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Down on the Farm
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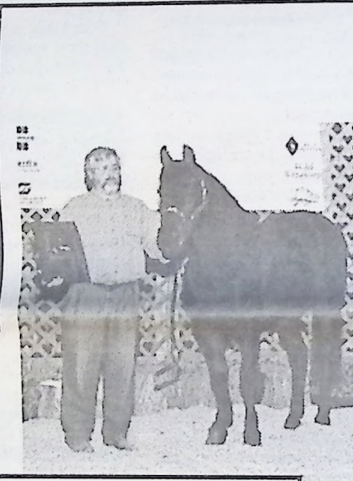
January 2000 Vol. 7, Issue 1

P.O. Box 51, Middlebrook, Va. 24459



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Drink from
the fountain
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with two
busy ladies

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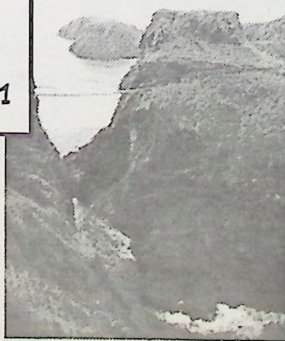
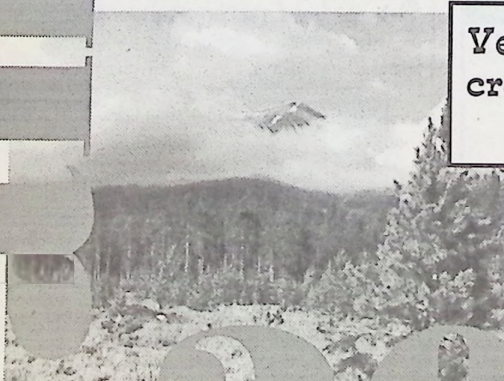


Verona woman weaves
craft into home business

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Visit the 'new' mountains
and the old country

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2000

Va. Farm Bureau draws up legislative wish list

By BETTY JO HAMILTON

STAUNTON — Virginia Farm Bureau Federation has made its list and checked it twice. Its legislative wish list, that is. Now it will be up to members of Virginia's upcoming session of the General Assembly to determine which of the VFBF's wishes will come true and which ones won't.

(See related stories, page 15.) Local Farm Bureau members met in December to discuss strategies for presenting the VFBF legislative agenda to the General Assembly. Joining them in a work session were Glenn Weatherholtz of Rockingham County and Emmett Hanger of Augusta County. These two area representatives to the General Assembly listened to rationale presented by Farm Bureau members on particular legislative issues and provided feedback on how these issues will be received and managed in the upcoming Assembly session.

Issues included among the VFBF "Priority Issues for 2000" package are restructuring disaster assistance, farm preservation, right to farm, farm buildings and structures regulations, wetlands protection, forestry department funding, updating cotton laws, funding for Virginia



Rick Shiflet, center, president of the Augusta County Farm Bureau, speaks with Glenn Weatherholtz, left, of Rockingham County and Emmett Hanger of Augusta County, during a Virginia Farm Bureau Federation senatorial district meeting held recently.

Photo by Betty Jo Hamilton

Tech's livestock teaching arena, and funding for a packing/shipping point for the fruit industry.

Hanger noted that the state's farmers rely heavily on the federal government to devise plans for quick movement to respond to disasters. He agreed that there may need to be some way to address disaster situations related to weather conditions in a time sensi-

tive manner. Weatherholtz agreed with the need for speedy response to disasters, however, he noted he would be reluctant to set up yet another state agency representing yet another layer of bureaucracy to handle such situations.

To the farm preservation issue, Hanger said, "We're going to have some rather significant recommendations to make. We need to come up with a plan

to preserve production farming."

Farmers have long complained of the unfairness of a tax system in which they are taxed for services they do not receive. Hanger noted that localities need to find ways to end their reliance on real estate taxes to fuel local coffers.

Part of the VFBF package calls for the purchase of development rights to preserve farmland.

"It bothers me when we start talking about giving somebody money to do something with their land," Weatherholtz said. "I thought farmers wanted to get away from subsidies."

Steve Saufley, VFBF board of director, noted that land use has "slowed the loss of agriculture" in the state.

"We need something more than land use," he said. "It's lost its effectiveness."

Both Hanger and Weatherholtz said their support of the Right to Farm Act is sound.

"Rest assured," Weatherholtz

stressed, "we're all behind the Right to Farm Act."

Hanger noted that he believes there will be an effort made to repeal the Right to Farm Act.

"We need to be prepared to not let it sneak up on us," he said.

Whether it was the hour of the evening or the persistence of the Farm Bureau members at the legislative workshop, objections by Hanger and Weatherholtz to the remainder of the VFBF priority issues were few. Weatherholtz seemed hesitant to make commitments regarding funding for a number of the items, however he indicated he would support these items. The state budget, to be presented during the Assembly session, was not available when Hanger and Weatherholtz met with Farm Bureau members.

Absent from the VFBF Senatorial District meeting were Vance Wilkins, Steve Landes and Creigh Deeds. Nicole Riley, Landes' legislative aide, attended on his behalf. —

Valley to host inaugural Va./D.C. Farmers' Market Workshop

STAUNTON — The Shenandoah Valley and Augusta County have been selected to host the first comprehensive effort to unite participants of Virginia and District of Columbia public farmers' markets. Jeff Ishee of

Middlebrook and Andy Lee of Buena Vista are organizing the effort. "The retail farmers' market movement is exploding not only locally, but all across the United States," reports Ishee. "There have been almost 1,000 new public

farmers markets organized in the U.S. during the past four years, and the mid-Atlantic region is following the national trend."

Ishee and Lee are working with Virginia Cooperative Extension, the Virginia Farmers Direct Marketing Association and several other groups to help anyone associated with farmers' marketing

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Verona woman weaves hobby into successful home business

By PENNY PLEMMONS

VERONA — What's in a name? For Susan Reed Fanfoni it's the stuff her business is made of.

Reed passing through this Verona woman's hands becomes masterful basket creations. She readily admits her passion for the art form.

"I love to weave," she said. "There is something very satisfying in seeing the whole thing appear in front of you."

Her present livelihood is the byproduct of a single basket weaving class

taken over 15 years ago. Aptly named "Folk Art Basketry," Susan has developed this unique cottage industry into a mail order basket kit business. An accounting degree and expertise in marketing helped her business evolve from hand-made basket sales to kit sales only. Partially hearing impaired, Susan commented on her success.

"What I didn't get in my hearing, God has made up for in my hands," she said.

Susan's entry into the crafters' marketplace began 20 years ago when she opened a small craft shop in her hometown in upstate New York. She sold quilts, decorative pierced lamp shades and eventually her hand-woven baskets.

A combination of marriage, children and moving south opened Susan's opportunity for a home-based business. She set up shop behind her home. Her ability to blend crafts with baskets has landed her squarely on centerstage in the basket world.

"I combine craft items such as wood pieces and fabric with baskets. When I started selling kits in 1995, no one was making baskets this way. It has gone over very well," Susan said.

She sells between 600 to 1,000 kits annually and sells thousands of dollars worth of inventory at basket weaving conventions. According to Susan, she is the sole originator of sought-after her basket doll patterns.

Santas, snowmen, and scarecrows are favorites among purchasers. With wooden heads and colorful basket bodies, these basket dolls are embellished with appropriate craft accessories.

Susan related the story behind the dolls' origin.

"My friend had a knob missing off the end of her bed. So, I went to find a wooden knob. And when I found it, I thought, hey, this would make a great doll head. Little did I know that this would work out so well."

Susan creates anywhere from four to eight basket patterns a year. Her ideas come from everyday life. "Sometimes I am walking or driving and I will see something that sparks an idea," she stated. "For example, I got tired of having microwave popcorn packages all over my counter. So I made a basket popcorn keeper."

Susan particularly likes affordable baskets with a purpose. One of her latest projects is a birdhouse tissue holder with the tissues coming out of the bird hole. For decoration she has just designed mini ornaments featuring Santa, Uncle Sam and Miss Liberty.

Once Susan has an idea, she thoroughly plans it in her head. Then she takes several hours and creates a demo, writing the steps and measurements as she goes along. Her husband Ken, and sons Kyle and Kevin pitch in occasionally when the orders pile up. But for the most part she employs her friend and fellow crafter, Cindy Ingraham on a part-time, as-needed basis to help package kits. The cost of the basket kits range from \$2 to \$25 and contain the pattern and accessories. At present she does not supply the reed.

Susan predicts that the next fad will be bumblebees and she is already tooling with ideas for patterns. "In this business you always have to stay one step ahead," Susan says. "Always on the edge of the next craze. I really need to be there the day before."

Holidays are extremely busy at Folk Art Basketry. Susan commented, "Right now I don't have time to give instructional classes. But, I am looking to do



Susan Reed Fanfoni shows some of the many creations she has crafted through the art of basket weaving.

Photos by Penny Plemmons

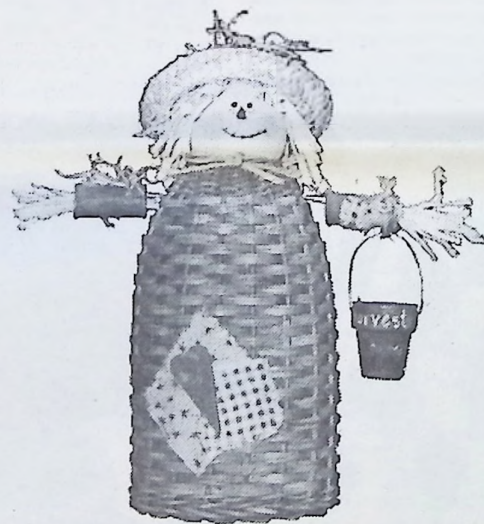
that in the future."

Susan never imagined that her baskets and kits would be so popular and she is thankful to be able to do something that she loves.

Sometimes success just pops

right out at you. For Susan Reed Fanfoni it was there all along, in her name. —

Go to www.basketpatterns.com on the internet for a listing of Susan's baskets.



Susan Fanfoni of Verona overlaps reeds to form the base of one of her woven creations.



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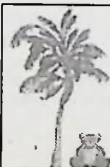
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Love of life, hard work keep fountain of youth flowing

By BONNIE MOSES

I have often daydreamed about how my life would be in the future. Going to college, getting married, having children, getting a great job. But there was always one part of my life I avoided thinking about — old age.

I have heard from almost everyone about how terrible it is. The wrinkles, pains, rising food prices and declining values that all seemed to come with getting old. So I had always thought, "Why even think about it? It will only make me depressed right?" However, I was about to find out how wrong I was when I went on an unusual assignment for this paper. I was to find the fountain of youth!

The Bird Lady

My first subject was the Bird Lady. You've probably heard about her or at least read her articles in the local newspaper. Her name is YuLee Lerner and her passion is birds. As far back as she can remember, birds have always been a part of her life. Her parents loved the mountains and taking picnics. And while on these trips they would often see birds and watch them carefully.

However, when she was nine, her

interest became a passion. She went on a cookout with five other girls to a schoolhouse. There she and her friends watched the birds play with each other almost as if they were children themselves. "It was then that I think they truly flew into my heart to stay," YuLee explains.

In 1966 she audited an ornithology class at Mary Baldwin College. "That's when I realized how important it was to keep an eye, or two, on these disappearing birds." From there she joined the Augusta Bird Club, started by John Mehner. Through the years, YuLee has seen many amazing things, like 10,000 hawks at one time. "It was amazing! They were all over the sky. My heart just jumped, I'll never forget it." But, as YuLee says, "I'm only able to see such wonderful things because of all the people who help keep these birds alive. If it wasn't for all the work all these caring people do, most of the birds I've seen would be extinct."

In 1972, the sky-blue bluebirds were almost extinct. So the club jumped to action. Members set up a bluebird trail and added a few boxes each year. In about two years, 80 new babies had been born! This has helped save the glorious bluebirds from certain death.

The neatest thing about YuLee is not just her love for birds, but also her amazingly large and youthful heart. Sitting at her table looking out on the cardinals and chickadees, I hear in her voice a youthful excitement. Her eyes light up like a child's at Christmas when she sees an unusual bird float into her garden. I realized I had found the first part of the fountain of youth — the love of life!

The busy hands

Any good craft store will have her crafts. Her name is Ester Williams, and from age six, she has known how to use a sewing machine. She always believed that lazy hands were the devil's playground. Just looking around her home you can see that her hands have stayed busy.

"I made that lamp two years ago and I couldn't give it up. That pillow over there, I crocheted it last month." Everything in her home has been made by her. And that's not all. She even drew up the plans to build her home!

Ester graduated from Booker T. Washington School in Staunton and left for Baltimore. She soon graduated from nursing school and became a nurse in 1946, but during World War II, she riveted airplanes.

She moved back to Virginia when she was married and she had children. One year her son broke his arm, and she didn't have any-



YuLee Lerner — "The Bird Lady" — of Staunton, fills one of the many bird feeders in the yard at her home.

