it the way we know.’”

Are there ways communities can get enough residents on board to create the critical mass needed for change? “Probably one of the most useful things you can do is to get your people here to the Annual Institute,” Vaughn recommended. “I don’t know of a program as complete as this one, not in the whole nation, that offers you all these different tracks,” Vaughn said. “It’s a way of jump-starting your community. The power is incredible!”

Vaughn Grisham:  
“Probably one of the most useful things you can do is to get your people here to the Annual Institute. I don’t know of a program as complete as this one, not in the whole nation.... It’s a way of jump-starting your community. The power is incredible!”

## 3 Building an army

### Successful communities invest in infrastructure to develop leaders.



*Peter Hille: Many if not most communities have leadership development programs but if people go through a program for a year and that cadre of leaders doesn't do anything, the investment is wasted. Drawing these people together, building an army to move the community forward with a unified vision is where you start to get traction out of the investment of training.*



Peter Hille commented on leadership programs and organizations: “Many communities have these programs, but they don’t always operate at a high level of effectiveness.” Peter suggested that communities might improve their programs. Peter was responding in part to comments by an Annual Institute participant from Rockcastle County, Kentucky, who had provided a good example of how a community could get results from an investment in training.

Robert Lawson, the participant, described Leadership Rockcastle, a program the community had developed four years ago with guidance from Brushy Fork. Each year, he said, leaders in the county joined the program and discussed important issues. But the real power of the program has come after the participants graduate.

“As far as moving not only the city of Mt. Vernon but the county of Rockcastle forward,” he explained, “one of the great things we have done is combine all four classes into an alumni program.” The alums meet monthly. “All the issues we brought up the last four years in each of the classes are taken on by the whole alumni class,” continued Robert.

He described a difficult issue the group addressed: “We are at a situation in Rockcastle County that if a factory came in and proposed building a factory with 200 jobs—guess what? We don’t have the water or the sewer to do that.... We would have to say no.” The alumni group drafted a letter to city council in support of funding a new sewer facility, and the 67 members signed it.

“It was like the Declaration of Independence—one sheet of letter and two pages of names,” described Robert. After seeing the letter, the city council decided within an hour to pursue funding for a new sewage treatment plant. When the alumni group took the letter to the local area development district two days later, the district board unanimously passed a resolution for Rockcastle County to get a new sewer plant.

A committee of the alumni group will meet and plan with engineers working on the facility, so they can continue to represent the community and its interests. “When [local leaders] see 67 names on a letter, they stand back and say these people mean business. We are very proud of that.”

Another participant commented on the value of involving a broad range of people in community work, which can be a difficult task. “But if you really want to have success that’s where it comes from. You’re really working with everyone in the community, bringing them to be involved.” A strong leadership program can help communities do just that, but how do you get people interested?

## 4 Self-Interest is an asset

### Successful communities create a reason for people to get on board for community development.



*Becky Anderson: "We drink a lot of coffee, eat a lot of pie, and have a lot of one-on-ones before we ever get to a meeting with several people. Sometimes people say, 'Yeah, you're fixing it.' But in the end it pays off."*

When Becky Anderson is invited to a community to help them with development efforts, she focuses her conversations on what residents there do rather than on her own approaches. "It's a way of letting people know they've got the ideas for their communities—even if they don't know they have the ideas yet."

Becky's approach also allows for people to express their self-interests. And self-interest is important in involving people in community development, according to Vaughn. His advice is to find somebody who has a stake in the work. "Don't be disturbed that they are going benefit from this," explained Vaughn. "Assume that they will."

To illustrate, he shared a story about trying to work on economic development in his own home county. "There was one key guy that I had to get on board. I drank coffee with him every Friday morning, and I don't even like coffee..." But when Vaughn would try to talk to him about economic development, his eyes would glaze over.

One morning when Vaughn arrived at their usual coffee time, the man was glum.

"What's wrong?" Vaughn asked, and the man answered that Bobby (his son) had just graduated from the county high school and had to go to Memphis to get a job.

Vaughn responded, "He does?"

"Yeah," the man explained, "Ain't no jobs around here."

And Vaughn saw his opening: "Well, let's talk about getting a job for Bobby."

