Wynott goat soap? Wynott farm produces organic, quality goat products for the Valley

Ripping mud & roaring metal
Jeepers club finds off-road fun in the Valley

A presidential project
The first Air Force One is being restored in Bridgewater
Dear reader,

You’re no stranger to the beauty of this valley — nestled between the Appalachian and Blue Ridge Mountains, the heart of the Shenandoah runs deep through all of our homes. People travel from all over the world to our homeland to explore its caverns, hike its trails, learn about its rich history and bask in this beautiful, unique region. Boasting rugged mountains and two thunderous rivers, the Valley isn’t only a testament to the power and beauty of nature, but also an example of a community that values kindness, hospitality and (occasionally) a frothy IPA.

We've worked hard to bring to you a good blend of stories that showcases this region. Inside the pages of Curio, you’ll find its people — a radio host whose laughter lights up her whole station, a veteran focused on helping other servicemen and women, a Bridgewater-based business that’s restoring the original Air Force One. You’ll also find activities, like six great trails to hike this summer, an exciting escape room and a board game that has skyrocketed as an Amazon best-seller. If you live in the Valley, we invite you into Curio to find out what you may already know: this region is a hidden gem full of wonderful things to explore. All of the stories in this publication, whether highlighting a business or depicting a new experience, are geared toward proving that this area of Virginia is as rich in culture as it is in love.

Thank you for reading this magazine. The Curio staff and I hope that you find the stories within engaging, and a satisfying answer to your curiosity.

Enjoy exploring,
Matt D'Angelo | Editor-in-chief

About Curio

Curio, a magazine highlighting Harrisonburg and its surrounding communities, is published by students in the Media Arts & Design program at James Madison University. Curio is a non-profit organization that was founded by Dr. David Wendelken in 1978 and is supported by the College of Arts and Letters and the School of Media Arts & Design. Subscriptions are not available.

On the cover

We decided to display the beautiful goats of Wynott Farm on this spring’s edition of Curio. The farm is run by Bob, Kathy and Derek Ramsay, all of whom make organic goat soap and various other products and sell them at local grocery stores and farmers markets. The goats were certainly not camera shy, as all were clamoring for attention when our photographer, James Allen, was at Wynott Farm. We decided to choose Wynott farm because of its representation of the valley as a whole — agriculture and environment play two important roles in life in the valley, and Wynott farm is just another local example of how the people in this region make it so special.

Special thanks to our contributing writers, Gillian Dukoff, Peter Cagno, Robyn Smith, Brie Ellison, Mike Dolzer and Ingrid Basheda and to our adviser, Brad Jenkins.
## Hiking in the Valley

Find out about the best six hikes the Valley has to offer.

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The Shenandoah Valley is home to hundreds of trails, and countless hikers have trekked through them and seen the sights they have to offer. Here are a few of our favorites:
Dark Hollow Falls
With a 1.4-mile round-trip hike, the shortest route to a waterfall in Shenandoah National Park, Dark Hollow Falls is a quick trip with a big payoff. The source of the waterfall, Hog Camp Branch, accompanies you the entire way, running parallel to the trail. Due to its quick elevation change, there are steps built into the trail that aid in traction and movement. Despite its short length, beware that the hike back is more strenuous than the hike down due to the incline.
Location: Milepost 51 on Skyline Drive in Shenandoah National Park.

Rose River Loop
This trail follows Hog Camp Branch and Rose River. At around 4 miles round trip, it’s a great way to see smaller, unnamed waterfalls and cascades along the trail. Similarly, there are spots along the river that provide great break and picnic spots. Be wary when the trail is wet, due to shifting mud and rocks.
Accessible from the Dark Hollow Falls Trail (milepost 51), Rose River Fire Road and Skyland Big Meadows Horse Trail in Shenandoah National Park.
Location: Milepost 51 on Skyline Drive in Shenandoah National Park.

Carvin Cove Hay Rock
This 8-mile hike has views of the Carvin Cove quarry before the final destination of Hay Rock, which like Dragon’s Tooth, is a magnificent rock formation that can be climbed. The hike itself gets steep and rocky, so vigilance and awareness is key, especially if the views catch one’s attention.
Access is available at the commuter parking area in Jefferson National Forest.
Location: Milepost 51 on Skyline Drive in Shenandoah National Park.

Dragon’s Tooth
This 5.7-mile hike is rather difficult because it requires hiking on a rocky section of the Appalachian Trail. The “tooth” is hard to miss as it rises out of the ground in a steep rock formation. It’s possible to climb but also dangerous. Views of the valleys below are available without reaching the top of the tooth.
Parking is available off of VA 311 at the Dragon’s Tooth parking lot in Jefferson National Forest.
Smooth. Juicy. Tactile.” These are some words that might come to mind when asked to describe a citrus fruit. For Sarah Hade, this trifecta is how she classifies her design style.

“Tactile, I want to be able to pick up my letters and squeeze them,” she said.

Hade’s growing repertoire of hand-lettered functional art in the form of menus and sandwich boards started at downtown Harrisonburg’s Bella Luna Wood-Fired Pizza, where she worked as a server while completing her degree in graphic design from JMU. Her signature style has caught the eye of locals and visitors alike, as she’s lent her hand to multiple storefronts. Most notably, Bella Luna’s sister restaurant, Bella Gelato, where she was an integral part in developing a friendly and familiar environment.

“It’s a healthy symbiotic relationship. I started my exploration into the type world when I was first asked to do the chalkboard signs.”

A large part of this symbiotic relationship Hade describes has resulted in a noticeable beautification of downtown Harrisonburg. Hade’s work has driven traffic into restaurants and shops, championing and empowering the small businesses many have come to love. Her work is not only an asset to communicate promotions and offerings, but a way to start conversation and develop a unique brand image.

