



*... real people, dealing with real problems,
working for real solutions*



2007 Annual Report

Charlottesville
703 Concord Avenue
Charlottesville, VA 22903
(434) 984-4655
(434) 984-2803 fax

Sally Bastian
Grassroots Fundraising Coord.
bastian@virginia-organizing.org

Harold Folley
Apprentice Organizer
harold@virginia-organizing.org

Michele Mattioli
Special Projects Coordinator
mattioli@virginia-organizing.org

Laura Ramirez
Office Manager
lramirez@virginia-organizing.org

Joe Szakos
Executive Director
szakos@virginia-organizing.org

Prince William/Fairfax
Richard Faithful
Apprentice Organizer
faithful@virginia-organizing.org
(757) 784-6046

Richmond/Petersburg
Cathy Woodson
Organizer
cwood329@aol.com
(804) 261-7497 office/fax

Roanoke/Salem
Sharon LaMar
Apprentice Organizer
lamarvop@aol.com
(540) 397-2379 office/cell

Shenandoah Valley
Larry Yates
Organizer
lyates@shentel.net
(540) 436-3432 office/fax

Southwest Virginia
Brian Johns
Organizer
bjohns@virginia-organizing.org
(276) 619-1920 office/cell

Western Virginia
Barry Butler
Organizer
bbutler@virginia-organizing.org
(540) 989-1419 office/fax

Williamsburg/Peninsula
Ben Thacker-Gwaltney
Lead Organizer
ben@virginia-organizing.org
(757) 570-3005 office/cell

VIRGINIA ORGANIZING PROJECT 2007 ANNUAL REPORT



www.virginia-organizing.org

We are pleased to present this report of the exciting work of the Virginia Organizing Project in 2007. Every year we get bigger and stronger, building a more effective grassroots citizens organization. Even as we publish this summary of accomplishments, we are moving full steam ahead on a massive door-to-door canvass — the Civic Engagement Project — in the summer of 2008, involving 50 interns and 11 other statewide groups.

Here are some examples of VOP's accomplishments, by the numbers.

In 2007, the Virginia Organizing Project had:

- its 13th year of continued growth, with four new staff positions added
- 60 constituent meetings with state legislators
- 90 days of workshops and trainings on leadership development, economics, racism and classism
- 1,194 workshop participants (over 16,000 people have now attended a VOP leadership training)
- 305 leaders who used a new skill to improve their community
- 900 one-to one conversations with leaders across Virginia to talk about what they would like to see changed and how they want to take action
- 45 interns working throughout the state
- 207 consultations with other groups to help increase their effectiveness
- 61 communities in Virginia where VOP worked
- 24 forums on poverty, mental health, predatory lending and for candidates running for office
- 53 letters to the editor and 32 op-eds on VOP issues distributed to 125 newspapers statewide
- 62 radio spots distributed to stations statewide
- 50 computers given for free to non-profit groups and families who couldn't otherwise afford them

But we also measure success in community organizing in other ways — read on and imagine the kinds of changes that happen in the hearts and minds of the community leaders with whom it is our honor to work, and how all of that organizing makes our communities better places for every Virginian to live, work and raise their families.

In our first 13 years, we have been successful with our “breadth” approach: have leaders and members in every district in the state. Now, as we increase our staff, intern and volunteer resources, as well as develop even stronger working relationships with other groups, we are in a position to go “deeper” in many more concentrated geographic areas. This should result in much stronger local groups, and will enhance our presence at the state level even more. VOP is moving forward!

— Janice “Jay” Johnson, Chairperson, VOP State Governing Board

Statewide Victories and Accomplishments



Some of the VOP Interns take a break from a door-to-door canvass getting people active on the predatory lending campaign and shout out "VOP!" with their bodies.



The Virginia Organizing Project held a funeral on April 4 in Richmond to mourn the loss of a minimum wage increase. A horse drawn wagon, bearing a coffin draped with an American flag, led the procession.

"VOP's mission embraces my code of ethics as a social worker, my values as an individual, and my passion to promote social change."

— Sharon LaMar, who joined the VOP staff in 2007

Working with other statewide and local groups, participation of the Virginia Organizing Project during the 2007 General Assembly session resulted in significant progress and legislative action on priority issues for the session:

- Passage of a tax reform bill that removed approximately 150,000 low-wage workers from the Virginia tax rolls and prevented almost 150,000 more from having to file tax returns to get their refund.
- Senate passage of a minimum wage increase and, for the first time, the House Commerce and Labor Committee reporting the minimum wage increase out of committee to the floor of the House, where it took an unusual procedural vote mandated upon the Republican Caucus by House leaders to kill the bill.
- Introduction of a budget amendment to fund a bias-based policing coordinator in the Department of Criminal Justice Services.
- Meeting with staff in the Governor's Office to discuss the need for funding of the DCJS coordinator position and data collection by law enforcement officers in Virginia.
- Bringing the payday lending industry practices into the spotlight and setting the stage for a push for a major initiative in the 2008 General Assembly session.
- Passage of a bill prohibiting future purchases of direct recording electronic voting machines, phasing them out and replacing them with optical scan voting machines which provide a paper ballot, giving the voter confidence in the accuracy and security of elections.

Local Chapter Accomplishments

Examples of local accomplishments in 2007 include:

Predatory lending

VOP was a major force behind more than 55 local governments passing resolutions in 2007 calling

VOP enters into areas where others are afraid to go and this is exciting. As a member of the Petersburg VOP Chapter, we worked hard on educating the public on predatory lending, getting petitions signed and increasing awareness of alternatives, i.e., credit unions and savings. For VOP, this was just ONE of the MANY issues we work on!

– Sandra Cook, Vice-Chairperson, VOP State Governing Board

on the state legislature to cap the interest rate on payday loans at 36 percent. Hundreds of petitions were signed in support of capping payday lending interest in communities across the state. Examples of local chapter activities to move the campaign forward include:

- The Central Shenandoah Valley VOP Chapter sponsored a public meeting featuring a credit counselor and a former payday lending operation manager to talk about alternatives to payday loans;
- A Northern Virginia Strategy Committee was set up to prepare for predatory lending campaigns in Fairfax and Prince William Counties;
- Working with local leaders and interns, VOP helped recruit exploited payday lending consumers to tell their story on a local Roanoke Valley radio station and helped raise awareness of the issue;
- More than 450 payday lending surveys were completed in Richmond/Petersburg; and,
- The Virginia Beach VOP Chapter pursued local angles on predatory lending, including mapping payday shop locations and speaking before the city's Human Rights Commission.

