From the Editor

For almost two decades, Curio has brought its readers features highlighting people and places in the Shenandoah Valley. Through the years, the circulation, frequency of publication, format and design have gradually changed. This year, due to factors affecting all print media, Curio has undergone dramatic changes in producing and delivering a publication that has built a loyal audience in the Harrisonburg-Rockingham area.

Because of rapidly increasing paper costs and the availability of new technology, Curio has changed from a small-format magazine with limited circulation to a tabloid format. This enables us to print and distribute more than five times as many copies for a fraction of the price. In addition, Curio has succumbed to new technology and expanded the scope of the audience even further.

For the first time, Curio will appear on the World Wide Web, introducing many more people to our Valley. This staff wanted to widen the span of Curio and explore the world of everchanging technology as it develops.

This not only brings us new readers, but it allows for a more varied content in the magazine. This change is reflected in stories such as “Cybercafes Enhance the Coffee Connection” on page 6, which shows how technology is affecting the Valley. But like many other traditions, Curio has survived the technological boom and still strives to maintain that Valley flavor so many residents find appealing. “A Chip Off the Old Block” on page 12 and “Carving a Niche in the Valley” on page 20 still cling to this Curio tradition, featuring a small successful business and a local artist. Additional stories that are not in the print version can be found at our Web site. We hope you enjoy these changes and let us know what you think about the new format.

Karen Brewer
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

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Cover: Rick Thompson captured Gary Simmers at the entrance of his new operation near Harrisonburg.
As the slowly rising sun faintly flushed the early morning sky, the vibrant voice of Scott Gilbert, a James Madison University senior, floated across the radio airwaves in the Valley and nudged sleepy listeners awake.

"This is Scotty G., and it's three past six on the 'Morning Rock Buzz.' The weather's coming up next on WBOOP 106.3," he said into the microphone.

Dressed casually in a T-shirt, jeans and sneakers, Gilbert looked like a typical college student. But his job as WBOOP's morning air personality gets him out of bed earlier than most of his classmates.

From 6 to 9 a.m. each weekday, he and co-host Dan Wright, WBOOP's news director, provide entertainment to Valley listeners during radio's most competitive time slot. "In radio, the morning is where you build your audience," Wright explained. "Drive time gives you a captive audience."

WBOOP hired Gilbert to turn this captive audience into a captivated one. "There are certain things people need in the morning," Gilbert said. "People need the weather, they need the news and, of course, they want music as well. It's finding the right balance. What I do is basically talk to people and spin rock 'n' roll. As long as you have a good time, your listeners have a good time."

Nicole Curry, general manager of JMU's radio station, WXJM, worked with Gilbert at WXJY. "He's a perfect fit for BOOP. That time slot is specifically for that kind of show — informal, chatty and funny. That's what Scott wanted to do with radio, and he's found a perfect home for it."

Between cracking jokes on the air with Wright and munching on a blueberry bagel, Gilbert flipped through a file folder covered with labels such as "Dumb Crooks," "Facts, Figures, Trivia" and "Weird!"

Gilbert said he tries to read several newspapers a day to come up with the material he files away and later uses on the show. "I look for common everyday stuff — human interest stories that are odd, that are off-beat. Stuff that'll make people laugh in the morning, because once you do something funny, listeners want to hear that every morning."

Wright said he thinks maintaining this level of entertainment creates the most difficult aspect of his job. "The biggest challenge here is keeping it fresh. You come in, and it's too easy to coast."

After more than 20 years in the radio industry, Wright has learned the value of keeping his audience in mind. "There's a way of contacting people with radio that is unique. It's not really one-way because it's always coming back to you — you get feedback through calls, on the street, everywhere. I fell in love with it at some point and just never quite got over it."

Working as a team eases the stress of continuously coming up with new material, Gilbert said. "If you do it right, people will be drawn into the conversation. I think Dan and I have good on-air chemistry. We're on the same wavelength."

General Manager Tom Manley also said he thinks Scott and Dan work well together. "These two guys have jelled together better than anyone we've ever had. And the age of these two represents the range of music we play. We thought it was a good match."

WBOOP's format, espoused by its slogan, "the best classic rock and the best new rock," switched to this mix in February 1995 after other stations began playing adult contemporary music, its former format.

According to Manley, the show's structure did not change when the station did; the show just changed the music it played. But when the previous air personality left and Gilbert took over in September, the station "decided to change the content of the morning show and get a little more controversial, a little more '90s," Manley said.

Despite the early morning hour, Gilbert's animated voice never fades on the air. He jokingly gestured toward his coffee mug as his source of energy.

Wright has learned the value of keeping his audience involved. "It's always coming back to you — you get feedback. I feel I couldn't pass it up."

The WBOP position didn't just fall into Gilbert's lap; he's been in the radio industry since high school, when he interned at WKBO, an all-news station in Harrisburg, Pa. Since then, he has worked steadily at campus stations in both high school and college and at top-40 stations in Pennsylvania.

Gilbert had been working as a part-time air personality on weekends at WBOP when the morning show position opened.

Manley admitted Gilbert's youth concerned him at first, but he pointed out the large amount of experience Gilbert already had in the radio industry. "Scott has a lot of youth and vitality. We're very happy with the job he's done."

If the station broadcast in a more urbanized area, Gilbert probably wouldn't have had this opportunity, Gilbert said. "But I like the small-market feel. The station is friendly; the area is friendly. And contrary to popular belief, the ratings are just as competitive."

According to Manley, WBOOP pulls in a weekly cumulative audience of 30,000 listeners, and its weekly cumulative audience for the morning show totals more than 19,000 listeners.

Wright agreed working as an air personality at such a young age, especially on a morning show, makes Gilbert fairly unique. "But Scott's got good ad-lib. He's quick on his feet. He's a little inexperienced, but he's already got the basics."

Gilbert joked, "I love to hear myself talk. That's why I'm in radio."
Standing atop a hill in Landwirt Vineyards, one can see over the rows of vines into the Shenandoah Valley and across to the ridges of Massanutten. The hues of the land vary from lush green to a dried-out yellow, and the terrain goes from hills to a valley and finally to the craggy top of a mountain. This view is found on each bottle of wine that comes out of the Landwirt Winery in Harrisonburg.

Landwirt is a German word meaning caretaker of the land, and winery owner Gary Simmers is a caretaker of the land himself.

Simmers has been a dairy farmer in the Shenandoah Valley for more than 20 years. Only recently has his care of the land turned to growing grapes and making wine. Landwirt will open to the public in late spring and produces seven wines and offers tours on the weekends.

Simmers started the winery after being approached by family friend Charles G. Byers. In 1982, Byers grew grapes as a hobby and asked Simmers if he had any land to begin a small-scale vineyard. The two started planting on a 12-acre plot and sold their grapes to local wineries from 1990-'94, and this system was successful, Simmers said.

"We knew we were producing great grapes. Several of the bottles that were made [by other wineries] from our grapes ended up winning gold medals [in Virginia competitions]," Simmers said. So in fall 1993, Simmers decided to advance the production.

"It was very frustrating seeing our grapes doing so well and not making the wine ourselves," he said. "Our land produces a great grape, which produces a great wine, and we decided to make the wine ourselves."

Simmers referred to that decision as the turning point in the winery. The partners produced their first wines in 1994, making three types of wines. They had two white wines, a Riesling and a Chardonnay, and one red wine, a Cabernet Sauvignon.

In 1995, Byers sold his share to Simmers. "Byers started to feel that what he was doing as a hobby was getting too large. I wanted to continue to the next step," Simmers said.

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Landwirt has grown to 16 acres, making it the second largest in the Shenandoah region behind the 40-acre Shenandoah Winery.

Landwirt produces seven different wines: Riesling, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Noir, Cabernet Franc and Gewurztraminer.

The grapes used at Landwirt are grafted European vines with American root stock, and each type of grape makes a certain type of wine.

Simmers has only one full-time employee other than himself, and they oversee production of the wines from start to finish. "We're what is called an estate bottling winery," said Simmers, meaning they grow, age and bottle the wines all on one farm.

The quality factor at this winery can be a laborious task. We spend the summer hand picking leaves off the vines to allow the right amount of sun to get to the grape. Extra steps like that make the difference in our grapes," Simmers said.

Although volunteers sometimes help, the majority of the work is done by Simmers and his employee, George Givens. "It's a lot of hard work. Lots of people think it's glamorous, but it's extremely hard," Givens said.

Simmers' vision for his winery came from traditional European roots. "We want to have a winery like those in traditional European vineyards."
Many people wouldn't expect such equipment as test tubes and a microscope to be part of the wine-making process, but according to Gary Simmers, many subtle things can affect the taste of wine, including acidity and additives.

In Europe, you visit wineries by roaming the countryside. "If you were invited in a winery, the owner would take you down to his basement and allow you to taste the wine. We're plain and simple here. We don't worry about a setup. We just concentrate on making a good wine," he said.

The winery reflects Simmers' attitude. A simple sign that says Landwirt Winery beckons visitors, and the winery itself is a renovated chicken house.

From the outside, visitors may think they are in the wrong place, but inside the building there is no mistake — it is a winery.

"We're plain and simple here. We don't worry about set up. We just concentrate on making a good wine." 

Oak barrels with crimson wine stains around the cork lie in a row, and large, steel vats for the fermenting process sit like rocks throughout the room.

Simmers said a chicken house actually provides a good environment for making wine, saying the original 1949 oak wood, making up the low ceiling, and the stone walls and floors allow for easy temperature control, which is essential for making wine.

In one corner of the winery is a small tasting room. It has painted white walls like the rest of the winery, but grape stencils and curtains add charm to the room.

Simmers takes the visitors into the room and describes each wine in a robust manner that seems to make the wine spread through the senses. He points out how each grape tastes and how the aging process affect the wines' tastes.

Because Simmers is the wine maker, taster and ager, his tours give all the viewpoints of the wine-making process, making visitors feel they experience wine, rather than just sip it.

"We wanted to have our visitors enjoy the wine," Simmers said. "I wanted to get away from the rushed winery service that is so common. I wanted to be able to sit down with our guests and enjoy the wine."

