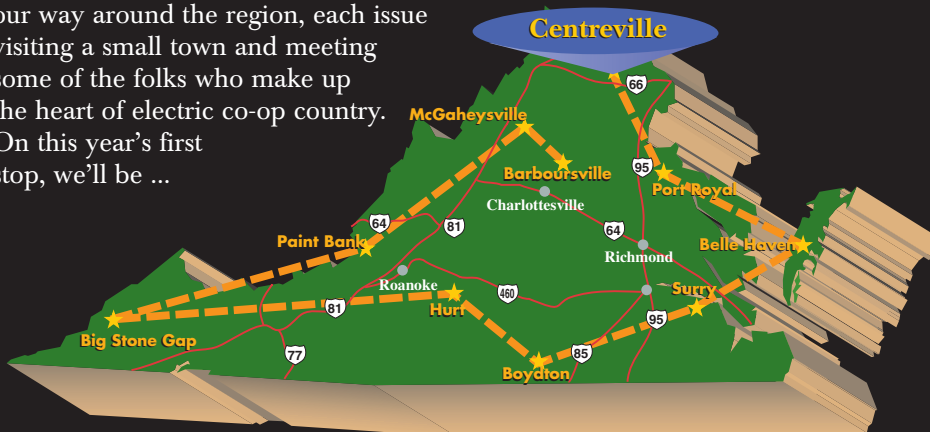


DOWN HOME SERIES

Supervisor Michael Frey and his German shepherd, Marley, at the entrance of the Westfields Government Center. Marley spends each day in Frey's district office.



Again in the year 2005, we're making our way around the region, 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 first stop, we'll be ...



DOWN HOME IN CENTREVILLE

by Jeb Hockman, Contributing Writer

Centreville in sprawling Fairfax County can be a difficult place to define.

There is a post office and a zip code. There are two Centreville exits on I-66. Yet even longtime residents can't always agree about the geographic area that Centreville entails.

Pat Lawless, a real estate broker and one of the founders of the Centreville Community Foundation, says that Centreville is bounded by the Prince William County line on the west and south, Braddock Road on the north and "the old creek beds" toward the community of Clifton to the east.

"Route 29 is Centreville's Main Street," Lawless adds.

Michael Frey, Fairfax County supervisor, is confident that all of Centreville lies within his Sully District and notes that



"It's the spirit of a town that makes a town," says Pat Lawless, who manages a bustling real estate office with over 150 agents.

Centreville has been divided into four quadrants by I-66 and routes 28 and 29. "The historic area of Centreville is tucked back off of two major highways," Frey explains.

It is the rich history of the original town settled in the early 1700s that Frey and a core group of local residents are working to preserve in the midst of astounding growth. What was a sleepy farming community of less

AT A GLANCE ...

POPULATION: 48,661

LAND AREA: 9.7 square miles

CHARTERED: 1792

ELEVATION: 300 feet

FUN FACT: The creek that flows across Braddock Road and through the town's historic district is called "The Thames," which early settlers borrowed from the river in their native England.

than 500 in the 1940s, his Western Fairfax district is now home to over 150,000 people – a 63 percent increase in population in the past 10 years.



Centreville Circa 1940

Mount Gilead, built around 1780, was once known as “The Ordinary of the Black Horse” and offered meals and lodging to Colonial-era travelers.



At Mountain View School, an alternative high school in Centreville, history and government teacher **Geneva Lindner** and guidance counselor **Sharon DeBragga** have begun a unique project to spark the interest of their students in the history of the area. The students have toured historic sites and conducted interviews with lifelong residents.

In one interview, the students were surprised to learn that Centreville, only 25 miles from the nation’s capital, had no electricity until 1941 when lines were strung by Prince William Electric Cooperative. Today, Northern Virginia Electric Cooperative (NOVEC) continues to provide power for much of the area.

or “ordinaries,” as did Thomas Jefferson en route to his inauguration.

