

■ DOWN HOME SERIES

Again in the year 2011, 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 first stop, we'll be ...

DOWN HOME IN

MIDDLEBURG



Story and photos by Bennie Scarton,
Contributing Writer

Founded in 1787, cozy, quaint and historic Middleburg today has a collection of unique shops and restaurants far out of proportion with what you might expect in a community of 650 people.

Visitors often compare the village and its stunning surrounding landscape to a beautiful English-countryside vista.

With more than 160 buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places

and the Virginia Landmarks Register, Middleburg is synonymous with history and charm.

Here, the very best of our nation's past meets the style, substance and creativity of the 21st century. The result is a remarkable escape from the ordinary.

Martha Mason Semmes, town administrator, says, "People in the town are warm and caring. We have the reputation of being a very high-end-income area, but

the town is very diversified. We do have a large commercial base compared to the number of people in town, but we are a major tourist attraction because of our beautiful area and events."

Low stone walls gracefully wind through pristine fields that stretch to the horizon. Picturesque farms provide tranquil settings for some of the finest horses in the country. Cattle graze in rolling pastures against a backdrop of nearby mountains.

Vineyards abound in a climate that yields impressive wines. In every direction, one sees that only a rich and complex history could produce such beauty. Middleburg is now and has long been one of the country's rare jewels.

"It's a small town where everyone knows each other, but it has a world-class reputation as a wonderful place to work and live. We get visitors from all over the world and we strive to make them welcome to our historic town," says Mary Kay Garwood, director of the Pink Box Visitor Center, who has spent the past 20 years helping visitors become acquainted with all of the town's and nearby attractions.

For shopping enthusiasts, Middleburg offers a treasure trove of variety, quality and distinction. Elegant boutiques in historic buildings offer goods from the United States and abroad, all carefully hand-selected by proprietors who operate their shops with pride in their wares. There are 250 businesses in the town.

Betsy Allen Davis, lifelong resident, has a dual role in the community. She has been mayor for the past five years and is office manager of The Fun Shop, which has been family-run since 1956. The business has

An equestrian mecca, Middleburg has earned a reputation as the "Nation's Horse and Hunt Capital."





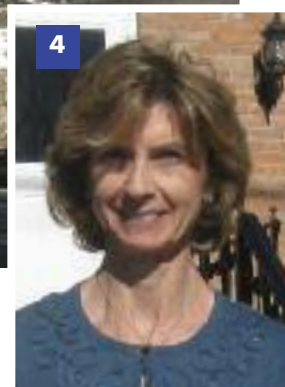
AT A GLANCE...

POPULATION: Approximately 650

LAND AREA: Approximately 1.5 square miles

ELEVATION: 475 feet above sea level

FACTOIDS: Middleburg was established in 1787 by Revolutionary War Lt. Col. and Virginia statesman Leven Powell. He purchased the land for \$2.50 an acre from Joseph Chinn, first cousin to George Washington. Previously called "Chinn's Crossroads," Powell chose the name Middleburg because of the town's location midway between Alexandria and Winchester on the Ashby Gap Trading route (now Route 50).



1. Mary Kay Garwood, director of the Pink Box Visitor Center, has spent the past 20 years helping visitors become acquainted with Middleburg. **2.** Emmanuel Episcopal Church, founded in 1843, is just one of scores of historic structures in the town. **3.** Main Street Middleburg. **4.** Martha Mason Semmes, town administrator, says Middleburg is very diversified, and its residents are warm and caring. **5.** Betsy Allen Davis, mayor for the past five years, is also the office manager of a long-time local business, The Fun Shop.

served the Middleburg community and visitors from all over the world in elegant style.

"I love the town's size, its people, and being in the heart of the hunt country — not in the middle of an overly crowded big-city business area. We have the reputation of being the place where if we don't have it, you probably don't need it," says Davis.

Davis says it was only at the last minute that she decided to run for the office of mayor, pledging to "represent all the people and, hopefully, to continue to run the town the way it has been run for years."

Middleburg consistently upholds its heritage and the shops accordingly contain a multitude of items that reflect the refinement of upscale country living and the finest objects from bygone eras.

Additionally, the village successfully incorporates a modern ambience. The young and young-at-heart are treated to fashion-forward trends in all aspects of personal attire and one-of-a-kind items for the home.

A popular stop in the town is the Creme de la Creme, a shop managed the past 10 years by Manuel Simpson, and offering

unique specialty items ranging from table linens to pottery.

