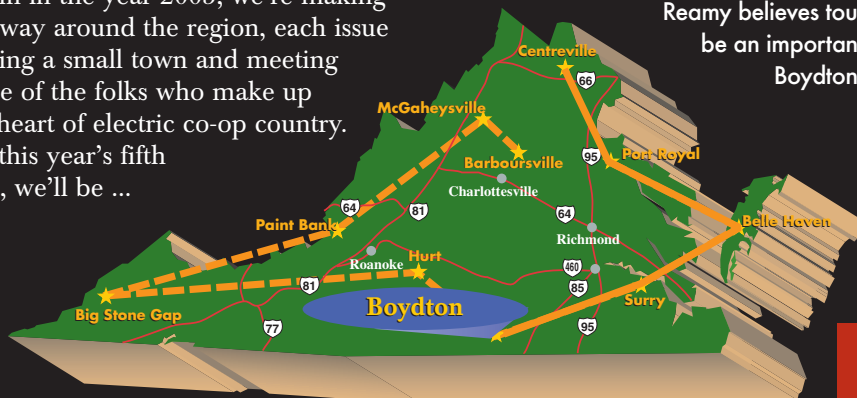


DOWN HOME SERIES

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 fifth stop, we'll be ...



DOWN HOME IN BOYDTON

by Keith Weston and Bill Thompson, Contributing Writers

The citizens of Boydton, Virginia, are proud of their small town, and with good reason. Nestled in the center of Mecklenburg County, the picturesque town looks like a scene from a Norman Rockwell painting. From the courthouse square in the center of the town to the newly dedicated county offices, Boydton is a mix of business and pleasure, old and new. Located just two miles from Bugg's Island Lake (Kerr Lake), the town provides access to some of the finest outdoor recreation you're likely to find anywhere. Most importantly, Boydton has managed to hold onto the easy feel of a

small, friendly community. Boydton is centrally located in Mecklenburg County eight miles east of Clarks-ville, on Highway 58.

Kerr Lake averages over two million visitors a year. It has over 800 miles of shoreline and is one of the largest, most pristine freshwater lakes on the East coast. There are more than 500 campsites and over 20 boat-launching pads within 15 miles of Boydton. There are 13 swimming



From left: The town seal of Boydton emphasizes its heritage; the Mecklenburg County Courthouse building is one of Boydton's most distinctive structures; Mayor Charles Reamy believes tourism will be an important part of Boydton's future.



AT A GLANCE ...

POPULATION: 477

LAND AREA: 1 square mile

FOUNDED: In 1812 by Alexander Boyd, who owned the property and designed the town.

FUN FACT: Randolph-Macon's first session opened in October, 1832, on the Boydton campus with the Rev. Martin Parks, a mathematics professor, as acting president. The president's annual salary was \$1,000, while professors earned \$800 per year.

beaches within the same area. The lake is home to largemouth bass, crappie, catfish, and striped-bass professional tournaments throughout the year. The water is good and clear for swimming and boating and is managed by the Corps of Engineers.

EARLY HISTORY

In the first part of the 19th century, a large racetrack located just west of the town attracted horsemen from around the region. The track thrived, but in 1829 the Virginia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church announced that it would locate a new college in Boydton, if it could build on the racetrack site. The town agreed, and in 1832 Randolph-Macon College opened in Boydton.

By the early 1850s, the Boydton-Petersburg Plank Road provided a link from Boydton to the rest of the world.

Bugg's Island Lake (Kerr Lake) is a pristine Corps of Engineers reservoir near Boydton with more than 800 miles of shoreline.



The original Randolph-Macon College building is still standing in Boydton.

From left, Landon H. "Bumps" Carter is greeted by Boydton Mayor Charles Reamy outside of the Town Office. Looking on are the mayor's wife, Ann Reamy, Town Clerk Shirley Bowen and Elaine Bowers, executive director of Historic Boydton's Renaissance, Inc.

Built out of wooden planks, the road was a success, but keeping the wooden road in repair was expensive. After a few years, the owners abandoned the effort and its use gradually decreased.

With the start of the Civil War, Boydton became an important recruitment spot for soldiers from around the county. The old Boyd Tavern, by then a hotel, was used as a recruiting station and several militia units were formed from the county. The Boydton Cavalry became part of J.E.B. Stuart's famous command.

The war and its aftermath were particularly hard on Randolph-Macon College. Due to low enrollment and a lack of con-

venient transportation, the college relocated to Ashland, Virginia, where it remains to this day.

Despite the loss of Randolph-Macon, the years after the Civil War were not as hard on Boydton as they might have been. After the war, Boydton emerged as a tobacco-growing center with a prizery and several warehouses. Those businesses, and the town's status as the county seat, enabled the town to survive and prosper into the next century.

