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Meeting on March 3 to discuss the NEH grant proposal were (front row, L-R) Dr. Harry R. Faulk, executive vice president and chief academic officer at New River Community and Technical College; Libby Belcher, director of College Relations for New River; Karen Dickinson of Delta Development Group, a consulting firm that is helping with the application; Bill Loope, vice president for Institutional Advancement and Workforce Education at New River; (back row, L-R) Dr. Bill O'Brien, director of Concord University's Beckley Center; Lewisburg Mayor John Manchester; and New River President Ted D. Spring.

OLD LIBRARY BUILDING ENVISIONED AS “LIVING MUSEUM” FOR CIVIL WAR STUDIES

[LEWISBURG, WV] Since the Greenbrier County Public Library moved into its new home in 2007, the former library building, a structure of great significance in the history in this region, has sat empty. 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 is now in need of repairs and was recently placed on the Endangered Properties List by the West Virginia Preservation Alliance

Dr. Ted D. Spring, president of New River Community and Technical College, has initiated an effort to find a way to partner with the City of Lewisburg and other organizations to restore the building and return it to a prominent role in the cultural and educational life of the community. The building is on property that was once part of Lewisburg Academy, the school that later became the Greenbrier Women's College and is now home to New River's Greenbrier Valley Campus. It occurred to Spring that the building might be utilized in a way that would benefit both students at the college and the community at large.

Last fall, Spring invited representatives of the college, the City of Lewisburg, The Greenbrier Historical Society, the Historic Landmarks Commission, the Greenbrier Women's College Alumnae and the Greenbrier County Public Library to an informal meeting to tour the building and brainstorm ideas about ways the building might be used that would be in keeping with the stipulations of the will and that would best serve the interests of the community.

Spring indicated that the college would be interested in serving as the lead organization in pursuing grants to preserve and restore the building if there were ways that the college could use the building for its educational programs. A number of ideas were discussed, but the one that generated the most enthusiasm was to use the building as a "living museum" to teach the history of the Greenbrier Valley in the Civil War era. The group 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.

As a first step towards saving the property, the college submitted the application to have the building designated an endangered property. When the announcement of the designation was made in Charleston last month, Spring commented that "receiving the endangered properties listing is an important first step that will allow us to pursue grants to restore this beautiful and very historic structure. We look forward to continuing our partnership with the City of Lewisburg through this effort."

The college is now pursuing 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.

New River is partnering with the City of Lewisburg, Concord College and other groups to design a curriculum for the workshops. Grants will be awarded in September, and if New River is awarded a grant, the workshops will be held in the summer of 2011.

"If we are successful in getting this grant, we will offer this program whether we are able

to use the library building or not, but it is a perfect example of the kinds of programs that we envision hosting in the old library to encourage and advance teaching about the history of this region,” Spring said. “The Greenbrier Valley has played a pivotal role in America’s history since before the Revolutionary War. Our goal is to find exciting ways to make that history come to life in a beautifully restored historic gem.”

Lewisburg Mayor John Manchester added, “This is a wonderful historic building in Lewisburg that we need to be sure to preserve for future generations. We are pleased that the college is actively involved in a partnership with the city to develop a creative re-use for it.”

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