

UpFront

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If Angela Fox has her way, the city outside her office will look a lot more like the walls inside her office—colorful, inviting, even hip. Those aren't words one would normally use to describe Crystal City, the sprawling mixed-use Arlington County complex where 16,000 people live—and 34,000 work—in mostly high-rise buildings. Critics have called it sterile, chock-full of big gray buildings and government contractors, but a lot has changed in the four years since its Business Improvement District (BID) was formed, with the energetic Fox as its president.

Business improvement districts, common in urban areas, are usually formed by businesses and property owners to attract new growth and to solve problems like crime or sanitation. Crystal City's BID is different. "Clean and safe are not the issues here, and they never have been," Fox says. "The issue for Crystal City was ... image."

Fox, who's 41 and a former corporate executive, says her mission is to scrub clean the notion that this D.C. suburb has no soul. And so she's set about turning Crystal City into a place that is active, artful, accessible and green. One of her first initiatives was to hang colorful abstract paintings by local artists in public areas that were once corporate and nondescript.

And there have been many others. The "city" now hosts, every Friday in the spring, 5K races for residents. And last February, Fox organized the second annual weeklong Crystal Couture event, with fashion models, trunk shows and champagne-infused parties. It was an opportunity for the young and fashionable to have fun and visit city boutiques. "People don't tend to think of fashion in Crystal City," Fox says, "so we said, 'Let's come up with something.' You should be able to go in, enjoy watching the local boutiques strut their stuff and buy something."

Fox, whose office walls are red and covered with framed posters touting Crystal Couture and other local events, has also been instrumental in practical changes. Crystal City used to have a lot of one-way streets that made

Local Color

ANGELA FOX IS TRANSFORMING CRYSTAL CITY FROM A CONCRETE JUNGLE INTO A PLACE THAT'S ACTIVE, ARTFUL AND GREEN

BY JASON WATKINS • PHOTOGRAPH BY CADE MARTIN

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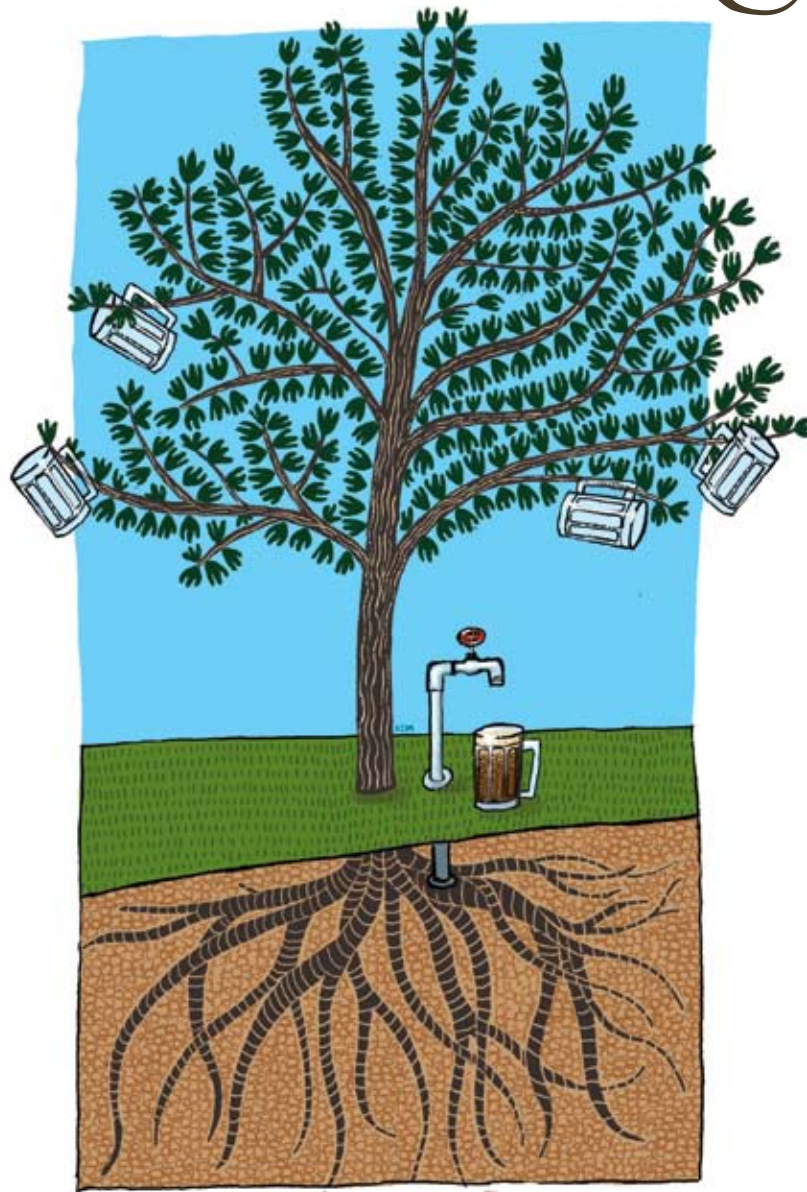
getting around the place a hassle; now, many are two-way, and traffic flows more smoothly. She's also promoted the use of bicycles by residents, and during a recent visit more than a few folks could be seen pedaling the streets. What's more, Fox has brought in a fall farmers' market, a wine festival, a marathon, a Shakespeare theater company, Wi-Fi and an electronics recycling program. "People still think of Crystal City as concrete and all of that," says Fox, who lives a couple of blocks away. "It's not. We've moved so far beyond that."

