

**Preliminary Thoughts on a Possible
Vision and Market Positioning for
The Stanardsville Area (Revised 1/15/08)**

The Town and *STAR* need to have a brief statement of what they believe the Stanardsville Area could be like in 15 to 20 years if a revitalization program is implemented successfully. The description should include: the main features of the Town, and how the Town will be attractive to new and established businesses and residents, and to tourists visiting the area. Such a statement will focus our revitalization efforts, make clear to potential investors why it makes sense to invest, encourage local residents to participate, and satisfy sources of grants that we have a realistic plan.

In brief, by 2020 the Stanardsville Area will have developed a vibrant economy by capitalizing on its special assets, including historic buildings, rural setting and its closeness to the Shenandoah National Park, the Skyline Drive and the Appalachian Trail. Its specialty shops and personal service providers make it appealing to local and regional customers who never, or rarely, shop at mass merchandisers. Likewise, local coffee shops, restaurants and inns offer a unique blend of food and eating experience. Well-defined moderate and middle-income population segments love Stanardsville for its peaceful pace, specialty merchandise, friendliness and lack of traffic. The Area's features and appeal are described in greater detail in the sections that follow.

This preliminary statement outlines some relevant features of an imagined revitalized Stanardsville Area and identifies potential commercial activities. It conjectures as to who might be business owners, residents and visitors, and suggests how the Town might be marketed. The statement is written as if it is a retrospective review from the year 2020.

Features

The primary distinguishing feature of the Town is its robust commercial base, consisting of some two dozen locally-owned retail and service establishments. The increase in the number of businesses was made possible as a result of new fill-in building and restoration/conversion of existing buildings on Main Street, new buildings on Ford Avenue north and south of Main Street, and the growth of a shopping area along Stanard Street and up Blakey Street. A new 'professional' building stands where once Greene County had offices before they were moved to above the Library. There is now a critical mass of commercial establishments, many local residents are employed in the new businesses, and Stanardsville is a destination for shoppers from the surrounding area and further afield. The Town is justifiably proud of the fact that most of its historic buildings, some from the 1700s, have retained their authentic condition or have been restored to their former glory.

Services: Businesses provide services such as dry-cleaners, printing and packaging, medical care, barber shop, beauty salon, pet care and realtors. As Stanardsville is the County Seat, there are several legal offices. However, these have mostly chosen to locate on the second floor above retail stores or in the 'professional' building.

Restaurants: Residents and visitors have several restaurants and coffee shops to choose from for their daily java, a light lunch or a fine meal. A 'quick-service' store sells fresh produce, a few groceries and a wide range of prepared foods for busy two-income families, many of who have a lengthy commute to Albemarle and Charlottesville.

Retail: Stores include a range encompassing: antiques and collectibles; wine, cheese and gourmet foods; organic basics and nutritional aids; new and used books and magazines; gifts; long-established hardware and drug stores; flowers; arts and crafts; apparel and footwear; sports gear appropriate to local activities - e.g. hiking, camping, fishing, cycling and running; and a pet store. The shopping center has become more a part of the Town and is easily accessible by sidewalk. New shops have been added, extending down to and along Main Street.

Local shops have defined a merchandise and service profile that differentiates them from the mass merchandisers that dominate the Ruckersville market. They offer unique or specialized items not carried by mass merchandisers. Moreover, most are passionate about their specialized niche, highly knowledgeable about their product and enthusiastic about helping their customers.

Farmers' Market: After many years in which the Farmers' Market run by the Ruritan Club shifted from location to location, they found a permanent location for the market a decade or more ago. The Main Street Business Association recognized that by working with the Ruritans a farmers' market would help generate traffic and decided to support the effort. Today, farmers from far and wide come on Wednesday and Saturday when the market is open and sell a wide range of fresh produce, baked goods, meat, cheese, flowers and confections. The Stanardsville Area market draws customers from Ruckersville, Harrisonburg, Albemarle and Orange. Local retailers and restaurateurs have found that farmers' market customers spend time in the Town, usually enjoy coffee or a meal, and shop in other stores. Typically they are people with significant disposable income who, generally, are not 'price-sensitive'.

Hi-tech: The professional building, in addition to doctors and lawyer, also contains some small hi-tech businesses that are contractors to the National Ground Intelligence Center. They, and an internet business started by local entrepreneurs, are served by a high-speed broadband service established throughout the Town.

Accommodation: The Stanardsville Area has many fine places to stay. These range from rustic cabins to the utmost in sophistication at the Queen Anne B&B. Some visitors love to stay in comfortable cottages and take their meals in Town. Others enjoy rustic cottages where they can prepare their own meals or buy prepared meals in Town. Still others enjoy staying at the historic Lafayette Inn, taking all their meals there and using it as a base from which they can take trips to Central Virginia's many historic sites.

