Home Cookin’  
Serving up hot, home-cooked meals for 54 years, regulars frequent L & S Diner for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Operation Ostrich  
Raising ostrich is just a pet project for farmer Willard Lutz and his family who are finding their way in a new feathered field.

Serving Society  
Bob Holton has dedicated his time and energy to Bridgewater residents, having served as town manager for 28 years.

Code for Learning  
The locally developed Rosetta Stone software teaches students in the Valley and around the world different languages.

Monroe’s Manor  
Ash Lawn-Highland plantation in Charlottesville features seasonal attractions for the historian and musician at heart.

INNchanted Rooms  
Area bed and breakfasts charm patrons with unique decor through rooms of antiquity and each innkeeper’s personal touch of hospitality.

Daily Bread  
Three Mr. J’s stores offer Valley residents a friendly place to enjoy New York-style bagels and other baked goods.

Bard of the ’Burg  
Ralph Cohen shares his enthusiasm for Shakespeare with students and thespians of the area and abroad.

Remember When  
Shedding light on the effects of The Great Depression in Harrisonburg and the life-long residents who still have stories to tell.

Perfect Petals  
Pat Brennan’s orchid farm in Mt. Jackson produces beautiful, award-winning flowers that are distributed nationwide.
EDITORS’ NOTE

Mixing successful concepts from the past with creative, new ideas, Curio 2001 presents a plethora of topics unique to Harrisonburg and the Shenandoah Valley. Modern design elements and fresh story topics provide readers with exciting insights to popular local establishments as well as to some of the area's best kept secrets.

Filling the shoes of last year's award-winning publication, which was named best annual college magazine in the Mid-Atlantic region by the Society of Professional Journalists, proved a challenge, but our able-bodied staff welcomed it with open arms. Featuring stories that warm the heart, mind and in some cases, the belly, Curio captures the community's eclectic walks of life. Farming is seen in a new light at Conicville Ostrich, while modern technology breaks new ground at L & S Diner a routine stop to share their day’s tales. Recollections of the Great Depression are told by lifelong Harrisonburg residents, and an experienced public servant shares his secrets to Bridgewater’s success.

Providing an invaluable service to our culturally diverse area, local entrepreneurs have unlocked the key to learning languages, while the words of Shakespeare are given new life by an inspirational professor and director. Crafters act out 19th century-life at Conicville Ostrich, while local farmers and other regulars make L & S Diner a routine stop to share their day’s tales. Recollections of the Great Depression are told by lifelong Harrisonburg residents, and an experienced public servant shares his secrets to Bridgewater’s success.

So dig in and fill your plate with a taste of local flavor, recognizable faces and charming personalities.

Christina Cook
Co-Executive Editor

CURIO STAFF

CHRISTINA COOK
a senior SMAD major from Manassas, Va., just finished three years of involvement with the award-winning Bluestone yearbook. Having lived all over the world, she plans to continue her globetrotting by spending a month in Scotland, discovering her heritage.

TOM STEINFELDT
has the valued knowledge of where his native Chester, Conn., is located. A senior political science major, he worked as a news editor and writer for The Breeze. He is also a sports correspondent for the Daily News-Record. After graduation, he will work as a reporter.

SARAH JONES
is a senior SMAD major from McLean, Va. She has been writing for a number of publications while studying at JMU, including the student newspaper, The Breeze. After graduation she plans to continue pursuing her interests in journalism.

KELLY ESTES
is a senior SMAD major from Gainesville, Va. While attending JMU, she has worked on the student newspaper, The Breeze, the literary arts magazine Fugue and the school yearbook, the Bluestone. This summer she plans to travel across the United States.

MEGHAN MURPHY
is a junior SMAD major from Portsmouth, N.H. She is currently the Art Director for The Breeze. After graduation, she aspires involvement in a sweeping romance with a handsome political philosopher, the Baja Peninsula and plenty of surf.

ABBY GREENAWALT
is a junior SMAD major from Manassas, Va. While at JMU, she has held the position of ad designer The Breeze. This summer she plans to intern at the Outer Banks Sentinel in Nags Head, N.C. and travel across the United States.

JULIE SPROESSER
a junior SMAD major from Woodbridge, Va., is currently editor-in-chief of The Breeze. She has also served as editorial assistant for the Center for American Places. Sproesser will spend the summer writing on the Emerald Isle with the SMAD in Ireland program.

ALLISON HENRY
is a senior SMAD major with an advertising minor from Manassas, Va. She was the assistant photo editor for Madison 101. After graduation, she plans to work with IDI Multimedia in Manassas. In about a year, she hopes to move out to the West Coast.

AMELIA TABER
is a junior SMAD major from Williamsburg, Va. She was an advertising designer for The Breeze and worked as a graphic designer for The Journal of Mine Action. After graduation this May, she plans to pursue a career in graphic design.

ANNE WHITLEY
is a senior SMAD major from Suffolk, Va. She has worked as an account executive for The Breeze at JMU. She is looking forward to leaving the 'Burg and exploring a world of possibilities. After graduation she plans to obtain a job in the advertising field.

KRISTEN PETRO
is a senior SMAD major from Middletown, Del. She was the assistant copy editor for The Breeze and a writer for Montpelier. After graduation she plans to be a waitress for the summer and travel before moving to Baltimore to pursue a journalism career.

XRIS THOMAS
is a senior SMAD major from Fredericksburg, Va. He was a photographer and designer for 8 Days a Week, The Breeze and South Main. Following graduation, he is moving to NY to fulfill his dream of being both a designer and rock star.

Co-Executive Editor

Tom Steinfeldt

Christina Cook

Supporting Staff

SARAH JONES

KELLY ESTES

MEGHAN MURPHY

ABBY GREENAWALT

JULIE SPROESSER

ALLISON HENRY

AMELIA TABER

ANNE WHITLEY

KRISTEN PETRO

XRIS THOMAS
Less than 15 feet from the railroad tracks in downtown Harrisonburg lies a quaint little diner that passersby could not miss if they tried. Resembling a derailed old train car, its red-and-white exterior and the vintage sign stand out in a city where most businesses have continued to renovate and expand.

With each door swing a "Hello darling honey," is heard from behind the counter. From the old stools with the vinyl red tops to the dishes that could be sold in an antique shop, it appears that this diner was preserved in a time capsule of sorts.

Love
at first bite

Story by Kathleen Rellihan
Photos by Meghan Murphy
This train car has not moved or changed in the last 50 years. Step aboard and you will go on a trip... a trip back in time that is. Back to a time when grabbing a bite to eat for lunch was about socializing and not convenience. A time when, instead of drive-thrus or deliveries, there was just a counter and a waitress. A time when the employees knew their customers by name and knew their favorite dishes by heart.

The friendships and the values at L & S Diner, and even sometimes the jokes, are just as old as the squeaky stools.

Established in August 1947, L & S has been a part of Harrisonburg's small-town culture for over half a century. L & S stands for the names of the original owners, Frank Lee and Ike Simmons. Now, four proprietors later, Samuel and Jeff Lambert and their sister, Joyce Graves, share the ownership of this time-honored diner.

Though inevitably prices have changed over the years, the first meal was 35 cents, and now the average meal is a little less than $5, the atmosphere has not. A long black counter is the only separation from the sizzling grill and hungry mouths. So as the food cooks, the conversation warms.

Robert Fletcher, a regular of the diner, has been eating at L & S since 1949. Twice a day, for the last 10 to 15 years, Fletcher stops at the diner, in the morning for coffee and around lunch when he gets off work.

Knowing most people in the diner, Fletcher feels free to joke and stake claim upon his position as one of the oldest regulars. "Did you get permission to sit there?" Fletcher says to a customer at the end of the counter. "Well, look, don't you see, there's my name right there...."

Not surprisingly, Fletcher points to a blank counter top, and both men chuckle at his familiar line.

It appears Fletcher has a contender for the most coveted seat at the end of the counter. Raymond Andrews dined at L & S the day it opened in 1947. He now heads to the diner more than once a day, and the employees hold him to be a permanent fixture just as much as the old coat rack by the door. After retiring from 48 years of driving a school bus in Augusta County, Andrews is able to make the trip from Sangersville to Harrisonburg in the mid-morning and around dinnertime for his daily dose of L & S.

"I always sit in that corner seat," says Andrews as he points to the same seat that supposedly has Fletcher's name on it. "If someone sees someone sitting in my seat, they will tell them to get up, because that's Raymond's seat," laughs Andrews.

Despite battling for the head of the counter and the prestige of being regulars for the most years, Andrews and Fletcher have been friends since Andrews first started making a daily appearance at the diner 17 years ago.

"He bought me something to eat and I have been friends with him ever since," Andrews chuckles. "That Fletcher will drink his coffee and then look over at me like I am going to pay."

Andrews and Fletcher might be two of the diner's most well-known faces, but the majority of the L & S patrons eat there daily as well. "You can set your clock by people coming in and out... some are so regular that waitresses don't even have to take their orders, they already know what they want," says Fletcher.

Another Harrisonburg resident, Debbie Huffman, comes in every morning and orders her usual: eggs and scrapple. "You put my name on the ticket and they know how to fix it," says Huffman. Every day she looks forward to chatting with the employees and seeing fellow regulars such as Andrews and Fletcher joke about such things as who will pay the bill.

From 5:30 a.m. when the doors open, to 8:30 p.m. when the last dish is served, there are all types of people at the counter, from the old to the young, from truck drivers to college students, from the locals to travelers. "All walks of life come in, judges, farmers and people like me," says Andrews. But L & S has something that keeps people coming back.

"It's a place where people can keep
in touch with what’s going on in Harrisonburg,” says manager Theresa Smith, an employee of L & S for over 25 years. Smith describes the diner as not just your typical place to grab a quick bite. Regulars claim they hear the news at the diner before they read it in the newspaper.

Richard Tysinger, a Harrisonburg resident, has been dining at L & S since the early ’60s. Other than his favorite dishes, the saltfish and the pan-fried chicken, the familiar voices of fellow customers and the friendly staff keep him coming back. “They have down-to-earth people working here,” Tysinger says. “They take a lot of interest in the customers, giving them nicknames even if they don’t know their first name.”

Though the diner is located in a small town, Smith insists that people from various locations stop in for a bite.

“You put my name on the ticket and they know how to fix it.”
“I’ve never been in a place where I have had so many friends.”

With people constantly coming and going, Andrews cocks his head a bit to see if it is a recognizable face that just walked through the door. “Hello West Virginia!” he says to one. “Hello junior” he says to another.

The regulars form friendships that are just as important as their rumbling stomachs. “I’ve never been in a place where I have had so many friends,” Andrews says.

Throughout the day, a steady stream of customers comes in for a meal, to talk, or just to read the newspaper and grab a quick cup of coffee. But the diner attracts its largest rush of hungry mouths during breakfast. “We go through 25 to 35 dozen eggs on any given morning,” Smith says. “And I remember our record ... 49 dozen eggs one morning that there was something going on at JMU.”

