

■ 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 fourth stop, we'll be ...

DOWN HOME IN

WARM SPRINGS

Story and photos by Deborah R. Huso and Dorothy A. Stephenson



Those who take scenic Route 39 across Warm Springs Mountain into the historic village of Warm Springs often stop at the crest of the ridgeline to take in the views from the Dan Ingalls Overlook. This is the first of many picturesque scenes visitors will enjoy during their time in this small rural town.

Located on the western base of Warm Springs Mountain, at the intersection of Routes 39 and 220, is the historic Warm Springs Inn. It was the view from this inn's front porch that newly seated county

administrator Matt Walker took in after his job interview last year. As he sat there, he enjoyed the view of the nearby Jefferson Pools (the building housing the town's natural hot springs), the rolling countryside, and the slow-moving traffic.

"We sell relaxation and comfort here," he says. "I think getting off the beaten path and away from the rat race is what draws people to this area."

Walker moved to Warm Springs, the seat of Bath County in August of 2011, to

get acquainted with his new position. Coming from a more populated area — Richmond County on Virginia's Northern Neck — was a big change, but one Walker says he and his family have appreciated.

"We might not have a McDonald's," he says of his newly adopted hometown, "but I can show you about five different mom-and-pops who have the best cheeseburgers I've ever eaten in my life."

One of the cheeseburgers to which Walker is referring can be found at Jason's Pizza and Subs, which is a five-minute drive north of town on Route 220. It's not unusual to find the parking lot of Jason's crammed full at lunchtime. Take a seat, and you will more than likely hear the friendly whistle of owner Mike Pollard coming from the kitchen. Once he emerges with a burger the size of your head, he will likely address you as "sir," or, if you're a lady, "love."

"Do you need anything else, sir?" he asks. Or "How's the salad, love?"

The view from the front porch of the historic Warm Springs Inn (below, left) includes Jefferson Pools (below, right), the natural hot springs that have been attracting visitors to the area for centuries.



DOROTHY STEPHENSON PHOTOS

AT A GLANCE ...

POPULATION: 290

LAND AREA: 148.459 square miles

ELEVATION: 2,350 feet

FOUNDED: 1791

FACTOID: In 1791, German, English, and Scottish immigrants settled in what was originally called "Germantown." The present-day town of Warm Springs serves as the county seat of Bath County.



DOROTHY STEPHENSON PHOTOS



1. Mike Pollard (left) and his culinary cohort, Chef Herman, are known throughout Bath County for the food and friendly service they dish up at Pollard's restaurant, Jason's. **2.** Lea Campbell and his wife, Claudia, own and operate Turtle Brook Farm and Cabins, which offers guest cottages for visitors and boarding for their horses. Horse facilities include a riding ring, pasturage and trail access to thousands of acres of U.S. forestland over Cobbler Mountain into Hidden Valley. **3.** The Waterwheel Restaurant, housed in a converted mill in quaint Gristmill Square, is acclaimed by locals and visitors alike. The restaurant offers fresh seasonal selections in an elegant country setting, and guests may choose their wine from a cellar that is located among the workings of the mill.

Pollard opened the restaurant affectionately known throughout the county as "Jason's" in 2005. Pollard and his culinary partner in crime, Chef Herman, serve up burgers, subs, pizzas, and salads.

"Bath County is a beautiful place to live, and it has wonderful people," says Pollard. "Can't say nothing but good about it."

That seems to be the consensus. Lea Campbell agrees the people here are not only friendly but hard-working and passionate, especially when it comes to the history and heritage of the area. Twelve years ago, Campbell purchased a farm in Warm Springs and moved to the area with his wife, Claudia, and their three children.

The couple now owns and operates Turtle Brook Farm and Cabins, which offers

guest cottages for visitors and boarding for their horses.

But before Campbell started "horsing around," he owned *The Recorder*, a local newspaper that has served Bath County and neighboring Highland County, for 20 years. Working as a local newspaper publisher helped him learn a lot about the area. Campbell says the characteristic he has noticed the most about the county is its ability to stand the test of time. "In the 12 years we have lived here, there have been many restorations everywhere, from this farm to all around the county," Campbell explains.