The room has a small serving area and two round tables with chairs against the wall. "Sitting with our guests may not be the most economical way to do tours, but we want people to enjoy their time here at Landwirt."

That caring attitude sums up Landwirt from the growing of the vines, to the final products, to the tours. Simmers worked hard to create a winery like those in Europe. He concentrates on making a good wine, bypassing all the frills, as any good caretaker of the land would do.

Colleen Phalen is a graduating English Major and Mass Communications Minor. She plans on moving to Northern Virginia to pursue a career in events planning.

Ryan Netzer is a senior who plans to pursue a career in photography upon graduation in May.

Rick Thompson will be moving to Charlottesville after graduating in May to pursue a career in photojournalism.

Directions: Landwirt Winery is just a short drive from JMU, buried in an out-of-the-way corner of the Shenandoah Valley. From Harrisonburg, drive north on Route 11. About six miles north of downtown Harrisonburg, just before the town of Lacy Springs, turn left on route 721. As route 721 winds through fields and cow pastures, be sure to bear left at the intersection of 721 and 805. Two miles from route 11, turn right on route 619, another windy country road. Follow 619 for about another 2 miles. The winery is a moderately humble affair, so be ready for it to appear suddenly on the left. The winery is open on weekends from 1 to 5 p.m., with Gary Simmers ready to show the place off.

If you have questions, call Simmers at the winery at (540) 833-6000, or write the Landwirt Winery, Route 2, Box 286, Harrisonburg, Va., 22801.
Cybercafes enhance the coffee connection

Area businesses provide alternatives to computer labs and coffeehouses

Story by Christy Johnson  Photography by Rick Thompson  Graphic by Erin O'Meara

Even on a lazy, rainy Saturday the Mudhouse was thriving. Patrons of Charlottesville's Downtown Mall were lured by the aroma of gourmet coffees. Hot chocolate was the drink of the day. The walls were a collage of avant-garde art, mirrors and pastel prints supplied by local artists. Big brown sofas beckoned weary shoppers.

Magazines were scattered across the tables, accompanied by a unique salt and pepper shaker chess set to enjoy.

Mudhouse owner John Lawrence assisted customers and showcased the special feature of his establishment — the high-speed computer nestled in the corner. By definition, this is a cybercafe, one example of the technological explosion of the '90s.

Lawrence was inspired when he attended University of California in Santa Cruz. He enjoyed frequenting cybercafes and coffeehouses, and he and his wife, Lynelle, shared a dream of opening their own.

In 1992 they tested Charlottesville's market with an espresso cart to see if there was an interest in gourmet coffees and juices before opening the Mudhouse in October 1995.

The Mudhouse is foremost a coffeehouse. Lawrence capitalizes on University of Virginia college students and high school students in the area by hosting special events, such as "Fresh Squeeze," Lawrence's production of poetry reading and music jam. Local bands such as the Tree Frogs and Naked Puritan Philharmonic play weekend gigs.

Lawrence said he wanted to create a community center where people would feel at home. "It is great to watch the fluid social interaction and see how people negotiate space here in the cafe," Lawrence said. He defined his cafe as a "social decompression chamber where people could unwind." The computer is just an added bonus.

Employee Thomas Thorkildson said, "The Mudhouse serves every type of person: students, artists, developers and politicians."

He said he sees the computer angle as "adding another element to the atmosphere. People should not be so afraid to approach [the computer]. It is a tool for learning."

Customers may browse the Internet as long as they like. As for customers lingering too long, "most users will be courteous and surrender when someone else is interested," Lawrence said.

In the future there may be more demand, but he does not see himself expanding past one computer right now.

Getting a quick byte is easy at Bogen's

Virginia is on the crest of the technological wave. Blacksburg has been named the "most plugged-in town in America," according to a 1996 Esquire article. The town, the first one in America to go online, has created a virtual "electronic village" with far encompassing Internet capabilities. The Esquire article stated, "Blacksburg claims the highest per capita Internet and e-mail use in the world."

Bill Ellenbogen is the owner of Bogen's Restaurant, which features the "world's first cyberbar," he said.

He explained why the concept of cybercafes makes so much sense. "When you go in a place that does not have pay phones, or a sports bar that does not have televisions, you get frustrated because these are expected. The day is coming when computers will be our source of information, and they, too, will be commonly accepted everywhere. We are just a little ahead of the curve."

"Our one terminal will not make or break my business, but it does make it unique and helps differentiate from competing enterprises," he said.

Ellenbogen said he runs a successful restaurant which maintains the image of "casual with class." During business hours, Ellenbogen mingles with the Virginia Tech students, local residents and businessmen in the upstairs bar.

On Saturday evenings the establishment is a popular haven. People throw darts, play pool and enjoy a few drinks, while songs from such groups as Jane's Addiction and Blues Traveler blare in the background.

Ellenbogen decided to implement the computer
in June 1995. Tech student Danielle Heineman said the computer is a popular novelty. “Every time I come in here someone is on it.”

Radford graduate Michael Moncaba used his free access to check his mom’s homepage. He said he was not bothered or really surprised by the presence of technology. “The computer does not shock you because computers are so prevalent in society. I wish every bar had something interesting to do besides just looking around at weirdos,” he said.

From the bartender and manager’s perspective, Mark Krenachew sees a positive response to the decision to include the terminal in the atmosphere.

“Most students like the access to check their e-mail.” Krenachew said some patrons have different uses for computer time. “We have this one regular, though, who likes to play backgammon games for hours. We eventually have to cut him off.”

Staunton is Equipped to Educate

Staunton’s version of a cybercafe steers away from the coffeehouse scene and focuses primarily on education. Since opening in November 1995, the Cybercafe and Training Center has hosted birthday parties, Girl Scout troops and class field trips. Still, manager Kate Dewisar said she sees the business as “less a social place and more of an educational environment. Our focus here is not on the food or socialization as much as the essential computer access and training,” explaining why they have many more terminals than other cybercafes.

The cybercafe, featuring five terminals for public use and eight additional computers reserved for teaching classes, is a venture of the Adult Education and Training Corporation in Staunton. The training corporation empowers adults with skills to help them prepare for the real world and obtain jobs, Dewisar said.

The cafe is also known for its socializing, Dewisar said, which is why they have “less a social place and more of an educational environment.”

“We have become a help desk for problems,” Dewisar said.

“We realize it is a new thing, and it is intimidating for people to take their first steps. We hope to create an inviting place where you know someone will smile and sit down to reassure you.”

The training center has employees called cyberguides who assist with questions. “We jokingly called them cyberguys. We like the phrase because for some people [learning computers] is like exploring uncharted territories,” Dewisar said. Cyberguides are supposed to know a little bit about everything. They make the coffee and keep customers moving along so they do not become frustrated or waste time.

The cafe also features a “cyberlunch time” where area businesses deliver food during the 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. lunch slot. Dewisar said, “This idea has not really taken off, even though business does pick up around those times. People seem to have their own agendas.”

Another brainstorm was the after-school 3 to 5 p.m. weekday game hours for children. Parents purchase gift certificates to entertain their children with popular games, such as Descent, Doom, Dark Forces and Terminal Velocity.

“We like to keep those hours separate because they get a little loud and rambunctious when they compete against each other,” she said.

Linked to History

Cybercafes as an emerging phenomenon have been gaining the attention of The Washington Post, Chicago Tribune, The Philadelphia Inquirer, Esquire and USA Today. Ian Hooper prepared a homepage on the World Wide Web and dedicated a master’s degree project for the University of Calgary to this emerging trend. His paper provided some valuable historical progression from the original artistic endeavors to the cybercafe movement today.

According to Hooper, it all began in 1971 when Woody and Steina Vassulka founded a cafe in New York City called the Kitchen, a home for artists experimenting with new media technologies.

Two artists, Kit Galloway and Sherri Rabinowitz who had frequented the Kitchen, branched off on their own project for the Olympic Arts Festival in 1984. Galloway and Rabinowitz linked five cafes together in the Los Angeles area to provide “teleconferencing terminals that would allow for artistic and social interaction,” according to Hooper’s homepage.

“Their initiative, called the Electronic Cafe International, could be called the first example of an electronic cafe, but it was really an art project first,” the homepage states.

In 1991 Jill and Wayne Gregori envisioned a system where average individuals could have access to computers. They created SFNET, a network of coin-operated terminals providing an electronic link to 20 cafes in the San Francisco Bay area. These early entrepreneurs laid the foundations for cybercafes across the United States, Europe and Canada.

The influence has spread to Virginia. Three examples sit within two hours drive of the Shenandoah Valley. In March, Lynchburg opened its own version called Percival’s Isle.

The Mudhouse in Charlottesville, Bogen’s Restaurant in Blacksburg, and the Cybercafe and Training Center in Staunton are a few of the many examples of the marriage of computers and culture.
The American Spirit

JMU graduate Steve James moves from the thrill of producing a triumphant documentary to the calm of planning for his next film projects — variations on the same inspirational theme.

Story by Sherri Eisenberg

I
n the heady wake of film festivals, media buzz and acclaimed reviews, life goes on for Steve James.

James, a 1977 James Madison University graduate, directed last year's box office success, "Hoop Dreams." The documentary traced two black, inner-city Chicago youths from intermediate school to college as they struggled to become successful basketball players. For James, the importance of the film is evident in the larger implications of race and class in American society.

Frederick Marx, who produced and directed the film with James, said there were many times during filming when he and the crew were the only white people around, and he directly felt the impact of the racial implications.

"I felt extremely privileged in a lot of those situations," Marx said in a presentation following a screening of the film at University of Virginia. "There was definitely a certain amount of fear [in going into these situations]. We never made any bones about being outsiders to this community."

It was this fear that called attention to the film's issues of privilege and the American dream. James described the American dream as "part of the fabric of how America defines itself," as well as how the United States is defined globally as a nation. There's enough truth to the theory of the American dream, he said, that it can't be written off as a myth. Arthur Agee and William Gates, the young subjects of the film, are examples of that truth.

"The pursuit of basketball for these kids [Agee and Gates] and their families becomes a metaphor for the American dream," he said.

