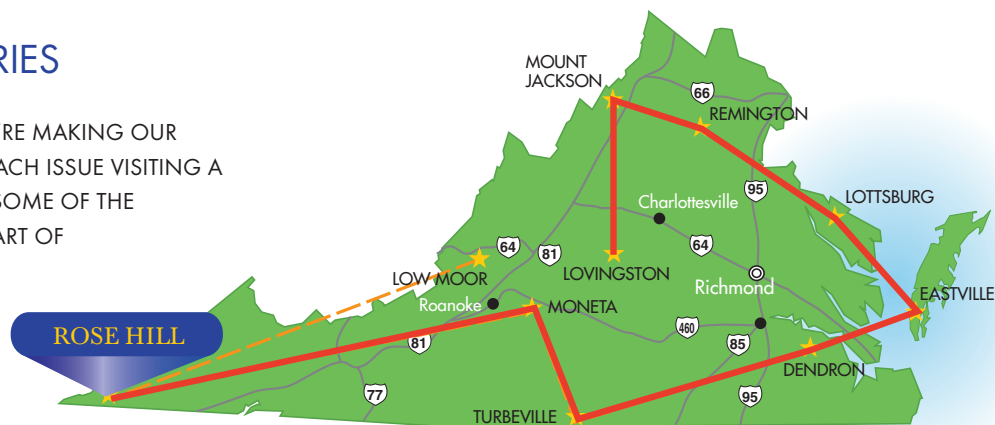


## DOWN HOME SERIES

AGAIN IN THE YEAR 2009, 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 NINTH STOP, WE'LL BE ...



## DOWN HOME IN

# ROSE HILL

Story by Louise Carver, Contributing Writer • Photos by Rick Watson

Located in Southwest Virginia's Lee County, Rose Hill was once home to Cherokee Indians and is today described on its Web site as a place characterized by warm and friendly people.

It is a community with staying power for residents and attraction for newcomers, offering potential new employment with the construction of a shell building in the Rose Hill Constitutional Oaks Industrial Park. The facility is served by fiber-optic Internet, water and sewer services.

Lee County Economic Developer **Tim Long** recently described Rose Hill as a "new 'town' on the move" with the upgrading of the adjacent 289-acre industrial park.

Long says the community has significant potential for self-employment and small business. And, he adds, the county and state (through Wilderness Road State Park) are promoting tourism, an industry that is growing in the area. In 2008, there were 138,000 visitors to the park, which is located about 10 miles west of Rose Hill.

According to the 2000 Census, 23 percent of the Rose Hill labor force is self-employed, mostly as workers in their own businesses. This compares to 9 percent in Lee County, 6 percent in Virginia, and 7 percent in the United States.

Rose Hill is located at the original site of Martin's Station, at one time the westernmost fort in the frontier U.S. It is not an incorporated town, but rather a community once known as Boone's Path.

Two late historians, **Bashie Kincaid** and **Frances Bayless**, agreed that Rose Hill was named for the local rose-laden hills at the time, with Miss Bayless narrowing the site to wild roses growing in front of the home of the late **Byrd Johnson**. Bayless listed the elevation of Rose Hill at 1,340 feet.

A cruise through the business district reveals the hardiest of businesses that are surviving tough economic times and are easily accessed by U.S. Highway 58, a four-lane roadway laid parallel to the business district and completed Nov. 15, 1994.

**Don Grabeel** operates a combination supermarket/variety store/laundromat in the center of town, which, with the new Dollar Store, he agrees is probably the hub of activity.

He notes that business is not as good as in years past, adding that the new road and the tunnel built to connect Virginia and Kentucky might have had some impact, but only temporarily.

Grabeel doesn't let his age — 70 — keep him from working about 80 hours per week, usually 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. His secretary and office manager, **Sharon Bryant** says, "He works harder around here than anyone else, young or old." He does admit to a siesta after lunch each day.

Grabeel and two of his sons and their wives are runners, with Don winning first place recently in his



Rose Hill's business district has remained viable through tough economic times. Don Grabeel (R), whose combination supermarket/variety store/ laundromat is the hub of the community, has been serving customers for 47 years.



