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Frank Lloyd Wright's masterpieces and the landscape that shaped them



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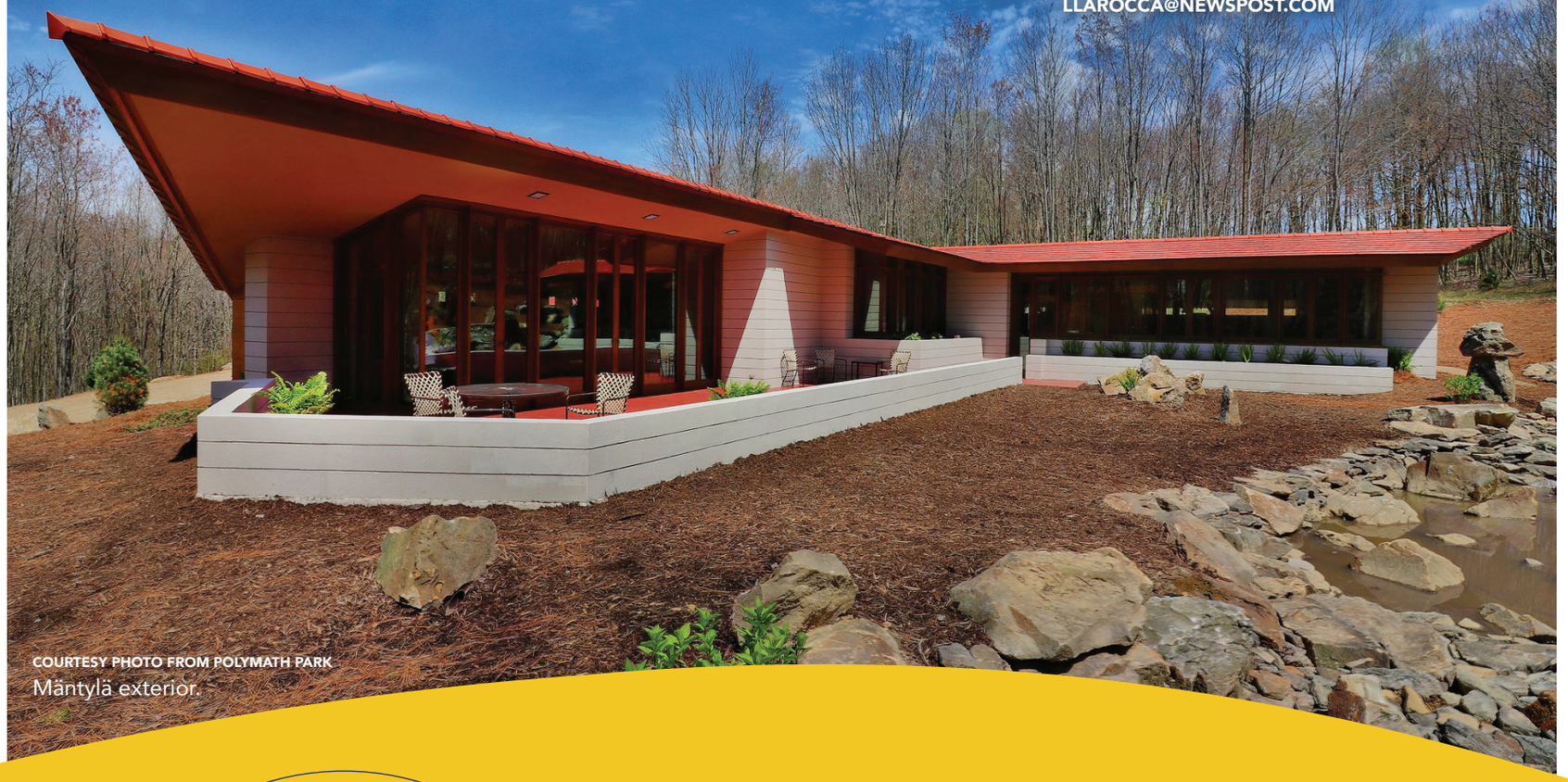
DRAWING INSPIRATION FROM PENNSYLVANIA'S

Laurel Highlands

BY LAUREN LAROCCA
LLAROCCA@NEWSPOST.COM



COURTESY PHOTO FROM POLYMATH PARK
Mäntylä exterior.



A visit to Frank Lloyd Wright's masterpieces and the wild landscape they were born from. It's often said that walking through a Frank Lloyd Wright house is like walking through a work of art. That's true. But after experiencing his homes firsthand, I'd describe it differently.

It felt like walking through the wilderness.

Not just because of the obvious connection to the natural world found in his materials – stone, copper, wood – but because it brings the same delight of discovering a waterfall or turning a corner to find an unexpected vista; noticing the way branches and stone frame a view; walking a tight path between boulders or through thick brush, only to exhale when they open to a wide field of sunlight and sky.

All of these elements are reflected in his work. His "compression and release" method moves you from narrow hallways and low ceilings to grand, wide-open spaces. His small bedrooms and private studies feel like sheltering caves. Stone floors anchor you to the earth. Wooden ceilings draw the warmth of the forest canopy inside. Natural light moves through the rooms the way it moves through trees, shifting with the hour and season. A Wright house feels like a living thing.

Wright called his approach "organic architecture," and he was developing these ideas in the late 1800s, long before sustainability became a design conversation – and all while waging a very public war against the American Institute of Architects. He designed each of his houses to be a natural part of the landscape rather than a separate object within it.

"If the thing is successful … you can't imagine that house anywhere but right where it is," Wright said in an NBC televised interview when he was 83. Asked about Fallingwater, perhaps his most famous building, he said, "The site determined the features and character of the house."

The mountains, forests and rushing streams of the Laurel Highlands weren't just backdrop for the work of one of the 20th century's greatest architects but its raw material. It's where Wright found inspiration for and built Fallingwater.

This region spans 3,000 square miles of Appalachian ridges in southwestern Pennsylvania, about an hour southeast of Pittsburgh. It sits notably higher than the surrounding lowlands, which is part of why the light behaves the way it does, why the hemlocks grow so dense, and why the air feels different.

The Laurel Highlands include three counties: Somerset, Westmoreland and Fayette, each with its own character. Westmoreland is home to the quaint borough of Ligonier, its reconstructed 18th-century Fort Ligonier and the Westmoreland Museum of American Art. In Somerset County, the ski mountains rise, with Seven Springs Mountain Resort at nearly 3,000 feet altitude and Hidden Valley Resort offering a quieter, more intimate alternative nearby.

Fayette is Wright country.

While Fallingwater gets most of the limelight, three additional Wright homes are open for tours in the region – Mäntylä, Duncan and Kentuck Knob – and two of them even allow you to spend the night there.



COURTESY PHOTOS FROM POLYMATH PARK

TOP: Duncan House living space. MIDDLE: Mäntylä Interior. BOTTOM: Mantyla living space.



> "A Wright house feels like a living thing."
>
> LAUREN LAROCCA ON HER EXPERIENCE STAYING IN & EXPLORING FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT'S HOMES



SLEEPING IN A FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT HOME

Imagine waking before dawn to find the walls of your room transformed into rows of rectangular windows glowing a cool, even blue – less like windows, more like an art installation – then waking a couple hours later to golden morning sun revealing the surrounding forest, close and dense and awake.

If you've ever fantasized about the singular experience of waking up in a Frank Lloyd Wright house, Polymath Park grants that wish. The private preservation effort, owned and operated by Tom and Heather Papanchak, allows visitors to tour Wright's Mäntylä and Duncan houses among its 130 acres of forest – and spend the night in one. The park began when the Papanchaks purchased land that already contained two houses designed by Peter Berndtson, one of Wright's apprentices, and has since grown into a sanctuary for architecturally significant homes threatened by demolition or encroachment.

I visited in April and stayed at Wright's Duncan House, originally designed in 1957 for a family in Lisle, Illinois. Fifty years later, rather than see it demolished, preservationists dismantled it piece by piece – cataloging every nut, bolt, window, door and roof tile before shipping it to Pennsylvania and rebuilding it in the mountains.

I noticed details – the old-fashioned knobs on the bathroom sink, the scent of minerals in the water while taking a shower – that just don't come across in a house tour, much less a YouTube video. I could sense firsthand how the house doesn't end so much as dissolve into the woods. At night, so dark, so quiet – no WiFi, just woods. The stay took me back to a simpler time, to when the house was actually built and lived in. I browsed books on the coffee table in the evening and watched birds and chipmunks outside. I wandered onto the back patio to see the stars after it got dark, and then I got into my pajamas and got into bed … in a Frank Lloyd Wright house. Going to bed is such a personal,

private time, so there was something special about doing it in a place like this.

Seeing the stone fireplace and Wright's signature wall of wooden storage cabinets was impressive, but standing at the kitchen sink and looking out the window at the front yard, brushing my teeth and getting into bed in the master bedroom, waking and taking a shower while watching the wooded backyard fade to steamy windows gave me the experience of what it would be like to actually live there. It felt more like a home and less like a museum.

Just a short drive down a gravel road through the woods from Duncan sits Mäntylä, Finnish for "among the pines." The house was originally built in Duluth, Minnesota, and relocated to Polymath Park in 2019 after its peaceful surroundings were overtaken by commercial development.

If Duncan introduced me to Wright's domestic warmth, Mäntylä delivered his full architectural drama. The compression and release felt even more pronounced here – an 18-inch-wide hallway leads to a small, solitary study, dark and cave-like, before the house opens unexpectedly into light. Wright's attention to detail is everywhere: the color palette, the proportions, the way each room feels considered rather than constructed.

When relocating each house, the Polymath Park team was careful to orient them to the sun exactly as Wright had intended – a detail Wright himself would never have permitted anyone to overlook.

Polymath Park also includes two houses designed by Berndtson, open to tours and overnight stays. Onsite, TreeTops Restaurant offers an experience as unique as the architecture surrounding it: private treehouse-style dining pods perched in the woods, set apart from an indoor dining room and patio, with a chef-driven menu that integrates local ingredients and changes with the seasons.



COURTESY PHOTO FROM THE WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA CONSERVANCY
Fallingwater, classic view from the SW elevation

FALLINGWATER

Chestnut Ridge connects Kentuck Knob with the real thing – the famed Fallingwater, a UNESCO World Heritage Site that draws around 140,000 visitors a year. Designed in 1935 for Edgar Kaufmann Sr. and his family, owners of Pittsburgh's Kaufmann's Department Store, Fallingwater is Wright's most widely acclaimed work and the fullest expression of his organic architecture philosophy.

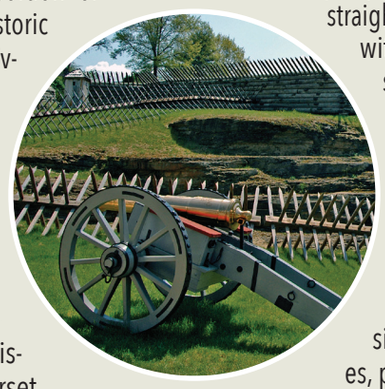
Quick Guide to the

THINGS TO DO

Fallingwater, Kentuck Knob & Polymath Park – Each offers a variety of tour packages, where a guide will walk you through a Frank Lloyd Wright home and tell the stories behind each detail. Fallingwater: Tours run daily except Wednesdays and must be reserved in advance. For a deeper experience, the In-Depth Guided Tour grants access to additional spaces not included in the standard tour. Polymath Park: Thursday through Tuesday tours range from a one-hour walk through the Duncan House and Mäntylä to an immersive evening that pairs a two-house tour with dinner in one of the forest dining pods. Kentuck Knob requires reservations at kentuckknob.com.

Drive historic roads – Route 30, aka the old Lincoln Highway and one of America's first transcontinental roads, traces the ridgelines through small towns that still carry the atmosphere of an earlier era. The Lincoln Highway Experience Museum in Latrobe is billed as the largest museum in America dedicated to the story of the first coast-to-coast highway. Route 40, the old National Road, offers a parallel journey through the southern portion of the region, passing the historic Stone House Inn and delivering sweeping views.

Learn local history – Fort Ligonier, a reconstructed 1758 British fort in the town of Ligonier, tells the story of the French and Indian War. The Somerset Historical Center in Somerset serves as the region's rural heritage museum, with a log farm, a covered bridge, a cider press and a Pennsylvania Maple Museum on the grounds.



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS/ JEFF KUBINA
Fort Ligonier

Outdoor adventures – Rent rafts, kayaks and bikes at Ohiopyle Trading Post and River Tours. For guided whitewater trips, Wilderness Voyageurs and White Water Adventurers both operate out of Ohiopyle. Or bike the Great Allegheny Passage from Cumberland to Pittsburgh.

Skiing – Seven Springs Mountain Resort in Champion is the region's largest four-season resort, with a spa, multiple dining options and kid-friendly activities. Its neighboring Hidden Valley Resort is a more intimate alternative, particularly popular with families learning to ski. In warmer months, both resorts transition to hiking, biking and resort activities.

Explore Pennsylvania's largest cave – Laurel Caverns in Farmington offers guided tours and is a reliable rainy-day option for families.