"I came to realize what the dream means to kids from the inner city. It's different from the middle class. The stakes are higher," James said. It is the only ticket to the full scholarship necessary for many low-income students to attend college. He added that there are extremely small odds of crossing from community basketball courts to university or professional teams.

Viewers around the country have noted the implausible nature of the dream with sadness and have connected with it, explained James, who said he believes it is part of what jelled the film's success. He suspects another reason for the box office triumph was the sincerity of the finished product.

"The film charted these two families' lives in a way that was both honest and real. And for both of them, there was a happy ending," James said. He was pleased the success extended beyond the filmmakers to the families they presented.

In the end, both men left for college on scholarships made possible by their athletic potential.

James recognized the possibility that things could have turned out differently.

Despite the support of critics on both coasts and a petition signed by actors such as Paul Newman and Robert Redford, "Hoop Dreams" was not nominated for an Oscar. Masses of viewers nationwide expressed their outrage, and David Letterman dedicated a Top-10 List to the film, titling it "Top 10 ways you know the movie you're watching will not get an Academy Award." Number six: "It's a beautifully made documentary about two kids in the inner city trying to realize their dream of playing professional basketball."

"Not being nominated really wasn't that disappointing," James said. "The film won so many awards and was so widely recognized."

The awards included being listed in more than 100 top-10 lists by film critics, including a number-one rating by Siskel and Ebert, The Washington Post and Los Angeles Times.

The film was named for Best Documentary by the National Society of Film Critics, the New York Film Critics and the National Board of Review.

Marx said President Clinton's praise of the film was an honor and a privilege. "It doesn't hurt to have the president endorse your film and all," he said, smiling proudly.

James won several awards for the documentary as well, including the 1994 Outstanding Alumni Achievement Award from JMU. He returned to Harrisonburg in January 1995 to receive the accolade.

"I hadn't been back in quite a while," he said. "My wife [Judy Roth James] and I went to the basketball game, and I was presented with an award at halftime . . . and there was a large turnout for the screening at the local theatre. It's always nice to come back, especially after a success."

In the works

Since working on "Hoop Dreams" together, James has continued to collaborate with co-producer Peter Gilbert.

The two produced commercials for FILA starring Grant Hill, Prime Sports Cable Network starring Wayne Gretsky, and an ESPN2 commercial showcasing boxing.

They also "signed a two-picture deal with Savoy Pictures to develop a dramatic feature called 'Nagasaki Dust' and another based on the life of Phoenix Suns player Connie Hawkins," according to the summer 1995 issue of Montpelier, JMU's alumni magazine.

James said it is wise for a cinematographer to have a lot of projects in the works because funding is so hard to come by, and they increase a director's probability of success.

"You have to have a lot of [films] you're trying to do because film is an expensive medium," James explained.

Another project he is attempting to fund is a film on Anna Deavere Smith's one-woman show about the Los Angeles riots, "Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992," to be produced by Jonathan Demme.

"It's been tough trying to raise the money . . . especially because there's no happy ending, and it's a one-woman show. We've been trying extensively for some time now," James said.

According to Gayle Wald in a review published online by Oxford University Press, Smith's performance is such a harsh slice of reality that some people may not consider it entertaining.

"Though 'Twilight' is at times highly amusing," Wald said, "its effect..."
Filmmakers Steve James, Peter Gilbert and Frederick Marx film the court during the production of 'Hoop Dreams.' Photo courtesy of Fine Line Features.

is to memorialize the voices of Los Angeles.

In another sense, ‘entertainment’ is one of the many challenges posed by ‘Twilight,’ a work which seeks to generate theatrical compassion through Smith’s hallmark technique of literal impersonation.”

Smith, an associate professor of drama at Stanford University, said her play illustrates the metaphor of the onset of darkness in early evening to the shadow cast over Los Angeles during the riots incited by the Rodney King verdict.

“Twilight is a time of danger, when objects ordinarily visible in broad daylight are obscured and the time of day when much of the first rioting occurred,” Wald said.

Like most of the projects James is drawn to, Smith wrote the play to combat ethnocentrism. “Twilight” is as much an activist’s cry for social justice as it is an artistic work of theater.

James also plans to direct another film about social issues, this one about Latin American baseball hero Roberto Clemente, who played for the Pittsburgh Pirates in the ‘60s. Clemente died early in his career when his plane crashed while flying supplies to Nicaraguan earthquake victims. The script is still being written, but the project will be funded by Disney Productions. James said he has not yet seen the first draft.

Another project stems from the 1995 Sundance Film Festival in Arizona, when producer Spike Lee approached James and asked if he would consider giving permission for the right to remake “Hoop Dreams” in fiction form.

“Twilight pictures has acquired these rights and is considering filming a made-for-TV movie version.”

James is also considering a story about the child he works with through the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program in his Southern Illinois community, he said.

James said the box office success of the film has not amounted to personal financial success for the producers, though it has created more opportunities. “Nobody has gotten rich off of ‘Hoop Dreams,’ but it certainly has helped me to pay off old debts and replace broken furniture,” he said.

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Humble beginnings at JMU

James grew up in Hampton.

“As a child, I always played basketball, and I had dreams not far removed from Arthur’s and William’s. Even after I lost those dreams, I still played for fun,” he said.

After he graduated from high school, he moved on to study mass communication at JMU without much thought.

“I went off to college not caring,” he said. “I wasn’t motivated.”

His parents had taken him to see the JMU campus and watch a basketball game. He liked it, and it was that simple. Not a lot of thought went into the decision.

At first, he said, he got by in JMU’s mass communication program by being halfway intelligent and “skating along.” He said he wasn’t “monstrously challenged.”

It wasn’t until he was an upperclassman at JMU and took Ralph Cohen’s film appreciation course that he got excited about film as a medium. Before then, he was focused more on radio.

“I fell in love with film as a senior at JMU,” he said. “This one class motivated me, and it changed everything.”

After graduating magna cum laude, he chose to follow his college sweetheart, Judy Roth, who had accepted an associate psychology professorship at Southern Illinois University.

“I looked through the course book and saw some film classes I liked,” he said. “I wasn’t going to lose her that easily.”

James married Judy and received his master’s degree in fine arts from Southern. He met Peter Gilbert in the process, and the two teamed up right after graduate school to make “Hoop Dreams.” Kartemquin Films set them up with cinematographer Peter Marx.

St. Joseph’s head basketball coach Gene Pingatore, famous for training NBA star Isiah Thomas when he was in high school, pointed the film team to Agee and Gates — young men he believed fit the criteria of showing a lot of promise at an early age.

The first few years, “Hoop Dreams” yielded no money. The trio had to do other work for pay and shoot the documentary when they could.

“It really, truly was a labor of love,” James said, describing the project as

see Spirit page 23
The enthusiastically bounded down the aisle of the classroom and cleared his throat, the loud “uh-hum” reaching the packed front row of students before he did. For the next hour, Nikitah Imani, an assistant professor of sociology and Africentric studies at James Madison University, paced in front of his Modern American Culture class nearly nonstop.

His hands kept equal pace with his feet. Their energetic gestures reached out to his students, emphasizing his thoughts almost as often as they found their way back to his face to stroke his chin or adjust his glasses. Though he’s a thin man and not especially tall, his presence, as defined by his constant movement and energetic gestures, filled the lecture hall. He seemed to stop moving only when he wanted to stress an important point; the pause took on the characteristic of a physical punctuation mark.

Imani ended this lecture with a discussion of popular stories whose characters, such as Dracula and Santa Claus, are familiar to his students. Though he elicited a round of chuckles with his Frankenstein impression, he eventually got more serious, warning students not to honor the symbols found within these stories if they are not sure what they mean.

“You should seriously consider checking into the Easter bunny,” he said at the end of the lecture. “Watch the Easter bunny ladies and gentlemen; he may be hopping away with your spirituality.”

As it stands, no one is hopping away with Imani’s spirituality. In addition to being a university professor, he is also a traditional African priest.

Imani’s role as a traditional priest reflects the dynamic aspects of African spiritual systems. As a minister in the Kemetian system, the Lifegiver Ministry, he acts as a scientist, artist, educator and health care specialist and performs priestly functions, such as conducting weddings, funerals and christenings. His role also requires him to preside over communal dinners and meditation sessions and deliver talks “designed to encourage people in a spiritual direction,” he said.

The knowledge he imparts during these talks is based on experience. Priests and priestesses within the Kemetian system learn universal principles, such as justice, honor, humility and faith and apply them to their lives. “If you find you aren’t able to apply [the principles] well, you consult other priests,” he said. “You learn and you grow.” For Imani, the educational process began at an early age and continues today.

Imani first felt called to the priesthood when he was a child, growing up in Atlanta. At the time, Imani envisioned places where circumstances were different, “places where people could be at peace.” These visions continued into adulthood through dreams, meditations and spiritual presences.

“I think all of us get a calling,” he said, explaining his inspiration.

“It is different for different people. I think I was called to the ministry. There are others who are called to be writers . . . all of us are in a sense called.

“Now what happens in this society unfortunately is that you’re often told not to listen to that inner voice, and you miss the call,” he said. “You do something because society says it’s what you’re supposed to do, or you’re concerned about popular perceptions, and you deny that inner voice. My argument is that you’ll never be satisfied until the inner voice is satisfied.”

His quest to satisfy his inner voice led him to Egypt, once called Kemet by its residents. The Kemetian spiritual system attracted Imani partly because of Egypt’s significant role in African history. Because of its locality along well-traveled trade routes, Egypt served as an important meeting place for the whole African continent. Therefore, it provided a place for a fusion of many different traditions.

“It was from this fusion, ironically enough, that western traditions developed,” Imani said. “So if we’re ever going to find a link between Western religious systems, we’re going to have to come back to Egypt because the irony is that Africa is the birthplace
of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.” He believes this is important because it shows these religions are all rooted in similar systems.

Last August, Imani came to Harrisonburg to teach at JMU. Lifegiver Ministry is also setting up a compound here to serve as a base for its community. “It’s designed to be a place where all of the priests and priestesses in the order and those that are in training can come and have a place of rest and meditation,” he said.