One of her biggest successes has been attracting the Arena Stage, the area's largest not-for-profit theater. It operates in a 460-seat venue in the middle of town, and Fox says its presence has boosted the area's restaurant business by at least 10 percent. Arena Stage will be moving to another location this year, but Fox says she's "very close to finalizing a deal" with another performing arts group.

Mara Olguin, vice president of marketing for a Crystal City real estate and development company named Vornado and the founding chair of the committee that formed the BID, says there's been a "huge transformation" of Crystal City in recent years. "Angie has really helped to create a brand, and created more reasons—new reasons—to explore Crystal City." The complex now has "a different feeling," says Olguin. "You change the physicality of the place—with restaurants and streetscaping and the new urban grid system—and you add all kinds of diverse people working in Crystal City. It's a very potent combination of what a city feels like. Angie's creativity and enthusiasm have made a difference."

Fox, who studied electrical engineering at Georgia Tech, began her career at Bell Atlantic. Now she's managing a group that not only has a \$2.4 million annual budget but also allows her to indulge her creative side. "So much of engineering is transformation," she says. "It's taking a perfectly situated neighborhood and transforming it into someplace you really want to be." Instead of government contractors and business people commuting in and out every day, she says, people are staying in the neighborhood, starting families and putting down roots.

It's Fox's role to make sure they stay, and she plans to do that with even more art and culture. As she says, "We all need it."



NATIVES

Hero or Villain?

GOOD OR BAD, SASSAFRAS IS POWERFUL STUFF

Don't consume sassafras. According to nearly every medical reference, sassafras causes hallucinations, hot flashes, sweating, hypertension, liver cancer and death. Thanks to its offending chemical compound, safrole, sassafras has been banned by the FDA since 1960. So, when you run across the sweet-smelling tree, covered with tiny yellow flowers or laden with clumps of dark, pendulous fruit, just about everywhere in the forests of eastern North America ... RUN!

Or don't. The plant's long history, interestingly, includes no stories of direct harm to humans. Safrole is present in about half the spices in your spice cabinet—mace, nutmeg, cloves, rosemary, basil and more. And there are some legitimate questions about the studies on which the FDA ban is based.

In any case, the sassafras tree, *Sassafras albidum*, is a real multitasker.

It grows three different shapes of leaves—oval, mitten and three-lobed—on one tree; it provided the original flavor of root beer (which goes back to colonial times); its leaves are dried and ground into the filé powder that thickens gumbo (roots contain more safrole; apparently, the leaf's content is low enough for the FDA); its fragrance is said to repel bugs and other vermin; its wood is great for building. Most of all, though, sassafras was for a long time *the* cure-all, reputed to fix everything—the common cold, gout, kidney disease, arthritis, skin ailments, sprains, gastrointestinal complaints, liver trouble, malaria, syphilis, even cancer—and Native Americans used it from time immemorial. In fact, sassafras was one of the most coveted commodities found in Europeans' pre-colonial investigations of the New World.

