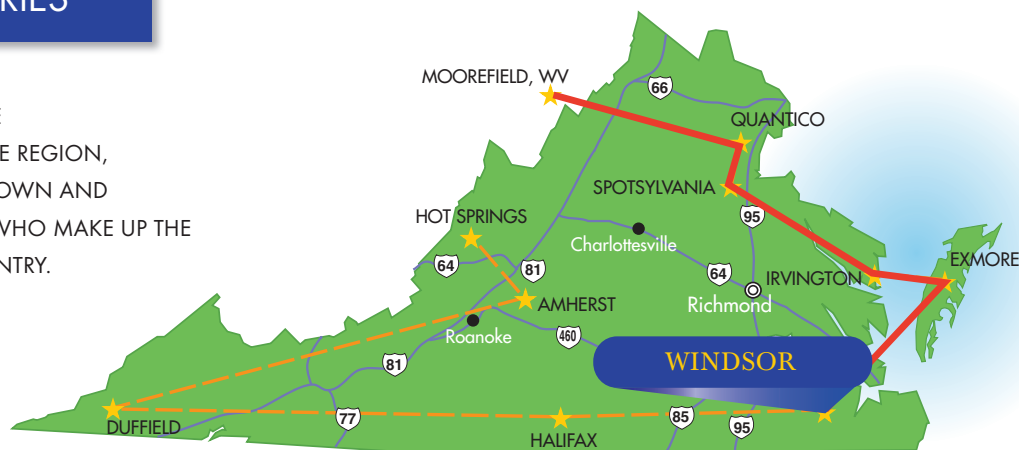


DOWN HOME SERIES

AGAIN IN THE YEAR 2007, 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 SIXTH STOP, WE'LL BE ...



DOWN HOME IN

WINDSOR

BY AUDREY T. HINGLEY, CONTRIBUTING WRITER • PHOTOS COURTESY OF AUDREY T. HINGLEY

THIS GATEWAY TO
HAMPTON ROADS RETAINS THE
FLAVOR OF A SIMPLER TIME.

“Windsor is the crossroads of two fast lanes,” says **Delbert O’Meara**.

It’s an apt description for the rural-struggling-with-suburban-growth town of Windsor. Heading east along U.S. 460, a steady stream of truck traffic passes through pastoral land and towns like Waverly, Wakefield and Ivor on the way to Windsor and points beyond. Route 460 cuts right through Windsor, which in promotional literature touts itself as “at the heart of Isle of Wight.” The town is also intersected by U.S. 258, running north-to-south and linking Windsor with communities like Franklin and Smithfield.

O’Meara, who says he’s “65 plus,” is surrounded by friends **Tim Gardner**, 70, of Suffolk; **Jay Stephenson**, 66, of Windsor; and **Ray Lee**, 85, of Windsor. The men are holding court at the local Dairy Queen on Route 460, indulging in not just breakfast, but a meeting of the minds where diverse conversation is part of the regular menu.

