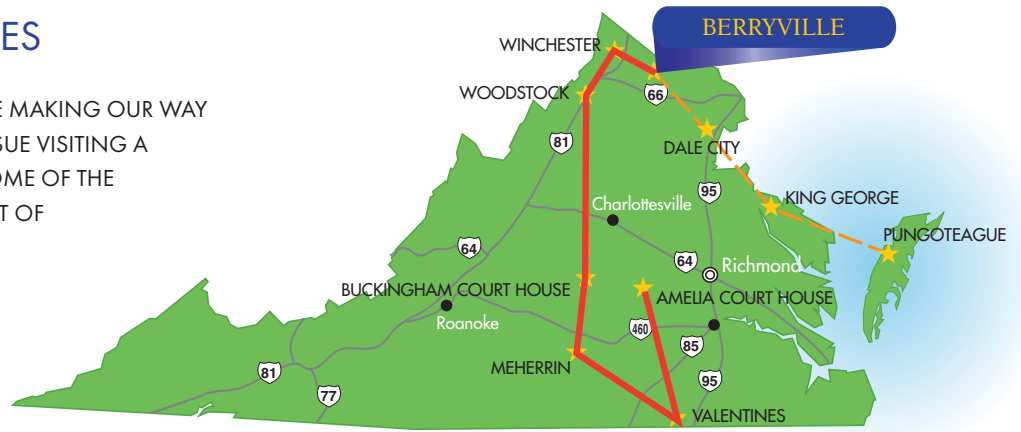


DOWN HOME SERIES

AGAIN IN THE YEAR 2010, 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 SEVENTH STOP, WE'LL BE ...



DOWN HOME IN

BERRYVILLE

by Robin Couch Cardillo, Contributing Writer

With a population that barely bests 3,000, Berryville offers a lesson in stick-to-itiveness. When Horace Smithy, in 1964, left the town a pair of dairy barns along Main Street, his only request was that the structures be converted into a center for community gatherings, arts, and education.

A tall order for a small, rural town with limited funds.

But this July, after nearly 50 years of on-again-off-again planning and fundraising, the Barns of Rose Hill finally hosted a ground-

breaking ceremony. A labor of love, the Barns are now on their way to being restored as the Smithy family envisioned — thanks to a collection of committed area leaders and donors, affectionately called the “barn raisers.”

“It’s just a tremendous level of collaboration and commitment on the part of the citizens of Berryville and Clarke County,” says Berryville Town Manager **Keith Dalton**. “The Barns’ development is one example of how the efforts of a handful of people and hundreds of contributors can keep a project moving along.”

The secret in Berryville? Cooperation. Someone has an idea, brainstorms its feasibility, and the community rallies around it.

Clarke County is one of the smallest counties in Virginia. But the residents have big plans. Another recent philanthropic project involved restoring a two-room schoolhouse to become the Josephine School Community Museum. The original school was built in 1882 to teach the children of the area’s freed slaves. According to the National Register of Historic Places, it’s a rare example of a Reconstruction-era schoolhouse built within a self-contained community.

“This area of Berryville was called Josephine City,” explains **Dorothy Davis**, the museum’s president. “It was a city unto itself, with a grocery store, gas station, restaurant, and churches. The only thing Josephine City depended on from Berryville was the mail. You see, the residents of

Josephine City weren’t welcomed in Berryville.”

Davis calls Josephine, the school’s namesake, “an elusive individual.” Research suggests she was Josephine Williams, the owner of two lots at the end of Josephine Street, where the school is located, and probably was a slave of wealthy landowner Edward McCormick. McCormick’s widow sold 31 one-acre lots to the former slaves after her husband’s death, following his directive.

Today, the well-appointed, freshly painted school hosts monthly book clubs and historic research groups focusing on the lives of African-Americans, in par-



Berryville Town Manager Keith Dalton and Assistant Town Manager/Town Planner Christy Dunkle are among the town’s many advocates.

“Barn raisers,” a collection of committed community supporters, have worked together tirelessly to move the restoration of the Barns of Rose Hill forward.



BILL SHERROD PHOTO



1

AT A GLANCE...

POPULATION: 3,200

LAND AREA: 2.275 square miles

FOUNDED: 1798 (Berryville); 1836 (Clarke County)

FACTOID: The tract where Berryville now sits, where the Winchester Turnpike crossed the Charlestown Road, was first granted by the Crown to Capt. Isaac Pennington in 1734. It is said that as a youth, Revolutionary War General Daniel Morgan had frequented this intersection where young “toughs” would congregate to fight; and that he would strategically place large stones nearby ahead of time, for his use as ammunition in case he had to retreat. Owing to this and the rowdy tavern nearby, the area received its first, informal name: “Battle Town.”

2



3



1. Downtown Berryville. 2. The recently opened Fire House Gallery. 3. Berryville Farmers' Market.

particular those from Clarke County. The museum also holds a popular Black History Dramatic Reading competition each year for area elementary students.

As with other endeavors, “the community has been extremely generous with this project,” says Davis, adding with a smile, “and it’s still a work in progress.”