In 1584, Sir Walter Raleigh

received a six-year patent from Queen Elizabeth I that entitled him to whatever he found across the Atlantic, with the contingency that he establish a colony in that time. So, in 1585, Raleigh sent an expedition, which landed near the southeastern edge of Virginia. Thomas Harriot, an explorer-navigator-scientist, and John White, an artist, were to map and document the natural resources of the region. One of their finds was sassafras, not native to Europe but already well known there—especially for its near-magical capacity to relieve "the French pox" (syphilis). It would mean a goldmine for Raleigh.

That first attempt at colonization failed, as did the second—the ill-fated Roanoke Island colony, which, for all historians know, evaporated. Meanwhile, back home in England, Raleigh was selling sassafras at a huge profit—until Bartholomew Gosnold returned with his own cargo of the stuff, in 1602. Raleigh had the cargo seized (no one seemed to remember that his patent had expired a dozen years prior), but the secret was out; prices fell, and the sassafras market soon collapsed, though the plant remained popular. Ironically, Gosnold would go on to help found the colony that finally survived, Jamestown ... where, not so ironically, he promptly died.

Fast-forward to 1960, to the studies concluding that sassafras caused cancer, in which lab rats were force-fed doses of safrole that no rat would ever consume voluntarily. Alternative medicine practitioners, ethnobotanists and others contend that, as the great physician Paracelsus reputedly said, "the dose is the thing." Subhuti Dharmananda, Ph.D., director of the Institute for Traditional Medicine in Portland, Ore., notes that it later turned out that the cancer-causing agent in the rats was not directly safrole but a rat-specific metabolite—a product of the rats' metabolizing of safrole—that, lo and behold, does not occur in humans. Dharmananda quotes an article from the journal *Food and Chemical Toxicology*: "It is likely that the use of these high doses [in animal studies] markedly overestimates the potential hazard to humans" He cites studies that demonstrated the lowest liver cancer incidences nationwide in the Appalachians and other regions that consumed sassafras regularly. Hmm.

So maybe the story of sassafras has more surprises ahead. And maybe, one day, we'll get to taste real root beer again.

—CHRISTINE ENNULAT

A Simple Flower?

THE ANNUAL DAFFODIL SHOW IS SERIOUS BUSINESS

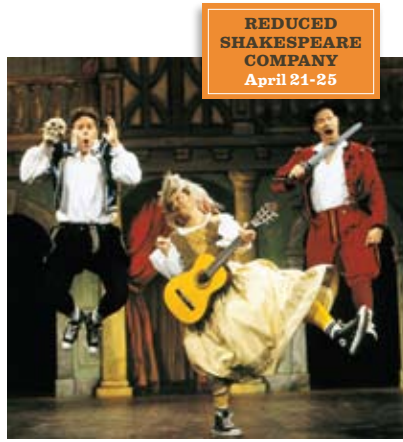
For most of us, looking at flowers is a simple aesthetic delight. But the Annual Daffodil Show, like all competitive events, is different—a chance for serious growers to gather to show their various blooms. In doing so, the experts demonstrate that true beauty can be analyzed, quantified, classified—and not so easy to achieve.

“Oh, this is serious,” says Melanie Christian, a Lynchburg resident who is co-chairman of the 76th Annual Daffodil Show, sanctioned by the American Daffodil Society, presented by the Garden Club of Virginia and sponsored by the Hillside Garden Club of Lynchburg. Forty-seven garden clubs will participate in the event, which will be held at Sweet Briar College and open to the public on April 7 and 8. Christian expects some 250 competitors to take part in the event—vying for scores of ribbons and awards.

For the uninitiated, trying to get a handle on the Horticulture competition is daunting: There are 22 class award categories and at least 13 divisions—Trumpet, Large-cupped, Small-cupped, Double cultivars, Triandrus and Tazetta, to name a few. And we haven’t even mentioned the miniatures! Each year’s Daffodil Show features an artistic class competition, and the theme for this year’s is “The James River Runs Through It,” a nod to the James River’s significance to the history of Lynchburg and Amherst County.

