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**Sent:** 9/26/2017 10:01:12 AM  
**To:** cmcnamara@ashevillenc.gov  
**Cc:**  
**Subject:** Asheville Stories - Kicking Off A New Project

News, updates, and announcements from Code for Asheville

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## Asheville Stories - Kicking Off a New Project

A small group of Code-for-Ashevilleans marked the National Day of Civic Hacking last Saturday by working out details of a story collection project idea that emerged at our last Community Night. We left feeling quite excited about the potential impact on our community as well as on Code for Asheville itself.

Our first decision was to build a site that would enable community groups do story collection projects, rather than try to do it all ourselves. PRC Applications will create a lightly customized Wordpress site that allows anyone to create a project and then upload stories to it as video, audio or text. Jesse Michel even came up with [an initial design](#) on the spot.

Our second decision was to make one of the first projects on the new platform a collection of stories about our own members! As Sylvia Landis pointed out, few people have any idea who we are, what we do, or why. Improvements to our website will certainly help, but nothing is more powerful than just hearing our members talk about what they care about and why they participate. At the same time, we will also reach out immediately to other communities to invite them to create projects as soon as the platform is available.

The focus of the platform is on stories that give voice to the most vulnerable in our community and those typically marginalized by our current systems, as well as stories that highlight the efforts of those working to bring positive change to Asheville.

Can you help? We have lots of places to plug in:

- Intrepid interviewer? Help us collect Code for Asheville member stories, including your own. Stories can be video or just text, with or without pictures.
- Magnificent manager? Help coordinate efforts to gather member stories and new projects.
- Governance geek? Work with us to establish our Code of Conduct and identify ways to ensure that the platform remains a place that supports constructive efforts to enact positive change.
- Extraordinary editor? Help pull quotes from stories to help draw visitors in.
- Community connector? Help us connect with community groups who might want to do story projects of their own.

[Email us](#) and we will hook you up!

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## 10/24 Newsletter Help Needed

I will be out of the country October 11-24 and need one or two people to get the October 24 issue of the newsletter together. Interested? [Email me](#). Thanks! -Eric

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## Patrick Conant Wins UNCA Alumni Award

On September 22, Patrick was awarded the [Order of the Pisgah Award for Alumni Achievement](#) for his work on behalf of the community (click on the award to see the citation). We at Code for Asheville are delighted to celebrate this well-deserved recognition of a member who works tirelessly to promote the values in which we believe.

In accepting the award, Patrick gave an acceptance speech which we share in its entirety below. One line of the speech in particular caused the audience to interrupt Patrick with applause:

I work extensively in a new field, called “civic technology,” championed by organizations such as Code for America with the bold idea that government works better when we build “with” not “for” our community.

Take note of that. We are part of a movement to change the way we govern ourselves for the better and that is important. But we are also part of a movement that can help transform government itself into something that citizens can be proud of and enthusiastic about. Thank you, Patrick, for carrying that message to the greater community through all the work you do.

### Patrick's Acceptance Speech

It is a huge honor to be recognized by this University for my work in the field of Computer Science, but I take particular pride in the way I have been able to apply my skills for the benefit of our local community.

My story is not one of individual accomplishment, but rather one of a meandering journey where my progress as a person and professional has been defined by the connections I have made with other amazing individuals and organizations in our community.

Like many of you here tonight, my journey in Asheville started on this campus, and I truly believe my decision to attend UNCA marked a significant turning point in my life. I was a transfer student, halfway through my college career after spending two years living in Los Angeles attending the University of Southern California.

I was burnt-out on the big city, the big college, I simply didn't feel "connected" or confident in my path - to put it simply, I was lost.

I stepped into Founders Hall in August 2007, and a shift started to happen. I met Jesse and Lauren, my closest friends who are the core of my business, PRC Applications, and here with me tonight.

I found a supportive close-knit community where I felt accepted. I found that smaller class sizes and a focus on the liberal arts provided me with an environment where I could succeed academically.

It's a bit unusual to receive a Computer Science degree from a liberal arts school, but I am so grateful that I took this route. As a small business owner and community advocate, I need every bit of knowledge I received from this University to do my job, and my technical skills are only a small piece of the puzzle.

I work extensively in the a new field, called "civic technology," championed by organizations such as Code for America with the bold idea that government works better when we build "with" not "for" our community.

This concept provided something that wasn't previously possible - an opportunity for me, as a citizen, to apply my technical expertise to create a community impact. I am an advocate for government transparency and open data, and while it has not always been an easy process, I see us entering a time where community-driven solutions are made possible through data and technology.

This underscores the importance of UNCA in the Asheville community - as we try to deal with the complex, multifaceted issues that face our country today, we need 21st century leaders with more than knowledge and experience - they need a wide variety of skills and a broad social conscience.

I want to highlight some of the work we have done in the past two years, because without these partnerships in our community, I would not be here tonight.

I have worked with BeLoved Asheville, represented here tonight by Amy, Adrienne, and Poncho, to create a community computer lab to benefit the homeless and others who lack access to reliable internet connection. We have also collaborated on a data-driven project to analyze trends in arrests and citations of potentially homeless individuals, an effort which has directly led to ongoing policy discussions in our community and within our local government. I am honored to be able to assist the hugely impactful and important efforts of BeLoved Asheville.

I would also like to highlight my work with the Asheville Buncombe NAACP Criminal Justice Committee and the Southern Coalition for Social Justice. I worked with Dee Williams and many other devoted community members to analyze racial disparities in traffic stop outcomes, working slowly through the City process. Again, these data-driven efforts have raised a previously invisible issue to the forefront of our community and local government, and while there's still much work to be done, we are making progress.

Building upon these examples, I feel that I have to highlight the particular honor of being recognized tonight with Dr. Mullen. His work on the State of Black Asheville served as a personal inspiration for my data-driven and socially focused efforts in Asheville. Dr. Mullen provided some of the most critical and eye-opening education I received at this University. Now, 10 years later, I have the honor of working with him on the City of Asheville Blue Ribbon Committee as we develop the framework for a Human Relations Committee in Asheville.

To close this out, I have to provide a special thank you and recognition to my team at PRC Applications - Jesse, Lauren, Brady, and Holden. As a company, we dedicate at least 20% of our time towards community projects, and it is their support, passion for the community, and hard work that has made all of my success possible.

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## News from the Network

### Brigade Projects Galore!

Code for Denver volunteer Tom Bayer recently shared an amazing [deck with successful projects](#) submitted by CfA brigades in response to a request Code for Denver earlier this summer. There are 63 project submissions from 25 CfA brigades. Some great ideas here that you may want to explore for Asheville as well.

Shamefaced confession: no Asheville projects were included because we never got around to submitting - maybe next time. But we're grateful to Code for Denver for their awesome work.

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### Have a Story to Share?

We'd love to have your contribution. You can write something up about a Code for Asheville event or share something else going on in the civic tech world. Email us at [code4asheville@gmail.com](mailto:code4asheville@gmail.com).

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## Upcoming events

### Brigade Planning Meeting 9/26

Our next regular planning meeting will take place **today**, Tuesday, September 26 at 5:30pm at the Battery Park Book Exchange. These planning meetings take place on the second Tuesday after each community night. RSVP [here](#).

### Monthly Community Meetup - NEW DATE!

Our next Community Night will be Thursday, October 26, two weeks later than usual, so that we can hear from Code for Asheville members who will travel the National Brigade Congress in Philadelphia in mid-October. We will update the location as soon as we find a space.

You can RSVP [here](#). Community nights normally occur on the second Thursday of each month. The location rotates among different Asheville community centers.

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