



# The Progress-Index

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## New group aims to connect area's nonprofits

BY LINDSAY SIMPSON  
STAFF WRITER

**HOPEWELL - Non-profit organizations have had very little ability to connect with each other in the past, making it difficult for them to organize, promote and help one another. That is, until now.**

Recently, Wendy Austin and Nancy Stutts with Connect Richmond, developed Connect Southside, an organization designed to aid the many non-profits in the area with multiple tools for those within the groups.

Austin, the newly-appointed coordinator of Connect Southside, said that the organization was developed as, "an information sharing tool and resource for non-profit groups to help with the exchange of ideas to bring about change in the community."

Some of the tools, listed on the organization's Web site, include an extensive e-mail list to all of the non-profit groups and their leaders, a job finder, non-profit profiles for each individual group and a weekly update newsletter. When Connect Southside began earlier in the year, the first e-mail list contained 100 recipients. Now the list is at approximately 450 recipients. And although that number is one-tenth the size of Connect Richmond's e-mail network, both Austin and Stutts hope it will eventually get to those high numbers.

Many groups affiliated themselves with Connect Southside early on, including Virginia Commonwealth University, the Appomattox Regional Library System and the Cameron Foundation.

At the first meeting Sept. 25, which Austin deemed a "steering committee," a large turnout of approximately 40 people filled the room at the Appomattox Regional Library Headquarters in Hopewell. Some of the non-profit groups represented at the meeting included museums, libraries, the Appomattox Regional Governor's School, Downtown Petersburg Inc., the Pregnancy Support Center and many other well-known organizations.

The steering committee looked at ways that Connect Southside and its site could help the non-profit groups. Some suggested forwarding specific e-mails to the entire e-mail list after an answer was compiled, where if someone sent out an e-mail asking where to look for cheap or free office space, the replies could be forwarded to all 450 people on the list.

"We are thrilled to have everyone here and involved," Austin said to the group. "You're the first group taking a look into the program."

The committee broke into three smaller groups, discussing different ways to improve Connect Southside and make it known to citizens that it is also available to them if they wish to seek out different opportunities with the multiple non-profit groups.

Austin said, "While it's [Connect Southside] for non-profits, it's also for citizen networking."

"It's a great way for the citizens to help," said Stutts.

For more information on Connect Southside, visit [www.connectsouthside.org](http://www.connectsouthside.org).

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