MIMSLYN INN
OUT WITH THE OLD,
IN WITH THE INN

CELEBRATING
YEARS OF
NIELSEN
BUILDERS

JMU PROFESSOR
CHARLES HARRIS
SCHOOL BY DAY, DANCE BY NIGHT

SPOTLIGHT ON
STAUNTON
SPRING 2008

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ABOUT CURIO
Curio is a regional general-interest feature magazine published each spring by students in the School of Media Arts and Design at James Madison University. Curio is a nonprofit organization supported by the College of Arts and Letters and the School of Media Arts and Design. Subscriptions are not available.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Thirty years ago, Sony introduced the Walkman, "Annie Hall" won an Oscar for Best Picture and Curio made its debut in the Shenandoah Valley.

After three decades, Curio continues to bring community-based stories to its readers. From outstanding local residents and JMU professors to restaurants, inns and vineyards, Curio aims to highlight what makes the Valley so spectacular. Over the past 30 years, the magazine has featured award-winning writing and photography that has placed at a national levels, an accomplishment for both James Madison University and the surrounding communities.

Curio isn't the only anniversary we are celebrating this year. JMU celebrated its 100th birthday this past March, marking a milestone not only for the institution but also for the entire community. For this reason, this year's issue focuses more on the symbiotic relationship between the university and the Valley. Many local residents have given support and encouragement to the student body, and we're highlighting the most inspiring efforts as our thanks.

We've spent the past four years in Harrisonburg, a place we've come to call our second home. This magazine expresses our deep appreciation for the people we've met, the places we've gone and the adventures we've experienced during our time here.

We'd like to give special thanks to our advisers, Dr. David Wendelken, Ken Terrell and Dietrich Maune, who helped us through the entire process of creating Curio. We'd also like to thank our amazing staff of editors, writers, photographers and designers. Without their help this magazine would not have been possible.

We can only imagine what the next 30 years will bring...

Kelly Fisher  Eleni Menoutis
Kelly Fisher  executive editor  Eleni Menoutis  executive editor
Carly LeDuc
editor

CURIO 2008 STAFF

KELLY FISHER is a senior print journalism major and art history minor from Richmond. She worked as an editor at The Breeze and interned at a luxury magazine in Boston. After graduation, she plans to pursue a career in journalism or publishing in Washington, D.C.

ELENI MENOUTIS is a senior print journalism major and retail merchandising minor from Baldwin, N.Y. She is a staff writer for The Bluestone, a contributing writer for The Breeze and has a personal travel blog. After graduation, she is moving to NYC and hopes to work in the fashion industry or for a travel magazine.

KATE HEUBACH is a senior print journalism major and a writing and rhetoric minor from Harrisonburg. She served as president of Delta Delta Delta and as an editor for Tri Delta's national magazine. Upon graduation she will be moving to Knoxville, Tenn., to take part in the Knoxville Fellows Program.

BRITTANY URBACH is a senior print journalism major and Spanish minor from New Fairfield, Conn. She has her own blog about her sailing and traveling adventures. After graduation, she hopes to write for a travel magazine in order to pursue her love of traveling.

MARY CZARSTY is a senior print journalism major from Watertown, Conn. She has served as editor in chief for The Breeze for the past year and has previously served as a news editor and staff writer for the paper. She plans to work for the Roanoke Times as a page designer after graduation.

KATIE PIWOWARCZYK is a senior print journalism major and cultural communication minor from Cranford, N.J. She is currently the creative director of The Bluestone and co-captain of JMU's women's ultimate Frisbee team. In the future, she plans to move out west to pursue a career in print design.

ASHLEY KNOX is a senior interactive media major and writing and rhetoric minor from Media, Pa. She currently works for the Office of Residence Life as a graphic designer. She plans to pursue a career in interactive media and Web design.

MEG STREKER is a senior print journalism major and creative writing minor from Newport News. She is currently the supervising editor of The Bluestone. After graduation, she plans to pursue a career in publishing.

RACHEL CANFIELD is a senior print journalism and public relations major from Richmond. She is currently the managing editor of The Bluestone and an editorial assistant and student researcher for the Journal of Mine Action. After graduation, she hopes to pursue a career in public relations.

ALISSA NAGLE is a senior print journalism major from Pasadena, Md. She contributed to southmainonline.com, a Web site directed toward local news stories. She also has her own blog that focuses on media and politics. She hopes to continue to work with new media in the future.

For more staff profiles, check the end of each story.
JMU professors David Wendelken and Ken Terrell have seen *Curio* evolve over 30 years

**How did Curio come about?**

**DW:** The first *Curio* in 1978 was an extra-credit project in a feature writing class. After it succeeded, I proposed a feature magazine production course and it is still produced that way. The number of interested students has grown and we've added other publications to the course as well as Web sites, but *Curio* as a student-produced regional general-interest magazine remains a key part of the class.

**Ken, you were the editor of the first Curio. How does it feel to be back?**

**KT:** Having *Curio* in my portfolio helped me get my first job after college. Returning to JMU to help students polish their skills and build their own portfolios is a great way to give something back. It feels good to have had a role in launching something that's lasted so long and has become a fixture in the Valley. *Curio* was Dave's brainchild and I'm just glad he chose me to help bring it to life. It's amazing how far his passion has taken the students and the magazine over the years.

**What does Curio mean to you?**

**DW:** I think of it as a celebration of community. The central Shenandoah Valley is characterized by a sense of history, strong religious influences and a tradition of community service, and the magazine seeks to reflect the many elements that make this area special and unique. I also think of the editors and staffers as part of an ever-expanding family. I keep in touch with many of them, and many say this was one of the best experiences they had in college and it was a strong influence on their careers.

**CURIOLOGY:** a study of some of *Curio*’s most memorable moments over 30 years

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<td>The first issue of <em>Curio</em> featured Harrisonburg High School basketball phenomenon Ralph Sampson. He later went on to play in the NBA for the Houston Rockets.</td>
<td>The 1988 issue looked back to the Turner Ashby basketball team that won the 1968 state championship and created a sports frenzy in the Valley.</td>
<td>In 1998, <em>Curio</em> featured Valley doctors John Glick and Steve Phillips on the cover. The duo practices medicine by day and performs musical satire by night.</td>
<td>The 2005 issue featured famed photographer Bernie Boston, who passed away in January 2008.</td>
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*Curio* 2008
Charles Harris has taught psychology classes at James Madison University for 38 years. Serving under three university presidents, he has worked to improve the use of instructional technology on campus. Through it all, he never stopped dancing.

**Competing across the country**

Charles, 72, and his wife Karen, 52, met through dance and have been dancing together for 11 years. They have competed up and down the East Coast, acquiring over 60 awards along the way.

“Dance is a metaphor for a good relationship,” Charles says. “A good relationship is about mutuality. Dance works best when it’s 50-50.”

While the duo is currently active in ballroom dancing, country and western dancing was their original specialty. As country and western dancers, Charles and Karen placed seventh out of a group of 27 teams for their overall performances at the 2000 World Championship. They placed third in two-step.

“They say the first time you go to the World Championship you don’t place, so we were surprised,” Karen says, adding that without practice they might not have placed as well as...
they did. “We had set choreography that we used for competi-
tions and practiced hundreds of times. When it comes to com-
petition, you want it to come naturally to you.”

After the emotional rush of being named World Champions, regular competi-
tions didn’t seem as exciting to the Harrises. Rather than racking up more country western medals, Charles suggested the pair try ballroom dancing. While Karen initially thought Charles was crazy to suggest the switch, she eventually agreed.

Since then, the duo has placed in three regional ball-
room dancing competitions. In 2000, they received first in foxtrot, tango and swing at the Intercity Dance Challenge in Falls Church; first in waltz, tango and foxtrot at the Virginia State Ballroom Championship; and first in waltz, quickstep and swing at the Carolina Amateur DanceSport Jubilee in Durham, N.C.

Practice makes perfect
While Charles and Karen no longer dance competitively, they are avid social dancers and practice often.

In fact, they enjoy dancing so much that Charles built a 15-
foot-by-21-foot dance studio in the basement of their house, complete with mirrors and a floating wooden floor to reduce noise and vibration.
“Dance is a metaphor for a good relationship... dance works best when it's 50-50.”

CHARLES HARRIS
JMU psychology professor

“We practice an hour or more almost every day,” Charles says. “I finish at JMU, I come home, we eat and we practice. You have to make it so when you get on the dance floor it's natural, like breathing.”

They often end up incorporating their own moves into the dances they learn, giving them a style and flair all their own. Trying to stay at the top of their game, they do all they can to improve, no matter how good they become.

“No matter how accomplished you get, you're always learning and you're always improving,” Karen says. “There's always something new to learn.”

