JMU Arboretum: A Growing Heritage

Religious Broadcasting • Chiang House • Women's Self Defense
Dear Readers,

With all that occupies our lives today it's safe to say perceptions and attitudes that pervaded the lives of our parents and grandparents have changed.

However, it's not hard to realize that many of yesteryear's values and beliefs are alive and well today. Core American values such as religion, education and fellowship that have withstood the test of time are evident throughout the Shenandoah Valley.

What we've tried to do in this year's CURIO is illustrate many of these traditions Valley residents still hold dear. Whether it's experiencing firsthand the beauty of nature at the James Madison University Arboretum (see page 11), renewing one's faith by listening to the area's religious broadcasters (see page 2) or ensuring a bright future through the Tom Harris Mentorship Program (see page 5), we hope you'll find a piece of yourself within the pages of CURIO.

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Chiang House, p. 35  
photo by Maggie Welter

Marriott Ranch, p. 20  
Illustration by Brian Minter

Yogaville, p. 28  
photo by James Morris
It was a dark winter night when the shepherds were out watching their flocks, and an angel suddenly appeared to them. They were about to hear the biggest piece of news ever to be broadcast on Earth. The angel spoke these words: “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people.” And to the bewildered shepherds, the message rang out loud and clear — “A Savior has been born; he is Christ the Lord.”

Today there are many who remain dedicated to telling the same message that brought inspiration to the lowly shepherds that winter night. Though they don’t appear as the heavenly hosts dressed in robes of white, they would still call themselves messengers of God’s Word. You won’t find them appearing from the clouds, but rather from behind a microphone in a recording studio or in front of a camera in a TV station.

They are members of the Christian broadcasting community and can be found scattered throughout the world, the message being heard even in the heart of the Shenandoah Valley.

Religious broadcasting has been a growing part of the Valley since radio and TV signals made it possible to reach such a large, dispersed area. From early-morning gospel music to late-night heavy metal and rock to powerful sermons from renowned preachers, there’s a diversity of Christian programming hitting the airwaves today.
One thing just about every community needs is Christian broadcasting," says Alan Arehart, director of technical operations for WAZT-TV in Woodstock.

Meeting the needs of the community is central to all communications, as David Eshleman, general manager of radio stations WLTK and WBTX in Broadway, will attest. He says he first noticed the need for a specialized format of Christian programming in the Valley in the late 1960s, when he began building WBTX. "This area didn't have any full-time Christian radio," he says. "The dream I had was to provide this type of programming to the Valley."

WLTK, found at 96.1 on the FM dial, provides all-Christian radio to Valley residents. Operations Manager Barbara Finnegan says the format is mostly adult contemporary Christian music, with a target audience of 25-45 years of age. Known as Light 96 to listeners, it operates 17 hours a day and all night Friday in order to provide music that appeals to the Valley's youth. It also offers updated local weather, news and a limited amount of teaching programs.

Finnegan says the concentration is on music because "that's what our listeners want. To me, having an outlet for contemporary Christian music is so valuable. I'm convinced music speaks to people and ministers to them."

Its sister station, WBTX 1470 AM, is dedicated more to the sounds of southern gospel music, which is particularly popular in the Valley. While the older hymns and traditional Christian music of WBTX can be picked up from as far north as Middletown and just south of Staunton, the more contemporary sounds of Light 96 reach homes from Winchester to Charlottesville. Eshleman says both stations meet the needs of a large listening audience.

Both WLTK and WBTX operate on a mission statement, declaring their purpose: "To proclaim the uncompromised message of the gospel of Jesus Christ through music and the spoken word."

Eshleman, a 30-year worker in Christian broadcasting, says WLTK is successful in communicating this message to the Valley. "I don't think I've ever worked with a format where the listeners have been so responsive," he says. "The inevitable thing about Christian radio is that it is getting into homes and speaking to people that will never go to church."

Eshleman says the station receives many letters from inspired loyal listeners and from some who even became Christians by hearing the message delivered over the airwaves.

While WLTK and WBTX have a loyal core of listeners, other stations in the Valley are attracting a conservative population. Sallye Trobaugh broadcasts a daily devotional time on Harrisonburg local station WSVA. Her show, "Hymn and Gospel Time," airs every day at 5:10 a.m. Known as "Sallye T" on the air, she says her program is more than just easy listening in the morning hours.

"Because we live such fast-paced lives, in my heart it's a ministry to the community," she says. "It encourages me to give them some thought as to who created them and..."
what their responsibility is to [God] that day.”

After 20 minutes of music, scripture reading and prayer, she signs off with the same attitude in which she begins: “I pray God’s blessings on you today and invite you to join us tomorrow to get your day off to a good start.”

Sallye isn’t the only one in her family with the heart to broadcast Christian music. Her son, Scott, is a junior at James Madison University and has worked at WEMC on the Eastern Mennonite University campus, WXJM (JMU’s educational radio station) and WLTG as well. Although he has had more experience in broadcasting than his mother, he says she’s a constant source of encouragement.

“I see her work and it encourages me,” Scott says. “She kinda holds my feet to the fire and helps me keep my focus and my reason for doing it in the first place.”

Scott shares his mother’s Christian beliefs and enthusiasm for music but says their taste in music differs. While “Sallye T” may play classical hymns, Scott enjoys playing what he calls “Jesus Rock,” the early sounds of Christian rock music. He says there are chart toppers in all types of Christian music today, from the sounds his mother’s generation enjoys to the heavy metal, rock sounds of the 1990s. He says he often encourages friends to “try out Christian music. If there’s a genre you listen to, there’s a Christian band that does it.”

In addition to hearing the Christian message on radio, thanks to one local TV station, residents can also be inspired by turning on their TV sets. WAZT-TV in Woodstock provides religious broadcasting to people living from as far as Martinsburg, W.Va., to Staunton.

The 11-year-old station continues to provide the Valley with a wide range of inspirational programs, from church services and preaching from local and nationally known pastors to children’s programs. Managing General Partner Art Stamler says the station “devotes more than 80 hours a week to programs of a spiritual matter.” He adds that non-spiritual programs are screened for content and acceptability standards for Christian broadcasting.

Stamler, who calls himself a “pioneer in TV broadcasting,” has been in the industry since 1952. He says it was always a dream of his to own a TV station where he could “serve an unserved area.” He says his dream came true and he feels the communities’ needs are better met by the efforts of the station.

“We have developed a real intimacy with our audience, which is very rare,” Stamler says. “We often hear from viewers through the mail and find we are providing a service that doesn’t exist anywhere else.”

In addition to programs transmitted via satellite, the station also brings local news and weather to the Valley every day at 5:30 p.m. and 9 p.m. Unlike other news services in the area, WAZT limits its content to events and activities that take place throughout the Valley.

Arehart serves as the station’s weatherman and says as a WAZT employee, he too sees his work as a service to the community. “I think there are a lot of ways to serve the Lord, and [Christian television] is my contribution to that,” he says. “It spreads the word of God, and that’s our main goal here.”

The Word is being spread through many channels of communication in the Shenandoah Valley by devoted members of the Christian Broadcasting Community. Just as the mission statement was proclaimed in Bethlehem almost 2,000 years ago, there’s evidence it’s still as much alive today, and many have accepted it.

Growing technology in the Valley has made it possible for even more people to hear the “good news.” Tune in to any of the Christian programs on the airwaves today, and the message will ring out loud and clear.

MITZI O’REAR is a senior mass communication major from Woodstock. After graduating in May, she plans to pursue work in Christian media. Her career goal is to serve God with the gifts and talents He has given her.

JAMES MORRIS, of Charlottesville, is a senior mass communication major who wants to pursue a career in photojournalism. He has interned with The Daily Progress.
imitation may be the sincerest form of flattery, but for some it's paving a path to the future. For area students involved in the Tom Harris Mentorship Program, it's a future bright with career opportunities and success.

While the yesteryears of masters and apprenticeships may be gone, the fundamentals of mentoring still have a strong influence in the world of education. A learning culture outside the classroom and inside the contemporary work world not only advocates practical experience but manifests an atmosphere rich in intellect and motivation.

Through the Tom Harris Mentorship Program, a Valley Alliance for Education-sponsored activity, seven high schools in Waynesboro, Staunton and Augusta County successfully extend these benefits to many of their high-achieving students by pairing them with professionals throughout the Shenandoah Valley.

“This is the one opportunity the business world has . . . to directly affect the perspectives and lives of the students,” says Doug Guynn, co-founder and former president of the Valley Alliance for Education.

Since the formal establishment of the VAE in 1990, Guynn has guided the program from placing its first student at the DuPont Plant in Waynesboro to serving hundreds of others. Over the past six years, the program has increased its student involvement 500 percent. Whether the VAE is working with one student or hundreds, it will always be the supportive backbone of the program.

“We want their education to currently have everything to do with choices and freedom later in life,” says Guynn, who remains an active member of the VAE’s Board of Directors.

Fort Defiance High School senior Keli Lam is already discovering these choices through her mentorship. Lam’s time spent with mentor Mary Koogler, a registered nurse in the Rockingham Memorial Hospital emergency room, exposed her to a fast-paced, high-energy environment — a pace she discovered she wanted to keep up with. Lam said she originally applied to the program
hoping to reaffirm her career interest in physical therapy.

After being placed on a waiting list to mentor at a local physical therapy rehabilitation center, Lam accepted a position working in the ER at RMH and realized her true aspiration of becoming a nurse. "I enjoy getting to help different people and healing them," she says.

Although the ER at RMH may not be like Hollywood's "ER," Lam has seen some hectic days. She remembers a day in particular when three heart attack cases and a car accident victim were rushed into the ER.

Lam didn’t just see the team in action that day — she felt the pressure weighing on the doctors and witnessed death.

As she stood along a side wall of the trauma center, Lam saw doctors urgently working on the accident victim. Only moments later, she saw the woman die. "It was really hard to watch her die," she says. "Her family didn’t even know, and that was hard to see."

When Lam wasn’t working in the ER, she aided in the labor and delivery department. From assisting women in labor to cleaning off second-old newborns, Lam helped with five or six deliveries by the end of her mentorship. At only 17 years old, she’s already experienced the circle of life firsthand.

Then there's the schedule of Jezeriah Cook, also a senior at Fort Defiance. Shadowing surgeons, ER staff, general practitioners and radiologists, he finds himself busy but far from overwhelmed. In fact, Cook says he appreciates the opportunities he has been given.

"He’s my doorway into the hospital," Cook says of his mentor, Dr. John Barton, a hematologist and oncologist at the Rockingham Cancer Center. "He’s sensitive to my naiveté and always seems to know what I’m wondering or wanting to do."

Cook, 17, has already seen two hernia surgeries, a bone marrow abstraction, a spinal tap and a night in the ER — all things some first-year medical students haven’t even experienced. He’s even getting a taste of something that takes some doctors years to master. Working in a cancer center, Cook sees many terminally ill patients. "I see people progressing and sometimes not progressing," he says. "I felt I would be really depressed and it was tough at first, but I’m learning to deal with it."