## AT A GLANCE ...



1

**POPULATION:** 714 (2000 Census)

**LAND AREA:** 3.43 square miles

**FOUNDED:** The first settlement in Lee County, established by Joseph Martin about 1768 and called Martin Station, is now Rose Hill, a community about 20 miles east of Kentucky and the Cumberland Gap, Daniel Boone's passageway into Kentucky.

**FACTOID:** A "new 'town' on the move" with the upgrading of the adjacent industrial park, water and sewer services and broadband, Rose Hill is variously referred to as a community, a village, and a hamlet.

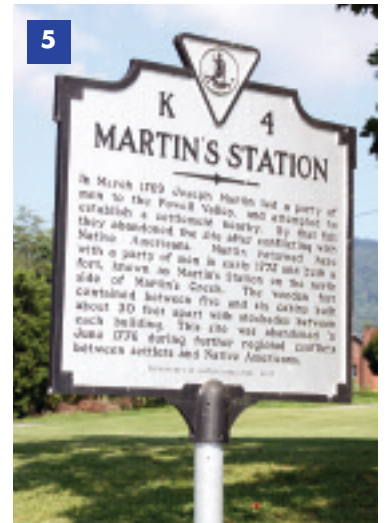


2



3

1. Just west of Rose Hill, Thomas Walker Civic Park offers picnic facilities and access to hiking trails. 2. The Karlan Mansion at Wilderness Road State Park can be rented for special events. 3. First Baptist is one of four churches in downtown Rose Hill.



5



4

4. Wilderness Road State Park, located 10 miles west of Rose Hill, brings tourism and economic opportunity to the area. The Visitor Center (pictured), received approximately 138,000 guests in 2008.

5. Rose Hill is located at the original site of Martin's Station, a frontier fort built in 1775 and abandoned in 1776 due to regional conflict with Native Americans.

age group in a half-marathon of 13 miles in West Virginia. His time was two hours, 43 minutes and 10 seconds.

His father, the late F.L. Grabeel, opened the business as the G&G Supermarket in 1958, and Don opened his Foodliner store in 1962, staying 47 years, so far, with no plans for retirement.

The "hub" has become so comfortable a gathering place that local people say, "We're going over to Don's," instead of naming the business, according to one observer.

"We used to say we had a town of 1,000 and a trade area of 6,000 including shops,

groceries, gasoline and more," says Grabeel.

The annual Christmas parade, sponsored by the Thomas Walker Civic Club in early December, is a big draw to the community, according to Grabeel. He says viewers begin arriving for the event three hours early, filling his parking lot to capacity and enjoying seeing each other. "I usually close the store and let the employees watch the parade," he adds.

Bell-ringers for the holiday fundraiser by the Salvation Army hold out their bright-red buckets in front of his store on December weekends each year.

Sue Rosenbalm, a retired educator, served as the 2008 parade grand marshal. She speaks lovingly of Rose Hill, noting that she and her late husband, Kyle, also an educator, and their son, Steve, have lived in the community twice. She is a long-time member of the Rose Hill Christian Church.

"I love living in Rose Hill," she says, adding, "The more I travel, the happier I am when I get home. If I could choose anywhere in the world to live, I would choose where I live. It's a wonderful little town. I love it."

She says she shops in Rose Hill, where she can get most anything she needs.

Other long-time businesses include O'Dell's Furniture Store, Mike Bacon's Car Parts and Wrecker Service, and Morris Lawson's Building Supply.

The building-supply store has been in business 64 years. It was established by the late C.M. Lawson Sr. and his wife Mayme in 1964. Morris Jr. and his wife, Linda, live in Rose Hill and operate the business, with son Chris serving as manager — the family's third generation in the business.

Chris, who oversees day-to-day decisions and sells equipment, says the business has 10 employees and serves a 75-mile radius. He notes that the company currently concentrates on agriculture-related business, selling tractors, mowers, and related equipment to full-time and hobby farmers. The company has the oldest ready-mix concrete plant in the county and molds pre-constructed septic tanks.

