

■ DOWN HOME SERIES

The year 2012 marks the 15th anniversary of *Cooperative Living* magazine's popular DOWN HOME feature, so we're revisiting the communities we profiled in 1997, the first year of the series. On this first stop, we'll be ...



DOWN HOME IN

VICTORIA

Story and photos by Brian Nowlin, Contributing Writer

“Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name, and they're always glad you came.”

This lyric, part of the theme song for the popular sitcom, *Cheers*, could easily serve as the slogan for Victoria, Va.

For most residents of Victoria, a trip to the local Food Lion or one of the local

restaurants around town is also an opportunity to catch up with friends. Breakfast at one of several local restaurants in Victoria is a must for many locals. While it's an important meal and these places serve great food, the chance to “shoot the breeze” and discuss the latest big topics around town is also a big draw.

In recent years, Lunenburg County has seen many former residents moving back to the area and new people becoming part of the community. The friendly and safe atmosphere around Victoria and Lunenburg County are big draws. Many former residents who grew up in Victoria have returned with their families to raise children in the same safe environment that they grew up knowing. One such resident is Jason Mattox, who moved back to Lunenburg with his wife Jennifer and their children.

“Jennifer and I both grew up here in Lunenburg, and moving back to Victoria has been great for our entire family,” says Jason. The couple owns Uptown Coffee Café and Jason observes, “The support for our business in this community has been nothing short of amazing.”

Robert Clement, longtime Commonwealth Attorney in Lunenburg County, also appreciates the small-town advantages that Victoria offers. “Having lived in Victoria all of my life, I enjoy the experience of knowing, meeting, and greeting everyone on the street. People are genuinely interested in each other. It's great the way a smile and a wave can make your day. I remember hosting a friend from the city on a visit here, and he commented on the trust and friendliness of everyone. He

Signs of past railroad days still remain in Victoria. Markers throughout the town detail the community's history. The caboose located in Victoria Railroad Park is open for visitors to walk through and enjoy.





AT A GLANCE ...

POPULATION: The town of Victoria is home to approximately 1,698 residents.

LAND AREA: 2.83 square miles

ELEVATION: Approximately 500 feet

FACTOID: Victoria is one of only two towns located in Lunenburg County. Lunenburg County was the largest county in Virginia at one time and was later broken up into nine neighboring counties.



1. The Victoria High School Museum highlights the history of Victoria. The location has served as a high school and elementary school for Victoria children. A modern elementary school is now located directly in front of the old high school. **2.** An Easter egg hunt near the Victoria Railroad Park is a favorite event for many local children. **3.** Musical groups from throughout the country have participated in concerts organized and run by local high school students. These concerts take place in Victoria and in the neighboring town of Kenbridge.

found it fascinating when we went to three different businesses that day, grabbed an item and just told the clerk to charge it as we walked out the door.”

On the flip side are residents new to the area, such as Marshall Hardy. Hardy moved to the Victoria area from Metro Washington, D.C., following his retirement. “My wife and I were looking for a nice, friendly place, easily accessible to major highways.” Hardy notes that he and his family enjoy traveling and Victoria is centrally located, with major interstates and major airports within easy driving distance from their home.

Railroad beginnings put Victoria on the map.

Victoria is one of two towns located in Lunenburg County, in the central part

of Southside Virginia. Victoria was founded in 1906 on undeveloped land set up by Tidewater Railroad, which was chartered to operate a new east-west rail system.

The town of Victoria was designated as the midpoint of one railroad line, and it became the home of a large equipment-maintenance operation that included a roundhouse, turntable, and coaling facilities, at the large rail yard.

A ROYAL NAMESAKE

The town got its name, Victoria, from a railroad man. Industrialist and financier for this new operation in Victoria, Henry Rogers, was reportedly very fond of Queen Victoria of England, and named the town in her honor.

With the railroad business booming and more people moving to the area, buildings, movie theatres and even hotels sprang up in Victoria. The book, *The Virginian Railway*, makes reference to the fact that many railroad investors envisioned Victoria growing and eventually becoming a community similar to Roanoke in size. As land sales and job opportunities expanded in the early 1900s, those projections looked like they may come true, but things began to change as diesel-electric locomotives came onto the scene. Less labor and fewer facilities were needed to operate the railroad system, and by the 1950s, Victoria’s position as an important midpoint for coal and labor exchanges was greatly diminished.



1. Victoria is a location that offers newcomers and visitors a friendly and safe environment, while still striving to provide fun entertainment for everyone. **2.** Mayor Carol Watson and Town Manager Ken Patterson have worked diligently along with town officials to make major improvements to the community. **3.** Marshall Hardy is one of many new residents in the Victoria area who have made their home in Lunenburg after having lived in a more urban location. Hardy enjoys the friendly atmosphere and central location. **4.** Horse enthusiasts enjoy the many equestrian trails found near the Victoria Railroad Park. A horse campground is currently in the works. **5.** Timmy's Grocery is a favorite stop for the "Bike for Fallen Officers" group that travels from Charlotte, N.C., to Washington, D.C., each year. **6.** Events such as this "Fun Day" held at the Central High School in Victoria take place throughout the year. **7.** "The Falls" is one of several locations in and around Victoria that offers boating, fishing, photography and trail-walking opportunities.

The last Virginian Railway passenger train served Victoria in January 1956, and steam operations completely shut down in June 1957. Finally, on Dec. 1, 1959, the Virginian Railway merged with Norfolk and Western Railway. Coal traffic was shifted from Victoria to Crewe, Va. Rail traffic through Victoria was eventually abandoned by the 1980s.

FINDING A NICHE IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY

So Victoria, like many small towns, has faced adversity through the years. Following the loss of railroad operations, Victoria enjoyed a time when manufacturing and farming provided an abundance of jobs to local citizens. But over time, logistics and economic factors forced several companies out of the town.