It’s this exposure that cultivates the central goal of the program. To have students discover every angle of a field and then be able to decide whether they like it or not is a success. "Everything we do is about being real," says Don Landes, Augusta County mentorship program coordinator. "They see the pressure and intensity of different occupations. It makes their visions of a career more real in their minds."

This mission may remain the same, but what actually happens in the mentorship process varies by student, because each one comes into the program with an individual goal. Fort Defiance senior Mary Hylton says she hopes to decide on a certain career path to pursue. "I always knew I wanted to go into the health field," she says. The hard part seems to be choosing a specific area to study, Hylton says.

Hylton’s partnership with Debbie Dunn appears to be a perfect match.
Planning to attend Virginia Tech in the fall, Hylton intends to study sports nutrition and one day become a university professor. As a Virginia Tech alumnus and a part-time nutrition instructor at James Madison University, Dunn appears to be just the mentor to show her the ropes.

"You can go all through school in dietetics, and if you don't have field experience you just don't know what to expect," Dunn says. "How to make nutrition interesting, how to catch people's attention and make them adopt good nutrition — that's really hard to learn from a book."

Working toward completing 150 hours with the program, an Augusta County school system requirement, Hylton finds herself nowhere near a book and with plenty of time to explore a variety of areas in the dietetics field. Sitting in on counseling sessions at the Appalachian Physical Therapy Center, observing Dunn's Community Nutrition course at JMU and recording dietary needs of patients at RMH are just some of the experiences priming her for a career in dietetics. On top of all this, Hylton still has time to compete for her school's track team.

However, the students aren't the only ones who gain something from this program. The mentors benefit equally. Having students ask questions and participate in the workforce gives professionals the opportunity to see their careers in a new dimension.

"The students give a renewed appreciation for the excitement of learning," says Guynn, who offers students opportunities to mentor at Wharton, Aldhizer and Weaver, where he is a senior partner.

A strong proponent of mentorships, Barton says the most enjoyable aspect is helping someone experience new things. "Everything's unpredictable and busy, and sometimes Jeriah just runs alongside," he says. "But I always try to keep him up to speed."

Koogler says she enjoys working with high school students. "They all come in shy and bashful," she says. "It's nice to watch them come out of their shell and gain more confidence."

Koogler remembers Lam as one of the more bashful students. By the end of the mentorship, however, she was part of the team.

"Everything is changing so rapidly in the ER, and we all need to work together," Koogler says. "By the time [the students] leave they are a part of the staff."

For others it's truly an honor. "It shows that the person must think a lot of your field to want to emulate it," says Dunn, who was chosen by Hylton. The dietetics field would be lucky to have Hylton some day, Dunn says.

Ultimately, the rewards of mentoring are as valuable as the incentives of learning. Without textbooks and lectures, these mentors are teachers making a difference. They act as role models, advising and encouraging students. And together, these students and mentors are building the future.

DEBORAH BABROSKI is a mass communication major. She has interned at "Good Morning America" and plans to pursue a career in TV production.
The Defense Never Rests

Self-defense programs teach women to fight back with their fists, feet and minds

Story By Simone Elise Figula

With her warm smile and hearty laugh, Peggy Campbell doesn’t look like the type of woman who spends much time thinking about kicking people in the groin or delivering a hammerfist to an unsuspecting forehead.

But she is.

Campbell has been a James Madison University police officer for 12 years. While ensuring the safety of the entire campus is her foremost goal, Campbell doesn’t necessarily believe in down time. When it’s time to interact with civilians, Campbell trades in her dark blue uniform for a pair of sweatpants and teaches members of the JMU community how to strike with their fists, feet and most importantly, their minds.

Campbell is a certified instructor in the Rape Aggression Defense system, or RAD, the fastest-growing self-defense program in the country, according to Campbell. With chapters in 40 states and Canada, RAD boasts about 1,500 instructors.

In 1991, Campbell was doing some routine paperwork at the station when she stumbled upon a brochure — which had been deliberately planted there by a colleague — on the RAD program. RAD was looking for instructors; Campbell was looking for ways to be the most effective cop she could be.

“In October of that year I went down to get the training; it was 16 hours in two days,” Campbell says. “And in early ’92, we had our first class, and we’ve been going since then.”

Campbell’s need to teach students to defend themselves is a natural one. According to the Ms. magazine study on sexual assault and rape, one out of every four college women is sexually assaulted during her four years of college. Some are assaulted long before then, too.

“We get all types of women [taking the classes],”
Campbell says. "Some are incest survivors, some have had previous bad relationships, some haven't had any bad encounters. "What we're trying to do is raise awareness. That's what self-defense is all about."

But it's also about physical resistance, and the RAD instructors aren't kidding themselves into thinking just yelling "No!" is enough to ward off an attacker. "I think awareness is about 90 percent of prevention," Campbell says. "But we spend about 75 percent of our class time on physical techniques, because it's something that women need to know how to do when an attack is unavoidable."

Campbell, along with fellow RAD instructors and JMU police officers Sid Hartman and George Drumheller, are teaching JMU women how to think and act quickly on their feet. "It's all about developing a defensive mindset," Campbell says. "Women need to think, 'I can do a snap kick and if that doesn't work, I can try something else.'

JMU students aren't the only ones who feel the need to defend themselves. "Harrisonburg was once known as a sleepy little town with almost no crime," says Beverly Noel, manager of the JMU Office of Development and Training. "But lately, it doesn't seem that safe anymore."

Evidence of the growing sentiment about safety concerns on campus came early in 1996 when female university employees began to request self-defense instruction. In response, Noel cooperated with campus police to offer training to employees based on the RAD system.

In the fall of the same year, the Office of Development and Training announced the first Self-Defense for Women class, which has had near-capacity enrollment ever since.

The 12-hour program, usually divided up into four sessions, holds a maximum of 20 students, so each participant can have hands-on practice with the instructors. The class is offered to all JMU female employees, including faculty, staff and hourly workers.

"One of the reasons I think the requests have come in is because, as we expand our [university] services, especially housekeeping, people often work around the clock, and women want to know how to defend themselves at all hours of the night," Noel says.

As for the results, Noel hasn't heard of anyone needing to use their skills on an attacker this year, but she says she knows "they felt a lot more confident when they left [the class]."

Noel herself is confident in the level of instruction campus police offer. "They have been wonderful giving their time," she says. "We [Office of Development and Training] pay for it and run it, but the trainers are superb."

And, it seems, enthusiastic. Campbell's efforts to spread the word of the program now include setting up a Website schedule, which may be needed. There were three different programs offered to staff in the 1996 fall semester, and two were scheduled for the spring, according to Noel.

It may be either a desire for increased awareness or the tangible evidence of crime in the Shenandoah Valley that is shaking up local women — or maybe "a little of both," Campbell concludes.

In the wake of the 1996 alleged abduction and homicide of Harrisonburg resident Alicia Showalter Reynolds, as well as the October shooting deaths of two JMU students, it has become increasingly hard for area residents to cling to the homey feel and safe reputation of the Shenandoah Valley.

As tragic as the events were, they have evidently had at least some small positive effect. "People have become more safety conscious," Campbell says. "They want to take steps to defend themselves."

For certain, one Harrisonburg resident agrees and is helping to develop the increased level of awareness among Valley women. Harold Halterman, a seventh-degree black belt and owner of Halterman's Karate and Kickboxing on Pleasant Valley Road in Harrisonburg, has been active in self-defense and martial arts for 30 years. As a teacher, Halterman encourages women to know what to do before something happens, not after.

Fight Back America is one program designed to prepare women to fend off potential attackers. Halterman swears by it and uses the technique of cardio-kickboxing to teach his students the principles of self-defense.

"One of the reasons our program is so effective is because it is unique," he says. "A lot of other programs teach
FULL FORCE: Halterman demonstrates fighting-back techniques to participants at a special self-defense clinic at Halterman’s Karate and Kickboxing in Harrisonburg.

‘tricks.’ ‘If the assailant does this, then you should do this.’ But these don’t work in real situations, and they’re giving people a false sense of security. What we teach is that it’s all about reflexes, not ‘tricks.’ Cardio-kickboxing teaches the proper body dynamics; the key is full body power.”

Campbell, on the other hand, doesn’t consider the individualized techniques used in the RAD program to be “tricks.”

“What we use are simple, easy moves that anyone can learn,” she says. “It is about reflexes, yes, but what we’re trying to do is teach women simple skills they can use to help develop the defensive mindset.”

JMU senior Crystal McClintock remembers her first taste of self-defense instruction through the RAD program. “When I first came to college, a lot of people kept telling me about sexual assault,” McClintock says. “Where it could happen, which places to avoid, who we should call if it happened. But no one really talked about what to do to prevent an assault if we actually got attacked.

“At first, we all kind of acted goofy when we learned a snap kick,” McClintock says. “But the more we practiced the moves, the more realistic it seemed to actually try to fight off an attacker.”

This realism is exactly what Halterman tries to develop for his students. “We’ve had people come in with no skills at all, and after a few months, they’re devastating,” Halterman says. “I’d say a month [of participation] in my program is about equal to a year elsewhere. I guarantee it to be the best self-defense class out there.”

At the least, cardio-kickboxing offers an intense workout. The first session of each class is spent jumping rope. Next, there are 20 minutes of shadow-boxing to practice form and technique. Afterward, participants don hand wraps and bulky gloves and engage in 20 minutes of “bagwork,” where the punching bag receives the brunt of the would-be victim’s defense techniques.

“We use the bag because we want people to understand what it’s like when you actually make contact with the attacker,” Halterman says.

The class is then finished with five minutes each of abdominal work and stretching. Halterman’s goal for his cardio-kickboxers is the attainment of fitness as well as self-defense. Cardio-kickboxing is offered four times a week. “You never totally forget [what to do] but the more you train, the more efficient you’ll be,” Halterman says. “I’d like to see most people for at least six months to a year.”

What Halterman doesn’t want to see is people overworking themselves just to learn self-defense. “You work at your own pace, and you can still get a good workout,” he says. “I’ve had students from ages four to 75, but in my self-defense it’s usually a range of 16 to 35. About 75 to 80 percent of the class consists of women, but men can come too.”

Though Halterman’s program isn’t designed specifically for women, it attracts them because it’s successful. “We’ve had a lot of people that have used our techniques and have come out victorious,” Halterman says.

“Recently we had a girl get attacked in the parking lot of our studio; someone tried to push her into a car,” says Halterman, who is proud to share the result of the encounter. “She sent him running up the road in the other direction.”

SIMONE ELISE FIGULA is a senior mass communication major from Prince William County graduating in May. She plans to work in corporate communication.

