

VOP State Governing Board

Kathy Rowles, Chairperson, Lee County Chapter
Janice "Jay" Johnson, Vice-Chairperson, Hampton Roads Chapter
Sandra Cook, Secretary, Petersburg Chapter
Andy Kegley, Treasurer, At-Large Member, Wytheville

Stephen Abercrombie, Public Housing Association of Residents
Sheilla Bell-Clifford, Tenants' and Workers' Support Committee
Ed Clark, Virginia Forest Watch
Holly Farris, Wythe County Chapter
Herman Frederick, Amherst County Chapter
Jason Guard, Richmond Peace Education Committee
McDonald Johnson, Wythe County Chapter
Laura Lawson, Lee County Chapter
Dyana Mason, Equality Virginia
Markell McPherson, Petersburg Chapter
Tenise Monterio, Lynchburg Chapter
Danielle Poux, At-Large Member, Alexandria
Mary Randolph-Preston, Lynchburg Chapter
Robert Salyer, Wise County Chapter
Denise Smith, At-Large Member, Rocky Gap
Faye Smith, Amherst County Chapter
Sherri Smith, Virginia Health and Environment Project
Maura Ubinger, Appalachian Peace Education Center
Kristi Wallace, Hampton Roads Chapter



New VOP State Governing Board members (from the top): Sandra Cook, Markell McPherson and Kristi Wallace.

Mission Statement

The Virginia Organizing Project (VOP) is a statewide grassroots organization dedicated to challenging injustice by empowering people in local communities to address issues that affect the quality of their lives. As a non-partisan organization, VOP especially encourages the participation of those who have traditionally had little or no voice in our society. By building relationships with diverse individuals and groups throughout the state, VOP strives to get them to work together, democratically and non-violently, for change.

VOP Staff: Jill Carson, Organizer; Brian Johns, Organizer; Michele Mattioli, Grassroots Fundraising Coordinator; Janice May, Foundation Grants Coordinator; Laura Ramirez, Office Manager; Ellen Ryan, Lead Organizer; Joe Szakos, Executive Director; Ben Thacker-Gwaltney, Organizer; Steve Vaughan, Communications Coordinator; Octavia Ware, Apprentice Organizer; and Cathy Woodson, Organizer.

VOP Consultants: Hisham Ashur, Frank Blechman, Don Giecek, Christine Johnson and David Rubinstein

VOP Interns: Mariel Abbitt, David Barish, Tom Benner, Meghan Blackman, Ellen Brown, Ian Burke, Deaunta Carter, Alex Davis, Ryan Farr, Rasheika Jackson, Travis Johnson, Claire Jolly, Paula Leff, Kathryn McKinney, Jyothi Natarajan, Johann Neem, Cedric Odom, Lisa Romano, Shanti Salas, Calloway Scott, Maya Stewart-Silver, Erin Tapscott, Zora Tucker and Adam Turner

Message from the Chairperson

As we turn the page from 2003 to 2004, changes in how things are done in Virginia are being talked about from the isolated communities of Appalachia where I live in Lee County, to the state house in Richmond, to the homes of Northern Virginia that neighbor our nation's capitol, and many places in between. At public hearings all over the state, in newspapers, on the radio and television, even in one community's local parade, the Virginia Organizing Project is present. We are mentioned in more places, and people are asking questions about who we are.

During 2003, VOP has pushed harder for Virginians to get involved in looking at policies and the processes that create those policies in order to address issues of importance in building a more fair, healthy and just society. In our statewide campaigns, in our local campaigns, and in building relationships with affiliates and other groups organizing for change, VOP has continued to show that when people work together regardless of differences in race, gender, class, sexual orientation, age, occupation, geographic location or ability, we win together. Again in 2003, we have seen some obvious and some not so obvious achievements in building an organization with staying power.

