



Voices in Action



From the Director

I have had the pleasure of being part of two projects that have enabled lasting, positive changes in rural communities in North Carolina and beyond. I have seen what can happen in limited-resource communities when talented, capable people acquire new skills.

Professionally, this has been extremely rewarding. It has also been gratifying on a personal level. I have met many amazing individuals who love their neighbors and communities, and who have demonstrated how communities can succeed when people and groups work together.

This booklet shares some of those success stories.



Shirley Allen Pope
Project Director



Dr. Shirley Allen Pope (formerly Shirley M. Callaway), on the campus of North Carolina A&T State University in Greensboro.

VOICES REACHING VISIONS: CREATING STRONG ORGANIZATIONS TO ENHANCE COMMUNITIES and COMMUNITY VOICES: LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT FOR COMMUNITY DECISION-MAKING are sponsored by the Cooperative Extension Program of North Carolina A&T State University with funding provided by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.



Two programs, one mission

What are COMMUNITY VOICES and VOICES REACHING VISIONS all about? The question may be answered in two ways.

On a technical level, COMMUNITY VOICES is a program that develops the leadership skills of a group of individuals; it enables them to become involved in community decision-making and actively respond to issues facing communities. The model is designed for existing leaders to develop the skills of new, emerging leaders in several communities within a county or counties at the same time. The COMMUNITY VOICES philosophy emphasizes the notion that everyone has something to contribute, that everybody is somebody, and that the voices of everyday people are important in community decision-making.

On a more personal level, COMMUNITY VOICES opens doors. It gives individuals, groups and communities access to powerful skills and information.

COMMUNITY VOICES and its sequel, VOICES REACHING VISIONS, offer community organizations the means to answer community needs, cooperate with others toward common goals, and bring about positive change. The Voices programs offer no guarantees; rather, they help create an environment where people who are concerned about the common good can acquire knowledge and skills to improve their communities.

Leadership from the grassroots

Developing leaders from all aspects of society is essential to build strong communities. The Voices programs focus on individuals who usually are not part of local leadership. The programs welcomes people who usually do not have access to traditional leadership development programs. These individuals typically live in communities with limited social, educational and economic resources; they are often overlooked as leaders or potential leaders.

But the Voices model has proven that individuals can be identified, nurtured and trained to become successful community leaders. And perhaps more importantly, Voices sets in place a structure so that new leaders are continually identified and brought forward to assume future leadership responsibilities.

The COMMUNITY VOICES and VOICES REACHING VISIONS programming model has proven that essential positive change can be effected among people at the lower end of the social, economic and political spectrums. The stories presented here capture a few of the achievements attained by communities that took part in the COMMUNITY VOICES sequel, VOICES REACHING VISIONS.

Voices sets in place a structure so that new leaders are continually identified and brought forward to assume future leadership responsibilities.

Building experience through Voices

COMMUNITY VOICES AND VOICES REACHING VISIONS participants are leaders of organizations or active members with the potential to become group leaders. They are men and women of all ages, races and cultures. The program assumes that these participants in organizations have a passion for their communities and that they know a lot about the place they live and their neighbors. The program also assumes that the individuals already have many leadership skills that are needed to work with others to improve their community. However, these individuals may lack self-esteem or the confidence that they can improve matters in their communities.

VOICES REACHING VISIONS training provides a comfortable, supportive group where mem-

bers can practice their skills, exchange ideas, and work together on relevant issues facing their communities.

COMMUNITY VOICES and VOICES REACHING VISIONS are grounded in the belief that these leaders of organizations need experience and practice in specific areas if they are to be truly effective. These specific areas are strategies to:

- develop their leadership skills;
- strengthen their organizations;
- obtain and combine resources through working together and with other community groups and non-profit organizations, as well as local, state, and federal agencies; and
- apply their collective knowledge and skills to improve their communities.

Co-facilitation is the key

Co-facilitation is a key component of COMMUNITY VOICES and VOICES REACHING VISIONS training. The technique involves trainers modeling the methods prescribed in Voices training materials and engaging participants to become active learners.

Co-facilitation helps leaders develop rapidly by allowing participants to practice Voices techniques in a safe, supportive environment. Rather than remaining passive listeners, participants learn important communication and group development skills by doing. The process helps ensure that local groups will remain strong and that communities will continue to develop new leaders.

Five train-the-trainer workshops were held to assist participants in developing their organizations and the communities that they serve.

The series of two-day workshops was held from September 2002 through February

2003. Each workshop was attended by 100 to 140 persons. Four workshops were held in Greensboro; one was held in Raleigh.

Workshops 1 and 2 focused on developing participants' skills to enhance their organizations.

Developing skills to help participants reach their visions in their communities was the focus of Workshop 3.

The final two workshops dealt with building skills to enhance the financial and human resources needed to support organizations in reaching their visions for better communities.

A closing ceremony, "Celebrating the Visions," was held on February 28, 2003, and was attended by about 160 participants. Tabletop displays from each community celebrated their successes, and each organization received a certificate of achievement for its participation in the VOICES REACHING VISIONS project. (See photos, page 23.)

Program materials

Community Voices

1. Introduction to Program and Participatory Training – A program overview and staff training workshop.
2. Implementation Guide – Step-by-step guide and training workshop for existing leaders.
3. Participatory Training Guide for Community Co-facilitators – Two-volumes covering 15 sessions to enhance skills and motivate existing leaders to work on community issues.
4. Community Voices Videotape – A four-segment videotape that demonstrates how leaders and communities can work together to bring about change.

Voices Reaching Visions

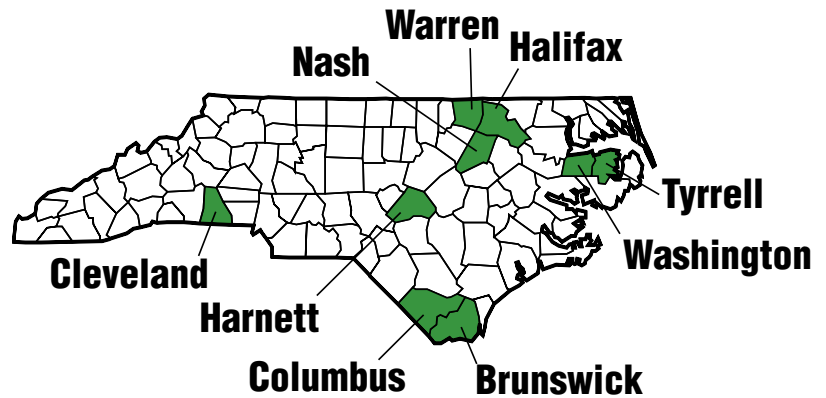
- VOICES REACHING VISIONS is conducted by using Participatory Training Guides for Co-facilitators. The guides are organized in five manuals and subdivided by training sessions.
- Part 1: Assessing Your Organization's Structure and Mission
 - Part 2: Refining Your Organization's Vision and Goals
 - Part 3: Planning for Community and Economic Development
 - Part 4: Securing Funds for Your Organization
 - Part 5: Developing Working Relationships with Community Assets

Demonstrating success, county by county

Voices Reaching Visions enabled several local organizations in counties across North Carolina to apply their training by developing community projects as demonstration sites.

