



Dr. Stephen R. Briggs



RETIREMENT COMMUNITY

TENNIS CENTER CLUBHOUSE

# Feeding the soil

**B**ERRY IS ROOTED DEEPLY IN THE SOIL OF NORTHWEST GEORGIA, its enduring values and defining characteristics shaped by the needs and particularities of this place. Aspects of Berry's educational approach could be transplanted successfully in other contexts, but this relationship to place – what the winemaker would call its *terroir* – is central to Berry's distinctiveness.

In this way, Berry's identity is intertwined with that of Rome and Floyd County. The relationship is mutually beneficial and ongoing. Berry originated in this place a century ago, and this place will be part of Berry a century from now. Just as we design the campus, construct buildings and plant trees with a hundred-year mindset, so also must we care about the long-term health and well-being of Rome, the ecosystem that we inhabit.

A major theme of the college's current strategic plan emphasizes partnerships that support the surrounding community while providing students with practical firsthand experiences. To that end, the college has initiated several major projects that align with the goals of the *Rome-Floyd 20/20* development plan.

## TENNIS CENTER OF GEORGIA AT BERRY COLLEGE

Rome is a charming small city with a thriving downtown, a top-notch medical community and an appealing quality of life. It is an easy place in which to live and a delightful place to visit. Part of its allure is its sense of identity: It is close enough to I-75 to provide easy access to major cities but sufficiently far not to be engulfed by corridor sprawl. Of course, that means Rome is faced

with the challenge of luring visitors and businesses away from the interstate highway.

While Rome offers many recreational opportunities, it is known best as a tennis town, hosting some 20 regional recreational tournaments each year. Rome is located at the center of the United States Tennis Association's largest region and has an appealing 16-court facility downtown. Large tournaments, however, need up to 50 courts at a time, ideally in close proximity; Rome's courts are spread at some distance. To remain competitive and to attract significant tournaments on a frequent basis, Rome needs a new tennis facility.

When the new Armuchee Connector linking Veterans Memorial Parkway to Martha Berry Highway was approved, it orphaned off a piece of Berry land to the north and east of Mount Berry Square Mall, a site large enough for a major tennis center with good highway access. By the time the Armuchee Connector opened in May 2012, a collaborative group of community partners had developed a facilities and operating plan for the Tennis Center of Georgia at Berry College. The project was included in the Rome-Floyd County 2013 SPLOST referendum and approved by voters for \$11.4 million. Project construction begins in June 2015 with an anticipated opening date in June 2016.

The Tennis Center of Georgia at Berry College will have space for 60

regulation courts (with at least 50 available on opening day), including six NCAA-regulation courts and three main-event courts. Twelve of the regular courts will be painted with "quick-start" lines to introduce children to the sport. All courts will have lighting and access to shade structures. A lodge-like clubhouse with a large exterior porch looking out over the main-event and NCAA-regulation courts will be located on the highest ground, making good use of the site's natural topography.

Berry College acted to make the tennis center possible by donating 35 acres of land and helping to sustain the lengthy development process. We did this first and foremost to attract people and tourism dollars to Rome-Floyd County so that it remains a great place to live. And, what is good for the health of Rome is good for Berry. Families who visit the tennis center will be introduced to Berry's campus, students and athletics. The center will





SOUTH ROME REDEVELOPMENT

STUDENT PHOTOGRAPHER JASON HUYNH

provide work opportunities for students interested in the management and marketing of sports events and facilities; Berry student workers are built into the center's operating budget. In addition, the college has signed a memorandum of agreement with the USTA to become one of only four institutions in the nation offering experiences and courses leading to a USTA Certificate in Tennis Management for undergraduates.

**CONTINUING CARE RETIREMENT COMMUNITY**

The qualities that make Rome a pleasing place to work and raise a family make it a lovely place to retire as well. For many years, Berry alumni have nudged the college to consider building a retirement center. The college considered the idea in 2007 but decided not to proceed at the time because of the national economy. During the last two years we have examined the opportunity again, and the time now seems ripe.

