



## SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2025.** Please include this submission form as the first page of your electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

### PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Greene County

Program Title: Greene County Newsletter

Program Category: Communications

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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Title: Grant Writer

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### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Cathy Schafrik

Title: County Administrator

Signature: 



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## **2025 VACO Achievement Award Submission**

### **Locality: Greene County**

### **Program: Informing the Public**

#### **Executive Summary:**

Greene County is a community in transition from a rural community to a hybrid rural/suburban one. The population has grown by 41% since 2000 to more than 21,500 residents, however there is no longer an independent full-time media source informing the public about government actions or community events. Finding a way to communicate important information to the community has been a struggle, including finding ways to productively engage the public in local government. In 2023, the County began a new monthly electronic newsletter which expanded to emailing agendas prior to public meetings. In 2024, the County invested in a new alerting system for emergency and non-emergency alerts and a new website interface to improve the accessibility of information to the public. Local government has a responsibility to actively inform the public about what is happening in the community and help to mitigate rumors and false information on social media.

#### **Background:**

Greene County is a small rural community at the crossroads of two large thoroughfares—(U.S. Routes 29 & 33). The population has grown by 41% since 2000 to more than 21,500

residents. Despite the growth in population, the one dedicated media outlet has shrunk in size to only one or two local news pieces per week. The television stations, focused on Charlottesville and Albemarle County, rarely cover aspects of importance to our residents. A new online media outlet covers Greene, but also covers three other localities, so there is no longer a media source that is dedicated to Greene County. While the Board of Supervisors has live-streamed meetings since 2016, a direct communication avenue with residents had not existed prior to 2023.

Despite placing advertisements for public hearings in the newspaper and putting the agendas on our website a week prior to meetings, people still complained that they were unaware of the hearings. Additionally, people said seeing a post on our social media was not enough notice as they could be missed or seen after a meeting, depending on the algorithm. People wanted more direct communication with the local government.

Consistent, clear, and transparent communication helps build trust between the government and the public. This is especially true during emergency situations. Until 2024, the alerting system was only accessed by the Sheriff's Office and not the County government. It did not allow people to sign up to receive non-emergency communications about any specific County department. Our website needed to be updated for security reasons, but also because finding information was sometimes difficult. A new website needs to make finding information easy for the public but also highlight news releases.

### **Program Overview:**

In the weeks leading up to the newsletter, a sign-up form was created by staff using Constant Contact. The first newsletter was released in September 2023 to 177 individuals. The July 2025 newsletter will go out to 1,065 individuals. It is also shared on our Facebook and

website to an even greater audience. It was decided early that the newsletter would not focus only on government information, but community events and especially the local nonprofits. The newsletter editor works with the departments, constitutional officers, state officials, and the public to gather information to include in the monthly newsletter.

The newsletter has included feature stories through an in-depth “spotlight” about specific topics, such as a story about the creation of [Greene County’s only public park](#) and a story about the building of the historic courthouse (attached). Due to the size restriction for the award application, we are providing a link to the most recent County newsletter, the [June newsletter](#).

The new alert system has been successfully implemented. It relies on self-sign up but has the option for Reverse 911 as well. It works with our website so that when an emergency alert is sent, it gets added to the top of our website to inform those who come to our site about the event. It has been used for emergency situations such as flash flooding, water outages, winter storms, a hazardous material spill, a cooling center opening, and a potential dam collapse. It has been used for non-emergency notifications, such as election day, office closures or extended hours (i.e. tax due day), and a pet vaccination event.

### **Financing, Staffing and Replication:**

Greene County does not have a full-time Communications Department. The newsletter, website, and alert system falls under the Grant Writer, Terry Beigie. She serves as the newsletter editor and updates the website and sends the alerts as necessary. She works closely with staff and constitutional officers to develop content for the newsletter. The cost of the program, in addition to staff time, includes Constant Contact subscription costs and Civic Ready and Civic Plus for the alerts and website. These sites allow for individual branding, so they are easy to use for any

locality. Additionally, the creation of content for the newsletter is something each department head can tackle. Deciding to add additional community events was not a difficult task and usually requires a quick email to them asking what's upcoming for the following month.

### **Results of the Program:**

The newsletter and alerting system have contributed to increased participation in local government. The open volunteer board positions have received numerous applications after being advertised in the newsletter, on our social media, and on our website. In some years, positions would remain open for longer or only one or two applications would be submitted. The interaction on our social media posts has grown exponentially and people continue to subscribe to our newsletter every day. Also, the newsletter has created efficiencies for staff which allow them to focus on planning events rather than finding ways to communicate about them.

