

outbursts

● a monthly publication of outreach and international affairs

spotlight on save our towns

volume 2, issue 8

Internet series targets mayors

Video project links Virginia Tech with 80 towns and cities

By Andrea Brunais

Kyle Fletcher of St. Paul was celebrating his 59th wedding anniversary the day my colleague Keith Pierce and I first visited the tiny southwestern Virginia town where he is mayor. The passion and commitment of this former high school teacher, whose father founded a timber company in the early 20th century, was astounding.

He defined his town as scrappy, fast-moving, and relentless – qualities that brought St. Paul a Virginia Main Street designation despite its being one of the commonwealth's smallest towns. The Main Street label took 10 years to snag.

It didn't take even 10 seconds for Fletcher to agree to our proposal: We would bring our videocameras repeatedly to St. Paul to follow his economic-development efforts for a year. Even after we explained that we would provide warts-and-all coverage, reporting on the bad and ugly as well as the good, Fletcher was game.

On Aug. 1, Fletcher and his fellow mayors in 80 towns and independent cities across Appalachian Virginia received the premiere episode of Save Our Towns, a monthly Internet video series designed to guide and inspire leaders working to build strong communities in tough economic times.

The series is formatted into segments. Each episode includes:

- A quick tip from an expert
- Three questions for a mayor or town manager
- An interview with a Virginia Tech faculty member or director
- An update from Kyle Fletcher in St. Paul
- An "examples of awesome" feature with Whitney Bonham of the Virginia Tech Office of Economic Development reporting from the field. In Episode 1, she shows Big Stone Gap, transformed by a production crew during filming of the movie of the same name directed by author Adriana Trigiani.

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Why 'Save Our Towns'?



Guru Ghosh

VP, Outreach and International Affairs

Save Our Towns has a high purpose. We aim to deliver value-added material to mayors and town managers in Appalachian Virginia – an audience hungry for training and resources. By demonstrating Virginia Tech's commitment – and the commitment of others – to Appalachia, we hope to build capacity in leaders to help them create economic prosperity in their communities.

Almost a full year of preparation has gone into the launch of Save Our Towns. It's been exciting to bring to life Virginia Tech's commitment to Appalachia. We believe people will be amazed at the work of Virginia Tech faculty members – as well as other universities active in the region. The reception we've received so far from mayors and town managers shows that what we're doing adds value to the vital work of community revitalization.



SAVE OUR TOWNS

Graphic by Rich Mathieson

Save *continued*

Save Our Towns also features an interactive website to connect the mayors to experts and each other. Many of the experts work for state or federal agencies who can guide mayors and town managers to sources of grant money and technical assistance.

The website will not only showcase Virginia Tech projects in Appalachia, but it will also point mayors and town managers to case studies, funding opportunities, and faculty-led interventions (involving education, special-needs children, or environmental preservation, for instance). In addition, experts interviewed for the series will have their transcripts and contact information posted so mayors can follow up.

Upcoming segments will examine how Glade Spring resurrected its small but thriving downtown (Episode 3) and a winning collaboration in the region around Galax that promotes job training and job creation (Episode 2).

Back in St. Paul, Mayor Fletcher just won another two-year term after already serving for six.

Tourism is at the forefront of his economic-development agenda, and Virginia Tech students working with the campus-based Community Design Assistance Center have already been on the ground (and in the water) in St. Paul to help with that.



OFFICE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
WHITNEY BONHAM 

Whitney Bonham of Virginia Tech's Office of Economic Development visits sites in Big Stone Gap during filming of the movie by the same name. Among the places she toured was Mulligan's Mutual, the town pharmacy, where key scenes in the drama by Adriana Trigiani take place.

Fletcher ticked off St. Paul's assets: "We're only 40 minutes from the Breaks, called the Grand Canyon of the South. We're on the Trail of the Lonesome Pine. We have the Clinch River, the most biodiverse river in the world."

Save Our Towns will detail how Fletcher competes for tourist dollars. St. Paul will prevail, Fletcher said. "We think that we're tough. We've always been tough."

Project earns news coverage

Even before launch, Save Our Towns already attracted news media attention.