When they stopped talking about "economic development," when they got down to the very personal level of getting a job for the man's son, the person became engaged. "Anyone who talks in grand terms about moving society won't move most people," Vaughn pointed out. "What will move them is helping their own children, helping themselves."

Yet self-interest does not necessarily mean competition in community development. As she talked about connecting with people around community issues, she laid out a simple challenge: "I am going to ask that each of you do one thing—forget about the Friday night football game!"

She explained, "If I were to tell you the most divisive point in all the counties and communities we live in, it's probably the Friday night football game. Somehow we have to get above that." Becky encouraged participants to make a commitment to go home and have a cup of coffee with someone who needed to be involved in the community's work. "I don't care if you have to go to the next town and forget the Friday night football game, do it! I promise you they will know someone else to involve also. It will never fail."

Vaughn Grisham:  
Anyone who talks in grand terms about moving society won't move most people. What will move them is helping their own children, helping themselves.

Becky Anderson's challenge:  
I am going to ask that each of you do one thing—forget about the Friday night football game!

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**5 Song for community**  
**Successful communities celebrate their culture and history to keep the fire going.**



*Linda Parris-Bailey: I know culture keeps the fire going. I know what the role of culture is in instigating and keeping the backbone strong. I grew up in the Civil Rights Movement. I know the power of song. I know that when people come together and they give each other that kind of energy, nothing can stop them.*



Linda Parris-Bailey shares her insights during Hammin' and Jammin'.

As Executive and Artistic Director for Carpetbag Theatre Linda Parris-Bailey has spent many years keeping people motivated and moving in their community development work. Linda talked about the role of culture in community development.

“Collective knowledge is always smarter than the individual knowledge,” she asserted. “Community development is an exercise in popular education; we are teaching each other. That is the strength of the way this type of education works.”

Linda acknowledged some of the incredible work she had learned about in her few days at the Institute and pointed out the value of communities having a chance to share what they are doing. “It’s inspirational when you can share that with people. One of the problems with economic development is that people can’t envision what can be. Some of the things you are doing in your communities are models that can be shared to help people have that vision of what can be. We really limit ourselves by not knowing and hearing about what’s going on.”

In popular education, people share both ideas and support. Throughout the ages, people have found creative ways through theater, story and song to express their passion and support one another through the long days of hard work they must undertake.

The power of song has long been a source of energy for groups working toward change. Linda explained, “Sometimes when you sing a song, you ignite that passion. You really have to sing out and you are a cheerleader for the revolution.”

**Carpetbag Theatre** continued from page 9

community-based professional theater. They have addressed such issues as the death penalty and its impact on the African American community; economic development and the barriers encountered by people of color in the market place; domestic violence and black feminism; and environmental racism.

Historically, CBT has focused its program initiatives on the professional development of young artists and the

participation of all segments of the community in the creative process. In the early years, the focus was the instruction and training of student and community artists. As they began to expand their focus, they developed the professional ensemble company and a series of drama-based activities for specific populations. CBT has become a resource for the many communities who have taken the initiative to document their own history.

## *Big Stone Gap, Virginia*

# A little town with a big story

Address by Barbara Polly, Big Stone Gap,  
compiled by Rodney Wolfenbarger, AmeriCorps VISTA Volunteer



The town of Big Stone Gap, Virginia, has partnered with Brushy Fork in the Community Transformation Program for the past two years. At the Annual Institute, a group shared the story and the community's accomplishments.

*A lesson that all of us need to learn in community development is to not build the community development process around an individual; we need to build it around a community. And so this group did just that, they began to build a genuine community effort from the grassroots up. The achievements here are quite remarkable.*

—Vaughn Grisham

Big Stone Gap is a little town with a big story. Located at the junction of Route 58 and Route 23, we are the largest town—with a population of approximately 4,000—in our four-county area. We are nestled in the coalfields of the mountains and, for many years, mining was our major industry. Headquarters for the Westmoreland Coal Company were located here until about fifteen years ago, when the company pulled out and left our community. The public sector now seems to be our primary employer. Opportunities also exist with the state community college, the department of mines, our two auto dealerships and two food chains, and the Wellmont Lonesome Pine Hospital.