Charles and Karen travel to New York two or three times a year to dance at the Stardust Dance Weekend, a four-day, three-night extravaganza that attracts dancers from across the country. More locally, the couple visits the Harrisonburg dance studio, Dancing with Karen, for training about twice a month.

While the pair used to work with many different individuals, these days Karen Thomas, 58, of Harrisonburg, is their only coach.

“Charles and Karen work really hard at what they do,” Thomas says. “They want to be good dancers, and they know what they're doing.”

Not only does the couple find social benefits from dancing, they benefit mentally and physically as well.

“It's good for stress,” Karen says. “I call it a natural high. I always feel good while I'm dancing.”

Hitting the town

The couple dedicates a lot of time to practicing, but it's worth it when they hit the dance floor. While in Harrisonburg, the duo goes out two to three nights a week, dancing at the Dayton Learning Center, The Artful Dodger or Fairfax Hall in Waynesboro. The pair has traveled extensively throughout Virginia, Maryland, Tennessee and New York.
“You use it or you lose it,” Charles says. Whatever they are doing seems to be working. Fellow dancers commend the duo for their hard work, looking to them for inspiration and entertainment. “They’re extremely elegant dancers and really nice people,” says Carl Lind, 55, who has known Charles and Karen since he started attending the Dayton dances five years ago. “They’re really willing to help others learn.”

Psych and swing at JMU

When Charles is not dancing around town, he’s teaching GPSYC 160: Life Span Human Development in Moody Hall and acting as faculty adviser of the Swing Club. He also taught graduate counseling programs for six years from the mid ’70s to early ’80s.

Charles currently teaches four hybrid courses on JMU’s campus and one completely online. His helpful nature quickly wins over his students.

JMU senior Adrienne Hayden, 21, who had Charles for GPSYC 160 in 2005, has fond memories of Charles’ ability to incorporate dance into his lectures. “He used to play dance music at the beginning of every class and he would occasionally show videos of him and his wife participating in ballroom dance competitions,” she says. “It was so precious and abnormal, especially because I was a freshman and not used to seeing the more human and personal side of my educators.”

When he is not in the classroom, Charles works to improve and expand the Swing Club, where he took the role of faculty adviser approximately six years ago. When he came in, the group was established but lacked the space to hold practice, host events and promote its activities. Charles worked with the Swing Club officers to gain Sports Council membership, ensuring the group the space it needed to be successful on campus.

Between practicing his dancing, going to dances, teaching classes and advising the Swing Club, Charles has a full schedule and an active lifestyle. While many others his age have retired, he continues teaching, learning and above all else, dancing.

To view a multimedia presentation on Harris, titled “For the Love of Dance,” visit evandyson.com. ©

ASHLEY HOPKINS is a senior print journalism major and creative writing minor from Harrisonburg. She has worked as news editor of The Breeze and is a subject-area honors student. After graduation, she plans to attend graduate school for journalism.

EVAN DYSON is a senior print journalism major from Virginia Beach. He has most recently been managing editor for The Breeze and has served as a photographer and photo editor in past years. After graduation, he plans to pursue a career in documentary photojournalism.
JMU alumna Elizabeth Gauldin reminisces about her 30 years with NASA.

story by KALEIGH MAHER
photography courtesy of TOM COGILL and THE MADISON INSTITUTE

James Madison University alumna Elizabeth Gauldin ('50) says there’s nothing she would change about her career.

“I was a woman chemist at a time when [women in science] didn’t come about very often,” she says.

Gauldin was one of the first female scientists in the space program. During her 30-year career with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, she took part in both the Apollo 13 and Skylab rescues.

“It was not a routine job,” she says. “It was an exciting job.”

College to career

Gauldin says Madison College, now JMU, was an easy choice for her. Growing up in the Shenandoah Valley, Gauldin considered attending Madison College and Radford University, but Madison seemed like the best choice. However, she’s not sure why she chose to study science in the late 1940s.

“I’ve thought about that a lot,” she says. “Why did I pick that? Almost every girl at that point was either a nurse or a teacher.”
Gauldin says science and understanding how things work always intrigued her.

“We had dorm rooms with bunk beds, and I always had the top bunk,” she says. “I remember laying up there studying chemistry freshman year. When I finally figured out how atoms worked I got so excited I jumped down off the top bunk and started screaming.”

Gauldin says her interest in science was encouraged by her father from a young age.

“I give a lot of credit to my father,” she says. “He wanted me to be a doctor. He wasn’t paying any attention to the fact that I was a girl. He just wanted me to be the best I could.”

Gauldin wasn’t sure what she was going to do after she graduated in 1950 with a double major in chemistry and biology.

“No one in the Valley was going to hire me,” she says. “That was too far advanced for the Valley at that point.”

After graduation, Gauldin moved to Richmond where she landed a job performing thermal dynamic calculations with Experiment, Inc. The corporation was contracted by the Navy to build and test solid rocket boosters, which are used to provide thrust during spacecraft launches.

“I knew nothing about the space program at that point,” Gauldin says. “I had not been paying any attention.”

Don’t mess with Texas

In 1967, Gauldin was hired by General Electric. The company was contracted by NASA to develop non-flammable materials after a capsule caught fire in 1963, burning three astronauts to death. Gauldin worked in a shop researching and experimenting with new chemical substances to cover materials.

She didn’t work there for long. NASA was preparing for the first moon launch by the end of the decade, and Gauldin began working on a team in the engineering and fabrications shop she would later manage.

“If you laid a tube of toothpaste down in the capsule, it would float away,” Gauldin says. “Everything [the astronauts] had and everything they used had to be in a bag that was specially designed for it.”

Houston, we have a problem

Gauldin’s most memorable moment at NASA was sitting in the control center in April 1970 when word came over the radio that the Apollo 13 was going to make it home.

“Every body gathered somewhere they could hear. We just gathered, waiting to know if they were safe or not.”

ELIZABETH GAULDIN
JMU alumna (’50)

“Everybody gathered somewhere they could hear. We just gathered, waiting to know if they were safe or not.”

Apollo 13 was the third planned lunar landing. Two days after the shuttle launched, an on-board explosion damaged the Service Module and left the crew without oxygen or power.

“The whole side was blown out of that capsule,” Gauldin says. “It’s a miracle that they came back.”

NASA developed a plan to move canisters that would rid the air of carbon monoxide from the still-functioning Command Module into the Lunar Module, where the crew had taken refuge. Gauldin’s shop tested the plan to make sure it would work before the astronauts implemented it.

“It was a frantic effort,” she says.

The decision was made in the control room that in order to bring Apollo 13 home safely, it would have to circle the moon and come back along the intended flight trajectory written in the computer software.

“We sat there in the control room for a long time, just waiting to see if they made it,” she says. “All of a sudden there was a voice saying they had made it around the moon and were coming back. Nobody could believe it. Everybody was hugging everybody and was just thrilled.”

Retired but not tired

Gauldin retired in 1997 after 30 years with NASA.

“I probably would have stayed there forever if I could have lived forever,” she says.

While at NASA, Gauldin says she received just about every award they had at the time and has them proudly displayed on her walls. She still keeps in touch with people from the program.

“I follow every shuttle launch,” she says. “I haven’t lost my interest in the program.”

Even though Gauldin experienced the triumphs of the space program firsthand, she still thinks it’s astounding that people have traveled through space.

“Just think of the bravery those first guys had, those first people who had ever left the earth and gone up and walked on a place that you only ever see in the sky.”

Kaleigh Maher is a senior print journalism major and organizational communication major from Warrenton. She has most recently been news editor for The Breeze and has previously served as a staff writer. After graduation, she plans to move to Washington, D.C. to pursue a career in journalism.
John Neff places a premium on what he calls “good people.” At Nielsen Builders, Inc., the Shenandoah Valley construction business where Neff has worked for more than 40 years, he considers himself blessed to be surrounded by these types of people on a daily basis.

“I have a passion for this because it’s easy to sell an organization when you know the people who are going to deliver and be behind it,” Neff says. “It’s not difficult to sell a product when you have the best to sell.”

Neff is CEO and chairman of the Board of Directors of Nielsen, and has worked with the company since he was a sophomore in high school. During the summer of 1968, he worked on the construction of Shorts Hall on James Madison University’s campus.

The company has enjoyed a lengthy and fruitful partnership with the university and has constructed or renovated all but four buildings on campus. Nielsen recently completed construction on the new East Campus Library, and is in the preliminary stages of construction for the new Performing Arts Center scheduled to open in 2010. The Center will be Nielsen’s largest project, costing approximately $80 million.

Neff’s early ties with the company were fostered through his father’s 42-year tenure with the company, as well as an early meeting with founder Joseph Nielsen.

“I was able to go out on a boat fishing with him and my dad back when I was probably 10 or 11 years old, which was pretty special,” Neff says. “I was very aware of who he was because Dad had a strong sense of pride in the people of the Nielsen organization, and I wanted to emulate that strong work ethic and sense of accomplishment.”

