

# Town Hall, arts center blossomed because of vision

**W**HEN THE MAYOR of Louisa discovered that a 12-acre parcel would be up for sale back in 2001, Town Council wasted little time piecing together a plan to purchase the land. Seven years later, thanks to an ability to adapt to changing circumstances and a partnership with the non-profit Louisa Downtown Development Corp., the results are obvious: a renovated 1907 era school building and associated grounds are home for a new Town Hall, a 200-seat performing arts theater, an art gallery, art education classrooms and a community park.

The 12-acre parcel consisted of a baseball field, a 1914 home, two storage buildings, six acres of open space and the 1907 granite school building when former mayor Charles Rosson learned of the owner's wanting to sell it back in 2001.

Town Council decided to renovate the Louisa Elementary School, built in 1907, to serve not only as a government center, but also as a hub for the arts community. Its historic integrity and setting would remain intact. Town Council also decided to transform the open space into a park and retain the baseball field. The 1914 Sergeant-Pettit House was determined to be eligible for listing in the Virginia and National registers of historic sites. It was designated to become a museum for the town and county that would be renovated and operated by the Louisa County Historical Society. A landscape plan would tie everything together with a common parking lot, patios, picnic sites and plantings.

To pay for the project, the town leveraged available town funds with

donations and grants to avoid raising taxes.

Like many projects this ambitious, an assortment of challenges presented themselves. Some were

entirely by the newly created non-profit Louisa Downtown Development Corp. and was responsible for the building becoming the Town Hall and Arts Center. Grant funding from the



**The new Louisa Town Hall and arts center reside in a renovated school building originally constructed in 1907.**

financial, some engineering, and some regulatory. All were overcome.


When bids for an all-in-one project came in substantially over budget, the town devised a three-phase approach, each of which could stand on its own until blending seamlessly into the final product. In addition, the town overcame problems that involved the removal of lead paint and asbestos, repairing inadequate sanitary sewers and preserving the building's historic details.

Phase I was completed in late June 2006; the new Town Hall opened just a few weeks later. Phase II included the gallery

building addition, the main entrance and parking. This phase was funded

Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation helped build the community park. Phase III included adding the theater, renovating the second floor offices and classrooms, and completing the site work, including lighting, pavers, curbs, gutters, sidewalks and basic plantings.

To ensure coordination between all phases of the project, the town tapped one of its employees to serve as project manager. Boy Scouts and a group from the Central Virginia Master Gardeners performed most of the landscaping. In addition to state and federal grants, the Louisa County Board of Supervisors earmarked more than \$500,000 to help pay for the arts center portion of the project.

**What the judges said:** "A first-rate example of a small town with a big vision making the most of existing resources, grant funding and an important new partnership to add to the quality of life for residents for many years to come." 



**Under 5,000  
Population  
Louisa**