By Carolyn Wilson
Coordinator, E&H Tutoring Program

Emory & Henry student Nikki Lynn gained a new perspective on service work when she and other first-year Bonner Scholars traveled to a scenic and historic community in Grayson County, Va., earlier this semester.

“I didn’t know what service was until that trip,” said Lynn, who helped clean and paint in the Town of Fries, Va., about an hour from campus. “Because I met so many friendly people in the town, I was able to relate my service experience to the people and places in that town. I had helped with community projects in high school, but I didn’t know about the larger issues.” Lynn describes her trip to the Southwest Virginia community as an “eye-opening experience.”

Lynn is among many E&H students who will begin to learn more about Fries through service projects designed to support efforts to revitalize the economy in the former mill town. E&H President Rosalind Reichard signed an agreement in October with Mike Spears, the mayor of Fries, which establishes a partnership between Emory & Henry College and citizens of Fries. The two communities will work together to help the Fries citizens redefine their community for the 21st century, while preserving its rich history and culture.

In the early 1900s, Fries flourished as a mill town, hiring people from several Virginia and North Carolina counties. The first citizens of Fries brought with them skills of farming and homesteading, and a culture of traditional music, as well as values of faith, family and place. Since the closing of Washington Mills in 1987, the future of Fries has been in doubt.

“The Town of Fries has fallen on hard times,” explained Mike Spears, mayor of Fries. “There is so much to do and few young people to help.” Spears has witnessed the young people leaving the community to find employment elsewhere, a trend that many small towns face today. According to Brian Reed, a senior planner with Mount Rogers District Commission and Fries town manager, including Emory & Henry in the revitalization project will encourage the younger generation to utilize their ideas and energy to breathe new life into the town. Reed, a 1995 graduate of Emory & Henry, said the project will serve as an outdoor classroom for students in various departments at the College.

Relying on the region’s natural beauty and heritage, the College will help the town transition from its former manufacturing-based economy to an economy based on its cultural and outdoor recreational opportunities. Located on the banks of the New River, one of the oldest rivers in the world, the Town of Fries offers tourists a host of activities, such as kayaking, canoeing and rafting, as well as rock climbing and caving. Spears said regional tourism will be an anchor for the picturesque town that approximately 600 people call home.

Marie Isom, who owns the Back Porch Gallery, a business in Fries that features artwork and crafts from local artisans, believes the partnership with the College will help the town come to life again. “We want to use our small-town flavor to help the town grow and prosper.”

“Born and raised in the nearby community of Elk Creek, Va., E&H alumna Brett Morris laid the ground work for the partnership last year when Morris completed her senior project. “It was a meaningful experience to return to my home county to do community work. I can’t explain how rewarding it is to see the effects of my work through this partnership.” Morris continued, “Rather than focusing on tourism alone, the College will help to bring a different element to the town. I hope to see higher education courses offered and other forms of training so that community members will learn how to create their own small businesses, for example, without having to leave the area. The culture, history and values found there cannot be found in the same manner anywhere else in the world.”
Residents prioritize ideas for improving their communities

Carroll and Grayson Counties, City of Galax

September 18, 2008
Crossroads Institute, Galax, Va.

What needs and issues face our community today?

1. Workforce development/ economic development/ education
2. Increase/improve collaboration among groups, people, governments
3. Build leadership capacity (more leaders, better equipped)
4. Transitioning economy
5. Education (resources to be utilized)
6. Wellness education and awareness
7. Optimizing natural resources—alternative approaches to recruit investment capital
8. Balanced/planned growth
9. Jobs, industry, employment
10. Education (affordable) across spectrum (adults and youth)
11. Safe and affordable housing
12. Workforce development (education, training)
13. Community development (leadership development)
14. Preparing for 21st century economy
15. Small pool of leadership (need more)
16. Preserve agriculture (maximize agricultural economy)
17. Work together more to meet new options maximize economy
18. Agricultural opportunities
19. Share common models how to identify/develop/ capture community problem-solvers (enhance civic engagement, increase numbers of citizen leaders)
20. Engage youth in real-world issues
21. Education that targets and ties in resources

What are the assets and resources of our community?