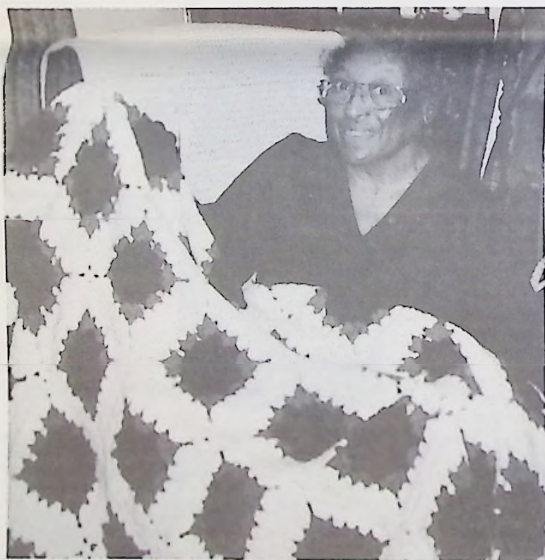
Photos by Nancy Sorrells

thing to make sure he didn't move it. So she made him an arm brace and soon patented it. And now it sells all over the country.

However, that's not the only thing she has done. Since then, she

has created many children's Bible games like, *Traveling Through The Bible* and *Words of the Bible*. In her quiet times, she writes spiritual poetry and composed the books

See *ESTER*, page 13



Ester Williams of Staunton shows off one of the many crocheted afghans she has made over the years.

Staunton's 'Bird Lady' compiles second volume of *Random Ramblings*

By NANCY SORRELLS

STAUNTON — It's a streak that rivals Cal Ripken's in longevity. Since 1977 YuLee Lerner, known as the "Bird Lady," has written a weekly birdwatching column called *Random Ramblings*. More than 1,100 columns have now appeared in a local newspaper.

You don't have to be a "mad keen birder" to appreciate YuLee's weekly visits. Although presented with the accuracy of the ornithological expert she is, the columns are not laced with highly technical, scientific jargon. Rather, she speaks of visitors of the feathered kind and provides brief glimpses into the birds' world as it intersects

ours whether here in Augusta County or beyond.

In 1980, 30 of YuLee's columns, selected from about 100 that had appeared, were published in a book, *Random Ramblings of an Everyday Birdwatcher*. That volume was delightfully illustrated by Mary Pemberton. Although the two women had always planned to create a second volume, the years passed by and the columns piled up.

Then in May of this year, YuLee's best friend and birdwatching companion of 33 years, Isabel Obenschain, passed away. Shortly before Isabel's death, YuLee learned that her friend had collected and mounted

into eight scrapbooks all of the *Random Ramblings* columns in chronological order.

"When her family presented me with this collection, I began reading over again, the accounts of our adventures during our 33 years of birdwatching together," writes YuLee in the introduction to her newest book, *Random Ramblings of an Everyday Birdwatcher, Vol. II*, published in late summer of this year.

Isabel's gift prompted a trip down memory lane and a few weeks later YuLee decided that volume two of *Random Ramblings* was in order. She carefully selected and edited 53 columns from the more than 1,000 pasted in the scrap-

See *RAMBLINGS*, page 13

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Augusta 4-H honors members for achievement

AC staff report

CEDAR GREEN — Four Augusta County 4-Hers were recognized recently for outstanding accomplishments in project work.

Sisters Jessica and Tamara Rohrbaugh were honored as Outstanding Junior and Senior Girl 4-Hers for 1998-99. Will Earhart and Neal Buchanan received the awards as Outstanding Junior and Senior Boy 4-Hers during Augusta County's 4-H Achievement Night held Dec. 11 at the American Legion Hall.

Jessica and Tamara, daughters of Jeff and Cindy Rohrbaugh of Mt. Sidney, are members of the Willing Workers 4-H Club.

Jessica, 11, has been very active in local, district and state 4-H programs. She exhibits lambs in the Market Animal Show and has participated in the presentations and Fashion Revue contests at the local and district level. She is a member the livestock judging team. She also was a member of the junior stockman's team for the state fair. For the 1998-99 4-H year, she completed nine project books on a variety of topics including lambs, fashion, gardening, dogs, photography and vet science.

Tamara has served as treasurer and historian of the Willing Workers Senior 4-H club and is currently serving as president. She has exhibited lambs in the Market Animal Show and displayed her musical talent in the 4-H Share the Fun talent show at the county and district level. She is involved in helping her community by volunteering at the Valley Mission, helping to raise money for the needy, and helping in nursing homes during the holidays. She is also an excellent student and has plans to pursue fur-

ther education in animal science. For the 1998-99 4-H year she completed five project books on a variety of topics including vet science, photography, and market lambs.

Will, son of Chris and Becky Earhart of Verona, has been active in 4-H for two years as a member of the Middlebrook Livestock 4-H Club. According to his club leaders, he is always willing to do whatever is asked of him. He is always friendly and courteous. He has perfect attendance at his club

meetings as well as practices and contests for the livestock judging team. He has participated in all of the activities of the livestock club including fundraisers, Christmas projects, and clinics. He exhibits steers in the Market Animal Show and is starting his own Angus herd. He makes an effort to promote 4-H in his school by encouraging classmates to join 4-H. He participates in many school and church activities as well.

Neal, son of Lacy and Kay Buchanan of Middlebrook, is a member of the Middlebrook 4-H Livestock Club and the livestock judging team. He is a great role model for younger members in his club. He helps other members with their livestock projects and believes that a good leader is one who makes the people around him better. He strives to do this by helping the younger 4-H members in areas in which he is knowledgeable. He has participated in the Market Animal Show and many livestock judging contests at the local, district, state, and national level.

Tina Horn, of the Augusta Cooperative Farm Bureau and a member of the Augusta County Cooperative Council, presented \$100 U.S. Savings Bonds to each out-

standing 4-Her in recognition of his or her accomplishments.

Individuals inducted into the Augusta County 4-H Honor Club included Audrey Fuller, Zachary Waldron, Rachael Swartzel, Jimmy Crosby, Laura Grimm, Cole Heizer, Bobby Perkins, Ben Burton, Timothy Cupp, Jillian Begoon, Tamara Rohrbaugh, and Aaron Shiflett.

Recognizing the spirit of volunteerism among 4-H members, Maxine Arey, a member of the Augusta County Farm Bureau Federation, presented \$100 in scholarship money to the Augusta County 4-H camp counselors. The money will be used to help counselors fund their expenses to assist with 4-H camp activities.

Council officers installed at the event included Liz Cupp, president; Daniel Salatin, vice president; and Ellen Murray, secretary.

In other presentations made during the evening, 4-H club leaders were recognized for years of service and members received achievement awards for completing project work in a variety of areas including dairy, horse, outdoor sports, judging competitions, presentations, Share the Fun, and Fashion Revue. —



Tina Horn, far left, of the Augusta County Cooperative Council, stands with outstanding Augusta County 4-Hers, from left, Will Earhart, Neal Buchanan, Tamara Rohrbaugh, and Jessica Rohrbaugh.

Photo courtesy Augusta County Extension Service

4-Hers compete in air rifle match

VERONA — The third annual Bill Suter 4-H Christmas Air Rifle Match was held on Dec. 9. Seventeen 4-H members from Augusta County, Staunton, and Waynesboro participated in the event. The course of fire was 10 shots in each position, kneeling, standing, and prone. John Fulton was the Grand Champion shooter overall followed closely by Lee Kelley. John also was the high-scoring individual for both the prone and

kneeling positions. Lee was the high scoring individual in standing. Hannah Short was the overall champion in the rookie division.

This match was an in-house competition of the Augusta County 4-H Outdoor Sports Club. This is a shooting education club that meets two times per month (second and fourth Thursdays from 7-9) at the Augusta County Government Center. The club is open to all youth from Augusta County,

Staunton, and Waynesboro who are between the ages of 9 and 19.

Each new member, during their first meeting, attends a safety class to learn the range rules and to learn how to safely handle the firearms. All equipment is provided and there is no membership fee to join the club. For information on the 4-H Shooting Education program, call Jennifer Mercer, Extension Agent 4-H at 540/245-5750 or see Don Studer, Head Range Officer, at Hassett's in Waynesboro. —



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First Night to ring in New Year

WAYNESBORO — First Night Augusta will feature a variety of events on New Year's Eve. Entertainment begins at 7 p.m. in Waynesboro and concludes at midnight with fireworks.

Among entertainers performing will be the Mountain Heritage Cloggers, Oak Grove Gospel, Puppets & Friends, Shiloh Baptist Gospel, Whiskey Creek, and Folk Salad. Events will be held at Main Street Methodist Church, First Presbyterian Church and First Baptist Church, all in Waynes-

boro. The fireworks display will be at Constitution Park.

First Night Augusta is an alcohol-free celebration of the New Year. It is sponsored in conjunction with numerous businesses throughout the area. Admission buttons for the event are \$5 each.

Buttons must be worn to gain entry to First Night performances and may be purchased at the following locations: In Waynesboro — Body By Nature, CFW Intelos, Chamber of Commerce, Donna's Hallmark, Humphries Press, News

Virginian, Purple Foot, Scott & Stringfellow, Sharon Bookstore, Team Tire, Valley Framing Studio and Gallery, Waynesboro Downtown Development, Waynesboro Florist, and Waynesboro Landscape; In Fishersville — Planters Bank and Sweet Williams; In Stuarts Draft — Cohron's Hardware and Eavers Citgo and Amoco; In Staunton — Blue Mountain Coffee, The Bookstack, Chamber of Commerce, Elegance by Petal Pushers, Kathy's and Pampered Palate. —



Yesterday once more



Middlebrook community dedicates historic marker

By NANCY SORRELLS

MIDDLEBROOK — What do you give for a 200th birthday? That's what the citizens of the village of Middlebrook asked themselves one day as they stood and chatted in Brubeck's Hardware Store. Ruby Rosen might have been the one to think of it first and one or two others, like Bill Brubeck, quickly latched upon the idea. How about a historical highway marker, they wondered?

With a lot of hard work, fundraising, and perseverance from the residents, the villagers turned that daydream into a new village "accessory" in the form of a cast-iron marker. And all before the curtains closed on Middlebrook's bicentennial.

In front of a crowd of about 75, the marker was dedicated on a sunny Saturday after Thanksgiving. The ceremony began with the reenactment of settlers arriving to purchase lots in the newly laid off village. Providing characters from the past were Kenneth LaPorte who drove his horse and buggy through downtown. His passengers were Lee Ann Heizer, who came with enough pounds and shillings to purchase one lot, and frontier children Andrew Heizer and Justin Walker who arrived without a penny in their pockets.

Together they helped set the scene for a spring day 200 years before. Two centuries ago, the road the buggy moved across was already in use, but it was dirt, probably uneven and perhaps deeply rutted from the hooves of livestock and wagon wheels. Tradition says there might have been a building or two already here along this main road through the county but certainly not the clusters of structures seen today. There might have been stakes driven in the ground and

connected by string to delineate rectangular tracts of land. Despite its emptiness, however, there would have been a special air of excitement that spring morning in 1799, for with the stroke of a pen the village of Middlebrook was being formed.



"Middlebrook settlers" Justin Walker, Lee Ann Heizer, and Andrew Heizer prepare to depart for the village to pay for their lot.

Photos by Nancy Sorrells

It was a planned community that had been a year in the making — and William and Nancy Scott were here because land was gold in the Shenandoah Valley and this was their land. This tract of land, originally part of William Beverley's grant, was first sold to David Cunningham in 1749. Then Andrew and Thomas Scott acquired it. In 1798 they deeded it to William and Nancy Scott. Seizing the opportunity along what was already an established transportation route from Staunton to Brownsburg, William Scott laid out a number of lots along the road in 1798.

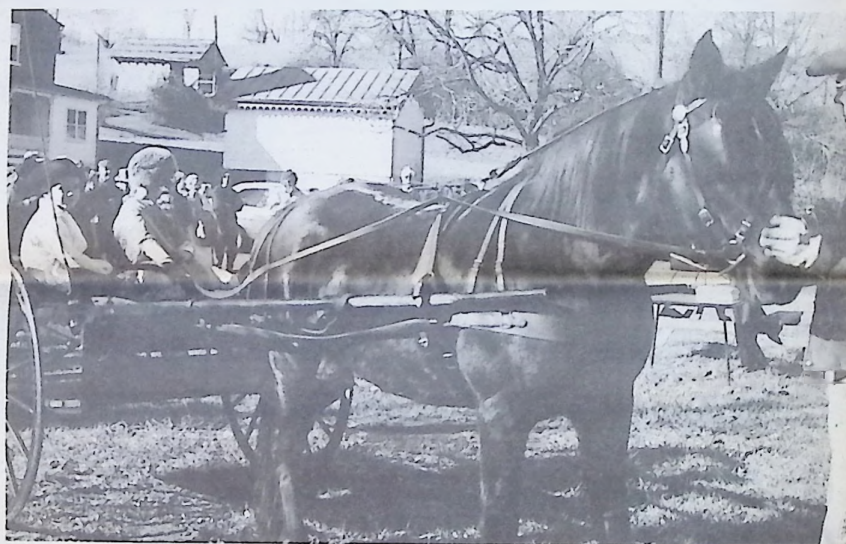
And so it was that on April 16, 1799, 26 lots were sold off in this newly planned community. The young country of the United States was still using pounds, shillings, and pence as well as dabbling in dollars and cents. Thus the sale prices are recorded in both denominations. The smallest lot near the edge of town brought two pounds, while Samuel McCutcheon paid 30 pounds for his. The lot next to Samuel's and the one across from him commanded a whopping \$50 each. These high-priced lots may also have had some sort of building on them, otherwise they would

not have brought such large sums.

The purchasers were, for the most part, family members of some of the area's earliest Scots-Irish and German settlers. In addition to the McCutcheons, there were Ewings, McChesneys, and Wilsons — all good Scots-Irish. There were also Sensabaughs, Bossermans, Bumgardners, and Fulwidars — good German names; and a few English names — Martin, Summers, and Lowman.