"There hasn't been a day that I haven't looked forward to coming to the store. People who come in are so nice. I can't see why anyone would ever want to leave the town."

Simpson takes time from his shop to volunteer to run the annual Salvation Army Kettle Drive during the holiday, recruiting some 300 residents to ring the bell. The volunteers normally raise upwards of \$8,000 each season.



1. Creme de la Creme shop manager Manuel Simpson offers many unique and colorful items. **2.** Norman Myers, real estate appraiser and consultant, finds the town to be very pedestrian friendly. **3.** Innkeeper JoAnn Hazard describes Middleburg as a “timeless place.” **4.** Dana Reuter, owner of the Red Fox Tavern & Inn, notes that the inn has served as a prominent landmark since early in the town’s history. **5.** Chef de Cuisine Vaughn Skaggs is the backbone of Market Salamander, which carries a wide selection of Virginia wines. **6.** Lisa Capraro is owner of Betsey, a women’s clothing store that is among the newest businesses in Middleburg.

Lisa Capraro is owner of Betsey, a young contemporary women’s clothing store. It is among the newest businesses in Middleburg, opening less than a year ago.

“The response from other businesses in the community has been fantastic. We all work together to help one another,” notes Capraro. She formerly worked for the town of Leesburg in the historic preservation area, but had always wanted to be a store owner, and “Middleburg offered me a great opportunity.”

Visitors can enjoy organic and gourmet markets and tours of local wineries. Middleburg’s numerous restaurants have something for every appetite and budget. Visitors can settle in for a leisurely meal in a historic, romantic setting, or take a quick break for casual fare indoors or al fresco.

Among the 15 eateries in the town, the best known is the Red Fox Tavern & Inn, dating to 1728 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Owner Dana Reuter notes that the inn has served as a prominent landmark in the heart of Middleburg since early in the town’s history.

“We have 14 rooms and the restaurant seats 200, serving breakfast, lunch and dinner with our crab cakes and fresh meats and vegetables being longtime traditional favorites among our customers,” according to Reuter.

Market Salamander is another Middleburg destination restaurant, offering a delightful indoor cafe, courtyard or outdoor cobblestone patio for a relaxing breakfast, lunch or dinner in the charming village.

Chef de Cuisine Vaughn Skaggs is the backbone of the market, noting that the facility offers “award-winning crab cakes as well as fresh salads and sandwiches to eat in, or the catering department will create a menu for any event and bring it to your home, office or other location. We also have a wide selection of Virginia wines,” he says.

HORSE COUNTRY USA

As an equestrian Mecca, Middleburg provides the setting for many horse-related events. Glenwood Park, a spectacular center that dates back to 1911, hosts year-round equestrian activities.

The town has earned a reputation as the “Nation’s Horse and Hunt Capital,” attracting prominent visitors from across the United States, such as the late Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis.

Established in 1978, Journeymen Saddlers, Ltd., has been providing belt, boot and saddle repairs to horse riders in its shop.

Slim Berg has worked in the shop for 22 years, specializing in saddle repairs.

"I enjoy the freedom and solitude the job offers. I also like living in Middleburg, which is ideally located — from here you can quickly go to Washington, D.C., the Shenandoah Valley and the ocean, where I enjoy boating, fishing and snorkeling — plus, the town has every kind of restaurant you would ever want," says Berg.

TRAVEL STOP TURNED DESTINATION

Since the 1700s, Middleburg has been a staging point for weary travelers along the Ashby Gap Road. Later, the town began welcoming a new wave of visitors that arrived for fox-hunt and steeple-chase events. Over the years, Middleburg has maintained its status as a premier destination.

To welcome visitors and cater to their needs, there are various inns in and around the town, which have hosted everyone from Civil War officers and soldiers to high-ranking statesmen, government officials, corporate leaders and celebrities.

JoAnn and Kevin Hazard are the innkeepers for Middleburg Country Inn, which is adjacent to dozens of unique shops and restaurants all within walking distance of the Inn.

"There is a place inside all of us that welcomes a warm smile, the aroma of cookies baking, a snug bed on a glorious morning in Middleburg — a timeless place where genteel charm and an ageless spirit seem to fill the very air," says JoAnn.

She adds, "We just love the town and welcome visitors with the same warmth and hospitality we have always shared with our friends and family."

Norman Myers, a real estate appraiser and consultant, says he has found the town to be very pedestrian friendly.

"I like walking down the streets and smelling the aroma of the food being prepared in the restaurants. Its convenient location, just one hour from downtown Washington, D.C., and 35 minutes from Washington Dulles International Airport, makes it the perfect spot for a multiple-day vacation or a brief excursion," says Myers.