Each time the VOP State Governing Board members, VOP staff and leaders meet, we each add our stories of success to all the others around the state, and we are encouraged and motivated to continue the struggle to speak out on issues that affect us all. In this report, you will read some of the highlights of those achievements. It has been a year when the voices of those who have traditionally had little or no voice have continued to speak through a state and local election year when many didn't want to hear what we had to say. But we kept speaking. And as the year closes, we can see the difference it has made.

While we are pleased with the progress we have made, we are also excited about some new things that are happening in 2004. Recently, the VOP State Governing Board adopted a 2004 Organizing Plan that outlines five priorities, in addition to what we are already doing.

- 1. We will expand our presence to more communities in Virginia.*
- 2. We will create more leadership depth in the Virginia Organizing Project.*
- 3. We will re-assess VOP's strategy of social change in Virginia.*
- 4. We will involve more people in grassroots fundraising.*
- 5. We will write more about what we are learning.*

Some details of this plan include involving more youth, a new *Dismantling Racism Workshop II*, gender workshops, Women's Leadership Development, Roundtables, a Living Wage Conference for college students, and exploring future statewide campaign issues.

Several years ago, I said that my hope for VOP is that its basic principle of bringing people together – especially people who haven't been active before – will win out. Clearly, that is happening, and I firmly believe that the Virginia Organizing Project has become an organization that will continue to shape the way things are done in Virginia for many years to come.



Senator L. Louise Lucas, center, was presented an award for introducing legislation on tax reform by VOP Chairperson Kathy Rowles and VOP Vice-Chairperson Jay Johnson (left to right).

Statewide Issue Campaigns

Tax Reform

Our tax reform campaign celebrated two successes in 2003 – \$7 million has been generated by closing the foreign income loophole, and \$211 million was saved by stopping the repeal of estate taxes on estates over \$1 million. We held 41 *Who Pays and Who Benefits?* workshops throughout the state. The workshops were designed to help Virginians determine what public needs are met by state resources and to see the importance of building a fairer tax system.

Tax reform is currently the most important legislative issue in Virginia. The debate is attracting national attention, as it was recently highlighted in the *New York Times*. VOP has been a forerunner and central player in this issue. Through this campaign, our media contacts have grown significantly over the year. We were featured in articles in the *Washington Post*, the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, the *Virginian-Pilot* (Tidewater), and the *Roanoke Times*, to name a few. We have been credited in a variety of publications in Virginia with providing continued grassroots leadership in addressing this critical issue.

VOP has organized in key legislative districts and built strong alliances with other organizations interested in issues of economic security. State Senator Louise Lucas has agreed to sponsor a bill that would include VOP's tax reform plan. This plan is designed to reduce the income tax burden on most working families while adjusting the tax rates to make sure everyone pays their fair share. In addition, VOP supports providing local governments with adequate revenue streams to meet local needs and reduce pressure on local property taxes.

Key elements include: increases in the personal exemption and standard deduction; elimination of special interest tax exemptions; removal of sales tax from food; and the addition of taxes on specified services, reflecting the service-based nature of Virginia's 21st century economy.

Our plan also includes an increase in the corporate tax rate and elimination of corporate tax loopholes.

We have been a leader in the development of a group of independent organizations – ranging from labor to environmental – with the goal of calling attention to the need for an equitable and adequate Virginia tax code. Individuals who have participated in the discussions so far have come from the following organizations (participation does not imply organizational endorsement):

- AARP
- League of Conservation Voters
- Nature Conservancy
- Catholic Diocese of Richmond—Office of Justice and Peace
- RENEW
- RENEW Virginia's Schools
- Virginia AFL-CIO
- Virginia Association of Counties
- Virginia Chamber of Commerce
- Virginia Coalition for the Homeless
- Virginia Council Against Poverty
- Virginia Education Association
- Virginia First Cities
- Virginia Interfaith Center on Public Policy
- Virginia Municipal League
- Virginia Organizing Project
- Virginia Poverty Law Center
- Voices for Virginia's Children



Attendees at the VOP Tax Reform Workshop on January 8 participate in an exercise that demonstrates how much tax burden each fifth of Virginia's population bears.