Chris says the low population in Rose Hill slows business, but the extension of services and experience helps. "We're learning to survive with hard work and dedication," he notes.

His twin brothers, Travis (pharmacist and owner of Rose Hill Pharmacy at the western outskirts of the business district) and Tracy (also a pharmacist), have offered their services to Rose Hill the past four to five years.

#### FOUR-GENERATION BUSINESS

John Phillip O'Dell Jr., current proprietor of O'Dell's Furniture, says his family has been in the same location for more than 90 years.

O'Dell notes that the store was started in an old converted blacksmith shop by his great-grandfather, Bartholomew Grabeel. His grandfather, Van Grabeel, told John Phillip Jr. that when he started the business, he could put all his merchandise into a large wash tub. Van developed a thriving business and purchased adjoining property, with the business evolving from a general merchandise store into one offering a full line of furniture, bedding and appliances. According to O'Dell, his mother Roseanna remembered that people in

the community would say, "If you can't get it at Van Grabeel's, you don't need it." She said the store had a dirt floor when her grandfather started the business.

Van, whom O'Dell describes as very hard-working and industrious, was with the business 60 years. O'Dell's father, John Phillip O'Dell Sr., was involved in the business 54 years. He is a fourth-generation owner, while his son, John Phillip O'Dell III, who worked at the store in the summers during his college years, chose a military career and is a major in the U.S. Air Force.

O'Dell says one customer told him that, as a girl, she could get anything she needed at Grabeel's. "Many customers' grandparents did business with my grandparents," he says, adding that many customers have had accounts with him for more than 30 years, a few for more than 50.

"This is a good town with a lot of good people," he says, adding that he has a lot of friends all over Lee County. "If you don't know us, come in and get acquainted. We'll swap stories. We have a good reputation for quality merchandise. Some of our customers express pride in the fact that everything they have in their house came from O'Dell's."

Rose Hill's relatively small business district also has two banks: Farmers and Miners, on the east end; and Peoples Bank, on the west end. There are two supermarkets: Grabeel's IGA Foodliner, adjacent to Don Grabeel's Discount Center; and Food City Super Dollar, on the west end. There's one laundromat, an addendum to the IGA; three gasoline stations, Eddie Grabeel's Rose Hill Truck Sales, Everett Gibson's Tip Toe Market, and Hensley's Quick Stop. There are three garages: Charlie Rouse's Wholesale Tires, J.R. Hoskins' Rose Hill Parts and Service, and Edwin Daniel's Garage. Vivian McMurray's Barber Shop (beauty shop) and other concerns round out the Rose Hill business community.

Mike Bacon, a former school board mem-

ber, opened his auto parts store on Dec. 15, 1967, and also operates a full-service garage and wrecker service. He says the economy has reduced the number of wreckers he operates from four to one, the number of workers he employees by two.

Bacon built a home in Rose Hill in 1973 and still lives there. "Lee County might not have many jobs, but it's the same everywhere," he says, adding that Rose Hill is a good place to retire, has a quiet neighborhood, the mountains, pretty views and a low cost of living.

Pizza Plus is located across the four-lane highway, near Dorothy Duff's flower shop; along with Rosemary Montgomery's business, Slender You, and Arney Mullins' Funeral Home.

Dorothy Duff, owner and operator of Dorothy's Flowers, was surprised at the length of Rose Hill's business list. "We have quite a bit, not to even have a red light."

She opened a flower shop, formerly called The Flower Gallery, for Phyllis Munsey in 1980 on Main Street, and is now shop owner. Duff moved to her current site at 118 Enterprise Drive near Pizza Plus eight years ago. She appreciates the patronage of her neighbors over the past 30 years. She describes Rose Hill as "a great place to live and raise children ... It's remarkable how people pull together in times of need or tragedy. I just think it's wonderful."

#### SOURCE OF PRIDE

A source of pride on Main Street is the Rose Hill Community Library, located on an attractive former residential site. A history of the Library, written by Lela Johnson, branch manager, relates the humble beginning of the facility as a bookmobile that operated in Rose Hill at various sites over a span of about 22 years. Due to fuel rationing in 1976, the bookmobile was parked, with patrons using the tiny stationery library.