Some projects focused on technology development and other initiatives to enhance the educational opportunities available in rural areas. Some projects developed community centers to serve the needs of youth, the elderly and families. The centers provide a variety of health-related, cultural, recreational and other services to isolated, disadvantaged areas.

One project focused on creating a commu-



nity vegetable garden for individuals to learn how to grow food for themselves and market it; in this case, the produce sold earned income for the organization to provide other community services.

Brunswick County

Northwest Community Organization
Project: Community Learning Center

Cleveland County

Kingstown Community Organization for
Concerned Citizens
Project: Kingstown Computer Learning
Center

Columbus County

Bogue Community Citizens Organization
Project: BCCO Learning Center

Halifax County

Concerned Citizens of Tillery
Project: Recreational/Cultural Center

Harnett County

Norrington Community Development, Inc.
Project: Community Health Education
Center

Nash County

Peachtree Community Development
Organization, Inc.
Project: Community Enrichment Center

Tyrrell County

Tyrrell County Community Development
Corp.
Project: Regional Business and Technology
Training Center

Warren County

Coalition of Youth Empowerment, Inc.
Project: Community Learning Center

Washington County

Scuppernong Vision & Action
Project: Youth Entrepreneurship
– Community Garden

Building a future in Northwest

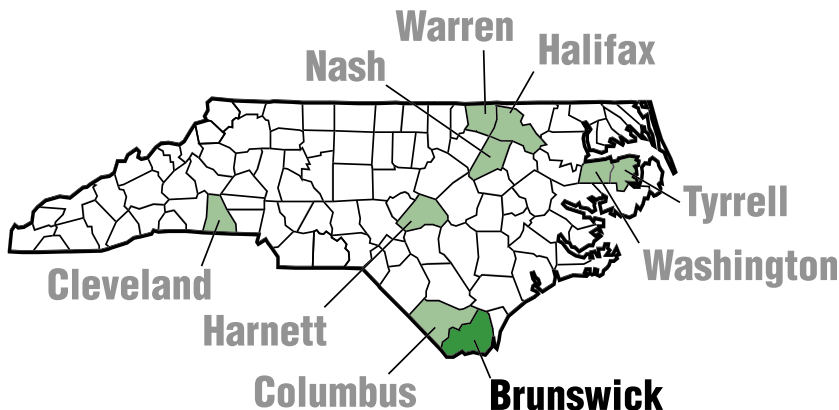
The Northwest Community Association building hums with activity on a spring afternoon. Adults hurry over after work to greet youngsters arriving to polish their academic skills before North Carolina's mandatory end-of-grade tests. Someone brings a donation for the community Food Bank that is ready to be launched. A reader takes advantage of the community library on the lower level of the two-story building.

The old masonry building, which stands near the Northwest Town Hall, had fallen into disrepair by the early 1990s. But its location and availability (it belongs to a fraternal organization that has since moved to other quarters and rents it for \$1 a year) made it a resource not to be overlooked.



Northwest Community Association building.

A handful of people heard about Community Voices training going on in Navassa, a neighboring community, and got involved. Brunswick County Extension Agent Pearl Stanley was asked to hold Community Voices classes for Northwest, and soon a core group of committed people was formed. As a result of Community Voices, citizens organized the community to seek in-



Patsy Mitchell, Mary Ratchford and Freddie Graham with Northwest's Voices Reaching Visions display.

corporation. The state legislature granted the charter in 1993, making Northwest a town of about 700 citizens scattered over six square miles of Coastal Plain fields and forests. There are a handful of businesses and churches here and there, but Northwest has no downtown. That's what made the old masonry building all the more important. Citizens, from school children to senior citizens, had needs to be served.

The continuing need for community services and Voices Reaching Visions training led to the formation of the Northwest Community Organization. The organization identified the old building as a resource that could be enhanced to become a multi-purpose community learning center. Plus there was plenty of land for a ballpark and other recreation.

"Our main goal was to find a place where we could come together," says Lonnie M. Adams, an association member who serves on the town council. "We had to be housed."

"Everything just came together once we started working," says Freddie Graham, president of the Northwest Community Association. "We got individuals in the



community interested in doing things, and they saw how it was starting to progress.”

Voices Reaching Visions provided additional skills that helped the association turn its dreams into action plans and, eventually, reality. “That’s what it’s all about – having a plan,” Graham says. “Voices Reaching Visions gave us that plan.”

Northwest resident Mary Ratchford says the training gave the group the step-by-step know-how necessary for success. “Knowing where to go to get what you want is one thing,” Ratchford says. “Knowing how to do it is another. Voices Reaching Visions has been instrumental in helping us put our vision into action.”

Association members learned to be flexible in order to meet challenges while never losing sight of their goal. “If things are planned one way and you get half-way and see things are not working like you planned,” Graham says, “you regroup, change your plan and drive on. Rework your plan as often as you need to.”

Even as the Northwest Community Center was reaching its potential as a gathering place and resource center for citizens of all ages, community leaders set new goals. Among them is a new building, much larger and more suited to present and future needs. The



The Rev. Dr. Carozell Henry, a volunteer, tutors youngsters for End of Grade tests at the Northwest Community Center.

4,000-square-foot facility also will double as a hurricane shelter in this coastal county.

Bess Fowler runs the Leland Area Reporter, a newspaper serving Northwest and neighboring rural communities. She watched as the community built itself up.

“They really want to do it for themselves,” Fowler says. “That’s where the changes and ideas come from. I think they’ve done great things.” ■



Northwest is one of the state’s newest incorporated municipalities.



Brunswick County Sheriff Ronald Hewett and local candidate for Clerk of Court Alice Hardee, subject themselves to a mock arrest for a good cause.