Joseph Nielsen came to the United States from Denmark in December 1902 at age 17. He founded J. Nielsen and Co. in 1908 in Round Hill, eventually moving his
company to Leesburg in the same year to pursue more business opportunities. His brothers, Nils and Otto, also joined the business and moved the company to Harrisonburg in 1917.

Nielsen worked on other projects in the Harrisonburg community before purchasing J.M. Bucher and Son in 1924, a local building firm that completed the original bluestone buildings on JMU's campus. Following Bucher's death, his son sold the firm to Nielsen, who took over his remaining projects, including those with JMU.

"We say that Nielsen's been working with JMU since the very beginning, since we purchased Bucher and finished off these projects," says Patricia May, Nielsen business communications specialist.

Nielsen retired from the company in 1961, several years before Neff joined the company's ranks as a laborer and apprentice carpenter in 1968. While Neff's father worked on the financial side of Nielsen, Neff found himself attracted to the engineering and construction side of the company.

"Obviously, it's what intrigued me and became a vision that I saw," Neff says. "I wanted to be involved in seeing things become a reality as the bricks, stone and workmanship went into the whole aspect of building from the ground up. You can get a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment from that."

Nielsen's partnership with JMU is especially significant considering that both organizations are celebrating centennial anniversaries this year.

Neff became president of Nielsen in 1987. Over the past 100 years, the company has had only six presidents, spanning from Joseph Nielsen to current president Tony Biller, who replaced Neff in April 2007.

Although the company's most visible relationship is with JMU, Nielsen has shaped the Shenandoah Valley by focusing on health care, education, retirement facilities and church projects. Neff has an obvious passion for community projects, which is evident in his enthusiasm in seeing the result of Nielsen's construction projects.

"We're often looking beyond the client and toward the end user of the project," Neff says. "With schools, it's the environment we're creating and the facility that we are building that will train students to develop themselves in a lot of different ways as well as to become good citizens."

The company has also been active in restoration projects such as the Paramount Theater in Charlottesville and the Orkney Springs Hotel.

"The Paramount Theater is an old landmark that we put back into its original condition with all the intricate woodwork, plaster and tapestries that were in that space," Neff says. "It's just a beautiful facility now. You sit in there and think, 'We've had a part in bringing this back to life, and that's special.'"

Nielsen also prides itself on its exceptional employee retention rate, which is unusual for the construction business. Project Manager Scott Baxter became attracted to the company after realizing the extent of Nielsen's history and reputation in the Valley.

"Before Nielsen, I was traveling
NIELSEN’S RECENT BUILDINGS AT JMU INCLUDE:

Performing Arts Center
scheduled to open in 2010

CISAT Residence Hall
scheduled to open in 2009

East Campus Library
scheduled to open in 2008

Miller Hall
(renovation)
completed in 2008

Plecker
Athletic Performance Center
completed in 2005

Track and Field Complex
completed in 2003

University Bookstore
completed in 2002

quite a bit and looking for a local contractor I could get roots with, so I did my homework and found that Nielsen was the prime contractor for the Valley area and the Piedmont region,” Baxter says. “Since I’ve been with them, understanding their history with the community and all their work with JMU, I’ve found that they were the exact type of company I was looking for.”

Many employees attribute the company’s draw and longevity in the Valley to Neff’s principles.

“John’s always had the belief that his word is as good as his handshake is as good as his signature,” Nielsen Chief Operations Officer Thomas Moomaw says. “If somebody at Nielsen tells you they’re going to do it, you can take it to the bank.”

Moomaw has worked for Nielsen in various capacities for almost 16 years and has found that Neff’s success as a manager comes from his ability to relate to all employees.

“Speaking for the guys in the field
who have grown up in the company, John has done more for the people in the field than any other past president,” he says. “It’s a hard and dirty job, and he’s been there in the trenches with them. He respects them and they respect him.”

The company opened an office in Charlottesville five years ago to pursue more projects in the Piedmont region. The company also recently transferred its ownership to its employees through an employee stock ownership plan.

Nielsen’s future looks bright as over 20 projects are currently underway between the two offices. Despite the busy nature of his business, Neff seems happy to continue Joseph Nielsen’s legacy as business continues to grow.

“It’s more than bricks and mortar here; it’s how we can be a part of the community and give back and share,” Neff says. “Because I’m surrounded by good people here at Nielsen, it’s helping me to share the load.”

KELLY CONNIFF is a senior print journalism and English major from Springfield. She has served as a copy editor and writer for The Breeze. After graduation, she plans to attend graduate school to pursue online journalism.

SUSAN SOMMERFELDT is a senior print journalism major and religion minor from Springfield. She was a staff photographer for The Breeze. After graduation, she plans to pursue a career in photography.
Lois Carter Fay checks on details for the next issue of Journal of Mine Action.
Since 1996, Harrisonburg has been home to an internationally acclaimed organization that is relatively unknown in its own community. Hidden in the northern outskirts of the city, the Mine Action Information Center has remained James Madison University and Harrisonburg's best-kept secret.

"The most frustrating thing is we're less known in Harrisonburg than in London," says MAIC Director Dennis Barlow, the former director of humanitarian policy in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. "We're mystified that with everything we've done around the world, more people in Harrisonburg don't know who we are or what we do."

Land mines have been a global problem since World War II, when they were first used extensively. Since the start of the war, approximately 400 million mines have been placed and over 100 million have yet to be reclaimed. Since 1975, land mines have caused an estimated one million deaths and casualties globally and continue to cause over 25,000 deaths each year in 63 countries.

The Mine Action Information Center was established in 1996 as a department in JMU's College of Integrated Science and Technology. It was designated by the United States government with a mandate to collect and disseminate information relevant to humanitarian land mine clearance, victim assistance and other land mine-related issues.

Since its inception, the MAIC has established itself as a highly recognized organization with more than 10 years of experience in support of the departments of State and Defense and the international humanitarian mine action community. It enjoys an international reputation as a neutral and effective center utilizing extensive contacts with International
Organizations (IOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and governmental, military and corporate entities which are involved in mine action programs.

Barlow initially led the MAIC with the support of JMU faculty and administrators. Over time, the MAIC built a strong foundation of students and professionals. Now, six full-time staffers and about 20 part-time JMU students run this influential humanitarian organization.

“Our goal is to help solve the worldwide scourge of land mines,” Barlow says. “The way we do that is acting as a neutral and trusted source that brings together the community of mine action removal practice.”

The MAIC is not a lobbying force for mine action laws. It does, however, attend international conferences concerning mine action, and oftentimes is the only U.S. organization present. At these conferences, the MAIC gathers current information and resources from specialists in the field to consistently remain up-to-date.

“The mine action community is a fairly small and specialized community of professionals across the world,” says Program Manager Daniele Ressler. “We try to be an international hub to help connect them so they don’t feel so isolated.” This community includes people involved in mine clearance, victim assistance and mine risk education of those who live in dangerous areas.

Organizations and individuals visit the MAIC’s Web site for the latest news, to find additional contacts from the mine action registry and to read the Journal of Mine Action. Because the journal’s readership is international, Carter Fay strives to maintain a global standard style of writing that doesn’t exclude any portion of the readership.

“The journal is written for people in the field by people in the field,” says Editor in Chief Lois Carter Fay. “One of the goals of our magazine is to bring together the various sectors in mine action — deminers, national program managers, non-governmental organizations, donors and states.”

The 112-page advertisement-free publication prints 1,700 copies bi-annually. The journal’s Internet audience includes 135,000 readers annually. The latest issue of the journal was 11.1, Summer 2007, which focused on Eastern Europe and the Caucasus. The issue highlights the role of mine-sniffing dogs in the Republic of Croatia, demining of underground explosives in the Ukraine and children who educate their families about mine risks.

Over the past four years, the MAIC has hosted five leadership-training programs to enhance the skills of international senior managers. The United Nations selected the students for this business management course, called the “United Nations Development Programme Mine Action Senior Managers Course.” The course was implemented after a 1999 UNDP study showed that these training courses
could help to improve conditions in the trainees’ home countries.

Students from 33 countries, ranging from Afghanistan to Zambia, have participated in the training courses. JMU professors and guest speakers teach international law, how to manage and use land mine data and how to plan training and assistance programs in their communities.

“They loved it here,” says Senior Research Associate Suzanne Fiederlein, the head of the training program. “Harrisonburg provides them with a pleasant, tranquil place to live and study for five weeks, and they enjoy the amenities of campus.” Fiederlein added that one student spent many days in Carrier Library because he didn’t have access to similar materials in his community.

Today, up to 400,000 people are living with mine-related disabilities. The MAIC gives victims hope by producing the Adaptive Technology Catalog, a reference guide for those seeking tools to help aid them at home and in their trades. Offered as an online download or via CD, the catalog is an excellent resource for survivor-assistance agencies. Tools listed in the catalog include one-handed keyboards, hand-powered bicycles and automobile pedal extenders. Occupational therapy and training sources are also referenced.

