

Dillsboro/WCU Partnership
Progress Update
March 2010

We're working! Excellent progress is being made on the WCU/Dillsboro revitalization project. To ensure that all interested individuals are aware of the work being done, the Dillsboro/WCU partnership committee has decided to provide monthly updates. The goal will be to provide highlights of the major initiatives.

Members of the Dillsboro/WCU partnership committee are (in alphabetical order): Carrie Blaskowski, assistant director of the Jackson County Green Energy Park; Walter Cook, owner of Smoky Mountain Dog Bakery; Betty Farmer, professor of communication and public relations and special assistant to the chancellor for Dillsboro; John Faulk, owner of Burger Shack and Applegate Inn; Mike Fitzgerald, mayor of Dillsboro and owner of Fitzgerald Shoe Repair; Jean Hartbarger, former mayor and co-owner of the The Jarrett House; and Kelly Mckee, Dillsboro town clerk.

The first focus for the workgroup has been to develop programming to support the initial, short-term objectives the group identified in December as the starting point. See <http://thereporter.wcu.edu/2010/02/faculty-commit-to-helping-achieve-objectives-to-shore-up-dillsboro-economy/> for the complete list of objectives.

This update highlights progress on the following seven objectives:

Objective 1: To have 50 percent of Dillsboro merchants begin to work with WCU's Small Business and Technology Development Center (SBTDC).

Tom Fleckenstein, SBTDC counselor, reports that approximately 12 Dillsboro businesses have contacted the SBTDC for help thus far. Due to confidentiality requirements, details cannot be provided.

Objective 2: To administer surveys to merchants, WCU faculty, staff, and students, and local and out-of-town customers.

Sandy Grunwell, associate professor of hospitality and tourism, and Steve Ha, associate professor of economics, expect that the first survey to Dillsboro merchants will be in the mail by March 5. Under Sandy and Steve's leadership, the Dillsboro/WCU partnership committee has spent numerous hours developing this survey. Topics being researched include merchants' interests in common and/or extended business hours, the top challenges facing Dillsboro merchants, which marketing strategies have been most effective, how WCU can best serve them, and more. The group piloted the survey with downtown Sylva business owners and WCU's institutional research board reviewed it. The group will begin working on the WCU faculty and staff survey next.

Objective 3: To create a comprehensive marketing strategy and/or branding approach for Dillsboro.

Steve Henson, graduate programs director and MBA director, is first focusing on the overall economy of the region. This semester, Steve and his MBA students are exploring ways to facilitate the creation of a vibrant economy in the region. They plan to develop a strategic plan for Dillsboro in the fall semester.

Objective 4: To have 10 percent of WCU faculty and staff report making at least one purchase at a Dillsboro shop.

Debie Connelly, visiting assistant professor of communication, and several public relations students are planning an event to introduce (or reintroduce) Dillsboro businesses to the WCU community. Plans are being made and approvals are being sought for a “Dillsboro on Display” day at WCU on Monday, April 12. Dillsboro businesses of all types – artisans, retailers, restaurants, inns, etc.--will be invited to display information, provide samples, and distribute coupons especially for WCU faculty, staff and students.

Objective 5: To send the first quarterly e-mail newsletter to at least 500 people.

Garrett Richardson, public relations intern for the Dillsboro/WCU partnership, has recommended that Dillsboro use the services of Constant Contact to distribute its email newsletter. The newsletter is in the design stages.

Objective 6: To develop an overall media kit for the town of Dillsboro and media kits for eight individual businesses.

Pam Harris, assistant professor of communication and public relations, reports that students have chosen the following businesses/organizations for the first round of media kits:

Dillsboro Inn

The Jarrett House

Smoky Mountain Dog Bakery

Oaks Gallery

Country Traditions

Claymates

Monteith Farmstead & Appalachian Women's Museum

Dogwood Crafters

Frank Lockwood, associate professor of entrepreneurship and director of the Master of Entrepreneurship Program, and Bob Lahm, associate professor of entrepreneurship, have assigned their entrepreneurship students to work with the public relations students on the Dillsboro project.

Objective 7: To increase the use of social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, to promote Dillsboro.

Public relations students Lauren Gray and Garrett Richardson will be hosting a Social Media Workshop at WCU in one of the computer labs for Dillsboro businesses. The training will include the following: how to register for Facebook and Twitter; what to post; how often to update; how to use these effectively; and other general rules and advice. Because of the growth of and interest in social media, the Jackson County Chamber of Commerce has asked if this training could be made available to other Jackson County businesses. Consequently, Dillsboro businesses will have first priority to register for the training. If seats remain, the training will be made available to any Jackson County business.

Work has begun on the remaining three objectives. The next report will update progress on these initiatives. Plans also are being made for the next community meeting in Dillsboro in April. The goal of this meeting will be to get feedback from residents and businesses about the next phase of the Dillsboro/WCU partnership. The group will set its next round of immediate objectives, as well as begin developing a long-term strategic plan.

For more information or to share suggestions, please contact Betty Farmer at Bfarmer@email.wcu.edu or 828-227-2804.