MAGGIE WELTER is a senior mass communication major from Wheaton, Md. She has interned at ABC’s “Nightline” and CNN and is a campus correspondent for the Virginian-Pilot. After graduation she will head to Los Angeles to become an assistant editor at U. The National College Magazine.
Thanks to the vision and dedication of a few green-thumbed individuals, the James Madison University Arboretum has blossomed into a unique medley of natural botanical gardens, where more is in bloom than just plants.

Carved out of an overgrown, forested patch in Harrisonburg, the scenic 125-acre site provides JMU and the Harrisonburg community with a natural facility for education, research, plant interpretation, conservation and simple enjoyment.

“It’s been said that we’re the best-kept secret in Harrisonburg,” Arboretum Director Norlyn Bodkin says of the tucked-away patch of paradise. “I don’t like that; I like to see the place visited.”

Located east of the JMU Convocation Center on University Boulevard, the Arboretum entices passers-by with a view of a landscaped pond in a picturesque meadow. Impressive gates and stone walls grace the entrance, and a narrowly paved drive winds its lazy descent through the orderly forest. Nature trails traversing ridges and footbridges reveal various habitats and plant life to visitors.

All great creative projects require an overarching vision. For example, 19th century landscape architect Frederick Law Olmstead provided the vision for New York City’s Central Park 140 years ago, as well as other urban parks.

Bodkin has been Harrisonburg’s Olmstead. Also a JMU professor of biology, he conceived the Arboretum more than 20 years ago and proposed the idea to JMU President Ronald Carrier in 1977. Carrier and then the Planning and Development Commission in Richmond approved the plan in the fall of 1984. Construction started on April 5, 1985.

“Carrier had a vision for this place, for growth and development at this institution,” Bodkin says. “Vision has no monetary value. You don’t get paid for it, but someone has to have it.”

For the past two decades, Bodkin has spent as much time cultivating the Arboretum as cultivating his students’ minds. Hard work, extensive knowledge and dedicated help have made that vision a reality.

The small Arboretum team includes Bodkin, full-time paid employee Dennis Whetzel and full-time unpaid “super volunteer” Ron Brown. The team of men that offers so much interest, enthusiasm and effort has worked together since Whetzel joined the staff two years ago.

“We’re all good friends,” Bodkin says. “We work side by side; nobody pulls rank.”

GAINING GROUND
Even such a devoted staff couldn’t tame the jungle without help. Many
volunteer efforts have contributed to the Arboretum’s growth.

The Arboretum receives occasional help from service organizations and sororities and fraternities. Volunteer efforts are always welcomed and appreciated.

During the January 1996 flood, a wooden footbridge of valuable cedar was washed off its foundation, and mud prevented the staff from getting a front loader to replace the bridge. “I’ll never forget it,” Bodkin says. “It was devastating. The flood and ice did so much damage.”

He challenged one of his students, former JMU football player Paul Harris, to gather some of his football buddies and bring them to the Arboretum to help. Harris showed up with about 20 football players and fraternity members. They lifted the solid, 18-foot bridge by hand and literally set it back on its foundation.

The flood proved to be a blessing in disguise. The damage to the Arboretum made everyone work harder, determined not to be defeated by the worst Mother Nature could provide. “By the time all the repairs were done, the Arboretum was in better shape than before,” Bodkin says.

Another source of help comes from Bodkin’s Arboretum Techniques class. Fondly renamed “Bodkin’s Arboretum Slave Labor” by students over the years, the course allows students to earn one credit by working 30 hours in the Arboretum.

Five to 10 students usually take the class each semester; 14 participated in the outdoor class this spring. Some relish the opportunity to apply botany in the field. “I took it because I’ve had two other classes with Dr. Bodkin,” JMU senior April Bowers says. “He’s fun to work with. The outdoor activity should relieve some of my stress, too.”

The experience, though considered an easy grade, is a lot of hard work. “You’re getting exercise and actually accomplishing something instead of just sitting around studying books,” Bowers says. “You get to see the final product when everything blooms in the spring and looks so perfect.”

Much like a university, an arboretum is a site of continual change and expansion. The original master plan still applies to the land site, but the development progresses constantly. “An arboretum is never finished,” Bodkin explains. You build, rebuild, plant, replant and refine.

Much of the Arboretum’s expansion can be attributed to new gardens, created when private individuals donate funds for specialized gardens in memory or in honor of a special person. The largest of these gardens is the William Wood Memorial Wildflower Garden.

“He was a student in my classes, and he loved plants,” Bodkin says. When Wood, a 1980 JMU graduate, was killed in a whitewater rafting accident, his wife and parents donated money for a huge plot of wildflowers at the Arboretum in his memory.

Other gardens, such as the McDonald Rhododendron Azalea Garden, honor the living. Kenneth and Sandra McDonald, who Bodkin and Brown know through their membership in the American Rhododendron Society, own Le Mac Nursery in Hampton. Each year they donate thousands of dollars worth of rhododendrons and azaleas to the Arboretum.

Bodkin’s ‘slave labor group’ travels to Le Mac, digs up the plants and transports them back to the Arboretum.
often bringing 100 plants in one trip. "Sandra is a plant breeder, so some of these are plants you couldn't get on the market," Bodkin says. "Some of these plants are old, so they're huge — many over 10 feet tall."

The visions for further developments at the Arboretum aren't limited to botanical subjects. For example, construction began in mid-April for an amphitheater on the slope of the main meadow.

The terraced amphitheater will solve some problems spectators encounter with the seating and terrain while enjoying performances by the Shenandoah Shakespeare Express. This traveling group brings Shakespeare's theatrical productions to the audience in an interactive, outdoor setting, much like theater in the Elizabethan era.

Spectators often enjoy a picnic while watching the shows — no easy task on the uneven, grassy terrain. "We need a place where people can watch Shakespeare in the Arboretum and not lose their chicken or spill their wine," Bodkin says.

An amphitheater garden will surround the theater. "I imagine nice little patios with rock walls and fountains to enhance the actual amphitheater," Bodkin says. The JMU Class of 1995 donated $25,000 to develop the garden as part of its Senior Class Challenge gift.

The outdoor theater will accommodate a variety of performances for the public. "I can see all kinds of concerts and plays there," Bodkin says. "It's something the university should provide to the community. I hope it will help add to cultural development to Harrisonburg."

About two million dollars in private contributions are targeted to build a nature center, envisioned as a glassed-in building with a greenhouse, auditorium and herbarium representing plants grown at the Arboretum. The building will also include meeting rooms and retail space for a nature store.

"I'm excited about the nature center," Whetzel says. "That's going to add a whole new dimension to the Arboretum."

GROWING PAINS

Although many local, influential citizens support the Arboretum and share the vision for such expansions, one of the greatest challenges the Arboretum staff encounters is selling their ideas for continued growth to members of the community.

"A lot of it comes down to funds, to getting the money to do what needs to be done," Bodkin says. The Arboretum is funded through private donations, dedicated gardens and members of the John Clayton Society, (Friends of the Arboretum). Any citizen can purchase a membership, and the money sustains the Arboretum in terms of non-restricted budget.

"Much of the money given to the Arboretum is donated for a specific purpose, like the memorial gardens or the nature center," Bodkin says. "That's why non-restricted money is extremely important to the life of the Arboretum."

The Arboretum is owned by the non-profit Arboretum Foundation, not by JMU. Aside from the value of the land on which it's located and the payment of utility bills, the only money
the university directly contributes is Whetzel's wages.

Administratively, the Arboretum falls under University Advancement, headed by Glenda Rooney, vice president for parent and external relations. In addition, the Arboretum Advisory Committee reviews, advises and approves projects, makes suggestions for plans and aids in the fund-raising efforts. The committee is composed of faculty, staff and interested community members.

“But we don’t have a university budget,” Bodkin says. “I’d love to have one. I need one.”

The Arboretum and the university are mutually beneficial organizations. “We provide tremendous public relations for the university,” Bodkin says. “It’s an exceptional facility, it’s highly visible . . . and there are more gardeners in the world than there are football fans.”

The outdoor scientific facility also serves the academic needs of JMU students; more than 876 JMU students from 41 class sections took guided tours during the 1994-’95 school year.

A rich variety of public programs have firmly established the Arboretum as beneficial to the community. Programs offered have included pruning workshops, April Walk (which featured daffodil varieties and bulb gardening), a wildflower workshop, a visit to the U.S. National Arboretum, a Constitution Day program, outdoor theater performances by the Shenandoah Shakespeare Express and plant and bulb sales.

This year, the Arboretum is sponsoring its seventh annual trip to the Galapagos Islands for a natural history studies tour. “It’s more of an adventure than a tour,” says Bodkin, who leads the group.

Galapa-goers live on a houseboat for a week and visit 11 of the 13 major islands off the southern tip of South America. The trip costs $2,600 and is open to anyone from the community. Although the 20 adventurers going from June 15-July 1 are all students, the tour is usually a mix of students and community members.

Bodkin estimates that about 10,000 people visited the Arboretum during the 1994-’95 school year. The total includes 2,310 visitors who received guided tours; about 4,000 who attended lectures, seminars, workshops and other programs; and a conservative estimate of about 25 independent visitors each day. Among the visitors were elementary, middle, and high school students, community groups, church groups, JMU parents and alumni and garden clubs.

Arboretum progress and growth has expanded greatly in recent years. “There has been more stuff planted and developed in the last two years than in any other time since its development,” Brown points out.

Whetzel agrees that there have been a lot of memorable developments to the Arboretum. “The creation of the herb garden and the new McDonald Rhododendron Azalea Garden are two highlights,” he says.

The amazing progress and growth doesn’t happen on its own. “It’s a labor of love,” Bodkin explains.

“Something is getting done, something is getting accomplished,” he says. “The Arboretum speaks for itself — go look at it!”

SHANNON N. BALLARD is a junior media arts and design major. She plans to spend her summer as a P.R. intern and hopes to live through her senior honors thesis to graduate in May 1998.
Going out on a limb

“Super volunteer” Ron Brown lends vision and dedication to the growth of the JMU Arboretum

Story By Shannon N. Ballard

“Super volunteer” Ron Brown defines both “green thumb” and “labor of love” with his 40-plus hours of unpaid work each week at the JMU Arboretum.

“A lot of people think I’m crazy as a loon for doing this, but it’s fun,” Brown says.

A typical day for Brown means working in his gardens before arriving at the Arboretum at 7:30 a.m. Brown works at the 125-acre site until about 3:30 p.m. and then goes home to tend his gardens once again.

Wearing a forest-green parka and soft, worn chinos, with white hair and perfect teeth gleaming against sun-browned skin, Brown leans comfortably against a tree and talks about the Arboretum as if he’d never tire of doing so.

As he guides visitors through the garden paths with his slow, ambling walk, he stops often to point out plants and flowers hidden beside rocks or beneath leaves that the undiscerning eye would never notice. And yet he explains in enthusiastic detail the different stages each unique flower goes through.