Northwest Police "Arrest" Local Dignitaries to Raise Funds for Community Center

The jail bird’s names read like a list of “Who’s Who” in Brunswick County. Sheriff Ronald Hewett, County Commissioner Bill Sue, Judge Ola Lewis, Jamie Orrock of the Department of Social Services and Atlantic Telephone’s Percy Woodard were just some of the names on Pasty Mitchell’s most wanted list. Mitchell had invited prominent citizens of Northwest and countywide officials to take an escorted ride with Northwest Police Chief Taylor and his officers to her makeshift Northwest Community Jail on Saturday, September 21* at the Leland Pizza Hut. The goal was to raise money for the Northwest Community Center building project. Bail was set at \$250 each. The Sheriff arrived, escorted by one of his deputies, and handed over his bail money without having to spend time in the “jail booth” in the back corner of the restaurant.



Brunswick County Clerk of Court candidate Alice Hardee

Creative fund-raising efforts have paid off with contributions as well as good publicity for Northwest.



Community volunteer Elizabeth Chase, retired Extension Agent Haywood McKoy and Extension Agricultural Technician Larry Wright. Behind them is the Hallsboro traffic signal installed after the community presented its case to the Department of Transportation.

Traffic light signalled a new day in Hallsboro

“Voices Reaching Visions empowered us. It told us how we can become a better organization...”

– Emma Shaw

To people just passing through Hallsboro, there’s nothing special about the stoplight at the corner near the fire department. But before the traffic signal was installed in the mid-1990s, the intersection was the scene of many accidents. Lives were lost.

The state Department of Transportation installed the stoplight after a group of Hallsboro citizens made a strong case for it after yet another fatal accident. Those citizens had taken part in Community Voices leadership development training, offered through Columbus County’s Cooperative Extension service. Years later, the stoplight remains a source of pride and a symbol of progress in the community. The successful effort to in-

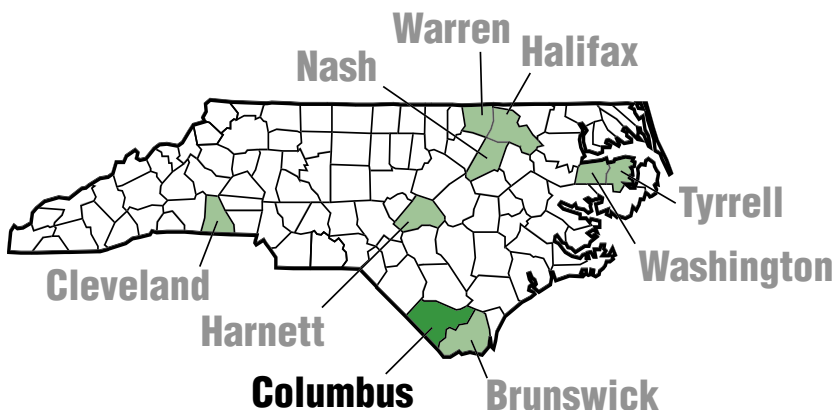
stall the traffic signal marked the beginning of a community-wide turn-around.

The Bogue Community Citizens Organization grew out of the Community Voices training and was hungry for more when Voices Reaching Visions came along.

“We were a good organization, doing good things,” says Emma Shaw, secretary of the Bogue Community Citizens Organization. “Voices Reaching Visions empowered us. It told us how we can become a better organization by involving more people, reaching out to the community, and letting more of the community become a part of us.”

Haywood McKoy, now retired from Extension, has seen the community group’s experience and confidence grow since its first success with the stoplight. Voices Reaching Visions, he says, provides practical information that any group can use to grow stronger and achieve its goals.

“Voices Reaching Visions can work for county commissioners. It can work for large corporations,” McKoy says. “I’m very impressed with it.”





A former teacher, McKoy appreciates how the training material is organized. It's easy to look up a particular topic, such as fund-raising, when a refresher is needed. The manuals also make it easy for groups to pass the information along to newcomers, he says.

“The purpose is to train leaders,” McKoy notes, “and let leaders train other leaders. That's the essence of it – to pass it on.”

In 2003 the Bogue Community Citizens Organization tackled two projects. With an eye toward improving students' end-of-grade scores on state-mandated tests, the group launched an after-school tutoring program. Volunteers coached students, from elementary grades through high school, on language and math skills. Sessions were held in the local Masonic hall, where the students also were given a hot meal before heading home.

The second project was more ambitious: to renovate a long-neglected community center. Once the group demonstrated its commitment, community volunteers came forward to help with the construction.

“It has been awesome the way people have volunteered to work on the project,” says Emma Shaw. Help came from youngsters, who did a general clean-up, as well as professionals. An electrician heard about the project and offered to wire the facility,



Regular events help build community spirit and promote the association's work.



Renovations under way at the Bogue Community Citizens Association's building.



Volunteer Francella Thurman and Emma Shaw, association secretary.

free of charge. The spirit was contagious, Shaw says.

Future after-school tutoring will take place in the community learning center building, which is part of a community park complex. Health information programs for senior citizens and other community events also will

take place there.

Shaw says Voices Reaching Visions strengthened the Bogue Community Citizens Organization by introducing the power of networking. By partnering with other groups, a community organization can increase its effectiveness. The Bogue Community group reached out to the local hospital to improve outreach services. The group also worked with a physician to hold a community health fair and an agency that will provide counselors to work with youngsters.

“What the training did for us was just unreal,” Shaw says. “We were able to build on what we had.” ■



The annual Pre-Thanksgiving Dinner has become a part of community life.

Project helps Kingstown learn about its resources

The parking lot at the Kingstown Computer Learning Center fills up quickly on weekday mornings. Kingstown area residents, many of them senior citizens, flock to the center and its late-model personal computers. For many of them, it's their first experience with keyboards and word processing, e-mail and the Internet.

"Every day, we're packed with the adults," says Derrick Haynes, a volunteer computer instructor. "They really like it."

In the spring of 2003, several seniors used their newfound skills to communicate with loved ones serving in the military overseas.

The parking lot scene is repeated in the afternoon as young people come after school for tutoring and to use the center's library.

The Kingstown Computer Learning Center is the newest resource in this largely African American community, where some 1,200 people live within sight of the Blue Ridge Mountain foothills. Kingstown boasts a new public park (which grew out of Com-



Volunteer Derrick Haynes assists senior citizens in the Computer Learning Center.

munity Voices training in the early 1990s) and a town hall. Single-family homes spaced neatly over the rolling countryside make up most of Kingstown.