Jane Vaughan, a grower who with her husband has won more than a few awards over the years, says that while many people think of the event as yellow flowers in vases, “that’s not at all what it is. There are so many different sizes, colors, hybrids.”

The Daffodil Show, then, is a lot of hard work for the competitors—but it’s also a bonanza for those in the general public who can attend the event, for free, and experience spring through the beauty of these not-so-simple flowers. GCVirginia.org



REDUCED SHAKESPEARE COMPANY
April 21-25



CHRIS BOTTI May 14



VIRGINIA INTERNATIONAL MILITARY TATTOO
April 30 - May 2



AFRICAN CHILDREN'S CHOIR May 12



BELA FLECK May 28



BIRMINGHAM ROYAL BALLET
May 7-9



ANOUSHKA SHANKAR April 16

Strength in Numbers

THE VIRGINIA ARTS FESTIVAL HAS A PERFORMANCE FOR EVERY TASTE

TAT STATS

96

HOURS OF REHEARSAL TIME

100+

VOLUNTEERS

4,000

HOTEL-ROOM NIGHTS FOR PERFORMERS

1 million

MILES OF TRAVEL FOR CAST AND CREW TO NORFOLK

30,000

EXPECTED TO ATTEND

Edinburgh, La Rochelle, Laguna, Monterey, Salzburg—all boast world-renowned arts and music festivals. Now consider this: Hampton Roads is trying to carve out its own reputation as a big-festival venue. Though not specialized like, say, the Fringe or the Francofolies in Europe, the Virginia Arts Festival is utterly ambitious. Held April 15 through May 30, the event brings in hundreds of performers from around the world to entertain audiences at various venues in Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Virginia Beach and Williamsburg.

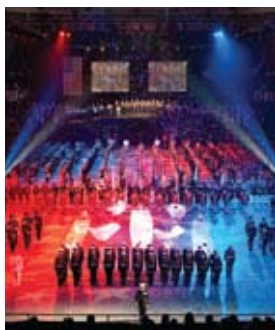
Now in its 14th year, the festival’s strength is its breadth. There will be soaring ballerinas (the Birmingham Royal Ballet), a cappella singing (Cantus) and virtuosic soloists (guitarist David Russell and pianist Maurizio Pollini). Laugh at Reduced Shakespeare Company as it compresses Shakespeare’s 37 plays into 97 minutes; sit mesmerized by the Garth Fagan Dance troupe (Fagan choreographed *The Lion King*); or admire the Cavani String Quartet, recipient of the prestigious Naumburg Award.

The festival’s signature event, conceived to appeal to the many military families in Hampton Roads, is the Virginia International Military Tattoo. It’s a military music extravaganza, the biggest tattoo in the nation—this year with more than 20 acts from six countries. With its 1,000-plus performers, the Tattoo pays tribute to the battle drummers and bagpipers who communicated commanders’ field orders in 17th-century Europe. “One of the [key] elements of the Tattoo is the mix of performers,” says Scott Jackson, who is both general manager of the festival and producer/director of the Tattoo. He notes that the audience will see everything from traditional military bands to Irish dancers, a 500-strong chorus and a very modern interpretation of a Scottish highlands warrior drum and bagpipes display. “It’s a perfect mixture of ... great performances and our deep respect and appreciation for the military.”

Organizing the festival every year, says Jackson, is daunting. “Basically, the planning is a year-round process. It requires 18 to 24 months in advance planning for overseas acts and 12 months for domestic ones.” And the payoff? “I always tell people, ‘You’ll see something you’ve never seen before.’”

For the complete schedule of events, visit VaFest.org.

—CHRISTINE STODDARD



Brass Tacks?