“Whether people realize it or not, they are sensitive to the organic. A hand drawn sign offers personality, which reflects positively on the business,” Hade said.

JMU international student Tahli Moore of Sydney, Australia, notes that it makes the normally mundane experience of ordering more exciting.

“Tahli Moore, who graduated from JMU with a degree in graphic design, stands with one of her signs outside of Bella Luna.

Food

There are two ways to access the loop: the Big Hollow Trail and Heartbreak Trail. Either way will yield similar steep and rocky areas. There are several overlooks that provide scenic views of the horizon and forest below, including the Abbie Point overlook, which can be accessed by taking the Hone Quarry Mountain trail.

Loop can be accessed through the Hone Quarry Campground in George Washington National Forest.
Returning to flight

A
ir Force One may be one of the most recognizable planes in the sky, and the origin of that famous name is awaiting its return to glory in the Shenandoah Valley. The first plane to be called Air Force One, the Columbine II, was purchased by Dynamic Aviation of Bridgewater in March 2016. It is in the beginning of a three to five year process to restore the aircraft to its original condition.

"When I read this article that this airplane may possibly be scrapped out, I thought that was a piece of American history that absolutely, positively could not be discarded," said Karl Stoltzfus, the founder and chairman of Dynamic Aviation. Before they could get it back to Bridgewater, Dynamic Aviation hired a few mechanics to work on the plane near Tucson, Arizona, to make it airworthy for the almost 2,000-mile flight.

Dynamic Aviation of Bridgewater is focused on getting Dwight D. Eisenhower’s plane back in the sky. "It was mostly complete," Rod Moyer, the legacy aircraft manager at Dynamic Aviation, said. "It just really needed a good look-over." Moyer also remembers the day when Columbine II first touched down on Dynamic Aviation’s air strip. "It was a huge deal," Moyer said. "Lots of press, all the employees [were] out." Once the plane arrived at its new home in Bridgewater, Dynamic Aviation began the restoration process. "It’s a fairly complex airplane," said Gabe Heatwole, the legacy aircraft maintenance supervisor. "Probably the hardest part would be understanding the airplane well enough to manage the restoration of all the different systems."
In regard to Stoltzfus’ plans for the aircraft, Moyer said, “He’s a real stickler for detail, and he really wants it to be authentic as possible.”

While his attention to detail may be intense, Stoltzfus hopes that the hard work will be rewarded by the plane’s role in teaching young people about history.

“We want to be able to perhaps use it to be able to teach young people about history and geography,” Stoltzfus said. “The airplane flew all over the world.”

The age of the 80-year-old aircraft adds to the restoration’s complexity, since the mechanics at Dynamic Aviation typically work with modern aircraft.

Heatwole said he and the other mechanics restoring the plane have to do a lot of learning on-the-go. To do that, the mechanics use the aircraft’s many maintenance manuals.

“You’ve got several different airframe manuals,” Heatwole said. “You’ve got manuals for each of the systems.”

Heatwole and Moyer are both in charge of monitoring the progress of the restoration.

“Right now, we are in the removal phase,” Moyer said. “Then we’ll go through a major cleaning, and then a rebuild phase with repaired or replaced components, and then the interior.”

Even with six full-time mechanics working on it, Moyer thinks the restoration will take “close to 5 years.”

When the restoration is finished, Dynamic Aviation plans on displaying Columbine II at airshows across the country as a piece of aviation history.

“Once word gets out that this plane is restored and available, we’ll get lots of requests to bring it [to air shows],” Moyer said.

Stoltzfus, Moyer, Heatwole and the rest of the team restoring Columbine II are looking forward to finishing the restoration so the public can see Eisenhower’s ride in the sky, as he would have known it.

1. The Columbine II was used by Dwight D. Eisenhower and was the first Air Force One. The plane has traveled across the globe, the first by Force One, the plane has traveled across the globe.
2. The almost 80-year-old aircraft is being restored by Dynamic Aviation. The process will likely take between three and five years.

In each room, there are clues that a team must find. Teams are encouraged to tear the room apart in search of clues that will get them closer to freedom. The game calls upon riddles, word games, math equations and other brain teasers to help aid in your escape.

Co-owners, Beth Brown and Heather Olsen, completed their first escape room in early 2016.

“We travel a lot and we would always try and find the nearest escape room,” Brown said. “We thought it looked like a fun business to be a part of so we said, ‘Let’s do it.’”

Crack The Code Escape Room in Staunton, Virginia, is the newest interactive escape game in which teams are locked in a room filled with clues with only 60 minutes to find their way to freedom. Escape rooms are becoming increasingly popular, with thousands emerging all over the country.

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Crack The Code currently has three different rooms to choose from: Da Vinci’s Office, Bunker and Asylum.

STORY BY Gillian Dukoff
PHOTOS BY Julia Nelson
Brown and Olsen decided that Staunton was the perfect place to open up their first escape room. “We were fixated on downtown Staunton,” Brown said. “It’s such a unique and cool area with a ton of foot traffic from the different restaurants, breweries as well as the Stonewall Hotel. We have built-in customers here.”

The pair signed their lease last October and opened on Jan. 27, 2017. While some rooms follow a linear path, meaning that you must find one clue to discover the next clue, others are non-linear, meaning that any clue can be discovered at any time. Oftentimes, the latter is more challenging because there are several possible paths a team can take to escape. Our team struggled with the non-linear format; we found that there were so many clues to be found that it made it difficult to decipher which clue led to another clue and so on. Newcomers are encouraged to try either, but linear is probably a safer bet. Every team has an hour to discover the one clue that will help them escape.

