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## CHRISTIANSBURG INSTITUTE: A LIVING LEGACY

The Montgomery-Floyd Regional Library is hosting a program on Saturday, Oct. 2, based on a picture from the National Endowment for the Humanities *Picturing America* series. The picture (below) is of a sculpture called *Ladder for Booker T. Washington*, by Martin Puryear.

For a century, from 1866 – 1966, the Christiansburg Institute provided education, inspiration and community for African Americans working to better themselves in the face of adversity.

Booker T. Washington, a Virginia native, agreed to serve as school supervisor in 1895. As founder and principal of the Tuskegee Institute, Washington was pioneering a new movement in education. Through his influence, countless schools were established throughout the South to educate African American children. The inscription on the Booker T. Washington Monument at Tuskegee University reads: “He lifted the veil of ignorance from his people and pointed the way to progress through education and industry.”

The leaders of Christiansburg Institute have always realized that education is the key to power. Their alumni organized in 1976 to save the last remaining academic building from the wrecking ball. Through their hard work and support, Christiansburg Institute, Inc. has been reestablished on four acres of the former farm campus. CI’s online archive and exhibits reach out to national and international audiences.

As described by the NEH, Puryear used the concept of a ladder not easily ascended more than once. The title of Washington’s autobiography *Up From Slavery* is a direct reference to an ascent to a richer existence, both materially and psychologically. The finely crafted ladder resonates with Washington’s belief in the dignity of manual labor expertly accomplished, but leaves open the final explanation of his construction.



The program is part of the library's "Sharing America" series and is inspired by Puryear's sculpture and the leadership of the Christiansburg Institute. The poster of Puryear's work will be on display at the Blacksburg library during October.

A reception, sponsored by StellarOne Wealth Management, starts at 2 p.m. and a short video of alumni talking about their experiences will be available for viewing. Excerpts from an interview with local poet and educator Nikki Giovanni by Theresa Burriss, Chair of Appalachian Studies at Radford University, will also be available.

At 3 p.m., a panel of Christiansburg Institute alumni will discuss attending CI, and the values and principles instilled in teachers and students that prepared them for integration. Panelists include Virginia Tech Professor Dan Thorp, William (Bill) Brown, Evelyn Young, Gladys Sokolow and Mary Mills. Virginia Tech Professor of History Peter Wallenstien will moderate the discussion.

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