Two bestselling novelists have written about our town. *Trail of the Lonesome Pine* by John Fox, Jr. is the earliest and

most well-known of those novels. During hardback publishing times it was only outsold by two other books, the Bible and *Gone with the Wind*. It was also made into a movie three times. Next year marks the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the novel, during which time we will also be celebrating our 45<sup>th</sup> season of production of *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* outdoor drama.

Modern best-selling author Adrianna Trigiani, who grew up in Big Stone Gap and has written four novels based on life here, is also preparing to have her first novel made into a motion picture soon. The movie is tentatively titled *Big Stone Gap* and filming is expected to begin this year.

Building on the popularity of these novels, we have other assets which also

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## Big Stone Gap continued from page 15

offer a lot of tourism potential. Among them is the Southwest Virginia State Park Museum, around which a lot of activities revolve. Last year, Virginia State Parks were voted the best state park system in the country.

Our town is also home to two national and state historic landmarks, the John Fox House and the June Tolliver House. We use the first during the off-tour season as a place to have special dinners. The June Tolliver house is adjacent to our amphitheater and houses our Folk Arts Center. The Fox family contributed another building to our town in the early 1900s. Originally built to serve as their mining offices, it is now the Harry Meta Coal Museum.

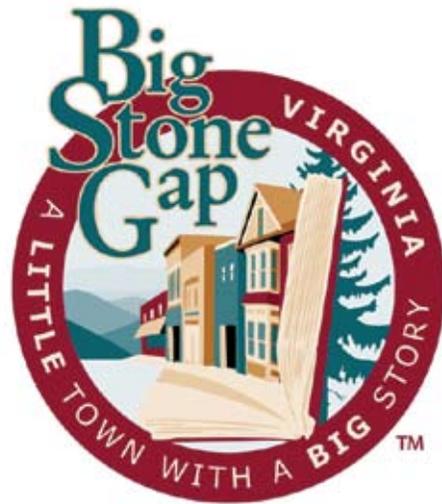
Another venue, the Lonesome Pine School and History Center, tells the history of education in the Wise, Lee, and Scott counties and serves a popular geneology center. This district is going to be called the Jerome Street Historic District, which is one of the projects we're working on.

Big Stone Gap had been known as a bedroom community for years. In 2005, seven of us decided to get involved with community transformation. We all came up here to the Annual Institute, got excited, and went back with a vision to make our hometown a better place to live—and one where people would want to visit.

After meeting with Brushy Fork staff, we held meetings in different neighborhoods in order to pull everyone together to develop our community as a community of choice to live in.

We identified the need for branding and a publicity campaign. We decided to design a logo for use on flyers and posters about the program. We saw the two novels as things that have brought us to the attention of the world, so we thought “a little town with a big story” was fitting. We created a web site, [www.bridgethegap.com](http://www.bridgethegap.com), which we hope will serve as an information resource about the community and the activities of Bridging the Gap.

Some of our first projects involved beautification of our town. A group began decorating the streets in accordance with each season—Christmas decorations in winter, hanging baskets and flags during spring and summer, and corn shucks and pumpkins in the fall. We took on a senior services project. We had a



Big Stone Gap is known for several novels based in the area, so the group developed a logo and tagline that focused on these assets.

committee visit that identified a need of an assisted-living center. We're trying to see if there's a way to bring that to Big Stone Gap.

We instituted the Gathering in the Gap Music Festival this year. One of our performers, Carl Martin, is a native of Big Stone Gap and a fellow that's famous in the history of blues. Our festival was built around popular music of the 1890s, such as the blues and barbershop quartets, but included bluegrass, country, and mountain music as well.

Another of our town's events is the Mountain Empire Community College Festival, which centers on music as well as crafts. It's so large we have to shuttle people from the high school parking lot. The motels in our area are so full that weekend; there's not an available room in the region.

Currently, we're working toward two big projects. The largest is the community wellness center. We hope to develop a facility to improve the quality of life and promote the physical and mental health of our citizens. The other big project we're starting involves the new Jerome Street Music Hall, located in our historic district. It will be an old-fashioned 1890s music hall in which we'll be able to hold performing arts events and support tourism year round. Big Stone Gap was the very first community to be a part of the Crooked Road Music Trail, so we wanted to capitalize on the potential for tourism through our music.