MICHIE TAVERN HAS ADDED A METAL SHOP, HOUSED IN A 220-YEAR-OLD CABIN

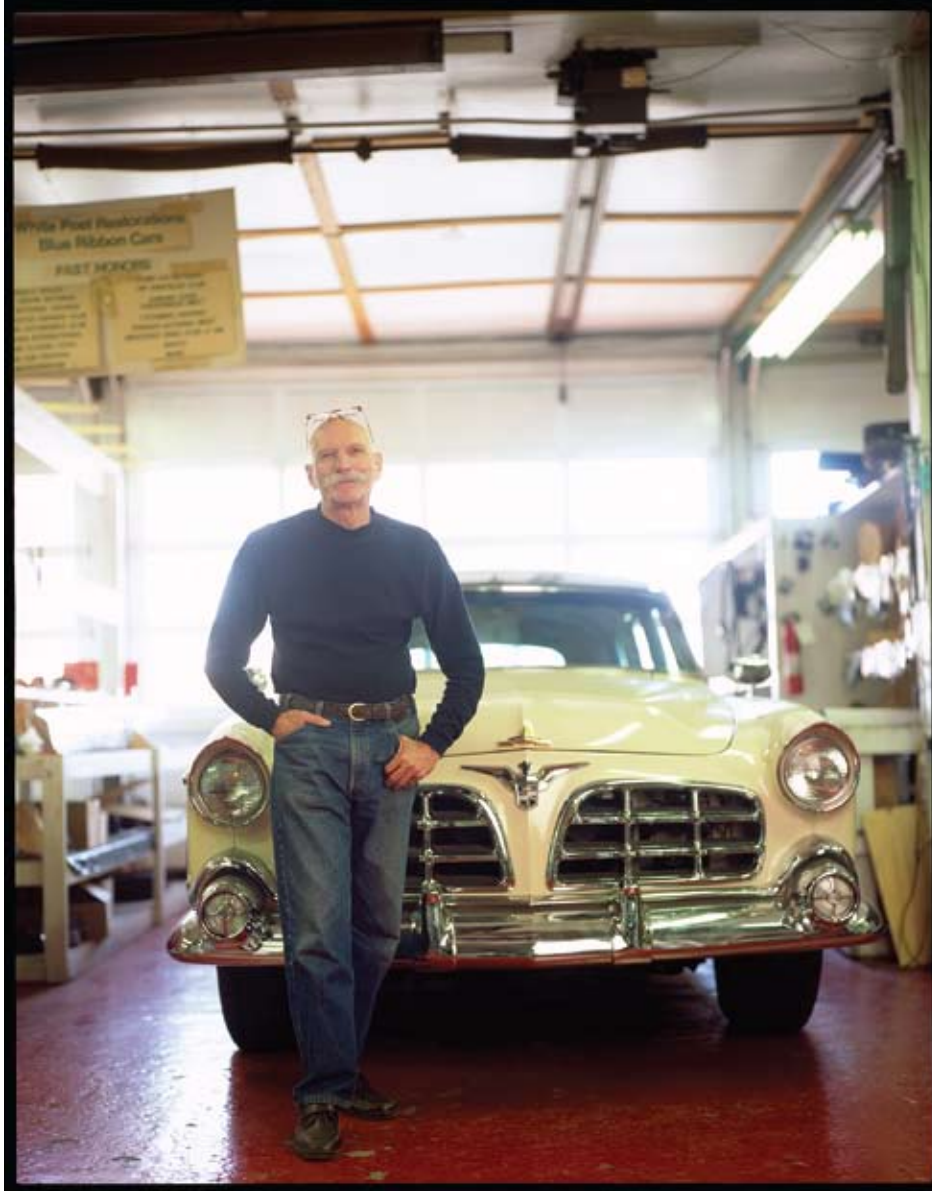
Michie Tavern, a historic landmark in Charlottesville, isn't just a place to explore late-18th-century colonial life and to gobble a hearty Southern meal. It's gradually becoming a period shopping complex. The Michie Tavern General Store, with its early-American atmosphere, opened in an old mill building in 1976. The Clothier, a shop that sells reproduced period clothing, along with quilts, jewelry and accessories, opened in 2004 in a circa 1820s structure that, like the mill building, was moved to the Michie Tavern property from another Virginia location.

The latest addition to the Michie site is The Metal Smith Shop, which threw open its (very old) doors last September and offers a variety of metal crafts and "general housewares" made from pewter, brass, silver, copper and bronze. There are period products (antique weaponry, wrought iron nails, strap hinges) along with other items that are more artistic in design—hand-pounded copper vessels, pewter plates and tankards, Mexican copper and sterling jewelry, for example.

