



2013 All-America City Award Application

Application Due: Monday, March 11, 2013

Finalists Announced: April 2013

Up to 30 finalist community delegations will be invited to Denver to present.

**Peer-Learning Workshops & Awards Presentation/Competition: June 14-17, 2013
in Denver, Colorado**

The All-America City Award

The National Civic League invites you to apply for America's oldest and most prestigious recognition award, now in its 64th year.

The All-America City Award recognizes ten communities annually for outstanding civic impact and action planning. Winning applicants demonstrate innovation, inclusiveness, civic engagement, and cross sector collaboration by describing successful efforts to address pressing local challenges. For this year, 2013, NCL is pleased to announce a spotlight on Veterans and Military Families and thanks its partners, particularly the Colorado National Guard.

In addition to the ten All-America City Awards, NCL also recognizes one community for its inclusiveness and diversity innovations. See Part 1, Section B.

A youth member of a finalist community is also recognized with the AAC Youth Award. Nominations for this award will be requested after finalists are announced.

Community Information

Community name and state: Town of Garner, North Carolina

Your community is applying as a:

Neighborhood Village Town City County Region

If applying as a region, name participating communities: _____

If applying as a neighborhood, name city: _____

Has your community applied before? Yes No If Yes, which years: _____

Has your community been a Finalist before? Yes No If Yes, which years: _____

Has your community been an All-America City before? Yes No If Yes, which years: _____

Contact Information

All-America City Award contact (primary contact person available throughout competition & follow-up):

Name: Kady Doelling Title (if any): Management Analyst
Organization/Government/Other: Town of Garner
Address: 900 Seventh Avenue City, State, Zip: Garner, North Carolina 27529
Phone (business/day): 919-773-4417 Mobile Phone: 720-244-7779
E-mail Address(es): kdoelling@garnernc.gov

List the 3 individuals who most actively participated in filling out this All-America City Award application (add additional lines if needed):

Provide name and title, organization/government, phone number & email address

- 1) Rick Mercier, Public Information Officer, Town of Garner, 919-773-4418, rmercier@garnernc.gov
- 2) John Hodges, Executive Director, Garner Revitalization Association, 919-773-4402, downtowngarner@nc.rr.com
- 3) Kady Doelling, Management Analyst, Town of Garner, 919-773-4417, kdoelling@garnernc.gov

The applying community will receive a complimentary membership (or membership renewal if an AAC application was submitted last year) to the National Civic League for one year. To whom should this membership be directed?

Name: Hardin Watkins, Town Manager

Address: 900 Seventh Avenue

City, State & Zip Code: Garner, North Carolina 27529

Phone Number: 919-773-4403 Fax: 919-662-1944

Email: hwatkins@garnernc.gov

If we are designated an All-America City, we agree to follow NCL's rules regarding use of the All-America City Award logo, a registered trademark of the National Civic League.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name: Kady Doelling Title: Management Analyst

Community Statistics and Map

Note: Use the most up-to-date statistics possible for your neighborhood, town, city, county, or region (source suggestions: U.S. Census Bureau, State Department of Economic Security, State Department of Finance, Department of Public Health, and local school statistics).

POPULATION (in year 2010 or most recent): 26,066

Source/Date: Garner Planning Department, January 1, 2013

POPULATION PERCENTAGE CHANGE 2000-2010 (indicate + or -): +45.0 %

Source/Date: 2000 and 2010 Decennial Census

RACIAL/ETHNIC POPULATION BREAKDOWN:

White	57.8 %
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	9.9 %
Black or African American	32.9 %
Asian	1.8 %
American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN)	0.5 %
Mixed Race	2.3 %
Other	4.6 %

Source/Date: 2010 Demographic Profile, US Census

MEDIAN FAMILY INCOME: \$ 73,635

Source/Date: 2008-2010 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates

PERCENTAGE OF FAMILIES BELOW POVERTY LEVEL: 3.8 %

Source/Date: 2008-2010 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE: 8.6 %

Source/Date: 2008-2010 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates

POPULATION BREAKDOWN BY AGE GROUP (percentages, if available):

19 years old and under	25.5 %
20-24	6.3 %
25-44	32.4 %
45-64	26.0 %
65 and over	9.8 %

Source/Date: 2008-2010 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates

PERCENTAGE OF HOME OWNERSHIP: 70.0 %

Source/Date: 2008-2010 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates

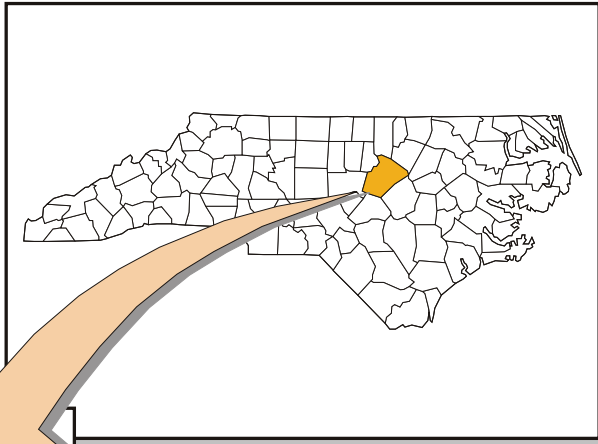
WORKFORCE DISTRIBUTION -- Name the three largest employment sectors (include military services and/or installations, if any) in your community and provide the percentage of total employed in each:

