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Hospitality and serendipity

IN BERKELEY SPRINGS, WEST VIRGINIA

FEATURE & PHOTOS BY ERIN JONES
SPECIAL TO DAY-TRIPPER

After a whirlwind week of deadlines, video calls, late nights and early mornings, I headed into the mountains of West Virginia, hoping to restore my weary bones by soaking them in natural spring baths.

Before long, I saw the sign: Welcome to Berkeley Springs.

I had visited Berkeley Springs only once, a brief afternoon. Like countless visitors before me, I sat with friends, our feet in the mineral waters in the park in the center of town, and snapped a photo at the place where George Washington once bathed. We wandered in and out of shops and marveled at the majestic Berkeley Springs castle on the hillside, built in the late 1900s as a romantic gesture to win the hand of a young bride.



“
Berkeley Springs
is truly a place of
kindness, inclusion
and hospitality.”

ERIN JONES ON HER EXPERIENCE STAYING IN
BERKELEY SPRINGS, WEST VIRGINIA



THE GRAND CASTALIAN INN



OLD ROMAN BATH HOUSE



THE GRAND CASTALIAN INN
BED & BREAKFAST

But as summer ripened, I returned for a longer stay, feeling a real need for its restorative waters. After just a few days, I would learn how deeply the healing waters of Berkeley Springs run — and also discover the town holds magic of another kind.

While many people's welcome mat to Berkeley Springs is its restored train depot Welcome Center, mine was the historic, welcoming arms of the Country Inn of Berkeley Springs. The property itself has a hospitable history nearly as old as the nation itself. A lodging house once on the property hosted George Washington in 1784, and then the Berkeley Springs Hotel hosted President James K. Polk in 1848. The current establishment, the Country Inn of Berkeley Springs, has been extending the land's historic hospitality since the 1930s.

After dining on a delectable shrimp wrap lunch, my first item of business was a soak at the Old Roman Bath House. I entered a small private room and stepped into a large tub filled with the same mineral-rich water that flows from the springs at 74 degrees — but heated until steamy. I took a moment to adjust to the stillness.

The springs represent such profound natural abundance, I thought, and later at the history museum above the bathhouse, I would learn how deeply that was true. Thousands of years before George Washington was born, many first nations tribes viewed the waters as sacred. They didn't claim the land as belonging to any of them, but shamans would bring their sick to the water.

After checking in at The Grand Castalian Inn Bed and Breakfast, I headed to Ravenwood Pub for dinner and to meet Dusty Martin, the executive director of Travel Berkeley Springs, to learn more about the area. Ravenwood was so close that I decided to walk there, a perk of having a home base and a sense of belonging in the neighborhood.

Entering the small restaurant, I sat at one of only three tables. Dusty would later remark that by the end of the evening, it felt like we were all sitting around one table. His observation precisely described the atmosphere.

The couple to the right of us had been married at the restaurant earlier, and they sat with their officiant and newly minted marriage

license on the table. At the other table, I recognized someone from Panhandle Apothecary, where I'd stopped earlier for an iced maple-bourbon latte. A small-town feel already.

Presiding over all of this was Regina AaMacha, who poured the wine, explained the truly decadent pairing of cheeses, took our orders, cooked and served the food — and, while we dined, pulled out a guitar and sang for us. The posters and photos adorning the shop reflect her decades as a touring musician. She now owns four businesses in the town.

Dusty told me the word "Cacapon," which I recognized from the Cacapon River and Cacapon Resort State Park, means healing or medicine waters. The waters possess not only physical healing but interpersonal healing, he said.

According to local lore, the region survived the French and Indian War and the Revolutionary War with no major battles. Even when Stonewall Jackson's forces briefly occupied the town during the Civil War, local stories tell of Union and Confederate soldiers washing their feet in the springs side by side.

Already in one short afternoon, I saw the warmth and connectedness of the town, recognizing faces and finding strange and inexplicable moments of synchronicity. I walked into a room full of strangers and spent an evening in laughter, decadence and community. Regina showed us with a laugh how she'd saved the newlyweds' number in her phone as "Lucy and Ted always give them a table." We took their wedding photos between courses.



RAVENWOOD
PUB

Community in Action

The Grand Castalian Inn is a broad-porch beauty of a bed and breakfast, a rich seafoam shade of green, brightly decked in bunting. My room was the Lady Rosa Suite, just off the main entrance, and entering felt like stepping into a fairy tale. An electronic fireplace crackled, a massive four-poster bed held a unicorn tapestry pillow, and other decor touches set the scene. I felt a twinge of comforting familiarity.

In college and graduate school, I studied medieval literature and later, as a teacher, taught an interdisciplinary humanities curriculum that included medieval manuscripts, tapestries and art. I felt like the embers of a forgotten part of myself flickered to life as I settled in for the night.

Breakfast the next morning was served across the hall. In addition to a selection of pastries, fruit and a truly addictive sourdough bread, owners Bob and Nickole Harris

prepare a variety of hot breakfast offerings. I learned about their careful restoration of the inn and desire for guests to feel at home here, encouraging the use of the dining room and the front porch. I can attest to the feeling of being at home.

Later that day, I explored Cacapon Resort State Park (well, first its Prospects Restaurant, for a delightful crab soup). The park was constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps, a New Deal work relief program, and officially opened in 1937. While the park has been updated to include modern resort amenities, historic buildings and legacy cabins are still in use today.

Park Ranger Isaac Lewis took me on a driving tour, from the beach around the lake where people were swimming and up the winding gravel road to a breathtaking view that overlooks four states. Pennsylvania's distant peaks were just visible against a mountainous skyline that stretched from Maryland, Virginia and, of course, West Virginia.

Once again, the abundance of the natural world loomed large, but what's even more beautiful is that the state park exists both to protect the beauty and to share it. While there are certainly luxurious spa treatments, upscale cuisine and a golf course for those who want a little pampering, the richness of the land itself is not gate-kept. Mountain bike trails wind throughout the property, and swimming all afternoon costs only a modest fee.

I thought once again about the Shawnee meaning of "Cacapon," a reflection of the ancient wisdom sprinkled throughout the region, a power for good meant to be shared, not hoarded.

That evening, I wanted to usher in the weekend by spending some time in the vibrant downtown.



FRIDAY NIGHT CONCERT AT MAC ICE HOUSE IN DOWNTOWN BERKELEY SPRINGS

I took in a Friday night concert at Morgan Arts Council's Ice House first, where the lawn was packed with lawn chairs and picnic blankets, along with food vendors and children playing. And there was dancing — couples in pairs swinging, solo dancers moving to the music and children twirling.

A creek borders the edge of the property, and just on the other side is Creekside Provisions and Supplies, a fun and eclectic deli, gift shop and supply store (perfect for gearing up for an outdoor adventure). Creekside was selling pizza at the concert, and I spotted owner Jeff DuVal across the creek. He had cleverly rigged up a pulley system and was coordinating with family to hoist freshly baked pizzas over the creek and onto the lawn to be sold and enjoyed during the concert.

The MAC Ice House itself once served to keep apples cool but now incubates the local arts

scene. The Ice House Artist's Co-op market on the first floor appears like a gallery on display, but all the treasures created by local artisans are available for purchase. The building holds trace echoes of its industrial history but has been transformed by pure imagination. One space serves as an art studio, a black box theater, a classroom, a yoga studio and whatever else is needed.

I met MAC President Carly Swaim during the concert, and we discovered we grew up just minutes from each other in a Maryland town so small, I usually mention the next town over as a reference point. I was shocked at the coincidence, but Carly just laughed. "That's Berkeley Springs!" she said.

She was right. The connections I discovered over the course of the weekend were far too numerous to be coincidental.

For dinner, I headed to Lot 12 Public House, named for the precise lot the property was on

DID YOU KNOW?

The word 'Cacapon' from the Cacapon River and Cacapon Resort State Park, means healing or medicine waters.

CACAPON RESORT STATE PARK

when the charter for the Town of Bath was laid out in 1776. It's situated on a hillside not far from the Castalian Inn.

We were greeted by owner Betsy Heath. She and her husband, chef Damian Heath, a James Beard Award semifinalist from 2008 to 2017, opened the restaurant in 1999. In the elegant dining room, the walls are adorned with work by local artists, including Damian's own parents.

The restaurant has a multi-course prix fixe menu, and after a difficult deliberation, I started with one of my longtime favorites, prosciutto and burrata. Between the two courses, a coconut sorbet served as a palate cleanser. For the main course, I got a lobster tail with one of the most delicious preparations of corn I have ever experienced in a relish. The meal finished with a truly decadent chocolate pot de creme.

Betsy came over and chatted to explain the ingredients are locally sourced, and they know each of the farmers and suppliers. Their menu changes seasonally, a model that was yet another reminder that the Earth's abundance is shared among community here.

Meeting the Mayor

The next morning, I met with the mayor of Bath (the official name of Berkeley Springs) and his wife, Greg and Claire Schene, after they learned I'd be writing a story about the area. Impeccably outfitted, complete with fedora and chic sun hat respectively, the Schenes embody the warmth and creativity I encountered time and time again in this small town. The lifelong entrepreneurs told me about their experience moving to Berkeley Springs five years ago from Maryland and opening Mendenhall 1884 Inn Bed & Breakfast, as well as their other businesses.

Claire is the creator of the Tiny Shoppe Village Carriage House Boutiques, brightly colored, individual storefronts for businesses ranging from macarons to succulents. Located behind the coffee shop, the strip has a fairy-tale quality about it.

They explained the town of Bath is the heart of the greater Berkeley Springs area. It was named

for the town of Bath, England, which is also known for its therapeutic baths. They visited the town's sister city and had tea with the English mayor of Bath in 2024. Schene was on the council at the time and became mayor in 2025.

Their love for the town was evident, as is their passion to uplift the local entrepreneurs and see the small-town community thrive.

The Great Outdoors

That afternoon I had provisions to pick up, because I was heading out of town and deeper into the mountains for the next two days. At Creekside, Jeff supplied me with a cooler full of picnic food: chicken salad, cold drinks, baked goods and a pesto pasta salad that I'm embarrassed to say was so good, it did not survive the afternoon. I then headed to Charlotte's Cafe, owned by the Mason family and run by daughter Ashley Mason. I picked up from them an equally lavish breakfast cooler of pastries, breakfast sandwiches, cold brew and orange juice.

Fully supplied with Berkeley Springs to-go hospitality, I headed to Firefly Ridge Luxury Retreat for an evening of glamping. I pulled up the gravel driveway and checked in, greeted with a s'mores kit and directions to my tent.

I unzipped the canvas and stepped into a cool, air-conditioned space with a comfortable bed, a sitting area complete with a rug and throw pillows, kitchen supplies (including a mini fridge) — i.e., everything I could possibly need for the night, including fire starters and gloves.

Before an evening at the campsite, however, I had a dinner date with the sunset at Panorama Public House. I sat at the bar and enjoyed an exquisite cocktail called Ultra Violet in a luscious shade of lavender. Anywhere else, the cocktail might have been called an Aviation, but at Panorama, it was named after a cat called Violet.

One of the most memorable parts of the meal was a side dish called Rumbledethumps, a Scottish casserole made of potatoes, cabbage, cheese and onion pressed into a square. For such simple ingredients, it held powerfully rich and luxurious flavor. Owner Trey Johanson ex-



“

I loved seeing the rows of little tents glowing in the night and the crackling fires sending sparks into the air.”

ERIN JONES ON HER EXPERIENCE
“GLAMPING” AT FIREFLY RIDGE LUXURY RETREAT

plained that she wanted the menu to tell the stories of the region — in this case, the Scottish immigrants who settled in Appalachia.

The food had so much heart and authenticity poured into it, and another woman sitting at the bar mentioned that everything she's had at Panorama is the best food she's ever had. Though we didn't know each other prior to



sitting down, at sunset, we took turns watching each other's drinks and bags so we could each run outside and snap a photo. I learned later that it was her birthday, and she was treated to a rousing rendition of "Happy Birthday" sung by Trey. Once again, a room I entered as a stranger became a scene of warmth and connection by the time I left.

I returned to Firefly Ridge to see the rows of little tents lit up and crackling fires sending sparks into the night air. Eventually the night wound down, and I sank into sleep.

I woke at 3:30 a.m. with a feeling of dread as I tried to gauge what the spookiness factor would be walking to the bathhouse alone in the middle of the night. But when I gathered the courage to step into the darkness, my breath caught as my eyes raised heavenward. I found myself face to face with a sky so rich in stars, they seemed to be clustered into clouds made from starlight. It seemed so close, like I could reach up and touch it. I not only made it back from my errand in one piece but lingered outside to soak in the night sky some more.

The next morning I woke early and packed up to head deeper into West Virginia to Paw Paw, where I went canoeing on the Potomac River with Mike Malaska from Greenridge Canoe Outfitter. The boat drifted serenely while Mike pointed out the patterns of the shale underneath the water and along the cliffs, a reminder of the ancient wisdom the region holds. Back on dry land, we walked to the Paw Paw Tunnel, which was blasted through shale for canal boats. The towpath where mules pulled the boats through the tunnel is still visible today.

