

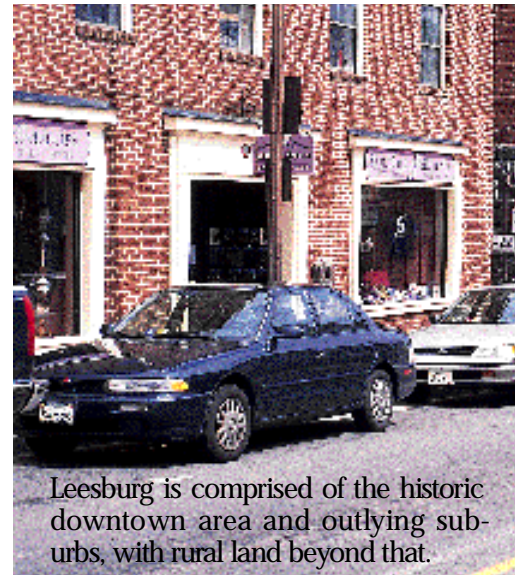
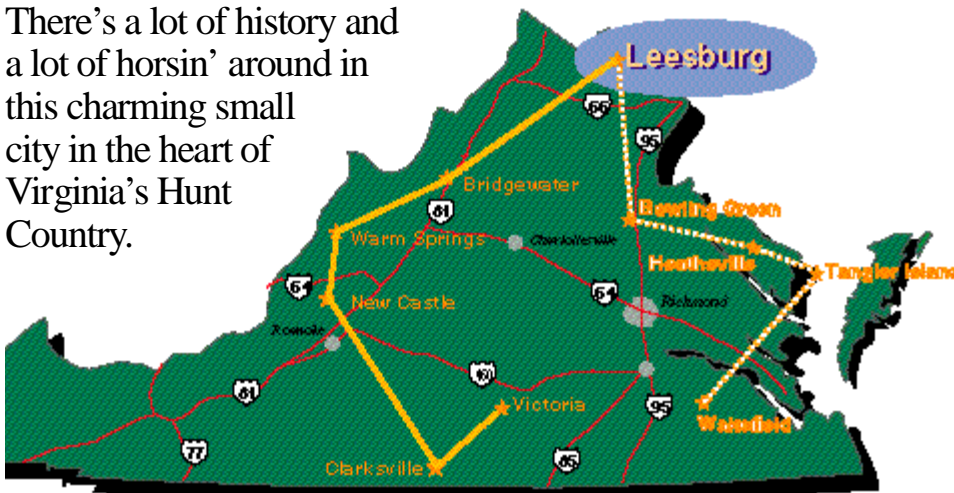
DOWN HOME SERIES

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 sixth stop, we'll be...

Down Home in Leesburg

There's a lot of history and a lot of horsin' around in this charming small city in the heart of Virginia's Hunt Country.



Leesburg is comprised of the historic downtown area and outlying suburbs, with rural land beyond that.



"I'm happy she can still recognize me," says Lyn Harper of her mother Dorothy, a resident of Heritage Hall Nursing and Rehabilitation Center.

Lyn Harper leans over and gently kisses her mother Dorothy, a resident of Heritage Hall Nursing and Rehabilitation Center. Dorothy has been unable to communicate her needs for more than five years. Lyn talks to her softly in a dining room filled with residents awaiting their lunches.

"I'm happy she can still recognize me," says Lyn. She enjoys the convenience of being able to visit her mother in Leesburg rather than having to travel to Manassas, or Reston, or Warrenton.

Lyn is director of the Loudoun Transitional Housing Program, which helps homeless families and women gain self-sufficiency. The agency has eight apartments at its facility. It also provides support services and an evening meal seven days a week.

"The goal is for people to go from being homeless to being our neighbors again," says Lyn.

On this Sunday afternoon, children play in Ida Lee Park as parents and family members look on.

"It's close to D.C., but it's still kind of country," says Leesburg resident Paul Lueders.

Once the U.S. Capital

Leesburg, established in 1758 from land originally held by Lord Fairfax, is named for the influential Lee family of Virginia. Its history includes serving as the country's temporary capital during the War of 1812. The town was a safe haven for the U.S. Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and other vital documents.

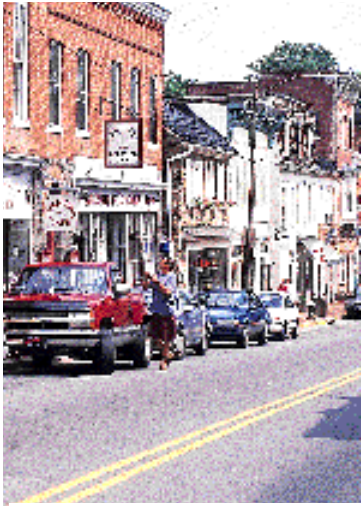
This seat of government for Loudoun County is comprised of the historic downtown area and outlying suburbs, with rural land beyond that.

"Not much happens in Leesburg," says Mary Beck Desmond, another resident. "That's why we live here."

A festive mood prevails outside the First Mt. Olive Baptist Church. The service is over. John Lewis Camp, the grandson of Leona Roberts, has been baptized.

"It's convenient to everything," says Roberts, a Northern Virginia Electric Cooperative member-consumer who lives just outside Leesburg. "I'm 10 miles from Dulles Airport. I'm 35 miles from Washington. I can go to Philadelphia and back in a day."

Leesburg's historic downtown area



Brandy Clark and Octavian share a tender moment at the Marion duPont Scott Equine Medical Center.



