

The Henning Project: A Community Awakening

HENNING
HENNING
HENNING

Connecting
Community



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Regional Economic Development Center
Department of Architecture

February 2010

Prepared for:
Town of Henning
Michael Bursey, Mayor

The Regional Economic Development Center was established in 1967 as a research and outreach unit of The University of Memphis to provide management and technical assistance to both the public and private sectors. The center is located within The Graduate Program in City and Regional Planning, School of Urban Affairs & Public Policy. The findings of technical and research efforts are those of the Center and practicing professionals. These opinions are not necessarily those of the University or funding agencies. Information concerning any of the Center's activities can be obtained by contacting:

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**An Update on the Progress of the
Revitalization Plan for Henning:
Storytelling Initiative and The Henning Project**

Prepared for:
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February 2010

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Part I

"To be a person is to have a story to tell."
- Isak Dinesen





The Henning Project

The Henning Project was born out of the Revitalization Plan for the Town of Henning. This project is based on Storygathering (often known as Oral Histories). The project proposes to gather stories from the community to be used in various forms for economic development. These forms could include: annual productions, walking history tours, site specific sketches, and a Storytelling/Genealogy Center.

Overview

Senator Lamar Alexander recognized the particular needs of Henning, as well as its potential for revitalization, and initiated the effort to recast Henning as a town with recognized acclaim and sustained economic growth. The Regional Economic Development Center (REDC) at The University of Memphis was contacted by the Memphis Area Association of Governments to conduct an economic development study and revitalization plan for Henning. USDA Rural Development provided funding for this study through a matching grant to the Town of Henning. The result was a report entitled: *"A Vision for the Future of Henning, Tennessee: Connecting Community"* which was presented to the Board of Mayor and Aldermen of the Town of Henning in September, 2009. This report can be found online: http://www.memphis.edu/planning/pdfs/redc_reports/Henning_report_final.pdf The study included recommendations for Main Street revitalization, tourism development, design guidelines, a creative village and economic development among others. The Tourism Development section of the plan included the specific recommendations of encouraging Cultural and Heritage Tourism thus creating an opportunity for economic growth in Henning.

This first plan of action is entitled *The Henning Project*, with the Town of Henning and its heritage leading the way. The project is a long-term action plan that involves the gathering of what are often referred to as "Oral Histories." In the tradition of Alex Haley and his experience growing up in Henning, the project has taken a more informal approach - that of "Storytelling". Storytelling has been a tradition of passing down histories and experiences since the beginning of time and served Mr. Haley well in his creation of "Roots."

Pam Hurley from the University of Memphis began working with Henning residents Cubert Bell and Barbara Manns. Together they created a group of "story gatherers" who will go into the community to collect the stories of Henning. With the help of producer/director Lisa Mount, the group is on track to create a product around the summer of 2011. Ms. Mount has worked on successful projects that *The Henning Project* will use as guides -- *Swamp Gravy* in Colquitt, Georgia; *Headwaters* in Sautee Nacoochee, Georgia; and most recently, *Higher Ground* in Harlan, Kentucky.

The gathering of stories will be an ongoing process that will culminate in several possible scenarios. 1) Annual Productions 2) Walking Tours led by local storytellers 3) Site Specific events that would include sketches in the vacant storefronts on Main Street - literally bringing Henning back to life in the days of a thriving downtown.

Goals for The Henning Project:

- Finalize Mission/Vision Statements and Bylaws
- Continue gathering stories of the community
- Become chartered
- Receive 501(c)(3) status
- Acquire a “home” (in-kind donations of office equipment have been promised based on the group finding a stable location for office and meeting space)
- Continue to create partnerships -
 - Current Partnerships** Include: Town of Henning, The Alex Haley House and Museum, The University of Memphis Department of Architecture and City and Regional Planning Program
 - Ideal Future Partnerships:** Community Businesses, Lauderdale County Arts Council, The University of Memphis: Department of Theatre, Department of English, Tennessee Arts Commission, International Storytelling Center, The Smithsonian Institution Affiliations Program
- Secure funding/sponsors for productions and continued work

Community Goals:

- Meeting and reconnecting the community of Henning
- Create partnerships with local businesses
- Community Revitalization - specifically in the Town of Henning proper
- Create economic opportunities through Cultural and Heritage Tourism
- Create a need for support services (restaurants, bed and breakfasts, gift-shops, galleries, other entertainment venues)
- Create a Gathering Place for the community
- Sustain a healthy, vibrant downtown



“My fondest hope is that “Roots” may start black, white, brown, red, yellow people digging back for their own roots. Man, that would make me feel 90 feet tall.”

Alex Haley

Steve Redding (University of Memphis), Senator Lamar Alexander, Michael Hagge (University of Memphis) at USDA/REGB Grant Presentation.

Why Now?

The population of Henning is predominately ages 15 - 24 with the smallest segment of the population being over the age of 75. This is a critical time for the residents of Henning to come together to get to know one another, to share their histories, and ultimately to provide a system of communal support for the future success of their community and most importantly, its younger residents. The opportunity and time is now - before it is too late.

Why Storytelling?

The universal aspect of Storytelling eliminates perceived barriers, opens hearts, and connects people, thus creating a sense of community. One of the most important aspects of a successful community is that of knowing your neighbors, knowing where you fit within the community at large, and knowing that your lives are not that disparate. If this does not exist in a community, no amount of economic planning and development will make a difference. In order for a community to thrive, the individuals in the community must be personally invested in each other and entire the community.