DINING

Twisted Spoke Cafe – A casual stop in Ohiopyle favored by cyclists and river-goers coming off the GAP trail or the Yough. 724-329-1122; gettwistedohiopyle.com

Falls Market Restaurant & Inn – A family-friendly spot in Ohiopyle serving straightforward American food, with rooms available upstairs for overnight stays. 724-329-4973; fallsmarketinn.com

Falls City Pub & Restaurant – Just steps from the river in Ohiopyle, Falls City serves classic burgers and sandwiches, perfect for refueling after a day on the water. 724-329-3000; fallscitypub.com

Bittersweet Cafe – Tucked in the woods of Farmington, this farm-to-table cafe built on a family's love of

Laurel Highlands

local food serves specialty coffee, fresh pastries and dishes made from locally raised meats and produce. 724-329-4411; bittersweetfresh.com

HillBilly's Pub & Grub, 3531 PA-31, Donegal – A convenient roadside stop between Seven Springs and Ohiopyle, serving hearty American fare – burgers, meatloaf, pot roast – in a fun, two-level space with a casual downstairs dining room and a full pub upstairs. Try their fried green tomatoes. 724-623-3585; hillbillysgrubnpub.com



PHOTO BY LAUREN LAROCCA
HillBilly's fried green tomatoes

Out of the Fire Cafe – This Donegal spot is celebrated for its smoked salmon and its charming patio made for watching sunsets. 724-259-8887; outofthefirecafe.com

Braddock's Restaurant & Tavern – A mountaintop stop on U.S. Route 40 serving comfort food, weekly specials and Sunday brunch, with live music and a popular barbecue shack. 724-329-5508; braddocksinn.com

Historic Stone House Restaurant & Inn – Elevated dining in a landmark 1822 inn along the National Road in Farmington, convenient to Fallingwater, Kentuck Knob and Ohiopyle. 724-329-8876; stonehouseinn.com

TreeTops Restaurant at Polymath Park – The most distinctive dining experience in the Highlands, with gourmet meals served in private pods suspended in the forest canopy. Brunch, tapas, lunch and dinner options available, plus an outdoor bar and pizza oven. Reservations required. 877-833-7829; treetops-restaurant.net

STAY OVERNIGHT

The Ohiopyle Suites – A convenient motel in the heart of Ohiopyle, steps from the river, the GAP trail and every outfitter in town. Free breakfast daily, communal fire pit, dog-friendly. 724-329-8850; yough plazamotel.com

Wright at Polymath Park – The bucket- list option: spend the night in an authentic Frank Lloyd Wright-designed home and wake up surrounded by iconic architecture and forest views. 877-833-7829; franklloydwrightovernight.net

Historic Stone House Restaurant & Inn – A preferred hotel of Timber Rock Amphitheater and a short drive from Falling water and Kentuck Knob, featuring Victorian-style rooms in Farmington. 724-329-8876; stonehouseinn.com

Nemacolin – The region's ultra-luxury resort in Farmington, with AAA Five Diamond properties, two championship golf courses, a full spa and endless curated experiences. 877-864-9765; nemacolin.com

Seven Springs Mountain Resort – 400-plus hotel rooms and its own dining, spa and entertainment onsite. 814-352-7777; 7springs.com

Lodge at Chalk Hill – A relaxing lakeside retreat on 37 acres near Ohiopyle, with scenic mountain views, bike rentals and year-round access to wineries and historic sites. 724-438-8880; thelodgeatchalkhill.com

For vacation rentals near Ohiopyle – from treehouses to riverside cabins – check Discover Ohiopyle, Vacation Ohiopyle and Wilderness Voyageurs.



COURTESY PHOTO FROM THE WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA CONSERVANCY
Fallingwater, view of living room.

What makes the commission particularly fascinating is that Edgar Kaufmann Jr. was himself a Wright apprentice before his parents hired the architect – meaning Wright was building for a family that already understood, from the inside, exactly what he was trying to do.

The house that resulted has been called America's greatest building, and the designation feels earned. Wright didn't want the Kaufmanns to look out at their favorite waterfall; he wanted them to live with it. He positioned the structure directly over Bear Run, its terraces above the rushing water in a feat of engineering that still mystifies nearly 100 years later. The stone hearth in the living room erupts from the floor like an outcropping of the bedrock beneath it.

But it's the water that commands everything. Bear Run drops roughly nine meters over natural rock ledges beneath the house, and Wright designed the space so that its sound fills every room – a constant, living presence. A hatch door in the living room floor opens to a suspended stairway that descends directly to the stream, ending at a small rectangular plunge pool at water level, where the Kaufmanns could step out of their living room and into the current. Bear Run flows year-round, which means Fallingwater is never quite still.

KENTUCK KNOB

While the Duncan and Mäntylä houses were brought to the landscape, Kentuck Knob was born from it.

Kentuck Knob feels like a house someone actually lived in – because the Hagan family did, for decades. It's intimate, warm. A hexagonal Usonian design tucked into a mountaintop, with sweeping views that overlook the Youghiogheny River Gorge, the house was built from the land beneath it, its sandstone cut directly from the property. The roof is composed of 9,000 pounds of copper, weathered now to a green patina.

Inside, compression and release plays out again – the house draws you through toward the great room, where carved wooden skylights extend across the length of the ceiling, casting hexagram shapes of sunlight across the stone floor below. That same stone floor, incidentally, is used at Fallingwater. A long built-in bench couch runs along one wall – a signature Wright motif, seen also at Mäntylä – designed to keep seating low and horizontal. One of the more quietly surprising details is the master bedroom, where two twin beds sit side by side rather than one large bed. Wright believed a single large bed dominated a room's visual field; two smaller ones placed together drew the eye elsewhere and let the room speak as a whole.

Outside, 75,000 trees were planted on the property, and a sculpture garden winds through the grounds, artworks folded into the landscape the way Wright folded the house into it. The Hagan family, who clearly absorbed something of Wright's sensibility during their decades there, called their outdoor water feature their "little Fallingwater."

IF YOU ONLY HAVE ONE DAY IN

PITTSBURGH

The Duquesne Incline – Take a ride on the 150-year-old incline that climbs Mount Washington to get a classic Pittsburgh skyline panorama.

Mount Washington overlook – Grandview Avenue, along the ridge above the incline, is worth a stop – especially at night, when the whole city and all its bridges are lit up below.

Point State Park & the confluence – Where the Allegheny and Monongahela join to form the Ohio River, and where it becomes easy to understand why both the French and the British were willing to go to war over this particular piece of ground.

Andy Warhol Museum – Seven floors devoted to Pittsburgh's most famous native son, with a collection deep enough that even visitors who think they know Warhol will leave understanding him more fully.

Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens – A stunning Victorian glass greenhouse in Oakland with stunning seasonal displays.

Children's Museum of Pittsburgh – Rated No. 2 in the country by USA Today in 2025, and housed in a repurposed post office that is itself part of the experience.

PNC Park – One of the best stadium settings in baseball, with the Pittsburgh skyline framing the outfield and the Roberto Clemente Bridge.

The Strip District – Pittsburgh's market and warehouse neighborhood (best on a Saturday morning), with produce vendors, fish markets, pierogies and excellent coffee.

The Cathedral of Learning, University of Pittsburgh – A 42-story Gothic skyscraper housing 30 Nationality Rooms, each decorated by a different immigrant community, built during the Depression with pennies donated by Pittsburgh schoolchildren.



PHOTOS BY LAUREN LAROCCA

TOP: Ohiopyle inside visitor center. CIRCLE: Ohiopyle – Cucumber Falls.

INTO THE WILD

Fallingwater's Bear Run feeds into the great Youghiogheny River. Follow the water downstream and the wilderness Wright was channeling indoors spills back out into the open.

If the Wright houses bring the outside in, Ohiopyle sends you back out.



Ohiopyle State Park is built around the Yough – specifically the Lower Yough, which American Whitewater has called the best-known whitewater run in the eastern U.S. The river is the organizing fact of the place. Multiple outfitters operate in the tiny town, offering white-water rafting, kayaking and tubing. The biggest draws are on the water, but the surrounding trails, fishing holes and bike paths mean you can spend days here without repeating yourself.

The Great Allegheny Passage cuts right through Ohiopyle – 150 miles of path connecting Cumberland to Pittsburgh. So you can enter the wilderness on foot, on a bike or in a raft.

The Yough makes a sharp horseshoe bend through town, and within that curve sits Ferncliff Peninsula, a 100-acre National Natural Landmark where the river's tight turn creates its own warmer microclimate, allowing wildflowers and ancient ferns more common to Southern regions to take root alongside 200-year-old hemlocks.

In the early 1950s, Edgar Kaufmann Sr. – yes, the Fallingwater Kaufmann – purchased the land and donated it to the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, which eventually helped to establish Ohiopyle State Park. The foundations of the old hotel are still visible, if you know where to look.

The Visitor Center is worth a stop, if only for the glass-walled room overlooking Ohiopyle Falls – wide open, above the water, with broad views upstream and downstream. A geological and cultural history exhibition on the lower level adds context to everything you've just seen in the area.

Cucumber Falls, an easy nearby hike, offers a whole different experience. The 36-foot bridal veil waterfall is tucked into the forest on Cucumber Run, quieter and more intimate than the main falls. Follow the trail farther and it leads to the Yough itself, and this area, too, is often less crowded than the park's main access points.

Ohiopyle manages to feel both wild and welcoming – the same quality I'd ascribe to Wright's houses. During my time here, I understood how the wilderness and the architecture are in continual conversation.

You might visit this area to see the famous Fallingwater, but you'll also find a wild river that's been running for centuries – or vice versa.

It's a place of stone – Ohiopyle's riverbed visible in the rapids and falls, the sandstone at the Duncan House harvested from the property, the dry-stack masonry at Kentuck Knob, the hearth at Fallingwater erupting from the earth like the bedrock it sits on.

A place of wood – the forest canopy of hemlock and oak, whether you're hiking to Cucumber Falls or walking the path to Kentuck Knob.

And a wilderness of running streams – Fallingwater's Bear Run flowing into the Youghiogheny River, which carves the gorge that Kentuck Knob overlooks and runs through Ohiopyle like a story waiting to be discovered.

A REGION THAT SHAPED A NATION

Few places in America carry the weight of history the way the Laurel Highlands does. The story of the nation's founding runs directly through this landscape – from Fort Necessity, where a 22-year-old George Washington commanded his first battle in 1754 and set in motion the conflict that would eventually lead to American independence, to Fort Ligonier, where Washington survived a harrowing friendly fire incident that the fort's museum now commemorates in a dedicated gallery.

At Historic Hanna's Town in Greensburg, settlers issued the Hanna's Town Resolves in 1775, a declaration of liberty published more than a year before the Declaration of Independence.

As the country marks its 250th anniversary, communities across the Laurel Highlands are celebrating with festivals, performances, living history reenactments and special exhibits. ***A full calendar of regional America's 250th events is at golaurelhighlands.com/america250PA.***

FLIGHT 93 NATIONAL MEMORIAL

In Somerset County, one of the nation's most moving memorials stands on the quiet field where passengers and crew of United Airlines Flight 93 brought down a hijacked plane on Sept. 11, 2001, preventing a further attack on the nation's capital. The Memorial Plaza features a 40-stone Wall of Names and a 17-ton boulder marking the impact site. The Tower of Voices – a 93-foot-tall structure fitted with 40 wind chimes, one for each life lost – rises nearby, its sound carrying across the open landscape. In 2026, the memorial will host a yearlong series of programs culminating in the 25th anniversary ceremony on Sept. 11, expected to draw national dignitaries, surviving family members and media from around the world. Free admission. **814-893-6322; nps.gov/flni.**

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS/ANDRE CARROTFLOWER

The Tower of Voices at the Flight 93 National Memorial in Stonycreek Township, Somerset County, Pa. An enormous wind chime – the world's tallest, at a height of 93 feet – contains 40 bells, symbolic of the 40 people who were on Flight 93 on 9/11.

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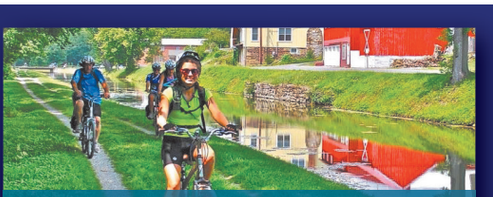
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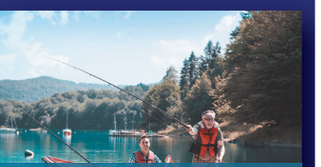
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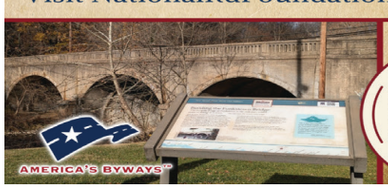

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Affordable, family fun to be found at Berkeley County Youth Fair

BY TABITHA JOHNSTON
TJOHNSTON@JOURNAL-NEWS.NET

The fun, the food and the family-friendly activities of the Berkeley County Youth Fair (BCYF) will be returning for the 79th year in a row to the region, at the end of the summer.

From Aug. 1-8, the BCYF will be held on its fairgrounds, located at 2419 Golf Course Road in Martinsburg. "This is the largest event in Berkeley County with 20,000 visitors annually," said BCYF Executive Board First Vice President Charlie Moore.

FAIR GROWTH

Moore noted that this year's fair is expected to be bigger and better than ever, as it will showcase the work and talents of the largest number of exhibitors, to-date.

"We have over 500 exhibitors, across all of our clubs: the Boys & Girls Club; Girl Scouts; Scouting America;



JOURNAL STAFF PHOTOS

TOP: A family admires the view of the fairgrounds, from one of the carnival rides. MIDDLE: A young boy holds onto the back of a sheep for dear life, during one of the rodeo competitions. BOTTOM: A bull attempts to buck a man off its back, during the rodeo, all taken at the 2025 Berkeley County Youth Fair.

Family, Career and Community Leaders of America; Future Farmers of America; and 4-H," Moore said, mentioning the greatest exhibitor growth has been in the animal husbandry realm. "Our barns are full. Last year, we were just pens away from having no more room in the pig barn. The beef and dairy barns had very little extra room. The goat barn was bursting out of its seams."

FAIRGROUND EXPANSION

This year's exhibitor registrations are indicating that the upward trajectory in exhibitors seen last year, was far from a standalone occurrence. For this reason, the BCYF Executive Board has engaged in some serious conversations over the past year, about the best way to expand the fairground facilities.

"One of our buildings is needing a repair. We are looking at possibly next year taking our newest barn and extending that out, to replace our older building," Moore said, noting the extension would end close to the main exhibit hall. "We want it to be a space that can be used year-round, not just one week, to accommodate more events that are being held on the fairgrounds."

A definite timeline for making this update has not been determined, however, as it will depend entirely on grant funding and support from the local community.

"We want to plan for the future and not be overwhelmed in hard times. We want the fairgrounds to be a viable place for the community to gather," Moore said. "The only way we will be able to do that, is through community partnerships, fundraising and support from our local government authorities."

FAIR HISTORY & PURPOSE

Founded in 1949, the youth fair began as a way for Berkeley County's 4-H members to present the results of their yearlong 4-H projects to the public. It eventually was expanded, to welcome participation from youth ages five to 21, in clubs and organizations across Berkeley County. Exhibitors are held to rigorous project completion standards, to encourage them to produce their very best work for the fair. Those standards have been outlined by the BCYF and, if not followed, will lead to them receiving lesser ribbons and prize opportunities than they might have otherwise received.

"Our fair provides excellent opportunities for youth to discover their own potential," Moore said.

The purpose of the youth fair is twofold: to promote awareness of and appreciation for agriculture in the general public and to pass on the knowledge and love of agriculture and agriculture-related-activities to the next generation. Moore himself was molded by his childhood experiences exhibiting at the fair – one of the main reasons he has chosen to become so deeply involved in it over the last few years, in spite of his busy schedule as a full-time farmer and senior master sergeant with the 167th Airlift Wing of the West Virginia Air National Guard. But as a father of two – a 13-year-old daughter and 10-year-old son – Moore sees it as his duty to ensure the fair presents youth with the same opportunities he once enjoyed, to make wonderful, lasting memories and connect on a deeper level with their community.