Each year, the Department of State’s Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement (PM/WRA) gives one recent JMU graduate the opportunity to work in the office through a one-year paid fellowship. PM/WRA handles requests from countries in need of funding and assistance in carrying out weapons removal programs.

The current fellowship holder, Derek Kish (’07), has spent the last year planning and organizing mine action programs for Sudan. He planned the budget for the program for future years, wrote reports on weapons found in Sudan and has made sure the program is running smoothly through his administrative efforts.

“It’s a great opportunity for graduates right out of college,” Kish says. “Future fellows can expect to travel.”

In the last year, Kish traveled to Sudan and Peru to see current clearance operations and meet with NGOs and partners to observe operations of the programs.

The MAIC recently received a grant dedicated to supporting mine risk education in Jordan. The MAIC will write and produce a play that will be released in Jordanian high schools in summer 2008 that aims to sensitize teenagers to the threat of land mines so that they will be able to avoid injury and death. Three MAIC representatives will travel to Jordan in June 2008 to confer with the country’s representatives and begin development of the training materials.

In early and mid-2000s, international funding for demining began declining globally, partially due to the stabilizing situation.

According to Ressler, deciding which other humanitarian causes to adopt is the MAIC’s biggest challenge right now. As it looks into causes, the organization is currently expanding its information efforts from land mine clearing to helping victims return to normalcy. It also has begun projects related to wider post-conflict issues, such international stabilization and reconstruction efforts.

“There has been so much massive progress in the last 10 years in terms of places that are clearing mines and becoming safe for people to live again,” Ressler says. “So as that happens, we have to ask the larger question of what else we support people in.”

Please visit maic.jmu.edu for more information about the Mine Action Information Center.
World-renowned viola player Amadi Hummings not only teaches on JMU’s campus, he also lives in a student dorm.
Viola professor Amadi Hummings reaches out to JMU students

Delicate notes of viola music float through the air, competing with thumping bass and rap lyrics coming from the floor above. Following the viola's sound leads to room 103, the residence of Amadi Hummings, world-renowned viola player and "dorm mother."

At 38, Hummings is the oldest resident of Eagle Hall at James Madison University. Standing at an imposing 6 feet 1 inch, he towers over many of his charges with a stern air at first meeting. But why would a musician who has performed in such places as Israel, India, Japan and at the United States Supreme Court choose to live in a freshman dorm?

"When I heard they were looking for professors to live in residence halls, I thought that would be a great way for me to get to know the students," he replies. "I worked at music camps where the professors and campers were really involved with each other, and I really enjoyed that experience and wanted to continue it."

Hummings has played "dorm mother" since 2005, when he accepted the viola professorship at the School of Music because of its reputation as the best in Virginia. The fact that the school recently achieved the prestigious...
all-Steinway status (all pianos in the school are Steinways, widely regarded as the best pianos in the world), enhanced the program’s reputation. Since then, Hummings has built a reputation of his own.

“Amadi always has an open door when he’s around,” says Tia Mann, the director of Eagle Hall. “He’s great at breaking down the barriers between students and professors. He goes the extra mile to get to know the residents as people with names, feelings and unique experiences.”

Outside of his duties at Eagle Hall, Hummings is the head of the viola studio at the School of Music. His reputation precedes him there as well, as the nameplate outside his office reads “mad Hummings,” where a clever student taped over the first and last letters of his first name. At first meeting he may seem quiet, but around people he knows well, his “madness” shines. His deep baritone voice changes as he imitates cartoon characters and movie villains, and his gestures shift from graceful conducting to manic dancing. One of his favorite haunts is the main office of the music building, where everyone enjoys his antics.

“One time, one of our students made muffins with syrup that had gone bad,” says Donna Wampler, program support technician at the School of Music. “Amadi is always hungry when he comes in, so he ate a bunch of them despite the fact that they smelled like vinegar. When the student who baked them saw Amadi had eaten them, Amadi pretended like his throat was closing up and collapsed in a chair in fake shock. The poor girl was so scared, and when he finally got up laughing, she was very, very angry. But no one can stay angry at Amadi for long.”

Teaching at such a prestigious music school is serious business for Hummings, but it is not about personal achievement.

“Without a doubt, the best part of teaching is the encouragement of new artists, watching them grow and discover their music,” he says. “Knowing that they place their confidence in you, it’s a big responsibility.”

Former professors are an inspiration for Hummings in his approach to teaching. “I had a professor once who gave me his expensive bow for my recital when he saw mine had worn down. I try to do that now for my students. If they have a bow older than three months, I get them a new one. I believe what goes around comes around, and I hope they do the same for their students someday.”

Senior music education major Alex Mason affirms that Hummings has encouraged him to become a better musician in his own unique way.

“Amadi always gives great feedback in lessons, but it doesn’t necessarily come after you have played a piece for him,” he says. “One of the things that scared me to death about Amadi when I first started playing with him was that while I was playing, he’d sort of lay back with his arms crossed with this blank expression on his face, no matter how well or poorly I was playing. When I finished, he’d inevitably ‘Hmm…’ — leaving me hanging as to my performance quality. Usually I can read how well I’m doing at any given time by gauging the teacher’s reaction, but not with Amadi. With him, I just have to see how quickly the corrective comments fly after my performance.”

Senior viola performance major Jamie Chambers agrees that Hummings’ approval does not come easily. “It’s very rare to get a ‘Good job’ out of Amadi,” she says. “The most I’ve gotten, maybe twice, was a ‘Not too bad.’ It makes you feel good when he says that, because you know he doesn’t say it lightly. None of the greatest music teachers ever gave their students compliments, so to get anything out of a good teacher, you have to do something special.”

Longtime friend Wanchi Huang, the violin professor at JMU, has witnessed Hummings’ growth over the years. “When I first met him in 1989, I thought he was very serious, almost too quiet,” she says. “It was very hard to know what he was thinking at first. Once he got older and more comfortable with his environment, his funny, silly side started to emerge.”
Hummings, a New York City native, began playing the piano and violin at age 4.

Son of famed concert pianist Amenta Adams Hummings, Amadi attended both the New England Conservatory of Music and Indiana State University. He says listening to recordings of violinist David Oistrakh was his biggest influence growing up. “He remains my favorite violinist of all time,” he says. “He’s honest and a hard worker, and is about making music rather than show.”

Hummings also says his mother, classically trained at Juilliard, is another influence. “She’s a terrific pianist and musician,” he says. “She’s so honest when she plays, you can tell she’s all about the music. That’s not something you see too often.”

The desire to teach grew more alluring than performing full time at the end of his graduate career. “I just thought to myself, ‘Hmm, what would I most enjoy doing?’” he says. “All the musicians I admired were teachers in some way, and I thought to myself, ‘If I was going to follow in their footsteps, teaching would be the most rewarding step to take.’”

After teaching for six years at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Hummings took four years off to travel and play professionally. When the offer to teach full time at JMU came, Hummings gladly took it. “It really can be tiring to travel that much all the time,” he says. “I thought it would be good to have a balance between performing, teaching and traveling. It’s what all my former teachers are doing.”

Though Hummings tries to get all of his students to have the same passion for their craft that he does, they don’t always step up.

“The most difficult part is expecting and wanting my students to work hard, and when that doesn’t happen, it’s disappointing,” he says. “It’s hard not to take that personally. If I ask you to do something, your job is to do it to the best of your ability. Screaming is not my style. If you’re going to waste my time by not being prepared for a lesson, go practice.”

Performing is still the highlight of Hummings’ musical growth, as he practices up to four hours a day on as many as 27 pieces he prepares for each semester. “The great thing about music is that when you listen to a live performance, it is unique and will never be told the same way again,” he says. “I enjoy bringing out the most compelling themes in the music — all the drama and beauty and emotion that is there, because those are the things that define our lives.”

CARLY LEDUC is a senior print journalism major and music minor from Ashburn. She currently works at Modson magazine as an editorial intern and as an administrative assistant at the School of Music. After graduation, she hopes to work for a major sports media outlet or feature magazine in the Northern Virginia area. ASHLEY BEAUDIN is a junior print journalism major with a minor in Spanish from Winchester. She is currently a contributing writer for The Bluestone. After graduation, she plans to pursue a career as a photographer and writer for magazines and nonprofit organizations.
STROLL SOUTH TO STAUNTON

A historic town 30 miles south of Harrisonburg is full of hidden treasures

story by ASHLEY BEAUDIN and ASHTON SMITH
photography by SAMANTHA ELCHENKO

For the past 250 years, Staunton has offered a unique sensory experience to visitors and residents alike. As the only Shenandoah Valley town to escape the Civil War unscathed, Staunton’s architecturally rich downtown has something to offer everyone. From traditional glassblowing demonstrations to Tiffany stained glass windows that sparkle in the afternoon sun, downtown Staunton is a jewel of the Valley. A few miles away, a retro diner and homemade frozen custard are a tasty cap to this sensational tour.
Gothic doors guard the entrance of Trinity Church, both weathered and heavy as if transported from medieval times. Traveling through an enclosed foyer leads to an Episcopalian sanctuary, stunning in beauty from floor to ceiling. The stained glass windows stretch 7 feet high, whispering secrets of faith and history to the congregation below. On a balcony spanning the width of the church, a new gallery organ hums melodies of praise, echoing off arched beams that have supported the structure’s ceiling for over two centuries.