Voices Reaching Visions played a major role in the creation of the Learning Center, says Mayor Clarence Withrow. The center is a project of the Kingstown Community Organization for Concerned Citizens (KCOCC), a non-profit group that formed as a result of Community Voices training.

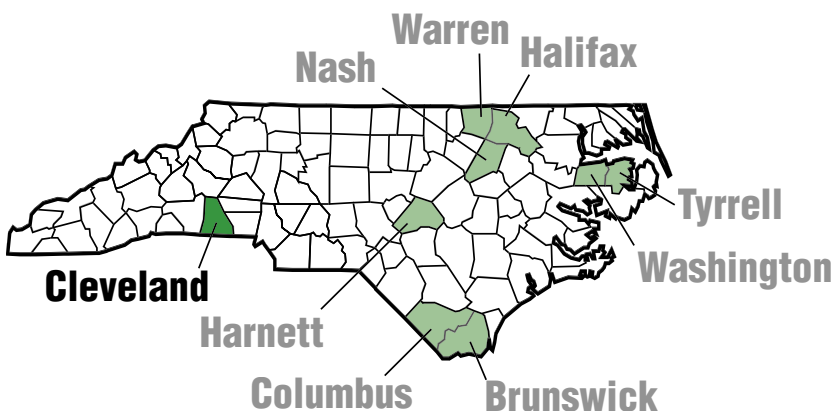
Sharpening communication skills and practicing consensus decision-making helped the community clarify its vision for the future, Withrow says. Co-facilitation and modeling of leadership skills gave participants tools that can be used in many aspects of community life.

The programs also brought participants "abreast of all of the things we didn't know," Withrow explains. "The things that you know are not that important until you find out the things that you don't know."

For example, Kingstown's human

"We have found out that we have such a large quantity of talent that we didn't even know we had."

– Clarence Withrow,
Mayor



Volunteers renovated an existing building for the learning center, which contains a library as well as a computer lab.



resources were far greater than anyone imagined. “We didn’t know how many brick masons we had, how many accountants we had, how many people who could sew, how many people who could teach,” Withrow says. “We have found out that we have such a large quantity of talent that we didn’t even know we had.”

Many of those resources were called upon as volunteers renovated an existing brick building to become the Computer Learning Center. Others came forward to coach their neighbors on keyboarding skills, using the Internet and to tutor school children.

“A lot of those people we didn’t have to ask,” Withrow says. “They would volunteer themselves.”

The enthusiasm for involvement has spread beyond Kingstown, says Lillian Corprew. Some volunteers at the center, like Derrick Haynes, don’t actually live in the community. “Voices are really reaching out, and our vision is becoming a real reality.”

Voices Reaching Visions gave community

leaders the ability to analyze needs and match them with resources, says Nancy Abasiokong of Cleveland County Cooperative Extension.

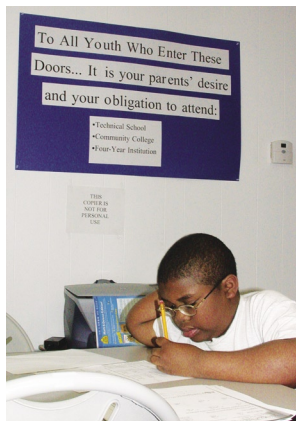
Voices Reaching Visions, she explains, enabled the group to “focus on what is doable, in the time period that we have, with the funds we have available, and with the manpower that we have.”

Networking enabled the Learning Center to assemble its library of several hundred volumes. Citizens had learned that local school libraries were about to discard the books to make way for new ones. The books were saved and now are available for learners of all ages.

The tangible results of the KCOCC’s efforts and its group energy have attracted new members, increasing the pool of future lead-

ers. KCOCC understands that future community efforts depend on always developing new leadership and enhancing their skills.

“There’s so much growth here,” says Lillian Corprew, “and so much potential yet to be developed.” ■



A student at work in the center’s library.

“There’s so much growth here, and so much potential yet to be developed.”

– Lillian Corprew

Tillery refreshes its commitment to networking and group leadership

Concerned Citizens of Tillery (CCT) came together in 1978, making the non-profit organization the most experienced group to take part in Voices Reaching Visions. CCT has been working to improve and enrich the lives of Halifax County residents for a quarter-century and has earned a reputation for effectiveness that reaches far beyond North Carolina. Yet this group found that Voices

where it was going or where it was coming from.”

Voices Reaching Visions helped frame CCT’s approach to group work, Grant says. That’s important in Tillery, where the population is aging and there’s constant turnover in the group as natives come home to retire and older individuals become less active and pass on.

CCT answers many needs for residents of the Tillery area. Some come for the fellowship of Open Minded Seniors, a group that meets every Tuesday in the Tillery Community Center for lunch, followed by cultural and recreational programs. The yellow, frame building is a community landmark that was built before World War II; efforts to save it in the late 1970s helped to bring about CCT.

CCT has been on the forefront of efforts to deal with corporate hog farms and other environmental concerns. It has addressed the health needs of citizens, especially seniors, and developed programs for young people.

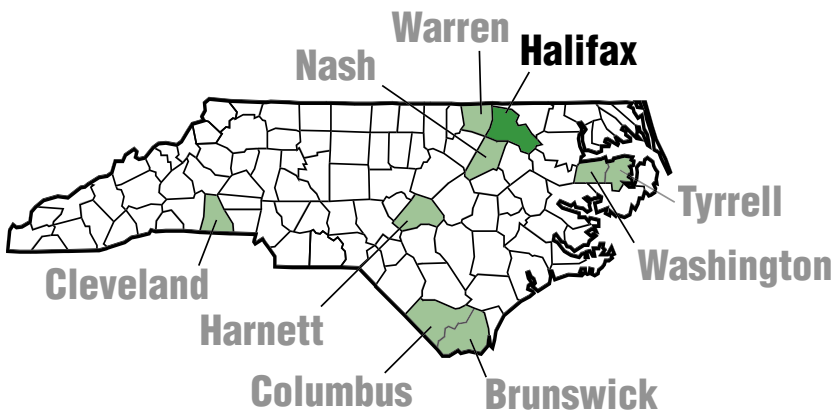


Members of Open Minded Seniors visit before a regular Tuesday lunch meeting.

Reaching Visions has as much to offer seasoned groups as it does to relatively new organizations.

CCT Executive Director Gary Grant says newcomers to the group usually learn how CCT does its business through “on the job training.”

It had been several years since Community Voices training had taken place, and newcomers were picking up on the group’s leadership style “but never had understood



The Community Center’s kitchen is always a center of activity.



The cultural heritage of the area, where there are many African American land owners, also has been a focus.

