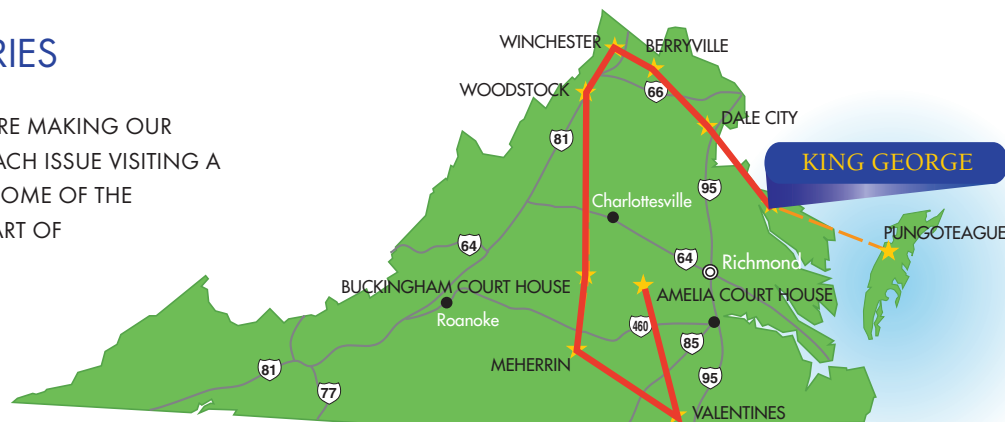


DOWN HOME SERIES

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 NINTH STOP, WE'LL BE ...



DOWN HOME IN

KING GEORGE

Story and photos by Audrey T. Hingley, Contributing Writer

Former teacher **Dave Arnold**, owner of Green Acres, a nursery/landscaping/grounds-maintenance company, has lived in King George since 1998.

The Pennsylvania native is succinct when asked about life there: "I like the rural area. I'm a boater and do a lot of water activities, and it's close to the river. It's rural and laid-back but there are still things to do here."

Anchored by King George Courthouse, built in 1915, and a modern two-story county administration building, King George includes a smattering of shops, businesses, restaurants and churches.

Sixty-four miles north of Richmond and 58 miles south of Washington, D.C., it's the county seat for King George County, dubbed "The Gateway to The Northern Neck."

Captain John Smith explored the area in 1608, then home to Native Americans of the Powhatan nation. Carved from Richmond County in 1720 and named for Great Britain's King George I, the county is traversed by two major thoroughfares — U.S. Route 301 and U.S. Route 3 — and boasts 131 miles of shoreline on the Potomac and

Rappahannock rivers, along with lush farmland and a wealth of history.

In 1918, the U.S. Navy established the Naval Proving Grounds at Dahlgren in King George County to test naval guns. Today, Dahlgren's Naval Surface Warfare Center (NSWC) is the county's major employer, focusing on research, development, military safety testing, integrated warfare systems, weapons and ammunition, sensors and homeland/force (military personnel and equipment) protection.

The economic impact of NSWC is undeniable. According to county administrator **Travis Quesenberry**, in 2008 Dahlgren had 4,184 civilian employees and 370 military employees and/or soldiers, in addition to over 4,200 "badged contractors" who provide goods and services to Dahlgren. Quesenberry, who oversees day-to-day county operations, grew up in "the farming part" of the county and says NSWC has been "a good partner with us."

A new CVS store is coming, new restaurants have opened and Walmart is opening a Dahlgren store. Two other large employers, the county landfill and a GE power plant, are in the county. Quesenberry says the landfill brings the county \$6 million dollars annually, all of which goes to capital improvements.

"There's a 30-year agreement with the landfill, with 17 years remaining until the landfill is filled, so we're trying to expand our economic base in anticipation of that," he explains. "King George Industrial Park opened in 2003 and we have a precast-concrete company, a steel-fabricating compa-



The county seat is anchored by King George Courthouse (above) and a modern county administration building. Native Travis Quesenberry is the county administrator.



1

AT A GLANCE...

POPULATION: 1,100 in King George; 22,205 in King George County

LAND AREA: 183 square miles

ELEVATION: 130 feet at King George Courthouse; 220 feet at highest elevation in King George County.

FACTOID: In 1873, 80 people died when the paddlewheel steamboat *Wawaset* burned and sank off the shores of King George in the Potomac River. Many victims jumped overboard to escape the flames and drowned, including an entire family of six. U.S. Navy divers located the remains of the paddlewheel offshore in 19 feet of water in June 2010.

1. St. John's Church, located near King George Courthouse building, was built in 1843. **2.** The King George County Museum and Research Center is housed in the old jail at the east end of the courthouse building. **3.** Elizabeth Lee and Jean Graham are museum volunteers.



