

Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Commission Interim Activity Report for CY 2009

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Section 2.2-2534 of the Code of Virginia requires the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Commission to submit an annual report to the Governor and the General Assembly. The document is to take the form of an executive summary outlining the interim activity and work of the Commission. The document is to be submitted for publication as a report document according to the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems and posted on the General Assembly's website. The following information covers the Commission's activities during calendar year 2009.



The General Assembly established the Commission by Chapters 654 and 659 of the 2008 Acts of Assembly. It serves a 19-county and three-city area of southwestern Virginia. Its 23 members represent state, local and regional governments; state and local tourism, educational, cultural and music organizations; and the Virginia General Assembly.

The Commission held its initial organizational meeting in Abingdon on August 14, 2008. Later, at its second meeting on October 14, 2008 in Floyd, the Commission named members and chairs for five standing committees: Finance and Fundraising, Real Estate and Operations, Technology, Cultural Assets and Development, and an Executive Committee. The committees subsequently assumed responsibility for launching several critical activities. These included the selection of a website design firm, identification of regional cultural heritage venues and attractions, and completion of the design and property disposition necessary to begin construction of the signature component of this regional initiative--the Heartwood Artisan Gateway located in Abingdon near Exit 14 of I-81.

Commission Activities During CY 2009

The full Commission held three meetings in 2009. During this first full year of operations, the Commission made significant progress in the following areas:

- The Commission completed all of the remaining legal agreements necessary to begin construction of the Heartwood facility in Abingdon. On May 8, 2009, in accordance with a motion passed at the April 9, 2009, meeting of the Commission, the State Board for Community Colleges and the Commission signed the Ground Lease and Agreement. This document provided for the development, construction and operation of the Artisan Gateway on an approximately eight-acre parcel on the campus of the Virginia Highlands Community College in Abingdon.

- On May 27, 2009, for nominal consideration, the Commission also entered into a sub-lease agreement with People Incorporated of Southwest Virginia, an Abingdon-based, private non-profit Community Action Non-Stock Corporation. People Incorporated became responsible for obtaining the general contractor and overseeing the construction of the facility. Following completion of project construction, People Incorporated will re-sublease the Heartwood facility to the Commission for a thirty year term.
- Groundbreaking for the Heartwood facility took place on August 6, 2009. Contractors recently erected the primary steel framing elements. Exterior construction is now approximately forty percent complete. The facility is scheduled to begin operations in mid-2011.
- Also on May 27, 2009, the Commission entered into a services agreement with ES3 to provide website design services. By year's end, ES3 had completed significant portions of the design work. The prototype web site is expected to be complete by April 2010.
- During the latter half of 2009, the Commission initiated a series of Cultural Asset Inventory sessions covering all of the participating localities. To date, these sessions have occurred in eleven participating counties and one city. The Commission anticipates completing the remaining session for this phase of its work in the spring of 2010.
- The Executive Committee also entered into an employment contract with a newly-designated Executive Director for the Commission. The Executive Director is charged with overseeing and coordinating activities related to achieving the overall goals of the Commission and their integration with the completion of the Heartwood facility.

Commission Activities for CY 2010

Aside from monitoring the progress of ongoing construction at the Heartwood site, the Commission will take a number of steps anticipating project completion and the opening of this significant tourist attractant in 2011. These include the following activities:

- The Commission will conduct interviews with management firms with the intent of negotiating an agreement for the operation of the Heartwood facility once it comes under Commission control.
- Continue to work with web development providers, videographers creating community and cultural attraction videos, and the designers of exhibits to be installed at the facility

- Continue to work with the Virginia Tourism Corporation, The Crooked Road, Round the Mountain and other interested parties in the development and promotion of cultural heritage tourism opportunities throughout the region.