

**THE SOUTH GEORGIA FOLKLIFE PROJECT AT VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**SELECTIONS FROM GRANT FINAL REPORTS, 1998-2005**  
**NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS FOLK AND TRADITIONAL ARTS**  
**INFRASTRUCTURE INITIATIVE**

OVERVIEW

The South Georgia Folklife Project (SGFP) is a pioneering collaboration between Valdosta State University (VSU) College of the Arts and the Georgia Folklife Program (GFP) to provide long-term and systematic support, documentation, and interpretation of traditional arts within a 41-county service area which stretches from the Alabama border to the Atlantic, and the Florida state line to Cordele. Use of NEA seed money to help establish a professional folklorist position as enabled has enabled both VSU and GFP to more effectively reach a large and underserved region of the state. By establishing a regional folklorist in South Georgia, the South Georgia Folklife Project expands VSU's mission in regional arts outreach and applied research to include traditional arts. It also enhances efforts of the Georgia Folklife Program (Georgia Council for the Arts) to facilitate long-term and systematic documentation, support, and interpretation of folk arts throughout the state (Objective 4, "Be an effective catalyst for creating a statewide network that supports Georgia's folk arts and folklife," GCA long-range plan, 1998-2000).

The traditional culture of south Georgia has been the subject of several previous documentation efforts; however, prior to the establishment of the South Georgia Folklife Project, no professional folklorist had had an institutional base in south Georgia for nearly two decades, leaving a large, artistically rich region without the infrastructure necessary for effective technical support of artists, utilization of field documentation, traditional arts advocacy, and public presentation. NEA funding has enabled the SGFP to establish the groundwork for effective grass-roots collaborations and programming in the region.

SOUTH GEORGIA FOLKLIFE PROJECT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- 1) Conduct folklife field research in the service area
- 2) Develop a data base and resource center on South Georgia folk culture
- 3) Serve as a regional information source on traditional arts, artists, and organization
- 4) Network with local educational, arts, and cultural organizations to increase awareness and appreciation of traditional culture
- 5) Provide training and technical assistance on documentation, teaching, and presentation of regional folklife
- 6) Reach new audiences and underserved constituencies within VSU service area
- 7) Serve as South Georgia liaison for the Georgia Council for the Arts Folklife Program
- 8) Disseminate research findings through specific projects which meet the SGFP mission, such as exhibitions, media programs, educational materials, workshops, concerts

- 9) Seek outside funding in support of project objectives
- 10) Provide students with academic courses and fieldwork opportunities involving traditional arts and folklife

**SOUTH GEORGIA FOLKLIFE PROJECT, 1998-1999**  
**NEA GRANT 98-5500-3109**

Primary project activities included grant writing, field documentation, networking to introduce the SGFP to the local constituency, preliminary development of a needs assessment, university teaching, public presentations, and workshops, and technical assistance to local traditional artists and cultural organizations. A crucial part of publication and audience development was additional distribution of the Wiregrass Ways 13-part radio series to two Florida NPR stations, reaching 33,000 people (initial distribution to Georgia and parts of Alabama took place prior to the the NEA grant period). Crucial to the needs assessment was the successful application to the Georgia Humanities Council to fund nine workshops on the topic of "Exploring Community Heritage." These workshops helped to introduce the SGFP to key cultural workers in the region and better familiarize the project director with traditional arts activities and artists in the region. These workshops reached many of the key players in South Georgia arts and heritage, but did not reach much of a minority audience.

In FY-98-99 the project director addressed NEA Goal #3 (preservation of cultural traditions) by 1) conducting folklore field research covering 23 counties and 2) directing a graduate student independent study project on culture and community in the student's home town of Jakin (Early County). This combined work produced 50 field tapes, 500 photogrpahic images, and supporting field notes and vertical file material. For the time being these original materials are in the possession of the project director; however, discussion is underway with VSU Odum Library Special Collections staff about plans to house the SGFP materials after completion of the new library addition.

A special field survey initiative has been the Okefenokee Traditional Music Survey which documents a distinctive folk region as the first step in a multi-phase cultural conservation strategy. Principal artists identified were Sacred Harp singers David I. Lee, Clarke Lee, Johnny Lee and participants in monthly sings; elder Tollie Lee and members of the Big Creek and New Hope churches for Primitive Baptist hymnody; Judy Drury, Roxie Crawford, Bernice Roddenberry for Okefenokee historic and contemporary music traditions. Traditional artists have been provided copies of field tapes and photos upon request.