Asylum is their newest room and was introduced to the public in February. “You need to change your themes to keep things fresh,” Brown said. “This allows for repeat customers to come back and find something new and exciting.” Brown and Olsen came up with themes on their own. They think of scenarios that would fit well into an escape room format and go from there when it comes to designing appropriate clues. Building an escape room is much like writing a story; an author comes up with a story idea and builds characters and plot points based on the story. Similarly, an escape room designer comes up with an idea for a room, and then develops clues and chooses props.

Simply designing each room can take hours because of the tinkering that ensues — when a customer messes with one aspect of the room, you open up the rest of the room to be altered with. “We design the rooms based on what we would like to experience as a customer,” Brown said. “Then we ask ourselves ‘Can I make this happen?’ What do I have to work with? Where do we go from there?’” Meghan Tocci, a senior communications studies major at JMU, has always loved escape rooms.

“The puzzles engage your brain and the hour time limit cranks up your adrenaline,” Tocci said. “Even if you don’t get out of the room, you end up laughing, having fun and feeling like a MacGyver-type genius.”

A common misconception of escape rooms is that they are claustrophobic and scary. Crack The Code definitely breaks down those misconceptions, as Brown and Olsen are always monitoring the game and communicating with team members while they’re in the room. If you’re lucky, they’ll even provide you with a couple clues if you get stuck.

According to the website, the different rooms have a 40 to 50 percent success rate, meaning the team escaped the room, you end up laughing, having fun and feeling like a MacGyver-type genius.”

- Meghan Tocci

Wynott Farm continues long-standing tradition of bringing quality goat products to the area

Bianca, Esther and Journey, three does at Wynott Farm, gave birth to seven kids eight hours ago. Now, in the late afternoon sun, the mini-Nubian goats contently chew their cud and walk around their birthing pen. The parents rarely acknowledge the kids screaming and hopping around, occasionally headbutting those they didn’t birth that come to feed.

Bianca, Esther and Journey, along with another mini-Nubian doe, a full-Nubian doe, two full-Nubian bucks and the seven new kids, make up Wynott Farm.

By the end of the summer, the Ramsays will have a new barn on their property, allowing them to improve and expand their production process.

“We’ll have a dedicated milking section in the barn, and a place to have milk storage,” Kathy said. “We’ll have electricity in the barn, so we’ll have freezers out there to store the milk, and we’ll have a dedicated, pretty large section for the goats and another for hay storage.”

Along with the goats, the Ramsays own two mini-Schnauzers, Zoe and Paco; two Karakachan herding dogs, Ethel and Lucy; and an assortment of chickens.

The Ramsays’ large, white farmhouse and guest cottage may be a new buy, but the history of Wynott Farm extends beyond the present day and location.

In 1967, Bob’s parents moved their family from Severna Park, Maryland, to Missouri, where they bought a 40-acre farm. “All their friends back east kept asking them, ‘Why did you move out to the country and buy a farm?’ And they kept finding themselves saying, ‘Why not?’” Bob said. “And so my dad . . . drew this little horse with glasses, and he put it on his truck and came up with that spelling, which is W-Y-N-O-T-T.”

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Resting on 23 acres in the mountains of Howardville, Virginia, Wynott Farm continues to hone its primary product: goat soap. Five and a half years ago, after Wynott was started as it’s known today, Bob and Kathy Ramsay — along with their son, Derek — are making a name for themselves, and their goats, in Virginia.

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After graduating from JMU in 1984, Bob entered the Navy for four years and was stationed at the Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, where he met Kathy — then attending nursing school at the University of Maryland, College Park. The pair married and moved to Harrisonburg. In 1997, with three kids — Derek, Nathan and Stephanie — they relocated to Crozet, Virginia.

Bob’s parents had bought an 18-acre plot of land, giving two to Bob and Kathy. Last spring, the Ramsays realized they were going to need more property.

“As to how we got started, I’d been to a sort of a farmers market one day and I saw somebody there who sold goat milk,” Bob said, laughing softly. “I left thinking, ‘I could do that and maybe make it more presentable.’ So I came home and kind of off-hand said, ‘Hey, you want to try making soap?’”

Thus, the “high school science experiments” began.

“We had these goats that were kind of like a replacement for our kids when our kids left, and we started milking them,” Kathy said. “After we had our first set of kids, we [found] that we had this glut of milk … and we couldn’t keep up.”

Kathy went online, extensively researching soap calculators that led her to the five key qualities of good soap: bubbliness, cleansing, conditioning, hardness and lather. She developed Wynott’s recipes, which address these characteristics.

With their first batch of 20 bars made, wrapped in burlap bags and labeled with a “very rudimentary” photo of one of their goats, they began the process of getting the Wynott name — an ode to Bob’s parents’ Missouri dream — in the community. Kathy told Bob to sell at least five bars at the Crozet Farmers Market.

“I remember leaving, thinking, ‘Wow, she really set the bar low, OK, well, maybe I could do that.’ And I sold nine that day,” Bob said as Kathy chuckles. “And I heard people talking about the Charlottesville City Market, and so I went down there, filled out an application to it and we got accepted into the market on a weekly basis.”

Wynott Farm has had its soaps in a dozen stores. Among them are The Cheese Shop in Staunton; the Charlottesville Whole Foods; Cranberry’s Grocery & Eatery in Staunton; and Grandma’s Pantry in the Shenandoah Heritage Market. Wynott’s next step? The Wegmans in Charlottesville, where its first order was delivered on April 4.

As the Ramsays begin their partnership with Wegmans, they’re content with keeping Wynott a family affair.

“It’s the idea man, Mom’s probably the ret of the group … and I’m just the dumb muscle,” Derek says.