Trinity Church was founded in 1746, making it the oldest church in Staunton. The city itself was not established until the following year. The church was formerly known as the Augusta Parish before its name changed in 1830.

The present-day church was completed in 1855, with renovations occurring from 1869 through 2000. The renovations included a new rectory — the first in the state of Virginia — and the installation of a new Taylor & Boody organ in 1999. The organ was built from black walnut trees by George Taylor of Taylor & Boody, who traveled to Germany as an organ maker’s apprentice.

“It’s the way organs have been built since about the 1400s, and that organ should be here for a long time,” says Thurston Robinson, a longtime member of the church. “It’s a magnificent machine.”

Trinity Church has had its share of famous visitors over the years, including the 1781 Virginia legislature. The council members intended to meet in Richmond but the British eventually pursued them to Staunton, where they met with Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry at Trinity for 10 days.

The most remarkable features of this Gothic-style church are the stained glass windows that line the walls of the sanctuary. All the windows were donated by parishioners between 1894 and 1970.

“They are a potpourri of themes and manufacturers,” Robinson says, “I think it makes for a rather interesting collection because of that.”

Each window holds a special significance to the church, from depictions of biblical stories to representations of lost loved ones who were former members of the church. The windows were restored in 2000 when the church was renovated.

One window in particular holds a special memory for Robinson.

“I had a retired rector in here who sat down in front of the Missionary window about a year ago,” Robinson says. “I bet he studied it for the better part of an hour before he turned to me and said, ‘I have never seen anything that has told me as much about Christianity as that window.’”
Owner Doug Sheridan concentrates on a glass piece in Sunspots Studio. The color of the glass is made by combining different color crystals.

Sunspots Studios stands prominently on the corner of South Lewis Street in downtown Staunton. With windows stretching across all sides, the building itself acts as a display case for the innovative art within.

The door of Sunspots opens into a showcase of hand-blown glass art. Many of the pieces are original designs created by the talent and superb precision of owner and artist Doug Sheridan and his staff. From perfume bottles to wall art, there is a piece of glittering glass for everyone.

Glassblowing demonstrations allow participants to step behind the counters of the store and into the work studio to witness creations as they emerge from molten blobs of glass. Bleachers line the studio, allowing everyone to have the best seat in the house for an artistic performance unlike any other. There is usually a free daily demonstration, but calling ahead is encouraged to make sure artists will be working that day.

Glassblowing classes are offered on occasion, in which participants can create their own blown glass vessel. The cost of an introductory class is around $150 for two four-hour sessions.

Nearly 40,000 people have visited Sunspots each year since its 2001 opening. Sheridan and his wife, Caroline, opened the business in the historic 1929 Klotz building.

“I was doing copper work for many years,” Sheridan says. “When I moved to Staunton I moved my copper store in between two glassblowers’ stores and quickly began putting glass in my copper designs. Eventually, I built a glass studio, and this is where we are today.”
For 56 years, Wright's Dairy-Rite has been a household name in Staunton. What started out as a drive-up service, complete with curb girls, is now a successful eat-in diner as well.

Wright’s has transformed over the years, starting when Forester A. Wright founded it as an ice cream-only store in 1952. Originally, Wright bought the venue to try to form a Dairy Queen franchise, but the corporation rejected his proposal. Instead, he later created a drive-up diner that offers ice cream, hamburgers and hot dogs. Speaker boxes were placed outside so customers could drive up and place their order. Most customers preferred yelling their orders at Annie Smalls, who was Wright’s curb girl for 35 years.

“She knew everybody and they would holler at her from the road,” says James Cash, the present owner of Wright’s and Forester Wright’s son-in-law. “It was strictly a curb business; you take the order and bring it out. We got the first three numbers of the license plates so we could keep track of what went where.”

Cash and his family took over in 1978 and made alterations to the business by adding a patio and expanding the curb service to a full indoor diner. He and his son, Jim, used a unique design they saw in Kentucky where customers ordered by telephone. Cash decided to take it one step further, placing telephones at every table to allow customers to call servers and place their orders.

Wright’s has received attention from more than just residents and tourists, attracting some high-profile figures, most notably the Statler Brothers, a former country music group from Staunton. Band members Harold and Don Reid, Jimmy Fortune and Phil Balsley are good friends of Cash’s, as they all went to high school together. The band makes it an annual event to hold Harold and Don’s mother’s birthday celebration at Wright’s.

Former Governor Mark Warner has also dined at Wright’s, along with U.S. Senator Jim Webb, former U.S. Senator George Allen and past Washington Redskins teams.

Wright’s attracts customers of all walks, not just for the retro diner experience, but also for its homemade onion rings and milkshakes.

“We take big onions, slice ’em and bread ’em,” Cash says. “They have been homemade since the very beginning.”

Wright’s has been recognized nationally for its style. Epicurious.com, a culinary Web site, named Wright’s one
of the Ten Best Drive-In’s in the nation in 2004. Wright’s was also featured in *Southern Living* magazine, *Road Trip* magazine and has been featured in three different Charlottesville papers. Cash gets excited when talking about Wright’s most recent honor, representing the month of November in a calendar of diners across the United States.

“This man came in and wanted to take pictures of the place and the next thing I knew, we were Mr. November,” Cash says.

Images of Wright’s history line the walls inside including pictures of the Statler Brothers, newspaper articles highlighting the diner and portraits of famous visitors. Wright’s is historic not just for its food and history, but also for the people who have made it a staple in Staunton.

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ASHTON SMITH is a junior print journalism and English double major from Charlotte Court House. She currently works as a news editor for The Breeze. After graduation, she plans to pursue a career as a writer for magazines or online journalism.

SAMANTHA ELCHENKO is a junior print journalism major from New Hope, Pa. She currently is the photography director of The Bluestone. After graduation, she plans to pursue a career working for a magazine in New York City.

KLINE’S DAIRY BAR
906 Greenville Ave.

Rich, decadent, homemade ice cream lures the residents of Staunton to Kline’s Dairy Bar no matter the season.

“Kline’s is so well known for our homemade ice cream,” says owner Kim Arehart. “You know it’s different from soft serve and from that hard, hand-dipped ice cream that you go into some shops to get. It’s hard to beat.”

Modeled after a beach boardwalk, the open, airy environment offers a glimpse of the longed-for “lazy days of summer,” even in the depths of winter. Walls on both sides of the barn-shaped building were removed and replaced with garage doors that open when weather permits.

Kline’s has been a booming business since 1943, when the Kline family opened its first stand in Harrisonburg. After the death of John Kline, his family passed on this ice cream legacy to the Arehart family. Years later, Kim Arehart decided to spread the sweetness around by opening her own branch in Staunton in 1997.

The biggest asset to this expanding family-owned business is the custard-style ice cream in vanilla, chocolate, strawberry and an assortment of flavors of the week. With a selection of a cup or waffle cone, the ice cream is delicious no matter what holds it. The service is quick and friendly, and with an easy-to-find location on Greenville Avenue, Kline’s ice cream fulfills the last stop on a day trip to Staunton.
Fort Defiance head football coach Dale Spitzer gives an inside look at what it’s like

HOLDING DOWN THE FORT

There wasn’t much to do outside the farm Dale Spitzer grew up on in New Hope, Va., so he began playing sports when he was 8 years old. He and his two brothers helped their father run the family farm, while their mother worked as a school teacher. The Spitzer family wasn’t rich and work on the farm wasn’t always easy, but Spitzer says it shaped him into the man he is today.

Spitzer’s father taught him not to take shortcuts because in the end, his name would be on the job. He still carries that principle onto the football field.

“My players know that when the game is over, their name is on it,” Spitzer says. “They better play hard enough to be able to walk proudly off the field.”

Spitzer enjoyed success in football and track, but it was during his time on the Fort Defiance High School basketball team that he learned one of many lessons that continue to serve him well in his 24th year as the head football coach at the very same school.

During his senior year, Spitzer and his teammates experienced former basketball coach Don Landes’ intimidating reputation for punishing lackluster performances.

After the Fort Defiance Indians
lost the first game of the season to Wilson County by one point, Spitzer says the team ran until the coach said they were tired.