VOP pulled these groups together beginning in March to find common ground to revise the Virginia tax code in order to make it more *fair* for taxpayers and local governments, and *adequate* to meet public needs for essential services, including education, transportation, health care and natural resources. We have also been working closely with the Center for Budget Policy and Priorities (CBPP) and with the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy (ITEP).

Racial Profiling

After having a bill killed in the 2003 General Assembly that would have mandated a simple data collection procedure, the strategy team regrouped to evaluate and plan an alternate course of action. Our goal is to get systematic data collection implemented by targeted law enforcement agencies that would provide needed facts to support a policy change. The campaign includes holding community forums, keeping the issue public through a statewide media campaign and getting endorsements from other organizations working on criminal justice and civil rights issues.



Col. W. Gerald Massengill (second from left) answered questions asked by Kathy Rowles, Mary Randolph Preston, Robert Salyer and Bill Anderson (not pictured).

During VOP's Annual Meeting in July, Col. W. Gerald Massengill, superintendent of the Virginia State Police, answered questions about racial profiling asked by Kathy Rowles, Mary Randolph-Preston, Robert Salyer and Bill Anderson.

On August 20, Gov. Mark Warner announced an initiative to end racial profiling in Virginia. He appointed an Advisory Panel on Biased-based Policing to establish new standards of training and model police policies aimed at ending the discriminatory practice of racial profiling. VOP congratulated the governor and his advisors on plans to end "remnants of racial profiling" in Virginia, but we continue to stress the importance of data collection, which is a necessary step to ending racist practices where they exist.

Environmental Issues

In all of VOP's statewide issue campaigns and in our grassroots organizing work, our strategy includes making an impact in the work of environmental policy change. Budgetary issues affect environmental policy. Building democratic participation among those who have not previously been active is important in organizing for environmental policy changes. Such connections were the subject of the "Understanding the Economy" column of our November 2003 issue of *virginia.organizing*, VOP's news-magazine.

We facilitate strategic planning sessions and provide other developmental organization support for environmental groups. In 2003, requests for consultations and workshops by environmental groups increased at VOP. We remain active in building a multi-constituency approach, giving importance to addressing anti-racism as a direct need to achieving success in long-term environmental issue work. *Dismantling Racism Workshops* have been held for the Appalachian Community Fund, Save Our Cumberland Mountains, and the (national) Sierra Club. Discussions are underway to do *Dismantling Racism Workshops* for the Virginia Conservation Network. Consultations were given to other environmental groups such as Rail Solution and the Route 1 Corridor Coalition, among others.

We have representation on the steering committee of the Conservation E-action Virginia! network which provides action alerts of environmental issues across the state. Due to our work in developing a grassroots political base, we were able to bring more people to the list of contacts than any other group in the network.

In addition, VOP continues to support our affiliates working on statewide environmental issues (see "Affiliates and Others"). We assist our affiliates such as the Virginia Forest Watch and the Virginia Health and Environment Project with links to our web site and our statewide e-mail action alert system as well as highlights in our news magazine. Affiliates and other statewide environmental issue organizations have found these resources valuable to their success.

Other Statewide Issues

VOP successfully worked with our affiliate, Equality Virginia, to realize the completion of another objective in our **affordable housing** campaign. In July 2003, VHDA removed a rule that barred unrelated couples from applying for loans. This policy was used to discriminate against gays and lesbians. Also, VOP continues to monitor previous gains in order to assure their outcomes are not reversed. Through consultations and other services, VOP is assisting in the grassroots development of policy work on a variety of issues (see "Affiliates and Others" and "Workshops").

Living Wage Campaigns

In 2003, Charlottesville hotel owners and Piedmont Virginia Community College agreed to develop a job training program that hopefully will lead to increased wages. In our living wage campaign directed at Albemarle County Schools, we received an endorsement from the Albemarle Education Association. In May, the school board approved an increase in wages for their lowest paid employees. (More details are discussed in the section on the internship program.)

