

Vital Communities' History

2nd edition, June 2009

- 1993 In September, the League of Women Voters of the Upper Valley launches a new project called "Upper Valley: 2001 & Beyond" (UV:2001). Betty Porter and Charlotte Faulkner are the project Co-Chairs; Delia Clark is the Coordinator. The project's purpose is to increase communication and cooperation among Upper Valley towns for regional planning, sustainability and civic engagement. The League envisions: (1) increasing awareness and participation at the town level by holding Community Profiles throughout the Upper Valley; (2) developing a list of quality-of-life indicators (Valley VitalSigns) and recruiting local organizations to monitor those indicators over time. The League contracts with Antioch New England Institute for staffing (Delia) and fiscal agent services.
- 1994 Activities include: (1) creating the Community Profile model for town visioning (*the Civic Profile* used by New Hampshire's Cooperative Extension Service doesn't evaluate a town's economic conditions; the *Take Charge* model used by Vermont's Cooperative Extension service doesn't evaluate a town's social conditions; so UV:2001 borrows from each of these, as well as from other models); (2) holding gatherings of civic leaders to get their input on how to make Profiles and Indicators happen in this region; (3) holding 2 Community Profiles to test and polish the new model; and (4) making a video to promote Community Profiles.
- 1995 Four Community Profiles are held. UV:2001 convenes a region-wide "Valley VitalSigns Forum" in October, run by Alan AtKisson (Director of *Sustainable Seattle*) and attended by 150 people from 25 Upper Valley towns. Its goal is to learn from participants *what they value* in this region and what sustainability indicators they would like to track. Participants suggest over 50 indicators in 14 topic areas. To advertise the Forum, the Valley News donates tongue-in-cheek versions of October 2010 front pages of the Valley News, with stories and graphics depicting dire consequences from ignoring the region's sustainability. Planning begins for Valley Quest, designed to work with schools to strengthen community among young people.
- 1996 Four Community Profiles are held. UV:2001 brings Alan AtKisson back to the Upper Valley to give a talk on the value of indicators programs. Fifteen volunteer groups continue working on a proposed list of Valley VitalSigns indicators – at its longest, the list numbers 81 indicators. UV:2001 requests public input to help narrow the list. The list is finalized at 23 indicators in 4 categories: social, economic, environmental and cultural. Valley Quest is piloted in 10 schools. The first Quest booklet is created, with 16 Quests, and the first Teachers' Guide is published.
- 1997 The League of Women Voters of the Upper Valley spins off *Upper Valley: 2001 & Beyond* to become an independent organization called "Vital Communities of the Upper Valley." Delia Clark is the Executive Director. The organization's first programs are Community Profiles, Valley VitalSigns, and Valley Quest. Four Community Profiles are held. The second Quest booklet, featuring 21 Quests, is published.
- 1998 Vital Communities of the Upper Valley receives 501(c)3 status from the Internal Revenue Service. Three Community Profiles are held. The third Quest booklet is published, containing 39 Quests spanning 18 towns.

- 1999 No Community Profiles are held. The fourth Quest booklet is published, containing 52 Quests across 24 towns. A group of local trails groups forms an umbrella organization, the “Upper Valley Trails Alliance,” for which Vital Communities is the fiscal agent.
- 2000 Two Community Profiles are held, and 25 new Quests are created. The organization shortens its name to “Vital Communities” and becomes an independent nonprofit organization (no longer contracting with ANEI for services). Len Cadwallader becomes Vital Communities’ Executive Director.
- 2001 One Community Profile is held. Vital Communities publishes 2,500 copies of *Valley Quest: 89 Treasure Hunts in the Upper Valley*. The book’s 89 Quests span 31 towns. The Upper Valley Trails Alliance receives 501(c)3 status from the Internal Revenue Service and becomes an independent nonprofit organization. Under the auspices of the Valley VitalSigns program, 3 new projects begin: one supports local agriculture; one (partnering with local businesses) is called the “Upper Valley Housing Coalition”; and one (partnering with town officials and transportation companies) is called the “Upper Valley Transportation Management Association.” The Housing Coalition and the Transportation Management Association are independent entities hiring Vital Communities to provide staffing and fiscal agency.
- 2002 No Community Profiles are held. 30 new Quests are created. Valley Quest publishes the *Village Quest* curriculum and releases a 2nd printing of *Valley Quest: 89 Treasure Hunts in the Upper Valley*. Vital Communities holds a local agriculture fair called “Flavors of the Valley.”
- 2003 One Community Profile is held. Valley Quest publishes the *Cemetery Quest* curriculum and 35 new Quests. Vital Communities formally names its agriculture project “Valley Food & Farm,” and the program hosts its 2nd annual “Flavors of the Valley.” The Upper Valley Housing Coalition produces 2 short videos on the need for workforce housing in this region. Vital Communities runs a *Great Train Adventure* in October for outreach, development and education.
- 2004 The Community Profile program is suspended. The Valley Quest program now includes 164 Quests spread throughout 50 Upper Valley towns. University Press of New England publishes *Quests: A Guide to Creating Community Treasure Hunts*. Vital Communities publishes *Valley Quest II: 75 MORE Treasure Hunts in the Upper Valley*. Valley Food & Farm hosts its 3rd annual “Flavors of the Valley” and publishes a Locally Grown Guide (listing farms/stores where locally grown farm products can be bought). Vital Communities holds a 2nd *Great Train Adventure* and discontinues the use of “Valley VitalSigns” as a program name. It now runs 2 programs (Valley Quest and Valley Food & Farm) and coordinates 2 partnerships: Upper Valley Housing Coalition and Upper Valley Transportation Management Association. The Hanover Conservation Council gives Vital Communities its “Community Organization of the Year” award. Vermont Housing Finance Agency gives the Upper Valley Housing Coalition its bi-annual “Housing Hero” award.
- 2005 Valley Quest begins offering workshops outside the Upper Valley: Burlington, Berlin, Keene, Manchester and Martha’s Vineyard. Valley Quest seminars are offered for graduate credit through Plymouth State University. Valley Food & Farm hosts its 4th annual “Flavors of the Valley” and publishes the Locally Grown Guide’s 2nd edition. Valley Food & Farm also launches a “Farm to Dartmouth” project to help Dartmouth’s food service staff purchase locally grown foods for its dining halls. The Upper Valley Housing Coalition educates citizens, planners and zoning officials about the importance of affordable housing. It advises other

