

The closest thing to a main drag in McGaheysville is the intersection at Island Ford Road and Route 33, where the fire department faces the new building that houses Thunderbird Diner and Ginger SNAPP House.

Again in the year 2005, we're making our way around the region, each issue visiting a small town and meeting some of the folks who make up the heart of electric co-op country. On this year's ninth stop, we'll be ...



DOWN HOME IN

# McGAHEYSVILLE

by Cammie Tutwiler, Contributing Writer

## AT A GLANCE ...

**POPULATION:** Approx. 756.

**LAND AREA:** Currently has no formal boundaries.

**INCORPORATED:** McGaheysville is unincorporated!

**ELEVATION:** About 1,160 feet.

**FUN FACT:** Bingo is played every week at the McGaheysville volunteer fire department.

**M**cGaheysville (pronounced Mc-Gackeesville), Virginia, is a community that has new restaurants, new shops, and soon a new water park combined with an old, small-town feeling that locals and visitors love.

The earliest records of the settlement that is now McGaheysville date back to 1716, when Governor Spotswood made a voyage west of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Surveyor Tobias Randolph McGahey came to the area in 1801 with a Scotch-Irish colony, spent the night at a tavern run by Eva Conrad, and married the innkeeper a short time later. In 1802 McGahey established a post office that he called McGaheysville.

Situated between Penn Laird and Massanutten, McGaheysville is an interesting combination of an old-fashioned community with a forward-thinking outlook.

While McGaheysville is unincorporated, the county of Rockingham is working with residents on a comprehensive plan that will assist the area with the pressures of growth that have recently become more evident.

"It was a reason I requested the study, trying to save the old-time feeling," said **Mike Breeden**, who represents McGaheysville on the Rockingham County Board of Supervisors.



Tobias McGahey married an innkeeper and set up a post office, naming it "McGaheysville."



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CAMMIE TUTWILLER



Sue Justis, owner of the Ginger SNAPP House – an artisan’s cooperative located in the Olde Town Center, is also an artist.

The boundaries of McGaheysville are such (there are no formal lines, due to the unincorporated status of the area) that distinguishing what is exactly “McGaheysville” is quite challenging. Saying “McGaheysville” is an elastic term describing the community between Massanutten and Penn Laird.



Even though it’s a town hall (above), since McGaheysville is not incorporated, there are no town meetings here. The graveyard (left) is tucked away from the “main road” of McGaheysville, on a road that eventually turns into a dirt path.

### OLD “TOWN”

Many buildings and events in McGaheysville are reflective of a small community. There are churches, a school, a small post office, and a graveyard. There is a “town hall” building, which is used for Ruritan meetings, but not town council meetings, since the community is unincorporated, and they do not have a council.

Several homes in McGaheysville are significantly older, with some dating back to the 1840s. On a map prepared by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, some homes in the area date from the 1840s to the 1940s.

One of the shops in McGaheysville, Stumps Antique Mall, was built in 1910 and originally used as a garage for Model T’s, according to **Mitzie O’Neill**, manager of the antique mall.

The building was a dance hall, then later a store, with a soda fountain, hardware, groceries, and a filling station.

“A lot of people got engaged here (when it was a dance hall),” O’Neill said. “I’ve had people come in and tell me they got engaged here.”

Another important part of McGaheysville is the volunteer fire department, which hosts bingo weekly and an annual lawn party, a big event during the summer.

If you are planning a trip to McGaheysville, here are a few suggestions:

- Take a fishing pole and bait. There is plenty of access to the **Shenandoah River** in the McGaheysville area.
- Pack those hiking boots, water bottles and sunscreen. McGaheysville is in close proximity to the **Blue Ridge Parkway**.
- Plan some time to ride around and look at historic homes. There are several

homes in the area that date from the 1840s to the 1940s.

- Any time of year you cruise to McGaheysville, there will be something to do at **Massanutten**, the four-season resort. A water park is scheduled to open in mid-October, which will have an indoor facility. So take your skis and your swimsuits in the winter!
- Visit **The Ginger SNAPP House** in Olde Town Center to see work by local artists. Numerous



artisans, who work in various mediums, are featured at the cooperative at any time.

- Eat where the locals eat at the **Thunderbird Diner**. Pot roast, fried chicken, and hamburgers are specials of the house. Breakfast is served all day.
- One-of-a-kind items are around every corner at **Stumps Antique Mall**, which also has quite a history of its own. Check out the picture of the folks sitting at the soda fountain, when that was in the building.

Thousands of people show up during the span of the three-day-long event to eat carnival foods, enjoy live music, rides and games, and visit with one another.

“... What you see around here, the lawn party, it’s a family event,” said **Jeff Werner**, a 14-year resident of McGaheysville who is a volunteer with the rescue squad. “It’s a large reunion, the whole community turns out to support the cause (the McGaheysville Volunteer Fire Company).”

The whole community just might turn out for the event. The entire population of McGaheysville is approximately 756 people, or more exactly, 755.89. Since the area is not incorporated, there is not an official population count, but the approximation is a number derived by using the 2000 census standard, which is the number of dwelling units multiplied by 2.69 per household.

The population of McGaheysville might not seem large, but the area has experienced growth in recent years.