A festive mood prevails outside the First Mt. Olive Baptist Church where John Lewis Camp has just been baptized.



ROBERT GROSSMAN PHOTOS

Air traffic control specialist Don Hilton of the FAA's Automated Flight Service Station gives a pre-flight-weather briefing to a pilot.

"It's pretty cool," says Payne's Biker Cafe bartender Sandra Stokely, referring to motorcycle tours sponsored by Payne's to benefit charities. "People come here from all over the country."

Phillips, chief of planning. "The town was really excited when that happened."

"The Biggest Trees of Leesburg" contest is sponsored by the Leesburg Tree Commission in cooperation with the Virginia Department of Forestry.

The contest seeks the largest (trunk circumference), tallest (total height), and widest (crown circumference) trees. Each winner gets a certificate of appreciation, a free consultation with a trained arborist, plus fertilizer, tree maintenance tools, and a new tree.

"They provide a sense of permanence," says Marilee Seigfried, planner and staff liaison to the tree commission.

In the Air and On the Air

Over at Leesburg Municipal Airport's Godfrey Field (named after entertainer and aviator Arthur Godfrey), Don Hilton, air traffic control specialist for the FAA's Automated Flight Service Station, is explaining the weather situation to pilot Elliot Chakoff. He decides not to fly because of thunderstorm activity in the area.

"It's just too dangerous," says Chakoff.

Air traffic control specialist and Rappahannock Electric Cooperative member-consumer Carl Pollard leads the way around the facility. During the tour, he gives a detailed explanation of the facility's functions.

In addition to weather briefings (the

includes shops and restaurants. At the Potomac Gallery on King Street, displays reflect the history of the Civil War. Ball's Bluff Battlefield, overlooking the Potomac River, was the site of a Union defeat by Confederate soldiers in 1861.

Yesterday's Memories, also on King Street, sells crystals, books, herbs, Native American jewelry, and other items. It sits opposite Loudoun Western Wear.

Then there's Payne's Biker Cafe, which sponsors motorcycle tours to benefit charities. "Better off here than across the street," reads a neon sign in the window. The town's jail is across the street.

"Riding to help others" is how the cafe bills the tours. The calendar of events includes annual runs to benefit the Muscular Dystrophy Association

and the Loudoun County Volunteer Rescue Squad.

"It's pretty cool," says bartender Sandra Stokely. "People come here from all over the country for the runs."

Leesburg's growth has meant the removal of many trees. Therefore, trees are a priority. The town has adopted various ordinances. If you develop property, for example, you're required to plant trees and shrubs as part of your project. There's no ordinance that requires developers to preserve trees, but if they want to do so, the town will show them how.

Moreover, the town is recognized as a Tree City USA by the National Arbor Day Foundation, based in Nebraska City, Nebraska.

"It's a privilege to be designated by this national organization," says Lee

focus of their work), flight service station personnel also open and close flight plans, do search and rescue, help pilots experiencing emergencies, and relay clearances to pilots.

"Aviation goes awry when the weather goes awry," says air traffic manager and Northern Virginia Electric Cooperative member-consumer Marilyn Jackson-Brame.

And Horses, Too!

Harold McKenzie, D.V.M., trims one of Next Venture's hooves following removal of corrective orthopedic shoes. At Marion duPont Scott Equine Medical Center, 1,800 to 2,000 horses are treated each year.

This "horse hospital" is a reflection of the importance Leesburg places on equine care and events. The availability of top-notch care is essential in Virginia's "Hunt Country" where fox hunting,

steeplechase racing, and other equestrian events are a way of life (see May issue, pg. 12), and a source of tourist dollars.

"When a horse comes here, it's because the horse's vet has referred the horse for specialized care," says Pamela Woolley-Cann, director of development for the only university-affiliated teaching hospital devoted exclusively to horses. "We can pull out all the stops and give the horse what it needs. It's a valuable service to the equine community."

The Leesburg community and surrounding counties, in turn, have supported the hospital with charitable contributions, explains Woolley-Cann.

Close to D.C., yet quiet. A blend of upscale downtown culture and rural horse country charm. Where trees and Virginia's Lees are revered. A study in contrasts? Sure. It's all part of Leesburg's charm. ■

If You Go... Consider visiting Morven

Park, a 1,200-acre estate. The mansion houses the Museum of Hounds and Hunting. Annual events include steeplechase racing, and horse events are run year-round.

Oatlands Plantation, meanwhile, features a mansion and expansive formal gardens. Annual events include antique fairs in April and September, as well as Sheep Dog Trials and Farm Days in May and a Celtic Festival in June.

Dodona Manor is another attraction. It was the home of General George Marshall, best known for the plan he devised to rebuild Europe after WWII.

Activities abound for outdoor enthusiasts. Lube the chain on your bike and head for the W&OD Trail. Hiking paths are available at Red Rock and Ball's Bluff Regional Parks. The latter surrounds the second-smallest national cemetery, where 54 Union soldiers are buried.

If you're interested in information about the Colonial period, the Revolution, The War of 1812, or the Civil War, check out the military collection at the Thomas Balch Library. Local history and genealogy are the library's focus.

More than 50 historic structures are highlighted in Leesburg's walking tour. And artifacts which chronicle the area's history are on display at the Loudoun Museum in downtown Leesburg.

You can get more information about Leesburg by calling the Loudoun Tourism Council. The phone number is (800) 752-6118. ■