Around Town

On Sunday afternoon, Berkeley Springs was completely abuzz with the farmers market. I perused the booths and indulged in a milkshake before wandering around the town some more.

At the historic century-old Star Theatre, I learned from Paul Johanson about both the

historic preservation and the role the theater plays as a modern hub for film and live performance in the community. Paul is married to Trey, whose hospitality I enjoyed at Panorama, and they also own Fairfax Coffee House, where I stopped for a fresh-squeezed lemonade in the heat of the afternoon.

What pairs better with the movie theater than a candy shop? Happily, Mischief Sweets & Shenanigans lives just down the sidewalk from the theater. Its mix of whimsy and nostalgia reminded me of visiting my grandparents and perusing the penny candy at their country store in Vermont.

But the downtown ramble had just gotten started. Inspired Chaos had already caught my eye with its creamy yellow, blue and lavender exterior, surrounded by award-winning gardens. The establishment won the town's first "Bath in Bloom" Award for the impeccably cultivated flora. Inside, however, I found an inventory that strangely looked like it had been conjured from the Notes app where I keep a running wishlist of clothes and brands. From the clothing styles to the gift boutique and the mixture of whimsy and quirk, everything fit together in a delightful harmony.

I experienced the same serendipity at Jules Enchanting Gifts & Collectables. The store is owned by Happy Rone, executive director of the Berkeley Springs-Morgan County Chamber of Commerce, with whom I had a delightful conversation about the small-town magic of events like the Apple Butter Festival and Cocoa Crawl. I could see from the shop that she infused a bit of her own magic — and humor. I found myself chuckling one minute and enamored the next as I perused the boutique's collection.

I wandered through the Berkeley Springs Antique Mall, marveling at the sun coming in through the glassware while soaking in the smell of old books. Among its treasures, I found the identical turquoise Fiestaware pitcher that my great-grandmother once had in her Long Beach Island beach house.



FIREFLY RIDGE
LUXURY RETREAT



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MINERAL SPRINGS TRADING COMPANY



MENDENHALL
1884 INN B&B

My mother always carried regret that it had been lost in the sale of the house, so I bought it, feeling that surge of familiarity and home that had come so often during this trip.

I checked into Mendenhall 1884 Inn Bed & Breakfast that afternoon and was happy to see Mayor Greg on the porch. He kindly took my bag and showed me around the inside of the inn. In the front nook, a correspondence station was set up with crafting and letter supplies for those who wanted to send a letter during their stay. A cozy sitting room, and even a station for tea, coffee and wine, only further expressed the hospitality of the place. Everywhere from the common areas to the room itself showed an attention to detail and anticipation of what a guest might want, need or even wonder about while staying there.

I rested until evening fell, then ventured out to Proof on Washington, a cozy restaurant and whiskey bar off North Washington Street. The menu harkens back to a revolutionary era in theme and names. I started with an Old Fashioned, smoked tableside, and enjoyed the Commander's Cut, a steak smothered in whiskey-cooked onion and mushroom.



BREAKFAST AT MENDENHALL 1884 INN B&B

Wandering back to the inn, I could feel the town, like me, exhaling into the stillness after a full weekend.

The street corners held bundled-up trash waiting to be picked up, and the deserted streets had a sleepy, comfortable feel. After four days, I couldn't go anywhere without recognizing someone, and I felt lucky to be experiencing the Sunday-night version of the town.

Town of Connection

Breakfast at Mendenhall was served on the terrace at a table impeccably laid with china. Claire made an exquisite chia pudding and a stuffed pepper egg dish with Boursin cheese. I dined with a fellow solo traveler, and we enjoyed leisurely conversation with the Schenes,

punctuated by greetings from passersby bidding good morning to the mayor and first lady. After checking out, I had time for one more stroll around the town, visiting Regina again, this time at Brick House Vintage.

I also stopped at Mineral Springs Trading Co. and chatted with owner Kate Kolbe about the ecosystem of the town's shops and how supportive they are of one another. After this conversation, it occurred to me that the goodwill that the locals pour into each other overflows into the warmth of the welcome they extend to outsiders. Berkeley Springs is truly a place of kindness, inclusion and hospitality. Its people are deeply connected to the Earth and to one another.

It's easy to visit a town and notice the natural features, the architecture or the attractions. But it's impossible to talk about Berkeley Springs and leave out the people who fill it with such warmth and character.

I suppose it's only natural that a region so rich in natural resources would have such wonderful people. After all, we humans are a part of nature's goodness, and the connectedness and reciprocity of a community are an extension of her abundance. It's easy to forget that when you read the news some days, but a visit to Berkeley Springs might be the remedy to restore a spark of hope.



Fall Festivities

IN MORGAN COUNTY

PAWPAW FESTIVAL

September 12, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.

The Pawpaw fruit is a local treasure, native to West Virginia, and the Pawpaw Festival celebrates both the fruit and the region's rich cultural heritage. Enjoy live music, local food vendors enriching educational presentations, and peruse the wares of local artisans who showcase their craft and creativity. The Pawpaw Festival is a community-filled day of fun for the whole family. For more information visit: www.pawpawfestivalwv.com.

TAILS ON TRAILS 5K RUN/WALK

September 12, 10 a.m.

A dog-friendly 5K, at Cacapon Resort State Park in Berkeley Springs, combining outdoor recreation with a fundraiser for the Humane Society of Morgan County.

CACAPON ENDURO

September 19-20

Mountain bikers will compete on Cacapon's trail system as part of the West Virginia Enduro Series.

C&O CANAL TOWNS ART TRAIL

October 3, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.

Paw Paw United Methodist Church, Paw Paw

A one-day arts event featuring local and regional artists and handmade works as part of the C&O Canal Towns Art Trail.

APPLE BUTTER FESTIVAL

October 9-11

Celebrate the return of sweater weather at the 51st Annual Apple Butter Festival in Berkeley Springs. Festivities will kick off Friday night with a Beer Garden Party. The Festival will begin Saturday morning with a parade. Take in live music, food, drink and craft vendors all against the backdrop of changing foliage and the seasonal smells of apple butter. Enjoy some favorite whimsical traditions like the mustache and hog-calling competitions, alongside the inaugural Apple Butter Festival 5k at Cacapon Resort State Park. For updates, follow facebook.com/AppleButterFestivalWV or by visiting www.berkeleysprings-chamber.com/apple-butter-festival.

BERKELEY SPRINGS STUDIO TOUR

October 24-25

This fall, experience the perfect pairing of natural artistry in the form of fall foliage, and the creativity of local artists in the Berkeley Springs Studio Tour. This self-guided driving tour offers a behind-the-scenes glimpse into the studios of artists who create in a variety of media. The artists range from regional to nationally known and their work includes fiber arts, pottery, glass, jewelry, painting and more. Visit the MAC Ice House Artist's Co-Op Gallery in person or online for a map of your artistic itinerary. Visit www.berkeleysprings-studiotour.org for more information.

DECEMBER DELIGHTS IN

the Town of Bath

COCOA CRAWL

Friday December 4 will launch the holiday season on the sweetest of notes with the Cocoa Crawl in Downtown Berkeley Springs. From 5-9 p.m., sip while you shop, sampling the variety of hot cocoa flavors offered by participating vendors and small businesses. Chart your shopping route on a custom map, showcasing the variety of cocoa flavors-some of which may hold whimsical thematic connections to the businesses.



BERKELEY SPRINGS WINTERFEST

Saturday, December 5, enjoy Berkeley Springs Winterfest annual parade and tree lighting, beginning at 5 p.m. This year marks both the 10th anniversary of the parade and the 250th Anniversary of the town of Bath, which was chartered on December 6, 1776.

BATH CHRISTMAS MARKET

Then December 11-13, take in the magic of the holiday season with the warmth of the small town experience at the Bath Christmas Market. Visit with Santa and Mrs. Claus, take a sleigh ride through the town, and glide around the outdoor ice skating rink. Shop from artisan vendors at the Enchanted Artisan Village and picturesque chalets around town. Embark on a scavenger hunt, enjoy live music performances, and then close out each day bundled up around the firepit for a Christmas bedtime story. For more information, visit: www.townofbathwv.gov/bath-christmas-market-wv-main.





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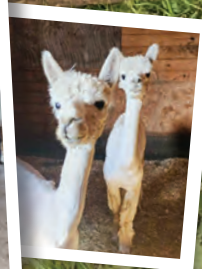
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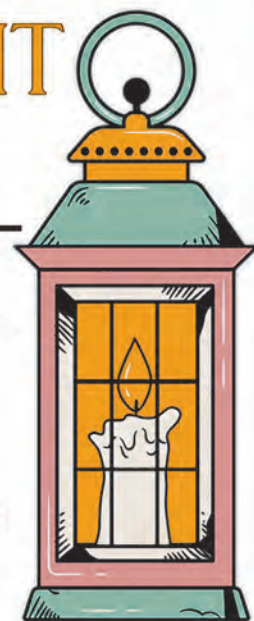
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Coolfont Resort is nestled in a picturesque, hidden valley of wooded acres between Cacapon Mountain and Warm Springs Ridge in Morgan County, West Virginia. It's often described as a little slice of heaven on Earth and is an excellent location for memorable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

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Maryland Microbrewery Festival
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 Union Mills Homestead

Traditional Arts Festival
 October 10: 11 AM – 4 PM
 Carroll County Farm Museum

Food Truck Sunday Funday
 October 18: 12 PM – 5 PM
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Johnny Appleseed to make appearance at 47th annual Mountain State Apple Harvest Festival

BY TABITHA JOHNSTON
TJOHNSTON@JOURNAL-NEWS.NET

MARTINSBURG -- The 47th annual Mountain State Apple Harvest Festival (MSAHF) will feature a new addition this year, in the form of special guest Hank Fincken.

Fincken will be embodying the historical figure of Johnny Appleseed, during the festival, in honor of this year's theme.

"Hank Fincken has captivated audiences across the country for more than 40 years, with his engaging one-man portrayals of iconic American figures," said the MSAHF board, during the announcement. "As part of the Mountain State Apple Harvest Festival's celebration of 'From Our Orchards to Your Family, An All-American Tradition,' Hank will bring history to life through the story of John Chapman - better known as Johnny Appleseed - highlighting the values, faith and spirit that helped shape our nation and continues to inspire generations today."

Chapman gained the moniker "Johnny Appleseed" through his work in the late-1700s and early-1800s, planting apple nurseries in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Ontario and the northern counties of West Virginia. His conservation efforts, which included teaching people to grow apples from seeds rather than grafting, led to his recognition as an American folk hero. Those qualities, along with his unique character, have made him one of Fincken's favorite roles to portray.

"I love being John, because of his optimism," Fincken said.

He noted that his portrayals of historic figures, including Chapman, strive to be as authentic as possible.

"I have a duty to show my historical characters in the context of their time. Sugarcoating is for cereal, not history.

Total accuracy is impossible, but nevertheless, must be the highest priority," Fincken said. "Years ago, I got an evaluation about my Columbus performance, which read, 'We would have preferred a more humble Christopher Columbus.' So would we all.

"I deliberately chose controversial characters to portray, because their struggles might trigger dialogue. This I believe - in hindsight, every historic event should have



COURTESY PHOTO

Community members compete in the apple peeling contest at the Mountain State Apple Harvest Festival.

been done better, every participant was flawed, but 'flawed' still deserves study, not censorship," Fincken said. "My performance must include triumphs, setbacks and provide insights beyond the 'truths' of this moment, or the crimes of the past will be reborn as new injustice. Complex history inspires, because of its intent."

Johnny Appleseed will appear at several festival events, including the MSAHF "Grand Feature Parade," "Coronation" and "Queen's Grand Ball." His one-man theatrical performance will be presented during the "Royal Gala" in the ballroom of Hollywood Casino on Oct. 15 and in the Indoor Arena on the grounds of the Berkeley County Youth Fair on Oct. 18. Additional appearances may be announced closer to the festival date.

This year's Mountain State Apple Harvest Festival will feature a full schedule of events.

A fashion-focused kickoff event, "Ruby & Rhinestones," will be held at The Venue by Brix 27 on Oct. 8 from 6-9 p.m. The evening will feature food, dancing, a signature cocktail, a display of former Queen Pomona gowns and a shoe parade and contest.

That event will be followed by "Handshakes at the Harvest" in the Rumsey Event Center on Oct. 13, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. The networking event will bring together business professionals, community leaders, entrepreneurs and agricultural advocates to celebrate the area's orchard heritage.

The Royal Gala will begin at 5:30 p.m. on Oct. 15, at Hollywood Casino in Charles Town, with a social hour and dinner. The evening will include recognition of the 2026 Honored West Virginian, the farewell



"I love
being John,
because of
his optimism."

HANK FINCKEN ON PLAYING
JOHNNY APPLESEED.



COURTESY PHOTO

Award-winning historical performer Hank Fincken will portray Johnny Appleseed at the Mountain State Apple Harvest Festival in October.

address from the 2025 Queen Pomona, a \$500 scholarship presentation to the outgoing queen from the Snowden family and the introduction of the 2026 MSAHF Court and Maid Elect.