**Grants:**

Raised \$24,822 in FY 98-99 using NEA funds as match; these funds supported a needs assessment and community workshops, fieldwork in the Okefenokee as a basis for a future exhibition, and field equipment purchase

**Regional Outreach and Programs:**

15 regional heritage presentations and workshops serving 260 people from 15 counties with a grant from the Georgia Humanities Council entitled "Exploring Community Heritage"

Field recordings at community events with mention made of SGFP and VSU, reaching an additional 2000 persons

□□□□Networking with over 75 community organizations and educators in the region

Distribution of the 13-part Wiregrass Ways radio series to over 66,000 public radio listeners *per single show* in Georgia, Florida, and Alabama

Coverage of activities in a dozen regional newspapers

Technical assistance to over 50 individuals, organizations, and artists

Consultant to Valdosta Symphony's 10th anniversary commission to composer James Oliverio for a new work based on south Georgia traditional music

Consultant and researcher, The Last Harvest, photo exhibit of Lake Apopka, Florida farmworkers, currently touring sites in Florida

Project Director, The Florida Music Train, multicultural curriculum unit prepared for the Florida Heritage Education series

#### University Teaching and Public Lectures:

Reached over 275 faculty and students on topics which involved traditional arts

Independent study project by English MA candidate Gretchen Geisinger, "On Solomon's Porch: Culture and Community in Jakin" reached an audience of 75 in three public presentations and resulted in original field materials being deposited in the Museum and Library of her hometown (Jakin, Early County)

#### Selected Comments about the South Georgia Folklife Project:

I have been remiss in not telling you how fascinating your radio programs are. We have enjoyed them a great deal. Thank you for making the programs and thank you for sharing them with us.  
Lee Bradley, Lowndes County, March 17, 1999

Dr. Sommers has encouraged and supported our efforts to re-introduce this tradition of singing sacred harp to our local school children, to our local college, to local folklife and historical societies, and to the local community at large. She has offered advice and instruction in the methods of such an effort. While I have the fervent desire to protect and nourish our old tradition, I have leaned heavily on Dr. Sommers for the expertise to accomplish it. She has guided me and others among us with her knowledge of folklore and with her dedication to these important tasks.  
David I. Lee, Brantley County, September 17, 1999

Wonderful evening. Thank you so much. The plans to document the last year of turpentine would be benefit enough from such an evening—but I know there will be more projects to come from you. I'm looking forward to all of them...Christine Tibbits, May 1999, Tift County

Thank you so much for allowing the Colquitt County Arts Center to participate in the South Georgia Folklife Project. It was an instructive workshop that serves our community as a catalyst in the exploration of our traditions. Jane Simpson, Colquitt County, March 25, 1999

I was inspired by the many options and suggestions adaptable to local projects. Gwen Adams, Wilcox County, Feb. 17, 1999

The program was excellent and fueled my desire to document cultural traditions, both at the Okefenokee Heritage Center and personally. Catherine Larkins, Ware County, Feb. 9, 1999

It has been my privilege to live in the Okefenokee Swamp region for the past ten years. It is an area especially rich in unique folk music traditions...Imagine our delight when rumors circulated that a qualified folklorist had moved into the area. We were plotting for her to take interest in this project long before she ever contacted us about it. Ann Tweedy, Pierce County, June 25, 1988

Thank you so much for presenting at the Heritage Education Workshop for teachers during the week of June 21-25. Your presentation on South Georgia folklife and traditions was very interesting and it really tied people and traditions to the historic buildings that we studied. James A. Horton, Brooks County, July 9, 1999

**SOUTH GEORGIA FOLKLIFE PROJECT, 1999-2000**  
**NEA GRANT 99-5500-3093**

During the 1999-2000 grant year, the South Georgia Folklife Project continued to support traditional arts and artists in the 41-county VSU service area in rural South Georgia. Primary project activities included grant writing, field documentation, networking with local artists and organizations, public presentations, technical assistance to artists and community organizations, and university teaching. During the grant period NEA funds helped to leverage an additional \$19,300 in grant money from the Georgia Humanities Council, the Georgia Folklife Program, and the Valdosta Symphony. These grants funded two future exhibitions—an update of the “Folklife of the Georgia Wiregrass” and a new permanent exhibit for the Okefenokee Heritage Center in Waycross on “Southeast Georgia Sacred Harp.” NEA match also helped fund performances by traditional artists as part of South Georgia Heritage Month in Valdosta.