In recent years some manufacturing concerns have returned to the area, and the Lunenburg Correctional Facility was built just outside of the Victoria town limits. All of this has helped the town's economic outlook. And as Lunenburg County Board of Supervisors Chairman Wayne Hoover observes, "With all of the parks and things to do around here, Victoria may have also found another niche."

These days, Victoria is home to many outdoor activities attractive to local residents and visitors alike. Victoria Town Manager Ken Patterson says local officials in Victoria are "working hard to actively improve the quality of life for our citizens, while also promoting tourism through many recreational aspects of our community."

NEW COMMUNITY PARK REFLECTS RAILROAD HISTORY

The town recently built a 21-acre community park that pays homage to the railroad beginnings of the town. The Victoria Railroad Park is located near downtown Victoria and the central business district. The park is actually where the old roundhouse was once located during the peak of railroad activity. It features a C-10 caboose, built in the 1950s, on display.

Also at Victoria Railroad Park are numerous pavilions, several sections of playground equipment, restroom facilities, a sand volleyball court, horseshoe pits, paved walking trails, gravel walking trails, and historical Virginian Railroad equipment. There are plans to create basketball courts, tennis courts and other major upgrades in the future.

Along with the park facilities, the town is working on overnight facilities for horse activities. The plan is to have this facility open in the spring of 2011 and the Roundhouse Horse Campgrounds (RHC), once opened, will provide access to another activity in Victoria, The Tobacco Heritage Trail.

The Tobacco Heritage Trail is a system of long-distance recreational trails located throughout Southside Virginia. These trails are designed for non-motorized uses such as hiking, walking, bicycling and horseback riding. Three miles of trails are open and additional trails are planned to be available in the near future. Eventually, the trail could cover as much as 25 miles throughout Southside Virginia.

For the outdoorsman who enjoys photography, fishing and boating, "The Falls" is one of Lunenburg County's best-kept secrets. This location just northeast of Victoria is owned by the town and features natural bedrock waterfalls and rock formations throughout the site.

In addition to The Falls, Victoria offers areas such as Lunenburg Lake and Modest Creek that provide fishing and boating opportunities for water enthusiasts.

STICKING TOGETHER AND MOVING FORWARD

Victoria residents have always supported their community. From the large crowds that gather at local high school and youth sports activities, to the generosity shown each year during the annual Bucket Brigade to raise money for Victoria Fire and Rescue, Victoria residents stick together.

The Town of Victoria is involved in another major project called Streetscape. This will feature the renovation of some downtown areas in Victoria. Carol Watson, mayor of the town for more than a decade, says, "I am really looking forward to seeing the changes and upgrades that will be coming to our town."

Victoria has undergone some major upgrades in recent years, and local officials are looking forward to the future. Several area companies have begun expansion projects and local officials continue to work on bringing more jobs to the area. Victoria Town Council members have also begun discussions to create a wish list of future needs, wants and improvements for Victoria. The hope is that this will continue to bring more residents and visitors to a town offering a good quality of life and a friendly atmosphere: a great place to call home. ■

IF YOU GO...

Victoria may not be the largest town in Virginia, but there is no shortage of places to see and activities to pursue in the one-stoplight town.

For someone visiting Victoria for a few days, start by booking a room at the **Uptown Inn**. This bed-and-breakfast inn, located right on Main Street in Victoria, features a spacious, newly renovated bed and living-room-style area for guests. While offering visitors a place to stay and relax, there is the added benefit of having **Uptown Coffee** just below your room. This modern restaurant offers the big-city style of other coffee-house businesses with the down-home décor that fits Victoria. Once arriving at the Inn on a Friday night, you can enjoy weekly live music at Uptown Coffee or walk just up the street to **Kendal's** for a homestyle meal and more music.

After a good night's sleep, Saturday offers you the opportunity to browse some of the many quaint shops located on Main Street in Victoria. A quick walk over to the **Victoria Railroad Park** will help you get ready for a trip to **The Station** for lunch.

Victoria Town Office, also located on Main Street, is a source of visitor information and the place to set up a tour of the **Victoria High School Museum**, where classrooms of the old high school are set up to showcase the town's history. There are areas dedicated to local sports, the



The Central High School JROTC participated in the opening ceremony at the 2011 Autumn Day festival. Visitors from throughout the state make their way to Victoria on the first Saturday of October for this event.



Uptown Coffee offers a big-city coffee house menu with small-town charm and atmosphere. Jason and Jennifer Mattox opened the business after moving back to Victoria.

railroad, tobacco farming and more that will draw your interest.

After the morning and mid-afternoon sights, true thrill seekers can head to **Lunenburg Airport** where **No Limits Skydiving** is located. This company offers tandem jumping and other attractions and activities.

For supper, try Chinese or Italian food from **China Wok** or **Marino's Italian Restaurant**. At night you can check the local Lunenburg Chamber of Commerce website (www.lunenburgchamber.org) or the Town of Victoria's Facebook page for a list of activities. The Chamber sponsors events all throughout the year including **Autumn Day** in October and the **Lunenburg Christmas Parade** in December.

The town plans other activities throughout the year, including **Movie Nights in the Park**. The neighboring town of Kenbridge also frequently holds concerts in Kenbridge Town Hall Auditorium that have become very popular.

Victoria also features many free music nights and programs at **The Victoria Public Library**, along with a concert series that is presented by students from Central High School. Before you leave town, stop by **Timmy's Grocery** for one of his world-famous Timmy Dogs and visit "Victoria's Biggest Little Store," **Vaughan's Grocery**.

Victoria is also easily accessible to communities like Farmville, South Hill, Colonial Heights and Chesterfield, all less than an hour away. ■