How does a community achieve this sense of interconnectedness and interdependence? It comes from knowing and understanding your neighbors. Knowing that, no matter how different one may think they are from their neighbor, ultimately we are all very much alike; we share the same fears, hopes, and dreams. This is where the art of storytelling comes into play. Storytelling is a leveler, something in which we all have taken part. Stories have been shared with the community for centuries, from tales of the big hunt, to ghost stories and miraculous adventures. This process serves not only to reconnect the community of Henning, crossing generations that may never interact otherwise; but it will also serve to connect Henning with the rest of the Mid-South.

In the book "Psychological Sense of Community," the author, S. B. Saranson defines it as:

"... the perception of similarity to others, an acknowledged interdependence with others, a willingness to maintain this interdependence by giving to or doing for others what one expects from them, and the feeling that one is part of a larger dependable and stable structure."

In the "Journal of Psychology," D. W. McMillan defines the sense of community as :

"... a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together."





Potential benefits of this project:

- Capture an audience that already exists - the visitors to the Alex Haley House and Museum and Interpretive Center.
- Create a tour package with the Alex Haley House and Museum. After the tour of the Haley property, visitors can stroll downtown for a walking tour of the community where Alex Haley and other famous residents spent their time.
- Create a need for support services: cafes, gift shops, galleries, and potentially create a market for other works including books, tapes of *The Henning Project* stories and events.
- As an annual event, the production season/schedule can be tied into other events in the region to capture tourists. Such events could include: Memphis in May, The Memphis Blues Festival, and the Ripley Tomato Festival, among many others.
- By creating a home for *The Henning Project*, the opportunity exists to create a genealogy center for visitors as well. During the downtime of production, the facilities can still be beneficial to the community and to visitors as a place to see the history of Henning as well as tap into their own Roots.
- Connect the entire State of Tennessee. Quite often Tennessee is seen as three sections: East, Middle and West. The International Story Telling Center is anchored in the East, in Jonesborough, Tennessee. With the success of *The Henning Project*, a tie could be made across the state. This would give visitors who sojourn annually to the Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough an opportunity to continue the pilgrimage across the state to enjoy *The Henning Project* as part of the entire experience.
- The economic impact of storytelling events has been proven in similar small towns throughout the south (see Appendix).

“When you start about family, about lineage and ancestry, you are talking about every person on earth. “

- Alex Haley

The Process

Phase One - Creating and Preparing the Committees (Gatherers, Tellers) and Board

The Henning Project has already begun. Community members, Barbara Manns and Cubert Bell together with Pam Hurley from the Department of Architecture at The University of Memphis, have been diligently at work. They have created a Board and two groups of community members that will be the driving force of this project. Ms. Manns, and Mr. Bell have also collected members for two committees: 1) The Storygatherers and 2) The Storytellers. A third committee, The Production Committee, will follow as the stories have been gathered and turned into scripts.

These groups have been under the consultation of Lisa Mount, Jo Carson, and Pam Hurley. Ms. Mount is part of the creative team that developed *Headwaters* in Sautee Nachoochee, Georgia and is an internationally renowned consultant with many arts organizations. Ms. Carson is an award winning playwright and has worked with communities that include Colquitt, Georgia: (*Swamp Gravy*) and Harlan Kentucky (*Higher Ground*). Her recent book *Spider Speculations: the Physics and Biophysics of Storytelling* will serve as the guidepost for the work.

The group recently had their kickoff workshop at the Haley Interpretive Center. This was a two-day workshop, led by Ms. Mount, dealing with story gathering techniques, sense of place, and numerous issues that arise as the gatherers go out into the community to visit with people and gather their stories. Ms. Mount also met with the President, Cubert Bell and Vice-President, Barbara Manns, to guide them with the logistics of creating a strong, healthy, non-profit arts group. Ms. Mount had wonderful things to say about the prospects of success in this endeavor.

“The community of Henning has a powerful storytelling tradition, embodied by Alex Haley and alive and well in the current residents. During the time that I was in Henning, I heard stories about coming to town, about life in school, about pranks people played on one another, and about important life lessons people learned as children. While humans are hard-wired for narrative, not everyone has developed their talents in this area – but the people of Henning have. It makes sense that they have gravitated toward a story-based project for their first step toward community revitalization. There is life in Henning’s stories, and there’s a clear desire to use stories to bring Henning back to life.”

- Lisa Mount, Artistic Logistics

Phase Two - Going into the community

The Storygatherers will go regularly out into the community for one on one or small group story gathering events. They will visit with people in their homes, churches, and various locations and record their stories. These stories will then be transcribed into written versions that will be kept on file at the University of Memphis as well as with *The Henning Project*. The Storytellers also have the option of receiving a written transcript of the stories they have shared. The Storygatherers will continue to host Storycircles which are great generators of ideas and give the community an opportunity to come together.

The main task of the gatherers is to listen. Encouragement, trust, and listening skills are the keys to success in gathering stories and increasing the size of the group. As these Storygatherers and Tellers come to know each other the cast will organically begin to emerge from the group as will possible participants in the third committee - the Production Committee.



Phase Three - Transcribing the stories and finding the through-line

As the stories are gathered and recorded, they are set down on paper. This is when the real decision making will begin to unfold. How do these stories shape themselves into something to share. The product of these stories can take several shapes, and may take more than one for the community. These include: walking history tours, site specific sketches on Main Street in the vacant storefronts, annual productions, and weekly storytelling events.

