



Sautee Nacoochee
Community Association

Field Application Exercise
1 of 5

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Sautee Nacoochee Community Association

The Sautee Nacoochee Community Association (hereafter referred to as SNCA) is located in the Sautee and Nacoochee valleys of Northeastern Georgia (specifically in White County). The SNCA was formed in 1980 to “...promote an active and involved citizenry by providing opportunities for cooperative participation in preserving the historical, cultural and environmental resources of the area and by developing and participating in comprehensive quality arts programming and endeavors” (Mission: 1996 annual report).

The physical facilities of the SNCA cover an area of about eight acres. The main building is a historic schoolhouse, built in 1928. Within the main building are rooms which serve as meeting places, offices, artist studios, a dance studio, the art gallery, the gift shop, and the history museum. Next to the main schoolhouse is a recently added playground. I did not notice any other public play areas during my drive through the area, though it certainly could be that I did not know where to look. The old gymnasium is situated next to the playground. This building is where the community holds dances and town meetings. The dining hall in front of the gymnasium was recently built and houses a professional kitchen and well designed meeting space for groups seeking places to retreat. A little used bar-b-que pit sits underneath a shelter outside of the dining hall. A nature trail meanders throughout the property and includes benches with placards telling the names of the patrons that donated them. At the end of the property lies the community post office which the SNCA leases to the Federal Government.

Three “primary initiatives” serve to support the mission of the organization through program offerings. These areas are Arts Programming, Environmental Preservation, and Historic Preservation. The primary audience for the programming efforts of the center continues to be the populations of the surrounding local area. Since its inception, the SNCA has sought to empower the local community rather than to appeal to the tourism-related trades of the Atlanta and Helen areas.

The Arts Programming aspect of the primary initiatives is expressed through both visual and performing arts opportunities. An exhibition gallery seeks to offer community residents the opportunity to experience traveling and local exhibitions within their local area. A small art history library is available offering resources which may be unavailable elsewhere in the community. Numerous art classes are offered to adults during afternoon and evening timeframes. An artist gallery displays artwork for sale by regional craftsmen and artists. Traditional Contra, Square and Circle dances are held in the gymnasium on Saturday nights. The Evening Star music series is an acoustic music performance which is broadcast on Peach State Public Radio on a monthly basis (produced through a grant from the Georgia Counsel for the Arts). The Hamstock music festival is held yearly in September which showcases two days of regional and national traditional music acts. The Echota Cultural Arts Festival is held yearly and offers six weeks of music, theatre, performing arts, exhibits, classes, camps, art demonstrations, and children’s activities. Recognized by the Southeast Tourism Society as one of the Southeast’s Top Twenty Events, it has been a mainstay at

the center for 15 years. In 2005 a new wing to the main building will be built which will house one of the few museums dedicated to folk pottery in the nation. This museum, as well as its collection, is to be funded by an endowment from a single individual.

The Environmental Preservation aspect of the primary initiatives is expressed through the environmental committee which pre-dates the official formation of the SNCA. In the late 1970's, local landowners shared the belief that the environment in which they lived was a vanishing resource and needed to be protected. In time, these individuals became the core group of the SNCA and worked together to obtain National Registry of Historic Places standing for the valley.

The environmental committee holds locally focused monthly meetings in order to determine emerging issues which will impact the community. Of particular concern is water quality in the Chattahoochee River Basin and the vegetation in the area. The committee has focused on old growth trees with the Heritage Tree Program. A project in cooperation with the White County Chamber of Commerce focusing on treescaping is in progress.

Perhaps the greatest threat to the community is the proposed 100+ home site development in the northern portions of the valley, extending toward the Helen area. The SNCA recently held a series of town hall meetings to discuss the environmental and monetary impact such a development would have on the local community. Unprecedented attendance resulted from word of mouth and printed materials **advertising** the meeting. This serves to illustrate how important the

SNCA is to the local community as well as supporting the mission of political empowerment for the local citizens.

The historic preservation aspect of the primary initiatives perhaps goes hand-in-hand with some of the aspects of the environmental preservation programs. The SNCA seeks to serve as a catalyst for preserving the Sautee-Nacoochee valleys and strives to be a model for the study of issues related to rural historic preservation. The SNCA seeks to “...provide an authentic destination for tourists where emphasis lies with mountain arts and culture” and to “...influence a shift in the economic policy on tourism by providing a tourist attraction based on indigenous mountain life while maintaining the historical integrity of the area” (SNCA Goals, 2nd draft, 1987).