There's no denying CCT's long record of community involvement and success, but Voices Reaching Visions still proved useful to members. Newcomers might not have appreciated the difference between formal and informal organizations, says CCT President Doris Taylor Davis. They may not have fully understood the responsibilities of group members or officers and "how an organization should be run."

Davis found that Voices Reaching Visions' emphasis on networking opened the eyes of some participants; many have spent their entire lives in the community, with little opportunity to interact with people from other places. Even the networking afforded by VRV training was beneficial, Davis says.

"Networking changes their attitude about the way they're living," she says. Seeing the accomplishments of others instills the confidence necessary for newcomers to tackle new issues.

VRV training stressed to Grant, the executive director, that getting more members involved in group leadership is helpful even to veteran organizations.



Concerned Citizens of Tillery was founded in part around preserving the historic community center.

"Many times people like myself, who have been in community organizing for a long time, forget that everyone is not where we are," he says.

Grant points out that established groups like CCT may find themselves at a disadvantage when seeking outside funding. Foundations often prefer to fund new community efforts; this makes it difficult when a group like CCT has a major initiative, like refurbishing its aging Tillery Community Center. However, Voices Reaching Visions has helped give the group new insights and energy to renovate its property. Now the Open Minded Seniors look forward to many more years of fellowship and luncheon meetings on Tuesdays. ■



Gary Grant, executive director of Concerned Citizens of Tillery, at a restored Halifax County farmhouse preserved by the group.

Cultivating life in Tillery

Partnership between town, ECU enhances lifestyle for residents

By Jenna Hunt
The Daily Reflector



Rhett Butler/The Daily Reflector

The town of Tillery sings and dances more since students from East Carolina University began making weekly visits.

The partnership between ECU and the town of Tillery in Halifax County has brought a higher level of health care and recreational opportunities to a predominantly black community that historically lacked adequate support.

On Wednesdays, Kimberly White, an occupational therapy student, leads about 10 seniors in a gospel slide dance that has some breaking a sweat for 20 minutes.

"A few more practices and I'll have it," said Lois Barley, a senior who has participated for five years. "I love it. They are so friendly and not negative."

The town of 1,200 people has hosted the health and recreational venture for the past seven years through the federal

KELLY RHODES, a student with the East Carolina Allied Health Sciences program, provides a hand massage for a Tillery resident, right, on Wednesday.

grants that provide \$150,000 per year with an equivalent match from the university, she said, and the school funded one year of the program without grant

Networking is essential to bringing services to Tillery's rural population.

"Networking changes their attitude about the way they're living."

– Doris Taylor Davis



Norrington Community Development bought land and renovated a mobile office to serve as its health center.

Knowing what questions to ask helps Norrington find the answers

Tackling community development is like working a jigsaw puzzle. An organization may seem to be on the road to success. Many of the pieces of a project may come together. But like a jigsaw puzzle, a single missing piece can lead to failure.

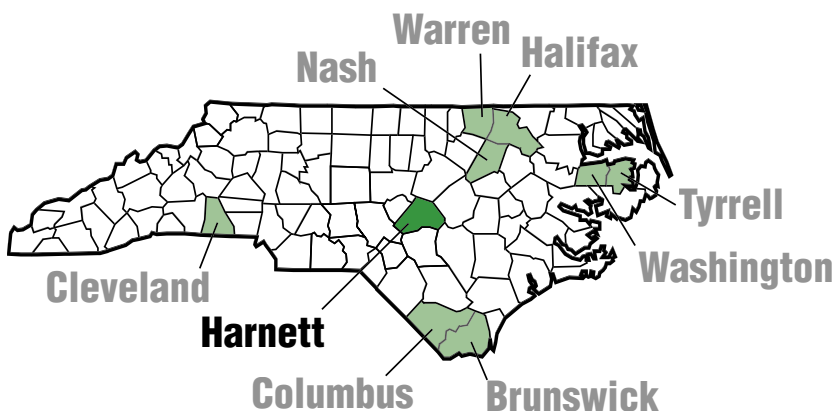
That’s the way the Rev. Michael Bell describes the challenge of community development in rural areas. Voices Reaching Visions (VRV), he says, helped the Norrington community achieve its goal by laying out

proven strategies and methods for success. VRV helped Norrington identify the missing pieces in its project, Bell says, and guided the group to find what was needed.

“Voices Reaching Visions cuts every piece and puts them in place,” says Bell, who guided Norrington Community Development’s efforts to create a community health education center.

“Before, there were questions we didn’t know to ask ourselves. Voices Reaching Visions said, ‘These are some imperative questions you must ask. And if you ask these questions, there are some answers you will get. And the answers will enable you to make the right decision.’”

The Norrington Community is one of several in Harnett County that took part in Community Voices leadership development training and Voices Reaching Visions. The community is centered about six miles from the county seat of Lillington, is pre-





dominantly agricultural and counts some six churches as community institutions.

Norrington's core group of leaders followed VRV's public relations suggestions to build community awareness. The group worked with newspapers, radio and television stations to publicize meetings and announce decisions. They found that keeping the community informed swept away misunderstanding and recruited more people to take part.

VRV's fund-raising suggestions also worked for the group, says Jennifer Walker, director of Cooperative Extension for Harnett County. "They're learning to do it on a larger scale and be more consistent," Walker says. "You just can't do one fund-raiser a year and think you're going to survive."

The group's community assessment found that many Norrington residents (like many other Americans) suffer from hypertension and diabetes. Diet and lifestyle plays a major role in these life-threatening conditions, and the group decided that a community health education center could help area residents learn how to take better care of themselves.

"Food is just one part of the nutritional program," says the Rev. Lester Brown. "It's to make you aware of what you are going through and to prevent you from becoming

a statistic." The center has become a personal mission for Brown, who says he lost his fiancé to diabetes.

Norrington Community Development acquired land and renovated a mobile office building for its center. The group has networked with nearby Campbell University and other institutions for health educators who will come to make presentations. The facility may also set up a small food bank.

The two Voices programs proved so popular throughout the county that an umbrella group was formed to further communication and group work.

William Walker, a Harnett County native who returned after spending his career in law enforcement in Philadelphia, heads Harnett Voices.

"People didn't seem to realize what you could do if you would work as a community instead of as an individual," Walker says. "My job is to try to enlighten them, that if we work together, we can accomplish things."

Harnett Voices works to spur action to address other needs in the county. Issues under consideration include

parenting and fatherhood, recreational activities for youth and young people, and economic development to create jobs.