Affordable housing

Northern Shenandoah Valley VOP Chapter members and allies spoke to six governing bodies about increasing affordable housing. They also critiqued all five fair housing forums (all held during the work day) of the Winchester Office of Housing and Neighborhood Services. VOP also built a coalition of community groups, non-profits, businesses, business groups and faith groups to push affordable and workforce housing in the Greater Williamsburg region. The Greater Williamsburg VOP Chapter made a public response to the release of the Housing Needs Study, paving the way

for a local workforce housing ordinance.

Chapter expansion

We laid the groundwork for a future VOP chapter in Fairfax and Prince William Counties and new VOP student chapters were developed at Virginia Commonwealth University and the University of Virginia. We also held the first VOP organizational meeting in the Galax area. In addition, we started a new chapter in Hampton/Newport News which has begun working on local alternatives to payday lending and gathering data from the two police departments around racial profiling and traffic stops.

Candidate forums

VOP co-sponsored a dozen candidate forums across the state for local as well as statewide races.

Handicapped accessibility

Working with several other groups, we succeeded in getting the Charlottesville City Council to designate \$1.1 million to make all school facilities in the city fully compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Drug abuse

We held a vigil, rally and press conference on July 20 in connection with the Oxycontin sentencing hearing in Abingdon and a regional meeting (with six southwest Virginia counties and two cities represented) about drug abuse.

Education

We assisted on a local campaign to keep the Williamsburg/James City County's Alternative School operating. We also assisted on a local campaign in the

Williamsburg area around school redistricting, working for racial and economic parity between schools.

Neighborhood preservation

We assisted the Historic Gainsboro Neighborhood group in their victory that blocked the City of Roanoke's plan to build a Social Security Administration office in their neighborhood.

Health

We worked with the Sierra Club to collect hair samples from 30 women at a Portsmouth hair salon; tests showed some levels of mercury in every sample, with two above the EPA "acceptable limit."

Youth Involvement

VOP had 25 interns during the summer, with each VOP organizer having at least one intern working with him/her. A total of 45 interns during the year worked on state and local campaigns, assisted with website development, helped raise funds, attended democratic skills trainings and worked on a wide range of other projects. VOP is proud of the growing list of former interns who now work full-time for social change. We are also developing solid relationships with more professors and field placement supervisors in more colleges and universities across the state.

In late fall we began preparations for a major door-to-door canvass in summer 2008 which will involve 50 VOP paid interns as well as VOP staff and volunteers from other groups across the state. This will involve the Virginia AFL-CIO, Virginia NAACP, the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the Virginia ACLU, Equality Virginia, Tenants and Workers United, the League of Conservation Voters, Virginia Conservation Network, Virginia Sierra Club and the Virginia Education Association, among others.

Leadership Institute

The Virginia Organizing Project sponsors a Leadership Institute each year to build a larger network of leaders across the state. Using popular education methodology, the program



Jill Carson and members of the Lee County Chapter speak at a July press conference about their campaign to get more resources for prevention and treatment of painkiller addiction in Southwest Virginia.



Some of the active members of the UVA VOP Chapter pose for a picture after one of their meetings. Front row (l-r): Sarah Sievert, Quynh Vu, Janie Williams, Veronica Gutierrez. Back row (l-r): Jeannette Williams, Tommy Roberts, Brittany Reid, Lily Smith

"It was a proud moment for me to join the organization and have an opportunity to contribute my experience and expertise to the critical needs of Virginians. I was particularly excited over having the prospect of advocating on public policies with such great impact, especially public policies so dear and close to my heart."

– Ben Greenberg, VOP Legislative Director

format includes participatory exercises, guest speakers, presentations and other activities. The purpose of this program is to build:

- a common framework and a better understanding of organizing around the state
- a core of VOP leadership trained in community organizing, organizational development and issue analysis
- VOP as a strong grassroots political force that is effective at the state and local levels

A dozen new leaders attended the Leadership Institute for four weekends; many local leaders also joined when the workshops were in or near their communities.

Groups With Which VOP Borrowed and Shared Power

- ❖ AARP
- ❖ Adopt a Soldier
- ❖ Advancing Green Chemistry
- ❖ African-American Teaching Fellows of Charlottesville/Albemarle
- ❖ Alexandria Office on Women
- ❖ Alternatives, Incorporated
- ❖ Appalachian Office on Justice and Peace
- ❖ Appalachian Peace Education Center
- ❖ Asociacion de Trabajadores de Construccion Residencial
- ❖ Augusta Coalition for Peace and Justice
- ❖ Berryville Citizens Association
- ❖ Better Than Television
- ❖ Better World Betty
- ❖ Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Williamsburg
- ❖ Blue Ridge Radio Project
- ❖ Brothers for Change
- ❖ Camping for All
- ❖ Central American Resource Center
- ❖ Central Virginia Vets for Peace
- ❖ Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Alliance
- ❖ Chesapeake Climate Action Network
- ❖ Citizens United For Rehabilitation of Errants
- ❖ Coalition for Smarter Growth
- ❖ Community Bikes
- ❖ Concerned Citizens for Abingdon's Future
- ❖ Defenders for Freedom, Justice and Equality
- ❖ Delta Sigma Theta Sorority
- ❖ Earth Week
- ❖ Environmental Health Sciences
- ❖ Equality Virginia
- ❖ Families and Allies of Virginia's Youth
- ❖ First Street Church Project
- ❖ Foothills Child Advocacy Center
- ❖ Friends of Washington County Schools
- ❖ Gulf Coast Bookmobile Project
- ❖ Help Winneba Read
- ❖ Hispanic Services Organization
- ❖ Hogar Hispano
- ❖ HOME Consortium Advisory Committee
- ❖ Interfaith Gay/Straight Alliance
- ❖ Jobs with Justice
- ❖ JustChildren
- ❖ Justice Seekers
- ❖ Latino Connection
- ❖ League of Women Voters
- ❖ Legal Aid Justice Center
- ❖ Living Wage Coalition at Emory and Henry
- ❖ Local 400 UE160
- ❖ Migrant Health Network
- ❖ National Environment Trust
- ❖ Network for Latino Peoples
- ❖ Northern Virginia Pan-Hellenic Council
- ❖ Our Sons and Daughters Support Group
- ❖ Parent Advisory Council-Legal Aid Justice Center



Supporters attend a Show Me the Money event in Woodstock to become more involved in fundraising for VOP.