Walking histories can be packaged together with other tour options for the town. A great opportunity for bus tours and school groups, with a tour guide that shares the stories of specific events that are connected with buildings and homes in Henning. Site specific sketches can take place in the vacant storefronts on Main Street, offering an opportunity to literally bring life back to Main Street. The Storycircles that have already taken place have proffered great stories for this type of event. Annual productions can be created that are large scale productions and be presented either in the Palmer Turner Community Center or the proposed Haley Amphitheatre (see Architectural Design Component Section). Weekly storytelling events can take place in the proposed Lewis-Barbee Blues Hall or other restaurant/cafe locations. Each of these options have already proven to be successful in other towns that are similar to Henning.

Phase Four - Pre-production

As the production component takes shape, the Production Committee will be created. These are the people that create the behind the scenes magic. This group will be made up of a wide variety of individuals that include those with skills in: marketing, carpentry, electrical work, sound engineering, painting, sewing.

For the first production of this annual production, a writer/director will need to be commissioned. This person will take the helm to guide the production through from script creation to opening night.

Part Five - Funding and Production

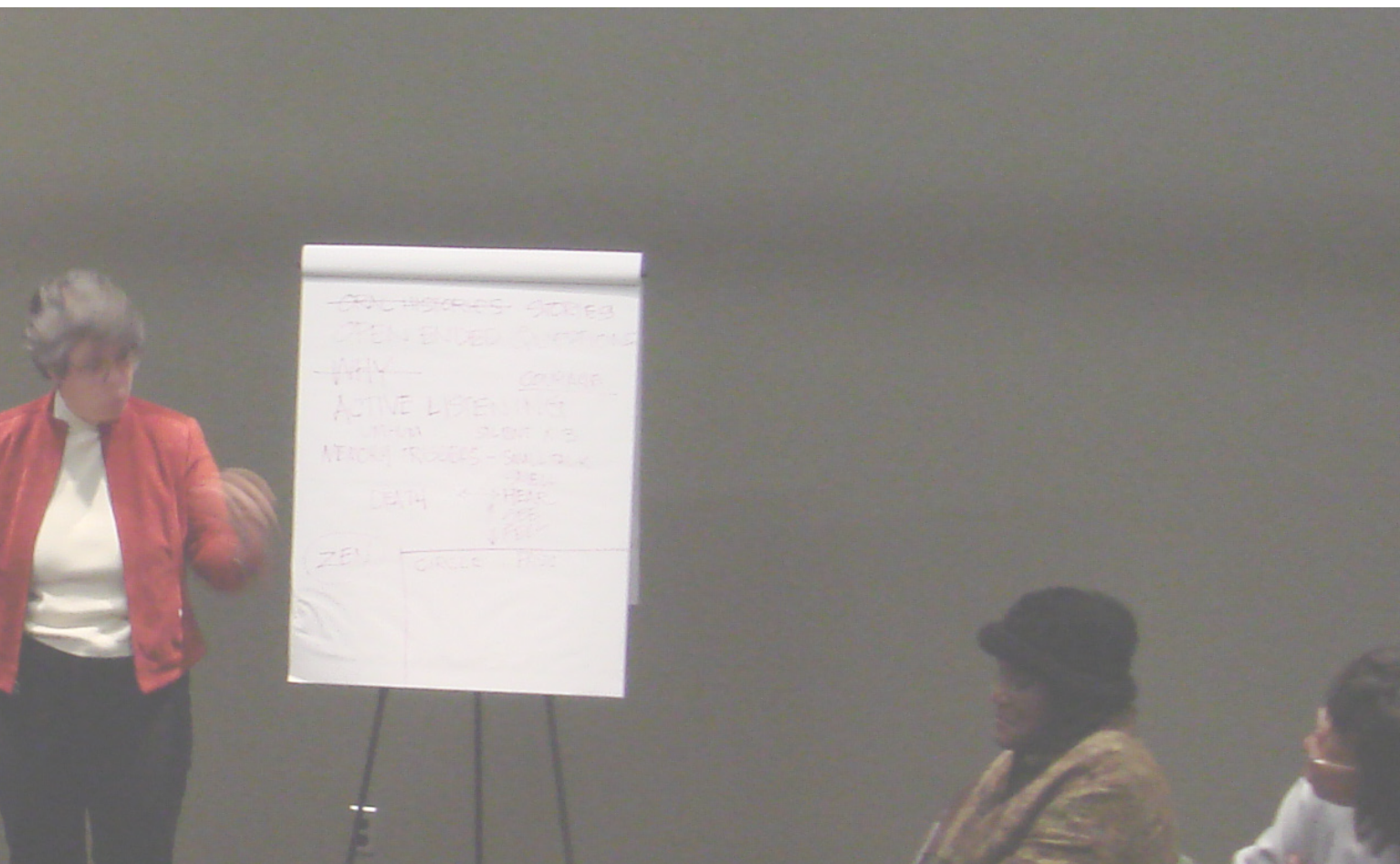
With the acquisition of a non-profit status for *The Henning Project*, the final step will be funding for the productions and support system that will be needed to sustain the entire project.