"I see that in the future we can take care of all these needs," Walker says. "Bringing a lot of people together will expose them to new ideas, and people will see that, together, we can do it." ■



William Walker heads the countywide group called Harnett Voices.



The Rev. Michael Bell, a group leader.

"If we work together, we can accomplish things."

– William Walker

Step by step, Peachtree charts its path and lays a solid foundation

Forty years ago there were far-sighted people in the Peachtree Valley Community who saw unmet needs. There was no gathering place where youngsters could play ball, no spot for neighbors to enjoy a picnic, no community building where people could gather to discuss issues or celebrate an occasion.



David and Gladys Johnson helped found the community association.

David and Gladys Johnson were among those who thought Peachtree Valley deserved more. They worked to gather together community resources, organized fund-raisers and got their neighbors to believe a community center was possible. Eventually a small tract of land was purchased for the Peachtree Valley Community Club.

But progress was slow for the volunteers. A picnic shelter eventually was erected and some playground equipment installed. By the early 1990s, the shelter was screened and housed exercise equipment for senior citizens. But the dream of a year-round, multipurpose building was still unmet.

Things changed dramatically after mem-

bers of the Peachtree Community Association experienced Community Voices and, later, Voices Reaching Visions.

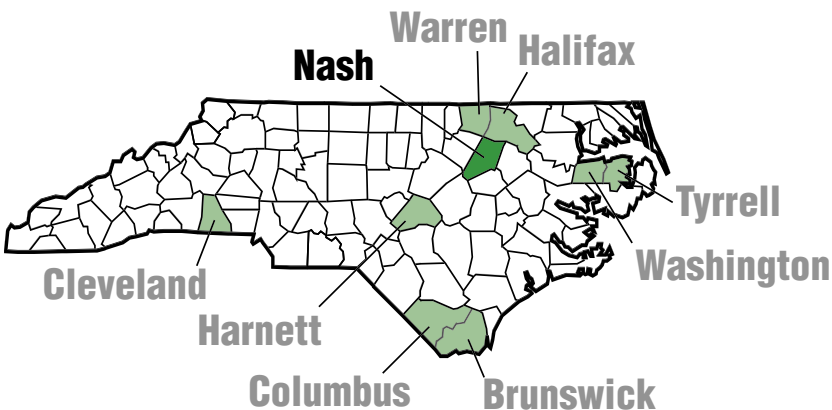
“We saw a means of educating ourselves, right here, without having to go to school, without having to go to the universities, and get what we need,” says Charles Battle, association president.

The leadership and community development programs provided the enabling tools that harnessed Peachtree’s desire to improve, Battle says.

The association achieved formal status as a non-profit organization, and members became keenly aware of additional opportunities and resources when they assessed their community’s strengths.



Barbara Hedgepeth, who had the idea to acquire and fix up mobile classrooms, stands near the kitchen area. Below: before renovations.





The renovation project drew lots of volunteers.



The turning point came when Barbara Hedgepeth, an association member and school employee, realized that the county school system had mobile classrooms being taken out of service. This surplus property – little more than two large shells, both well-worn but full of potential for reuse – turned into an opportunity for Peachtree.

There were doubters when the two ramshackle structures were pulled onto the property. How could the tattered old classrooms become a useful community enrichment center? Could they ever be made to look inviting and be a source of community pride?

The Peachtree Community Association, thanks to Voices Reaching Visions, has made believers of everyone. The old classrooms were joined together and placed on a permanent foundation. Enthusiasm for the project quickly spread through Peachtree.

“Once people begin to see something happening, it’s a magnet,” Battle says. “They see something they can go touch, and they want to be a part of it. Something



Charles and Dorothy Battle

they’ve never had before. Something they can use. Something they can call their own.”

Long-time association members were joined by new volunteers who installed new windows, exterior siding and completely renovated the interior.

Groups are no longer at the mercy of the weather; the building is tight and warm in winter, cool in summer.

The community facility envisioned so long ago by the Johnsons, who live only a few hundred yards away, now teems with activity. Senior citizen meetings, wedding receptions, family reunions, church services and, of course, regular meetings of the Peachtree Community Association, take place there. The facility has become a source of income for the association.

Another renovated mobile building has been installed on the site and serves as a computer lab. Youngsters, supervised by adult volunteers, come after school to practice computer skills and use the Internet. The lab is part of an extensive youth-oriented program that includes tutoring for students from preschool through high school. Peachtree also allows time for fun outside and has a spirited step team.

Younger community residents now lead the organization that took root under David Johnson’s leadership. He and his wife take pride in seeing their vision realized.

“It feels good,” he says.

Peachtree now has the foundation in place for a strong community organization for years to come. “Once we get a system in place,” Battle says, “it will work forever. Voices Reaching Visions lays a foundation for structure.” ■



Volunteer Ulysses Horrison helps student.

“Once people begin to see something happening, it’s a magnet...they want to be a part of it.”

– Charles Battle

Tyrrell's roadside canals play host to many types of waterfowl and other wildlife. One community effort focuses on cleaning up fallen timber and debris so that the canals can again be free-flowing.



Natural resources and ecotourism hold promise for Tyrrell's economic growth

“The information I attained from taking Voices Reaching Visions is just awesome.”

– Doris Maldonado

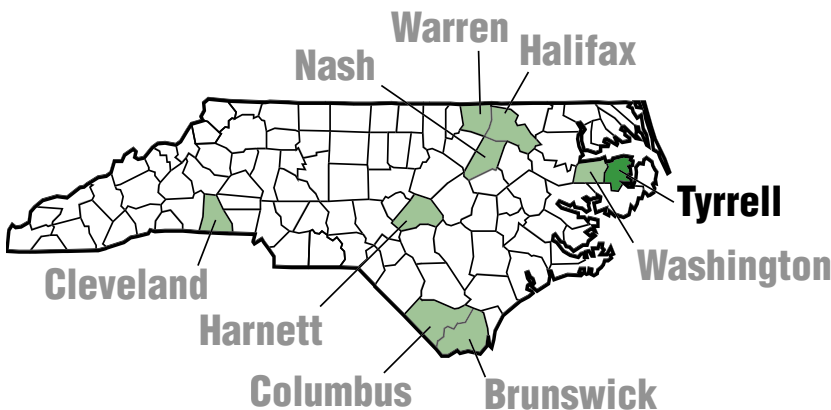
Egrets and blue herons seem to outnumber people in Tyrrell County. White-tailed deer bound through the broad fields before disappearing into endless dense woodlands. Bear are common. With Albemarle Sound to the north and the Alligator River to the east, Mother Nature is a constant presence.