As if his love of plants wasn’t evident enough through his long volunteer hours at the Arboretum, Brown has his own three-acre arboretum at home. He and his wife, Norma, have cultivated nearly 19,600 daffodil bulbs and 21,000 Virginia bluebells.

Each year, garden clubs and other groups come to visit the Browns’ arboretum, which is always open for the public’s enjoyment. The Watercolor Society came last year to paint tree peonies and is scheduled to return this spring.

One Easter Sunday, Brown remembers a group of visitors from a residence home who came to see the fully blooming gardens. “One woman just looked . . . and looked and looked. Then she just threw her hands up in the air and said, ‘Just like a Hallelujah chorus!’” he says with a chuckle.

Brown has been interested in the JMU Arboretum since it opened, but he didn’t branch out from his own garden work until he retired three years ago. Although his job with the Department of Agriculture leads people to believe he gained his background in plants there, that wasn’t the case.

Brown was a money lender with the Farmer’s Home Administration for 17 years. His promotion to district director made him responsible for 21 counties. But retirement didn’t mean slowing down — just changing directions.

Now the Arboretum has become his office. He takes money from no one, and all his energies are devoted to the development of vast amounts and varieties of gardens. He constantly thinks of new and creative ways to increase growth in the Arboretum.

However, Brown isn’t only concerned with the growth of plants. He has a keen interest in the cultivation of young minds. He envisions a place for school children on a wooded hilltop where they can learn about nature, plant whatever they like and return years later to see the results.

One of Brown’s many ideas for the Arboretum is a garden devoted to the official trees and flowers of the states. Each tree, arranged in a 180-foot-wide circle, would have a plaque naming the state’s official, bird, flower and date admitted to the Union.

The 13 original colonies would lie in a six-pointed star design within the circle, with Virginia — the first U.S. colony — gracing the center. The area would be filled with pea gravel and flowers grown in colonial times, such as those at Montpelier and Monticello.

“It’s one of my ‘pet things’ I would like to see done here,” Brown says. “It could be done, and done with little or no cost. I’m naive enough to think that if we contact the governors of each state and explain a little bit about the Arboretum, we could get everything we needed from the states for free.”

Brown even has the problematic details worked out, such as how plants from other climates would survive in this environment. Only half a dozen couldn’t thrive, and those would be planted in huge pots and brought indoors during the winter. “I think it would be a really interesting thing and great for school kids, even adults,” he says. “How many people can even name all 50 states?

“If the Arboretum is not about [education], what is it about?”
Whether it's the fresh, crisp scent of a new book or the slightly musty smell many used books acquire, books have their own personality. Bookstores embody these traits, inviting readers to explore new stores, while enticing them to return to their favorites.

Used bookstores make up the bulk of booksellers in the Shenandoah Valley. While some provide cafés and other amenities for readers, others appear to be nothing more than a vast wasteland of books. Most, though, are simply small stores catering to the scholar, the curious, the book hunter.

Whatever the case, three of the Valley's used bookstores represent this diverse sampling by providing their patrons with a wide variety of new and used books and a place to prop their feet up and enjoy the company.

**Satisfied Mind**

Used bookstores often conjure up images of clutter and books stacked everywhere. Satisfied Mind defies this characterization. Relaxed, open and friendly, this is where the works of favorite writers and good conversation can be found in one place.

“I like the atmosphere a coffeehouse provides,” says Lorne Bair, co-owner of Satisfied Mind, the only bookstore/coffeehouse in Winchester. Bair and his wife, Lee-Anne, opened Satisfied Mind in December 1996. Located in the middle of the old town mall, the storefront doesn’t look any different from the others. Walk inside, though, and it’s quite different.

Satisfied Mind is divided into a café and a book area, each with its own distinct character. Perfect for reading or...
browsing, the book area is dominated by soft lighting and dark-wood bookshelves. Most of the bookshelves are lined against the walls, with a few book islands in the middle. Against one wall is an old upholstered couch; settled into another corner sits a seemingly comfortable chair.

“There is a segment of the population who have been starving for something like this,” Bair says. Researching the store’s design was a pleasure — Bair remembered the good qualities he saw in other bookstores and copied them. He says he wants people to be comfortable enough to just “sit and waste time.”

Satisfied Mind specializes in poetry, modern fiction and valuable books. Bair’s book-buying strategy is simple. “I don’t buy junk, I don’t buy filler . . . I have a highly personal selection of books,” he says. Very personalized — there are only 7,000 books in the store.

Stacked neatly on one of the book islands are a number of new books, one of which is written by a Portuguese writer. Bair recalls the author, Fernando Pessoa, by name. “It’s the only place you’re likely to find it,” he says with pride, mentioning he’s already sold two copies. He says the big chain stores wouldn’t carry about 90 percent of the new books he sells — mostly small press and hard-to-find stuff.

Opening a bookstore was always in the picture for Bair. “I knew it was just a matter of time,” he says. “Originally my intention was to work for a few more years and collect more books.” He had been collecting books for about 10 years, and when he moved to Winchester he made the decision. “I could go out and find a job or I could open the store.”

Satisfied Mind isn’t all books, though. Bair has also made it a point to decorate his store with samples of several local artists. “This is a revolving show,” Bair says of the collection of paintings on the walls. “Any artist I like I’m inviting them to hang their work on my walls.” There are also poetry readings every third Sunday. Paintings, poetry and books combine, making Satisfied Mind more than a typical bookstore. All this is for one reason, Bair says. He wants people to walk away with one feeling — to have as many good books as Bair.

**Backstreet Books**

A half-hour drive down Interstate 81 to Strasburg leads to a different sort of bookstore. Whereas Winchester has several bookstores, Strasburg has one — Backstreet Books. Owner Joan Gorman opened Backstreet Books three-and-a-half years ago after years of selling books independently. Opening a bookstore was an extension of her own love of books. “I learned that George Washington chopped down a cherry tree, but books told me different,” Gorman says.

The store is small and divided into three smaller rooms. Two outside windows display the store’s specialties — children’s books and collectibles. The neat, open children’s section appears on the left upon entering. Toys are on the floor or in a large wicker basket. The books are in columns against one wall, opposite a pink hippo.

Gorman’s children’s section, which she opened for her son, Jake, is her favorite area. “He was an absolute maniac as a kid,” Gorman says of her son, who read everything he could get his hands on. However, other kids also benefit. “I want them to feel the store is as much for them as for the adults,” she says.

Kids are encouraged to read through the store’s book-buying policies. “We try to give kids a better deal, if we can, than the adults,” manager
Dave Rinker says. “If it’s a kid and [the books are] in good shape we’ll buy them.”

Rinker says the advantage goes both ways — the kids become readers, and young readers become older readers with jobs.

Backstreet Books plays an important role in Strasburg. The town library, with 10,000 volumes, is smaller than Backstreet Books, which has 13,000. Except for the Edinburgh library, Shenandoah County libraries are voluntary and receive no county funds. Gorman and the library have found ways to work with each other; Backstreet Books sometimes sells books for the library on the Internet when something valuable comes its way.

A love of books and a streak of practicality fuel Gorman’s optimism for the future. The danger of computers replacing books doesn’t bother her, Gorman says. “When you can take a computer into a bathtub, I’ll believe it.” She also points out that people still need books to learn how to run computers.

For Gorman, her bookstore is ultimately about satisfaction. “The whole essence of books is curiosity,” she says. “Hopefully when [the customers] leave here they’ve satisfied that.”

Paper Treasures
First it was a Ford dealership, then an antique store; now it houses New Market’s own Paper Treasures. Visualizing the Ford dealership is easy. The back has the high ceiling of the maintenance shop; another part has the lower, but still high, ceilings of the showroom; and of course a block of offices and a place where perhaps there was a secretary pool. All this forms a single, huge, diverse bookstore.

For a book lover, entering Paper Treasures is like entering another world. Every turn has more books. There are rooms created from bookshelves, aisles within aisles, and it’s all a bit of an adventure, mainly because owner Mike Lewis doesn’t like too many signs. “They get in the way,” he says. “The openness really closes down. It becomes more like a supermarket than a bookstore.”

Paper Treasures’ specialty is anything made of paper, Lewis says. “We’re 98 percent used,” he says. That includes a vast collection of newspapers and magazines. “A lot of people don’t do newspapers, magazines, because they don’t have the space. I like newspapers because of the quality of the paper before 1880.” Then, newspapers used rag paper instead of wood pulp, Lewis explains.

There are 10,000 to 20,000 magazines and newspapers on display and perhaps another 10,000 in storage. On the other hand, Paper Treasures has about 120,000 books on the shelves and another 150,000 in storage or yet to be priced.

Paper Treasures sells between 500 and 1,000 new and used books a month. Last year Lewis donated 3,000 books to James Madison University’s Carrier Library sale and didn’t miss the space.
Lewis said he wants people to leave Paper Treasures with “the impression that if they didn’t find it here this time, they can find it next time.” Sometimes they don’t have to return a second time.

Lewis recalls a man who came in five or six years ago. “This guy had been looking for a book for 20 years,” he says. “The title was Futility.” Needless to say, he bought the book.

So what makes for a good bookstore? “One that makes me want to have more books,” Bair says. Lewis said he wants people to leave knowing they can always come back and keep looking. For Corman, bookstores fulfill a need for satisfaction and curiosity. Ultimately that decision doesn’t rest with them, or any other bookstore owner; it resides with the reader.

For bookstore owners it’s their livelihood, or, as Lewis says, “We just keep plodding along.”

JOHN MILLER is a senior majoring in mass communication who will graduate in May. He plans to pursue a career in journalism.

Out-of-print, specialty books give used bookstores their purpose

Book selling is big business in the United States. According to the American Booksellers Association there are almost 13,000 total bookstores in the United States that made more than $8 billion last year. A quick perusal of area phone books illustrates the situation in the Shenandoah Valley. Of the 20-plus bookstores between Winchester and Harrisonburg, 15 are in or around those two towns. Libraries and bookstores share space in the middle of the Valley; there are seven bookstores and six libraries.

Many people who move to the Valley, retirees and commuters, don’t support local bookstores and libraries, says Karen Cooper, a history professor at Lord Fairfax Community College and the founding president of the Shenandoah Valley Historical Society. “If they are acquainted with facilities in the urban areas, they may not be pressured to change,” she says. They may find it worth the time to drive to their old favorite shopping havens.

“We don’t have enough interest in the community to encourage reading,” Cooper says. “The presence of education institutions makes a big difference. The more the education level grows in the area, the more people will buy books.”

Without community support for libraries or enough business potential to attract larger bookstores, readers in the Shenandoah Valley are left with little choice except used bookstores to fill their needs. Finding a copy of a new best seller, or a paperback of a classic, isn’t very hard. It’s the out-of-print or specialty books that give used bookstores their purpose.

Readers who want to read the book without paying outrageous prices find many common works reasonably priced at used bookstores. Others go in search of books they know they probably won’t get the chance to read, but they want the book anyway. Still others simply browse, imagining what they could own.