Landon H. "Bumps" Carter is one of Boydton's best-known and respected citizens. Born in 1912, he remembers the more recent history of the town. Although he moved briefly to Richmond to attend col-

lege, he quickly decided that city life was not for him. "I stayed down there about two months. My father came down to see how I was doing and I told him I wasn't doing. I wanted to come back home and I did."

Carter's father, Garland Holmes Carter, was a physician in Boydton from the 1880s until the early 1950s. A brother, Garland Norfleet Carter, was also a physician. "They were together," says Carter. "They had an office upstairs over A.T. Snelling's drug store."

He also remembers when electricity was much more "hit or miss" than it is today. "The town had a generating plant on the hill," remembers Carter. "But they only turned the power on from about 6 p.m. until



"We absolutely love living in Boydton after living in New York for 30 years," say Bob and Jenny Solzman, whose historic home, "12 Oaks on the Hill," is an architectural gem. The equipment for Boydton's high-speed Internet system, provided by Mecklenburg Communications Services Inc., is mounted on the town water tower.

11 p.m. They figured everyone was in bed by 11. Entertainment," says Carter, "was seldom lacking in Boydton. Along with dances and silent movies," Carter remembers that "Vaudeville acts would pass through and perform. Sports and parties also contributed to an active community. There was something going on all the time," laughs Carter, "especially for a little town."

Carter believes the recent attempts to revitalize the town are going to help keep the community going. "I want to see Boydton grow more," says Carter. "My family and friends are all here. I've enjoyed living here."

Despite the emphasis on history, Boydton has not been opposed to embracing new technology. The community was



The library in Boydton is a branch of Southside Regional Library, Virginia's oldest regional library.

among the first small towns in Southside to make use of wireless, high-speed Internet service. Not only are Boydton residents able to surf the Web and pick up their e-mails more quickly, the service has also allowed the Boydton Medical Center to link patients in Boydton with specialists across the state.

"It's called telemedicine," explains **Carol Dill**, executive director for the Boydton Medical Center. "It allows us to stage a patient's appointment in real time with the patient here, and the doctor is at University of Virginia. They can talk with each other and see each other. The doctor can direct the



Dr. Carol Dill (left photo) is executive director of the Boydton Medical Center, which features telemedicine capabilities. Dr. Charles Ashbey and Christy Newcomb, finance director of the Boydton Medical Center (above) are shown with one of the telemedicine monitors.



(Left) Elaine Bowers is executive director and Dave Arnold is president of Historic Boydton's Renaissance, Inc. (Above) Gene Coleman, clerk of courts for Mecklenburg County, says, "You won't find a better place to live" than Boydton.

tests the local doctor is performing and see the results on his screen. They can monitor the vital signs as the tests are happening. It's kind of cool," laughs Dill. "The patients are amazed by it."

According to Dill, the technology for this type of service is not new. Developed by the military more than a decade ago during the Gulf War, the service is starting to be seen in the civilian world. "It's not unheard of," adds Dill, "but it is very unusual to see it in a town this small." She credits Mecklenburg Communications Services, a subsidiary of Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative, for service "above and beyond" in setting up the system for the clinic. "They believed in our project and our ability to pull this off so much that they came in and facilitated a lot of getting our project together. They never billed us for this time and effort," adds Dill. "They spent, I don't know how much time, making certain that everything worked perfectly to get us online with U. Va. It's always nice for a company to come in and support non-profit organizations like us. That shows

a lot of community spirit and care for the people in the area."

The clinic itself is also unusual for a town as small as Boydton. Founded 20 years ago as a not-for-profit organization, the clinic provides a variety of medical services for residents with fees based on a sliding scale to ensure affordable health care for the area. Originally operating in a small modular building, the clinic was forced to seek larger quarters. After looking at several options, the board of directors decided on a row of vacant and run-down buildings across the street from the courthouse square. Restoration and renovation of the buildings not only provided the clinic with a spacious, modern facility, but also helped improve the looks of the historic district.

Like a lot of small towns in Southside, Boydton has seen its share of problems over the past few decades. As the tobacco and textile industries waned, the town went through a gradual decline. The people of Boydton, however, never seemed to lose faith in their community. In fact, they began

celebrating the town with "Boydton Day." People from far and near come each year to Boydton Day, which is held the last Saturday in October. The streets of Boydton are lined with food vendors, crafts, and antiques in which the largest crowd for the year assembles in Boydton. The big parade, which is usually at 10 a.m., is followed by all sorts of entertainment. Boydton Volunteer Fire Department cooks the finest Brunswick stew, and the rescue squad



For more information about Boydton, Va., contact The Town of Boydton at (434) 738-6344; www.boydton.org.

