

# A view from the mountain

a newsletter from the Lillian E. Smith Center of Piedmont College

## Something fine and splendid: a message from Craig Amason



In a letter from 1932 to the counselors of the Laurel Falls Camp, Lillian Smith wrote: "Come to camp with ideas, with determination to make your group happy, with a resolve

to make of your relationship with them something fine and splendid." Beginning a few years ago, a strong relationship developed that was indeed "something fine and splendid" and ultimately led to the LES Foundation's generous donation of the LES Center to Piedmont College last September.

I had the pleasure of meeting Nancy and Robert Fichter back in 2008 while I was the director at Andalusia, the home of Flannery O'Connor in Milledgeville. Our paths crossed because Andalusia and the LES Center were both part of a tri-state consortium called the Southern Literary Trail, and I invited them to speak at Andalusia about Lillian Smith. As readers of this newsletter would expect, the Fichters were absolutely charming and

masterfully engaged their audience. I was intrigued by the Center's work, and my wife, Amy, and I became donors. Never would I have dreamed that Amy would eventually become the Vice-President for Institutional Advancement at Piedmont College and I would be offered the privilege of serving as the director of the LES Center.

I am extremely grateful to President James Mellichamp for this opportunity and to the Fichters and the other members of the Advisory Board for being so helpful during this time of transition. Also, we deeply appreciate the ongoing support of the Friends of the LES Center — you are crucial to our success. Dr. Mellichamp and I are at work drafting a master plan for the Center, including short and long-term goals. Like those camp counselors so many years ago, we are all coming to this pivotal place and time with determination, exciting ideas, and a resolve to move forward as we honor the memory of Lillian E. Smith.

— Craig Amason



Photo by Tim Lytle

## A Message from Nancy Fichter

Dear Friends,

As we send you these words, we are experiencing our first year of the remarkable change in the Lillian E. Smith Center's relationship with Piedmont College. As you know, the LES Center is now part of Piedmont College, a welcome and exciting development that has emerged from several years of thoughtful and productive experiences and programs shared with the College. We are delighted with this new arrangement, knowing that it not only secures the future of the Center and its vision but also opens many doors to evolving programs and events that will surely serve to enrich and deepen the Center's meaning and its legacy.

Lillian Smith was certainly no stranger to change, having sought throughout her life to effect it in ways that could improve human lives and the cultures in which we live. Although deeply aware of both subtle and radical change, she did not fear it, but rather embraced it as an opportunity to be valued and used. She wrote that out of change "comes the new growth, out of change comes the new way." In an essay published in *The Winner Names the Age*, her words speak to these issues:

"It is terribly hard for the poet and artist as well as for everyone else to see around the unknown (Cont. Page 3 )



## Author Virginia Euwer Wolff at the LES Center

On March 26, a group of Piedmont

College students and faculty, along with several Friends of the LES Center, joined visiting writer Virginia Euwer Wolff in the Common Room for lunch and



conversation about reading, writing, and social justice.

In her books for young adults, Wolff often examines social issues such as racism, teen pregnancy, and poverty. She was the inaugural speaker at Piedmont the previous evening for a new lecture series titled *Social Ethics Meets Creativity & Innovation*.

Wolff is the winner of the 2011 Phoenix Award for her novel *The Mozart Season*. Her 2001 novel, *True Believer*, won the National Book Award, and her newest novel for young adults, *This Full House*, is on the American Library Association's Amelia Bloomer List. Her other books include *Probably Still Nick Swansen* and *Bat 6*.



Brenda Bynum as Lillian Smith

## Brenda Bynum performance

Approximately 200 people attended an evening performance by Brenda Bynum of *Jordan is So Chilly: An Encounter with Lillian Smith* Feb. 22 in the auditorium of the Russell Building Special Collections Library at the University of Georgia. The event was sponsored by Piedmont College, UGA Libraries, and the Georgia Humanities Council.

