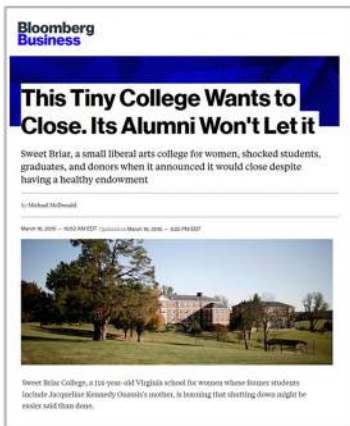


Sweet Success!

HELPING A DEVOTED GROUP OF SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE ALUMNAE SAVE THEIR ALMA MATER.



Overcoming an Existential Threat

On March 3, 2015, the interim president of Sweet Briar College, a 114-year old women's liberal arts college in central Virginia, announced without warning that the school would close on August 25, 2015. The president cited insurmountable financial challenges triggered by declining enrollment and a steady drop in tuition revenue as the principal reasons for the closure.

Faculty, students and alumnae were never consulted about the decision and were shocked by the announced closure.



Immediate Response Proved Key to Victory

Within hours, thousands of alumnae from around the country began organizing a fierce campaign to save Sweet Briar. Tracy Stuart, a 1993 graduate of Sweet Briar, was among those who swung into action. Stuart hired Troutman Sanders, a powerful global law firm with a higher education practice and a large Richmond, Virginia office to mount a legal challenge. She also retained the services of CK Communications to provide crisis public relations support and to lead media engagement. Another alumna, Brooke Linville, launched a website to serve as the hub of an online fundraising campaign and an information source for alumnae, students and faculty. Stuart's effort and the website created by Linville were unified under Saving Sweet Briar, Inc., a nonprofit that would raise the funds needed to help the college close its financial gap.



Over the course of the nearly four-month battle, Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. raised over \$21 million in pledges and with the support of CK Communications, launched a blistering and sustained public relations campaign that challenged the college's argument that its financial problems could not be overcome. Supported by the facts that Sweet Briar College had an \$85 million endowment, a respected reputation for academic achievement and a ranking as one of the nation's most beautiful college campuses, the alumnae message that an alternative to closure existed began to resonate.

The New York Times

Anger and Activism Greet Plan to Shut Sweet Briar College

By SHERYL GAY STOLBERG MARCH 22, 2015



SWEET BRIAR, Va. — Here at bucolic Sweet Briar College, equestrians awaken at dawn and trek to the stables to ride on 18 miles of trails through wooded countryside, fields and dells. Women study on the boathouse dock at sunset, as geese squawk over a lake. Pearls are still in fashion, and men must have escorts. Students call it “the pink bubble.”

BUSINESS INSIDER EDUCATION

There are 2 very different pictures emerging of an imploding college's financials

PETER JACOBS
April 7, 2015, 6:00 PM

Two sharply distinct pictures have emerged about the financials of Virginia's Sweet Briar College, which abruptly announced its impending closure last month.

The all-women's college blamed its closure on insurmountable financial obstacles. However, a lawsuit from the state of Virginia and a professor at the school have claimed Sweet Briar was in much better shape than it led the world to believe.

The lawsuit filed last month by the Commonwealth of Virginia — through Amherst County Attorney Ellen Bowyer — claims the 114-year-old college didn't do enough to stay open.



Students walk around a snowy Sweet Briar College.

The Washington Post

Why close this college? Sweet Briar was in better-than-average financial shape.

By Daniel Gottlieb May 29



Dan Gottlieb (courtesy of Dan Gottlieb)

After the president of Sweet Briar College announced in March that the private women's school would shut down after this summer because of insurmountable financial challenges, Daniel Gottlieb, an associate professor and chair of psychology at the college, began asking questions. (His more detailed analysis can be found as Sweet Briar Story guest blogs at www.usaollected.guru, and he can be reached at gottlieb3b@gmail.com.) What he found made him even more curious about the school's finances.

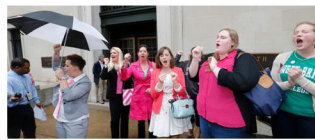
USA TODAY

Va. Supreme Court temporarily blocks closure of Sweet Briar College

By Amanda Simon June 8, 2015 2:29 pm

On March 3, 2015 — in the wake of declining enrollment and debt — the board of directors at Sweet Briar College voted to close the private liberal arts school. But the women's college may open its doors once again if the courts have anything to do with it.

In a decision released Tuesday morning, the Virginia Supreme Court ruled to have the case reexamined in lower courts, which rejected a temporary injunction to block the school's closing.



