

## DOWN HOME SERIES

by Lisa Valdrighi  
Contributing Writer

*During the year 2000, we're making our way around Virginia, each issue visiting a small town and meeting some of the folks who make up the heart of electric co-op country. On this year's seventh stop, we'll be...*

# Down Home in Lively

*Steeped in Southern hospitality and rich in history, this community epitomizes life in small-town America.*



Most visitors to Virginia's lower Northern Neck unwittingly overlook the tiny town of Lively. Spanning just a mile in its commercial section, the village is steeped in Southern hospitality and rich in history.

It's often said passersby can pass

through the town in the blink of an eye. But the sleepy little town, where treasures and friendly smiles are abundant, deserves a long look.

**Mrs. Katy Bush**, known simply by many as "Miss Katy," handed out smiles every day for 30 years at the Lively Post



Office. A fixture in the tiny town, she retired as postmaster on June 1. Bush moved to Lively with her husband, Eugene, in 1956 and raised four sons in the quiet, carefree neighborhood.

"It's the caring that people have for each other [that makes this town special]," says Bush.

For three decades, she's been a source of information for locals and come-heres. The town post office, a hub of activity, is where townsfolk can find out all the latest news.

In fact, says Bush, some people think she knows everything.

"A lady came in one day and said her neighbor was miffed at her," explains Bush. "Someone had died in her neighbor's family and she didn't know it. She told her neighbor she would have said something if only she knew and her neighbor said, 'Well you should know; you've been to the post office, haven't you?'"

Such is life in small-town America, and Lively is the epitome of that.

The town has just two restaurants, a few shops, a local swimming pool, and a club that hosts bingo on Friday nights. In a time of hustling and bustling, big city development and commercial boom, Lively is a throwback to a quieter, peaceful way of life.

But as Bush explains, it's the people that make Lively and every other country town across America like it special.

**Mrs. Katy Bush**, who retired on June 1, had served as postmaster in Lively for 30 years.







LISA VALDRIGHI PHOTOS



Hanging above Lively's main drag is the town's new time and temperature sign. The sign was purchased with funds raised by the town's annual Christmas celebration. Next on the improvement list are "Welcome to Lively" signs and an extension of the sidewalks.

According to Bush, the population of the town is difficult to determine.

"So many folks living outside of town call their home Lively," she says.

"It used to be," says **Butch Jenkins**, local proprietor and county supervisor, "that people right here in the town limits, so to speak, called Lively home. But now people as far away as a mile or two say they live in Lively."

The post office has just 396 boxes, and since the town is not incorporated, an exact resident count is hard to determine.

Epping Forest Antiques has been in the Jesse family for three generations. The business was founded by current owner Louise Jesse's grandmother in the dining room at Epping Forest.

Lively's a kind of Norman Rockwell town, where folks can still leave their doors unlocked, stroll with their dogs late at night, and let their kids walk to the corner market.

"It's just easy here," says **Phyllis Jernigan**, manager at The Perfect Touch. "There's not a lot of traffic. It's real safe with nice old buildings and great people."

Jernigan's shop is one of the must-see stops along a tour of the town. Located in the old Lively Oaks manor house, built in 1686, it offers an array of

gifts, home and garden accessories, and gourmet foods.

Located next door is Epping Forest Antiques, founded 45 years ago by **Louise Jesse's** grandmother in the dining room at historic Epping Forest. She is the third generation Jesse to operate the shop. She and Jenkins operate the antique store in conjunction with an estate sale business.

Jesse is the daughter of the former owners of Epping Forest, the birthsite of Mary Ball Washington, mother of George Washington. Located just a mile northeast of town, Epping Forest was built between 1780-1800. The original structure includes a full basement, above which is the birthing room where historians believe Mary Ball may have been born.

Many of the Ball family graves are located just east of Lively at St. Mary's White Chapel, founded in 1669. One of the oldest and most interesting churches in Virginia, the present building was constructed in 1740. Mary Ball Washington's father was a member of the vestry.



Phyllis Jernigan (right), manager at The Perfect Touch, shows off some of the fine home accessories and gift items at the store, which has been located in Lively for just over a decade.





The home of Robert O. Norris, former state senator, is undergoing renovations. It is located in Lively's commercial district.