Oct. 16 will feature the "Pomona Ladies Brunch," "Apple Pie Baking Contest," Coronation and Queen's Grand Ball.

Oct. 17 will feature a full day of activities, including: a pancake breakfast, "Bob Baronner Apple Trample 5K," "The Makers Market," agriculture and photography contests, apple pie sales, the Grand Feature Parade, parade awards presentation, a rodeo and the crowning of "Baby Appleseed."

On the final day of the festival, Oct. 18, all of the activities will be taking place at the fairgrounds, including: the pancake breakfast, The Makers Market, apple pie sales, the "Jeep Show," live entertainment in the Indoor Arena, introduction of the MSAHF court, the "Apple Pie Winners Auction," apple contests and a quilt raffle.

A \$5 gate fee will be charged at the fairgrounds on Oct. 17 and 18, beginning at 9 a.m. Tickets and registration for many of the festival events can be found on the MSAHF website, at www.msahf.com. Updates to the festival schedule and details may also be found on the website, closer to the timing of the festival events.

BENEATH THE APPLESEED: A HISTORY OF THE MOUNTAIN STATE APPLE HARVEST FESTIVAL



MARTINSBURG -- The Mountain State Apple Harvest Festival dates back to 1979, when many residents in the Eastern Panhandle were financially struggling.

WEPM Radio manager Charles Thornton Jr. came up with the idea to create an event that would bring joy to the community event, as they fought to keep their heads above water during a period of high gas prices and economic hardship.

After coming across the history of apple carnivals in Martinsburg, which had been held in 1896, 1909 and 1935, Thornton gathered together local businesses, organizations and volunteers into forming the Mountain State Apple Harvest Festival Committee, to find a way to revive that tradition in a lasting way. The committee succeeded in their efforts, establishing a 501(c)(3) nonprofit festival that would go on to promote West Virginia's apple industry, particularly in Berkeley County and the Eastern Panhandle, while supporting community pride and improvement, for the next half century.

Held annually on the third weekend in October, the festival celebrates the region's rich orchard heritage through contests, entertainment, craft shows and other family-friendly events. The festival's queen is known as Queen Pomona, named after the Roman goddess of fruit trees and orchards, symbolizing the area's agricultural roots.

Since its founding, the festival has grown into a beloved homecoming tradition - one of the region's signature annual celebrations.



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PHOTOS BY JENNIFER JULE STUDIOS

Waterford Fair offers a walk through history

BY ELLYN WEXLER
SPECIAL TO DAY-TRIPPER

The ring of a blacksmith's hammer echoes along a quiet village street. Fresh-baked treats tempt passersby while music drifts across the village green and artisans demonstrate time-honored skills beside stone houses that have stood for generations.

For one weekend each fall, that history comes to life during the Waterford Fair.

Just 10 miles northwest of Leesburg, the National Historic Landmark village becomes the setting for the 82nd Annual Waterford Fair, Oct. 2-4. Unlike most festivals, the Fair has no fairgrounds. Waterford itself is the venue, where visitors stroll tree-lined streets, tour centuries-old homes, watch master craftspeople at work and discover why the community remains one of Virginia's best-preserved historic places.

The three-day event welcomes more than 15,000 visitors each year, but its beginnings were humble. In 1943, local residents organized an exhibition of handcrafted items and historic artifacts during World War II to raise money for the village, support the newly established Waterford Foundation and boost community spirits. More than 80 years later, the event continues to celebrate traditional craftsmanship while helping safeguard the place that makes it possible.

"The Fair is a blend of history, artistry and community," said Tracy Kirkman, public programming director for the Waterford Foundation. "Coming to the Fair directly supports keeping this historic landmark preserved for the future."

Designated a National Historic Landmark in 1970, Waterford is recognized as one of the nation's best-preserved 18th- and 19th-century rural communities. Stone walls, original homes, mills and public buildings create an authentic backdrop unlike any other fall festival.

"What sets us apart is that the village is the experience," Kirkman said. "You're walking through historic homes, strolling 18th-century

Loudoun County, VIRGINIA

streets and meeting artisans working in and near original buildings.”

More than 220 juried artisans showcase traditional woodworking, blacksmithing, pottery and weaving alongside contemporary jewelry, textiles, furniture and fine art throughout the village.

Beyond browsing artisan booths, fairgoers can watch demonstrations throughout the weekend, learning techniques passed down through generations. “The artisans aren’t just selling a product,” Kirkman said. “They’re sharing the history and technique behind it. You get to buy directly from the person who made it by hand.”

Another favorite tradition is touring private homes open to the public only during Fair weekend. Guests also can explore the Old Mill, step inside the Second Street School to experience 19th-century classroom life, browse the fine art exhibit and enjoy living history and heritage craft demonstrations.

Live music is another Fair highlight. This year, the Waterford Foundation is partnering with River and Roots Productions to present a lineup that includes Tessa McCoy and the State Birds, Hot Club of Baltimore and Furnace Mountain.

Families will find children’s activities across the village, while local food vendors, homemade baked goods and nearby wineries provide welcome breaks between exploring artisan booths and community landmarks.

This year, the Fair introduces a new admission structure. One adult ticket now provides access to all three days of the Fair for the same price previously charged for a one-day ticket. Children 12 and younger are admitted free, and parking is included.

“We’re making the Fair more accessible than ever,” Kirkman said. “It lets folks take their time and enjoy the entire weekend.”

Behind the scenes, more than 400 volunteers help make the Fair possible, serving as tour docents, ticket takers, hospitality hosts, event setup



“
The Fair
is a blend
of history,
artistry and
community.”

TRACY KIRKMAN,
PUBLIC PROGRAMMING DIRECTOR
FOR THE WATERFORD FOUNDATION

crews, educational demonstrators and beer and wine tent staff.

For first-time visitors, Kirkman recommends beginning at the Old School and strolling down Main Street to watch artisan demonstrations before the crowds arrive. Tour a few private homes, enjoy lunch while listening to live music, then visit the Second Street School, see traditional crafts in action and browse the Old Mill and Bond Street Barn for early holiday shopping.

Those who wander beyond the busiest streets will discover quiet gardens, the Waterford Union of Churches Cemetery and scenic stone-lined lanes that reflect the community’s enduring commitment to preservation. Visitors also can sample wines from six Waterford-area wineries.

For those getting a head start on holiday shopping, artisan booths are filled with handcrafted wooden bowls, pottery, woven scarves, jewelry, holiday ornaments and dozens of other one-of-a-kind gifts.

For Kirkman, however, the Fair’s greatest appeal is its authenticity.

“People love real history and real craftsmanship,” she said. “The Fair isn’t commercialized. It’s built on community, talent and the rare experience of stepping into a real preserved historic village.”

Every admission helps support the Waterford Foundation’s ongoing work to protect one of Virginia’s most treasured historic communities, ensuring future generations can experience Waterford much as visitors do today.

Whether discovering Waterford for the first time or returning for a favorite tradition, visitors will find an experience where history, craftsmanship and community come together in one remarkable setting.

For more information and tickets, visit waterfordfoundation.org.



Early holiday shopping begins at Waterford

By early October, the holiday season may still seem months away, but the Waterford Fair offers visitors a chance to get a head start on holiday shopping while enjoying the craftsmanship and history that define the event.

With more than 220 juried artisans throughout the village, the Fair provides a rare opportunity to find one-of-a-kind gifts while meeting the people who created them. Shoppers can browse handcrafted pottery, jewelry, woodwork, woven scarves, fine art, holiday ornaments and dozens of other creations made by skilled artisans.

“The artisans aren’t just selling a product,” said Tracy Kirkman, public programming director for the Waterford Foundation. “They’re sharing the history and technique behind it.”

Because many handcrafted items are one of a kind, shopping early offers the best selection. Every purchase supports independent artisans, while admission to the Fair helps fund the Waterford Foundation’s ongoing work to preserve one of Virginia’s most treasured historic villages.

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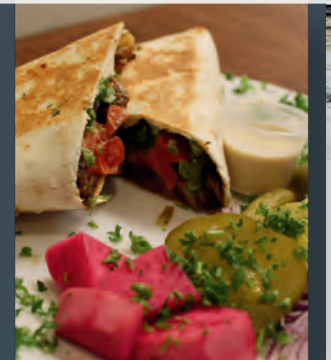
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A GRAND CELEBRATION ALONG THE HISTORIC RAILS!

Catoctin Colorfest: The fall tradition visitors plan their year around

BY ELLYN WEXLER
SPECIAL TO DAY-TRIPPER

The aroma of roasting nuts drifts through the crisp autumn air as shoppers browse tree-lined paths filled with artwork and handcrafted treasures.

For more than six decades, Catoctin Colorfest has transformed Thurmont Community Park into the setting for one of the East Coast's largest outdoor arts and crafts festivals. About 240 juried artisans help make the festival a fall destination for generations of visitors.

"It's one of those events people plan their year around," said Carol Robertson, who has volunteered with Colorfest for nearly 40 years and has served as its president for the past 20. "People come here for the weekend, regardless of the weather."

This year's festival will be held Oct. 10-11 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Additional activities and vendors also can be found elsewhere in Thurmont during the weekend.

For Robertson, planning Colorfest is a year-round job. Working with nine volunteers, including three jurors, she reviews applications, corresponds with artists and coordinates the festival.

She spends much of the year communicating with returning artisans and new applicants, reviewing submissions and ensuring exhibitors meet the festival's standards. Returning artists receive priority for their previous spaces, helping create a familiar atmosphere for vendors and visitors alike.



PHOTOS BY NEWS-POST STAFF

TOP: Apple dumplings are shown during Catoctin Colorfest in Thurmont. BOTTOM: Kacie Samuelson, center, looks at jewelry made by Wagman Designs during Catoctin Colorfest.

Attendance has remained strong over the years, Robertson said. Colorfest attracts at least 100,000 visitors annually and as many as 125,000 to 130,000 in particularly strong years.

The artisans come from across the United States. While very few are from Maryland, most exhibitors travel from other states and return each year. New applicants are evaluated by a jury before being accepted.

"Everything has to be handcrafted by the artisan," Robertson said. "We don't allow vendors to resell commercially manufactured items. If they show up with something that doesn't meet our guidelines, we shut them down."

The exhibitor standards help create a festival with a strong mix of materials, styles and artistic disciplines. Shoppers can browse pottery, woodworking, paintings, stained glass, jewelry, candles, textiles, seasonal décor and countless other original creations they won't find in traditional retail stores.

"A lot of people do their Christmas shopping here because they know they can't find comparable items or this range of handcrafted work in a store," Robertson said.

Robertson is also an artist. Each year, she creates about 125 original pieces, many by transforming thrift store finds into decorative works of art.

"My first customer usually arrives around 7:30 in the morning," she said. "They want the first pick of my one-of-a-kind artwork."

The park itself is part of the experience. Mature trees provide welcome shade as visitors browse at a leisurely pace, watch demonstrations and meet the makers behind the creations. Guests can learn the stories behind the artwork they purchase and connect directly with the artists who bring those ideas to life. The relaxed setting encourages visitors to linger, enjoy the festive atmosphere and discover something unexpected, from a new favorite artist to a one-of-a-kind treasure.





PHOTOS BY NEWS-POST STAFF

Visitors flock to Colorfest in Thurmont each year.

Robertson's advice for first-time visitors is simple. "Just wander around," she said. "You never know what you're going to discover."

Food is another part of Colorfest's appeal. In the park, visitors can enjoy food from festival vendors as well as longtime favorites prepared by local civic organizations, including the Thurmont Ambulance Company's apple dumplings and Lions Club breakfast sandwiches. Additional dining options are available throughout Thurmont.

Colorfest also boosts the local economy, raising money for nonprofit organizations while bringing visitors who support area businesses throughout the weekend.

Visitors coming from Frederick can easily turn Colorfest into a full-day getaway. If autumn weather cooperates, the drive itself becomes part of the experience, with brilliant shades of gold, orange and crimson coloring the surrounding Catoclin Mountains. Nearby attractions include Cunningham Falls State Park, Catoclin Mountain Park, the National Shrine Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes, the National Shrine Basilica of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, local orchards known for apples and homemade jellies, the Catoclin Wildlife



Preserve and Zoo, and Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, about 15 miles away.

Admission is free. During the festival, downtown Thurmont is closed to vehicle traffic. Visitors can park at designated park-and-ride locations, where shuttle buses provide transportation within walking distance of the festival.

Long before this year's festival begins, Robertson is already planning next year's event.

"The vendors are like family," she said.

"It's so nice to see them again. The children call me 'Miss Carol.' Some people call me 'Colorfest Carol,' and others call me 'pain-in-the-neck Carol.'"

For more information about the festival, parking and shuttle service, visit www.colorfest.org.

Early holiday shopping begins at Colorfest

While visitors come to Catoclin Colorfest for its autumn setting and handmade treasures, the festival also offers an early start to holiday shopping.

At Colorfest, every exhibitor accepted must create the items they sell. Artisans from across the country offer original work, representing a range of materials, styles and disciplines. Shoppers will find pottery, woodworking, paintings, stained glass, jewelry, candles, textiles, seasonal décor and countless other distinctive gifts.

