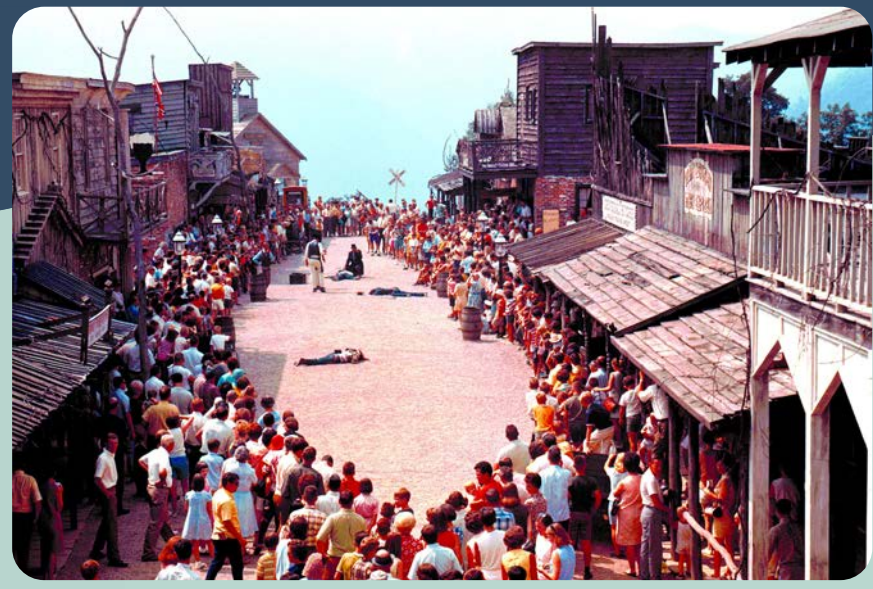
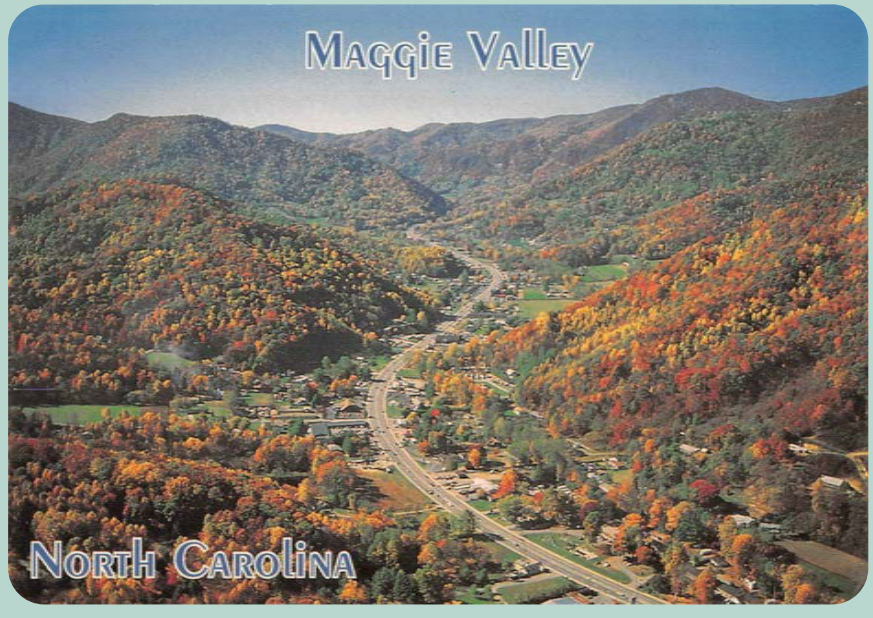
Happy 50th MAGGIE VALLEY





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Maggie Valley NORTH CAROLINA

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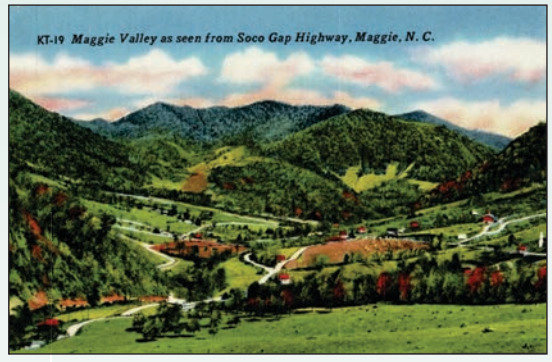
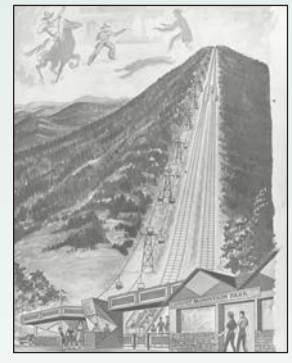
MAGGIE 50TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

TOURISM THEN AND NOW

EVOLUTION OF A TOWN

MAGGIE LUMINARIES





When the community of Maggie was christened — by the U.S. Postal Service — in 1904, no one knew what she would become. But Maggie found her calling, as a town that would draw tourists and visitors to her beautiful streams and spectacular vistas.

It was her destiny, and opportunities abounded for her to fulfill it. As Maggie Valley grew up, she became a town in 1974. That birthday makes her 50 years old now.

Like most folks who have half a century behind them, she has stories to tell, some of them exciting, a few of disappointments. Her family has had its quarrels, and times of harmony.

But because she is a town, and towns can live a long, long time, and because she is so beautiful, Maggie Valley is only getting started on the phase of her life, whether as a residential retiree community, a revived rousing entertainment center or a haven for ecotourism — or maybe a bit of all.

Before she moves forward, here is a look back, a scrapbook of sorts, describing how she got here. We hope it helps readers understand "Miss Maggie" a little better, and that they enjoy the look back.

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The cover image of Ghost Town and several others in this publication are by Pal Parker, the official photographer at Ghost Town for over two decades. The images were provided by Pal Parker Archives, LLC, courtesy of Pal's son Russ Parker of Epic Photography.

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GHOST TOWN IN THE SKY: THE THEME PARK THAT BUILT A COMMUNITY

By Vicki Hyatt

Maggie Valley's history would have been far different had it not become a tourist destination in the 1960s compliments of Ghost Town in the Sky.

The western theme park on top of Buck Mountain drew an average of half a million visitors a year in its heyday, transforming a sleepy area along U.S. 19 into a boom town.

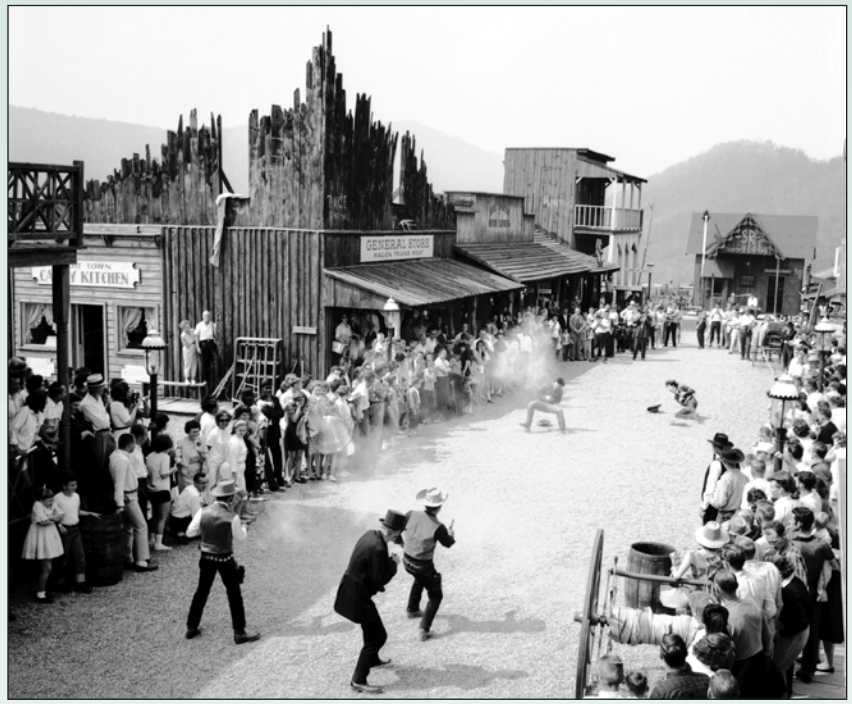
It was an era before the likes of Carowinds, Busch Gardens, Six Flags and even before Dollywood as we know it.

Ghost Town's central theme was that of a vibrant, wild west town reflective of the common scenes on the wildly popular westerns of the day such as Laramie, The Virginian, Wagon Train, Gunsmoke, Bonanza, and more. Many of the television stars from such shows were brought to Ghost Town for a weekend to draw visitors to the park.

Ghost Town sparked the vibrant strip of mom-and-pop motels, diners and gift shops along either side of Soco Road. The visionary behind Ghost Town was R.B. Coburn, a Virginia-born entrepreneur who was captivated by several abandoned ghost town on a family vacation.

A visit to Maggie Valley eventually led to working with a group of local business owners, raising $1 million, and building Ghost Town in the Sky within a year. The attraction opened in June 1961 with little fanfare.

When R. B. Coburn began building Ghost Town in the Sky, most had no idea how successful it would be upon it's 1961 opening.



Pal Parker Archives

The early years

Ironically little was written about the project during construction, perhaps because few understood how transformative Coburn's vision would be to the area.

During its opening season, Ghost Town attracted 300,000, and had visitors from every state in the union and nearly a dozen foreign countries.

Within a couple years, Ghost Town in the Sky had developed a brand name that later became known internationally and was a desirable family destination attracting an average of 500,000 visitors a year.

To this day, the long-closed amusement park still has a vibrant Facebook following operated by those fondly reminiscing about the good old days.

Old-timers will remember seeing Dan Blocker of "Bonanza," Burt Reynolds during the beginning of his television and movie career and Jon Provost, along with his sidekick, Lassie, who starred in a television series named after the resourceful Collie, to name a few.

In the 1980s, it was country-western singers like Reba McEntire, Mel Tillis or the Statler Brothers who provided the star-power.

The successful amusement park featured staged gunfights on the hour, was filled with rides, souvenir shops, places to eat and a saloon fashioned after the ones seen in popular in television westerns of the day. Can-can girls and a honky-tonk piano player entertained and mingled with the crowd.

Ghost Town also provided a venue for local entertainers like renowned banjo player Mark Pruett of Balsam Range fame and "Panhandle Pete" (Howard Nash) on his one-man band.

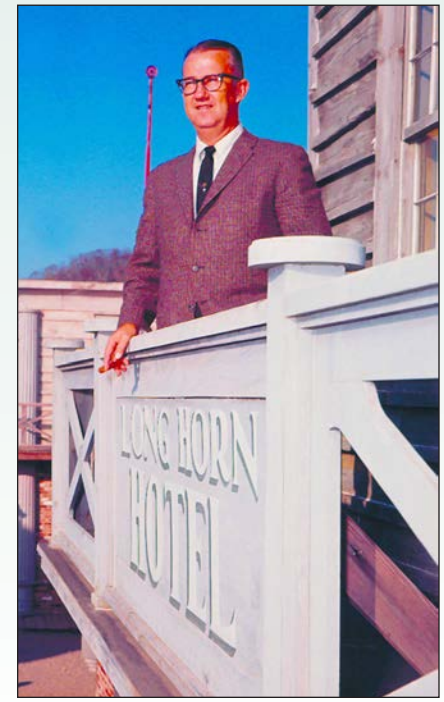
The mastermind

All the while, Coburn was the man behind the operation, continually finding new ways to expand and improve the venue. Coburn was known for his generosity and for shedding the limelight.

In 1994 when Coburn was to be honored by the Maggie Valley Chamber of Commerce for bringing in $45 million in business, 600 jobs and television advertising that promoted not just Ghost Town but the community, he wasn't told of the award beforehand. Organizers feared he wouldn't show up if he knew.

In 1970, Coburn sold Ghost Town to the National Park Service but repurchased it in 1986, at the urging of his son. On round two, he upgraded the many of the attractions that had faded over time, and added new ones.

"Mr. Coburn said he would come back if he could get a commitment from people in the community to help," recalled



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Ghost Town founder R.B. Coburn in 1963.

A roller coaster that barreled 900 feet down the face of Buck Mountain had varying names through the years – Silver Bullet, Red Devil and later Cliffhanger.

Maggie Valley businesswoman Brenda O'Keefe, who, along with her husband, opened Joey's Pancake House soon after Ghost Town created a bustling tourism base.

When the park reopened two years later, there was even more to offer visitors, including a ride initially called the Red Devil, later renamed Cliffhanger.

"That roller coaster, now — there won't be nothing like it in this part of the world," Coburn said at the time. "We're going to put it all over the side of the mountain. It's got the curves and the loops and the view over the cliff. People'll think they are going to outer space."

Ghost Town anchored Maggie Valley's prosperity and identity until 2002 when the park closed after a period of deterioration, rides that were often closed and a declining number of visitors.

It wasn't until 2006 that Coburn found a buyer for the property. After that there were sputtering attempts to reopen Ghost Town, but all failed.

When Coburn sold Ghost Town for the second time, Maggie Valley pulled out all the stops to pay tribute to the man who put them on the map.

Larry Blythe, vice chief of the Cherokee tribe, was one of those who praised Coburn's accomplishments and what Ghost Town had brought to the region.

"This guy had a vision 50 years ago we could really use today," he said at the time. "He saw potential and he saw potential beyond Maggie Valley. At that point in time, he changed Cherokee."

Maggie's identity crisis

When Ghost Town was booming, the entire region prospered, especially the businesses built to serve the bustling tourist community.

There were other places to visit, for sure.

Jim Miller's Soco Gardens and Zoo featuring exotic animals was a prime destination for Maggie visitors during Ghost Town's early years, while Wheels Through Time Motorcycle Museum was the go-to destination during its waning years.

Other attractions such as Carolina Dinner Theater, Raymond Fairchild's Maggie Valley Opry House, the acclaimed clogging to be found at the Stompin' Ground and later destination events at the Maggie Valley Festival Grounds brought tourists in, but none had the draw of Ghost Town.

The reduced visitor numbers were sorely missed not only by business owners, but the town leaders struggling to return the town to the Ghost Town glory days.

Plans were hatched to create a "town center" that would provide a small town

Pal Parker Archives

The incline railway, along with chairlifts, carried visitors up and down the mountain.

Pal Parker Archives

A hallmark of Ghost Town was its saloon entertainers, including can-can girls and a honky-tonk piano player.

feel instead of just a commercial strip on both sides of a busy highway. Studies were done and shelved to offer an alternative business model to replace Ghost Town but nothing came of them.

Still, the community held on to the hope Ghost Town would be back. Several tried, and eventually failed, to bring back the splendor and prosperity of Ghost Town.