Perhaps the most successful activity of the past year in terms of public education and building infrastructure at VSU and in the local community was the series of activities for South Georgia Heritage Month in February 2000. The events were well attended, had good local press coverage, and generated many positive comments. A highly visible event in the SGFP’s host community (as opposed to elsewhere in the service area) has been crucial for stabilization of the project and attracted a cross-section of the community. Heritage Month was a collaboration between the SGFP, African American Studies at VSU, and the Valdosta Symphony Orchestra with funding from the Symphony, various university units, and the Georgia Humanities Council. Major components included the following:

- 1) Five fiddler workshops throughout the month of February with 125 S. Georgia String Project students, featuring Thomasville fiddler Henry Rutland and Valdosta fiddler Bud Zorn
- 2) "Know From Whence Ye Came: Preserving African American Traditions," part of the 2000 African American Studies Lecture Series, featuring the presentation of the ring shout by the McIntosh County Shouters and introductory remarks by Dr. Laurie Sommers, Continuing Education Building Auditorium, Thursday, February 3, 7 p.m. (audience of circa 150; program repeated for a local elementary school)
- 3) South Georgia Heritage: Tunes and Traditions, a special concert featuring fiddling by Henry Rutland with guitarist Paul Massey, sacred harp singing from Hoboken, Georgia, ring shouts by the McIntosh County Shouters, Friday, February 4, First United Methodist Church, Downtown Valdosta, 7 p.m. Sponsored by the Valdosta Symphony Orchestra (audience of circa 300)
- 4) Valdosta Symphony Orchestra, Georgia Heritage Concert. James Plondke, conductor with Ossie Davis, narrator, and James Oliverio, composer. Saturday, February 12, Whitehead Auditorium, 8:15 p.m. Additional performance Sunday, February 13, Waycross Middle School, 700 Central Avenue, Waycross, sponsored by the Okefenokee Heritage Center. Premiere of a new work “Gonna Go Back to Georgia: A Tribute to

South Georgia Folk Music” based on original folk material provided by the South Georgia Folklife Project

Field survey included completion of phase one of the Okefenokee Traditional Music Survey (funded in part by the Lila Wallace Reader’s Digest community Folklife Program with NEA match). This project generated several programs and cultural conservation strategies: 1) a Library of Congress Local Legacies project on Southeast Georgia Sacred Harp with David I. Lee of Hoboken; 2) the previously mentioned exhibition application done at the request of local Sacred Harp singers; and 3) consultation on an Okefenokee/South Georgia component for the Florida Folk Festival in White Springs (May 26-28, 2000) with its special theme of “Traditional Wetlands Culture.” The festival reached an audience of 20,000 and featured the New Taylor Singers (African American gospel) from Blackshear, fiddler Henry Rutland and guitarist Paul Massey from Thomas County, 50 members of the Hoboken Sacred Harp singing community who sang in memory of their late song leader Silas Lee, the Roddenberry family of Folkston demonstrating Sacred Harp, gospel and palmetto brooms, and walking sticks and tupelo gum bread trays by Ronnie Dale Lee of Waycross. Notable accomplishments in technical assistance include working with the Bainbridge Arts Council on a grant for a Dia de los Muertos altar and Mexican Fiesta in the local schools and community (funded and forthcoming); facilitating a successful Traditional Arts Apprenticeship application for Waycross tatter Myrtie Highsmith and three apprentices, and assisting the Hoboken Sacred Harp community with their cultural conservation and documentation efforts.

The SGFP presented on Folklife and Writing Across the Curriculum at the South Georgia Writing Project (VSU) 2000 Summer Institute, initiating an exciting new collaboration in folklore and education. Fifteen educators from Thomas, Tift, Lowndes, Cook, and Colquitt Counties prepared folklife lesson plans to accompany the Folklife of the Georgia Wiregrass exhibition and many are now incorporating folklife into their classrooms. Plans for follow-up grants and activities were generated as a result.

Information about South Georgia traditions was presented via a new web site, two national conferences, program notes and publications, local press coverage, and at invited programs of the Colquitt Historical Society, the Early County Historical Society, and the Coastal Georgia Historical Society.

#### Anecdotal Information/Human Interest

I attended last Friday night’s Tunes and Traditions concert. It was a wonderful experience. Although none of the traditions presented were mine, each one of them touched me deeply. I think there is something in each of us that responds to the shapes and tones of the traditional music, no matter what the particular tradition....I am continually astounded with your ability to find the real roots of South Georgia Folklife. You are doing an excellent job and are to be commended for it. (Sarah Bartholomew, 2-27-00).

It (lecture/performance of the McIntosh County Shouters) was the perfect program: I learned something and I was entertained as well. The Shouters are a wonderful group. Thanks for your efforts in bringing them here (Sheri Gravett, 2-4-00).