Total revenue from commercial establishments is close to \$10 million (2005 dollars) and the businesses contribute several hundred thousand dollars in revenues to the County through sales, beverage, personal property and real estate taxes.

Residential: The commercial activity would not be possible if it were not for the new residential communities within the Town and in Ruckersville. Three new developments have grown during the past 15 years, each with a different character. One is a moderately expensive town home development with great interconnectivity with the Town. Sidewalks and bicycle paths lace the neighborhood and allow residents to enjoy the generous amounts of open space that have been set aside for parks and gardens. The terrain is relatively flat and two entrances provide easy access to the Town. An upscale development offers large lots and beautiful views. It too has easy walking and driving access to the Town. A handsome development of affordable town houses serves the growing population of middle and moderate income residents. Many of these are young people with starter families who are delighted to be near Greene's fine school complex. However, there are also residents who have lived their long lives in Greene and enjoy having a home where someone else takes care of the maintenance. The developer has accommodated the needs of both segments, setting aside areas for kids to play and also parkettes where older people can sit and enjoy the passing seasons. Together more than 650 homes have been added to the Stanardsville Area's housing base and increased its population to over 2,500 people. The average household income is roughly equivalent to the average for all Virginia households and in the aggregate amounts to \$40 million per year (\$2005).

Education: Greene has seen a blossoming of its educational system during the past two decades. At the turn of the century it had a solid base with exceptional programs for vocational technology and special education. It built on these to create a system that exceeded SOL requirements and trained people for successful careers in the new economy. Today, the system also has a Community College campus and educational program that is the envy of many communities. Coupled with the basic community college curriculum is an exciting program for lifetime learning that appeals to adults of all ages. This draws outstanding lecturers, including retired executives from public and private careers, retired professors from UVa and JMU and noted authors and experts living in the area.

Amenities: A major effort has been made to create amenities for the community. There are two parks and several other parkettes. A walking and cycling trail circles the Town, in part passing through some of the new communities. In addition to the library and the senior center, a community center is well-used by community groups and churches. Adjacent to the new community center is one of the parkettes, and beside it outdoor basketball courts and a skateboarding area. These amenities serve residents along Ford Avenue and in the new townhouse development. The Town hopes that one of the open areas in the vicinity can be converted into a larger venue where concerts and other events can be held. The County's Museum records a history that dates back 8,000 years. The Battle of Stanardsville commemoration has been an annual event for over three decades and draws close to 10,000 visitors to the area each year.

The Stanardsville Area has capitalized on its rural setting and its proximity to the Shenandoah National Park, the Appalachian Trail and the Skyline Drive. It has also focused on attracting the wine aficionados who enjoy visiting the many fine wineries in Madison, Greene and Albemarle. Its Fine Wine Trail draws thousands each year, many staying overnight in one of the comfortable local B&Bs or Inns.

Participants

The Stanardsville Area has built a reputation for being a great place to visit, live, work and/or own a business. It has retained its rural character and scenery, and is very appealing to people who no longer want to cope with urban sprawl, dense neighborhoods, crime and traffic jams. It is especially attractive to retirees who can capitalize on their equity in homes in Northern Virginia, New York, New Jersey and New England and buy superior housing at lower prices in an ideal urban-rural setting.

Residents: The Stanardsville area now has a mix of residents and visitors who are attractive customers for independent business owners. They include:

- Retirees with high disposable incomes, living in one of Greene's Active Adult communities. They prefer to shop in smaller stores where they receive personal service and can find unique products. They enjoy a walk in the Town, rather than driving to the retail strips North of Charlottesville or East of Harrisonburg where the majority of stores are owned by national chains.
- Long-time residents who meet an increasing percentage of their needs without having to go far from their homes. Moderately-priced stores supply this group's basic needs, while specialty stores provide shopping opportunities for special occasions and gift buying.
- Young, moderate income households who wrestle with one or more jobs to make ends meet while raising new families are a significant third segment. Stanardsville shopping provides for unplanned purchases, pre-prepared 'quick-food' alternatives and special occasion shopping. Some also seek better-quality hardware and fixtures as they customize their new homes. However, most of these households depend on bulk purchasing and low-price buying from mass merchandisers in Ruckersville and Albemarle.
- Most stores have been unable to be competitive in meeting the needs of low income households. The Wal-Mart Superstore and other box stores in Ruckersville have captured the segment focused on low-cost, foreign-produced and mass-marketed goods, produce and groceries. Local stores serve this population, when they do, by being the provider of things forgotten or when supplies unexpectedly run out.
- Many tourists visit the Town. They include vacationers spending a few quiet days in one of the local cottages, hikers stopping for supplies, bikers on long treks along the beautiful country roads, wine lovers visiting the local wineries and stopping for a meal, history buffs visiting nearby homes of Presidents, and bird watchers. Others come to research their roots, working in the Greene County Genealogical Center. While the tourists spend substantial amounts of money, it is largely a seasonal business that peaks during the fall leaf season.