"The fair is very much a labor of love," Moore said. "There is true exhaustion at the end of the week, but to see everybody out there enjoying the projects and the camaraderie in the barns, is so rewarding."

> "This is the largest event in Berkeley County."
>
> BCYF EXECUTIVE BOARD FIRST VICE PRESIDENT CHARLIE MOORE

FUTURE OF THE FAIR

As the BCYF Executive Board look toward the future, they anticipate many challenges, as well as opportunities, presented by the rapid population growth in the area. They recognize the sobering reality, that a significant amount of farmland is being lost, to build housing for this population. At the same time, they believe this may present the fair with the opportunity to share the county's agricultural heritage with a greater number of people and to increase the overall attendance of the fair.

"We have all of these new families that are coming to the area that we want to get this information to," Moore said, noting the fair has only raised its ticket prices once in the last 30 years and has no plans to ever increase them. "Our goal is to continue to grow the crowds every year, to make the fair into a hub for the community to gather, one of the last weeks of the summer before the kids head back off to school."

To learn more, visit berkeleycounty youthfair.org.

Honoring 250th Anniversary & Local Patriot with Theme: *"Youth Strong, America Proud"*

Longtime attendees of the Berkeley County Youth Fair (BCYF) may recall how its Executive Board has often infused a patriotic theme into many of its events, highlighting how the fair's agricultural focus is deeply connected to the country's origin.

"Our country and our county were both built on agriculture," said BCYF Executive Board First Vice President Charlie Moore. "This country was formed by farmers and pioneers – regular Americans. Those people ensured that we would have the freedom to do everything we desired to do, within the bounds of the law. Today, the fair serves as an opportunity to celebrate this foundation."

The fair's events have, in the past, included everything from horses in red, white and blue costumes to patriotic musical performances on the BCYF amphitheater stage. Last year, this was taken a step even further, with the BCYF Executive Board planning the fair week around the theme "Stars, Stripes and Youth Fair Nights." The theme of this year's fair week will be similar, to properly honor the 250th anniversary of the United States' founding.

"Our theme for this year's fair will be, 'Youth Strong, America Proud,'" Moore said.

In line with this theme and in honor of the anniversary, patriotic emblems and colors will be featured around the fairgrounds and a 15' x 20' American flag will be displayed high above the crowd, with a crane. Youth will also be encouraged to use the theme as inspiration for decorating their exhibits with patriotic motifs and colors.

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TARARA SUMMER CONCERT SERIES TO KICK OFF FINAL SEASON MAY 23

BY KAREN GRAHAM
KGRAHAM@LOUDOUNTIMES.COM





For Bob and Gloria Serig of Myersville, Maryland, the Tarara Summer Concert series in Lucketts means picnic dinners under the stars, live music and dancing with friends.

As season ticket holders, they drive 30 miles from their home almost every Saturday during the summer, with folding chairs and a wagon in tow.

"It's an enjoyable routine and it's always a fun time," Bob Serig said. "I'm always surprised by how much talent is out there. And the bands come from all over the country."

Bob, 80, and Gloria, 76, were originally drawn to Tarara in 1990 for its warm and hospitable atmosphere – and the winery's friendly owners, Margaret and Whitie Hubert, who have since passed away, Bob Serig said.

They would always look for Margaret Hubert at the concerts, he said, and if she was there, they would be sure to say hello.

While the concert series will continue in the summer of 2026, this will be the last season, according to Rusty Foster, owner of Bow Tie Strategies, who has managed the events since 2016.

The 27th Annual Tarara Summer Concert series kicks off May 23 with So Fetch, a band that plays favorite hits from the 2000s. The series continues weekly until Sept. 26.

Patrons can enjoy live music, local wine, beer and cider; food and outdoor entertainment, Foster said.

Held at an amphitheater overlooking Shadow Lake, the series showcases popular cover and tribute bands.

"This is not just a concert series — it's a summer tradition that thousands look forward to each year," Foster said. "We're proud to continue producing this incredible event."

Foster says that 75% of concert patrons come from outside Loudoun County. In 2025, people from 18 states and Canada were represented. Like Gloria and Bob Serig, there are about 30 to 40 couples who come to nearly every concert, he said.

"We get to really know them and their families and they become our concert family," Foster said. "We've witnessed family events, engagements, you name it. It's neat to see the evolution of things."

He said there is a running club that has been coming for years, and a paddle board group that takes a shuttle to Point of Rocks, Maryland, and paddle boards down to the concert.

New this year, Tarara has created partnerships with the Hotel Burg, Waterford Reservations and the Hilton Garden Inn in Ashburn with special rates to encourage a weekend stay.

Bruster's Real Ice Cream, a locally owned business, will serve as the presenting partner and have an on-site food truck throughout the 2026 season.

Each concert runs from 6 to 9:30 p.m., with gates opening at 5 p.m. Visitors are encouraged to bring lawn chairs and blankets to enjoy the music.

Private tents are available for rent and are ideal for corporate outings, birthdays, family reunions and other group celebrations. Concert Club Passes, which include access to all 19 shows, early entry and exclusive perks, are also available in limited quantities.

Foster says he hopes this last season will feel like "one big celebration."

"Tarara has never just been about the music to me," he said. "It's been about the people, the friendships, and the memories made on that hillside over the past 27 years. I've been fortunate to be part of this series for more than a decade, and it's honestly hard to imagine summers without it.

"There's a lot of emotion going into this final season, but more than anything, I just feel grateful – grateful for every person who bought a ticket, every artist who took the stage and everyone who helped turn this into something that meant so much to so many people. We want this season to feel like one big celebration of everything Tarara has been."

SUMMER SCHEDULE

May 23 – So Fetch! ('2000s)
May 30 – The New Romance ('80s)
June 6 – White Ford Bronco ('90s)
June 13 – 7 Bridges (Eagles)
June 20 – Delta Spur (Country)
June 27 – Groovalicious ('70s Disco)
Friday, July 3 – Stifler's Mom ('90s)
July 11 – The Bridge with Elizabeth's Furnace (Led Zeppelin & Rock)
July 18 – Turnstiles (Billy Joel)
July 25 – Jimmy Kenny & the Pirate Beach Band (Jimmy Buffett, Kenny Chesney, Zac Brown Band)
August 1 – The Legwarmers ('80s)
August 8 – Slippery When Wet (Bon Jovi)
August 15 – The Seven Wonders (Fleetwood Mac/Stevie Nicks)
August 22 – E5C4P3 (Journey)
August 29 – Gonzo's Nose (Hits)
September 5 – Super Trans AM with The Darby Brothers ('70s Rock)
September 12 – Bad Animals (Heart)
September 19 – High Noon (Southern Rock)
September 26 – The Reflex ('80s)

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TARARACONCERTS.COM

AMERICA 250 1776 2026

LOUDOUN COUNTY, VIRGINIA

THE TOWN AT THE CROSSROADS:

Find hints of Revolutionary Leesburg in this magical history tour

BY TAMELA BAKER
TBAKER@LOUDOUNTIMES.COM

If we could travel back to colonial Leesburg, how much of the town would we recognize?

After two and a half centuries, little if anything is left unchanged. But vestiges of the town's earliest days remain. And the researchers at Thomas Balch Library have made it easier to sample those remnants.

They've put together a short self-guided walking tour in the historic commercial district to direct visitors to six examples of 18th-century sites and architecture.

Leesburg predates the founding of the United States by nearly two decades. The town got its start in 1757, when the colony of Virginia chose this site at the crossroads of the Carolina Road (now U.S. 15) and the Alexandria Road (VA 7) for a local courthouse.

Landowner Nicholas Minor engaged surveyor John Hough to plat his 60 acres into 70 lots for the town he initially called George Town, for King George II of Great Britain.

The town was formally established in September 1758 and renamed Leesburg, for the prominent Lee family. Two members of that family, Philip Ludwell Lee and Francis Lightfoot Lee, served as trustees.

Meanwhile, Minor began selling those lots, divided along streets that are still in place.

He later stipulated that purchasers build a brick, stone or wood house within three years – or the property would revert to Minor.

And that's where our tour begins, with two examples of these "covenant houses."

Site 1: Donaldson Silversmith Cabin, 14 Loudoun St. SW

According to the guide, Leesburg's first silversmith, Stephen Donaldson, bought lot #16 on the southwest corner of Loudoun and Back (now Wirt) streets in 1760. He built a log structure for his shop, which he ran until 1810.



COURTESY PHOTO – WILLIAM BAKER HOUSE

Site 2: William Baker House/Old Stone House, 106 Loudoun St. SW

William Baker built the front portion of this house c. 1762, according to the guide. Like Donaldson, Baker built his structure to the minimum size required.

Site 3: The Crossroad, intersection of King and Loudoun streets

This is where two historic trails meet – and why a settlement grew up here. The north-south route, historically known as the Carolina Road because the Iroquois used the trail during seasonal migration to the Carolinas, runs through Leesburg as King Street.

Loudoun Street, the east-west route, lies on a road that connected the Shenandoah Valley with the port of Alexandria. To the west, it was known the Shenandoah Road. To the east, it was called the Alexandria Road.

Those trails are heavily traversed by commuters and travelers today – as U.S. 15 and VA 7.

Site 4: Patterson House/ McCabe's Tavern, 4 Loudoun St. SE

John Patterson first purchased this plot from Nicholas Minor. It was later sold to Henry McCabe, who opened a tavern here that catered to travelers in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. During his visit to Leesburg in 1825, according to legend, a welcoming address was made to the Marquis de Lafayette from the building's steps.

Site 5: Eagle Tavern, 20 S. King St.

It's an office building now. But once upon a Revolutionary time, the basic structure here housed a tavern. Eventually, the Eagle Tavern became the Linden Hotel. The changes in the building are evident if you look at it from the side.

Site 6: Loudoun County Courthouse, 18 E. Market St.

This one will require a little imagination. The current building is historic in its own right, but is not the original structure. It is, in fact, the third courthouse to be built here, and dates to 1895.

But according to the researchers at Balch, county freeholders met at the original courthouse in June 1774 and published the Loudoun County Resolves, which condemned the Intolerable Acts imposed on the American Colonies by the British.

That's the end of the tour, but not the adventure. Have your own mini-celebration of America's past by taking an amble around downtown Leesburg.

And while you're enjoying these historic sites, you can also sample the local fare and wares of the many locally owned shops and restaurants along the way – just as a traveler along the Carolina and Alexandria roads might have back when America was just getting started.



COURTESY PHOTO – PATTERSON HOUSE/MCCABE'S TAVERN

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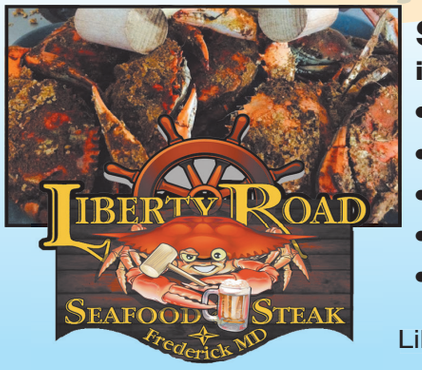

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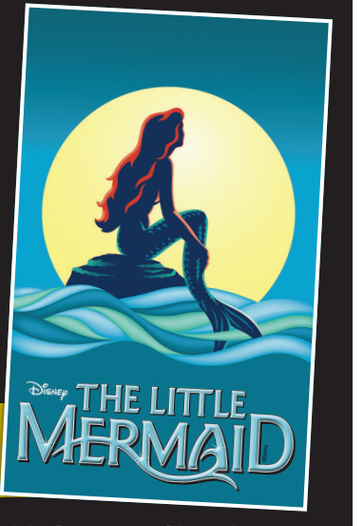

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Frederick County, MARYLAND

Frederick's 4th gets bigger and better all the time

BY COMFORT DORN
SPECIAL TO DAY-TRIPPER

Along with the 250th birthday of the United States, 2026 marks the 42nd year Frederick has hosted its annual 4th of July celebration in Baker Park. And for almost 22 of those years, Jennifer Martin, executive director of Celebrate Frederick, has worked with a small army of volunteers to plan the party.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CELEBRATE FREDERICK

"Frederick's first official celebration was in 1984," Martin said, "so it's been around for quite a while, and it has grown from an event that had one stage of entertainment and a few kids' activities and fireworks to what it is today."

This year's Frederick 4th will include two stages of entertainment, a full day of activities for families, three beer gardens, 20-some food vendors – and, of course, fireworks.

"It definitely has evolved," Martin said, "but one through line that's stayed consistent is that it has always really relied on community partnerships to make it happen."

These include a strong history with local businesses and radio stations, including WFRE, bringing country music to a stage near the park's tennis courts, and WFMD, honoring members of the military, police, and fire and rescue close to Culler Lake. Near the family-friendly Carillon area, Key 103.1 and 106.9 The Eagle host a cornhole tournament.

"We have all of the main local stations represented," Martin said.

On the main stage, at the Baker Park Bandshell, performers of Caribbean, rock, soul, jazz, blues and more will play and sing from afternoon to evening.

In recent years, the Boy Scouts of America have become involved, building a monkey bridge in the park that both children and grown-ups can cross and also offering camping demonstrations.

"We have a really fun partnership with them," Martin said, "and they want to do the more this year."

The local Daughters of the American Revolution chapter and representatives from Fort Detrick participate in the opening ceremonies. And these groups are just the tip of the iceberg.

Coordinating this many groups and activities takes time. "We're always planning," Martin said, "but we kick it into high gear in the late fall in terms of bringing the volunteer committee together. Volunteers typically are in charge of a certain area of the event – there's a multitude of roles."

Like everyone else, Martin has a favorite 4th of July moment.

"I always love fireworks," she said. "It's not just the display, but it's seeing the park just packed full of people and the excitement."

"That crowd peaks in the evening at about 50,000 to 60,000 people," Martin said, and the fireworks are set off at nearby Parkway Elementary School, so the entire park is available for attendees to spread their blankets and watch. This year's 20-minute display will be put on by a local company, Mr. Pyro, at a cost of about $20,000.

"We have heard that some people watch them from the tops of the parking decks or from just downtown. They are pretty visible."

Frederick's five municipal parking decks will be free of charge on the 4th, and Martin recommends attendees take advantage of that or look for street parking a few blocks from Baker Park.

"We always say, 'Get your steps in walking to the park; that way you can enjoy all that great festival food,'" she said. "If you park a little further away, you have an easier time at the end of the night because it's always a challenge with that volume of people all leaving at the exact same time."