The group representing Big Stone Gap at the 2007 Annual Institute, left to right: Barbara Polly, Tabitha Peace, Skip Skinner, Barbara Orndorff, Stan Botts, Shirley Smith and Judy Hall.

To publicize Bridging the Gap, we built a Christmas parade float that represented a bridge among the many small neighborhoods around town. Events like that leave people asking if they can be on the committee. That's what you want to create, that interest, where people say, "I'd like to be a part of that."

This all sounds so wonderful, but we also face difficulties. First of all, you've got to have that one person who's out there every day, hammering away, getting things done. We still need to find that person. Sometimes people get excited in the beginning and the momentum starts, yet when things don't happen quickly, the momentum drops. You have to deal with a little apathy in the community.

Other difficulties we face involve community groups competing for funds, a lack of diversity in our community, and the fact that we are without a philanthropic base.

So what are our next steps? For starters, we have forged a partnership between Bridging the Gap and an existing local business organization called the Gap Corporation. The Gap Corporation had a part-time staff, a relationship with our business community, and their nonprofit status in place. That was a natural partnership for us to develop, so we decided to form a new group called the Gap Partnership. We created a board made up of existing members of both groups.

The question we are still trying to answer, and one of the reasons we are here today, is "How do we take this partnership to the next level with our major fundraising efforts to sustain the community?" We are here trying to learn more so that we can make all these things happen. We all have high expectations, love for our community, and the passion to make this happen. I guess that's all we have to have.

### Reflections on community transformation from members of Bridging the Gap

"Community transformation is when people of a community come together to better and grow their community. Instead of just attracting businesses and bringing them into town, it's more about a local effort by individuals wanting to see change in their community."

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"Community transformation takes a group of citizens willing to work hard; it takes funding; and it takes a community willing and open to transformation and change."

\*\*\*

"In trying to move a community toward transformation, I've learned that it's important to discover everyone's self-interests, what motivates individuals to action. One of the keys is matching a person's passions to an issue the community is dealing with. It takes both organization and desire."

\*\*\*

"Community transformation begins with a change of attitude. A community has to believe that something can be accomplished and accept that things can work here. It takes people believing."

\*\*\*

"For us, community transformation consisted of going through a strategic planning process of sorts. Communities need a coordinated plan to take advantage of local assets."

\*\*\*

"My advice to another community would be not to give up. Keep meeting, keep inviting people, keep the public informed. Make the community aware that there are people working for change."



## Looking ahead

### 2008 Annual Institute to be September 10-12

*The 2008 Annual Institute promises to be bigger and better than ever. Exciting plans are underway for workshop tracks and plenary sessions. Below is some of what's in the works. Check our web site at [www.brushyfork.org](http://www.brushyfork.org) for updates as plans develop.*

#### Communication, Management, Leadership

Popular tracks are back in 2008

While we are still planning the full slate of workshop tracks for 2008, we have confirmed several.

Steve Kay's track on Advanced Communication Skills provides participants with tools and techniques to become better facilitators, leaders, mentors or coaches. "I will use these skills not just in my work but my volunteer and personal life, too," said a 2007 participant. Steve's track provides the tools to improve the outcome of group and individual communication.

In 2008, David Sawyer will return to lead his popular track on Executive Problem-Solving. Participants in 2007 described this track as "deep and transforming." This track is designed for professional nonprofit staff willing to participate in a peer-consultation and discussion of organizational challenges and plans to manage them.

David Cooke's track on Leadership Development will also return in 2008. A 2007 participants said, "I would encourage other members of my organization to participate in order to achieve their full potential." This track offers a variety of sessions to build skills and inspire new perspectives. And it works, according to a 2007 participant: "I definitely believe the skills I gained will help me be a more effective leader."

We are still working on more tracks for 2008; watch for developments on our web site: [www.brushyfork.org](http://www.brushyfork.org).

#### Vaughn Grisham: Three Rs Plus

A Track for Communities Willing to Succeed

"It's like Stephen Covey's *Seven Habits for Highly Effective People* for communities." That's how Dr. Vaughn Grisham describes his new track for the 2008 Annual Institute.