When Ron DeSimone was elected as mayor in 2011, he said the town lacked an identity — a unique and marketable character that needed to be separate from Ghost Town.

Town officials needed to be supportive of Ghost Town, which was set for a third reopening, but they need not to be Ghost Town, he stressed.

It was a slow process, but years of building and improving an attractive event space in the center of town that would attract various types of activities, the Festival Grounds, have met with success.

So has investing in an effort to brand the community the "Elk Capital of North Carolina and embracing the natural beauty of the area, the original tourist attraction.

Last salvo for Ghost Town

By 2012, long-time Maggie Valley resident Alaska Presley, one of the original investors in Ghost Town in 1960, bought the beleaguered theme park out of foreclosure for $2.5 million.

Months later, she unveiled her dream of a Christian-themed attraction with a giant cross that would tower above the park, with Stella Parton (Dolly's sister) joining her to bring in a summer concert series.

Presley ultimately spent millions on getting water to the mountain top, fixing the incline railroad that brought visitors up the mountain, building a new zip line and getting the A-frame entrance at the end of town stocked with souvenirs.

Under her ownership, the park was only open sporadically for the next couple years. The time was marked by failed state ride inspections, unsuccessful attempts at drilling for water, new regulations requiring an alternate evacuation route, a veteran actor-gunfighter being injured with a real bullet during the show and lawsuit filed by a visitor injured on the zip

CONT. ON PAGE 8

line. All took their toll.

By 2014, Presley told the town governing board was "cash poor," that land wasn't selling and she was out of money to start a winter wonderland at the base of the mountain and build a gondola to the top.

Helping her would help the town, she said, but the town council didn't bite, reasoning that spending taxpayer dollars on a private enterprise was not its role.

By 2016, Presley announced she was throwing in the towel after spending $5 million on trying to get Ghost Town going again.

Two years later, she partnered with a company named Ghost Town Adventures with a planned reopening in 2019. That never happened after one of the company principals, Lamar Berry, left town with a trail of unpaid bills and accusations of fraud, never putting up the money he promised.

That left Presley with the property unsold, and poor health that prevented her from going on alone.

At that point, South Carolina developer

The late Alaska Presley is shown here in this 2016 after announcing she would reopen Ghost Town.

Frankie Wood entered the picture, promising to help Presley fulfill her dream of a once-again vibrant Ghost Town, complete with a cross on the mountain top paying tribute of the Lord. They formed a partnership in 2021.

Like the other efforts, that promise has failed to develop.

Presley passed away in 2022 at age 98, leaving her niece, Jill McClure, in charge of her estate.

Wood won a lawsuit this May that was filed by McClure over control of the

Pal Parker Archives

Alaska Presley (center) held a Ghost Town reunion of former gunslingers in 2021 while making plans to reopen the park. She passed away at 98 before her dream could become a reality. Frankie Wood is pictured second from right.

Ghost Town property. He promised to move forward with elaborate plans for a revitalized theme park once the lawsuit was settled.

Whether that happens is yet to be seen, as is the fate of Buck Mountain and its fondly remembered Ghost Town in the Sky.

FROM MAGGIE'S DARKEST HOUR TO THE DAWNING OF A NEW DAY

Pal Parker Archives

By Becky Johnson

For decades, Maggie Valley was synonymous the mile-high western theme park just above it on Buck Mountain. While that park put the town on the map, Maggie's tourism story didn't start with Ghost Town, nor has it ended with Ghost Town.

Before the gunslingers and can-can dancers and Red Devil roller coaster, Maggie Valley was a gateway community for the newly minted Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Blue Ridge Parkway. Roadside attractions like Soco Tower and Soco Zoo, craft shops, diners and motor courts sprung up to cater to the new golden era of motor tourism.

Ghost Town was a game changer in the early 1960s. The tourism industry exploded with mom-and-pop motels and kitschy souvenir shops that hitched their wagons to the old west theme park.

Once the sun set, the masses coming down on the chair lift and incline railway filled the valley — and they needed night-time entertainment. This gave rise to attractions like the Stompin' Ground, Carolina Nights dinner theater, Diamond K Dance Ranch and the Maggie Opry House, along with the ubiquitous tourist trappings of mini golf and go carts.

Maggie was, by all accounts, a miniature version of Gatlinburg.

Desperate times

It all came crashing down at the dawn of the 21st century when Ghost Town closed following a decade of slow decline as the amusement park fell into disrepair.

Maggie Valley not only faced an economic crisis, but an identity crisis. Desperation gripped the valley. Some businesses closed, while others struggled through until someone came along to reopen Ghost Town — believing a savior was just around the corner.

"If it wasn't for Ghost Town, there would be no Maggie Valley. Ghost Town is what brought the hotels and motels, shops and tourists here. Let's get Ghost Town up and running," long-time hotelier Sonja Michaels said in 2003.

Pal Parker Archives

The chairlift that took tourists up the mountain to Ghost Town was one of the hurdles in getting the park reopened, as it could no longer meet safety regulations.

There was plenty of false hope. A parade of investors and developers came and went, touting plans to reopen Ghost Town. Some had the best intentions but failed. Others, it seemed, had only been preying on Maggie's desperation.

When one such entity landed in bankruptcy, it appealed to the town for money. A heated debate ensued over whether tax dollars should back the dream of Ghost Town's return.

"Our industry is tourism and Ghost Town produces it. Ghost Town is like a plant or a factory working to produce tourists," business leader Shirley Pinto said at the time, lobbying town leaders to pony up.

But the town board ultimately voted no to the dough.

But Maggie's woes were bigger than loss of Ghost Town, as tourism leader Wade Reece pointed out in 2005.

"Tourism has been on the decline for a long time. It's a deeper issue than just Ghost Town," he said.

The families of blue-collar workers were the core demographic of Maggie's tourism market, but they had evaporated with the loss of the state's textile mills and furniture plants, Reece said.

"We don't have the families coming to the mountains like we did in the past," he added.

Dawning of a new day

Then came the Great Recession. And a new reality set in.

"This is the worst it's been around here in 20 years," Alderman Phil Aldridge said in 2011. "The valley is dying on the vine."

Closed and for-sale signs littered store fronts through the valley.

"It's like a poker game. Everybody's folding," Ray Borges of Deer Country Cabins said in 2011. "There's nothing here. There's nothing that's attracting people to come here."

The first people to say it aloud, that the waiting game for a white knight to reopen Ghost Town was over, that Maggie must find a new course, faced public backlash. A vision of Maggie without Ghost Town bordered on blasphemy.

"People want to blame the demise of Maggie on Ghost Town. To tie your whole business economy to something like that is really foolish. Well, people have come here for years just because of the mountains, the natural things that are here," said Billy Case, a candidate who ran for alderman in 2013. He lost.

But gradually, the sentiment began to soak in. Maggie had to move on.

There was no silver bullet that could singularly restore Maggie's tourism trade. Instead, what emerged was a more well-rounded, diverse tourism base.

Carolina Nights dinner theater hung on for a decade after Ghost Town's closure in hopes it would reopen. But it pulled the plug in 2011, leaving the town with this parting message.

Maggie capitalized on the elk and trout fishing. It embraced its proximity to the Smokies and Parkway once more. Motorcycle tourism erupted. The festival grounds became an economic engine. And Cataloochee Ski Area grew into a winter power house.

Maggie's story is still being written. While vintage motel signs still harken back to the glory days of Ghost Town, a new chapter continues to unfold.

FORESIGHT OF THE FESTIVAL GROUNDS

Many balked when Maggie Valley town leaders forked over $450,000 for a field along Soco Road in 2003 with the vision of turning it into an outdoor event venue.

But in hindsight, the move was a critical turning point for the post-Ghost Town economy. Then-mayor Ralph Wallace made a case for the festival grounds in a guest editorial to The Mountaineer following the town's land purchase.

FESTIVAL GROUNDS – The Maggie Valley Festival Grounds attracts thousands of events to the community each year, many that return year after year.

"The festival grounds will be an economic advantage for Maggie Valley in that we now will have place to hold festivals and events to attract visitors in greater numbers," Wallace wrote.

The town has sunk more than $1 million into the festival grounds since that initial purchase: a stage, lights, sound, restrooms, a fancy entrance, additional parking — and more additional parking.

And it's all been worth it, according to now-mayor Mike Eveland.

"Over the last dozen years, we were able to take the festival grounds and turn it into the tourist attraction it is today," Eveland said.

The festival grounds is an economic engine, drawing thousands of visitors to the valley nearly every weekend from spring through fall.

"We're up to 29 events this year," said Alderman Tim Wise. "It's been extremely successful. You're not going to replace a Ghost Town, but it's been huge for our growth."

CONT. ON PAGE 13

THE TWO-WHEEL REVIVAL OF MOTORCYCLE TOURISM

Shortly after Ghost Town's closure, a new sheriff rode to town on two wheels. Dale Walkser opened Wheels Through Time museum in 2002, housing a mind-blowing collection of rare and vintage motorcycles and memorabilia spanning more than 100 years. Known as the "museum that runs," each machine is kept in running condition, many of which are fired up regularly for visitors.

The museum brought in half a million visitors from around the world during its first decade of operation and now claims 100,000 visitors a year.

"If not for bikers, some of us would be in serious financial trouble," Joanne Martin with the Maggie Valley Area Lodging Association said in 2005.

Natalie Nelson of Abbey Inn estimated 85% of her business was from motorcycles.

"Motorcycles are almost all we see anymore. If it wasn't for them, we would be in very dire straits," she said in 2006, crediting Walksler's museum for the boon.

Walksler was routinely featured on reality TV shows, and the museum even scored a visit from Jay Leno in 2015.

But Walksler was also a lightning rod. He often blasted town and business leaders for not doing more to recognize the value of the motorcycle industry and of his museum.

"Our county economic development core needs to come to grips that not only has Wheels Through Time changed the economy of pathetic Maggie Valley, it has given it a unique brand," Walksler said in 2014.

Twice, Walksler threatened to leave Maggie Valley due to what he called was a "dismissive attitude from local and regional power structures."

The Festival Grounds and Wheels Through Time have cemented Maggie Valley's reputation as a motorcycle hotspot.

Luckily, he stayed put. Dale passed away in 2021, and his son Matt Walksler carries on the torch.

WELCOME TO THE ELK CAPITAL OF N.C.

When plans were being made to reintroduce a herd of elk to Cataloochee Valley in the late 1990s, Ghost Town was still chugging along. Few knew that fledgling herd of 52 elk would play an integral role in the town's new tourism identity.

"I don't know that too many people in Maggie realized what the elk would mean. Of course, now it is a huge tourist draw for bringing people into Maggie," said Jim Blythe, an early champion and donor for the elk reintroduction.

Blythe was part of a contingency that lobbied the state

early on to designate Maggie as the Elk Capital of North Carolina. Within a decade of the reintroduction, elk became the mascot of Maggie Valley, and the county tourism authority launched a new logo with an elk front and center.

While the elk are a nuisance to locals upset by the beasts trampling their yards and destroying their gardens, tourists keep a watchful eye for the big animals and eagerly pose with the elk crossing signs along Soco Road.

The elk also rekindled a connection to Maggie's original tourist attraction. As a gateway to the Smokies, the most-visited national park in the country lies in Maggie's backyard.

"I've always said Maggie Valley's natural beuaty is so much more than any manmade attraction. And now we have the elk," Blythe said.

CATALOOCHEE SKI AREA WINS OVER WINTER

Cataloochee Ski Area has evolved from a novel experiment in southern skiing in the 1960s — when snow-making technology was a new-fangled invention — to a tourism kingpen.

Many thought Tom Alexander, the owner of Cataloochee Ranch, was off his rocker when he opened Cataloochee Ski Area, the first in North Carolina.

"He was somewhat of a visionary you could say," said his daughter, Alice Aumen, who helped start the new family venture. "It was something new, and no one was doing it."

Cataloochee Ski Area has now become Maggie's single biggest tourist attraction. It's often the first ski area in the South to open, and the last to close.

Cataloochee's growth over the last decade is witnessed by sold out weekends, when visitors who didn't buy passes in advance must be turned away from the mountain. Meanwhile, motels and restaurants that used to close in winter have found a reason to stay open — making Maggie more of a year-round destination than it ever was in Ghost Town's day.

With its festival grounds, scenery and wildlife, a nationally recognized motorcycle museum and the lure of winter skiing, Maggie Valley's tourism industry is poised to tackle the future with enthusiasm and diversity, whatever the future holds for the silent theme park on Buck Mountain.

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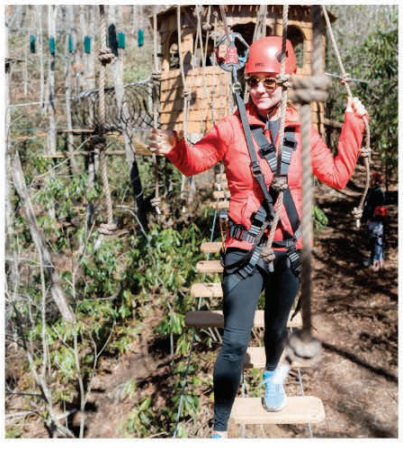

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MOM-AND-POP MOTEL OWNERS ARE THE STALWARTS OF MAGGIE

Cindy McElroy Mong as a teenager posing in front of the motel her parents owned. Cindy, like many children in the valley, grew up immersed in the tourism industry plied by their parents.

By Paul Nielsen

Maggie Valley is home to several motel families who have been in the game nearly as long as Maggie has been a town. Over the decades, they've seen the face of tourism and the motel industry change.

Among them is Roger McElroy, who ran Meadowlark Motel with his wife Donna for more than 40 years, from 1975 until 2017 when it passed to his son, Joseph.

The 34-room motel on the town's main drag sits on four acres of land on the banks of Jonathan Creek, framed by the Great Smoky Mountains.

One of the most notable changes, of course, was the closure of Ghost Town that had long been the bread and butter of the lodging industry. That ushered in a demographic shift of the average tourist, from families with kids to empty nesters and baby boomers.

"We used to have a lot of children come to Maggie, but once Ghost Town closed, the children didn't come anymore," said Roger McElroy, who also served on the town board for 26 years.

Today, families who visit gravitate toward vacation rental homes.

"Families will tend to stay in vacation rental homes, where couples and individuals will stay in motel rooms," said Carol Burrell, owner of Maggie Valley Creekside Lodge. "Families really migrated to vacation rental homes after Covid, and that is when it exploded here in our county."

The explosion of AirBnb's and online vacation home bookings had been on the upswing since the mid-2010s, but took off in Covid. Vacation rentals have since eclipsed the traditional hotels and motels in volume of business.