The most evident recent contribution to historic preservation is the Bean Creek History Project which demonstrates the African-American experience in the Sautee-Nacoochee valley through a series of photographs and histories documenting the years from the late 1800's to the mid 1900's. In addition, the only surviving slave cabin in the area will be moved onto SNCA grounds and antebellum artifacts will be displayed in a “heritage site” in order to educate the community about the vanishing history of the Sautee-Nacoochee Valley.

A permanent museum within the main building showcases artifacts found in the local area. The museum is organized into different eras exhibiting Native American artifacts, Pioneer tools, Gold mining relics, old photographs, and archeological items. Included in the museum is an

autobiography written by a local resident illustrating his life in the community and the changes wrought by the depression and the world wars.

The organizational structure of the SNCA follows the traditional linear approach to hierarchy within organizations. A Board of Directors consists of 17 members including a president, vice-president, treasurer, and secretary. This Board has defined ten responsibilities for the Board as a group as well as six personal responsibilities of each Board member. The General responsibilities are to: “1) Select, support, and evaluate the Executive Director. 2) Review and protect the mission of the organization. 3) Drive the planning efforts of the organization. 4) Serve as ambassador and spokesperson for the organization. 5) Evaluate regularly the program of the organization. 6) Communicate the community and lay perspective to the Board. 7) In internal conflict, serve as final court of appeals. 8) Continually appraise the Board and assess its performance. 9) Serve as fiduciary representative of the organization. 10) Ensure the financial solvency of the organization: 10a Oversee fiscal management, 10b Participate in fundraising (by reflecting 100% participation in annual giving program).”

The six responsibilities for individual Board members are to: “1) Meet general Board-wide expectations. 2) Attend Board and committee meetings regularly. 3) Maintain a supportive relationship with the staff. 4) Avoid conflicts with the staff. 5) Be fiducial in all actions relating to the organization. 6) Practice fund-raising: 6a Lead by example-give annually, 6b assist in implementation of the plan, 6c provide names of and/or recruit new donors” (SNCA Board of Directors Responsibilities, 1987).

The Board of Directors hires and evaluates the Executive Director. The Director is responsible for all aspects related to staff hiring and overseeing responsibilities involved in programming, fundraising, and facility management. In addition to the Executive Director, there are two full time positions at the SNCA. The Director of Marketing/Gallery Coordinator is responsible for marketing the center, fundraising, and coordination of the art gallery exhibits. The Theatre/Rental Coordinator is in charge of dramatic programming and coordinating facility rental opportunities. Part time positions include: art studio instructors (2), volunteer coordinator (1), facilities manager (1), evening star/music program coordinator (1), administrative assistant [general] (1), administrative assistant [bookkeeping] (1). The center has more than 300 active volunteers on its active roster, contributing over 27,000 hours per year. This equates to an additional 12-17 full time employees. According to the Executive Director, without the efforts of its volunteers many aspects of the SNCA would cease to operate.

In addition to a volunteer labor force, many organizations/businesses choose to donate in-kind services. Since the SNCA serves the local community, local business-owners recognize that it is in the best interest of their own community to help the SNCA as much as they can. A local printer **may** offer to print the annual report; a local caterer **could** offer to supply the chicken for the fundraiser bar-b-que. In addition, many local businesses purchase ads in programs for planned events.

According to minutes from Board meetings and initiatives held in the late Eighties and early Nineties, the same types of battles have been waged for many years. Some members of the community seek only traditional music while others seek more modern forms of entertainment. Some members of the community seek traditionally conservative definitions of “family-values” to hold sway with programming choices of the SNCA while other community members want their family’s values to be included in the programming as well.

Portions of the battle may stem from the geographic line of ideology among residents in Northern White County and residents in Southern White County. While it can be very difficult to change minds, community education and empowerment are key factors in the mission of the SNCA. Perhaps in the same way the center helped to infuse energy into the opposition of the large scale housing development threatening the northern section of the valleys, the SNCA can find a way to bring both sides together and serve as an instrument of co-existence among the very different demographics that they serve.