“The enthusiasm in Henning for creating a story project was palpable while I was conducting the workshop. Hearing about similar projects that have been successful in other places made the idea seem real, and there were clearly leaders in the community who can engage others in the project. Henning has the will, what it will need is the way – and the way requires an infusion of cash in order to make this large endeavor possible. Securing spaces, even temporarily, for site specific performances will require equipment and labor. Managing a project of this size demands an administrator (or administrative team) on site. Working with the professional artists who have experience with this kind of work is not cheap. A rough estimate of expenses to get from 501(c)(3) incorporation through a first full production is \$100,000. This is a modest investment in changing a community’s perception of itself – the first step in true revitalization. “

- Lisa Mount, Artistic Logistics







Part II





The People of The Henning Project

Our Board

Cubert Bell - President
 Barbara Manns - Vice - President
 Carolyn Douglas - Secretary and Treasurer
 Robert Lane - Sergeant of Arms
 Scott Lovelace - Attorney

Our Storygatherers

Kendra Bonds
 Carstella Bates Douglas
 Rita Lake
 Gwen Langford
 Alice Reed
 Marvin Montgomery
 Marsha Thompson
 Beverly Johnson
 Phillis Barlow
 Robert Lane

Our Storytellers

Marvin Montgomery
 Barbara Manns
 Carstella Bates Douglas
 Beverly Johnson
 Phillis Barlow
 Charlotte Smith
 Thelma Winbush
 John Wilson
 Tyrone Bonds
 Ross Bates
 Mary Neal
 Henery Polk
 Ethel Fields
 J.B Bonds

Our Partners

Town of Henning
 University of Memphis
 Department of Architecture
 City and Regional Planning Program
 Lisa Mount, Artistic Logistics
 Alex Haley House and Museum





Events

The Henning Project has been meeting since August of 2009. The Storygatherer group has participated in several preparatory workshops where they have received recorders, tapes, storylogs, releases and Jo Carson's *Secret Filled Instructions for Collecting Great Stories* from her latest book, *Spider Speculations: A Physics and Bio-physics of Storytelling*. They also have successfully held two Storycircles with amazing results. The strongest aspect in this entire project is that the people of Henning want this to happen, they are eager to share their stories.

The latest event was the Official Kick-off of the Storygathering - a two-day workshop with Lisa Mount. Lisa met with the gatherers over two evenings leading them in activities that will help with their storygathering process. Giving them great insight as how to ask open ended questions, be good listeners, and to guide the storytellers through tough moments of memories and help them through the threshold of sharing. The second evening ending in an impromptu storycircle where they were joined by Mayor Michael Bursey, who shared some great stories himself, of encouraging and uplifting students.

Ms.. Mount also met with Cubert Bell and Barbara Manns, consulting with them on the logistics of successfully running a non-profit arts group, the subjects covered included: by-laws, charters, budgets, fund-raising, and keeping a strong momentum.

A "one-minute glimpse" of the workshop can be found by going to the link from the University of Memphis website: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XT9NW2aqMz0>



Future Plans

The Henning Project will continue hosting Storycircles, offering opportunities for the community to join in the sharing of more stories. The Gatherers are set to go out into the community to meet with folks one on one to start collecting great stories.

A summer workshop with the teens and senior citizens of Henning is being planned. Led by Heather Wilson, a Graduate Directing student at the University of Memphis, the workshop will cover a three-week period of interviews, scriptwriting, acting classes, and culminate in performances by the youth.

The group is also working on a possible collaboration former Henning resident Yvonne Draper and the Honors English class at the University of Memphis. The goal of these collaborations with the University is to create a symbiosis between the Community of Henning and the University with the goal that the youth in the community will pursue a higher education.



The Timeline (a guide only - subject to change)

August 1, 2009	First formal meeting of the Storygatherers and Tellers.
September, 2009	Meetings with Cubert Bell and Barbara Manns to determine Gatherer Group
October, 2009	Meetings and Informal Workshops with the Storygatherers.
January 4,5 2010	Official Kick-off Workshop with Lisa Mount of Artistic Logistics and the Board and Storygatherers of <i>The Henning Project</i> .
January - December, 2010	Storygathering and Recording, creation of The Production Committee.
May 2010	Production Committee to be formed to begin plans for Pre-production work.
July, 2010	Director/Playwright should be chosen and contracted.
December 2010	Decisions made to type of production(s): Annual Production, Walking tours, Site Specific Sketches.
January 2011	Script writing begins.
March - May 2011	Production and Rehearsal Process take place
June 2011	The Official Opening of The Henning Project's first series of Productions. This should be coordinated with the Family Reunion Season to capture the greatest number of tourists.

Conclusion

The Henning Project is an amazing opportunity for the community of Henning. The fact that it has developed thus far over such a short period of time show that there is truly promise in this initiative. The people of the community are open and responsive to the task at hand and the hopes that it provides.

The momentum must be continued for assured success. As Jimmy Neal Smith, Executive Director of the International Storytelling Center, advised us early on, “you must celebrate every success. . .” Help the people of *The Henning Project* to continue to celebrate their successes with your support. This first production can take place with a budget of \$100,000. This will cover the work into the production in 2011 and help the Town of Henning to be revitalized.

Additional Means of Support for *The Henning Project* may include resources from:

- State and Local Funding
- Federal Programs - EDA, USDA
- National Endowment for the Arts
- National Endowment for the Humanities
- National Trust for Historic Preservation (Cultural Tourism)
- Tennessee Arts Commission (Lauderdale County Arts Council)
- Private Investors
- Community Partners
- In-kind Contributions







Part III



Architectural Design Elements

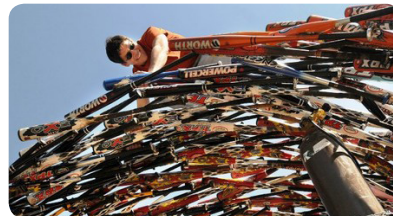
The Architectural component of the September Report included proposals that would work hand in hand with The Henning Project. Each element of the design offerings has been created to support the next. These designs can be done in phases. When one aspect is completed it will provide support for the next structure. These include:

- **Developing a Series of Gateways into town and the Main Street Area**
- **Establishing an Aesthetic Link throughout the area to create a Sense of Community**
 - Family Reunion Park
 - Improved Sidewalks to create a Walkable Community
- **Establish Hale Museum Complex as a Cultural and Heritage Tourism Hub**
 - Haley Amphitheatre
- **Promoting Mixed-Use Development within the Main Street Area** (these proposals include):
 - The Lewis - Barbee Blues Hall
 - Converting the Old Cotton-Gin into The Henning Storytelling Center
 - Jim Hickman Park beside City Hall
 - Mixed-Use Housing in the Vacant Buildings



Gateways

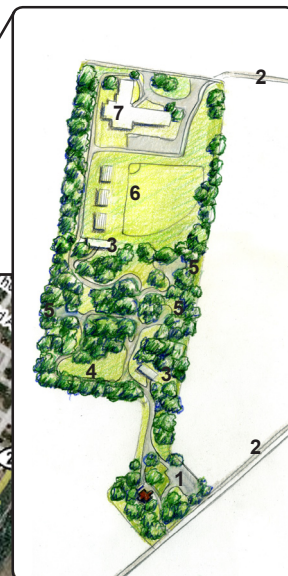
Gateways are Cultural Sign Posts to direct visitors to Henning and are anchored in the idea of community. The design and construction of the Gateways will be a collaborative event with Henning, the Department of Architecture at the University of Memphis, and may include site-specific sculptor Christopher Fennell. The Gateways will be constructed from reclaimed materials from the community thus offering a sustainable tourism draw as well.



Family Reunion Park

Henning has a great opportunity to reconnect families as the community is revitalized. The Family Reunion Business has become a major aspect of tourism throughout the south. Currently, many Henning families have had to go to Ripley for reunions due to a lack of facilities locally. A new park that will connect the entrance into town on Highway 209 to the Community Center will offer a venue for reunions. Creating this connector park will provide picnic locations and open fields for play and relaxation in addition to the community center and baseball field.

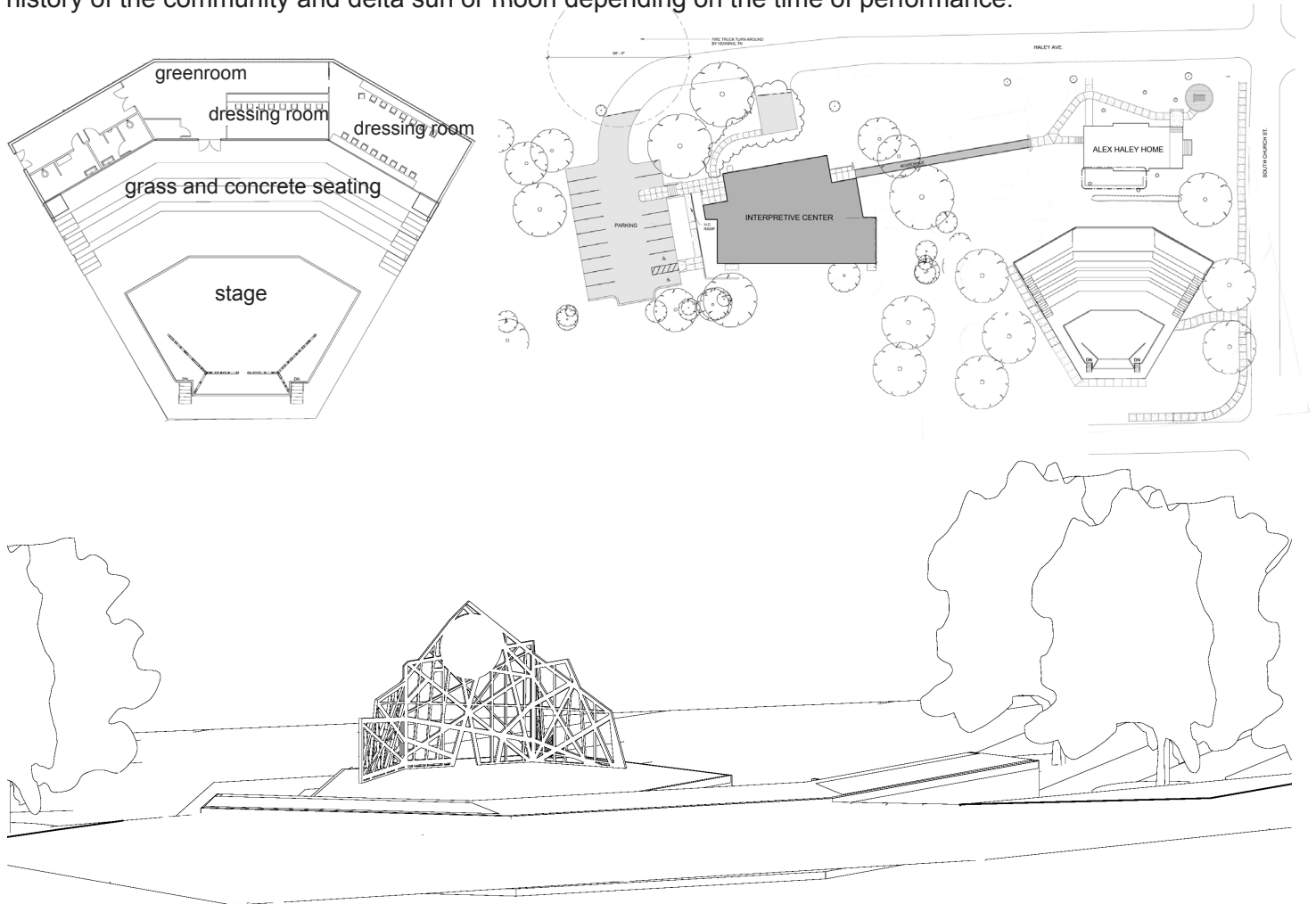
- 1 - visitor's center / check in / parking
- 2 - sidewalks connecting downtown
- 3 - picnic bbq pavilions
- 4 - family games field
- 5 - picnic bbq areas
- 6 - multi-purpose field
- 7 - community center