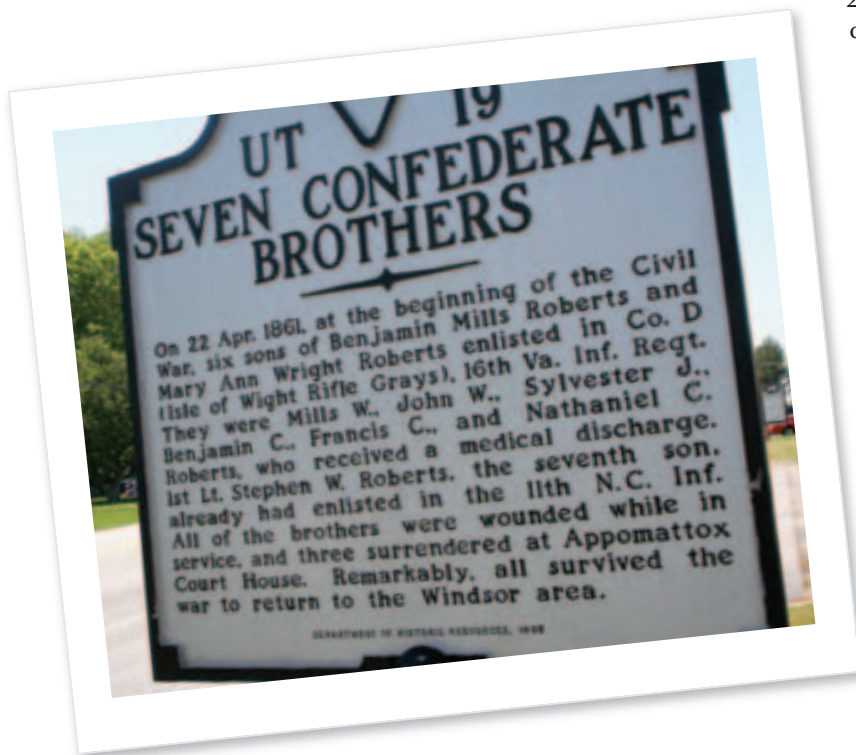
Stephenson, born and raised in Isle of Wight county by parents who were farmers, is himself a retired farmer. Lee, who has lived in Windsor 56 years, says he “sold out and retired” from his farm-supply business to enjoy golf. Both are quick to respond when asked about life in Windsor.

“It’s an old country town, and most people here are friendly,” Lee says. “Northerners come down here and don’t want to leave!”

Stephenson opines, “It’s relaxing and wonderful ... country roads and a country town. People ought to visit and see it for themselves.”

But in almost the next breath, the men agree that Windsor is changing. Stephenson says the coming Route 460 bypass road “will make Windsor a ghost town”; but Lee thinks the bypass

road “might be good ... it will get all the trucks [going through town] off the road.” Everyone agrees growth and increased population are inevitable. Stephenson describes Windsor’s future as “more taxes and more people,” while O’Meara says “locals will have to adapt to a faster way of life.”





AT A GLANCE ...

POPULATION: 2,400

LAND AREA: 0.9 square miles

FOUNDED: 1902

ELEVATION: 85 feet

FUN FACT: A town landmark is a plaque honoring seven Roberts brothers who all enlisted in the Confederate Army during the Civil War ... all seven brothers survived the war and returned to the Windsor area.



FROM TOP: Tidewater Farm Supply is a Windsor fixture offering not only farm and garden supplies, sporting goods and plants, but providing a gathering place for small-town fellowship. • Town of Windsor offices include a mini-museum featuring photographs and artifacts from Windsor's history. • Kurt A. Falkenstein, Windsor's town manager, has seen a great deal of change in the community since his installation in 1997.

At an adjacent table, **Margaret Anna Marshall**, 84, of Windsor and her friends **Celia Outten**, 80, and **Janie Rhodes**, 82, both from nearby Zuni, agree that growth is coming.

"Windsor will grow ... there's nothing to keep it from growing," Marshall observes.

Outten interjects, laughing, "Don't come here, we don't want you!"

Marshall lives on a family farm, adding, "I've lived here all my life. Windsor is a nice little town. I knew everyone when I was young; now I don't even know some of my neighbors. A lot of people are coming from

cities to get to rural areas [like ours] where there is less crime. A lot of people who have moved near me are from other states, or from Virginia Beach."

The women are keeping their community ties, despite concerns about growth. Rhodes says they're all members of The



Young At Heart Club, which began as a group of senior citizens getting together: “We take one trip a month and we [do things like] give to the library and the Salvation Army.”

James Beale, 90, hangs out with friends at another town fixture, Tidewater Farm Supply, where locals often gather for small-town fellowship. Beale worked at Newport News Shipbuilding, a 45-minute commute, for 50 years. He agrees Windsor has changed – for the better.