Though L & S has your staple breakfast dishes such as eggs and waffles, some of the dishes are house specialties. The “garbage omelet,” which started off as a joke, is now one of the most popular dishes and is comparable to a Western omelet. Even a waitress couldn’t tell you exactly what is in this special omelet. “It’s whatever they can’t sell that week,” jokes Andrews.

Another favorite dish is the saltfish, made with herring heavily salted, breaded then fried. Smith remembers when a particular customer just couldn’t get enough of this Southern delicacy. “We had one guy who just had to have our saltfish,” Smith says. “He’d come in right at the end of the season, buy 20 of our saltfish, put ’em in the freezer, and then all summer long he cooked ’em up and ate ’em.”

Over half a century after the first short order was served, the owners are still capitalizing on what the diner was
The L & S Diner has kept its customers satisfied for more than 53 years. Below, from left to right: Kristen Lambert calculates a customer's tab, Margie Turner checks tickets and prepares plates of food for hungry patrons, regulars Raymond Andrews and Debbie Huffman enjoy each other's company, and customers fill up with home-cooked meals at the signature diner counter.

"The real reason I come back is that it reminds me of home."

In the past there was a jukebox and beer was sold, yet the disappearance of both never affected socializing at the diner. Items have been added to the original menu since the initial idea was to have a place with just your basic hamburgers and hot dogs. But for the most part, things have remained exactly the same as the years have passed. The same faces. The same home cookin'. The same inviting and casual atmosphere.

Sam and his siblings have kept the family business running for the last 13 years, after their father, Mervin, owned it for 12 years. Hoping for continual success, Sam believes his son, who is currently the assistant manager, will continue to keep L & S a living tradition, along with his nephews and nieces.

"We try to keep it the same," Sam says. "Most of the people that eat in the diner now eat there because they ate there as a kid."

In a time when tearing down and rebuilding is a common practice, and the diner culture is becoming a rare breed, keeping such a small and simple business prosperous over the years is an accomplishment. Sam, not so sure of the secret of owning one the oldest diners around, speculates by saying, "It could just be the location ... It could be the food." It seems clear, though, that there is no secret. The diner's unique exterior may attract passersby, but it's the Southern cooking and the friendly staff that continue to collect regulars.

One of Fletcher's oldest memories of L & S is coming in with his mother. "I remember my mother would get all our vegetables from the cook," he says. "I remember sitting at the counter and watching him peel the potatoes by the door. I watched him peel many potatoes over the years."

Though the "vegetable guy" is long since gone, and employees come and go, Fletcher remains loyal to the diner. "The real reason I come back is that it reminds me of home," he says with a smile.

KATHLEEN RELLIHAN is a senior SMAD major from Glen Burnie, Md. After graduation, she plans to go abroad, taking pictures and notes along the way, in hopes that she’ll work for a travel magazine.
Willard Lutz Has A Farm

... And on his farm he has 25 ostrich, 5 emu, 7 calves, 3 pigs and 3 horses

Story by Jeri Moser
Photos by Kelly Estes

Twenty-five ostrich are waiting hungrily for Willard Lutz to come home and feed them late one Friday afternoon. After eating, these massive, yet uniquely graceful birds scatter through the barn into the pen where they will live a carefree life until they are large enough to be sold for their meat and leather.

Ostrich meat is becoming increasingly popular throughout the world, not only because of its low-fat content but also because it is not affected by many of the diseases that affect other farm animals. By six months of age, the birds are disease free, according to Willard. Conicville Ostrich farm is making the “new” meat available to residents throughout the Shenandoah Valley.
Conicville Ostrich, a Virginia Century Farm owned by the Lutz family for more than four generations, used to be a typical farm with cattle, chickens, turkeys and emu (birds in the same family as the ostrich). But in 1995, Lutz bought a pair of ostrich from Texas at his sons Walter's urging. In 1996 he added another pair purchased in Orange.

“When we started raising the ostrich, we thought it would catch on quickly,” says Willard watching his ostriches devour their food. “It hasn’t quite gained the momentum we hoped for, but I still think it’ll catch on soon.”

As the birds raise their heads from the trough, Lutz points to their necks. “You see that bulge?” he says. “Their esophaguses are outside the bone of their necks so you can see all the food going down. They have to hold their heads up to swallow.”

“In ‘Jurassic Park,’ I understand they used their feet to get an idea of how to make the dinosaurs’ feet look,” Lorna Lutz, Willard’s wife, says pointing to the ostriches’ immense, two-toed feet.

Once finished eating, the ostrich spread their wings, showing their meaty legs and white hides as they run through the barn. “They’re showing off for you,” Willard explains. “But in the summertime they open their wings like that to cool off.”

“They can’t have an enormous brain because there’s not a lot of room in those heads,” he says. “But they’re just as curious about you as you are about them. They come right up to you. You can’t work in the field with them at all because they just follow you around.”

Every year the ostrich get to show off for crowds of people when the Lutzes bring them to fairs. It was at one of these fairs an ostrich escaped.

“When the one got away at the fair I thought ‘Oh God, what am I going to do?’” Lorna says describing the escape. “Luckily it was the one day I didn’t wear sandals. I wore tennis shoes. Of course it was muddy. The ostrich went through the cattle barn and they yelled for the gates to be closed, but the people at the end just stood there. She got out to where they water and wash the cows and got scared. I just thought that if she goes over to where all those cars are, that is going to be terrible.

“So I got on the other side of her and starting jumping up and down like an idiot. Two boys, one was really tall and the other was shorter and heavier, got on either side of her. The shorter one was about the right height to grab her chest. I was yelling at them to get a sock and they grabbed a sack instead, which was even better. The tall boy put the sack over her head and led her back into her pen.”

The birds appear very mild mannered, even as they nibble on the finger Willard offers them. “The only time I’ve ever had a problem with the birds being mean was with the breeding pair,” he says. “The male was very protective and the female was very aggressive. Once she started breeding, she never stopped. Even out of season. We had to separate them from the others.”

When they first started raising the birds, the Lutzes tried breeding the ostrich themselves but weren’t successful. They got eggs but no live chicks. Around that time Willard found out he could buy chicks for as cheap as he could breed them. “A one-day-old chick costs about $50,” Willard says.

“No we buy the chicks about once a year and we stagger their ages,”

“In ‘Jurassic Park,’ I understand they used [the ostrich] feet to get an idea of how to make the dinosaurs’ feet look.”
“We buy them at 2 months old, 4 months old and 6 months old. That way we won’t be sending all the ostrich off at once to be processed.”

“The ostrich get their height first and then they start putting on weight,” he explains. “They’ll grow to about 8 feet and weigh 250 pounds. They are about 14 months old then.”

When the birds reach the age of 12 to 14 months, Willard loads them into his trailer and drives to Lynchburg where they are slaughtered and processed into meat.

Some of the meat products made from ostrich include ground patties, ground bulk, steaks, fillets, tenderloin, sausage and jerky.

“If the meat is cooked right it’s great,” he says. “But people tend to overcook it because they’re waiting for the grease to come out. The thing is, there isn’t any grease. It has less fat than other meat. You can substitute it for anything that has ground beef in it.”

The ostrich hides are sent to Iowa to be tanned. Then they are sent to Missouri where the leather and its products are made, although some of the smaller leather products like simple billfolds, cardholders, luggage tags and key rings Willard makes himself.

“Things made from ostrich leather last forever,” he says displaying a 3-year-old wallet. “Did you know they even make boots out of this leather?” he asks, disappearing into his house and returning with two pairs of boots he purchased from a producer in Texas. “I was on the Internet the other day and saw boots like these selling for $600!”

The feathers and eggs collected from ostrich as well as emu provide Lorna with craft opportunities. She paints the eggs and makes wreaths out of the feathers. “I get the ideas for the crafts off the Internet or out of my head,” she says. He [Willard] thought of making the lamps from the eggs all by himself.

Also grown on the 42-acre farm is produce such as blackberries and raspberries. Although the Lutzes are not certified organic farmers, they do not use antibiotics or sprays.

Surprisingly, caring for the ostrich, cattle, chickens, turkeys, emu and produce is not a day job for the couple. Willard has worked at the Rockingham Harrisonburg Dental Clinic since 1975, although he plans to retire this summer.

Lorna teaches fourth grade in Strasburg.

“I was born and raised on the farm. I liked it so I decided to stay here,” says Willard, who bought the farm from his father in 1985.

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“The farm actually isn’t a money making proposition,” he says. “The breeders were about $27,000 a pair. It takes a long time to make that up. Each bird eats about 25 pounds of food a day. It takes about $20 a day to feed. We do sell the crafts and ostrich products to those visitors who want them.”

Willard also sells his ostrich products and produce to farmer’s markets in Mt. Jackson, Staunton and Richmond once a week during the summer.

On the weekends, Conicville Ostrich attracts two or three visitors. “We’re not too far from Bryce Resort so we get a lot of people going up and down the road,” Willard says.

Every September, the Lutzes celebrate National Ostrich Month. “We put on a two-day deal the second weekend in September,” Willard says. “The farm is open and we serve ostrich products outside.

“This March we put on a big feast for National Agricultural Week. About 40 people showed up,” he says. “I guess we’ll do it again next year. It’ll be the third Saturday in March.”

Willard will continue taking care of his ostrich and farm for years to come. “Farming is my out,” he says. “I go home and go outside. I don’t need people around me. I can do whatever I want to do.”

JERI MOSER is a senior SMAD major hailing from Carlisle, Pa. After graduation she’ll be returning to Pa. before moving to Baltimore to pursue a career in PR.
College professors are many things: teachers, intellects and leaders. Some enter and leave student life for only one semester, while others make a deeper connection. They leave an impact on the way their students look at the world, becoming mentors and friends through the challenging path of college and the professional world beyond. Such professors make universities more interesting, teaching with a passion and hoping to make a difference in each student.

Bob Holton is one such professor. He has been a part-time member of the James Madison political science department since earning his masters degree in 1989, and teaches introductory public administration courses. By teaching about a career he has been involved with for almost 30 years, he strives to make college an educational experience students will both use and enjoy.

Holton has been the town manager of Bridgewater since the April before completing his bachelor of science degree in 1973 at JMU. He brings experiences from nearly 30 years of public administration to his courses with hands-on learning experiences to give students a realistic understanding of the profession.

Raised in Fishersville, Holton attended JMU during the evenings and worked full time in a rock quarry during the day to pay for his education. With a workload of at least 12 credit hours per semester and the rigorous demands of his full-time job, it was a tough learning experience that lasted longer than most. “JMU didn’t have a six-year program back then,” he laughs. “But I did.”
pointing out various mishaps in the public works projects. The two have remained friends through the years, and Holton has incorporated this walking field trip into his own lesson plans.

Unaware of the impact it would have on his life, Holton's chemistry class at JMU became one of his most useful classes. He barely passed the course and thought he would never use the material again. "I saved it until the last semester of my senior year," he says of the class he struggled through. Holton remembers walking out after the final thinking, "Thank God I'll never have to deal with chemistry again," but has dealt with it every week since then.