SMALL TOWN, BIG CONNECTIONS

On weekdays, Berryville bustles with locals darting into coffee shops and pizza places, catching up on local sports and politics. On weekends, the downtown population swells as county residents from surrounding White Post, Boyce, Bluemont, and Millwood visit local produce stands or fill the bleachers at the county ball fields.

For 15 years, Berryville’s Farmers’ Market — boasting more than 20 vendors this summer — has treated locavores to such fresh fare as Mackintosh Farm’s leafy lettuces, Tadpole Acres’ aromatic herbs, and Carl’s Breads’ hearty Brigadier General loaves.

By population, Berryville Main Street is the smallest participant in the Virginia Main Street program. But that doesn’t keep the town from innovating. One of the latest additions to downtown is the Fire House Gallery, which opened this year. Representing more than 50 local artists, the eclectic gallery showcases works ranging in price from \$2 to more than \$20,000.

“The Fire House Gallery is an outlet for the arts community in this area, and it’s planned to become a key part of our retail

activity,” says Christy Dunkle, Berryville’s assistant town manager and town planner as well as one of the masterminds behind the gallery. “It’s another example of the cooperative effort here. You know, if someone is waiting for a table at the Berryville Grill, the hostess will send them down the street to explore the gallery while they wait.”

Under Clarke County’s I-can’t-believe-this-is-here category is White Post Restorations, known internationally for its high-end work on classic cars. The owner — energetic and neighborly **Billy Thompson** — also is one of Clarke County’s most vocal ambassadors. (He passes out lapel pins that read “I love Clarke County!”) While the garage-style façade of his compound is understated, his clientele isn’t. The walls are plastered



1



with photos and penned gratitudes from such clients as hotel magnate Bill Marriott, actress Stephanie Powers, and comedian Jay Leno. (According to Thompson, Leno always starts his phone calls with, “Yo, White Post.”) The firm doesn’t bother to give estimates on its restorations, says Thompson, whispering, “They cost a fortune.” They simply invoice in \$30,000 increments.

As Thompson moves from room to room, he interrupts the tour to take calls from Florida, Michigan, Maryland, Illinois. “Good morning. Billy at White Post,” he says cheerfully. One call concerns a 1962 Chevy — a relatively young specimen for White Post Restorations. Typically working on 10 cars at once, the skilled technicians currently have in house a 1917 Model T, a 1923 Hudson, and a 1949 Cadillac.

Thompson is close-mouthed about many of his jobs but says his most unusual restoration was of a 1939 Scarab, built by automotive and aviation design innovator Bill Stout and owned by his grandson. Debuting in 1935, only nine Scarabs were built.

While White Post Restorations is no longer open for public tours, the business still plays an important part in Clarke County’s growth. Thompson never fails to work references to the Shenandoah Valley into his client conversations, repeatedly referring to Clarke County as “one of the most beautiful places in the world. Period.” His customers always agree.

AREA GEMOLOGY

Just south of the classic car shop is what Town Manager Dalton calls “one of the gems” of the area: Blandy Experimental Farm and the State Arboretum of Virginia.

Graham Blandy made his fortune in the stock market in the early 1900s and purchased the 912-acre Tuleyries estate in Clarke County as a summer place. He eventually donated 712 acres and a large stone building once used as slave quarters to the University of Virginia — with two stipulations: The university must use the acreage to teach modern farming methods and must call the complex Blandy Experimental Farm.

Today, the “quarters” on the grounds house the staff and volunteer offices as well as the headquarters of the Virginia Native Plant Society, the American Boxwood Society, and the Northern Shenandoah Valley Audubon Society.

Open 365 days a year, Blandy is called the Commonwealth’s Public Garden, “a living museum and outdoor laboratory.” More than 8,000 trees and woody shrubs grow here, including examples of more than half

1. Billy Thompson, owner of White Post Restorations, is one of Clarke County’s most vocal ambassadors. **2.** The expansive Blandy Experimental Farm, dubbed the Commonwealth’s Public Garden, is one of Berryville’s gems. **3.** Dorothy Davis is president of the Josephine School Community Museum. The original school was built in 1882 to teach the children of the area’s freed slaves. **4.** Watermelon Park offers tubes for rent and a shuttle service for a leisurely float down the Shenandoah River.

of the world's pine species. Japanese Cedar, Chinese Juniper, Oriental Arborvitae, Arizona Cypress, Carolina Laurel Cherry, Eastern Redbud — all are cultivated and well-marked for both the casual observer and the devout arborist. And the farm's simple signage beckons visitors to explore paths to the Pollination Garden, Herb Garden, Rain Garden, Native Plant Trail, and a wonderfully secluded Picnic Grove.

When you're finished at the Arboretum, relax and head for Veramar Vineyard along Route 7 in eastern Berryville. Award-winning Veramar is a family-owned and -operated winery, with son **Justin Bogaty** taking the role of wine maker. Veramar recently added four awards from the 2010 *San Francisco Chronicle's* wine competition to its collection of medals.