Imani described the compound as “a lifetime project” that will include a medical center, library, herb garden, school, holistic health care center, legal aid center, temple and communal kitchen.

Eventually, the public will be able to use the library to learn about African history. Along with providing books and other materials to read, the library will feature programs and films accessible to the public.

Imani will be busy working on the compound and filling his role as a priest over the next few years. For now, however, he can still be found at least three times a week on campus teaching his classes.

One of his students, senior Kim Varnum, said his Politics and Society class is “incredible,” and by providing a different perspective, Imani has completely changed the way she sees things. “Because he comes from a very Africentric viewpoint, he has really challenged my Eurocentric education.”

Senior Tim Coleman takes Imani’s Modern American Culture class. “I think it’s great,” he said. The class shows how American society is reflected in popular cultural forms such as music, literature and film. “I like getting different perspectives on everyday events like sports and movies. [I like] being able to think about something in a new way.”

As a professor, Imani enjoys the opportunity to open the minds of his students as well as “to get other people to question what has historically been, with the idea that if you can question the status quo, then maybe you can change it, and hopefully change it in a more constructive direction.”

Imani has spent his life questioning the status quo. Along with being a priest and professor, he is also a lifelong activist.

“I’m one of the people who chose early on to fight against apartheid in South Africa, to fight against the militarization of society, to fight against the poor economic distribution in society because all of these things were impacting on my community and what I saw growing up,” he said. “I watched its effects. So I knew, looking at its effects and watching it decimate my community, my friends and my family, I had to do something from an ethical standpoint.”

His life as an activist began with his childhood. Much of his family lived in housing projects in Atlanta. “Project life is a nightmare,” Imani explained. “We were heavily penetrated by state agencies — everything from social welfare agencies, to child care agencies, to court agencies to police agencies. And all of these agencies saw our community as an object to be manipulated, controlled and dealt with.”

Though he was eventually adopted, Imani’s natural mother fought against many of these social service agencies to keep her children and maintain her home. According to Imani, she resisted conformity to the Eurocentric standards set up by these agencies. Because she spoke out, she was eventually committed to a mental institution by the state of Georgia. Authorities gave no reason for her institutionalization.

According to Imani, during this time, if people were wards of the state, whether they were in prison or not, they were “fair game for experimentation.”

While she was committed, Imani’s mother worked endlessly for her freedom, but she suddenly died on the day of her release. Imani said she had no visible health problems at the time.

“My mother died,” he said. “I blamed this society. Not so much for her individual death, but for the setup of social circumstances that caused her and people like her [to die] and were on good track to cause me to die.” Imani’s activist spirit grew from experiences like this.

He began to study African history and revolutionary theory, while becoming increasingly involved in the civil rights movement. He was involved with several organizations, including the Black Panthers, Nation of Islam, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, All African People’s Socialist Party and NAACP, where he was once youth director.

“So I was pretty much in anything if it was identified as being black or African or Pan-African or whatever,” he said. “I was involved.”

Sue Spivey, an associate professor of sociology, can attest to his involvement. When Imani came to Harrisonburg, he lived with Spivey and her husband for a month, while he looked for his own place. “He has his hands in a ton of different pots,” Spivey explained.

“Most of us in academia are boring,” she said laughing. “He’s doing music. He’s into a lot of different art projects. He has a clear-cut agenda of building community — for African-American students in particular. He is so intensely spiritual; he’s not as narrow as some of us. He adds a lot [to the department] because of his diversity.” The number of different organizations he was involved with during his youth illustrates his diversity.

Participation in these organizations gained him knowledge of the significance of the Pan-African movement. According to Imani, those involved in the Pan-African movement “push for a circular, holistic model of the world,” where people aren’t placed in positions of inferiority and superiority. Imani’s involvement began to turn toward the ministry. He chose to become a traditional African priest, providing leadership in a spiritual system with which the African community can identify.

Imani said Africans have had to rely on others for culture, language and religious beliefs. “If those things that you’ve been given, or have taken or borrowed, don’t work for you, then you feel helpless because you don’t think you have anything of your own. But my argument is that African people have their own signs and symbols, religions, beliefs, economic systems, and political systems, and we can look to those as a resource. We’re not trapped.”

The culture, language and religions he referred to came from Europe. “Sadly, even God himself was reconstituted and became northern European in terms of orientation toward people and gender and so forth,” he said. “I think that any time people cannot see themselves in the divine image, whatever that divine image is, that person is going to be spiritually disconnected.”

In his roles as a traditional priest and educator, Imani tries to ensure Africans in his community don’t have to feel spiritually disconnected; he provides another option.

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Robin Gulick is a junior mass communication major/English and anthropology minor from Newport News. She plans to go abroad for a year and do volunteer work after graduating next May.
A chip off the old block

Sarah Cohen didn’t plan to take over her parents’ potato chip factory. Now she supports herself by frying potatoes with five other employees in a small factory just south of Winchester.

Located right off Route 11 at the only traffic light in Middletown, a rural Frederick County town less than a thousand people call home, is a small factory. Actually the factory is nothing more than a mini-warehouse, slightly larger than a mid-sized home. A gravel lot capable of holding about five cars sits in front of the old, blue-and-white, wooden building, and a fenced-in porch encompasses the entrance.

Step inside — there’s no massive assembly line here, just five folks and their “micro chips” — potato chips, that is.

And this isn’t the average potato chip — imagine the “anti-supermarket potato chip,” as Sarah Cohen, owner and manager of Route 11 Potato Chips in Middletown, described it. Route 11’s chips are prepared “fresh from the farm to the kettle to you,” as its motto goes. The potatoes are grown and shipped from farms in cities along the East Coast, including nearby Tabard Farm in Middletown.

Route 11 Potato Chips is not only a company that rejects mass production of food products, Cohen said. It is also one of the smallest potato chip factories in the country.

Route 11 Potato Chips may be small, but the company’s five employees can produce 60 pounds of chips — not potatoes — an hour, or 400-500 pounds a day. During the winter holidays, they may prepare as many as 1,000 pounds a day. “And everything we cook goes selling out the door immediately,” Cohen said.

To settle the curiosity of how potato chips are made, Cohen offers chip-making tours to the public every Friday and Saturday. During a tour, visitors can view the whole process through a large glass window adjacent to the kitchen.

Route 11 starts the process with fresh potatoes, which are stored for about two months in a separate room in the factory until they are produced into chips. When the chips are down, so to speak — or ready to cook — Cohen calls on “Omnipotent Chipping Czar” Chris Miller to take over the job. Miller develops chip recipes when he’s away from the deep-fryer.

With 10 years under his belt, six of which have been with Route 11 Potato Chips, Miller practically lives, breathes and eats potatoes. His family owned Chesapeake Chips in Waldorf, Md., before Cohen’s parents bought the company in 1990 and made it their own.

Miller said people enjoy watching the chip-making process. “The fact that they can see [the chips] being made, and they can take a bag home with them — I think that makes a lot of people a lot happier. [They] know they’re fresh.”

When the stored potatoes are ready to be chopped into chips, Miller dumps a barrel of potatoes into a machine which rinses and peels 75 pounds in 20 seconds. From there, the potatoes go into an automatic slicer, which dックス the chips into the fryer — a 55-gallon tub of hot peanut and sunflower oil. The chips are cooked for five to six minutes and then shuffled onto a cooling tray, where Miller spices them up with salt or other flavorings.

Along with the traditional potato-chip flavors, like Lightly Salted, Barbeque, Salt-N-Vinegar and Sour Cream & Chive, come a few out-of-the-ordinary creations which may entice the nose and tempt the taste buds. These include Dill Pickle, Chesapeake Crab, Sweet Potato and Mixed Vegetable. Mixed Vegetable chips are made from taro root, sweet potatoes, beets, parsnips, carrots, purple potatoes or whatever else farmers may “dig up.”

“Only two companies in the United States make veggie chips,” Cohen said, “and we’re one of them.” The other is Terra Chips in New York.

How did Route 11 Potato Chips come up with these flavors? “We’re so small that we can throw things into the fryer and experiment,” Cohen said. “We’re kind of the micro-chippery.”

The company’s biggest claim to fame is Tabard Farm Potato Chips, named for Tabard Farm in Middletown, which Cohen’s parents raised in 1982. These chips are made from organically grown Yukon Gold potatoes, a yellow, flesh-colored potato with a buttery taste. The potato chips are hand-cooked in 100 percent monounsaturated sunflower oil, for the “health-conscious chip lover,” according to a company pamphlet.

Tabard was one of the first three farms in Virginia to be certified organic by the Virginia Association of Biologic Farming, and Route 11 Potato Chips is currently the only chipper in the country making Yukon Gold chips.

The company no longer holds organic certification, Cohen said, “because [being certified organic] sort

Gary Meadows uses a rake to stir some chips. The fryer holds more than 50 gallons of oil.
Of lost its meaning. The state comes up with standards, and there are so many different methods of farming, I think it was an insult to be stated organic.”

When Cohen’s father purchased the potato chip company, she wasn’t very gung-ho about the idea. “At the time,” Cohen said, “I thought ‘Dad, you’re insane.’” But that was years ago.

Shortly thereafter, the Cohens went to a food trade show in San Francisco, where they introduced their chips to Williams-Sonoma, a national kitchen and housewares company.

Cohen’s mother, Fritzi, sparked the company’s interest in their unique product and made the sale, sending the family into “a production frenzy,” Cohen said. They packaged and distributed potato chips to 93 Williams-Sonoma stores and filled the company’s catalog orders. The Cohens had never done any previous manufacturing.

After receiving more than 100 positive letters from satisfied snackers, Cohen decided her dad’s idea wasn’t so crazy, after all. So she stayed with the company and nursed it as her own. Cohen was contemplating career options at the time, so she agreed to a yearlong commitment to help her parents. As for Miller, “He came with the deal,” she said.

Miller helped the Cohens fill the Williams-Sonoma order and hasn’t left the company yet.

Once word got out to other food companies, the little potato chip company became big business almost overnight. The Cohens’ creation was requested everywhere — in gourmet food stores, delicatessens and restaurants, as well as locally and through mail orders.

