

greetings from

STANARDSVILLE, VA

The Greene County seat is a protected historic district.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ETHYLE GIUSEPPE



At 98, Ethyle Cole Giuseppe is Stanardsville's senior benefactor. She is shown here at her family farm. She sold the property and used proceeds to support various components of her native community. Giuseppe's charity enabled construction of Piedmont Virginia Community College's Eugene Giuseppe Center; Giuseppe Pavilion at the Greene County Community Park; Giuseppe Hoops, the basketball court at the Community Park; the greenhouse at Greene County High School, and a new game clock in the Greene County High School gym. Giuseppe's charitable donations also support the Greene County Historical Society and numerous scholarships to Greene County students.

Stanardsville, Virginia

An idyllic small town with a mix of old and new continues to thrive beneath the undulating Blue Ridge Mountains to its west.

Having grown up one mile south of Stanardsville along the muddy waters of Blue Run with the abandoned old Stanardsville Road bisecting my parents' farm, I lived an idyllic small-town life for my first 18 years.

On summer days, I'd pedal my bike along back roads to buy ice cream at the Swift Run Store just west of town, which also sold the onion sets and seed potatoes my parents purchased for their garden. I played many piano recitals at the Stanardsville Baptist Church and remember how sheep grazed in the pasture adjacent to Courthouse Square. These were scenes I took for granted until much later in life; and they're scenes that have changed surprisingly little in the last three decades.

Situated just a few miles east of Swift Run Gap, a well-known pass across the Blue Ridge Mountains, Stanardsville has occupied a major transportation route from Virginia's Piedmont to the Shenandoah Valley since its establishment in 1794. The town, with an official population of just over 350 residents, became the county seat of Greene in 1838,

when the former was formed out of neighboring Orange County.

Ethyle Cole Giuseppe, who resides three miles out of town on South River Road, has lived almost half of the two centuries of Stanardsville's existence and *has* seen remarkable changes in that time. Now 98, and a widow of 10 years, she says she still mows her own grass (about three acres), keeps her own garden, and cans her own produce. "I canned 75 quarts of pickles this year," she remarks.

Her sturdy independence is unsurprising when one considers she once walked three miles to attend school in Stanardsville after having to move out of the mountains in order to do so. She began her secondary education in 1925 in a schoolhouse that stood at the present location of William Monroe High School. "It was a white clapboard school with dirt floor," she notes.

Eventually her family acquired enough extra income to purchase a buggy, which she and her older sister took to school until the coming of the first school bus. In 1936, Giuseppe graduated salutatorian, went to college, and worked for the



Kaye and Alan Pyles

Lafayette Inn and Restaurant

government in Washington, D.C., and Alexandria for much of her career. She and her husband eventually returned to the farm of her mother's family, and Giuseppe has lived there ever since.

NEWCOMERS AND OLD FAMILIES HELP REVIVE A SMALL TOWN

Giuseppe's story is becoming an increasingly less familiar one. As young people flock to the cities after graduation, Virginia's rural towns like Stanardsville have ceased to be the exclusive homeland of long generations of families with names like Morris, Shifflett, Snow and Lawson.

Fortunately, however, some of these towns, Stanardsville among them, continue to thrive, not least because of newcomers who are reviving old businesses, revitalizing streets and storefronts, and encouraging the establishment of protected historic districts. Stanardsville became one in 2004.

Among the proponents of Stanardsville's renewal is Leonard Dunahoo, proprietor of Stanardsville

'I just love being in Stanardsville. ... My church is just down the street. I eat lunch just down the street or across the street. I can get to know people here, and there's a generational life,' says Leonard Dunahoo. He especially loves seeing three and four generations of families having dinner together in restaurants on Sundays.

Hardware on Main Street. Born in Texas, raised around the world as the son of an Air Force sergeant, and last residing in San Francisco before moving to Virginia, Dunahoo and his wife, Susan, ended up in Stanardsville after her parents bought an interest in nearby Farm Colony, one of the country's first so-called "conservation developments."

After working long hours with his father-in-law on the farm, Dunahoo found himself increasingly surprised with the fact that they had to go to Orange or Charlottesville whenever they needed basic farm and hardware supplies. Finally, in the early '90s, after leaving a long-time career with GM, Dunahoo decided maybe he was the one who needed to open the community's first and much-needed hardware store.

"I had a lot of business experience, but I didn't know anything about hardware," he says. "However, I know a lot about customers and their needs." Stanardsville Hardware is now one of the oldest retail establishments in Stanardsville proper, having been in business 22 years.



Small-Town
Commitment
to Service



Clockwise, from upper left: Stanardsville’s Main Street is a bustling, small-town thoroughfare vital to community life. Leonard Dunahoo, proprietor of Stanardsville Hardware on Main Street, is a proponent of the town’s renewal. *The Greene County Record*, also located on Stanardsville’s Main Street, is the weekly newspaper that serves readers throughout the scenic environs in and around the thriving rural mountain community. Mark Lawson turned an old feed-store building that once housed the volunteer fire department into Lawson Enterprises.

“I just love being in Stanardsville,” Dunahoo adds. “My church is just down the street. I eat lunch just down the street or across the street. I can get to know people here, and there’s a generational life.” He says he especially loves seeing three and four generations of families having dinner together in restaurants on Sundays.