- ❖ People of Color Coalition
- ❖ People, Inc.
 - ❖ Petersburg City Workers Association
 - ❖ Piedmont Environmental Coalition
 - ❖ Public Housing Association of Residents
 - ❖ Quality Community Council
 - ❖ Quinn Dam Project
 - ❖ RAIL Solution
 - ❖ Resource Information Help for the Disadvantage
 - ❖ Reston Interfaith Center
 - ❖ Richmond Peace Education Center
 - ❖ Richmond Peace Foundation
 - ❖ Richmond Tenants Organization
 - ❖ Rockingham-Harrisonburg NAACP
 - ❖ Rocktown Infoshop
 - ❖ Rooms for a Reason
 - ❖ Rt. 1 Taskforce
 - ❖ Save Our Cumberland Mountains
- ❖ SHEA Collaborative
- ❖ Shenandoah Valley Network
- ❖ Social Action Linking Together
- ❖ Southern Appalachia Mountain Stewards
- ❖ Southwest Virginia Alliance
- ❖ Sowers of Justice
- ❖ Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition
- ❖ Sunrise Center
- ❖ Tenants and Workers United
- ❖ The Bridge Progressive Arts Initiative
- ❖ The Clinch Coalition
- ❖ The Commonwealth Institute of Virginia
 - ❖ The People United
 - ❖ Unity in the Community
 - ❖ Upper Tennessee River Roundtable
 - ❖ Urban Ministries
 - ❖ Virginia ACLU
 - ❖ Virginia AFL-CIO
 - ❖ Virginia Association of Personal Care Assistants
 - ❖ Virginia Association of Realtors
 - ❖ Virginia Black Lung Association
 - ❖ Virginia Center for Policing Innovation
 - ❖ Virginia Coalition for Latino Organizations
 - ❖ Virginia Conservation Network
 - ❖ Virginia Education Association
 - ❖ Virginia Forest Watch
 - ❖ Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy



VOP held protests throughout the state to encourage legislators to stop the abuses of predatory lending.

"I know you care about environmental, racial, and economic justice and GLBT issues. I know you believe in democracy. Participating in VOP is a good way to act on your concerns and beliefs."

— Jason Guard, VOP State Governing Board

- ❖ Virginia Justice Center
- ❖ Virginia League of Conservation Voters
- ❖ Virginia Muslim Political Action Committee
- ❖ Virginia NAACP
- ❖ Virginia Partnership to Encourage Responsible Lending
- ❖ Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance
- ❖ Virginia SCOPE
- ❖ Virginia Sheriffs Association
- ❖ Virginia Sierra Club
- ❖ Virginia State University
- ❖ Virginians Against Payday Lending
- ❖ Virginians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty
- ❖ Warren-Page NAACP
- ❖ Washington County TRIAD
- ❖ Westhaven Afterschool Program
- ❖ Westhaven Nursing Clinic
- ❖ Wild Virginia
- ❖ Williamsburg Climate Action Network
- ❖ YouThink Coalition
- ❖ Charlottesville-Albemarle Commission on Children and Families
- ❖ Charlottesville DSS Advisory Board
- ❖ Fairfax Futures
- ❖ Fairfax Office for Children
- ❖ Infant-Toddler Family Day Care
- ❖ Inova Health System
- ❖ League of Women Voters of Virginia
- ❖ Northern Virginia Family Service
- ❖ Prevent Child Abuse Virginia
- ❖ SALT (Social Action Linking Together)
- ❖ Smart Beginnings South Hampton Roads
- ❖ United Way of Central Virginia Success by 6
- ❖ Virginia Alliance of Family Child Day Care Associations
- ❖ Virginia Alliance of Social Work Practitioners
- ❖ Virginia Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Networks
- ❖ Virginia Association for Early Childhood Education
- ❖ Virginia Coalition to End Homelessness
- ❖ Virginia Head Start Association
- ❖ Virginia School Aged Child Care Coalition
- ❖ Virginia League of Social Services Executives

Sharing Power in Coalitions

Working Families Child Care Coalition

"Strengthening Virginia's Workforce Through Access to Quality Child Care"

Steering Committee

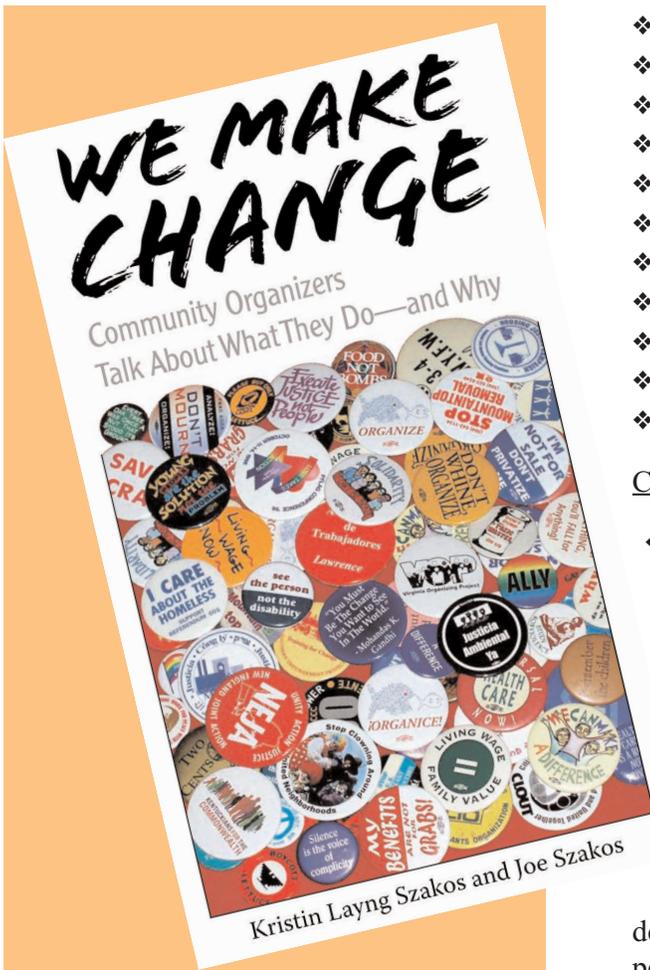
- ❖ Voices for Virginia's Children
- ❖ Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy
- ❖ Virginia Organizing Project
- ❖ Virginia Poverty Law Center
- ❖ Reston Interfaith