Bynum has given this performance at several venues since its debut on April 20, 2013, at the Rearden Theater of Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School, an event that was presented by the LES Center for

a tri-state literary festival sponsored by the Southern Literary Trail. An actor and director in Atlanta since 1973, Brenda Bynum served as the Acting Teacher for the nationally known Professional Intern Program at the Alliance Theater in Atlanta. From 1983 to 2000 she was a Resident Artist and member of the faculty at Emory University in the Department of Theater Studies.

The one-woman play is based on published and unpublished writings and dialogue from Lillian Smith. "For me, it has been a true labor of love to bring her back to life in this way," Bynum said, "and I have been extremely gratified by the responses to her story, particularly from the many people who are hearing her story for the first time. What I want is for her name to be as familiar to any reading Georgian (and beyond) as the names of Flannery O'Connor, Carson McCullers, Alice Walker, and even Margaret Mitchell. A Lillian Smith renaissance is far overdue."

*Below: Georgia Humanities Council President Jamil Zainaldin, with Brenda Bynum and Piedmont President James Mellichamp following Bynum's performance as Lillian Smith at the University of Georgia.*





STUDY AWAY IN 2014  
**LILLIAN E. SMITH**  
**EXPERIENCE**  
MAY 5-15

## The 2014 Maymester

Piedmont College students enrolled for Maymester at the LES Center this year will be challenged to answer some thought-provoking questions. Why do you live where you live? Do you feel safe, secure, and content with your surroundings? What if the security of your surroundings was ruined or taken away?

*Exploring North Georgia's Geology and Native American History* is a 10-day, intensive class that will give these students an opportunity to study one of the most striking cases of social and environmental injustice in the nation's history: the removal of the Cherokee from north Georgia. Economic, social, and political decisions are often based on resource availability. Given Lillian Smith's legacy as an advocate for social justice, the LES Center is the perfect location to examine how these decisions

adversely affected marginalized people like the Native Americans of the nineteenth century and so many other Americans during the author's lifetime and today.

The Maymester students will have a chance to explore the natural resources and history of north Georgia, not only at the LES Center, but through tours of Coleman River Scenic Area, Tallulah Gorge, Vulcan Mineral Deposits, Foxfire Museum, and the Dahlonega Gold Museum. Dr. Debra Dooley (Geology) and Professor Ryan Franklin (History) will lead the class, which is scheduled for May 5-15 and is sponsored by the Piedmont College School of Arts & Sciences. Maymesters at the LES Center offer students a wide range of experiences including hiking, exploring, reading, writing, sketching, photographing, and sharing daily tasks as a part of community living in a beautiful setting surrounded by hills and forests.

(Cont. from page 1) curve, to guess by means of intuitive wisdom what the unborn thing we call our future will grow into."

We look forward to the future of the LES Center as part of Piedmont College. The vision and the sensibility of the College, under the leadership of its fine administration, are so in tune with the Center, and we give thanks for this significant new chapter.

Robert and I feel deeply connected to the LES Center/Piedmont College. We continue to be members of President Mellichamp's Advisory Council for the Center. We plan to be up at the Center at various times this year: in April, several months during the summer, and several weeks in the fall.

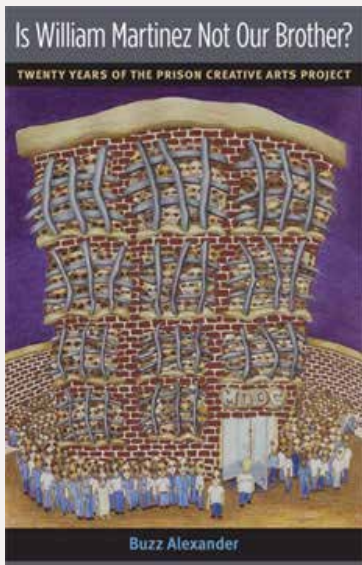
We are so grateful for the opportunities we have had to be part of the growth of the LES Center over the years and are particularly thankful for the support and friendship extended by all of you.