Tyrrell County is proud, beautiful and poor. The population of about 4,100 is sprinkled over 390 square miles. Jobs are few, and

many Tyrrell residents drive long distances to work in neighboring counties. To the east is Dare County and its seasonal tourism industry, where many Tyrrell residents work. Young people often move away after high school graduation. “There’s nothing here” is a frequent complaint.

“Nothing,” however, depends on one’s perspective. There is wildlife at every turn, good fishing, and waters friendly to craft ranging from kayaks and bass boats to sailboats. People in Tyrrell County know good places to watch wildlife, hunt and fish. Wood carvers in the area are renowned for their lifelike decoys, which are prized by hunters and collectors.

Some Tyrrell County residents now see opportunities instead of “nothing.” The natural resources that county residents take for granted are out of reach for many Americans;





people in more urban areas might pay to experience Tyrrell's wetlands, waterways and wildlife. This awareness grew after a number of Tyrrell citizens took part in Community Voices and Voices Reaching Visions.

Doris Maldonado, president of Alligator River Community Development, is a vocal proponent of focusing on the county's beauty and environmental resources to spur tourism and economic development. Ecotourism, she says, can make a difference in Tyrrell County.

"The information I attained from taking Voices Reaching Visions is just awesome," she says. "I want to share it with the community and get them trained in this, so that they will have the same realization that I have."

The Alligator community is making progress on several fronts, she says. Neighborhood cleanups have taken place, and the group is networking with the N.C. Department of Transportation to clear the area's unique roadside canals of debris and overgrowth. The canals teem with wildlife but, when stagnant, are unsightly and breed mosquitoes.

The group also is networking with the



Dr. Olden of the National Institute for Environmental Health Services addresses a group of residents from the Alligator community at a meeting at the former schoolhouse to discuss eco-tourism.

Alligator meeting highlights eco-tourism in Tyrrell County

Local groups are networking with the Conservation Fund and National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences to develop ecotourism opportunities.

Conservation Fund, which administers a 9,000-acre wildlife refuge, the Palmetto Peartree Preserve.

Mavis Hill is executive director of the Tyrrell County Community Development Corporation. She says VRV helped breathe new life into

the 10-year-old non-profit organization. "Voices Reaching Visions allowed the board of directors to go back and look at our mission, our vision, our goals and objectives and ask, in the past 10 years, have we met the needs of the community? What is the next step for the organization?"

The CDC is always engaged in economic development in job-starved Tyrrell County. In 2003 the CDC renovated a building adjacent to its offices to become a regional business and technology training center. One goal is to assist entrepreneurs in starting businesses.

The CDC also promotes ecotourism to stimulate economic development. A waterfront boardwalk along the waterfront in Columbia, the county seat, was a CDC initiative.

Hill is upbeat about Tyrrell County's future. "When a community sees progress, it gives it new life," she says.

Maldonado is confident about making progress. "I know the people in our community and what they are capable of. We can accomplish some things," she says. ■



Mavis Hill of the Tyrrell County CDC and the training center building that will be used for assisting entrepreneurs in starting businesses as well as other community needs.



Home of the Tyrrell County CDC in Columbia.

Successes in Warren are a model of group process and action

Warren County buzzes with excited voices.

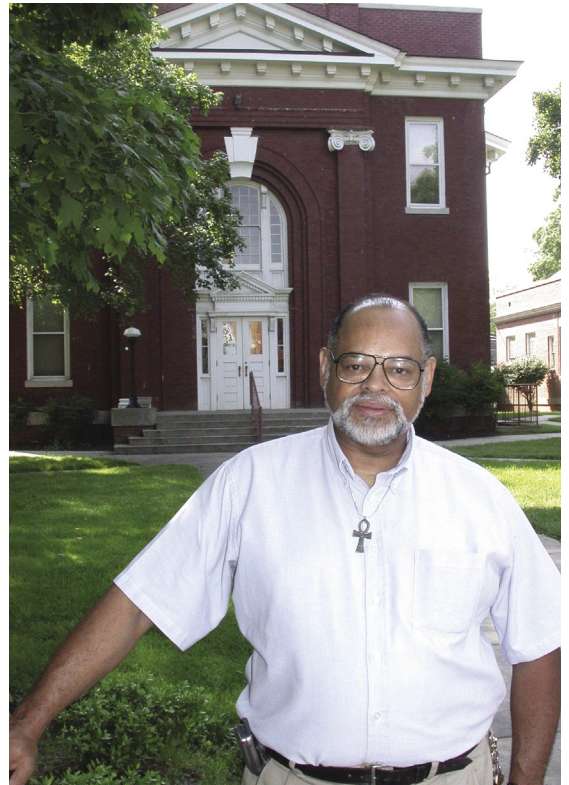
One group works to create a regional conference and recreation center that will serve Warren County citizens and boost economic development. Another group focuses on preserving a historic school and renovating it for current community needs. Yet another works with African American youth, educating them about their cultural heritage and helping them stay focused on long-term educational goals.

Communities across the state have found success through Voices Reaching Visions and its companion program, Community Voices. But nowhere has the impact of these programs been as far-reaching as in Warren County.

Citizens have applied the knowledge gained from the programs to reactivate long-dormant plans to create a conference center and recreational facility at Buck Spring on the shores of Lake Gaston. The county-owned property is the homeplace of Nathaniel Macon, a prominent early 19th century congressman and senator.



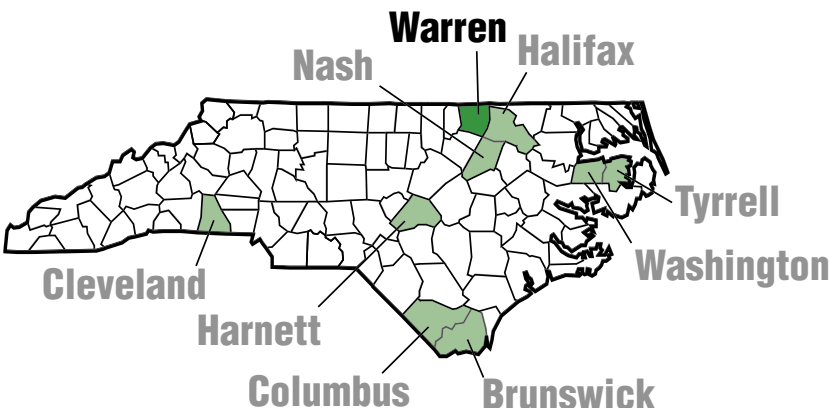
One of the buildings at historic Buck Spring; citizens are working to establish a regional conference center there.