**Edith Breeden**, who has lived in the McGaheysville area for 60 years, has noticed the changes coming to the area.

“Right now, they are doing a lot of building,” she said, noting the new bank, doctor’s offices, and florist that have moved into PeakView Plaza, which is located beside the Olde Town Center and across Rte. 33 from the volunteer fire company.

“Even though the area is growing, it’s still a close-knit community,” Werner said. “It has a comprehensive plan that channels the growth into proper areas.”

### NEW DEVELOPMENTS

The draft of a comprehensive plan is coming at a good time, when restaurants and shops are trickling down Rte. 33 from Harrisonburg, which is the closest “big town” for McGaheysville residents.

“The plan gives citizens input about how they want to see McGaheysville look,” Breeden said. “Both sides were represented, (those) for and against growth.”

There are several reasons that McGaheysville is the county’s first area with a plan. One of the reasons, from the final draft of the McGaheysville Area Plan, is that: “(McGaheysville) has been the subject of

substantial recent development activity and development pressure.”

The plan is going through the approval process. Breeden anticipates that it will go to the board of supervisors in early autumn of this year.

“I hope in the end, it gives us good balance between folks who want to use land for development and those who want controlled development and green space,” Breeden said.

In early June, a restaurant and an artisan’s cooperative were added to the McGaheysville mix when the Thunderbird Diner and the Ginger SNAPP House opened in the Olde Town Center located on the corner of Island Ford Road and Rte. 33, across from the volunteer fire company.

**Sue Justis** opened the Ginger SNAPP House in McGaheysville on July 4.

“The people (of McGaheysville) are curious to know where you’re from and who you are. The next time they see you, they’re your best friend. They’ll smile at you and call you by name. They are friendly and remember you,” Justis said.

Business, she said, has increased significantly since their relocation from Grottoes.



- For a night out in McGaheysville, visit **Hank's Smokehouse and Southern Grillery**. Choose from ribs, steaks and seafood.

If you happen through the area on a Wednesday night or the first Saturday of the month, you could be a winner at the **McGaheysville volunteer fire department bingo game**. The early-bird game starts at 6:15 on Wednesday nights and the early-early-bird game starts at 11:45 a.m. on the first Saturday of the month.

The **McGaheysville volunteer fire department lawn party**, usually held toward the last weekend of July, on a Thursday, Friday and Saturday, offers an opportunity to rub elbows with the locals while eating chicken made by the fire department, riding rides, playing games and listening to the evening's entertainment. The last night of the lawn party usually features a fireworks display. ■

From left: 1) With lots of history in its walls, **Stumps Antique Mall** has items from many different time periods to offer to shoppers. 2) There is always something to do at **Massanutten**, the four-season resort located just outside of McGaheysville. 3) Folks gather before the lawn party really kicks into gear to enjoy chicken served by the volunteer fire department.



"We are pleasantly surprised because our sales have exceeded our expectations during the first month," she said. "One of the joys of a business like this is meeting the people of the local area and across the U.S. who visit our lovely valley."

**Clay Clark**, majority owner of Hank's Smokehouse and Southern Grillery and Thunderbird Diner along with partners **John Strong** and **Stacy Rose**, said the restaurants offer fare for both the locals and the tourists of the area.

"(We get) the tourist trade with the Smokehouse, from Massanutten, and then the Thunderbird is for the local trade. The Thunderbird has home-cooked-style foods at reasonable prices. The Smokehouse has ribs, steaks, and great seafood."

Clark estimates the Thunderbird averages 3,500 customers a week, while Hank's Smokehouse and Southern Grillery averages 2,000.

"We've had great support from locals and tourists at both locations," he said. "(The restaurants) don't compete with each other."

Neighboring four-season resort Massanutten, developed beginning in 1971, is also

considered part of McGaheysville. It is a village that is home to about 3,405 people, along with seasonal timeshares. The resort features 14 ski trails, 36 holes of golf, and various other activities. A new water park is scheduled to open in mid-October, 2005, according to **Joe Grandstaff**, marketing director at Massanutten. The water park is indoor/outdoor, with the indoor section remaining open year-round.

### STILL THE LOCAL PLACE

Despite the development, it's the small things that make McGaheysville the place to be for the residents.

"It's not that many people, for one thing," Edith Breeden said. "... It's a nice, clean town."

Jeff Werner appreciates the proximity to other towns, combined with the serenity of the small community.

"McGaheysville gives the opportunity to sit back and enjoy a quiet community life," he said. "It's just minutes away from Harrisonburg and any communities you might need."

Some people, on the other hand, choose to stay in the McGaheysville area for their needs. Ginger SNAPP House owner Sue Justis told a story about a woman who recently visited her store.

"A customer told me the other day, a McGaheysville resident, that she had not been to Harrisonburg in five weeks. She said there are enough stores in the area for necessities and such to prevent her from dealing with the congestion of Harrisonburg."

Clay Clark, owner of Hank's and the Thunderbird Diner, appreciates the natural beauty of the community.

"It's a beautiful area to be in. I hope we're an asset, not a detriment. It's a beautiful town and a great place to be in business," he said.

No matter who you speak with, despite the beautiful scenery, the local attractions, and the history of the area, the biggest draw of McGaheysville is the welcoming nature of the people.

"They'll stop what they're doing to help you," Justis said. "The people embrace you and accept you as a new neighbor." ■