His explanation? "All towns are involved in water treatment and sewage treatment, and that is nothing but chemistry." His advice for public administration students now is to take as many environmental sciences as possible including biology and chemistry. Towns are addressing issues with more of an environmental mind set than 20 years ago when Holton first started.

During his college years, Holton married his childhood friend, Brenda. "Her house was on one side of the street, and mine was on the other," he fondly recalls. "There isn't a time I don't remember us not being together as friends." The couple continued to live in Fishersville among family and friends until eight years ago. It was a tough commute he recalls, but worth it.

Holton mulls over a report regarding Bridgewater's public works. New projects present continual challenges that he accepts with open arms.

It was during those six years that Holton met the professors who had a profound impact on his life at school and influenced his views on teaching. Paul Kline, who has since retired, had the most direct impact on the young man. "He took me under his wing," Holton explains. "He watched over me. I think he had sympathy for my situation." The guidance made an impact that Holton will never forget and the two still keep in touch.

Bob Sullivan is one of the last JMU faculty members who taught Holton. Sullivan taught Holton the introductory public administration course that ironically, Holton now teaches. He says Sullivan had a direct influence on his education through the realistic "know-how" he brought to the classroom. Sullivan included a walking tour through campus and town in his class.

In the spring of his senior year Holton was faced with a life-changing decision. He had always wanted to be a public administration major, with the intentions of teaching high school government courses and coaching basketball. He was offered a teaching position with Fort Defiance High School, but at the same time Bridgewater had an opening for town manager offering the same salary. One thing led to another and in April of that year he found himself in charge of public works for the small town of then 2,300 people.

The first year of his job was one of the most "intense learning experiences I've ever had," Holton truthfully admits. He learned more about the technical side of the job, aspects of public administration he had only read about but never used. His first day was April 10, 1973. He was 24 and could have spouted
goal is to always cover "everything in
the book without you knowing it," he
says. "Students are more attentive if
you tell real-life stories and events
rather than reading from the book."

He turns the budgeting lesson
from a text lecture into an interactive
competition where class members
become elected officials. There is also
the infamous field trip to the sewage
processing plant. Holton believes peo-
ple working in public administration
do more than wear starched shirts and
pass laws. His classes expose students
to the grittier side of public adminis-
tration not presented in textbooks,
which provides a true sense of the job's
duties.

"Teaching has turned out to be one
of the most enjoyable parts of my life,"
galore." It wasn't long before
he found himself run down. Thinking he
needed a break, in 1979 he took
some time off to attend graduate
school at the University of Virginia.

His replacement was an experienced
federal government worker with plans
of whipping the town into shape.
Fifteen months after he left, Holton was
asked to come back. The anticipated
replacement decided the federal govern-
ment was more his taste. Holton put
his graduate studies on hold and went back
to Bridgewater, transferring his studies
to JMU a few years later.

He eventually finished his master's
in 1989 and started teaching at JMU in
the spring of the next year. "They asked
me," he responds when asked why he
began teaching. "From 1967 until now,
there's hardly been a time I didn't have
some contact with JMU." In 1974,
Bridgewater started taking interns,
continuing Holton's involvement with stu-
dents. "I've always enjoyed being a part
of JMU," Holton says.

Grading papers is just about the
only thing he doesn't enjoy about teach-
ing. He brings a unique curriculum to
class, instead of the usual grind of
reviewing chapters, giving exams, and
moving on to the next subject. Holton's
goal is to always cover "everything in

on April 13 of that year there was a
major snowstorm. "It was the first time
I knew that stomach acid existed," he
says, recalling his emotions while sit-
ing in his new office watching the snow
come down. Questions plagued him.
Should he put down salt or gravel? When
do you begin plowing? It was all
up to him. An entire town was depend-
ing on his decision.

For quite some time the only other
person in the office besides him was the
treasurer. He admits the workload was
stressful. Holton was the building
inspector, relief operator for the water
plant, and attended "night meetings
and enjoys the energy and enthusiasm
he finds from the students in the
classroom. It is a pleasant change from
the day to day crunch of work. "Some
people fish to get peace and enjoy their
life. I teach." His fondness for teaching

These negative experiences have
been light-hearted at times and
extremely serious at others. "We actu-
ally believe we had a bomb in the building
at one time," says Holton. It turned out
to be a ticking watch in a box meant to
scare someone, but the situation was
still traumatic.

"I've had six death threats since I've
been here," continues Holton with a
mixed look of humor and amazement.
These threats resulted in
charges being brought against the
intimidators. At one point the FBI was
involved with a death threat and Holton
got to know the investigator very well.
"I did not hear from him again from that
time forward," says Holton of the agent
who oversaw the ordeal, "until I later
read a book about Donnie Brasco."

It turns out the FBI agent who
uncovered the sender of the death
Holton has worked as Bridgewater's town manager for 28 years, overseeing the town's growth and meeting a wealth of new friends along the way.

He believes the real joy in his work is "making friendships that have an influence." Citizens and council persons are considered some of his best friends with whom he shares the joy of getting to know and enjoying his life.

Don Litten, the town's attorney since 1956, is one such person. "I was 8-years-old when he started working for the town of Bridgewater," Holton recalls warmly. "I've always told people the three most influential people in my life are my wife first, my mother second but Don Litten a close third." More than a mentor, "he always holds me accountable for my mistakes, but in a friendly way, like a family member who sees you heading in the wrong direction and helps you straighten things out. He's been a real best friend over the years."

During that time, Holton has seen many changes in the town. Boasting a golf course, a college, over 98 acres of park, a small airport and some of the largest names in industry, Holton talks proudly of his town. Some of the honors Bridgewater has won include the very first Urban Forestry Award for a program that planted one tree for every household. "The two finalists for that first award were Bridgewater and Virginia Beach, and we won," which was a pleasant surprise, says Holton.

As for plans for his and the town's future, staying busy is all this man wants to do. Projects with the Federal Emergency Management Association, Main Street restorations and annexations that will almost double the size of the town are just some of the projects either currently underway or on the drawing board. Holton is proud of the town he has come to love and call his home and plans on sticking around much longer to see his plans through.

Retirement isn't in the picture for Holton. "Probably 62, if my health holds out, is about the time I'll retire (from this job)," but not from the other aspects of his life that keeps him going, he says. "I'll always teach. I can't imagine myself taking up golf and being on the course every day," he jokes.

Holton has seen much over the years as JMU and the surrounding community have grown and changed, bringing new meaning and obstacles to his own life. "I thoroughly enjoy things that are a challenge to me," he says. "I wouldn't be surprised if something else filled the vacuum [after retirement]. I don't want to stop, that wouldn't work for me. If I stop I'd probably die," laughs Holton.

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In recent years, the Shenandoah Valley has been developing and expanding culturally with the influx of new residents from different parts of the world. Members of many of these international families are not fluent in English.

Eleven years ago, Allen Stoltzfus and John Fairfield came up with a remedy for combating the language barrier many of these immigrants face. They developed the Rosetta Stone Language Library, a revolutionary computer program designed to teach language in a natural, interactive fashion in the fall of 1991.

Using the Dynamic Immersion method, Rosetta Stone focuses on immersion in the language through graphics, rather than translation, demanding immediate feedback from the user. When the program was ready for the market, Allen, along with his brother Eugene and his brother-in-law Fairfield, established Fairfield Language Technologies (FLT) in 1992, to further develop, market and distribute the software. By 1994 the program was being sold.

Story by Cyprian Mendelius

Photos by Xris Thomas and Meghan Murphy

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Allen Stoltzfus, left, and his brother Eugene fuel the success of the Rosetta Stone Language Library.

Allen, who grew up in Harrisonburg where he has raised his four kids with his wife Anne, has had a lot of international influence in his life. After going to Germany for a year, as an undergraduate studying history at Eastern Mennonite University, he earned his master’s degree in international relations at Tufts University in Massachusetts.

“I found language to be difficult in high school and college,” Allen says. “But I saw by being immersed in the language in Germany, I learned an incredible amount, and I had a great time doing it. I’ve always been interested in developing a program that could achieve that, especially for children.”

Fairfield, a former professor of computer science at James Madison University, works in software development as senior engineer. Currently, he works on developing new technologies, license validation and gathering new ideas for the company. Fairfield married the Stoltzfus’ sister, Kathryn, who is a lawyer mediator doing mediation training worldwide. They have four sons, two of whom are in college, one in law school, while the youngest is still in high school. Fairfield grew up in Singer’s Glen, attended Turner Ashby High School and graduated from Eastern Mennonite University.

Company vice president, Eugene Stoltzfus, a licensed architect who grew up in Rockingham County, describes the program as cutting-edge. “One of our critical features is that we use pictures to convey meaning,” Eugene says. “What makes the program is that we teach without translation, giving immediate feedback. The program requires action on the part of the user.”

Fairfield says, “If you are Chinese and are trying to learn French, you are treated the same as an American trying to learn French. You get thrown into it. It’s very interactive. This is a program that makes you prove that you have learned [the language]. To act and to learn are one and the same.”

FLT developed the program’s curriculum, which has expanded to a worldwide library of language programs used by over 4 million users in 55 countries. “No one else can deliver online like we do worldwide,” Eugene says, referring to competitors like Berlitz and Syracuse Language.

Now FLT has contracts and sells licenses to schools all over the world and caters to organizations like the Peace Corps, NASA, the State Department and the Navy SEALS. Some agencies responded to advertising and sales contacts, and others heard about the success of the program and sought out FLT. “We’ve gone off to the military to sell contracts,” Allen says. “NASA just heard about it.”

Fairfield adds, “People have heard of us. We have a certain presence now.”

The Rosetta Stone was marketed largely through conferences to FLT’s major market of American high schools. Through the dedication and perseverance of its sales staff, the program has been implemented extensively. Sales have been successful with entire school districts buying copies of the software for their students.

“That approach has been the bread and butter of our company,” Fairfield says.

For authenticity and accuracy, FLT recruits native speakers to work on the programs as they are developed and uses standard accents for different languages. “We look for highly qualified candidates,” Eugene says. “We select speakers based on a variety of factors, including education level, origin of accent, where they grew up and how long they have been in this country.” He says the company targets Richmond, Charlottesville and Washington, D.C. when hiring, and it also finds many qualified people in the Valley.

Allen originated the idea of the image-based language immersion method. “We wanted to develop the program all the way back in 1983, but the technology wasn’t there,” he says. “So we put it on the back burner until 1990, and then we decided to run with it.” He and Fairfield created a program prototype in 1990. They tested it extensively in high schools and received excellent feedback from students, Allen says. FLT adopted Fairfield’s name because no one could pronounce Stoltzfus.

Fairfield hired former students to help develop software. One student, Greg Keim, began as a computer programmer and wrote the first version of the program. He is now the company’s chief technology officer.

“This was Allen’s baby,” Fairfield explains. “We had been dreaming of doing this for a long time. We both had experience in foreign languages, we both went to Germany in college. With computers, there is potential to do much better in immersion technology. As a child, you experience things first hand through context, not through translation. We wanted to replicate that in a natural environment.”