Dennis Gayles of Warren County Community Voices.

Plans for the Buck Spring project include a conference center with meeting facilities and overnight lodging. The spacious grounds already offer picnic sites and can accommodate other park-like features lacking in Warren County. Buck Spring, proponents say, will provide needed recreational opportunities for Warren County citizens and encourage tourism-related economic growth. In this sparsely populated, rural county on the North Carolina-Virginia border, that translates as jobs.

Gladys Favours credits the projects with kick-starting the various grass-roots efforts. If not for Community Voices training, “Warren County Community Voices simply would not be an organization,” says Favours, “because we all came together starting with the training.” People with different backgrounds, experiences and outlooks found common ground. “Now,” Favours says, “we know each other, we like each other, and the



main thing is, we're concerned about our county."

Information provided by Voices Reaching Visions guided the group as it sought to become a formal organization. An assessment of community resources discovered someone with experience writing grant proposals. The group included several people who had returned to Warren County after spending their careers working in large organizations in major cities. Their experience proved invaluable.

The turning point for the group came when it sought to get the Buck Spring project on county government's agenda for action. Previous efforts over the years had not been well-organized or fruitful. Following suggestions in the training materials, more than 100



Gladys Favours

supporters turned out for a meeting of the Warren County Board of Commissioners. The group presented a petition containing more than 750 signatures in support of action regarding Buck Spring. The project

already had received endorsement from former U.S. Rep. Eva Clayton's office, but as a locally based project, it needed local action to move forward.

That night, the project was placed on the county's agenda.

Gladys Favours says the encouragement of the leadership and community development programs gave the group confidence. "Yeah, just ordinary people...we can make a difference," was the message. "And we believe it and we encourage each other," Favours says.

Projects like Buck Spring and the restoration of the Mayflower school in the Inez Community had been floating about for years. Every now and then a good idea would resurface, only to fade into the shadows. Backers of these ideas now know that earlier efforts probably failed because they weren't supported by consensus building; interested people may have lacked organizational and communication skills; and proponents may have failed to identify other community resources or network successfully.

The information available through Voices Reaching Visions and Community Voices was "the magic pill," says Vernita Terry, who directs the Coalition of Youth Empowerment, Inc. "It was like energy" for the group, she says. "It got them started."

Now that Warren County Community Voices (WCCV) has a foundation for success, the group feels energized to realize its vision for Buck Spring and other projects. Expanding the Voices concept and recruiting new leadership are part of the plan.

Whenever a problem arises, says WCCV President Dennis Gayles, the group returns to the program materials to find avenues for a solution. "Those VRV manuals are indispensable," he says, "the best reference manuals I've ever had." ■



Whole Village Drum Ensemble, sponsored by the Coalition of Youth Empowerment, Inc.

"Those VRV manuals are indispensable, the best reference manuals I've ever had."

– Dennis Gayles



Vernita Terry at Coalition of Youth Empowerment offices in Warrenton. The coalition's community learning center is a Voices Reaching Visions project.



Gloria Lawrence is executive director of Scuppernong Vision & Action CDC in Creswell. The CDC formed as a result of Community Voices.



Adult coordinators in 2002 led young people in planting a garden. The Voices Reaching Visions project produced a wide range of vegetables for sale and to feed the youngsters' families.



Economically depressed Creswell has several historically significant structures awaiting restoration.

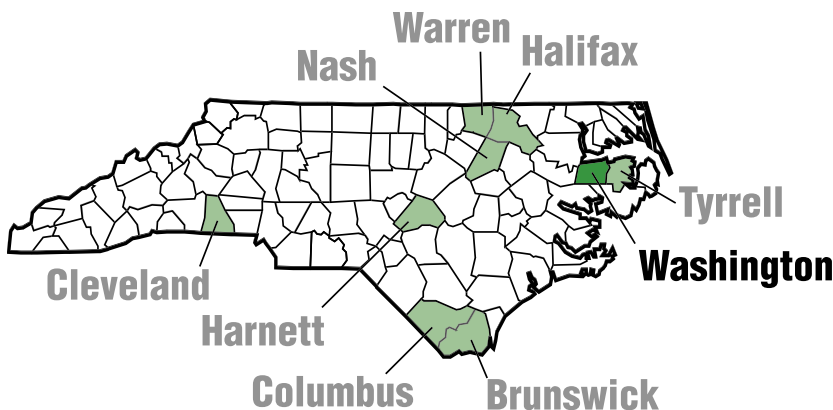
Like all gardeners, Creswell group hopes for a better harvest next year

Young people in the town of Creswell have few constructive after-school and summertime opportunities. Jobs are scarce. So Scuppernong Vision and Action CDC undertook a Voices Reaching Visions project to involve youth in a community effort and give them horticultural experience, too.

The 2002 Community Garden was a hit, producing (among other things) plenty of collard greens for the gardeners. The extra produce was sold to support group activities.

Scuppernong Vision & Action was poised to plant again and build upon its success in 2003, but record rainfall throughout the spring and summer made the garden a washout.

Gloria Lawrence, the CDC executive director, says the group was energized thanks to Voices Reaching Visions. She created a program for young people to keep them involved with regular activities year-round. Adult members of the community group moved forward with plans for fund-raising events and a survey of community needs. ■



Celebrating The Visions



Dr. John O'Sullivan of N.C. A&T Cooperative Extension looks over the display from Brunswick County. With him are Jacqueline Hill (left) and program consultant Sallie Migliore.



Carolyn Williams and Juanita Yancey of Warren County with their group's Voices Reaching Visions certificate.



Warren County participants, including the Whole Village Dancers & Drummers.



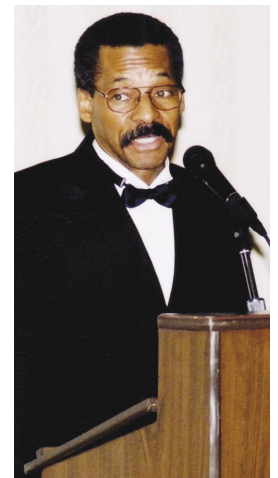
Daria Holcomb of Warren County and Gary Grant of Concerned Citizens of Tillery in Halifax County.



Whole Village Dancers perform.



Brunswick County participants, proud of their accomplishments.



Charles Battle of Peachtree Community, Nash County.

February 28, 2003
Greensboro, N.C.



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