Although their basic distribution area is Maryland, Virginia and Washington, D.C., Route 11 Potato Chips mail orders to anywhere in the country. Locally, the potato chips are carried at the Joshua Wilton House in Harrisonburg and the Tabard Inn in Middletown.

At the time of the Williams-Sonoma order, the Cohens bought many of their potatoes in the Shenandoah Valley. About five years ago, to get closer to the land they used, the Cohens moved the business from its former home in Waldorf to Middletown and put Sarah in charge.

As for Edward and Fritzi, they’re still involved with the business, although Cohen is the one who runs it day to day. At present, they are working on other entrepreneurial goals, like starting a hotel business on the West Coast.

What’s it like to work at a small business that has achieved national success? For Cohen and her employees, it’s business as usual. With such a small staff, everyone does production, administration, customer service and shipping.

“I refuse to put one person in any one job,” she said. “We’re planning to expand this summer, but we still want to keep it small. We never want to get too big.” Cohen plans to add 5,000 square feet of production space to the current 3,300 square feet.

This size “affords a chipper attention to detail, turning what is usually mass produced by machines into a fine art.”

Cohen said, “In the past several years, there has been a rejection [by consumers] of mass-produced products. People are into local products. They’re interested in where food is coming from. That’s a wave we’re on; we’re lucky.”

Her father Edward said, “Over the years, we gradually realized how cheap products are for the public. People are interested in where food is coming from and what’s in it? That’s the big question.”

As for huge companies, like Frito-Lay, who want to monopolize the snack-food industry, Edward said, “We’re a reminder of what they’re incapable of doing. They’d have to bury us under a pile of rocks.”

Cohen said, “We’re trying to make a unique product. We’re not trying to be a Frito-Lay. We’re small, and we’re not mass producing the product. We’re into quality and what the final product is. I look at us as a revolution of mass-produced products.”

For Cohen and her employees, the chip business is no small potatoes.

Paula Finkelstein is a junior mass communication major and psychology minor who will serve as assistant News editor for The Breeze next year.
Helping

In addition to classes and homework, students at JMU learn through helping those in need. Community Service-Learning, an agency sponsored by JMU, brings nearly 2,500 volunteers to the Harrisonburg-Rockingham community annually.

JMU student Shella Burch puts a tattoo on Matthew Privott at the Waterman Elementary School spring festival. Burch's sorority, Sigma Gamma Rho Inc., teamed up with CS-L to send volunteers to the festival.

A growing legacy

In 1986, Ann Myers and Cecil Bradfield had a vision. In this vision, these two professors of social work at James Madison University saw a focal point of providing students with a clearing house of volunteerism. Soon, their vision became a reality, and they formed the Center for Service-Learning, which serves as a placement agency for students and faculty interested in giving something back to the Harrisonburg-Rockingham community through service.

"We were interested in promoting the value of service-learning as an extension of the classroom," Bradfield said. "For some years before that, we both encouraged students to be involved in community agencies, and we felt we could promote this on a wider basis by creating a program that would facilitate a connection."

Ten years ago, when Myers and Bradfield created CS-L, it was only a shadow of what it is today. The center's resources consisted of a tiny office, a graduate student, a desk and a telephone, according to Bradfield. The center serviced seven agencies and had about 60 volunteers.

In 1992, the university made a financial commitment by creating a full-time position, a center coordinator, which Holly Smith has held since 1992. In addition, the office moved from a cramped space in Wine-Price Hall to newly built Taylor Hall, part of the university's campus center. The center changed its name to Community Service-Learning in 1995 when it became a part of the Madison Leadership Center.

Now, JMU's CS-L is a model for other universities committed to incorporating service into education. "We are unique in the country because the university has made a collaboration between student and academic affairs by giving a faculty member credit for assisting the center in faculty development," Smith said.

JMU's CS-L is a first-of-its-kind program on campuses across the nation, Smith said. Assistant Professor of human resource development, Oris Griffin, receives class-release, where she is excused from teaching one of the four classes required for a full-time professor, for working with the center. Griffin assists with curriculum design while encouraging faculty to incorporate service into their class requirements.

In addition to Smith and Griffin, CS-L is run by eight program assistants who are each in charge of a social issue: hunger and housing, youth and adult services, health, environment and education, tutoring, mentoring and special projects. Annually, about 2,500 students volunteer at the 100 area agencies for which the center does placement. This expansion, which has occurred in CS-L in the past few years, somewhat worries Smith.

"We've expanded so much that my concern is the quality of service and learning will lessen," she said.

Smith's goal is to create a legacy of service during her reign as coordinator. Because her coordinatorship is an entry-level position, she does not see herself staying with CS-L much longer, and she doesn't expect a successor would either.

"I'm trying to create a sustainable structure so a new coordinator won't have to start anew. My hope is that people at JMU will have a tradition of service."

Smith is trying to form partnerships between organizations and agencies so they can establish a sense of tradition and a foundation to build upon.

"If they're going to be able to withstand turnover."

In addition to providing volunteerism for its agencies, CS-L also sponsors several programs that are required if the organization wants to collaborate with CS-L. These programs instruct the agencies on, among other things, finance, diversity and sensitivity.

"Every one of our agencies agree the agencies come to
Teaching a tradition of Service

Many professors look to CS-L as a vehicle to enrich their students’ educations. About 40 teachers across the JMU campus require students to serve the community as part of their class assignments, and Griffin’s goal is to encourage more professors to do the same, she said.

“I try to get faculty committed to encouraging students to participate [within the community],” she said. “I stress the importance of service to one’s life and applying what you learn in the classroom.”

In fact, Griffin’s chief role is to act as a liaison between the center and the faculty. The university’s main investment in CS-L stems from a commitment to integrate the education process with service.

Many professors are leery of requiring volunteerism on the basis it’s something that needs to come from within. My argument on the philosophical debate about requiring volunteerism is that it’s like requiring anything else,” Bradfield said.

“It’s teaching the practice of volunteerism.”

Myers said she feels most classes can relate to service-learning, but faculty members often don’t see the link. “Students in all disciplines need an opportunity to test involvement. Most faculty could connect it, but it doesn’t seem like it at first.”

According to A Guidebook for Instructors, a pamphlet CS-L created to enlighten faculty members about the importance of service-learning, “Service-learning is a component of leadership which assists in preparing students to learn how to influence real social change through acting upon their beliefs and utilizing their skills, through exploring diversity and responsibility in order to make life and career decisions and through applying their classroom instruction while meeting the needs of the community.”

The guidebook adds that a strong balance between classroom enrichment and outside practice is a fundamental component of a fulfilling education.

“When students are able to move out experientially, they are able to see the concepts they are studying,” Myers said. “It comes alive.”

Myers said she feels service-learning is important in all stages of education.

“Helping develop responsible citizens and people being responsible in society is important. Unless we all participate with this, we won’t have the kind of world we want.”

“Service needs to be practiced so students can feel comfortable going into the situation; the support system facilitates growth,” she said.

Griffin said she sees service affecting her students.

“They get into a lot of discussions. They feel a little guilty because they didn’t realize these problems were in the community.”

When people work with others, their attitude changes, she said. “When you talk about handicapped people in class, you only know the terminology. But when you’ve worked with them, you’re attitude changes — you become more sensitive.”

Latoya Ingram, a senior speech communications major at JMU, has been a program assistant at CS-L for two years. She said she agrees with Griffin that service is an important part of education.

“When I go to the agencies, I get to use the theories I learn and see them happen,” she said.

Still, service alone will not enrich an education. The professors must also create a forum within their classes where the students can reflect on their experiences.

“Students tend to have compartmentalized learning, meaning they disregard information from semester to semester,” Griffin said.

You need to integrate and reflect on it. If faculty forget to integrate [the service], students will look at it as a requirement rather than an opportunity to serve.”

Continuing an age-old tradition

By moving beyond the classroom and applying the knowledge they have acquired, students are doing more than enriching their minds — they are giving something back to the community that has embraced them during their college years.

CS-L places volunteers and provides services to most of the volunteer agencies in the Valley. CS-L is the only service-placement agency in the area, so it’s the only place the agencies can go to for a volunteer base.

Many agencies see CS-L as a great pool of potential volunteers.

“It’s the only place we can call and get volunteers instantly,” said Emily Perdine of the United Way in Harrisonburg.

She added that the 24 agencies the United Way funds, which include the Red Cross and the Association of Retarded Citizens, could probably not get along without CS-L.

“We definitely feel the strain at times when students aren’t here,” Perdine said. “A lot of times we have to either look for other volunteers or detain programs.”

The United Way presently contracts about 5 percent of its volunteers through CS-L.

Janet Slaugh is the coordinator of volunteers at Sunnyside Presbyterian Retirement Community, and she works closely with the Valley Volunteer Forum, an informal network of agencies.

Most of the agencies would not be able to function on the level they do without CS-L. Although agencies receive great support from area residents, CS-L volunteers make important contributions on a number of levels, she said.

According to Bradfield, CS-L’s first landmark achievement concerning reaching out to the Valley occurred in the late ’80s when the center received a grant to provide Mercy House with its first paid employee.

see Helping page 23
Making Things Better

Friendship Industries works to improve the skills of the area’s disabled while providing top-quality service to its customers.

Because of an optical disability called channel vision, Doris Lambert of Harrisonburg is unable to work in a typical factory environment, which generally has conveyor belts to move items down a production line. Lambert’s disability makes it difficult to see moving objects. Things on a conveyor belt zip past before she has a chance to see them.

This disability would prevent her from working at most factories, but at Friendship Industries, a company which overcomes many obstacles some handicapped face in the workplace, Lambert is a factory worker assisting in the custom packaging of such things as shampoo bottles, books, computer disks and mass mailings.

Lambert is able to do this because Friendship Industries understands her disability and has found ways to work around it.

Rather than the typical conveyor belt, Friendship Industries provides Lambert with a table where she can work at her own pace. The items Lambert must package or assemble are prepped with attention to her special needs and the idea of enhancing her productivity.

Many of the area’s disabled, like Lambert, are helped by Friendship Industries.