The festival's strict exhibitor standards ensure shoppers won't find mass-produced merchandise.

"Everything has to be handcrafted by the artisan," Robertson said. "We don't allow vendors to resell commercially manufactured items."

Early shoppers arrive before the festival opens at 9 a.m. to get a first look at the artists' booths.

"My first customer usually arrives around 7:30 in the morning," Robertson said. "They want the first pick of my one-of-a-kind artwork."

Visitors often make Colorfest an annual holiday shopping destination because they know they can purchase distinctive gifts directly from the people who created them.

"A lot of people do their Christmas shopping here because they know they can't find comparable items or this range of handcrafted work in a store," Robertson said.

Whether searching for holiday gifts or simply looking for something unique, shoppers can spend hours browsing booths and talking with the artists who make Colorfest a beloved fall tradition.

“Everything must be handcrafted by the artisan.”

CAROL ROBERTSON,
COLORFEST VOLUNTEER



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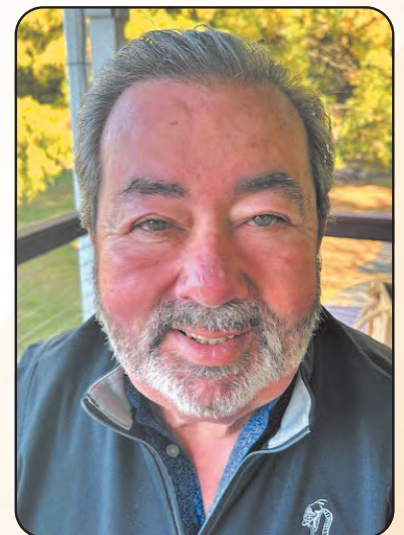
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CELEBRATING 50 YEARS *Mountain Heritage Arts and Crafts Festival*

BY AINSLEY HALL
AHALL@JOURNAL-NEWS.NET

KEARNEYSVILLE — Mountain Heritage Arts and Crafts Festival is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year as artisans throughout the country gather at the Jefferson County Fairgrounds starting Sept. 25. Since June 1973 and later in Sept. 1976, this event has given artists the chance to share their work with others while visitors look for unique gifts and connect with friends and family.

The festival first began when the Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce needed to find a way to raise money. Each member of the board committed \$1,000 to put the event together, bringing people together for the first festival in June 1973. When they were looking for craftsmen, they focused on finding anything that could be a demonstration so people could learn more about how things are made. Executive Director Heather McIntyre's father, Edward "Ed" Morgan, decided he would find a cornmeal grinder.

"I remember him coming home from something after he had been in somebody's barn or garage looking for parts to put together this cornmeal grinder," McIntyre said. "He came home and says, 'Guess what we're doing on the weekend? We're going to sell cornmeal.' And I said, 'Have fun!'"

Despite McIntyre's hesitancy, selling cornmeal during the festival quickly became a family tradition. They taught people how it was made, while also sharing recipes. Though the cornmeal grinder is no longer a part of the festival, it continues to be a special part of the festival's history. For years, artists have secured their spot at the festival, continuing family traditions and even starting new businesses.

"The artists and crafters became like family," McIntyre said. "And if they would come set up and if Joe Schmo is not over here setting up at his usual spot, they would ask where is he? What's going on with him? Is he okay? And if not, they would check on him."

The festival was a huge success, so in 1976 the chamber started a second festival in September. In 2014, they ended the June festival, instead focusing all their resources to make sure the September festival was fun for everyone.

This year, they are celebrating their 50th anniversary by giving out new bags and selling new T-shirts recognizing the event's long history in the community. They will have 160 artisans and crafters, bluegrass music, live chain-saw cutting, a petting zoo, local wine, beer and spirits and so much more. This year they will also have primarily local artists, with 10% coming from West Virginia and 50% from Pennsylvania, Virginia and Maryland. Other artisans will be traveling from all over the country including New York,

New Jersey, Vermont, North and South Carolina, Florida and more. The Chamber is also partnering with Prismatic Art Studio and the Jefferson Art Council to encourage kids to create art of the festival which will be displayed.

The festival will take place Sept. 25, 26 and 27 at the Jefferson County Fairgrounds from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. For more information, visit www.mhacfestival.org/.



For their **50th year**, they will have primarily **local artists** participating in the festival.



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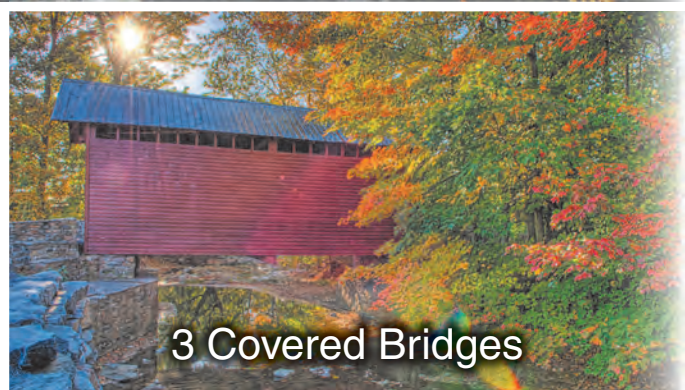


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A VERY BIG DILL: The Quad State Holiday Pickle Fest

BY JENNIFER LEE
SPECIAL TO DAY-TRIPPER

Pickles. Cucumbers in a jar. Add a little acidic liquid or salt-water brine. Let sit for a few weeks to a few months. And you have a pickle — a fermented cucumber that doesn't spoil. Hmmm. Sounds good, yes?

Welcome to the Quad State Holiday Pickle Fest on National Pickle Day, November 14, that celebrates this 4,000-year history of the simple pickle.

Held at the Washington County Agricultural Education Center at 7313 Sharpsburg Pike, north of Sharpsburg, the Holiday Pickle Fest celebrates National Pickle Day with a pickle-themed holiday festival.

This is officially only the second year of the event. The first was in 2023, which drew over 2,400 attendees — last year's fest was beaten

out by the December weather, so everyone is hoping for a great November day to celebrate the 2026 holiday pickle extravaganza.

"The main Quad State Pickle Fest is a two day affair in May that draws over 9,000 guests over the weekend. Due to the popularity of everything pickle, and because National Pickle Day falls on Saturday, November 14, we decided to have another Holiday Pickle Fest," said Rob Immer, M.S.S., Founder of the Quad State Festivals.

The main difference between the May event and November event is that it is the start of the holiday

shopping season. The Quad Pickle Holiday Fest will have around 100 total vendors committed to not only selling pickles and pickle related items, from pickle-focused treats and food to pickle-infused adult beverages, to a variety of delicious pickles, but also holiday novelties and gifts.

Why not surprise the pickle-loving family member and friend for the holidays with a selection of tasty pickles and holiday-themed arts and crafts — best of all, it is getting the holiday shopping done early, all while supporting local vendors.

The event boosts live music, special appearances, contests, and a considerably abundant amount of holiday fun. It's an event for the whole family.

Visitors can expect to find pickle treats from Bad Ass Pickles, Parker's Fired (locally famous pickle pizza), to Mojo's Smashburgers (pickle-centric burgers), and Test Of Time Bakery — "surprisingly delicious pickle cupcakes," Immer said — and pickle fudge from Wow Fudge, which, yes is apparently a big hit and always sells out.

Festivalgoers can also expect the likes of fried pickles, pickle pierogis, pickle cookies, pickle pretzels, and so much more, including pickle whiskey — imagine being the one to bring the pickle whiskey to the holiday dinner party!

"We have an amazing entertainment lineup planned for this event with the hot young Mack Berry Band and the powerhouse regional country/rock band Triple Rail Turn. Both acts draw sizable audiences on their own," said Immer.

The Holiday Pickle Fest will also have pickle eating contests both for the adults and the kids, as well as a special kid-related gift opening.

COURTESY PHOTO

A couple is enjoying pickle samples from Bad Ass Pickles at the last Quad State Holiday Pickle Fest.



Attendees can grab a selfie with Peter Pickle, the Quad State Pickle Fest mascot! Quad State Holiday Pickle Fest will be giving out free green Santa hats to random attendees throughout the event, but to top off this year, all “Early Entry Festival Attendees” will receive special Quad State Holiday Pickle Fest Tote Bags — to carry all of their holiday/pickle finds!

“I can’t stress how much fun this event is!” Robert Andelman said.

The main nonprofit partner for this event is Margaret’s Saving Grace Bully Rescue from Northern Virginia (near Winchester) — a foster-based, all volunteer, canine rescue that serves the Virginia and West Virginia areas.

The Quad State Festivals Organization will be making a generous donation to “the beloved rescue” for their time, Immer said.

MSGBR’s upwards of 30 volunteers will help with ticketing, pouring cocktails, and general event duties.

“Whether you are there for part of the day or a full day, you enjoy so many food trucks, vendors, and distilleries. You meet lots of new people and sample some great pickles. And you do these fun events, raising hourly donations for the rescue!” Jessica Cook, owner, Margaret’s Saving Grace Bully Rescue, said.



COURTESY PHOTO

Artisan pickles crafted by The Brinery at Two Acre Farm, a specialized producer known for small-batch pickled goods and unique brine variations.

While there is a nominal entry fee for adults (12 & under get in free), parking is free, and the entertainment, range of incredible vendors, and the modern, secure venue provides for a fantastic backdrop for a great holiday festival.

The festival begins at 11 a.m. for Early Entry Ticket holders, Regular Entry Ticket holders may enter at 12 noon, and Late Entry Ticket holders begin their fun at 1 p.m. The event as a whole ends at 6 p.m.

This Holiday Pickle Fest is an all weather event, so come prepared and ready to celebrate National Pickle Day for the Holidays.

To learn more about the Holiday Pickle Fest and to purchase tickets visit www.QuadStateFestivals.com.

HOLIDAY HAPPENINGS

The holiday season in Washington County is a tradition of heart and heritage. The celebrations begin in September and run through December — their community takes their holiday celebration serious-

DOWNTOWN HALLOWEEN BLOCK PARTY

Friday, October 23 – 5:30- 7:30 p.m.

Kids of all ages will enjoy this weekend block party. Visitors can expect a bounce house and treat-or-treating, along with costume contests for both kids and adults.

99TH ANNUAL MUMMERS PARADE

Saturday, October 31 – 6 p.m. with the Pre-Parade Activities begin at 4 p.m.

Mummers Parade, a long-standing, Hagerstown Halloween tradition, where floats and processions from local organizations, youth programs, schools, and local businesses fill city streets showcasing the best (& spookiest) of Hagerstown!

HOLLYFEST

Friday, November 20 – 7 p.m.

Featuring young, up and coming performers in the Hagerstown area, this showcase includes various studios and companies presenting holiday themed performances, free to the community.

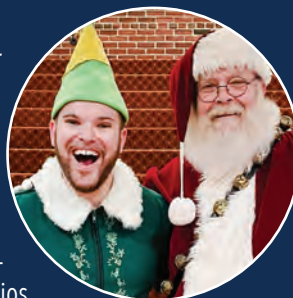


PHOTO FROM
DOWNTOWN
HAGERSTOWN

DOWNTOWN TREE LIGHTING

Saturday, November 21st – 5 p.m.
& Holiday Market from 2-6:30 p.m.

Kick off the holiday season with early gift shopping, artisan vendors, igloo bounce houses for the kids, and plenty of holiday cheer to go around with the annual downtown tree lighting on South Potomac Street.

SMALL BUSINESS SATURDAY

Saturday, November 28th (All Day)

Shop small, dine local, and pack the city with holiday cheer! Downtown Hagerstown Small Business Saturday celebrates a vibrant local businesses to kick off the season with family-friendly fun.

CITY PARK LIGHTS

Friday, December 4 – 5-8 p.m.

Lights come on at 7 p.m.!

City Park offers free family activities including a winter petting zoo, craft and food vendors, photos with Santa, kids crafts and more.

MERRY & BRIGHT HOLIDAY LIGHTS TOUR

Friday, December 11 – 6 p.m.

It’s that time of year again to enjoy the festive holiday lights of Hagerstown. From a vintage yellow London bus, this 45-minute tour throughout Downtown Hagerstown and surrounding neighborhoods will spark the holiday spirit.

SECOND SATURDAY: HOLIDAY COOKIE CRAWL

Saturday, December 12th at 11 a.m.

A self-guided tour of downtown shops where visitors can build their own plate of locally-made holiday cookies.

“THE NUTCRACKER”

Saturday,
December 12 –
7:30 p.m.
Sunday, Decem-
ber 13 – 3 pm

The Western Maryland City Ballet Company and The City Ballet School present this stunning classic at the historic Maryland Theatre in Hagerstown. Experience the magic of ballet this holiday season as you join Clara and her Nutcracker in the epic battle of the mice and toy soldiers, and their enchanted journey through the snow forest to meet the Sugar Plum Fairy in the land of sweets. Set to Tchaikovsky’s famous score, this magical ballet is the perfect way to celebrate the holiday season with your family. This beautiful Christmas favorite has a full cast of 100 dancers, brilliant theatrical magic, and elaborate costume and set designs to delight an audience of all ages. The Nutcracker features a cast of children, company dancers, and professional guest artists.