But business is still good, Burrell said. The Burrell family has owned Maggie Valley Creekside Lodge since 1981, a 45-room motel also on the town's main drag.

Many who come do so year after year, finding the spot they feel comfortable and making a tradition out of it.

"When they find a place, and they click with you and you click with them, they don't leave you," Burrell said. "I have a couple here right now that is here for five days, and they have been coming for five or six years. They get out of Orlando and read a book, take a nap and chill."

Joseph McElroy said many of the current visitors to Maggie arrive on motorcycles in what he describes as "road culture" tourists. Motel rooms are filled throughout the season by those who come for motorcycle rallies and car and truck shows held at the Maggie Valley Festival Grounds.

"There are some arts and crafts, fly fishing and other things, but it is really the road culture that drives a lot of Maggie's tourism right now," Joseph McElroy said.

Motorcyclists are also big business for Burrell. The motel hosted a large group of Harley Davidson enthusiasts earlier this month from Nashville. The group of around a dozen stayed multiple nights on their 22nd annual visit to the motel.

"They ride the mountains, and on Saturday they barbequed all day long and had a duck race in the creek. They just did fun stuff and relaxed. It's a four-day, five-day stay for some of them," she said.

But it is a clientele that is on the decline Burrell fears. Avid motorcyclists are aging there and their numbers are decreasing, while younger people are not as into the hobby.

"The people that are riding motorcycles are aging out and they can't ride them anymore. The younger generation is not as interested and price is number one. They don't have as much disposable income for a third vehicle," she said.

Advances in technology also have changed the motel business over the past couple of decades.

Prior to the widespread use of the

While some of Maggie Valley's vintage motel signs have become worn and shabby over the decades, the owners of Route 19 embraced the retro vibe when purchasing the former Rocky Waters Motel in 2018 and embarking on a total renovation.

As witnessed by the sign board on Maggie Valley Creekside Lodge, the labor market shortage is another challenge facing today's hotel and motel owners in Maggie Valley.

internet, reservations were made by phone, while many others just walked in the door. Now, reservations are made online with very few walk-ins.

"There used to be a lot of walk-ins, and you had to be open to two, three o'clock in the morning," said Joseph McElroy, who grew up at the Meadowlark Motel run by his parents. "They just drove up here looking for a room."

"That's only changed in the last 10 years," added Herbert McElroy, Joseph's brother who ran the motel for five years. "Ninety percent of our business was walk-ins when we ran the motel. We had a whole lot of one-night stays. It was costly because we had to clean a lot of rooms on a Saturday morning for a Saturday night. It cost a fortune."

Roger McElroy remembers those days before the internet very well.

"I'd have to get up in the middle of the night to rent a room and then go back to sleep," Roger McElroy said.

SOCO TOWER: A BEACON OVER MAGGIE VALLEY

Is it really the most photographed view in the Smokies? Who knows. But this clever moniker adopted by Soco Tower may well have become a self-fulfilling prophecy over the years.

The tower sits atop Soco Craft gift ship, which has been slinging kitschy roadside souvenirs to tourists since 1947. The tower itself become a calling card for Maggie Valley tourists by the 1960's, just a short jaunt off the Blue Ridge Parkway.

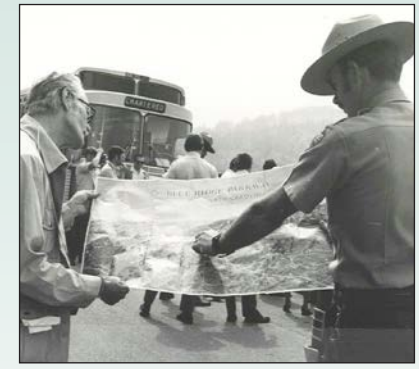
The nine-story tower offers a spectacular 360-degree view unlike anything Maggie visitors had seen in the cities where they lived. They readily forked over the small admission charge to climb the tower and see for themselves what the so-called "most photographed view in the Smokies" looked like.

Soco Crafts and Tower has been for sale for some years. While the shop is closed this season, though visitors can still stop by the viewing platform.

BUT FOR THE GRACE OF THE BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY

Construction of the Blue Ridge Parkway was a game changer for Maggie Valley, which was little more than a rural outpost at the time.

The Parkway came to Maggie in the early 1940s — an era when motor touring was all the rage in America. The automobile had finally become attainable for the average family during the post-WWII boom year.



The construction of the Blue Ridge Parkway segment through Haywood County opened the door to a motor touring, fueling some of Maggie Valley's earliest visitors. Pictured is a ranger with tourists at Mount Pisgah along the Haywood County stretch of Parkway.

But where to go in this new-fangled automobile? The Blue Ridge Parkway fit the bill, as families, newlyweds and retirees packed into their cars for a journey along what soon became known as "America's Favorite Drive."

Maggie Valley's tourism industry was kick started by this new breed of tourists behind the wheel and its proximity to the Blue Ridge Parkway.

SOCO GARDENS ZOO AND ITS EXOTIC MENAGERIE

Soco Gardens Zoo was one of the earliest attractions in Maggie Valley, opening in 1954 and remaining in the same family for five decades until it closed in 2005.

It was a favorite among locals, with generations of school children traipsing through on field trips. The menagerie included an impressive array of exotic animals, including giant pythons, a bengal tiger, snow leopard, alligators and monkeys.

The jungle-like enclave offered a respite from the hustle and bustle of Soco Road. The zoo was known for its tour guides who shared knowledge about the animals and their care, and who would don fall leather boots to walk among a pit of rattlesnakes and cooperheads.

The zoo was founded by Bo and Clara Miller, and then passed to their son and his wife, Jim and Beverly Miller.

The zoo saw as many as 40,000 visitors annually during Ghost Town's heyday, but had already dwindled by the time Ghost Town closed, which was the nail in the coffin for the zoo.

"If families were still coming to Maggie Valley, and if business was better, and if we were 10 years younger, we might try to sell it. But age catches up with you," Beverly said in September 2005. The zoo closed, and animals were found new homes, but the memory of Soco Gardens — and the giant python — live on in memory.

Soco Gardens Zoo was famous for its giant python. Among those pictured are workers Thomas Sutton (third from left), Harry Valentine (red shirt) and Les Cowan (holding the tail).

Lulu Cowan (right), whose brothers worked at the zoo, with one of the seasonal workers in the 1960s.

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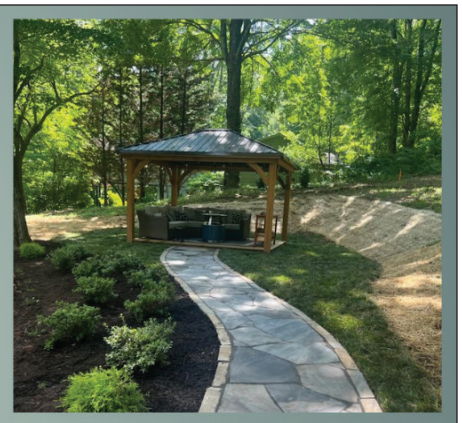

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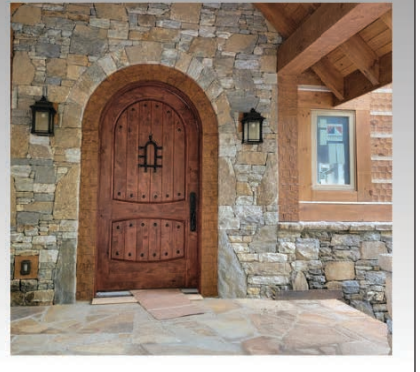

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MISS MAGGIE: PIONEER WOMAN AND SOCIAL MEDIA ICON

By Kathy N. Ross

Since the late 1940s, when business owners created the image of a pioneer woman in a sunbonnet to promote tourism, "Miss Maggie" has been the face of the valley.

Well, sort of. Because it took Miss Maggie more than three decades to show her face.

From the time of its creation, that early image of Miss Maggie with her red and green dress and yellow sunbonnet has graced brochures and advertising for the valley. At one point, said Alice Aumen in a 2004 interview, an artist sketched a face for Miss Maggie. But business owners rejected the notion, preferring the mystery of the sunbonnet.

"Miss Maggie" would not get a face until the late 1970s, with the arrival of Miss Jennie Reninger.

Reninger was the perfect woman to become Miss Maggie's living image. A former journalist, cattle farmer and world traveler, Reninger discovered the valley in the late 1970s while on a cross-country tour

Jennie Reninger donned the Miss Maggie bonnet from 1980 to 1996.

in her pickup truck. When the town put in sidewalks in 1979, she began picking up trash, evolving into the role of Miss Maggie, waving to visitors as she walked.

Reninger retired as Miss Maggie in 1996 at the age of 89. The next year, the chamber and the civic association requested several volunteers to step in.

Each future Miss Maggie would have to be a seasonal or year-round resident of the town for at least 10 years, have good reputation, be able to walk three to four miles per day, and relate well to children. References were required.

From 2004 through 2008, a Little Miss Maggie pageant was held each spring to pick the living youngest version of town's icon. The first runner-up would alternate duties as the little sidekick to the "grownup" Miss Maggie, who was played by several women.

In late 2019, Miss Maggie took on a new look, when the youthful Mary donned the pioneer garb and sunbonnet to play the role. Mary has spent the past 4½ years modernizing Miss Maggie while preserving the traditional look. She wears sneakers under the dress and often has a coffee in hand. Above all, she carries her cell phone at all times.

Miss Maggie locks onto her target at the Maggie Valley Axe Lounge.

Because Miss Maggie may look like a pioneer, but she still needs to take selfies with the kids to post on Facebook and Instagram.

MAGGIE TO MAGGIE VALLEY: THE NAMING OF A TOWN

By Kathy N. Ross

In 1904, Maggie Setzer was dismayed to learn her community had been named for her.

The shy 14-year-old feared she would be teased by her schoolmates, according to her daughter, Patty Pylant Kosier. Maggie could not have imagined that the name would not only mark postal addresses, but that the community would evolve into a town that would be known throughout the South for its tourist attractions and spectacular scenery.

The name had been chosen by Maggie's father, Jack Setzer, the first postmaster for the valley along the upper section of Jonathan Creek. Just after the turn of the 20th century, Setzer grew tired of traveling to the Plott post office near Waynesville to pick up mail for himself and his neighbors. For six months he kept records of the mail that passed through his hands as well as the stamps he sold. He submitted the records, and the government asked him to submit names for a new post office.

Setzer tried several, which were rejected, already in use elsewhere in the state.So he submitted a list that included the names of the his daughters. And the Postmaster General informed him that the post office would be titled "Maggie."

Four years after the valley was named for her, Maggie Setzer married and moved away, eventually settling with her husband in Texas.

The creation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park dramatically increased the number of visitors to Maggie, and the area grew as a tourist destination. By 1949, business owners in the valley organized to promote tourism and announced they considered "Maggie" an awkward name for advertising and promotion.

They encouraged one another and locals to refer to the area as "Maggie Valley." R.B. Coburn obliged, promoting his theme park as "Ghost Town in Maggie Valley," which hastened the transition, given the crowds that it drew.

By the time the town incorporated in 1974, most people referred to the area as Maggie Valley, and the U.S. Postal Service made it official that year.

A young Maggie Mae Setzer reportedly burst into tears when she found out her community's post office would bear her name.

A LONG LABOR THRUST MAGGIE INTO TOWNSHIP STATUS

By Kathy N. Ross

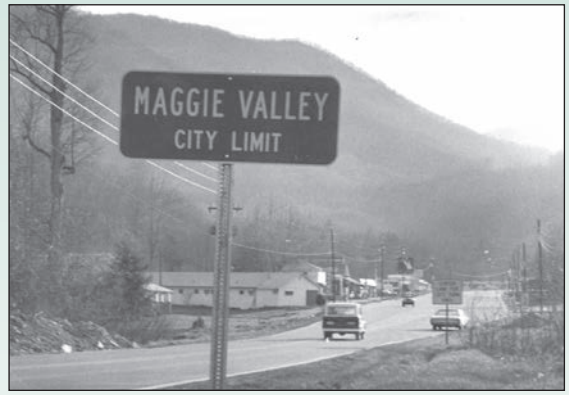
Becoming a town is a complicated process, and Maggie Valley's birth was no exception. In some ways it was a long labor.

First, came the business owners who recognized the potential of the mountain community as a tourist destination. They had been working to promote the area since creation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in the 1930s, especially since Ghost Town in the Sky began luring thousands to the valley in the early 1960s. By the 1970s, incorporation seemed the next logical step.

There was opposition, as shown by a public hearing held in late March of 1974. While more than 400 attended, 24 spoke against creation of the town while nine supported it. However, the vast majority of opponents did not live in the proposed town limits.

But they might be annexed later, those opponents argued. They also feared the move would bring an ABC store to the valley, with its beer and wine sales.

On April 12, the General Assembly approved the incorporation of the Town of Maggie Valley. And yes, the town did get an ABC store in 1979 and Maggie Valley did grow, though much of that expansion didn't take place for decades.



Maggie Valley's initial town limits were long and skinny, following Soco Road – which widened to four-lanes when entering town from Dellwood.

The little town, with about 250 year-round residents, accomplished some remarkable things. In 1986, the town laid sewer lines through town and down the Jonathan Creek valley to its new wastewater treatment plant near Interstate 40. To this day, that plant operates well under capacity, allowing growth in that corridor when other regions have had to wait for upgrades to approve bi developments.

And that, by the way, is not a fact that all residents celebrate, as the town, beginning its sixth decade, grapples with what that corridor, and its own limits, will look like.

In 1987, the town also purchased the Maggie Elementary School, converting it into a town hall and police station before constructing a separate, modern police station in 2007.

The town has grown to a year-round population of more than 1,600 people, much of that due to annexation. It has purchased and developed the Maggie Valley Festival Grounds, which draw visitors for events ranging from concerts to car shows and the annual Fourth of July fireworks festivities.

Today, Maggie Valley leaders work to reconcile conflicting interests, from those who dream of seeing a revival of high-excitement attractions such as Ghost Town, to those who see its future as a center for eco-tourism and others who are content to be a pristine, mountain residential community. It may be a challenge for the next decades, to blend those sometimes-discordant interests into a prosperous future.

IN THE ROOM WHEN IT HAPPENED: MAKING OF A TOWN

By Brionna Dallara

Kyle Edwards is one of the few early players in Maggie Valley's formation 50 years ago who's still alive to remember it.

And like sausage being made, it wasn't always pretty. Incorporating as a town would make Maggie its own master. It could have its own police department, get state money to build sidewalks and, of course, allow alcohol sales since the county itself was dry. Aside from getting beer and wine, Maggie could be the first town in the county to legalize mixed drinks.

But it also meant property taxes and regulations, which inspired critics. Most business owners thought it was worth it, however.