The company has two missions: to provide the area’s disabled with real-world work options and to stay competitive in producing quality packaging, assembly and mailing services for its customers, according to Vice President of Operations George Homan.

“We give the area’s disabled, many who have never had a job, a chance to work in an industry environment with real industry expectations,” Homan said.

Professionals at Friendship Industries assess each worker and give him or her individual goals instead of requiring them to meet production quotas. The company provides individual assistance and close supervision to help every worker improve his or her job skills, Homan said.

The company also provides its employees with transportation to and from work. The company’s vans travel 500 miles a day transporting more than 60 disabled workers.

Not having a means of transportation is often a major barrier the area’s disabled face when finding work, according to Homan.

The United Way donates most of the money for the transportation service, but Friendship Industries also charges a small fee to help maintain the vans and to give its employees a positive, real-world learning experience, Homan said.

The company also strives to find solutions to the more individualistic problems of the disabled.

Finding Solutions

When a disabled person comes to Friendship Industries, he or she is given what the company calls a work assessment, which charts individual progress. The staff uses the work assessment, which is reviewed every six months, to set individual goals and to track productivity. The work assessment is also a contract service Friendship Industries offers to such agencies as the Department of Rehabilitative Services, Homan said.

The work assessment tests the disabled person’s physical ability to perform certain tasks and helps the company match a person’s physical ability with the particular work environment most suited to those capabilities.

In addition, the assessment tests the person’s social skills in dealing with fellow employees and supervisors.

“Problems on the job site do not usually arise because the employee cannot do the assigned task,” Homan said. “Social skills and the person’s ability to get along with his or her supervisor generally cause most of the problems.”

From the work assessment, professionals at the company set short- and long-term goals for the disabled individual. Short-term goals usually pertain to the person’s speed at performing certain tasks or his or her behavior on the job. Long-term goals deal mainly with the extended employment program at Friendship Industries or with their supported employment program, which places disabled individuals into jobs at area businesses, Homan said.

After the work assessment, most new employees go into a training program called work adjustment, which eases new employees into the work environment. A staff of 18 from the counseling and rehabilitative fields helps employees become more productive at their jobs and provides guidance on proper work behavior, Homan said.

Michelle McCabe, a senior social work major at James Madison University, is completing a practicum at Friendship Industries in which she assists the staff in helping employees reach their full potential.

Her duties include working with employees on the plant floor and assisting in the review rehabilitative plans.

“If I see a faster way of doing a particular task, I’ll show the worker,” McCabe said.

Vice President George Homan poses with boxes of ready-to-ship, shrink-wrapped manuals.

Story by Jason Brockwell  Photography by Ryan Netzer
On days when there isn't enough work for all the employees, the company has training classes, she said. In these sessions, employees practice putting disks into book jackets and stuffing envelopes to improve their speed and productivity.

Homan said that because of its status as a nonprofit corporation, Friendship Industries can pay disabled employees a commiserate wage based on their proficiency compared with an able-bodied person's ability to do the same task, Homan said. 

As the individual's productivity improves, his or her pay improves. "This provides a strong market incentive and gives the employee an understanding of industry expectations."

All jobs at Friendship Industries are based on a pay scale of $5.25 an hour or higher, he said.

The commiserate wage ensures the company will stay competitive in the marketplace. "We want to make sure we are not spending more on a product than we are earning," Homan said.

If the employee makes enough progress and wants to remain with Friendship Industries, he or she can graduate from the work adjustment program and move into the extended employment program.

Lambert graduated into the extended employment program after a few months with Friendship Industries, but the amount of time it takes to graduate into the extended employment program varies, depending on the person's ability.

According to Ellen Harrison, Rehabilitative Services coordinator for Friendship Industries, the company also has a supportive employment program for those individuals who want to work at community jobs.

The program places 10 to 15 people a year in such area establishments as Rack & Sack, Wal-Mart, McDonald's, Red Lobster, Howard Johnson's and Eastern Mennonite University.

Harrison said the supportive employment program uses the "job coaching model," under which job coaches from Friendship Industries accompany participants to their job sites and learn the new jobs with them.

The coach helps train the individual for the job, provides emotional support and becomes a model of proper job conduct.

Job coaches look for modifications to make the environment "flow" better for the disabled person, Harrison said. These are most often simple modifications that make things more accessible for the disabled person.

Sometimes, a high-tech invention is used to help a disabled employee. Woodrow Wilson, a state rehabilitative agency, designed a potato scooper for a kitchen worker placed by Friendship Industries. The employee could not hold and scoop a potato at the same time, and the machine enabled the individual to do this.

It was free to the employer and allowed the disabled employee to keep his job, Harrison said.

Job coaches work closely with the disabled individual, making sure the person understands all of his or her responsibilities by looking for different cues that will help the individual remember his or her job.

"We often provide pictures or other visual cues to help the individual remember," Harrison said.

After a couple of weeks, the job coach begins to "fade out" of the work site. This process may begin with the job coach going to a different room for an hour.

"We don't want the person to feel dumped on a job site," Harrison said. "It is often their first work experience."

After about a month, the job coach leaves the work site, and Harrison or one of the other two job coaches returns every two weeks to check up on the employee and to provide support or help if problems arise.

The job coaches also retrain people in the program if the employees have to change jobs, Harrison said.

The supportive employment program offers a voluntary site assessment where the job coach and a participant will go to a possible job site and volunteer for a day. This allows an employer to see how the program works and lets the employee try the job before either make a commitment, Harrison said.

"When we match the right person to the right job, they blossom like a flower," Harrison said. "They become more independent. They get off social security and become tax payers. They get their own places to live and make new friends."

Fostering independence in the area's disabled is a big part of what Friendship Industries likes to do. There is, however, another aspect to Friendship Industries — the packaging and mail service company that must compete in the marketplace by providing dependable, top-quality service for its customers.

**Not Just Business as Usual**

Friendship Industries has changed a lot since its beginning in 1964. "We're much more business-oriented today," Homan said about Friendship Industries' course of progress. The mission to remain competitive is a part of the company that Homan wants to push.

The company began as an off-shoot of the Association of Retarded Citizens. It was then considered a "sheltered workshop," and the company mostly did salvage work on Coke crates, put corrugated dividers into cases and boxes and did some packaging work, Homan said.

Friendship Industries broke away from the Association of Retarded Citizens in 1972 and became a nonprofit corporation. In the current lingo of the rehabilitative field, the company is considered an "employment service organization," Homan said.

This is a term Homan wants Friendship Industries to transcend by focusing more on the competitive business aspect of the company.

"We're going where we want to go, not where people want to put us," Homan said. "We're looking to be proactive in setting our own objectives for the future."

To increase its growth potential, Friendship Industries wants to set up what Homan calls "strategic alliances" with various businesses. The company's partnership with Good Printers is an example of this type of alliance.

The partnership began last year. The two companies joined up because Good Printers needed a full mailing service to complete many of its largest print orders. Rather than spending the money on the new equipment and manpower necessary to create this service, Friendship Industries and Good Printers joined forces so each could concentrate on its core business, Homan said.

Friendship Industries has an independent division in Bridgewater that concentrates on mail management.

It is more business-oriented and integrates disabled workers with a higher ratio of non-disabled employees, Homan said.

Friendship Industries hopes to form similar partnerships with other companies in the future. Friendship Industries also wants to start its own manufacturing facility with its own product sometime in the future, Homan said.

Whether it's the lives of the area's disabled or customers' products, Friendship Industries seems to be making things better.

Jason Brockwell is a special student studying journalism. He is from Middlesex County and graduated from College of William & Mary in 1994. After spring semester, he plans to pursue a career in journalism.
Creation Station

The Children’s Art Network brings art, art history and a sense of service to the youth of the Shenandoah Valley

Story and Photography by Lindsay Bowen

Give a child a blank piece of paper and a box of crayons, and he or she can work magic. This was the premise on which the Children’s Art Network was created — to give anyone — although the majority of its members are children — the opportunity to be creative and imaginative with art when they might not otherwise have the chance. The creators of CAN believe art feeds the soul; it is as crucial to young souls as old souls.

CAN has been serving children in Staunton and Augusta counties since Executive Director Brenda Papke started the organization a few years ago. Originally, Papke ran CAN out of her home, but the growth of the organization soon facilitated a move to a small public office, she said.

“After exhausting all other possibilities, I decided to create an organization that utilized the abundance of local resources and complimented existing art programs,” she said.

Because CAN is primarily staffed by volunteers, Papke spends much of her time planning a mix of community service projects and fund-raisers to support children’s art in the community. To raise money and find donors, she spends a lot of time and energy convincing the community that art is an essential part of a child’s life. “Every child should have the opportunity to create. The need for self expression dates back to the beginning of humankind,” Papke said.

CAN’s primary goal is to make a difference. The program has successfully accomplished that goal. Most area elementary schools do not provide art education for students. If they do, it is very limited, Papke said.

“I hope that in some small way our organization can address this problem. More importantly, I hope that we can encourage others to do the same,” she said.

Papke said she believes CAN provides children with an opportunity to learn about art and art history. She further believes CAN is not a substitute for the lack of art education in the schools, nor should it be. “[If] sequential art education should arise, then CAN could beautifully complement it. What the Staunton and Augusta area desperately needs is art education, and it does not look like anything is going to be done about it any time in the near future,” she said.

Jessica Davis, a senior at James Madison University, spent several years volunteering for CAN. She said she agrees CAN is a positive influence on the children. “They have the opportunity for a real hands-on art experience. While the kids are learning, they are also doing something that they really do enjoy.”

Papke referred to CAN as a “finger in the dike,” providing opportunities for children to learn and contribute artwork to the community. It provides a way for kids to express their individuality.

Members of the community respond well to children’s art because they can see the individual emerging through the work, Papke said. “Children have a wonderful way of letting everything come out on paper, unlike adults who have grown to shut everything up inside.”

Art is a sure way to let kids show who they really...
projects and sharing their expertise. Martha Degen is a local artist in Staunton who originally got involved with CAN when a friend asked her to be involved in some of the network's projects.