COURTESY PHOTO

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Saturday, October 3



Jamey Johnson
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Friday, October 9



Brad Williams
Saturday, October 10



Golden Girls
The Laughs Continue
Friday, October 16



**Temptations
& Four Tops**
Celebrating 40 Years
Saturday, October 17



Leslie Jones
I'm Hot Tour
Friday, October 23



Kathleen Madigan
Flying Cats & Marching
Armadillos 2026 Tour
Saturday, October 24



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Friday - Sunday,
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Kameron Marlowe
Friday, November 13



Twisted Sister
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Saturday, November 14



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Saturday, November 21



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No Hard Feelings Tour
Friday, November 27
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Tom Segura
Friday, December 4



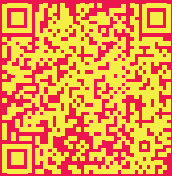
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December 11, 12 & 13



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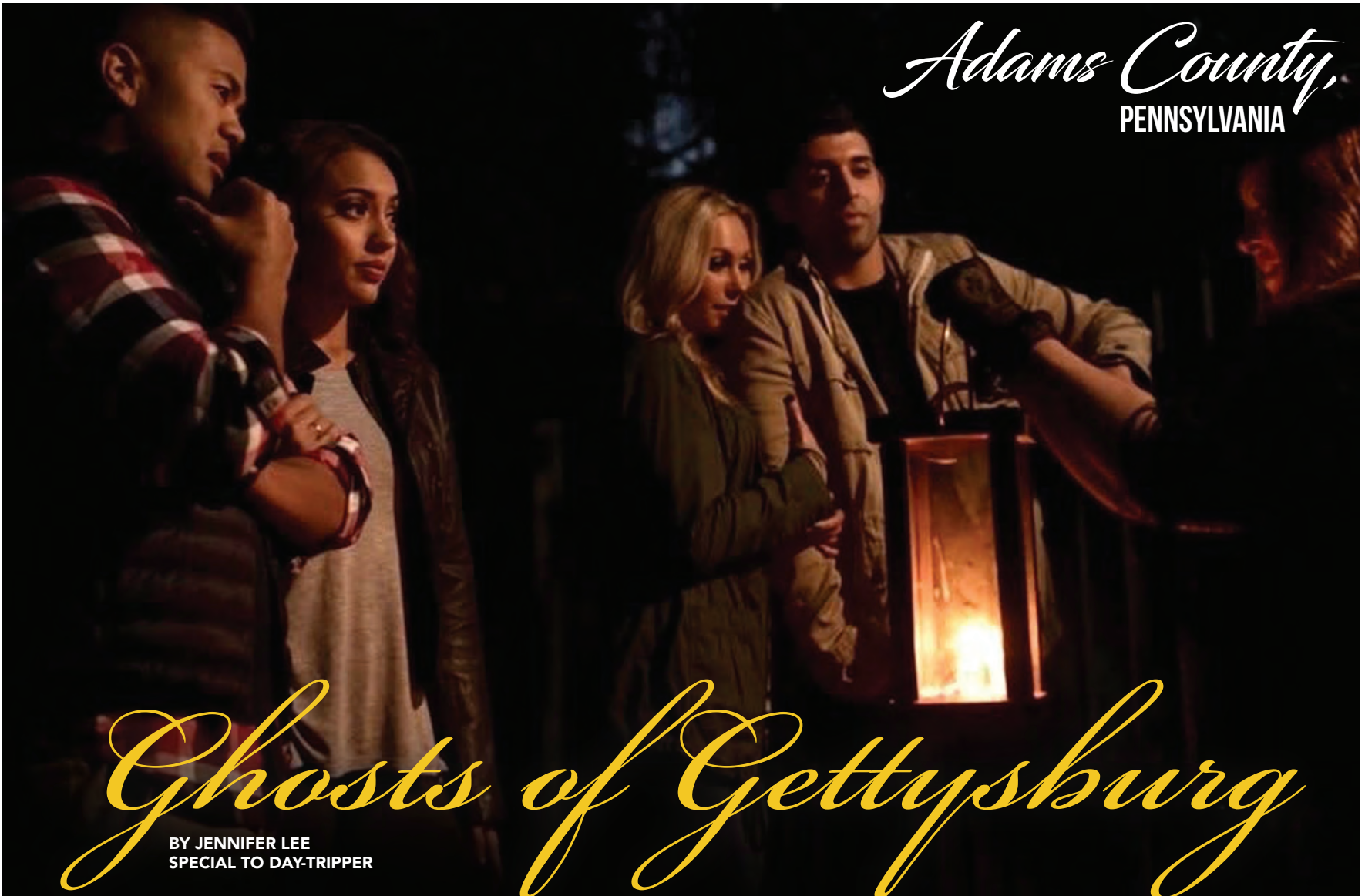
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A group of people, including a man in a plaid shirt, a woman in a grey top, and a man in a tan jacket, are gathered at night around a glowing lantern. They appear to be looking at something off-camera with interest. The scene is dimly lit, with the lantern providing the primary light source.

Adams County,
PENNSYLVANIA

Ghosts of Gettysburg

BY JENNIFER LEE
SPECIAL TO DAY-TRIPPER

Visitors can walk the historic streets of Gettysburg any time of year, but the cool crisp air that blows in during late October sends shivers up the spine — even without knowing the ghostly hauntings the old buildings and the land itself hold in this small town.

From the Homestead Orphanage, the School and Battlefield Farmhouse and The Tillie Pierce House to The Michael Crist Farm, the Creek Bed at Winebreener Run, Sachs Covered Bridge, and the School and Battlefield Farmhouse the spirits are abundant.

In the daytime, Gettysburg seems like just any other historic battle-torn town, but comes truly alive when the moon lights the night sky. It's the hairs on visitors' arms that begin to twinge letting them know where they are, that little itch on the back of the neck, the faint whispers that echo from the dark letting one know they are walking on the bloodiest of ground.

There is an estimated 3,155 Union soldiers lost to battle and another 3,903 Confederate soldiers, while 5,265 and 5,424, respectively, presumed missing and/or captured, more than 32,000 injured — that's nearly 50,000 casualties — in just a three-day battle. The carnage was overwhelming. It was the bloodiest single battle of the Civil War.

Over 6,000 soldiers are buried at Gettysburg National Cemetery, including 3,512 interments from the Civil War, with 979 of those being unknown soldiers.

Despite the bloodshed that took place in just three days, Jennie Wade was the only civilian killed during the Battle of Gettysburg — shot by a stray bullet while making bread for Union soldiers — but her death rings out still today. The bullet hole remains in her family home, now called the Jennie Wade House.

During the battle, civilian homes and community businesses were turned into field hospitals where the wounded lay side-by-side in hallways and in rooms. The buildings often-times became uninhabitable due to the blood of the wounded that soaked the floors.

When the Battle of Gettysburg ended on the third day of fighting, the streets and fields were muddled with the decaying bodies of soldiers who fought on both sides — in the heat of the July summer. The corpses that lined the streets, swollen twice their intended size, would burst.

It's no wonder, why many believe a large number of those soldiers never left. Though their bodies

Adams County, PENNSYLVANIA

are buried, their spirits remain stuck in the battle still today more than a century later. And perhaps, Jennie Wade is still there, baking bread.

The spirits that are said to haunt Gettysburg are ever present, and for those looking for a historical thrill steeped in the macabre, flock to Gettysburg Ghost Tours for a glimpse of the soldiers who remain. Tour-goers hear the gruesome story of the battle that took place 163 years ago — stories of those who once fought on the very streets visitors now walk.

The Headlining Tour Guide at Gettysburg Ghost Tours is Jolene “Spooky” Riley, notable for her skills in spirit communication — and a well-known paranormal investigator. She’s also a published author and host of “Ghostly Encounters” radio show. Spooky has been featured on TV, radio, and in magazines. She has lectured at conferences across the county.

“It’s an honor and a privilege to both live and work in Gettysburg. This quaint historic town is full of energy from the many people who travel here each year to the many spirits that linger on the battlefields and in the town itself,” Riley said.

Visitors can expect more than just a ghost story. Spooky knows her history and has a way of story-telling that is unparalleled. Always dressed in period clothing, the team draws visitors in with the intention of ghostly sightings, but offers a deep education in the history of the Battle of Gettysburg. Nothing is overlooked, nor forgotten.

“A good number of people travel to Gettysburg and hope to see or hear a spirit. I always caution them to be careful what they wish for because it might just happen in the town known for its frequent paranormal activity. At the end of the day, it just comes down to being at the right place at the right time,” Riley said.

Visit Gettysburg Ghost Tours to learn more: gettysburgghosttours.com.

If you want to explore more ghostly haunts of Gettysburg, try these tours:

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Offering a paranormal investigation of one of the oldest, most historic, and haunted houses in town — Jennie Wade’s birthplace. Stay for a short time or stay the long haul for an overnight experience. Other tours here allow visitors to stand alongside dead soldiers, but more family friendly daytime tours are available, as well. Learn more at www.gettysburgghosts.com.

To find all ghost tours available in Gettysburg, visit www.destination-gettysburg.com/things-to-do-2/entertainment-and-paranormal.

Visitors won’t be disappointed. Learn the history of the battle, alongside the haunted remembrance of the soldiers who fought and died on the very streets and fields of Gettysburg.

Apple Harvest Time



In Adams County, Pennsylvania, it’s Apple Harvest time — a celebration of abundance and gratitude where community near and far come to join in the festival of Fall for two consecutive weekends, October 3-4 and October 10-11.

The National Apple Harvest is truly a celebration of bountifulness rooted in community spirit.

The festival is packed with child-focused activities and family-friendly attractions, agricultural exhibits and apple-themed experiences, including delicious food options that cover nearly every apple food one can imagine.

Visitors can discover hundreds of arts, crafts, and specialty vendors, as well as see demonstrations by skilled artisans and craftsmen.

The festival offers live music and entertainment. Special attractions include the Apple Auditorium, antique cars, steam engines displays, orchard tours, petting zoo, and appearances by the Pennsylvania Apple Queen.

Native American dancers, tractor square dancing, an apple pie auction, and too many more attractions to name have been added since the festival’s inception.

“The festival is presented by the Upper Adams Jaycees with the manpower being provided by the organization and volunteers from throughout the community. In addition to raising funds for the community (including helping families in need during the holidays with Holiday Baskets and gifts for children), the National Apple Harvest Festival promotes the recognition of the vastly produced apple crop which often gets overlooked in our small county (Adams County),” Barb Althoff, member of the publicity team for the National Apple Harvest Festival.

“

This event has been celebrating the fall harvest season for over 60 years and is built for having fun and creating memories.”

BARB ALTHOFF
MEMBER OF PUBLICITY
TEAM FOR THE
NATIONAL APPLE
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THE NIGHTMARE CONTINUES AT **Darkwood Manor**

PHOTO BY LORI D'ANGELO

Creator Louis Brown stands inside Darkwood Manor in Luray.

BY LORI D'ANGELO
DAILY NEWS-RECORD

LURAY — The ideas for the haunting themes behind Luray's Darkwood Manor come from a dark place, inside creator Louis Brown's mind.

And this year's story is a dream, or rather a nightmare, come true.

"This year's theme is called Mr. Hyve's Midnight Masquerade," Brown said. "The character popped into my head, and then I said, 'What's the story?'"

Each year, there's a new theme with some returning characters and some new ones. The title character this year, Mr. Hyve, is new.

"This is Mr. Hyve's first appearance because he popped into my head sometime in October," Brown said. "Mr. Hyve is an insect toy from the eighth dimension who has invaded this little girl's dreams to bring himself and his ilk into our reality."

One of the main characters in this year's nightmare is a teenage girl who has fallen into a coma. Mr. Hyve wants haunted house participants to wake the girl up.

"Mr. Hyve tells them to wake up the sleeper," Brown said. "And then other people in the dream, the nightmare, will warn them not to wake up



PHOTO BY LORI D'ANGELO

GM Grant stands near some of his paintings at his art gallery in downtown Luray.

ART MAKES A GREAT GIFT FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Although GM Grant does other kinds of artwork, one of the things he is known for is his paintings of cows. At his studio and gallery, Arts & Artisans Fine Art Gallery in downtown Luray, you can find not only his artwork but also the work of other artists and artisans. Grant took over the gallery space owned by Wes and “Little” Porter earlier this year.

“They were gracious enough to say yes,” Grant said. “We worked out a nice arrangement, and here we are.”

Wes Porter passed away in July at the age of 91.

In addition to paintings, the space also displays work from other creators, including jewelry from Barbara Paul, a long-time local teacher who now makes sterling and gemstone jewelry; watercolor and pen and ink pieces from naturalist Chris Anderson; as well as notecards by Lucia King, who had a show at the gallery in June.

Another fun gift that the gallery offers is travel watercolor kits, which allow visitors to the gallery to create their own mini paintings.

And as to why there are so many cows in his gallery, Grant said, “They are so iconic to local scenery, and people seem to connect with them.”

So much so that people, including tourists to Luray who stop in to look at the art, often end up leaving with a cow print for themselves or a loved one.