In our living wage campaign to increase the wages of workers for companies under contract with the University of Virginia, the University's Student Government unanimously passed a resolution supporting living wages for all workers. On June 7, a rally was held at which students delivered a letter to the University's president supporting a living wage for contract workers.

In addition to these campaigns, we are developing and assisting with living wage campaigns in Richmond, Blacksburg/Montgomery County, Emory and Henry College, and Wythe County, and studying possibilities in other locations.



Richmond Coalition for a Living Wage has had an increased involvement of temp workers.

Local Issue Campaigns

Amherst County VOP Chapter

- conducted local research contributing to the statewide racial profiling campaign
- worked on education issues, wanting to build more minority representation in the staffing of Amherst County Schools
- organized to have a new bridge over the James River named “Monacan Bridge,” to recognize the local heritage of the Monacan People
- held a one-day *Dismantling Racism Workshop* for chapter and other local leadership



Amherst County and Lynchburg chapters would like this new Route 29 Bypass bridge named in honor of the Monacan Indian Nation.

Hampton Roads VOP Chapter

- worked on affordable housing issues
- studied issues affecting people working in service jobs at Tidewater Community College
- met with candidates for fall elections
- organized a series of meetings aimed at getting participants thinking, learning and talking about Virginia's money issues
- invited candidates seeking election to a *Who Pays and Who Benefits?* (tax reform) workshop that was held in October

Lee and Wise County VOP Chapters

- held a *Who Pays and Who Benefits?* workshop, resulting in local leaders making a presentation on tax fairness to the Lee County Board of Supervisors



The Lee County VOP Chapter sponsored a question and answer forum for school board candidates.

- organized a voter education and registration effort to increase participation in the local elections where there has rarely been a challenger
- followed-up on the successful campaign that improved voting opportunities for former felons and reported assisting with a flood of applications for restoration of voting rights – a very welcomed challenge
- organized a candidates' forum for the fall elections which was critical in a vote that overturned the local power structure

Lynchburg VOP Chapter

- worked on getting a safety barrier put on a bridge that is a high risk location for suicide attempts
- held a media conference as part of this local campaign, drawing the attention of local decision makers
- continued to push a local government that has been slow to carry through on their commitment to construct this safety barrier
- worked with local high school students faced with suspension, staying actively involved in assuring the implementation of previous gains in their local campaign which improved policies and procedures used in suspending students

Petersburg VOP Chapter

- hosted a *Who Pays and Who Benefits?* workshop
- met with state Delegates Fenton Bland and Kirk Cox about racial profiling and tax reform
- met city councilpersons and the city manager about the fair housing campaign
- worked on affordable and fair housing issues, learning more about the policies and procedures of the Petersburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority and how landlord-tenant problems are approached
- linked with Housing Opportunities Made Equal, a successful non-profit group based in Richmond, in order to learn more about housing issues in the city
- initiated a local campaign to have the city fill a vacant position for a fair housing officer, a position that hasn't been filled since 1999
- studied the problem of adult literacy where it is reported that 43 percent of adults in the city cannot read at a 4th grade level
- worked to develop and cultivate a working relationship with current literacy groups in the area



Lloyd Hines, Juanita Wyatt and Leonard Muse participate in a small group exercise at the Petersburg *Dismantling Racism Workshop*.

Wythe County VOP Chapter

- held a *Who Pays and Who Benefits?* workshop
- obtained co-sponsorship of VOP's tax reform bill from their state senator
- held their second Annual Living Wage Luncheon to honor employers in the area who pay all their workers a living wage

New Chapter Development

During 2003, VOP has been organizing a new chapter in Williamsburg. The group has been meeting and holding workshops on economic and racial issues. In February, they held a leaders' training workshop for *Who Pays and Who Benefits?* workshops. Since this workshop, they have been continuing to do one-to-ones to expand the chapter. Also, they met with state Delegates Bill Barlow, Melanie Rapp and Floyd Miles, and state Senator Tommy Norment. They have been empowered through their work on tax reform issues and will have official chapter status early in 2004.