Two factors will make Berry's Continuing Care Retirement Community distinctive and interesting. One is the nature of the relationship to Berry. Although the CCRC will operate as a separately incorporated 501(c)3 entity, the intent is to optimize the relationship between the CCRC and Berry. The CCRC will be close to the college and will provide work and learning opportunities for a significant number of students in a variety of roles. Job possibilities include event planning, recreation and fitness, gardening, bookkeeping, and nursing assistance among others. CCRC residents will have the opportunity to enjoy arts performances, special lectures and athletic events at the college. The CCRC will emphasize lifelong learning and will offer a variety of short courses. Residents with special expertise may mentor college students. An ongoing and complementary relationship will allow different generations to enjoy and serve one other, and both the CCRC and Berry will be richer for it.

The other key factor is the proximity to excellent health care – the Harbin Clinic and

Rome's two hospitals are all less than five minutes away. Many of the CCRC's residents will be active and in reasonably good health when they join the community. Most, however, also want the assurance of good access to care should they need it. In this case, top-quality care could hardly be closer or more convenient.

Current plans for the CCRC call for 140 independent living units including both apartments and small cottages. Another 100 rooms will be dedicated to memory care, assisted living and critical care nursing. These specialty rooms will be arranged to create home-like clusters. General amenities will include dining services, fitness and activity rooms, walkways and gardens, and a pool.

This summer, the CCRC will send out notices inviting interested seniors to enroll on a priority list. Alumni will receive an early invitation to join this list. By spring 2016, we hope to have established a sufficient list to proceed with residential sales. If all goes smoothly, construction of the facility may begin in 2017 with a (very) preliminary opening date in fall 2018. [To inquire: [www.berry.edu/retireatberry](http://www.berry.edu/retireatberry)]

**SOUTH ROME EARLY LEARNING CENTER**

The early years of life, when a child's brain undergoes rapid development, is a critically important time for shaping the cognitive and social skills that are the foundation of success in life. Yet language learning and neural maturation are both strongly correlated with socio-economic status.

When the new Anna K. Davie Elementary School opens this August in South Rome – a community with a significant number of children from disadvantaged families – it will include an Early Learning Center with three classrooms designed to serve up to 18 children each. One classroom will enroll students this fall. Rome City Schools is providing the space, Berry is providing the curriculum and staff, the South Rome Redevelopment Corporation is providing

operational support, and other organizations are providing supporting funds. Parents will pay tuition as they are able.

Emerging from a grassroots movement for community renewal, the SRELC will follow the multifaceted curriculum developed by Berry College faculty for the college's own laboratory pre-school. Stimulating activities encourage children to discover, question and explore as the means by which to grow socially, emotionally, physically and cognitively. Learning goals focus on the core language and number skills needed for kindergarten but include exploration with science, fine arts and Spanish as well.

Each class will be staffed by a full-time teacher and teacher's assistant as well as Berry College students. While the children are learning, Berry's student assistants will be learning as well. These pre-service teachers will work with SRELC teachers and researchers to identify best practices and effective teaching strategies for at-risk, high-need students.

In many ways, the South Rome Early Learning Center is a modern-day counterpart of the educational initiatives that Martha Berry introduced at Possum Trot School and the "whitewashed schoolhouse" more than a century ago in cooperation with the Floyd County Board of Education.

**THIS PLACE**

Martha Berry cared deeply about the lives of individual young people and described them as the nation's greatest natural resource. Her primary goal, however, was for these young people to become the responsible adults who would strengthen the region's towns and cities.

The enduring purpose of a Berry education is to prepare responsible adults who will strive to improve the communities in which they live, work and serve. In that same spirit, Berry as an institution must also seek out ways to improve its home community, to enrich the quality of this soil for decades to come. **B**