<u>Educational Services and Health Care</u>	<u>21.3%</u>
<u>Professional, Scientific, Management, and Administrative</u>	<u>12.8%</u>
<u>Construction</u>	<u>9.8%</u>

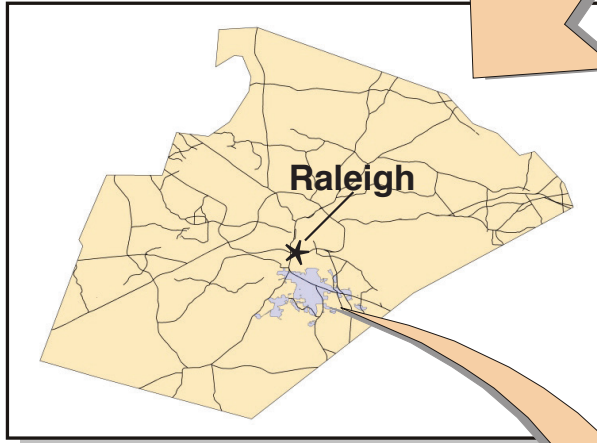
Source/Date: 2008-2010 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates

MAP -- Please attach a state map (8.5" x 11") with your community clearly marked.

North Carolina

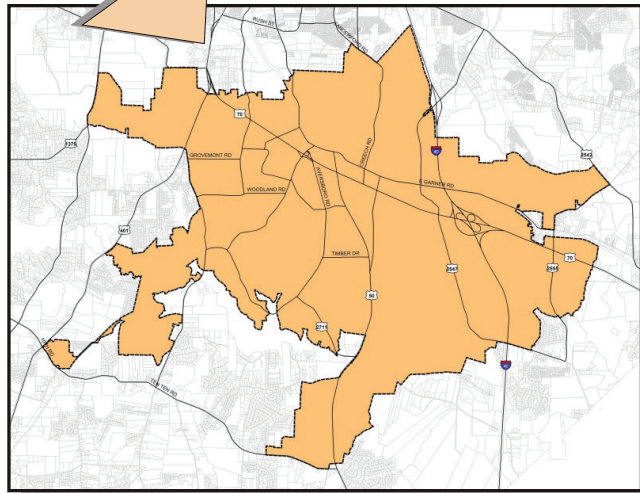


Wake County



Raleigh

Garner



Garner, North Carolina

ALL-AMERICA CITY AWARDS CRITERIA

Resource: [NCL's Civic Index](#). [Ask for a free copy!](#)

Civic Engagement and Collaboration: comprehensive citizen/resident engagement in decision-making and action planning, cross-sector collaboration (business, local government, nonprofits, military, etc.) and regional collaboration.

Inclusiveness: recognition and involvement of diverse segments and perspectives (ethnic, racial, socio-economic, age, sexual orientation, gender expression, people with disabilities, and others) in community decision-making.

Innovation: creative use and leveraging of community resources.

Impact: **demonstrable** significant and measurable achievements in the past 5 years (for example: dollars raised, jobs created or lives impacted), particularly in projects that address the community's greatest challenges.

PART I: TELL YOUR COMMUNITY'S STORY

Section A: Tell us your story. Utilizing the awards criteria (above) describe how your community addresses its pressing challenges and plans for its future. How are citizens/residents involved in planning and implementation? What are examples of cross sector collaboration among the neighborhoods, government, businesses, and nonprofit organizations engaged in these efforts? What is your community's vision? Include real examples of how your community has demonstrated its strengths, innovations, and faced its challenges. (1,000 word maximum)

Garner is a community that comes together to solve problems. It cherishes its hometown feel and strong volunteer spirit. It honors its past – but also plans progressively for its future. And it doesn't back down from a challenge.

When a highway proposal threatened to split Garner in half in fall 2010, thousands of residents came together in a few weeks' time to stop it. The "red route" would have wiped out approximately 2,300 homes and three municipal parks, obliterated a historic African-American church with over 1,000 members and delivered a crippling economic blow to the town by tearing through the town's primary industrial park.

But Garner's citizens sprang into action. A local videographer volunteered his time to make a documentary that became a critical educational, lobbying and citizen mobilization tool. Citizens with lobbying and state government experience worked the halls of the N.C. General Assembly. Neighborhood groups organized meetings with Town and N.C. Department of Transportation officials. A meeting held at Garner Historic Auditorium drew an overflow crowd of 1,300 people representing all segments of the community.

The result: In an unprecedented move, the General Assembly passed a law banning the route from being built. The bill sailed through the bicameral legislature with only one "nay" vote and was signed into law by the governor in an astounding 17 days. Since the law was enacted, dozens of homes have been built for retirees in a community that would have been eviscerated by the red route, and Strategic Behavioral Health built a new facility in Greenfield South Business Park, bringing 250 healthcare jobs to the region.

It was not the first time in recent years Garner had to fight against something. In January 2010, it was disclosed that Wake County was considering closing the town's only library (600,000 users annually) due to budget woes. A fascinating coalition of citizens – homeschoolers, job-seekers, high school students, mothers of preschoolers, retirees, realtors and Chamber of Commerce leaders – organized to

petition county leaders. Picket lines formed with children. A Facebook page was launched with over 1,600 fans supporting “Save Southeast Regional Library.” Numerous meetings and rallies were held. Because of this grassroots activism, the proposal to shutter the library was quickly shelved.