Henning as a Cultural and Heritage Tourism Hub

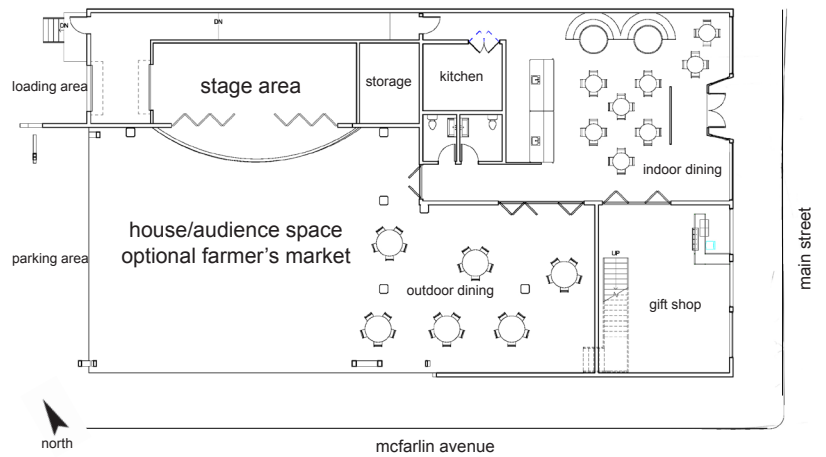
The Haley property is the main destination point for most visitors. The proposal is to increase its draw to visitors and the community. By adding sidewalks surrounding the property and joining those to the walkway from the Community Center to Downtown, the Haley property becomes connected to the entire community. The addition of the Amphitheatre will provide a location for productions done by The Henning Project Storytelling Initiative and a performance space for other events. Including landscaping and sculptural signage will add to the experience of visitors.

The amphitheatre will seat 100 - 150 people and has the sustainable feature of grass on each level of seating. The top level of seating also houses the performers restrooms, dressing areas, greenroom and storage space. The sculptural backdrop on stage connects the amphitheatre to the community as well, reflecting the spiritual history of the community and delta sun or moon depending on the time of performance.



The Lewis-Barbee Blues Hall

The proposal for this segment is to convert the historic building on the corner of McFarlin Avenue and Main Street into the Lewis - Barbee Blues Hall and Commonground Cafe that will be run by the Choctaws. The Blues Hall will have an enclosed stage area that can be kept closed for small events or opened up for outdoor festivals. This will be an outstanding opportunity to capture tourism from the regional Blues Festivals and perhaps ignite festivals in Henning in the process. When the festivals are not in season (but they always are) the area can be converted into an open-air farmers market. The cafe will be a cultural tourism offering as well with Choctaw frybread and a gift/crafts-shop.



Rendering above - view from Main Street. Rendering below - view from McFarlin Avenue. The open area is multi-purpose for audiences or farmer's markets and crafts.



Home for The Henning Project - Conversion of Old Cotton-Gin

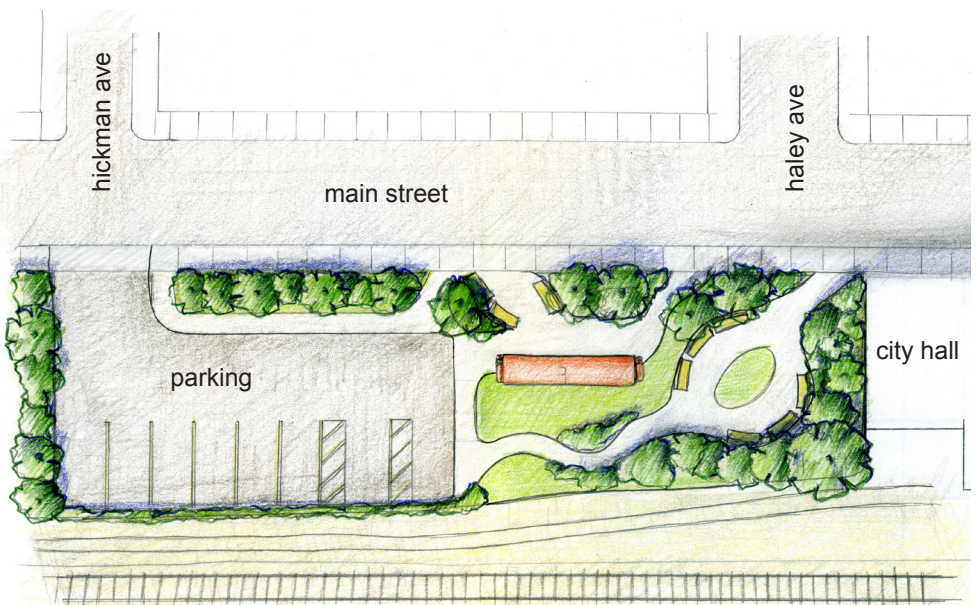
The Old Cotton Gin could be converted to hold office, meeting, and informal gathering spaces for The Henning Project, and the remainder of the old industrial buildings at northern end of main street could be converted to working studio spaces and galleries. This plan will tie the entire downtown town area of Henning together - from the southern entrance of the family reunion park to the northern entrance of The Story Telling Center. This will provide destinations for tourists to explore the entire community and not simply visit The Haley Museum and go home. Visitors can spend the day, exploring the galleries and watching the artists work, stop in at The Henning Storytelling Center for a story or to do their own genealogy research, then take a walk back through town for lunch at the Commonground Cafe and relax as they listen to local blues musicians at the Lewis - Barbee Blues Hall. The Creative Village will provide housing for the artists and the gallery/studio spaces will provide revenue for the community as well as food for the soul.