Experiencing other countries around the world has helped the FLT founders realize their dreams of creating an effective language-learning technology.

“I’ve lived in Germany, Belgium,
France, Africa and Nepal,” Fairfield says. “I’ve taught all over the world with my wife. It’s been a very educational and valuable experience, as well as a great way to see the world. You get a new perspective on your own culture.”

After teaching English successfully, the FLT staff decided to tackle other languages.

“Basically we decide which languages to implement by demand,” Eugene says. “We went on to Spanish, French, then German and Italian, and so on.” Generally, languages are selected on sales possibilities, but there are many special projects selected by request, which help preserve less common languages.

“We are currently working on developing software for Miccosukee, the language of the Seminole tribe of Florida, in conjunction with the tribe,” Eugene says. “We are also working on Kalallisut, an Inuit language of Greenland spoken all around the North Pole. We want to show the world that we can do that, that we can handle projects for any language, regardless of how difficult.”

One innovation of the Rosetta Stone Language Library is that it is now completely available online. Many users have switched from the CD-ROM to the Internet version of the software for convenience by purchasing the license to utilize the program. Fairfield wrote the online code for the program.

“You can try a few lessons free to test out the software and see if you like it, and then you can buy a subscription,” Fairfield says. “The Web is great. People want to try it out and see if it works for them, and after they get it online, they know it works.”

English as a Second Language (ESL) programs throughout the Shenandoah Valley have adopted the Rosetta Stone program and swear by its success.

Jackie Morales, of McGaheysville, has taught as an ESL tutor at Montevideo Middle School and currently heads the Sheltered English Program at the Dayton Learning Center. She helps new arrivals to the United States who do not speak or write English.

“It’s constantly on,” Morales says of the program. “Each student has a chance to use it at some point.”

Local, middle and high schools bus students to the program, which lasts two to three hours. Morales uses the Rosetta Stone software for about 30 minutes during that period, reaching what she calls maximum effectiveness for the age group. She’s used the software since the program’s start in November 2000.

“When I tutored at Montevideo, we had the software on CD-ROM,” Morales says. “It was very familiar there, and it just seemed like what we needed to use at Dayton.”

Beery Adams, a senior at JMU, also uses the Rosetta Stone to teach ESL at Elkton Elementary School.

“It use it about once a week to interactively teach pronunciation, build comprehension skills and for the students to grasp meanings,” Adams says. Teachers recommend the program to both groups and individuals. “I absolutely recommend it,” Morales says. “It’s not the only thing we do, but it is a great teaching tool. I plan to go online to learn another language for myself.”

“It’s definitely helped,” Adams says. “Part of it is the computer aspect that kids enjoy, and part of it is the interactive aspect that helps them comprehend.”

It’s been a long road to the success now experienced at FLT.

Fairfield attributes the success to Allen. “He’s the one who put all the money on the table, quit his job, and went full time, and got us to do the same,” Fairfield says. “It’s one thing to write a program and an entirely different thing to sell it.”

Allen says, “I’m excited about what has happened. We are a family business that started from nothing, and now we have clients all over the world.

In the future, FLT hopes to sell countrywide options, where 4,000 or more schools adopt the software at one time through their ministries of education. Presently, FLT has been approved to work with Thailand and is in negotiations with some schools in Hungary.

Danish and Arabic have recently been added to the 23-language roster, and the company is developing new language programs.

Fairfield Language Technologies has helped many people grasp language in a unique way, locally and worldwide.

“Learning without translation, directly from experience, is a gift,” says Fairfield.
Nestled in the mountains, Ash Lawn-Highland, home to President James Monroe, rewards Virginia day-trippers with historic sights, scenic views and a festival of sounds.
It's a beautiful, sunny day and there is a slightly warm breeze. Escaping to the back roads of Charlottesville, cars wind along the mountains. The road narrows and the curves sharpen as travelers pass Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello. Turning onto a dirt-and-gravel covered road shaded under a canopy of ash trees lining both sides of the road, several tree-covered mountains can be seen to the left and huge grassy fields to the right. The dirt road ends at a small picturesque cabin-like house. Welcome to Ash Lawn-Highland, the home of America’s fifth president, James Monroe.

A dirt pathway leads to the brick patio of an entrance building and gift shop. Inside, among many pamphlets and handbooks describing Ash Lawn-Highland, tickets are sold for a tour of Monroe’s home.

Monroe and his wife Elizabeth bought the property, then 1,000 acres, in 1793 and moved in during November of 1799. Presently, the estate is a working farm of 535 acres that shows visitors the farming lifestyle during Monroe’s time. The Monroes’ first guests were thought to be James and Dolley Madison, according to Carolyn Holmes, executive director of Ash Lawn-Highland. The Monroes were frequently absent from their farm due to the many positions James Monroe filled during his political career, including his presidency from 1817 to 1825.

April through October marks the height of the tourist season at Ash Lawn-Highland, which is now owned by the College of William and Mary. In these months, crafters dress in Monroe-era garb, and the cooking and chores, such as wool gathering, re-create early 19th century life in Central Virginia. The estate features a mix of farm animals such as sheep, chickens and peacocks. The vibrant blue-and-green-feathered peacocks are a modern addition, donated by the National Zoo in 1976.

Holmes, who estimates about 90,000 travelers visit the estate each year, says among estate’s chief attractions is the colorful fall foliage that cover the historic grounds. “The color of the trees holds remarkably well,” she
says. While some visitors come to see the beauty of the plantation, its historic atmosphere, antique furnishings and a plethora of theme events is inviting to people of various interests.

Visitors are encouraged to take their time to tour the grounds themselves. “We really encourage people to bring picnics,” Holmes says. Visitors are permitted to picnic at nearly any location on the grounds. A prime place to grab a bite is in back of the house. Here, the small white paneled buildings of the overseer’s cottage and slave quarters form an L-shaped area with the house, providing visitors with a scenic view of the mountains.

**Monroe’s Manor**

Tours, which are offered throughout the day, feature Monroe’s home and several other buildings on the plantation. At the west end of the house is Monroe’s bedroom, in which the most notable item is an American-made bed covered in a canopy of dark blue-and-white fabric. The canopy posts are hand-carved with feather-like designs. The bed is almost square rather than rectangular, and a bit smaller than the modern beds of today.

A short, narrow hallway opens to the dining room, which showcases a small circular table in the center of the room surrounded by only a few chairs. The tour entails a description of the chairs, which are part of an original set of 12 used by the Monroes when they lived in the White House. Looking at the opposite wall, visitors are greeted by their own reflection in a large rectangular mirror with a 3-inch border covered in dark green velvet. It is one of many French items in the house.

Through a connecting doorway to the dining room is the study. The desk in this room, while not one used by Monroe, is strikingly similar to the desk used during the signing of the Monroe Doctrine in 1823. On one wall hangs a portrait of Madame Campan, the headmistress of the school attended by Monroe’s first daughter, Eliza. On another wall rests a miniature portrait of Monroe’s wife.

Exiting from the study and down a narrow hallway is a doorway leading to an outdoor courtyard and a view of Monticello. Wooden benches along a brick walkway and well-kept lawn provide a breathtaking vista to sit and view the sunset over the mountains.

Adding to the estate’s historic context are tours of the slave quarters and overseer’s cottage. Monroe had slaves to serve the house and for farming. Three connected slave quarters sit near the main house. These cramped one-room structures typically housed all of the slaves working in the house. Each room is approximately 10 feet by 14 feet, and together, housed 10 to 15 slaves. Historians assume that slave quarters...
Many people see opera for the first time here.

A statue of President James Monroe is the centerpiece along the walkway to his estate.

were also built in the fields for slaves harvesting crops, however these no longer exist.

A Guided Experience

Some Ash Lawn-Highland tour guides, such as 25-year veteran Dotty Brown, have worked at the estate for many years and have seen the grounds altered and refurbished. Brown shares with her tour groups the story about the smokehouse renovation. The building’s foundation began to collapse causing the building to sink into the ground. “I don’t think there has been a more meticulous restoration,” Holmes says.

In Tune For The Summer

Complementing Ash Lawn-Highland’s historic charm and scenic mountain backdrop is its annual Summer Festival. In its 23rd season, the musical event, which lasts from late June to mid-August, presents two full-length operas and a musical theater piece. Past performances include “The Marriage of Figaro,” “The Wizard of Oz,” “Oklahoma!” and “Don Giovanni.” The repertoire for this season features “Carmen,” “Little Women” and “Fiddler on the Roof.” The operas, performed in English, and the musical theater piece take place in the Boxwood Gardens on the estate grounds. During inclement weather, the shows are held under cover in the Pavilion. “The pieces are chosen on artistic endeavor first and foremost,” says General Director Judy Walker.

“Carmen’ is a very dramatic piece, and it has beautiful music. It’s one of the most popular operas.” As are several of the operas done in the past, such as “La Bohème” and “Madame Butterfly.”

Ash Lawn-Highland includes a professional opera company, which auditions about 500 singers each year for the selected pieces. Each piece brings new performers, conductors and directors. The budget for the Summer Festival is about $500,000, which covers the cost of every singer, orchestra member, director, conductor, accompanist, coach and box office staff member. “The performers stay in local homes for the two months they’re working here with no cost,” Walker says. “It’s amazing that it comes together every year.” Many people simply offer to open their homes to the performers, and Ash Lawn-Highland advertises through church bulletins and through word-of-mouth.

“Many people see opera for the first time here,” Walker says. The majority of audience members at the performances are over 50 years old. However, younger audiences are encouraged to come. “I would love for [a younger audience] to understand just what a special festival this is,” she says. “I don’t think they realize it’s something they really would enjoy if they gave it a try.”

In addition to the operas and musical theater, the festival holds lectures prior to some performances to help interpret the pieces. Other musical events include Music at Twilight and Summer Saturdays. Music at Twilight features classical, folk and contemporary music performed nearly every Wednesday at 8 p.m during the season. “It’s everything from country to jazz,” Walker says. Summer Saturdays feature puppet shows and family entertainment. The events are held in July and August at 11 a.m.

Activities For All Seasons

A plethora of theme activities fill the Ash Lawn-Highland calendar throughout the year. This season the sky will fill with vibrant, gliding objects when Kite Day takes flight on May 13. Virginia’s finest grapes will take center stage on May 19 and 20 when the estate holds the Virginia Wine Festival. During Plantation Days on July 14 and 15, professional actors re-enact the War of 1812, wearing period military costumes. About 20 colonial crafts are demonstrated and children’s activities are also available.

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Clockwise from upper left:
By the Side of the Road Bed and Breakfast, Belle Hearth Inn,
Sampson Eagon Inn,
and Belle Grae Inn.
Timeless Getaways

INN the Valley

Story by Nicole Caddigan
Photos by Allison Henry
Perched on a smart little hill in Staunton’s historic Gospel Hill district is the beautiful restored Sampson Eagon Inn. Built around 1840, the Antebellum mansion is named for its original owner, Sampson Eagon, who helped found the Methodist church in downtown Staunton. The Eagons lived in the house with their nine children for 50 years. Six additions have been added to the house by the four different families who have lived in the mansion over the last 200 years.

