

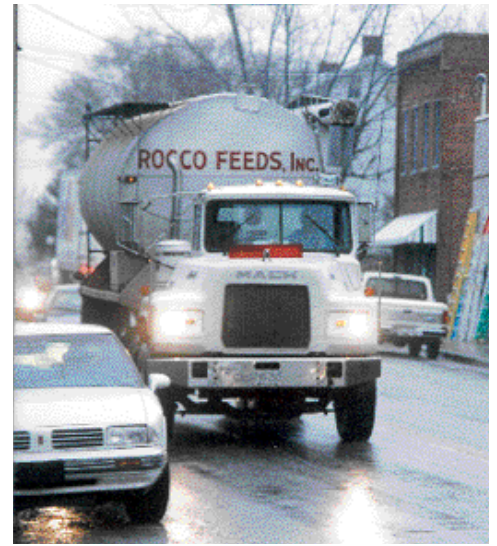
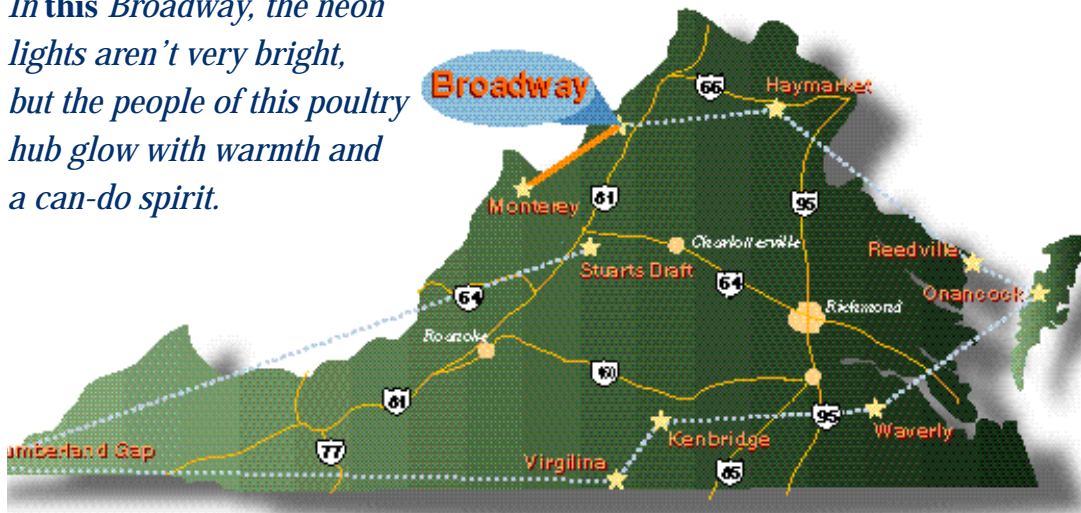
## DOWN HOME SERIES

by Lawson Marshall,  
Publisher, North Fork Journal

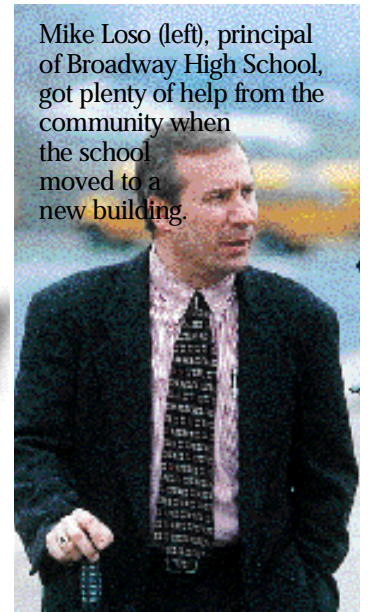
*During 1998, we're making our way around Virginia, each issue visiting a small town and meeting some of the folks who make up the heart of electric co-op country. On this, our second stop, we'll be...*

# Down Home in Broadway

*In this Broadway, the neon lights aren't very bright, but the people of this poultry hub glow with warmth and a can-do spirit.*



Mike Loso (left), principal of Broadway High School, got plenty of help from the community when the school moved to a new building.



THURSTON HOWES PHOTO

"We're still a small-town community, even though we're growing," says Steve Burkholder, Broadway store owner.

When a new Broadway High School was scheduled to open after the Christmas vacation, local school officials didn't call a moving company. Instead, **Mike Loso**, the school principal, just put out the word that the school needed help.

On the Saturday before Christmas, hundreds of volunteers showed up at the old high school with their pickups, and by day's end, books, supplies and equipment had been moved the mile or so across town to the new high school.

"That's the kind of town Broadway is," says **Steve Burkholder**, who owns a grocery store across Route 259 from the old high school and is also a board member of Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative. "We're still a small-town community, even though we're growing."