Bob laughs, but agrees. Derek’s workshop takes up some of the outbuildings, so he lives in the guest cottage.

“We try to make [Derek] do all the heavy work,” Bob said. “Here’s the rules for the farm: I come up with all the projects and these two do them.”

With both Kathy and Bob working full-time jobs as a nurse and an auto insurance underwriter, and Derek’s blacksmithing business steadily growing, the family’s daily schedule is busy.

During milking season, Bob and Kathy rise at 5 a.m.

When they aren’t milking, they allow themselves an extra half-hour of sleep.

“So we get up in the morning, get ready for our other jobs, feed the animals, go to our other jobs, come home, milk, feed the animals and wrap soap,” Kathy said.

Evenings are reserved for store deliveries and soap wrapping, especially when Kathy’s stressed and behind on wrapping. As for making the actual soaps, she has it down to a science.

“To create the soap, we have our recipe that has the types of oils that we use, and each of the oils and butters has different characteristics once the soap is made,” Kathy said.

The Ramsays use any combination of cocoa butter, shea butter, olive oil, sunflower oil, rice-bran oil, coconut oil and essential oils to make the scents.

“We’ll combine that, and then we mix the goats’ milk and lye together,” Kathy continued. “And then you combine the two mixtures, blend it with a blender and pour it in a mold.”

Lye is an acidic solution of either sodium or potassium hydroxide. The first mold sits for 24 hours before its cut into logs. Included in this mold is draft, a by-product from the leftover barley that’s an effective exfoliant.

The logs then sit for another 24 hours before the Ramsays cut them into bars. The bars cure for about four to five weeks before they’re sold. Curing allows the soap to dry and harden while a chemical reaction eliminates the leftover lye.

“If you used the bar of soap right after it was made, right after we cut it into bars, it would probably wash away in a week,” Derek said.

Wynott’s goat soap is made by the Ramsays and is featured in several local stores and farmers markets in the Valley. The Ramsays love their goats.
Most people would be enraged if it took them seven hours to cover 8 miles in their car. However, one group of people enjoy doing exactly that as a weekend activity.

The NOVA Jeepers are a club of off-road enthusiasts who spend many weekends a year battling rocks, mud and steep gradients in an effort to optimize their smiles-per-gallon.

Their Jeeps sit high off the ground and resemble four-wheel drive gladiators, kitted out to do battle against all that Virginia’s trails, including the Flagpole Knob trail in Rockingham county, can throw at them.

"I don't have any kids, so she's almost my baby," said Nova Jeepers’ vice president Jeremy Long in regard to his Jeep. Long and other Jeepers hit the Potts Mountain Jeep Trail just outside of Covington, Virginia, for a full day of off-roading on what many of them called the most difficult public trail in Virginia.

The 8-mile trail took about seven hours to navigate. In those seven hours, the Jeepers had to crawl over sofa-sized rocks, drive trails pitched so heavily to the side that it felt as though the Jeep was going to tip over, and climb slopes so steep that the only thing visible in the windshield was the cloudless, blue sky above.

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-Jeremy Long

"You’ve got obstacles that you can’t go around," said Long. "I love the problem-solving aspect of it."

Even in purpose-built Jeeps, maneuvering through the obstacles on the trail requires precision, specifically in the line the driver uses.

"The line is just the path you want your tires to go on," said Alec Scheiber.

When drivers are navigating obstacles, other Jeeps will stand in front and spot for the driver because it’s impossible for drivers to see what’s under their front wheels.

"What makes you good at spotting is knowing where to put your wheels and stay off the gas," said Richard "Turkey Man" Graham, one of the ride’s leaders. "I’ve put a lot of Jeeps in places they thought they’d never go."

Along with spotting and driving technique, the Jeeps themselves play an important role in overcoming the obstacles. Tires from 32 to 40 inches, upgraded suspension, skid plates and winches, which are cables that pull the jeep when the tires can’t get traction, are required on a difficult trail like Potts Mountain. One of the Jeeper’s Jeeps had about $70,000 in aftermarket parts installed.

However, less difficult trails like Flagpole, just a few miles from Reddish Knob, can be done with fewer upgrades.

"Even a stock Jeep is quite capable," said Long.

The NOVA Jeepers use Flagpole as a way to introduce people to off-roading.

"We use it for our new members," said Long. "We kind of show them some things and at least give them a taste of going off-road."

"I think it’s really cool to see new people experience the things that I’ve experienced," said Graham. "Just the expressions on their face and the fun that they have, that’s what Jeepin’ means to me."

Club members love tearing through trails, which sometimes feature dense mud and splashing water. It’s not uncommon for group members’ Jeeps to be caked in dirt after an afternoon on the trails.
“Giving back to veterans, one yard at a time.”

That’s the maxim of Mission Mulch, a company based in Harrisonburg that donates $1 to the Wounded Warrior Project for every square yard of mulch sold. Founded by Jimmy Flynn in 2015, Mission Mulch is on pace to donate $8,000 this year, with hopes to increase that number in the future.

Flynn, a JMU (’10) alumnus, was inspired to donate to the Wounded Warrior Project after serving in the U.S. Coast Guard. During his senior year at JMU, Flynn enrolled in the Delayed Entry Program and was sent to Cape May, New Jersey, shortly after graduation.

Fast-forward five weeks of basic training and Flynn was sent to Marina del Rey, California, where he was stationed on the Halibut — a 91-foot Marine Protector-class coastal patrol boat. The main duties of the Halibut were search and rescue missions, and to patrol the waters for Mexican drug smugglers. Being a member of a small, 12-man crew was ideal training for Flynn.