The bedrooms are named for each family and decorated appropriately according to the time period in which they lived there. “Some bed and breakfasts get themey,” innkeeper Frank Mattingly jokes. “They'll have the Teddy Bear room with 22 teddy bears sitting there. We wanted to get away from that.”

As he leads the way through the dining room, light spills through the long, plantation-style windows. On the rich antique table a silver serving set glints. An empty dog bed sits forlornly near the kitchen. “Jeepers is at the vet today,” Mattingly explains. “We just learned that he has diabetes. Guests come and they feel guilty because they’ve left their dogs in the kennel so they spoil him. They give him cookies and sausage. Well, he’s gotten much bigger now.” He smiles and fondly looks up at a painting of a little black dog.

Mattingly heads into the downstairs bedroom, which celebrates the American Empire period decorated in airy green and ivory hues. “This room is great for elderly people who can’t get up and down the stairs very well,” Mattingly says as he moves through the extra-wide doorway leading to the bathroom and points to the sit-down shower with grab bars. On the molding just behind him is a clear carving: “Dan Carver. 1856.”

“When I was sanding this wall, I found this,” Mattingly says as he runs his hand across the words. “I’m not sure where it came from, but it’s very interesting, so I left it.”

Heading up the curved staircase, Mattingly gestures toward the front bedroom. Decorated in 1920s and ’30s traditional brass and floral wallpaper and decor, the room is named for Kitty Holt, who, now in her 80s, lives nearby.

“Kitty and her sister grew up in this room,” Mattingly
explains. “Everyone knows them. We've actually become quite good friends with Kitty. We had thought about taking down the closet in here, but when Kitty found out she was very upset. She said, ‘You can’t take down that closet! My Daddy built that for me!’ We promised her that it would stay put.”

The master bedroom boasts a sleep porch and a large baby nursery that has been converted into a full bath. Although the fixtures are modern, the glass knobs adorning the large white drawers and closets whisk guests away to the early part of the century. Mattingly and his wife have been careful to maintain the mansion's authenticity throughout all its renovations.

Although he enjoys innkeeping, Mattingly admits it is not easy. “It's hard to get used to the lifestyle,” he says. “You sometimes feel really captive. The phone is constantly ringing. I don't know how many times I've missed the end of movies answering that phone. It takes its toll mentally on marriages. My wife and I are together 24 hours a day and really see each other for about five of those hours.”

He was born and raised in Washington, D.C. and had an early interest in antiques and restoring houses. “You also have to really love people to be in this business,” he says. “If you walk out of the kitchen and find all your guests sitting at the table you have to find a way to get them talking.

“And I don't mean asking them what they do. I've learned that you can ask that question, and you bring back all the bad stuff that may have happened to them during the week. A fight with the boss, or whatever. My wife and I realized we did this inn keeping thing because we didn't like our jobs. We needed a change of venue.”

Just then, Mattingly’s wife, Laura, appears, her cheeks flushed, wiping her hand on her jeans before offering it to shake. His long hair is tied up smartly in a knot and she's wearing a big smile. “Sorry I couldn't get out earlier!” she says. “It’s been really hectic here today! Innkeeping is a lot of fun, but very busy,” she adds, her husband nodding solemnly in confirmation.

“Yes, we don’t want to ask people about their jobs,” he continues shaking his head. We also try to stay away from politics and religion. Dogs and weather are the great equalizers. Yes. Animals and weather are always safe.”
Nestled in the historic factory town of Waynesboro stands The Belle Hearth, an early-1900s Victorian home that served as the town's first hospital.

The midday sun shines through the windows that line two sides of the old sleeping porch in the back of the house, which has been converted into a game room. The windows look out over the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Inn’s newly installed swimming pool.

Inside, The Belle Hearth holds the mementos collected from many years living abroad, family heirlooms and turn-of-the-century architecture, all of which contribute to the ambiance of another era. The innkeepers, Carolyn and Jim Rodenberg, named the house for its seven beautiful fireplaces, each a completely different style.

The spacious bedrooms all celebrate a different flower. Carolyn says the Iris Room is particularly special because it is named for her late mother’s favorite flower.

The house boasts a large wrap-around porch where guests can relax. The ceiling is painted a dreamy blue green and sturdy ionic columns add a neoclassic touch to the Victorian tradition.

Guests enter the front walk through an antique black-iron gate, of which Jim beams proudly. “You would not believe how much work I’ve put into that fence!” Jim says with a chuckle.

Carolyn explains, “When we moved in, there were only two sides. I was talking to this woman from the town who is probably in her ‘80s. She said she could remember walking down the street as a little girl and running a stick across all the fences the whole way down the block. So we know it used to have a front. We finally found this one in Kansas.” They are both from Kansas.

“We lived 30 miles apart but never knew each other,” Carolyn says. “We met when I was in college in Oklahoma and he was in the Air Force. We moved to Virginia for the first time in 1975.”

Later, Jim served overseas in Turkey, Japan, Vietnam, and later as a military attaché in Burma for two years. After the Air Force, Jim worked as a lobbyist in Washington, D.C.

“Our house in Burma had 16-foot ceilings,” Carolyn says. “It was an old British colonial. We had a six-member staff and 18 [people] would sit down for dinner several nights a week. All I had to do then was write the menu and set the flowers!” she laughs. “My son wrote me a letter soon after we bought the Belle Hearth and said, ‘Mom, you’re doing the same thing you always do, only now you’re getting paid for it.’”

Rooms contain souvenirs from Burma, Japan, Austria and England. The elegant living room is accented with a hanging Victorian lamp, a 300-year-old hibachi, and most remarkably, an old rice storage pot presumably used by Tibetan monks. The gold leaf bamboo container stands about 3-feet tall and is ornately decorated with colorful jewels, resembling an oversized genie bottle.

Jim explains that the monks had no source of income, so they’d venture out into the nearby community holding out bowls that the people would fill with rice. The rice donations were much too large to eat, so the monks would store the remaining rice in these large pots.

“Our house has a lot of genuine antiques,” he says. “A lot of these things were carried into the country by the British and they left them. The Burmese collected them and now sell them.”

Although the Rodenbergs have many incredible stories about living abroad, they have enjoyed inn keeping thoroughly.

“This has been a real role reversal,” Carolyn says. “I mean, here’s a guy who was a lobbyist on Capitol Hill and now he’s inn keeping! After living abroad … it makes it all come together. The fun of a bed and breakfast is to sit down at a table with perfect strangers who you know very well when you leave. People talk about things they wouldn’t normally discuss at the table like politics, religion and values.”
own a winding road past the rush of JMU and downtown Harrisonburg, the air seems a little lighter and the reserved quiet is unmistakable. By the Side of the Road Bed and Breakfast faces a tranquil pond in which the water barely seems to ripple as a faint breeze makes its way through the tall grass. The inn sits on its spot very importantly, undaunted by the shade cast from the large tree in the front yard. The yellow paint is peeling and chipping in some places, conveying wisdom and insinuating that the house has a long history.

Inside, the inn is decorated with rich greens and blues, invoking the comfort of one’s own living room. Trees sway lazily outside the windows and the colonial patterned couches make it tempting to curl up and read a book. Despite its inviting decor, the inside of the house emits the same strength as the outside. Insulated by thick brick walls, not a sound can be heard from one room to another.

“Let me live in my house by the side of the road and be a friend to man,” reads the poem hanging in the dining room.

“The house is named for the poem,” explains innkeeper Janice Fitzgerald. “People are warred, harried and tired on Friday. By the time they leave here, they’re like marshmallows.” As Fitzgerald walks through the house, her greyhound, Jackson, follows diligently behind. By the Side of the Road is Harrisonburg’s first bed and breakfast.

Built in 1790, the inn survived the devastation when General Philip Sheridan torched the Shenandoah Valley during the Civil War. “An Indian tribe lived where the WSVA towers are now,” Fitzgerald says. “They kept burning down the framing when the house was first being built because they didn’t like the settlers. Finally, the builders put up bricks so it couldn’t be burned.”

Bishop Peter Burkholder, the first Mennonite Bishop of Virginia, lived in the house from 1818 to 1846. “When we first bought the house,” Fitzgerald says. “People kept saying, ‘Oh! You bought that old Civil War hospital!’ But since the bishop was a pacifist, I find it hard to believe that he turned it into a war hospital. Personally, I believe he was a compassionate man who used his house for a refuge for the homeless after the Valley was burned.”

What is now called Fitzgerald Cottage was added in 1840. Fitzgerald enters the cottage, to a bedroom area and climbs down the iron spiral staircase to a modernized bathroom. The 110-gallon tub sits in front of the fireplace, complemented by his-and-her vanities.

The inn’s upstairs bedrooms are filled with family antiques and old portraits. Fitzgerald gestures towards a regal-looking couch and chair in the master bedroom. “People always compliment me on this set,” she says. “But this was in my living room growing up and we sat on the floor all the time! Yes, I wouldn’t recommend sitting here.”

Fitzgerald gestures towards the back yard. “There’s a cemetery up the road that goes with the house,” she says. She smiles and admits there have been rumors of ghosts on the property. “I think that mostly the ghosts are friendly and benevolent,” she says. “Guests have heard footsteps and things.”

Fitzgerald’s favorite part of innkeeping is cooking. “I’ve really discovered that about myself,” she says. “I’ve always loved cooking. We have a kitchen garden with herbs, and I love to create a picture and presentation of food.”

Fitzgerald and her husband came from Annapolis to Staunton in 1998 before moving to Harrisonburg. “We have just loved inn keeping,” she says. “It’s a way of life. It’s a lot of work, but very rewarding. If you do it well, almost every day someone affirms you and your work.”
Up the old front porch, through the sturdy entrance-way, sunlight forces its way through the green stained-glass windows that frame the door. “Belle Grae Inn” is delicately etched in several panes and an emerald glow casts itself on the shiny wooden floor. The faint clinking of teacups and people chattering can be heard as Rudy, the inn’s bulldog, eagerly trots to the front door to issue his greeting. The walls in each room are drenched in the bright hues like tangerine, pink and peach that kept Victorian families cozy in the mid-1800s. In the sitting room, guests sit on the overstuffed sofas and chairs laughing about something. A harpsichord leans quietly against the wall.

The dining room is quiet now, but each table is set with white linens and china for an evening anniversary party. The silverware glistens as the light pours through the floor to ceiling windows, catches it just right. Outside the window a Victorian garden waits patiently for spring and a little boy whose parents have just checked in is running down the green hill, tossing a stick in the air.

Innkeeper Michael Organ sits at the head of a large table near the kitchen and discusses the evening’s itinerary with his staff as they bustle around, tidying, adjusting, and putting the finishing touches on their table setting display.

“When people come here, they are not just renting a room,” Organ says. “They’re experiencing the past.”