> "Frederick's first official celebration was in 1984."
>
> JENNIFER MARTIN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CELEBRATE FREDERICK

In the months leading up to the event, organizers work with city police to make sure the park and surroundings are safe for pedestrians, and officers will be out in full force during the celebration, along with emergency medical services. The police also monitor online chatter for signs that political groups are planning activities or protests.

For folks who don't like the crowds and noise of the fireworks display, Celebrate Frederick suggests a few alternate locations for watching the show, including Harry Grove Stadium (where the Frederick Keys have a 1 p.m. game scheduled, so that's a two-fer). Check out the event map at celebratefrederick.com/events/fredericks-fourth.

Martin recommends visiting the website for more detailed information about entertainment, activities, food and drink, and sponsors. "And of course, I always encourage people to follow us on social media for updates as we get closer to the event."

Who will serenade America on her birthday?

AMERICA 250 1776 2026

From the nation's beginning, Frederick was all in. More than a decade before the Declaration of Independence was signed, all 12 judges of Frederick County's court resolved not to comply with the British Stamp Act of 1765 requiring that all official business, including newspapers, be on paper bearing a stamp (paid for by a tax). The county still celebrates their defiance on November 23, Repudiation Day.

This and other revolutionary actions in Frederick are recalled in 'Cultivation Independence,' a special exhibit at Heritage Frederick, the Frederick County Historical Society's museum.

To mark this early history, special activities are planned for the 2026 4th of July celebration in Baker Park.

250th anniversary organizers aim to make this year "a little bigger, maybe more eye-catching," according to Jennifer Martin, executive director of Celebrate Frederick.

Not all plans are nailed down, but fun additions could include a festive giveaway of glow sticks to make the evening even brighter. Strolling entertainers, including stilt walkers and jugglers, will roam the park dressed in patriotic attire, and the lighting, signage and banners will reflect the 250th theme "to just give it a little facelift and make it feel more special for the anniversary."

Both the city of Frederick and Frederick County have 250th anniversary committees, largely consortiums of local historical groups, and 4th of July organizers have invited them all to have space at what's being called the "250th village."

And beginning May 1, a contest was launched for a singer to perform the national anthem, inviting local residents to submit a video and "throw their hats into the ring to sing live just before the fireworks" at the Baker Park Bandshell, Martin said.

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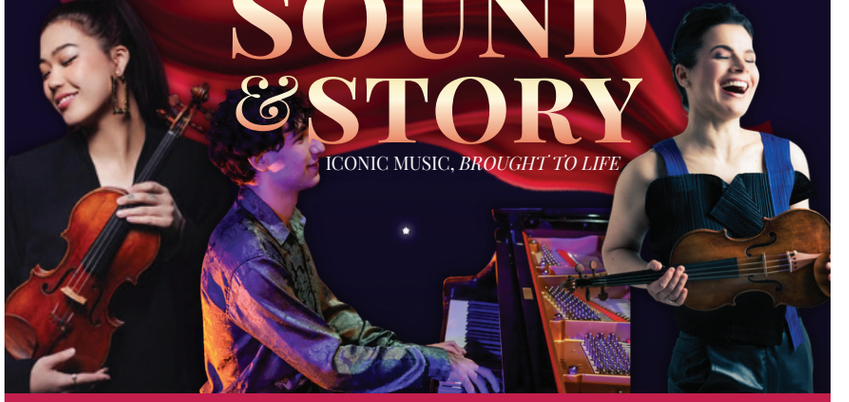

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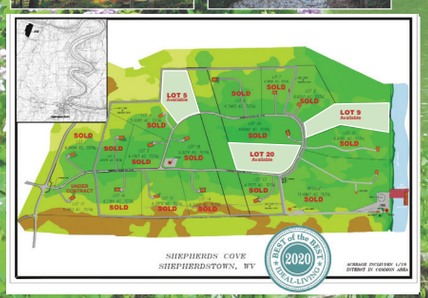

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Harpers Ferry welcomes visitors of all types: THERE IS SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

BY TONI MILBOURNE
TMILBOURNE@JOURNAL-NEWS.NET

Perched at the confluence of two rivers and three states, Harpers Ferry offers more than a vacation destination. It provides a living timeline of history as well as a gamut of outdoor recreation.

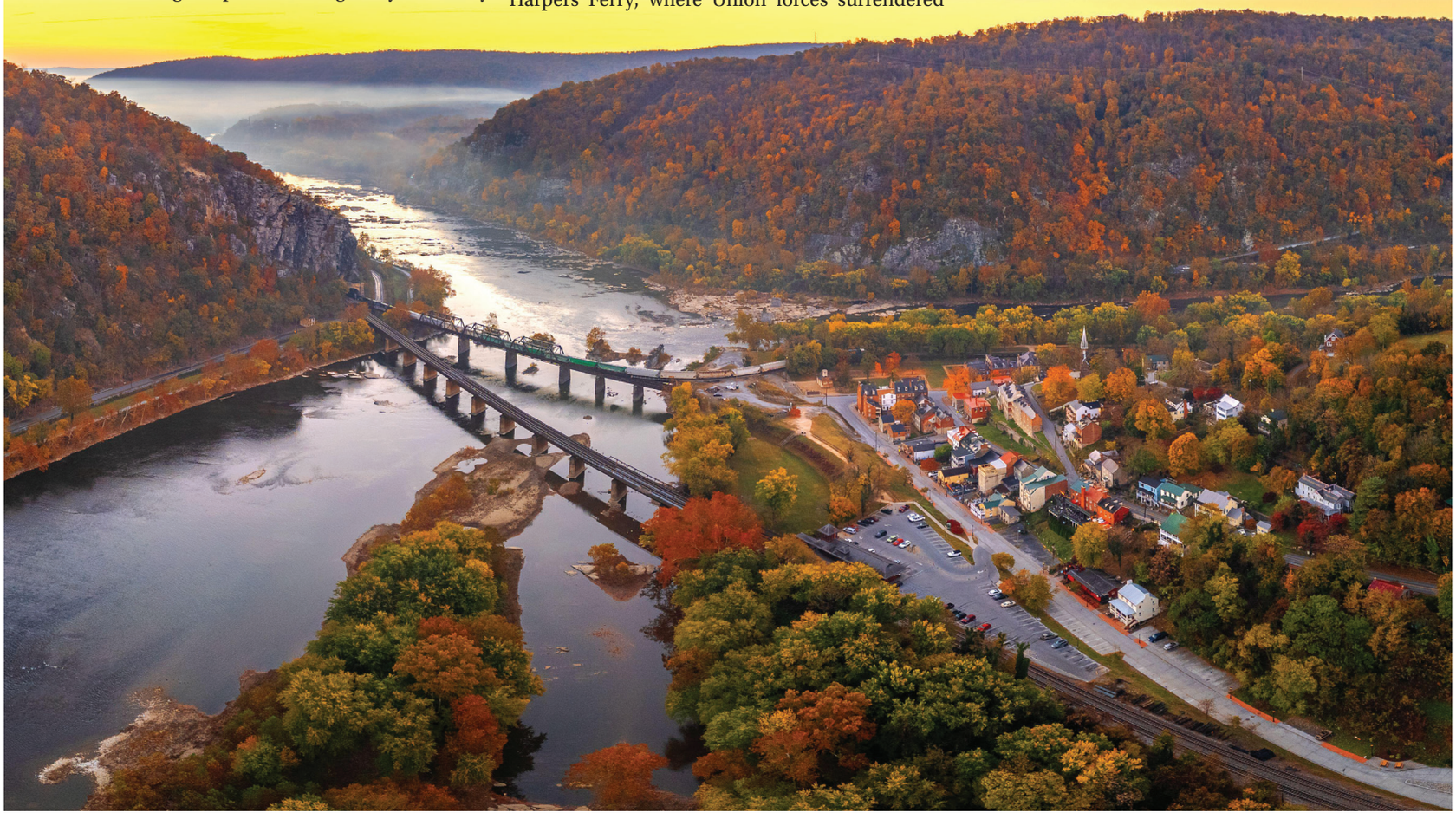
Visitors arrive for its postcard views where the Shenandoah meets the Potomac; but, they stay for something deeper including a layered story of war, education and outdoor adventure that unfolds with nearly every step one takes.

At the heart of the visit is Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, a sprawling site that blends preserved 19th-century buildings with miles of trails and sweeping overlooks. Begin in Lower Town, where history feels immediate and tangible. Here, small museums and restored storefronts tell the story of the town's industrial past and its outsized role in American history. Visitors can stand near the site of John Brown's Raid, the failed but pivotal attempt to spark a slave revolt that helped push the nation toward civil war.

The Civil War itself left an even deeper imprint. Harpers Ferry changed hands multiple times during the conflict, culminating in the Battle of Harpers Ferry, where Union forces surrendered to Confederate troops in one of the war's largest captures. Today, visitors can walk those same battlefields including places like Bolivar Heights and Schoolhouse Ridge, where interpretive signs and beautiful views bring the past into focus.

Harpers Ferry's story does not include only war tales. A short climb uphill leads to one of its most profound chapters, that of Storer College. Founded in 1867, just after the Civil War, the school became a pioneering institution for the education of formerly enslaved people and one of the few places in the region where Black and white students could study together.

The campus, now part of the national park, carries a quiet but powerful legacy. In 1906, it hosted a meeting of the Niagara Movement, a precursor to





the NAACP and a critical step in the early civil rights movement. Walking through Camp Hill, where the college once operated, visitors encounter more than historic buildings as they step into a place that helped shape the long struggle for equality in America.

Harpers Ferry is equally defined by the natural beauty that surrounds it. The town sits amid the Blue Ridge Mountains, and the same terrain that made it strategically valuable in wartime now makes it a haven for hikers and outdoor enthusiasts.

More than 20 miles of trails wind through the park, ranging from gentle riverside paths to challenging climbs with panoramic rewards. Among the most popular is the hike to Maryland Heights, where a steep ascent leads to one of the most iconic views in the region – an overlook of the town, rivers and railroad bridge below. For a more immersive journey, visitors can follow a portion of the Appalachian Trail, which passes directly through Harpers Ferry, which serves as the midpoint of the East Coast hiking trail.

Along the way, hikers encounter a blend of scenery and history encompassing stone steps leading to Jefferson Rock, ruins of old armories and quiet cemeteries tucked into the hillsides. It is this seamless merging of landscape and legacy that sets Harpers Ferry apart where even a casual walk becomes a journey through time. Visitors can stop in to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy to find out more information about the trek.



PHOTOS BY TONI MILBOURNE

TOP: The view of the Potomac River as seen through historical Harper Cemetery. BOTTOM: John Brown's Fort was the site of the final standoff between the abolitionist and his men in 1859.

Down at the water's edge, the rivers offer a different kind of adventure. The Shenandoah and Potomac provide opportunities for tubing, kayaking and whitewater rafting, with stretches suitable for both beginners and experienced paddlers. Floating through gentle rapids or drifting along calmer sections, visitors gain a new perspective on the town as seen from the rivers.

For those who enjoy shopping, Lower Town offers a place to browse small shops and sample local treats. One should make sure to stand at "The Point," where the two rivers meet before leaving the area. It is here, surrounded by mountains and water, that the full character of Harpers Ferry comes into view as a place where natural beauty and national history are inseparable.

In a single day, a visitor might trace the footsteps of soldiers, stand where abolitionists once fought for freedom, walk the grounds of a pioneering college and end with a hike or a float downriver. Few destinations offer such a compact yet expansive experience.

Harpers Ferry is more than a place to visit. It is a place to understand where the currents of American history run as clearly as the rivers that meet at its center.

Harpers Ferry attracts around **300,000 to 500,000** visitors annually – especially in the spring and fall.

NPS.GOV

Harpers Ferry's 250th events bring history to life

AMERICA 250 1776 2026

To mark America's 250th anniversary, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park is hosting a myriad of immersive programs that invite visitors to experience the town's pivotal role in shaping the nation.

On May 23, Defend and Protect highlights weapons and technology produced at the historic Harpers Ferry Armory, including live firing demonstrations. On May 30, John Brown and Frederick Douglass: A Legacy of Freedom explores the intertwined histories of John Brown and Frederick Douglass, culminating in a dramatic recreation of Douglass's 1881 speech at Storer College.

June 20 has visitors examining Harpers Ferry's influence on the Civil War through ranger-led interpretation and a talk by a regional historian. Fall programs take a more reflective turn, including Sacrifices & Circumstances (Oct. 10), which explores the human impact of Brown's 1859 raid.

One of the most distinctive events, Proceed to the Ferry (Oct. 16), retraces Brown's march from the Kennedy Farm in a guided evening hike. The following weekend's living history program brings multiple perspectives on the raid to life.

The season concludes with a Veterans Day ceremony at the Storer College Veterans' Monument, honoring those who served.

Most events are included with park admission, offering a vivid, hands-on way to engage with Harpers Ferry's enduring legacy.

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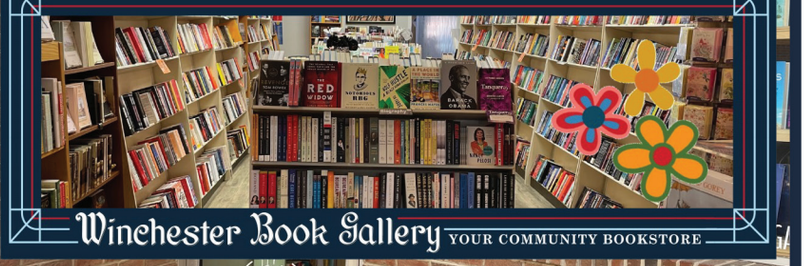

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City of Winchester, VIRGINIA

13th Hop Blossom Craft Beer Festival on tap in Winchester

BY CYNTHIA BURTON | THE WINCHESTER STAR

Love beer? Want to help doggies and kitties? Then you won't want to miss the 13th annual Hop Blossom Craft Beer Festival in Old Town Winchester.



Eighty-plus beers from 30-plus local breweries will be on tap on June 6 from noon to 6 p.m. Taps close at 5:30 p.m.



Even better? The event, hosted by Winchester Brew Works, benefits Dakota's Dream Animal Rescue, a small, volunteer-run, no-kill non-profit animal rescue group.

"We care deeply for our four-legged friends and are excited that we can help with the effort to find forever homes for wonderful animals," says a social media post about the event. "Over the past six years, Hop Blossom has donated over $80,000 to animal welfare organizations."