### **Conclusion:**

We believe these changes have assisted in improving the transparency and trust of the government with the local public. It's afforded us a direct communication link with residents that did not exist prior to 2023, and that reach continues to grow. We have two new portals that are opening on our website that will increase transparency further in future months—building inspections and planning and zoning. We believe that communicating directly with the public is the best way to get correct information to the community and continue to build public trust.





## Greene County News & Events

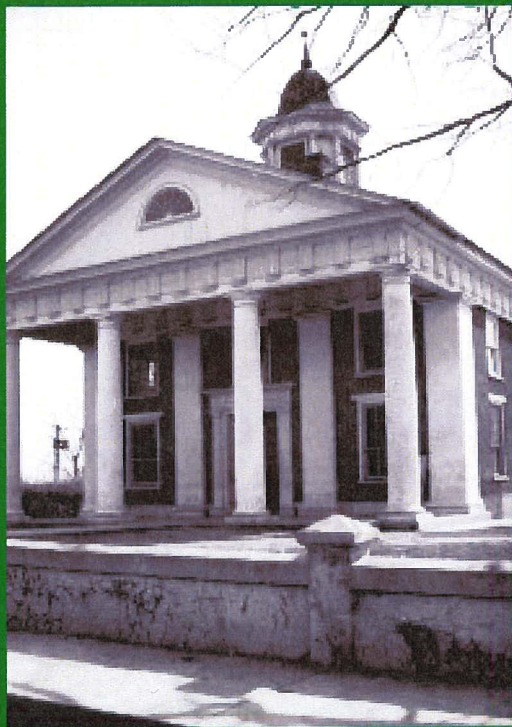




# Greene County Courthouse

This new feature of the newsletter aims to tell a deeper story about different aspects of Greene County government departments utilizing historical archives and interviews. The month's topic is the **Greene County Courthouse**, which is undergoing extensive rehabilitation that will be completed this month. Watch the County of Greene Facebook page for more information about a ribbon cutting!

*Photo courtesy: Greene County Historical Society circa 1900s*



Courthouse circa 1930s

## The courthouse

Greene County didn't exist prior to 1838, when several residents petitioned the General Assembly to separate from Orange County. It would often take more than one day travel time to reach the courthouse in the Town of Orange and would then require lodging in Orange before returning back to Greene. In a time without easy access to information channels, court days were some of the most exciting for remote communities like ours. Many villages would halt work during court day and people far and wide would come to town to do their business and catch up on the news of the day. The local newspaper would list the names of the jurors the week prior to the event and the Justices would hear lawsuits, criminal cases, wills, and more. At that time, they also had the power to determine roadway access and tell residents to clear the land for it.

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[Click here for full story](#)

[Click here for historical photos of the courthouse](#)



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The Courthouse was built between 1838-1839 by master mason William B. Phillips, who studied under Thomas Jefferson at the University of Virginia. Through the design and construction of the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, Jefferson taught his style to architecture students, but also to many carpenters and master masons, including Phillips. Jefferson even wrote a recommendation letter for Phillips, saying he "executed much of the bricklaying at the University and of the best work done there."<sup>1</sup> During the second quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, more than 20 courthouses exhibiting the Jeffersonian idiom were built throughout Virginia. Jefferson himself provided designs for three courthouses, but only one remains: Charlotte County Courthouse, completed in 1823.<sup>2</sup> The Institute of Classical Architecture & Art listed in 2012 the Greene County Courthouse as among the best surviving Jeffersonian courthouses and it was the final one Phillips constructed.<sup>2</sup> The final cost for the building was \$6,832.

When the building was first constructed, the Greene County Courthouse looked different than it does today. Greene County was then, and remains today, a rural county. By the 1840 U.S. Census, Greene County only had a population of roughly 440 households, 4,232 residents with about half listed as slaves, limiting the budget for the new construction. When it was built there was no portico or columns, which were added in the mid-1920s. The balcony with seats and two staircases was also added at that time as was a cement fence and walkways—for a cost of \$10,000.00, according to a 1927 *Greene County Record* article.

In the years since its construction, the courthouse has seen a lot of history. Probably the most well-known was the shooting of Magistrate Sullivan in 1919 in the courthouse by defendant Edgar Morris. Morris testified in his own defense after a manhunt saying he thought he saw the Magistrate reaching for a gun so he "quickly drew his own and got in six shots before Sullivan could act."<sup>3</sup> The article goes on to state that Morris's own counsel denied that the justice was going for a weapon.