"After the game, one guy asked me if I could stand another practice like the last one, because he didn’t think he could,” Spitzer says.

When the Indians lost the second game of the season by a larger margin, Landes burst into the locker room happily praising them. The players were more confused than scared.

That day, Landes taught Spitzer a valuable lesson by explaining that it didn’t matter that the team lost; what mattered was that they gave a winning effort.

At just about any level of competition, wins and losses determine the length of a coach’s career, which can make leading a team a very taxing profession.

Spitzer has seen the highs of his team being dubbed "the team of the '90s" by The Daily News-Record, and the lows of last year’s 1-9 season. He worries about more than his record, though.

Most of Spitzer’s stress comes from worrying about his players, according to his wife, Susan Spitzer, who coached basketball and tennis at Wilson High School.

“He sees how hard his players work, and he worries about them not getting enough credit for that unless they win,” she says.

Susan recalls with a chuckle the night Spitzer came home after keeping their son, Drew, who played quarterback for the Indians in 2003, in a game too long after he suffered a serious back injury. Spitzer walked in the door and nervously told her, “You can divorce me now if you want to.”

Susan says she didn’t get upset with her husband, even though she was worried for her son. She understands how dedicated Spitzer is to making sure that his players are growing as athletes and people, instead of worrying about the hype and criticism that often surround them.

“I tell all my players that I’ll never judge them on wins and losses. I judge them on the effort they give.”

DALE SPITZER
head football coach, Fort Defiance High School

After his team lost the final game of the 2007 season to Spotswood High School by 26 points, Spitzer’s dedication to molding respectable young men paid off. Despite a tumultuous 1-9 season, teammates did their best to keep everyone unified and confident instead of blaming each other.

As Spitzer paced the sidelines during the game with his arms folded across his chest, occasionally murmuring into the headset clamped around his ever-present Fort Defiance cap, he watched as his quarterback, Daniel “Lefty” Wright, threw a costly interception.

Spitzer didn’t scream. He didn’t slam his headset to the ground. As he towered over his quarterback on the sidelines, he simply explained exactly what he had done wrong and assured him that as long as he stayed confident, they were still in the game.

“He never rags on us,” Wright says of Spitzer. “He keeps us positive by always letting us know every week is a new week. He’s the best leader I know.”

Ironically, leadership is something Spitzer did not learn from his football coaches at the Staunton Military Academy.

“They coached from a very negative aspect,” Spitzer says. “In their eyes everything stunk and we were always horrible.”

The military academy coaches were verbally abusive to their players. Spitzer remembers how after many games, the coaches would berate the team with tirades such as, “If you can’t play any better than that, you should just quit,” and, “You don’t deserve to be on the field.”

“That’s just not what you want to hear as a young person,” Spitzer says.

Spitzer proved that he aims to shape his players from a positive point of view when his team lost 33-6 to formidable Robert E. Lee High School in October 2007. After the game, he gathered his team around him and instead of talking about how badly they had played, he was encouraging. He explained what the players had done wrong, assured
them they would fix the problems in practice and told them how proud he was of their effort.

“Good teams work hard and give everything they’ve got,” Spitzer says. “Isn’t that the real measure of success?”

Not all the lessons Spitzer learned at the military academy were negative, though. He attended the academy because he needed to improve his grades before going to college, especially in math. Though stronger students flew through their classes, the teachers always took the time to help Spitzer by standing at the board with him and slowly walking through problems step-by-step.

The teachers understood that there is no universal method of teaching and passed that knowledge to Spitzer, who now puts it into practice on the football field.

Last season, Spitzer began giving his football team quizzes because some of his players can study a playbook once and know it, while others need constant repetition before they can remember one play. Once a week, he assigns worksheets that show a formation and a play that may be called. The players must show where they line up in the formation and their particular assignment.

“Working with teenagers in class or on the field is a roller coaster,” Spitzer says. “It’s all about finding ways to make each kid learn.”

In 1974, Spitzer became a student at Madison College, now James Madison University, and majored in health and physical education.

“I couldn’t get into JMU today with what my grades were then,” Spitzer says. “There was an open spot on the football roster, and JMU gave precedence to students who were willing to commute because of how small the school was.”

Spitzer knew he was in trouble on the first day of practice when he walked onto the field and saw 120 prospective players, a stark contrast to the 35 that were on the roster back when he played wide receiver for Fort Defiance.

The number of players competing for 22 starting spots and Spitzer’s nagging shoulder and knee injuries persuaded him to quit the team before the season even began.

However, he still wanted to make sports part of his life, so as a senior he rejoined the football team as a student assistant. One of his duties was to run the scout team against defensive coordinator Elis Wisler’s first-team defense.

Spitzer says he learned a lot about creating game plans for opponents by asking Wisler why certain defenses worked well against different types of offenses. Those lessons still serve him well today, according to his peers.

“He is one of the best coaches in the area as far as creating schemes,” Spotswood head coach Eric Phillips says of Spitzer. “You never know what he’s going to do, but you can always expect his team to play clean and hard.”

After Spitzer graduated, he was offered a spot on JMU’s coaching staff as a graduate assistant. He considered the offer, especially since that is where most college coaches begin their careers, but Spitzer decided it was time to move on and establish his legacy at Fort Defiance.

“It wasn’t a hard choice,” Spitzer says. “My parents had sacrificed enough to send me to JMU in the first place.”

Spitzer went from a self-proclaimed typical high school jock who just scraped by academically to one of the longest-tenured head coaches in the central Shenandoah Valley. Along the way, he learned the real measure of success.

“If the worst thing they can say about me when I’m gone is that I didn’t win enough, then I’m successful,” he says.

RON COUNTS is a senior print journalism major with a minor in sports communications from Orange County. He works as a sports writer for The Daily News-Record and The Breeze. After graduation, he plans to write for a sports staff.

CRAIG HUTSON is a senior print journalism major from Danville. He is a staff photographer for The Breeze and for JMU’s Sports Media Services. After graduation, he wants to shoot sports for a newspaper or magazine and possibly start a wedding photography business.
Eleanor Roosevelt said to her husband, President Franklin Roosevelt, “You can rough it out in the wilderness of the Shenandoah Park, but I’m going to stay at the Mimslyn.”

The Mimslyn Inn where Eleanor stayed in Luray had fallen into disrepair by the time the Asam family discovered it in 2005. The ceiling was crumbling, paint was peeling and curtains had holes in them. There was mold in the rooms and the roof was leaking.

“If I checked in, I would’ve checked right back out,” says Christian Asam, son and co-partner of the new owners of the Mimslyn. The Asam family heard about the Mimslyn from the Alnutt family, their lifelong friends and frequent guests of the Bavarian Inn in Shepherdstown, W.Va. The Asams saw potential in the Mimslyn, and wanted to make it as lavish as the Bavarian Inn, which the Asams have owned for 31 years.

“It’s a beautiful shell and it’s sad that it
was so rundown,” Asam says. “[The community] wanted someone to save this centerpiece of Luray.”

Before the Mimslyn Inn existed, a Civil War hospital stood in its place. Construction of the Mimslyn began in 1929. The residents of Luray and employees of the Mimslyn have said that Civil War veterans, and even the Mims family itself, haunt the Mimslyn. The first floor is said to be haunted by Mr. Mims, and the second by Mrs. Mims. According to Jennifer Web, the dining room assistant manager, “People would hear pool table balls clank together and no one would be near them.”

The Mimslyn has been in the hands of six different owners since it opened in 1931. The first owners, Henry and Elizabeth Mims, turned the Mimslyn into a high-class establishment. “To come to dinner, all had to be in their ‘Sunday best,’” Web says. “It was very high society.”

With new hope for the Mimslyn, the Asams began the restoration; it closed in 2006 to undergo renovations. “They pretty much gutted it,” Web says. Instead of costing the predicted $2.3 million, the overall costs totaled almost $7 million. The plumbing and electric had to be redone, the heating and air conditioning were faulty and the telephones and wiring all had to be repaired.

“It was not a seamless project,” says Asam. “It took a long time to get done.”

Prior to the grand opening party on Dec. 8, 2007, “It felt like the ‘Extreme Home Makeover’ show,” Asam says. “We were doing final touch ups 20 minutes before the guests were arriving.”

The Mimslyn’s new look focuses on a sharp image with comfortable surroundings. Each guest room has a blanket stitched with the new Mimslyn logo to welcome guests. The bathroom toiletries are imported from England, and there are fresh bags of coffee ground locally in Luray.

There are still new additions planned for the Mimslyn. A spa and fitness center have been built, and an outdoor pool is expected to open in summer 2008. The Asams also built a Prohibition era-style pub, located on the lower floor of the Mimslyn, called The Speak Easy.

