

THIS YEAR COOPERATIVE LIVING IS TAKING A ROAD TRIP ALONG THE LENGTH OF ROUTE 11 AS IT CROSSES VIRGINIA FROM NORTH TO SOUTH. EACH ISSUE, CORRESPONDENT DEBORAH HUSO WILL RELATE HER EXPERIENCES ALONG THE WAY.

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Step back in time in Stephens City, where a nostalgic drive-in theater, old-time fruit markets, and lots of friendly faces bring back the good old days.

Fruit Finds & Movie Times

As I head south along Route 11 from Winchester through rolling farmscapes below the soft outline of the Blue Ridge Mountains to the east, it's easy to feel nostalgic. I pass old yet still operating budget motor inns, roadside fruit stands, and finally, a still-running drive-in movie theater, one of four such still-operational theaters along Route 11.

The Family Drive-In Theatre



Richard's Fruit Market (above) and the Family Drive-In Theatre define the hometown feel of the section of U.S. Route 11 that runs through Stephen's City south of Winchester.

in Stephens City has been open continuously since 1956, and owner Jim Kopp still has the original projection room and screen intact, though he recently went digital with his movies. He has operated the drive-in four years, having been a patron since 1986. Though he spent a career working for the Library of Congress, drive-in movie theaters are his first love. "I grew up in Pittsburgh, and we used to have 35 drive-in theaters there," he says. "We went to the drive-in every weekend. I always thought it would be fun to own one."

Kopp is no novice either when it comes to drive-in theaters. Before he began leasing the Family Drive-In, he owned a theater in Henderson, N.C. And don't be thinking drive-in movies are some outdated piece of nostalgia. Kopp keeps his theater full. It holds 434 automobiles, and sometimes patrons have to walk-in when there is no parking left.

"Eight-five percent of my audience is families with young children," he notes. And that's probably why he has a playground front and center from which the little ones can enjoy the movies while swinging and slipping down slides.

"Drive-in theaters are my passion," he explains. "When I worked for the Library of Congress, I went around and took pictures of drive-ins around the country, and whenever someone had a question about drive-ins, people came to me."

Kopp's theater isn't only kid-friendly. It's also dog-friendly, which makes sense given that Kopp is rarely seen without his faithful drive-in dog, Damon, a 12-year-old golden retriever.

FRUIT OF THE VALLEY

Taking a quick jaunt off Route 11, I make my way to Richard's Fruit Market on Middle Road, where proprietor Eddie Richard and his family raise 15 varieties of apples as well as peaches, pumpkins, and tomatoes. His mother, May Richard, hands me an apple and puts her arm around me as if I'm an old friend she hasn't seen in ages. It turns out this type of greeting is typical for this friendly



The Family Drive-In Theatre (top) in Stephens City has been open continuously since 1956. Owner Jim Kopp (above, left) says 85 percent of his audience is families with young children, and the theater features a playground front and center from which the kids can enjoy the movies while swinging and slipping down the slides. Damon, a 12-year-old golden retriever (above right), is Kopp's constant companion.



Eddie Richard and his mother, May (above), welcome visitors to Richard's Fruit Market. The family raises peaches, pumpkins, tomatoes, and 15 varieties of apples on their farm, which has been in the family since 1878.



Shawn Steffey (below), his wife and two other couples own Valerie Hill Vineyard and Winery, a few miles west of Stephens City. Valerie Hill's wine-tasting space occupies an 1807 home (right) built by Revolutionary War Capt. Peter Rust. The 200-plus-year-old home complements the area's historic preservation efforts.



HISTORIC DIGS AT VAUCLUSE SPRING

I have to admit historic architecture is my thing, so I'm delighted to head down the road from Stephens City to spend the night at the Inn at Vacluse Spring, part of which occupies a 1780 manor house. Barry and Neil Myers have been operating the house and surrounding cottages as an inn since 1995. "We're escapees from Fairfax County," says Neil. "We wanted to move to the country, and we fell in love with the property."

The inn has 15 guest rooms and suites, though my favorite part is the manor house front porch where rocking chairs are lined up to take in the distant view of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The Myerses completely restored and renovated the manor house, which Neil says had no running water or electricity and no heat except the fireplaces. It had been vacant since the 1950s when the couple bought it.

I spend the night in the Chumley Suite located in a separate cottage overlooking a pond and gardens. Decorated with rustic antiques, this sunny room features a fireplace that opens to both the bedroom and the bath, one of many details at Vacluse Spring that ensure I'll be visiting again. Along with Chef Adam Policinski's cooking ...

