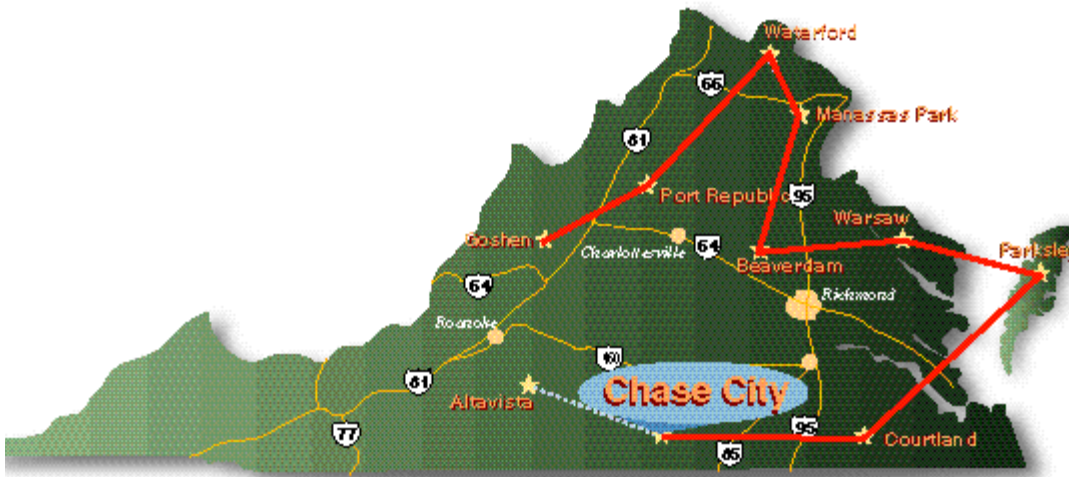


## DOWN HOME SERIES

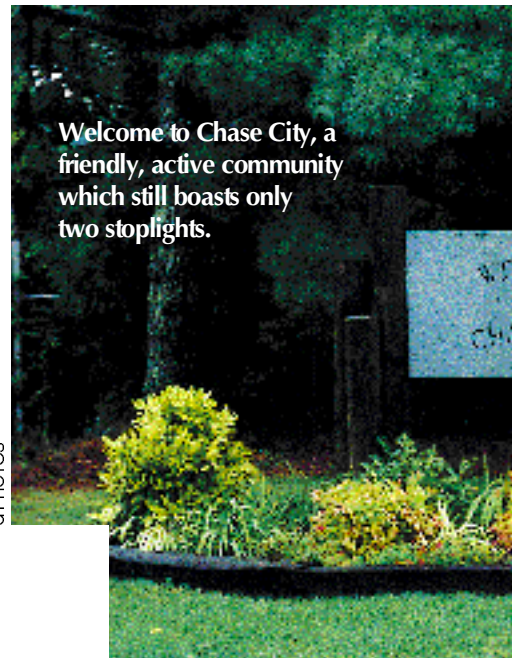
by Robert Benning,  
Staff Writer, *The News-Progress* (Chase City)

During 1999, 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 year's ninth stop, we'll be...

# Down Home in Chase City



G PHOTOS



Welcome to Chase City, a friendly, active community which still boasts only two stoplights.

Whether you enjoy modern-day window shopping along small town streets or meandering through atue-lined paths of an exotic garden, the best of both worlds can be nestled amid the rolling farmlands of Virginia's Southside, in the small town of Chase City.

During the reconstruction of the town following the Civil War, a man by the name of George A. Endly left

his home in Pennsylvania, and purchased approximately 1,300 acres of land surrounding the village of Christiansville in the northwestern section of Mecklenburg County.

He came to the area with one purpose in mind: to turn the small village into a well-constructed modern town. By 1872, Endly began working with a surveyor to map out the streets and alleys, and form a structured business district.

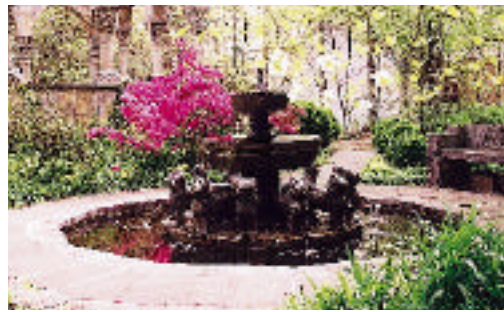
Along with his partner, John E. Boyd, Endly worked hard to invite people from all over the country to come and live in the new town, and come they did.