The name of Middlebrook had already been decided upon when the town was platted and recorded

See **MARKER**, page 7



In the spirit of Middlebrook's days along the wagon road between Staunton and Lexington, the "settlers" were transported to the

marker dedication ceremony in a horse and cart provided by Kenneth LaPorte of Staunton.

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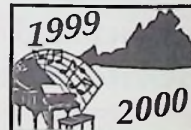
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See page 2 for details.

Marker

Continued from page 6

in the Augusta County deedbooks. But just how the area residents arrived at that name is open to debate. There are, in fact, at least three stories to explain the name. The oldest comes from Augusta County historian Joseph Waddell who mentioned some rather vague story about this brook coming right out of the middle of the land where the waters divide — half going south to the James and half going north to the Shenandoah.

Then there is the McCutcheon family story which says that William McCutcheon, as a young lad in George Washington's army, spent a winter in 1777-1778 stationed in Middlebrook, N.J. "Elder Billy," as he was later called, liked the name and gave it to this new village which was nearby to his home.

The third story, found in a Middlebrook newspaper of the early 20th century, is a statement of the obvious — that the Scotts named the village Middlebrook because it has, yes indeed, a brook running through the middle of it. Back Creek to be exact.

Perhaps the truth lies in a combination of the three. Maybe the Scotts were laying off the lots for their new village and Elder Billy



Middlebrook,
Virginia 24459

1799 BICENTENNIAL 1999

and a few others happened by. A discussion ensued about what to name this new place — should it be for the scenic landscape? Say Hillsborough. How about for the proprietors? Say Scottsville. Or maybe for the creek running through the village? Say Brookside, or Back Creek. Then Elder Billy piped up saying he recollected a place he had stayed in 20 years ago called Middlebrook...

However the village was named, it prospered. Move forward in time a few months after the sale of lots to a late November day in 1799, and this place must have been swarming with activity. Cattle and pigs would have been driven on this road to market, travelers would have been passing through and there probably would have been the ring of hammers and zing of saws as people were putting the finishing touches on new homes and stores.

Within three or four years there

were a number of large dwellings and stores and a "lodging room." Growth was so rapid that in 1805 the Scotts had platted and sold off another set of back lots. By 1836 there were 150 people living in a village of 30 houses. There was also one interdenominational church, a school, a tavern, three stores, a tanyard, two tailors, one cabinetmaker, one cooper, one carpenter, one wheelwright and two boot and shoe factories!

The next big jump in growth came as a result of this road. Although the road had always gone through here and was the reason for the village's existence, in 1851 the Middlebrook and Brownsburg Turnpike Company was established. The road was improved and macadamized, which means putting a packed rock surface down. And a toll was charged — the turnpike company was a for-profit enterprise. The numbers of stagecoaches and



Roberta Hamlin plays the "Middlebrook Waltz" on her dulcimer during the dedication ceremony. The waltz was originally written to be played at community events.

mail carriers as well as everyday travelers jumped significantly as soon as the road was improved. By 1855 Middlebrook had doubled in size to 60 dwellings.

Prosperity continued unabated in the 1880s when the village was one of the most "enterprising and prosperous villages in the county." In fact, it was the largest village in Augusta County with 274 inhabitants. One of the reasons for such success was John S. McCorkle's "thrifty, enterprising, pleasant, and attractive" mercantile business. Another reason was that the village was a crossroads in the center of some prime agricultural land. Middlebrook was the business center for the farmers in the southern part of the county.

Around 1900, Middlebrook was a happening place. There was a community league, a modern school campus, a community band, a furniture factory, three doctors, five undertakers (did it take that many undertakers to keep up with the doctors?), taverns (including Frank Arhart's House of Entertainment) and more businesses than you could shake a stick at. There was even a prosperous African-American community with its own school and church that was part of the village.

Then something happened. The world changed. Transportation changed. Although Middlebrook had pushed hard to get the B&O railroad, it had actually gone farther east through Greenville. The Valley Turnpike which went through that other village also gained the upper hand over the Middlebrook-Brownsburg turnpike. And so Middlebrook became almost a time capsule, frozen in its 1880s-1920s heyday.

Gradually as growth and sprawl took over in other places, Middlebrook also became a unique breath of fresh air straight from the past. In 1980 the village was honored for its uniqueness by being placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The entire village was nominated and accepted on the list as an historic district.

But appearances can be deceiving. Middlebrook may appear to be a sleepy little village frozen in time, but the residents can still produce a "beehive of activity" when prompted. The fact that a historical marker now stands in the village is one example. When Mrs. Rosen and Brubeck hit upon the idea of having an historic highway marker placed in the village in honor of Middlebrook's bicentennial, they were not to be stopped. Everybody has seen these markers scattered all over the state. They reasoned that Middlebrook was just as historic as those other places and deserved a marker.

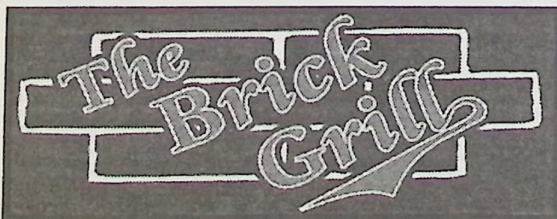
So how does one get a marker? You don't just call up the marker factory and order one. Instead a representative of the Augusta County Historical Society was called for advice.

The first step was to research and write the text for the marker —

See CEREMONY, page 13



Bill Brubeck and Ruby Rosen, residents of Middlebrook, unveil the historic marker.



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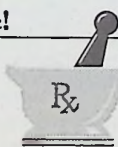
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Notes from the road

In this issue, *Augusta Country* writer Nancy Sorrells continues her report on a recent visit to the British Isles. Contributing writer Madison Brown takes us to the Continental Divide and those 'new' mountains out west. And leave it to staff writer Sue Simmons to find an obscure point of interest - a brothel museum, no less - on a trip to Butte, Mont.

Northern Ireland plays host to U.S. visitors, including a fellow named 'Floyd'

EDITOR'S NOTE: For three weeks in September, Nancy Sorrells took a "40th birthday party trip" to the British Isles. In the December 1999 issue she began unraveling the story of her trip. In this issue, she continues.

By NANCY SORRELLS

NORTHERN IRELAND —
At the end of our sixth day in Ireland we crossed the border

and headed to "the North" — Northern Ireland that is.

The distinction between the countries of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland is hard for many Americans to grasp so I will try and straighten that out. Ireland is an island geographically divided into four non-political regions, just like Virginia is divided into the Tidewater, Piedmont, and Mountains. One of those regions in Ireland is called Ulster. Today much

of Ulster is a separate country called Northern Ireland. Most of the early Presbyterian settlers of the Shenandoah Valley came from the geographic region of Ireland called Ulster which is the 20th century country of Northern Ireland.

For several centuries the entire island of Ireland was ruled by England. In the 20th century, most of the Irish gained their independence and became a separate country called the Republic of Ireland. However the northern part of the country, Ulster, did not become part of the new Irish Republic. For a variety of reasons, including religious and economic, that portion remains under British rule and is known as Northern Ireland.

The easiest way for Americans to understand this is to think about the Olympics. Athletes from the southern part of the island in what is now the Irish Republic would compete under the Irish flag, but athletes from Northern Ireland would compete under the British flag. Because there are those who would like the entire island to be reunited as one country and because there are those who would like Ulster to continue as part of Britain, Northern Ireland has been a scene of unrest since the 1970s although permanent peace appears to be on the horizon. In the North, this civil unrest is referred to as,

simply, "The Troubles."

After we crossed the border into the North, we stopped and called a friend whose house we were visiting. Because we were now in another country, we immediately had to master new money and telephones, two tasks we accomplished after a little mental maneuvering.

Soon, however, we had more mental maneuvering than we could handle. We received what sounded like simple directions for meeting our friend Kate and sped off on the motorway with an almost cocky air. This would be the point where I should explain roundabouts.

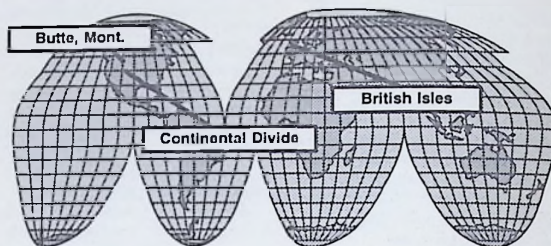
In Ireland and Great Britain, the convergence of traffic from different directions does not usually meet at an intersection. Rather the traffic flows into a circle called a roundabout. From the air, this circle would look like a wagon wheel hub and all the roads leading to it would look like the spokes. Vehicles drive around the circle until reaching the proper exit, at which point they turn to the left. Always think of this seemingly simple rule when entering a round-

about: "Look to the right and drive to the left." Remember that we were driving on the left in a car with a steering wheel on the right.

Further complicating the situation was the fact that our rental car was a standard transmission which means the driver was shifting gears with the left hand. Entering a roundabout can be quite hair-raising for Americans who are sitting (in their minds at least) on the wrong side of the car, shifting with the wrong hand, and driving on the wrong side of the road. Traffic enters the roundabout and drives in a clockwise fashion, using the wagon spokes to exit the circle. In theory, if one doesn't choose a "wagon spoke" or exit road, then the car circles in the hub endlessly.

Round and round, again and again. It can be a dizzying exercise. Roundabouts come in all sizes and several shapes. Some are, indeed, round. Some are oblong. Some have a large island in the middle, while some, in villages, have a small circle painted on the road. In big cities there are DOUBLE

See IRELAND, page 9



An elevated pulpit in an 18th century Presbyterian meeting house as seen at the Ulster American Folk Park in Northern Ireland. The objects hanging on the wall on either side of the pulpit are collection plates which were passed by being extended into the pews from the aisles rather than being passed from one congregant to the next along the pew.

Photos by Nancy Sorrells

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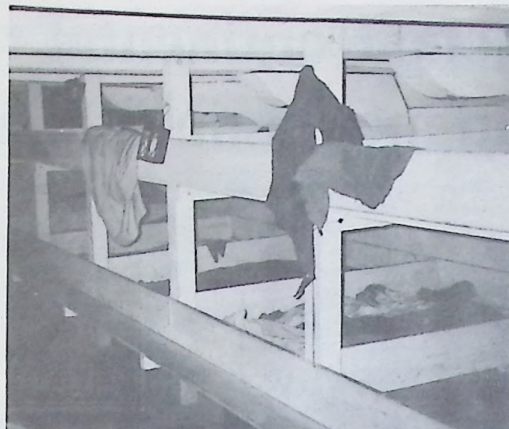
Ireland

Continued from page 8

ROUNDABOUTS. And that was our undoing. Somehow we passed through a double roundabout and wound up miles out of our way in a working class neighborhood in Belfast. We queried several people on directions, but despite the fact that we think we were speaking the same English language, we could not follow their simple directions to get turned around.

Finally one woman sensed the desperation in our voices and "dumbed down" the directions for us. The worst was yet to come. We returned to the double roundabout where we went awry but could not locate the correct exit road. So we went round and round, screaming and screaming, round and round. We took each road out only to find it was not correct and would be forced to return to the roundabout. It was like we were caught in a computer loop and could not exit the program. Finally our eyes lit upon a smaller, almost hidden exit. We turned left, and 15 minutes later arrived at our rendezvous point more than an hour late.

Despite the rough start, our stay with Kate was quite nice. She was most hospitable and even let us use her washing machine. (Another new thing to be mastered. Bet YOU don't know how to open a washing machine in Ireland). As our 40th birthday party moved



The photos above left and right show an Ulster American Folk Park recreation of the "tween decks" of ships which brought passengers to the New World. As many as 200 people were crammed into this space that was their living, cooking, and sleeping quarters during the 12-week voyage.

north, another guest "blew" in from the States for the celebration. Like most Americans, I have never given much thought to what happens to hurricanes after they play out in the U.S. Sometimes they die at sea, but sometimes they make it all the way across the Atlantic and visit Ireland. That's exactly what happened with Hurricane Floyd.

By the next morning, the wind was blowing and the rain was beating down. Not the normal gentle Irish rain, but a lashing rain that had residents out building dikes with sandbags. We had already learned, however, that in a land where rain can be expected almost every day, life does not stop with raindrops. However, everywhere we went, the kindly Irish folk leaned toward us and scolded us gently about this particular rain, "This is YOUR Floyd, you know."

So we set off for County Tyrone and a day of sightseeing under Floyd's threatening skies. Our final destination was the Ulster American Folk Park, an outdoor farm museum designed to show how people in Ireland lived before they came to America (mainly Pennsylvania and the Shenandoah Valley) in the 1700s and then later in the 1800s.

Visitors tour through a number of farms, a blacksmith house, a weaver's house, a Presbyterian meeting house, and a Catholic mass house before entering an Irish dockside street complete with the requisite businesses. All of these buildings are staffed with costumed interpreters weaving, spinning, cooking, making baskets, and carrying out the everyday life of their ancestors.

The dockside street leads into a build-

ing where visitors can climb aboard the life-size replica of a two-masted sailing vessel. Despite the fact that you are actually inside, the air is filled with the sounds of seagulls, and creaking masts. Climbing aboard the ship leaves one with the understanding of just how small and vulnerable these 100-foot ships really were.