The shop is housed in a single-room, 1790 log cabin that was once located on a mountaintop in Nelson Country. It was dismantled and its hand-hewn chestnut logs stored in a tobacco barn at Michie Tavern for years before being rebuilt, about a year ago, by Beaverdam Custom



Builders. "We thought it was a fitting product mix for this rustic setting," says Greg MacDonald, executive director of Michie Tavern, who notes that all the buildings on the property are "historically and architecturally significant." He says that Michie Tavern isn't trying to steal a march on Colonial Williamsburg, "but we're doing our own thing in ways that fit the tavern site." *MichieTavern.com*



Boys with Toys

A GO-TO PLACE FOR CLASSIC CAR COLLECTORS BY PHYLLIS SPEIDELL

Convoys of black stealth limousines barely rate a second glance when they cruise past the local landmark, a white surveyor's post that a young George Washington reputedly erected here in the mid-1700s. Residents in the tiny town of White Post, 50 miles west of Washington, D.C., know that the international celebrities, Middle Eastern sheiks and other well-to-dos rolling by are focused on a more contemporary destination—the half-acre of garages and workshops that are White Post Restorations. The business is renowned but so low-key that most visitors have to ask for directions.

White Post Restorations is a place where lovers of classic cars indulge their collector's appetite. Owner Billy Thompson, 71, and his 20 restoration craftsmen (at \$100 an hour, you don't call them mechanics) work only on cars predating 1970. And what cars they are: The White Post crew is currently restoring a 1923 Hudson convertible and a 1956 Crown Imperial limo. Not long ago, they restored a '58 Dodge in which the owner had proposed to the love of his life. If you need an estimate, look elsewhere; restorations take one to two years to complete and are billed in \$30,000 increments.

Thompson, as colorful as the cars he restores, was 12 when he started sweeping floors in the four-bay repair garage his father built in 1940 behind the house where he still lives. "I commute 37 steps to work," he quips. He says his client list has included actress Stephanie Powers (owner of a 1967 Mercedes), business tycoon Bill Marriott (a 1934 500 K Mercedes) and many foreign royals he refuses to identify. "All my customers are famous if they pay their bills," he quips. Two of the rarest cars White Post has restored were a Scarab (a limited production 1930s car hailed as the first mini-van) and the Tucker from the 1988 movie of the same name.

Thompson's crew researches, documents and photographs each new vehicle, then assigns it to a master restorer, who leads a team of technicians who completely disassemble the car, down to the bolts. Each part is tagged, inventoried and sent to specialty sections of the facility for cleaning, stripping, restoration or rebuilding. The entire car—wood parts, upholstery and the exterior colors—will ultimately replicate the original. Of his clients, Thompson says, "They're just good old boys and their toys. They put bread on our table and we put joy in their life." And what does this granter of automotive wishes drive? "A hot rod Lincoln," says Thompson. As he puts it, "just wheels." *WhitePost.com*



Hall Raisers

UPPERVILLE RESTORES A ONCE-SWINGING LANDMARK BY RICHARD ERNSBERGER JR.

Buchanan Hall, in Upperville, has a storied past. Named after U.S. Army Brig. Gen. James A. Buchanan (1843 to 1926), who made his home in Upperville, it opened as a community center in the 1920s, became a not-for-profit corporation in the 1930s, and by all accounts was a swinging place in the post-World War II years. Historically, Buchanan Hall was “both famous and infamous,” Upperville resident Meg Mullery said in a recent message. “It played host to rather wild jazz and dance parties in the 1950s and 1960s,” she noted, adding, “A gentleman named Chauncy Brown performed at Buchanan Hall. Chauncy’s wife, Georgia Brown, served as inspiration for the song ‘Sweet Georgia Brown.’”

Bob deButts, an Upperville resident and former board member for the community center, said in a recent video about Buchanan Hall, “There was nothing fancy about [the place], but the dust did get to rising a little bit if the dancing was heavy.”

By the turn of this century, however, the center was ready for the wrecking ball. According to architect and Buchanan Hall board member William Ridge, the heating system didn’t work, the plumbing leaked and the building had essentially become “unusable”—not fit to be rented. Other locals called the center “seedy.”