Sweet Briar alumni cheer for the school after a hearing on the closure of Sweet Briar College at the Supreme Court of Virginia in Richmond, Va., Thursday, June 4, 2015. (AP Photo/Steve Helber)

RELATED: Sweet Briar College to close because of financial challenges

According to *News & Atlantic*, opponents who filed the injunction argued that the school is a trust based on the will of its founder and must undergo court review to close. Sweet Briar officials

“Without a doubt, Eric Cote and his team helped us save Sweet Briar College. We are grateful for Eric’s media savvy and calm demeanor that provided a steady hand from the very first days of our fight right through our incredible victory. Eric and his team helped shape and implement the media strategy that provided a potent and steady media barrage. This really helped tip the scales in our successful fight to save Sweet Briar College.”

— Tracy Stuart, Founder and Board Member, Saving Sweet Briar, Inc.

Unrelenting Media Coverage of Questionable Justification for Closure Eroded Credibility of College Officials

The media onslaught that CK Communications sustained generated massive media exposure including extensive coverage by the New York Times, the Washington Post, Newsweek and dozens of Virginia media outlets. The unrelenting coverage highlighted the disconnect between the college’s claims of insurmountable financial challenges and the facts that suggested otherwise, eroding the administration’s credibility and planting the seeds for a stunning victory few thought possible.

Troutman Sanders led a complex legal fight that enlisted Virginia’s Amherst County Attorney Ellen Bowyer to join Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. to stop the closure. Bowyer filed a suit against the college alleging it had violated several Virginia laws pertaining to charitable donations and trusts in its move to close the school without first seeking court permission and oversight as mandated by the Virginia Uniform Trust Code. Bowyer had to contend with Virginia’s Attorney General who argued that she lacked the legal standing to block the closure.



CK Communications Carefully Dovetailed Media Approach with Litigation Strategy

After a split decision by a Virginia Circuit Court Judge that helped slow the closure but failed to stop it, Bowyer and Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. took their case to the Virginia Supreme Court. The court accepted the legal arguments advanced by Bowyer and Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. It ruled that a key element of the Circuit Court judge’s ruling in the college’s favor was in error, and that in fact the provisions of trust law could indeed apply to a nonprofit corporation that was founded by and subject to the terms of a will like Sweet Briar College, as Bowyer and Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. had argued all along. The Virginia Supreme Court sent the matter back to the lower court for a new determination on the dispositive issue of trust law but before the circuit court judge could act, the parties agreed to a legal settlement that called for the removal of the embattled president and the entire board of directors and reversal of their decision to close the college.

“Eric Cote’s role in generating extensive media coverage of our fight to save Sweet Briar College was tremendously helpful to our ongoing legal strategy. He understood the need to carefully calibrate media coverage to support our litigation strategy and he did so masterfully.”

— Ashley L. Taylor, Jr., Attorney for Saving Sweet Briar and co-chair of the Education Team at Troutman Sanders

The Washington Post

Va. Supreme Court says lower court erred in Sweet Briar case, sends it back, as advocates cheer

By Susan Serfaty June 9

A Virginia Supreme Court ruling Tuesday elated advocates working to keep Sweet Briar College from closing, as justices wrote that a lower court had erred and sent the case back for more arguments.

The private women's college is slated to close this summer, after its president announced what he called "insurmountable financial challenges" in March. Alumnae and others have been working feverishly against the clock to keep it open through lawsuits, fundraising and protests.

In the case at hand, Amherst County Attorney Ellen Boyner sought to stop the closing, arguing that it would violate the terms of the will upon which the college was founded, and that charitable funds have been misused. After a

FOX NEWS

Virginia attorney general announces rescue plan: Sweet Briar College will remain open

Published June 25, 2015 Associated Press



PHOTO: In this April 15, 2015, photo, protesters gather at Sweet Briar College, a private liberal arts school in Virginia, to demand the school be kept open. The school is slated to close at the end of the summer. Virginia's attorney general announced a mediated settlement Sunday, June 21, to keep open Sweet Briar College, using \$15 million raised by friends (AP/Wide World Photos). The settlement also includes the appointment of a new board of trustees and the resignation of the school's president. (AP Photo/Steve Haber, File) (The Associated Press)

SWEET BRIAR, Va. — Virginia's attorney general has announced a mediated settlement to keep open Sweet Briar College, a tiny women's college whose planned closure had stirred passionate opposition.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Sweet Briar College Gets Reprieve, to Stay Open Another Year

Settlement must be approved by a judge Monday

By DOUGLAS BELEN June 21, 2015 1:37 p.m. ET

Sweet Briar College in Virginia, a 114-year-old private, women's liberal arts school that was slated to close at the end of the summer, has received a reprieve and will remain open for at least another year under new leadership, Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring said.