But the real eye-opening part of the exploration comes by going below decks. There in the "tween decks" area is where the passengers bound for the New World lived. As many as 200 people were crammed into the space that was their living, cooking, and sleeping quarters for up to 12 weeks. It is not hard to imagine why so many perished on the journey. The stench that comes from so people (many of whom were seasick) living so tightly packed together would have been almost unbearable.

Museum visitors exit the ship onto the cobblestone street of an American dock. Here the recreated businesses are furnished with American artifacts. The folk park experience ends in America with a cabin on the frontier. More such frontier farms are planned for the future. And so the visitor has come full circle, viewing first what life in

See MUSEUM, page 18

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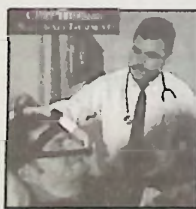
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A visit to Omagh – a city about the size of Staunton and scene of a deadly car bombing in August 1998 which claimed the lives of 29 people – was a sobering reminder of the political and religious fissures of this island nation. Hundreds of bouquets, poems, and messages of hope bear silent witness to the section of the city that took the brunt of the blast.

'New mountains' along Continental Divide challenge 'old mountain' hikers

By MADISON BROWN

Once upon a long, long time ago, when our Appalachian Mountains were thrust up for the most recent time beginning some 470 million years ago, our peaks reached up to grand heights like those of today's Himalayas. Since that time, erosion in many different forms has brought them down to their present heights — relatively gentle roundness, and thick forest covering. The Rocky Mountains some 1,600 miles west of us give a hint of what our Appalachians were like that long, long time ago.

Nowhere but in Colorado are the Rockies at their highest and most impressive. California may sport Mt. Whitney at 14,495 feet, the highest point in the contiguous U.S., but Colorado boasts 55 "fourteeners," peaks over 14,000 feet. Mt. Elbert is the highest at 14,433. I still do not know why Coloradans have not carried enough rocks to Elbert's peak to close that 62 foot gap to surpass Mt. Whitney.

And nowhere in Colorado are the Rockies more stunning, accessible and alluring than the Sawatch Range which runs north and south between the Continental Divide and the uppermost 60 miles of the Arkansas River — 14 fourteeners, gulches and basins, neighboring thirteens and lesser mountains.

It took a week for my old Virginia lungs, spoiled with all the oxygen and humidity we enjoy at 1,500 feet here in the Great Valley of Virginia, to adjust to Colorado's dry, oxygen stingy air. My first week I hiked Shrine Mountain ridge above Vail Pass on I-70 at some 12,000 feet, assaulted Mt.



The peak of Mt. Elbert, Colorado's highest point at 14,433 feet, can be seen in the distance through a gap in the clouds. Colorado boasts 55 peaks over 14,000 feet.

Photos by Madison Brown

Elbert twice unsuccessfully, and day-hiked two days in the Vail Valley, and once on the Colorado trail panting and panicking for air all the while. Taking an 8-swallow drink from my water bottle would leave me gasping. "Colorado takes my breath away," I kept mumbling.

I was up very early on the eighth day and I did make it all the way up Mt. Elbert along with maybe 20 other hikers — a young woman who worked in an REI store and wanted information about Shenandoah National Park for her teacher friend, a recent retiree who is climbing all the fourteeners, a party of three back-

packers out for three days and two fourteeners, another flatlander whose friend was dragging him up fourteeners, more dayhikers of many ages and addresses. We had clouds, temperatures in the high 30s and low 40s, a bit of sleet, an occasional break in the weather, and, of course, our excellent company at the summit.

All the elements play their parts in eroding down mountains. Water as rain from the sky, springs from the ground, and run-off from the winter snowpack have cut all those gulches where the mountains are most susceptible to erosion. Those Colorado creeks are formi-

dable. Down mountain I can hardly imagine fording them. Higher up they are just as ferocious, only narrower and, if you pick carefully, they are fordable with dry boots. They look so clear but they have cut those gulches.

My next six days I spent camped at about 11,600 feet in Missouri Gulch. A Sawatch gulch is the narrow, sometimes precipitous small valley leading north or south down from the mountains into the larger creeks which feed eastward into the Arkansas. I camped in sight of fourteeners Mts. Missouri and Belford. One day I hiked up the gulch to Elkhead Pass (13,200 feet) where the view down into Missouri Basin was another breathtaking surprise. Basins are relatively flat and much wider than gulches. Missouri Basin is more than a mile square with three small lakes. From the pass I then hiked on to the summit of Belford.

As usual there were more hikers out on Belford than I could keep track of — a Colorado father and daughter out for three nights; a Minnesotan in Colorado for the fourteeners; a Colorado couple even older than I; three young men

who had just summited Missouri, now Belford and were looking longingly at their third fourteener of the day, Mt. Oxford a mere mile ridgeway with a 700-foot descent and ascent away.

Another day I hiked up the steep west side of the gulch to where I had seen what I guessed were big horn sheep on the high horizon. Again to my surprise the other side was not steep but a long, gentle sweep of meadow almost half a mile wide. What I saw on the horizon this time was truly a Big Horn Sheep which took off running down this meadow to escape whatever threat it thought I posed. Starting from the Arkansas River and working my way up to 14,000+ feet, I began to see an organization in the flora. High above timberline as soon as there is the slightest possible opportunity, the chain of vegetation begins to take hold. First come the lichens and the mosses. Then follow the small plants growing out from between those rocks and from the sandy slopes, no matter how steep. When enough organic material accumulates, elder, shrubby cinquefoil, and other larger, more substantial plants move in.

Some of the basin and gulch floors above tree line are sandy, other sections are rich, black soil. At a certain altitude trees begin to take over in this rich black soil, first the evergreens and lower down the aspens. Further down where the creeks have gullies together into the larger, raging tributaries to the Arkansas, the soil becomes dry and sandy with only a meager covering of needles. Lodgepole pines and sage interspersed with new wild flowers are able to thrive in the dryness which predominates at this altitude.

My last day I hiked part way up the gulch and then the steep western side to the ridge and the mile south to Missouri's summit. My company was one other hiker and the summit marmot. Marmots (high-altitude woodchucks) are very tame, eat everything, and may whistle at you. The other hiker was a Coloradan who talked about blue grass music and Roanoke! I just missed a second hiker who had camped in Missouri Basin, climbed up to the neighboring thirteener (Iowa Peak at 13,831) and then along the connecting ridge to Missouri and back down into the Basin.

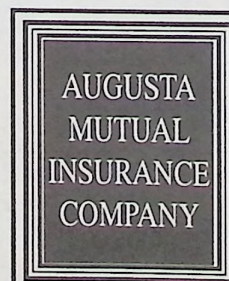
The cliffs are not stable and gravity brings different sized chunks of See CLIFFS, page 11



Madison Brown sits atop Colorado's Mt. Belford with a canine friend he met along

the way. The peak of Mt. Missouri can be seen in the background.

Photos by Madison Brown



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Butte's Dumas preserves artifacts of world's oldest profession

By SUE SIMMONS

BUTTE, Mont. William Shakespeare once said, "There is a history in all men's lives." The Bard could easily have been talking about the Dumas on Mercury Street in Butte, Montana, a unique and obscure American museum. The Dumas, you see, is -- or was -- a brothel. Now on the National Register of Historic Places, it is the last intact example of brothelized architecture in the United States. More on that later.

Designed and built as a brothel in 1890 in Butte's red light district, the business operated until Montana outlawed prostitution in 1982.

The building was quite literally abandoned overnight, boarded up for several years and slated for demolition in 1990. Little did anyone know what artifacts lay behind its walls, its contents completely intact.

While Butte's city fathers would rather ignore the seamier side of their town's history, Rudy Giecek recognized the building's historic and architectural value. Mortgaging everything he owned, he bought

the Dumas from its last madam who was letting it go for back taxes. Giecek has spent the last few years slowly restoring the building and its contents to interpret a slice of life that went hand-in-hand with the cattle and mining industries of the old west.

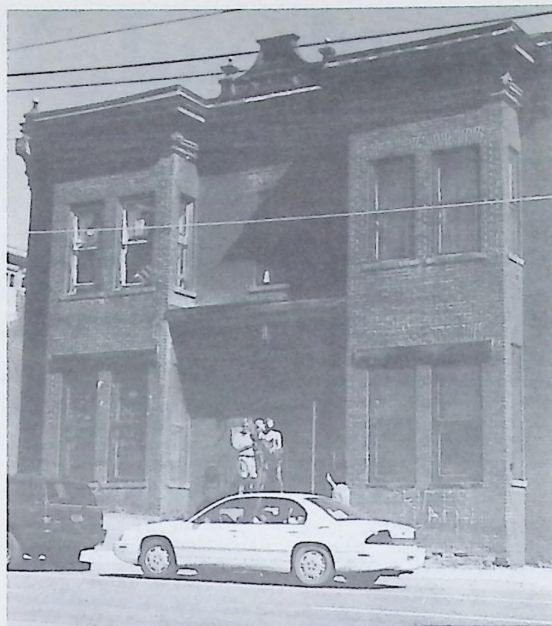
A mere \$3 buys a close-up snapshot of the world's "oldest profession."

The Dumas is a two-story brick building with a basement the windows of which are mostly on the inside -- that is what makes it brothelized. In its heyday, ladies of the evening sat in windows advertising their services to men hungry for female company and entertainment after months on the trail or a week extracting copper ore from the nearby Berkley mine. The most popular women lived and worked in spacious, well-lighted second floor rooms. Smaller rooms on the second floor were reserved for the "soiled doves" whose careers were waning. Cribs located in the back of the building and that opened to the back alley were rented to entrepreneurs who wanted to work for themselves. The basement is per-

haps the meanest part of the museum. A dark, narrow, low slung hallway parades past equally small, dark "cribs" set aside for women too worn out to be attractive to any but the most down-and-out.

As interesting as the building is, the 90 years of objects left behind by these working women are even more fascinating. Clothing, medicine bottles, shoes, pictures, radios, curtains, beds, opium vials, and cosmetics are only a small portion of the artifacts that remain.

Although they aren't visible, it is said that a warren of tunnels provided escape from the dozens of bordellos that made up the four-block red light district. Many of Butte's bordellos were owned by prosperous and respected business men who paid off the police. The women were usually warned of police raids in time for them to vacate the building and avoid arrest. If you're not too much of a prude and you happen to find yourself in Butte, Mont., pay a visit to this little treasure. Walk on the wild side! It's a refreshing change from your standard stuffy Victorian house museum. ---



The Dumas, a museum in Butte, Mont., preserves for posterity the seamy underside of the town's history. The brothel operated until 1982 and was slated for demolition in 1990. It is now on the National Register of Historic Places. It is the last intact example of brothelized architecture in the United States.

Photo by Sue Simmons



The photos above show two very different perspectives of Colorado's Mt. Missouri. In the photo at left, Mt. Missouri is seen from below looking up the Missouri Gulch. In the photo at right, the north ridge walk of Mt. Missouri is seen from its peak.

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Continued from page 10
rock rolling and bouncing down on those steep mountainsides. I re-

member hearing, but not seeing, one piece on its downward trip. I did see a plume of dust rising from where it had just bounced. I thought

to myself, "So that is where some of the sand comes from." There were plenty of other pieces collected at certain levels below the open faces of the cliffs as well as single stones which had bounced past these rock fields.

Sunday and back to the woods beginning at North Cottonwood Creek Trailhead. I parked my car among the 40 cars there! Four miles up the trail I camped two nights at Lake Kroenke (11,600 feet) which was my base camp for

the west ridge route to Mt. Yale. A group of four 14- and 15-year-olds set out before me, made the summit and met me on their way back. They were Texans from their YMCA who were in Colorado for a week of rock climbing, camping and hiking, plus rafting. Their Colorado Y guide was a native Virginian from Virginia Beach and Urbanna. They were too tired to brag about their topping Mt. Yale via the tough west ridge.

See RIDGE, page 19

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Y2K

stuff, I won't be offended if you stop reading right here. You're excused. (By the way, this column is

Y2K compliant

according to standards set forth by the federal government, so if you happen to be reading this at the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve, absolutely NOTHING will happen when the clock ticks to 12:00:00:0001, Jan. 1, 2000. I promise.)

For those of you who want to continue reading and who might consider this column space to be a place to find just a little different slant on a topic, stick around. I'll try not to disappoint you. And maybe I'll even give you a couple things regarding

Y2K

(There it is again. Is there no escaping that despised designation for the coming of the year 2000?) to think about that hadn't occurred to you before.

And while I'm thinking about it, aren't you just tired of every thought or concept of this present day and age being reduced to strings of letters -- Y2K, SOLs, ASAP, ATM, PDQ, FYI, FYEO, BTW, IMHO, EIEIO? Here we are at the chasm separating the 20th and 21st centuries and communication has been reduced to series of vowels and consonants. Seems like we're regressing. Will anyone in 3000 know what any of these abbreviations stand for? It will be as if 20th century civilization was reduced by wholesale proportions to undecipherable encrypted lingo. Anyway... back to Y2K.

Don't you just wish you could wake up tomorrow and have it be Jan. 3, 2000? Even if it meant sleeping through Christmas and New Year's Eve, I don't think I'd

DOWN ON THE FARM

BY
BETTY JO
HAMILTON



mind. Pulling a Rip Van Winkle for 8-10 days would seem to have its advantages. And all of us probably could use the rest.

By the way, if it hasn't occurred to you already, I hope you know what to expect from the television networks on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. You do realize that they are set to broadcast around the clock with up-to-the-minute Y2K (ugh, there it is again) advisories. You'll want to be prepared for some astounding revelations during these broadcasts, which typically will go something like this.

