

Uniquely Powhatan

Nontraditional community services from one family to hundreds



Courtesy of Katrina Blankenship

Executive Summary

The Blankenship Mission:

To celebrate the cultural history of Powhatan County, Virginia and to inform, educate and unite the local community.

History:

The opportunity to educate the citizens of Powhatan and beyond about their Native American heritage presented itself in 2007 with the Jamestown 400th anniversary celebrations spreading throughout the state. For the Blankenship's, it was time to set the record straight. When asked why she took on the responsibility of educating the masses Katrina states that "Its important to me to see that the culture is here, that the people are educated" (personal communication February 2, 2012). With only moral support from the Board of Supervisors, Katrina and Curtis committed to organizing and financing the first ever Powhatan Pauwau in October of 2007. This grand event was conceived as a one-time event but has evolved into a reoccurring tradition for some, and a mission for Katrina.ⁱ To continue keeping the community aware and informed, not only about their history, but their present and future as well as been her personal and professional passion for almost two decades.

It all started 17 years ago when Katrina Blankenship wanted to create a way to keep the Powhatan citizens connected, informed and involved with their community. With the support of her husband Curtis, and the encouragement from the county Board of Supervisors, she developed, what is still today, the most utilized Non Governmental (NGO) website dedicated to the community of Powhatan, Virginia. Powhatanva.comⁱⁱ is the place to stay informed and linked to the services, events, celebrations and opportunities in the county. Now when anyone does an Internet search for Powhatan County, Virginia they will find this site among the top listings.

This community service initiative was not organized or financially supported by the county government. Rather, it was the dedication of a private citizen that provided the community with informational resources and local connections to facilitate understanding and growth in an effort to unite a fragmented county. This dedication to informing, educating and sharing of knowledge has blossomed over

the last 17 years into three distinct community projects. The virtual world met the physical world in 2007 with the Powhatan Pauwau, and now continues with the *Free Powhatan Community Journal*^{liii} is printed and circulated to all parts of the county.

From the Virtual to the Physical

The 400th Anniversary of Jamestown, Virginia began a wave in celebrations of the *Powhatana* indigenous people. What we now call the Commonwealth of Virginia was once named *Powhatana* by Captain John Smith's on his 1612 map documenting this new-found territory^{liv} ("Captain john smith: smith's,"). Variances in tribes existed in language, local customs, geography and use of the land. Smith, with the help of tribal leaders, memorialized the diversity of the different tribes in the naming of Virginia's geographical areas.

The History of the Powhatan Pauwau

What has been called Powhatan County, Virginia since May 17th, 1777 was named after Chief Powhatan, whose proper name was Wahunsenacawh, even though this was originally Monacan territory (personal communication, February 2, 2012). The misunderstood "fact" that Chief Powhatan was originally from Powhatan County was the driving force to take action for Katrina and Curtis Blankenship, Powhatan citizens by residence, Cherokee by blood. Katrina reflects on the organizing in 2007 as a time when "We had an opportunity to put Powhatan on the map as a community that was thriving and growing" (personal communication, February 2, 2012). This was the concept that gave birth to the first annual Powhatan Pauwau.

The celebration of Powhatan County's Native American heritage spread through the public schools as tribal drum groups, traditional dancers and oral historians visited the local schools to share their cultural rituals and history with the students of the county. This cultural, community connection between the schools and the tribal historians and performers continued in the years following with field trips to the Pauwau location of students in the surrounding counties as well.

The Future of the Powhatan Pauwau

The potential of cultivating an important community and educational tradition is at risk for becoming extinct.

The school/community relationship, like the even itself is facing extinction. With no financial assistance from the schools, county administration or other community groups, the financial responsibility for organizing an annual event like this falls on the Blankenship family. Even as strong as their passion for community education and unity is stronger than ever, the financial strain of sustaining this type of outreach program has overcome the dream.

The first annual Powhatan Pauwau in 2007 was held at the county fair grounds. All fees from the \$2,500 land use fee to paying for all the performers came from the Blankenship's household account. The ticket sales from this event never have been substantial enough to cover the cost of hosting it. Even with the generous donation of land for the event by the Powhatan Rescue Squad in 2008 and 2009, and a private citizen, Mr. Gitts in 2010 and 2011, the Blankenship family has operated at a deficit every year. Now, the possibility of their being a 2012 Powhatan Day Festival and Pauwau looks very grim.

The Blankenship Mission Continues

The original mission to celebrate the cultural history of Powhatan County, Virginia and to inform, educate and unite the local community has not changed in 17 years. What has, and is changing is the means by which communication and activity continue. The formation of the *Free Powhatan Community Journal* is now circulating regularly throughout the county delivering community news, local business advertisements and commentary of the sort not covered through the traditional methods of a newspaper. The *Powhatan Today* is the local newspaper, but the *Free Powhatan Community Journal* is the people's paper. There is a physical location now, which also houses Katrina's web design company, in one of the shopping centers in Powhatan. It's a small storefront that is quickly becoming the unofficial welcome center of the county.

Staying Connected

To learn more about the Powhatan County, Virginia and Native American History, visit the following sites created by Katrina Blankenship.

<http://www.pauwau.com/powhatan2007.htm>

<http://www.pauwau.com/chiefpowhatan.htm>

<http://www.powhatanva.com/>

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Sources

Captain John Smith's maps. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.smithtrail.net/captain-john-smith/smiths-maps/>

ⁱ Katrina Blankenship is the creator of www.powhatan.com, Computer Connections and the Powhatan Community Journal; as well of the host of a weekly Internet radio show *Powhatan Radio*.

ⁱⁱ This website was created and is maintained by Katrina Blankenship with no affiliation to the Powhatan County government.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Powhatan Community Journal is a privately published news magazine dedicated to keeping the citizens of Powhatan County informed of their communities happenings.

^{iv} More information about Captain John Smith's explorations can be found at <http://www.smithtrail.net/privacy-policy/terms-of-use.aspx>