Coalition Members

- ❖ Albemarle County DSS Advisory Board
- ❖ American Association of University Women — VA

Virginia Partnership to Encourage Responsible Lending

- ❖ AARP Virginia
- ❖ AFL-CIO of Virginia
- ❖ Better Business Bureaus of Virginia
- ❖ Fluvanna/Louisa Housing Foundation
- ❖ Greene Alliance of Church and Community Efforts
- ❖ Housing Opportunities Made Equal
- ❖ Legal Aid Justice Center
- ❖ The Metropolitan Business League
- ❖ Monticello Area Community Action Agency
- ❖ NAACP Virginia State Conference
- ❖ New River Community Action
- ❖ Peninsula Community Development Corporation
- ❖ People Incorporated of Southwest Virginia
- ❖ Piedmont Housing Alliance



- ❖ Residential Construction Workers Association
- ❖ Social Action Linking Together
- ❖ Tidewater Sowers of Justice
- ❖ Virginia Association of Area Agencies on Aging
- ❖ Virginia Citizens Consumer Council
- ❖ Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy
- ❖ Virginia Muslim Coalition for Public Affairs
- ❖ Virginia Organizing Project
- ❖ Virginia Poverty Law Center
- ❖ Virginia Transfer & Storage Co.
- ❖ Voices for Virginia's Children

Collaborating organizations, non-members:

- ❖ The Family Foundation and Virginians Against Payday Loans

Capacity Building

We increased our grassroots fundraising:

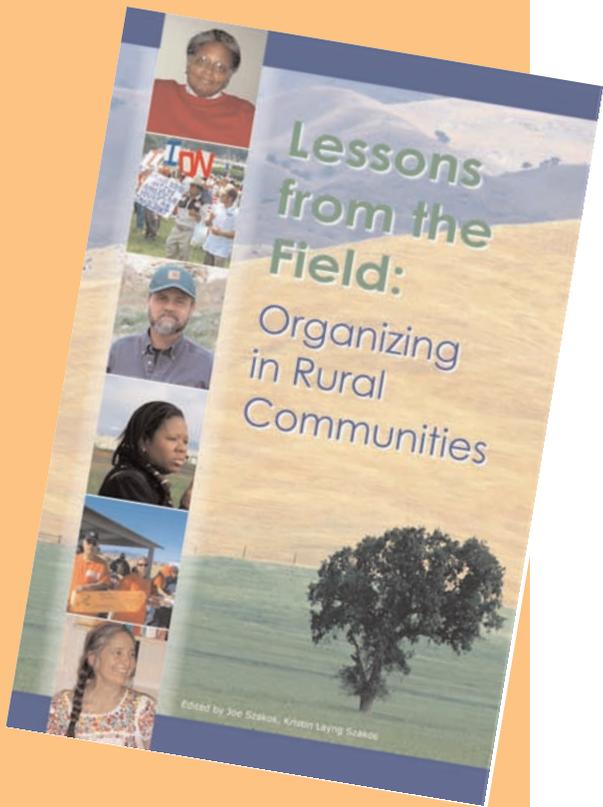
Seeing that VOP chapter members have been increasing their leadership on issue work, the staff and board devised a series of regional meetings across the state to see if people would take more leadership on fundraising as well. The answer was yes! VOP supporters found out how the Virginia Organizing Project raises and spends its money, shared successful fundraising practices, learned skills for grassroots fundraising, and joined with others to help VOP raise money to expand its important work. Sharing VOP's financial situation and letting folks know about our fundraising code of ethics has increased buy-in of VOP supporters to yet an even higher level.

We also expanded our grassroots fundraising methods. Examples include:

- More outlets collecting cell phones and printer cartridges — raising funds and keeping waste out of the landfills
- *We Make Change* book launch reception and concert featuring John McCutcheon
- Social Justice Bowl IV, in which volunteers and local groups are honored
- Six supporters wrote fundraising letters to friends on VOP's behalf

We increased our visibility and communications capacity:

VOP published three issues of its news magazine,



“Please understand that the kind of political outcomes we hope to see in Virginia cannot happen unless there is widespread buy-in to our democratic system. The Virginia Organizing Project, by empowering the least of our citizens, widens voter participation and ensures more responsive government at all levels.”

— Al Weed

virginia.organizing, with sections on understanding the economy and an Organizing Toolbox that is also in Spanish; groups across the state reach more supporters by publishing articles in *virginia.organizing*.

We worked with interns to update the web site, which in 2008 will have video clips and photos for the first time.

We continued to supply a steady stream of letters to the editor, op-eds and press releases to all 125 Virginia newspapers. VOP continues building relationships with editors who have come to expect well written opinion pieces on vital issues.

We are helping groups across Virginia to work with the Public News Service to provide more progressive radio programming in the state by “bridging mainstream and alternative media with progressive voices to foster mutual understanding rather than polarity.” We helped pull together 20 groups to form the Virginia News Connection, a service that distributes three radio spots each week to every radio station in the state, spreading the word on social and economic justice issues.

Filmmaker Herb E. Smith of Appalshop captured the work of five community organizers featured in *We Make Change* on film this year. Smith is creating a 40-minute documentary on community organizers that can be used in training or classroom settings. Those who are filmed will be given a copy of all footage for their group’s use.

We were proud of the publication of two books on community organizing:

With two major presidential candidates — Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton — offering their experience in community organizing as evidence of their ability to lead the country, many Americans are beginning to wonder just what a community organizer is. A timely new book by VOP Executive Director Joe Szakos and writer/editor Kristin Layng Szakos helps to demystify

this little-known profession and offer a glimpse into the daily lives of the people who make changing the world their life’s work. *We Make Change: Community Organizers Talk About What They Do — and Why*, published by Vanderbilt University Press, is a lively, readable collection of stories and observations by organizers across the United States.

