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## News

## Front Page

### And dinner on the ground



**Nathan Norris of PlaceMakers, left, talks to the crowd assembled on Court Square about the week-long charette planning process taking place in the community this week. An estimated 1,500 people showed up for the free barbeque dinner Monday afternoon. Above, charette director Bill Dennis, left, talks with local citizens while they enjoy their barbeque.**

The court square at one time was the center of activity for people living in Early County and many other rural communities across the country.

It was not unusual for entire families to show up for activities, bring a dinner in a basket and spend the entire day enjoying friends and activities.

The late Roy F. Chalker Sr., former publisher of the Waynesboro **True Citizen** once published a book titled **An All Day Hanging and Dinner on the Ground**.

There was no hanging on Court Square Monday, instead it was the kickoff of a weeklong planning event called a "charrette." And the barbeque was free for the approximately 1,500 people who turned out.

The afternoon got underway with comments from local officials and leaders from PlaceMakers, the planning firm leading the planning process for the Early County 2055 initiative being funded by the Rice Foundation.

"During my visits to your community I have learned that the greatest asset you have are the people," stated Nathan Norris of PlaceMakers. "When we were here before we learned that this really is a caring community that's a little different from many of the other small towns that we have visited." "While I could go on and on about a vision of how Early



County can be a better place, there's really one goal that we've set our sights on," Norris stated. "And that is the idea that this place would generate enough opportunities for your children and your children's children that they would never want to leave this place."

"The plans we develop this week will go nowhere if you don't get actively engaged."

Norris noted that PlaceMakers had assembled a team from all over the country and beyond who have special expertise to help in the planning process.

Noting some of the team members' experiences along the Gulf coast in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, he said it took the complete devastation of their communities for some of those people to come together to try to do something for their community.

"I'm glad to see the enthusiasm here today in Early County which clearly suggests that you are not waiting for your community to be blown off the map by an act of God."

"The charrette planning process usually lasts about a week and is typically worth about a year of a typical planning process," stated Bill Dennis, director of the charrette.

In addition to team members and local officials, the crowd was also addressed by Representative Gerald Greene, Senator John

Bulloch and Thomas Daniels from Congressman Bishop's office.

The charrette will consist of meetings and presentations throughout the week and conclude with a closing presentation at 2 p.m. Sunday in the courthouse courtroom.

The charrette team is working out of the old bank building on the corner of Court Square and North Main.

May 10, 2006

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