"The program gives the children a chance to channel their creative ability, allow them to trust their own instincts and to share their experiences with others," Degen said. Most of the children's projects have a second or third life, meaning they give their work away to others.

While CAN and its volunteers are busy teaching art, the program also teaches the children about community service. The children have a responsibility to contribute something back to the communities that have given them such opportunities, and the art is a great vehicle for that, according to Papke.

One way for the kids to show their artwork to the community and help raise money for the program is through the Children's Community Art Gallery. Drawings and paintings are photographed and displayed in a portfolio, which is shown to local businesses. From the portfolio, area businesses can select art to display in their offices. Once a piece is chosen, it is professionally matted and framed. A plaque is placed on the bottom listing the name of the child, his or her school and the Children's Community Art Gallery.

The local business pays a fee for displaying the artwork, which goes to support CAN. The artwork then moves on to another business after a few weeks. After four years the work is returned to the artist with a list of businesses where the piece was displayed.

Papke said this is a wonderful way for CAN to raise money, but most importantly, for the kids to get recognition for their hard work, Papke said.

Being involved with CAN provides something for all participants. Davis said one of her fondest memories was working with the shy children. "Some of the children were very timid and were hesitant to come over and participate with the other outgoing kids. Once the children got into the project, they began to enjoy themselves and had some fun. You can see the enthusiasm in their eyes." She described the experience as a "rush."

Degen expressed similar attitudes toward CAN. "There is a satisfaction in seeing a light bulb go off in someone's head. To know that the children realize that they can create no matter what the medium."

Projects in Progress

The latest of CAN's projects involves fifth-graders from Cassell, North River, Riverheads, Churchville, Verona and Clymore elementary schools and the Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind. The project is called "History in the Making." Each school has chosen a historical site in the Shenandoah Valley, an area rich in historical significance. Some of the historical subjects chosen for the project include Grandma Moses, Jedediah Hotchkiss and the Serpentine Wall. The children research, write and illustrate their topics.

The end result of "History in the Making" will be a series of historical markers that will be permanently displayed at the historical site with the artwork chosen by an anonymous panel of judges selected by the network. The markers will be drawings done with paint, colored pencils, markers and oil pastels. "Each one will be individualized," Papke said.

Papke said the kids make visual contributions to the community, and she hopes the project will continue with the help of community donations.

The ultimate goals of "History in the Making" are encouraging artistic expression and teaching the children the history of the area in which they live.

"Clay in the Classroom" is another program CAN provides during the year. The network's traveling pottery studio brings the magic of clay to classrooms across the area.

At the Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind, Papke and her two assistants organized the program with the school principal Tanya Fadley.

One Wednesday morning, the program began with an introduction to clay and the potter's wheel, along with a brief description of how Native Americans created and used pottery.

Jim Hanger, a professional potter from Staunton, instructed the children on how to use the wheel. After a demonstration, each child came up to the wheel to play with the clay. Hanger said the clay on the wheel "looks like magic. It looks like the clay is alive." After the opportunity to play on the wheel, each child sat at a table to make his or her own medallion.

Fadley said she was thrilled to have CAN visit the...
Carving a niche in the Valley

Local artisan's love of nature shines through his creations

In a room barely 12 feet long, Allen Aardsma surrounds himself with paintings, models and tools as he transfigures a $5 block of wood into an original creation worth hundreds.

Aardsma is a professional wood carver, and he proudly displays his latest accomplishment — a 4-inch-tall beaver mounted on a log, painted a rich brown, looking lifelike, except for its size. The subjects of his creations range from tiny birds to a newborn fawn. Aardsma said, while some enjoy carving air crafts or figurines, his primary interest is birds and animals.

A resident of Broadway, Aardsma moved there from Adirondacks, N.Y., two years ago in search of a better climate and because he loved the beauty of the Shenandoah Valley.

He also thought his creations would sell better here where there is a larger and possibly more affluent market than in other regions. Aardsma now realizes this notion did not take into account the fact the Valley is a highly agricultural area.

Aardsma, who has been carving for 30 years, set up shop in the middle of his home. He spends his days surrounded by the buzz of activity from the children in his wife Robin’s day care center in the adjacent rooms and the flutter of pet birds flying freely about his studio.

For five years prior to moving to Virginia, Aardsma was a Baptist minister. He planned to carve only temporarily after moving to Virginia before returning to the ministry, but two years later, Aardsma, in his early 40s, is still carving for a living. His wife primarily supports his family, while carving profits supplement her income, he said.

The creative process is what keeps Aardsma’s heart in carving, he said. “While I’m doing it, I’m enjoying it. I love to run [the image of] an otter through my mind and freeze him in a pose entirely original so I’m creating a pose no one else has ever come up with. “My trademark is that my animals are very twisted,” he explained. “They show a lot of movement and motion. They are frozen in a pose far from being straight.”

It takes a lot of work before an Aardsma original is complete. Planning, carving, texturing and painting a new creation takes Aardsma an average of two weeks.

“It’s close, tedious work, so I don’t spend more than five hours a day, five days a week on a carving,” he said. “To me, five hours is all I really want to do before I need to switch gears completely.”

Aardsma began carving in 1966 at age 12, when he watched an old man whittle birds. Two years later Aardsma wanted to buy a canoe to explore the rivers of upper New York state, so he whittled birds and sold them at $10 a piece to finance the boat.

“I started [carving] with a knife and then learned there are power tools, and I thought to be a real carver I had to use power tools,” he said. “So for the next 10 or 15 years I used the power tools and never gave a thought of going back to knives.”

Last fall, however, Aardsma “got the old knife out and had a ball with whittling.” He said, “I really like this; I’ve come full circle. There is something very satisfying about whittling. Having a razor-sharp knife and a piece of wood that wants to be carved is aesthetically pleasing.”

Aardsma has been spending time lately whittling birds with an X-acto knife and a jackknife. He starts his projects with a piece of bass wood and draws the outline for each new project. Aardsma uses a jackknife for the majority of the carving, but he switches to an X-acto blade for the fine details. He generally carves a set of six little birds each week and said he finds this work relaxing. His reasoning for whittling birds was to display some of his work in the stores that would get his name out.

“I had never given a thought of going back to knife carving until I thought I had better make some inexpensive carvings that I could market quickly,” he said.

The Foredom power tool he uses, takes away the aesthetic enjoyment of...
carving because of its noise. He said most people visualize carvers as old men sitting in rocking chairs on the porches in rural areas, while communing with nature.

However, the realities of the experiences of a professional carver are vastly different. With a paper mask covering the lower half of his face, Aardsma turned on a vacuum tube to catch flying dust and switched on the Foredom, a machine that looks and sounds similar to a dentist’s drill. The combined effect is not one of simple pleasures and serenity, but one of imposing technology.

While Aardsma prefers to whittle with his knife, he had to use the Foredom again to carve the beaver he was working on because of the extreme detail it required. He claimed to like whittling so much he doesn't plan to do much Foredom carving anymore.

Hoping to improve his sales, Aardsma displayed creations on consignment at several local businesses to "let people know I'm out there."

Wild Bird Crossing in Harrisonburg, Crafty Hands at the Dayton Farmers’ Market, the Sporting Gallery in Middleburg and Homespun Creations at the Shenandoah Heritage Farmers’ Market sell Aardsma's work. Aardsma said it depends on what the store wants to feature whether he consigns whittled or power-tooled creations.

According to Susan Berdeaux, owner of Wild Bird Crossing in Harrisonburg, six of Aardsma’s carvings have been purchased for $50 or more. Of his work, Berdeaux said, “I like it well enough to have it in the store, and customers seem to like it.”

Sales and publicity were not a problem for Aardsma while living in New York. He was a resident artist at a popular tourist store in the Adirondacks. People came from all over the East Coast and placed orders. In 10 weeks of the summer each year from 1984-'88, Aardsma had enough orders to keep him busy into the following summer.

“Since we had done so well carving up there before I was a pastor, I thought I could come down here and at least temporarily support my family carving. I had a difficult time finding a wholesale market though, so my wife started her day care,” he said.

Aardsma attributed his difficulties selling his work to the lack of public awareness of his talent. “I haven’t marketed anything. I looked for wholesale buyers, but nobody wanted to tie up their money. I guess. It’s only been the last three or four months that I thought I better leave them [my carvings] somewhere other than on my own shelves.

“I might have sold a dozen or so since I’ve left them on consignment, which is pretty good,” he said. “I think if I had left them in 10 times as many places I would have sold 10 times as many. It’s my own problem with marketing.”

For items he sells wholesale, Aardsma charges an hourly wage. When working on a specific piece for a customer, he will set up a price range within which he works.

In order to keep track of what he’s done, Aardsma fills a photo album with pictures of every carving he’s made.

During the course of his life, Aardsma has carved 441 creations that he has recorded and probably more than 200 before he began keeping track.

He proudly shows his first trout and first owl but recognizes how much his talent has progressed since then. “I keep improving. I think everything I do seems to be a little better than the last animal of the same species,” he said.

Aardsma is especially fond of a sleeping fawn he carved about three years ago. The carving is so realistic one would think it was real if just looking at the photo. Aardsma noted it's the pose and coloring of the fawn that makes it appear so lifelike.

For projects he knows will cost the customer quite a bit of money, over $200, Aardsma will make a clay model before he pulls out his tools and slices into the wood. His recent project is one of the most difficult because “a beaver is kind of a lumpy looking thing, but I tried to put in a lot of angles and curves so he’s not just straight,” he said.

He admitted, “While I’m carving I enjoy it. I love the creating. If someone asked me to do another one just like it I wouldn’t do it. I have no interest in making two of something. I don’t like the repetition.”

He also sees “a need for a knowledge of the subject you are going to carve before you can actually carve so it is anatomically correct and in a pose characteristic of the subject. You have to have that subject and make it art. You have to have the skill of carving and texturing as well as painting and mounting. These are all areas of expertise where one artist will outshine another.”

Aardsma said he’s eager to learn more and his training has come from books. He admits he avoids any hands-on training with a carving instructor because he does not want his work to be influenced by the talent of another carver.

Aardsma said he loves nature, so he’s always looking and learning. He takes hikes to observe animals and admitted, “I never think I’ll know everything there is to know about an animal or everything about carving, and I think that will challenge me to keep going.”

