Hartwell’s New Historic Downtown Walking Tour
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With support from the Hart County Archway Partnership, a Hartwell Downtown Walking Tour Committee was formed that is dedicated to preserving local history and promoting heritage tourism. Committee members represented a number of local organizations, including the Hart County Historical Society & Museum, the John Benson Chapter of Daughters of the American Revolution, Hart County Library, Hartwell Downtown Development Authority, Hartwell Historic Preservation Commission, Georgia Mountains Regional Commission, and the Hart County Archway Partnership. The committee developed a new historic downtown Hartwell walking tour which highlights 32 buildings, homes, and churches. The new walking tour has helped bring in tourists and inform them about the history of the downtown area.

Committee members selected the properties to feature on the tour, shared many stories from downtown Hartwell’s past, created short descriptions of each property, took photos, and reviewed all the information for accuracy. To design and print the brochure, the committee worked with a University of Georgia graphic design student, staff from Information Technology Outreach Services at UGA’s Carl Vinson Institute of Government, and UGA’s Printing Department.

The committee applied for and received a grant from the Hart Electric Membership Corporation (EMC) Foundation’s Operation Round Up. The funds were used to print the walking tour brochure and to purchase small metal signs with the tour stop numbers for each of the properties. Funds were also used to purchase bronze National Register historical plaques to establish permanent, visible documentation of the significance of the downtown properties on the tour.

The next step of the project incorporated new media. An Archway Partnership graduate assistant in telecommunications filmed and produced a video version of the walking tour that can be downloaded as an audio/video podcast or viewed on DVD. An oral history interview of the owners of Bailes Cobb, a third-generation family-owned department store in downtown Hartwell, was conducted by a UGA Social Work student as part of an oral history project. Part of that interview is included in the walking tour video. Also, local historians and committee members provided photos from their records, and others were located by searching Vanishing Georgia, an online photo collection maintained by the State of Georgia Archives.

Nancy Clark, the committee chair, told The Hartwell Sun “it is incredibly important for a community interested in tourism to have a downtown tour.” With Clark’s leadership, it will continue to be an ongoing project. “We hope to revisit later on and see what can be added to the tour,” she said. The Hart County Chamber of Commerce, Hartwell DDA, and the Hart County Partnership are currently partnering on a “behind the scenes” addition to the walking tour that will feature photos and information about the downtown properties on the tour. A photography student from UGA’s Lamar Dodd School of Art spent time this summer shooting photos of chic loft apartments and other downtown locales that are not normally viewable to visitors. The group has applied for grants for downtown signage to help highlight these hidden treasures.

Advancing Community Priorities: The Hart County Archway Partnership identified tourism as one of the main priorities. Utilizing resources through the University of Georgia’s Archway Partnership, Hart County has taken a large step by developing the Historic Downtown Walking Tour that will attract many more tourists in upcoming years.