“You learn so many more skills being on a small ship,” Flynn said. “You have to take on the roles of three people. It was very educational but also very demanding.”

What happened next in his journey ultimately became the impetus for Flynn’s passion to give back to veterans: a bloody altercation with Mexican drug smugglers.

There are two main ways drugs are smuggled by sea into the U.S. from Mexico: one is where the smugglers run their boat, called a panga, ashore, abandon it and bring the drugs in from the beach. The other way is when a panga is met by a second boat and the drugs are exchanged and smuggled in.

While Flynn initially experienced little action during his service, all that changed on the night of Dec. 2, 2012.
While on a routine patrol off the California coast, Flynn and the crew of the Halibut received an order to patrol the area near Port Hueneme when a surveillance aircraft spotted a suspicious boat.

The Halibut approached the boat, which Flynn noted had two 50-gallon fuel drums and was in an area with rough waters and poor fishing. The crew boarded the boat and discovered the boat was likely en route to pick up drugs. Following the fugitives’ apprehension, the Halibut was ordered to pursue another suspicious boat three miles away.

This is where things went south. Flynn was manning the Forward Looking Infrared Camera, a heat-sensing camera that allowed the Halibut to approach the enemy boat with no heat from their heads bobbing in the water,” Flynn said. “I saw a guy with no waist. He’d been blown up by an IED [improvised explosive device] and he was smiling.” Flynn said. “I thought, ‘If that guy is smiling, then I can too.’ That’s when my whole attitude started changing. I made the decision that when I get out of the service I’m going to do something to help the Wounded Warrior Project.”

Flynn notes the importance of giving back to veterans because they typically have a hard time assimilating back into civilian society.

“You go from a world where people are trying to kill you and come back to a world where people’s biggest concern is what kind of coffee they’re going to have,” Flynn said. “People stress about the little things and you really just feel like you can’t relate.”

Flynn also notes the reactivation difficulties are due in part to inefficiencies from the Veteran’s Association. Flynn’s father, Jim, agreed, noting that the Coast Guard and the VA didn’t help his son enough with his mental instability and “let him down in nearly every way imaginable.”

Flynn’s roommate at Walter Reed, Aaron Miller, said this is an unfortunate and common occurrence.

“Each veteran has a different experience with the VA,” Miller said. “I’m probably one of the only people I know that has had positive experiences with the VA.”

Flynn continues to see a civilian psychologist once a week, but disclosed that he stopped taking his five prescribed medicines “cold turkey.”

“The problem is they try to treat every different symptom with a pill, instead of trying to treat the root cause,” Flynn said.

Flynn plays with his dog, Turbo, a Border Collie mix, among in the mulch yard of his business. (Photo courtesy of Jimmy Flynn)

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Depending on who's looking, project-based housing in Harrisonburg is a sore reminder of the city's high homeless population. But for those who have no place else to go, they're a glimmer of hope. The duplexes, with their blue and beige siding, concrete porches and occasional lawn ornaments, are friendly. The families who live there are diverse. Some were homeless, some recently immigrated. Many don't speak English. They all look to succeed. There are bikes on porches and grills on patios. A well-loved playground is worn but clean. Of Harrisonburg's Housing and Urban Development office's 249 units, two cul-de-sacs are for families, one off Reservoir Street and the other off Kelley Street. Spotswood Elementary School is a couple hundred feet away from the Family Self Sufficiency program office, which, connected with HUD, supports families in public housing. Families keep their homes for five years. They learn English or get their GEDs, and save money in an escrow account every time their income increases. The Almashahedis are one of the many families who've recently immigrated to the U.S. Marwah Almashahedi is a refugee from Baghdad, Iraq. Her husband recently became a truck driver, causing a dramatic increase in their income and an early graduation from the FSS program. Before moving to the U.S., they lived in Jordan.

Lilly and Ronnie Corum live with their daughter off Kelley Street. Before that, they lived in their car. Ronnie, 58, lost his job in 2012, and soon after they were evicted. Lilly doubts their future would have been pleasant had they not moved into public housing. "I'd probably be dead," Lilly, 53, who's used an oxygen tank since 2010, said. "I remember when we got this house, I stood in the middle of the floor and cried because I couldn't believe it." Though these families have different journeys, these paths led them to the same place. Public housing isn't their final destination, but it's a shared step that's helped lead them to where they're meant to be.

Escaping War
Everyone's eyes were overflowing with tears at the airport in Iraq when Marwah Almashahedi said farewell to her family in 2011, for what seemed to be the last time. Her mother didn't want her to go — Almashahedi's youngest children were still in diapers, and her oldest hadn't started school yet. "My mom almost, like, dead from crying because she doesn't want us to go," Almashahedi said. "She's very, you know, the grandma — she has big heart."

The mother of four remembers her childhood in Baghdad, Iraq, fondly, as if "you could touch the sky." The taste of food, the way people interacted, the nightlife — everything was different. Though Almashahedi misses her family, she knows that even if she could return to Iraq, it would be different. She and her family moved to Jordan for two years — framed in her house is a picture of her oldest son, Yaseen, in a cap and gown; he'd just graduated kindergarten. The family moved to Harrisonburg in August 2013.

Little Hope
The Corums lost all of their possessions, as well as custody of their daughter, Tamara, for the second time within 10 years. Struggling at night to find a place to plug in Lily's oxygen tank, the uncertainty of whether or not they'd be able to meet their basic needs of survival was killing them. "It's not like you can just lay in your room and kick back," Michael Wong, HUD executive director, said. "It becomes an obsession when you're homeless trying to figure out what you're going to do or where you're going to stay." For two years, Ronnie and Lily lived in their car parked outside a Wal-Mart in Greene County, Virginia. Then one day, a pastor came by and knocked on their car window, leading them to public housing and changing their lives forever.
Hope for the Future
Once they arrived in Harrisonburg in 2013, Marwah Almashahedi’s oldest son, Yasser, was going into second grade. He couldn’t speak any English, and anxiety over making friends and being able to learn consumed him. He lost weight over the stress.

