

Archaeology students help unearth history of 18-century Brentsville tavern

By **MATT HOURIHAN**

mhourihan@potomacnews.com

Behind a grove of trees in Brentsville, invisible from drivers zipping down Bristow Road, a team of archaeologists has spent the last month unearthing a part of Brentsville's past.

Surrounded by trees and scrub foliage, Mary Washington University archaeologists have labored in the heat to unearth the foundations of an old tavern, next door to the Brentsville Courthouse.

Long since burnt down, all that remains of the tavern is the stone skeletal foundation and buried layers of brick rubble and coal slag, with a wide smattering of smaller artifacts spread around the site. While there

are few records remaining about the tavern, which experienced its heyday in the early 19th Century, archaeologists will eventually piece the clues together to learn how the tavern looked.

"It's a jigsaw effect, just trying to figure out what layer goes where, and figure out where the building goes," said field technician David Weese, 31. "I see it as a big jigsaw puzzle."

The project is part of the county's larger Historic Brentsville venture, whose aim is restoration of the courthouse, jailhouse and church for eventual use as a park and tourist attraction.

The tavern site work began years ago, when the area

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Peter Cihelka/News & Messenger

Alex West, a 2004 graduate of the University of Mary Washington, looks for artifacts at the site of the Court Tavern in Brentsville's historic recreation district Thursday.

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