Lessons from the Field: Organizing in Rural Communities is a collection of essays by experienced rural organizers, edited by Joe and Kristin Szakos. The essays show that in addition to the better-known urban organizing, there has been an equally powerful groundswell of rural community activism. The collection is being published as an “imprint” by Social Policy magazine.

Joint Plans of Work

VOP had a formal Joint Plan of Work with 27 groups to mutually strengthen the effectiveness of each organization.

Adopt a Soldier

In the past year, Adopt a Soldier volunteers have visited military hospitals, providing aid and comfort for returned troops on a weekly basis. They provided toiletries, financial assistance and transport for family member visits. They also took the soldiers on outings for meals with the VFW, shopping trips and museum visits. Adopt a Soldier has also been able to outfit over 15 apartments for soldiers upon release from the hospital.

Advancing Green Chemistry

As a new group, Advancing Green Chemistry worked to create an identity for the organization, cement relationships with members of the Green Chemistry and environmental health communities, identify key niches

AGC could and should fill, define specific projects, enlist allies and supporters and begin to receive private foundation funding.

African-American Teaching Fellows of Charlottesville/Albemarle

2007 was a year of administrative transition and program review and revision for the African-American

Teaching Fellows. Based on a review of the three years the program has been in operation and in the context of comparing it with other similar programs, the board developed new policies and procedures for recruitment, selection and monitoring of AATF Fellows.

Fundraising focused on building a core of individual contributors and there was wide community support for a successful Silent Art Auction. Two newsletters highlighted the stories of AATF Fellows and research findings on the impact of a diverse teaching staff were widely distributed.

Outreach efforts consisted of visits to African-American churches and establishing closer working relationships with area colleges with strong education departments and with several Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

Better Than Television

Better than Television provided community space and activities that promote empowerment and development of progressive alternatives.

Blue Ridge Radio Project

The Blue Ridge Radio Project collected funds and coordinated volunteer efforts to apply for two non-commercial Educational Radio licenses. They collected over \$8,000, hired an attorney and radio engineers and successfully completed a set of applications and submitted them to the Federal Communications Commission. Given the competition for radio applications, they continue raising funds and reviewing competing applications with the hope of negotiating with or winning over the competition before the Federal Communications Commission review process.

The Bridge | Progressive Arts Initiative

The Bridge worked to fulfill its mission of supporting the work of young and emerging artists and dissolving social barriers through arts-based civic engagement in the community of Charlottesville. Bridge staff and volunteers worked with youth in the community of Westhaven to create painted portraits of prominent black figures for the walls of the Westhaven



A large crowd enjoyed a delicious selection of soups and breads — and got to keep the soup bowl — at Social Justice Bowl IV.



The Bridge | Progressive Arts Initiative worked with the children at the Westhaven Afterschool Program to create portraits of prominent local and historical figures for the walls of the Westhaven Community Center.

"My VOP experience has strengthened my commitment to resolving the issues for the people of Appalachia, and given me an experience that I doubt many people in life will get. I know just a little bit more about how to change the world now."

– Brett Morris, former VOP Intern

Community Center. The Annual Film Series, showcasing the work of local, international and experimental filmmakers, celebrated its first birthday.

The Bridge collaborated with *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, bringing award-winning photojournalist Ashley Gilbertson to The Bridge for a public talk addressing his extensive work in Iraq. They supported the work of artist Johnny Fogg and The Mother.Father Project, bringing thousands of hand-made portraits of mothers and fathers, created by community members, to neighborhoods and schools city-wide. The Bridge partnered with The Living Education Center for a city-wide three-day event exploring the Columbus legacy and its implications on contemporary American culture.

Camping for All

Camping for All was founded with the mission of opening the world of camp to Central Virginians with special needs. They contacted 115 camps and summer programs, received and compiled data from 55 programs, began a database of year round programs for children with special needs and provided assistance with placements for 14 children with special needs.

The group partnered with the Special Education Advisory Committee of the Charlottesville City Schools to survey parents of children receiving special education services about their interest in and experiences with camp for their children, and with The Wintergreen Nature Foundation and Summer Arts @ the Museum. They made presentations to groups, held workshops and wrote publications to provide support to camps. Camping for All is developing a network of professionals and students who will be able to provide training for camps, and contacting special education departments at James Madison University and the University of Virginia concerning using their students as mentors for inclusion programs.

The Clinch Coalition

One of The Clinch Coalition's main priorities for the

past two years has been to prevent the Back Valley Timber Sale, a project which would allow logging in the same watershed which fueled the 2001 flood that swept an elderly man to his death. They worked with the local community to force the Forest Service to hold a public hearing, conducted biological surveys in the Back Valley area, and submitted extensive comments about the proposed timber sale. After the Forest Service decided to go ahead with the timber sale in May, TCC joined with other local organizations to appeal this decision, with the U.S. Forest Service withdrawing their ruling on the timber sale until further studies have been done.

A second mission this year was to increase the recreational opportunities in the High Knob area in order to replace extractive industries such as clearcutting with more sustainable industries such as ecotourism. To that end, TCC received a grant from the Virginia Recreational Trails fund to renovate a 24-mile trail running through the heart of the National Forest. The project has received widespread support and donations from businesses, politicians, scout troops, a high school ecology club, governing and tourism bodies and from other non-profits.

The annual photo, essay and art contest for school children attracted 200 entries, doubling the number of entries from 2006 and showcasing the students' awareness of a broad range of environmental issues.

Community Bikes

Community Bikes continued to recycle bikes and mentor youth in Charlottesville. Highlights of the year included keeping open shop hours for the general public two days per week, hosting several Bike-In Movies, and working with the Living Education Center and their Bike Riding/Bike Mechanics course as well as collaborating with students on the first newsletter. They also added a Women's Bike night to their open shop time, sent a representative to the BikeBike conference in Pittsburgh, collaborated with ACCT in bike safety

issues and began accepting monetary donations for bikes the volunteers have reconditioned to raise funds for shop tools, parts and supplies.