When ConAgra decided in spring 2010 to close its Garner factory and eliminate 400 jobs and \$55 million in investment, the company offered to donate the plant and 100 acres of land to the Town. Garner officials decided that a not-for-profit, the Garner Economic Development Corporation (GEDC), should be created to receive the property, manage its use and prepare and implement redevelopment plans. A three-person volunteer GEDC board of directors was established, and the board created an eight-member advisory board made up of a diverse group of local entrepreneurs and citizens.

The board has handled important matters such as selection and management of an economic development consulting firm to prepare a master redevelopment plan for the property. The plan included significant stakeholder and citizen involvement, including a focus group meeting with many former ConAgra employees. The GEDC held an open-house meeting on the plan, which was attended by approximately 300 citizens who represented a racial and socio-economic cross-section of the community.

A key recommendation that gained broad community support was to demolish the plant and redevelop the site as a sustainable-industry cluster (life sciences, biopharmaceutical or similar industries). The renamed Garner Technology Center will raise the average wage expectation for the community and bring something better than what was lost.

Garner embraces its tight-knit, small-town feel. It’s an image of the town that has even entered pop culture through Garner native Scotty McCreery’s song “Water Tower Town” and the music video accompanying it. In this town where “everybody knows your mom and them” (to quote the song’s refrain), people have a way of taking care of each other.

Several years ago, parishioners at Garner United Methodist Church identified the need to support the homeless in the Garner area and developed a solution, HOPE (Homeless Outreach Providing Encouragement) Ministry. Since its inception in 2007, HOPE has served over 12,500 meals, provided over 9,000 showers, washed over 2,000 loads of laundry and given away over 7,000 pairs of underwear and socks. The ministry is staffed entirely by volunteers who have worked over 24,000 hours, and it is supported entirely through monetary and in-kind donations. The church partners with six others in the area to provide volunteers and resources.

One of the biggest identified challenges in the community is the need to improve student performance in Garner’s schools. Toward that end, the Schools and Community Organized to Read (SCOR) program was established. The reading buddy program, which serves primarily second-graders, has continued to grow since its inception in the 2000-01 school year and now serves about 100 students annually.

The Garner Police Athletic and Activities League (PAAL) was launched in fall 2010 and currently serves approximately 80 “at-risk” students in four programs. PAAL organizers – who include police officers and local business and civic leaders – have established partnerships with the Town, the school system, local businesses and the local volunteer fire and rescue agency.

Another especially noteworthy volunteer effort is Garner’s annual Relay for Life, one of the most successful events of its kind anywhere. Last year, the town’s event raised nearly \$210,000 and had more than 1,000 participants.

Despite its strong community spirit, Garner isn't exactly a typical "water tower town." Its population has grown by 45 percent since 2000 to just over 26,000, and it is part of the thriving Raleigh metropolitan area. That means Garner must plan wisely for its future. In doing so, the Town has actively involved citizens.

Most notably, citizen input has played a crucial role in recent development of parks and recreational amenities. The 2007 Parks and Recreation Master Plan incorporated feedback from 300 completed surveys, two focus group meetings and two open-house meetings. Citizens identified needs for additional sidewalks and greenways, expanded nature-related programming and a recreation center with basketball courts/gym space.

Parts of the plan have already been implemented, including a new five-mile sidewalk loop and the one-mile South Garner Greenway, which opened in October 2011 and connects Lake Benson and White Deer parks to neighborhoods and schools. White Deer Park and its LEED Gold-certified Nature Center, which opened in November 2009, were also outcomes of the plan. The Nature Center offers ongoing educational programming, including 37 special programs for local public and private schools last year. Over 1,200 participants – mostly young people – took part in other educational programming based at the center in 2012. Finally, a bond program that goes before voters this March 12 includes a proposed recreation center with three basketball courts and an indoor walking track. The center would be built in an economically distressed part of North Garner.

Garner is certain to grow at a rapid rate in the coming years. As it does, its citizens will surely rise to the challenges of maintaining Garner's sense of community while helping those in need and building a vibrant town that is welcoming to all.

Section B: How does your community embrace diversity and demonstrate inclusiveness in community decision-making? ***In addition to the ten All-America City Award recognitions, one finalist community that demonstrates community-wide extraordinary and innovative success in valuing diversity and inclusiveness will be recognized with the All-America City Diversity and Inclusiveness Award.*** Describe challenges, specific actions taken, and successes achieved by your community to embrace diversity and demonstrate inclusiveness in community decision-making, including involvement of diverse segments and perspectives -- ethnic, racial, socio-economic, age, sexual orientation, gender expression, people with disabilities, veterans and military families, and others. (1,000 word maximum)

Drop in for a visit to Garner Senior Center on any weekday, and you'll see a bustling place with citizens working out and dancing, painting and playing bridge, and playing basketball and table tennis.

The Senior Center, with a racially mixed (60 percent white, 40 percent African-American) membership of 3,500 people 55 years of age and older, is a shining example of Garner's citizen-led efforts to embrace diversity and to make inclusiveness an essential criterion in decision-making.

The center would not even exist were it not for a grassroots movement by local seniors. In the beginning, the citizens who formed Garner Senior Center, Inc., were mainly looking for a place to hold dances and to serve as a base of operations for local Meals on Wheels efforts. The group held a number of fundraisers and approached Town Council about building a center. The council agreed to donate property for the project once the group had raised \$300,000.