The television screen is filled with whatever network logo is applicable accompanied by some really dramatic and sweepingly intense music, which will probably sound like Darth Vader's theme from Star Wars played backward. The words "SPECIAL Y2K REPORT" or "SPECIAL Y2K UPDATE" or "LIFE AFTER Y2K" will be emblazoned across the screen and then there will be the face of some stone-faced anchorman filling the screen preparing to deliver his or her dire news of some catastrophic Y2K event.

"Good morning, I'm _____ (They always tell us who they are, but why do they bother since they all look alike?) It's just a few minutes after midnight on Jan. 1, 2000 and we're beginning to get a few reports in of some Y2K glitches that are occurring."

A piece of paper is thrust hastily toward the news anchor from somewhere off camera. The news anchor begins reading without even looking at what he or she has been handed.

"This just in. We have a report of a computer chip glitch in a seven-state area in the southeastern United States. It seems a number of Tastee-Freeze restaurants have reported that their frozen custard machines shut down on the stroke of midnight due to an unforeseen computer chip error. We'll be back in a minute with more late-breaking developments on this story."

Then you'll be treated to commercials adnauseum from businesses which the networks have charged triple their normal rates for ad time because they can, because it's Y2K (yuck, again) and the networks can justify higher ad prices

because everyone will be watching TV, they think.

When the network breaks back from its 15 minutes of commercials, the news anchor is joined by a former Tastee Freeze custard machine expert, now employed by the network, who will provide analysis of the custard machine computer chip error. They'll probably have some diagrams and computer-generated video images detailing the breakdown. There may be someone from NASA on hand to discuss implications for an upcoming space shuttle mission because there is a custard machine of a similar model to those at the Tastee Freeze on board one of the shuttle vehicles and you wouldn't want to be caught out in space with a malfunctioning custard machine in a zero gravity situation. Then they'll break for more commercials.

This is what you need to be prepared for on Jan. 1, 2000. Network television at its lowest possible level. And that's pretty low, considering what we normally see on the tube. If you would like to do something entertaining, keep a pad and pencil handy and write down some of the most insane things you hear news anchors say during the upcoming Y2K coverage. Along these lines, I'm remembering news coverage of a snow storm last winter when a field reporter for a local news station said, "It's really snowing hard out here, so be sure to turn on your windshield wipers." I never would have thought to do that had I not been prompted by the station's news coverage. So that's what those floppy long things on my windshield are for. Go figure.

You may have been warned of many things regarding the approach of 2000, but this is the Y2K warning I'm issuing: Be sure to plan on some kind of entertainment that doesn't involve the television or make sure you've got plenty of videos on hand to view, because — if your preferences are anything at all like mine — you won't be able to bear to watch what the networks will be dishing out on Jan. 1, 2000.

If you're noticing that I seem to have my tongue placed firmly in cheek regarding all the Y2K flap, you're not far from wrong. It's not that I don't think there are things

that might happen or might not happen as the calendar flops over into double zeros. It's mostly that I think that whatever does happen will be caused by human error or — even if I don't particularly like the term — human STUPIDITY (and folks, there are going to be a lot of people doing a lot of STUPID things on New Year's Eve) or human carelessness or — most unfortunately — human meanness. I firmly believe that in the case of the approaching double goose egg year, as on any typical day of our lives, extra measures of good judgment and common sense will go a long way toward preventing calamity. "Let good judgment and common sense prevail," should be our Y2K mantra.

Perhaps I feel less prone to worry about Y2K complications, because — down on the farm — sometimes it seems like everyday is

Y2K.

It seems like there's always something going wrong we didn't anticipate. Something which forces us to think on our feet, improvise, and get on with whatever needs to be done. And it may be the same for folks in other walks of life as well. I think we all have enough life experiences behind us — excluding perhaps anyone under the age of 7 — to cope with a few inconveniences whether they occur on Jan. 1, 2000 or any random day of any random year of any random century.

Remember the Easter Ice Storm? In I believe it was 1978, but the year is irrelevant. Some of us went without power for more than a week. That was Y2K.

Remember the rolling power blackouts during the week-long January snowstorms accompanied with sub-zero temperatures? In I believe it was 1994, but the year is irrelevant. That was Y2K. By the way, I've been told by a reliable source that on that occasion it was a humble technician at Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative who noticed the increasing drain on power supplies then picked up a telephone and called the guys over at Virginia Power to ask whether they were ready for the state's entire power grid to shut down if they didn't do something pretty quick — a situation which could have crippled the state if not for the alertness of that one technician at SVEC. See, good judgment, common sense...

Remember Hurricane Fran in September 1996? I'm sure about this date, but the year is still irrelevant. That was Y2K. Remember the blizzard in March 1993? I'm sure about this date too, but the year is still irrelevant. That was Y2K. Remember the snowstorm

— in I believe it was 1960 — again the year is irrelevant, when snow was piled up to mailboxes and the power did go off (middle of winter, mind you)? That was Y2K. Remember the January snowstorms in 1988 (I believe, although another irrelevant date) when it took bulldozers and graders and snowblowers to get the roads open and the wind closed the roads back up as quickly as they were opened by the highway department? That was Y2K.

Come on folks. We've all been there before. Let's show a little team spirit here. Let's show a little faith in human resilience. Let us be ready to boldly step forth into the dawn of Jan. 1, 2000. Let us glare straight at Y2K and say, "HAH! You blackguard!" throwing down the gauntlet in defiance of the many dire predictions associated with the arrival of 2000. Let us look at Y2K with a sneaky grin on our faces and say, "Go ahead, Y2K; make my day."

I'm expecting Jan. 1, 2000 to be very much like any other day. Actually, I'm hoping it won't be very much like any other day down on the farm, because a typical day down on the farm usually involves something going wrong. But we persevere, none the less.

I'm hoping Jan. 1, 2000 will be like one of those days down on the farm when nothing out of the ordinary happens. I'm hoping it will be a day when the water pump on the tractor doesn't go out. When there's not a flat tire on the insilage wagon. When there's not a motor on the place that won't turn over. When there's not snow drifted across every gate on the farm. When there's not a dead battery in the truck. When we don't have to call the vet out. When we don't have to call the rendering plant to make a pick up. When the cows aren't out. When the sheep aren't lost. When the calves aren't sick. When the wind doesn't blow the barn roof off. When the water pipes don't freeze. When lightning doesn't blow up a transformer. When the creek doesn't rise and wash out the bridges and flood gates. When there's no gas because the fuel company forgot to make a delivery. When the gate doesn't get left open so the cows get in the corn. When the silo unloader doesn't go on the fritz. When the tie rod on the pick up doesn't break. When the feed truck isn't stuck to its axles in the mud. And when the only way to the main road isn't on a tractor out across the field and through the neighbor's pasture.

Y2K??? To put it '90s style, "Hey, Been there. Done that." I really think we're going to be Y2-O.K., down on the farm and otherwise. Happy New Year. —



A 101 MIDDLEBROOK HISTORIC DISTRICT

Nestled here in the countryside south of Staunton, along historic Middlebrook Road, is one of the oldest villages in the region. William and Nancy Scott sold the first 27 lots in April 1799 to Scots-Irish and German settlers. In 1851, the stagecoach road through the village became the Middlebrook and Brownsburg Turnpike. By the late 19th century, Middlebrook, the center of a prosperous agricultural community with 274 inhabitants including an African American community, was the county's largest village. Because 20th-century railroads and highways bypassed Middlebrook, the rows of closely spaced dwellings and stores lining the main road retain the picturesque character of the village's heyday in the 1880s.

•Ceremony

Continued from page 7

keeping it to about 130 words (that's way less than one word for each year of Middlebrook's existence), provide location maps for the marker, send letters of recommendation, and come up with a substantial amount of money, which was guaranteed by the Middlebrook Ruritan Club. The whole proposal package had to be submitted to a review board at the Virginia Department of Historic Resources twice, first for a preliminary read through and then for the final evaluation. The text for the marker went back and forth four times for final editing and adjustments, but finally in September the village learned that the marker was

going to be a reality.

From Richmond, the text had to be sent to the "marker factory" where the sign was cast in iron, a process that takes six weeks. Then the second state agency, the Virginia Department of Transportation, picked up the ball and oversaw the placement of the marker. The people at both state agencies, Larry Curry with VDOT and Katherine Long with Historic Resources, made the job easy. Even with all that work, this marker would not have been a reality without the sponsorship of the Middlebrook Ruritan Club and the generosity of the area residents who donated well over a thousand dollars to pay for the marker.

When Mrs. Rosen and Brubeck unveiled the marker it was to the

applause of the community. Not to be missed was the fact that the plot of land around the sign is beautifully landscaped, a donation from another area resident, David Ramsey of TurfCo.

Roberta Hamlin, who lives in the village's old tavern, provided an appropriate musical selection for the ceremony. The Middlebrook Waltz was written as song to be played at community events in the 19th century, and this being a community-oriented event, Ms. Hamlin played the tune on her dulcimer. Short speeches were also given by Dennis Clemmer, the Middlebrook Ruritan president. He provided the audiences with several family memories of Middlebrook during its busy heyday, including one about his father driving hogs through the village. Riverheads supervisor Don Hanger also praised the people of the area for their community spirit, and the Rev. Clifford Caldwell offered a prayer. Just like in times past, the gathering adjourned to the community center for refreshments and good, old-fashioned chats between friends and neighbors.

The community should be proud of this marker. When those first lots were sold 200 years ago it was the start of something special. The people of Middlebrook have always known it is a unique place, and now with this marker, any visitor coming by will know that as well. —

•Ramblings

Continued from page 4

books and worked with Mary Pemberton for some more delightful illustrations.

The result is a light, easy-to-read volume for nature lovers of all types. Her columns are not only about birds — featured feather friends are just the tools YuLee uses to introduce her readers to nature and the great outdoors, one step at a time.

Some of the columns are about particularly rare avian visitors to the area, like the Snowy Owl, others are about the common starlings. Then there is the one about a particular starling, Nerd Bird, "accidentally" raised by YuLee and her husband, "The Other Birdwatcher."

Although most of the random ramblings take place in Virginia, she does occasionally take readers far beyond the state's borders. A column about the Grand Canyon and another about Costa Rica attest to that.

The final pages in the book speak to Isabel and the bird-watching friendship between these lifelong friends. YuLee notes that she will carry on without her friend, but that it will never be the same. Let's hope that the *Random Ramblings* of the Bird Lady continue to inspire her loyal flock and draw in new fledglings for a long time yet to come. Isabel probably would have wanted it that way.

You still have time to buy *Random Ramblings, Vol. II* before

Christmas. The books are available at the Bookstack and from YuLee for \$11.45 (includes tax and p&h, checks payable to YuLee Larner, 1020 West Beverley St., Staunton, VA 24401). *Random Ramblings, Vol. I* is available for \$6.25 (includes

tax and p&h, checks payable to YuLee). Also available at the Bookstack or from YuLee for \$14 is another of her books, *Birds of Augusta County, 1998*. There is no tax for this book and checks are made payable to Augusta Bird Club. —

Augusta Bird Club to host bluebird classes

STAUNTON — The Augusta Bird Club will sponsor a beginner's class on "Bluebirds" at 7 p.m., Feb. 3 in the fellowship hall of Covenant Presbyterian Church, 2001 North Coalter St., Staunton.

Anne Little, vice president of the Virginia Bluebird Society, will be on hand to provide information on bluebird box construction, the proposed establishment of a statewide network of bluebird trails, and creation of a consistent protocol for monitoring and record keeping. John Spahr will focus on habitat requirements, biology, and natural history of the bluebird; YuLee Larner will present historical high-

lights from documented records in Augusta County and Mary Penn will outline plans for the club's re-organized bluebird project.

On March 16, a more advanced session, including information about other cavity nesting species, including American kestrel and eastern screech-owl, will be held at the same time and location. For more information about these classes, contact YuLee Larner at 886-7815 or e-mail: larnery@cfw.com; John Spahr at 943-6618 or e-mail: jspahr@cfw.com; Mary Penn at 887-3332 or e-mail: mmpenn@intelos.net

•Ester

Continued from page 4

Links of Faith and Blessing Unique. She has not only written her own plays and designed them, but also has helped with charity. Even now she makes her own greeting cards.

She's a hard worker, but she doesn't see herself as one. "I have fun in everything I do. I don't see it as hard work, I see it as fun." The neatest thing about Ester is that not only is she a hard worker but she also has a youthful heart and soul. Nothing stops her from doing what she loves. So I found the second part of my fountain of youth — hard work.

As I think back on these two amazing women, I realize it's not all the moisturizers, gels, surgeries or pills that keep you young, but some other things which are really a ton easier! The love for life and hard work, but mostly a passion for something you love that not only helps yourself, but also others. I hope that one day I might be like these two lovely ladies. —

Bonnie Moses is a junior at Stuart Hall.

Time to
renew?
See
page 2

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Robb tells farmers his stance on taxes, trade

AC staff report

WILLIAMSBURG — Reducing estate taxes and maintaining disaster relief are issues U.S. Sen. Charles S. Robb, D-Va., told farmers he favors.

Robb, who unofficially is running for re-election to his senate seat, spoke Nov. 29 during the kick-off luncheon of the three-day Virginia Farm Bureau Federation Annual Convention in Williamsburg.

Early on in his career, Robb learned an important perspective on Virginia politics.