Luxury and friendly faces greet guests of the renovated Mimslyn. Weddings, parties and proms are celebrated in the Mimslyn, with Sunday brunch being the most popular among the residents of Luray. The menu varies each week, so guests can always try something new.

The Asams hope to draw customers from the Washington, D.C. area and Harrisonburg alike with their renovations. They want to preserve memories that locals have shared there, and create new ones as well.

“[We want] to continue to try to make the Mimslyn Inn a great place to stay,” Asam says. “This inn is the community center. That’s why it was important that it was saved.”

The Asam family is still receiving “thank you” letters from residents of Luray who can’t believe how grand the Mimslyn has become.

“It’s interesting, because it’s our business,” Asam says. “But it’s an added bonus that [we have] actually saved a place that was so special to people.”

Visit mimslyninn.com for more information.

AMY FISHER is a senior print journalism major from Newport News. After graduation, she plans to move to New York City to pursue her dream of writing for a magazine.

SUSAN SOMMERFELDT is a senior print journalism major and religion minor from Springfield. She was a staff photographer for The Breeze. After graduation, she plans to pursue a career in photography.
Nestled in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Acorn Hill Winery uses old-world techniques to produce the highest quality

FRUIT OF THE VINE

story by MICHELLE HABEL
photography by SAMANTHA ELCHENKO
A gravel road winds past a rickety old barn. An elaborate construction site stands to the right. Driving through the 40 acres of sprawling vineyard fields is a man surveying the grounds. His tractor reaches the edge of the road and with a smile and thick French accent he says, “Welcome.”

Nestled in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains about 30 miles north of Charlottesville, Acorn Hill Winery is the newest addition to Virginia’s acclaimed Monticello Wine Trail. Excitement is in the air as the winery’s team remains hard at work preparing for its opening to the public in August 2008. The team includes owners Jess and Sharon Sweely; the president and general manager, Marcie Siegel; the hospitality manager, Anita LeGault; and the friendly French vintner, Frantz Ventre.

“We all want to put a quality product out there,” Siegel says. “That’s why we’re all here and that’s why the team works so well together. Everybody’s very passionate about what they do.”

Five years ago, Sharon Sweely discovered the fields in Madison County, which would eventually become Acorn Hill Winery.

“I decided to go down there and look at the property, and she was right,” Sharon’s husband Jess says. “It was an absolutely beautiful piece of property with lots of possibilities.”

The Sweelys then struck a deal: Sharon could buy the land if Jess could grow grapes.

In addition, the couple owns an established 85-acre breeding and training horse farm and a 115-acre farm for young horses, located a few minutes down the road from the winery.

From meticulous research to visiting and talking with vintners from France, California and South Africa, Acorn Hill Winery was born.

The vintner and his fruit

Before relocating to Acorn Hill, Frantz Ventre was the vintner for several years at Jefferson Winery, located near Charlottesville. Ventre grew up in the Bordeaux wine region near St. Emilion, France, where he worked on his family’s vineyard. He received a master’s degree in oenology, the science and study of wine making, from the University of Bordeaux. Ventre brings to Acorn Hill his old-world knowledge of wine making.

“My job is to nurture the fruit and provide it with ideal conditions, so that I can make great wine,” Ventre says. “Don’t try to interfere too much, and you will produce good wine.”

This old-world style includes vigorously tending to the vines in the fields and delicately handling the fruit in the cellar. The idea behind the prodigious three-level production facility is one of gravity flow, rather than the use of a pump. Ventre says this gentler approach helps maintain the integrity of the fruit without compromising the quality.

Inside the production facility, every piece of machinery is new and top quality. On the top level, the vibrating hopper is used to gently sort through the grapes, removing stems, leaves and unripe berries. It is the only machine of its kind in the United States. The whole clusters of grapes for red wine

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1976, Virginia had only six wineries. By 2005, that number had increased to more than 100, producing approximately 762,000 gallons of wine a year.
“Our philosophy is to let the fruit speak for itself and not try to make it taste like it's from somewhere else.”

MARCIE SIEGEL
hospitality manager,
Acorn Hill Winery

Then move onto a conveyor belt to the destemming machine and are hoisted in bins to the facility’s second level, where they are left to ferment in gleaming stainless steel vats. On the third and final level, the wine is stored in French oak barrels in a dimly lit cave, ready to be sent to the bottling line when the time is right.

The lay of the land

The first vines were planted in 2004, which turned out to be an excellent harvest season for Acorn Hill. Today, vines have been planted across 40 acres of fields. Last year, around 10,000 cases were produced, and target production is anticipated to increase with each year. Siegel says they are hoping to produce 15,000 cases in August and 25,000 cases over the next few years.

The Acorn Hill Winery sits atop 295 acres, which has a unique history all its own. The property was one of the original land grants in Virginia during the mid-1700s. The historic barn at the entrance to the gravel road was built in 1867, and upon close inspection, one will find these roman numerals etched into the wood. Thus, the team decided to name its first Bordeaux-style blend “1867.”

According to Siegel, when the Sweelys bought the 295-acre property for their winery project, the people of Madison County were thrilled to know the land would stay in agriculture.

“The county has been really supportive of all of our efforts, and they're looking forward to us opening,” Siegel says. “We're glad to be a contributing member of the county.”

Satisfying the senses

The Acorn Hill team is patiently awaiting the day they will be able to swing open the doors to those seeking a unique mix of wine, food, art and music. Anita LeGault calls it “satisfying the senses.”

LeGault came on board the winery project after meeting Ventre through a mutual friend who was a French vintner in New York.

“My past is in food, wine and cooking, so I've always had that throughout my life,” says LeGault. “This is a wonderful project. There's so much we're going to be able to bring to the people seeking the wine country experience.”

The hospitality center at the winery is an elaborate structure designed to escort visitors on their journey through the joys of wine and wine making. Each facet of the center offers visitors an intimate and unique encounter featuring the beauty of the arts and wine.

“That's what is so brilliant about this building — it offers so many opportunities,” LeGault says.
“People come to wineries to taste the wine, but it is also to have an experience of wine country, and there’s a lot of different aspects to that. We think we are well-positioned to provide a lot of that. It’s very exciting.”

Acorn Hill Winery’s 2006 wines are just coming to market now. The three white wines that will be offered are a 2006 Pinot Gris, Viognier and Chardonnay. The three red wines that will be featured are a 2006 Merlot, Cabernet Franc and the “1867” Bordeaux-style blend.

“Our wines are about what does well in Virginia,” Siegel says. “Our philosophy is to let the fruit speak for itself and not try to make it taste like it’s from somewhere else.”

Siegel says there are some varieties of wine that do very well in central Virginia, including the Cabernet Franc and Viognier. Recently, Acorn Hill participated in two wine festivals, during which both of these wines were widely favored as two of the best.

In next year’s harvest, the Riesling and Vin Gris will also be showcased, both of which Siegel predicts will be favorites.

The winery is scheduled to open to the public in early August 2008, and will later have a grand opening in October to which the entire community will be invited. Siegel maintains Acorn Hill is not just another stop on the Monticello Wine Trail; it is a vineyard all its own: a focal point of wine culture.

“It’s really nice to see something come to closure, to be able to watch a building be built and to be able to see everybody’s efforts over the course of a year finished in a bottle,” Siegel says.

Visit acornhillwinery.com for more information about the winery.

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SAMANTHA ELCHENKO is a junior print journalism major from New Hope, Pa. She is currently the photography director of The Bluestone. After graduation, she plans to pursue a career working for a magazine in New York City.
The Old Schoolhouse Restaurant is currently owned by Rodney Hulse (pictured with his wife on page 39).
The drone of teachers lecturing, book pages rustling and muffled voices of students fill the hallways and classrooms of Stuarts Draft High School. The principal gets up from his desk to ring the school bell, indicating that school is done for the day. The gleaming wooden gymnasium floor is instantly filled with high school students, desperate for the freedom of the outdoors.

Now, 50 years later, the sounds of the old school have been replaced with those of a busy restaurant. The Old Schoolhouse Restaurant in Stuarts Draft has been in operation for 25 years. The building was built in the 1920s and has served as a high school, elementary school and middle school. Students moved out of the school in the late '70s, leaving the building vacant for 10 years until it was transformed into a restaurant.

The owners have done their best to maintain the original structure of the building. Upon entering the restaurant, customers step into the old gymnasium where the original wood flooring has
been meticulously preserved, telling the tales of great basketball games that were once played there. Customers can also choose to dine on the stage, where the white walls are now filled with nautical relics.

"We really tried to stick with the old school themes," says Wayne Flippin, the previous owner of the restaurant. "We didn't want to have the floors tiled up, taking away from the ambiance."

Before Flippin owned the building, the old school housed another restaurant called Patty's Pantry. The restaurant served one special a day, which normally consisted of meat, vegetables and dessert. It was open for less than a year before Flippin bought it in 1983.