In 1873, the village of Christiansville officially became known as the town of Chase City. Endly named the new town after the Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, Samuel Portland Chase, a man well known in his time for honesty and integrity.

In the early 1900s, Chase City became a popular vacation spot for the rich and famous, as trains rolled in from every city with rail service to bring people to the 150-room Mecklenburg Hotel.

Once located a short distance from modern-day Main Street, the fancy hotel provided the perfect comforts for anyone wishing to

Brenda Arriaya, executive director of the The MacCallum More Museum and Gardens, pauses at the garden entrance with husband Leonard. Inset is one of the garden's many fountains.





bathe in the mineral springs that surrounded the area, or partake in well-organized fox hunts and horse races.

Regrettably, the grand days of the hotel ended way too soon, as a devastating fire destroyed the structure just six years after it first opened its doors.

But, even though the wealth and prosperity that came to the area in that short time came to an end, the town continued to push forward into the future.

For more than a century now, Chase City has continued to grow and become as culturally diverse as America itself. People from all walks of life live side by side, enjoying the conveniences of modern-day life mixed with the charm of old-style Southern culture. Strangers passing each other on the street still exchange a pleasant greeting and a welcoming smile.

Although Chase City can still be referred to as a small town (it only has two traffic lights), its main street is filled with dozens of small businesses, where shoppers can find everything from the latest in computer technology to fresh fruits and vegetables delivered straight from small local farms.

Within town limits, there are three large grocery stores, five automotive parts stores, two large furniture stores, realtors, florist shops, building supply stores, department stores, three banks, and enough antiques to satisfy the tastes of every treasure hunter between Chincoteague and Cumberland Gap.

**The town's many small businesses offer everything from fresh fruits and vegetables to the latest in computer technology.**



**In the early 1900s, the Mecklenburg Hotel became a popular vacation spot for the rich and famous.**

Every small town has some form of local government that works to bring improvements to all aspects of the community. But the town of Chase City has more than just a local government; it has caring people. People who are stepping forward and trying to bring back the prosperity of days gone by and initiate additional development in the new century to come.

The people that visitors see operating



**While Police Chief Jay Jordan may not be smiling in this photo, he's all smiles at heart. When he's not keeping a watchful eye over Chase City's citizens, he's organizing Youth Awareness meetings and children's basketball tournaments.**

local businesses and walking along Main Street are the same people volunteering their time to make Chase City a "quality of life" community.

After suffering from a devastating loss of jobs during the early 1990s due to the closing of several area manufacturing plants, town leaders and citizens put forth a great effort to rebuild the local economy and keep the community focused on a brighter future .

Within just a few short years, their hard work is beginning to pay off. In the last six months, the town has been awarded a \$250,000 grant to be used to upgrade and improve Main Street. It has been promised an additional \$530,000 next year for the same purpose, and most recently the town was chosen as the site of a new 120-bed nursing home to be built across the street from the elementary school.



Two of the town's largest manufacturing plants inside its industrial park, that have sat empty for the last few years, have been sold to new developers and may soon be operating once again.

**B. Dale Wilson**, who owns and operates one of the automotive parts stores in town, played a large part in securing the grants to improve the appearance of the downtown area.

"It was simply amazing to see so many of the town's residents step forward to help secure the grants to improve our community," Wilson says. "The people of this town are one of its greatest aspects, and the hard work of a lot of caring citizens is really beginning to pay off."

Wilson is chairman of the town's downtown revitalization committee, and the committee is just one of the many factions working toward the benefit of the community.

The town council is currently working alongside the town's industrial development authority in an effort to bring additional industry into the area.

The Chase City Chamber of Commerce spends much of its time promoting and sponsoring town functions such as Christmas parades and horse shows, and is planning to hold the community's first Autumn Jubilee, scheduled for Oct. 23.