Hop Blossom also benefits Friends of Old Town, a community-focused nonprofit that celebrates and enhances Old Town Winchester through local events, public art, and design projects.

This year's Hop Blossom theme? "A Hoppy Fate Awaits."

Not only will the stars align for a good time and good brews, visitors will cross paths with lots of crafters and specialty vendors at the Hop Phased Makers Market on the south end of the Loudoun Street Mall. Moon Phased, a downtown shop, will have vendors of all kinds, including some tarot card reading.

Some of Hop Blossom's participating breweries include Alesatian Brewing, Bear Chase Brewing Company, Big Truck Farm Brewery, Broken Window Brewing Co., Brothers Craft Brewing, Caboose Brewing Co., Center of the Universe Brew, Coastal Fermentory, Coyote Hole Craft Beverages, Cushwa Brewing Co., Devils Backbone Brewing Company, Denizens Brewing Co., Dividing Creek Beer Company, Midnight Brewery, Nepenthe Brewing Co., Old Town Cidery, The Veil Brewing Co., Adroit Theory Brewing, Henway Hard Cider Company, Ono Brewing Company, Honey & Hops Brew Works, Jackie O's, Triple Crossing, Vibrissa Beer, Sojourn Fermentory, Twisted Oak Farm Brewery, Escutcheon Brewing, Chilly Hollow Brewing Company, Sinistral, Vassen Brewing Company, Winchester Brew Works, Funktastic Meads and Beers, Other Half Brewing Company and Winchester Ciderworks.

Hop Blossom tickets are $40 and include 10 tastings and a commemorative tasting glass. Three additional tastings can be purchased for $5. Only attendees with valid IDs will be permitted to participate in tastings.

Get your tickets at hopblossom.com, Eventbrite or in person at Winchester Brew Works or The Beer and Wine Shop.

Volunteers are also needed to pour beer, help with T-shirt sales, and more. Sign up on Hop Blossom's website.

Winchester-Frederick County keeps America's birthday party rolling

In 2020, the Virginia General Assembly established the Virginia American Revolution 250 Commission to commemorate Virginia's role in the 250th anniversary of American independence.

One of the goals is to engage every community in events that tell the story of Virginia's leadership in the shaping of our nation. In 2023, Winchester City Council and the Frederick County Board of Supervisors each approved resolutions forming the Winchester-Frederick County VA 250 Committee to support efforts to commemorate of the 250th.



The committee has already held numerous events, and more are to come, including the Winchester Revolt: Historic Bike Ride on June 6 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. The route is 7 miles long with seven stops along the way. Each stop will have a narrator explaining why the site is important. Cost to participate is $10. Riders should meet at 329 N. Cameron St., Winchester.

There also are numerous 250th events planned by local communities. Over Memorial Day weekend, you can celebrate America's 250th at Winchester Parks and Recreation Department's Red White and Lights! drone show at 9 p.m. May 30 in Jim Barnett Park.

For America's big birthday bash on Independence Day, the city's parks department will host Red, White and Boom! on July 3 from noon to 10 p.m., ending with fireworks at Jim Barnett Park. On July 4, Middletown will have a Fourth of July Celebration from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. There's a parade on Main Street at 5 p.m. and fireworks at dusk in Middletown Community Park. Frederick County Parks and Recreation will have Independence Day fun at Sherando Park from 5 to 10:30 p.m., with food vendors, music and fireworks at 9:15 p.m. The outdoor pool will stay open late.

Winchester-Frederick County VA250 will host an Old Town Jubilee from noon to 9:30 p.m. in downtown Winchester, with a laser light show at 9 p.m. There also will be Virginia-made artisan vendors, live music, and a kids' zone.

But wait, there's more! You can catch a reading of the Declaration of Independence at the Shenandoah Valley Civil War Museum in Old Town Winchester, and, at 2:50 p.m., bells across the state will ring out to mark the nation's 250th. There also will be free admission all day on the Fourth of July to three Winchester museums: Abram's Delight, George Washington's Office Museum, and Stonewall Jackson's Headquarters.

More information visit, visitwinchesterva.com/virginia-american-revolution-250-commemoration.

Clarke County has its own VA250 Committee as well. Find events at: www.va250.org/clarke-county.

A drone show celebrating America's 250th anniversary will be at 9 p.m. May 30 in Winchester's Jim Barnett Park.

STAFF PHOTO

A drone show celebrating America's 250th anniversary will be at 9 p.m. May 30 in Winchester's Jim Barnett Park.

Winchester-Frederick County Historical Society

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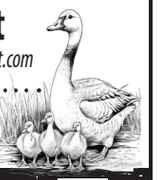

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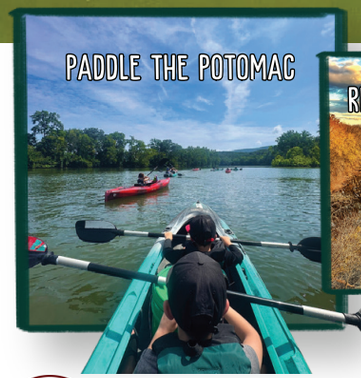







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Escape to Lavender Fields: A Summer Day Trip to Irwin Farm at Prospect Hill

BY JENNIFER LEE
SPECIAL TO DAY-TRIPPER

Looking for a day trip this summer to enjoy the warmth of the sun, buzzing bees, and the sweet floral scent of lavender? Look no further than Irwin Farm at Prospect Hill in Knoxville, Maryland – a family-run, organically-grown lavender farm.

Originally from North Carolina, the Irwins moved to Washington County 13 years ago and purchased a small eight-acre farm – they tried their hand at fruit trees, sunflowers and pumpkins, but the deer devoured everything. Through some research, owner Heather Irwin learned that deer won't touch lavender, so they planted an entire field in 2016 with more than a thousand lavender plants on one and half acres and Irwin Farm became what it is today – an idyllic lavender farm painted in fields of purple flowers.



COURTESY PHOTO

AMERICA 250 1776 2026

WASHINGTON COUNTY, MD

Red, White & Boom: Washington County Hosts 250th Celebration

To celebrate the United States of America's 250th birthday, Washington County, Maryland will be hosing a celebration at Washington County Agricultural Education Center, 7313 Sharpsburg Pike, Boonsboro, MD, 21713 to commemorate the signing of the Declaration of Independence on Saturday, July 4, from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Washington County, itself, is also celebrating their 250th year of being a vibrant community that has been a cornerstone of American History, culture and progress.

To foster a sense of connection to the local history of Washington County, the county has created a commemorative coin set. There are 10 coins in all. Each town has been hosting events throughout 2026 leading up to the July 4 celebration, but these commemorative treasure pieces can be purchased online and at the event on July 4 as a full set. A collector's box is provided to house the coins as a 250th keepsake.

The momentous celebration on July 4 will be a family-fun event with live music, a beer garden, food and drink vendors, craft vendors, kids zones, games, a car show, and exhibits, along with a live drone show and fireworks. The county has also set up an online storefront to purchase apparel for the 250th anniversary.

"Celebrating 250 years of Washington County is something we want everyone to be a part of," Danielle Weaver, the directors of public relations and marketing, said.

LEARN MORE AT WWW.WASHCO-MD.NET/ WASHINGTON-COUNTY-250TH-ANNIVERSARY



COURTESY PHOTO

Irwin Farm is set on an historic Civil War era property. The barn that still stands on the farm today was once used as hospital during the Civil War and is now used to hold the lavender bundles and occasional events.



Most days of the year, the farm is closed to visitors, but the farm holds Pick Your Own Lavender days at the end of June each year from 10 a.m.-5 p.m., so families can enjoy a day in the lavender fields.

This year's Pick Your Own Lavender days are June 27 and 28; however, the farm is hoping to add two more days for this year's event on June 20 and 21, along with some weekdays as well.

Irwin Farm also uses their own lavender to hand make all of the products sold to the public in select shops throughout Maryland, West Virginia and North Carolina. Irwin also attends local vendor markets and events throughout Washington County to sell her handmade products to the community.

Purchase of their products, such as lavender lip balm, lotion, milk bath and liquid soaps, carpet deodorizer and all sorts of sachets can be made online via the Irwin Farm website and during seasonal hours from the farm itself.

The lavender lip balm is a best-selling product from the farm and the lavender sachet pillows made with vintage linens are always the first to sell out, so grab some while they're stocked!

When guests visit the farm and relish in its beauty and sweet scent they leave changed – finding calm and peace – so why not take a part of the farm home, whether a bundle of lavender, a lovingly handmade product, a set of seasonal postcards or a print of a painting Irwin's daughter created when she was just 16.

To celebrate their 10th anniversary, Irwin Farm will be offering new products at the Pick Your Own event this year, such as candles, salves and toners. Additionally, Irwin Farm will be holding several anniversary events this year.

"Tending our lavender farm is measured in seasons, this being our 10th! It's honest work that keeps me busy (and dirty) but I'm rewarded with a beautiful field and the footsteps of visitors who return every year. It's been a blessing," Irwin said.

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND UPCOMING EVENTS FOLLOW THEM ON FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM:

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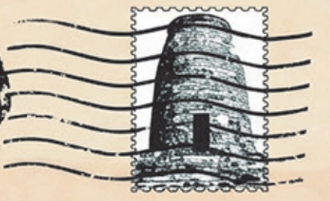

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GETTYSBURG: MAKING THE MOST OF A DAY TRIP

Just a short drive from Frederick, Gettysburg is close enough for a spontaneous outing, but a little preparation can make the experience far more rewarding.

Start early to avoid crowds and give yourself time to get oriented before heading onto the battlefield. Begin at the Gettysburg National Military Park Museum and Visitor Center to pick up maps and get a quick overview.

Allow at least three to four hours on the battlefield. Driving the auto tour is the easiest way to cover ground, but be sure to stop at key points and step out – much of the impact comes from walking the landscape. Comfortable shoes, water and sun protection are essential, especially in warmer months.

For a deeper experience, consider hiring a licensed battlefield guide. Guides ride along in your car and tailor the tour to your interests, helping make sense of what can otherwise feel overwhelming.

Take a break in town. Downtown offers plenty of options for lunch or coffee before heading back to Frederick.

Even a single day can be meaningful, but the most memorable visits are the ones that leave time to slow down.

Historic Gettysburg battlefield invites reflection on nation's past and future

BY ELLYN WEXLER
SPECIAL TO DAY-TRIPPER

Morning mist drifts across the rolling fields of Gettysburg, where rows of monuments and stone walls mark one of the most consequential landscapes in American history. Visitors move slowly along the paths, pausing to read inscriptions or gaze across ground that once thundered with cannon fire.

More than 160 years after the Battle of Gettysburg, the small Pennsylvania town still draws millions seeking to understand the nation's past and consider its future.

As the United States approaches its 250th anniversary in 2026, Gettysburg offers a place not only to explore history but also to reflect on the struggles and ideals that shaped the nation.

Fought over three days in July 1863, the battle involved more than 160,000 Union and Confederate soldiers and produced about 50,000 casualties, making it the bloodiest battle on American soil. The Union victory proved a turning point in the American Civil War and halted the Confederate army's invasion of the North.

Many begin at the Gettysburg National Military Park Museum and Visitor Center, where maps, artifacts and a short film introduce the battle. From there, the park's auto tour route winds past farm fields, wooded ridges and historic structures that witnessed the fighting's most dramatic moments.

For Frederick-area residents, Gettysburg makes an easy day trip. The town sits about 40 miles from Frederick, making it possible to explore the battlefield in a day or spend a weekend discovering the area's museums and countryside.

"Gettysburg resonates with people more than ever," said Carl Whitehill, vice president of the tourism organization Destination Gettysburg. "Gettysburg was both a symbol of our nation's greatest division and, thanks to Lincoln, a place of hope that no matter how divided we are, we can come back together again."

"America's 250th birthday is a perfect time to visit places such as Gettysburg," Whitehill said. "You cannot tell the story of America without Gettysburg."

Today, the battlefield remains the centerpiece of a visit. About 1 million people explore Gettysburg National Military Park each year, while an estimated 3 million to 3.5 million travel to the surrounding region.

Across the battlefield, markers identify the positions of Union and Confederate units, allowing people to follow the three-day battle almost step by step. At places like Little Round Top, where Union soldiers held a critical defensive position, sweeping views help explain the terrain that shaped the fighting.

Many explore the battlefield with a licensed guide who rides along in their vehicle, explaining troop movements and pointing out landmarks that might otherwise be missed. Others rent bicycles or join ranger-led walks focused on specific moments of the battle.

One of the most powerful moments comes near the end of the tour at the field where Pickett's Charge took place. The failed Confederate assault marked a turning point in the battle and, ultimately, the war.

As travelers leave the battlefield, they pass the quiet grounds of Gettysburg National Cemetery, where more than 3,500 Union soldiers are buried. "It all comes together for people," Whitehill said. "It's a very moving experience, even for those who have been here many times."

More than a century and a half after the battle, the landscape still invites people to slow down, walk the fields and consider what unfolded there. As the nation prepares to mark its 250th anniversary, Gettysburg remains a place where Americans pause to think about how the country began, struggled and continues to move forward.



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Page Valley Agricultural and Industrial Fair celebrates agriculture, community

BY LORI D'ANGELO
DAILY NEWS-RECORD

If you want to know when the 74th Page Valley Agricultural and Industrial Fair will be happening, all you have to do is go to the fair's website.

On the fair's main page, there's a countdown showing when the fair will take place, and each day, the highly anticipated yearly event grows closer.

"It's really one of the highlights of the year for our community," said Regina Hilliard, president of the Luray-Page Chamber of Commerce. "It's more than just a week-long event. It's a celebration of agricultural heritage, the people who make Page County special, the farmers, the kids working with the 4H with all of their animals, and all of the rides and the food and the folks that enter into contests."

The fair is a week-long celebration that begins on Aug. 23 and runs through Aug. 29, featuring agricultural events, music, and children's and youth exhibits.

Stephanie Breeden, vice president of the fair, said that the livestock exhibits are a highlight of the fair.

The 4H kids exhibit beef, swine, lamb and goats. There is also the commercial side of the exhibits, Breeden said.

Many people from throughout the community attend, she said.

"Each year, part of the county and the community kind of converge at the fair," Breeden said. "A lot of our nonprofit partners are at the fair. I feel like a lot of family traditions go into county fairs. This year, we have sort of two local acts as far as grandstand entertainment."

The fair's events include a 4H/FFA livestock competition, grandstand entertainment, and adult and youth exhibits.

Hilliard also said that the fair plays an important role in the local economy.