PRIZED POSSESSIONS: Paper Treasures, located in New Market, houses nearly 120,000 books on its shelves.
A Little Piece of

Story By Ashley P. Hall
Photos By Roger Wollenberg
Located in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Marriott Ranch is the Shenandoah Valley’s connection to the Old West.

BACK IN THE SADDLE AGAIN: The 4,200-acre Marriott Ranch, located in Hume, is open year-round to the public.

Allowing a half-smoked cigarette to fall from his fingers, Tom Maute pauses only briefly to pivot on the butt to ensure it's extinguished on the dry dirt ground.

The sun sits high in the sky telling them it's time — time for the second trail ride of the day. As her long, sandy-blond ponytail swings from side-to-side, Maute follows his daughter Jennifer's lead. Climb, mount, adjust and the pairs of horses and riders line up and anxiously await their rides.

About 12 miles southeast of Front Royal in Hume is Marriott Ranch. Situated on 4,200 acres, the ranch consists of trail rides, a cattle farm and a special events division. Located in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the ranch is well-known for its horseback riding, says Casey Turner, former special events assistant manager.

Doc Mitchell, the trail boss, leads these popular trail rides. Tall and solid, Mitchell appears as if he just stepped out of an old Western. Intimidating at a glance, it ends there. Ambling around the stables greeting guests with an outstretched hand, he always offers a hearty “hello” or the more traditional whisper of respect, “ma’am.”

On this day, Mitchell squats down to meet Jennifer Maute. “Jennifer, have you ever ridden a white horse?” Her eyes widen — he read her mind. “I wanted to ride a white horse,” she says.

The Mautes, of Front Royal, have come in celebration
of Jennifer’s 10th birthday. “It was her birthday wish,” Tom Maute says.

Riding along with the Mautes is Hisanori Yoshida, an exchange student visiting the United States from Japan for a month. Yoshida, 21, is staying with Pam Corry of Alexandria. Today Corry has brought him to Marriott Ranch to experience another aspect of the country and state. “I wanted to take him out of Washington, D.C. and show him this part of Virginia,” Corry says. “It’s a beautiful location with a very safe, comfortable trail ride.”

Waiting for just the right moment to break in with his heavily accented English, Yoshida says, “I can only imagine doing this in Tokyo.”

While Jennifer and Yoshida may have wished to go horseback riding, they didn’t realize what else a ride at the ranch entailed.

Tyrell Domigan, 15, rode with his Boy Scouts troop earlier in the day and came back talking not only about the usual trees, creeks, mud and vines, but also of bones. “It was probably a cow’s bones, the [thighbone],” Domigan says.

Considering the substantial acreage of the ranch, this finding is fairly common. A number of inhibitors intermingle in the pastures, wooded areas, harvest fields and the open valleys. Passers-by may spot anything from cattle, sheep and deer to an occasional bear roaming the land, Mitchell says.

Along with the various animals, the rolling hills, gated pastures and scattered homes indicate Marriott is an actual working ranch. Turner says it looks more like a Virginia farm than a western ranch. Appearance aside, the evidence is in the work that goes into maintaining and improving the ranch.

“Most of being around horses is the ground work; there’s a lot of work in the mud and dirt,” says Jami Bladen, a wrangler from Linden.

Continual maintenance and additions during the winter months keep both employees and volunteers busy. “There’s always something to be done, but that’s the beauty of it,” Bladen says. “Every day we do something different, and there’s a lot of satisfaction out of accomplishing something daily. Everyone works together.”

Not only do the employees work together, but they work well together. Bladen mentions how nice the people are to work with and how, unlike many jobs, there are no ulterior motives. All the workers are there to accomplish the same goals and objectives.

After working at the ranch for five years, Mitchell has witnessed some changes. “We’ve changed in respect that we’ve developed a larger customer base,” Mitchell says. “We have a customer-oriented quality product; we don’t do a ride unless it’s a good ride. On the other hand, our philosophy is that one person is a group and if one person comes out, day or night, and wants to ride, we’ll ride.”

Although Mitchell is in charge of organizing all trail rides, his duties don’t stop there. His responsibilities include, but aren’t limited to, running the trail rides, cattle drives, buying and selling the horses and hiring and overseeing the ranch staff. “I get paid to do the things I would do even if I wasn’t paid,” Mitchell says.

Mitchell’s right-hand man, Bob West says, “Cowboying ain’t a job description, it’s a way of life.”

— Bob West
Marriott Ranch wrangler

Originally from southern Missouri, Mitchell came to Marriott Ranch in 1992. He first came to the East Coast in the spring of 1977 after traveling for 18 months and covering more than 2,800 miles across the country, all on horseback. “It was the whole works then,” he says. “There were no guidebooks like you’d find today. I’d just go
ROUGH AND RUGGED: Doc Mitchell, Marriott Ranch’s trail boss, gets paid for what he loves to do. Although Marriott has owned the property for almost 50 years, the ranch changed hands many times prior to 1951, when J. Willard Marriott purchased it from a Belgian family. The Baroness Jeanne von Reininghaus Lambert had acquired the land at the beginning of World War II when she fled to North America with her children. Originally known as Fairfield, ownership may be traced as far back to the 1600s, when King Charles I of England owned the land.

A prominent feature of the property is Manor House, a large plantation home built in 1814. James Marshall, the brother of John Marshall, former chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, built the house with massive doors and large rooms for his 6-foot-2, 200-pound frame. The house sits atop a small hill overlooking part of the ranch and the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Before the Marriotts acquired Fairfield, Manor House remained empty and unused for nearly 30 years. Almost 50 years later, it’s still undergoing renovations.

Presently, Marriott is preparing Manor House to serve as a bed-and-breakfast inn. The upstairs will house individual rooms, while the downstairs will double as a conference room and common dining room. The old plantation house will surely add to the experience and atmosphere, Turner says.

Whether it’s a lesson in history, horses or the great outdoors, Marriott Ranch provides a unique experience. “The beauty still strikes me, especially during the spring and fall,” Bladen says. “It’s a totally different world.” Marriott Ranch offers 90-minute rides four times a day on weekends and holidays, and three times a day Tuesday-Friday. Call ahead to make reservations. Prices range from $25-$30. For more information call (540) 364-2627.

ASHLEY P. HALL is a senior from Fairfax Station, majoring in mass communication. Graduating in May, she plans to travel across country this summer, but not on horseback.

ROGER WOLLENBERG is a senior history major from Annandale. He hopes to pursue a career in photojournalism and nature photography.
A Meal Fit for a King

Fat Boy’s Pork Palace packs a different type of royalty into the rural mountains of Brandywine, W.Va.

Story By Jen Nowitzky
Photos By John M. Taylor

The phone rings. Server/cook Heather Bland jumps up to answer the call. When she returns to the corner booth she explains, “He says I’m the only one who makes it the right way for him.”

The unnamed regular likes his shakes made thick, with chocolate ice cream and chocolate syrup. But most importantly, he likes it ready when he gets there — all the servers know this.

In a secluded area at the base of Shenandoah Mountain, a palace sits quaintly. To get there, one must drive through scenic views and on a curvy two-lane road. A king and queen oversee their extravagant fortress with the assistance of their lords and ladies. It attracts visitors, many of whom make long pilgrimages to the legendary landmark they have heard numerous stories about.

But King Louis XIV or Queen Victoria never walked the halls of this humble abode. More so, it lacks the high ceilings and decor that make traditional palaces the elaborate buildings they are.

As far as the fairy tale definition goes, this building hardly resembles a gothic paradise. However, hidden off Route 33 in Brandywine, W.Va., the neon-yellow, convenience-store-sized structure makes up in charm what it lacks in the imperial ornateness its name suggests.

Fat Boy’s Pork Palace is a palace in its own right. Its off-the-wall name conjures up images of good ol’ boys and royalty. In Fat Boy’s case, the former is much more accurate.

Fat Boy’s specialty is pork barbecue — its top-selling menu item. Owner Mike Burkett makes the barbecue fresh with his highly-sought-after special sauce. Like many cooks, Burkett keeps his recipe about as highly classified as Pentagon secrets. “People from [North] Carolina, the barbecue capital of the world, come and buy our barbecue to take back to their friends,” Burkett says.

The rest of the menu consists of common roadside cuisine including hamburgers, beef barbecue and various side items like french fries and vegetables. On weekends, Burkett whips up special home-cooked meals ranging from meatloaf to surf-and-turf.

The king and queen of this roadside joint are Burkett and his wife, Sharon, who have lived in the scarcely populated town of Brandywine — at last count, about 300 people called it home — for 12 years. Having spent most of their lives in the restaurant business, the couple had been trying to buy the place for a while. Then, finally, “the price was right,” Burkett says.

The price was right four years ago — March 1, 1993, to be exact. In purchasing the building the Burketts received its unique name, a sign to go
COME AND GET IT: Waitress Cindy Harrison shows off a few of Fat Boy's house favorites. In her left hand she holds a plate of biscuits and gravy.

with it and a little bit of history. As the story goes, a salesman from a sign company in California was traveling through town when Fat Boy's previous owner, Dave Snyder, still reigned king. The salesman was delivering an ordered sign to a business (no one remembers where) that refused it.

"He just had the sign with him when he walked in the door," Burkett says. Originally named Country Store, the owner was looking for a change of pace, and the 50 percent discount offered by the salesman was just too good to turn down. The quaint Country Store was now the robust Fat Boy's Pork Palace.

Two teenagers, a girl and a boy, enter the restaurant. Waitress Heather Van Horn slowly drifts over to their booth and slides her arm around the young boy. "Where's your dad?" she says. "He's not coming up today?"

They engage in casual chit-chat, a common practice at the Palace. This scene replays itself at each table.

Since the structure was built in the 1930s, the building has housed many businesses including a post office, gas station (which the front still strongly resembles), grocery store, dance hall and bar. It's also been added onto and redesigned over the years.

Turning the often-stuck door handle and entering the building, visitors first notice a counter lined with bar stools on the right. Just ahead in the main room, the dominating image of the brown, hollow wood paneling lines the walls; booths line the left side and mismatched tables cover the rest of the room.

But perhaps the most dominant images are the many trinkets covering the walls. The gadgets range from pink hearts with candle settings to a gun that hangs on top of a storage room door. Van Horn explains it's a West Virginia joke — a wooden gun with a rat trap on the end.

However, what allows the Pork Palace to stand out most is its name. The change in name has brought the restaurant greater recognition, but Burkett doesn't believe the changed name has brought a great increase in clientele. In fact, one of the greatest impacts on the Pork Palace's success is, of all things, weather.

"[Business] starts picking up when the winter weather has broken . . . We get some ski trade in the winter, but lots [of business] from tourists in the summer." Burkett says he thinks the tourist industry brings in between 40 and 50 percent of the sales.

But what brings the customers back is simple: "The food," Burkett says with a nod.