County commissioners donated \$50,000, an array of local businesses donated money and offered services, and the group continued fundraising efforts such as selling memorial bricks and plaques. In

less than a year, the citizens had the \$300,000 to approach the council. The council donated two adjoining properties on Garner Road, a main thoroughfare through downtown.

The center opened in 1991 with an agreement that the Town's Parks and Recreation Department would run it. In response to community demand, the Town added a \$1.2 million fitness annex to the center in 2006. In 2009, North Carolina's Division of Aging and Adult Services certified the facility as a Center of Excellence.

Today, the multipurpose facility offers over 150 classes and programs per month. It also serves as the largest congregate site for Meals on Wheels in Wake County, home of the state capital of Raleigh. In February 2013 (the latest month for which data are available), 1,648 people received meals in person at the center; another 1,032 received home-delivered meals through operations based at the center. In 2012, 33,728 meals were served through the center's Meals on Wheels program.

The center also partners with Resources for Seniors, a non-profit in Wake County that serves senior and disabled adults by providing information and support for decision-making, and also direct services such as home care, adult day care, home repair and more. In 2012, Resources for Seniors served 3,357 people as a result of its partnership with Garner Senior Center.

Seniors are not only members of the center; they volunteer their time to help run it and base other volunteer efforts out of the facility. For example, On the Mend volunteers make and donate quality handmade items such as quilts, bags, afghans, dishcloths and other items to hospitals, same-day surgery facilities, nursing homes and to many others in need locally. In this way, seniors are not only recipients of services but also active contributors in their community.

This facility, now an irreplaceable cornerstone of the community, is Garner's most extraordinary example of citizen-led successes and innovation that embrace diversity (age, racial, socio-economic, people with disabilities) and demonstrate inclusiveness in community decision-making. However, Garner continues to make progress in valuing diversity and inclusiveness in other important ways.

In January 2011, the Town of Garner and a new citizens group, Garner Concerned Citizens United, teamed up to hold a celebration of the life and teachings of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The racially mixed audience filled up the 471-seat Garner Performing Arts Center (at the time, there had been only a handful of "sellout" events ever at the venue) and heard keynote speaker the Rev. Dr. David Forbes Sr. deliver a spirited and frank assessment of the state of racial equality in our community and nation.

Dr. Forbes, a member of the Shaw University Board of Trustees and founding pastor of Christian Faith Baptist Church in Raleigh, was one of the first members of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). As a student civil-rights activist in the 1960s, he learned strategy and non-violent protest methods directly from Dr. King in Atlanta. He now calls Garner home.

"I was very proud that my mayor and council and city were willing to do that," he said of the decision to institute an MLK celebration. "It was quiet for far too many years on the King legacy. But to make that decision was, I thought, a very progressive decision."

The celebration has become an annual event, with a volunteer citizen committee organizing it. This year's celebration featured a testimonial by a Latino activist from Garner and recognized the volunteer

work of two Garner citizens with Garner Concerned Citizens United's Martin Luther King Jr. Dream in Action award.

Garner Concerned Citizens United formed about four years ago. The initial goal was to enable citizens of the New Rand Road area of town – a largely African-American area composed of low- to moderate-income households – to be better informed “on the front end of planning,” says member Elmo Vance, who serves on the Town's Planning Commission and is also a member of the Garner Revitalization Association and Garner Economic Development Corporation boards.

The group of about 15 citizen-activists has initiated a dialogue with elected officials and Town staff, and that dialogue is ongoing – whether it involves formal presentations to the group and New Rand neighborhood about Garner's upcoming bond referendum or the group's criticism of a planned expansion of an Alcoholic Beverage Control store (i.e. a liquor store) in the community. The group's input has led to repaving of New Rand Road, installation of sidewalks in the neighborhood and better lighting in neighborhood parks.

The Town and citizens continue to work to seize on the opportunities that Garner's diversity offers. The Town's Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Department is currently working with the pastor of the Hispanic ministry of First Baptist Church of Garner to hold a Latino festival at Lake Benson Park – Garner's town common – in September. The goal of the event is to foster better cross-cultural understanding in a community that has seen its Hispanic population increase from being 4.7 percent of the town's total population in 2000 to 9.9 percent in 2010, according to Census Bureau estimates.

Garner is a community willing to be honest with itself, to confront its challenges and to embrace diversity and inclusiveness in order to fulfill the tagline in the Town's logo proclaiming that Garner is “a great place to be.”

PART II: DESCRIBE THREE COMMUNITY-DRIVEN PROJECTS

Describe your three best projects that have resulted in significant local impact and action planning within the past five years. Past All-America City Award applicants have highlighted projects to increase third grade reading success for at-risk children, to increase health care for underserved populations, to create new businesses and jobs, to revitalize downtown, to engage youth in identifying and planning services and facilities, to promote cross sector collaborative centers, to increase fiscal sustainability, to develop emergency disaster plans, to recover from a natural disaster, and more. For 2013, NCL invites, but does not require, one project that spotlights innovative approaches to address veterans' and military families' access to jobs, housing, and health services or to recognize civic leadership by veterans or military families in strengthening communities. Tell us how each of these projects promote civic engagement, collaboration, inclusiveness, innovation, and impact. See criteria above and consult NCL's Civic Index – available at no cost to applicants. Request it @ aac@ncl.org.

PROJECT ONE (May spotlight veterans and/or military families)

- 1) Provide the project name and a description of its qualitative and quantitative impacts in the past five years. (1,000 word maximum) You may use this format: a) challenge, b) actions taken, c) impact, d) individual or community leadership.