2



3

ny and asphalt plant there, but there's 50 or 60 acres not built on so there's room for expansion.

"We want to maintain our rural county, but we also need to expand our economic base," Quesenberry adds. "A year ago we hired an economic development director and we're working with Northern Neck tourism to expand our tourism efforts. We're a bedroom community to some extent, with a lot of subdivision activity near Dahlgren."

Quesenberry says the county's biggest challenge is facing reductions in funding from state budget cuts, noting, "We haven't been impacted as badly as some areas with property tax and business tax issues ... we've weathered the economic downturn well."

THE BIG EVENTS

Two large community events are held annually. The King George Fall Festival, which began in 1959, is held the second

weekend in October each year and includes a parade through town, a carnival and crafts. Proceeds from the event help support King George Fire & Rescue. The King George Home & Craft Show, organized by the King George Builders Association and the local *Journal* weekly newspaper, is held the first weekend in March and features all sorts of home-related exhibits, crafters' displays, vendors and community organizations.

Elizabeth Lee, a retired NSWC physicist who grew up in King George, says the hardest thing for people to understand is "we have no towns or cities, we are a rural community.

"King George proper we call the village sometimes, but you blink and it's gone," Lee says. "There are no incorporated towns in the county."

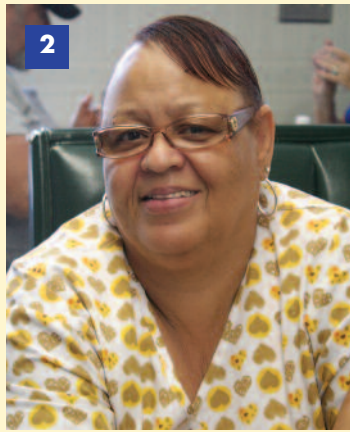
Lee recalls as a child not being able to travel at times on Route 301 due to heavy traffic: "We had a farm on 301 highway, and my parents also had a farm where I live now.

There was a back road so they could get over there from one farm to another to feed the animals, because they couldn't get out on the highway. Then I-95 came along and 301 traffic disappeared."

Although the area has grown, she adds, "There is community involvement here, and if something happens, people will feed you and make sure you have all you need."

Lee co-authored *A Pictorial History of King George County* in 2006 with friend and fellow King George County Historical Society volunteer **Jean Graham**. Graham, a genealogy buff who says she's "been back home" for 22 years, says of life in King George, "I love every second of it! I live on the water on the Potomac and I don't have enough hours in the day. I'm not a person who's ever been bored."

Both women volunteer at the King George County Museum and Research Center, housed in the old jail at the east end of the



1. Natives Howard and Virginia Burchell are the proprietors of Howard's Bakery and Restaurant. **2.** Colonial Beach resident Phyllis Jett enjoys the ambience, fellowship and food at Howard's. **3.** Mary's Cakery & Candy Kitchen is the largest privately owned specialty chocolate store in Virginia. **4.** Unique, hand-made chocolates and confections abound at Mary's. **5.** Christy Davis moved to the King George area five years ago, and says "people are so nice here." **6.** Amanda Christensen (left) and Amanda Bratz enjoy their work at the counter of Mary's Cakery & Candy Kitchen.

courthouse building. Open Thursdays and Saturdays March through October, and Saturdays November through February, the free-admission museum displays everything from prehistoric oyster shells to Native American and 1700s-era artifacts. A research collection includes books focusing on area history, published genealogical information and files on family histories, places and events available for researchers.

A society task force was formed to research the area where 80 people died after the steamboat *Wawaset* burned and sank in 1873 (see "At a Glance") off King George shores, resulting in the boat's wreckage being located with the help of U.S. Navy divers. In August, the group organized a memorial/county volunteer picnic attended by 300 people to commemorate the tragedy, including erection of a granite marker on the beach in memory of those who died.

Author Alvin Oickle, who wrote *Disaster on the Potomac — The Last Run of the Steamboat Wawaset*, signed copies of his book at the event. The book is available at the county museum.

"I love history, so my thoughts are on the preservation of sites that have meaning for the county," Lee says.

COMMUNITY FIXTURES

Down the road from the courthouse at 9237 Kings Highway, Howard's Restaurant & Bakery, a local hangout featuring down-home cooking and menu items like fried flounder and grilled chicken, is buzzing at lunchtime. Among the diners is Phyllis Jett, a certified nursing assistant from nearby Colonial Beach.

"It's comfortable in Colonial Beach ... I knew everyone, but now I go there and don't know a soul," Jett explains. "King George is a nice place, and the people still pretty much know each other here."