"It was designed, or supposedly designed, to help generate business for everybody," Edwards said. "Everybody wanted to see everybody succeed."

The swearing in of Maggie's 1983 town board (L-R): Keith Robinson, Jack Adkins, Kyle Edwards, Mayor Jim Miller, Sam McCrary and Al Pinto.

However, more than just business owners had to be in favor of becoming a town. Edwards said it required numerous meetings, and about 100 petition signatures before it was voted on.

"We had some meetings, and we had some closed meetings, and we had some meetings that wasn't in town hall when we decided everything," Edwards of the tricky negotiations to build consensus.

To placate opponents, they proposed narrowly drawn town limits — taking in commercial frontage along Soco Road and little else. But it still didn't sit right with some of the farmers in the valley. Edwards said they were scared the town would grow to where the regulations would affect their land.

"A lot of them didn't agree with it being a town. And that's true today, a lot of them still don't," Edwards said. "It wasn't supposed to grow and spread out. It was set up more for the local businesses."

In March 1974, N.C. Sen. Charles Taylor called for a public hearing on the incorporation of Maggie Valley.

The following month, some 400 citizens, which according to Edwards was about how many total residents the valley had, spent more than three hours at the Maggie school — now town hall — discussing the proposed incorporation. Later in April, legislation incorporating the Town of Maggie Valley became a law.

Edwards continued to serve on the Maggie governing board for 21 years, all on the whopping salary of $1 a year.

FORMER MAYOR RECALLS THREE DECADES OF PROGRESS

By Paul Nielsen

Former Maggie Valley mayor and alderman Roger McElroy is one of the most influential elected officials in the town's 50-year history — serving for half the town's existence.

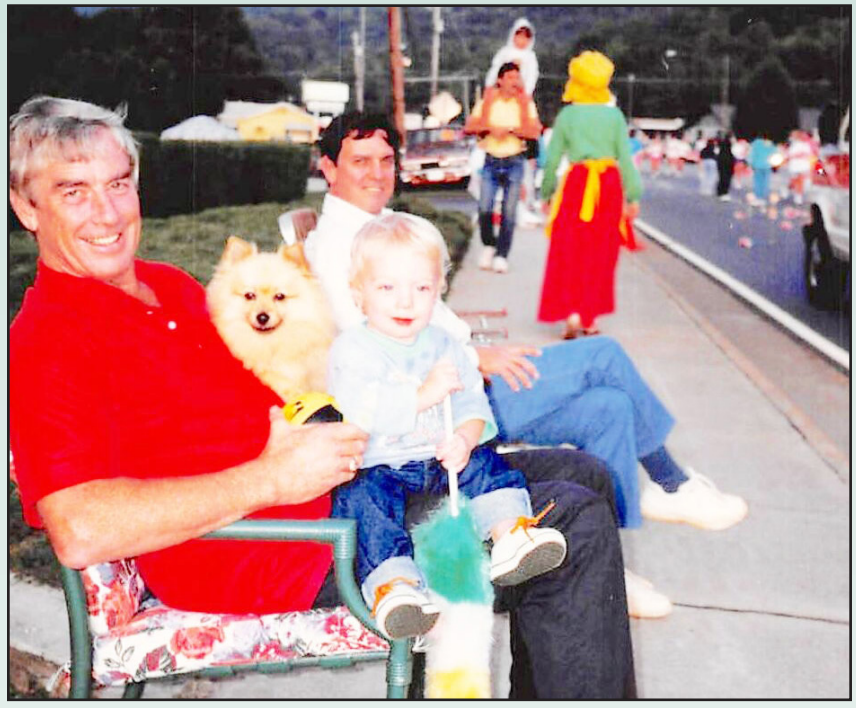
McElroy was elected as a town alderman in 1985, served in that position 20 years, then as mayor for six more years. He had been among the early pioneers of tourism in the Valley, arriving on the scene just as the town was forming and taking over the Meadowlark Motel.

Along the way, McElroy was a driving force in policies that helped turn the town into a thriving tourist hotspot and community as Maggie Valley's population grew from around 200 people to 1,200 residents in 2010.

Some of those policies include the purchase of the Festival Grounds, bringing sewer to the town and leading the effort that resulted in Maggie Valley getting a better share of occupancy tax revenue.

In the early 2000s, McElroy was among the visionaries who pushed to buy property for what is now the Festival Grounds in the heart of the town. The venue is now an economic engine, hosting major events almost every weekend of the year from April to October.

McElroy put his money where his mouth was after the town bought the property, which was just a hay field. He owned a construction firm at the time and donated the use of heavy equipment and his own time to level and reseed the property and to help build a stage.



Roger McElroy with his grandson in 1993 watching the Moonlight Run, a longstanding tradition.

"I graded that whole festival grounds," McElroy said. "Took all the topsoil off and piled it in the middle. I leveled it back and put the topsoil back. I worked for free, I think they bought me $500 worth of gas."

McElroy envisioned the Festival Grounds not just as a place to showcase the area's rich cultural heritage but a way to keep tourists coming to the valley after Ghost Town had closed.

In a letter to voters before the 2011 election for mayor, McElroy said he was very proud of the Festival Grounds and that the town should continue to invest in improvements to the site.

"It has become the center of activity in our community with programs ranging from fireworks to music shows to craft shows featuring our proud mountain heritage," McElroy wrote in the letter.

Some were opposed to the festival grounds at first, critical of the town spending the public's tax dollars on an event venue serving tourist interests. But the festival grounds proved a wise investment that kept Maggie's economy afloat post-Ghost Town.

One accomplishment that McElroy is most proud of is his successful push on how room taxes on overnight lodging are collected are distributed. Historically, the countywide tourism authority spent the dollars as it saw fit.

The change that McElroy helped usher in ensured Maggie Valley received a guaranteed percentage of the lodging tax revenue to use for its own goals. Maggie — as home to so many of the hotels and motels — brought in more room tax than other locales.

"I argued that it needs to go back to the source where it was collected," McElroy said. "The county got it and they did what they wanted to do with it. I won that one and Maggie started to get real funding. It gave Maggie money to really start promoting Maggie. Before that Maggie didn't have much money to play with."

Another milestone McElroy pushed for was bringing sewer service to the town. It was a big lift for a town as small as Maggie to build a sewer plant. It ultimately paved the way for the development, which was then annexed into the town limits — leading to the town's growth.

"That opened up a lot of development. The water table is pretty high on flat fields, so it's hard to develop it with septic tanks," McElroy said.

But more than his tangible accomplishments, McElroy was known for his calm demeanor in a town where tempers flared easily, for rising above the fray in a town where drama was thicker than molasses, and for his "greater good" philosophy in a town where self-interests all-to-easily crept into politics.

Roger McElroy on the chair lift to Ghost Town.

Evolution from tourist town to real town: Population grows nine-fold in 30 years

By Becky Johnson

Maggie Valley made headlines as the fastest growing town in North Carolina when the 2000 Census came out. But was it really?

Sure, the Census showed Maggie's population had grown from just 185 to 711 residents between 1990 and 2000 — a more than 300% increase. But the moniker of "fastest growing town" wasn't entirely accurate.

Maggie's growth was largely due to a march of annexation that expanded the town beyond its initial boundaries — a narrow linear strip along Soco Road — to include residential communities beyond the commercial corridor.

The storyline would continue to play out in the 2010 and 2020 Census. Maggie's population appeared to be exploding, but it was in fact driven by annexation.

The trajectory would ultimately alter Maggie Valley's entire identity. When Maggie Valley incorporated as a town in 1971, the campaign was driven by business owners plying the tourism trade along Soco Road.

It was no secret that businesses behind the push wanted alcohol. The county was dry, and becoming a town was the only way restaurants could serve beer and wine. To boot, if Maggie became a town, it could have an ABC store and restaurants could also serve liquor — and it was the only town in the county to have mixed drinks for some three decades.

To serve the commercial tourism interests, the original town limits were drawn as a skinny line along Soco Road.

That changed in the 1990s, however, when the town began a concerted expansion of its footprint, absorbing subdivisions up the mountainsides and out Jonathan Creek into the town limits. The town grew from just 0.7 square miles in 1990 to 3.39 square miles by 2020.

Year-round town

Annexation wasn't the only factor driving Maggie's population growth, however. Maggie was evolving from a tourist town to a second-home enclave. And the evolution didn't stop there. Those second-home owners gradually became year-round residents.

"A lot of the tourists that come in here, they decide to live here, and they buy a lot to make their house place. We need both and both's got to work together for the town to prosper," Alderman Colin Edwards said in 2009.

The second-home industry boomed during the 2000s. Developers couldn't build subdivisions fast enough to satisfy

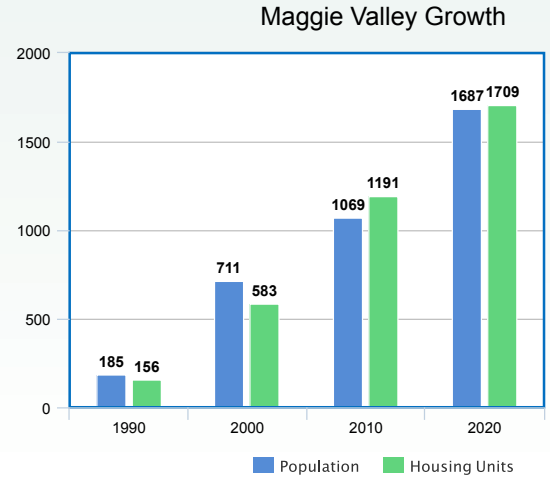
Maggie Valley firefighters in 1979.

demand from baby boomers in search of their mountain dream home. Meanwhile, tourism was tanking from Ghost Town's closure.

"The residential market is driving the economy here. Do they accept that or will they still focus on the commercial side that started this town?" Maggie Valley town planner Kevin Byrd said in 2005.

When Maggie Valley Country Club announced a $100 million project to build 300 residential units that same year, Developer Mike Toohey claimed it would have{/span} "more of an impact on Maggie Valley than whatever happens at Ghost Town."

In 2000, 40% of the homes in Maggie Valley were second homes. By 2010, that number had grown to more than half, according to Census numbers.



Gradually, some second-home owners eventually became year-round residents, once again changing Maggie's economy.

"We sell a house to someone that wants to come in June, July and August, then they come April to October. Then they come to spend Thanksgiving and Christmas. Then they sell their house in Florida and move here year round," Alderwoman Linda Taylor said back in 2002 — predicting the path that would ultimately play out. "There was a time things would close during the winter. But in the next 10 years, everyone will be open year round."

Maggie Valley — much like how Pinocchio became a real boy — became a real town.

Changing identity

As the town's footprint grew and absorbed residential subdivisions, a new class of town leaders emerged. The town board had historically been dominated by Soco Road business owners, who ran the town as an extension of the tourism industry.

But newly annexed residents became eligible to run for the town board, bringing a new host of players into the political arena and giving residents a voice.

A push-and-pull ensued, as the town struggled to balance the traditional tourism interests of businesses with its grow-

Continued on page 27

MAGGIE'S EVOLUTION SINCE THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

By Aarik Long

Maggie Valley only had 111 registered voters in its first town board election in 1974, shortly after its formation as a town. Aside from a few vintage remaining motel signs, that tiny town is barely recognizable today.

"I think the biggest change is the growth. In 2000, we had right over 700 people. In 2020, that was over 1,700," said Maggie Valley Alderman Tim Wise. "That's changed Maggie Valley from just a tourist town to also a residential town."

The transition came with its share of growing pains and conflicts — especially as the business leaders at the town's core had to make room at the table for more voices, namely those representing the residents not tied to tourism.

"A lot of the people who were in charge were people who had been there for a long time — real estate people and hotel people," Mayor Mike Eveland said. "Now, you have a bigger mix of people getting involved. The demographics and people getting involved are changing on a daily basis."

During Maggie's early years, it was defined by the tourism magnet of Ghost Town in the Sky amusement park.

"People may not know where Haywood County or Waynesville is, but they know where Maggie Valley is because that's where people came," Eveland said.

The loss of Ghost Town thrust Maggie into an identity crisis. At the same time, however, Maggie was discovered by droves of second-home owners during the 2000s. By the 2010s, those second-home owners began morphing into full-time residents.

"That's been our biggest change and our biggest challenge," Wise said. "Full-time residents expect different things than a seasonal person."

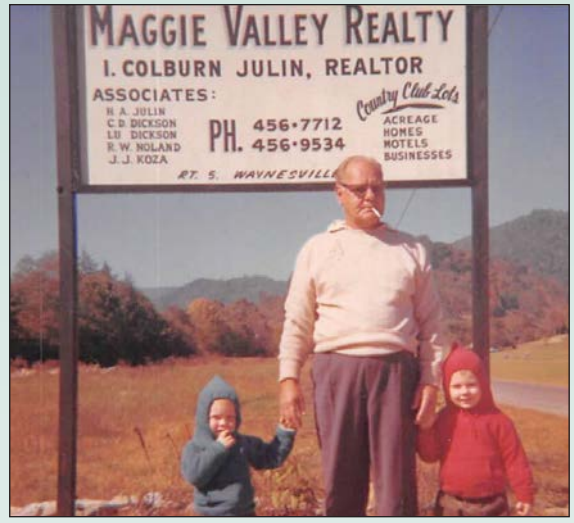
There's more streets to plow when it snows, more leaves to pick up in the fall, and more calls for police. The town added two more officers to its force this year, bringing the total to 11.

Having a full-time population has also meant building more amenities. The town has focused making Maggie more walkable and adding to the inventory of public parks, especially creekside parks.

"Twenty years ago, the cows probably had more access to the creek than we did," Eveland said. "The town will stay committed to that, especially with the board we have now."

The town's growing full-time population has helped many businesses in the Valley stay afloat thanks to a consistent stream of customers year-round.

"We still have a vision with tourism, but we're getting more people who are living here full-time and becoming part of the family. In January, they're going to want to go eat somewhere," Eveland said. "That's exciting. I love it, and I love watching it grow."



Real estate has been a big business in Maggie Valley well before it was a town. Herbert Julin is pictured in the early 1960s with his grandchildren below his real estate firm's sign.

He expects the trend to continue.

"The forecast is that we'll continue to see growth in the residential side," Eveland said. "The future of Maggie Valley is bright. The vision I have is different than the vision they had in 2004."

Push and pull

Much of the town's population growth has come from absorbing new territory into the town limits. In the 1990s, the town could forcibly annex new areas. The law changed in the 2000s, and now property owners must agree to be annexed. But the town holds a trump card: anyone wanting to connect to the town's sewer system must apply for annexation.

"We continue to grow and annex people around our town pretty much every meeting," Wise said.