When citizens organized in 2006 to form the Garner Veterans' Memorial Committee, they refused to think small. Although the memorial will not be unveiled until May 4, the process of creating this memorial has resulted in beneficial collaboration, creation of long-term partnerships and healing of old

wounds among many in our community. With this type of success even before the memorial has been dedicated, the project figures to be a transformative element in Garner.

Like many communities across our nation, Garner knows the pain and loss of war firsthand. From the Civil War to the present, 67 Garner-area residents – including two in the past seven years – have died while serving their country. It was the combat death of Garner resident Henry Sanchez in July 2006 that galvanized the community and served as the primary catalyst for the memorial project. Indeed, Sanchez’s grandmother, who serves on the project’s committee, has been a driving force in the movement to get the memorial built.

Fundraising for this ambitious \$500,000 project would have been challenging under any circumstances, but undertaking it during the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression has made this an extraordinary example of community leadership and action. It’s also an example of how to involve large segments of the community instead of just a few well-heeled players. “We wanted it to be a community effort – not one big check writer,” says committee Vice President Faye Gardner.

The memorial committee – which includes six American Legion members, three Veterans of Foreign Wars members and retired Maj. Gen. Charles Scott (a Garner citizen) – reached out to local organizations including the Chamber of Commerce, Civitan and Optimist clubs as well as Legion and VFW posts. Many anonymous individual donors (big and small) came forward, and numerous local businesses also made significant contributions.

The most notable feature of this remarkable grassroots fundraising campaign has been the sale of memorial bricks and benches for the project’s Walkway of Honor. To date, nearly 700 memorial bricks and 12 benches have been sold, bringing in \$125,000 – a quarter of the total funds raised for the project. Since the bricks can honor any veteran, living or dead, from any part of the country, brick orders have come from as far away as Alaska and Hawaii. Gen. Scott has overseen the sale of the bricks and benches.

In addition to brick orders from all over the country, the Veterans Memorial Committee secured a \$50,000 contribution from Wake County. The committee also is forming an important regional partnership by working with the Greater Raleigh Convention and Visitors Bureau to promote the memorial.

The memorial, designed by Garner resident Mon Peng Yueh, who won a statewide competition to earn the honor, will have large panels representing the decades that the nation has been at war. Educational text on one side of the panels will discuss the wars and conflicts. Smaller panels at the site will list the names of the men and women from the Garner area who made the ultimate sacrifice in service to their country. The reverse sides of the panels will have a sculptural component made of red clay and hand-formed by world-renowned sculptor Thomas Sayre.

The Town donated land at Lake Benson Park, which effectively serves as Garner’s town common. The scenic park, which opened in 1993, is the site of the town’s annual Independence Day celebration as well as other special events throughout the year. Sidewalks and a growing greenway system connect the park to neighborhoods, schools and an adjacent park. Besides being the focal point of the Garner community, the park was chosen as the memorial site for another important reason: It is where Henry Sanchez trained daily in preparation for his military service.

In 2012, the park had an estimated 200,000 visitors. Adjacent White Deer Park, which is connected to Lake Benson Park by walking and biking trails, recorded an additional 15,963 visitors to the park's Nature Center. The two parks recorded 58 groups of public, private, charter and home-schooled students in 2012, and 40 groups have signed up for scheduled spring programs in 2013. These figures do not include the estimated 135,000 walkers, joggers, playground users and picnic groups who frequent the two parks and trails annually.

With nearly 300,000 public school students in a 60-mile radius, the Veterans Memorial Committee is also working to make certain that the memorial is a popular field trip destination. Committee members and the Town have plans to reach out to local school systems to urge them to integrate trips to the memorial into curricula on history, social studies and civics.

And while all of those visits to the memorial will offer great opportunities to learn and reflect, the most powerful impacts will occur among the veterans themselves who will forever be connected to this project.

Garner resident Toni Poole knows this as well as anyone. Her father, Marshall A. Sauls, was awarded a Purple Heart after being hit with shrapnel from a grenade in Vietnam, but he never really had spoken with his family about his wartime experiences. When Ms. Poole's husband brought up the idea of presenting her dad with a brick, she "just didn't know what he was going to think." The family surprised him with a certificate informing him of the brick purchase at a family dinner. "As soon as he opened that, he just started bawling. I had never seen him cry that much," Ms. Poole recalls. "He told us, 'You just don't know how much this means that someone will remember me.'"

Les Harmon, a town fire inspector who served in Vietnam, was presented with a certificate for a donated brick (paid for by his co-workers) during a recent Town Council meeting. In comments that evening, Mr. Harmon said: "When we got out, it was a different time back then. We were called warmongers, baby killers. And when we got discharged and went home, they would tell us, 'Don't wear your uniforms home because people are going to demonstrate against you.'" He said the brick presentation was the first time in his life he was recognized for his service. Nearly overcome with emotion, he said: "I really don't talk much about my service because it wasn't the thing to do back then. It's great to see America finally beginning to see its service people and appreciate them."

For many decades into the future, the Garner Veterans Memorial will be a place where people from all over will come to learn about the sacrifices of our veterans and to show them the appreciation they so richly deserve.