"It brings in visitors to our area, so it's supporting local businesses at the same time," she said. "Families are out there making memories with their kids, spending time together. It's a tradition. Everybody tries to fit in at least one night that they can go. A lot of people you'll see out there every night."

For many, eating fair food like deep-fried burgers is also a tradition, Hilliard said.

"I think everyone comes to the fair for something different," Breeden said. "I know the Stanley Fire Department has its fried tenderloin. The Luray Fire Department has its fried Oreos and fried ham. The Ruritans have



PHOTO BY ZACK SAM
The Page Valley Agricultural and Industrial Fair returns this August.

their chicken, so I think it's just a matter of preference and what you're looking forward to. 4H, I think they had walking tacos and things like that. Thankfully, it's a good mix, a lot of variety."

Each evening, there are various events, including concerts.

"The demolition derby is probably the most popular in my opinion," Hilliard said. "There's a huge, huge crowd. But then they bring in other things, like a rodeo, truck and tractor pulls. The fair committee that puts this together is trying each year to make it better and better."

For this year's fair, the Aug. 24 concert will feature Mountain Highway from Lynchburg. That band will perform at 7 p.m. On Aug. 25 and Aug. 26, there will be a truck-and-tractor pull at 7 p.m., and on Aug. 27, country artist Ryan Jewell of Danville will perform at 6:30 p.m. On Aug. 28, the High Steel Rodeo will perform at 7 p.m., and on Aug. 29, the fair will feature the fan-favorite demolition derby at 7 p.m.

During the night, families can also watch performances of Pirates of the Colombian Caribbean, a high-wire thrill show, but there will also be something new for families to enjoy this year, Breeden said. "We're going to have pig races at our pavilion, so that'll be different," Breeden said.

> "It's really one of the highlights of the year for our community."
>
> REGINA HILLIARD, PRESIDENT OF THE LURAY-PAGE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Each person likes different things about the fair, she said. "My thing is the nostalgia part of it and the tradition that the fair brings back every year," Breeden said.

"I think that's a unique kind of experience in a way. Yes, everybody's able to FaceTime now and see each other a lot, but still they get together at the fair every year."

For Breeden, who raised hogs and lambs, the fair is not just a community tradition but a family one.

"My grandfather was a fair board member, and my dad was a fair board member," she said. "I grew up in 4H, so I've never known anything other than the fair every year. My kids were also in 4H, and they had cattle and hogs."

"The fair is about the community," she said. "It's the community's fair, and it's for everyone."

Daily admission to the fair is $10 for adults, $5 for children ages 6 to 12, and free for children under 6. Most nights, ride bands cost $25. According to the fair website, rides operate from 6 to 10 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 6 to 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday, weather and attendance permitting.

The fair takes place at the Page Valley Fairgrounds, 15 Fairlane Dr, Luray. **For more information about the fair, see the fair website at pagevalleyfair.org.**

Page County to install four commemorative markers for VA250

Page County, named for patriot John Page, wants the impact of its VA250 celebrations to be lasting. To that end, it will install four historic markers in the county, one in Stanley, one in Shenandoah, and one in Luray, as well as a county marker at the courthouse in Luray.

The county will also hold special events to commemorate the nation's Semiquincentennial, said Rod Graves, chairman of the county's VA250 committee. Graves is also vice president of Luray Caverns.

The first marker will be installed on Friday of Memorial Day weekend in Shenandoah to commemorate religious freedom, Graves said.

"There was a lot of religious fervor in the Valley at that time, and I think some of that contributed to the Revolutionary War cause."

The installation of that marker will take place at the Town of Shenandoah Museum and Welcome Center, 507 1st St., on May 22 at 3 p.m. Light refreshments will be served.

That same weekend, a VA250 kickoff celebration will take place at Luray Caverns' Shenandoah Heritage Village. During the event on Friday and Saturday, the VA250 mobile museum will be on-site. There will also be special 18th-century reenactments and demonstrations on May 22, May 23 and May 24 at Shenandoah Heritage Village.



"We're having approximately 35 re-enactors, some continental soldiers, 18th-century period crafters," Graves said. "They'll include a tinsmith, 18th-century open hearth cooking. We'll have a gunsmith and a person that spins wool and another man that does loom work."

Eighteenth-century dancers will perform on Saturday, and Sunday will feature music by Ben Miller, Graves said.

During the weekend of July 4th, another marker, dedicated to agriculture, will be dedicated at Ed Good Park, 332 E. Main St., in Stanley during the town's annual Homecoming celebration.

Two other markers, one for the county dedicated to colonial patriots and one for Luray, dedicated to colonial industry, will be erected at later dates, Graves said.

PHOTO BY DANIEL LIN/DNR

Visitors to Luray Caverns make their way through a self-guided tour.

Agricultural Fairs a summertime staple

BY MICKEY POWELL
THE WINCHESTER STAR

Two annual agricultural fairs in the area are fast approaching.

The Frederick County Fair will be held July 27 through Aug. 1 at the fairgrounds in Clear Brook. A little over a week later, the 71st Annual Clarke County Fair will be held Aug. 9-16 at the fairgrounds just west of Berryville.

Both events are still in the planning stages. Yet they typically feature entertainment, pageants, carnival rides and food and product vendors along with livestock shows and competitions pertaining to farming/agriculture and rural lifestyles.

The Frederick County Fair's website shows the following activities are being planned: A rodeo on July 27, a monster truck competition on July 28, truck and tractor pulls July 30-31 and a demolition derby on Aug. 1.

Organizers say the fair will have a new carnival provider, Jolly Shows from Annapolis, Maryland, which will offer more rides. Also, there will be a water-focused circus, Aqua Live Spectacular.

Two opportunities will be available for those with singing or musical skills they want to showcase.

A "Rising Star" competition for children ages 5-13 is scheduled for 7 p.m. July 28. For individuals 14 and older, a "Frederick County's Got Talent" competition will be held at the same time the following day.

Both competitions will be held on the South Lawn Stage at the fairgrounds. To register, go online to frederickcountyfair.com/frederick-countys-got-talent.html and scan a QR code.

The fair is seeking agricultural groups, farmers, educators and food enthusiasts to lead hands-on demonstrations during The Daily Dirt from 5 to 6 p.m. each day of the event.

Plans are to host two to three demonstrations daily on topics such as agriculture, food, farming skills and/or homesteading projects, the website shows. Potential ones include beekeeping, baking, livestock care and gardening. For more information, call or text 540-247-6753 or send an email to ekelley8804@gmail.com.

The fair is organized by the nonprofit Frederick County Fair Association.

The Clarke County Ruritan Club organizes the fair there. Activities are still being planned, yet club President Brad Broy said fair-goers can expect many of the same things they've come to enjoy over the years.

But "we're going to mix the schedule up a little bit," Broy said, with activities being held on different days than in the past.

Pageants will still be held on Sunday and Monday nights. However, the Lawn & Garden Tractor Pull will be held after the Little Miss Clarke County pageant on Monday night. "Dirt drags" will be held Tuesday night, followed by the Atlantic Pro-Pulling Tractor Pull on Wednesday night, a demolition derby on Thursday night, a rodeo on Friday night and the Pig Scramble on Saturday night.

Musical entertainment hasn't yet been confirmed, Broy said. He mentioned, though, a cover has been installed over the grandstand at the fairgrounds to keep the sun – and any rain that might suddenly occur – off event spectators.

Go online to clarkecountyfair.org to keep up with the fair as plans progress.



PHOTO BY DANIEL LIN/DNR
Leah Stout, 17, of Winchester, washes her hogs prior to the start of the livestock sale at the Frederick County Fair.

Newtown Heritage Festival will spotlight America's 250th

AMERICA 250 1776 2026

Stephens City's Newtown Heritage Festival – an annual event held over Memorial Day weekend – is known for celebrating the Frederick County town's rich history.

This year, it's casting a wider net and going all out to commemorate America's 250th birthday.

You can kick off the holiday weekend on Friday, May 22, from 6 to 9 p.m. with live music, food, and more in Newtown Commons at 5615 Main St. On Saturday, May 23, from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., enjoy a full day of festivities, including trolley tours of various homes of people who fought in the American Revolution. Tours start at 10 a.m., 11:30 a.m., and 4 p.m. at 5408 Main St. The Daughters of the American Revolution will host a tea on the porch. Also part of the day's events: heritage demonstrations, a car and tractor show, craft vendors, live music, free activities for kids, a parade on Main Street, and a fireworks finale to close out the night.

The event schedule, with the music lineup, food trucks, vendors, and more, will be updated soon at **newtownheritagefestival.org/event-schedule**.


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OUTDOOR ESCAPES

The nearby South Branch of the Potomac River offers fishing, kayaking and quiet spots for a picnic. For a longer outing, head to Nathaniel Mountain Wildlife Management Area, where trails lead to wide views of the valley.

LOCAL FLAVORS

Area diners and bakeries serve regional staples, from country breakfasts to fresh-baked goods. Seasonal items such as apple cider often reflect the area's agricultural roots.

ARTISAN FINDS

Shops in Moorefield and surrounding communities feature handmade goods, including pottery, quilts and woodwork.

PLAN AHEAD

Most attractions keep daytime hours. Arriving early or staying overnight allows time to explore beyond the festival grounds.

Branch Mountain Bluegrass Festival invites day trippers to celebrate America 250

BY ELLYN WEXLER
SPECIAL TO DAY-TRIPPER

A quiet pasture outside Moorefield, West Virginia, comes alive each summer with banjos, fiddles and harmony singing, drawing visitors from across the region. The Branch Mountain Bluegrass Festival returns July 15-18, offering four days of music, camping and Appalachian hospitality on Powder Spring Road.

Now in its third year, the festival has gained a loyal following by blending traditional bluegrass with a relaxed, family-friendly atmosphere. Organizer Billy Keplinger and his family, drawing on decades of musical experience, bring together local, regional and national performers while maintaining a strong community feel.

The Keplingers have played bluegrass since 1980, performing at venues including the Wheeling Jamboree in Wheeling and recording multiple albums. Though they scaled back touring in the 1990s to focus on careers and family, they never stepped away from music, continuing to write, perform locally and mentor younger musicians. In recent years, that commitment has expanded to teaching lessons, hosting weekly jam sessions and creating opportunities for musicians of all ages to connect.

That dedication to passing along tradition inspired the festival itself.

"We are a family event, and we want everyone to feel comfortable, make new friends, visit with old friends, just relax and make memories." Keplinger said.

The festival unfolds under a large pole tent in a scenic pasture, transformed each year into a temporary village of campers, musicians and fans. Campers arrive days in advance, setting up chairs and instruments as the space fills with tuning strings and informal picking. Jam and lesson tents encourage spontaneous collaboration, often continuing well after the main stage goes quiet.

Music runs each afternoon into the evening, with rotating bands and breaks that let attendees browse vendors, grab a meal or join a jam circle. A family-style dinner on opening day offers an early chance for newcomers and returning guests to gather, reinforcing the welcoming tone. For many, the setting is as much a draw as the music. Children play nearby, pets are welcome, and the atmosphere is festive yet easygoing.

By evening, stage lights rise and the energy builds. Performances take on a more electric feel, with tight harmonies and fast-paced picking carrying across the hills. When the final set ends, small groups often gather around campsites for late-night sessions that stretch into the early hours.

Moments of connection between artists and audiences set the festival apart. Last year, singer-songwriter Larry Cordle – known for "Highway 40 Blues" and "Murder on Music Row"– lingered after his performance to take requests and share stories about how he wrote his songs, giving listeners a rare, personal glimpse into bluegrass music's creative process.

Attendance reached about 2,000 in 2025, and organizers expect 3,000 to 4,000 this year.

This year's lineup reflects that growth, featuring a mix of established and emerging acts, including Cordle, Dave Adkins & Mountain Soul, Lonesome River Band, Lorraine Jordan & Country Grass, Nothin' Fancy and Hammertowne. The host band, the Keplingers' bluegrass group N2PICKN, appears throughout the weekend, including collaborative sets with multiple artists on stage.

Musicians of all skill levels are encouraged to bring instruments, join jam sessions and take part in workshops designed to preserve traditional techniques. For younger attendees, the festival offers both entertainment and education, providing a hands-on introduction to a distinctly American musical form.

In recognition of the nation's 250th anniversary, organizers are adding patriotic elements throughout the weekend. "We want to bring a smile, a laugh and pride in being an American to all our guests," Keplinger said.

The event opens with the national anthem and a flag-raising ceremony, alongside antique displays, programming highlighting early American life and children's activities, with an opportunity to dress as Uncle Sam. As the United States approaches its 250th anniversary, the festival highlights how deeply American musical traditions remain tied to gathering, storytelling and shared experience. Bluegrass, rooted in Appalachian communities, continues to serve as a bridge between generations, connecting past and present through song.

For the Keplingers, that connection remains at the heart of the event. Through performance, teaching and the festival itself, they continue to create a space where tradition is not only preserved but lived, one song, one lesson and one gathering at a time.



For more information and tickets, call 304-257-3378 or visit westvirginiasbranchmountainbluegrassfestival.com.



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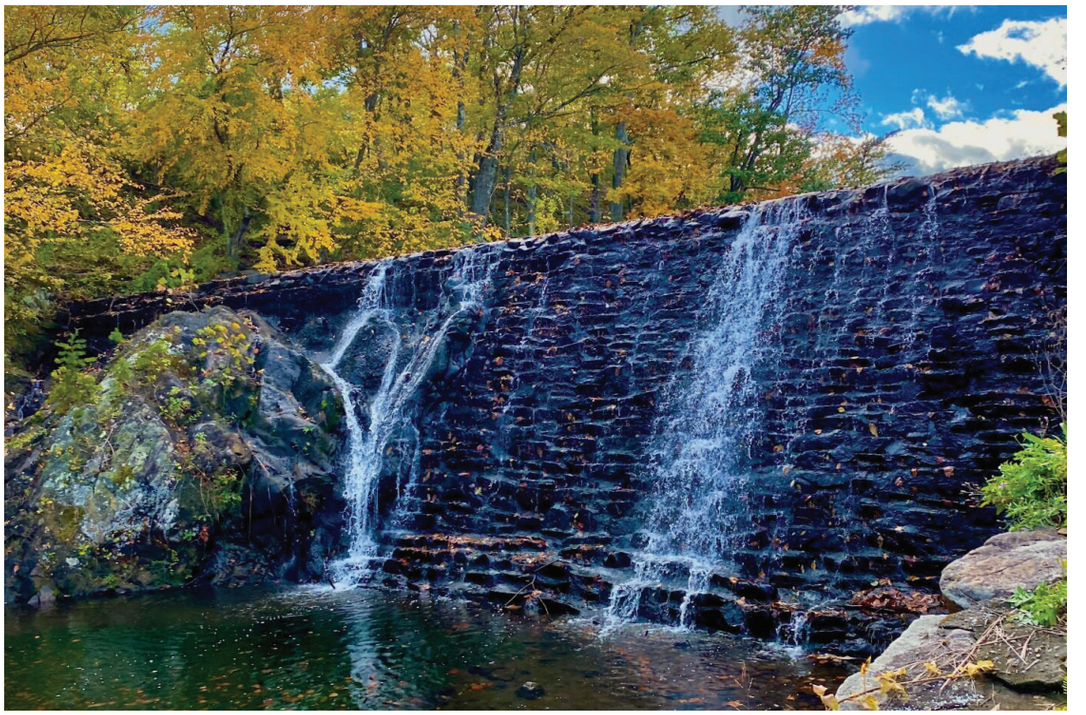
Enjoy the outdoors at the growing Cacapon State Park

BY TOM MARKLAND
TMARKLAND@JOURNAL-NEWS.NET

Tucked into the mountains of Morgan County, Cacapon State Park has long served as a cornerstone of outdoor recreation in the Eastern Panhandle, offering visitors a mix of natural beauty, modern amenities and year-round activities that continue to draw both locals and tourists.