Art can make a good gift, including a good gift for the holidays, Grant said. People may go into the gallery with no particular idea in mind and then find something, perhaps a print of a groundhog standing near The Luray Carillon Singing Tower, that speaks to them.

For more information about Arts & Artisans Fine Art Gallery, see Grant’s website at gmgrantart.com or the gallery’s Facebook page, Arts & Artisans Gallery featuring GM Grant.

PAGE COUNTY, VIRGINIA

the sleeper. So, at the end of the haunted house, they’ll have to make a choice, whether they wake up the sleeper or not wake up the sleeper.”

Last year’s theme was Appalachian horror stories. This year’s haunted house is a little more interactive than in some years, Brown said.

Brown, 59, a Bridgewater College graduate who majored in art, has been running the annual haunted house attraction for a long time. In fact, this year marks his 26th year.

The house is currently a work in progress as Brown prepares for the start of a new spooky season.

This year, all of the haunted house attendees will wear a red masquerade mask, Brown said.

Each year, the haunted house gets between 6,000 and 7,000 visitors.

If you’re thinking about going to see the haunted house, Brown recommends going early. In fact, if you get your tickets for opening weekend, which is Oct. 2, 3, and 4, before Oct. 1, using promo code MASQUERADE202, you can save 25%. Tickets are on sale now.

The haunted house will run through Nov. 1, which is a Sunday. That night will be the haunted house’s Blackout Night. During Blackout Night, visitors can walk through the haunted house with no lights on, or with a flashlight or a glowstick.

“People like it because it’s more scary; it gets more attention that way,” Brown said.

While this is a popular night with fans because it’s scary, it isn’t Brown’s favorite night of the season because he enjoys doing the special effects for the haunted house, and in darkness, you can’t see those special effects as well.

“I spend a lot of time designing the lighting and the sets,” Brown said.

The haunted house usually has between 20 and 25 volunteer actors as well as a crew, Brown said. The crew helps with things like makeup, stage, management, and ticket taking.

People come to the haunted house from the local area as well as far beyond that, Brown said.

“We have people who travel thousands of miles,” Brown said.

Some people even build their vacation around traveling to Darkwood Manor.

“We’ve been around a while, so we’re pretty well known in the spook house community,” Brown said.

During December, Darkwood also offers Krampus Nights. This year, both regular Darkwood Manor and the Krampus Nights will have a no-scare night. The No Scare Night for Darkwood Manor will be on Oct. 4.

No Scare Night will allow people who want to check out Darkwood Manor to do so without worrying that actors will jump out at them, Brown said.

Krampus Nights will be held on the first weekend in December.

In the beginning, Brown ran Darkwood Manor at the Page Valley Fairgrounds, but that was challenging because he only had limited time to set up the haunted attraction and take it down.

“There was only so far I could go with how detailed I could get,” he said. “That’s really my favorite part is getting detailed.”

Then he found the current building, which a woodworker occupied at the time.

One of Brown’s goals for the haunted house is to immerse people in the environment.

“It’s like going to a different world,” he said. “One of my aspirations when I was in college was to be an installation artist, but 35 years ago, there was no call for installation artists. It wasn’t really a big field. It’s changed now.”

But the haunted house filled that need, and, in a way, it is a form of installation art.

Each year, the haunted house gets between **6,000 and 7,000 visitors**, both local and those that “travel thousands of miles.”

LOUIS BROWN, OWNER

“Luckily, a haunted house fills the same niche for me,” he said.

At the haunted house, Brown does it all, or at least most of it, although he does have some help. He comes up with the characters and the story, makes the masks and the sets, and also does the advertising and the marketing as well as recruiting and training actors and doing maintenance.

Brown said that the haunted house should appeal to people who are looking for something “outside the virtual.”

“It’s an experience,” he said. “It’s fun to do with friends. It’s definitely for adventurous types and also those who are more into the more theatrical haunted houses than the typical boo-scare haunted house.”

To prepare for this year’s haunted house, Brown said he watched a lot of immersive theater.

Tickets for Darkwood Manor can be purchased at www.darkwoodmanor.net.

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LUCKETTS FALL MARKET

'a one-stop shop' for fun finds for everyone

BY MOLLY WILLIAMS | THE WINCHESTER STAR

If your perfect fall day involves browsing vintage wares while sipping a fun drink, peeping leaves and admiring pumpkins with a break for a yummy lunch sprinkled in for good measure, then the Lucketts Fall Market in the Clarke County town of Berryville might just be your paradise.

From Oct. 16-18, more than 200 vintage vendors will be set up at the Clarke County Ruritan Fairgrounds.

Casey McGrath, who helps plan the event, said that the aesthetics alone make the market a worthwhile way to spend an autumn outing.

The event is “very pretty and charming and fall oriented,” she said. “... There’s pumpkins everywhere. You can take home flowers. It’s pretty much everything you would like to do in the fall, all in one weekend.”

With local beer and wine offerings, McGrath added, “It’s a one-stop shop.”

The Lucketts market began at the brick-and-mortar Lucketts Store in Leesburg 22 years ago.

“And then right before COVID, we just outgrew the grounds,” said McGrath. “... So we decided that we either had to move it or just cancel it altogether. So then that’s how we ended up in Berryville.”

The original market was much smaller, McGrath said. When it first moved to Clarke County, it was held only in the springtime.

Then organizers had to cancel a couple of events due to the pandemic.

In 2023, “in hopes of getting back on the calendar,” said McGrath, organizers arranged a fall market, which proved to be a hit.

“Everybody loved fall so much, and you know, pumpkins and all that,” she said. “So ... we just tried two (annual markets) from that point, and here we are.”

Vendors travel from all over to participate at Lucketts, spending seven to eight days setting up their spaces at the fairgrounds.

“It’s not a typical flea market,” said McGrath. “It’s not a typical antique market. It’s some place you go and just see something that is insane and how hard they work. And so every year, we love to see their displays.”

Between food and drink, cowboy boots and clothes and all manner of vintage furniture and finds, McGrath said that “you can get anything” at the market.

She suggests bringing or renting a car capable of hauling large purchases. The market also employs a crew that will load items into your car for \$10 a piece. Some local delivery options are also available.

Early bird tickets for weekend access, including early admission on Friday, are currently on sale for \$50. McGrath said that these passes typically sell out around the end of August.

General admission passes go on sale Sept. 1 and cost \$20 per day.

For more information on tickets, visit www.luckettsmarkets.com/fall-tickets.

PHOTOS BY JEFF TAYLOR, THE WINCHESTER STAR

TOP: Lucketts Market co-founder Amy Whyte puts the finishing touches on a “Pumpkin House” as she prepares for a previous Lucketts Fall Market.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Ramesh Seetaram of the Northern Virginia Growers Farm Market delivers 300 mums.

BOTTOM LEFT: Mark and Stephanie Granit of Le Passerine in Cream Ridge, New Jersey, unload a table from their trailer to sell at a previous Lucketts Fall Market.



Frederick County, VIRGINIA

Apples, Cars & Fall Fun

BY BRIAN BREHM
THE WINCHESTER STAR

The Winchester area's heritage as an apple-growing region will be celebrated in September at the **52nd annual Shenandoah Valley Apple Harvest Arts and Crafts Festival** at the Frederick County Fairgrounds.

Sponsored by the Rotary Club of Winchester, the festival is a family-friendly event where parents, kids and pets can enjoy a two-day celebration of the region's apple harvest, which begins in August and carries through until early November.

This year's festival, which will be held Sept. 19-20, will feature inflatables, pony rides and a petting zoo for young visitors, plus live music, an apple pie eating contest, an apple pie baking contest, vendors, food trucks, concessions and more.

The festival will also include face painting for kids and the 12th annual Classic Car and Hot Rod Show for kids at heart.



Admission to the Shenandoah Valley Apple Harvest Arts and Crafts Festival is \$10 for guests who are 10 and older, and free for kids 9 and under. Admission is also free for veterans and active-duty members of the military, as well as all law enforcement officers.

All proceeds from the festival will be donated to local nonprofits. According to the Rotary Club of Winchester's website, previous festivals have brought in more than \$1.2 million total for charities that serve the Northern Shenandoah Valley.

Ticket sales and registration for the car show, the apple pie eating contest and the apple pie baking contest, as well as a schedule of events and this year's entertainment lineup, will be available soon through the Rotary Club of Winchester's website, rotaryclubofwinchester.org. You can also stay up to date on the 52nd annual Shenandoah Valley Apple Harvest Arts and Crafts Festival by following its event page on Facebook at <https://bit.ly/3S75tcl>.

The Frederick County Fairgrounds is located at 250 Fairgrounds Road near Clear Brook.

For more information, visit www.winchesterappleharvest.com.

KRIS KRINGLE MARKET OFFERS FESTIVE OUTDOOR SHOPPING

Get into the holiday spirit at Belle Grove's 7th annual Kris Kringle Market on Nov. 21-22.

The juried market, held on the grounds of historic Belle Grove Plantation south of Middletown in Frederick County, features a variety of unique vendors, stories with Kris Kringle, a petting zoo, spiced wine, and self-guided tours of the manor house, which was completed in 1797. The house won't be decorated for the holidays, however. That will take place from Dec. 4-30, when Belle Grove will be adorned with festive holiday decorations provided by local garden clubs, including a 12-foot Christmas tree in the parlor.

Kris Kringle Market tickets are \$5 for adults for early shoppers on Saturday, Nov. 21, from 10 a.m. to noon. Entry is free all other times.

Market hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 21, and Sunday, Nov. 22, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Belle Grove is located at 336 Belle Grove Road, Middletown. More information is available at bellegrove.org.





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DECEMBER 12 @ 7:30 PM
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MARCH 5-6 @ 7:30 PM
FEBRUARY 28 & MARCH 7 @ 2 PM

Anastasia: The Musical follows a brave young woman on a journey from the Russian Empire to 1920s Paris as she uncovers the mystery of her past and discovers who she's meant to be. **Recommended for ages 8 and up.**



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Step back in time at **HARDY COUNTY'S HERITAGE WEEKEND**

BY ELLYN WEXLER
SPECIAL TO DAY-TRIPPER

A blacksmith hammers away at glowing metal. A craftsperson demonstrates a skill handed down through generations. The scent of homemade food fills the air as visitors browse handmade goods and listen to stories of a region shaped by Appalachian traditions.

For a fall day trip that combines history, craftsmanship and community, Hardy County's Heritage Weekend offers a chance to experience the past while enjoying the beauty of West Virginia's Potomac Highlands.

Held Sept. 25-27, the countywide celebration is centered in Moorefield, with activities taking place throughout the community and surrounding areas, including Stump Run Farm, about 13 miles from town. The celebration highlights the people, skills and customs that have helped shape Hardy County for generations.

Now in its 73rd year, Heritage Weekend has grown from a local gathering into one of the area's signature fall celebrations, attracting visitors from throughout West Virginia and neighboring states.

"Heritage Weekend is really about celebrating the history and heritage of Hardy County," said Kriston Strickler, executive director of the Hardy County Tour & Craft Association, which presents Heritage Weekend. "It's a way for people to come together, share traditions and experience what makes this area special."

Over more than seven decades, the celebration has remained a place where longtime residents and visitors can connect with the region's past. It reflects the traditions that developed in Hardy County, where craftsmanship and hands-on skills were once essential parts of everyday rural life.

Visitors can explore community venues, watch demonstrations, browse exhibits, enjoy live music, sample food and meet artisans and vendors while discovering the character of Hardy County.





COURTESY PHOTOS

The variety of locations encourages visitors to explore more of the area rather than spending the day in a single venue.

More than 30 artisans and vendors are expected to participate, with most coming from Hardy County and surrounding counties. Their offerings reflect the region's creativity and craftsmanship, giving visitors an opportunity to purchase handmade items and locally produced goods while meeting the people behind their creations.

The celebration also highlights traditional skills through demonstrations and hands-on experiences. Visitors may see a honeybee demonstration hive, watch a local chainsaw artist at work and explore other craft demonstrations that showcase the creativity and knowledge passed through generations.

For many visitors, the appeal goes beyond shopping. The event offers a chance to ask questions, learn about the work behind handmade items and hear the stories of the people who continue these traditions.

It is also an opportunity for early holiday shopping. Visitors looking for distinctive gifts can find locally made items while supporting regional artisans and small businesses.

Food is another part of the experience, with breakfast, lunch, drinks and desserts available from the Moorefield Band Boosters. Combined with live music and demonstrations, these offerings create a full day of activities for visitors of all ages.

The celebration's success depends heavily on community involvement. More than 50 volunteers help organize activities, welcome visitors

and ensure everything runs smoothly. Their efforts reflect the same sense of community that has sustained the gathering for more than seven decades.

Organizers estimate that 2,000 to 3,000 people attend each year. Some come specifically for the celebration, while others make it part of a larger trip exploring Moorefield and Hardy County's scenic drives, small-town attractions and surrounding mountain landscape.

For visitors from the Frederick County, Virginia, area and other nearby communities, Hardy County offers the appeal of a destination that feels a world away while remaining within an easy day's drive. The area's mountain views, winding roads and welcoming communities make it especially appealing during the fall, when the landscape provides a colorful backdrop for exploring.