Of late, that growth has pushed further and further afield out Jonathan Creek.

"Look at the growth taking place on Jonathan Creek. We have neighbors and folks that live out that way, and we're starting to get to know each other," Eveland said.

But not all are happy with the town's growth, especially the rash of development spreading from Maggie into Jonathan Creek. They've criticized town leaders' willingness to grant sewer for subdivisions, which in turn has enabling the development to puncture their community.

"It seems like the leadership is hellbent on making Haywood County a continuous housing development," Haywood County farmer Don Smart said during a public hearing on one such subdivision last year.

"This right here is going to kill the whole dang integrity of Jonathan Creek," John Leatherwood added. "This is a

Continued on page 27

Town leaders gather in 2022 to discuss plans for a veterans tribute park in front of town hall. Mayor Mike Eveland is second from left.

Three subdivisions totaling more than 300 housing units are in various stages along Jonathan Creek. Residents opposed to Maggie's growth trajectory along J-Creek attend a public hearing on one such development in 2022.

MAGGIE'S EVOLUTION CONT. FROM PAGE 26

shame. It's sad. It really is."

When Maggie incorporate as a town in 1974, it met similar opposition. The original town limits were narrowly drawn along Soco Road's commercial corridor, and business leaders pushing for incorporation promised it would stay that way. But critics on the outskirts feared it would only be a matter of time until the town gobbled them up.

While the town stayed small as promised for the first two decades, its footprint has since quadrupled over the past three decades. That growth is as inevitable as the day is long, according to Mike Sorrells, one of the few Jonathan Creek residents who voiced support for the town's annexation of new development last year.

"It would be nice to keep everything the way it is, but that's not what has happened. The whole valley has changed," Sorrells said. "We benefitted from the growth. There was a lot of people that moved in that bought homes and bought developments up on the mountains. We've prospered from it."

While the town has seen plenty of growth over the last two decades, both Eveland and Wise agree that the town leaders look to continue building on the progress in Maggie Valley.

"Maggie has gone through some things, but I think we're on a positive trajectory and hopefully we continue to move forward," Wise said.

TOURIST TOWN TO REAL TOWN CONT. FROM PAGE 25

ing residential base. The 2011 election proved a turning point, when Ron DeSimone — a contractor who lived in one of those newly annexed subdivisions — became mayor.

"I've always been of the opinion they were paying attention to the businesses and not the residents," DeSimone said when running for election in 2011. "Let's face it, the majority of the town is around that strip. If Maggie Valley wants to move into the future, it needs to stop looking toward the past."

DeSimone launched an initiative dubbed Moving Maggie Forward, aimed at finding a new identity for Maggie — one that didn't pinning its hopes on Ghost Town reopening. Indeed, the town was reeling from decline of the tourist industry.

"The curbside appeal of the town has suffered. You're greeted with empty buildings and for sale signs. Residents are concerned the town is evolving into a real ghost town," said Craig Madison, the consultant who led the community-driven revitalization plan.

Maggie Valley ABC store manager Bill Kimble in 1979.

DeSimone was tragically killed in a construction accident in 2015, but the conversation he set in motion is still playing out today.

"The first thing is to recognize what Maggie is," Alderman Tim Wise said during a candidate forum in 2023. "We're a top travel destination. But we're also a place for working people and retired people. Maggie is all of these things, and we need to embrace that."

HAPPY 50TH MAGGIE VALLEY!

On behalf of the Realtor® community, we congratulate Maggie Valley on its 50th anniversary.

History of real estate in Maggie Valley

The price of a home in Maggie Valley, N.C. has grown exponentially (approximately 989.6%) since the town was officially incorporated in 1974. According to historical median home price data from Census.gov, one of the few sources of historical median and average home price data in the U.S. since 1961, the approximate median price of a home in the South in 1974 was $37,400. Fifty years later, at midyear 2024, the median sales price of a home in Maggie Valley is $407,500.

	MORTGAGE RATE	MEDIAN HOME PRICE
1974	9.58%	$37,400
1984	13.1%	$78,300
1994	9.2%	$135,000
2004	5.7%	$154,500*
2014	3.8%	$159,500*
2024	6.8%	$407,500*

Sources:
30-Year Fixed Rate Mortgage Averages U.S. (1971- present),
Median and Average Sales Prices of New Homes Sold in U.S. (Census.gov) 1963-2015
***Maggie Valley Home prices from 2004 -present, Canopy MLS, June 2024**

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FROM LAWMAN, BOOTLEGGER TO MUSIC MAN: THE CHARACTERS OF MAGGIE VALLEY

By Kathy N. Ross

Throughout its years as "Maggie," and since it grew up to become Maggie Valley, the community along the upper waters of Jonathan Creek has been adorned with characters ranging from the outlaw bootlegger to devoted schoolteacher. These folks represent multiple facets of Maggie Valley's personality as a community. The one thing they have shared is the powerful influence each has exercised on their mountain valley.

Two of Maggie Valley's most interesting characters were both named Sutton. One invested his own money in keeping the law while the other made his cash from openly defying it.

By Kathy N. Ross

I.C. SUTTON, POLICE CHIEF

Ira Claxton Sutton was sworn in as a special deputy around 1948. For 32 years, he worked full-time at Dayco, then spent his nights answering calls in Maggie or riding with the sheriff's department. When the town incorporated in 1974, Sutton was sworn in at the town's first police chief – but he wasn't on salary. Until 1980, the town paid for Sutton's car insurance and gas, but furnished no pay or equipment. Sutton bought his own uniforms, guns, blue lights and sirens.

This was the police chief who often had toys in the back of his patrol car to give to children. The one who often "forgot" to wear a gun – like the time he arrested three vandals at a convenience store. He had them under control before he borrowed a gun from the store manager.

On another occasion, Sutton spotted some suspects sought by the Haywood County Sheriff's Department. He followed them up Soco Mountain and radioed in. The dispatcher told Sutton not to pull the suspects over, just to stay behind them until backup arrived.

Instead, when deputies reached the scene, they found Sutton had pulled the car over and was standing by the door, ordering them to stay in the vehicle – so they wouldn't see that he didn't have a gun.

On another occasion, paramedic David Reeves entered a residence where the occupant was waving a gun and screaming.

Maggie Police Chief I.C. Sutton, right, confers with FBI agent Steve West following a bank robbery in Maggie Valley in October 1980.

"A deputy sheriff jumped in front of the guy … and I was thinking about jumping through the window," Reeves recalled. "Then I.C. stuck his head in the door. He called him by name and said, 'You go sit on the couch and I'll be there in a minute.' And the guy just put the gun down on the washing machine and sat down. It was absolutely amazing."

Sutton retired in 1988 and died in 2006 at the age of 83. The next year, the town named its new police station after him.

Maggie's first three police chiefs were, from left: I.C. Sutton, Saralyn Price, and Scott Sutton, I.C.'s son. This was taken shortly after Scott Sutton joined the force. Price became chief upon I.C.'s retirement and Scott Sutton assumed the post when she retired.

THE MOONSHINER

Clad in his trademark overalls, with his long beard, Marvin "Popcorn" Sutton didn't look like a publicist. But he was, and a brilliant one, at that. He did look like the stereotype of a moonshiner, which was his intent.

His choices up to the time of his death – to publicize his moonshining, to record his defiance of federal laws in videos and documentaries, cultivated his legendary fame. For some, his decision to die rather than go to federal prison elevated him to folk hero status, while others considered him a criminal with a genius for self-promotion.

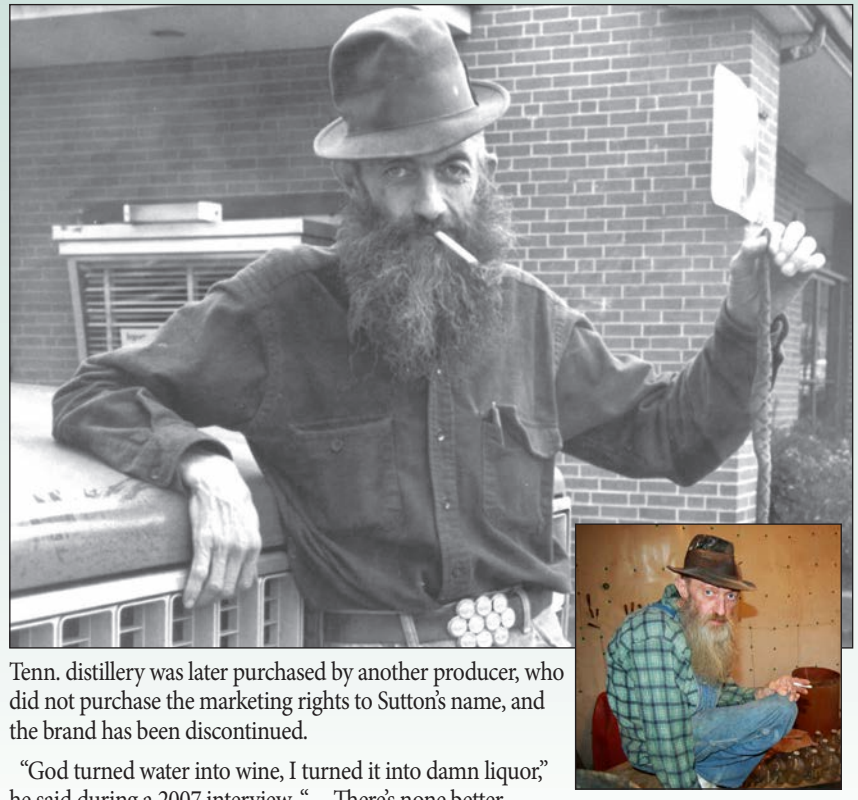
The Haywood County native began making illegal moonshine in his late teens, he said, after selling it for others by the time he was 16. He was featured on cable TV networks and produced his own documentary, The Last Run of Likker I'll Ever Make, laced with his characteristically foul and blunt language. A series of documentaries propelled him to national fame, particularly Neal Hutcheson's This is the Last Dam Run of Likker I'll Ever Make. Of the book he co-authored with friend Earnestine Upchurch on his life, he said, 'I can tell you this: It ain't made to read in Sunday school."

Sutton's decades-long ongoing and public defiance of the law caught up with him when he was ordered to federal prison. Two weeks before, on March 9, 2009, he took his own life, dying of carbon monoxide poisoning. Family members said he had battled depression off and on for years.

Popcorn Sutton continued to make news long after his death. Seven months after his suicide, Sutton's widow, Pam, had his remains removed from a gravesite besides that of his parents near Harmon Den. She re-buried him in Tennessee, over the objections of his family.

Merchants in Maggie Valley found ways to build on his legendary status. His videos continued to attract viewers on line. Hank Williams, Jr., partnered with Pam Sutton and another company to produce and market "Popcorn Sutton's Tennessee White Whiskey." The Newport, Tenn. distillery was later purchased by another producer, who did not purchase the marketing rights to Sutton's name, and the brand has been discontinued.

"God turned water into wine, I turned it into damn liquor," he said during a 2007 interview. "… There's none better nowhere. Nobody's ever made better liquor than me."



Neal Hutcheson

STILL – The late moonshiner Popcorn Sutton inside one of his sheds.

THE BIG INVESTOR

Ronald Braxton "R.B." Coburn became a well-known character in Maggie Valley in part because he changed the very character of the future town – but also because he looked and lived the part.

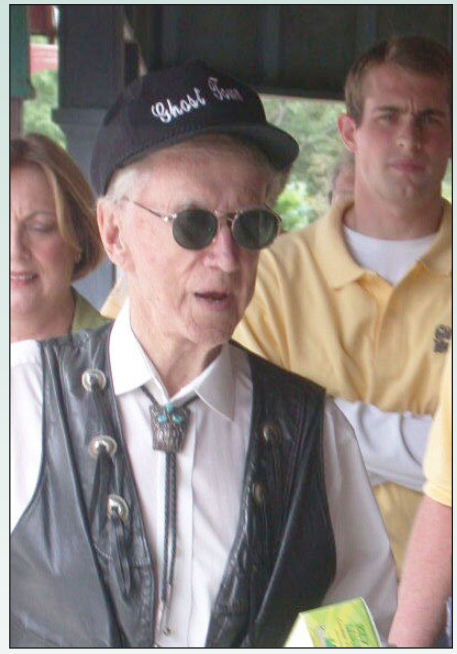
In 1960, when the businessman was 40, he was vacationing in Maggie Valley when he looked up at the steep slopes of Buck Mountain and decided he would buy the place, put in a chairlift and have tourists pay for the ride.

On a trip to Oklahoma City, Coburn decided he would add a Western theme park to the mountaintop. In June 1961, just over a year and $1 million later, Ghost Town in the Sky opened to the public. In the years before massive theme parks, it was wildly successful, and traffic into the Maggie community would slow to a near-standstill in summer months.

As Ghost Town took on a character of its own, it drew characters to its streets, from movie star Burt Reynolds to its own high sheriff. Coburn, however, was the master script writer, luring the big names and staging dramas. He could be found on the streets of Ghost Town, donned in his trademark black vest, bolo tie, cigar in his mouth, talking to kids and sharing memories with their parents of their own childhood visits.

In 1973, he sold his three theme parks to a national conglomerate. Then he didn't like what he perceived as the neglect Ghost Town suffered. His son David had also regretted the sale, so in 1986, Coburn bought Ghost Town back and constructed a new rollercoaster, the Red Devil. When his son was seriously injured and could not take over the theme park, Coburn continued to run it. He emjoyed people, he said, and he loved kids.

In 2003, Coburn, whose wife of 65 years, Jeanette, was ailing, decided Ghost Town would not reopen that season. He sold the park in 2006 and retired to Florida. He died April 1, 2008 at the age of 88. That year, Maggie Valley town leaders voted to annually recognize June 11 — the opening day of Ghost Town in 1961 — as R.B. Coburn Day in recognition of his role in Maggie Valley's development.



R.B Coburn in 2006 during a community celebration of the sale of Ghost Town to a new owner.

R.B. Coburn and wife Jeannette in 1976, who were married for 65 years.

THE FAST FINGERED MUSIC MAN

An oft-told Raymond Fairchild story was related yet again at his October 2019 funeral.

When the World Champion banjo player was about to go onstage at the Grand Ole Opry, country music star Roy Acuff was nearby, and realized that Fairchild had his Smith and Wesson .38 Special tucked in his belt.

Acuff whispered, 'You can't go onstage at the Opry with a gun.'

The world champion banjo player responded, 'My gun goes where I go,' and walked onstage.

Fairchild was considered by many to be the best banjo player in the world. He was also colorful in character, immensely proud of his Cherokee heritage, a lifelong worker for children's causes who taught many of the next generation of great banjo players.