“I don’t want to go to school, Mom,” Marwah recounts him saying. “I can’t speak their language. I can’t like eating their food. I can’t understand the teacher. Please! I don’t want to go anymore.”

Because of her own uncertainties, Marwah struggled to explain how things would get better. In the FSS program, Sheets says that overcoming the language barrier is the most common goal for families. A majority speak Arabic, though some speak Spanish. Marwah said the first six months were the hardest. She could only communicate to non-Arabic speakers through body language.

She compares her adversity to a pencil being sharpened — when one faces a challenge, that’s how they become successful.

She practices every day, and works hard to communicate with her neighbors and friends. When she’s not in class, taking her children to school or doing other motherly duties, Marwah makes homemade pickles.

There are about a dozen garlicky pickles swimming in a plastic container in the dining room. Sitting on a shelf is a small box of chocolate. It’s meant for guests, but Marwah’s children still ask for some. They’re less enthusiastic about the pickles.

Since the Almashahedis are graduating early, they’re currently looking for a place to live independently. Next year, Marwah and her husband will apply for citizenship.

“America is my country now,” Marwah said. “We are not terrorists … Why we came here, because we have to save our children and get better future for them. Better life, because they are human, like you … We have hope.”

The Next Step
In their living room, which has a TV, a few couches and an olive green prayer rug, her children will often read or do homework. Mays, 6, loves to draw at the kitchen table.

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Gateway to Opportunity
Before public housing, the Corums moved into Mercy House on 2. High Street. Ronnie got a job at McDonalds as a fry cook, and walked about a mile and a half every day to the restaurant on Reservoir Street. The bright side, Ronnie said, was that it helped him lose weight.

The Corums moved to their current home in 2014. When they first moved in, they had no furniture. Ronnie and Lilly slept on an air mattress and Tamara slept on blankets next to them, not ready to sleep in her own bedroom yet.

Having their daughter back was a joy, but they had other issues to overcome. Tamara was diagnosed with dyslexia, which made reading a challenge. Now, at age 14, she reads at a fourth grade level, though Lilly says she’s improving fast. Next year, Tamara will be in high school.

As life moves on, the Corums find comfort. There’s a TV across from the leopard print couch, and two computers. Most of the furniture is from Aaron’s, a local furniture lease store. On their movie shelf, “The Land Before Time” is on prominent display — it’s Tamara’s favorite.

“And I love Legos,” Tamara said.

“She’s my Lego freak,” Lilly said. “She does not like boys. She thinks boys are yucky.”

JMU Landscaping hired Ronnie in September. He loves it, and will talk about edging grass for 15 minutes straight if someone’s listening.

“I’m an outside person,” Ronnie said. “I love working outside.”

Lilly considers herself and her family blessed. She has a place to lay her head down, Tamara’s down the hall. Ronnie enjoys his job and the family owns a working vehicle. She cooks dinner every night, and the kitchen is fairly stocked.

“If you come here for a cookout and you leave hungry, it’s your fault,” Ronnie said.

Though life is good, it’s not perfect. The Corums have faced problems in the cul-de-sac from others not keen on the rules.

“I love everybody ‘til you do me wrong,” Lilly said. “You do me wrong and I’m done. I’m a very nice person. I’ll give you food if you need food … Over here, [some people] take advantage of it.”

Wong said that only 5 percent of the participants break the rules. As his organization works toward eliminating homelessness, he recognizes the damage of eviction — the safety of the community outweighs that.

“People sometimes have to fail and hit the pavement and hit their face on the ground,” Wong said. “They have to recognize the importance of taking care of themselves.”

The Corums have about two years left in the program. When they graduate, they plan on putting a down payment on a house. Next year for Christmas, Tamara wants to give up her presents and encourage friends and family to donate to Mercy House and the HUD office instead.

“All we want to do is help somebody,” Ronnie said. “Because we know how it is to be homeless.”
For the love of the game

Since 1996, soccer in the Valley has created a community like no other. Ritter Clevenger, 40, has been playing since 2006 and now couldn’t imagine going without a season. His team “Udaman” is the second oldest in the league, and has held some great accomplishments through the years.

Harrisonburg is home to numerous soccer leagues that lend to all ages. During summer, the Shenandoah Valley Adult Soccer League takes flight. For $80 per player, you can find yourself a spot on a team. Ritter’s journey with SVAL started when his son Adam Clevenger expressed interest in gearing up for his high school season. “I hadn’t played the game in 16 years,” Ritter said. “When I found out that the league was 15 and up, it just made sense that we could play together.”

This league has given a father and son the opportunity to competitively play on a team together. With such a large age range, it attempts to provide growth in high school players by giving them the chance to play against more experienced players. “Being able to play with my dad was such a great experience,” Adam said. “We formed a team that was a mixture of my friends and his so the ages varied along with the nationalities.”

The encouragement that Adam received from Udaman has not only helped his game, but also gave him life-long friends. “Udaman has always been a pleasure,” Adam said. “If we are to win or lose it’s always a great time playing with them.”

The diversity in this league is what makes it my favorite,” said Ritter. “We have guys that don’t speak a lick of English yet we can communicate clearly through soccer because we all know the game.”

On Ritter’s team there are players from not only the Harrisonburg community, but from Kenya, Ghana, England, Mexico, Jordan and Spain. The team thrives off the friendliness and cohesion that its players bring to the field. Despite coaching themselves and not holding practices, they come out to play every Friday night on Eastern Mennonite University’s turf field.

