

# AmeriCorps' Raven Thomas has passion for local history

BY DEBRA MINOR WILSON  
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FAIRMONT — Raven Thomas has always liked history.

"My family — Toothman — settled in Plum Run. They were pioneers. They settled here, and they're still here.

"My roots run deep in West Virginia and Marion County."

Even while she was studying for a business administration degree, her love of history kept nibbling at her. So it was no surprise when she took some folklore classes at Fairmont State University with Dr. Judy Byers.

"That got me going," Thomas said. "If I was interested in Marion County history before, she jump started it for me."

She volunteered for West Virginia's sesquicentennial celebration. But that wasn't enough.

She then applied for an AmeriCorps position.

"And how here I am."

"Here" is working for the Marion County Historical Society and Museum on various projects as one of 11 "PreserveWV AmeriCorps" workers to serve historical and economic development organizations in their historic preservation projects.

The purpose of the PreserveWV AmeriCorps program is to promote historic preservation and heritage tourism in West Virginia through historic resource re-use, improvement, and development.

"Currently I'm working on the Historical Homes Tour in November," she said. "This is new for me. I'm trying to orchestrate events such as this."

She also has eye on the former jail.

"I have plans for it, to restore the cells. Now, only four are open. I'd like to get them available for the public (to tour) and have displays of different historical events."

She's also active in the ongoing Civil War grave marker project, which will place markers on registered graves, Union or Confederate, from that conflict.

"Next year, around West Virginia's birthday, we're going to have a three-day event that will be part of the Civil War project as well," Thomas said.

"We're also working on having other historical sites in Marion County on the Civil War Trail, like the Jones raid and others."

A coal mining swap is being planned, she added.

Thomas is one of 11 AmeriCorps workers in the state and one of two for Marion County.

"I'm excited to get working," she said.

"We're excited to have been chosen for one of the 11 positions in the state to have been granted a full-time AmeriCorps person," said Dora Grubb, president of the society.

"We interviewed people from all over the United States. Our selection was Raven, who recently graduated from Fairmont State University with a major in business administration.

"We were impressed with her ideas, enthusiasm, willingness to explore and design new programs. Her first three projects are to begin creating displays for the jail project, recruiting new members and working with the Civil War projects. She will also assisting with our partnerships with other organizations on combined programs."

PreserveWV AmeriCorps will focus on nonprofit capacity building through organizational policy development, volunteer management and community engagement. AmeriCorps members' service will contribute to West Virginia's economic development and environmental stewardship through historic resource improvement and capacity building.

Members applied with the Preservation Alliance of West Virginia, and after a competitive application process, were selected and placed for one year of service at the following sites.

Other workers have been placed with Adaland Mansion in Philippi, the Cockayne

Farmstead in Glen Dale, the Craik-Patton House in Charleston, Main Street Fairmont, Main Street Morgantown, Preservation Alliance of West Virginia, the Wheeling National Heritage Area Corporation and Wheeling ONTRAC.

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