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Gardner-Webb Alumna releases book about the Community Building Campus in Spokane, Wash.

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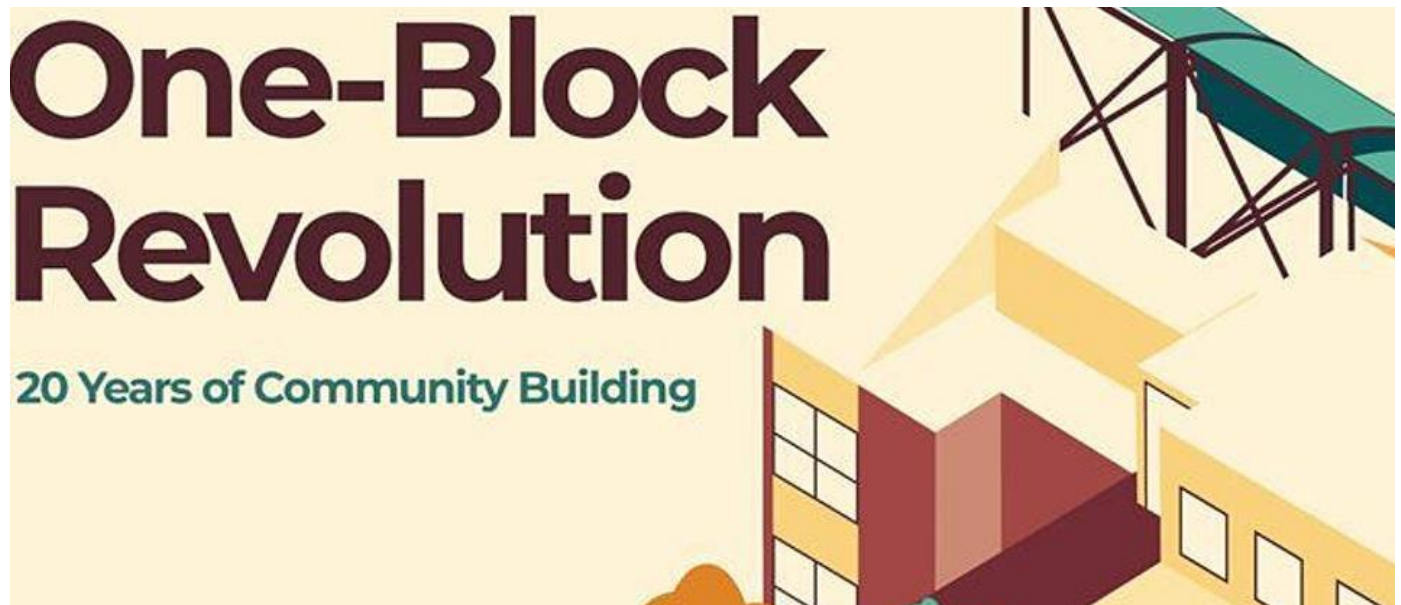
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ALUMNI

Gardner-Webb Alumna releases book about the Community Building Campus in Spokane, Wash.

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON JANUARY 5, 2022



Summer Hess, '06, Appreciates GWU Professors who Engaged Students in Critical Thinking

Summer Hess, a 2006 alumna of Gardner-Webb University, has actively promoted the concept of community since her days on campus. Not just a word to describe a place on a map, her goal is to create a sense of community by bringing people together, building strong relationships, and impacting lives in a positive way.

She remembers hosting a forum on community at one of the shops in Boiling Springs. "It wasn't affiliated with anything in particular other than I wanted to get some of the leaders who I really respected together to talk about why building community matters," Hess reflected. "It's a pretty natural evolution that later in my life, I use the English degree I earned at Gardner-Webb to edit a book on building community."



▲ Summer Hess

Her new book, “One Block Revolution: 20 Years of Community Building,” honors a group of diverse changemakers in Spokane, Wash. It contains the stories of 20 people who have participated in the Community Building Campus, started by philanthropist Jim Sheehan.

During her four years on the GWU campus, Hess said she began a personal path of inquiry. An English major, her professors engaged students in critical thinking by offering a place to discuss difficult topics and ask hard questions. “English is the best subject to study because you get to read about everything,” she reflected. “Literary criticism is historically informed and so you have to deeply understand history and social movements and everything that’s influenced how we live and understand the world today.”

Hess earned her Master of Fine Arts in non-fiction writing from Eastern Washington University in Spokane. From 2011-2012, she was a Fulbright Fellow in Chile. Her husband is also a GWU alumnus, Matt Jones, Class of 2009, who was a Fulbright Fellow in New Zealand. They loved the Spokane area and decided to stay there after graduate school.

One of her first jobs was working as an executive assistant to Sheehan. “I quickly grew in my role and became a project manager for the six-building campus,” Hess shared. “I ran a lot of programs, a professional development series for non-profits and a small business loan program for the businesses that were incubated in the commons building.”

She worked at the Community Building Campus for six years and is now a social impact advisor with Measure Meant (<https://measurepnw.com>), a women-owned consultancy. “We help organizations that care about equitable and sustainable business practices analyze opportunities, implement change, and sustain their impact,” she described.

Sheehan asked her to edit a book about what the Community Building had accomplished, and she was happy to help. She is donating 100 percent of her royalties from the book to the Community Building Foundation. “I’ve never seen one person invest in a single city block with so much intention, enthusiasm and real resources,” Hess observed. “Jim’s story is super interesting. He was a public

defender for more than 20 years and some of the higher profile death penalty cases in the state of Washington were assigned to him.”



He received an unexpected inheritance and decided to put his money to work for people and the planet. He purchased and renovated a cluster of six buildings in a dilapidated corner of downtown Spokane and repurposed them. They have served as an interdisciplinary hub where grassroots leaders run campaigns, build coalitions, host meetings, train activists, and transform their city. Sheehan and his family foundation are committed to investing into the Community Building Campus. “His mantra has been for a long time: the antidote is community, so if we bring people together, if we build strong relationships, if we trust each other, we can do a tremendous amount of work together,” Hess explained. “He put his resources out there and got out of the way so that everybody else could do the hard work of building community.”

The people who contributed to the book represent the dynamics and complexities of community building. “It is one of the greatest pleasures of my life to capture the impacts and help tell that story,” Hess said. “We hope it tells the story of how intentionally investing in relationships over time can affect social change in the long-term and those effects can be felt outside the block on the city level and in some ways even on the regional and state level.”

The book is available from Latah Books (<https://www.latahbooks.com/>) and other retailers.

Gardner-Webb University is North Carolina’s recognized leader in private, Christian higher education. A Carnegie-Classified Doctoral/Professional University, GWU is home to six professional schools, 14 academic departments, more than 80 undergraduate and graduate majors, and a world-class faculty. Located on a beautiful 225-acre campus in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb prepares graduates to impact their chosen professions, equips them with the skills to advance the frontiers of knowledge, and inspires them to make a positive and lasting difference in the lives of others. Ignite your future at Gardner-Webb.edu.