"Shortly after I became governor," Robb told the Farm Bureau delegates, "I was presented with a framed quotation which I hung in my office in the State Capitol. It reads, 'A half an inch of rain every week is more important than who gets elected governor of Virginia.'" Robb noted he still has the framed quote hanging behind his desk in the Senate.

While Robb admits he may not have fully appreciated the gravity of the quote when he first he received it, he said, "I sure do now."

During the past four months, Robb said he was in the position of simultaneously seeking disaster funding for Virginia farmers suffering the effects of the worst drought in memory and for other farmers whose operations were devastated by flooding from hurricanes.

In 1999, the Mid-Atlantic suffered the worst drought since the 1930s, and Congress so far has appropriated \$1.722 billion for weather-related disaster relief, Robb said. "And we're not finished yet," the senator added. "I will continue to work" with Senators John Edwards, D-N.C.; Jesse



U.S. Sen. Charles S. Robb, D-Va., speaks with a delegate at the 74th annual Virginia Farm Bureau Federation Convention held Nov. 29-

Dec. 1 in Williamsburg. Robb spoke at a luncheon on the convention's opening day.

Photo by Betty Jo Hamilton

Helms, R-N.C.; and John Warner, R-Va., to make sure there is enough funding to help our farmers make it to the next season."

In addition, Robb noted that he is working with a group of senators to improve the federal crop insurance program, as well as develop pilot programs for specialty crops, and reduce limitations in the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program.

"If we can help farmers buy additional insurance, perhaps we can reduce the level of weather-

produced disaster relief. If you have insurance, you won't have to wait for Congress to decide if the disaster was big enough to warrant disaster relief."

Robb told the 400 ag leaders from across the state that he wants the federal estate tax structured to protect family farms. "I don't believe a single family farm should be lost because of the way we tax gifts and inheritance." Robb has cosponsored legislation that would eliminate estate taxes on family farms and small businesses

when the principle owner dies.

He's also introduced legislation to allow a 100-percent deduction for the self-employed to buy health insurance.

To help U.S. farmers overcome trade barriers with other countries, Robb recently co-sponsored legislation to include a chief agricultural negotiator. "A high-level ag negotiator with the rank of ambassador will help provide strength and expertise to trade negotiations involving agriculture and agricultural commodities," Robb said. "We need to take a sledgehammer to trade barriers. ...the tide of exports is a tide that raises all boats."

He noted that the recent trade

agreement between the United States and China "holds great promise for America's farm economy." Tariffs on U.S. priority agricultural products to China will be cut in half from an average of 32 percent to 15 percent by 2004.

In addition, Robb said government regulations affecting agriculture should pass a cost-benefit test before being implemented. He said later that genetically modified crops should not be used by other countries as a reason to block the importation of U.S. crops.

Pointing out that "farmers need good weather more than they need good government," Robb noted that there are limits to what government "can do or should even try to do." Quoting America's farming forefather Thomas Jefferson, Robb said, "Were we directed from Washington when to sow and when to reap, we would soon want bread."

"The safety net provided by our government should not become a hammock for the unmotivated but a trampoline for the hard-working who just need help to bounce back from hard times," Robb said.

With 138,000 members in 88 county Farm Bureaus, the VFBF is Virginia's largest farm organization. Farm Bureau members receive such benefits as: involvement in the state lawmaking process; access to grain and livestock marketing programs; a free subscription to the Farm Bureau News and county newsletters; complete lines of insurance; reward protection for stolen property; and discounts on truck, outdoor power equipment, child restraint seats and vision care.

Delegates representing Augusta County at the state convention included Charles Wonderley, Harold Armstrong, Mary Ruleman, Carmen Davis and Rick Shifflet.

Some information included in this article was provided by the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation.

Education leader endorses Governor's School for Agriculture

WILLIAMSBURG — Two major programs involving agriculture and Virginia public schools received a strong endorsement from State Supt. of Public Schools Paul D. Stapleton at the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation's 74th Annual Convention in Williamsburg Nov. 30.

"We are going to have a Governor's School for Agriculture in this state, I can guarantee you that," Stapleton told those attending the VFBF Women's Luncheon. "We're going to have a good one. We're going to make sure that we do what we need to do this year with Virginia Tech and some other folks to come up with the right kind of school that will make us all proud. Sometimes if you rush this process, you tend to guarantee failure."

A governor's school offers a special program of study for high school honors students, usually

centered on technology, economics or another educational focus. Stapleton said the typical procedure in establishing a Governor's School is for the General Assembly to appropriate funds in the first year to study how to establish one, and to start at least a pilot program in the second year. Under that timetable, Virginia could have a governor's school as early as 2001.

"We may even be setting a model for the rest of the country with this concept of a Governor's School for Agriculture," he said. "We're trying to tie in all the best and brightest of our agriculture students across the state," in a summer program, instead of offering it to students only on a regional basis.

Agriculture in the Classroom also was praised by the superintendent. That voluntary program allows elementary school teachers to

integrate agriculture into their lesson plans. Virginia's AITC program meets the state's standards of Learning criteria, and is an excellent way for teachers to use concrete examples in their classroom, Stapleton said.

"I started Ag in the Classroom many, many years ago in Charlotte County because I believed in it," the former superintendent of Charlotte County schools said. "I don't know of a better way to teach science than through agriculture. Anything I can do as far as encouraging more teachers and more schools to be involved in AITC, we're going to do that."

More than 20,000 Virginia school children have become agriculturally literate through the AITC program in Virginia since it began in 1987.

Information for this article was provided by the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation.

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Allen urges ag leaders to seize opportunities

WILLIAMSBURG — Former Gov. George Allen urged agricultural leaders to greet America's technological advancements with open arms and to elect him as their U.S. Senator.

Allen addressed hundreds of farmers at the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation's Annual Convention in Williamsburg on Dec. 1, the final day of the three-day event.

The Republican and former member of Congress will be on the November 2000 ballot, running against U.S. Sen. Charles Robb, D-Va., who spoke at the convention on Nov. 29.

During his speech, Allen reminisced about his tenure as governor of Virginia and recalled bills he sponsored into law to benefit agriculture signed. He described overseas trips he made to attract international companies to Virginia and boost trade with Virginia businesses, including agribusiness.

Turning to a more serious issue, he said, "I despise the death tax." Referring to the federal estate tax, Allen mentioned that Congress is phasing in an exemption of \$660,000. But the entire tax should be phased out, Allen said. Over the years, farmers have complained that the estate tax burden is so great that it has put family farms out of business after the principle owner died.

He also complained that when two people marry, they usually end up paying more in taxes than they did as single adults. "When you spend your money, you pay taxes. When you earn money, you pay

taxes. You pay capital gains taxes. Then you die, and you still pay taxes," he said.

Allen generated applause when he said, "No taxation without representation."

Moving on to international trade, Allen said, "We need to open more

markets. Global demand for food is increasing. We need to ensure that trade agreements include agriculture." American agricultural products aren't going to enough countries because some nations erect trade barriers, he said.

Citing an example of barriers,

Allen complained that a Great Britain ag official gave Virginia's peanuts a thumbs-down because the government there requires warning labels on packages of peanuts.

Fortunately, selling products through the Internet "is erasing borders," said Allen, a long-time member of the Albemarle County Farm Bureau. "We can have a virtual farmers market, selling fruits, vegetables and meat all over the country and the world. And I don't feel there should be Internet taxation."

Mentioning federal lawsuits on the tobacco industry, he said some money from tobacco settlements should go to communities where

tobacco is produced. He described tobacco farmers and farmers in general as "decent, honest-people working hard for their families." They are also people who "don't want children to smoke."

Finally he said, "It's important that you have a government that understands your challenges and concerns. I hope and pray God blesses the nation and world with people with your common sense, creativity and virtuous character."

Information for this article was provided by Kitty Armstrong of Churchville who attended the state convention and the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation.



Trade agreement with China should open new markets

RICHMOND — Virginia farmers stand to benefit from a proposed new trade agreement with China, even though the Chinese raise many of the same commodities produced in the Old Dominion.

"The winners for American agriculture will be feed grain and livestock producers," said Tony Banks, assistant commodities director for the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation. "We have an advantage in technology and infrastructure in producing those commodities."

In fact, economists estimate farm exports to China could triple over the next three to five years if the new trade accord goes into effect. In 1998, the U.S. exported \$1.3 billion in corn, cotton, poultry, rice, wheat and other farm products. That figure could approach \$3 billion very quickly, especially through the sale of soybean products, according to John Skorburg, senior economist for the American Farm Bureau Federation. Meats, poultry and citrus are other commodities where exports to China could rise quickly.

The agreement calls for Beijing to slash import tariffs by more than 60 percent, increase import quotas for major feed commodities and eliminate government export subsidies of Chinese ag products. In exchange, China would be admitted to the World Trade Organization

and be granted normal trade relations with the United States.

With trade protectionist fears rising in the United States, particularly among labor interests, that last item may be a tough sell for Congress, Banks said. But he feels it would be in the best overall interest of Virginia farmers if the agreement goes forward. However, there are exceptions.

"Many of our peanut and apple producers are worried about increased competition from China," he added. "If China becomes a member of the WTO, it will have to agree to comply with WTO rules regarding trade and dispute settlement with member nations. If China does not abide by those rules, we will have real problems like the recent case of China's dumping of apple juice concentrate on the U.S. market. It took years for that case to be settled. Meanwhile, Virginia and U.S. apple growers suffered tremendous financial losses."

"Our commodity prices are extremely depressed right now due to supplies outpacing demand," Banks said. "A new export market would jumpstart demand. China is the biggest potential export market in the world and we've barely tapped into it."

Information for this article was provided by the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation.

Farm calendar

Jan 7-8: Shepherds Symposium, Sheraton Four Points Hotel, Harrisonburg. Contact Scott Grenier, Virginia Tech, 540/231-9159.

Jan. 11-12: Virginia Farm Show, State Fairgrounds, Richmond. 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Call 1-800-218-5586 for more info. —

Farm preservation among top issues of Farm Bureau

RICHMOND — As people scurry about getting ready for the holidays, Virginia's farm leaders have been busy setting their priorities for the upcoming session of Virginia's General Assembly.

At 16 different sites across the

state, Virginia Farm Bureau Federation leaders have met with senators and delegates to discuss issues they plan to lobby for during the upcoming General Assembly session.

Farmers told legislators they need to protect the state's Right to Farm

law, which allows farming, including farm expansion, in agriculturally zoned areas. It was enacted to prohibit local governments from requiring special use permits for agricultural operations located in these areas.

However, some localities have restricted farm expansions by imposing extraordinary setback requirements, arbitrary minimum acreage requirements, or changing zoning so that certain operations are prohibited even in agricultural zones.

Farm Bureau leaders also want their legislators to help them preserve farms. One technique would have localities pay farmers a per acre rate for the development rights to their property. Under this plan, the farmer agrees to continue farming the land and not sell it to real estate developers for a specified period of time.

Other issues the Farm Bureau leaders want their legislators to support include: a Central Virginia Shipping Point Market for Piedmont and Central Virginia fruit industry and timely disaster assistance. —

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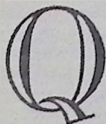
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References provided upon request.

The Hitching Post

Beginning students should gain experience before buying



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- a patient student

Many instructors ask students to wait before buying a horse for a couple of reasons. First, they understand the risk involved in horseback riding and care about the safety of their students. Preventing an accident due to the lack of enough training or skill is part of their responsibility as YOUR instructor!

Instructors know that finding great beginner horses is difficult to begin with. And finding one at an affordable price is also tough. Beginner students are limited in their choice of horses. Which brings me to my second reason. Riders who take lessons for longer periods of time are able to look at a much wider selection when it comes to horse buying. This means that common problems in horse behavior will be nothing new to the seasoned lesson student.

Common problems in horse behavior are things that often crop up in lesson programs. The irony is that beginners ride lesson horses and create the problems in the first place. Instructors constantly teach

beginners how to work through these problems. If your instructor asks you to wait before looking for a horse, then it might be because he or she feels you are still not comfortable with these problems. Another reason might be because he or she feels that you have not ridden enough different horses to build proper riding skills. Many riders become comfortable on one horse. Good riders become comfortable on many horses.

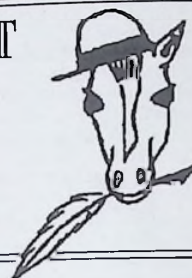
I would like to describe some common lesson horse behavior problems. Most of them are the direct result of student riders or riders with inexperience. Horses that are difficult to stop. Horses that refuse to move forward and have the rider digging his heels into the horse's sides ineffectively. Horses that will not stay on the rail and wander around either to be with other horses or visit the instructor. All of these are common situations which reflect rider behavior. Timid or inexperienced riders allow some

of this behavior to develop and continue. Instructors often reschool their lesson horses to put good habits back on them. Learning how to work through these problems is part of learning how to prevent them in your own horse when you decide to purchase one.

If you feel ready to purchase a horse I recommend you talk to your instructor about schooling some of the lesson horses first. If you can school these horses and your instructor can work with you on different problems you will have some good solid basics in your riding skills. (Schooling is the riding done outside of a lesson program to work on problems horses have in the lessons. Schooling is not training. Lesson horses are already trained. Schooling reinforces good behavior patterns for a successful lesson program.)

Most lesson programs can use good riders to school lesson horses.

I.B. HOOFINIT
From
the
Horse's Mouth



If you reach the point where you can school these horses successfully, you will find owning a horse not much different.