Policinski has been with the inn for four years and serves up breakfast each morning along with dinner five days a week. How did this Johnson & Wales University-trained young chef end up in the rural countryside of Frederick County? Well, with a laugh, Policinski explains he found himself out of work when the owners of a resort where he was employed were arrested for embezzlement. "And here's Adam, who just bought a house!" he exclaims. So initially his landing at Vacluse

Spring was one of desperation, but years later, he's still here. "It's a good fit," he says. "I can be creative here. I don't make the same thing every day." ■



Neil Myers is a "Fairfax County escapee."



directly from the land. Among them is relative newcomer Shawn Steffey, co-owner of Valerie Hill Vineyard and Winery, just a few miles west of town. Valerie Hill is Frederick County's only winery.

and happily rowdy family of producers.

The Richard farm has been in the family since Eddie's great-grandparents bought the place in 1878. Eddie is the fourth generation to run the farm and says he has the sixth generation living on the same home place where he grew up. Eddie has raised all kinds of things, but notes, "After 28 years of sticking my fingers into more things than I could be successful at, I'm coming back to the basics of growing food."

And that includes not just produce but turkeys. "White turkeys are quirky, emotional creatures," Eddie explains. "They're a little demanding and always hungry. It's like I'm married to them," he quips, barely laughing. "I feed them tomatoes, so if you buy a turkey from us, you're essentially buying a turkey marinated in tomatoes."

Eddie says whatever the family doesn't sell at the roadside fruit stand goes into his own freezer. He also raises beef cattle and hay, prides himself on being a full-time farmer, and has three other family members working on the farm. He's quick to note the market is the lifeblood of the farm. "This market has sustained us," he remarks.

There are plenty of folks around Stephens City who earn their living

Steffey put down roots in the area after graduating from Winchester's Shenandoah University, though he acknowledges, "I am not a winemaker. I know how to drink it but not make it."

But that's not a problem. Steffey, who owns Valerie Hill with his wife and two other couples, says they have a local winemaker on staff, who produces what is currently a collection of nine vintages.

"All our fruit is Virginia fruit," Steffey says, "some of it from right here in Frederick County." The winery has also started planting its own grapes. Steffey says their red wines are so popular that they actually run out of them sometimes.

In keeping with the commitment to historic preservation in the Shenandoah Valley, Valerie Hill's wine-tasting space occupies an 1807 home built by Revolutionary War Capt. Peter Rust. Steffey says the home has only been sold five times in its 200-year history. As an odd aside and a nod to the area's Civil War heritage, the winery has a Confederate coat on display in the tasting area. It belonged to a soldier from Tennessee, though one of Steffey's partners actually purchased the coat in England.



The porch (far left), breakfast setting (above) and Chumley Suite (left) at the Inn at Vaucluse Spring bespeak the inn's historically elegant trappings. A portion of the business occupies a manor house dating to 1780. Barry and

Neil Myers completely restored and renovated the manor house.

● IF YOU GO ...

The Winchester-Frederick County Convention and Visitors Bureau (1400 Pleasant Valley Road, 540-542-1326, www.visitwinchesterva.com) is a good place to hit before beginning your exploration of **Stephens City** and surrounding Frederick County.

The biggest attraction in Stephens City is probably **The Family Drive-In Theatre**, one mile south of town center (540-665-6982, www.thefamilydriveintheatre.com). It's open for business March through November on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays and seven days a week in summer. Get some history of Route 11, the Great Wagon Road, and Stephens City's history as a center of wagon making (at one time there were a dozen wagon-making shops in town) at the **Newtown History Center** (5408 Main Street, 540-869-1700, www.newtownhistorycenter.org). And check out the **Stephens City Outlet** on Main Street (540-869-5736), where you'll find a wonderfully disorganized conglomeration of discount furniture, clothes (including name brands like Calvin Klein and Kenneth Cole), as well as shoes,

luggage, linens, dry goods, yard décor, electronics, and even groceries.

The countryside surrounding Stephens City is home to several orchards, including **Rinker Orchards** (1156 Marlboro Road, 540-869-1499, www.rinkerorchards.com) and **Richard's Fruit Market** (6410 Middle Road, 540-869-1455, www.richardsfruitmarket.com). Just down the road from Rinker's, you'll also find the newly opened **Valerie Hill Vineyard & Winery** (1687 Marlboro Road, 540-869-9567, www.valeriehillwinery.com). You can enjoy an extensive tasting of as many as nine wines for \$8.

The best digs in the countryside can be had at **The Inn at Vaucluse Spring** (231 Vaucluse Spring Lane, 540-869-0200, www.vauclusespring.com), which is home to six bed-and-breakfast rooms in the restored manor house as well as log house suites and cottages, all located on 103 acres of verdant pasture peppered with grazing Holsteins. The inn serves dinner with reservations Tuesday through Saturday, though if you prefer to dine off site, you can enjoy ample servings of Italian and Greek fare at **Roma** (120 Fairfax Pike, 540-869-5200, www.romacasual.com). ■



Stephens City Outlet on Main Street features a wonderfully disorganized conglomeration of stores offering everything from clothing to discount furniture.