For much of its history, Middleburg had been a stopping-off point on the way to somewhere else, but its contemporary transformation has made it a destination in its own right.

Serving as a host community for more than 250 years, it is no surprise that Middleburg, set in the foothills of Virginia's horse and wine country, has developed such a high concentration of fine inns, shops and restaurants.

The town has grown from an 18th century coach-stop village to a bustling modern community, while successfully retaining its historic small-town ambiance. ■

IF YOU GO...

The first place for visitors to go when they need information is the **Pink Box Visitor Center**, 12 N. Madison St. 540-687-8888.

The **Red Fox Tavern and Inn** is the oldest and most historic building in town. 540-687-6301. Other popular restaurants and eateries include **Back Street Café**, 540-687-3122; **Cuppa Giddy Up**, 540-687-8122; **Dank's Deli**, 540-687-3456; **The Fox's Den Tavern**, 540-687-4165; **The French Hound**, 540-687-3018; **Home Farm**, 540-687-8882; **Julien's Restaurant/Café**, 540-687-3123; **Market Salamander**, 540-687-8011; **Mello Out**, 540-687-8635; **The Red Horse Tavern**, 540-687-6443; **Scruffies**, 540-687-3766; **Teddy's Pizza**, 540-687-8880; **The Tasting Room and Wine Bar**, 540-687-8080; and **The Upper Crust**, 540-687-5666.

The Fun Shop, offers department store shopping on two floors to be explored and enjoyed. 540-687-6590.

Middleburg participating events include a fly-fishing show in January; Piedmont Fox Hounds Point-to-Point, and Orange County Hunt Point-to-Point in March; Middleburg Spring Races and Middleburg Hunt Point-to-Point in April; Virginia Gold Cup, Virginia Hunt Country Stable Tour and Virginia Foxhound Show in May; Upperville Colt & Horse Show in June; 4th of July Celebration and Bluemont Concert Series in July; Saturday Night Polo and sidewalk sale in August; Middleburg Horse Trials and Mosby Heritage History Weekend in September; Virginia Fall Races and Field Hunter Championship of America in October; Christmas Shop in November; and Christmas in Middleburg with parade in December.

Goose Creek Stone Bridge is located off Route 50 west of town. This circa-1802 four-arch stone bridge is believed to be the oldest and longest bridge of this type in Virginia.

Fox Chase Farm is a premier equestrian-event facility that hosts many horse shows.



Virginia Costa is on board *Tryst* for a workout at the Fox Chase Farm.



Slim Berg works on repairing a saddle at **Journeymen Saddlers, Ltd.**

Open on show days and by appointment. 540-687-5255.

Wineries include **The Boxwood Winery**, 540-687-8778; **Chrysalis Vineyards**, 540-882-9073; **Swedenburg Estate Vineyard**, 540-687-5219; **Piedmont Vineyards and Winery, Inc.** and **The Tasting Room Wine Bar & Shop**, 540-687-8080.

Aldie Mill, Virginia's only surviving grist mill and Civil War historical site, is four miles east of Middleburg along Route 50.

National Sport Library is a research library for horse and field sports featuring rotating exhibits. 540-687-6542.

Mt. Zion Old School Baptist Church, Aldie, is an 1851 church used as a barracks, prison, hospital and cemetery during the Civil War.

Historic **Morven Park**, Leesburg, is home of World War I-era Gov. Westmoreland Davis. The 1,000-acre site includes a recently restored Greek Revival mansion, 19th-century Winmill Carriage Collection, Museum of Hounds and Hunting and boxwood gardens. 703-777-2414.

Oatland Historic House and Gardens, Leesburg, is a 360-acre National Trust site with an 1804 mansion, four acres of breathtaking formal gardens and gift shops. 703-777-3174.

The **John Singleton Mosby Heritage Area Driving Tour**, recognized for its associations with local Civil War figure, Col. John S. Mosby. The driving tour highlights many significant historical sites and natural resources in a multi-county area.

Washington Street was named one of the top 10 streets in the U.S. by the American Planning Association for "successfully balanced through traffic and pedestrians while holding on to its 18th-century character."

Emmanuel Episcopal Church was erected in 1843 and used as a hospital during the Civil War. It holds a plaque dedicated to Leven Powell, founder of the town.

Middleburg Community Center, which through the years has been the site of numerous special events and meetings, was a gift to the town primarily through the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Howell Jackson in 1947. ■