In Three Rs Plus, he will explore nine Rs that community developers need to consider in their work. We won't spoil the Rs for you, but encourage communities to come learn for themselves.

And this track is designed for *communities* rather than individuals. "In this track," says Vaughn, "I am looking for communities that are willing to make it. To participate, a community must send three to four representatives who will be able to go back home and make things happen."

#### Becky Anderson: New Tools

A Track for Communities Willing to Succeed

"I feel more inspired, more ready and more prepared than ever to tackle projects in my community..." This comment was about Becky Anderson's 2007 track, New Tools for Economic Development.

Becky will return in 2008 with her high energy and bright ideas for place-based community development. Come learn to build on your community's assets. If last year's participant feedback is any indication, you will find Becky's sessions "very engaging, energetic, and pertinent."

#### They're back! Carpetbag to be at 2008 Annual Institute

Uplifting. Powerful. Creative. Superb.

These words characterize participant reactions to the Carpetbag Theatre during the 2007 Annual Institute. We've got good news, folks! Carpetbag will be back to share their unique facilitation style and a brand new workshop track on digital storytelling.

We can't wait to see what they've planned this year, and we hope you will come in September to discover how this group keeps the fire going! For more about what Carpetbag Theatre did at the 2007 Institute, see page 7.



*2008 Annual Institute Keynote Address*



**No substitute for tolerance**

**Whitwell Middle School  
principal and students  
to share paper clip story**

*We did what we had to do. We try to honor the dead and tell the world that there is no substitute for tolerance. Are you listening? Please come to Whitwell and see for yourself.*

—the students of Whitwell Middle School\*

In a small town in Tennessee sits a German railcar, built in 1917, that once carried Jewish victims of the Holocaust to concentration, work and death camps. The car houses eleven million paper clips, one for each victim of the Holocaust.

How did this railcar—today reconceived as a memorial to victims of the Holocaust—come to be in Whitwell, a small southern town with a predominantly white, Protestant population? The answer lies in a story that was shared in the 2004 documentary film *Paper Clips*.

Whitwell Middle School principal Linda Hooper started a project that used the Holocaust to teach her students the importance of tolerating and respecting different cultures.

The students found themselves overwhelmed by the concept of six million Jewish victims. When one of the students suggested that they collect six million paper clips to help them understand the magnitude

of the Holocaust, the students began a quest for donations of paper clips. They also asked people to share thoughts and stories of the Holocaust.

By the end of that first school year, 700,000 paper clips had arrived at the school, along with several hundred documents and letters. The students' interest in honoring Holocaust victims gained national and international attention.

At the 2008 Brushy Fork Annual Institute, Linda Hooper and some of her students will share the inspirational story of how something the size of a paper clip expanded to affect their entire community and the world beyond.

Don't miss the opportunity to share in this unique experience. Hold the dates for the 2008 Annual Institute: September 10-12.

\* Student quote is from the book, *Six Million Paper Clips: The Making of a Children's Holocaust Memorial* by Peter W. Schroeder and Dagmar Schroeder Hildebrand.

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Don't miss upcoming announcements, brochures and other information about the Brushy Fork Annual Institute. Complete this form and return it to the address below. Or if you want to save postage, go to our web site and complete the online form at [www.brushyfork.org/forms/aimoreinfo.asp](http://www.brushyfork.org/forms/aimoreinfo.asp).

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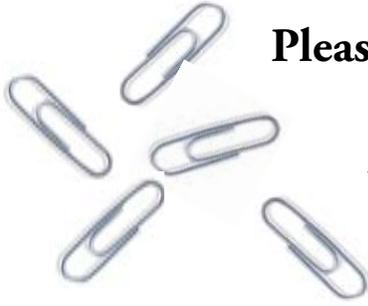
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Please plan to join us for the

# 2008 BRUSHY FORK ANNUAL INSTITUTE

September 10-12, 2008

on the campus of Berea College

Learn more about plans for the 2008 Annual Institute on pages 18 and 19.

What's new with workshop tracks?    How can you get more information?

What's with the paper clips?

Which presenters might be there?

What stories will we share?



What lessons might we learn?



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