

DOWN HOME SERIES

AGAIN IN THE YEAR 2009, 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 FIRST STOP, WE'LL BE ...



DOWN HOME IN

LOVINGSTON

Story and photos by Maureen Kelley, Contributing Writer

The Nelson County Visitor Information Center is a natural rest stop between Charlottesville and Lynchburg along scenic Route 29.

When visitors stop at the center, they marvel at the amount of information available and the helpful staff, scenic picnic area, geologic rock trail and wireless Internet service.

Ben Muldrow of Greenville, S.C., said, "I travel this road a lot from North Carolina to Charlottesville, as I avoid Interstate 81 at all costs. I always knew where I was, because it is such a beauti-

ful place, but I really never knew that I was in Nelson County."

The same can be said about the village of Lovingston. And the county likes it that way.

QUIETLY SUCCESSFUL

Nelson residents like the peaceful nature and lifestyle they enjoy and have directed local officials to ensure that the landscape and their quality of lifestyle remain intact, while maintaining a low cost of living. As with many such opportunities, Nelson County decided to pursue its own direction.

Nelson County was one of the first rural tourism programs accredited by the Virginia Tourism Corporation. Tourism is the primary economic development strategy for the 471-square-mile county, which has no incorporated towns or cities and is bounded by the Blue Ridge Parkway and the James River.

Known for its wineries, breweries and single-malt whisky distillery, Nelson County is home to Wintergreen Resort — and is a premier destination for the outdoor enthusiast. Close to one-third of the revenues for county government operations are generated from tourism-related taxes.

"Tourism is Nelson County's economic engine, and the increase in local tax revenues each year speaks to the success of tourism as a successful economic development strategy," Board of Supervisors Chairman **Tommy Harvey** said recently.

THE VILLAGE OF LOVINGSTON

Carefully planned as the county seat in 1807 by its founding fathers, Lovingston continues to prosper with careful attention from county leadership and residents.

The courthouse is the oldest in Virginia in continuous use. It was built in the town-hall style, with a unique five-bay arcade and a hexagonal cupola. On the courthouse lawn a memorial marks a major event in the history of the county when the remnants of Hurricane Camille in 1969 swept the area, causing major property damage and loss of life. But from that tragedy, the county grew stronger and focused on important matters — its residents.



The courthouse in Lovingston is the oldest in Virginia in continuous use.



AT A GLANCE...

POPULATION: 15,200 (Nelson County)

LAND AREA: 471 square miles (Nelson County)

FOUNDED: 1807 (Lovingston and Nelson County)

ELEVATION: 745 feet (Lovingston)

FACTOID: Lovingston was named for James Loving, Sr., who donated land for the courthouse.

(CLOCKWISE, FROM UPPER LEFT) Rapunzel's offers evening entertainment. • Ralph and Patty Turpin live in the village, where Ralph practices law from their Front Street home. • Patty is heavily involved in community activities, such as the annual July 4 parade.

Local attorney **Ralph Turpin** has been practicing in Lovingston a long time. **Patty** and Ralph Turpin are village dwellers. Ralph's legal practice is located in the front part of their home on Front Street. Ralph is native Nelson; Patty hails from nearby Amherst County. Much like Nelson County — which was formed from Amherst County in 1807 and named for the third governor of Virginia, Thomas Nelson — the Turpins are loyal to their Nelson roots and ambassadors for the village.

Patty stays involved in many community activities. She helps with the July 4 parade in downtown Lovingston, organized by her neighbor and fellow businesswoman, **Kim Bryant**. Kim and her husband own a successful Internet-based business. The county encourages home-based businesses and en-

trepreneurial endeavors. "The county believes in its villages and knows that mixed use of residential properties is a sound economic development strategy," says Lovingston District Board of Supervisors member **Allen Hale**. In the village, Front Street Gallery and Stitches and Shavings complement the other locally owned businesses, many of which are located on the first floor of residential structures.