"It's been my belief that Bath and Highland offer visitors an unspoiled, authentic experience. When you leave

Washington or Richmond, when you cross Warm Springs Mountain, you're in a place that's unchanged."

Among the landmarks to which Campbell is referring is the Old Dairy. Built in 1928, these buildings housed a dairy for The Homestead, the famous and historic resort located in nearby Hot Springs, until the 1970s. Many residents recall when the dairy was fully operational.

"I remember as a child, traffic would have to stop and wait for the cows to cross the road," says Penny Peery, who has memories of the dairy workers herding the cattle across Route 220 from the pasture to the barns. After the dairy closed, the buildings remained unused and vacant until 2005, when Homestead Preserve, a local real estate devel-



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE INN AT GRISTMILL SQUARE



DOROTHY STEPHENSON PHOTO



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1. The Inn at Gristmill Square offers 17 rooms and suites that fill spaces once occupied by blacksmiths and old hardware stores. **2.** Kate and John Loeffler, who own the Inn, feel very fortunate to live in a place as beautiful as Warm Springs. **3.** Maggie Anderson, tourism director, and Melinda Nichols, executive director for the County of Bath, are champions of the area. **4.** Native Penny Peery remembers when dairy workers herded cattle across Route 220 from the pasture to the barns. **5.** Paula Welch Connor remembers watching milk being bottled at the Old Dairy.

opment, now owned by Wells Fargo, began renovation. Today Old Dairy serves as a community center for Homestead Preserve owners and provides meeting rooms and spaces for ballet and yoga instruction, movies, wedding receptions, and community functions. The Milk House Market, which serves up soups, sandwiches, and specialty items, also calls Old Dairy home.

"The Old Dairy Barn is such an icon," says Peery. "Everyone's been very happy that it's been turned into something useful."

The Inn at Gristmill Square is another historic relic that has received a redesign. The inn offers 17 rooms and suites that fill spaces once occupied by blacksmiths or old hardware stores. Since 1771, a mill has been present on this site. The current structure was built in 1900 and operated until 1971, when it became the Waterwheel Restaurant. The restaurant serves classical American cuisine that incorporates many local ingredients, such as Allegheny Mountain trout, but also offers entrees like pasta, steaks, Tournedos au Poivre, and salmon. (And they sometimes turn on the waterwheel during dinner service!)

Kate Loeffler, a Charleston, W.Va., native who owns the inn with her husband, John, says a lot of visitors reserve rooms around local events, such as the Garth Newel Music Center Blues and Jazz Festival or the Maple Festival in neighboring Highland County. Then again, some visitors just like to come to get away.

"It's not crowded or congested," says Loeffler. "You have time to stop and smell the roses." Loeffler says she is lucky to be able to live and work in a place as beautiful as Warm Springs. "There's always stress everywhere, but this is just such a peaceful part of the world," she says. "We live in a place where people love to vacation. But we get to live here ... with a little work in between."

RELAXING FOR CENTURIES

Some residents (as well as vacationers) looking for a little extra relaxation take advantage of the historic Jefferson Pools, which sit directly across from the Warm Springs Inn in an octagonal wooden building built on June 1, 1761. This structure houses the gentlemen's pool, which is 120 feet in circumference and holds 40,000 gallons of constantly flowing, 98-degree mineral water, making this building the oldest spa structure in America. On June 1, 1836, a separate ladies' pool joined the original building. The waters from these natural hot springs have been relaxing muscles and soothing aches and pains for centuries. In fact, in 1818, a 75-year-old Thomas

Jefferson came here to treat what he described as “rheumatism.”

He stayed for three weeks, taking the waters several times a day, and when he left, his name stayed.

Maggie Anderson, the tourism director for the county of Bath, says the Jefferson Pools are (and have been) one of the main tourism draws to the area, even when Mrs. Robert E. Lee used to soak in the waters to relieve arthritic pains. (The chair she sat in is still in the ladies’ bath house.) Today, The Homestead owns the pools, but they are open to the public.