Established in 1936 during the Great Depression as part of a broader effort to create jobs and expand public lands, the park spans more than 6,000 acres of forest, rolling hills and scenic overlooks. Today, it stands as one of the region's most visited destinations, balancing its historic roots with recent investments aimed at improving accessibility and expanding its appeal.

At the center of the park's offerings is Cacapon Lodge, a modern facility that reopened in 2021 after a $41 million renovation and expansion project. The lodge features dozens of guest rooms, conference space and a restaurant overlooking the surrounding mountains, positioning the park as both a leisure destination and a venue for events and business retreats.



COURTESY PHOTO
The spillway at Cacapon Resort State Park can be a lovely place to take in fall colors.

Outdoor recreation remains the park's primary draw. More than 20 miles of hiking trails wind through the property, ranging from beginner-friendly paths to more challenging climbs. Among the most popular is the Cacapon Mountain Overlook trail, which leads to a panoramic view of the surrounding valleys and ridgelines.

In addition to hiking, the park offers mountain biking, fishing and boating opportunities. Cacapon Lake, a 6-acre body of water, is frequently used for paddle sports and catch-and-release fishing, particularly during the warmer months.

Cacapon Resort State Park is also home to its own "Almost Heaven" swing, part of the state's popular swing trail that encourages visitors to explore scenic locations across the Mountain State. Perched at a high-elevation overlook, the wooden swing offers sweeping views of the surrounding mountains and valleys, making it a frequent stop for visitors looking for a good photo.

A $3.5 million trail expansion will add 35 miles of professionally designed mountain biking trails to the park's existing 25-mile system. Once completed, the project will more than double the available trail mileage and position Cacapon as a major destination for mountain biking in the Mid-Atlantic. Construction is already underway, with the first phase completed in 2025 and the full project slated for completion in 2026. The expansion is designed to accommodate riders of all skill levels, from beginner-friendly

> "The park spans more than 6,000 acres of forest, rolling hills and scenic overlooks."

WVSTATEPARKS.COM/PARKS/CACAPON-RESORT-STATE-PARK

paths and youth-focused features to advanced trails aimed at experienced cyclists.

The trail expansion builds on recent recognition for the park's outdoor infrastructure. Cacapon was awarded the 2023 Coalition for Recreational Trails Award for Trail Construction and Design, helping secure additional funding through partnerships with organizations such as the International Mountain Bicycling Association and the Morgan County Commission.

Golf has also become a major attraction. The park's 18-hole championship golf course, originally designed in the 1970s, underwent renovations in recent years to modernize the layout and improve playing conditions. The course now attracts players from across the Mid-Atlantic region, contributing to the park's growing reputation as a golf destination.

In addition to its recreational offerings, the park hosts educational programs and community events throughout the year. Nature walks, interpretive programs and youth camps are regularly scheduled, providing opportunities for visitors to learn about the region's ecology and history.

Efforts have also been made to improve accessibility and inclusivity. Park officials have expanded ADA-compliant facilities and continue to evaluate ways to make trails and amenities more accessible to visitors of all abilities.

Cacapon's growing reputation has also made it a host site for large-scale events. In August, the park welcomed the International Bowhunting Organization World Championship for the third consecutive year, drawing more than 3,000 competitors, coaches and spectators from around the world.

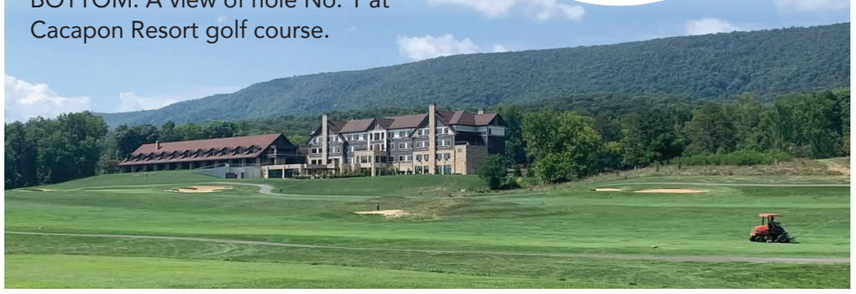
Environmental stewardship remains a priority as well. The park operates under guidelines aimed at preserving its natural resources while accommodating increased use. This includes habitat protection efforts, water quality monitoring and sustainable maintenance practices.

Despite its growth and modernization, Cacapon State Park has retained much of the character that has defined it for decades. Visitors still find quiet stretches of forest, scenic overlooks and a sense of seclusion that can be difficult to find elsewhere in the region.

Looking ahead, state officials have indicated continued interest in investing in West Virginia's park system, with Cacapon expected to remain a focal point. Future improvements may include additional trail development, expanded programming and further upgrades to existing facilities.

As interest in outdoor recreation shows no signs of slowing, Cacapon State Park appears well positioned to meet growing demand while maintaining the natural and cultural qualities that have made it a staple of the Eastern Panhandle for nearly a century.





COURTESY PHOTOS

CIRCLE: Trenton Asbury (Putnam County Pedalers Composite) races through the course of Rock and Roll at Cacapon on Sunday afternoon. BOTTOM: A view of hole No. 1 at Cacapon Resort golf course.

Town of Bath celebrates 250 years along with national 250th

BERKELEY SPRINGS – As Cacapon Resort State Park continues to expand its footprint in Morgan County, nearby Town of Bath is marking a milestone of its own.

In 2026, the Town of Bath is celebrating its 250th anniversary, along with the United States' own 250th, commemorating its founding in 1776 and its long-standing identity as a spa town.

Mayor Greg Schene recently announced that the town received an official proclamation from West Virginia Gov. Patrick Morrisey recognizing Bath as "America's First Spa Town," a designation local leaders say reflects centuries of history and cultural significance.

"This is more than a title on paper – it is a declaration of 250 years of history, resilience, and enduring community spirit," Schene said in a statement.

The town's origins are closely tied to its mineral springs, which flow at a constant 74.3 degrees and have attracted visitors for generations. Even before the town's formal establishment, the area drew attention from prominent figures including George Washington, who visited in 1748.

Since then, Bath has developed into a hub for relaxation and tourism, hosting attractions such as the Berkeley Springs Water Works and the internationally recognized Berkeley Springs International Water Tasting.

Anniversary celebrations, emphasize both preservation and progress, with town officials focusing on infrastructure improvements and efforts to enhance walkability and support local businesses.

"Our goal is not just to maintain our town, but to elevate a national treasure," Schene said.

Schene says the milestone offers an opportunity to honor Bath's past while reinforcing its role as a key driver of tourism in the Eastern Panhandle.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Shenandoah County, VIRGINIA

Celebrate summer under the stars at Shenandoah Valley Music Festival

BY ASHLEY MILLER
THE NORTHERN VIRGINIA DAILY

A mix of classic sounds, crowd favorites and a few long-awaited bookings will take center stage this summer at the Shenandoah Valley Music Festival beginning in July with "a little something for everybody" including The Four Tops, the Bacon Brothers and a special 250th Big Birthday Bash.

"We have a lot of really popular things going on this summer – some classic rock, classic country, and whatever you want to call the Bacon Brothers," said SVMF Executive Director Dennis Lynch.

"We set our sights on some bands," he said. "We wanted to get early on, and we ended up getting most of them. We're real pleased with that."

Every summer, the SVMF presents a series of concerts on the grounds of the former Orkney Springs Hotel, now used by the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia as its Shrine Mont retreat center. Since the festival's inception in 1963, thousands of people have sat under the stars at the base of Great North Mountain to enjoy a wide variety of musical genres including classical, big band, bluegrass and pop rock.

The pavilion can hold 580 guests and the lawn can hold hundreds more.



COURTESY PHOTOS

Diamond Rio's hit songs include "Meet Me in the Middle" and "One More Day." They will perform July 24.

FULL SCHEDULE

July 17: Little River Band

July 18: The Four Tops
Lawn tickets: $77. Pavilion tickets: $82.

July 24: Diamond Rio, with special guest Voth

July 25: "A Big Band Birthday" celebrating America's 250th with LSO

Aug. 7: Original Beach Boy Al Jardine & The Pet Sounds Band

Aug. 8: The Bacon Brothers

Sept. 5: Hotel California: The Original Eagles Tribute.

Sept. 6: Hot Strings & Cool Breezes Americana Minifest with Michael Cleveland & Jason Carter, Josh Martin & Jenee Fleenor of the Wood Box Heroes

FOR SHOWTIMES, TICKETS AND TO LEARN MORE ABOUT SVMF, VISIT: MUSICFEST.ORG

One standout addition to the concert lineup ties into this year's 250th celebration of America's founding. "We'll be doing our big band birthday party with the Lynchburg Symphony Orchestra," Lynch said. "It seems like the 250th celebration, well, as it should be, is getting a lot of attention, so we're going to be part of that."

Planning is still underway for the big bash, but Lynch said it will be memorable for all attendees.

Some bookings, Lynch noted, have been years in the making.

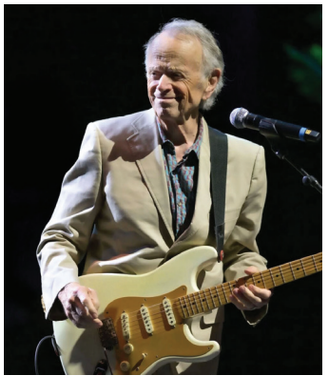
"We had looked into Little River Band in the past and never could work out a date," he said.

Others were easier to secure, including the rescheduling of the Bacon Brothers, who canceled last year but quickly rescheduled.

When asked about must-see acts, one rose to the top for Lynch.

"One band that I'm really looking forward to – [original Beach Boy] Al Jardine and the Pet





COURTESY PHOTOS

LEFT: The Bacon Brothers. Kevin Bacon, right, is a popular Hollywood actor appearing is such films as "Footloose," "A Few Good Men" and "Apollo 13." Michael Bacon is an Emmy-winning composer. RIGHT: Al Jardine, one of the original Beach Boys, will perform with The Pet Sounds Band. BOTTOM: The Four Tops.

Sounds Band," he said, noting the show will celebrate the legacy of the Beach Boy's Brian Wilson. "All this music is going to be familiar to anybody in America, everybody in America."

Fan feedback continues to shape the summer lineup as well.

"We survey our audience and Motown is like way up there," he said. "They like classic rock first, Motown and classic country are generally kind of neck and neck."

Added Lynch: "We don't really go for one central vibe. We kind of pride ourselves on having something, a little something for everybody."

And if all goes according to plan, it will be yet another memorable season under the stars, if the weather cooperates.

Since 1963, Shenandoah Valley Music Festival has brought live music to the Valley. The nonprofit is supported by Shenandoah County Tourism, the Town of Mount Jackson, private sponsors and donors, as well as grants from the Virginia Tourism Corporation, Virginia Commission for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts.

The venue is located at 217 Shrine Mont Circle, Orkney Springs, VA, 22845. Parking is free. Food and ice cream may be purchased on site, but attendees are welcome to bring their own food and drinks, including alcohol.

> "All this music is going to be familiar to anybody in America, everybody in America."
>
> DENNIS LYNCH, SHENANDOAH VALLEY MUSIC FESTIVAL EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Shenandoah County to step back in time with Celebrates 1776 event

AMERICA 250 1776 2026

To celebrate the nation's 250th birthday, the Shenandoah County Historical Society will present Shenandoah County Celebrates 1776, which will bring the sights, sounds and spirit of the American Revolution to downtown Woodstock.

Slated for June 20 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., the event will feature historical lectures, reenactors, artisans and interactive programming focused on the Revolutionary War era including music and dance by Sala de Estar, Ian MacDougall, Heart Strings, Shen Rio and Tom Mack.

Organizers say it's "a once in a generation event."

The opening ceremony at 10 a.m. will include special guests Fred, Nick and Steve Hufford, descendants of the sculptor who created the John Peter Gabriel Muhlenberg bust that stands in front of the historic courthouse.

Speakers and authors include Michael Cecere, Jeff Evans, Gabe Neville, Dr. Emily Sneff, John Settle, Lisa Minardi and Brett Walker.

Family and children's activities including face painting, scavenger hunts and 18th century drumming.

There will also be weaving and basketry demonstrations, a traditional gunsmith as well as encampments, children's programs and a public mosaic.

The historic Shenandoah County Courthouse at 103 N. Main St. along with the Woodstock Museum at 104 S. Muhlenberg St. and the Wickham House at 124 W. Court St. will be open for the day's festivities.

Organizers said they hope to attract all ages, especially youth hoping to encourage a deeper understanding of the nation's founding and its enduring legacy.

A full schedule and list of participants may be found at: sc250.shenandoahhistory.org

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Bridgewater Lawn Party returns for 88th year

BY LORI D'ANGELO
DAILY NEWS-RECORD

In the Shenandoah Valley, summer is a time for fairs, fireworks and lawn parties. And one of the most anticipated lawn parties of the season is the Bridgewater Lawn Party, which will take place this July for the 88th time.

Joshua Shank, chief of the Bridgewater Volunteer Fire Department and Bridgewater Lawn Party chair, took over organizing the lawn party in 2018 after its previous organizers, Charlie Craun and Doug Martin, asked someone to step up. Shank and Shawn Rhodes now serve as co-chairs. Charlie Craun passed away in 2023, but his widow, Vicki Craun, continues to help out with the lawn party.