- 2) Provide a summary of the first project which we may use to promote your community. (250 words maximum)

The Garner Veterans Memorial, to be dedicated on May 4, is the product of an inspiring grassroots community effort to, in the words of organizers, "provide a memorial that pays tribute to our veterans but not to create a memorial which glorifies war." Garner individuals, civic and veterans organizations and local businesses have raised the funds to build the \$500,000 project, which features pillars with the names of 67 Garner-area veterans who have died serving our country as well as the artwork of world-famous Raleigh-based sculptor Thomas Sayre.

The committee that has overseen planning, fundraising and implementation of the project wanted to involve the entire community. Organizers' fundraising approach relied heavily on small contributions

from many donors. A centerpiece of the grassroots fundraising campaign has been the sale of memorial bricks and benches. So far, nearly 700 memorial bricks and 12 benches have been sold, raising \$125,000, or a quarter of the total funds for the project.

The memorial will be located at Lake Benson Park – Garner’s town common. The park receives an estimated 200,000 visitors annually, and an adjacent park, connected to Lake Benson Park by walking and biking trails, receives another nearly 16,000 visitors to its Nature Center. In addition to these visitors, another estimated 135,000 walkers, joggers, playground users and picnic groups use the two parks and trails each year. The Town and memorial committee also plan to work with school systems in the region to organize field trips and incorporate the memorial into curricula.

The most meaningful impact of this memorial, however, will be the positive healing effects it will have for veterans and their families.

Provide the name of the primary contact for the project. Name & title, organization, address, telephone, and e-mail address. *(This person may be contacted to verify information.)*

Faye Gardner; Vice President of Operations; Garner Chamber of Commerce; 401 Circle Drive, Garner, NC 27529; 919-772-6440; Faye@garnerchamber.com

PROJECT TWO

- 1) Provide the project name and a description of its qualitative and quantitative impacts in the past five years. (1,000 word maximum) You may use this format: a) challenge, b) actions taken, c) impact, d) individual or community leadership.

Like most communities, Garner struggles with meeting the educational needs of a segment of the student population that is at risk for failure in our schools. In 2004, a study of 10 Garner-area public schools showed over 500 children were at risk of falling behind in school or at risk of violence.

To deal with this challenge, a Garner citizen, Amy White, and a group of supporters applied for a federal grant aimed at matching community agencies with low-income grade-school students falling behind in reading and math. When the grant was awarded, First Baptist Church of Garner started Community of Hope Ministries as a separate 501(c)(3) to launch an after-school program to help children with reading and math. But what started out as a program to help lower-income kids learn opened up organizers' eyes to a wider web of needs – and Community of Hope became a “dot connector” that linked needs with those who were willing and able to lend a hand.

Community of Hope now collaborates with six Garner-area public elementary schools to identify at-risk students who are both socio-economically challenged and are below grade level in reading and math. On average, only 66 percent of students in these schools are performing at grade level. The non-profit targets students whose families generally do not have the means to enroll their children in after-school programs. It eliminates the participation barrier by providing the program at no cost to families who qualify and by providing transportation from the six schools. Since 2004, the program has served over 575 children and families in the Garner area, and 20-25 volunteers donate their time each school year.

To understand the impact Community of Hope is making, one need only look at students such as Fernando Cervantes, the son of first-generation immigrants who moved to Garner to find a better life. His parents worked hard to pay the bills and provide a good home, but both struggled with English proficiency, so helping Fernando with homework was a challenge. When Fernando first enrolled at Community of Hope as a third-grader, his teachers in the program saw him cry when all his homework could not be finished before leaving. The teachers quickly recognized they were his only source for homework assistance, so they would either take extra time or assign a volunteer to help him specifically.

Today, Fernando is an honor-roll student in middle school, says his father, Jorge, who has gone on to serve on Community of Hope's Board of Directors. “I can see the people that work [in the program] got passion to help the children,” he says. “We are sure that this program is a blessing to each boy or girl that is reached and that it makes an impact on the whole family.”

In addition to homework assistance, the program also offers an on-site computer lab. The Success Maker program was developed to specifically align with the state's Standard Course of Study. *Every* child enrolled in the after-school program has made progress in their math and reading skills over the time they were enrolled.

Within a year of the creation of the non-profit, the leadership and volunteers grasped a very real truth: *Children in need are often indicative of families in need.* This realization prompted the Community of Hope Board of Directors to open a food pantry.

The food pantry has provided over 381,613 meals to Garner-area households in the past five years and has experienced a growth rate of 504 percent since the pantry began formally tracking meal distribution

in 2007. Over 112,987 meals were distributed in 2012 alone. And the demand continues to grow. More meals were given out in January 2013 than the total number of meals distributed in 2007.

An estimated 35 percent of clients are unemployable due to age or health, while another 40 percent are unemployed but looking for work. The remaining 25 percent are underemployed. On average, 12 percent of food pantry clients are over 65 years of age, 62 percent are women, 70 percent African-American, 24 percent white non-Hispanic, 5 percent Hispanic and 1 percent register as “other.” While most of the clients are repeat consumers, over 1,100 different families have received assistance through this ministry.

The food pantry’s success is the result of the volunteers and various partners who contribute time, money and food to the program. Over 30 volunteers contribute their time each month. Partnerships with the Food Bank of Eastern North Carolina, Garner Magnet High, Chick-fil-A, McDonald’s, Food Lion, BJ’s Warehouse, Garner Area Ministries, Able to Serve and Hope Ministries make it possible for Community of Hope to reach a large and diverse number of people. Whether it’s the donation of over 1,000 turkeys by Garner-headquartered Butterball at Thanksgiving or collection of over 10,000 nonperishable items from over 20 Garner neighborhoods by an army of Garner Magnet High students, Community of Hope is constantly engaging as many partners as possible.