## IF YOU GO...

**Wilderness Road State Park** — The park is open from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. Visitors can participate in numerous history and nature workshops. Other possible activities and features include picnics, walking trails, a playground. To schedule reunions and weddings at Karlan Mansion, call 276-445-3065.

The visitor center is open Monday through Sunday from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Visitors can see the historical film, "Wilderness Road:

Spirit of a Nation," walk through interpretive exhibits, visit the Powderhorn Gift Shop, and talk with park personnel about the significance of the site.

**Historic Martin's Station Fort** is open Wednesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Visitors can take a walk back in time to the late 1700s, when settlers were making their way west, and can experience historically accurate re-enactments of pioneer life as volunteers re-create the 18th-century lifestyle and use native materials and historically accurate tools.

**Cumberland Gap National Historical Park** — Visitor center is open daily from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. For information, call 606-248-2817 or visit [www.nps.gov/cuga](http://www.nps.gov/cuga).

**Thomas Walker Civic Park** — Located off Route 724 in Ewing six miles west of Rose Hill, hiking trail leads to Sand Cave and White Rocks, managed by the National Park Service. One-mile walk through park. Wear comfortable walking shoes; you can reserve one month in advance. ■

Dr. Danny and Mrs. Rita Seale donated the house he grew up in to become the current library (given to Lee County) on Nov. 4, 1994, with renovations completed in March 1998 and dedication taking place in April that year. A grant provided funds for a computer lab in 2006, with that dedication on June 11, 2007. The grant ended June 30, with the 12-computer lab remaining for schoolwork and other public use.

Those helping with the renovations included the board of trustees, the director, the C. Bascom Slemph Foundation and the county's Board of Supervisors. The library in Rose Hill is part of the Lonesome Pine Regional Library (Wise County), with the only other branch, the Lee County Public Library, located about 25 miles east of Rose Hill in Pennington Gap.

**COMMUNITY SCHOOL**

Rose Hill Elementary School, which lies in the valley between the business district and the four-lane highway, was built in 1952, with renovations to add more classrooms and a lunchroom made in 1999. Students in grades K-7 number 200, while a Head Start Unit adds another 20 students.

As principal of nine years, Lynn Metcalfe supervises 15 teachers at the school, which is accredited by the Virginia Department of Education, as are all of Lee County's schools. There are currently approximately 3,377 students and 383 teachers enrolled and working in Lee County's schools.

Metcalfe said recently, "In my eight years as principal of Rose Hill Elementary, many tasks and challenges have arisen, providing the opportunity for me to make positive changes that have been beneficial to others. The day-to-day undertakings are important to me as I strive to provide the best educational setting for the students at Rose Hill Elementary. I enjoy working with the faculty, staff, students, parents, and the community and cherish the friendships this opportunity has given me as principal of Rose Hill Elementary."

Churches located downtown include Rose Hill Christian (built in the 1920s), Morgan Memorial United Methodist, First Baptist and Faith Trinity.

Rose Hill is one of five magisterial districts in Lee County and has had 39 churches at various times from 1851 to the present.

Joan Porter is a grant writer and composer of Rose Hill's Web site home page. Though not a native of the community, she's now very much a part of it. She said recently that a friend in another town told her of events to visit there. Porter asked, "Why would I want to go there? I have more to do in Lee County than I have time." ■



**1.** Morris Lawson Jr. and his son Chris run Morris Lawson's Building Supply, in business in Rose Hill for 64 years. **2.** John Phillip O'Dell Jr. is the fourth generation proprietor of the family business now known as O'Dell's Furniture, which has operated in the same location for over 90 years. **3.** Iris Gordon, postmaster. **4.** Linda and Mike Bacon outside another long-time Rose Hill business, the auto parts store Mike opened in 1967. **5.** Ryan Teague and Ron Eddy serve as interpreters at Martin's Station, one of the attractions at Wilderness Road State Park.