The village of Lovingston was designated a historic district by the National Register of Historic Places in 2004 and by the Virginia Landmarks Register in 2005. While the program is voluntary, it gives property owners tools and financial incentives to make property improvements. A master plan was completed for Lovingston in 2005. A major component of that plan is to retain the vil-

lage feel and pedestrian qualities that make Lovingston eminently livable and a great place to work.

BUSINESS FRIENDLY

There are not many industrially zoned properties in Nelson County. So, when the Lovingston Manufacturing Company closed its doors, the county looked to a different type of tenant. Blue Moon Antiques now occupies the entire building on Route 29, but the zoning remains the same. In that way, Whit's End Saddle and Harness can continue to manufacture onsite without interruption. That's the kind of business-friendly environment that makes Lovingston and Nelson County special. Down the road, Steve's Sculptures is located on Davis Creek, one of the areas



(CLOCKWISE, FROM UPPER LEFT) The Lovington Opry, in the former Catholic church, recently opened a bistro in its lower level and provides weekend entertainment. • Fortune's Cove Preserve is a wildlife enthusiast's paradise. • Saunders Brothers and other family-owned farms are in the "agri-tainment" business, according to Jim Saunders.

devastated by Hurricane Camille in 1969. Specializing in steel and soapstone sculptures, this former apple-packing shed, still zoned industrial, is a major artisan and shopping destination.

AGRICULTURE IS KEY

More than 40 varieties of apples and peaches are grown in Nelson County. Spring paints the mountainsides with pink and white apple blossoms, peaches abound from June to October, while fall means spectacular foliage and weekend festivals.

Family-owned farms like Drumheller's Orchard in Lovington and Saunders Brothers in nearby Piney River are successful, multi-generational businesses. **Jim Saunders** says, "We are in the agri-tainment business. Our farm market is a destination; the apples, peaches and other products are the main attraction and core business, but the farm museum and scheduled events keep the experience fresh for the customer."

Nelson County residents have worked to ensure that the county retains its rural character, yet is a viable place for business to flourish. In fact, the recent census from the Department of Agriculture noted that there are more working farms and open farmland in Nelson County than there were 10 years ago.

When the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries started the watchable wildlife program, Nelson County easily led the charge and currently has 11 loops promoted by the state, including two in Lov-

ington. The Nature Conservancy manages Fortune's Cove Preserve, with breathtaking mountain vistas and a challenging 5.3 miles of hiking trails and seven viewpoints. Lake Nelson, also managed by the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, offers camping and fishing in a relaxed family-style setting.

Three of the 10 wineries in Nelson County are located in Lovington. Mountain Cove Winery is the oldest new-era winery in Virginia. Lovington Winery, in Freshwater Cove, was the ninth winery to open in 2007. Democracy Winery is scheduled to open in 2009, but is already producing wine and promoting its new brand.

Also in Lovington, Eades Distillery is the first Scottish-style single-malt whisky distillery in America. **Chris Allwood**, chief operating officer, notes, "We chose Lovington and Nelson County for a number of critical reasons: the land at Eades Hollow has a perfect source of sweet, clean water; Nelson County helped in many ways to make the transition an easy one. In addition, Nelson County is an incredibly beautiful location with great quality of living, and I am looking forward to living and working here."

NOT WITHOUT NIGHTLIFE

Nightlife is the lifeblood of any downtown, and Lovington has two venues for evening entertainment. Rapunzel's is located in an old apple-packing shed on Front Street in the village, with coffee and music most evenings and weekends. Lovington Opry, the former Catholic church, has recently

opened a bistro in its lower level along with providing weekend entertainment.

HISTORY LIVES ON

Nelson County has preserved many historic homes, some dating back to the early 19th century. Oak Ridge Estate and Oakland Tavern are both within a short driving distance of Lovington. Oak Ridge, a privately owned estate of almost 5,000 acres and once owned by financier Thomas Fortune Ryan, is open for special events. The mansion is open by appointment only for group tours. Oakland Tavern houses the Nelson County Museum of History, a developing museum that was once a tavern along the old stage coach road through the county. The museum is open with limited visiting hours.