Also still standing in Lively is the home of former state senator Robert O. Norris. The town's name evolved from a farm in the Norris family, the Lively Oaks Plantation, founded by Thomas Norris in 1817. The heart of the town has shifted over the years. Its original post office was Lively Oak, established in 1833. It was moved to a nearby village, Bellwood Mill, in 1889. Belwood Mills Post Office, its spelling changed, became Lively Post Office in 1896.

The town was once home to a car dealership, egg businesses, a pool hall and several barber shops. Today, the town's main street features an antique shop, a bank, several specialty shops, a drugstore and physician's office, an insurance agency, a homebuilder, a real estate office, two restaurants and a long-standing grocery store, John Boy's Market.

The pool hall is no longer in operation, but avid cue-handlers can still enjoy a billiard game at The Corner, a restaurant and watering hole in the heart of the town. A white frame building once operated as a Texaco station, The Corner dates back to the 1920s, when it first operated as an ice cream parlor. Gradually changing over the years from a general store to a family restaurant, it has become the town's meeting place, with clientele including county administrators, supervisors, teachers and auto mechanics. The Corner is known for its king-size Buster Burgers and Thursday "Shrimp Nites."

Just down the street is the town's other restaurant and local hangout, The Oaks. **Nancy and Marty Carter** purchased the business two years ago. Over its 40 years, the business has been operated as Lively Drugs' soda fountain and

as a pizza place before becoming a casual, family restaurant, known for its ribs and steaks.

Lively Drugs and the adjacent physician's office, now CMG Family Medical Center, have also been fixtures in the town since the late 1950s. Although the medical office has changed locations and names, the faces of the doctor and nurses have remained the same.

**Dr. Norman R. "Rocky" Tingle** still makes housecalls and late night checks on patients, just as his father, Dr. Norman R. "Jiggs" Tingle did some 40 years ago when he opened the Pierce-Tingle Clinic in downtown Lively.

The spirit of volunteerism is also evident in the town's volunteer rescue organizations. Amazingly, Lively's one volun-



## If You Go...

No visit to the village of Lively would be complete without stops at **The Corner** (804-462-5700) and **The Oaks** (804-462-7050) restaurants, favorite gathering spots of the locals. The Corner, serving up the famous king-size Buster Burger, and The Oaks, with its casual family dining, are two of the best places for information and directions to points of interest.

Historic sites include **Epping Forest**, the birthplace of Mary Ball Washington, mother of George Washington. The home is located a mile-and-a-half



Epping Forest

northwest of town on Route 622 and is privately owned. Louise Jesse, whose family once owned the home, now operates **Epping Forest Antiques** (804-462-7960) in Lively.

The business was established in 1953 in the dining room at Epping Forest by Jesse's grandmother.

Another historic site not to miss is **St. Mary's White Chapel**, at the intersections of Route 201 and Route 354 just east of town. The original church was built in 1669, and the current building was constructed in 1741. St. Mary's Parish united with Christ Church Parish in 1752. Tombs of the Ball family, ancestors and relatives of George Washington are located there. With an outdoor information center, the church is open for tours on Thursdays from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. For large groups or private tours, call 804-462-7371 or 804-462-5908.

Other points of interest, not open to the



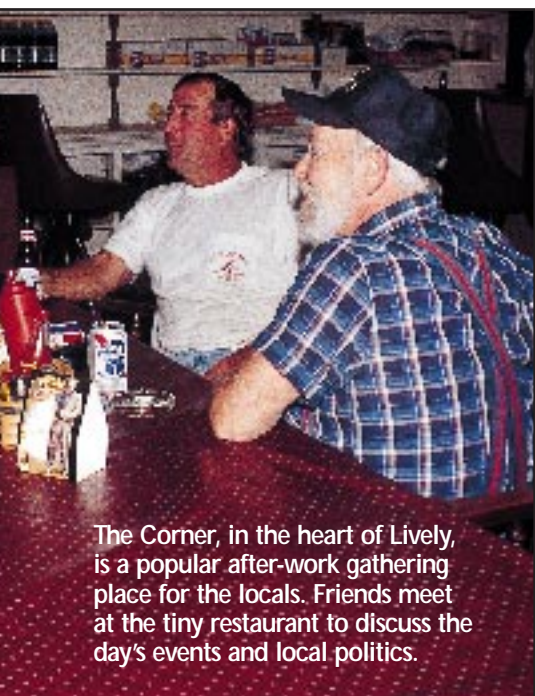
teer fire department has 45 volunteers; its rescue squad has 38 volunteers.