The lawn party, which is the fundraiser that got Bridgewater's Volunteer Fire Department started, is older than the fire department itself, Shank said. It has weathered many changes over time, including the country's two world wars.

People come from all around the area and beyond to attend, Shank said.

"We have people who travel three to four hours to come to the event," Shank said. "We have people who travel up and down the East Coast to bring things to do. We have people as far away as Tennessee and North Carolina scheduled their summer vacation, so they can be in Bridgewater and come to the steam gas show."

Shank said that the steam and gas show, which takes place all four nights and consists of "decades of history, older equipment, and a different way of life," is part of what makes the lawn party so successful.

The lawn party is a major undertaking, Shank said. About 50 volunteers help to plan the event.

Dan Rhodes, a member of the steam and gas group, is one of the volunteers who helps to get the lawn party grounds ready.

"We take care of the mowing all year long," Rhodes said.

Rhodes' history with the lawn party goes back decades. "My Dad and I were exhibitors [in the steam and gas show]," Rhodes said. "We had gas engines back in the 1970s."

Rhodes said that the biggest night of the lawn party is usually Thursday night with the tractor pull.

This year, Jack and Davis Reid, grandsons of Staunton's famous quartet The Statler Brothers, will return to perform at the lawn party that night.

In addition to the rides and other events, another draw is the lawn party's food, prepared by volunteers. "My favorite food is probably the fried country ham," Rhodes said. Shank said that another popular item is the fried chicken.

One of Shank's favorite events is the Thursday afternoon tractor pull. He likes how it pays tribute to members of the fire company and those who have helped with the lawn party in the past.

"At the very start of the tractor pull, we have a very small ceremony and acknowledge those that have passed in the last year and sound the whistle," Shank said.

The lawn party is a major fundraiser for the fire department, raising between a quarter and a third of its budget, Shank said.



PHOTO BY DANIEL LIN/DN-R
Entrants in the tractor show drive through the Bridgewater Lawn Party in July of 2025.



PHOTO BY DANIEL LIN/DN-R

TOP: Attendees at last year's Bridgewater Lawn Party line up for fried chicken. BELOW: Chase Christian, of Harrisonburg, makes a run in the pedal tractor pull at the Bridgewater Lawn Party last year.



"Everybody should come to the lawn party," Shank said. "You get to see history from the last 80 years, if not more, and you get great food and support a great cause."

The lawn party offers something for both adults and children, Rhodes said.

"It's a family event," Rhodes said. "We've got rides for the kids, eats for the parents. People really enjoy looking around the gas/steam engines."

Rhodes added that the community is what makes the event a success.

"The community really comes together to support this, and the fire company couldn't do it without the community support," he said.

The lawn party is a major undertaking, and takes about 50 volunteers help to plan the event.

This year's lawn party will be held from July 15th to July 18th. Each day features different events and attractions. For example, veterans can eat for free on Wednesday with an ID. On Wednesday and Thursday, kids can ride all night with an armband. And Friday is the annual Fireman's Parade.

A list of entertainers, as well as directions to the lawn party, can be found on the Bridgewater Volunteer Fire Company's website, bridgewaterfire.com, by clicking on lawn party. Information about the lawn party can also be found on the Bridgewater Volunteer Fire Company's Facebook page.

AMERICA 250 1776 2026

Virginia Quilt Museum to showcase state history during VA250 exhibit

DAYTON, Va. – The Virginia Quilt Museum will celebrate the nation's 250th anniversary in a big way, with 250 small quilts.

The museum's special 250th anniversary exhibit will open on the Fourth of July and remain on display through Dec. 22.

"It is 250 small quilts about Virginia history," said Alicia Thomas, executive director of the quilt museum.

The 20-by-20 quilts were stitched by 136 quilters from across the country, Thomas said.

The quilts had to be people, places, things or ideas related to Virginia, Thomas said.

The quilt themes include people such as Virginia presidents and Patsy Cline, as well as nature scenes like the Peaks of Otter, Thomas said. Some other quilts feature sites of interest such as the 9/11 Pentagon Memorial, the Blue Ridge Tunnel, Natural Bridge, Luray Caverns, Smith Mountain Lake, and the Roanoke Star.

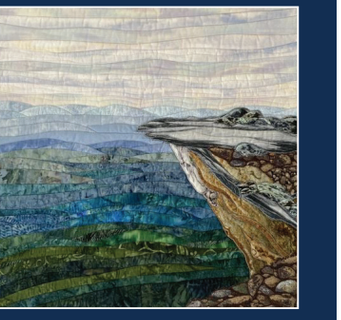
The quilt museum has also published a special hardcover book, with the same name as the exhibit, to commemorate it, called "Stitching Together History: 250 Quilts Commemorating the Commonwealth of Virginia."

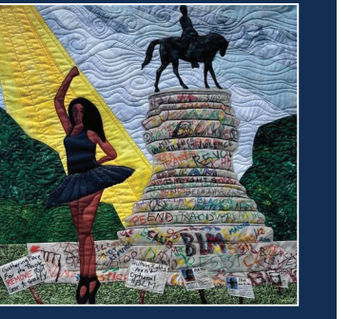
The book is available for purchase on the Virginia Quilt Museum's website for $36.84.

"We've been working on this project since 2023," Thomas said. "I'm thrilled about how it turned out. I'm excited to see them all up and see this exhibit come together."

The exhibit will be open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Saturday, from July 4 to Dec. 22. The Virginia Quilt Museum is located at Silver Lake Mill, 2328 Silver Lake Road, Dayton.







COURTESY PHOTOS

TOP: Ticked Off by Lisa Arthaud of Warrenton. MIDDLE: McAfee Knob by Barbara Brummond of Forest. BOTTOM: Dancing for Change by Polly Davis of Warrenton. All are samples of quilts featured Virginia Quilt Museum's VA250 exhibit.

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Annual county fair offers a full slate of family fun

BY LAURA RUBY
THE NORTHERN VIRGINIA DAILY

Amid the livestock shows, the music, and the games; alongside the carnival rides and competitions, the Warren County Fair brings families together.



STAFF PHOTO
ABOVE: A child rides the dune buggies at the Warren County Fairgrounds during Sensory Friendly Day. BELOW: Teens ride the Round Up at the Warren County Fair in the night skies.

Slated for July 27 through Aug. 1 at the fairgrounds just north of Front Royal along U.S. 522, the nearly 70-year-old affair has a little something for everyone – and a knack for bringing loved ones together for some quality time.

"There's truly something at our fair for children of all ages," said longtime fair board member Kandi Lamb, who not only participated in the fair as a kid, but supported her own children through their experiences at the annual event.

All week long, fair-goers can enjoy fast rides, free play, visit with animals, take in a wide variety of shows – from motor sports to rodeos and singing competitions – and eat until their bellies are content.

"I love our fair because it keeps the focus where it belongs – on our community. From the 4-H and FFA kids to pageant participants, to families making memories together, it's a place where everyone feels connected," Lamb said.

Lamb noted that several livestock events throughout the week offer an opportunity for local kids to show their animals, demonstrating the hard work they put into raising them over the summer.

Fair manager Robbin Lloyd concurs that family comes first at the fair.



AMERICA 250 1776 2026

WARREN COUNTY, VA

The Shenandoah River played a vital role in Warren County's history.

BY LAURA RUBY
THE NORTHERN VIRGINIA DAILY

Today, it remains an important feature for locals and visitors alike as Front Royal, the county seat, leans into its designation as the Canoe Capital of Virginia.

The Warren County Tourism Committee will dive deeper into that history with its Freedom Flows Festival, the second in a series of 250th anniversary events planned for the locality.

Set for Saturday, May 30, the event will be held along the river at Eastham Park, said Deputy County Administrator Jane Meadows.

"It is very much kid-focused and it's really kind of tying in the relationship of the Shenandoah River to the development and the growth of this area," said Meadows, noting that the festival will include "spending some time talking about how the river really helped with transportation and commerce."

The festival will feature games, food trucks and vendors. Participants will have an opportunity to create gondolas out of cardboard and float them down the river.

"We'll also have a little bit of a patriotic duck race," Meadows said.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT VA250.ORG/WARREN-COUNTY

"For me, the fair is about the people and the moments," said Lloyd. "It's watching kids play in the corn pit, seeing adults laugh as they try their hand at the mechanical bull, or noticing an older couple quietly enjoying an ice cream cone together."

Along with a headliner event or activity for each day, the fair will host nightly magic and comedy hypnosis shows, as well as a strolling mythical creatures act.

"The nightly shows are going to be brand new and super fun," Lamb said.

Monday night's festivities include an opening ceremony at 5:30 p.m., followed by a demolition derby at 7 p.m. ATV races are set for Tuesday night at 7 p.m.

Fair organizers will welcome back the wildly popular Bullride Mania Rodeo for the third year in a row on Wednesday evening.

"The rodeo has been very popular with people of all ages. We have received nothing but positivity for bringing it to Warren County," Lamb added.

Local singers will compete in the karaoke playoffs, also set for Wednesday night. Competitors must earn a spot in the contest by winning at a Front Royal bar or restaurant.

On Thursday night, the Marshall Tucker Band will take the stage after an opening performance by The Roadducks. Tickets are still available for the show, which starts at 7 p.m.
The annual Truck and Tractor Pull is set for Friday at 7 p.m. with Saturday's Monster Truck Show also scheduled for 7 p.m.

> "I love our fair because it keeps the focus where it belongs – on our community.
>
> KANDI LAMB
> FAIR BOARD MEMBER

The fair is open for daytime hours a couple of days each year to host special populations, including individuals with sensory processing issues, daycares and seniors.

"One of my favorite events is Senior Day," noted Lloyd. "It is incredibly meaningful to watch the faces of the individuals who may not get out often to come to the fair, pet animals, enjoy music, and simply have a fun time. My own mother, who is disabled, attends each year, and just seeing the joy in her eyes reminds me why this matters so much."

Fun contests throughout the week allow a wide variety of fair-goers to participate in everything from pie eating to judgement on their beards, mustaches, mullets and/or farmers' tans.

Lloyd lauded the many volunteers who work long hours leading up to the fair and during fair week to make it special for guests.

"It takes a dedicated team of volunteers and a supportive community to make it happen year after year. They all share the same passion, and each one brings something to the table along with hours and hours of time throughout the year to put on this spectacular event for our community to come out and enjoy," said Lloyd. "They are the true heart of the fair, and this story really belongs to them."

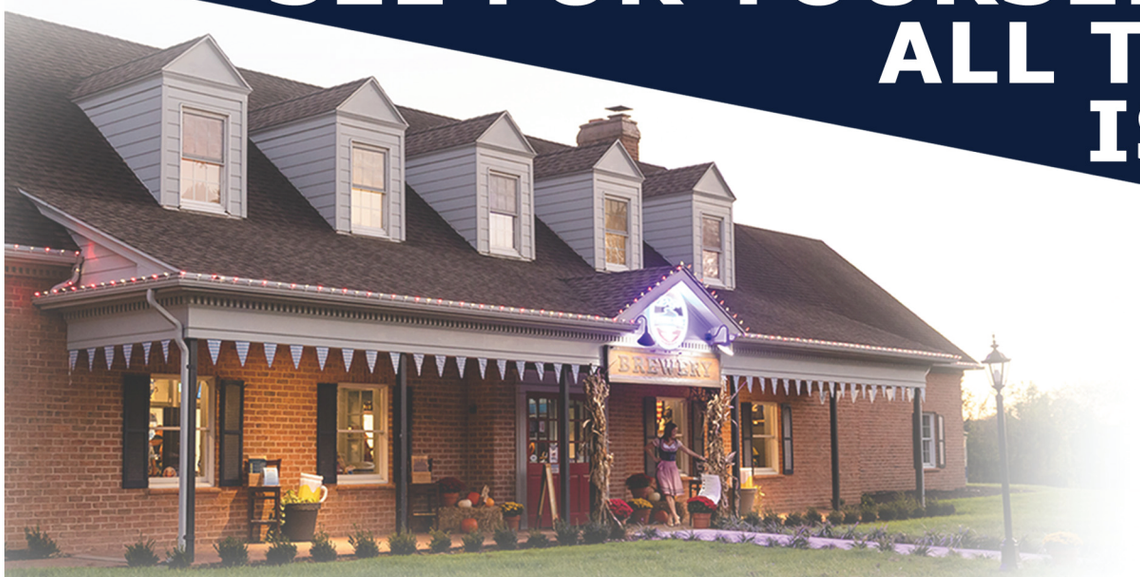
Added Lamb, "The fair isn't just an event for our family – it's been a lifelong tradition, filled with growth, learning, and community."

For a schedule of events and ticket information, visit www.warrencountyfair.com.



STAFF PHOTO
Adrian Stackhouse looks for a safe landing as he goes down during the professional bull riding competition during the Warren County Fair.

SEE FOR YOURSELF WHAT ALL THE TALK IS ABOUT!



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COOLFONT

Coolfont Resort is nestled in a picturesque, hidden valley of wooded acres between Cacapon Mountain and Warm Springs Ridge in Morgan County, West Virginia. It's often described as a little slice of heaven on Earth and is an excellent location for memorable events.

Guests can relax in the New Treetop Lodge's rustic yet modern atmosphere. Overnight visitors enjoy tranquil, clean lodging in our spacious suites in the secluded Woodland House or the cozy A-frame cabins tucked away on the ridge. Both locals and guests will appreciate the New Treetop Restaurant & Lounge, which serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner, along with a bar and outdoor dining on the Treetop Deck overlooking Lake Siri. The resort also offers numerous amenities such as our indoor Swim & Fitness Center with a heated pool, beautiful event and conference spaces, hiking trails, and a 12-acre lake. Coolfont provides year-round fun, making it perfect for a getaway or day trip.

About Coolfont Resort

- Spacious King Suites with fireplaces, private balconies and some with in-room jacuzzi tubs
- A-Frame Cabins – 1 to 4 bedrooms
- Group rates • Dining available 7 days a week
- Fitness Center • Hiking Trails
- Gift Shops • Lakeside Pavilion
- Indoor heated pool
- RV and tent camping – Coming Soon
- Onsite spa services available
- Seasonal outdoor activities, including volleyball, basketball, pickleball, tennis, cornhole, shuffleboard, horseshoes and more!
- Live Music - Check our website









Treetop Restaurant & Lounge

Restaurant Hours: Sun. - Thurs. 8 a.m. - 8 p.m.; Fri. - Sat. 8 a.m. - 9 p.m.

@coolfontresortofficial @coolfont

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