Wayne Ebinger

Bluegrass music legend Raymond Fairchild was

A native of the Cherokee Qualla Boundary, Fairchild met his future wife Shirley while playing banjo in Maggie. They married and settled in Haywood County, and Fairchild built his own music hall, The Maggie Valley Opry House, where visitors could hear and marvel at his lighting fast fingers and unique style of play.

Fairchild debuted at the Grand Ole Opry with the Crowe Brothers in 1977 and played there multiple times. During his lifetime, his playing earned him two Gold Records and induction into Bill Monroe's Bluegrass Hall of Fame. His style was distinctly his own, and Fairchild knew it.

"It ain't old-time music, but it ain't bluegrass. It's Fairchild style," he said in a 1997 interview. "It's a fast style that I taught myself." He loved performing. "When you start playing and see the excitement in the crowd, that's when you get paid," he said.

The man considered one of the best banjo players in the world did not read music.

When Fairchild died in in 2019 at the age of 80, some 500 people gathered to pay tribute to him at the Stompin' Ground in his adopted town of Maggie Valley. There, they came to their feet at a rousing rendition of his trademark tune, "Whoa, Mule" and sang Raymond on his way with "Amazing Grace."

Upon Ruth Henry's retirement in 1974, after 40 years of teaching in the Maggie Valley community, former students presented her with a quilt which contained hundreds of names of her students embroidered in its squares.

THE MOTHER TO MANY

In 1982, when David Reeves, a newly minted United Methodist minister, arrived in Maggie Valley to pastor two churches, his wife, Della, struggled. She wanted to teach, but couldn't find a job in her area of training, physical education.

One day, Della visited retired schoolteacher Ruth Henry, who lived in a country house beside the church. As many people did with Mrs. Henry, Della confessed her troubles. Ruth suggested Della return to school – and soon after presented her a check, calculated to cover the cost of upgrading her education.

Della became an elementary school teacher. And Ruth Henry became a hero to yet another family.

Henry spent 40 years teaching elementary grades, most of that time at Maggie Valley Elementary. The few years she wasn't in Maggie, she taught at nearby Rock Hill School. And when she retired in 1974, she continued to volunteer in the classroom.

With the support of her husband, Todd, Ruth Henry spent the rest of her life investing in the people of Maggie Valley. She had a scrapbook of sorts, which contained copies of some 20 college diplomas, belonging to people she had helped get an education. Because she and Todd had no children themselves, every child became her own, including two young men she and her husband raised.

Henry died in 1996 at the age of 84. She willed her home and land to her beloved Maggie Methodist church, a portion of which became an early part of the town's greenway system.

"Ruth became one of my greatest heroes," said Rev. Reeves, who preached her funeral, "because she had a real clear understanding of her place on the thread, found it and hung on it."

MEET MAGGIE VALLEY'S LUMINARIES

As Maggie Valley celebrates its 50th 'birthday' of becoming a municipality, *The Mountaineer* reminisced with some of the 'luminaries' of the valley — people who helped build Maggie Valley and shape its character.

They mentioned the hard work of residents, some departed and some still here, who were instrumental in helping the community prosper.

While we couldn't possibly capture the stories of everyone who has played a role in Maggie Valley, this final section of the magazine features a cross section of those who witnessed Maggie's ups and downs, her successes and foibles, her triumphs and tragedies.

Throughout the conversations, the pioneers, business owners and involved community members mentioned common themes of what make Maggie Valley special — amazing mountain scenery, temperate climate, cool mountain air and the hard-working folks who form the community here.

The gracious hospitality and friendliness of the people in Maggie Valley and Haywood County continue to make this beautiful area a place where people want to live — or visit again and again.

FUELED ON FLAPJACKS:

THE LEGENDARY JOEY'S PANCAKE HOUSE

By Carol Viau

When Brenda and Joey O'Keefe came to Maggie Valley on vacation in 1966, they saw an opportunity.

Joe, as he was known then, was manager of the famous Fontainebleau Hotel in Miami Beach, where they both worked and fell in love.

"When I came to Maggie Valley from Florida in 1966, it must have been at the hand of God," Brenda said. "We came on vacation and saw an opportunity."

For the O'Keefes, who knew the hospitality business, that opportunity was a small restaurant in what later became the fellowship hall for St. Margaret of Scotland Church, becoming the "little" pancake house.

The O'Keefes got into pancakes, since everyone eats breakfast, Brenda said. They named it Joey's Pancake House, fearing "Joe's" might sound too much like a bar. Thereafter, Joe became known as Joey.

While Joey ran the kitchen; Brenda ran the front of the house. People came in droves; in a short time, they needed a larger restaurant.

They served pancakes, but hospitality became their business, winning over the community and visitors with great food and gracious hospitality.

"When people who had been here before would come through the door, they'd hug me, and I hugged them back," she said.

Another opportunity presented itself in the Howard-Johnson restaurant across Soco Road. They purchased the building and operated both restaurants for a while, then settling on the "big" Joey's the community has loved for more than 50 years.

"There's something magic about this community," Brenda said. "We were welcomed by people here who might look at us as 'from somewhere else.'"

The O'Keefe's held Joey's Pancake House to the highest of standards in ingredients, food preparation and service — and looked after their employees like they were family.

Joey and Brenda were active in shaping the community that is Maggie Valley along Soco Road, which was a two-lane road in 1966 when Joey's opened.

"This was a small community and people reached out to help each other," said Brenda. "Joey did what was needed for the community and paid for many things himself."

The O'Keefes became immersed in the community. They and other Maggie Valley business pioneers, talked about ways to help the community prosper, including incorporation, which they felt was needed to help provide infrastructure and services for visitors.

Of course, some people didn't want to deal with higher taxes to provide services visitors expect on vacation. Town meetings heated up, she said. But the O'Keefes and others persevered, with Maggie Valley becoming a municipality in 1974.

The group also brainstormed events to bring visitors to town in addition to Ghost Town, which was in its heyday, including the Maggie Valley Moonlight Race, charity events and opening a liquor store in an abandoned building to generate funds for law enforcement.

Since that first trip here in 1966, Brenda has been in awe of the beauty of the scenery and nature in WNC.

"Go to the (Blue Ridge) Parkway and look at Maggie Valley — it's beautiful here. I've always seen selling ourselves as a charming place to visit, surrounded by the Parkway and the national park," she said.

When Joey passed away in 2001, Brenda relied on her determination and the hard work ethic of the staff to keep the dream of Joey's flourishing for 50 years. She decided to retire and sell the restaurant in 2017 after serving the community for 51 years.

"When I closed Joey's in 2017, people came from all over to help me," Brenda said. "It was like a fraternity of people who had worked here through the years. There are thousands of memories."

She was duly surprised and honored at the customer and employee appreciation event held before the closing, when the NC Governor's office presented her with the Order of the Long Leaf Pine, the highest civilian award in the state. After all, Brenda was one of the individuals who helped put Maggie Valley "on the map."

So what was the key to the success of Joey's Pancake House?

"You were always a guest at Joey's," Brenda said. "It has to do with respecting the people who live here — respecting their culture. Through the years, Maggie Valley was so welcoming — and it still is. This is my community."

New owners Roy and Sandra Milling reopened Joey's Pancake House in 2018 — with the same traditions passed to them by Brenda O'Keefe. Joey's Pancake House still remains one-of-a-kind.

O'Keefe family photo

When Joey and Brenda O'Keefe came to Maggie Valley on vacation in 1966, they saw a great opportunity, co-founding the much beloved Joey's Pancake House. They are pictured on a cruise in 1978.

HOW A MOUNTAIN HOLIDAY GETAWAY OPENED THE DOORS OF J. ARTHUR'S

By Carol Viau

A 1985 Christmas trip to the mountains and a visit to friends in Maggie Valley took an amazing turn for the Art Tiernan family.

Donna Tiernan Mahoney-Lynch remembers her father's friendship with Roger McElroy, Maggie Valley hotelier. McElroy was convinced the valley needed a nice restaurant, and during that visit, he talked the family into buying what became J. Arthur's Restaurant.

It was an unexpected outcome of Christmas celebrations. Within less than a year, the restaurant family from Florida had opened the doors of a new venture in Maggie Valley.

"At the time, the area was quite out of the mainstream," Donna said. "And locals didn't always accept people from Florida."

But the restaurant "took off like crazy." Famous for its Gorgonzola cheese salad, slow roasted prime rib, seafood and great desserts, J. Arthur's has long been known for its great food and hospitality.

"One thing I always remember was the graciousness of all the people who worked with us," said Donna. "The mountain hospitality was inborn in the people of the area who we worked with. It wasn't something you had to teach back then."

Donna credits part of the early success to mixed liquor drinks that were legal in Maggie Valley, but no other towns in the county.

"People from Waynesville could come to J. Arthur's in Maggie if they wanted a drink," she recalled.

Donna appreciates the people who come to this area seeking relaxation, peace and nature. She can relate to the awe of people from Florida who have never seen the mountains here and find the scenery spectacular.

Quoting the song, she said: "Nothing could be finer than to be in Carolina."

In 2015, Donna penned a memoir, Seduced by Gorgonzola: Reflections of a Reluctant Restaurateur to capture family stories through five generations in the family restaurant businesses.

J. Arthur's was named after Donna's father — James Arthur Tiernan. Donna, her father, and her late husband John Mahoney had been in the restaurant business together in South Florida in the '80s before opening the Maggie location. The family kept both going all these years.

J. Arthur's, pictured here in the 1980s, has been an institution in Maggie Valley since 1986. It's a true family affair – from the family-run business to the countless family dinners held here for birthdays, anniversaries, graduations and special occasions

Now, Donna's turned over running J. Arthur's to the next generation. Her son, Rick Mahoney, is in charge of the kitchen, and daughter, Erin Mahoney, runs the floor.

Mahoney family photo

Pictured are the restaurant's co-founders, from left, Donna Tiernan Mahoney; her parents, James Arthur (Art) and Ellen Tiernan; and Donna's late husband, John Mahoney.

CALL OF THE MOUNTAINS: CATALOOCHEE RANCH PIONEERS MAGGIE TOURISM INDUSTRY

Courtesy Cataloochee Ranch

Cataloochee Ranch is steeped in mountain tradition, growing from the vision of founders 'Mr. Tom' and 'Miss Judy' Alexander, who started the Ranch in 1933, originally in Cataloochee Valley.

By Carol Viau

Recognized for "mile high" hospitality, Cataloochee Ranch is steeped in mountain tradition, growing from the vision of founders "Mr. Tom" and "Miss Judy" Alexander.

Tom Alexander, a timber appraiser from Georgia in the 1920s, was tasked with valuing timber in what became the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. When the logging era came to a close and the Depression hit, he started a fishing camp in the Three Forks area of Cataloochee Valley, hiking visitors in and out for a week's stay.

In 1932, the national park superintendent offered Alexander a lease on an area in Cataloochee Valley with an old homestead, and in 1933, he and his wife, Judy, launched the original Cataloochee Ranch.

Their hospitality venture catered to early national park visitors, offering trout fishing and horseback riding. Since it was on Park land, they were mandated to follow Park rules (including leashing dogs, which "chaffed" the independently-minded Tom).

He abandon the tourist outpost inside the park, but not his vision for a wilderness camp.

"He had, as we call it now, 'mountain fever,' which means 'I need to be in the mountains in order to feel happy,'" said Alexander's granddaughter Mary Coker. "He was determined to come to North Carolina to find his mountain."

People suggested Mr. Tom contact Verlin Campbell, the "Potato King" of Haywood County, who had a large property on Fie Top Mountain. They met on the road there, and visionary Mr. Tom knew it was the right place — he had "found his mountain."

In 1938, the Alexanders purchased a large part of the present Cataloochee Ranch property containing a sturdy stone and log cattle barn, several cabins, sheds and magnificent views. The Alexanders worked long and hard with other mountain people clearing the land, converting the barn into the main Ranch house and adding cabins, opening the new Cataloochee Ranch in 1939.

Miss Judy, who often ran operations, was known for touches of her "old Virginia" hospitality, family recipes and genuine interest in people. The Alexander children, Tom Jr., Judy and Alice grew up loving the mountains and the land.

The property's almost 5,000-foot elevation bordering the Great Smoky Mountains National Park created the ideal combination of extraordinary mountain views and cool summer temperatures. Visitors came back again and again, often passing love of the mountain Ranch to younger generations.

While Mr. Tom passed away in 1972, Miss Judy remained hostess, until her passing in 1997. The torch was passed to daughters Alice Alexander Aumen and Judy Alexander Coker, who had been integral to the family business along with their spouses Tom John Aumen and Rick Coker.

Those pioneers of mountain hospitality gave their knowledge and love of the land to the next family generation — Mary Coker, Judy B. Sutton, Richard Coker and Alex Aumen — each contributing their individual strengths. It was Richard who brought back square dances to the Ranch and served as caller.

Cataloochee Ranch became known and loved as a breathtaking, but comfortable place for hiking, horseback riding, wagon rides, concerts, cookouts and singing around the campfire. A special treat became the vintage "Way Back When" dinners, as daughters Judy and Alice "recreated" the 1930s fishing camp established by Mr. Tom and Miss Judy.

The next chapter

In March 2020, the Ranch was purchased from the Alexander family by David and Annie Colquitt under the business name Cataloochee Ranch Resort. They embarked on a complete renovation, while striving to preserve its history. Cataloochee Ranch re-opened in March 2024, in a horseback-themed ribbon cutting. The 685-acre resort is now a Relais & Châteaux property.

This 'Way Back When' dinner at Cataloochee Ranch in 2015 harkened back to the old days of the dude ranch and fish camp.

Carol Viau photo

The special nature of Cataloochee Ranch is front and center in ownership's minds. Owners David and Annie Colquitt endeavor to 'preserve and enhance' the mountain retreat. David Colquitt is pictured with son, Will, cutting the ribbon at the re-opening March 2024, as Annie (on horseback) holds the ribbon.

CARRYING ON THE LEGACY OF HOSPITALITY

By Carol Viau

Paul Viau photo

Alice Aumen, daughter of Cataloochee Ranch founders, played a significant role in developing Haywood County's Tourism Development Association and getting occupancy tax legislation to fund the development of the county's tourism industry.

When Cataloochee Ranch was founded by "Mr. Tom" and "Miss Judy" Alexander in 1933, tourism wasn't much of a business in Haywood, recalled their daughter, Alice Alexander Aumen.

That changed through the decades, largely because of Alice's vision for the region. Growing up on the ranch, she remembers the changes in Maggie Valley over the years.

"In the early years, Cataloochee Ranch was its own entity, catering to folks visiting the Great Smoky Mountains National Park," she said. "Maggie Valley was mostly a bedroom community then."

Alice was brought up in the beauty of mountains life.