Instructors have good reasons for asking students to wait. Safety is one of the most common. Most accidents in the horse industry happen due to inexperience. Tak-

ing the time to learn horse care, riding skills, and basic horsemanship are part of the responsibility of ownership. Take it "From the Horse's Mouth," preparing for ownership through a quality lesson program is the safest way to purchase a horse! —

I.B. Hoofinit is a fictitious horse character developed by Chris Marrs as a service to teach horse care. Questions to I.B. Hoofinit may be submitted to P.O. Box 136, Greenville, Va. 24440. Questions become the property of Chris Marrs, and answers are subject to editor ap-

proval. Information provided in this column is meant to be taken as general advice. Each horse, rider, owner, and situation reflects different problems. I.B.'s answers are meant to be informative and enjoyable, but not binding. Common sense in any situation is a must.

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Horsin' around town

AQHA Hall of Famer still in the running



"Mr. Sleepy Man" and owner Jim Smith of Staunton receive the 1999 Virginia Horse of Distinction Award.

Photo courtesy Jim Smith

By CHRIS MARRS

EDITOR'S NOTE: This column will feature notable horses in the Valley. If you know of a retired horse that has a remarkable history, please contact Chris Marrs at 337-0737.

Every story should have a happy ending like the one for Mr. Sleepy Man, a 21-year-old retired registered quarter horse. It started with a phone call to Jim and Vicki Smith from a gentleman that had seen Mr. Sleepy Man in an old barn lot. "If you had taken him to a horse sale he would have went 'to meat,'" says Vicki. "He was thin, ratty looking, and he stunk!" Vicki and Jim brought him to their stable for the routine vet check and didn't have the heart to send him back. "We actually kept him because we felt sorry for him." He has arthritis in his legs and is crippled from having accomplished so much in his lifetime.

Nicknamed "Smoky," Mr. Sleepy Man has the honor of receiving The

1999 Virginia Horse of Distinction award at the East Coast Championship Show. He has won awards in the following disciplines: Hunt Seat, Calf Roping, Halter, Western Pleasure, Western Riding as well as the National Reining Horse Association's (NRHA) Superior Reining Horse. He is in the American Quarter Horse Association's (AQHA) Hall of Fame, and has won points and awards from the AQHA, NRHA, NBHA (National Barrel Horse Association), and NSBA (National Snaffle Bit Association). A remarkable highlight of Smoky's career was participating in the Inaugural Parade for President Reagan as a lead horse ridden by the Rodeo Queen for the AQHA.

Smoky was originally bred and owned by Ray Melton of Powhatan. As a two-year-old, the horse and Melton participated in the Congress Western Pleasure Futurity against several hundred entries and, even with Smoky suffering from a bowed tendon, the two made it to the semifinals. This

was the beginning of a successful competitive career until his ownership changed and he finally found his way to his new home.

Smoky's health has been restored through the excellent care of his new owners and they admit he has a great personality. In spite of his arthritis he still enjoys running and sliding in the field. (He is famous for his 75-foot slide!) Special shoes, bandages, and magnets are part of his therapy. Shoeing him is difficult because it hurts and the process takes time. He successfully bred four mares this year and one of his previous colts "Mr. Sleepy Sandman" wrote him a letter telling him that he had been nominated for the Special Olympics. He has also bred foals that have become Barrel Racing Champions. Today he is feisty and full of himself says Jim and Vicki. "He's a big ham," Jim explains, "He loves attention and girls." Lucky for Mr. Sleepy Man part of his retirement includes light breeding to carry on the name of an exceptional athlete. —

Cold Springs Stables offers good start for beginners

By CHRIS MARRS

COLD SPRINGS—Visitors are always welcome at Cold Springs Stables of Stuarts Draft owned by Chuck Watkins. The stable offers a small breeding operation, standing three stallions — a paint, a quarter horse, and an Arabian. It also provides some boarding, but has recently focused on building a promising lesson program for beginner through advanced riders featuring both English and Western. Instructor Christi Meek teaches general horsemanship which includes grooming, tacking, riding, and untacking. She also takes some of



Christi Meek gives a mother/daughter lesson with Lori and Ginny Hocker at Cold Springs Stables.

Photo by Chris Marrs

her students to shows and furnishes horses, tack, and schooling for anyone interested in competition.

Chuck is pleased with the response the lesson program has received in the last year. A Fourth of July open house offered free pony rides, riding demonstrations, and free lemonade and candy. The turnout included over 50 children who got to meet the instructor (Christi) and see the farm. A horseman most of his life, Chuck is also a trainer and salesman. "I've owned several hundred horses in my lifetime, some for a couple of hours." The one horse he keeps for sentimental value is "Buckshot" named by his great grandfather. "Buckshot" is

about 30 years old. "I try not to become too attached. I try to keep it business. I had many (horses) that I would like to have kept, but I wouldn't be where I'm at if I hadn't turned them over." Chuck says he likes to work with everyone in the horse industry and works to provide quality service and sales. "In sales I try to match horses to the rider's ability," he explains.

The most influential horseman in his career was his father, Charles "Bud" Watkins, who passed away about two years ago. Chuck and his father started out working the horse business as a hobby. "I try to make the horses self supporting," he ex-

See *STABLE*, page 20

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Country Crossroads

Reflecting pool reflections

December 1999

Dear Maude,

From the local news you sent in your last letter, it sounds as if things are, and have been for some time, in full holiday form in the country. For those of us in the city, it has not been quite the same. Things got off to a rather slow start.

It is hard to be festive when your desk is piled high with all sorts of things that have been postponed because they do not rate as "first priority." Then we were told by the boss that there is a chance that we will move the office sometime after the first of the year. Move the office! Those three words are enough to put one into a decidedly unhappy frame of mind. Of course, professional movers will come and take away all of the desks and cabinets, the packed up files and supplies and other easily movable stuff. As for the things on our own desks and bookshelves, if we ever want to see any of them again, we had better pack them ourselves and label them well. What a way to start out the new millennium!

Not only that, but things tended to go from bad to worse. Someone in the office had seen a notice in the papers that Filenes Basement was filing for bankruptcy and would be closing the store near us. Oh what will I do, and how all of us in the office will miss them! I am looking forward to next month, however, and the sales I expect them to have.

But, all in all, the downtown area of Washington has not been as festive as those cities at home. There were no decorations put up by the city. The stores were very slow in doing anything. Finally, the Mayflower installed a very proper and sedate wreath, in a nice natural green (none of that emerald stuff) over the canopy at the main entrance. Later, in the second floor windows of Rizik's — the very nice, and very expensive clothing store across Connecticut Avenue — appeared mannequins dressed in wine red dresses, and a single strand of small

white lights lined those windows. Through the doors of the other establishments, after dusk, one could see a hint of glitter on interior decorations. One almost forgot that the holidays were so near.

And then there was the bus.

Washington Metro provides free shuttle bus service at the larger parking lots during rush hour. It is possible to get in quite a bit of exercise walking the equivalent of several blocks from one's car to the station! Many use the walk for their daily exercise, wearing proper footwear. I, however, tend to take advantage of that nice bus ride to within a short distance of either the station or my vehicle. One evening shortly after the first of the month, I walked along, tired after a very busy day, toward the light of the bus. Something seemed different — it looked crowded but not with people. Then something caught my eye — a bit of glitter — and I thought to myself, "that looks like a Christmas tree on the bus!"

It was. Not only was there a tree — small and artificial, sitting on a red felt covered table at the very back of the bus and decorated with big blue satin balls and a great gold starburst at the top — but there were garlands twisted around every pole and rail one could see. There were silver metallic garlands with red and white candy canes. There were green garlands, some with red and white flowers. There were glittering gold ones. On the very front of the bus was a huge wreath with a big red bow and several of the green garlands. The supports for the steering wheel were all covered with glittering gold. At the front the garlands were caught up at the ceiling with a big golden bow and with golden birds hanging down. Along the hand rails were more gold bows with big gold plastic angels attached to them. The windows were spray painted with white snowflakes and stars. There were stockings and large candy canes and very big plastic Santas and snowmen. There was not a place left undecorated. It was, indeed, a very happy sight.

By Roberta Hamlin



The next morning as I got back on this bright holiday spectacle, I asked the young woman who was driving if she was the one who had decorated it. "No," she replied, "one of my coworkers did."

"It's wonderful," I told her as I left on my way to the station.

That evening as I returned home again, weary and ready to shed my shoes which had become more uncomfortable as the day wore on, there it was to greet me again. I sat and looked at the wonderful jumble of things, thinking that it had to be someone's complete collection of Christmas decorations. It was the most amazing thing I had ever seen. Who would bring so much of their own stuff just to cheer such a grumpy bunch of workers? It had to have taken a huge amount of time and energy and was done as a labor of love.

"I wonder why anyone would have done this," I thought to myself.

I wanted to say something to the different young woman who drives in the afternoon and ask her if perhaps she was the one who had taken all the time necessary to create such a festive environment. But as I had hurried across the sidewalk toward the bus, it was already crowded and many people behind me were rushing to get on.

The people had pushed on into the bus, and there had been no time for questions then. However as I walked forward to get off at the second stop, I overheard a man sitting across from the driver say, "...when did you lose your son?"

"Last September," she replied.

And I wondered if perhaps she really wasn't the one who had given us this gift of brightness.

I'll be home soon. Love to you all,

LuLu

•Museum

Continued from page 9

Ulster was like, then taking a ship to America and, finally, seeing the life carved out on the frontier by those Ulster pioneers. Over two centuries, more than two million emigrants left Ireland to help settle America. Included in that number were the forebears of American presidents, Catholic bishops, and financiers. This museum immortalizes all their experiences.

We made another, more somber, visit during the day. The folk park is located on the outskirts of the city of Omagh, about the size of Staunton. Omagh was the scene of a deadly car bombing in August 1998. Twenty-nine people among the throngs of shoppers were killed in the blast, many more were maimed.

Those of us in the Shenandoah Valley who have visited Omagh and who have friends there were shocked at the time when we saw newspaper images of the blown-out areas of the shopping district and read the eyewitness accounts of the horror. A little more than a year later, hundreds of bouquets, poems, and messages of hope bear silent witness to the section of the city that took the brunt of the blast.

Many of the buildings will not be rebuilt — instead a park of peace will be created here in the memory of those innocent victims.

Tyrone and Omagh were west of our home base in Antrim. The next day we headed to the North Coast. First stop was the upscale beach resort town of Portstewart. The rain lifted long enough for us to "walk the prom" along the waterfront. Then "our Floyd" returned with a vengeance. We clambered around the ruins of Dunluce Castle as torrents fell. The rock skeleton of this castle is perched over the ocean and waves crash into caves beneath its walls. We were more worried about waterfalls than waves as we waded through water cascading down the steps around the ruins.

Next on the tour schedule was the Giant's Causeway, a natural wonder of the world so mind-bogglingly unique that it is listed as a World Heritage Site. Millions of years ago, this was the scene of a volcanic eruption. When the basalt lava cooled it formed about 40,000 hexagonal columns. Many of those tow-

ering columns remain, but the ocean has eroded most into what appear to be giant stepping stones leading directly into the ocean depths. As one walks across the tightly fitted stones, it is hard to believe this is not a man-made structure.

Or is it? Legend says that a giant named Finn McCool had a hand in the causeway's existence. He was an Ulster warrior and commander of the king of Ireland's armies. Out of the mists of Celtic history comes a story of the causeway's construction during Finn's feud with a Scottish giant. Of course that is all just mythology, you think. Then you look down at the craftsman-like perfection of the stones and think again...

For the second time in my life I also visited the Carrick-a-rede rope bridge, a swinging bridge that sways across a 60-foot gorge over the raging sea. For the second time I have been denied the opportunity to test my nerves at walking across it — this time because of Hurricane Floyd. I vowed, however, to return again and

See *BRIDGE*, page 20

The Carrick-a-rede rope bridge, a swinging bridge that sways across a 60-foot gorge over the raging sea, is seen in the photo at right.

Photo by Nancy Sorens



Bird feeders needn't be Y2K compliant, only bear-proof

By MARK GATEWOOD

We had a visitor at our bird feeders in the early hours of the first day of 1999. I remember hearing a slight metallic sound around 1 a.m. which I thought was the cat bumping against the basket of recycle cans by the side door. Never mind that the cat has never made that kind of noise before; it was so much easier to dismiss the noise than to roll out in the cold to investigate.

What I saw the next morning made me wish I'd gotten up. Our centerpiece feeder, a cedar hopper with wire baskets for suet, had been neatly snapped from its post and lay in pieces on the ground. A plastic hanging tube feeder was gone and its hanger pole twisted to the ground. The snow around the feeders was packed with big footprints. Our bird feeders had become bear feeders.

This wasn't a total surprise. A year or two ago, in July, we had found a large pile of scat—that's the accepted term for wild animal

droppings—on the trail above the house. It was too big to be anything else but bear. We reverently stepped over the pile for several weeks until it decomposed into plant food and then pretty much forgot about it. What did surprise me was that the bear was so interested in bird seed—hard, dry, scratchy seed. Just 50 feet away was juicy, attractively packaged garbage in an easy-to-open plastic can, and this bear chose seed. He left a calling card which confirmed this preference: a pile of scat filled with a type of wild bird seed mix which we don't use. This animal knew bird feeders, sought them out, and had hit someone else's feeder on his way to our place.