DeBragga and Lindner and their students recently wrote and published a booklet, “Welcome to Centreville – Your Passport to Local History,” that gives a guided tour in text and photos of landmarks such as Braddock Road, the Royal Oaks Site, St. John’s Episcopal Church, the Old Stone Church and Mt. Gilead.

Established as the community of Newgate by the British Parliament in 1742, the area was first farmed by a mix of tenants and convicts released from England’s famed Newgate Prison. Town fathers sought to change the name and obtained a new charter as Centreville in 1792.

Mt. Gilead, built around 1780, is in the heart of Centreville’s historic district. From 1785 to 1789, the two-story structure was known as “The Ordinary of the Black Horse” and served meals and offered lodging to travelers. An excellent example of Potomac River architecture, the house and its beautiful grounds are now owned by the Fairfax County Park Authority.

“Centreville drew its name from the fact that it seemed to be in the center of things,” says developer, realtor and historian **Dennis Hogge**, who notes that George Washington stopped at least four times at one of the town’s taverns,

Every September, the Centreville Community Foundation holds Centreville Day. This year, for the first time, the celebration was held at Mt. Gilead. As part of Centreville Day, Sharon DeBragga and



Geneva Lindner (above, left) and Sharon DeBragga pause at St. John’s Episcopal Church. Lindner’s history and government students at Mountain View School (right) are learning about Centreville through their oral history class project.



IF YOU GO ...

Centreville really isn't hard to find. It is easily accessible from I-66 and routes 28 and 29. There is much to see and do in and around Centreville and Western Fairfax County.

Before you go, check out the Centreville community Website, www.centreville.org. The site has everything from the history of Centreville, maps and directions, and guides to shopping and restaurants.

Centreville and Northern Virginia is awash in eateries from fast food to the major chains to gourmet bistros – most of which are located in the strip centers and along the highways. For a real taste of Centreville, try **Jamie's General Bean Coffee Shop and Roastery** (right), located in an old country store a stone's throw from the historic district at 13848 Lee Highway (Rt. 29). You can enjoy fresh deli sandwiches and soups, delicious pastries baked on premises and over 40 different coffees and teas (703-815-6880, www.generalbean.com).

Next door to Jamie's is a Centreville institution, **Payne's Restaurant**. The décor and the menu haven't changed much since the 1940s. Locals love its down-home diner-style food and you will, too.

Children will enjoy visiting the **Ellenor C. Lawrence Park and Walney Visitor's Center**, just



off Rt. 28 between Centreville and Dulles Airport. The centerpiece of this 660-acre park is the original Walney family farmhouse, built around 1780. Naturalist Karen Waltman and her staff delight in relating the history of the farm and the exhibits of the tobacco, vegetables, wheat, honey and other crops once produced there. There are picnic areas, hiking trails and admission is free (703-631-0013, www.co.fairfax.va.us/parks).

Karen Waltman stands before a crop of tobacco at Walney Farm Park.



Geneva Lindner present a play they wrote about Centreville's history. Local residents, many of whom are fellow teachers recruited from Mountain View School, dress in period costume to represent historic figures from John Smith to Civil War generals.

DeBragga and Lindner delight in taking visitors on a walking tour of the historic area that still has the look of a rural village, while the sounds of heavy construction equipment can be heard as new town homes are being built less than a half-mile away.

They point out a huge 200-year-old oak that was once one of seven trees that lined the entrance to Royal Oaks, the home of Centreville's founder and Revolutionary War patriot John Orr. During the Civil War, General John S. Mosby used Royal Oaks as a safe house and meeting place. In 1959, the home was dismantled

DeBragga and Lindner are dwarfed by the huge 200-year-old oak tree that was once one of seven lining the entrance to Royal Oaks.

and moved to a Fauquier County farm. The remains were recently rediscovered and there is hope that funds can be raised to rebuild the house on the original site.