In addition to the Jefferson Pools, Warm Springs also offers other ways to relax — a massage at the Warm Spirit Spa, viewing paintings and sculptures at the Warm Springs Gallery, or checking out artwork from around the world and around the corner at Seven Oaks Gallery. Plus, visitors can head to the Bath County Historical Society to view exhibits ranging from historic clothing and furniture to artifacts of railroad history. The Historical Society also has a genealogy research center downstairs where visitors might find a familiar family name or two.

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

Even though you may not initially see a lot when you pass through Warm Springs, this little village of 290 movers and shakers offers more than meets the eye. “It really has it all,” says Anderson. “There’s such a rich diversity of experiences. My husband likes to hunt, and I like art. We could come to Bath County and both be happy.”

And Melinda Nichols, executive director for the county of Bath, says the diversity of the county’s residents is another factor in its vitality. “You’ve got two strengths — the people from here who have grown up here and the people who come here and want to add to it,” explains Nichols. “When guests come here, they see that pride of the area and fall in love with it.”

Paula Welch Conner, who works at the Warm Springs Post Office, is among those long-time residents of the area. She graduated from Valley High School in 1970, and remembers when she and her friends would go to the movies in Hot Springs for 25 cents, and also remembers watching milk being bottled at Old Dairy when she went to pick up corn for her rooster.

“I used to get a couple of bottles of chocolate milk,” she laughs. But Conner agrees with everyone else — one of the best things about the area is its people. “It’s a community,” she says. “If you ever have a problem or a crisis, there are always friends to help you out.” ■

IF YOU GO...

Pick up a few brochures at the visitor’s kiosk, which sits at the intersection of routes 220 and 39, and then hop next door to check out the historic **Jefferson Pools** — the foundation of tourism in Warm Springs and Bath County.

There’s no shortage of events in the area. In fact, you can pretty much come to town almost any weekend of the year and find something going on in Warm Springs or the surrounding area. Just up the road from the Jefferson Pools sits **Old Dairy**, which hosts ballet and yoga classes as well as community events, such as old-fashioned barn dances. A couple of miles further on the left is Bath County High School, which is home to a beautiful auditorium featuring performances throughout the year from the **Mountain Valley Players** as well as the annual **Blue Grass Jamboree**. Continuing on about a mile, you will see the long driveway to **Garth Newel Music Center** on the left. This music venue features a resident chamber quartet that has performed throughout the United States and on five continents as a group and as individuals. In addition to the quartet, Garth Newel hosts various other concerts and events featuring visiting artists as well as educational opportunities for all ages.

If you work up an appetite, stop at **Cucci’s at The Varsity** across from Bath County High School, which serves soups, subs, sandwiches, pasta, and pizza. Or maybe head to **Warm Spirit Spa** in **Gristmill Square** for a hot stone massage. For unique overnight accommodations, consider **Hidden Valley Bed and Breakfast**, a beautiful antebellum home listed as both a Virginia Historic Landmark and on the National Register of Historic Places. It is located in the middle of the **George Washington National Forest** west of Warm Springs and provides access to a host of hiking trails as well as fly fishing in Hidden Valley.



DOROTHY STEPHENSON PHOTO

Dan Ingalls Overlook, on scenic Rt. 39 at the crest of Warm Springs Mountain, offers a long view of the area.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

County of Bath Chamber of Commerce
Tourism and Visitors Center
2696 Main Street
Hot Springs, VA 24445
540-839-5409
www.discoverbath.com

Jefferson Pools
Located at the junction of Rt. 220 and Rt. 39
11 Bath Street
Warm Springs, VA 24484
540-839-7741

George Washington National Forest
Warm Springs Ranger District office
540-839-2521
www.fs.usda.gov/gwj

Old Dairy
46 Old Dairy Road
Warm Springs, VA 24484
540-839-2899 ■



DOROTHY STEPHENSON PHOTO

Old Dairy serves as a community center and provides meeting rooms and spaces for ballet and yoga instruction, movies, wedding receptions and community functions.