Howard's owners Howard and Virginia Burchell grew up in King George. Howard explains, "Life here is calm, peaceful and safe. Even though as business owners we want to see growth, we want to keep the rural feel. You go to a lot of communities, they don't welcome new people well ... We still have a personal touch here in King George."

Another community fixture is Mary's Cakery & Candy Kitchen, owned by Mary and James Deatherage, located just off the main drag of Kings Highway at 10305 Indiantown Road. Mary's 2,300-square-foot store/kitchen is the largest privately owned specialty chocolate store in Virginia, filled with gifts, handmade chocolates, home-

made fudge and fresh cakes, pies and cookies. Unique items abound, such as caramel apples, pumpkin pie fudge and apple pie fudge in the fall months.

One of 15 employees, college student **Amanda Bratz** likes the quietness of King George, noting she can drive 20 minutes to the movies or mall in Fredericksburg or have fun with friends at local cookouts. Self-described “Mary’s assistant” **Christy Davis** moved to the area five years ago with her husband and also likes the area, explaining, “I grew up in a town of 1,300 people so I am used to small towns ... people are so nice here. We have local support, but we also have people who drive two hours for Mary’s cakes or special orders.”

DOWN-TO-EARTH WINERY

A short drive from the courthouse area is Oak Crest Vineyard & Winery, a lush oasis owned by **Conrad and Dorothy Brandt**. Dorothy jokes that the family-run business is “a hobby that went astray,” adding, “My husband’s German grandfather made wine and Conrad started studying winemaking and made wine for home use. We started planting our first grapes in 1986. I heard grape growing, not winery, but I got an inkling of the business when he started doing drawings for this facility. We broke ground in 1999 and opened in 2002.”

The Brandt-designed winery is built into a hillside two stories into the ground, providing natural cooling for an underground cellar. Along with complimentary wine tastings, the shop offers not only wine for sale but handmade pottery, bird sculptures by a local artist, and gifts. There are outdoor picnic areas and a landscaped patio area hosts weddings, receptions and private parties. An eight-acre adjacent field is laden with symphony grapes for white wines and red bordeaux grapes for red wines.

Dorothy says, “We want customers’ experience to be pleasant and enjoyable, not stuffy. We have soft drinks available, and kids get juice and crackers when they come.”

The Brandts, who moved to King George in 1961, like life in the slow-paced community.

“It’s very rural here but this is commercialized compared to when we first moved here and had to go to Fredericksburg just to buy groceries,” Dorothy explains.

Elizabeth Lee confirms the area has seen much growth over the past 20 years.

“Being an oldie, I’d like to see King George not developed so fast,” she says. “I’d like it to stay partly rural. I am hoping others see it that way.” ■



IF YOU GO...

King George County Museum and Research Center — 9483 Kings Highway (in the Old Jail, east end of King George Courthouse). Open Thursdays and Saturdays March-October; Saturdays only November-February; free admission (donations accepted). www.kghistory.org.

St. John’s Church — 9415 Kings Highway, near King George Courthouse. St. John’s was built in 1843, and has had an active congregation continuously since 1869. The church building features beautiful stained-glass windows. Telephone: (540) 775-3635. www.hanoverparish.com.

Howard’s Bakery & Restaurant — 237 Kings Highway. Open Monday-Saturday for breakfast, lunch and dinner 7 a.m. - 7:30 p.m. (until 8 p.m. on Friday and Saturday nights); closed Sundays. Telephone: (540) 775-0305.

Green Acres — 9230 Kings Highway. This nursery/landscaping business features a bubbling fish pond, pretty gardens and flowering plants for sale. Telephone: (540) 775-8383.

Dorothy Brandt (left) and her husband Conrad own and operate Oak Crest Vineyard & Winery. Self-proclaimed wine goddess Sharon McHale (right), has worked at the vineyard for about a year.

Oak Crest Vineyard & Winery — 8215 Oak Crest Drive (2.5 miles off U.S. Route 301). Open April 1 - December 23, Wednesday-Saturday and federal holidays 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.; on Sundays 11 a.m. - 5 p.m. Telephone: (540) 663-2813. www.oakcrestwinery.com.

Mary’s Cakery & Candy Kitchen — 10305 Indiantown Road. Open Monday-Saturday, 10 a.m.- 6 p.m.; holidays — call for hours. Telephone: (540) 775-9350. www.maryscakeryandcandy.com.

LODGING

A half-dozen chain motels and inns are in King George County, including:

Holiday Inn Express Hotel & Suites — Dahlgren. 1-877-786-9480.

Comfort Inn — Dahlgren. (540) 663-3060.



Green Acres’ owner Dave Arnold (right) and employee Trevor Alger welcome visitors.