Situated so near Manassas, Centreville is rich in Civil War history. Royal Oaks was also used as headquarters for Union generals McDowell and Pope during the battles of Bull Run. St. John's Episcopal Church was used as a hospital and campground for troops of both sides. The cemetery on the church grounds is the resting place of many fallen Confederate soldiers.

Michael Frey relates how the Civil War decimated Centreville. Many of its original buildings were burned, as were the fertile farmlands. "After the war, the need to rebuild was so desperate that not a tree was left around Centreville," Frey says.

In fact, the original St. John's Church burned and was rebuilt in 1867 using whatever lumber the builders could scrounge. In the ceiling above the pulpit, one can still see the keyhole of a door that was used.

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Even if you don't have a flight to catch, you don't want to miss the **Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center**, south of the main Dulles terminal near the intersection of routes 28 and 50. The Museum, an annex of the one in downtown Washington, D.C., currently houses over 80 aircraft and space artifacts, including the Space Shuttle "Enterprise," the B-29 Superfortress "Enola Gay" and an Air France supersonic transport. Open daily (except December 25) from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. (202-633-1000, www.nasm.si.edu/museum).

Also near the airport is the **Sully Historic Site** at 3601 Sully Road. Completed in 1799 by Richard Bland Lee, the main house combines aspects of Georgian and Federal architecture. You can also tour the original outbuildings, slave quarters and gardens. Open daily except Tuesdays and some holidays (703-437-1794).

If you are planning to stay overnight, there are many motels and hotels in the Chantilly and Dulles area, including the **Westfields Marriott** in the Westfields Corporate Center on Route 29. Economy-minded travelers may wish to consider accommodations in the Manassas area, which boasts a number of the less expensive national-chain motels. ■



A silo still stands in the middle of an apartment complex as a reminder of Centreville's recent past as farmland.

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Frey and community leaders envision Mt. Gilead as the centerpiece of a preserved historic village, “a mini village green” with the remaining buildings restored to their original state as was done in Colonial Williamsburg.

“With the increasing suburbanization of Fairfax County, people need a feeling of roots and are becoming more interested in history,” explains Frey, noting that Centreville’s multiple historic structures are “unique in the county” and deserve preservation.

Frey says that he and the citizens of Western Fairfax County are working to balance the growth of the area without damaging its economic vitality. “We want to discourage commuter traffic through the heart of Centreville,” the supervisor says, “while making sure there is enough traffic to assure the success of retail businesses in the area.”

Frey proudly notes that the county has been aggressive in acquiring and developing parklands and green spaces. Fairfax recently acquired 2,200 acres called the Sully Woodlands, near Historic Sully Plantation, the home of Richard Bland Lee, Northern Virginia’s first congressional representative and uncle of the Civil War general. “This is the largest single purchase of parkland in the county’s history,” Frey says.

Living in the shadow of Washington, D.C., and with its attractiveness as a location for headquarters of major corporations

and technology companies that want to be near the capital, it is unlikely that the rapid growth of Centreville and Fairfax County will subside. Yet even as town houses and shopping centers seem to sprout from the ground overnight, among its residents there is a real commitment to keeping alive the history, the spirit and farming village roots of Centreville.

“It is the spirit of a town that creates a town,” says Pat Lawless. “Without this community spirit, Centreville would become just another spot on the map.”

One way the Centreville Community Foundation is working to create a sense of community is through its Web site,

www.centreville.org, which Lawless calls “our electronic town hall.” She credits local resident **Brad Thompson** who helped develop and acts as Web master for the site. Lawless also cites *CentreView*, a weekly newspaper that chronicles events and people in Centreville.

“We’re providing opportunities for people to get involved, so they don’t feel disconnected,” Lawless says.

With such a wealth of true community spirit, the question, “Where is Centreville?” is really not one of geographic boundaries. Centreville lives in the hearts of those live and raise their families in this thriving community and are working so hard to preserve its history and heritage. ■