



## EXTRAORDINARY EMPLOYEES

# Small town native **Lisa Martin** finds dream job at Virginia Tech, dedicates life to serving others in rural Virginia

by LAURA NEFF-HENDERSON, APR

**Lisa Martin** says she never imagined she would find her dream job working in the small community in rural Southwest Virginia she has always called home.

Martin is the senior program manager at Reynolds Homestead, in Patrick County, Virginia, one of Virginia Tech's commonwealth campus centers and part of the university's Office of Outreach and International Affairs. Martin's work impacts hundreds of students and adults in the community who participate in programs at the facility each year.

The town of Stuart, where Martin was born and raised, is the county seat of Patrick County and is located in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Highlands. The county has a population of less than 19,000 people and has the distinction of being located in both the Piedmont Region of Virginia and mountainous Southwest Virginia.

Her job at Virginia Tech wasn't something she was looking for back in 2005 when she came across the posting in the local newspaper on the day the posting closed. In fact, she was packing that day, getting ready to head off for a week-long vacation.

She knew immediately though that this was the job for her, and that all of her previous work experience had prepared her for this exact job.

"It felt like the job description was written for me," said Martin.



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### ▲ AT WORK

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As it turns out, Martin was right. The job has been a perfect fit and Martin has made an incredible difference in the quantity and quality of programming offered at Reynolds Homestead.

"We are incredibly fortunate to have Lisa directing programs for the region," said Julie Walters Steele, director of Reynolds Homestead and Martin's supervisor."

"Lisa has developed great partnerships with area businesses and organizations to provide exceptional low-cost programs for Patrick County and surrounding communities," said Walters Steele. "What she does makes such a difference in our community."

Long considered one of the university's most well-kept secrets, Reynolds Homestead features the fully-restored Rock Spring Plantation House, which is the birthplace and boyhood home of tobacco manufacturer R.J. Reynolds. The center also has a Continuing Education Center, which hosts a wide variety of programs and classes for children and adults.

In her role, Martin is responsible for coordinating all of the programming at the center, including lectures, discussions, workshops, and classes as well as exhibits and performances – an array designed to fulfill the mission of the late Nancy Susan Reynolds, whose endowment created and helps sustain Reynolds Homestead.

Some of the most successful regular programs at Reynolds Homestead include the College for Older Adults and the Bushels and Barrels Local Food, Wine, and Beer Festival, which focuses on the development and sustainability of the local farmers and producers in the region.

The College for Older Adults is a series of between 25 and 30 classes held each fall and spring. Community members who are 50 or older pay a small fee and are able to take as many classes as they'd like. Class topics include everything from healthy cooking and fitness, to art, history, writing, horticulture, and beekeeping.

Recently, the center has hosted exhibitions from the Smithsonian Institution and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts as well as performances by the Latin Ballet of Virginia and Theatre IV of Richmond.

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During the school year, Martin and the dozens of staff and volunteers who assist her, take their programming into the local schools and help with events and fundraising for several local and regional charities including the Alzheimer's Association and the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation. They also host food and clothing drives throughout the year. And, each summer they hold several children's camps at the center. Martin also oversees the professional development courses they offer to local professionals on topics such as the multigenerational workforce and English and grammar in the workplace.

There's no question that Reynolds Homestead, and Martin's work both make a difference to others.

Janice Pendleton, a resident of Meadows of Dan, has participated in the College for Older Adults for several years and volunteers at the center.

"I have met so many wonderful people and made many friends through my participation in these classes. Lisa, using input from participants, creates a schedule of classes and special Friday activities for us that is unsurpassed in creativity and variety. When I think 'Lisa Martin,' I think, 'creative, inspiring, and fun!,'" said Pendleton. "Lisa is truly a valuable asset to Reynolds Homestead and Virginia Tech."

"I have always felt welcomed and so very much appreciated by Lisa each and every time I've arrived at the Homestead to volunteer for an activity or simply to visit," said Peter Zeien, who lives in a mile south of the facility. Zeien has been volunteering for three years and assists with house tours, maintenance, decorating for the annual Victorian Christmas, and the summer Nature Freaks camp. He recently volunteered to serve as the caretaker of the Reynolds family cemetery.

"Lisa Martin is the dynamo who enlivens Reynolds Homestead. Her expertise in establishing programs that attract people of all interests is amazing. She is a jewel of the organization," said Ray Dietz. Dietz and his wife Nancy have been involved with the center as participants and volunteers for nearly more than four decades. The couple, who live in Martinsville, Virginia, founded the "Friends of the Reynolds Homestead" group in 2012.

In 2010, Martin was awarded the Perry F. Kendig Award for excellence in arts education by the Arts Council of the Blue Ridge. The award was in recognition of her efforts to bring quality arts programming to her community.

"I have the best job at Virginia Tech. It's really an honor to do this for a living," said Martin.

As a high school English teacher for more than 14 years, Martin learned how to teach and share information. During her second career, working in sales, marketing, and product development, Martin says she learned how to get to know her audience and learn about the needs of consumer to develop products that filled those needs, she explained.

"Developing programming is exactly the same thing," she said.

In that job she traveled the country and often found herself standing before the head of major retailers asking them to buy her product.

### ▲ IN THE COMMUNITY

Martin spends her personal time cultivating relationships and giving back to the community as well.

Personally, she's involved in several community organizations and serves on the boards of the Caring Hearts Free Clinic and PARC Workshop Inc.

As an adult, Martin says she finds solace in sitting on her back porch with a glass of sweet tea and a good book. She enjoys living in a community where she knows her neighbors and has personal relationships with many of the local business and government leaders.

She says she and her longtime partner Ric, buy almost all of their groceries at the town Farmers' Market, only making a trip into Christiansburg, Virginia, or Mount Airy, North Carolina, (both are about 40 minutes from her home) every so often to buy things they can't buy locally. They enjoy large family holidays every other year that Martin coordinates and the town's many festivals and holiday events are among their favorite things to do.

The couple also enjoys spending time with Martin's children. Alexander Martin, 27, has a degree from Radford University in outdoor recreation and tourism management. He works as an event coordinator at Primland Resort in Meadows of Dan, Virginia.

Her daughter Sydney Martin, 24, has a degree in classical studies from Virginia Tech where she was a member of the Marching Virginians Flag Corps for four years, serving as captain during her senior season. Sydney just completed her master's degree at the University of Sheffield in South Yorkshire, England, and now lives in Ohio.

Lisa and Ric also devote many weekends and evenings following Ric's 14-year old daughter Macie around the state as she participates in cross country and track events for Patrick County High School.

The opportunity to do what you love, with people you love, in a community you love, and serve others is a blessing, says Martin who believes her job is an extension of who she is.

"Lisa is a tremendous ambassador for Virginia Tech. She exemplifies Virginia Tech's commitment to outreach and engagement," said Walters Steele. □

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[www.hr.vt.edu/extraordinary\\_employees/2014/lisa-martin/](http://www.hr.vt.edu/extraordinary_employees/2014/lisa-martin/)

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