One of the newest organizations is the "I Love Chase City Committee" which is currently selling buttons displaying the commit-

tee's name, in an effort to raise money to purchase additional computers for the local elementary school.

For the kids, the town has a public basketball court, a baseball field, a YMCA, and every Friday night Police Chief Jay Jordan holds a youth awareness meeting to help keep children focused on a positive future.

"Chase City is not just a town," Wilson continues. "It's a community. The people that work here, live here. The end result of the work we do today will be enjoyed by the generations to come."

### Mysterious Paths

Hidden away among the quiet side streets of the town lies a most unusual, and exotic, attraction — The MacCallum More Museum and Gardens.

Originally, the Gardens were the home of the late Chief Justice and Mrs. Edward Wren Hudgins. In 1929, they built a modest home and began to design a spectacular landscape that was later expanded by their son, the late William Hudgins.

As a personal aide to President Truman, William Hudgins traveled the world, bringing home many forms of eclectic art. These pieces were then incorporated into the Gardens' design, and form an almost mystical atmosphere.

Visitors walking through the stone-lined pathways dividing the well-maintained botanical gardens will be simply amazed by

the works of art that include a 1st-century Roman bust, a 17th-century bronze Samurai warrior, a Spanish Cloister, eight imported fountains, and a wide array of statues, plaques, stone work, and other fascinating attractions that literally fill the five-acre site.

The Gardens are also filled with every form of plant life imaginable, from the sturdiest of oak trees, to the most delicate of wildflowers. There is even a newly developed herb garden containing all forms of culinary, medicinal and fragrant herbs.

In 1996, the Gardens opened its doors to a new museum that permanently houses a large collection of Native American artifacts dating back to 9500 BC. The artifacts were generally collected locally by Arthur Robertson of Chase City. The museum also displays various other art forms throughout the year.

### Center for the Community

For 60 years, Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative (MEC) has been headquartered in the town of Chase City. Not only does the Co-op provide area residents with power, it also provides a strong community life force.

**John Bowman**, executive vice president of MEC, can often be found taking part in one of the many community functions, or working hard with various committee partners organizing community development. He takes an active role in the town, as do many of the co-op's employees.

Bowman belongs to the board of directors for the Chase City Community Services, Inc., which is currently overseeing the development and construction of the town's new community center.

**Dr. Earl W. Moore** is president of the board, and he explained that the community's participation and strong leadership has led to the completion of numerous projects over the last few decades.

"In just the 30 years that I have been a part of this community, the town has worked together to build a medical center, a library, a fire and rescue station, an auditorium, and now a community center to help move the community into the 21st century," he says.

"All of these accomplishments are an example of the vision of the community and its willingness to pull together to get things done."

Near completion, the community center contains a large meeting room, a dance room, offices, and three classrooms that will be used as a learning center complete with satellite hook-up to the local community college.

After more than 125 years of change, Chase City is now, more than ever, what its founder planned it to be — a real town, and a real community. ■

## If You Go...

To find out more information on the town of Chase City, contact the **Chamber of Commerce** at (804) 372-0379 or e-mail at [chasecityva@meckcom.net](mailto:chasecityva@meckcom.net).

The new Chamber director, **Sam Furgeson**, can provide you with all the information you need to join in such events as the **South Central Fair**, the **Autumn Jubilee**, the annual **horse show**, various **golf tournaments** at the Mecklenburg Country Club, the summer-long **antique and custom car "Cruise In" at Ludie May's store**, and any number of antique auctions.

If you're planning on a visit, don't forget to stop by the **MacCallum More Museum and Gardens** on Hudgins Street. The stone pathways and botanical gardens offer a relaxing

break from the hustle and bustle of everyday life, just a short walk away from downtown Main Street. The Gardens are open year-round Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sunday, 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. For additional information concerning the Gardens or the Museum, call (804) 372-0502, or fax (804) 372-3483.

If you'd like to follow in the footsteps of the **Home and Garden Tour**, simply take a leisurely drive along the town's backroads to see some outstanding turn-of-the-century Victorian-style architecture. Chase City has a splendid collection of well-maintained early American homes. When you're finished, enjoy a meal at one of the **many restaurants in town**. Whether you prefer chili dogs or tortellini, a wide variety of eating establishments are available. ■