

# DOWN HOME SERIES

by Robert Grossman, Feature Writer

*During 1997, we're making our way around Virginia, each issue visiting a small town and meeting some of the folks who make up the heart of electric co-op country. On this tour's seventh stop, we'll be...*

## Down Home in *Bowling Green*

Bowling Green is small but hardly remote, having hosted General Patton, Salvador Dali, and a recurring cast of thousands



The squeegee squeaks out a tune as Shorty Simms busily goes about cleaning his latest customer's windshield. Simms is owner of Shorty's-T, a full-service Texaco station in Bowling Green. Full service means you sit in your car while Shorty or an employee pumps your gas. Say goodbye to bugs and dirt on your windshield, too. Say hello to Shorty, a man whose heart is as big as his smile.

A steady stream of cars pulls into the station on Main Street to get the deluxe treatment. Most of Shorty's business is local. He gets plenty of positive feedback.

"They say, 'Shorty, my husband bought gas at a self-service place, but I'll never buy gas at a self-service place, because I appreciate your kindness and

great service,'" says Shorty, who's a Rapahannock Electric Cooperative member-consumer.

Shorty's approach to doing business goes beyond the Texaco jingle about trusting your car to the man who wears the big, bright Texaco star. He cares about his customers.

On one occasion, a woman pulled in with a flat tire. She had no money, and wanted to leave her driver's license as a show of good faith until she could return to pay for the tire repair.

"The price is \$15. If you don't pay me, accept it as a gift," says Shorty, recalling what he told the woman.

The woman was crying when she came back to pay, because she showed up on Saturday, instead of Friday as

promised. She'll never forget Shorty.

There's no doubt about it. Meeting him is a memorable experience. Shorty waves and flashes a smile to a passing motorist. "I'm very happy," he says.

### "The Town Fire Couldn't Stop"

Bowling Green, incorporated in 1837, was originally named New Hope. Major Thomas Hoomes — the town's founder — received a land grant from King Charles II of England, giving the 7,000-acre Hoomes estate its start.

The family's ancestral seat in England was called Bolling Green, which became Bowling Green here. The existence of a lawn bowling green near the courthouse may have contributed to the new name.

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ROBERT GROSSMAN PHOTOS



"If you don't have something, you send [customers] somewhere else," says Moody Pitts, who works at Western Auto. "If they don't have it, they do the same thing. It's not like that everywhere."



"This is my hometown," says Maxine Pauley (above), owner of the Main Street Cafe. Service at Shorty's-T, a full-service Texaco station, includes windshield washing. Owner Shorty Simms (left) dispenses goodwill along with gasoline.



Army Reserve gunners prepare an M-60 machine gun for action on Fort A.P. Hill's range number 5.

town that fire couldn't stop" because of two major fires. One was in 1900. The other was in 1955. Both occurred on Easter Sunday.

### You're in the Army Now

At just before 1030 hours during a two-week period of annual training, or AT, range control at nearby Fort A.P. Hill gives permission for the shooting to begin on one of the base's ranges. Range number 5 is hot.

Army Reserve gunners move an M-60 machine gun into position. Everyone on the range checks their hearing protection to make sure it's in place. Private Greg Reynard of the 319th Battalion out of Warrensville, Ohio, is the first gunner to shoot.

He takes his time, gets into position, and squeezes off a shot at the target. Boom! Too low. Reynard makes adjustments before the next shot.

"We have some of the finest ranges on the East Coast," says Pete Delosh, Fort A.P. Hill's chief of training, during a command briefing.

The base has 30 training areas, 40 live-fire ranges, 10 hardened campsites, 24 war-fighting lanes, and numerous recreation areas on 75,000 acres, according to a field card given to soldiers. It has served as a training base for World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, and other regional conflicts.

Fort A.P. Hill's three biggest calling cards, explains Delosh, are its use as a training facility, its ranges, and its prox-

imity to other facilities. Frequent customers include Fort Bragg, as well as the Marine Corps, the Navy, and the Air Force.

About 150,000 soldiers receive training at Fort A.P. Hill each year. That means personnel go into Bowling Green for items such as gas, food, and fishing licenses.

"Our facility has a tremendous impact on the local economy," says Delosh, a member-consumer of Rappahannock Electric Cooperative. "It may be as high as \$2 million a year for Bowling Green."

When the base gets complaints about the noise from shooting, Delosh, who calls it "the sound of freedom," says none of them is ignored. All of them are investigated.

Fort A.P. Hill tries to minimize the impact, explains Delosh.

"We care about the local community," he says. "That's our lifeline."

### "This Is My Hometown"

Maxine Pauley, owner of the Main Street Cafe, sits at the cash register and takes orders from customers. When able, she talks about Bowling Green and her life.

The chatting is interrupted when she has to tend to her customers. Folks go to

the Main Street Cafe to talk business, hold meetings, and get together for coffee. It's a popular gathering spot.

Pauley, a Rappahannock Electric Cooperative member-consumer and long-time resident, moved back to Bowling Green between her late husband's tours in the Army.

"It's always nice to come back to the country," she says.

Pauley, who started working at the drugstore in town when she was 16, says she always wanted to open a cafe.

"This is my hometown," she says.

The building that houses Bowling Green Optical, situated on Main Street, was a grocery store called the Sanitary Supermarket during World War II. General Patton reportedly went there to buy groceries.

So did painter Salvador Dali. As the story goes, his shopping list had a specific number of items. He'd get upset if the clerk filled the order with more or less items.

"I love the stories," says Bowling Green Optical owner Cindy Plachinski. "They're wonderful."

Plachinski makes the safety glasses for Rappahannock Electric Cooperative employees. "Have a happy day" is her refrain as customers depart.

Over at the Western Auto, employee Moody Pitts praises local merchants for their ability to work together.

"If you don't have something, you send them somewhere else," says Pitts. "If they don't have it, they do the same thing. It's not like that everywhere."

Is Bowling Green *really* more interesting than most small towns? Pitts and others think so.

"It surprises people what they can find in this little town," says Pitts. ■

## *If You Go...*

The 8th Annual Harvest Festival takes place October 18. The event includes live entertainment, food, crafts, pony rides, a car show, and fun activities such as pumpkin carving and face painting by the witch, Hora Dora.

Consider taking a walking tour of historic Bowling Green. Houses and buildings on North Main Street, South Main Street, East Broadus Street, Milford Street, Dorsey Lane, Maury Avenue, and Virginia Avenue are tour highlights.

You can hunt and fish at Fort A.P. Hill, a designated cooperative wildlife management area. Fishing requires a permit as well as a state or Caroline County license. Hunting requires a permit, too, along with a state hunting license. Deer, turkey, quail, rabbit, dove, squirrel, and duck are available in their respective seasons.

Fort A.P. Hill hosts an annual Haunted House, held the last week of October. You don't need a permit or license for ghosts and ghouls.

For music lovers, there's "Music Under the Stars," a series of free monthly concerts from May through September on the lawn of the Caroline County Courthouse.

And if you get hungry during your stay in Bowling Green, the Main Street Cafe is the place to go for a home-cooked meal.

For more info about Bowling Green, call the town at (804) 633-6212. ■