Affiliates and Others

Another important part of VOP's work is to build relationships with other organizations in the state. One way that we do this is by offering an affiliate status to those organizations interested in being an integral part of VOP's work which includes representation on the VOP State Governing Board, increased access to VOP resources, and a commitment and strategy to build diversity, among other advantages.

The following highlights about VOP affiliates were reported in 2003:

- The Virginia Forest Watch (VAFW) organized a four-city road show to mobilize interest around the U.S. Forest Service planning process for the future of the George Washington National Forest.

- VAFW was successful in their campaign to make Best Management Practices mandatory on logging jobs in Virginia.



Founding Fathers, played by Steve Krichbaum (right) and Sherman Bamford, speak in defense of Virginia's George Washington and Jefferson National Forests.

- VAFW co-sponsored the 13th Annual Heartwood Forest Council in Harlan County, Kentucky.

- The Tenants' and Workers' Support Committee (TWSC), working with other groups, got preliminary approval from the Arlington County government for a living wage ordinance.

- Due to the work of TWSC, \$250,000 in wage supplements were given to Alexandria Child Care Providers and \$400,000 in medical debt relief was made available to uninsured patients of the Inova Hospital System.

- TWSC increased the hiring of bilingual school personnel and the adoption of an in-school suspension policy at local schools.

- The formation of the Alexandria United Taxi-Drivers Organization was added as a chapter of TWSC.
- TWSC won a campaign seeking \$300,000 in increased funding for the Culmore Clinic (Fairfax County). This reduced the waiting list from 14 to 5 months.
- Two women completed the Resident Training and Leadership Development Program from Public Housing Association of Residents (PHAR).
- One of PHAR's first interns, Rosa Barber, was hired as the assistant to the coordinator of the Senior Community Service Employment Program. (A profile of Rosa was included in the April issue.)

- Equality Virginia, the state’s LGBT lobbying group, named a new executive director, Dyana Mason.

In an effort to increase the effectiveness of all organizations working on progressive change in Virginia, we have continued to assist other groups with:

- *Dismantling Racism Workshops*, economic education workshops and other leadership training programs
- consultations and trainings for at least 60 other organizations
- access to our statewide e-Action Alert system
- publication of issues in our news magazine

We are now working with 25 other groups for whom we accept grants and donations and provide bookkeeping and payroll services. This saves them a tremendous amount of time so they can focus on their social justice work. Recently, we have been able to make commercial liability insurance coverage available for these “program accounts.”

VOP Affiliates

Appalachian Peace Education Center
 Equality Virginia
 Public Housing Association of Residents (Charlottesville)
 Richmond Peace Education Center
 The Tenants' and Workers' Support Committee\
 Comité de Apoyo de Inquilinos y Trabajadores
 Virginia Forest Watch
 Virginia Health and Environment Project

The Internship Program

We are building a progressive internship program with a goal of providing youth with the opportunity to develop democratic and leadership skills while engaging in a hands-on, multi-generational community organizing effort. Interns make a personal contribution to the strategic work of social change aimed at a variety of issues, including education, economic security, anti-racism initiatives, sexual orientation issues, the environment and more.

The first half of 2003 was a growing time for our internship program. We maintained our monthly meetings with a group of 13 high school and college interns. They focused on living wage campaigns in the Charlottesville-Albemarle County area. We had several young leaders meet with the superintendent of Albemarle County Schools, Kevin Castner, a school board member, Gordon Walker, and three staff members. They did an excellent job of explaining the concept of a living wage, demanding a policy change and fielding questions from the adults present. At the April meeting of the Albemarle County School Board, wages for the



Deaunta Carter, Travis Johnson and Rasheika Jackson enjoy a lighter moment at a VOP intern training.

lowest paid workers were increased with a recommendation from the Superintendent for additional increases next year.

Maria Morelli worked with VOP during the first half of the year as a part-time apprentice assisting with statewide campaigns, recruiting new leaders in Virginia Beach, and the strengthening of Out Youth of the Blue Ridge, a local LGBTQ organization for young people.