Just want to remind you once again how much we appreciated the fellowship and singing at Stephen Foster State Park. It was so good of all to come and do something that has love mixed with it. I believe Pa Silas would have loved it all....He mentioned the term Sacred often, with deep feelings... And the Harp for sweetness and Harmony. Can you see now why it was so special to him and all the others too, that loved it? There was a lady came to me after the sing under the tent. Her name was Linda Little of Miami FL. She wished they sang SH in her area, was her first time to hear. Told me she had her father with her that day. She said as...the song was being sung goose bumps ran the course of her frame, and her eyes became watery and weepy, for the words and song brought her family joy and love she hadn’t felt in a long time toward her father.

Much relief and sweetness when you hear of others being helped by music... (Tollie Lee after Florida Folk Festival singing, 5-29-00).

What a wonderful gift you brought us in Mr. Zorn, the Fiddler! While his fiddling was fantastic, hearing Mr. Zorn speak was a real education and inspiration. The violin students were inspired, by by sheer coincidence the fifth grade students were in the midst of a study of family heritage, and all of his tales fit perfectly with what they were studying (Sue Miller, Lower School Dean, Valwood School, 2-15-00).

### **SOUTH GEORGIA FOLKLIFE PROJECT 2000-2002 NEA GRANT #00-5500-3039**

The South Georgia Folklife Project (SGFP) plays a key infrastructure role in South Georgia, functioning since 1998 as a regional folklore program for 41 predominantly rural underserved counties in the southern third of the state. The SGFP is a collaborative effort of the Valdosta State University (VSU) College of the Arts and the Georgia Folklife Program. The majority of NEA infrastructure funding supports a full-time professional folklorist position for Dr. Laurie Sommers, founder and director of the South Georgia Folklife Project. The grant also funds travel and supplies, much of this for fieldwork and technical assistance. All of the activities of the SGFP--which include research, programming development and implementation, publicity, fundraising, grant administration, and teaching--are done by the director. As one of the few granting organizations that supports folklorist positions such as this, NEA provides additional infrastructure through salary match for other project grants which further benefit artists and communities.

#### **Mission and Project Activities:**

- 1) Conduct folklife field research in the service area and develop a data base and resource center on South Georgia folk culture in conjunction with the Georgia Folklife Program and VSU's Odum Library. During this grant period the SGFP added to its growing resource collection of over 1200 photographs, 200 field recordings in various formats, books and other resources on South Georgia folklife, and vertical file material. While Odum Library is under renovation most of these resources are housed in the SGFP offices and are not yet publicly accessible. Additional staff is needed to fully computerize and maintain the collections.
- 2) Serve as a regional information source on traditional arts, artists, and organizations; network with local educational, arts, and cultural organizations to increase awareness and appreciation of traditional culture. During this grant period the SGFP worked with over 300 South Georgia traditional artists and 18 schools, libraries, arts councils, and local museums to provide training, programming and technical assistance on documentation, teaching, and presentation of regional folklife. A major new initiative during this funding cycle involved folklore and education. The SGFP website ([www.valdosta.edu/music/SGFP](http://www.valdosta.edu/music/SGFP)) is another tool for providing information.
- 3) Reach new audiences and underserved constituencies. The SGFP allows both VSU and the Georgia Council for the Arts to maintain an active presence in a rural region of the state that would otherwise have little or no traditional arts programming. Programming, technical assistance, and fieldwork during the grant period reached approximately 11,850 constituents in 20 of the 41 counties of the service area. (These figures do not include web site users.) See 5) below for discussion of specific programs. SGFP programs and fieldwork during the funding cycle highlighted the traditional arts of African American,

Latino, Cherokee, Asian, and working class southern white tradition bearers throughout South Georgia, groups not typically featured in area arts programming.

- 4) Seek outside funding in support of project objectives. During the grant period, the SGFP raised or spent \$46,500 in additional cash awards (plus match) to fund the research and development of two exhibits, related programming, and a major folklife in education initiative.
- 5) Disseminate research findings through specific projects which meet the SGFP mission, such as exhibitions, media programs, educational materials, workshops, and concerts. Major initiatives included the following:

The Folklife of the Georgia Wiregrass traveling exhibition which has currently toured to seven South Georgia communities, with opening receptions featuring local traditional musicians; an NEA Access grant is funding a lightweight duplicate of this exhibit so that it can reach small rural communities which lack formal exhibit spaces. The exhibit consists of photo/text panels which interpret the traditional agricultural, religious, and community arts of the Wiregrass region of South Georgia (1920s-present), highlighting local customs such as cane grinding, tobacco auctions, foodways, quilting, gospel music and singing conventions, traditional watercraft, and hunting.

Let Us Sing: Southeast Georgia Sacred Harp (with the Okefenokee Heritage Center and song leader David I. Lee, co-curators), a permanent exhibition with video at the Okefenokee Heritage Center in Waycross funded by Georgia Folklife Program and part of ongoing technical assistance of the SGFP to local sacred harp singers.