Earth Week

Earth Week Charlottesville serves the community by promoting awareness of local environmental organizations' projects and programs, and ways to live in an eco-friendly manner. On and around Earth Day 2007, they facilitated, sponsored and held numerous events, including a public festival showcasing and celebrating local environmental non-profits, government offices and businesses.

For the first time, in 2007 the City declared the festival to be Charlottesville's official Earth Day celebration. In addition, during Earth

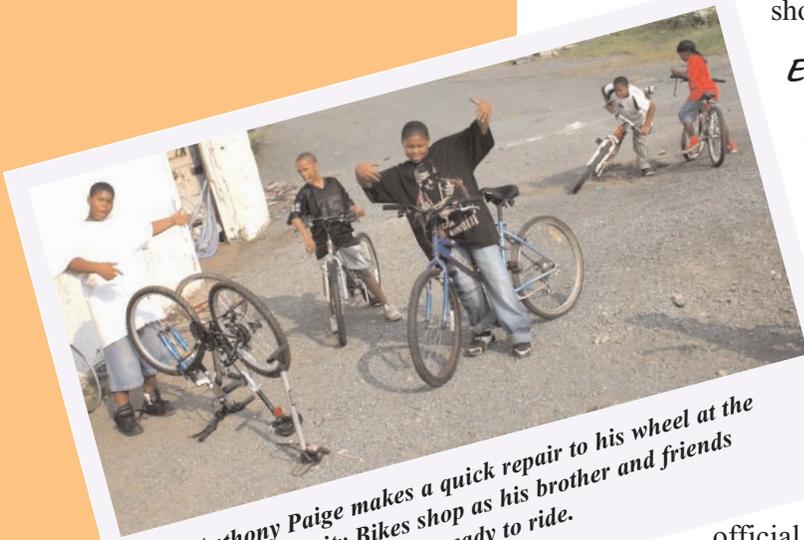
Week, Ralph Nader did a book signing at the Book Festival, Larry Gibson spoke on mountaintop removal, local musicians held three benefit concerts and 50 percent more green businesses were involved in Earth Week.

Environmental Health Sciences

EHS published EnvironmentalHealthNews.org and Above the Fold, its companion e-newsletter, every day, reaching over 2 million people a month with headlines about human health and the environment. Over 250 sites now use the RSS feeder service, including AlGore.com. During the year EHS web researchers and editors posted over 72,000 news articles, 3,000 editorials, 5,000 op-eds, 82 organizational reports and 105 scientific synopses. They launched www.DailyClimate.org, a daily aggregation of news about climate change that has been extremely well received. They received additional grants to support new publications on women's environmental health and on western land/resource issues. EHS's team of web researchers has grown to 42, including people as far flung as Belgium and Cambodia.

Foothills Child Advocacy Center

The Foothills Child Advocacy Center staff worked with 26 children (25 victims of sexual abuse and one victim of physical abuse) by conducting forensic interviews, coordinating the community response to the abuse allegations including case management, victim support, advocacy, counseling and therapy. In addition, Foothills CAC conducted a community forum entitled, "Resiliency and Recovery in Victims of Child Abuse" and hosted a workshop on "Abuse and Neglect in Children with Disabilities" and held trainings for



Anthony Paige makes a quick repair to his wheel at the Community Bikes shop as his brother and friends get ready to ride.



VOP canvassers went door-to-door in many Virginia communities to educate people about payday lending and to encourage them to contact their state legislators.

“My time at the Virginia Organizing Project has never been about putting something on a resume — I work at VOP out of a deep religious and moral conviction. I believe that every person deserves a decent standard of living, that health care is a human right, and that everyone is entitled to equal treatment regardless of sexual orientation, race, gender, or ability.”

— Kevin Simowitz, VOP Intern

approximately 150 on “Stewards of Children-Adults Protecting Children from Sexual Abuse.” Foothills CAC rented a dedicated child-friendly space to conduct child interviews and relocated its staff there.

Help Winneba Read

Help Winneba Read continued to collect used computers and books for its library project in Winneba, Ghana.

Interfaith Gay/Straight Alliance

IGSA met quarterly to share information about each of the participating congregations’ work in the area of furthering rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals and their families. They sponsored the local Q-munity Fair and staffed a table at the event.

IGSA maintains a website and e-mail distribution list for disseminating information and to assess where their perspective might be most useful in working for social justice for the LGBT community.

The People United

The People United’s fourth annual activist weekend of networking, information and skills-sharing gathered 70 people representing activist groups from across the state to discuss the themes of war, prisons and immigration. The group was the most diverse ever and for the first time required English/Spanish interpretation.

The People United mobilized support for the demonstration held by Smithfield workers at the shareholders meeting, demanding better wages and working conditions.

The group provided the non-violence training for the volunteer staff that coordinated a march and rally of more than 7,000 people on Labor Day weekend aimed at overturning an anti-immigrant resolution in Prince William County widely heralded as one of the harshest in the nation. Media coverage was favorable in part because the volunteers were so well prepared.

The People United called together a meeting of 50 immigrant rights activists for the beginnings of a statewide grassroots immigrant solidarity network.

In addition, The People United continues developing and maintaining a web of relationships; one of the primary vehicles for this is through workshops and trainings on themes including choosing issues in an activist organization, immigration, direct action training and street theater.

Public Housing Association of Residents

A highlight for PHAR this year was the successful completion of the Leadership Development Intern Program by six public housing residents. The Interns participated in classes, attended workshops and City Council and Charlottesville Redevelopment and Housing Authority (CHRA) board meetings. One of the goals of the leadership program was to encourage graduates of the Intern Program to get involved in the greater community — three interns were appointed to local boards and commissions.

PHAR continued to advocate for the rights of residents, including providing recommendations to CRHA regarding the trespassing policy and implementing a safety and security survey to the residents of Crescent Halls as CRHA was considering the use of cameras. PHAR has a representative on the Charlottesville/Albemarle Youth Development Network Coordinating Committee.

Quinn Dam Project

A Virginia family honored the memory of their mother by granting one of her final requests, to help restore the Tye River in Nelson County. By removing a former mill dam on the river that Bess Quinn had inherited from her father, more than 20 miles of the river ran free for the first time in roughly 100 years. This removal created one of the longest free-flowing rivers in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed and will benefit future gen-

erations of humans, fish, birds and other animals. American Rivers, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, and the Virginia Organizing Project all teamed up to accomplish this task.