Organ has been the innkeeper at the Belle Grae since the early 1980s. “I love it,” he grins. “I’ve been not working for 20 years!”

He purchased the old inn and has since bought four of the surrounding houses, renovating and turning them into guest cottages. Standing behind the house, in what he has deemed The Wedding Garden it is evident which houses are a part of the Belle Grae village by their pastel colors and fancy trim. “I’m my own best neighbor,” Organ jokes. “I don’t harass myself, I never call the police on myself and I take care of my lawn!”

The Blue Ridge Mountains are visible from his property, including the two hills for which the inn is named Betsy Hill and Mary Grae. Organ stops for a minute and shields his eyes from the sun, staring at the scenery. He gives a little sigh and with it, the impression that the breathtaking sight never looses its luster. He turns around and pulls a huge old-fashioned key ring out of his pocket, “C’mon, let’s go,” he says, leading the way to one of the guesthouses.

“Hello?” Organ calls peeking his head in the door of the Hideaway House, one of the guest cottages.

“I ’t s just me, guys, can I come in?” He stops to shake hands with the men and kiss the cheeks of the women. “These are our guests of honor tonight,” he explains indicating the elderly couple sitting in the center of the room. “It’s their 60th wedding anniversary today.”

The man blushes, and the woman chatters about how excited she is about the evening’s festivities and all the grandchildren and great grandchildren she’s expecting in the next couple of hours. She has her old wedding pictures out and her cheeks are pink with happiness. Organ snaps a few pictures of the couple and continues through the cottage to the front door.

“When people come here, they are not just renting a room. They are experiencing the past.”

When Organ first bought the old inn, the woman living there had essentially moved her entire life into the sitting room and boarded up the rest of the house. In what is now the dining room, the roof had caved in about eight or 10 years before. Organ moved in and completely restored the house, careful to preserve authenticity of the time period. Everything from the furniture to the light switches has been carefully selected to maintain the Victorian aura.

“My truck stops at every flea market, yard sale, and antique store I come across,” says Organ. “I do all the restorations myself. All the ripping, stripping, buffing...”

Each house Organ has renovated was basically falling down when he bought it. “I take non-tax producing revenues and make them tax producing right away,” he says. Organ gives himself a 90-day schedule to complete the revamping of each house. He also believes establishing rapport with guests is a central responsibility as an innkeeper.

“I hold cocktails and conversations at 5 o’clock with complimentary hors d’oeuvres and a cash bar,” he says. “I like to do that because a lot of times there are business people travelling alone who love to be able to come down and meet someone new. Or there are couples who are just bored with each other because they’ve been travelling together all day and want to come down for something different.”

Organ has two priorities. “We always have tea and of course a bottomless cookie jar,” he says.

NICOLE CADDIGAN
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Rising At Dawn

Mr. J's Bagels knead New York flavor with Valley charm

Story by Kelly Hannon

Photos by Abby Greenawalt and Meghan Murphy
Before driving to Harrisonburg to visit a cousin in 1989, Joe Jerlinski called to ask if she would like him to bring anything she missed from her hometown of Paterson, N.J. that she couldn’t find in the Shenandoah Valley. Thinking for a moment, she replied, “Bagels!”

Today, Harrisonburg residents don’t have to drive far or rely on relatives to enjoy a good bagel. Jerlinski, along with his younger brother Dave, have been mixing, shaping and baking hundreds of thousands of New York-style bagels at their stores, Mr. J’s, since 1990.

“We’d been down here a few times to visit family, and we liked the area and decided we wanted to move here,” says Jerlinski, who still speaks with a thick New Jersey accent. “I liked the mountains, and getting out of the city. We also thought the people were very nice down here.”

Deciding to move to Harrisonburg was easy, but figuring out what to do once the two brothers arrived was more difficult. Both were working in the restaurant industry in Paterson, where they had grown up and lived most of their lives. Jerlinski, 45, a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, was working at a catering facility and Dave, 43, was at an Italian restaurant.

“Our cousin, Irene, actually said, well why don’t you look into making bagels,” Jerlinski recalls. “So, we went back to New Jersey and did research on bagel making and bagel opportunities and decided to open a shop in Harrisonburg.”

The ingredients for a bagel are simple: flour, yeast and water. Yet they have become wildly popular over the past decade, migrating south and west from their native home of New York, primarily via chain bagel stores. Individually owned stores, such as Mr. J’s, account for part of the boom, but the Jerlinski brothers are thankful they established themselves in Harrisonburg before the height of the bagel craze.

“We really got in right at the start,” Jerlinski says. “We were probably open for two years before the big bagel boom.”

Coming up with the name was the easy part. “We wanted a name that was a catchy name that people could remember, you know, one-wordish,” Jerlinski explains. “So we thought, hey, our name is Jerlinski - Mr. J’s.”

Once Mr. J’s was up and running, they had no problem finding customers.

“This is a very Southern town,” Jerlinski says, nodding when asked if he had some reservations about introducing a Northern delicacy to the area. “We were a little skeptical, but because of all the transplants, like myself, from the bigger cities that work at Rocco and JMU, we started off with a good clientele that already knew bagels.”

For those who had never had a bagel, the Jerlinski brothers were quick to win them over.

“Eventually we just educated people to what bagels were and the difference
between a fresh bagel and a Lender’s bagel,” Jerlinski says.

By all accounts, the Jerlinski brothers have been successful. After opening their first store on Route 33 in 1990, their business volume led them to open a second store on Route 42 toward Dayton in 1997.

To meet the increasing demand of customers throughout Harrisonburg and its neighboring towns, a new Mr. J’s located on Route 42 near Eastern Mennonite University opened on March 1 this year.

Jerlinski paces purposefully around his new store, weaving between tools and tubs of unlabeled construction goo as he monitors the progress of the workers, takes phone calls and interviews job applicants. Owning a business can be tough, he says, and requires a lot of energy. Yet being a co-owner of Mr. J’s has been a dream for him.

“I worked at a deli from when I was 13,” Jerlinski says. “There was a deli around the corner from my house and I got a job there and continued with food the rest of my life. I’ve wanted to own my own business since I was 30.”

The long hours, often beginning at 5 a.m. to bake the bagels, have been worth it, he claims. The brothers can experiment with bagel flavors and products they may not have been able to if Mr. J’s was a chain store. Starting out with the basic flavors - plain, wheat, cinnamon raisin, onion, everything - the brothers have branched out.

“We developed the strawberry, pumpkin in the summer, granola, chocolate chip and sundried tomato spinach,” Jerlinski says, counting them out with his fingers. “And they’re trial and error. Sometimes they don’t come out right and you have to throw it away and start over.”

Mr. J’s has also always sold a variety of muffins as well as pastries and sandwiches.

“They’ve all sold,” Jerlinski says. “Some more, some less. The bagel flavors depend on whether or not a sandwich can be made on it. Like a blueberry bagel sells well, but it’s really only a morning bagel. You’re not going to get tuna on a blueberry or strawberry. Although with some people, you will. But not usually.”

The bagel stores also benefit from their close proximity to James Madison University. Although Mr. J’s has contracts to provide bagels for local companies, JMU’s daily order is by far the largest. Every day, Mr. J’s bakes and delivers 90 dozen bagels, that’s 1,080 bagels, to dining facilities on campus.
Other students skip the dining hall and go directly to the source. One of the most surprising things about running Mr. J's, Jerlinski says, is it has become a place to meet and socialize, not just to grab a bagel and go.

“I didn’t think it would be a hangout,” he says, smiling. “It’s a quiet atmosphere. We have a lot of Bible study classes meeting. JMU students will come in, do their homework, have group meetings.”

JMU seniors Geoffrey Ehrlich and Jeremy Albers are prime examples. The two munch on bagels, sundried tomato spinach and onion with cream cheese, and talk on a quiet Thursday afternoon at the Mr. J's on Route 42 toward Dayton.

“If you have people spending the night, in from out of town, you always bring them here the next morning,” Ehrlich explains. “I’m usually busy with school but I try to come in when I can.”

Neither Ehrlich nor Albers could remember how they discovered Mr. J's.

“It seems as if we’ve always been coming here,” Ehrlich says. “I guess I just expected to find bagels in Harrisonburg.”

Nicole Foltz, of Grottoes, slowly eats her plain bagel with cream cheese at the Mr. J's on Route 33, her eyes scanning a newspaper. Although she only spends a few lunch breaks a month at Mr. J’s, she is a wholehearted enthusiast of their products.

“I think the community really welcomed Mr. J’s,” Foltz, a life-long resident of the Shenandoah Valley, says. “Their bagels have more of a homemade taste than other bagels.”

Mary Anselo, a Harrisonburg resident sitting at a nearby table, agrees.

“I don’t even like anyone else’s bagels,” Anselo says, mulling over other bagel shops and chains she has visited. Anselo usually comes into Mr. J’s for lunch, not breakfast, because of their menu of sandwiches and rotating specialty items.

Other customers are more frequent patrons. “I’m here at least three times a week,” Joe Silkwitz, a sophomore at JMU, says biting into his Turner Ham bagel sandwich. “I’m here all the time for lunch.”

Silkwitz was surprised to learn the owners of Mr. J’s hailed from his home state, New Jersey. “Well, then I’m not surprised they’re the best I’ve had in Virginia. Everything here is pretty good, better than The Festival sometimes,” he says, referring to a popular JMU dining hall.

For the truly dedicated customers, Mr. J’s offers special services. Jerlinski says both stores have a regular morning crowd who are ready to order when the store opens at 6 a.m.

“There’s a lot of our customers that as they walk in the door, we already have their coffee poured and cinnamon with cream cheese ready on the counter,” Jerlinski says.

NBC weatherman Willard Scott is also a big fan of Mr. J’s, according to Jerlinski.
"I didn’t think it would become a hangout. It’s a quiet atmosphere."

“I think he owns a farm nearby, possibly down in Lexington,” he says. “He started out going to the store on Route 33, but has been to the one on Route 42 several times.”

Although he’s not positive, Jerlinski thinks Scott gets a cinnamon raisin bagel when he stops in. “He wrote an article about the Shenandoah Valley ... and included Mr. J’s as a ‘unique thing found.’” Jerlinski proudly recalls. “He dared anyone to come down from New York and make a better bagel than Mr. J’s.”

Although the brothers had a lifetime of eating New York bagels to base their own recipe on, Jerlinski says their ingredients and baking process make Mr. J’s a standout.

“We use Pillsbury flour,” he says. “There are cheaper brands of flour you can buy. We try not to cut any corners, and we don’t cut any corners when it comes to the bagels because that’s what makes us different.”

The baking process is similar to the process used by companies that make supermarket bagels, he describes, except for one step. When the bagels are formed and rising, they stop the rising process early and cool them. Then they are baked the next day.

“That’s what gives them the chewier texture,” Jerlinski explains. “That’s one of the big differences between a Lender’s bagel and a bagel-shop bagel. Any bagel you buy in a supermarket will have more of a bread taste than one of mine, because they are made and baked the same day.”