Folkwriting: Lessons on Place, Heritage, and Tradition for Georgia Educators (with Diane Howard of the VSU English Dept. and educators from Cook County Schools), a workbook funded by the Georgia Humanities Council designed to enhance writing skills across levels and connect students with their community traditions by using folklife as the subject matter. Student work was presented to the community in January 2002 at a gala Celebrating Cook County event which also featured the local opening of the Folklife of the Georgia Wiregrass exhibit and a special tribute to Cook County fiddlers.

Collaboration on conferences and concerts, including the VSU English Department's Georgia Humanities Council-funded mini-conference "Understanding Place," held in October 2000, and the VSU African American Studies 2001 Lecture Series which featured a performance by the Freedom Singers of Albany, Georgia.

- 6) Provide VSU students with academic courses and fieldwork opportunities involving traditional arts and folklife. During the grant period the SGFP director revised her Multicultural America class, taught an independent study on Introduction to Ethnomusicology which resulted in a fieldwork project on a local Latino dance hall, taught Beyond the Melting Pot for Learning in Retirement, and developed a new course at the request of the Music Department, World Music Cultures.

#### Involvement of Key Artists and Partnering Organizations

Artists: David Lee and Southeast Georgia Sacred Harp Singing Community: video and audio documentation as part of requested technical assistance and a future planned video documentary; completion of the Let Us Sing exhibition at community's request (co-curated by David Lee). Artists featured at special events: Henry Rutland, fiddle, and Paul Massey, guitar, Thomasville, Bluegrass Boys, Cordele, Johnson Two, Valdosta, and New Taylor Singers, Blackshear (featured at exhibit openings of the Folklife of the Georgia Wiregrass); Freedom

Singers of Albany, African American gospel and political songs, (featured in performance at the African American Studies Lecture Series, sponsored by SGFP).

Major Partnering Organizations: Cook County Schools was the major partner in designing and piloting the Folkwriting folklife in education project; Okefenokee Heritage Center, Waycross, host for the Folklife of the Georgia Wiregrass exhibit, and partner in the Let Us Sing exhibit, the first permanent exhibit on local traditional arts and now a model for future new exhibits; Bryant-Lang Historical Library, Woodbine; workshops on community documentation and oral interviews; Bainbridge Arts Council: technical assistance on Georgia Folklife Program grants for a Día de los Muertos Ofrenda (Nov. 2000), and the Bainbridge Suckerfish Festival (Jan. 2002); Three Rivers Regional Library System, Brunswick and vicinity: public programs on folklife; Fitzgerald-Ben Hill Arts Council, Fitzgerald; Lowndes County Historical Society, Valdosta; Crisp Area Arts Alliance, Cordele; Museum of Southern Cultures/Swamp Gravy, Colquitt, Jimmy Carter Birthplace National Historic Site, Plains: host sites for the Folklife of the Georgia Wiregrass exhibit; Southern Arts Federation: traditional arts advisory board; Florida Folklife Program: Music of the Sunshine State radio series and the Florida Music curriculum unit consultant; panelist for Traditional Arts Apprenticeship grants.

### Impact

A folklorist based in South Georgia enhances public knowledge and understanding of folk arts, increases public access to traditional arts, facilitates presentation and preservation of traditional arts in the region, and enhances the cultural life of the region by highlighting community-based art forms. Specifically, the project strengthened infrastructure by providing a regional folklorist to assist Georgia Folklife Program (Georgia Council for the Arts) in fulfillment of its mission in the southern third of the state. Especially during this current period, when the state folklorist position has been vacant since June of 2001 (and remains frozen as of this writing), a regional position such as this is vital to continuity and continued service to artists. The SGFP director has been one of the few folklorists consistently doing fieldwork in the state, highlighting such traditions as tating, African American sign painting, woodcarving, African American gospel singing, traditional fiddling, Flint River fishing traditions (including narratives, watercraft, swamp gravy, and fishnet making), Primitive Baptist hymn singing and river baptisms, sacred harp, and narratives and occupational folklife of turpentine workers. The Folklife of the Georgia Wiregrass exhibit and programming was provided at little cost to host organizations. It is the only such exhibit touring the region and has been an important tool in increasing understanding of traditional arts of the Wiregrass region. The *Folkwriting* project and workbook is the first comprehensive folklife and education project geared to Georgia quality core curriculum standards and will give educators and students valuable tools for incorporating oral interviews, community documentation, creative writing and other forms of writing into the classroom. The workbook deals with such topics as calendar customs, foodways, games, family stories, names, and music.

