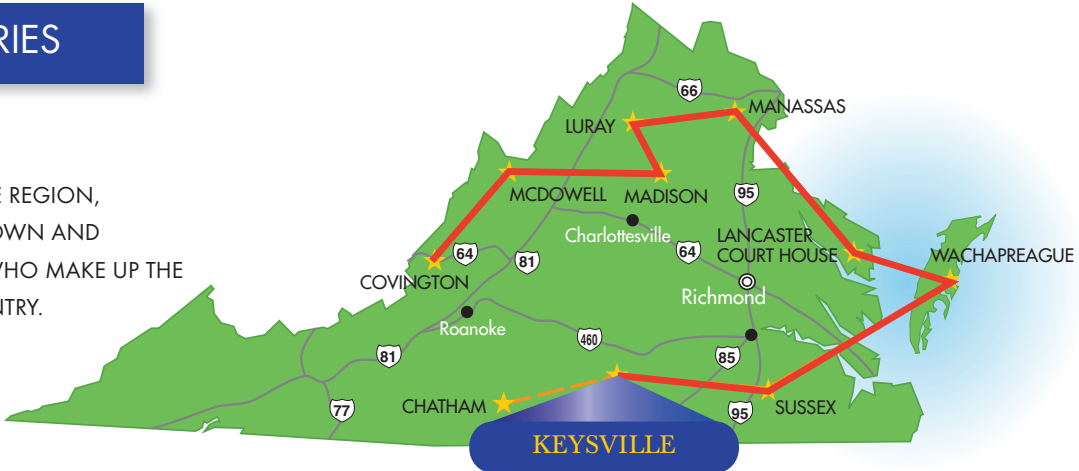


DOWN HOME SERIES

AGAIN IN THE YEAR 2008, 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

KEYSVILLE

STORY AND PHOTOS BY CRYSTAL VANDERGRIFT, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

WHERE PROUD CITIZENS CALL THEIR HOMETOWN
"A SMALL WONDER."

Located eight miles east of Charlotte Court House is Keysville, a town rich in history yet making strides to the future.

A part of rustic Charlotte County, Keysville probably got its name from its first postmaster, John Key. Over the years, the town has also been known as Key's Tavern and Key's.

What is known today as King Street in the center of the town began as nothing more than a wooded area when, in 1755, George Foster purchased 134 acres for the price of five shillings. There was a marked path through Foster's woods known as the "Kings Highway." In 1805, the Fosters sold their property to John Key, who later started Key's Tavern.

The town is located between two main routes, Highway 40 and Route 360, also known today as "Kings Highway."

The Keysville Railroad Station, located on Railroad Avenue, is one of the last surviving single-story, wooden railroad depots of its type, according to **P.K. Pettus**, member of the Friends of the Fort Mitchell and Keysville Depot.

The Keysville Railroad Station faces Railroad Avenue with a 19th-century streetscape, still mostly intact, that included the former Charlotte Hotel, Rutledge's Distillery, and Wilson's Store.

"Between the Charlotte Hotel and the depot is an open area where railroad passengers would take their meals and wait while the train refueled," says Pettus.



The main thoroughfares in the town of Keysville are Railroad Avenue (above) and King Street (left). The majority of the 70 businesses operating within town limits are located along these streets.

AT A GLANCE ...

POPULATION: In 2003, approximately 817

LAND AREA: 1.2 square miles

FOUNDED: Believed to have first been called Key's Tavern or Key's, the town of Keysville is said to have been named after its first postmaster, John Key.

ELEVATION: 676 feet

FACTOID: Keysville serves as a low aviation airspace, allowing a turn-around point for naval aircraft from Norfolk during training and war games – about a 15 minute ride at Mach 2.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Mayor James D. Ramsey, Jr., on his tractor in front of the Keysville Town Office. Mayor Ramsey spends a lot of his time riding around town on his tractor and lawnmower checking on things in the town. "He's a real hands-on mayor," says one town citizen. • The Korean-Vietnam War Memorial Park on King Street. • The Charlotte Hotel, which sits across the tracks from Keysville RR Station, now houses apartments. • The historic Keysville Railroad Station is currently undergoing restoration.

The town of Keysville and the railroad depot gained notoriety in 1975 when the depot was selected as a location for the filming of *Eleanor and Franklin*, a television film about the Roosevelts that later earned 11 Emmy awards.

COLORFUL PAST, BRIGHT FUTURE

Keysville is full of history, and over the years it has become Charlotte County's most heavily populated town — in both citizens and businesses — and it continues to

grow with each passing year, while at the same time working to keep its history alive.

In 2006, Norfolk Southern Railroad conveyed the Keysville Railroad Station to the Friends of the Fort Mitchell and Keysville Depots, Inc. The organization plans to renovate the Keysville Depot as a community center for meetings, performances, and other events. The Keysville depot will also become a stop on the Tobacco Heritage Trail, which is currently in development.

Back in 1874, buildings in the town included a leather tannery, a blacksmith, a wheelwright shop, a hotel, the depot and a few homes.

Today there are 70 businesses located within the town limits. "There has definitely been growth here over the years," notes **Rhonda Brankley**, owner of the Hair Depot.

"But not so much so that you still don't have that small-town feel ... It's nice because we all look out for each other."



The Perfect Package, which opened on King Street in 2006, offers a fun assortment of unique gifts. Owners Tammy Bavely and Becky Watson like to refer to their merchandise as “whimsical.”



Keysville’s memorial park is home to a Blue Star Highway Marker; the Blue Star program was initiated in 1945 by the National Council of State Garden Clubs to honor our armed forces.

Brankley remembers an incident back in the late 1980s, when her sister’s business was destroyed by fire. “People were calling me to tell me the place was on fire,” she says. “Some people call that being nosey, but it’s just concern — that’s something you may not see in a large town.”

