BCCC leads effort to preserve local history

Dozens of old photographs and previously unpublished historical records will be available to the public via the Internet this spring thanks to a federal grant awarded to the Beaufort County Community College Learning Resources Center, Historic Bath and the George H. and Laura E. Brown Public Library. The three agencies are developing a searchable website that will initially contain a collection of 600 items—such as maps, unpublished research reports, photographs, colonial and maritime records and objects in special or rare collections—that are significant to the region.

Project organizers plan to launch the website with the bulk of material from Historic Bath along with the opening of the Bath tricentennial celebration on March 8. And they hope to continue to add items to the online collection in future years.

"This is really the push of the future," said Patricia Samford, director of Historic Bath. "Having information like this online available at your fingertips has made historic research less expensive, easier and available to more people."

The project is funded by $47,922 grant from the federal Library Services and Technology Act, or LSTA, the only federal program devoted entirely to funding library services. LSTA provides block grants to state libraries based on population, targeting programs that use technology for information sharing between libraries and community agencies.

The grant, to be matched by $6,446 in local funds, will be used to develop CIRCA NC East (Community Images Researchable by Computer Access) as a website to contain the digital collection. It is one of 153 grants totaling more than $4 million awarded to North Carolina libraries this year through the LSTA.

Money from the grant will be used to buy computers, scanners, digital cameras and other equipment for BCCC, Brown Library and Historic Bath Site to allow staff members to scan materials to be posted to the website and to allow public access to the site, when developed.

"The primary goal of CIRCA NC East is to unite and make available via the Internet the special collections of two libraries and a state historic site, a first for this area," said Penny Sermons, director of BCCC's Learning Resource Center. "This project will make it possible to combine reference materials into one easily accessible site creating a 'critical mass' of resources that complement each other."

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