Through support of a folklore specialist, VSU is able to include traditional arts within its mission of regional arts outreach and applied research. It currently the only public institution in the state with a full-time public folklorist and ethnomusicologist devoted to regional culture and traditional arts. No other program in the College of the Arts has conducted activities in 20 counties in the service area. These accomplishments have positioned VSU as a state and regional leader in traditional arts and folklife. Financial impact of the SGFP on VSU has been substantial: the SGFP brought \$95,750 in outside grants, matched by \$27,500 in non-VSU outside match. In FY 02, the SGFP accounted for 58% of outside grants to the College of the Arts.

### Anecdotal Information or "Human Interest" Stories About the Project



"I am struck by how amazing this all is. Thanks to you we now have a beautiful display in the cultural center for Waycross." David Lee, sacred harp song leader, Hoboken, GA, November 9, 2001

"Laurie introduced Mama to the GCA Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program while providing technical assistance to artists in the region. My mother has since taught three years of tating to apprentices including my sister and I, who are certified teachers now. My sister has taught her daughter and several of her neighbors and friends. We love it. As the new museum Coordinator of Programming and Exhibits at the Okefenokee Heritage Center, I was proud to have my first 2001 gallery exhibition, 'Tatted Treasures' with over 100 pieces of tating created by my mother and the 14 student apprentices." Tina Rowell, Waycross, September 25, 2002

"Because I am a life-long resident of South Georgia, and served 23 years as director of the Arts Experiment Station at Abraham Baldwin College, I am extremely supportive of Dr. Sommers' work from both a personal and professional perspective. The enthusiasm, commitment, and professionalism she brings to workshops and presentations lend them a rare authenticity, and often inspire local people to explore and celebrate traditions in their own communities." Syd Blackmarr, Tifton, September 27, 2001.

**SOUTH GEORGIA FOLKLIFE PROJECT, 2002-2003**  
**NEA GRANT 02-5500-3087**

- 1) Conduct folklife field research in the service area and develop a data base and resource center on South Georgia folk culture in conjunction with the Georgia Folklife Program and VSU's Odum Library.
- 2) Serve as a regional information source on traditional arts, artists, and organizations; network with local educational, arts, and cultural organizations to increase awareness and appreciation of traditional culture. During this grant period the SGFP worked with over 300 South Georgia traditional artists, 1800 K-12 students, and 9 schools, libraries, municipalities, and local museums. The SGFP website ([www.valdosta.edu/music/SGFP](http://www.valdosta.edu/music/SGFP)) is another tool for providing information.
- 3) Reach new audiences and underserved constituencies. Programming, technical assistance, and fieldwork during the grant period reached approximately 29,800 constituents in 15 of the 41 counties of the service area. (These figures do not include web site users.) SGFP programs and fieldwork during the funding cycle highlighted the traditional arts of underserved African American, Latino, and working class southern white tradition bearers throughout South Georgia.
- 4) Disseminate research findings through specific projects which meet the SGFP mission, such as exhibitions, media programs, educational materials, workshops, and concerts. Major initiatives included the following (major partner organizations are underlined):

*Folklife of Wiregrass Georgia Traveling Exhibition:* continued its touring schedule, visiting 7 South Georgia locations and working with the following partner organizations: The Jimmy Carter Birthplace NHS Visitors Center, Plains, June 1 to November 30, 2002; Valdosta State University Fine Arts Building, January 6 to 23, 2003, Valdosta; Homerville Municipal Complex (City of Homerville and Huxford Genealogical Society), February 3 to March 3, 2003; Roddenberry Memorial Library, Cairo, March 5 to April 20, 2003; Georgia Southwestern State University, Americus, April 21 to May 9, 2003; Southwest Georgia Regional Library, Bainbridge, May 9 to June 25, 2003; Bryant Lang Historical Library, Woodbine, July 1 to August 29, 2003, with opening receptions featuring local traditional musicians. The exhibit consists of photo/text panels which interpret the traditional agricultural, religious, and community arts of the Wiregrass region

of South Georgia (1920s-present), highlighting local customs such as cane grinding, tobacco auctions, foodways, quilting, gospel music and singing conventions, traditional watercraft, and hunting. It is continuing to tour the region.

*Folkwriting: Lessons on Place, Heritage, and Tradition for Georgia Educators* (with Diane Howard of the VSU English Dept. and educators from Cook County Schools), a workbook funded by the Georgia Humanities Council designed to enhance writing skills across levels and connect students with their community traditions by using folklife as the subject matter. This project was used at Gainesville Middle School in 2002-03 as the North Georgia site for Folkwriting. The project was also featured as part of a folklife and writing workshop at the National Council for Teacher's of English meeting in Atlanta, November 26, 2002. During 2002-03 the SGFP worked on revising the website and securing permissions to increase access by putting Folkwriting on the Web. This was not yet completed at the end of this grant period.