In 2000, a group of Upperville community activists met at the

local volunteer firehouse to talk about how the landmark could be saved. Months of discussion led to a business plan to expand and renovate Buchanan Hall—one requiring \$900,000 to make good. And the Upperville community came through, raising \$600,000 itself—“a mix of major donations and a lot of small donations,” says Ridge, who served as the project’s architect—and taking out a roughly \$300,000 mortgage. In 2006, after three years of work, the new Buchanan Hall was unveiled, significantly larger than the original, with a new commercial kitchen, new restrooms, offices and backstage dressing rooms, among other improvements.

Nowadays, a decade after the first restoration meeting, Buchanan Hall is more sedate than in its heyday—the alcohol-fueled bashes of yesteryear have given way to low-key events such as anniversary parties, youth dances, and community theater—but Upperville has got its own place again. Says Ridge, “Since we opened ... the income from events is paying all the expenses, and we still get contributions [to help] pay down the mortgage. It’s working as a viable entity, which is very satisfying.”

Interestingly, nearly 50 years ago, at a time when Buchanan Hall was going strong, a young writer named John Updike visited Upperville, and in 1961 wrote a witty poem (light verse, to be

exact) about it that first appeared in the *New Yorker* in 1961 and later was published in Updike’s *Telephone Poles and Other Poems* (Knopf, 1963) and in *John Updike’s Collected Poems 1953-1993* (Knopf, 1993). There is no mistaking the cheeky intellect of Updike, who wrote a lot of poetry (about many places, including Richmond) and later of course became a renowned novelist. He died last year at age 76.

UPON LEARNING THAT A TOWN EXISTS IN VIRGINIA CALLED UPPERVILLE

BY JOHN UPDIKE (1961)

*In Upperville, the upper crust
say “Bottoms Up!” from dawn to dusk
and “Ups-a-daisy, dear!” at will
I want to live in Upperville.*

*One-upmanship is there the rule,
and children learn, at school,
“The Rise of Silas Lapham” and
why gravitation has been banned.*

*High hamlet, but my mind’s eye sees
Thy ruddy uplands, lofty trees,
Upsurging streams, and towering dogs,
There are no valleys, dumps or bogs.*

*Depression never dares intrude
upon their sweet upswinging mood;
Downcast, long-fallen, let me go
to where the cattle never low.*

*I’ve always known there was a town
just right for me; I’ll settle down
and be uplifted all day long —
Fair Upperville, accept my song.*

COUNTY CURIOSITY: SPOTSYLVANIA

Hardtack and Tough Feet

Spotsylvania County, midway between Washington and Richmond, was established in 1721 and named for Englishman Alexander Spotswood. In 1710 he was appointed Lieutenant Governor of Virginia. He later established the Germanna colonies (to man an ironworks he started) and led the Knights of the Golden Horseshoe Expedition to explore beyond the Blue Ridge Mountains. The 412-square-mile county has more than 100,000 residents and is adjacent to the city of Fredericksburg.

Try the Hardtack: Spotsylvania is a must-see place for Civil War buffs. Says Kathy Smith, the county’s public information officer, “We have more Civil War battlefields than any other place in the country,” among them Chancellorsville and Wilderness. Spotsylvania also has a Confederate Cemetery, the U.S. National Slavery Museum, and Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania Military Park.

Thar (Was) Gold! Lake Anna State Park isn’t just a camping haven with a lake (and nearby nuclear power plant). “There’s an old abandoned gold mine here,” says park administrative assistant Roberta Bennett. Gold found in the area in 1829 prompted prospectors to call it “Gold Hill.” Gold mining peaked in the 1880s, but a few folks still poke around. “Some say they’ve successfully panned out in this area,” says Bennett, “but I haven’t struck it rich yet.”

Crowning Success: You want street cred in this county? Go “wakeskating”—which is getting pulled on a board over water, with nothing holding your feet to the board. Matt Hayden, a senior at Spotsylvania High School, won the 2008 World Wakeboard Association’s amateur title. Get this: Miss America 2010, Caressa Cameron, hails from Spotsylvania. She scored big on the talent component with her wakeskating demonstration. (Wink.)

—CHRISTINE STODDARD

