



**RETURN  
to ROOTS**

It's time to  
come home...

[www.ReturnToRoots.org](http://www.ReturnToRoots.org)

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Return to Roots announced as a Top 50 Innovation in Government by  
Harvard University**

**RADFORD, Va., March 31, 2009-** Earlier today, the Return to Roots program, a Virginia Tobacco Indemnification and Community Revitalization Commission funded project managed by Virginia Economic Bridge, Inc., was announced as one of the top 50 finalists for Innovations in American Government Awards judged by the Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

Return to Roots was selected as a top program from an extensive field of 600 applicants that underwent rigorous rounds of evaluation by policy experts and practitioners from across the country. The Top 50 programs include 21 cities and towns, six counties, one school district, 11 states, nine federal agencies, one tribal government, and one regional authority.

The Innovations in American Government Awards was created by the Ford Foundation in 1985 in response to widespread pessimism and distrust in government's effectiveness. The awards program acts as a significant force in restoring public trust in government by promoting public sector creativity and excellence. Competing programs demonstrate innovative solutions within a host of policy areas including health and social services; management and governance; community and economic development; education and training; criminal justice; transportation and infrastructure; and the environment. Since its inception, over 400 government programs across all jurisdiction levels have been recognized and have collectively received more than \$20 million in grants to support dissemination efforts.

"Being selected for this award by Harvard University is a testament to the importance of a program like Return to Roots that works closely with the state to support economic success," said Carl Mitchell, Program Manager for Return to Roots and President & CEO of Virginia Economic Bridge. "The national recognition received by Return to Roots as a result of its services is a part of the driving force behind our continued efforts in Southwestern Virginia, our newfound endeavors within Southern Virginia, and our desires to see this program become implemented statewide."

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Return to Roots is bringing people back to Southwest Virginia, even though unemployment numbers have been disappointing. Allen Thiel, of CGI; Jim Reiley, of Mountain Empire Community College; and Kendall Edmiston, of Mailtrust, are all recent successes that were attracted to the Return to Roots website because of the local job postings and helpful regional information. Their experience with the website and program resulted in them now living and working in the region.

The Return to Roots program has made great strides in recruiting back and retaining the Commonwealth's highly trained graduates within Virginia. Currently, Return to Roots is reaching out to educational institutions across the state of Virginia to request their assistance in the search for alumni. A single organization cannot hope to achieve broad accomplishments on its own, and Return to Roots works to build a larger network within Virginia to reach out to former and potential residents of Virginia.

*Return to Roots* locates former and potential Southwest Virginia residents and brings them to their roots for career opportunities. The program operates primarily through the website [www.ReturnToRoots.org](http://www.ReturnToRoots.org) to inform them about employment opportunities available in Southwest Virginia.

*The Tobacco Indemnification and Community Revitalization Commission* is a 31-member body created by the 1999 General Assembly to promote economic growth and development in tobacco-dependent communities, using proceeds of the national tobacco settlement. To date, the Commission has awarded 1,071 grants totaling more than \$525.3 million across the tobacco region of the Commonwealth, and has made available nearly \$268 million in indemnification payments to tobacco growers and quota holders. For information on the Commission's history, mission, funding programs and recent grant awards, visit our website at [www.tic.virginia.gov](http://www.tic.virginia.gov) or call toll free 877-807-1086.

*Virginia Economic Bridge, Inc.* is a nonprofit organization that promotes the economic vitality and external competitiveness of the Commonwealth through business, industry and educational partnerships between Southwestern Virginia, Northern Virginia and other regions of the Commonwealth. Value driven, innovative and efficient, Virginia Economic Bridge, Inc. defines success and gives organizations and businesses the tools necessary to cultivate new possibilities at a price they can afford.

*The Roy and Lila Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation* advances excellence in governance and strengthens democratic institutions worldwide. Through its research, education, international programs, and government innovations awards, the Institute fosters creative and effective government problem solving and serves as a catalyst for addressing many of the most pressing needs of the world's citizens. Asia Programs, a school-wide initiative integrating Asia-related activities, joined the Ash Institute in July 2008. The Ford Foundation is a founding donor of the Institute. Additional information about the Ash Institute is available at [www.ashinstitute.harvard.edu](http://www.ashinstitute.harvard.edu).

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