Steven Tennyson the head of the Masters league and player speaks similarly about the strong community the league develops. “It’s great,” said Tennyson. “A lot of the teams have been playing in the league for a long time so there are a lot of friendly rivalries. At the end of the game we’re all friends and that’s what I appreciate most.”

Tennyson has spent the last five years helping the Master’s League grow and become as popular as it is today. He also plays on the oldest team in the league, The Boneheads.

“When I came on board five years ago the league was struggling,” Tennyson said. “We’ve changed our whole system from pen and paper to be online and it has done wonders for us.”

Within these soccer leagues teams are always looking for players. People can come out with a group of friends or even by themselves as a free agent.

“Getting everyone who wants to get involved together is the goal of SVAL and the Masters League,” Ritter said. 
Best-selling Valley game challenges players to speak using cheek retractors

Jasmine Matos, a sophomore at JMU, said that Watch Ya Mouth has become the No. 1 best-selling game on Amazon. With thousands of games sold worldwide, Watch Ya Mouth has earned its spot as the best-selling game on Amazon in three categories — Toys and Games, Launchpad and Card Games.

The creators Peter and Alison Denbigh, both JMU alumni, were watching “The Boss” when a scene showing the lead character, Michelle, came on. Sitting in Michelle’s office, Claire, played by Kristen Bell, tried to whiten Michelle’s teeth using a whitening pen. Michelle wore a cheek retractor in her mouth to help keep it open while Claire tried to work.

“She kept trying to talk,” Peter said. “It was really funny.”

It only took one scene from a movie to inspire what has become the No. 1 best-selling game on Amazon. For Peter and Alison, the definition of strange has changed since the start of this game. It was fulfilling for them to place their hand on the product and physically ship it out, but even more rewarding when customers would place videos and comments on social media.

“Kids laugh until they cry, grandparents losing their dentures, adults peeing their pants, marriage proposal, the list goes on,” Alison said. “It is the highlight of our day to watch these videos at the end of a hard working day.”

The game pieces were originally made in China due to time constraints, but are now produced overseas and domestically.

“We have a couple great partners that produce high-quality product and passed all safety checks,” Alison said. “We have moved some domestically to avoid air shipping during the holidays, the logistical ease and to support our country.”

The game is part of the Amazon Launchpad program, which helps startups tell their story, get discovered, build their brand and earn global customer trust.

“They hold our hand through the onboarding process, purchase order/shipping process, marketing, portals and all the many items a vendor must master with Amazon to be successful,” Alison said.

Watch Ya Mouth also has expansion packs and a phone app.

“The app has free in-app purchases, automatic scorekeeping and two to four teams with unlimited players available for both iPhone and Android phones. It contains all of the expansion packs along with some free seasonal expansion packs.”

“The game, a top seller for Target and Toys R Us, is also selling in Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom. "Overall, we’re extremely grateful for this opportunity — to do something that we enjoy, make countless people laugh and to ride the crazy startup rollercoaster of ups and downs," Peter said.

“Best-selling Valley game challenges players to speak using cheek retractors.”

“I played a lot of rounds and we couldn’t stop laughing,” Matos said.

While Matos recommends the game to anyone looking for a good laugh, some say that Watch Ya Mouth wouldn’t be their first pick.

Rachel Petty, a senior at JMU, says the game is "silly and entertaining," but that she prefers strategical games.

“If you’re into more serious, strategical games, I’d steer clear,” Petty said.

Although Watch Ya Mouth has become a global success, getting there was not easy. The Denbighs had difficulties getting funding early on.

In order to make enough money for their first production they had to start a Kickstarter campaign. Six hundred and seventy backers donated $27,586 to help bring Watch Ya Mouth to life.

“Traditional banks would not fund us because we had not been in business over a year and had no capital or assets,” Alison said. “We borrowed money from some friends and family, but still needed more to get us through the holidays.”

They resorted to invoice factoring financing, which has a higher interest rate. Invoice factoring financing allows a business to sell its invoices to a third party at a discount in exchange for cash without selling equity or taking on debt.

“We went as long as we could without it, but timed it where it was only needed for about 40 days, then were able to pay off quickly,” Alison said.

For a couple of months, the Denbighs were fulfilling website orders out of their basement. It became so demanding that they switched to Vector Industries out of Waynesboro to help fulfill their orders.

“Our families would come down during the weekends and some evenings to help make boxes,” Alison said.

The Denbighs did everything from inserting the product pieces, placing shipping labels and dropping the packages off at the post office.

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Downtown Harrisonburg restaurants have increased their dedication to serving locally-sourced food

**STORY BY**
Emma Bleznak

**PHOTOS BY**
Loren Probish

The trend toward eating and buying locally has been prominent in the Shenandoah Valley, however, the benefits are lesser known. Within a 5-mile radius of Harrisonburg are over a dozen restaurants and stores, which have become a crucial component of the downtown district. The palettes of the eateries feature a cornucopia of cuisine, with one important quality in common: a dedication to local ownership and, for a few, sourcing local ingredients. While eating locally sourced food has become a trend in recent years, many of Harrisonburg’s downtown restaurants have been ahead of the game, diving into locally sourced food forks first. As a result, employees have adapted to the relationships with local farmers who provide local ingredients.

“Locally sourcing ingredients ... keeps money in the local economy, creates relationships within the community and gives the restaurants a higher quality of healthy, fresh ingredients that they know exactly where they’re getting them from,” Josie Showalter, the Harrisonburg Farmers Market owner said. One employee turned restaurateur, Amanda Cannon, has had a front-row seat to the popularization of locally sourcing ingredients taking over downtown Harrisonburg. “My experiences have been illustrative to me about how lucky we are here in the Shenandoah Valley to have so many resources,” said Cannon. “Everyone from dairy farmers who then make their own cheeses to buffalo beef out of Lexington.”