Both organizations are supported solely through donations and fundraising. The Upper Lancaster Rescue Squad, which was established in 1983 and operates its four units out of an 11-year-old building, raises its money through spaghetti dinners, bake sales and small fundraising projects.

The Upper Lancaster Volunteer Fire Department, which opened a substation in conjunction with the rescue squad in nearby Ottoman several years ago, was established in 1948. With six fire trucks, including a brush truck, two pumpers and two tankers, it hosts the annual Lively Firemen's Festival every August as its major fund-raiser. The event draws thou-



Kim Robinson assists a customer at Lively Drugs. The drugstore and adjacent physician's office have been located in Lively for over 40 years.



The Corner, in the heart of Lively, is a popular after-work gathering place for the locals. Friends meet at the tiny restaurant to discuss the day's events and local politics.

sands to the tiny town for a parade, arts and crafts, children's rides, homecookin' and street dance.

**Artie Ransone**, president of the Lively Community Association, has been a fixture in Lively's commercial district as an owner and manager of several businesses there for over 25 years. He came home to Lively to run his family business, and in 1997, started his own, Window Direct.

"I refuse to work in the city," says Ransone, who lives just two miles from his store. "With my family property here and my mom here, I wouldn't be anywhere else. Someone who just moved here said to me the other day, 'everyone is so friendly here.'"

The Community Association, which began as the Lively Businessmen's Association some 30 years ago, has evolved into a community organization,

sponsoring the town's annual Lively Christmas celebration, with a parade, town tree lighting, live Nativity and visit from St. Nick. Money from the event is used for town improvements. The association recently purchased a Lively time and temperature sign that hangs over Main Street. Plans for future improvements include extending the sidewalks up and down Main Street and purchasing Welcome to Lively signs.

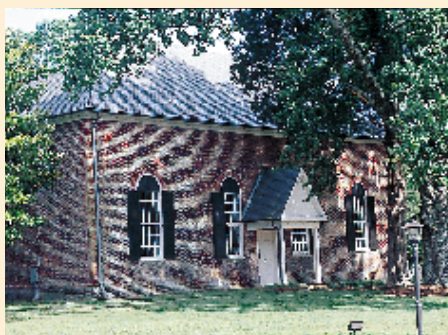
**Patricia Lewis**, former chairman of the Christmas project, believes Lively has a great deal of potential because it's a wonderful place to live and work.

"Others may not share the same view," says Lewis. "But having grown up in Lively, it's always been home. And I think it's a wonderful benefit to be able to live and work in your hometown, where everybody knows everybody." ■

public, are **Fox Hill Plantation**, built in 1761 and added to in 1803, and **Lively Oaks**, a pre-1817 Tidewater vernacular.

Be sure to also visit **The Perfect Touch**, a unique gift and home accessories shop, located in the old Lively Oaks manor house on Route 3. The original home was built in 1686. The store, which carries everything from gourmet foods to garden items, is open Monday through Saturday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The town hosts several major events during the year, the first of which occurs this month. The annual **Upper Lancaster Volunteer Firemen's Festival**, featuring a grand parade, arts and crafts, music and food, will be held on Saturday, Aug. 26.



St. Mary's White Chapel

Continued favorites are the carnival rides, raffles, mudbog and street dance from 8 p.m. to 12 a.m. Saturday night. New to this year's festival are lawn mower races. The feature

parade heads down Main Street Lively at 1 p.m. All activities are held at the firemen's pavillion.

Another festival not to miss is the annual **Christmas Parade and Tree of Lights** sponsored by the Lively Community Association. This year's Lively Christmas celebration, featuring an afternoon parade, live Nativity, visit from Santa Claus, children's shopping area, homemade soups and baked goods, and community tree lighting, will be held on Sunday, Dec. 3.

To reach the village of Lively, follow 360 east from Richmond, in Warsaw, take Route 3 east and go approximately 20 miles. ■