WLSL reporter and anchor Dawn Jefferies dropped by during studio taping on campus. Her story stressed the aspect of the program that connects mayors with experts and with each other.

A story in the Bristol Herald Courier described the project as seeking "to help town and county leaders in Appalachian communities share ideas and boost economic development."



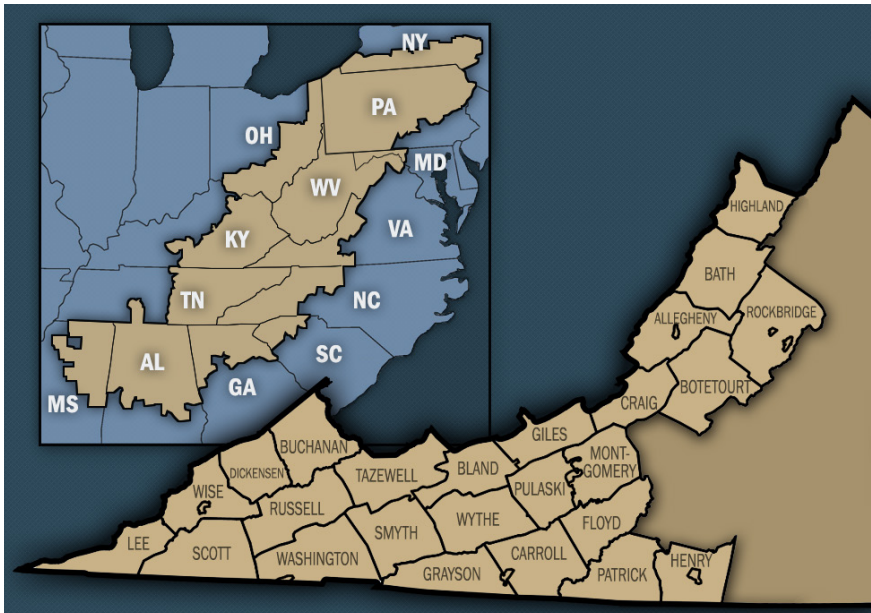
Laurel Heile, left, a Virginia Tech student in landscape architecture from McLean, Va., who has since graduated, was part of a team under the supervision of Kim Steika of Virginia Tech's Community Design Assistance Center. In 2011 and 2012, the team created a conceptual design for St. Paul's park, plus a trail on 1.3-acre Bluebell Island. Mayor Kyle Fletcher, center, in striped shirt, looks at the plans.



Valley Business Front, published in Roanoke, devoted a portion of its cover package in the August issue to the project. A story quoted St. Paul

Mayor Kyle Fletcher on Page 21, and the "publisher's welcome" column also touted Save Our Towns. The magazine plans to devote coverage in the September issue as well, focusing on Glade Spring's downtown redevelopment.

Virginia's Appalachian region



Graphic by Rich Mathieson

While various ways exist to define the Appalachian region, Save Our Towns adopts the standard for Virginia outlined by the Appalachian Regional Commission. Counties are Allegheny, Bath, Bland, Botetourt, Buchanan, Carroll, Craig, Dickenson, Floyd, Giles, Grayson, Henry,

Highland, Lee, Montgomery, Patrick, Pulaski, Rockbridge, Russell, Scott, Smyth, Tazewell, Washington, Wise, and Wythe. Independent cities are Bristol, Buena Vista, Covington, Galax, Lexington, Martinsville, Norton, and Radford.

Faculty show strong outreach in Appalachia



Holly Kobia, right, interviews Emily Satterwhite for Episode 1.

Episode 1's faculty member interview (shown above) is with Emily Satterwhite of the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, author of a book about best-selling fiction set in Appalachia. She talks with interviewer Holly Kobia about stereotypes – how people in Appalachia must confront them daily and how romantic or glorified stereotyping can be as harmful as the toothless-hick caricature. Virginia Tech colleges whose faculty

members are lined up for interviews include the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, the College of Architecture and Urban Studies, and the Pamplin College of Business. See the "VT projects" page on the website for some of Virginia Tech's projects in Appalachia, which run the gamut from literacy and landscape architecture to design of trails and exposure of economic disparities.