The demographics of the visitors who make the pilgrimage to the Pork Palace range from teenagers to senior citizens, regulars to passers-by. Fat Boy's also has become a regular stop for numerous truck drivers.

Trucker Randy "Nine Ball" Miller sways in the door about 5 p.m. one Wednesday. ("Nine Ball," he explains, means he's "a few balls short of a rack"). He asks for his usual cup of coffee as he reclines in a booth and lays his head against the Palace's hollow wooden wall. This is his second trip of the day, after stopping by in the morning. "There's a lot of hell in here . . . with the morning crew," he says of the typical a.m. crowd.

Regulars stop in each morning for coffee, breakfast and most importantly, the company.

"You know everyone's order pretty much when they walk in the door. 'The regular?' we ask them."

— Heather Van Horn
Fat Boy's waitress

"[Fat Boy's] is really affordable and gives good food," Miller says. "And Mike [Burkett] takes good care of us." Miller is a familiar face at Fat Boy's. Like most costumers, he's a regular.

For the staff, it just makes the job easier. "You know everyone's order pretty much when they walk in the
door," Van Horn says. "The regular? we ask them." The twenty-something waitress has been employed at Fat Boy's since earlier this year but had been a regular before that.

On weekends, customers come from as far away as Waynesboro and Stuarts Draft, just to name a few. Burkett remembers one couple who drove four hours from Charleston, W.Va., to celebrate their anniversary.

Over the years, Fat Boy's has achieved its share of notoriety. In addition to appearing in numerous motorcycle magazines, the restaurant achieved its greatest moment of fame in September when a picture of Fat Boy's hit the front page of The Los Angeles Times.

Right after the resultant flooding from Tropical Depression Fran, volunteers came from Michigan to assist with rescue efforts and ate daily at Fat Boy's. The Associated Press took some photos which worked their way to the City of Angels. "The AP picked it up . . . they released it across the wire and The L.A. Times picked it up," Burkett says.

With a name like Fat Boy's Pork Palace, it may seem likely that visitors want to grab a five-finger discount on their way out the door, but Burkett says this isn't an issue. "I think maybe one time a couple of salt shakers came up missing," he says.

Van Horn says if anything is stolen, it's the menus — nothing extravagant, they're just white sheets of paper stapled together.

Possibly, there's a lack of stolen goods because Fat Boy's sells products bearing its unconventional name. Hats and coffee mugs are available, but t-shirts are the biggest seller.

James Madison University senior Brian Hennighausen bought a hat during one of his treks to the palace. "Fat Boy's is cool and the hats are a must," he says while planning another excursion to the palace.

The restaurant's four-year anniversary came and went without much hoopla, but the next birthday is the one that counts, Burkett says. "They say if you make it five years, then you can make it." By these standards, the Pork Palace is well on its way.

WHAT ONCE WAS: Originally built in the 1930s, Fat Boy's has housed many establishments over the years, including a post office, gas station, grocery store, dance hall and bar.

THE PORK KING: Mike Burkett, the restaurant's owner, reigns over the Fat Boy's Pork Palace kitchen.

JEN NOWITZKY is a graduating senior from Norfolk. She plans a career in print journalism, though where she will work continues to be a mystery.

JOHN M. TAYLOR, a senior mass communication major from Chesterfield County, will graduate in May.
LOTUS: The Light Of Truth Universal Shrine sits on a small hill in the central Virginia community of Yogaville.

Story By Brian Minter
Photos By James Morris

At first glance, there’s little to distinguish the Glenmore Grocery — a small gas station and convenience store in Buckingham County — from any other all-purpose rural store in Virginia. A sad-eyed hound dog blocks the front door. The gas pumps out front are the only ones for miles.

What sets the Glenmore Grocery apart from other area pitstops isn’t its gasoline, but its proximity to a very unusual place.

“If I had a cup in here in the summer for every person that comes in looking for Yogaville, I’d have a million dollars,” Glenmore employee Louise Miles says, shaking her head. “Chinese, Mexicans, all kinds of people come through here. And then they come back by on their way out and thank me and tell me they had a lovely time.”

In the back woods of rural Virginia you might expect to find many things. A few scattered homes with giant yards and satellite dishes, occasional lonely gas stations, bears. But you might not expect to find a thriving community of people who practice Eastern-style yoga and wake up every morning at 5 a.m. to meditate.

And you might not expect to find an immense pink-and-blue shrine sitting serenely on a small hill, surrounded by bright pools of water and thousands upon thousands of flowers.

The LOTUS

“It was the first time in my life I actually felt religious,” says Chris Walker, an English teacher at Ohio University and a 1996 graduate of James Madison University, of his trip last year to the Light Of Truth Universal Shrine.

The LOTUS is located on the property of Yogaville, a small community of people who follow the beliefs and teachings of yoga and lead meditative, uncluttered lives in the heart of central Virginia. LOTUS is the main shrine and the big draw for tourists and various seekers of enlightenment.

Directly surrounding the LOTUS for miles upon miles are nothing but fields and trees and the occasional pickup truck. This is how the residents like it. “We are here because it is a beautiful and serene place,” says Swami Murugananda, a monk at Yogaville. “All choices are made on purpose.”

“Most of the visitors are tourists
or people from Charlottesville,” says Allen Young, the receptionist at LOTUS and a resident of Yogaville. “We get a lot of Indian professional people who live in the States. They come down from Richmond, Washington [D.C.], Fairfax.”

Between 10 and 20 people visit the shrine each day, with twice that number arriving on weekends, Young says.

The shrine is dedicated to the light of truth universal — the belief that all religions, faiths and philosophies have something to offer, that there’s no one “right” religion. Within the shrine, each of the world’s major faiths (as well as some lesser-known ones) receive equal treatment.

Amin Merchant, of Richmond, recently brought his family to visit the shrine. He had been there before and wanted to share the experience with them. “It is very quiet here, very religious,” he says. “And it is good to be knowledgeable about other people’s beliefs.”

Into The Shrine

The shrine, a two-story building made of more than 500,000 Italian mosaic tiles and painted in pale pinks and blues, is shaped like a giant, rounded blossom of the lotus flower. It lies at the end of a long garden walkway, lined with flower beds, fountains and green statues.

Outside there are low, tidy shelves where people have left their various footwear (no shoes inside the shrine), and above the doorway in the lobby is the phrase “In Silence We Listen,” gently reminding people to be quiet in a holy place.

The shrine is divided into two parts. The first floor is All Faiths Hall, which displays many religions of the world. Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Sikhism, Shinto, Taoism, African faiths and Native American faiths are represented, each in a display area featuring photographs and pictures of holy people and places, sacred texts and writings, small sculptures and pieces of artwork, poetry and paintings important to people of that faith.

A smaller hall represents some lesser-known faiths such as Jainism, Zoroastrianism, Baha’I, Confucianism, Integral Yoga and religions of the native Pacific Islanders. Also included are artifacts of several different secular beliefs, including a copy of William Shakespeare’s Hamlet, the symbol of the United Nations, the diary of Anne Frank, Albert Einstein’s Theory of Relativity, quotes from Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and Martha Graham and printed sheet music of Mozart’s “The Magic Flute.”

The shrine is dedicated to the belief that everyone has something to offer, no matter what they believe, and the things that make people different are the things most worth keeping.

“When things become uniform, they become boring,” according to a pamphlet that states the beliefs of Sri Swami Satchidananda, the founder of Yogaville and the LOTUS. “Variety is the spice of life. God created all these differences for a reason. Our aim is to understand and enjoy the variety,” he says. “Ultimately we all aim for the same truth while walking on different paths.”

Up a short, spiral staircase is the shrine itself. The silence is deafening. There are usually a few people here. On this day, a middle-aged woman with two children, a young father with his daughter and a young woman with bare feet and long, braided hair are here. No one speaks a word, not even the children. No one seems willing to violate such a silence.

In the center is an altar, surrounded by lights and artificial lotus flowers. Stretching out of the altar, rising 46 feet to the vaulted wooden ceiling, is a
glowing tube of white neon light. The room is dimly lit by only a few skylights, so the tube gives the entire shrine an eerie blue glow.

Stretching out from the tube as it reaches the ceiling are 12 smaller tubes, which reach down to 12 alcoves. Each alcove contains a symbol and a sacred book from one of the 10 faiths displayed in the room below, with a quote from each. There are also two additional symbols, one for other known faiths, and one for faiths still unknown.

People are free to sit here and meditate for as long as they wish, or, as the woman and her children do, to walk slowly around the circular room, stopping at each alcove as they go.

Those who maintain the LOTUS ask that people who visit wear modest attire, suitable for a place of worship, and that they respect the shrine and the community.

Visitors to the LOTUS must take off their shoes, remain silent and follow some simple guidelines. Visitors are asked not to sit with their feet pointed toward the central altar and not to lay down in the shrine — both are considered disrespectful.

“Pointing feet at anyone is considered wrong in all eastern countries,” Murugananda says. “Simply put, you are showing the part that walks on dirt to someone. That is impolite, especially in a temple.

“Removing shoes is also done in all eastern countries,” Murugananda says. “Two reasons — one is for respect, by removing that which is attached, metaphorically, to the Earth. Practical reason — less cleaning up of rugs and things.”

People with children are welcome, but they are reminded to instruct their children to behave in a respectful manner.

Yogaville

“Living and working together as one beautiful family with total love — that is God.”

These are the words of Yogaville founder Satchidananda that hang in the visitor’s center, which is located about half a mile from the shrine. Here visitors can learn more about Yogaville and its inhabitants.

“It is a diverse number of people coming together for a spiritual purpose,” Murugananda says. “It is not really a religion, it’s not organized that way. It is a lifestyle and a philosophy.

“We get any kind of person you can think of, people from all over the country, people from all over the world,” he says. “We have people living here now from 24 different countries, all ages of people, from babies to our oldest resident, who is 84 years old.”

Louise Miles from the nearby Glenmore Grocery says she’s happy to have Yogaville residents as neighbors.
“Everyone of them up there is as nice as can be,” Miles says. “They don’t even know me, but three years ago my house burned down and they showed up with a little bit of everything. Writing paper, toilet paper — everything a house would need. It was some kind of nice of them,” she recalls.

About 130 people live in Yogaville, according to Murugananda. Many have jobs or own businesses in the Charlottesville area, while others are retired. Some work in the nearby rural areas and others, like Murugananda, work at the Ashram.

The Ashram, a Sanskrit word that translates loosely as “spiritual community,” consists of the main buildings like the visitor’s center, dormitories, an inn, teaching and meditation rooms and the LOTUS.

People come from all over the world to learn Integral Yoga, which the swamis teach. Occasionally, people come to meet Satchidananda, who is the founder of Integral Yoga. His bearded and benevolent face smiles down from pictures everywhere.

At the shrine, there’s a small museum detailing the history and construction of the LOTUS and featuring photographs of Satchidananda with dozens of world religious and political leaders.

