

## PAIR ON THE FRONT LINES PRESERVING LOCAL HISTORY

by Amy Davis

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Randy Williams, director of cultural resources management at the Upper Cumberland Development District, admires the trail head of the Monterey portion of Rails With Trails, located behind Monterey Farmer's Market. The project is one of many UCDD has been involved with over the last decade. Ty Kernea | Herald-Citizen

**UPPER CUMBERLAND** -- When it comes to preserving local history, they're on the front lines.



Randy Williams, director of cultural resources management at the Upper Cumberland Development District, and Dawn Kupferer, assistant director, spend their days in a variety of ways, from exploring historic buildings and trails to researching and writing grants to finding community champions who share in their passion to preserve, promote and protect the area's cultural and natural resources.

And that's no small job considering they serve a 14-county region -- a vast 5,000 square miles of rich history and cultural

heritage.

"It's very interesting," said Williams, who worked five years with the Tennessee Division of Archeology and seven years as a Tennessee Tech University instructor of English before joining UCDD in 2002. The agency had received a grant from the Tennessee Historical Commission to begin the historic preservation program, which has since grown to encompass cultural resources management.

"There are fun things about it, but there are frustrating things, too, because historic preservation is not at the top of funding totem poles," he said. "It's usually low priority, so that's another reason we have to look far and wide to find grants to fund some of these projects."

Kupferer came on board two years ago after having worked in environmental education in Georgia.

"The fun part is you're out there on the front lines making sure these places are preserved and making sure we don't lose our heritage," she said. "But you're also on the front lines watching pieces of our heritage disappear."

So the two have their work cut out for them, juggling at least half a dozen preservation projects at any given time -- projects like the Walton Road Scenic Byway, which is one of the Upper Cumberland's oldest pioneer wagon roads spanning through Putnam, Cumberland, Roane and Smith counties.

"One reason we've really emphasized the scenic byway is that it's such a good cultural resource management tool," Williams said. "You're bringing all the natural and cultural resources of that 90-mile corridor together for the communities along the byway to develop plans for future usage. It's really a convenient way to bring all those resources together, and it gets a lot of buy-in from the local communities because they can see its value to their individual community."

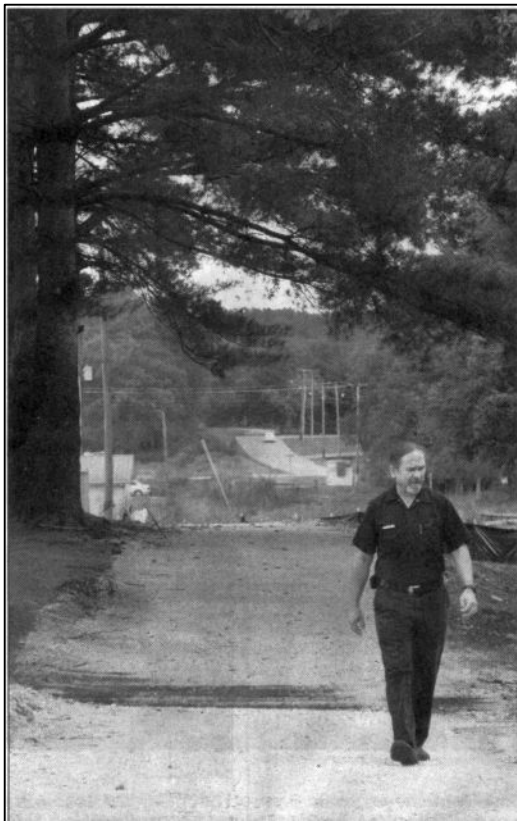
Williams pointed out that with current economic and political uncertainties, communities must look beyond traditional avenues of economic and community development -- and UCDD is ready to help.

"I think we've really done a good job of that over the last 10 years, and that's why our program is recognized as one of the best in the state, and I'm very proud of that," he said.

Kupferer elaborated on that point.

"Sometimes in these rural areas, folks go back to the same funding sources over and over again," she said. "It takes people who really have a vision of what the whole region can be, and I think Randy's knowledge of this region and his historical and archeological background play really well into that. We need to promote this area as a region, do these regional projects and go after new funding streams -- always be on the cutting edge of where the money is."

One such funding source UCDD has successfully tapped into is the Transportation Enhancement Grant, which has funded such projects as the new Dale Hollow Welcome Center in Pickett County and the revitalization of the Cannon County Courthouse. Recently, Williams and Kupferer learned that a grant for White County's Bon Air Mountain Historical Society railroad section house museum has been awarded.



And so the work continues -- which also means a boost to tourism.

And big money for the area.

"Tourism is the second-leading industry in Tennessee," Williams said. "In the next couple of years it'll probably be number one."

He pointed out that two years ago, tourism brought \$14 billion into the state economy.

(Pictured: Upper Cumberland Development District's Randy Williams, director of cultural resources management, takes a walk along the developing Tennessee Central Heritage Rail Trail in Monterey).

"More than \$2 billion of that was so-called heritage tourism, which is your historic sites," he said. "A lot of the things developed along the byways fit into that category."

Kupferer added, "And those heritage tourists stay longer and spend more money."

The key, she said, is to have "really unique things" in a community for people to see and experience. Part of that effort is interpreting the history for them, Williams added.

"They don't know anything about the area, so you have to interpret the history, culture, scenic beauty and natural resources for them," he said. "That's always an important component in these projects. Without that they won't know what they're looking at."

Linkages are important, too. Williams used the Walton Road Scenic Byway project as an example.

"It goes across the Cumberland Plateau from Kingston on the Tennessee River to Carthage on the Cumberland River, and those communities are linked together by that common history," he said. "They have their unique history, but they share a common history too."

Another key is sustainability.

"There again, Walton Road has been there for 200 years, and we can link all that history together in a sustainable way that interprets the story in perpetuity," Williams said. "That's what preservation and cultural resource management is all about."

Other current projects Williams and Kupferer are involved with include replacing windows in the historic Silver Point Church of Christ, a storm water inventory program in Cumberland County, Crane Hill School in Van Buren County and the Monterey portion of Rails With Trails.

Projects begin in a variety of ways, many times with members of a community group approaching Williams with their idea.

"Usually, a project is initially driven by the community, and sometimes we take over," he said.

It's a matter of guiding them through a project, Kupferer said.

"They have an idea, and we may know where the funding source is and link them to it," she said.

"Then we glean information from them and put it into the grant. If the project gets funded, we walk them through the process of getting everything set up."

In addition to their historic preservation and cultural resources management projects, Williams and Kupferer also provide technical assistance and answer questions for communities in such areas as grant writing and historic zoning.

They also aid in the process of getting structures added to the National and Tennessee Registers of Historic Places -- one of the most recent being the American Legion Bohannon Post #4 building in Livingston.

Both say their work as rewarding.

"What I take the most satisfaction in is seeing people get something out of it," Williams said. "I get a lot of enjoyment out of that. You feel good for the folks in the community."

\*Read more about the History of Putnam Co., TN at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>