They are so good, Jerlinski says, that he is even constantly eating them at home with his family, and never seems to tire of them.

“I usually will just have a bagel,” he says. “My favorite switches, but it’s usually the everything or the sundried.”

Jerlinski’s wife Sharon, and their children Kim, 29, Justin, 17, Jared, 14, and Krista, 13, all help out, especially around the holidays and graduation weekend. Dave’s wife, Elizabeth, and daughter Bianca, 7, also spend a lot of time working at the stores.

Living in Harrisonburg has been great, but it is a long way from Paterson and some of the conveniences of big city life, Jerlinski says.

“I miss the shopping,” he admits. “Shopping and family. We go to Northern Virginia a lot. But otherwise, we love it here.”
Much Ado About Cohen

Wallpapered with pictures, play posters and memorabilia preserved over time, the walls in Ralph Cohen’s office read like a biography. His office in Keezell Hall at James Madison University appears like a scrapbook, and any one of his photographs can open the story to one of his many adventures.

Cohen, a JMU English professor, founded the university’s London and Paris study-abroad programs. He also is the executive director, education director and co-founder of Shenandoah Shakespeare, a traveling theater company.

Growing up in Montgomery, Ala., Cohen says he wanted to be either a nuclear physicist or a cowboy. At age 12, his parents implemented an allowance program which he attributes to giving him his life’s direction. In order to receive the weekly wage, the Cohen children had to write essays. With his mother grading for style and his father for content, Cohen developed his skill for writing.

As a freshman at Dartmouth College, in Hanover, N.H., Cohen, then a chemistry major, found himself challenged. “I was ill-prepared for college but found that I had my writing and a grasp of words,” he says.

Finding his niche in an American modern novels class, Cohen says he was inspired to pursue his learning by Jim Cox, a memorable professor.

“He would stand in front of the class and make everyone want to read the book,” Cohen says. This motivational technique also fueled Cohen’s interest in teaching. Rotating in his chair and turning towards a black-and-white picture among the montage, he says, “This professor once told me that teaching is 99 percent enthusiasm, and 1 percent intelligence ... I knew I could do that.”

Cohen brings an inspired attitude to the classroom, which motivates his students. “His is one of the best classes I’ve ever taken,” says senior English major Melissa Vanasek. “The eye of every student is on the professor the entire time.”

Standing at the front of the class, eagerly waiting for the room to finish a quiz, Cohen rocks anxiously back and forth on his feet. Launching out from behind the podium, he addresses his students seated in a semicircle around him. He speaks to them about William Shakespeare’s works, the topic that has taken hold of his life.

“Shakespeare is meant to be experienced, seen and performed, not just read,” he says.

It is this philosophy Cohen has brought to JMU students for 28 years. His students not only read plays but are also spontaneously called upon to act out scenes in class, write plays of their own and create banners with some of Shakespeare’s famed words. Speaking to the students about writing their own plays, Cohen says, “I want something that captures your imagination,” his voice booming with excitement. “It’s a game, you can’t lose as long as you play.”

Senior English major Charles Garrett says, “His teaching style is successful because he is excited about our learning. He cares about the class and
wants us to connect with it and not just the facts.”

Turning back toward the podium, Cohen jumps around and addresses his student audience. In a lecture about “The Merchant of Venice,” which features everything from quote reading to stage blocking, Cohen again intrigues these eager minds. His voice changes to a whisper. “This is really cool – so disturbing, but so good,” he says.

A passion and understanding for Shakespeare’s work drives this animated professor to challenge students today. “I had a great Shakespeare teacher in graduate school,” says the former Duke University graduate student, “and when you begin to study Shakespeare you realize everything comes from him, he influences many writers – look, for example, at Faulkner’s books.”

Cohen has been making Shakespeare come alive for students at JMU since 1973. In 1979, he took his teaching a step further and implemented a study-abroad program in London. Students chose JMU because it had a perfect variety of classes, says University of Virginia senior Rachel Turner, who participated in JMU’s London program during the fall semester of 2000. “They were classes that not only taught us about art, literature, theater and history, they taught us about London.”

Cohen says, “[In London] you can easily do something you’ve never done before every day.” The program provides outlets so students walk away truly having experienced English culture. Classes meet twice a week, and only one day is spent in the classroom. The week’s other class day brings students into the city. For example, an art class professor will lecture in front of a painting at the National Gallery, or a theater class will spend a night seeing a show.

“Students learn culture with a capital C,” boasts Cohen. “They begin to see abstract concepts become concrete. I believe that when JMU students feel at home in London, they feel at home anywhere.”

Cohen’s wife Judy, director of JMU’s international internship program, says, “It is remarkable the way the study abroad program has grown since London. It has become more complex than the program that began out of his back pocket.”

It was also in London experiencing Shakespeare and theater with his students that another of Cohen’s ideas was born. This idea came from the dissatisfaction his students had with seeing some of the staged performances.

“The shows had become uninterest-
For this professor of Shakespeare

All the World's a Stage

Life in downtown Staunton reflects a moment frozen in time with buildings rich in historic architecture and small shops specializing in hidden treasures. Finding home in this surrounding is Shenandoah Shakespeare. Adding to the landscape is the creation of a new theater soon to bring London entertainment to small-town life.

Shenandoah Shakespeare has been operating out of Staunton for the past two years. The administrative office, homes for actors and soon to be theater are all located within a block of each other, set conveniently in the center of town. “This town is truly great; it has wonderful architecture,” says Shenandoah Shakespeare Executive Director Ralph Cohen. “It’s easily walkable, and the new theater will give visitors a reason to spend the night.

“I think Shenandoah Shakespeare and this theater are going to be a fore-runner as a Shakespeare attraction,” he says. “This will be an alternative to Disney World and theme parks, a real place with real shows that will have something for everyone.”

Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, the traveling troupe of actors, has been offering plays in its unique style to audiences around the country since 1988. In a room completely lit by artificial lights, chairs are seated in a semi-rectangle and the space in the middle acts as the stage. As the troupe begins performing “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” in an art studio at Mary Baldwin College, actors take the stage dressed in janitor’s uniforms. They sweep the cleared area casually. Suddenly one starts to sing “Tainted Love” and the rest slowly join in. Once the group is singing a cappella, the audience forgets in an instant the play about to be performed.

This mood doesn’t last long as two characters come wandering in speaking their lines as if right at home.

The Shenandoah Shakespeare Express’s approach deals with “a commitment to William Shakespeare’s works and to the mission of connecting his writings to modern audiences.” The troupe’s motto, “do it with the lights on,” follows Shakespeare’s intention of performing in a lit room to foster a greater connection between the actors and the audience.

Shenandoah Shakespeare doesn’t only try to reach the viewing audience through performances. The company has an education program that teaches high school and grade school teachers about Shakespeare’s works. Each summer, the theater company also holds a six-week education program that works to bring an understanding of Shakespeare to high school students.

“Students come and stay here,” says Susan Hawthorne, director of community affairs and assistant to the executive director. “They get to study, act and see plays. The best part of the job is hearing a student when it hits them for the first time. When they come out of a play saying, ‘I got it, I really got it.’”

Education is taken further with workshops for teachers interested in expanding their knowledge on the subject. The acting troupe also offers workshops to the high schools and colleges they travel to throughout the year.

“Our education program is extremely popular,” says Marketing Director Kim Glasman. “It is equal to the entertainment aspect of our company.”

This fall, the Blackfriars Theatre will open to the public. This theater is being designed as a replica of Shakespeare’s indoor playhouse and uses the same timber-framed construction as Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre in London. The theater area will be a 16th century environment with nine chandeliers lighting the actors and audience.

Plans for an outdoor theater similar to the Globe Theatre are in the works and planned for completion in 2005. While awaiting to open the new performing centers, the troupe has scheduled a full selection of plays for the remainder of the year. The season features, “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” “Hamlet,” “The Alchemist,” written by Shakespeare’s friend Ben Johnson, and “Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead,” by Tom Stoppard, who also wrote “Shakespeare in Love.” Both the summer camp and a national teacher’s conference are also set for later this year.

Shenandoah Shakespeare brings the classic words of Shakespeare to life in a modern style appealing to a broad range of viewers. From entertainment to education, the company has received international acclaim, earning praise from national newspapers such as The Washington Post, The Philadelphia Inquirer and The Oregonian.

Story by Kylie Cafiero
The Great Depression: Hardships and Experiences Remembered by Harrisonburg Residents

In the wake of World War I, the United States entered the Roaring '20s still reeling economically. The decade saw the first strains of the Women’s Rights Movement, heralded by waif-like flappers with cropped hairdos. It was a time of exuberance and widely perceived prosperity. It also launched unprecedented stock market speculation that turned to hysteria on “Black Friday,” Oct. 29, 1929, as traders scrambled to sell more than 16 million shares in a devastating stock market crash. By December, market losses totaled over $25 billion, and a worldwide depression was unleashed.

Today, at the threshold of a new era and a new presidency, America again enters a period of seeming affluence and underlying economic uncertainty. With the word “recession” on people’s lips recently, we turn back to examine how the Shenandoah Valley survived the worst economic blow in the country’s history, and how far the ‘Burg has come since.
When Mary Spitzer Etter graduated from Harrisonburg High School in 1930, her mother took her and her sister, Ruth, to Trenton, N.J., to visit family. During her stay there she was introduced to what, for many, would be a harsh reality for years to follow.

Now 88 years old, Etter recounts the initial experience from atop the piano bench in her home on West Market Street. “I remember seeing all these people standing in a line that went all the way up the street, and then you turned the corner and it went all the way up the next street,” she says. “So I said, ‘Why are all these people waiting in line?’ And they told me it was for the soup kitchens.”

She pauses to cross her legs and nods once decisively. “And that was my first initiation with the Depression.”

Etter, whose father owned Harrisonburg’s first bookstore and later a picture frame and wallpaper shop where Gitchell’s studio now stands on East Market Street, enrolled at the Harrisonburg State Teachers’ College in September of 1930, following her return from New Jersey. She lived at home as a student, in the same house she lives in now, and often invited girls over who couldn’t afford to go home for the holidays.

“I knew this one girl lived in Georgia, right far away,” she says. “And I told her, ‘Well, if you don’t get to go you could come spend Christmas at my house. I don’t know what we’ll have, but we’ll have something.’ And we just conserved as much as we could.”

Maxine Heneberger, now 85 years old and a resident of Harrisonburg since 1934, also recalls the Depression as a period in which neighbors did what they could to help each other, and people were generous with what little they had.

“It was a time of sharing,” she says, referring to her days training as a nurse at Rockingham Memorial Hospital. “I mean, it was rough going, but we had enough to eat, and clothes to wear, we just never had anything extra.”

Heneberger attended one semester at Shenandoah College before her father, a West Virginia farmer, ran out of money and couldn’t afford to pay for her schooling.

“I remember so well when the banks closed and my father had debts that he couldn’t pay, and the house went up for sale,” she says, shaking her head. “He managed to keep the farm, but he couldn’t pay off those debts.”