*The Last Harvest traveling exhibit and programs for Hispanic Heritage Month* featured a series of public programs to increase awareness of the traditions of Mexican-origin farmworkers in South Georgia. These events were co-sponsored with the Department of Modern and Classical Languages at VSU and funded by a grant from the Georgia Humanities Council and the Southern Arts Federation. They included display of the Florida Humanities Council traveling exhibit *The Last Harvest* with new panels created to show the South Georgia connection (Sept. 23-Oct. 31, 2002) and a series of four related public programs on music, customs, and occupational folklife.

*Collaboration on conferences and concerts*, including the VSU African American Studies 2003 Lecture Series which featured a performance by the Georgia Sea Island Singers on the VSU campus and for 500 K-3<sup>rd</sup> graders at Lomax-Pinevale Elementary in Valdosta.

- 5) Provide VSU students with academic courses and fieldwork opportunities involving traditional arts and folklife. During the grant period the SGFP director, taught an independent study on African American Religious Music Traditions (Spring, 2003) which resulted in a fieldwork project on black 7-shape singing traditions in Randolph County, and taught two sections of World Music Cultures for the Music Department.

#### Involvement of Key Artists

David Lee and Southeast Georgia Sacred Harp Singing Community: video and audio documentation as part of requested technical assistance and a future planned video documentary. Artists featured at Folklife of Wiregrass Georgia opening receptions: Henry Rutland, fiddle, and Paul Massey, guitar, Thomasville; Jerry Murkerson Bluegrass Band, Bainbridge; South Georgia Grass, Thomas and Grady Counties; Gayle Grimsley of Colquitt, (African American lined hymns); Freedom Singers of Albany, African American gospel and political songs. Other special events: Georgia Sea Island Singers, Brunswick (featured in performance at the African American Studies Lecture Series and at Lomax- Pinevale Elementary, Valdosta, sponsored by SGFP), Los Bandits (Tex Mex music), Kalamazoo, MI (Hispanic Heritage Month program).

Impact: Through support of a folklore specialist, VSU is able to include traditional arts within its mission of regional arts outreach and applied research. It currently the only public institution in the state with a full-time public folklorist and ethnomusicologist devoted to regional culture and traditional arts. The Folklife of the Georgia Wiregrass exhibit was provided at little to no cost to host organizations. It is the only such exhibit touring the region and has been an important tool in increasing understanding of traditional arts of the Wiregrass region. The *Folkwriting* project and workbook is the first comprehensive folklife and education project geared to Georgia quality core curriculum standards. Once the website is up in late 2003 and the program can be actively marketed, this will be an important accessible resource for folk arts in education. The SGFP has consistently been a voice for underserved and under-recognized constituencies in the region.

During the grant period SGFP brought \$63,500 in additional funds to VSU. In FY 02-03 the SGFP accounted for 58% of grants to the College of the Arts. No other program in the College of the Arts has conducted activities in 15 counties in the service area.

Anecdotal Information or "Human Interest" Stories About the Project

"Being a public library in a small rural community carries an added responsibility of providing quality cultural enrichment for the residents. Thank you for helping us achieve that goal by making this outstanding collection of photographs available to the people of southwest Georgia."  
Susan Ralph, Southwest GA Regional Library, Bainbridge, May 20, 2003 (on the Folklife of Wiregrass Georgia exhibit)

**SOUTH GEORGIA FOLKLIFE PROJECT 2003-2005  
NEA GRANT VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY 03-5500-3095**

1) What activities did the grant support and what did the project accomplish?