"I remember in my teenage years, going to the Maggie Valley Playhouse," she said. "It was the center of activity — everybody went. It was all we had to do for entertainment. And back then, square dancing was a big deal. There were double circles of dancers there were so many people."

She and her siblings attended boarding school during the week, but they got a real world education listening to the guests at Cataloochee Ranch.

"Guests were well-educated, without being ostentatious," she said. "They came to the Ranch, content with the beauty of the place for outdoor adventure, ride horseback and its rustic beauty. And they stayed for longer. We listened to their stories."

Alice went to Duke University, then to design school in New York, followed by living in California.

Before the Cataloochee Ski area was developed, the family would strap on homemade skis to enjoy the advantages of mountain winter. In 1961 while home for a family visit, "Mr. Tom," visionary that he was, talked about starting a ski area. Thinking that sounded like a fun and good idea, Alice stayed home.

Her sister Judy Coker and husband Rick had returned to the mountain, too.

The story goes that Mr. Tom said, "Good, now I've got help. We'll start the ski area."

Alice's future husband, Tom John Aumen, was a can-do it guy, too. They met after he landed a helicopter at Cataloochee Ranch to check it out for his sightseeing business. Alice and Tom John (or T.J. as he was often known) were married in 1965.

"Tom John became the architect of the Ranch, building the Silverbell Lodge and six of the new cabins," Alice said. "He had his hands in both the Ranch and the ski area."

Alice and T.J. were the general managers of the Ranch in the 1970s and active in management of the ski area until it was sold.

She became hostess at the Ranch for special events, ran reservations and added her design touch arranging flowers for guest rooms and family-style dining tables.

Tourism champion

At the time, tourism wasn't recognized as an industry. Sure, there was Ghost Town for a while and the popularity of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. But tourism wasn't viewed as a business back then.

"Tourism was the red-headed step-child, as far as county governments and civic leaders were concerned," Alice said.

Loving life here, she became an advocate for tourism in the mountains and stepped to the plate as director of both the Maggie Valley and Haywood chambers of commerce. Alice helped start Haywood County's official tourism arm, the Tourism Development Authority, and served as chairwoman.

She was instrumental in getting the first tourism room tax in North Carolina for Haywood County passed. Alice has left her mark as a tourism expert and advocate for Haywood County.

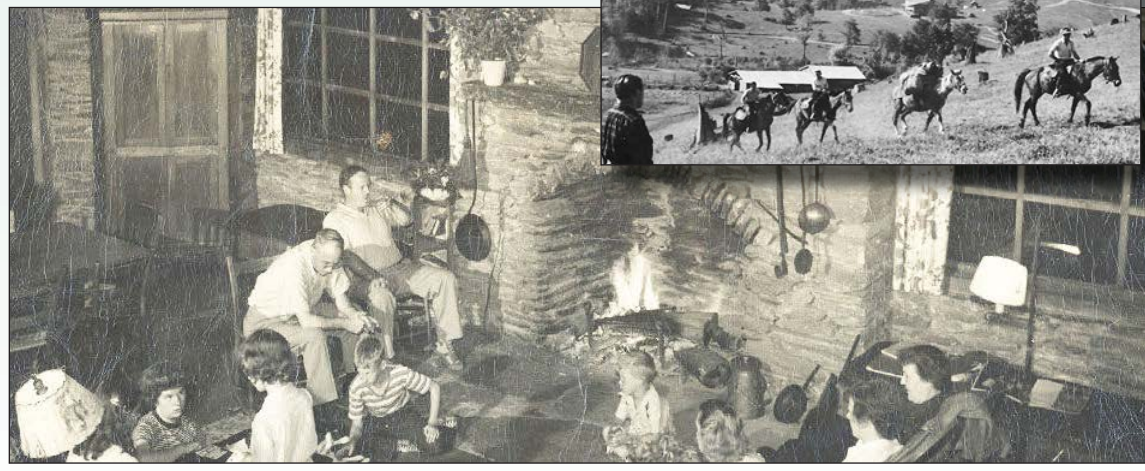
She remained active at the Ranch — enjoying music events and adding touches of hospitality, with fresh flowers for the rooms and dining tables, until Cataloochee Ranch was sold in March 2020.

Judy Alexander with trout catch of the day at Cataloochee Ranch when it was still located in Cataloochee Valley

During the re-opening of the totally renovated Cataloochee Ranch in March 2024, Alice said she was in awe of the design and construction.

She was reminded of something her father once said: "This place could be as beautiful as Biltmore."

In 1933, Tom and Judy Alexander launched Cataloochee Ranch, catering to early national park visitors with trout fishing and horseback pack trips. Pictured is a pack trip for the American Forestry Association, of which Mr. Tom was a member.



Charles Sappenfield

Guests at Cataloochee Ranch enjoyed relaxing in front of the large fireplace in the Main Ranch House, talking about their adventures and letting the children play. The Charles Sappenfield photo glimpse is dated 1964.

MAGGIE'S ORIGINAL GIFT SHOP PREDATES PAVED ROADS

Carol Viau photo

Long-time Maggie Valley resident, Sue Pendley is co-owner of the successful Maggie Mountaineer Crafts on Soco Road. She and garden expert Dan Dry keep a beautiful garden behind the shop along Jonathan Creek – a quiet place for customers to relax and enjoy.

By Carol Viau

Back in 1950, when Soco Road was a dirt road, Maggie Mountaineer Crafts, opened as the first shop in the Smokies on the North Carolina side. Being at the foot of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park had its advantages for attracting tourists.

Ghost Town brought Sue and Austin Pendley to Maggie from Ocala, Florida, in 1965. (Austin was the attraction's general manager for a dozen years.)

"It was a booming time," Sue said. "Ghost Town would have 600,000 visitors per year during its heyday — it was the No. 1 attraction in the state."

She credits residents like Austin, Joey O'Keefe, Al Pinto and Roger McElroy for "getting Maggie Valley going" and paving the roads.

Back in the day, Pendley said Maggie Mountaineer Crafts was more of a souvenir shop, with visitors purchasing everything from bears, cedar boxes, moccasins, quilts and hooked rugs.

In the earliest days of the shop, Native American women would walk over the mountain from Cherokee and do basket weaving on the porch.

Sue poured her time and energy into Maggie Mountaineer Crafts, building the shop's popularity for visitors and making it into "more of a craft shop."

It is a popular stop on Soco Road, known for its bears, both the cuddly plush kind and the larger-than-life big bear in the front for photo ops.

"People always buy bears," Pendley said, "Plus we sell a lot of homemade fudge, made daily (with 40 varieties)."

Maggie Mountaineer Crafts has an abundance of fall items in store. Be on the lookout for the 21 fall displays owner Sue Pendley coordinates around Maggie.

Maggie Mountaineer Crafts

Maggie Mountaineer Crafts on Soco Road is known for its many bears, since 'people love to buy anything bear-related' co-owner Sue Pendley said. The 'Big Bear' in the shop's parking area is a popular stop for photo ops.

Pendley still works tirelessly seven days a week at the shop with her co-owner and son, Brad, and says she wouldn't want to live anywhere else.

"I love it here," she said. "I love the people, the laid-back community, the temperate weather, and the fact everybody is so nice."

Pendley is the impetus behind Maggie Fall Days, the colorful autumn displays put up along Soco Road each September. When Fall Days began 29 years ago, displays were done with donations. Now tourism dollars from the room tax "helps tremendously," she said.

And thank goodness given the volume of decor lining Soco Road in 20203: 900 bales of straw, 500 corn shucks, 300 mums and $25,000 worth of pumpkins in different sizes — the largest weighing in at 65 pounds.

"The annual Fall Days displays are growing every year," she said. "We have 80 volunteers, all great people, who work hard and get hot and dirty putting up the displays. There's a sense of community."

To dress the valley for fall, Sue's group places pumpkins, mums, bales of hay, plus scarecrows, corn shocks and more decorations. The town helps finish the day-and-a-half decorating project and takes down the displays at the beginning of November, which is a great assistance Pendley said.

"There are a lot of good people here," she said. "Maggie Valley is home, with friendly people, temperatures to beat any in the Southeast, great churches, restaurants and visitors wanting to get away from the heat and crowds. What's there not to love?"

CLOGGING CAPITAL OF THE WORLD?
YUP, THAT'S MAGGIE

By Brionna Dallara

It's hard to miss the big wooden barn and signage that gleams Stompin' Ground when driving through Maggie.

Deemed the clogging capital of the world, the grounds have been a place where locals, tourists and even celebrities have boot-scootin' boogied since the 1980s.

Owner Kyle Edwards said the grounds have the "best dance floor in North Carolina."

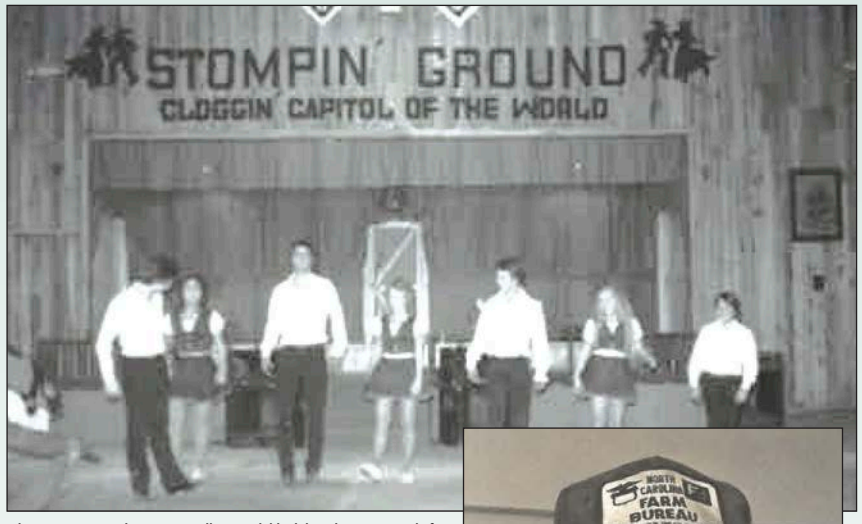
And he would know better than anyone.

Edward's name is among those on the grounds' Clogging Hall of Fame, and he's been dancing about as long as he's been walking.

"When I started, Maggie was just a two lane highway. I was born in that rock house straight across the street. My mother liked to see me dance, and at that time, I could dance pretty well. I got by anyway," Edwards said.

Edwards left the valley for a while and was in the military, but after being injured, he returned home and got back to his stepping roots. Following his mother's death, Edwards, with the help of his wife Mary Sue, sought to build a place where families could dance.

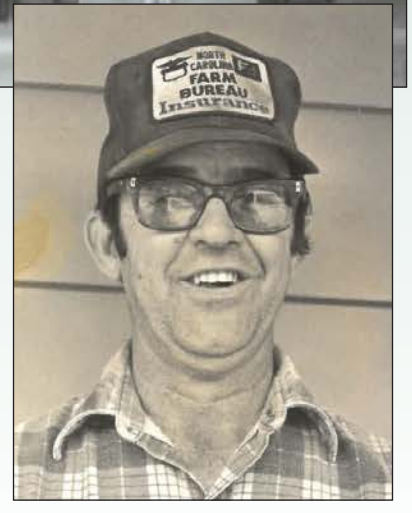
"I've been lucky, because when I built this thing, I had no money. I was doing a job as a little contractor for the Forest Service, and I cut a bunch of logs," Edwards said, explaining those logs became the structure of the soon to be Stompin' Ground.



The Stompin Ground in Maggie Valley was dubbed the "clogging capital of the world."

Verlin helped to design the building and renowned dance floor, while Edwards sawed and dry-kilned the timber. Other folks and businesses like Joey's Pancake House, helped get the building ready for its big debut in 1981.

"I had a following of dancers, which I still do. A lot of people, if I was dancing, they'd just about sit down because they couldn't stay with me," Edwards said. "I loved to dance, and my kids did, and my mother loved to watch us."



Kyle Edwards grew up dancing, and fulfilled his dream of building a place for his family, friends and community to dance when he opened up the Stompin' Ground in Maggie Valley.

It wasn't long after the Stompin' Ground was built that cloggers from all around the country, and even the world, flooded the oak floor.

From Folkmoot USA performers, to Haywood's own clogging groups and even Cherokees Chief Sam Smith, everyone was hitting the Stompin' Ground running.

Wall of fame

A slew of portraits and memorabilia line the walls today, including autographed photos of celebrities. Reba McEntire and Keith Whitley are alongside the musical groups Alabama and The Osbourne Brothers, to name a few.

Edwards even refers to some as friends, adding that his family would go on cruises with country singer George Jones and his family.

"He stopped the show to let my granddaughter dance. And that's a pretty good lick with George Jones," Edwards said.

Competitions drew thousands

Countless competitions and concerts were hosted at the grounds including the annual American Clogging Hall of Fame Dance off that would run through the weekend.

Teams, 182 of them, from North Carolina, every bordering state and Florida would show up annually, and at the end, three new members would be inducted into the Hall of Fame.

"I've had 2,700 people in here. It'll hold a lot more people than you realize," Edwards said.

Burton Edwards and his sister Becky rose to fame as children when both were named world champion cloggers. This photo was taken in 1983.

Alcohol forbidden

Visitors loved the Stompin' Ground, perhaps because there were never any problems, even when the place was packed. Edwards attributed that to the fact no alcohol has ever been allowed.

"I've got from (ages) 2 to 82 that comes here, and they still do because they don't have any problems," Edwards said. "I ruled it with an iron fist. I meant what I said, and back in the day I would do what I had to to run it."

In addition to making a name for himself in Maggie Valley, Edwards was honored in surrounding states, whether by being named Ian honorary citizen or being honored by highway patrol and sheriff departments statewide, who brought badges and honors when visiting the grounds. He's even a Kentucky colonel, the highest title of honor bestowed by the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

Family first

Pictures and awards of Edwards' son, Burton, take a good bit of space in the Clogging Hall of Fame, including his award for "Best Male Dancer in the East."

This is one of the early clogging teams that performed at the Stompin Ground.

"That's one he's pretty proud of," Edwards said. "He's never been beat in a competition. He won the World Championship three times."

Taking after their father, Burton and Edwards's daughter, Becky, have danced since the Stompinn' Grounds first opened.

Family has long been the foundation of the Stompin' Ground.

Even though the grounds are open solely on Saturdays now, to own such a legacy is a dream come true, Edwards said.

"I was blessed because I had a lot of friends to help me work on it, to build it. When we started we had a mud hole, and we built it from nothing."

MORE THAN A GIFT SHOP, CABBAGE ROSE DUO BRINGS SPUNK TO THE VALLEY

Scott Nielsen and Troy Graves

By Carol Viau

Scott Nielsen and Troy Graves are well known members of the Maggie Valley community, not only for the 36 years of running Cabbage Rose, but also for their continuing involvement making Maggie a great place to live.