“There are more conveniences now,” he notes. “I remember when there was no electricity here; electricity came in 1939. There were few stores, and I remember when Route 460 was a dirt road.” Windsor is now the headquarters for Community Electric Cooperative.

Beale says there wasn’t much to do when he was growing up in Windsor: “You had to figure out your own things to do. There was a train station and about 10 trains a day ran through here. The train station is closed; passenger trains were done away with [here], although the freight trains still run.”

“They let us sit here and talk,” says **Charles Braswell**, 80.

A retired farmer, Braswell says he farmed peanuts, cotton, and soybeans “all my life on the same farm” until his 1991 retirement. Braswell says the cost of farmland is “pricing farmers out of the business ... a lot of farms are selling [their land] to developers.” His son farms the 200-acre family farm, plus an additional 1,000 acres of leased farmland.

Jackie and Dean Blythe, co-owners of Tidewater Farm Supply, bought the former Alphin Farm Supply in 1976. The Blythes have retained the store’s comfortable, rural



atmosphere: Amid a flat-screen television that will show satellite-TV agricultural shows along with an array of new products for sale, the decor includes mounted deer heads on walls, rodeo ads and flyers announcing beagle puppies for sale. A variety of customers, the Blythes say, buy their Purina feed, garden supplies and plants, and sporting goods here. They offer a custom seed-cleaning operation for farmers to replant their seed.

“We’ve had so many new residents come in ... they want to raise animals and have gardens,” Jackie Blythe says. “We’re seeing more backyard gardeners, although larger farmers, who farm 500 acres plus, are really our [customer] base.”

Suffolk is only 12 miles away and Newport News is a 25-mile drive. Most people commute to jobs outside of Windsor.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Retired farmer Charles Braswell, 80, is concerned that farmland will continue to be lost to development.

• Margaret Anna Marshall, Celia Outten and Janie Rhodes enjoy breakfast at the Windsor Dairy Queen. • Gabriel Phipps and Karen Spencer, two students at Happy Hearts Childcare Center, pose with center founder and director Nikki Stokes-Council.

“In the last five or 10 years, we have seen new subdivisions and things have really been booming,” she explains. “A lot of town businesses are owned by people who have lived here practically all their lives. I think the biggest challenge is handling the influx of people coming in and the impact on the school system. We have both volunteer and

paid emergency medical technicians, a wonderful volunteer fire department and our own town police department.”

Employee **Mac Williams**, 41, a self-described “country boy” who has lived in Windsor “all my life,” has worked at Tidewater Farm Supply for 25 years and oversees the store’s seed-cleaning operation. He calls Windsor “a pretty good place to live,” adding, “The store is like family to me, and I enjoy meeting people.”

Windsor native **Nikki Stokes-Council** is excited about her Windsor business: As director of The Happy Hearts Childcare Center at Windsor’s Chapel Grove United Church of Christ, she’s fulfilling a long-held dream of running a church-based, licensed child-care center. Happy Hearts, overseen by Stokes-Council and three employees, has a diverse curriculum including art, music, Bible lessons and even a 15-minute daily Spanish lesson.

“We started with five children when we opened in August 2004 and we now have 23 children.

“I believe this is a ministry ... children are our future, and if parents give them a safe environment and a place where they can learn, they will succeed,” Stokes-Council says.

She says the best part of her job is “making a difference in a child’s life.” A graduate of Old Dominion University and a former elementary school teacher, Stokes-Council says she likes the country life better than the “rushing” life she experienced in Norfolk, adding, “Windsor is laid-back and relaxed.”

IF YOU GO ...

The Town of Windsor office is open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday-Friday. The town office features a mini-museum area with photographs and other artifacts from Windsor’s history. There is a small in-town park, **Robinson Park**, at 18 Duke Street (next to the **Windsor Public Library**) that offers a small picnic area with picnic tables and playground.

The town has two annual events, a town picnic called **Pig Pickin’** in May and an annual **4th of July picnic**.

