

Department of Historic Resources

(www.dhr.virginia.gov)

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**New Website for Owners of Historic Virginia Properties
Highlights Historic Preservation,
Sustainability, Green Practices, Energy-Saving Steps**

*-- The online resource results from a partnership between
Virginia's Department of Historic Resources, Dominion Virginia Power,
and Sweet Briar College --*

RICHMOND – If recycling, reusing and reducing waste is at the heart of sustainability and “green” environmental practices, then historic preservation is one of the greenest activities that individuals and communities can undertake.

That is the take-away message of a new Web site, the “Virginia Preservation Toolkit” (<http://www.tusculum.sbc.edu/toolkit/how-to-preserve.shtml>), that was officially launched today during a week of events tied to the 40th anniversary of Earth Day.

The on-line preservation toolkit was created to demonstrate the sustainability benefits of the reuse of historic buildings and to give tools to owners of historic buildings in Virginia.

It explains how they can best work with existing building materials and architectural features to increase energy efficiency—without destroying the historic character of a house or building and using strategies that are often much less costly than replacement, for example.

The Web site was developed through a partnership involving Virginia’s Department of Historic Resources (DHR), Sweet Briar College’s Tusculum Institute and Dominion Virginia Power.

“We are grateful to Dominion for its support in helping us reach out to Virginia citizens and communities,” said Virginia Secretary of Natural Resources Doug Domenech, who oversees the state’s key natural resource and conservation agencies, including the Department of Historic Resources.

“A central focus of Governor McDonnell’s administration is jobs and energy. Historic preservation is vital in this regard. Investment in historic rehabilitation creates jobs and renews resources we already have,” said Domenech.

The partnership arose when DHR Director Kathleen S. Kilpatrick approached Dominion to help the agency publicize how historic preservation dovetails with green practices and sustainability goals.

“Dominion’s long-standing commitment to energy conservation and its ongoing support for historical programs makes this an ideal partnership,” said William C. Hall Jr., a Dominion vice president and president of the Dominion Foundation. “We are pleased to help the Department of Historic Resources incorporate contemporary energy conservation practices into its important programs.”

As a partner, Dominion will promote the new on-line preservation toolkit on its own Web site, www.Dom.com, and through additional communication with Dominion Virginia Power residential customers.

In particular, DHR seeks to better inform both community leaders and property owners about the green goals achieved through historic preservation and the green features inherent in most historic buildings and neighborhoods.

Preservation means recycling existing building stock and materials, and the reuse of already developed sites and existing infrastructure.

For property owners, it means achieving energy savings in ways that are often low cost and high yield while retaining historic fabric.

For example, owners may remove historic building materials under the mistaken assumption that replacing – rather than repairing existing features – results in major energy-saving improvements. Often the energy savings turn out to be only marginal, while the cost of such steps themselves can be high for both the homeowner and the environment in terms of the production and transportation of new materials.

Moreover, throwing away historic building materials adds to landfill construction waste, an often overlooked environmental cost to replacing proven, more durable and already produced and transported historic materials.

Dominion worked with DHR and the Tusculum Institute to develop the Web site, providing information on steps homeowners can take to prioritize and make the biggest cost-saving, energy-reducing impact on their dwellings.

Countering a commonly-held but incorrect notion that historic houses and buildings must be energy hogs simply because they are old, the Web site provides information explaining why the opposite is generally true.

“Historic preservation takes us back to the future, you might say,” said DHR Director Kilpatrick, who led the effort to partner with Dominion and the Tusculum Institute in creating the online preservation toolkit.

“Builders were working before central air and heat, when electric energy was scarce or non-existent, and few people had automobiles. They designed and sited buildings to capture light and air, for example, and with energy in mind, just as they designed communities with efficiency in mind. It is these inherently green strategies that builders and planners are rediscovering,” Kilpatrick added. “The toolkit gives us a way to build on those green aspects and achieve modern energy-efficiency goals.”

A key feature of the Web site is an interactive feature highlighting 12 specific “hot spots” in a historic home that typically pose potential energy or maintenance problems.

The hot spots include windows, attics, porches, gutters and downspouts, among other items. Information about how best to remedy common problems associated with each hotspot is provided.

Visitors to the online toolkit should find it easy to navigate. The toolkit is organized into five simple categories relating to historic preservation. It also offers downloadable essays and guidance documents for property owners and community leaders interested in additional information regarding historic preservation and energy savings.

A resources page provides links to documents or Web sites that offer more in-depth information for many specific problems.

"Sweet Briar is especially proud of its ability to partner with other organizations to use technology to promote innovation in causes we support -- environmental responsibility and historical preservation. Using new technologies to help preserve both historic structures and the environment reflects our commitments to the past, the present, and the future," said Jo Ellen Parker, president of Sweet Briar College.

Sweet Briar College established the Tusculum Institute two years ago to develop educational and outreach programs in historic preservation in the context of environmental stewardship for students and communities in Virginia.

Links:

Website: (<http://www.tusculum.sbc.edu/toolkit/index.shtml>).

Interactive house module: <http://www.tusculum.sbc.edu/toolkit/preservation-house.html>.

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