Broadway, with almost 2,000 residents, is one of the twin towns along the North





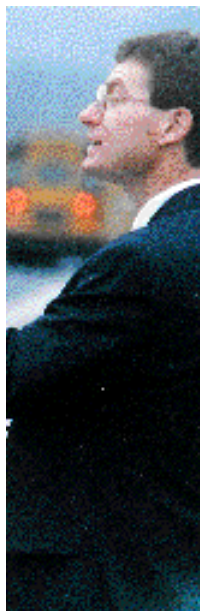
LAWSON MARSHALL PHOTOS

Broadway, like many towns throughout Virginia's mountains and Piedmont, grew up around a grist mill, which had been built on the lip of the peninsula formed by the confluence of Linville Creek and the Shenandoah River.



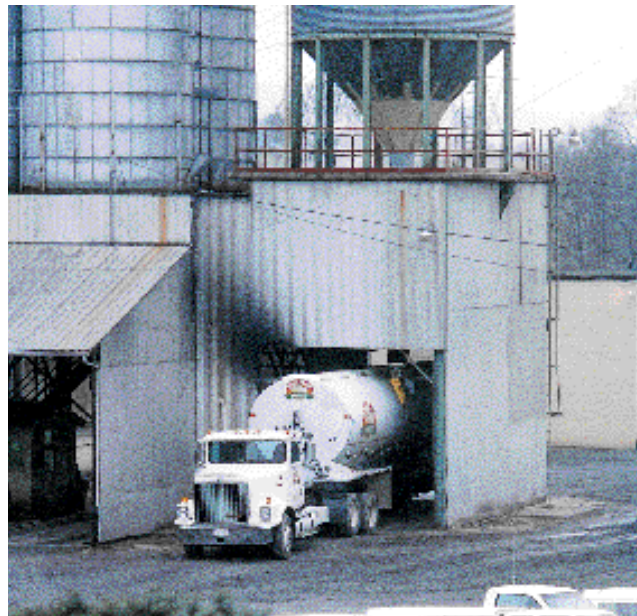
THURSTON HOWES PHOTO

Nancy Hoover, former president of the Broadway-Timberville Chamber of Commerce, at work in her shop, "The Beauty Spot."



Sylvia Rutherford (above), Broadway's postmistress.

Wampler Foods has its corporate headquarters, a feed mill (right) and hatchery in Broadway.



Fork of the Shenandoah River, in northern Rockingham County.

Broadway and Timberville are virtual Siamese twins, joined at the pocketbook and by the community's young people, who share classrooms, Little League teams and Scout troops.

The two towns are just 15 minutes north of Harrisonburg, but the "bedroom community" label doesn't quite fit. The community has jealously guarded its separate identity, says **Nancy Hoover**, a member of the Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative's Board of Directors who owns a beauty shop just west of the Broadway town limits.

"We are much more isolated in this end of the county," says Mrs. Hoover, a former president of the Broadway-Timberville Chamber of Commerce. That sense of isolation and independence, she says, has helped bring the community together. "We're a pretty cohesive group."

When Route 42 between Broadway and Harrisonburg was dual-laned a few years ago, some in town feared that Broadway would become another Harrisonburg suburb.

"We don't want to become a bedroom community," Mrs. Hoover says. "We're definitely independent and we want to stay that way."

### Go Gobblers!

That spirit of independence and community pride was never more evident than last fall, when the Broadway High School football team — the Gobblers — won the regional championship and played in Gate City for the state title, which Gate City won.

During the Gobblers' run through the regional and state playoffs, the community rallied around the team, with virtually every business on Main Street displaying signs

supporting the Gobblers. Nearly 2,000 people made the five-hour trip down Interstate 81 to Gate City for the game. On the day they left for Gate City, the Gobblers had an impromptu parade down Main Street the wrong way, as hundreds of fans lined the street to give them a send-off.

"I've never seen a parade the wrong way down Main Street before," says **Harvey Runion**, who manages A.W. Whitmore & Sons' Ace Hardware.

The hardware store is one of a half-dozen new businesses that have sprouted along Broadway's L-shaped business district in the past year or so, a testament to the vitality of the community's economy.

The business district runs along Main Street (Route 42) and turns west on Route 259 in front of the old high school.

The Whitmore family's cluster of businesses — the hardware, a grocery store and a Ben Franklin Crafts & Variety — sits in

the heart of Broadway's downtown. Unlike many other small and large towns, which have seen businesses desert their downtowns, Broadway's downtown remains its economic hub.

That's important, says Runion, who managed a clothing store for the Whitmores before they opened the hardware a year ago. "There's plenty of free parking here," Runion says, "and you can go to the bank, post office, grocery store, drugstore and hardware without getting back in your car. It's all right here."

If you elect to drive a little ways, you also can have your choice of several restaurants, a bakery, a video store, a couple of gift stores and other businesses normally seen in suburban shopping centers.