Octavia Ware, VOP apprentice-organizer.

In June, we increased our staff by adding a paid position for an apprentice organizer of color which is being filled by Octavia Ware, a recent graduate from Virginia Commonwealth University with a Masters' degree in social work.

We worked with nine interns over the summer and have a great group of 11 interns who have been working together during the last quarter of the year. In addition to working on VOP statewide issue campaigns (tax reform and racial profiling), the interns are currently working on a project with the Independence Resource Center in the Thomas Jefferson Planning District to do a wheelchair accessibility survey of local businesses and public buildings.

Our internship program is an unfolding vision of the VOP State Governing Board which has been working to emphasize a multi-generational focus at VOP for several years.

Workshops

In 2003, VOP held a total of 70 workshops involving over 1,300 people. With our campaign focus on economic security issues, the majority of our workshops have been the *Who Pays and Who Benefits?* workshop, with a total of 41 workshops being held in communities around the state. We held two weekend *Dismantling Racism Workshops*, one in Abingdon and one in Jamestown, and a one-day workshop in Amherst County. *Dismantling Racism Workshops* have been held for the Appalachian Community Fund, Save Our Cumberland Mountains, and the (national) Sierra Club. In addition, we have held living wage forums, and trainings and workshops on the principles of organizing. As part of the Southern Living Wage Conference, VOP participated and offered leadership for two workshops: *Win or Lose: What are the next steps?* and *How to Dismantle the "isms" in a Living Wage Campaign*.

To date, VOP has involved almost 8,000 participants in workshops on community organizing, leadership skills and systematic oppression of race, sexual orientation and class status.

2003 Annual Meeting and State Governing Board Retreat

The VOP Annual Meeting was in Richmond on July 26th. The meeting featured reports from VOP's local chapters and affiliate groups about what they've accomplished over the past year, as well as workshops on tax reform and racial profiling. Col. W. Gerald Massengill, Superintendent of the Virginia State Police, answered questions about racial profiling.

In November, VOP's State Governing Board held its annual retreat for the purposes of evaluation and planning. This year, we included two roundtable discussions, reflecting on our anti-racism work and on perspectives of the history of organizing in Virginia. We did more analyses of organizational capacities in



Some VOP State Governing Board members and staff enjoy a small group exercise during the annual VOP retreat.

Virginia and decided on strategic areas of focus to be included in the 2004 Organizing Plan.

Statewide events such as these are increasing enthusiasm at VOP. As a new Board member commented after the State Governing Board retreat: "This conference served to assist me in knowing the staff and the Governing Board members, as well as understanding VOP's goals, objectives and concerns. I am excited about moving forward to assist VOP in meeting and exceeding its goals while serving communities across Virginia."

Organizational Enhancements

Communications

In 2003, VOP

- issued 17 op-eds statewide
- was mentioned at least 48 times in media publications
- issued five press releases on tax reform, two on living wage issues and one on Lynchburg's campaign to provide safety fencing on Rivermont Bridge
- held two press conferences on tax reform and one press conference for the local campaign in Lynchburg
- issued 23 action alerts
- participated in 12 public hearings
- gave 10 radio interviews that were aired

Legal Services

David Rubinstein continues to offer legal assistance to VOP, its affiliates and other related organizations. David provides helpful advice on management issues and legal interpretations needed in campaign strategy. He also reviews court decisions affecting our work and offers suggestions on what issues might need to be addressed. This assistance offered through VOP has been an important aid to a wide range of issues being addressed in Virginia.

Technology and Database Management

VOP now distributes e-mail action alerts to more than 3,000 individuals and groups across the state. About 7,000 individuals and groups receive the VOP news-magazine. This year, we added more new features to our website – new pictures, more links, access to our news magazine, *virginia.organizing*, and other publications, just to name a few.