A visit to Hardy County can also serve as a starting point for discovering more of the Potomac Highlands. Travelers can explore Moorefield's historic downtown, take a leisurely drive through the countryside or simply enjoy the slower pace of a community where traditions remain part of daily life.

Heritage Weekend is more than a celebration of the past. It is a reminder that traditions continue because people choose to preserve them, share them and invite others to experience them.

Whether watching a blacksmith at work, shopping for handmade treasures or spending a fall day surrounded by mountain scenery, visitors will find a getaway that reflects the character of Hardy County and the people who call it home.

For information, visit heritageweekend.com.

Start holiday shopping with Appalachian craftsmanship

By late September, the holiday season may still seem a long way off, but Heritage Weekend provides a way to get a head start while supporting regional artisans and small businesses.

Rather than browsing mass-produced merchandise, shoppers can meet the artists and craftspeople behind the work. Vendors typically offer a variety of handmade and locally produced goods, from handcrafted décor and jewelry to specialty foods, personal care items and other one-of-a-kind creations.

"Visitors tell us they appreciate meeting local artisans and hearing the stories behind their work," said Kriston Strickler, executive director of the Hardy County Tour & Crafts Association, which presents Heritage Weekend.

Because many items are one of a kind, shopping early offers the best selection before the holiday season begins. Each purchase also supports independent makers and helps sustain the skills and traditions that have shaped Hardy County for generations.

The celebration extends beyond shopping, with opportunities to enjoy craft demonstrations, live music, food and activities throughout the weekend. Visitors can experience the creativity of regional makers while exploring the community traditions that have helped make Heritage Weekend a Hardy County tradition for more than seven decades.

Whether searching for a distinctive gift, a handcrafted item with a story behind it or simply a memorable fall outing, Heritage Weekend offers a way to experience the creativity and community spirit of the Potomac Highlands.



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AutumnFest welcomes fall with barbecue, brews and music

BY ASHLEY MILLER
THE NORTHERN VIRGINIA DAILY

There are plenty of ways to celebrate fall in the Northern Shenandoah Valley, but few capture the season quite like AutumnFest.

For first-time visitors, the event is more than just another festival. It's a celebration of everything that makes Shenandoah County special, with a reputation extending well beyond the county, earning honors from HGTV and the Travel Channel.

The event takes place Saturday, Oct. 3, beginning at 11 a.m. at the Shenandoah County Fairgrounds, right off Interstate 81 in Woodstock.

"I think the greatest thing about AutumnFest is it's our kickoff to fall," said Shenandoah County Chamber of Commerce President/CEO Sharon Baroncelli. "You're getting all the flavors through the barbecuing that's going on — prepared the old-fashioned way that they used to do it, food trucks and you've got the view of the mountain. It is just so pretty out there."

In addition to barbecue, attendees can sample some of Virginia's best seasonal beverages while browsing dozens of local artisans and vendors. This year's tasting lineup includes more than 22 craft brews from across the Commonwealth along with ciders, mead, spirits and wines.

Beyond food and drinks, AutumnFest offers experiences that many visitors won't find anywhere else. Harness racing takes place every 20 minutes throughout the afternoon, allowing attendees to watch the sport and even try wagering.

For many attendees, the races are their first introduction to harness racing, making the event as educational as it is fun, Baroncelli said.

One of the biggest crowd favorites is the annual log splitting competition.

"It's a lot of fun," said Baroncelli, reminiscing on years past.

The excitement continues with the popular Flippin' Chicken competition, where 10 teams prepare

their best barbecue in hopes of earning the People's Choice Award. Last year, more than 4,000 votes were cast as visitors sampled each team's recipes before selecting their favorite.

Throughout the day, local artisans demonstrate traditional skills, from woodturning to apple butter making, allowing guests to see Shenandoah County's heritage firsthand.

Those local traditions are exactly what AutumnFest was designed to celebrate.

"The whole reason AutumnFest was started (was) to bring people to the community," Baroncelli said.

"To bring the tourists in, to get a flavor of the Valley."

That mission continues today by showcasing the people and businesses that make Shenandoah County unique.

"We really wanted to focus in on our own," explained Baroncelli. "The breweries, the spirits, the wineries — (creating) a place to meet them, taste everything, get a flavor for fall, as well as what



Shenandoah County has to offer.”

AutumnFest has become “a gathering place” with attendance continuing to grow.

Roughly half of attendees travel from outside Shenandoah County, she noted. Many extend their visit by exploring local wineries, breweries, hiking trails, restaurants and nearby attractions after spending the day at the festival.

“We hope we’re drawing them not only that weekend, but to come back again,” Baroncelli said. “The county has a lot to offer.”

For those looking to enhance their experience, VIP tickets return for a third year. Limited to just 100 guests, the package includes reserved



The whole reason AutumnFest was started (was) to bring people to the community. To bring the tourists in, to get a flavor of the Valley.”

SHARON BARONCELLI, PRESIDENT/CEO
SHENANDOAH COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

parking, a private entrance, exclusive seating near the stage, dedicated food service and a private tasting area. The tickets have sold out early in previous years.

Entertainment remains another highlight of the event. This year’s featured band — Washington, D.C.-based rock band JunkFood — will bring an energetic mix of ‘80s hits and one-hit wonders to the stage from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

As the festival continues to grow, Baroncelli said the biggest challenge is simply keeping pace with its popularity. Attendance has increased by roughly 1,000 people each year, with hopes of welcoming more than 5,000 visitors in the future.

Still, the goal remains unchanged.

“That they had a good time and see everything the Valley has to offer,” said Baroncelli. “It’s beautiful. And have just a fun day.”

When asked to describe AutumnFest in three words, chamber administrative & events manager Kristen Simler didn’t hesitate.

“Nostalgic. Fun. Entertaining.”

After a day filled with barbecue, blue skies, mountain scenery, live music and hometown traditions, Baroncelli said it’s hard to find a better way to welcome autumn in Shenandoah County.

General admission, ages 15 and older, is \$10. Advance tasting tickets are \$30, with tickets at the gate \$40. VIP AutumnFest tickets are \$75.

Learn more at shenandoahcountychamber.com/Autumnfest.

PHOTOS BY RICH COOLEY, NORTHERN VIRGINIA DAILY

LEFT TO RIGHT: Kathy Poling, owner of The Wandering Pony in Edinburg, serves a Peach Rustler mocktail, a non-alcoholic drink, out of her mobile trailer during AutumnFest 2025. Kolton Poston splits a log during the log-splitting contest. Greg Hovatter, of Mount Jackson, a member of the Master BBQ Blaster team, sautes these 50 halves of chicken as part of the Flippin Chicken Contest, which allowed the public to vote on their favorite barbecued chicken. Autumnfest is an opportunity to enjoy the sport of harness racing.



Experience SMALL-TOWN MAGIC DURING THE HOLIDAYS IN SHENANDOAH COUNTY



STAFF PHOTO

The Christmas in the Valley light show takes place at the Shenandoah County Fairgrounds in Woodstock.

For many, the Christmas season begins after Thanksgiving, as communities across Shenandoah County welcome the holidays with traditions treasured for generations.

From Strasburg and Fort Valley to Woodstock and New Market, the arrival of Santa Claus marks the start of a season filled with parades, holiday house hours and small-town charm.

Families can experience the magic of the season at Christmas in the Valley, a dazzling drive-through light display that transforms the Shenandoah County Fairgrounds in Woodstock into a holiday wonderland. In Strasburg and Mount Jackson, celebrate the towns’ rich histories while touring beautifully decorated homes during their holiday house tours.

Throughout the county, visitors can support local shops and restaurants while checking off their holiday shopping lists. Find unique gifts at Jon Henry General Store in New Market or Three French Hens in Woodstock.

Whether exploring holiday events, discovering local businesses or taking in the beauty of the season, there are plenty of ways to experience the magic of Christmas in Shenandoah County.



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WoodsTACO

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Woodstock

TaterFest

Sat. September 26, 10am-5pm
Mount Jackson

New Market Fall Festival

Sat. September 26, 9am-4pm

Autumnfest

Sat. October 3, 11am-6pm
Woodstock

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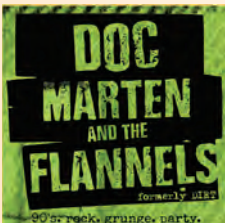
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Grand Caverns to host Dungeons & Dragons event

BY RICHARD H. HRONIK III
DAILY NEWS-RECORD

Visitors to Grand Caverns in Grottoes will have a chance to experience an underground adventure in late November.

The live cave park will host its first-ever Subterranean Sorcery event on Nov. 22 and 23. During the event, Dungeons and Dragons adventurers will be able to play a four-hour game in the caverns. Tickets are expected to be available in September, according to park staff.

Groups of up to 11 players will be able to reserve a table in the cavern, according to Diana Auville, parks coordinator for the town of Grottoes. She said she and her colleagues got the idea for the event after someone asked for permission to host something similar.

"It was kind of a long time coming," Auville said. "A couple of years ago, we got an inquiry about somebody wanting to come and set up and play some Dungeons and Dragons inside the cave. We accommodated that request, and from that point on, it was always in the back of our minds."

Auville said this would be the first Dungeons and Dragons event hosted in a live cave in the United States.

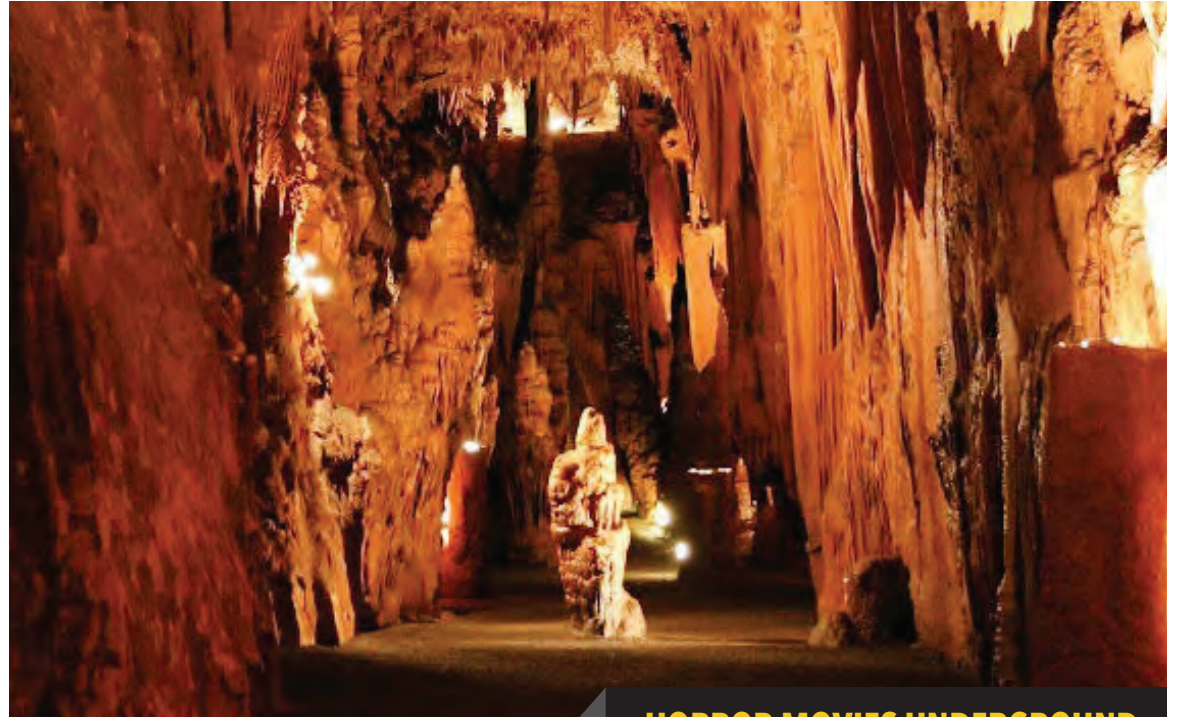
However, Auville and Hayley Savage, a park ranger at the caverns, said that their experience hosting other events like concerts and movies in the cave will give them a template to work from to make sure that both the adventurers and the cave are protected.

"We have the Subterranean Sound concert series from January to March," Savage said. "We have experience with that, as well as the movie series that we do in October, and sometimes around the holidays."

To keep potential contaminants like mold and bacteria out of Grand Caverns, no food will be allowed in the cave during the four-hour session. Food vendors will be present outside the cavern, however, and all guests will be given special cups to use inside the cave.

"We always want to make sure that we're being good stewards of the cave," Auville said. "One staff member will be assigned to each section of the cave, and they'll be able to watch over the tables as they're playing. We don't anticipate it's going to be a big issue, because it is a seated event."

Auville said the park staff hopes to have a total of 14 gaming tables in the caverns. Some tables will be set up for as many as seven people, while others will be able to host as many as 11. However, there could be as many as 18 tables available as plans are finalized.



COURTESY PHOTO

Grand Caverns will host a Subterranean Sorcery event in November where Dungeons and Dragons adventurers will be able to play a four-hour game in the caverns.