The Henning Project productions will ideally become an annual event with additional performance opportunities throughout the year. The ideal goal is to combine these storytelling events with other events that will take place at the Haley Museum and the Lewis - Barbee Blues Hall. These productions can take place at the proposed Haley Amphitheatre, and can be site-specific and happen as small gatherings around town in places like Hickman Heritage Park or Bethlehem Cemetery. The potential for this project to become a strong thriving base for Cultural and Heritage tourism is great.



Hickman Heritage Park

Main Street, Henning, has a great feeling of history. The proposal is to redesign the Heritage Park area by City Hall, honoring another famous resident of Henning, Jim Hickman. The new Hickman Heritage Park will be the first thing visitors see as they arrive in down town. Parking will be gently hidden from view. Placing the parking first and toward the rear of the property will encourage visitors and residents to explore Henning on foot while enjoying a walk through the park to get to Main Street and City Hall.







Part IV





Swamp Gravy

Colquitt, Georgia (from www.swampgravy.com)

“Colquitt uses the arts as a tool for community empowerment and economic diversification. The success of a community-based performing arts project has resulted in extensive downtown revitalization and economic development.”
UNC School of Government, Small Cities Big Ideas

Start Date: 1992

Personnel

Three full-time staff, 61 cast members, 21 technical crew members (plus Boy Scout Troop #85), and 170 storytellers and story gatherers. Significant part-time staff is employed depending on production needs.

History

“Swamp Gravy” is a musical play that celebrates rural southwestern Georgia folk life. Original songs and choreography are combined with traditional music and dance in a grand-scale stage production with a cast and crew of 100. Professionally written (originally by Tennessee playwright Jo Carson), directed and designed, the play draws on folklore, tall tales and family stories for its content, culled from oral histories gathered by a team trained by Carson. It is performed in Cotton Hall, a 60-year-old warehouse in Colquitt. It has also played in Washington, D.C., at the Kennedy Center and throughout the South.

Mission

To involve as many people in a theatrical experience that empowers individuals and bonds the community while strengthening the economy

Values

Community involvement: Swamp Gravy began in 1991 when the Colquitt/Miller Arts Council voted to sponsor the project. Since that time, over 1,000 citizens (16 percent of the county population) have been involved in some capacity. Their roles include: storyteller, story gatherer, actor, singer, seamstress, painter, carpenter, ticket seller, greeter, concession salesperson, souvenir salesperson, exhibitor, promoter, Swamp Gravy Institute consultant and more.

Bonding the Community

Swamp Gravy has united Miller County across the boundaries of age, race, class and gender, according to “Swamp Gravy Artifacts.” The ages of cast members range from eight months to 87 years, with as many as 50 percent of the cast under the age of 18. Because many of the cast members encounter one another daily, the Swamp Gravy esprit de corps carries over into all facets of life and work in the community. Swamp Gravy is a way in which the arts create common ground on which diverse people can work and play together.

Strengthening the Economy

Over the ten years 1994-2003, Swamp Gravy sold approximately 72,000 tickets. Seventy-five percent have been out-of-town guests, which mean new dollars coming into the community. Estimating \$53 in purchases per guest (\$18 ticket, \$15 meal, \$10 gasoline, \$10 souvenirs), over \$4,000,000 has been generated in the small community during this period, an average of \$400,000 per year.

Storytelling Festival

Jonesborough, Tennessee (from National Trust for Historic Preservation)

The Setting

Nestled in Northeast Tennessee's scenic mountains is a town with so many firsts that it can be a challenge to name them all. Jonesborough was the first town founded in the region (1779), the first capital of the "Lost State of Franklin" (1784), the first town in the new state of Tennessee (1796), site of the first regularly published abolitionist periodical (1820), the first Tennessee town listed on the National Register of Historic Places (1969), site of the first National Storytelling Festival (1973)...and the list goes on.

What Happened Next

Lifelong resident Jimmy Neil Smith (who served as mayor from 1978-1984 and today is president of the International Storytelling Center) recalls that as residents searched for ways to save their community, assistance arrived in an unexpected way – through a grant application for sewer line repairs. Smith explains that in working with the nearby Johnson City Office of the Tennessee State Planning Commission, Jonesborough's leaders learned:

- They had to have their own Planning Commission in order to receive the grant.
- The commission's formation propelled Jonesborough to begin a planning process that focused on restoration and preservation.
- Continued support from the State Planning Commission helped Jonesborough to build its capacity and find the necessary financial resources. .

Results

- Local residents have benefited with the creation of jobs.
- Jonesborough is home of the National Storytelling Festival and the International Storytelling Center
- About 100 acres, with the heart in the downtown district, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the first community to receive this designation in Tennessee.
- Jonesborough was awarded the designation of Dozen Distinctive Destinations by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 2005.
- The National Storytelling Festival began in 1973 with an audience of 60 people. Today, the festival draws a crowd of 10,000 to this small town each year.
- The International Storytelling Center opened in 2002, creating a year-round destination for visitors who enjoyed storytelling. An ongoing slate of programs, including the Teller-in-Residence program, attracts visitors to Jonesborough throughout the year.
- Jonesborough's cultural heritage tourism program has generated jobs for residents including more than two dozen shops, six bed and breakfasts (all in historic buildings) and several tour companies.