The town’s clerk of 19 years, **Sharon Layne**, adds, “I think you see that a lot in small towns.” Community pride is something else found in Keysville. According to Layne, when the town decided to build a playground, help came from everywhere. “From helping with fundraising events to installing the playground equipment, citizens volunteered. Somebody’s always ready to help.”

Helping each other and the small-town feel is something **Mayor James D. Ramsey, Jr.** takes pride in, too. On just about any given day, you can find Mayor Ramsey riding around the town on his tractor, “checking on things.”

ROOM FOR GROWTH

Though Ramsey has only been mayor the past two years, he is a life-long citizen of Keysville. Over the past 50 years, he has seen many changes take place in the town. Businesses have come and gone, and although its citizens like the small-town feel, he notes, there is always room for growth. “We’re always looking to grow and upgrade things in the town, but we want to keep

that small-town, friendly atmosphere,” he adds.

Keysville is home to the county’s industrial park, where UPS, Alderman Railcar Service and Ontario Hardwood have facilities, with Southside Virginia Community College situated nearby.

In an era where we as Americans are seeing manufacturing companies close and jobs go overseas, business owner **Garret Bosinger** has not let that happen. In 1995, Bosinger opened Appomattox River Manufacturing. The factory, which manufactures wooden drawer parts for furniture, today employs 60 workers.

QUAINT SHOPS

Those visiting the town should not expect to see large retail businesses, a fast-paced lifestyle, or traffic signals in the town or the county itself. The town, with a population of just over 800 according to the latest census, does have several quaint stores for those who feel the urge to shop.

The Perfect Package offers visitors the chance to pick up a truly unique gift. “We like to refer to ourselves as a whimsical store,” says co-owner **Becky Watson**. “We have items here that you just don’t see in other towns nearby.”

Watson and her business partner, **Tammy Bavely**, opened the store in 2006 and offer gift items for the home, garden, pets, babies and children, and much more.



Ethel's Old Fashioned Lunch Wagon, located on Highway 40 just outside the town limits and across from Southside Virginia Community College, serves "big-city food in a small town."

You could say businesses in Keysville come in twos — or it just may seem that way. Can't find what you're looking for in one sporting goods store? Then just go a few doors down to the second one. Just recently opened is Rebel Sporting Goods, providing everything the hunter or angler could need. Stewart's Hunting and Fishing also offers something for those interested in guns, archery, fishing and hunting supplies. Need to send your favorite someone flowers? You can pick from two flower shops in the town, both located on King Street right across from each other. Love thrift shops? Keysville has that, too. Tail Waggers is full of items, with sales proceeds going to the nearby Meherrin SPCA to help animals in need of homes.

ARRAY OF EATERIES

When it comes to dining out, Keysville has the largest selection of eateries in Charlotte County. There is home cooking at Kim's Kitchen and Sheldon's Restaurant, Italian at Pinos, Chinese at KAI XIA, and fast food at Burger King, to name a few.

However, if you're looking for something unique, located on the outskirts of town is Ethel's, an old-fashioned lunch wagon. Ethel's owners **Larry** and **Sandy Yoli** purchased a 1973 concession trailer a few years back. Wanting to work from home, the Yolis restored the trailer and opened the lunch wagon right in their back yard. "Big-city food in a small town" is what Larry says Ethel's offers.

Originally from New York, Larry says offering cheesesteak, Reuben and pastrami sandwiches and more gives the townspeople a taste of something different. When it comes to living in a small town, the Yolis say, "We love the area and love the people. Some nights we can't even serve people because we're so full, other days we're slow, but that's just part of being in a small town."

ONE-OF-A-KIND PARK

For the history buff, Keysville has a one-of-a-kind war memorial park. It is home to several markers honoring soldiers who fought in World War II, the Korean Conflict and Vietnam, as well as remembering the POWs and MIAs.

The park is also the site of a Blue Star Highway Marker, sponsored by the Virginia Federation of Garden Clubs in conjunction with the Keysville Garden Club.

In a book titled *Keysville, Virginia – A Pictorial History* published by the Keysville Garden Club in 1987, the town of Keysville is summed up well. "People smile in Keysville, and locals don't avert their eyes when meeting on the street. Here citizens care about each other; a caring which crosses racial, social, and economic lines. This blessedly communal spirit, which pervades the little town, is sometimes taken for granted by her long-time citizens, yet is greatly appreciated by her newcomers. Keysville ... a small wonder." ■



History buffs will no doubt enjoy Keysville's one-of-a-kind war memorial, which honors soldiers who fought in World War II, the Korean Conflict and Vietnam, as well as remembering the POWs and MIAs.

IF YOU GO ...

Places of interest in and around Keysville:

Charlotte County's Korean and Vietnam War Memorial, located on King Street.

Sheldon's Motel and Restaurant — Featuring Southern home-cooking and overnight accommodations — located on Four Locust Highway.

Roselawn Bed and Breakfast — Roselawn is a pre-Civil War Victorian farmhouse located on Four Locust Highway. Enjoy a relaxing stay in one of their historic rooms or suites.

The Perfect Package — offering unique and one-of-a-kind gifts — located on King Street.

Tail Waggers Thrift Shop. All proceeds from sales go to the nearby Meherrin SPCA to help animals in need of loving homes.

Keysville Railroad Station. Currently under renovation, only a few of this type of depot still stand today, and Friends of the Fort Mitchell and Keysville Depot hope to keep its history alive by offering the building as a place for community gatherings.

Ethel's Old Fashioned Lunch Wagon, located on Highway 40 just outside the town limits, is open from mid-March through mid-December. Ethel's also sells homegrown fruits and vegetables on the weekends. ■