"We are waiting on one final piece of the puzzle to fall in place, and then we will be able to get all of our information on the website, and get tickets ready and available for sale," Auville said.

While no specific attire is required to enter the cave, Savage said attendees were encouraged to dress in the spirit of the event.

"Come dressed as your character," Auville said. "It'll be a really fun event. Lots of cool mood lighting. It's such a unique experience, too, being able to participate in an event like this, inside of a natural landmark."

"We've started branching out to do a little bit more of a variety with events inside the cave," Savage said. "Coming up this month, Diana has a group that she's been working with that will be doing game music in Cathedral Hall."

"There is a little bit of variety," Savage said. "And of course, each event comes with slightly different techniques to avoid damaging the cave. We feel like we have nailed down our staffing model to the point where, when it comes to hosting an event like this, we can properly staff it and make sure everybody knows where they're supposed to go."

HORROR MOVIES UNDERGROUND

Grand Caverns in Grottoes will host several events throughout October for fans of the Spooky Season looking for a unique adventure.

The Caverns' annual Subterranean Cinema series will begin on Oct. 2. Screenings will begin at 4:30 p.m. and 7 p.m. Films will be shown Fridays and Saturdays in October. Tickets will cost \$20 per person.

Family-friendly movies will be shown on Fridays, while horror films for mature audiences will be shown on Saturdays.

Oct. 2: Scooby-Doo

Oct. 3: Backrooms

Oct. 9: Ghostbusters

Oct. 10: As Above, So Below

Oct. 16: Beetlejuice

Oct. 17: The Cabin in the Woods

Oct. 23: Coco

Oct. 30 and 31: The Descent

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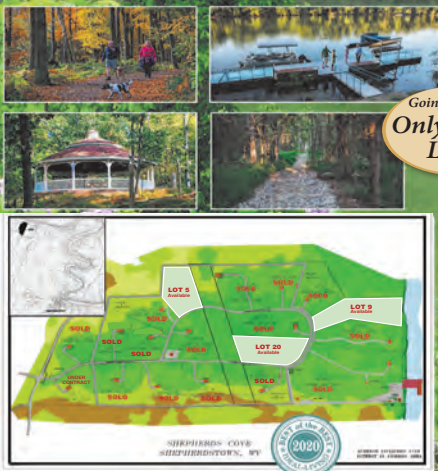
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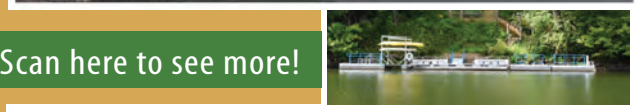
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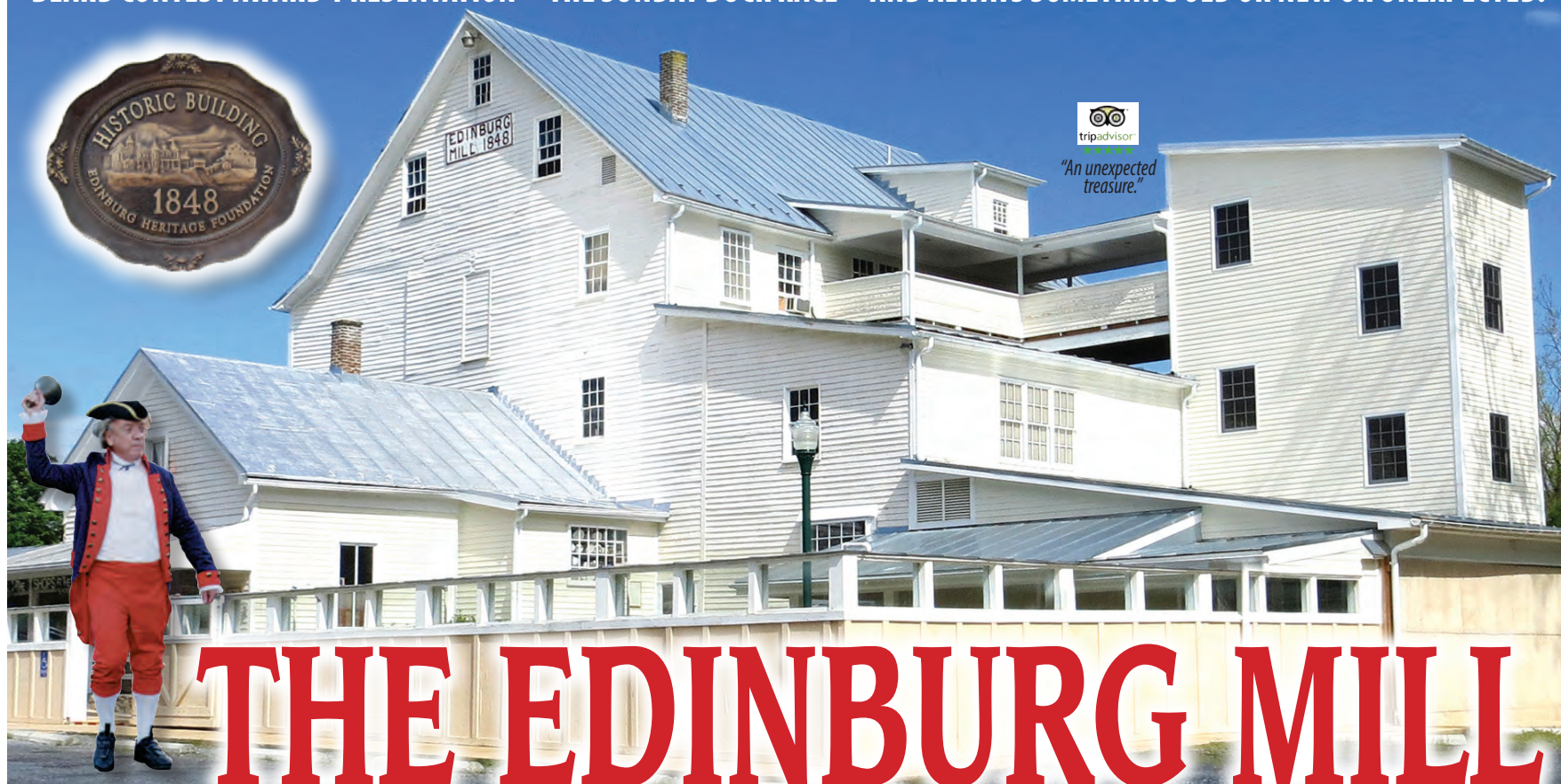
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MERRY MARKET AND ANNUAL PARADE BRING FESTIVE SPIRIT TO FRONT ROYAL

The Front Royal-Warren County Chamber of Commerce will roll out the red sleigh for its annual Christmas on Main festivities.

Set for Saturday, Dec. 5, along Main Street in Front Royal, the event includes a full slate of activities for all ages.

"This is one of my favorite events — everybody loves Christmas," said the chamber's Executive Director Niki Foster, noting that picturesque Main Street is the ideal backdrop. "We have a perfect downtown for that sort of thing. It's like a Hallmark movie setting."

The fun starts with the 8th annual Merry Market around the gazebo. Last year, nearly 60 vendors offered a large selection of gift options. Foster said she expects Christmas 2026 to be even bigger.

Vendors will have their wares out from noon to 7 p.m., Foster said. From noon to 4 p.m. the gazebo will also host kids' activities and music.

A 50-plus-year tradition, the Christmas parade will step off at 4 p.m. and travel east along Main Street toward the gazebo.

"This is always one of those events where people are really happy, from the folks participating as vendors to the people coming out to the parade," said Foster, adding that the holiday celebration is the largest community event that doesn't involve a festival. "With the businesses, nonprofits, church and school groups, the sheer volume of different organizations that participate in the parade makes it such a great community event."

“
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a perfect
downtown for
that sort of
thing. It's like
a Hallmark
movie setting.”

NIKI FOSTER, EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR FOR CHAMBER

Warren County, VIRGINIA

Front Royal's Festival of Leaves is the ultimate fall experience

BY LAURA RUBY
THE NORTHERN VIRGINIA DAILY

As the northern gateway to the Skyline Drive and Shenandoah National Park, the town of Front Royal welcomes thousands of visitors each year. The brilliant displays of reds, yellows and orange from sugar maples, red maples, oaks, beeches, and sycamores create a stunning patchwork of color, making the community a top choice for tourists each October.

The annual Festival of Leaves welcomes both locals and visitors and pays homage to not only the town's beauty, but also to its history.

With hundreds of vendors, three stages of music, a car show, beer garden and kids' play area, the 54th annual Festival is the perfect way to welcome fall, said Michael Whitlow, marketing and communications coordinator for the event.

"It takes an entire community to create something this special," Whitlow said. "Every October, more than 250 vendors, historic district businesses, musicians, nonprofits, sponsors, and volunteers come together to transform historic Front Royal into Virginia's ultimate fall experience."

Set to run from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 10, the festival has been recognized by Northern Virginia Daily readers as the Best Annual Event for four consecutive years, Whitlow noted.

He said that 225 vendors — positioned alongside nonprofit organizations — will line Main and Chester streets, bringing a wide assortment of products to the festival.

Bob Wilson, owner of Front Royal's Money Pit Recording Studio, will sing the national anthem, accompanied by the Skyline High School Choir at John Marlow Plaza on Main Street, locally known as the gazebo.

Area musicians The Yesterday Swing Orchestra, Souled Out Band and Five of a Kind will perform at the gazebo throughout the day.



PHOTO BY RICH COOLEY, NORTHERN VIRGINIA DAILY
Lane Sweeney, 8, of Front Royal, enjoys some cotton candy.

An Oktoberfest beer garden will be set up at the pavilion near the gazebo alongside inflatables for the kids.

Two side stages, one placed on Chester Street and the other on the west end of Main, will also host musical performances including Bearded Harmony, Michael Hasty, Elements of Kindred and Jig & Jive Dance Studio.

A car show will also be stationed near the Courthouse on Main Street until 4 p.m.

The kids zone, slated to be set up off Chester Street, will feature a petting zoo and family friendly fun, Whitlow said.

Along with the many restaurants open on Main Street throughout the festival, about 15 food trucks will be on hand, offering both savory and

It takes an entire community to create something this special.

MICHAEL WHITLOW, FESTIVAL OF LEAVES MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR



PHOTOS BY RICH COOLEY, NORTHERN VIRGINIA DAILY

ABOVE: Charleen Johnston, of Luray, works the crowd on stilts as a jester during the 53rd Annual Festival of Leaves. RIGHT: The color guard of the Colonel James Wood II Chapter of the Sons of American Revolution leads the opening ceremonies for the Festival of Leaves in 2025.

sweet treats.

Launched by the Warren Heritage Society in 1971, the event is now sponsored by the Front Royal Independent Business Association (FRIBA), which took over during the COVID pandemic.

Open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday, the Heritage Society at 101 Chester St. offers self-guided tours of its Ivy Lodge, Belle Boyd Cottage and Balthis House, as well as occasional guided specialty tours throughout the year that dive into local history.

From a new micro-museum at 205C E. Main St., the Heritage Society also offers guided, walking haunted tours throughout the downtown area. For more information about the Heritage Society, visit www.warrenheritagesociety.org.

The Festival of Leaves event has changed over the years. In the early days, it was a three-day affair with a parade centered largely around a downtown elementary school that hosted crafters and entertainment. In recent years, it has included a Friday evening Dancing Downtown event. In every incarnation, the event draws tens of thousands of tourists and locals to the downtown corridor each fall.

While the festival is held on the second Saturday of October each year, in hopes of coinciding with the height of the leaf peeping season,

Mother Nature does not always cooperate.

The Virginia Department of Forestry notes that “fall foliage sometimes comes in fits and starts.” Rain, temperatures and humidity all factor into the development of different color pigments, according to the department.

Because of varied elevations, the mountains around Front Royal offer a prolonged leaf-viewing season with maples on the higher elevations along Skyline Drive turning first in early to mid-October. Later in the month or in early November, leaves turn in the town itself and along the Shenandoah River in valley floor.

Starting in September, Virginia State Parks release fall foliage reports that can be helpful in planning. The guides are available at www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/foliage-report.

Whether or not the leaves are in full color, the festival is reason enough to visit, said Lizi Lewis, director of community development and tourism for the Town of Front Royal.

“We like the idea of being kind of a bellwether — of having people come out and see us for the festival and then come back when the leaves are super colorful,” Lewis said.

For more details about the Festival of Leaves, visit www.festivalofleaves.org.



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Wreath-Laying Ceremony
Time: 3:00-3:30 PM

**SEPT 12 |
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Time: 6-10:00 PM

Luminaria Ceremony & Tower of Light
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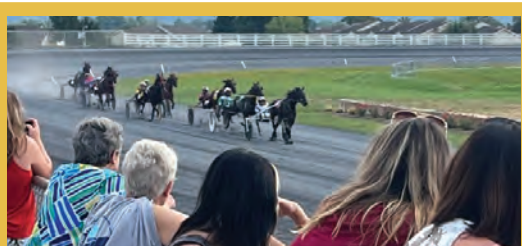




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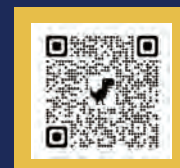
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