Residents and guests alike willingly live strict lifestyles in Yogaville that are far from American social norms. The schedule of events begins at 5 a.m. with meditation and continues all day with work and exercise. A strict vegetarian diet is observed and no smoking, alcohol, non-medical drugs or television is allowed.

“That is being healthy,” Murugananda says.

BRIAN MINTER is a senior mass communication major graduating in December. He plans to become an international rock 'n' roll celebrity, but he’s killing time until then by writing.

Visiting LOTUS and Yogaville

Yogaville is located in Buckingham County; the nearest town is Scottsville, which is 20 miles northeast of Yogaville on the James River banks. Charlottesville is another 20 miles north.

Yogaville and the LOTUS are free for anyone to visit, and the maintainers of the shrine encourage visitors from all walks of life. That, they say, is their aim.

There’s a museum and gift shop at the LOTUS, as well as a receptionist and information desk. The maintainers of the shrine also accept donations, which are almost solely responsible for maintaining the shrine and its grounds, according to receptionist Allen Young. There are paths leading to and around the LOTUS and behind it is a small lake with its very own tribe of geese.

The shrine is open from 10 a.m.-noon and 2-5 p.m. Monday-Friday. It’s also open from 7-9 p.m. on Friday, 10 a.m.-7 p.m. Saturday and 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Sunday. The visitor’s center is open until 9 p.m. daily.

For more information, call the LOTUS at (804) 969-4052, or check Yogaville’s Website at http://moonstar.com/~yoga.

The Website, which was created and is maintained by Murugananda, features pictures of the LOTUS, facts about Satchidananda’s life, suggestions and guidelines for visitors and information on Yogaville, Integral Yoga and the available teaching programs, workshops and seminars.
The alarm goes off, "The best mix of the '80s and '90s . . . just in front of 8 o'clock . . .," rings in the air. The radio dial is set to Q101, where the voices of Steve Williams and Michele Benson keep the airwaves busy and provide the caffeine for sluggish mornings. As Amy Grant's "I'm the Lucky One" fades in, they toss around some morning sarcasm.

"I'm lucky," Williams jokes.
"You sure are," Benson laughs.
"Because I'm with Michele, ooh!" Williams says.

This duo comprises Q101's Q-Morning Crew, which first aired in October 1996. They have clicked together from the very first day — or better yet the very first hour — and have been entertaining listeners ever since.

So how did Benson and Williams become the FM station's morning crew?

"I really don't know," Williams says. "I've had partners before, but when they put us together I had an idea it was going to fly. It did take us a while to get the timing down, and we're still working on it because it's still new."

When the Q101 morning show starts off at 5:30 a.m., it not only includes Benson and Williams, but also the "crew." Weatherman Frank Wilt and sportscaster "Coach" Bill Phipps have been part of the crew since the twosome's beginning. "It's not just the two of us," Benson says. "They also are a part of our team."

Benson and Williams say their ability to relate to people about everyday happenings keeps the audience tuned in to the morning show. While Williams talks about aspects of married life such as leaving the dishes in the sink and how the dog acts like a child, Benson discusses the single lifestyle.

"The male and female interaction is just perfect," Benson says. "Steve will bring something up that I obviously don't agree with and vice versa, and it just starts things rolling."

They may work together as a team, but Williams and Benson seem to know each other well enough to antagonize one another without taking it too seriously.

Bryan Hartman, a JMU senior business management major who works part time at the station, remembers one time the morning sarcasm wasn't too funny in Benson's point of view.

"When Michele was going to
have her wisdom teeth taken out, she couldn’t eat,” Hartman says. “So every time Steve said names of songs or titles on the air, he would give her a hard time and somehow would refer them to food.”

Susanne Mowbray, Q101 general manager, gives her own insight as to how Benson and Williams became a team. “We hired Michele to be [former Program Director] Steve Knupp’s partner, but when [Knupp] went on vacation for a week, Williams filled in and they were dynamic,” she says. “They were more like partners than Michele being a sidekick.”

Phipps agrees these two work well together. “They’re having a lot of fun,” he says. “The chemistry is as if they have been working together for years instead of several months.”

Working as a team for only about six months, Benson and Williams say they are very comfortable with the arrangement, and they easily bounce off each other like longtime friends.

“When I first started, it felt like I had a new partner every week,” Benson laughs. “But Steve has helped me along and that’s why it’s so comfortable. He has been like a mentor.”

Before starting the new Q-Morning Crew, Williams and Benson talked to Knupp and decided anything that went over the Q101 airwaves would not make the station appear too risqué.

Both agree they want their audience to have just as much fun as they’re having. “I just enjoy the devil out of them,” says David Derosia, a Harrisonburg resident and faithful listener. “They’re down to earth, and they make the ride home [coming off the third shift from Perdue] pleasant.”

Wilt enthusiastically sums up working with Benson and Williams with one word — fun. “Getting up early is hard,” Wilt admits. “But they are easy-going, nice to be around and just plain fun people to be in the company of that early.”

When Benson and Williams aren’t on the air, they may be found outside participating in local charity events throughout the year, like the Funfest and Autumn Peak.

Funfest, sponsored by Q101, The Daily News-Record, Joshua Wilton House, Harrisonburg Jaycees and Bud Light, runs every Wednesday from May to August in downtown Harrisonburg. Folks can enjoy the tunes of bands and relax. Q101 chooses eight charities to receive the proceeds.

Autumn Peak, sponsored by Q101, Coors and Massanutten Resort, is held on a weekend in October at Massanutten. Bands play, children have their faces painted and crafts are displayed. Proceeds go to the Harrisonburg/Rockingham County Fire and Rescue Squad.

Williams has been in the radio business for 18 years. “My father was in [radio], and I was on the air when I was three years old at station WGET in Gettysburg.” In 1979, he began his career at WTBO in Cumberland, Md., and since then listeners have heard his voice across the East Coast, in Maryland, Virginia and as far south as Florida.

Before moving to Staunton in January, Williams commuted from
Winchester, where he and his wife, Susan Hawthorne, lived. His career with Q101 began two years ago as a disc jockey, and he moved quickly up the business ladder — he was promoted to program director in March.

Benson also has made some cameo radio appearances in her past. A native of Hampton, she says she was one of “those high schoolers that constantly called radio stations to hear songs [she] liked.”

Before attending James Madison University Benson planned to pursue a career as a French interpreter, but she suddenly found herself in JMU’s mass communication program with a concentration in telecommunication.

Benson quickly jumped into the field by interning at several TV stations. She says the summer of 1992 was one of her most enjoyable ones — as an intern at WAVY-TV 10 in Tidewater, she helped produce a weekly segment for anchor Alveta Ewell.

Most people go to work saying dreadfully, ‘I’ve got to go to work,’ but I love doing the morning show. I come to work every morning knowing it’s going to be fun.

— Michele Benson
Q-Morning Crew personality

After graduating from JMU in 1993, Benson changed gears. She began working part-time in radio and has “loved it ever since.” Although she’s been in the business for about four years now, Williams still jokingly refers to her as a “rookie.”

As part of the competitive field of mass communication, Benson and Williams say they don’t mind giving some advice to those seeking a career in radio. “Read a lot,” Benson says. “People are interested in being entertained and sharing things with them that they can relate with and pass along to others. Always be willing to learn as well as be persistent.”

Williams adds, “If anyone wants to get into this business bad enough, and if you have talent and can do it, then go for it. Be willing to accept criticism. Broadcasting is not something you can teach — it’s a gift. And keep knocking on doors.”

Working in broadcasting not for the money but for the enjoyment, Benson and Williams want their audience to remember they have fun and hope their listeners enjoy the entertainment. “That’s the most important thing — that they were entertained and enjoyed listening to us,” Benson says. “Most people go to work saying dreadfully, ‘I’ve got to go to work,’ but I love doing the morning show. I come to work every morning knowing it’s going to be fun.”

MICHELLE K. BAKER, from Winchester, is a senior mass communication major with a concentration in electronic media production. After graduating in May, she plans to travel and see the world.

EDWARD L. BAKER, also from Winchester, is a senior mass communication major with a concentration in electronic media production. He plans to pursue a career in photojournalism after graduating in May.

NOTE: Michelle and Ed are not married; they are siblings.
Kids fidget excitedly and sit on their knees to get a better view of the juggling act. Parents smile and instinctively slide their protective arms in front of their children as the performer expertly slices the air around him.

A roar of “ooohs” and “ahhs” erupts as a ball of flames explodes toward the ceiling. Food flies through the air with the greatest of ease. Performers dressed in costume walk among the spectators.

Ladies and gentlemen and children of all ages — welcome to Chiang House.

Story By Teresa Martinez
Photos By Roger Wollenberg

“I almost forgot to eat I was so excited,” says James Madison University senior Mandi Marcopulos, a first-time Chiang House patron. “I could not get over how the chef flipped an egg on his spatula without breaking it and then tossed it and cracked it perfectly in mid-air. I can’t do that using my hands.”

So maybe the Ringling Brothers wouldn’t call it the “greatest show on Earth,” but the Japanese Teppanyaki, Hibachi-style cooking the Chiang House offers is a distinctive dining experience.

Outside, Chiang House is a modest, low-rise, oriental-style building on East Market Street in Harrisonburg. Inside, a guest can get a taste of oriental culture through the ambiance and the wide variety of dining options. Glass cases display ornaments, knickknacks, delicately painted statues, vases and an authentic handmade Japanese robe, while Japanese panel artwork and fans adorn the walls of the entire restaurant. Soft oriental music echoes through the rooms as waitresses dressed in Japanese kimonos bustle around.

FRYING HIGH: Chef Tom Dung prepares his grill as guests await a taste of Japanese cuisine at Chiang House.
The chef wheels his cart to the front of the table and, after polite hellos and introductions, begins making dinner for the guests. Each dinner includes a shrimp appetizer, Japanese soup, a salad, steamed or fried rice and a main entrée, composed of either chicken, steak, filet mignon, shrimp, scallops or lobster or a combination of any two.

The show begins as the chef makes a happy face with oil on the Teppanyaki table. Guests smile but sometimes fail to notice the chef strike a match and ignite the oil. The three lucky guests sitting directly in front of the chef instinctively check their eyebrows to make sure they haven’t been burned off, as they sniff for singed hair.

The chef laughs and informs them their eyebrows are where they have always been. From that point on, guests learn not to take their eyes off his hands, which is exhausting in itself.

Any new food he introduces is accompanied with a chunk of what he calls “low-fat” butter. In between cooking the rice, vegetables and main entrées and keeping a constant clatter with his customers, the chef shows off his knife-handling skills while tossing salt and pepper shakers into his hat. It’s like watching a movie stuck in fast forward — his movements are in fifth gear, but accurate.

The Americanization of some of the Japanese spices and sauces are the butt of many of his jokes. According to the chef, steak sauce and seafood dip are Japanese A1 and A2 sauces, hot sauce is Japanese ketchup and onions are Japanese hamburgers.