Curious about this aspect of bear behavior, I called the local office of the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and talked with one of their biologists. Bird feeders are indeed a common target, he told me, especially for young male bears which may ramble about all winter. The biologist finished the

conversation a bit defensively—maybe he was expecting me to hit the department up for damages—and told me it was a "people problem, not a bear problem," and that we should take down our feeders from January through March.

Well, I didn't regard it as any kind of a problem. Sure, it was kind of an expensive visit; I couldn't afford to feed bears for long at that rate. But it makes a good story and it confirms something I've been thinking about for a while.

Trace the ridge that includes Mt. Sidney (the "peak" is at 1,581 feet; our house is about 140 feet below) and you'll find that it runs for over seven miles, mostly wooded and in the same northeast-southwest orientation as the neighboring Blue Ridge and Allegheny Mountains. We see every type of wildlife here: deer, of course, foxes, and now bear. In the spring we usually have a good number of migrant warblers and thrushes pass through. Judging from the soaring turkey vultures and hawks, the ridge sticks up far enough to push

the prevailing westerly wind into decent updrafts for flight. In short, Mt. Sidney and the remainder of the ridge are a wildlife corridor.

Wildlife corridors are a concept that ecologists have been looking at for some time in the Appalachians. The idea is that the impact of habitat loss is lessened if long strips are left for shelter and migration. This also speaks a good word for the idea of backyard wildlife habitats. As the ridge develops, homeowners should retain as much natural vegetation as possible, instead of turning the whole lot into intensive care lawn. If just a little bit of woods is left, maybe there will be room for the occasional fox, deer or bear to slip through. As long as this ridge remains mostly wooded—and the human residents don't get too worked up about what comes walking through their yards—Mt. Sidney can function as a corridor for wildlife in the Valley.

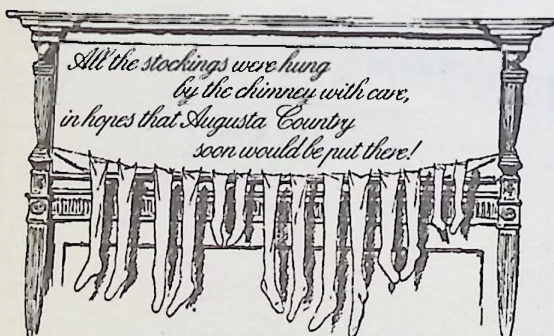
After the bear visit, the only feeder we had on that side of the house was a little \$7-dollar plastic

thing which I wouldn't mind losing to a repeat visit. Long about September, I started thinking about putting something on the empty pole for the coming winter. I visited the bird feeder section at Lowe's and saw engineering marvels ranging from over \$20 to nearly \$80. The bear was still on my mind, so I left empty-handed. Some of our best feeders over the years have been cobbled together from junk—pie plates, coffee cans, scraps of plywood, plastic jugs. With three sheds on the property, there must be some bird feeder material.

What I came up with was some cherry-stained pine shelf boards and some aluminum channel strips. The shelf boards became a platform and a roof, attached at the four corners by strips of aluminum. The aluminum, incidentally, gives it a rakish, techno-industrial look which contrasts nicely with the traditional setting. The birds seem to like it and I won't be too badly hurt if Y2K brings us another rowdy visitor. Happy New Year. —



A marmot, a Rocky Mountain version of a woodchuck, pokes around the Mt. Missouri summit. Mt. Missouri gulch is seen in the background.



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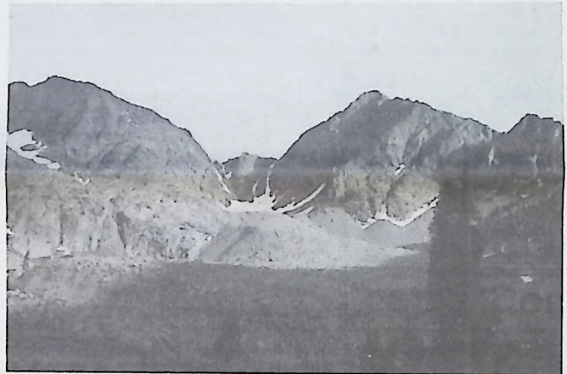


°Ridge

Continued from page 11

After an overnight with my son at the base of The Three Apostles, three of the more than two dozen thirteeners in the Sawatch along the Continental Divide, it was back to Halfmoon Creek opposite Mt. Elbert for the successful ascent of fourteener Mt. Massive. One Mt. Massive hiker, from Columbia, Mo., had camped just below treeline on the Massive trail and was so excited he was up and off at 4:30 a.m. Another on the Massive trail was from Minnesota, three from Iowa, and five more from Colorado.

Even though I have seen some of the dynamics which will make the Rockies look like our Appalachians some day, I am breathless



The Three Apostles -- three of the more than two dozen thirteeners in the Sawatch along the Continental Divide.

in the face of the magnitude of the process and the time it will take.

I saw so many Coloradans devoted to physical fitness and strenuous activities. In Denver there are cyclists, roller bladers, joggers; in the mountains there are hikers and backpackers. On the Arkansas River there are the rafters. The ones I met, young and old, are fit and judging by their organization and equipment, dedicated. Reading the registration logs at the trailheads, I saw that they had driven from all over the state to

climb their beloved fourteeners, to backpack the gulches and camp in the basins. They are very hospitable to us from out of state who also have come to climb, camp and hike in their Sawatch.

What a pleasure to be among that company. "I'll take your picture, if you'll take mine." "Sure!" What a pleasure to be in that place, in that company. "Where are you from?" "Virginia." What a pleasure to be from the old, worn-down Appalachians. —



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The Green Mile fails to go the distance

In the trailer for *The Green Mile*, the announcer's honey voice advises, "Miracles happen in the most unexpected places." Like, NOT in this movie! Frank Darabont (*Shawshank Redemption*) attempts another Stephen King story in *The Green Mile* but misses the mark with a movie that fizzles.

A faded green floor leads to the electric chair in E-block where guard Paul Edgecomb (Tom Hanks) keeps the peace on death row with fairness and a healthy dose of humanity. Kind and tough at the same time, Edgecomb's compassion and common sense are shared by all of his co-workers except Percy Wetmore, a sadistic little weasel who's a thorn in everyone's side.

Despite their compassion, the guards never hesitate in their role as executioners until John Coffey shows up. A giant of a man, Coffey — like the drink but spelled different — is condemned for the brutal murder of two little girls. As

time passes, Edgecomb begins to question the man's guilt. As he tells a lawyer, "I know bad men and this is not a bad man." But it isn't until Coffey reveals his ability to heal, to relieve pain and suffering, that Edgecomb and his men realize an innocent man is locked up. As a matter of fact, Edgecomb really knows it when Coffey miraculously lets him inside his head where he sees what really happened to the two murdered girls. The men are willing to help Coffey in any way they can but Coffey opts to die rather than live in a world filled with such unmitigated evil — something that causes him to suffer every minute of every day.

Several subplots revolve around this central theme: the sadistic Percy intentionally botches an execution; Coffey heals a woman of cancer and Lazarus-like raises a mouse from the dead; Edgecomb puts his career on the line to help a friend. This is perhaps the biggest failing of this movie. It tries to do

too many things and as a result doesn't do any one of them well.

The viewer cannot help but see the similarity between John Coffey and Jesus Christ (JC — get it?) but Darabont never informs us of the source of Coffey's healing powers. Indeed he can't even decide what kind of powers they are, once referred to as a "little miracle" but more often called "magic."

The story could have a strong Christian theme — would anyone know Christ if he appeared today; would he end up in an electric chair rather than on a cross — but it seems Darabont and King don't want to go there. The scenes where Coffey takes away the hurt resembles a schmaltzy *X-files* episode rather than a miracle.

The movie also dances clumsily around the issue of the death penalty. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the film, and the only one that is fully explored, is the way Paul Edgecomb never abandons his basic humanity in a most inhuman job.

Under the most dire circumstance, he serves the best interest of the handful of inmates he's guarding as well as that of the prison by simply doing the right thing.

Despite the film's weaknesses, the performances are stellar and ensemble-like. Tom Hanks (*Philadelphia*, *Forrest Gump*) isn't capable of a bad performance; he is his usual understated persona. Michael Clarke Duncan (*Armageddon*, *Bulworth*) does a great job as John Coffey, the gentle giant. Don't overlook Michael Jeter (*Miller's Crossing*, *The Fisher King*) as Eduard Delacroix, a hapless sympathetic Cajun who befriends and trains a mouse named Mr. Jingles (who is also quite endearing,) David Morse, James Cromwell, and Dough Hutchinson round out the cast. Hutchinson's acting credits include the role of a liver-eating genetic mutant on two episodes of *The X-files*. His characterization of the weaselly guard Percy is even more other-worldly than that of a



sci-fi genetic mutant.

I'm sure this movie will win some sort of Oscar nomination but I think it will be undeserved. Maybe Oscar consideration would be warranted were the film about 40 minutes shorter and 50 percent tighter — maybe. Save your money and wait for the video. *The Green Mile* is rated R for language, violence, and some sexual references. Hannah's Mom gives *The Green Mile* a banana-and-a-half. —

•Bridge

Continued from page 18
make the trip across the bridge.

We took the scenic route home to Antrim. Well, the narrow twisting road that hugged the coastal cliffs would have been beautiful if the fog had not rolled in. The hillsides on the other side of the road, however, were amazing as the rains gave birth to literally hundreds of new waterfalls which rolled down the steep, lush, green hills. For a moment we thought perhaps we were in a tropical rain forest rather than the northern reaches of the globe.

We arrived home tired and wet and ready for a good sleep. The next morning we arose and spent the morning on final errands and visits before heading back to the Republic and a night in Dublin. The return trip was uneventful un-

til we "accidentally" wound up in downtown Dublin and had to traverse the entire city by intuition. It was after dark when we arrived at our B&B (we knew we had chosen the establishment well when we learned the host family's surname was Staunton) located in the charming seaport town of Howth. The next morning it was off to the

airport so the birthday celebrants could fly to Scotland.

Our stay in Ireland, both the north and the south, had been way too short. We had seen far more than we expected and not half as much as we had wanted. We sensed that somewhere in our future, a return trip was in the cards. —

NEXT MONTH: On to Scotland!

•Market

Continued from page 2

achieve success. They have planned a comprehensive workshop for small farmers, market gardeners, and managers of markets to share their knowledge on profiting via the movement. Ishee reports that the majority of speakers are farmers and participants in public farmers' markets. They will be sharing their expertise and ideas for

both beginners and experienced producers and market managers.

The event is scheduled for March 18 at the Augusta County Government Center in Verona. In conjunction with the marketing workshop, there also will be an on-farm greenhouse clinic at Good Earth Farm School in Buena Vista on March 17. For more information, call 540/886-9394. Send e-mail inquiries to farmsted@cfw.com —

•Stable

Continued from page 17

plains. As a business he puts extra money into the purchase of more horses. He has five or six lesson horses for Christi to use that are safe for beginners. Safety is his main concern in horsemanship. The lesson program provides hard hats and riders are required to wear a boot with a heel. Students are encouraged to purchase their own equipment if after four or five lessons they are still interested.

Christi says that she has worked with different groups such as the girl scouts, the YMCA, home-schoolers, and even birthday parties. Her lessons include group and

private. "I enjoy private lessons because I can work the students on the lunge line. I also make up mazes and use dots on hands to help with the lefts and rights for younger ones." Kids say the funniest things and Christi likes to share her stories. "When I ask them what color horse they like, some say purple or pink! Most like black."

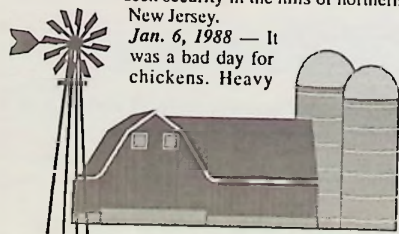
Lessons are an economical, fun, and safe way to find out if horseback riding is a sport you might like to participate in. Cold Springs Stables offers a program that welcomes beginners and people who just want to "try it." Interested students can call Christi for more information at 540/943-0665. —

Yesterday's weather

Most newspapers include a weather forecast in each edition. But we try to be a little different at Augusta Country. We may not know what the weather will be like tomorrow, but we sure know what it was like yesterday.

Jan. 3, 1777 — An overnight freeze enabled George Washington and his troops to flank the British at Trenton, cross their lines at Princeton, and seek security in the hills of northern New Jersey.

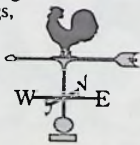
Jan. 6, 1988 — It was a bad day for chickens. Heavy



snow in Arkansas, with totals ranging up to 16 inches at Heber Springs, claimed the lives of 3.5 million chickens, and snow and ice up to three inches thick claimed the lives of another 1.75 million chickens in north central Texas. Up to 18 inches of snow blanketed Oklahoma, with Oklahoma City reporting a record 12 inches of snow in 24 hours.

Jan. 12, 1988 — Parts of North Dakota finally got their first snow of the winter season, and it came with a fury as a blizzard raged across the north central U.S. Snowfall totals ranged up to 14 inches at Fargo, N.D., winds gusted to 65 mph at Windom, Minn., and wind chill readings in North Dakota reached 60 degrees below zero.

Jan. 21, 1982 — The second of two major snowstorms to hit southern Minnesota came to an end. Minneapolis received 20 inches of snow in 24 hours to break the previous record of 17 inches in 24 hours established just a few days earlier. A record 38 inches of snow covered the ground following the two storms, with drifts 10 feet high. ---



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