"We now have three world-class wines, and that's a pretty big deal for a vineyard of our size," says **Laurie Orr**, manning the tasting room.

On a weekday afternoon in June, the tasting room is busy with visitors from Washington, D.C., Pennsylvania, and as far away as Sweden (yes, Sweden). Inside, freshly cut flowers decorate the small, bistro-like tables. Outside, a stone patio with a fountain, elegant statuary, and a comfortable canopied sitting area overlook the vineyard.

Veramar's wine tastings typically include eight selections, including the vineyard's signature Rooster Red (think black cherries, red berries, and spices) and Pink Chicken (sweet grapefruit, strawberry, and pomegranate). In the winter, says Orr, the rich aroma of spiced mulled wine fills the tasting room. As a prelude to summer weekends, Veramar routinely hosts Friday Wine Downs, often featuring "wine-aritas," a variation on margaritas that replaces tequila with a refreshing Seyval Blanc. "That's always popular," says Orr, with a grin.

SPOKES IN THE WHEEL

Whether you're a local or a tourist, you'll find Berryville and Clarke County's plate of events and activities uniquely upscale — and ever expanding, thanks to the town's contagious collaborative mood.

"We've tried to really think about where we're going to be in 25 years," explains Town Manager Dalton. "Our bottom line is to try to create a sustainable community, where you can get everything you need. And that's not easy. To keep a community vital, we need diversity. They're all spokes in the wheel — the restaurants, the arts, the recreation. That's what we're all working on."

And doing so admirably. ■

IF YOU GO...

Blandy Experimental Farm and the State Arboretum of Virginia — There's no way you'll be able to take in all that this wonderfully wild and beautiful research estate has to offer — but do try. Open dawn to dusk, 365 days a year. Free. Public picnic grounds and designated horse trails. www.virginia.edu/blandy.

Virginia National Golf Course — Who can resist golfing in the lush greenery along the Shenandoah River? A stunningly beautiful — and slow-paced, if you like — 18 holes. Plus, the course is at the site of the 1864 Battle of Cool Springs, the only Civil War encounter in Clarke County. www.virginiational.com.

Veramar Vineyard — Open year-round, this family-owned winery hosts some pleasingly unique community events, ranging from screening a classic movie on the lawn to offering "port and a cigar" on the porch. Perfect for a midweek rendezvous, complete with award-winning wines available for impromptu tastings, not to mention the romantic views. www.veramar.com.



Veramar Vineyard

Long Branch Historic House and Farm — On the eastern edge of Clarke County, this elegant early 1800s home and gardens — filled with 18th- and 19th-century furnishings from Europe and the U.S. — is open to the public. The well-attended flagship event is the annual Shenandoah Valley Hot Air Balloon, Wine, and Music Festival, in its 14th year. www.historiclongbranch.com.

Audley Farm — This 3,000-acre expanse is recognized as one of the top horse farms in the country. (Triple Crown winner Sir Barton hailed from Audley.) A little-known fact: It also was home to Nelly Parke Custis Lewis, George Washington's step-granddaughter. Audley was purchased by George's cousin, Warner Washington, in 1764, and the Washington family owned the estate for 138 years. www.audleyfarm.com.

Back Roads Century 100-Mile Bike Ride — The Potomac Pedalers Touring Club starts its annual ride in Berryville on Sept. 19. "Cycling in Clarke County is amazing," says Assistant Town Manager Christy Dunkle, who's an avid biker. "The back roads are just wonderful. You pass gorgeous horse farms and you have to deal with very little traffic." www.backroadscentury.org.



Dinosaur Land

Dinosaur Land — Yes, it's campy but oh-so-much fun, especially if you have little ones. Dinosaur replicas are life-sized (well, almost) and spread throughout a forest along Route 340. www.dinosaurland.com.

Watermelon Park — You'll enjoy all kinds of camping — primitive, tent, trailer — and periodic musical events. But, better yet, the park is well-equipped with colorful tubes that float you leisurely down the Shenandoah River. (And, yes, the 26 acres once was a huge watermelon garden.) www.watermelonpark.com.

The Bears Den Trail — If you're in the mood for heavy hiking, trek along the Appalachian Trail on the Bears Den Trail at the northeast corner of Clarke County. A fantastic view of the Shenandoah Valley from a rock overlook and a peek at the old stone Bears Den Lodge are worth the hoofing. www.bearsdencenter.org.

Berryville Farmers' Market — The fresh offerings span from veggies and fruits to artisan breads to handmade soaps. Try the sugar-crusted ginger cookies at the Magnolia Girls' stand. Heavenly.

Clarke County Historical Association Museum — A new addition to downtown Berryville, the museum uses displays, video, and artifacts to illustrate the movement of settlers into the area. www.clarkehistory.org.

Mr. B's Bar-B-Que — A local eatery you can't miss. On a recent Sunday afternoon, the line trailed out the door and the picnic tables in the nearby shade were filled. Tangy pork and chicken barbecue with all that's expected — baked beans, cole slaw, collard greens. Mr. B himself was nowhere to be found, but that didn't keep the crowds from forming.



Mr. B's Bar-B-Que