RAIL Solution

Emphasizing the environmental advantages of freight rail transportation has been a heightened focus for RAIL Solution this year, helped by the Virginia Energy Plan which makes clear that transportation is the largest energy consuming sector of our economy. A disappointment this year was the Final Environmental Impact Statement for I-81 expansion, which rejected rail altogether, as RAIL Solution had anticipated.

Legislation from the 2006 Virginia General Assembly called for a multi-state I-81 Freight Rail Study, which is currently underway. RAIL Solution anticipates the results in spring of 2008, and are hopeful the study will help bring the imprimatur of independent validation and acceptability to a rail vision in the I-81 Corridor.

RAIL Solution sent several delegates to an organizational meeting in Carlisle, Pennsylvania to discuss formation of an I-81 Corridor Coalition and continues to advocate for a national "Steel Interstate" concept.

Richmond Tenants Organization

The Richmond Tenants Organization has been accelerating its organizing around the issue of demolition and disposition. RTO submitted official comments to the Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority (RRHA) in early May, expressing concerns regarding RRHA's proposals, as listed in its 2007 Annual Plan, to demolish one housing development, to sell off units from two others, and to begin surveying residents in anticipation of tearing down the city's largest development over the next few years. RTO has also undertaken outreach at RRHA public meetings designed to inform residents of properties scheduled for redevelopment activity.

Rooms for a Reason

Rooms for a Reason improved five rooms for people dealing with cancer and another for a 13-year-old boy with leukemia. The project works to provide as comfortable a setting as possible for people dealing with major medical problems.



VOP Leadership Institute graduates and interns developed a classism workshop. Pictured here from left to right are Kevin Simowitz, Sandra Cook, Galina Boyarinova, Kim Lincoln, Jodi Mincemoyer, Juanita Brown, Ruth Snider and Danica Jamison.



Rooms for a Reason created a more comfortable living environment for people dealing with cancer.

"One of the most adventurous careers available is grassroots organizing for social change. The pay is lousy, the hours are long, but you won't find better company anywhere."

— Barbara Ehrenreich, author

SHEA Collaborative

The SHEA Collaborative launched its website and issued its first request for project proposals for community projects open to Charlottesville area groups and individuals. The following seven groups responded with program proposals:

- Virginia Art of the Book Center: host of a contest and series of printing workshops featuring art by teens in the region (co-sponsored by Virginia Festival of the Book and Virginia Foundation for the Humanities Center for the Book)
- Artisans Center of Virginia: Clay Mobile outreach program
- Play On Theater — Youth Theater Education Program
- The Bridge — Intergenerational Photography and Audio Documentary Workshop
- Computers4Kids: Summer Social Justice Arts Camp
- Charlottesville City Schools Adult Learning Center — Community Culture Quilt Project
- Focus: The Heart of Healing

A panel of community representatives reviewed the proposals in December 2007 for recommendation to the SHEA board in January 2008.

Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards

SAMS is dedicated to fighting the effects of coal on communities in Southwest Virginia with two campaigns. The first is fighting a 1,200-acre surface mine that would affect four communities in Wise County. Since the campaign began, the permit in question has been significantly delayed as local opposition has grown.

SAMS has also been involved in a statewide campaign to stop Dominion's plans for a coal-fired plant in St. Paul. SAMS has been working with Wise Energy for Virginia, a five-member coalition comprised of Appalachian Voices, Sierra Club Virginia Chapter,

Chesapeake Climate Action Network and the Southern Environmental Law Center to gather signatures for a mile-long petition of citizens opposed to the construction of this plant. They are preparing for the State Corporation Commission hearing regarding the permit for the proposed plant.

Virginia Forest Watch

Virginia Forest Watch was instrumental in establishing the Forest Issues Work Group (FIWG) of the Virginia Conservation Network, a statewide network of over 115 environmental groups, and continues to play a lead role. In the past year, the FIWG completed two reports, one on Forest Certification, and a second on the conflict between local authority and state authority, under the Department of Forestry, over logging practices.

VAFW's public lands program worked to protect one of the largest assemblages of public lands in the Appalachians, the 1.8 million acres of the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests (GWNF and JNF). The Virginia Ridge and Valley Act passed in the full U.S. House of Representatives on a voice vote. Members, friends and allies of VAFW played critical roles over many years to bring this about. The Act will permanently protect seven stand-alone Wilderness Areas, two National Scenic Areas, and six expanded Wilderness Areas on 55,000 acres of the JNF. The Bill has gone to the U.S. Senate, where it has the support of both of Virginia's senators. Virginia Forest Watch published its "Vision for the George Washington National Forest Plan" in response to the Forest Service's Plan Revision, which intends to weaken protections for the GWNF. VAFW monitored the two National Forests on a day-to-day basis and opposed the controversial Back Creek and Marshall timber sales.

The Virginia Forest Watch worked to protect "Virginia Mountain Treasure" areas on the GWNF by co-leading hikes in these areas and by encouraging people to sign up to "adopt" these areas. The publication, "Virginia's Mountain Treasures: The Unprotected Wildlands of the George Washington National Forest," will soon be released by a coalition of groups, including VAFW.

Virginians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty

2007 saw attempts by the Virginia General Assembly to greatly expand the death penalty. Legislation was passed to make the killing of a witness and the killing of a judge additional “eligibility factors” for capital punishment. The General Assembly also attempted to eliminate the “Triggerman Rule” which limits death sentences to the actual killer. Governor Tim Kaine vetoed all of the death penalty expansion bills. Two survived his veto: the killing of a judge and witness were enacted into law. The sustaining of his veto of the bills eliminating the “Triggerman Rule” was a major victory.

VADP showings of *Race To Execution* were held in Fairfax and Harrisonburg, with both programs well attended. Panels were held following the screenings with Harold C.

Wilson, a death row exoneree and Jack Payden-Travers, director of VADP. In addition murder victim’s family members Linell and Megan Smith spoke at the Harrisonburg venue. In Fairfax the panel also included the scriptwriter, Chris Intagliata, death row family member Terri Steinberg, and attorney Bill Moffit.