We upgraded our computer technology to support our needs for improving the website, news-magazine and other publications and training materials with more pictures and better graphics. In November 2003, we provided the equipment to set up three complete computer labs for low-income youth and/or adult education programs in Charlottesville, Petersburg and Wytheville. Also by the end of the year, we had redistributed 1,108 computers, 258 printers, 39 fax machines, 21 copiers, 12 typewriters and 9 scanners in our used computer project since its beginning in 1998.

Staff Development Opportunities

VOP continues to support staff development in a variety of ways. We encourage both development within the organization as well as attendance and contributions to development events outside VOP. In 2003, these opportunities included:

- holding a workshop led by Allen Cooper, a former IAF organizer from Texas, for VOP organizing staff focusing on power and culture in organizing
- sending two organizers to a seminar to help incorporate more of the Latino experience into our *Dismantling Racism Workshop*
- sending an apprentice-organizer to the Midwest Academy week-long training in Chicago
- sending our grassroots fundraising coordinator to classes at Virginia Commonwealth University on planned giving and grassroots fundraising
- having a staff and two board members attend the State Strategies Fund Convening in Utah in September
- having a staff person participate in "Strengthening Social Change through Assessment and Learning" – an international conference in Canada in September
- having a staff person and board member give a presentation on anti-racism work at the Bishop Begley Conference in Junaluska, North Carolina
- having our apprentice organizer attend the Anderson Leadership Conference at Lynchburg College

Grassroots Fundraising

VOP raised about \$155,000 this year in grassroots fundraising. We continue to receive in-kind donations of equipment repairs; computer programming services, especially for database improvements; office supplies; and donations of cars. We have developed an Honorarium Society which asks public personalities who are from or currently live in Virginia to donate the fees from one performance to our organization. Barbara Ehrenreich, author of *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America*, is providing leadership in this effort, making a personal contribution, sending a letter to others who would be able to participate and hosting a house party for VOP in September. We have added a program to collect used cell phones to be turned in for a donation. Also during 2003, we have organized a group of at least a dozen people, VOP Partners, who have committed to formally helping with grassroots fundraising projects.

In another development, VOP received a generous donation to fund a comprehensive remodeling of the first floor offices at 703 Concord Avenue in Charlottesville to provide complete handicap accessibility.

Writing Project

VOP has begun writing projects that will provide learning tools for leaders, organizers, funders and others interested in community organizing.

In a book of profiles of community organizers and a book of essays written by rural community organizers, the Community Organizing Writing Project will explore lessons learned by organizers covering a broad range of constituencies and issues across the country.

We are also working on a writing project highlighting what we've learned about confronting racism and how we've made connections to other oppressions. These materials will be easily readable and will include our practical experience in how to organize to change oppressive

systems through *Dismantling Racism Workshops*. The final written products will include lessons we have learned, interview transcripts, workshop exercises, relevant profiles and articles.

In 2003, we started the planning process for writing the 10-year history of the Virginia Organizing Project. The reflections of staff, board members and leaders from Virginia will be included in a way that will further VOP's mission to bring out the voices "of those who have traditionally had little or no voice." We want to share what we have learned about building a cross-constituency grassroots organization.

All these projects will be presented in a way that will be helpful to other grassroots-based organizations. As part of the projects, we held two roundtable discussions in 2003 that involved specific individuals who were identified for their ability to provide insightful perspectives on our anti-racism and organizing work. We also started circulating "learning memos" in order to share the lessons we are learning among our leaders and other interested persons. The memos can come from meetings, conversations, conferences, roundtable discussions, book reviews, or reflections on what we are learning in the organizing we are doing.

Report Summary

In summary, the Virginia Organizing Project surpassed the goals we set in our 2003 Organizing Plan. We saw many statewide as well as local achievements being celebrated as a result of our organizing. VOP is known in every region of Virginia or familiar to state legislators. We are building a stronger diverse grassroots political base in Virginia. More people are getting involved in social change, more people are acquiring leadership and organizing skills, community groups are getting more active, and new and emerging groups are coming together with established organizations to work on common issues.