The reversal comes three months after Sweet Briar President James F. Jones Jr. cited "insurmountable financial challenges" and said the school would be closed. That announcement sparked a backlash by alumnae who said Mr. Jones and the school's board of trustees had acted without transparency. A group called the Friends of Saving Sweet Briar organized and raised millions in pledges which will be used to keep the school open through the 2015-16 academic year.

CNN Money

Saving Sweet Briar College from financial ruin



Sweet Briar College held what was going to be its last commencement ceremony earlier this year, but is likely to be rescheduled until a financial rescue.

A judge green-lighted a plan on Monday to save Sweet Briar College a small private Virginia school for women that suffered a financial collapse earlier this year.

"We are pleased Judge James Updew approved the mediation agreement this morning," announce Sweet Briar College on its Facebook (f), Twitter (t) pages.

Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring had announced a settlement over the weekend to keep the school afloat with a cash infusion of \$15 million from an alumnae group called Saving Sweet Briar, while the 400-800 trustees on \$100 million from the college's investment fund to keep it going for the 2015-2016 year.

The rescue package approved by Virginia circuit court Judge Updew also requires a purge of the college board of directors and the resignation of the college president.

"The passion, creativity and commitment shown by the Sweet Briar family proves it is a special

In the End, a Stunning and Undisputed Victory for Saving Sweet Briar, Inc.

The settlement, a stunning and undisputed victory for Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. and all its allies and supporters, was advanced by Virginia's attorney general and stipulated that a new board of directors nominated by Saving Sweet Briar Inc. and the other plaintiffs in the multiple lawsuits pending against the college would be appointed. This board would then name Phillip Stone, a highly respected Virginia attorney who had successfully led Virginia's Bridgewater College over a 16-year period, as the new Sweet Briar President.

"As the Chairwoman of Saving Sweet Briar, Inc., I really enjoyed working with Eric Cote during our fight to save our beloved alma mater. I came into this battle with a legal background given my work as an attorney and a federal administrative judge. Eric was invaluable in helping me develop the right message at every juncture of our fight and in providing the right perspective throughout every crisis along the way."

— Sarah Clement, Chairwoman, Saving Sweet Briar, Inc.



In the aftermath of the crisis that nearly shuttered the venerable liberal arts women's college, Phillip Stone and his entirely new board of directors faced a major challenge in rebuilding the college and ensuring its long-term viability. Accepted freshmen had largely enrolled at other colleges and hundreds of the college's current students initiated transfers.

The immediate marketing challenge for Sweet Briar College was assessing the impact of the recent fight on the college's reputation and mitigating adverse impacts, while leveraging the positive components in a rebranding and marketing campaign.

After Victory, the Hard Work of Rebuilding the College Begins

Successfully repositioning the college also required an aggressive public relations campaign to let the world know that Sweet Briar College was open for business and was hard at work creating a new approach to ensure the school's solid financial footing and permanent role as a leading liberal arts college for young women. Given his role in helping Saving Sweet Briar, Inc. achieve its stunning victory in reversing the closure, the new college president tapped Eric Cote to continue providing public relations support during his transition as president.

Higher education experts and leaders in the nonprofit world have already begun to write case studies about the battle to save Sweet Briar College. Early consensus among experts is that the embattled Sweet Briar administration made a critical mistake in failing to engage key stakeholders in such a monumental decision about the college's very existence. That failure ultimately cost the college president his job and led to the ouster of the entire board of directors.



The Washington Post

New president of Sweet Briar says he'll work toward highest enrollment ever

By Susan Srivaga July 3



Sweet Briar College's 3,250-acre campus offers miles of trails through woods, fields and dells. (A Cook)

New leaders took over Sweet Briar College Thursday evening, ending a four-month battle to stop the private women's college from closing. While some alumnae popped pink champagne — a nod to one of the school colors — professors rang the Virginia school's historic bells to mark the new beginning.

It's a lesson CK Communications was proud to help deliver in providing aggrieved alumnae with a powerful public relations campaign that helped plant the seeds of their victory.

“We were honored to have played a role in saving Sweet Briar College. Cara Klein and I became emotionally and intellectually invested in this fight from the very beginning. Our clients showed incredible spirit and determination in their fight to save the college and we worked hard to give them every opportunity to succeed. Providing support to the incoming president was a nice validation of our contribution and recognition of the value we could bring to the new leadership team.”

— Eric Cote, Principal and President, CK Communications

Let the CK Communications team produce
measurable
results for you.

If you would like to leverage the vast experience and skills of the CK Communications team, contact one of our representatives today. We look forward to discussing the challenges you face, and the solutions we can develop that will produce measurable results. After all, measurable results is what we're all about.



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