Westhaven Afterschool Program

The Westhaven Afterschool Program provided 136 children with essential school supplies. During Black History Month the children participated in an art activity with The Bridge/Progressive Arts Initiative. The children picked eight influential local and historical Black Americans and wrote a small bio of their lives and accomplishments. The children sketched and painted a silhouette portrait of these heroes and mounted them in the Westhaven Community Center as a reminder that all things are possible and dreams can become reality if you work hard, create goals and strive to achieve them.

One of the UVA afterschool volunteers worked with the children to transform a vacant area behind the Westhaven center into a play area equipped with a new basketball court, handball set, picnic tables, benches and a garden.

The children enjoyed field trips to the circus, an apple orchard, a local organic farm, Kings Dominion and McGuffey Art Center, where the children were able to create their own piece of pottery. During the annual Thanksgiving dinner the children were rewarded for their accomplishments throughout the year and thank you certificates were presented to supporters and volunteers.



Kim Lincoln (left) and other William & Mary students support the Smithfield workers. Lincoln interned with VOP during the summer.



VOP Chairperson Janice "Jay" Johnson gives the eulogy at a funeral service to mourn the death of the minimum wage increase.

"VOP is one of the few non-profits I know that has their ear to the ground all over Virginia on multiple social justice issues of importance to vulnerable Virginians. They don't just talk about change, they empower people to make it. Their always quick response, deep understanding of both problems and solutions, and dedication to the cause has made them one of the key players in the coalition to end predatory lending. VOP's passion to right wrongs in our commonwealth means they'll be around for years to come!"

– Helen O’Beirne

Westhaven Nursing Clinic

The Clinic has continued to be a driving force for providing information, resources and programs to the public housing community. The focus has been to “meet people where they are” and create a unique delivery of services that have a whole person approach.

Monthly activities included BINGO, which also couples as an opportunity for blood pressure screening. The Women’s Group included a healthy lunch and a discussion about a health issue that concerns women. Over the summer the Clinic served as the weigh-in center for the QCC Walks exercise program.

There was a concerted effort to collect data to track clinic activities, and the Parish Nurse alone had 1,178 service encounters for the year. The UVA School of Nursing funded a second nurse for the latter six months of 2007 and the Clinic served as a field trip and practicum site for first year UVA medical students.

The Clinic helped plan Westhaven Community Day, coordinating health and blood pressure screening, glu-

cose testing and HIV screening and free sports physicals for youth. There was also a special recognition of a public housing resident who is now a Habitat for Humanity homeowner. The Clinic served as the distribution center for holiday baskets and gifts for resident families.

The low for this year was the tragic death of two community members. The Parish nurses provided spiritual support and coordinated mental health outreach for those affected by the loss.

Wild Virginia

Wild Virginia’s new Conservation Director’s first year was marked by monthly hikes, action alerts, a 50 percent increase in the e-mail list, a refined Powerpoint presentation and graphical table display, informative newsletters, an increase in WV membership, over 18 presentations and improved communication with allies and the U.S. Forest Service. He continued to encourage public participation in the Forest Planning process and in forest protection.

Wild Virginia purchased a new laptop and enabled it with ARCGIS 9.0 that can produce maps and analysis at the stand level for Virginia’s National Forests. Wild Virginia was a leader in organizing conservation groups to unite behind a single platform for the George Washington National Forest Plan and continued to monitor, visit and document all important Forest Service projects. Through their efforts at least a half-mile of road building and three timber sale units were dropped in 2007.

In cooperation with Living Education Center for Ecology and the Arts, Wild Virginia held their second Annual Treehuggers’ Ball, a successful fundraiser.



The Virginia Organizing Project held a media conference in Richmond on January 4 to announce VOP's 2007 legislative priorities.

Virginia Organizing Project Statement of Beliefs

- We believe that all people should be treated fairly and with dignity in all aspects of life, regardless of race, class, gender, religion, sexual orientation, age, ability or country of origin.
 - We believe that every person in the Commonwealth is entitled to a living wage and benefit package that is sufficient to provide the basic necessities of life, including adequate housing, a nutritious diet, proper child care, sound mental and physical health care, and a secure retirement.
 - We believe that every person is entitled to an equal educational opportunity.
 - We believe that community, economic, social and environmental policy should be developed with the greatest input from the people it is meant to serve, and that the policies should promote, celebrate and sustain the human and natural resources of Virginia.
 - We believe in the elimination of the extremes of wealth and poverty, in a progressive tax system based on the ability to pay, and in making the nation's financial systems, including the Federal Reserve Bank, more responsive to the average citizen's needs.
 - We believe that we should enhance and celebrate diversity in our community and in our state.
- We believe that those who have positions of authority in our governmental bodies, law enforcement agencies and institutions of learning should reflect the diversity of our communities.
- We believe that our public officials should be held accountable for their actions and decisions.
- We believe in the rights of workers, consumers, shareholders and taxpayers to democratic self-organization.
- We believe in the elimination of the death penalty in all cases because it is fundamentally inhumane, ineffective as a deterrent to crime, and disproportionately and unjustly applied against people of color and those who are economically or educationally disadvantaged.
- We believe that physical and mental health are parts of personal and community well-being; we believe that Virginians have a broad public health and economic interest in ensuring that adequate care is available to low- and moderate-income residents.



VOP supporters held demonstrations across the state to encourage legislators to protect payday loan borrowers from excessive interest rates.

"Over the last three years, VOP has shaped my values toward change and change-making. I'm beyond excited about joining the professional staff and cannot think of more rewarding work — out of college or frankly, during a lifetime."

— Richael Faithful, who was a VOP Intern prior to joining the VOP staff in 2007



VOP State Governing Board

*Sandra Cook, Vice-Chairperson
Jason Guard, Treasurer
Janice "Jay" Johnson, Chairperson
Ladelle McWhorter, Secretary
Jodi Mincemoyer
Denise Smith
Kristen Tilley
Karen Waters*



*. . . real people, dealing with real problems,
working for real solutions*



Virginia Organizing Project

*703 Concord Avenue
Charlottesville, VA 22903-5208
(434) 984-4655
(434) 984-2803
www.virginia-organizing.org*