Places to visit and accommodations:

Southern Heritage Bed & Breakfast

1100 Jefferson Street
Boydton, VA 23917
(434) 738-0167

Rose's Restaurant

109 Bank Street
Boydton, VA 23917
(434) 738-9500

Prestwoud Plantation

429 Prestwoud Drive
Clarksville, VA 23927
(434) 374-8672

Best Western on the Lake

103 Second Street
Clarksville, VA 23927
(434) 374-5023

Lake Motel & Efficiencies

101 Virginia Avenue
Clarksville, VA 23927
(434) 374-8106

The Copper Kettle

876 Madison Street
Boydton, VA 23917
(434) 738-6045

If you want to taste good food and enjoy old-fashioned Southern hospitality, you will want to stay at the Southern Heritage Bed & Breakfast. The old Southern mansion has been completely renovated and offers a great place for you to relax.

If you are a history buff, you will want to visit the Prestwoud Plantation, located eight miles west of Boydton. It is one of the most documented 18th-century plantations in America. The mansion is noted for its original furnishings, wallpaper, and complete set of dependencies for the mansion. The slave house is considered the oldest black-housing structure in America.

Each year in October, people flock to the town for Boydton Day.

While in Boydton, you have to visit the **Boyd Tavern**. It has been completely renovated and furnished. It will definitely be worth your while to see where the Boydton cavalry of the Civil War was recruited.

Rose's Restaurant in downtown Boydton serves the best Italian cuisine and stays open until 10 p.m. nightly. The friendly service will make you feel right at home.

There are several golf courses throughout the county that any golfer would enjoy.

Before leaving, you will want to visit the **John H. Kerr Dam and Reservoir**. This is located eight miles south of Boydton off Highway 4. The beautiful lake is the perfect place to enjoy camping, fishing, hiking, boating, or even horseback riding. For more information, you may contact the Corps of Engineers at (434) 738-6662. ■

serves delicious barbecue. There are all kinds of desserts, home-baked pies, and cakes galore. In 1977, *U.S. News & World Report* covered the event, calling Boydton "The Small Town That Refused To Die."

Today, Boydton is a town in transition. Historic Boydton's Renaissance, Inc., a non-profit group of volunteer citizens, have worked with state and federal agencies as well as local businesses to push through a restoration-renovation project designed to make Boydton more attractive to tourists.

"We think tourism is our future," says Mayor **Charles Reamy**. "We already have a lot of tourists coming to Bugg's Island Lake and we'd like for them to come to Boydton. History," adds Mayor Reamy, "is a key ingredient in the plan. We're a certified historic district with over 180 recognized historic structures in town," he explains.

"We've designed a walking tour that will include the Boyd Tavern, which dates back to about 1790. There's the Boydton Presbyterian Church, which is from around 1820. We have the courthouse that was built

in 1842. And, we have the Plank Road," Reamy notes. One of the centerpieces of the tour will be a replica section of the old Boydton-Petersburg Plank Road, built as closely to the original as possible.

Meanwhile, the "downtown" section of Boydton has also seen massive renovations, with facelifts to store fronts, new street lights, benches placed around the area, and streetscaping. Even the statue of the Confederate soldier on the courtyard lawn has recently undergone a complete restoration. The improvements seem to be having a domino effect. While restoration was underway at the new Boydton Medical Center, two other nearby storefronts were also renovated. A new breakfast-and-lunch café is expected to open in one of the buildings within the next few months. A new retail store is expected to open shortly in the second building. Old Lamps & Antiques, which will carry a variety of antiques and collectibles as well as offering antique lamp parts, service and repair, is scheduled to open in mid-summer.

According to **Dave Arnold**, president of Historic Boydton's Renaissance, it's only a matter of time before word about Boydton gets out to the rest of the world. "This is one of the nicest places you'll ever find," says Arnold. "It's a beautiful town, the people are friendly – it's just a wonderful place."

For **Gene Coleman**, clerk of courts for Mecklenburg County, living in Southside is all about quality of life. "My grandparents were our first generation here in Boydton," remembers Coleman. "They ran a grocery store on Jefferson Street and then moved downtown to where the current medical center is. They ran it until 1964." Coleman's father, mother, sister, and brother still live in Boydton. "Quality of life is what keeps me here" says Coleman. "I've got three kids and we have a good school system here. You won't find a better place to live. It's just good, rural country living and it might sound corny, but it's true; we're all one family. This is a great place to live. The quality of life is right here." ■