The South Georgia Folklife Project (for the period August 15, 2003 through June 30, 2005) conducted the following activities: 1) teaching two courses per year with folklife material, including courses which generated valuable primary research for the South Georgia Folklife Collection; 2) exhibitions, including the final stages of travel of the Folklife of the Georgia Wiregrass exhibit to Woodbine, Folkston, Valdosta, and Adel, (note: this exhibition is now on permanent display in VSU's Odum Library); and completion of the Legacy of Harley Langdale, Jr. exhibit for the VSU School of Business (turpentine); 3) on-line access of "Folkwriting" FAI curriculum ([www.valdosta.edu/folkwriting](http://www.valdosta.edu/folkwriting)) and conference/community presentations on same; 4) The Faces of the Piney Woods Occupational Folklife of Turpentiners documentation project with funding match from the GA Folklife Program, student internship, and website development of project findings ([www.valdosta.edu/turpentine](http://www.valdosta.edu/turpentine)); 5) Valdosta concerts of traditional artists, including Ballads and Breakdowns (November 13, 2003) and Hymns and Hoedowns (April 7, 2005); (6) Collection development, including development of ACCESS Data base template, data processing, and TAG residency on sound digitization and Adobe Audition sound editing; 7) fieldwork for the Changing Sounds of South Georgia radio series and production of 12 programs aired on Georgia Public Radio (discussed in more depth in the final report for NEA grant 03-5500-1029); 8) conference presentations on SGFP projects; (9) service to the field including Society for Ethnomusicology Southeast and Caribbean Chapter Sec/Treasurer (03-04), and President (04-05), Southern Arts Foundation Latino Initiative, Georgia Council for the Arts and Florida Folklife Program grant panelist; 11) Preserving Southeast Georgia Sacred Harp project, including digitization of historic family recordings, 12) Technical assistance to traditional artists and organizations.

Since VSU ceased support of the SGFP as of June 30, 2005--due to budget cuts--project director Sommers worked with VSU Archives during a 6 month extension period to turn a working collection into an archival collection so there will be a lasting presence of the SGFP at VSU. This work is being continued with funding from the Georgia Council for the Arts Folklife Program.

2) Were you able to carry out approved project activities? If not, please explain.

For the most part, approved project activities were carried out. However, beginning in September 2004, VSU made the decision not to continue its support for the project. This meant that efforts became focused on wrapping up existing projects and networking with VSU Archives to ensure the long-term preservation and access of the SGFP collection. Technical assistance and outreach activities were accordingly curtailed.

Since Georgia had no state folklorist for most of the grant period, planned networking with GCA was limited. The SGFP did maintain a viable public folklore program in the southern third of

Georgia during this period but with little to no coordination with GCA. Toward the end of the grant period, GCA hired a half-time traditional arts coordinator, but by this time SGFP had been notified of the funding cut effective June 30, 2005.

- 3) Who were the key artists and partnering organizations, and what was the nature of their involvement?

KEY ARTISTS: Sheila Kay Adams, acclaimed 7<sup>th</sup> generation Appalachian ballad singer from Madison County, NC; performed at the Ballads and Breakdowns concert and presented in two education classes at VSU; Henry Rutland of Thomasville, Georgia, and George Custer of Salt Springs, Florida, cousins and fiddlers, heirs to the great South Georgia fiddler, their Uncle Bob "Georgia Slim" Rutland: performed twin fiddles at the Ballads and Breakdowns and Hymns and Hoedowns programs; Hoboken Sacred Harp singing community (David and Clarke Lee, Hoboken, GA), participated in Hymns and Hoedowns program, consulted in preservation project for historic family tapes of Hoboken style, subject of numerous field tapes; Rutha Harris of Albany, Georgia, originally came to national attention as a member of the SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) Freedom Singers during the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, participated in Hymns and Hoedowns program, subject of fieldwork, featured in Folklife of Wiregrass Georgia exhibit.

KEY PARTNERING ORGANIZATIONS: Bryant-Lang Historical Library, Woodbine, Charlton County Public Library, VSU Library, Lowndes County Historical Society and Museum [all hosted the Folklife of Wiregrass Georgia traveling exhibition]; Cook County Arts Council [received technical assistance for presenters programs of traditional artists]; Great Impressions, Americus [design for Legacy of Harley Langdale exhibit]; Gainesville Middle School Humanities Program [North Georgia Folkwriting site; presented at American Folklore Society education workshop October, 2005]; Georgia Public Radio [editorial assistance and broadcast of Sounds of South Georgia Radio Series]; Dean Poling—Valdosta Daily Times [feature articles on SGFP programs]; Butterfield Overland Productions, Winter Park, FL [audio consulting, digitization]; First United Methodist Church [space and custodial for Hymns and Hoedowns program].

- 4) Beyond the project's direct accomplishments, what was the impact on—or benefit to—your organization, your discipline/field, and/or community?

The SGFP impacted Valdosta State University by creating greater visibility for the institution throughout South Georgia and by introducing a strong traditional arts programming element within the College of the Arts. The Folkwriting and Traditions of Turpentine websites, as well as a badly outdated SGFP website, have provided a presence for folklife and traditional arts in Georgia during a period when Georgia was without a State Folklorist. These web resources have reached a wide audience across the country and will be maintained through the VSU Archives. The South Georgia Folklife Project Collection, currently being organized and accessioned as part of the VSU Archives and Special Collections, will have a continuing presence in the region, serving as a resource on South Georgia for years to come.