“Our job is to make the customers happy and hope the food turns out good,” says two-year chef and employee Tuan Luong. Luong is one of four chefs who perform in the Japanese side of the restaurant. He admits sometimes he still gets nervous while he is performing, but he advises, “Don’t worry. Nothing is ever going to hit or fly at a customer.”

The grand finale and most popular act is the shrimp toss. At the end of his
demonstration, the chef uses a spatula to toss shrimp into his customer’s hesitantly open mouth, instigating challenges and friendly competition.

The show the chef puts on stems very much from his own personality. Chefs talk to the guests and try to play off them while chopping, cooking, cutting, tossing utensils, playing with fire and remembering everyone’s dinner selections.

The chefs need basic skills, but William Chiang, a recently retired 10-year chef, will sometimes train new employees to perfect their skills. He trained in Japan for a year.

Luong explains the training process includes learning to chop and cut quickly, but new chefs learn most of the techniques by watching an experienced chef. “You watch and practice it in your mind over and over,” he says.

The training pays off in the end because the quality of the food and entertainment surrounding it keeps both young and old guests captivated. Regular customers are entertained by watching the excited looks of the Teppanyaki virgins. “I really enjoyed the showmanship more than anything else,” says Harrisonburg resident Darleen Martin. “Our mouths were hanging open.”

Aside from experiencing Japanese cooking and customs, guests can enjoy a sushi meal. Chiang House also offers guests the opportunity to sit at a sushi bar and watch a chef make their meals. “When you watch them make the sushi, it is like they are creating an artwork,” JMU junior Marc Luber says of his visit to the restaurant.

Guests can order from a variety of seafood including tuna, salmon, octopus, fish roe, squid, mackerel, yellow tail, shrimp, eel, sweet egg and crab meat. In a matter of minutes, the chef prepares the raw fish into what Chiang House calls “edible art.”

One aspect about Chinese cooking in the United States that deviates slightly from the Chinese tradition is taste, William Chiang says. The flavor of the Chinese food in America is about 30 percent less spicy, because that is the taste Americans traditionally like.

“All Chinese food tastes different,” Michelle Chiang says. Chefs use different spices and sauce combinations to give the food its distinct taste, she explains.

Business has picked up for the restaurant in the last few months with the hiring of Chef Chen, the Chinese food chef for Chiang House. Even though Chen doesn’t speak a word of English, Michelle Chiang says, “Hiring him was the best decision I made.” Originally from Hong Kong, Chen moved to Harrisonburg from New York.

“A restaurant like this really makes people more aware of a different culture,” McFadden says. “It makes people who may have never seen outside of Harrisonburg open their minds and try something new.”

Michelle Chiang says, “Some people had never heard the word sushi before. We introduced a completely new culture to the locals and eventually they got used to it.”

Chiang House offers an Oriental dining experience found no where else in Harrisonburg. As JMU junior Jessica Walsh puts it, “It’s better than Thursday night TV. There is no higher compliment.”

Chiang House is located at 829 E. Market St. in Harrisonburg. Guests can dine in or carry out Chinese food 11 a.m.-10 p.m. Sunday through Thursday, and 11 a.m.-11 p.m. Friday and Saturday.

The Japanese side serves 4:30-10 p.m. Sunday through Thursday, and 4:30-11 p.m. Friday and Saturday. Reservations are available for large parties.

TEPPANYAKI TOSS: After preparing a customer’s meal from scratch, Dung flips shrimp tails from his heating surface onto the diner’s nearby plate.
A HARD DAY'S NIGHT

Michael McKee's modest Beatles collection has grown into the only registered U.S. Beatles museum

Story By Ken Weeks  
Photos By James Morris  
Illustrations By Brian Minter

It's a safe bet the Beatles — John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Starr — have never set foot in Stanardsville. The small town may be a long way from Liverpool, England, where the Fab Four got its start. In fact, it may be the last place one would expect to find a shrine devoted to the world's most famous rock band.

ONE OF A KIND: The only registered Beatles museum in the United States began its display to cover up flood damage.

But, as Starr might have said, the gods of rock 'n' roll work in strange and mysterious ways. Nestled between the local Episcopal church and the Greene County Courthouse is a little brick building where Beatlemania lives on.

"It all got started after the flood," says Michael McKee, owner and curator of the United States' only registered Beatles museum. Indeed, it took nothing less than an act of God to bring the British invasion to the Shenandoah Valley. McKee says he was looking for a way to cover up damage to the walls of his old Ruckersville print shop.

"Of course, I put up some Beatles posters," he says. "A friend of mine walked in and said 'Hey, this place looks more like a Beatles museum.'"

Six months later McKee's impromptu display of a few posters has grown to include some 300 items and has drawn visitors from as far away as Nepal.

"We average about 12 people a day in here," McKee says, brandishing a well-worn guest book. He points out names of visitors from Germany, France, Italy, Japan, England and all over the United States.

Today McKee's collection occupies nearly half of his Stanardsville print shop. The walls are crammed with precious albums and photographs of the Beatles in action. Visitors are welcome to peruse the albums or take a seat and watch one of 35 Beatles-related videos in McKee's personal library.

"It's tough to get any work done around here because you have to stop and talk to everybody who comes in," he
OFF THE WALL: Owner and curator Michael McKee stands in front of his large collection of Beatles memorabilia. His Fab Four display includes some rare, hard-to-find items, like a never-released Swedish studio master of “Ob-La-Di-Ob-La-Da.”

The tone of McKee’s voice, however, indicates he doesn’t really mind the task.

Not surprisingly, the museum attracts all kinds of Beatles fanatics looking to buy, sell, trade or just share memories of those lovable mop tops. “I must have met five or six women who told me they were John Lennon’s favorite waitress,” McKee says. “Another guy claimed that he saw the Beatles twice before they were on Ed Sullivan. Now that’s impossible.”

McKee, on the other hand, admits he never saw the Beatles perform live. “I’ve seen them all individually, but never together,” he says. But that doesn’t mean he hasn’t had any close encounters with any of the band’s members. “Once I saw George Harrison strumming his guitar on a sidewalk in L.A.,” McKee says. “Everyone was whispering ‘That’s George Harrison, that’s George Harrison.’ I threw a dollar in his guitar case and kept walking.”

A native of Los Angeles, McKee parlayed a struggling music career into a print shop business that brought him to Virginia in 1981. Later, he returned to Los Angeles to design albums for the likes of the Police, Janet Jackson and even 2 Live Crew.

Now settled in Ruckersville, McKee is philosophic about his up-and-down experiences in the music industry. “I got rejected by everybody,” he says. “Columbia records told me my material sounded like old McCartney songs.”

McKee often is forced to inform visitors that his collection, valued at $35,000, is not for sale. He also has turned away numerous would-be entrepreneurs offering to sell him albums he already owns. However, McKee is more than willing to trade, mentioning a deal he recently struck with a man in France. He has also bargained with collectors in Japan and England.

McKee obtained the bulk of the museum’s collection between 1981 and 1985 when he tirelessly searched through bins at used record stores. While his collection doesn’t contain any personal artifacts, it does include a treasure trove of rare albums, singles and studio masters that would make the Hard Rock Cafe jealous.

The Beatles released 14 albums in the United States and 12 in England before the compilations started. McKee has them all and then some. Among his most prized possessions is a rare Swedish studio master of “Ob-La-Di-Ob-La-Da” that never was released to the public. He also has a copy of the John and Yoko album Two Virgins, in which the pair appear nude on the cover.

Another rarity is a Dutch release on which drummer Jimmy Nichols stood in for Ringo, who was out with tonsillitis. “He was a Beatle for two weeks,” says McKee of the long-since-forgotten Nichols. “That’s more than most people can say.”

Many visitors come to gawk at the infamous original cover of The Beatles: Yesterday and Today, which features the macabre mop tops dressed in surgical gowns and holding pieces of raw meat and chopped-up baby dolls. The controversial cover was banned upon the album’s release and quickly replaced.

A sentimental favorite of McKee’s is a copy of the single “My Bonnie,” the first song the Beatles released in America through MGM. McKee points out that on this release, the famous songwriting duo of Lennon and McCartney is designated McCartney-Lennon and not the familiar Lennon-McCartney. “A lot of people don’t know that the B-side is a cover of ‘When the Saints Go Marching In,’” he adds.
In his never-ending quest for memorabilia, McKee has enjoyed some good luck. One day while browsing an antique shop in Greene County, he ran across the soundtrack to the unreleased Beatles movie “Eight Arms to Hold You.” “The movie ‘Help’ was filmed under the working title ‘Eight Arms to Hold You,’ ” McKee explains. “Capitol Records jumped the gun and released the soundtrack as ‘Eight Arms’ before they changed the title.”

Now the valuable rarity was on sale for a paltry 50 cents, but McKee didn’t have any change. He raced to find his wife. “The guy actually marked it down to 46 cents so I could pay the sales tax,” he recalled. Today the soundtrack occupies a rightful place of prominence at the museum.

A few of McKee’s collectibles have more mysterious origins. “The big mystery is this,” he says. “A couple weeks ago I got this tape in the mail marked ‘J. Lennon Demo.’ The return address says nothing but ‘Yoko NYC.’ ” A perplexed McKee was shocked to find the tape contained unreleased versions of Lennon singing “Free as a Bird,” “Real Love” and “Dear John,” as well as some studio chatter. “I guess Yoko is my new best friend,” he laughs. “When people ask me if Yoko broke up the Beatles I don’t say anything.”

McKee is equally non-confrontational regarding the other controversial Beatles wife. “Does Linda McCartney have talent?” he repeated. “She answered that question very diplomatically, so I’ll try to do the same.” McKee ponders for a moment. “I will say this — she always waves to the audience.”

As for the layout of the museum, space limitations allow McKee to display only about two-thirds of his collection. He says he hopes economics will allow him to move the museum to a larger building sometime soon. “This place is designed to lose money, and it does that quite well,” he says.

Still, McKee refuses to charge admission, preferring to rely on kindness of strangers, though some strangers, he admits, are kinder than others. “One guy walked in here and told me there hasn’t been any real music since Patsy Kline died,” he says.

James Madison University freshman Megan Ross, who recently visited the museum, says, “I think it’s a pretty cool place. I always wondered what John and Yoko looked like naked.” Ross, a long-time Beatles fan, says she was impressed by the completeness of McKee’s collection.

“He definitely has more albums than I do,” she says. Ross says she thinks many more people would visit the museum if they knew about it. “It’s so far out of the way,” she says. “None of my friends know it’s there.”

For McKee, keeping the Beatles Museum open has been one hard day’s night after another. But the area’s biggest Beatles fan isn’t about to give up. “I’m not an expert,” he says. “I just have a lot of stuff.”
Dr. Norlyn Bodkin proposed the idea of a public arboretum in 1972. He has served as director of the JMU Arboretum since construction began in 1985. Photo: James Morris