

NEWSROOM

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SCHOOLHOUSE

CLASS COMBINES THEORY WITH PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE.

by [Jane Heeter](#) | August 2, 2021*Above: The CNU team and members of the Woodville Rosenwald School Foundation**Read time: about 4 min*

Blink and you might miss the Woodville School.

Tucked behind tree limbs off U.S. 17 in rural Gloucester County, the two-classroom white schoolhouse is unassuming.

Sure, a historic marker out front designates the history that happened here: “Woodville School is an important monument to Gloucester County and the African American community who strove to ensure quality education for their children in the early 20th century.”

And beneath it, a temporary sign hangs, pointing out that the school’s “preservation and restoration” are in progress.

“In progress” may be an understatement. The interior of the school is a patchwork of original wood flooring, a smattering of drywall, evidence of construction over the years. Visitors park along a makeshift driveway in the adjacent lawn, and the air conditioning strains to keep it cool inside.

This much is clear: a lot of work is left to bring Woodville up to the modern museum that its caretakers envision, a symbol of the perseverance of those who came before. A group of Captains is integral to that mission, helping

ensure that future generations don't drive right by the history in front of them.

Between 1917 and 1932, over 5,300 buildings like Woodville were built. These small, modestly appointed schools are known as the Rosenwald Schools.

They came about as a partnership between Julius Rosenwald, a businessman and philanthropist, and local communities to provide equal educational opportunities for Black students. Rosenwald made his fortune as head of the retailer Sears, Roebuck & Company, and he donated millions of dollars to the effort.

In 1919, T.C. Walker, the first African American lawyer in Gloucester County, traveled to Chicago to meet with Rosenwald and secured funding for six schools and a teachers' home in Gloucester. Rosenwald required the community to contribute half of the cost, in money, materials or labor, and he contributed the rest. Woodville cost \$3,500 total when it was built.

The schools provided a safe haven for Black children to receive quality education in rural parts of the country where they otherwise had few, if any, opportunities.

Only 800 Rosenwald schools remain in various states of use and, of those built in Gloucester, only Woodville is still standing. It served as a school from 1923-1932. Since then, the building has served as a home and, since 2012, has been owned by caretakers looking to preserve its history. It is listed on the National and Virginia State Historic Registries.

Woodville's legacy is protected by the Woodville Rosenwald School Foundation, a group of local volunteers dedicated to preserving its history and pursuing avenues to help tell the school's story. The group owns the building and for years has been working to turn it into a museum.

In fall 2020, two sections of Dr. Matt Hettche's Integrated Marketing Communications course took on the task of developing a marketing campaign for the foundation to bolster its efforts. Dr. Ronnie Cohen, professor emerita of the [Luter School of Business](#), serves on the foundation's board and connected Hettche with the group.

Both classes worked with Baylen McCarthy '17, a [marketing](#) alum who freelances as a marketing consultant, and the local marketing agency Virginia Creative Group to finetune their ideas. The upper-level class covers all aspects involved with designing effective and efficient marketing communication plans, including the creative processes, media planning, and consumer behavior.

The results were a great start, but not quite enough to fully serve the foundation's needs, Hettche said.

"It wasn't simply that we could just take everything we did for the class and give it to the foundation and they would be fine," he said. "We needed people who were willing to refine some of the materials and make it more tangible so they could actually use these marketing materials."

After the semester ended, three students agreed to take their ideas further in an independent study course: seniors Bailey Hodges, Bryson Malo and Mariah Watt, all marketing majors. Each saw the potential to make a difference outside of the classroom, while getting the benefits of a real-world experience before graduation.

"Working on the project has really given me an open and different perspective on where I can go with marketing," said Watt, who also majored in [management](#).

"It was really interesting to see how everything came together in our Integrated Marketing Communications class, from the PR to the numbers and everything in between, and it really interested me and I wanted to keep working on it. And being African American, it hits home."

On a warm spring day, Hettche, Hodges, Malo and Watt drove up to Woodville to meet with members of the foundation.

Board president and executive director Dr. Wesley Wilson, Cohen and other members of the foundation sat in a

semicircle in one of the school's former classrooms as the group presented its work thus far and the plans ahead.

Malo started with a discussion about the nearly finalized logo. After a series of iterations and over 70 logos, the team landed on a design that highlights the shape and scale of the school's dramatic front windows.

All Rosenwald schools were built to take advantage of sunlight throughout the day. At Woodville, as was typically the case in the buildings, large windows, six panes tall and three across, help provide a bright space in which to learn.

Over 4,000 data points from surveying the foundation members and classmates helped Malo land on the logo. He explained that he'd done a lot of branding and logo work for organizations on campus, but that the act of including foundation members' opinions opened his eyes to how to work with clients.

"All of this input really taught me an important lesson as a marketer to order my workflow to really go and ask questions of the people who know the subject at hand best before I go into a decision in a particular direction," he said. "This was a really good learning experience for me personally."

And his work resonated with the board: one member called out, "That's the jackpot for me," and another simply: "I love it."

Watt similarly presented the various fonts that the team had considered and the strategic thoughts behind each, highlighting how it could set the tone at the top of letterhead or in the navigation on a revamped website for the foundation.

Hodges was tasked with explaining the community outreach portion of the plan. Her vision included creating a formal ambassador program to train advocates for the school; a mentorship program pairing foundation members with young people; community service; and collaborating with local educators to incorporate the Rosenwald schools into curriculum.

"The Woodville School is obviously known by a lot of people from that time, but younger generations, even myself, know nothing about it outside of our class. I believe that if you really push the younger high school students and the younger generation, we can implement more diversity of understanding. It can be through art, it can be through math, it doesn't have to just be static history."

Cohen said that's the foundation's goal: to teach the breadth of what happened at Woodville that enabled a generation of Black students to receive quality education, but do it in a modern, relatable way to excite the public.

"People are open to learning about this time, and I think it's on everybody's radar that we've missed a big part of history," she said. "I think everybody pretty much realizes that we haven't told the story fully, and our one little part is the story of these Rosenwald schools."