- regions in New Hampshire and Vermont on how to start local housing coalitions. It also studies the feasibility of starting a “Land Bank” fund to buy desirable properties and sell them to developers of affordable housing. The Upper Valley Transportation Management Association completes a study of the impact of Advance Transit bus service on the City of Lebanon. Vital Communities conducts a one-year project to measure quality-of-life in the Upper Valley through a survey and a series of public forums.
- 2006 Valley Quest continues helping other regions/organizations develop Quest programs. The first Quest book goes out of print after selling 5,000 copies. The program receives the “Marie Pirie Environmental Program of the Year” award from the New England Education Alliance. Valley Food & Farm’s 5th annual “Flavors of the Valley” draws 1,000 attendees. Its 3rd edition of the Locally Grown Guide lists 300 businesses that sell locally grown farm products. Valley Food & Farm publishes 20,000 print copies of the Guide and also makes it available online, where users can search by product, location, or farm name. The “Farm to Dartmouth” project continues, and “Healthy Eating by Design” is launched. The Upper Valley Housing Coalition advocates for zoning changes that will facilitate new affordable housing. It endorses specific development proposals in Woodstock, Norwich and Hanover. The Upper Valley Transportation Management Association publishes a regional Transportation Map showing bus routes, rail services, and contact information for 4 public transit providers. It advocates for increased public funding for these providers and researches additional funding sources.
- 2007 Valley Quest teaches 6 organizations across the country to develop their own Quest programs and curricula. Staff attend 12 conferences and teach 12 multi-day workshops throughout the United States. Valley Food & Farm prints 20,000 copies of the Locally Grown Guide (4th edition) and draws 1,500 attendees to its 6th annual “Flavors of the Valley.” “Farm to Dartmouth” concludes with contracts between Dartmouth and 10 local growers to supply its dining halls with fruits, vegetables, meat and eggs – an increase of \$30,000 in its local food purchases. The 18-month “Healthy Eating by Design” project concludes after teaching a group of local children how to grow and cook vegetables. It reports to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation on its pilot initiatives to engage children in healthy eating. The Upper Valley Housing Coalition hosts 2 well-attended Business Leaders’ Breakfasts and 2 seminars, continuing its advocacy for affordable housing. It also educates prospective homebuyers about the moderately priced housing being built and how to purchase a home. The Upper Valley Transportation Management Association prints “A Widening Gap,” analyzing the increasing demand for public transit services and the shortfall of state and federal transportation funds. It also supports the opening of a new park-and-ride, advocates for bus shelters, and helps transit providers apply for state funding.
- 2008 Valley Quest publishes *Best of Valley Quest*, featuring 70 Quests (old and new) in 50 towns. 16 new Quests are created. Staff give workshops and conference talks in 10 states and in Hungary. Valley Food & Farm hosts its 7th annual “Flavors of the Valley” and prints a 5th edition of the Locally Grown Guide. It also launches a new project called “Fresh Connections,” linking local business owners and their employees with local farms and food. The Upper Valley Housing Coalition continues its popular Business Leaders’ Breakfasts and its Homeownership classes. It also hosts a conference on the advantages of “clustering” smaller homes in new developments and helps create the New Hampshire Housing and Conservation Planning Program. This unprecedented fund awards grants for housing proposals that blend housing and conservation. The Upper Valley Transportation Management Association prints the “Mobility Checklist: Guidelines for Efficient and Livable Growth,” which helps communities reduce their reliance on single-occupant vehicle commuting. The checklist receives “Project of the Year”

recognition from the N.H. Planners' Association. The Transportation Management Association also helps create commuter vanpools and other solutions to address increasing fuel costs.