

Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Commission Interim Activity Report for CY 2010

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 in the form of an executive summary outlining the interim activity and work of the Commission. Each year 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 2010.



The General Assembly established the Commission by Chapters 654 and 659 of the 2008 Acts of Assembly. The Commission serves a 19-county and three-city area of southwestern Virginia. The 23 members represent state, local, and regional governments; state and local tourism, educational, cultural and music organizations; and the Virginia General Assembly. The provisions of the Code of Virginia establishing the Commission expire on July 1, 2011.

The Commission is an advisory body whose purpose is to encourage economic development within the region by expending cultural heritage ventures and initiatives related to tourism and other asset-based enterprises. By working with existing ventures such as The Crooked Road Music Heritage Trail and Round the Mountain Artisan Network as well as fostering the completion and opening of the Heartwood Artisan Gateway in Abingdon, the Commission promotes new entrepreneurial and employment opportunities that draw on the region's rich and distinctive cultural heritage.



After its initial organizational meeting in Abingdon in 2008, the Commission, the Commission met on October 14, 2008 in Floyd to designate members and chairs for five standing committees: Finance and Fundraising, Real Estate and Operations, Technology, Cultural Assets and Development, and an Executive Committee. The Commission, its Executive and other standing committees have remained active during the subsequent two years. The committees 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. Since 2008, the committees have been actively involved in subsequent phases of the Heartwood project, including the August 2009 groundbreaking.

Commission Activities During CY 2010

The full Commission held three meetings in 2010 at the Virginia Highlands Small Business Incubator in Abingdon. The Executive committee and other committees were also active in CY 2010. During its second full year of operations, the Commission made significant progress in the following areas:

Artisan Gateway Construction

- Construction of the Heartwood Artisan Gateway near Exit 14 on Interstate 81 in Abingdon continued throughout 2010. The building will be substantially complete in early 2011. Interior finish work was underway in late 2010; final exterior finish elements were scheduled to begin installation at the end of the year. The Commission has received bids on furniture for the facility and its offices should be ready for occupancy in early March 2011, presaging the start-up of the entire facility later in the year.
- Work also has advanced on the interior displays to be included within the facility. The contract for shelving and displays is in place; installation should begin in early March. Photo panels and storyboard content is complete and ready for production. Heartwood is scheduled to begin operations in mid-2011.

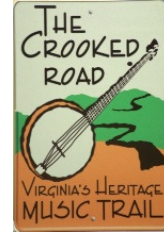
Operations and Marketing

- Guest Services, Inc., the national hospitality management firm working with the Commission, has made multiple visits to Abingdon in past three months as part of the process for staffing and launching the services to be offered at Heartwood. Active recruitment for key positions was underway during late 2010. The Commission posted advertisements and conducted interviews for these positions. Hiring decisions were pending at the end of the year.
- The Commission selected the Charles R. Ryan and Associates firm as consultants to assist staff in implementing the marketing plan. The overall marketing plan for the Heartwood facility has been developed in cooperation with the Virginia Tourism Corporation, which has provided its component for assisting in marketing the facility.

Products

- To assure that crafts and other products displayed or offered for sale at the artisan center accurately represent the distinctive regional culture and resources, the Commission has conducted a juried process to select artisans for product placement.

- In anticipation of the opening of the Artisan Gateway, Commission staff has worked with all parties to assure that merchandise associated with the facility has been inventoried and assessed for quality. An effort has also been underway to assure that providers draw on local resources that promote the regional economy and employment.
- Finally, in recognition of the region's unique musical heritage, The Crooked Road, Virginia's Heritage Music Trail, has requested the help of regional musicians to create an anthology of music rooted in Southwest Virginia for future sale at Heartwood. As with other aspects of product selection, this process will use a juried approach to identify groups and individual musicians for inclusion in Heartwood.



Other Ventures

Although completion of the Heartwood Artisan Gateway was the major task before the Commission, it has been or is currently engaged in a number of other related initiatives intended to foster and sustain long-term regional economic development. These include the following:

- Work is proceeding for an agreement that would provide \$300,000 in Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) funds for an Abingdon artisan incubator. The Heritage Commission is seeking an additional \$300,000 in matching funds from the Tobacco Commission's Reserve Fund. The incubator will include glass blowing, blacksmithing, a kiln and possibly a loom as well as space for classes and other onsite craft categories.
- The Commission is proceeding with the development of a nonprofit corporation, Friends of Southwest Virginia, that would manage revenues, gifts, and grants to Heartwood and distribute financial support to Heartwood, 'Round the Mountain, The Crooked Road, and, potentially, other cultural heritage entities. The nonprofit has received Commonwealth of Virginia designation and will seek IRS approval for designation as a 501(c)3 entity.
- The Commission has facilitated meetings in the New River and Clinch River corridors for developing economic development initiatives along in each of these subareas within Southwest Virginia. These sessions have attracted broad-based participation from an array individuals, businesses, and organizations that could benefit from such initiatives. These have included private outfitters and guides, environmental groups, local government representatives, tourism and economic development officials, and state government representatives including the head of Virginia State Parks.

- The Commission has facilitated an interchange with all 15 municipalities that have requested and committed funding to be involved in the community videography program that took place in late December. The Heartwood web site will include video highlighting each of the participating communities.

Commission Activities for CY 2011

Aside from monitoring the progress of ongoing construction at the Heartwood site, the Commission will continue to work toward the successful opening of this significant tourist attractant in mid-2011. The Commission will also closely monitor actions by the General Assembly related to the pending July 1, 2011, sunset of the statutes establishing the body and the future status of the Commission or the transition of its primary missions to a designated successor organization.