The enormous gift shop on Soco Road is a tourist magnet with its vast assortment of everything "mountain" along with a year-around Christmas shop, vast wine selection and more.

Originally from Florida, Nielsen is now a 40-year resident. "The town has been good to us and we try to give back to the community."

Nielsen and Graves enhance fun in the valley by organizing themed events. The Cabbage Rose Easter egg hunt is an extravaganza, with 2,000 eggs, most of them containing money, and Easter bunnies for family photo ops.

They put on a kicked-up trunk-or-treat Halloween party, with prizes for all costume ages — even pets and cars.

"We want to create a day that children and their families will remember for years to come," said Nielsen. "It's about bringing the community together."

eep enthusiasts and successful Maggie Valley business owners, Scott Nielsen and Troy Graves, organize the annual holiday All Lighted Jeep Parade through Maggie Valley.

They organize two popular December events — the Buffalo Plaid Party held at J. Arthur's and the festive All Lighted Jeep Parade through Maggie Valley to collect toys for children in need.

Nielsen, who was a volunteer park ranger for three years, maintains the "We Love Maggie Valley" social media group with a following of 25,000. He regularly posts stunning scenic photos throughout the year to let visitors know what they are missing.

Both Neilsen and Graves are staunch advocates for the elk roaming in the nearby national park and are often spotted in various business and residential neighborhoods in Maggie Valley.

When some of the cautionary flashing elk crossing signs on Soco Road were stolen, Nielsen took to his Facebook group to raise $8,000 — enough to replace six flashing signs.

"We love Maggie Valley 100%," said Nielsen. "This is a cozy, quaint area with gorgeous views, wildlife, shopping and restaurants. Here you have the chance to relax and enjoy nature — unplugged."

New signs alerting motorists for elk along U.S. 19 between Maggie Valley and the Blue Ridge Parkway were installed. After two were stolen, a fundraising campaign started by Cabbage Rose owners Scott Nielsen and Troy Graves on Face Book netted enough to buy six more.

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A RISING TIDE LIFTS ALL BOATS: TWINBROOK EMBRACES THE MANTRA

By Brionna Dallara

Carl and Viola Henry were among the early pioneers of Maggie Valley's tourism industry in the 1940s.

Before motels and hotels lined the two-lane road of Maggie Valley's yesteryear, there was one place where visitors could always count on during their annual road trips — Twinbrook Resort.

Tucked away off Twinbrook Lane, surrounded by forested peaks, the resort began as three one-bedroom cabins, all with a pipe-dream price tag by today's standards: $5 a day or $35 a week.

Twinbrook's cabins were purchased in the spring of 1947 by Carl and Viola Henry, who piled their bags and three boys in the car before leaving Detroit, Michigan, and embarking on a journey to Appalachia — a homecoming for Carl who grew up in neighboring Jackson County.

"He bought it for $8,000, every bit of money he could scrape up," said Dale Henry, son of the couple. "And he had a little idea. He wanted to start building cabins."

Henry was a bus boy of sorts around the cabins, helping his dad do repairs and tending to guests. But the foot traffic really started to pick up in 1959 when Cataloochee wanted to try Southern snow skiing.

At the time, all the businesses in the valley were geared toward people camping out and enjoying their summers' in the mountains, and there was really no place to stay during winter.

Well, folks giving the ol' ski mountain a trial run lodged at Twinbrook for the season. And Carl was hopeful — a winter attraction meant year-long business.

"They were trying it, and they really didn't open 'til 1960, but they wanted to see if it would work. And so my parents fed the people in our living room in shifts, because, by then we had probably 10 or 12 cabins," Henry said. "Then they decided that, yeah, they were going to start it. My dad knew if we wanted to stay open year round, during the winter time, we had to improve our cottages."

Henry and his dad got to work, taking two cottages each year and redoing their insulation, installing better windows, fireplaces, carpet — the whole nine yards.

Aside from a gas station and a couple other businesses, Twinbrook and Cataloochee Ranch were some of the first businesses that were tourist- related.

"But Cataloochee is a very exclusive place, and it was then," Henry said. "Rich people would go there. You didn't get your average old guy from South Carolina going to Maggie go to Cataloochee Ranch."

A place to come back to

Being that it was one of the tourist staples, people returned to the cabins every year.

Henry and his family formed friendships with a lot of the repeat customers, his parents even staying in touch with their first customer until their passing.

The interactions back then were personable, folks could walk in and be greeted with a "Come on it, its cabin Number 11, you know where it is. Well come on down tomorrow and we'll see you."

"That's the way my mother, and dad ran it. But it was a good way to run it, because you trusted people, and people back then loved to be trusted," Henry said.

Back then, summer break was a full three months, from early June until Labor Day.

"They'd come up here all summer long, bring the whole family, and they'd go blackberry picking and have picnics, and we'd have softball games and hayrides," Henry said. "I mean, it was just a great place to grow up."

Henry still keeps in contact with some of those summertime friends.

"My parents had so many people come back up," Henry said, recalling a story of a repeat guest. "I was there one night, some guy came in, and he said, 'Man I'm glad you're open. You got a room?' I said, 'Yeah' He took out his wallet and took out a card that we had years ago, a little business card. He said, 'I've kept this card in my wallet, and I kept telling myself I'm going to go

back there.' He said 'tonight is the night.' I gave it to him for free."

The traveler wanted to bring his wife — about 20 years after he first visited.

For locals and visitors alike

There were many nights the cabins would be full and Viola would have to phone a friend and send guests to places like Lambuth Inn at Lake Junaluska.

"If other people had rooms, she'd fill them. That's the way my mama was," Henry said.

Local kids and families would also benefit from the resorts, whether it be playing in the big front yard where the apple orchard was to having parties at the pool Carl had built.

Some of the town's key players came to the resorts. In fact, if it weren't for Carl and Viola, who knows if Joey's Pancake House would have even been located in the valley.

Joey and Brenda O'Keefe — the entrepreneurs who opened Joey's Pancake House — stayed at Twinbrook when passing through Maggie Valley.

"My mom and my dad really encouraged them to stay," Henry recalled. "They were talking about going to Gatlinburg to open a Pancake House. And my dad said 'man, don't just run over to Gatlinburg. Look around here a little bit before you leave. See if you can find something.' And they did."

While Gatlinburg is deemed the "Myrtle Beach of the Mountains," Henry likes to tell people Maggie Valley is the "quieter side of the Smokies."

However, quiet hasn't always been the case — like during Ghost Town's heyday.

Henry's dad did some plumbing for Ghost Town and all three of his brother's held down a job there. During the '60s and '70s, most of the resorts' guests had come for the attraction.

But Carl and Viola didn't mind the backed up traffic.

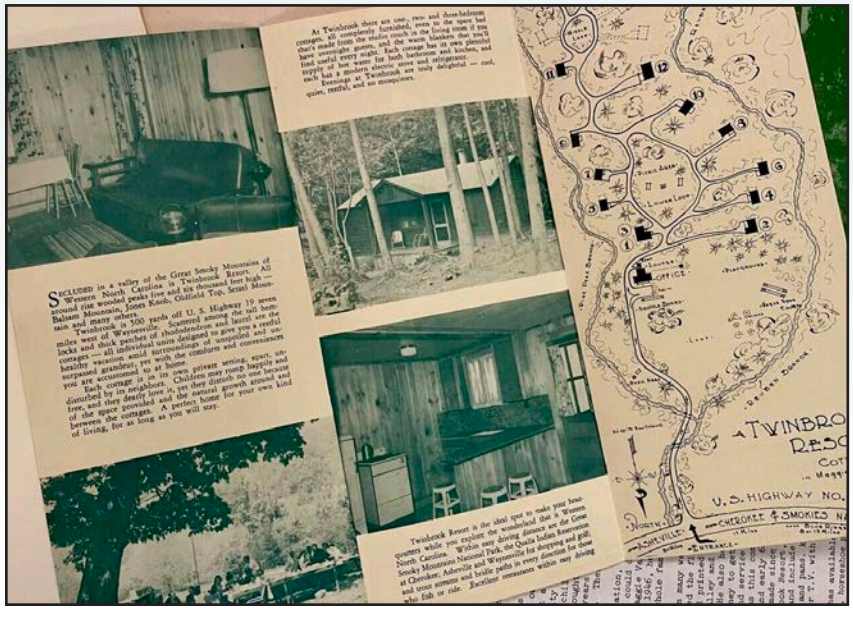
"They worked so hard for the valley," Henry said. "They knew if the valley made money, we were going to make money."

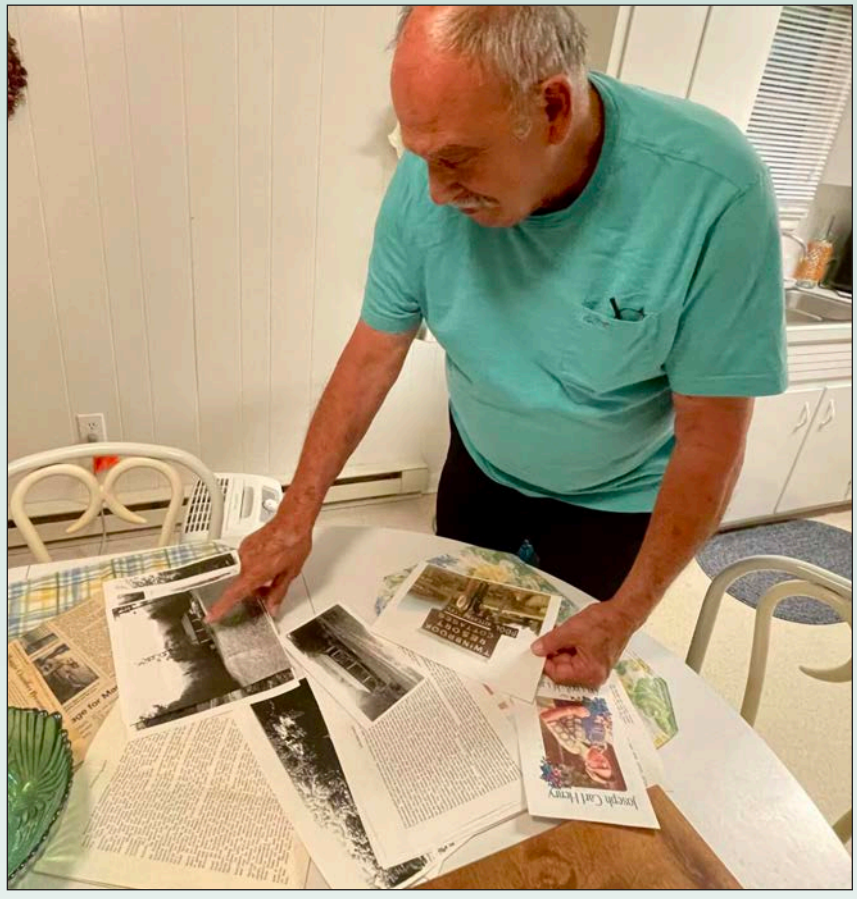
Apart from the resorts, the two were a power couple when it came to being involved in their community.

Carl was first president of the Maggie Chamber of Commerce. At the time, the chamber of commerce was Waynesville-centric, and Carl got the sense Maggie wasn't welcome.

"They were going to talk about whether to include all the businesses in Maggie into the Waynesville chamber, and they asked my dad to step out of the room," Henry said. "Being my dad, he kept on going, and he came out here to Maggie."

Carl later burst into the Kiwanis Club meeting and told them "We need to form our own Chamber of Commerce because they're not going to let us in."





Dale Henry grew up at Twinbrook Resort and treasures memories of playing in the apple orchard, helping his dad repair cabins and his mom at the front desk.

Meanwhile, Viola founding The Maggie Valley Civic Association and having the Maggie Valley Pavilion in her honor, the Henrys were deeply involved in the community's growth through the years.

"She worked tirelessly to get the pavilion built. They needed a place for people to have gatherings and different things, and she knew it would be very helpful for the valley if we could get something like that," Henry said.

Carl was instrumental in getting the town its own fire department. He was also a champion of incorporating Maggie as a bona fide town 50 years ago.

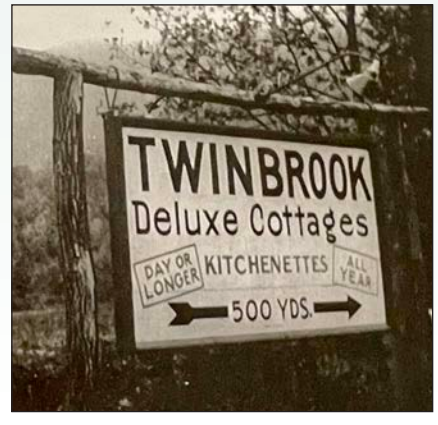
"They worked a lot for the valley, because he knew if it grew, he grew," Henry said.

Henry's dad also championed the town's first ABC store, serving as president of the ABC board

"He never drank a drop of liquor in his life, but he knew the ABC store, if you got that in here, that's going to make business grow. People are going to come here. He was all for it," Henry said.

Though under new ownership, the 'Twinbrook' name still reigns.

Henry worked full time at the resort, and in 2005, after his mother retired at the age of 90, they sold it. One of the new co-owners, Lyndon Lowe, became a champion of the Maggie tourism industry also, serving more than 10 years on the Haywood County Tourism Authority.



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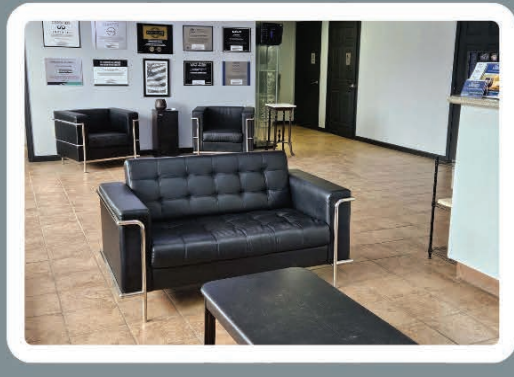

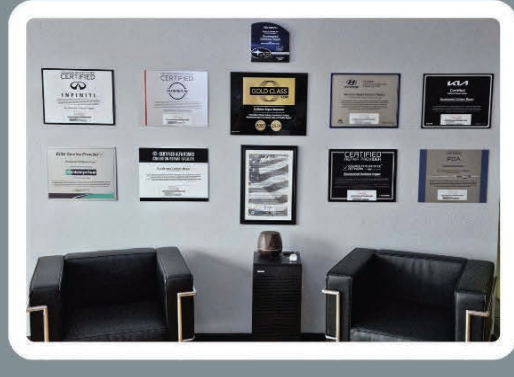

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