Business Owners: The merchants, service providers and hi-tech entrepreneurs have established their businesses in the Stanardsville Area largely because they were attracted by its ambience. Although they sought commercial opportunities, the lifestyle, rural setting and community values played a significant role in their decisions. Incentives provided by the County and a *STAR* loan fund contributed to a few of the owners' decisions, but only to a limited extent.

Five main groups of owners emerged:

- Local residents and 'returnees' who gradually gained confidence that the local economy would continue to expand and flourish. They quit jobs outside the community and invested in opportunities they saw could provide a good income while they enjoyed a more satisfying lifestyle. Their roots in the community and understanding of its consumer base gave them an advantage in identifying and capturing emerging market opportunities.
- Young retirees from Northern Virginia and beyond first chose the central Virginia region as a great place to retire. Although retired, they were not satisfied with playing golf, working out or traveling all the time. Still young and vigorous, they decided to establish the business they had long dreamed of having as they pursued careers in other fields. High profits are secondary to satisfying a love of the merchandise or service that had formerly been a hobby. They have become good mentors to many local young people working in their businesses. Several have contributed their skills toward enhancing the programs offered by Greene County's Technical Education Center.
- A third, but smaller, segment is a group of 'career switchers'. They have pursued careers in other fields, accumulated resources and decided to raise their families in a setting that has good schools, little crime, a healthy environment, a sense of community and a slower pace. In spite of their former careers, they remain innovative and success-oriented. As their businesses have grown they have made increasing contributions to the betterment of the Town, the County's schools and community activities.
- A few hi-tech businesses have established local offices. These have been influenced by the wishes of their employees for offices located in nice settings with appropriate amenities. The relatively lower costs of Greene and its easy accessibility to Albemarle and Charlottesville were contributing factors to the selection choices made by the companies.
- Dentists, doctors and lawyers were drawn to Stanardsville because of its base of potential customers and, in the case of the lawyers, the fact that it is Greene's County seat. However, since all of them could practice in any number of communities, it was the special character and assets of the Stanardsville Area that drew them here.

The success of the Stanardsville Area Revitalization program is due to its long term commitment to *"Restoring it Vitality... Retaining its charm... Serving its People"*. As a result, today the Area is a wonderful place to live, raise a family, start a business and visit.

Marketing

Many people from a cross section of the Stanardsville Area contributed to 'branding' the identity of the community. Its marketing campaign to attract business owners and entrepreneurs has been built around three elements:

Target Audience: Two groups were primary targets for the campaign. First, it focused on young retirees, 50 to 60 years old, financially comfortable and anticipating moving from Northern Virginia and beyond to an area north of the deep south. Second, it sought successful young couples in their 30s who were seeking a lifestyle more conducive to raising healthy families, and were willing to switch careers to do so.

Positioning Statement: "A move to the Stanardsville Area will transform your life and fulfill your dreams." The friendly little town of Stanardsville is where you and your loved ones can have a great lifestyle while owning a successful business built around your lifetime interest.

Reason to Believe: Our promise has been accepted because Stanardsville can demonstrate that it has a thriving business community of like-minded professionals and business owners. Local natives, returning children and new arrivals are here because the environment suits them: friendly people, cultural and economic diversity, strong community values, a beautiful rural setting, historic buildings, a slower pace of life, low crime, good schools and growing household incomes. Being at the gateway to the Blue Ridge Mountains, the ATC and the Shenandoah National Park brings many tourists and offers many opportunities for healthy personal relaxation.

The marketing campaign has focused on advertising in magazines read by the target audience, such as: regional magazines, "Preservation", food-related periodicals, outdoor magazines and AARP publications.

Some people will view this vision for the Stanardsville Area as fantastic, some will view it as fantasy and yet others will view it with foreboding. We know the area will be far different in 2020 than it is today, and that it will not evolve in precisely the way described above. However, if there are no deliberate efforts to improve the area it will either decline or be developed according to the whim of the market.

The ultimate vision that results from these planning efforts sets a goal toward which we should strive. It should reflect the common hopes and values of the community. This vision should also be consistent with the goals and values captured described in the vision statement contained in the County's Comprehensive Plan (which was approved in 2005).

The objective of *STAR* is to foster public-private partnerships that will help make the vision a reality. This will be in the interests of everybody in the community if the vision reflects the wishes of a broad cross-section of individuals. *STAR* seeks your thoughts about what the vision for the Stanardsville Area should be. Please send comments to dmpamenter@embarqmail.com.