A new tide

"I was just a young guy with a dream, and I thought that a seafood restaurant would be a great thing to open," Flippin says.

While he changed the restaurant from a luncheon to a seafood restaurant, he kept the same staff, including Audrey Stinnett. Stinnett continues to work at the restaurant, and has three children — two daughters and a son — who attended the school. She loves working at the Old Schoolhouse Restaurant not only because she loves to cook, but because she feels connected to the building.

"My daughter played basketball in the gym and I would come and watch her games," Stinnett says. "Now I cook here."

Flippin recently sold the restaurant to Rodney Hulse, who began working at the restaurant as a busboy at age 14. After working for eight years, he left to try his hand at construction but couldn't stay away.

"I approached him about two years ago and said that if he ever thought about selling the place I wanted the first bid," Hulse says. "I just enjoy the restaurant business."

Hulse decided to buy the restaurant last September and began working in November. Flippin's main concern was making the customers comfortable with the change, so both he and his wife stayed on to ease the transition.

"I wanted to make sure our customers knew we were OK with everything and that there weren't going to be many drastic changes," Flippin says. "I wanted them to fall in love with him the way they fell in love with me."

Family values

One aspect of the restaurant that really seems to please customers is its family-oriented atmosphere. Flippin says that he helped build a strong bond among the wait staff to create a positive, cohesive family unit.

"You have to get yourself in there and stop being a boss-boss and become a boss-worker," Flippin says. "Once they see that you are willing to do the work and that you are all in it together,
they are more productive.”

Not only does the wait staff act like family, many of its members are actually related. Flippin’s children all worked in the restaurant when they were younger, and the tradition has been passed on to Hulse’s relatives. Two of Hulse’s nieces and his nephew now work for him at the restaurant.

Crowd pleaser

According to Hulse, the restaurant will serve anywhere between 800 and 1,000 customers on a typical weekend. There is usually a line by 7 p.m., so those who do not wish to wait should plan to arrive earlier. Hulse says the big crowd pleaser is the seafood buffet as well as the steamed shrimp, crab legs and oysters.

“We really like the food here,” says Catherine Salcedo, a loyal customer of four years. “It’s the only reason we come to Stuarts Draft. It’s a really neat place and it reminds us of old schools that we have all been to.”

Open for dinner Thursday and Friday, 4 p.m. to 10 p.m., and Saturday, 3:30 p.m. to 10 p.m., The Old Schoolhouse Restaurant is also open for banquets and other events during weekdays. Former graduates of the old Stuarts Draft High School have chosen to have their reunions in the gymnasium.

Hulse does not want to change too much of the original restaurant. He does plan to knock down a wall or to create a bigger waiting room with better accommodations for customers. He also wants to turn one of the old classrooms into a gift shop, but he realizes these changes need to be treated with care.

“It’s scary in a way, because we want to put our own spin on things without changing it too much,” Hulse says.

Even with all the changes Hulse has in mind, there is one aspect he wouldn’t dream of changing — the bell in the old principal’s office. Every now and then, a child finds the button and pushes it. The familiar sound of a ringing school bell resonates through the halls to those eating in the old gymnasium.

The Old Schoolhouse Restaurant is located at 116 Draft Ave., Stuarts Draft, Va. (540) 337-2333. (©

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FOR NEARLY 20 YEARS, TWO WOMEN HAVE BEEN TRANSFORMING THEIR MISSION OF SAVING CHILDREN INTO THEIR

JOY OF LIFE

story by KRISTINA MORRIS
photography by SUSAN SOMMERFELDT

It all began when Twila Ressler saw a news story about a young mother, desperate and defeated, who threw her newborn child into a dumpster.

"I wept and I wept and I prayed," Ressler recalls. "And I thought, there has got to be some place for the desperate crowd where they don't feel any fear; there's got to be some place out there that will help them."

In 1990, with a giant leap of faith and a hunger to make a difference, Ressler and close friend Donna Garrett created that safe haven — and Joy of Life was born.

Joy of Life is a nonprofit foster home that licenses Ressler and Garrett as independent foster parents. Most of the children whom Ressler and Garrett take in come directly from broken and abusive families. The independent foster care license is a unique title that...
Lexie and her best friend, Joe Joe the horse. **Left**: Mick and Miguel paint a house for their guinea pig. **Middle**: Miguel finds joy in the swings by their home. **Top**: Ressler (left) and Garrett (right) pass the time with Mick and Wil.
only three organizations in Virginia hold, including Joy of Life.

Over the years, Ressler and Garrett have housed more than 30 children, and currently are foster mothers to seven. Of Ressler and Garrett’s charges, six of them may never go back to their original families; they will instead find hope and salvation within their new family.

“Our goal is not to take the kids, but to help families and really to protect the children,” Ressler says. “When parents really know they need help, hopefully they’ll reach out, but there are times when a family can never really do it. It becomes a court’s decision, but the point is never to separate the families. Our first interest is the kids.”

Building hope

Even though the children Ressler and Garrett shelter often come from abusive families, they believe that their efforts may help provide the children as much of a chance to succeed in life as those who are blessed with caring families.

“Life is so hard, you need people around you to lift you up and support you,” Ressler says. “If we can do this with these kids, when they get older and have their own families and have neighbors then they can be the kind of people who lift other people up.”

Rough times

Of the seven children, many have special needs that Ressler and Garrett must care for, including Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder, Tourette Syndrome and Reactive Attachment Disorder.

“The world tries to say that these kids are not as valuable as somebody who doesn’t have any disorders,” Ressler says. “But these kids are valuable. We look back at where they came from, and they are doing really well.”

Every Monday through Friday, Ressler and Garrett home school the children in the private school next to their house. The school is small for seven children, and is filled with out-of-date books and a few ’95 computers that are surprisingly still chugging along.

Because of the learning disabilities that many of the children struggle with, Ressler and Garrett have found that being home schooled has improved the children’s social and emotional aptitudes.

“Being at home with us all of the time and working together and learning together, and loving them through some of their real emotional challenges really does bring a sense of stability that the kids so desperately need,” Ressler says.

Many times the hardest part of being foster parents is not taking care of the children, but dealing with the parents. Over the years, Ressler and Garrett have received numerous threats from the parents of children they foster.

“Our priority is the kids and sometimes that makes the parents mad,” Ressler says. “Sometimes families are really dysfunctional, and a lot of them don’t know and aren’t used to kindness. They often think there’s something else we’re after; they think we’re out to get something out of this.”

Building a family

Ressler and Garrett are not only known around the Shenandoah Valley for fostering children; they have also

“These kids are valuable. We look back at where they came from, and they’re doing really well.”

TWILA RESSLER
founder, Joy of Life
gained a reputation for sheltering animals. Besides the seven children, Ressler and Garrett are moms to three horses, a goat, two sheep, four guinea pigs, a hamster, a snake, two dogs and six cats.

“The kids connect so well with the animals, especially when they're first here,” Ressler says. “You can connect with a pet much quicker than you can with a person. The animals are an important part of the family.”

Most days, the children find joy in simply riding the horses or playing with the guinea pigs. The animals eventually become faithful companions that the children so desperately need in the world.

“Joe Joe is one of the horses we have, and Mom lets me play with him every day,” says Lexie, a foster child. “He’s my best friend.”

**Gaining support**

As independent foster parents, Ressler and Garrett do not receive compensation from the government, but depend on food and monetary donations from the community. Although Joy of Life does receive some money from Social Security Income for the children’s disabilities, most of the donations and volunteers come from church and private individuals.

“When we started we felt strongly about never asking the parents for money,” Ressler says. “All sorts of different groups have come and joined with us. Sometimes it’s not financial help; it’s to come out and mow the lawn or fix the fence. It really makes a huge difference.”

Many of the churches that help Joy of Life say the feeling is mutual.

“People could assume that two single women trying to run a foster care would be too maxed out and overwhelmed to give back, but they do,” says Mike Souder, outreach pastor of Grace Covenant Church in Harrisonburg.

Recently Ressler, Garrett and the children volunteered to help with a 250-person theater production by the church. Several of the kids could be found backstage handling lights and setting up the sets.

“Twila and Donna think of the church as more than just a place to come,” Souder says. “They find that it’s a place to belong to, a place to participate and grow and love.”

The church not only helps Joy of Life financially, but emotionally too. At least once a month, church members volunteer to take care of the kids for a weekend, giving Ressler and Garrett some much-deserved rest.

Some male members have even acted as guardians and have taken the boys on mission trips, which allow the boys to experience a father-son relationship that Joy of Life cannot provide.

Although Grace Covenant Church is Joy of Life’s home church, Ressler and Garrett have continued to receive donations from different churches and denominations around the Shenandoah Valley.

“I believe it was James who said in the Bible that true religion is to look after widows and orphans in distress,” Souder says. “That is exactly what these women are doing. And they’re doing it selflessly, with big hearts.”

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