Until 1934, nurses at RMH received $7 a month. But when Heneberger began her training that year at age 19, the nurses were given free board but no salary at all, and they had to buy their own uniforms.

“We worked three years for nothing,” she says, “but no one really seemed to have much of anything.”

Three years of widespread and idle frustration drew to a close in 1933 when President Franklin Delano Roosevelt founded the Civilian Conservation Corps as a nationwide work-relief effort. In the Valley, the CCC was responsible for the Shenandoah National Park and the Blue Ridge Parkway. More than 75,000 men from Virginia enrolled in the CCC when the program began and were paid between $30 and $45 a month, $25 of which was sent home to their families.
Larry Ballard was out of work and in dire straits until joining the CCC in 1933, and described a sense of desperation coupled with a social cohesion that got everyone through the difficult times.

“Life was pretty hectic,” he said in a 1991 interview with National Park Ranger David Benavitch documenting the oral history of the Valley. “We were desperate. Crime was not a thing back then. Had it been, I’m sure the country would have been in terrible trouble. We were peaceful. In those days you didn’t have to lock the door, and everybody felt sorry for their neighbor.”

Etter’s father had $100 in cash when the banks closed, which, for a while, compensated for the family’s struggling business during the Depression. Fortunately, they had a large backyard garden, which provided them with food, as, inevitably, the money ran out.

“I remember mother needed a dollar to pay the laundry woman, and daddy handed it to her and said, ‘This is my last dollar,’” says Etter. “And I thought, ‘Oh, what will we do?’”

By Etter’s account, it was not uncommon for people to pass by neighbors’ homes, asking for something to eat or some change, and her parents often tried to give them whatever they could spare. “The old umbrella mender would always come by around noon time because mother would always give him a big plate of food,” she says, chuckling at the memory. “And he would eat it out on the porch and fix umbrellas for us.”

Marshall Firebaugh, also a Harrisonburg native, joined the CCC after briefly working for a pharmacy in Philadelphia when he graduated from Harrisonburg High School in 1932. Following his six-month term with the corps, he got a job keeping records for the Federal Emergency Relief Administration.

Now 87 years old, Firebaugh has the upright posture of a man who wears his years with pride.

“It’s what I never forgot,” he says of the Depression. “It affected the lives of quite a few people, and a lot of housewives didn’t have the training to work outside of the home. If their husbands lost their jobs, well then they had a pretty tough time. Then sometimes husbands would die, and that would leave widows with children to take care of.”

Public assistance was handled through the Welfare Department, says Firebaugh, with either work- or direct-relief programs. The indigent could apply for direct-relief in the form of purchase orders. “They could take them to approved grocery stores to buy approved items,” he says. “But now, you couldn’t buy cigarettes, or liquor, or soft drinks, or anything like that.”

Etter remembers the absence of such simple luxuries. “We never even had soft drinks!” she laughs, explaining the frugality of her family’s lifestyle. “Daddy’s store was just a one-man business, and he worked hard at it. I know that we had to be more conservative, but we were never the type that spent lavishly at all.”

For Christmas her family agreed not to exchange gifts,
“but mother fixed us pretty cards, and once she put a $5 bill in each for my sister and me,” she says. Christmas dinner consisted of plenty of vegetables from the garden, but meat was scarce. “I remember mother was trying to fry up some meat, and could hardly scrape up enough lard to put into the skillet,” Etter says. “But, really, we got along all right.”

According to both Etter and Firebaugh, the Valley was largely sheltered from the harshest effects of the Depression because it was mainly an agricultural region, and did not rely solely on one industry to survive.

Harrisonburg’s population of 7,323 in 1930 for the most part remained stable, with very little migration between rural areas and the town, and there were no bread lines or people starving in the streets.

Along with the CCC, other work-relief projects included a shoe factory built along the railroad tracks on Warsaw Street to provide industrial jobs for the unemployed, and a mattress factory that specifically hired women who had been laid off. Both closed by the late 1930s.

Etter explains that the Salvation Army was also instrumental in providing clothing and shelter for people in need, and families like her own tried to donate as much as they could. “We’d try to give people food if they needed it.” she says. “And I think Daddy would give anyone who asked a quarter or a nickel or something, which back then was enough to buy a loaf of bread.”

Etter insists that there was no particularly sharp distinction between the Depression and the period leading up to it and that, despite the hardships, the Valley remained largely unaffected. Families in general led more conservative lifestyles, “with no elaborate parties or anything like that,” she says, and overall, Harrisonburg emerged unscathed. And if another Depression were to occur?

Etter smiles and waves a hand with the unfazed authority of one who has lived through much over the years. “Everybody around here would help everybody, and I think they would survive again. But well, you know they say that always after a depression we’ll go and start a war,” she says, laughing. “But really, I certainly wouldn’t worry about it.”

Dena Ghieth
is a senior SMAD major who has lived in Africa and Italy. She enjoys taking photographs and traveling and plans to relocate to New Orleans this fall.
Bursting with color, Pat Brennan’s orchid farm in Mt. Jackson petals ahead of the rest

Inside the greenhouse at Brennan’s Orchids, a couple is wandering amid hundreds of beautiful, multi-colored orchids. It appears they are having trouble deciding which one they will take home. Pat Brennan, owner of the Mt. Jackson business, offers some advice.

“Keep looking,” he says. “One will scream out at you after a while.”

A few minutes later, the couple comes to the counter, triumphantly carrying the flower they have chosen.

“Seems like this one’s screamin’ the loudest,” the woman says smiling. She is holding a bright pink Phalaenopsis, or “moth” orchid.

Brennan gives the couple some tips on caring for the flower as he gingerly wraps it in a large paper cone.
“That’s a nice one you picked out there,” he says.

Brennan, originally from Bridgewater, Mass., was in the computer business in Washington, D.C., 11 years ago and decided to take a new route.

“I needed a career change ... I made a conscious decision to make a switch,” he says.

He chose orchid farming after he was given an orchid for a gift, “which I almost killed by overwatering,” he recalls. The next year the flower bloomed again, giving way to many more orchids and the blossoming of a new career for Brennan.

But the shift from the mainstream business world to the life of an orchid farmer was not an overnight process. It takes five years for an orchid to bloom.

“It’s such a long crop, you can’t just quit your job and start growing orchids,” Brennan explains.

In 1992, Brennan began looking for a suitable place to settle and start his business. He came to the Shenandoah Valley looking for a south-facing hill on land he could afford. He found a seven-acre plot in Mt. Jackson that suited his needs and began the building of four greenhouses on a terraced hillside. Still working in Washington, D.C., Brennan says he came to Mt. Jackson three days a week to work on the farm.

Once the farm was ready, he began producing seedlings to populate his farm.

Brennan has a master’s degree in operations research from Georgia Tech, but his knowledge of breeding and growing orchids is all self-taught.

“Forget Dolly,” he says, referring to the world’s first genetically reproduced sheep. “Orchids were actually one of the first things to be cloned.”

“Orchids were actually one of the first things to be cloned.”

Brennan produces only Phalaenopsis, which are native to the Philippines and Indonesia. Phalaenopsis “is the largest commercially produced orchid right now,” Brennan says. He spends a lot of his time crossbreeding new varieties of orchids. All of the flowers Brennan breeds are either from crosses he has made himself in his laboratory or are from seedlings he imports from Thailand and Holland.

“All of my crosses are Shenandoah-something,” he says, referring to the names he gives to these flowers. His crossbreeds are registered with the Royal Horticulture Society, a British organization that specializes in flower classification and records.

Brennan meanders through his greenhouses, each of which houses thousands of orchids in different phases of their growth. The system appears to be slightly haphazard, with hoses and buckets strewn across the walkways, but Brennan says that things are running smoothly.

“The worse things look, the better you’re doing,” he assures.

Brennan gets most of his business from wholesale garden centers in Washington D.C. He also sends many orchids to flower shops in the Northeast,
Top left: Orchids thrive at Brennan’s Orchid farm, where the flowers are cultivated as solid colors or with striped and spotted patterns. Top right: Variations of orchids are characterized by large, rounded petals. Center: Although Brennan’s collection solely consists of Phalaenopsis, or “moth” orchids, each flower has its own personality and complexion. Bottom left: Orchids grow in bunches on vine-like branches.
and sees some business out of his retail flower shop in Mt. Jackson, where the clientele ranges from “tourists to ‘orchid people’ from Philadelphia and D.C.,” he says.

Former JMU President and current Chancellor Ronald Carrier is one of Brennan’s best customers, according to Molly Dugger, an employee of Brennan’s and a longtime orchid collector. “He has a very fine eye,” she says. “He is always able to pick out the best blooming plant we have available.”

Brennan says the biggest season for orchid sales is from Valentine’s Day to Mother’s Day, but “because the Valley’s cooler, I can get plants out year-round,” he says. “It’s pretty nonstop.”

Cooler temperatures are better because, “orchids need the cooler weather to bloom,” Dugger says. “In a natural habitat they only bloom in winter. We are trying to replicate their natural habitat and force them to bloom.”

Brennan says one of the great things about his job is the variety. “There is no typical day,” Brennan says. “Some days can be potting, some days can be paying bills.”

Orchids require a controlled environment, and he claims there is never a dull moment. Brennan has alarm systems to alert him when part of his heating or watering system is failing. “You have to have backups to backups,” Brennan explains. “It’s a 24-hour job. If something breaks, you can’t just wait till Monday, and believe me, there’s always something.”

Brennan also likes the freedom his job allows him and says it “counts a lot” to be able to cultivate flowers in the winter.

Brennan also enjoys attending flower shows, which he does about 10 to 15 times a year.

“Some of these shows are all types of flowers, some are just orchids,” he says. At these shows, Brennan sets up exhibits to be judged and has won numerous awards including Best Phalaenopsis at four of the last five New York International Orchid Shows he has attended. Brennan has also received recognition from the American Orchid Society.

“They compare it [the orchid] to the ideal standard of what it should be,” Brennan explains about the judging process. For Phalaenopsis, the “ideal standard” for the blooms is flat, “like a piece of paper,” Brennan describes. The flowers are also judged on their color.

“A lot of what you see on sales tables have 100 years of breeding into them,” he says. “You wouldn’t see anything like them in the wild.”

Phalaenopsis bloom anywhere from three to six months a year. With proper care, orchids can live 25 to 30 years, but some can live to be over 100, Brennan says.

For those caring for Phalaenopsis in their homes, the ideal place for the flowers is in windows facing either east or west.

“It wants a bright spot, but can’t take midday sun,” he warns.

The biggest mistake orchid owners make is overwatering. “Orchids have a very defined wet-and-dry cycle,” Brennan says. “It’s as important to get air to the roots as well as water.” He recommends watering them once every seven days and fertilizing them every two weeks with any general-purpose plant food mixed at half strength.

Getting his hands dirty is part of the job for Pat Brennan as he prepares pots for the orchids.

Kimberly Miller is from Medford, N.J. She is a senior at James Madison University and will be receiving her B.A. degree in journalism in May 2001. She someday hopes to write for a magazine.