

# SISTER CITIES PROJECT

## Stanardsville, Virginia and Tarland, Scotland

### Sister Cities Program / Twinning

Sister Cities International was launched in 1956 to promote affiliations between cities in different nations to further international understanding and develop continuing projects of mutual interest through meaningful exchanges. A sister city program enables citizens of both communities to become directly involved in rewarding exchanges that benefit everyone. Within the program, cities and their citizens exchange people, ideas and culture in a variety of educational, municipal, professional, and youth projects. SCI membership advances grant proposals.

### Stanardsville Actions

Mayor Gary Lowe, on behalf of the Town Council, formally invited Tarland to become a sister city several years ago. This proposal was prompted by the visit of renowned Scottish fiddler, Paul Anderson, in 2013 and a Greene County couple who visited Tarland that year. Both commented on the striking similarities between the two villages. Paul and his wife Shona, a traditional Scottish singer, have returned to headline three hugely successful concerts in Stanardsville over the past few years.

The Town Council views a sister city relationship with Tarland, focusing on promoting educational and cultural exchanges, as a potential boon to tourism in Greene County. The School Superintendent, who arranged for the Anderson family to appear at the elementary schools in 2017, also endorses the twinning concept as a benefit to students through pen-pal/video exchanges, etc.

### Tarland Status

The sister city proposal, known as twinning in Scotland, has been discussed by the Cromar Community Council (comparable to Greene County's Board of Supervisors). They are supportive of establishing a sister city relationship and are soliciting the views of the surrounding community. A video conference between leaders in both areas and the sharing of village and landscape photos is scheduled for September 27.

### Commonalities

There are significant similarities between the two small towns, both physically and culturally. There is also a significant historical connection.

They both are nestled in a rural landscape, surrounded by rolling fields in the foothills of nearby mountains - the Piedmont region of Virginia and the Howe o' Cromar in Aberdeenshire. There is a pasture in both villages. Grazing Angus or Aberdeen cattle was the sight that first reminded Paul Anderson of home.

Both small towns have a population of less than 500 people and feature a central town square, with prominent war memorials.

Each is located next to a national park and boasts a historic home nearby - Balmoral Castle, the Scottish home of the Royal Family since 1852, and Montpelier, the ancestral home of President James Madison. Nearby are the South and Dee rivers.

The musical heritage of Appalachia also points to a strong cultural connection between the two communities. The two “Malt and Moonshine” concerts in Stanardsville headlined by the Andersons highlighted the deep cultural connection between old time, mountain music and traditional Scots-Irish music that was brought to the Appalachian Mountains of Virginia by Scots-Irish settlers three centuries ago.

Other common attributes abound, including recreational opportunities, cultural similarities, artistic and musical heritage, tourism, etc. Both towns capitalize on their scenic beauty to promote tourism and economic development.

### Andersons’ “Exchange” Activities

Paul and Shona, thanks to their generosity, have already begun an informal exchange with Stanardsville, both in terms of musical heritage and education. Their concerts here included conversations on stage with local musicians about the connections between Scottish, Irish and Appalachian music. Paul suggested “Malt and Moonshine” as an appropriate concert title to highlight that single malt scotch whiskey and Appalachian moonshine has long been the custom at informal musical get-togethers on both sides of the Atlantic. The Andersons performed in several jam sessions here with a dozen local musicians, and often do likewise in Aberdeenshire.

In addition, the Anderson family initiated the first educational exchange between our two communities by appearing at assemblies held for that purpose by both Nathanael Greene and Ruckersville elementary schools in 2017. Their two sons, Hector and Roderick, presented gifts to those schools from their own school in Tarland.

The town appointed Paul Anderson an unofficial Ambassador to Tarland in 2018 to help promote the establishment of a twinning partnership with Stanardsville.

### Next Steps

Stanardsville Town Council will renew its invitation to Tarland on September 14. Tarland will hold a virtual festival on September 27 that will include a segment on twinning with a video conference and photographs of both communities. Mayor Lowe will make a presentation to the Board of Supervisors on October 13. A formal Sister City Agreement will be prepared for signature by both communities.