With appreciation,

Nancy and Robert Fichter

“ No journey carries one far unless, as it extends into the world around us, it goes an equal distance into the world within. ~ Lillian E. Smith ”





Buzz Alexander's book

## Buzz Alexander: past resident artist

Buzz Alexander is an Arthur F. Thurnau Professor of English Language and Literature at the University of Michigan and founder of the Prison Creative Arts Project, working with several theatre groups in Michigan prisons. He has also cocurated *18 Annual Exhibitions of Art by Michigan Prisoners* and assisted prisoners in producing 622 original plays in 22 years.

At the University of Michigan, Alexander teaches students how to conduct workshops in the arts at urban high schools, juvenile facilities and prisons. For his work, Alexander received the University of Michigan Regents' Award for Distinguished Public Service and Professor of the Year awards from both the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education.

While a resident artist at the Lillian E. Smith Center, he worked on his book, *Is William Martinez Not Our Brother? Twenty Years of the Prison Creative Arts Project*, winner of the 2012 University of Michigan Press Book Award.

"I found at the side of my bed Lillian Smith's *Killers of the Dream*, which I have assigned to my class," Alexander said. "My wife, Janie Paul, an artist, went to Wolf Fork Road and to Betty's Creek Road and did landscape drawings. It was a small group of us, and Nancy and Robert celebrated us and made us very comfortable. I couldn't imagine anyone better than the two of them, seriously, and because of them we all gathered and talked, cared about and learned about each other. We both loved being there."



Sherrill Williams Ragans

## Donor Spotlight

Sherrill Williams Ragans said she first heard about Lillian Smith while a student at Tift College. "I had the privilege of visiting with Miss Smith at her beloved Screamer Mountain home and cherish those moments until this day," she said.

During her 43-year career with Florida State University—there is even a residence hall named for her—Ragans worked with Smith's niece, Nancy Fichter, who served as chair of the FSU Department of Dance for 33 years. "The opportunity to know Nancy and the work she and her husband, Robert, were doing to ensure Lillian Smith's richly deserved place in history and in our efforts to be a better country proved to be a significant inspiration to me," Ragans said.

"When I learned of the Foundation established under Nancy's leadership, I wanted to demonstrate my support in some way, and I hope to continue that support as Piedmont strives to ensure the legacy of Lillian Smith, using her beloved mountain camp for renewal and refreshment of those who seek to 'make the world a better place.' Piedmont needs the support of all who appreciate the contributions of Lillian E. Smith as they seek to ensure her legacy for generations to come," she said.

# RESIDENCY PROGRAM

Artists and scholars from near and far will make their way to Screamer Mountain again this summer for a time of peaceful reflection and serious work.

We are especially grateful to John Templeton and John Siegel for all of their extra efforts in managing the program during this year of transition, and as always, we sincerely appreciate Pearl Fortson and Bill Watts for making sure the guests' accommodations are clean, safe, and comfortable.

Residents at the Center this season will be working in a variety of fields, including writing, musical composition, needlework, textiles, photography, mixed media, theater, choreography, and historical research.

We are also pleased to announce the establishment of a Residency Review Committee composed of Piedmont College faculty and staff: Rev. Dr. Ashley Cleere (College Chaplain and Advisory Board member), Dr. Lisa Hodgens (English), Dr. Jeri-Mae Astolfi (Music), John Spiegel (Theatre), Daniel White (Art), and Craig Amason (Director of the Center). This group will examine all aspects of the program as it was established by the LES Foundation with the anticipation of guiding the program into the future.

Your ongoing support makes it possible for Piedmont College to continue to offer a place where gifted, creative artists and scholars may find the conditions of quiet solitude and privacy in which to pursue their work. *Thank you.*



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# SPRINGTIME AT THE LES CENTER



Spring has sprung at the Lillian E. Smith Center, and it is popping out in some new places, thanks to ongoing landscape work by Master Gardener Barb Misner (right, Advisory Board member) and horticulturist Pam Williams of Piedmont College. The pair have planted hundred of bulbs, shrubs, and shade-loving plants next to the library in an area that will be called "Nancy and Robert's Garden" as an expression of thanks to the Fichters from the former LES Foundation.



