April 30, 2010

FORMER LIBRARY BUILDING LEASED TO NEW RIVER COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGE

Participating in the lease signing ceremony on April 29 were Lewisburg Historic Landmarks Commission member Paul Lindquist; Lewisburg Mayor John Manchester; New River President Ted D. Spring; Mary Lindquist, a member of the New River Community and Technical College Foundation's Greenbrier Valley Campus Board of Advisors; and Libby Belcher, director of college relations.
[LEWISBURG, WV] New River Community and Technical College has signed a lease with the City of Lewisburg that will permit the college to use the former Greenbrier County Public Library building on Courtney Drive as a center for historical studies and cultural activities.

The lease arrangement was approved by a vote of the Lewisburg City Council at its April 20 meeting. Under provisions of the will, which deeded the building to the City of Lewisburg, it can only be used as a library, museum or historic building.

The structure was built in 1834 as the library for the Supreme Court of Virginia and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It has been vacant since the library moved out in 2007 and is in need of repairs. Earlier this year it was placed on the Endangered Properties List by the West Virginia Preservation Alliance.

“We are grateful that the City of Lewisburg is willing to partner with the college to bring this historic gem back to its rightful place as a centerpiece of Lewisburg’s downtown historic district,” says New River President Ted D. Spring. “Our first order of business will be to complete minor repairs to the exterior and improve the landscaping around the building. We are working in concert with city officials to pursue grants for further repairs and restoration.”

The college is consulting with a committee comprised of community representatives from the Greenbrier Historical Society, the Lewisburg Historic Landmarks Commission, the Mayor’s office, the Greenbrier College Alumnae Association, Carnegie Hall, Greenbrier Valley Theatre and other interested parties to determine the best way to use the building in a manner that is in keeping with the provisions of the will.

One idea that is already being pursued is to use the building as a “living museum” to teach the history of the Greenbrier Valley in the Civil War era. The group has discussed setting up a period classroom where school groups could be brought to attend a class taught by instructors dressed in Civil War era costumes and using teaching methods from that time.

New River has applied for a National Endowment for the Humanities “Landmarks of American History and Culture: Workshops for Community College Grant” to bring community college faculty from around the country to Lewisburg to learn innovative approaches to teaching history through an exploration of the impact of the Civil War on the Greenbrier Valley, from the wartime era up to today.

The grants will be awarded in September, and if New River’s application is successful, the workshops will be held in the summer of 2011. Even if that project is not funded, the college envisions offering similar programs for public school teachers and college faculty from across West Virginia.
Lewisburg Mayor John Manchester adds: “The old library is a wonderful historic building and we are happy to partner with New River through this long-term lease to make this facility a contributing asset to historic Lewisburg.

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