1. Transitioning to creative/asset-based economy
2. Education is strong
3. Wellness resources
4. Collaborative/corrective spirit
5. Resources
6. Crossroads Institute
7. Agriculture/natural environment, beauty of the place
8. Heritage—music, culture
9. Continuous improvement of education systems
10. People in region—biggest asset
11. Elderly/seniors as an untapped asset

Working together, building on those assets, how can we address these needs?

1. Entrepreneurship/ small business development
2. Investment in (targeted, intentional) workforce development education
3. Move from commodity economy to a value added economy
4. Deal with/ address generation poverty
5. Pool resources/ collaborate
6. Forecasting trends
7. Community-based facilitator to bring groups together
8. Forums/spaces/opportunities for people to come together
9. Reducing risk for business/entrepreneurs (making it easier to start a business)
10. Higher level skills (developing these in the workforce)— Problem solving and creative thinking
11. Better communication strategies
12. Instill sense of value/pride—ability to contribute to place (values in youth/young adults)
13. Maximize youth input in community problems
14. Attitude that accepts risks/promotes resiliency

Lee, Scott and Wise Counties, City of Norton

September 23, 2008
Holiday Inn, Norton, Va.

What needs and issues face our community today?

1. Education—top priority (workforce)
2. Transportation—access
3. Jobs—Increase opportunities for quality employment
4. Infrastructure
5. Substance abuse—seriousness of issue, how to address
6. Quality jobs that sustain a diverse economy
7. Substance abuse
8. Respect for environment (protection)
9. Greater appreciation of education
10. Economic development/job opportunities

What are the assets and resources of our community?

1. Culture and natural heritage
2. Capacity for partnering/collaborating to affect change/ access resources
3. Cooperation between localities
4. Higher education
What needs and issues face our community today?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Needs and Issues</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buchanan, Russell and</td>
<td>Quality jobs—training and preparedness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tazewell Counties</td>
<td>Changing economy—employment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Substance abuse</td>
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<td>Breakdown of family; increase in numbers of persons in foster care</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Health care</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. Adult care</td>
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<td>b. Child care</td>
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<td>c. Primary care</td>
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<td>Transportation for people with disabilities</td>
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What are the assets and resources of our community?

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<td>Buchanan, Russell and</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tazewell Counties</td>
<td>Affordability of living in this area</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Continued on back
Wythe, Bland, Giles, Pulaski, continued

3. Infrastructure
4. Natural resources
5. Health care resources
6. Tourism opportunities
7. Collaborate—people willing to work together
   a. Organization
   b. Government
   c. Regional visits

Working together, building on those assets, how can we address these needs?

Smyth and Washington Counties, City of Bristol, Va.

October 1, 2008
Emory & Henry College, Emory, Va.

What needs and issues face our community today?
1. Access to health care
2. Job growth
3. Economic diversity
4. Income gap/economic disparity
5. Child care
6. Workforce availability

What are the assets and resources of our community?
1. Recreation/cultural opportunities
2. Educational opportunities
3. Higher education
4. Community collaborations
5. People working together

6. Natural beauty/environment
7. Stable population

Working together, building on those assets, how can we address these needs?

1. More of a regional governance
2. Sharing of best practices between communities, organizations, people
3. Shared pool of resources to study/train/explore
4. Bigger picture—buy-in from organizations to provide programming and support ex: addressing substance abuse
5. Commitment to youth
6. ‘Round the Mountain, Crooked Road, etc.
7. Utilize old buildings/factories for artisans/shops
8. Foster creative partnerships
9. Training/production of leaders for regional vision
10. Sharing (visioning) perspective from other places/regions/approaches

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