Aardsma is not sure what the future holds for him but is certain he will never stop carving. “There will always be somebody who will approach me to carve something for them. I look forward to carving for the rest of my life.”

Stacey Danzuso is a junior mass communication major and will serve as News editor of The Breeze next year.
neading the fresh dough back and forth through her tired hands, Esther Shank hummed quietly to herself. She was making sure the mixture becomes smooth and elastic. Setting it in a large, plain bowl, she placed it in a warm spot, covered it and waited for the pale beige heap to double in bulk. The gray-haired woman then shaped the risen dough into four loaves, brushed them with melted butter and baked them until they once again doubled in size. The gray-haired woman then shaped the risen dough into four loaves, brushed them with melted butter and baked them until they once again doubled in size.

After the oblong loaves turned a golden brown and have sent a delicious aroma dancing through the kitchen, Shank removed them from the pans. She could finally taste the hot steaming bread, hours after her preparation began.

While most people would have opted to purchase a packaged loaf of bread from the grocery store, avoiding the time and effort of home baking, Esther Shank, author of *Mennonite Country-Style Recipes and Kitchen Secrets*, would never consider the idea. “I always bake my own bread, although I do buy the flour from the store,” she said.

For Shank, like many fellow Mennonites, cooking from scratch isn’t just a pastime; it’s a way of life. “As Mennonites, we believe Jesus Christ should be our model for life, and that means leading a very simple life,” she said. Baking their own foods and “avoiding many of today’s modern luxuries” helps them maintain their lives of simplicity.

As with any large group of people, there are exceptions to the norm. Some Mennonites are more modernized, eating prepackaged foods and using microwaves. Yet few have lost touch with their Mennonite culture, traditional cooking included.

Although Mennonite cooking greatly resembles regular country cooking, with dishes such as fried chicken and pot roast, American Mennonite recipes share a common heritage and culture all their own. From Virginia to California, Mennonite families continue to share numerous common recipes that have been passed down from generation to generation. It’s much like sharing a family recipe file, except this North American family has more than 403,000 members, rather than the usual five or six, Shank said.

Although their methods of cooking have changed, with the conventional oven replacing the outdoor wood-burning oven and the electric range replacing the pot-bellied stove, the food the Mennonites make has remained relatively unchanged. Homemaded breads, chicken and dumplings, German potato salad and cherry pie are just a handful of the many dishes that make up a cornucopia of savory Mennonite meals. Because of their farming background, poultry, ham, dried beans and vegetables constitute a large portion of the ingredients they use, according to Shank.

Where to find Mennonite cuisine

For Mennonite cuisine in the Shenandoah area, the Dayton Farmers’ Market offers authentic cooking. Found on Route 42, this indoor bazaar sells fresh-baked goods from the Mennonite-run Country Village Bake Shop. German chocolate and red velvet cakes, apple dumplings and shoofly pies are just a few of the many items on the menu. David Huyard, owner of the restaurant, said of traditional Mennonite cooking, “[It] keeps getting better all the time. There are absolutely no preservatives in our food, which I think the people here really like.”

Huyard lives in the true spirit of the Mennonite religion by donating all of the leftovers every Saturday to the Salvation Army.

“If you want traditional Amish food made from recipes straight from Lancaster County, this is the place to come,” Huyard said.

Customers are satisfied with the quality of food they buy at the farmers’ market. Karen Gooden, an occasional patron, said, “It’s just so unique. The [baked goods] are excellent, much fresher and better than anything you’d find in a regular grocery store.”

Cooking Mennonite food in the home can be easy as well. Among the cookbooks that give hundreds of authentic Mennonite recipes are *Mennonite Country-Style Recipes and Kitchen Secrets* and Mary Emma Showalter’s *Mennonite Community Cookbook*. Shank’s book lists many of her favorite recipes. Instructions for making everything from oven-barbecued chicken to chocolate eclair cake to her husband’s favorite fruit slush are all included. Remaining loyal to the old Mennonite way of life, Shank not only provides recipes, but also gives specific instructions for how to obtain the freshest ingredients.

At the beginning of her poultry section, for example, she explains how to properly kill and pluck a chicken, even giving the temperature for the water to be used to scald it before plucking. Diagrams also help clarify the process.

When asked about this unusual approach, Shank explained, “There may still be some people out there who have never killed a chicken before but...
would like to know how to do it. I think it is a necessary part of the book."

These details help those who plan to cook completely from scratch, like the Old Order Mennonites.

In Showalter’s *Mennonite Community Cookbook*, the author gives some of her favorite recipes while additionally printing 1,100 others sent in from Mennonite women across the nation. Basic bread recipes, jellies and poultry dishes are some of the creations readers can learn to make.

Recipes within the book originally hailing from such countries as Russia and Germany show how the Mennonite culture has remained intact. 

The *Mennonite Community Cookbook* displays the diverse cultural backgrounds of Mennonites, yet also shows the unity of the Mennonite tradition in a vast recipe collection.

Who are the Mennonites?

The Mennonite religion started in 1525 in Europe and was named after early Dutch leader Menno Simons. As an Anabaptist, Simons was a key Figure in the development of the Mennonite faith. The name "Mennonite" comes from Menno Simons' surname.

Mennonites are a religious group that believes in simple living, nonviolence, and community service. They follow some traditions such as homecooking. For example, they make bread in a specific way:

**Ingredients needed:**
- 6 slices bread
- 7 potatoes
- 7 potatoes
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. milk
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1/2 cup sour cream

**Directions:**
1. Heat a small amount of oil in a large skillet; fry chicken until browned. Drain; place chicken in 13X9X2-inch baking dish. In a saucepan, sauté onion in butter until tender. Stir in remaining ingredients. Simmer, uncovered, for 15 minutes.
2. Pour over chicken. Bake at 350 degrees for about 1 hour or until chicken is done, basting occasionally. Serve 6 to 8.

Mennonite culture has remained intact. Today, Mennonites are found in countries such as Russia, Germany and Switzerland.

**) To summarize, today’s luxuries, such as cars and electric appliances. The majority are farmers, ensuring self-sufficiency and simple lifestyles.

Yet no matter what the order of Mennonite, nearly all people of Mennonite faith still hold on to their ancestors’ traditions, cooking recipes included.

Rachel Pohle is a senior English major minoring in mass communication and secondary education and plans a career in journalism or education.
Driving down Main Street in Harrisonburg, the Virginia Quilt Museum doesn't really catch the eye right away. But given a second glance, the house with its big white pillars seems to tell a story of the past. Quilts are a major part of the history it tells. The museum opened in August 1995 with the help of a dedicated staff and volunteers from the Shenandoah Valley Guilds. “It took us many hours and lots of volunteer work and donations to finally open the museum, but since we had so many dedicated people, we are now well on our way,” Joan Knight, president of the museum, said.

The museum features art from both the past and present. “We always try to have a mixture of antique and contemporary quilts on display. We also display some children's quilts in the museum,” Knight said.

On the second floor of the museum, “we have quilts on display made by a second- and a fifth-grade class. It is nice to see children's quilts because they have a different angle on life.” The children used real quilting techniques with a little iron-on help.

The second floor of the museum will consist of more exhibition space, a big classroom and a small quilt research library. “We want to start teaching classes here, and we have been donated some computers for our library so that people can find out what they want to know about quilts,” Knight said. The second floor should be finished in time for the next exhibit.

The quilt exhibit has themes. “Our current exhibit is the ‘Festival of Flowers’ to celebrate Spring, and it is going to run until June 2,” Knight said. A collection of antique sewing machines accompanies this exhibit.

“The first exhibit the museum held featured a permanent collection of antique quilts, and after that, the museum held ‘Holidays and Hues,’ which featured seasonal quilts to celebrate Christmas time,” Knight said.

The next exhibit will have its grand opening June 8, according to Knight. “We are very excited for this next show because it is sponsored by the Embassy of Luxembourg, and it will feature contemporary quilts from the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.”

Knight said she is confident in the future of the museum. “We want to show people how beautiful quilts can be and give an insight about much work and love is put into quilts in order to get the finished product seen at the museum.”

Congratulations to Quilters, another popular quilt used for fund-raisers during that time was the Log Cabin quilt. “The Log Cabin quilts usually consisted of four rounds of logs, and people would pay money to have their name put on one of the patches. The closer to the center the log was, the more expensive it would be to have a name put on it. The center of the Log Cabins was usually red or yellow to indicate the light in the window. If the center was white, however, it indicated a safe house for escaped slaves going north on the underground railroad,” she said.

Coming into the present

Contemporary quilting is booming, according to quilting instructor Lynn Dash. “To me, quilting is a real art form, and it is one of the few art forms that have almost all their roots in the United States, and since Virginia was one of the first colonies, many of the roots of quilting lie here. Both my mother and my grandmother were good quilters, and I grew up sleeping under them, so it is no big surprise that I picked up what they liked to do.” Dash teaches at the Needle Craft Corner at Williamsburg Soap and Candle Company.

During the 1950s, old quilts became more valuable, and during the 1970s, quilting as an art form experienced a rebirth as people regained interest in the craft, Dash said. It has now evolved into a big business, but otherwise, it has changed little.

According to Knight, “The basic process has changed little from the original one. The patterns of modern quilts are still pretty much the same as the ones used 100 years ago. There are still standard patterns like the Log Cabin and the Hawaiian quilts, but the trend today is making the quilts smaller because it takes less time, and they make nice decorations for the wall.”

Dash said, “Quilting is an easy hobby to get started in. Much of the progress people make is by quilting itself. The classes I teach are pretty much learn-by-doing classes. We bring our work into class and give others helpful hints and ideas.” She admits an occasional lecture is necessary at times. “I grew up under quilts, and now I spend a lot of time making them, and because it is something I enjoy doing, I will probably do it for a very long time.”

Museum hours are Monday, Thursday through Saturday 10 a.m.-4 p.m. and Sunday 1 p.m.-4 p.m. Admission is $4 for adults, $3 for seniors and students and $2 for children. For information call (540) 433-3818.