Other needs have been identified in the past five years. The Carpenter’s Hands ministry coordinates volunteers and skilled tradespeople to do home repairs for the elderly, widowed and physically challenged. Many projects are made possible through partnerships with local builders and companies that donate supplies. HOPE Ministries (referenced in community story) also partner with Community of Hope in this ministry. Camp Courage is a summer enrichment experience for Garner-area children. Scholarships are available for students who would be otherwise unable to attend the program. The Crisis Housing Ministry provides financial assistance to families who have been suddenly displaced from their homes. This ministry offers a safe haven for displaced families as they explore options available to them for future housing. Community of Hope also partners with Garner Area Ministries – another important local non-profit – to provide emergency financial and food assistance to local families in need.

What began as a federally funded after-school program for at-risk youth has exploded into a thriving, self-sustaining and multifaceted community partnership that has positively affected thousands of lives. This Garner non-profit’s expansion of programming over recent years shows it has successfully leveraged community resources to offer HOPE to the town’s most vulnerable residents. With an annual budget of less than \$160,000, Community of Hope and its partners are making Garner a community of hope one day at a time.

- 2) Provide a summary of the second project which we may use to promote your community. (250 words maximum)

In 2004, First Baptist Church was approached by the Wake County school system with a need: help for struggling elementary students who were in danger of falling behind academically. First Baptist Church became one of three Wake County groups to earn the 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant, a federal program aimed at helping elementary school students who were behind in reading or math. The church started Community of Hope Ministries in 2004.

Community of Hope Ministries collaborates with six Garner-area elementary schools to identify at-risk students. On average, only 66 percent of students in these schools are performing at grade level. Hundreds of students have participated in the program through the years. As the leadership and

volunteers worked to serve the at-risk students in the after-school program, a very real truth was unveiled: *Children in need are often indicative of families in need.*

This realization identified other needs over the past five years. The food pantry has provided over 381,613 meals in the past five years to households struggling to make ends meet. Community of Hope also provides several other programs including Carpenter's Hands, Camp Courage and Transitional Housing Ministry

Community of Hope is able to meet these needs because of generous gifts from First Baptist; local businesses, individuals, and organizations; and the Town of Garner. They have become a "dot connector" between those with needs, those who can meet needs, and those who have the mandate to help others in need. By working with each other, people in need get a consistent message that Garner cares.

Provide name of the primary contact for the project. Name & title, organization, address, telephone, and e-mail address. *(This person may be contacted to verify information.)*

Craig Furlough; Executive Director; Community of Hope Ministries; 601 St. Mary's Street, Garner, NC, 27529; 919-779-6679; craig@cohmin.org

PROJECT THREE

- 1) Provide the project name and a description of its qualitative and quantitative impacts in the past five years. (1,000 word maximum) You may use this format: a) challenge, b) actions taken, c) impact, d) individual or community leadership.

Garner is a suburban community in the shadow of the state capital, and for many years, residents relied on nearby Raleigh and other towns for their cultural experiences. Garner citizens made an important investment in their community's future when a group rallied to save their abandoned 1921 school building from demolition. After a renovation completed in 2006, the school's auditorium became the Garner Historic Auditorium, creating a venue that would become a hub of arts and cultural activity.

Around the same time that citizens banded together to save the school building, a handful of residents sitting around their kitchen table formed a new theater group called the Towne Players of Garner. Its productions and occasional bluegrass concerts emerged as the town's primary cultural experiences at the auditorium for a number of years. The Towne Players flourished, winning regional accolades, and it has continued to grow. Now in its 15th year with over 900 season members, the program offers arts opportunities for citizens from toddlers to seniors. Last year alone, 575 volunteers worked 9,025 hours supporting Towne Players productions.

In 2007, as the Towne Players program continued to grow, the organization realized there was a need for affordable arts and education programming for children in the area. The Towne Players partnered with the Town to create the Theater Basics Camp and Theater Production Camp, establishing a five-week creative educational opportunity for children ages 5-19.

Participants learn theater fundamentals, and the camp culminates in a production involving singing, choreography, acting, costuming, complete sets and props. The 2012 season, involving 120 campers and 150 volunteers, featured a production of Disney's "Little Mermaid, Jr." seen by over 2,000 people during four performances. In five years, over 500 campers have participated in the program. The campers reflect Garner's diversity. Data for the past two years indicate that 31 percent of campers are African-American, 10 percent are Hispanic, 10 percent are Native American or of Asian/Pacific Island descent and 10 percent are mixed race.

To ensure the camps were affordable to all, a scholarships program was established. Much of the \$5,000 awarded through the Henry Sanchez Memorial Scholarship fund has been raised by the teenagers themselves through concession sales. The fund has provided 50 scholarships.

The scholarship program was "a financial relief, which gave my child an opportunity she might not have otherwise enjoyed," said one parent. "Her school does not provide the arts education I consider so vital to developing self-confidence, strong speaking skills and comfort in front of others." Other parents – one whose children's socio-economic situation often made them feel "less than" others and another whose developmentally delayed child was accepted as a "regular girl" in the camp – have praised the inclusiveness of the program.

A striking example of the camps' impact can be found in Arlie Honeycutt, who began participating in the program at its inception and established the scholarship fund. Many skills Arlie honed in the program are being put to good use this year as Miss North Carolina.