Among those long generations of Stanardsville families is that of Mark Lawson, owner of Lawson Enterprises. The long-time automotive technician worked 20 years at Brady Bushey Ford in Charlottesville, running his own shop at home on evenings and weekends part of that time, and then finally deciding it was time to go into business for himself.

In 2002, he bought the 1932 brick structure on Main Street in which his automotive shop is now located. The building has, at various points in its history, served as a feed store, Ford dealership and Stanardsville fire

department. Two years later, he asked his sister Carolyn to come on board as his office manager, and the two have been working side-by-side ever since. A former schoolteacher, Carolyn says she decided to work with her brother because she was ready for a career change and found herself enjoying the daily interaction with customers. “I try to make people feel welcome when they come in the door,” she remarks. “We’re kind of like family here.”

As if to prove the point, Mark pokes his head into the office after Carolyn tells him to speed up service on a customer’s car, and jests, “Cool your jets!”

Both Mark and Carolyn were born in Greene County, part of a long line of Lawsons, and remain here for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is the rural beauty. “I’ve found nowhere prettier or friendlier,” Carolyn says.

And Lawson Enterprises has certainly earned its stripes in the community and

beyond. I am the second generation of my family that Mark has served in a world where trust is an increasingly valuable commodity. “Word of mouth is the best advertising we have,” Carolyn remarks. “People come from as far as Nelson County to have their vehicles worked on here.” The shop is especially well-known for its diesel work. “Word of mouth is the best advertising there is.”

SMALL-TOWN COMMITMENT TO SERVICE

The attitude of service permeates so many of the businesspeople in Stanardsville, whether natives of the town or relatively recent additions to the community. That’s certainly been the case for Alan and Kaye Pyles, who purchased the Lafayette Inn and Restaurant 13 years ago after relocating from Fairfax. The couple became familiar with Stanardsville during their time owning a vacation home in adjacent Madison County.

Alan had worked in real estate training, traveling the world and spending 3,000 nights of his career in hotels. He was looking for a second career that would allow him to apply what he had learned while traveling. The Lafayette Inn and its associated restaurant offered a perfect opportunity, particularly for Alan's desire to serve "everyday food plated nicely in an upscale atmosphere." He adds, "I like to call what we do here 'kicked up comfort food.' If we can't spell it or pronounce it, we can't serve it."

The inn has six rooms, including "Dicey's cottage," the old slave quarters, and serves dinner on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, including 10-course, wine-paired chef-tasting dinners.

The Pyles reside on a farm five miles from the inn, and Alan admits, "It took awhile to get used to the community. We had no sense of community in Fairfax, but here you see the same people frequently. People know you and ask genuine, caring questions."

Today the inn and restaurant do a solid business during warm-weather months and in the fall. "It was five years before we got to do what we wanted to do rather than what the building told us to do," Alan jokes. The structure is nearly 200 years old and actually did start its existence as a hotel, but has also seen service as a Civil War field hospital, telephone exchange and newspaper office.

The Pyles have worked hard to make sure the structure and its significance to Stanardsville's history endure. The same might be true of Stanardsville Hardware, which occupies the old IGA grocery store building. "I will continue to be here as long as my health and the Lord allow," says Dunahoo, who remarks that one must really have the heart of a servant to run a business in a small town.

Giuseppe might agree as she approaches centenarian status. She has donated over \$1 million to community projects over the last decade, the Greene County Historical Society among them. What's her secret to longevity? Service, obviously. But also pickle juice. "I drink pickle juice every day." ■



If You Go ...

Start your exploration of Stanardsville at the **Greene County Historical Society**, which is open 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Friday and Saturday (434-985-1834, www.greenehistory.org). From there, walk over to the historic **Greene County Courthouse** on Court Square, and then grab lunch at the newly opened **Sombrero's Mexican Cuisine and Cafe** on Main Street (434-990-9153). Order some homemade ice cream in the afternoon at the **Lafayette Inn and Restaurant**, and, if you've fallen in love with this quaint little town by then, make reservations for dinner and an overnight stay, too (434-985-6345, www.thelafayette.com)!

A Quick History

Stanardsville formed in no small degree because of its proximity just below the Blue Ridge Mountain pass of Swift Run Gap, which was purportedly first explored by Europeans in 1716 under Governor Spotswood and his "Knights of the Golden Horseshoe." Today, Route 33 passes through this gap in the mountains, the very same gap General Stonewall Jackson used during the Civil War to shift troops between the Shenandoah Valley and Central Virginia.

Local landowner Robert Stanard donated the land on which the current Greene County Courthouse stands in 1838, establishing Stanardsville as the county seat.

Stanardsville, like so many communities abutting the present boundaries of **Shenandoah National Park**, saw many county families displaced by the park's establishment in the 1930s. Over 14,600 acres of Greene County land became part of the new national park, and 285 local families who lived within the new park's boundaries were displaced. You can learn about their stories at the park's **Harry F. Byrd, Sr. Visitor Center** in Shenandoah National Park (www.nps.gov/shen/planyourvisit/visitorcenters). ■