Windsor fast-food eateries include **Dairy Queen**, **Burger King** and **Subway**, as well as several restaurants, including **Windsor Cafe**, **Checkers** and **Anna’s Italian Restaurant**.

Some 2.3 million people live within an hour’s drive of Isle of Wight communities. Considered part of the Hampton Roads region, Windsor is a brief 12-mile drive from Suffolk, which offers historic sites, lakes and boating areas and **The Great Dismal Swamp**. Isle of Wight County, where Windsor is located, also offers numerous area attractions, historic sites, fishing and camping areas, accommodations and more.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Town of Windsor
8 East Windsor Blvd., Windsor, VA 23487
Telephone: (757) 242-4288
Web site: www.windsor-va.gov

Isle of Wight County Museum
103 Main Street, Smithfield, VA 23430
Telephone: (757) 357-7459
Web site: www.historysmithfield.org/LOW_Museum.htm

Smithfield and Isle of Wight Visitor Center
321 N. Main Street, Smithfield VA 23434
Telephone: (757) 357-5182 or
1-800-365-9339
Web site: www.smithfield-virginia.com

Suffolk Visitor Center
321 North Main Street, Suffolk VA 23434
Telephone: (757) 923-3880 or
(866) 733-7835
Web site: www.suffolk-fun.com

The first recorded name for Windsor, given by Native Americans, was Corro-waugh (“Frog Pond”), with a post office dating back to 1852. When a contract to deliver mail was given to the railroad, the depot became Windsor Station. Legend has it that

the name Windsor was tapped from a novel by Sir Walter Scott that the railroad builder’s wife was reading.

Chartered as a town in 1902, Windsor is one of only two towns (the other is Smithfield) in 319-square-mile Isle of Wight



Jay Stephenson, Ray Lee, Tim Gardner and Delbert O’Meara get together for conversation at the Dairy Queen on Route 460 in Windsor.



ABOVE: James Beale, 90, a frequent visitor at Tidewater Farm Supply, remembers when electricity first came to the town in 1939. BELOW: Jackie and Dean Blythe have owned Tidewater Farm Supply since 1976.

County. The town is anchored by a smattering of businesses, stores, churches, gas stations, homes and Town of Windsor offices in the midst of bustling Route 460. In 2000 the town's population was 916; in 2001 annexation swelled the population to 2,400.

Town Manager **Kurt A. Falkenstein** says when he became town manager in 1997, there were 2½ employees; today 10 employees oversee town functions.

"When I first came here we were issuing three zoning permits annually ... now that number is in the hundreds annually," he explains. "Initially I had to wear a large number of hats to do my job. I walked water-meter routes with the maintenance man; normally a town manager doesn't do that. Growth and additional staff have changed my role to more managerial."

Falkenstein says the Route 460 bypass is due to break ground in 2010, noting the town wants the bypass to come as close to the existing town limits as possible. He believes the bypass will benefit town businesses, although he admits that depends on the type of business and their target market.

Jackie Blythe says the bypass may help local businesses like theirs: "Route 460 is

scary to some people ... the traffic has greatly increased. Years ago there was no problem with any business in Windsor in terms of getting back out on 460, but there are more accidents now."

Mayor **Marvin A. Crocker, Jr.**, says Windsor's biggest challenge is transportation issues affecting the town. A town council member since 1992, Crocker has been mayor since 2002. The Isle of Wight native has lived in Windsor 37 years, and has worked at Newport News Shipbuilding for 41 years. Despite recent growth, he says Windsor remains "very much a rural community in a small-town setting."

"Because of our two main corridor highways, we have business, tourists and truckers [in town]," he says. "Regional issues will continue to drift our way, since we're just outside of Suffolk. Pressure from those areas will affect us as well."

"Windsor is an entrance to Hampton Roads, which makes us marketable to ports and ripe for residential development," Falkenstein says. "But living here is still like taking a step into the past, into a simpler place and time." ■