"I was never a scholar – until I realized that learning lines for a show was no different than memorizing multiplication tables," she said. "I was never an extrovert – yet I found that by daring to raise my voice

onstage I could command the respect of a room full of people. I was never an athlete – but I learned teamwork from constructing a set, pulling a curtain and helping a fellow actor make a quick change backstage. My community theater experience decisively shaped who I am today.”

The next step in Garner’s grassroots arts movement was the creation of the Broadway Voices concert series in 2010. The series has brought to Garner the principal actors from Broadway shows such as “Les Miserables,” “Phantom of the Opera,” “Beauty and The Beast,” “Mary Poppins” and others – and at a fraction of the cost of seeing a show on Broadway. The series resulted from a collaboration among the Garner Chamber of Commerce, the Town and local businesses who contribute over \$30,000 annually to sponsor the series. The series draws a regional audience and has generated more than \$100,000 in favorable publicity for the community through newspaper and magazine articles, radio and television coverage and social media, turning an arts project into an economic engine for Garner.

In addition to providing new and innovative arts experiences and education to the community, these partnerships are award-winning collaborations. Broadway Voices won the statewide Arts and Humanities Award from the North Carolina Recreation and Parks Association in 2011 and founder and Garner resident Tim Stevens won the Wake County Arts Award that same year. The Towne Players’ theater camps won the statewide Arts and Humanities Award in 2012. The successes of the Towne Players, the theater camps and the Broadway Voices series – all citizen-led initiatives – demonstrated the desire for broader cultural programming in Garner.

To meet this growing need, the town began implementing a strategic cultural arts plan in 2011. The Town department that manages the auditorium and programming partnerships added “Cultural Resources” to its name to become the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Department. There was investment in facility upgrades, programming and staffing including a full-time professional auditorium manager and theater services manager. Based on input from the community, the Garner Historic Auditorium was rebranded the Garner Performing Arts Center (GPAC).

Existing programming was enhanced, including an annual favorite, the Garner Showcase of Talent, whose alumni include Arlie Honeycutt and 2011 “American Idol” winner and country music star Scotty McCreery. The town also began a new cultural arts series with an emphasis on diverse offerings. The It’s Showtime! series has presented everything from magicians to jazz to funk to rock-and-roll with shows selling out the 471-seat venue.

New programming is always being developed to meet the changing needs of a growing population including a celebration of Black History Month and a children’s series. GPAC continues to draw on local resources to expand arts programming, including a partnership with the downtown revitalization organization to present an outdoor concert series and a network of local visual artists whose work shows at the center. GPAC has become the center of Garner’s cultural arts activities, and that is evident in the increase of participants. In 2012, 37,429 people used or visited GPAC compared to 19,627 in 2007, an increase of 91 percent.

From the historic building housing GPAC to the award-winning programming to the businesses that provide financial support to the artists whose work hangs on the venue’s walls, Garner’s new arts and cultural programming effort is an authentic blend of local talent, unique partnerships and strategic investment that is making a dramatic impact on the lives of citizens and is creating a new economic engine for the town.

- 2) Provide a summary of the third project which we may use to promote your community. (250 words maximum)

For many years, Garner residents had virtually no local cultural experiences. Several grassroots efforts began to fill this void, and their successes set the stage for what is now a vibrant arts and cultural economy – supported by both the public and private sector – that is enriching the lives of Garner’s citizens.

When Garner’s historic 1921 school building was slated for demolition, a group of citizens rallied to save it and created the Garner Historic Auditorium. Another group of citizens started a community theater group, The Towne Players, which has grown to 900 season members in its 15th year.

In 2007, the Towne Players realized the need for affordable arts education for children in the area. They partnered with the Town of Garner to create a summer theater camp program that serves 120 campers per year and provides scholarships to ensure the camps are available to all. In addition to theater skills, the camps are credited with building self-confidence in an inclusive atmosphere.

Another Garner resident developed a program to bring the stars of Broadway’s biggest shows to the local stage. A public-private partnership raises over \$30,000 annually to make the Broadway Voices series possible.

The success of these award-winning, citizen-created initiatives led the Town of Garner to implement a strategic cultural arts plan in 2011 that included rebranding the auditorium, investing in facility upgrades, hiring professional management staff and developing new programming. In 2012, the new Garner Performing Arts Center provided arts and cultural experiences to over 37,000 people.

Provide name of the primary contact for the project. Name & title, organization, address, telephone, and e-mail address. (*This person may be contacted to verify information.*)

John Hodges; Executive Director; Garner Revitalization Association; 120 East Main Street, Garner, NC 27529; 919-773-4402; downtowngarner@nc.rr.com

End of Application. Thank you for submitting your All-America City Award Application!

Submit the application: 1) by email (aac@ncl.org) or fax (888-314-6053) by Monday, March 11, 2013, 11:59 p.m. PST; and, 2) one hard copy with \$100 application fee to: National Civic League, 1889 York Street, Denver, Colorado 80206.
National Civic League is the home of the All-America City Award.

Need additional guidance? Email aac@ncl.org or go to www.allamericacityaward.com for announcements of upcoming webinars for prospective applicants or call NCL at 303-571-4343.

Up to 30 finalist community delegations will be asked to present their story to a national jury of civic, local government, business, philanthropy, and community experts in Denver from June 14-17, 2013. Finalists will be named in April 2013.