Headwaters: Birth, Death, and Places in Between Santee Nacoochee, Georgia (Santee Nacoochee Community Association)

www.snca.org

Written by Jo Carson and Jerry Grillo

Directed by Gerard Stropnick

Produced by Lisa Mount, Tommy Deadwyler, Terri Edgar

To nurture creativity and to preserve and protect the beloved resources of the Santee and Nacoochee valleys and surrounding areas.

—SNCA Vision Statement, 1999

Today the Santee Nacoochee Community Association is a thriving operation. The renovated school building houses a 100-seat theatre, a conference room, a history museum, dance and art studios, an environmental education resource center, and an art gallery. . . The extensive programming schedule includes events developed in-house as well as those of touring groups. The Association continues to play an active role in local as well as regional environmental and historic preservation.

The Story of Headwaters

Making Headwaters begins every two years with a long process of gathering stories from all over Northeast Georgia. People sit down in pairs or in groups with a tape recorder, letting questions like “how did your parents meet?” and “was there a time when you had an adventure in the woods?” open up rivers of stories... People from White, Habersham, Rabun, Stephens, Banks, Hall, Union and Lumpkin counties have shared stories for Headwaters, and in the process have come to understand even better why they love where they live.

For the 2009 production, Headwaters: Birth, Death and Places In-Between, the story collectors asked for stories about families – both the biological kind, and the kind people create for themselves when they’re no longer connected to the folks they were born to. Stories about births and about people who come back after death to help the living also emerged. Stories about families on both sides of the law – moonshiners and revenueurs – defy the common “good guys/bad guys” stereotypes. Northeast Georgia is rich in stories, and Headwaters is a way to display our local wealth.

Two playwrights – Jo Carson and Jerry Grillo – go to work on the stories that are collected and translate them into monologues and scenes. . . The key to dramatizing community stories is to find the way in which people are changed by the experience – whether they know it or not. Jo Carson has written a book, *Spider Speculations: A Physics and Biophysics of Storytelling*, about how stories work in the human body, and how community story performance can change a place – often by re-framing the story so that people see something they thought they knew in a whole new light.

As the stories begin to come together, the producers (Lisa Mount, Tommy Deadwyler, Terri Edgar) and director (Gerard Stropnick) choose and commission music that helps to set the scene or tell the story. Music is an essential part of mountain culture, whether it’s old-time pickin’ parties or jam bands at outdoor festivals.

How does Headwaters Happen?

It takes money to produce Headwaters, and the Santee Nacoochee Community Association raises the funds each year to ensure that the professional artists get paid, that the sets get built and lights get hung, that there are posters and flyers and a web presence so that people know about the show. Funding for Headwaters: Birth, Death and Places In-Between has come from the National Endowment for the Arts (your tax dollars at work), the Georgia Council for the Arts, and Alternate ROOTS through support from the Ford Foundation and the Nathan Cummings Foundation. Several generous individual donors have made gifts that round out the budget of approximately \$55,000 in cash, with lots of in-kind donations as well. It takes many many people to make Headwaters happen, people who contribute time and talent and food and energy and great good will.





Zora Neale Hurston Festival **Eatonville, Florida** (www.zorafestival.com)

Goals

To celebrate the life and work of 20th century writer, folklorist and anthropologist, Zora Neale Hurston. To celebrate the significance of her hometown, Eatonville, Florida, known as the nation's oldest incorporated African American municipality, and to celebrate the cultural contributions people of African ancestry have made to the United States and world culture.

The Setting

Every community has a unique something that sets it apart from all other places—that hook that can draw visitors in like no gimmick ever could. Sometimes it's so obvious, it's a wonder no one thought of promoting it sooner. Eatonville, the home of noted author and folklorist Zora Neale Hurston, faced near ruin before it recognized the value of honoring its native daughter with a festival now recognized around the world.

Eatonville, Florida is a small town known as “the oldest incorporated municipality in the United States founded by people of African descent.” In 1987, the community learned of plans to turn its main road, the two-lane Kennedy Boulevard, into a five-lane thoroughfare which would destroy the historic character of the community. Residents rallied to stop the plan and found the solution in the legacy of their most famous resident, noted author and folklorist Zora Neale Hurston. But how could they capitalize on this legacy?

What Happened Next

- Concerned citizens formed The Association to Preserve the Eatonville Community and started work. Among their efforts:
 - Decided to produce a festival to honor Hurston, her works, ideals and ethics
 - Agreed to include a strong humanities component
 - Attracted well known speakers and authors to the event
 - Recruited sponsors to help with everything from marketing to operations

Results

- More than 10 years later, Kennedy Boulevard has not been widened and Eatonville retains its small-town ambiance, which is in keeping with the community Zora Neale Hurston called home.
- In spite of its goliathlike neighboring attractions, the Hurston Festival draws visitors from around the country on its own merit. Surveys show that attendees come to Eatonville specifically for the festival and return year after year because of the quality of the programming and production.
- Conservative estimates show that the annual January festival brings \$3 million in tourist spending to Orange County.
- By 2007, this festival attracted an estimated 50,000 locals and tourists each year. The ZORA! Festival received the "Regional Destination Award in the Humanities" from the Cultural Olympiad and was named "One of the Top 100 Events in North America" by the American Bus Association in 2004.

“We have watched with admiration as Mrs. Nathiri and her dedicated colleagues have built that first small local festival into an internationally recognized celebration of ...the arts and humanities. And we have frequently partnered with the association by awarding grants to bring renowned international scholars of African American history, literature, and culture to Eatonville.”

— Francine Curro Cary, executive director, Florida Humanities Council

