

Macy Norfleet

SPEDA Project

Somerset Pulaski Economic Development Authority

August 3, 2022

My name is Macy Norfleet, I am a recent Somerset High School graduate, and I will be attending Somerset Community College in the fall. I was chosen to be SPEDA's intern for the summer. Sadly, my time here is quickly coming to an end, but I will never forget the things I have learned throughout my internship. For SPEDA, the community always comes first. They are constantly working to improve the place we all call "home."

Before I say anything in this paper I just want to express how eternally grateful I am for Chris Girdler and Jessica Carlton. Chris was a perfect example of leading with grace and kindness. Even though I was just an intern he never treated me like I was "Just an intern," he made me feel like my job and my presence was important. When I first started interning for Jessica I would've never thought that we would be as close as we are now. Her advice and mentoring throughout my time with SPEDA has truly changed my life.

As I said above, I am staying local for college. I didn't make this choice because it's cheaper than university or because I feel like I'm not ready to move away from home. I made the decision to stay local for college because I love my community. I've lived here my whole life and over the last few years I've noticed a tremendous growth in Somerset and Pulaski County. Through my internship I got to see this growth happening first-hand.

From new restaurants to new small businesses, SPEDA has been there lending a helping hand every step of the way in improving this community. They have worked with our community leaders and many others to make the growth we are seeing possible. I've taken extreme pride in being a part of SPEDA for this short time. It has been an honor to be their summer intern.

SPEDA asked me to do a project to get opinions from other high school graduates on how they think this community can be improved. I selected a few of my friends from local high schools to participate. Some of them are staying local for college and the others are going away for college.

Many questions were asked about our community and what my friends and I thought about it; but one question specifically sparked a conversation that many teens in our community have been having for a long time. The question was, "What is one thing you wish you could've had in high school? Or what's something that you think could benefit the incoming high school students?"

Macen was the first to answer this question. He responded, "I wish there was more for kids our age to do in our community, like a place to hang out."

The rest of the table immediately agreed. I went on to explain how right now teens are hanging out in parking lots. As for my friend group, we hangout at the old Kmart parking lot. We sit in lawn chairs and talk about our days. Some of my very best memories have been made in that parking lot. Memories that will last a lifetime.

Caleb went on to express his thoughts on the situation. He gave a brief insight to what he does in his free time. He says he often plays basketball at any outdoor courts that are available.

But he went on to say that sometimes it gets extremely hot outside so playing basketball outside is not always an ideal option.

After talking about our Kmart parking lot for a while, the idea of a teen center of some sort was put on the table. We all agreed that this would be great for kids our age and upcoming high school students. It would provide a safe environment for us to just hang out and enjoy each others company.

Now that I've talked about what we would like to add to our community; I would like to talk about what we already love about our community. We all love that Somerset and Pulaski County really is exactly what we call it, a "community." Most of the people here are so welcoming and kind. The small town feeling is truly indescribable. Everyone knows everyone here, our roots truly do run deep here.

Another thing that we all agreed that we loved was The Virginia. It's something Somerset has never had before in a historical building that feels like home. It truly doesn't get much better than that.

Peyton stated, "I love downtown events like somernites cruise and the food trucks!"

Paisley agreed and said, "Getting people involved in festivals and events gives a real sense of community. I really love the Master Musicians Festival."

Caleb even said that he loves the revitalization efforts we've all been seeing downtown like The Virginia and the Veteran's Park.

This new community that SPEDA is building is not going unnoticed. They have been putting that community feel back into Somerset and Pulaski county one step at a time. I can

safely say I don't ever think I'll have a job as cool as my job at SPEDA. I enjoyed every second and my heart is truly grieving now that my time here is over. This internship has been one of the best things that's ever happened to me. There was never a day that I dreaded coming to work. I loved every second. Thank you Chris and Jessica for making this summer the best one yet.