The hillsides that overlook the downtown businesses are crisscrossed with streets. These streets are lined with one- and two-story homes, with neatly manicured lawns. On the eastern side of town, just past the new high school, there's the Linville Creek Church of the Brethren. Across on the western side of Main Street, on the road leading to the community park and swimming pool, there's Sunset Drive United Methodist Church, and Comerstone Mennonite is just a few blocks away. These congregations, along with Baptists, Presbyterians and the Church of God, represent most of the town's residents.

### **Broadway's Beginnings**

There was a time when some northern businessmen envisioned Broadway as the social and economic hub of the entire Shenandoah Valley.

The town, like many throughout Virginia's mountains and Piedmont, grew up around a grist mill, which had been built on the lip of the peninsula formed by the confluence of Linville Creek and the Shenandoah River.

Just east of Brock's Gap, where the river flows through a branch of the Allegheny Mountains, the settlement was ideally situated to become a trading post, linking the mountains and valleys to the west with the Shenandoah Valley. When the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad's north-south Valley line came to Broadway in the 1850s, the town expanded off the peninsula to the east side of Linville Creek. The 1850s, when it was the southern end of the B&O line, were Broadway's first boom period.

The Civil War, when Union Gen. Philip Sheridan burned much of the settlement,

ended that boom.

By 1880, however, the settlement had recovered, and in that year, the General Assembly granted a charter to the new town of Broadway. That name, according to local legend, had its roots in the "spirits" of the times. As the town's comprehensive plan phrases it: "The land provided ample ingredients for the distillation of spirits and most of the inhabitants took full advantage of nature's bounty. Those who did not insisted that the others were on the 'broad-way to hell,' giving the new town its name."

The 1880s also saw the town's second boom period — this one based on the promise of nature's underground bounty.

As the decade began, E.D. Root, a wealthy Connecticut businessman, came to Broadway and bought acres of timberland in Brock's Gap. Root formed the Broadway Building and Improvement Company and sought investors to develop "inexhaustible coal and iron beds" in the region. The company's prospectus predicted, "Broadway will have from 8,000 to 10,000 population before two years go by."

Those predictions never materialized, and Root lost his fortune on his ill-fated Broadway venture.

The town, however, remained the economic link between the Valley and the mountains to the west, a role that continues today.

Each day, truckloads of poultry feed leave Broadway and head west through Brock's Gap to the poultry operations in the mountains and valleys that span the Virginia-West Virginia line.

The poultry industry is the economic lifeblood of Broadway today, Mrs. Hoover says.

Wampler Foods has its corporate headquarters, a feed mill and hatchery in Broadway. Both Wampler and Rocco, two of the nation's leading poultry processors, have processing plants in neighboring Timberville.

Grocery store owner Burkholder says nearly half of the payroll checks he cashes at his store are from the poultry companies or from Hartz Broadway Inc., a men's clothing maker. The other half are from businesses in Harrisonburg, Burkholder says.

Each morning, Mrs. Hoover says, a steady stream of cars passes her house on Route 259, bringing workers through Brock's Gap to jobs in Broadway, Timberville and south to Harrisonburg. The workers are coming from communities like

Fulks Run, Bergton and as far west as Mathias, West Virginia.

The poultry industry means more than just jobs in the processing plants, feed mills and hatcheries, however.

The mountainsides and valleys west of Broadway are dotted with the long, low buildings that house thousands of chickens or turkeys. Each day, the trucks head west on Route 259, taking feed to these birds, and most nights, other trucks are heading east into Broadway and Timberville, bringing the mature birds to the processing plants for slaughter and processing.

In addition, Broadway is home to a number of businesses that serve the poultry industry. Several Broadway businesses — such as Agri-of-Virginia, Lantz Building Supply, Valley Poultry and others — are involved in the various phases of building and equipping the poultry houses.

In some ways, Burkholder says, Broadway "is kind of the Harrisonburg to Mathias," making the town the commercial hub for a chunk of western Virginia and eastern West Virginia.

### **"Broadway Is Their Town, Too"**

The people of this wide area are part of the Broadway community, Mrs. Hoover says. "Broadway is their town, too."

And, they share the small-town community spirit that newcomers quickly notice when they come to Broadway.

**Daryl Ours** worked in Harrisonburg for years before joining the staff of the Ace Hardware Store when it opened last year. It didn't take Ours long to recognize that there was something different about the people of Broadway. "It's just a whole different attitude when you wait on people," he says. "They're so friendly and cooperative."

That's the kind of spirit that fueled the spontaneous outpouring of support when Mike Loso asked for help in moving to the new high school. And it's the spirit that's kept Broadway vibrant for over a century and a half. ■

### **To Find Out More...**

For further information about Broadway, contact the Broadway/Timberville Chamber of Commerce, 392 S. Main St., Timberville, VA 22853, (540) 896-7413.