The only record of an execution uncovered for Stanardsville was in 1860 when the overseer of a property off Simmons Gap Road, Joseph Hoy, was attacked with an ax and Winston, an enslaved man, was found guilty of it. Hoy was the manager of Dr. John R. Woods's property in Greene County, though Woods lived near Ivy in Albemarle County. Only one newspaper account could be located

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<sup>1</sup> Ross, A. (2009). *William B. Phillips, "Bricklaying . . . of the Best Work Done."* A Ross.  
[https://libraetd.lib.virginia.edu/public\\_view8049g5567](https://libraetd.lib.virginia.edu/public_view8049g5567)

<sup>2</sup> Loth, C. (2012, June 3). *Jeffersonian Temples of Justice*. Institute of Classical Architecture & Art. Retrieved December 9, 2021, from <https://www.classicist.org/articles/classical-comments-jeffersonian-temples-of-justice/>

<sup>3</sup> "Edgar Morris Relates Tale of Court Tragedy." (1919 June 27). *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 1.



about the hanging: the May 21, 1860, Alexandria Gazette, and there is little mentioned except that he was hanged. Utilizing the trial books at the Greene County Clerk of Court Office and transcripts from the Library of Virginia you can see no one spoke on Winston's behalf, though he did have a lawyer defending him. Witnesses included Hoy's wife and son, who was 11 at the time, and a doctor who examined Hoy—who survived the attack. Dr. Woods received \$1,200 from the state as compensation for the taking of his "property." Also uncovered at the Library of Virginia is that Hoy himself asked the governor for a stay of execution for Winston, though it was not granted. In the judgement, Judge George Sheaman tells the sheriff to hang Winston "at the usual place," but no definite location of a gallows was found in Stanardsville so it's unclear where the punishment took place or if there was a crowd for the event. Thousands attended executions in Madison and Orange counties throughout the same time period.

Court days were an exciting affair for many residents. Patent medicine men would travel from court square to court square to provide entertainment and sell their "miracle elixirs," or snake oils. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Stanardsville was known for being a "rough and tough town with brawls and fights occurring on court days," according to the Greene County Historical Society's book "Greene County." A former attorney certainly agreed in his personal diaries, found in the Albert and Shirley Small Collections Library at the University of Virginia.

"Greene court day was unlike any day I ever knew," remembered R.T.W. Duke Jr., a former lawyer, in his "Recollections." "Large crowds of men, women, and children attended the courts and by dinner half the population of the town and visiting mountaineers were drunk: there were innumerable fights and cracked crowns, and bloody noses were much in evidence."

There was a riot on the June 1911 term day in Stanardsville, according to the *Evening News* newspaper. "Several gentlemen of the section were present and saw the whole affair. They report that they had never before witnessed anything to equal it in the way of drunkenness, cursing, throwing rocks, and fist-fighting. About 100 people were engaged in the mix-up, which a man named Moyers was shot by Ellis Dean and numerous others got bleeding heads and contusions on the face," the article noted.

Judge Holt was the presiding judge that day and empaneled a special grand jury to investigate the riot. "Five indictments were returned for felonious assault, but no information was gotten of the 'booze' which it is stated at least a wagonload of moonshine was sold during the day," the article continued.

In a July 1924 *Greene County Record* newspaper article, it was the patent medicine men that attracted the largest crowd with their "Punch and Judy" show. The Punch and Judy puppet show made its first appearance in England in 1662. Punch was mischievous and by the end would succumb to his homicidal tendencies. During prohibition—1920-1933—dockets were full of moonshining or other illicit alcohol-related offenses. The *Greene County Record* newspaper even noted that more "ladies were attending court here" in 1929.

A natural gas explosion on site and the subsequent fire in the courthouse in 1979 decimated much of the interior of the structure. The 1979 fire gutted the interior of the courthouse, requiring all plaster to be taken down to the masonry, a damp-proofing bond added, and new plaster installed. Bricks were repointed and the building was waterproofed two years ago, making the work inside the building possible this year. A new judge's desk was crafted, the balcony was fixed, the cupola was repaired, and the roof redone. This will allow this historical building to continue to be used, safely, as the circuit court and meeting area for organizations.



Photos courtesy of the Greene County Historical Society of the courthouse in the late 1800s.





**Aerial Photograph Shows Damage to Greene County Office Building and Courthouse**

Richmond Times-Dispatch 1979 photo after the explosion.





Circa 2023