Residents and visitors comment that Lovington is a quaint mix of old and new. Longtime residents work and play beside new residents and visitors. It is a place that is comfortable, safe and unique. The fabric of the village is like a comfortable patchwork quilt. Each piece is different, yet adds to the complete picture of a prosperous village in Central Virginia.

Local people and businesses make this the center of the county, not just for government activities, but also for its connection to the past and future of Nelson County. Lovington is a place where you can stop, enjoy your stay, ask for directions and know that you will leave feeling better about the world.

continued on pg. 21

IF YOU GO...

There is always something going on in Lovingson. From unique shopping to local eateries, wineries, historical attractions or outdoor activities, Lovingson and Nelson County make for a great day-trip experience. Contact the Nelson County Visitor Information Center at 800-282-8223 — open 7 days a week from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. — to help plan your visit. For more information, visit www.nelsoncounty.com.

UPCOMING EVENTS

January 17 – Wine and Cheese Pairing at Wintergreen Winery

Guided presentation of cheeses of the world paired with Wintergreen's wines. Fee includes generous tastings and wine glass. 434-361-2519; www.wintergreenwinery.com.

February 14 – Valentine's Dinner & Dancing at Veritas Vineyards & Winery

An evening of fine food, Veritas wine and dancing. 540-456-8000, ext. 108; www.veritaswines.com.

February 14, 15 – Sweetheart's Weekend at Hill Top Berry Farm & Winery

Warm up your sweetie with "True to the Fruit" wines and historical honey meads paired with food. 434-361-1266; www.hilltopberrywine.com.

February 14, 15 – Wine and Chocolate at Cardinal Point Vineyard and Winery

Enjoy wines and handcrafted chocolates to sample and purchase for Valentine's Day. 540-456-8400; www.cardinalpointwinery.com.

February 14, 15 – Valentine Celebration at Wintergreen Winery

Indulge in a Valentine treat: our decadent pairing of raspberry dessert wine with organic chocolates, French truffles or homemade fudge. 434-361-2519; www.wintergreenwinery.com.

March 4 – Wine and Cheese Pairing at Wintergreen Winery

Guided presentation of cheeses of the world paired with Wintergreen's wines. 434-361-2519; www.wintergreenwinery.com.

March 14, 15 – St. Patrick's Day Open House at Hill Top Berry Farm & Winery

Food paired with mead enjoyed by the Irish for centuries. 434-361-1266; www.hilltopberrywine.com.

March 21, 22, 28, 29 – Spring Open House at Afton Mountain Vineyards

Come taste the new 2008 white wines. 540-456-8667; www.aftonmountainvineyards.com.

LODGING/DINING

Harmony Hill Bed and Breakfast

This log home offers a unique blend of luxury and casual living. Spacious air-conditioned bedrooms feature queen and king beds and private baths. Some offer fireplaces and whirlpool tubs. Lavish country breakfasts. Front porch overlooks acres of woods and fields. 929 Wilson Hill Road, Arrington. 877-263-7750; www.harmony-hill.com.

Orchard House Bed & Breakfast

This Victorian farmhouse built in 1895 has five rooms with private baths, each furnished in a romantic country style. Amenities include a front porch with wicker and rockers, tree swing, hammock, pond, hot tub, game room and sunroom. 9749 Thomas Nelson Highway, Lovingson. 434-263-7747 or 866-205-6978/9378; www.orchardhousebb.com.

Simpsons Hollow Bed and Breakfast

The octagonal house has three bedrooms, living room and kitchen. Each wall has a window that allows you to feel close to the natural setting. Outside the house, there is a brick patio next to the waterfall and your own swimming hole. The house is located on 100 acres of woods, with many hiking trails and scenic views. 580 Simpsons Lane, Lovingson. 434-263-6380 or 434-826-9237; www.simpsonshollow.com.

Village Inn

On Highway 29 in Lovingson, midway between Charlottesville and Lynchburg. A unique motel with a lovely country atmosphere. All rooms at ground level, park outside your door. Large full baths. Single, double or king rooms available. No pets allowed. 8010 Thomas Nelson Highway, Lovingson. 434-263-5068.