Dozens help launch effort



Save Our Towns reflects the mission of Outreach and International Affairs: to share the best of Virginia Tech by working side by side with communities around the world. The Save Our Towns website lists projects in Appalachia that represent the efforts of almost two dozen directors or professors at the university, and a "resources" tab lists helpful materials and personnel at Virginia Tech as well as other universities in the region.

Save Our Towns is a project of Virginia Tech's Outreach and International Affairs.

Others involved in the project include:

The university's studio in Whittemore Hall. The experienced crew at Digital Media Services, Technology-Enhanced Learning and Online Strategies, designed the set and provides three-camera, in-studio taping, along with editing services.

The Virginia Tech Foundation.

Foundation CEO John Dooley conceived of an academics-oriented Save Our Towns Summit with plans to co-sponsor the one-day event. Combining research and involving leaders from the small towns, the summit's program, planned for spring 2015, will be developed by Max O. Stephenson Jr.; he directs the Institute for Policy and Governance, which is associated with the College of Architecture and Urban Studies. Larkin Dudley, professor emerita, also with the college, is contributing to the agenda as well. She has worked in Appalachia under a Kettering Foundation grant.

University Relations. Especially during the planning stages, Associate Vice President Larry Hincker provided guidance and expertise, along with Mark Owczarski, assistant vice president for news and information; Gabrielle Minnich, manager of visual and broadcast communications for the university; and J. Scott Parker, a producer.

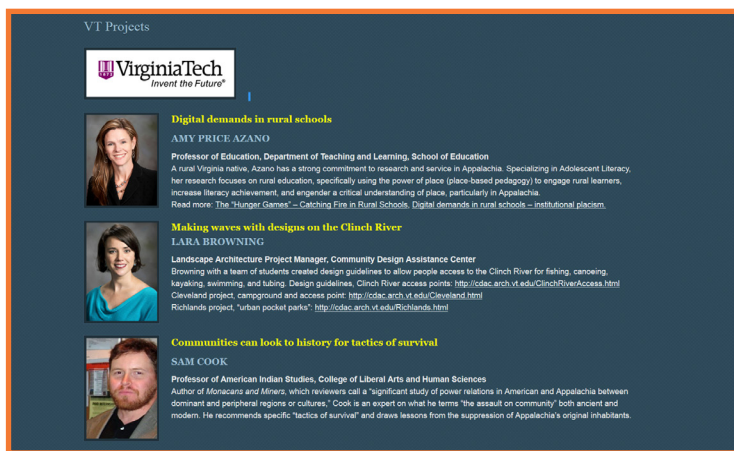
Visit Save Our Towns online...

www.saveourtowns.outreach.vt.edu/

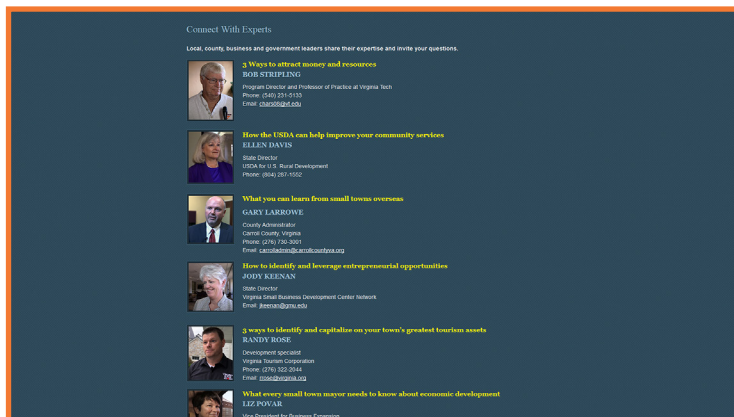
Home...



Virginia Tech projects in Appalachia...



Connect with experts...



Watch Episode 1:



<http://tinyurl.com/SaveTownsEpisode1>

Save Our Towns in the News:

- Aug. 2014 - Valley Business FRONT (pages 3 & 21): <http://tinyurl.com/SOT-Valley>
- July 20, 2014 - Bristol Herald Courier: <http://tinyurl.com/SOT-BHC>
- July 14, 2014 - WSLs: <http://tinyurl.com/SOT-WSLs>

www.outreach.vt.edu

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