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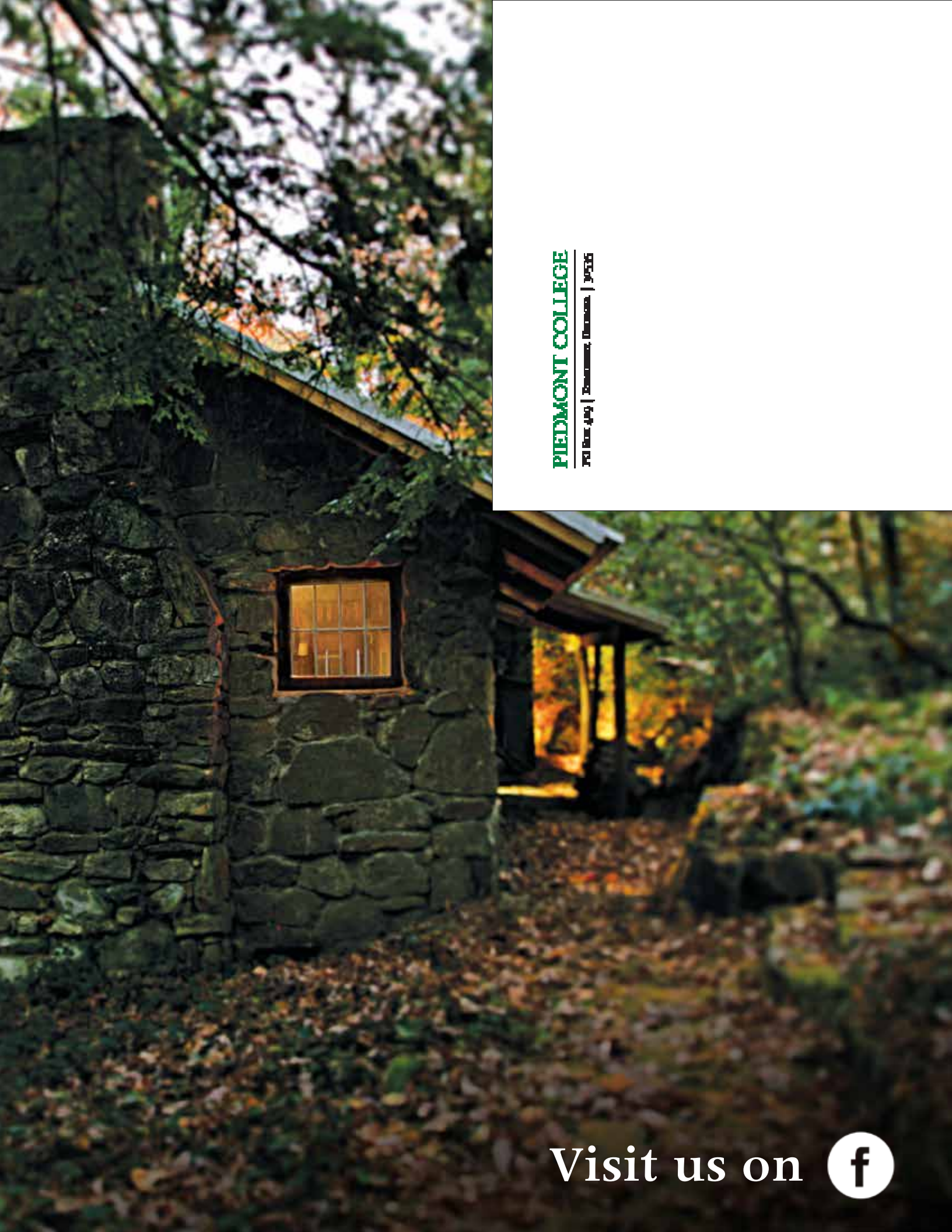
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