Lake Nelson Campground

Located next to Lake Nelson, with a fishing lake. 65 sites on 15 acres for RV or tent camping. Open April - November 15. 801 Lake Nelson Lane, Arrington. 434-263-8966 or 434-263-8967; www.lakenelsoncampground.com.

Basement Bistro

Located in the basement of the Lovingson Opry, enjoy homestyle cooking in the village of Lovingson. This new restaurant is open 8 a.m. until 3 p.m., Monday through Friday, serving breakfast and lunch. Daily specials. Open evenings during Lovingson Opry events. Eat in or take out. Limited delivery service. 632 Front Street, Lovingson. 434-263-8305.

Chicken Coop

Chicken, barbecue and a variety of sandwiches. Located in the Nelson Food Mart (Exxon Station), 40 Front Street, Lovingson. 434-263-7818.

Lovingson Café

A pleasant surprise in the middle of Lovingson, offering an eclectic menu with a full-service lounge. Steaks, seafood, vegetarian, pizza, desserts. 165 Front Street, Lovingson. 434-263-8000.

Vito's Italian Restaurant

Specializing in pizza and Italian dishes. 8181 Thomas Nelson Highway, Lovingson. 434-263-8688.

RECREATION

Fortune's Cove Preserve

Jane Heyward, a self-described outdoor enthusiast, donated 755 acres to the Nature Conservancy. The preserve is nestled within an area of comparatively unfragmented forest covering more than 29,000 acres, providing excellent wildlife habitat. The west face of the preserve's upper slope is broken by a series of rocky glades, where

the combination of plant species is thought to be extremely rare. A parking area and informational kiosk at the base of the cove will help orient visitors. Directions: From Route 29, turn onto Route 718 in Lovingson and travel approximately 1.5 miles; turn right onto Route 651 and travel approximately 1.5 miles; take the left fork in the road to enter the preserve.

Boat launch, Lake Nelson

On Route 812 south of Lovingson off Route 655. Picnic sites, fishing. Good for canoes, kayaks, rowboats and electric-powered boats.

Canoe/Kayak Run, Rockfish River

This run is scenic with just enough twists and turns to make it interesting. No rapids, but some good paddling skills required. It should take about two to two-and-a-half hours. Check water levels first. Put in by the bridge on Route 6 and take out at the Nelson County Wayside on Highway 29.

SHOPPING

Antiques at Southern Star

High-style country antiques and primitive furnishings from ceiling to floor. 10761 Thomas Nelson Highway, Lovingson. 434-361-9137.

Blossom's Flowers, Gifts and Crafts

911 Front Street, Lovingson. 434-263-8227.

Blue Moon Antique Mall

Unique antiques and collectibles. 8230 Thomas Nelson Highway, Lovingson. 434-263-8890.

Blue Moon Book Store

Used, rare, discounted and new books. 8230 Thomas Nelson Highway, Lovingson. 434-263-8890.

Claudia's Florist and Gifts

Celebrating our 26th year of business and community service in Central Virginia. 121 Front Street, Lovingson. 434-263-5848.

Front Street Gallery

In the heart of the Lovingson historic district. 773 Front Street, Lovingson. 434-263-8526.

Lovingson Antiques

Located in the packing shed at Rapunzel's, 924 Front Street in Lovingson. 434-263-6660.

Rapunzel's Coffee and Books

Espresso bar, gourmet coffee, tea, specialty drinks. Used books, live music Saturday nights. 924 Front Street, Lovingson. 434-263-6660.

Steve's Sculptures

Garden sculpture and steel statues. Soapstone sinks and signs. Benches, chairs and tables. 60 Davis Creek Road in Lovingson. 434-465-5555; www.stevessculptures.com.

Stitches and Shavings

Quality 100% cotton fabrics, patterns, notions and books for quilting and/or sewing. 605 Front Street, Lovingson. 434-263-6359.

Whit's End Saddle and Harness

8230 Thomas Nelson Highway, Lovingson. 434-263-8890. ■