UGA Students Help Preserve Oral History
By Ilka McConnell, Sue Chapman, and Shannon Knepp

Students from the University of Georgia School of Social Work have teamed with the Archway Partnership and the Hart County Historical Committee to preserve the county’s oral history.

After the unexpected passing of a member of the historical society in 2009, a member of the local Historical Committee came to the Archway Partnership asking to find a way to preserve the county’s rich history. This, along with the upcoming 50th anniversary of the Hartwell Dam created a need within the community to document the county’s history.

“If we don’t sit down and gather the history of our county from these community members, then we will eventually lose that opportunity,” said Hart County Historical Society president, George Nolan. “How else are we to educate those who follow behind us if we don’t accurately capture that history now?”

Collaborating with the Archway Partnership, students from UGA’s School of Social Work stepped in to fill the task of interviewing older members of the Hart County community. Students from Professor Stacey Kolomer’s “Working with Older Adults” course have been traveling to Hart County since the Fall of 2009 to create a montage of audio and video clips that can be used by the county. Interviews have been done yearly since, and have been used to promote the historical aspect of the county.

Within Hart County, tourism has been a top priority since 2009. More specifically, the county has been working with the Historical Committee to advance historical tourism. In 2010, a walking tour podcast of downtown Hartwell was created to boost enthusiasm of the historical aspect of the county.

Clips of the interviews done by the students were used in the podcast, as well as photographs depicting historical pictures of county landmarks. These photographs were obtained through the Hart County Historical committee. The podcast can be found through this link: http://vimeo.com/19182124.

Audio and video clips from the interviews will also be featured in a mini-documentary currently in production celebrating the upcoming 50th anniversary of the Hartwell Dam.

For students, this project provided the ability to obtain experience in the field of Social Work, while also getting to learn more about the history of Georgia from some remarkable sources.

“This project has been beneficial for the students because it gives them the opportunity to step out of the classroom,” Kolomer said. “It’s not just some assignment; it’s actually contributing to something.”

For the community, they received the opportunity to not only document the county’s history, but also watch and learn about the older members of the community.

“Those of us involved are learning things about Hart County that we did not know. We’re not only getting the facts, but we’re getting a personal history,” Nolan said.

Advancing Community Priorities: Tourism is one of the community-identified Archway priorities in Hart County. Through collaboration between Hart County locals who were willing to share their time and memories, local volunteers who helped coordinate the interviews, the Hart County Historical Society, the University of Georgia’s School of Social Work, and the Hart County Archway Partnership, the community has benefitted from preserving local history and advancing historical tourism.