Cannon is a past employee of five downtown restaurants. Currently, she owns FoodBarFood, a hotspot for “global comfort food” across from the Ice House on Bruce Street. Cannon’s journey from Joshua Wilton House employee to FoodBarFood owner began shortly after she graduated from James Madison University in 2002. Her friends encouraged her to apply to work at the Joshua Wilton House, a fine-dining establishment and inn on the corner of S Main and Campbell Street.

“Working there was really the foundation for my appreciation of the connection between farmers and food and the guest experience,” Cannon said. “It was the first time that I would see farmers knocking on the back door and talking to the chefs about what was in season.”

While working at the Joshua Wilton House by day and bartending at the Artful Dodger Coffeehouse & Cocktail Lounge by night, Cannon was offered a manager position at Clementine’s Cafe. The promotion came at a pivotal point for Cannon’s journey from Joshua Wilton House employee to FoodBarFood owner. The promotion came at a pivotal point for Cannon’s journey from Joshua Wilton House employee to FoodBarFood owner. The promotion came at a pivotal point for Cannon’s journey from Joshua Wilton House employee to FoodBarFood owner.

Among the local farmers who contributed to this growth were those who presented their products at the Harrisonburg Farmer’s Market. Showalter has noticed the shift as well. “When we started the market in 2007, it was a lot smaller ... around 2012 I noticed the boom in desire for local ingredients from restaurants,” said Showalter. “It was phenomenal.”

After four years at Clementine’s cafe, Cannon was hired as a general manager at Local Grill & Chop House, a grill-centric eatery in Harrisonburg’s historically renovated City Produce Exchange building.

“From the beginning at FoodBarFood, one of the main things we did was go to the Harrisonburg farmers market and introduce ourselves, and talk with vendors and start building those relationships,” Cannon said.

A stand at the Harrisonburg Farmers Market features seasonal produce.

Their dedication is supplying the community with the best local produce and products the Shenandoah Valley has to offer. Cannon referred to her time at Local Chop & Grill House as “invaluable” in educating her on utilizing locally sourced products and developing relationships in the Valley. This skillset became important in 2014 when Amanda and her business partner, Jeff Minnich, opened FoodBarFood. “It was a continuation of the relationships I’d seen at the Harrisonburg Farmer’s Market. Showalter has noticed the shift as well.

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While working at the Joshua Wilton House by day and bartending at the Artful Dodger Coffeehouse & Cocktail Lounge by night, Cannon was offered a manager position at Clementine’s Cafe. The promotion came at a pivotal point for downtown Harrisonburg restaurants, as they began to utilize local breweries and local farmers.

“Among these benefits, Cannon says the connections she’s made in the community are the most invaluable. “Being a part of downtown Harrisonburg as it has grown and developed is really rewarding ... everyone is supportive of each other and recognizes that a rising tide floats all boats.”

The trend toward eating and buying locally has been prominent in the Shenandoah Valley, however, the benefits are lesser known.
Beauty can be found in unusual places. For residents of downtown Harrisonburg, one should look no further than an airstream van.

She poured the sea salt mixture into a glass bowl. She stirred into the mix dried lavender for relaxation; orange peel powder for a healthy skin tone; licorice powder for a pink color; green tea powder full of antioxidants; frankincense oil for hydrating skin; and rose petals for decoration. Irina Dovganetsky, the 32-year-old owner of withSimplicity, scooped the make-your-own body scrub back into its container and finalized it with a dried butterfly pea flower on top.

Irina hatched the idea for withSimplicity in 2014 and opened the downtown Harrisonburg store in August of 2016. The business makes non-toxic, natural products such as lotions, makeup and candles.

Irina learned to love homegrown, natural products at a young age due to the farmland and limited supermarkets in Krymsk, Russia. Her family had a plentiful garden of plants from cucumbers and cherries to herbs and garlic.

“Our mom used a lot of home remedies and that’s where a lot of herb knowledge comes from,” Alesya, Irina’s sister, said in an email.

In Russia, Irina and her three younger siblings spent their days playing outside, gardening and canning tomatoes and potatoes. Alesya remembers going to use the bathroom outside one night as a child. On her way back inside, she decided to snack on some peas from the garden.

“It was definitely a different lifestyle,” Irina said.

When her parents told her at 12 years old that they were moving to America, she imagined that life would be like the soap opera “Santa Barbara,” found on channel two out of 10 on her TV. The dazzling Christmas lights in the “Home Alone” movies amazed her.

Although Irina has since gone back to the basics with creating organic, handmade products, she was originally amazed by the many convenient stores with pre-packaged foods. Before they moved, Irina heard from her relatives in Harrisonburg and married him in 2002, at age 18.

“I was like, ‘Oh my goodness, I can’t wait for ‘til I have a snack on some peas from the garden.'”

When her parents told her at 12 years old that they were moving to America, she imagined that life would be like the soap opera “Santa Barbara,” found on channel two out of 10 on her TV. The dazzling Christmas lights in the “Home Alone” movies amazed her.

“I was nervous about that idea because usually when she has an idea, she usually goes for it,” Andrey said.

The couple’s plan A was to open the store on South Main Street, but because there was nothing available at the moment they decided to create their own space. Irina believes that downtown Harrisonburg suits the company well because of its young culture of health-aware students.

With their ingenuity of creating their own space, though, the couple faced a bit of a challenge: the airstream trailer. It was built in 1975 and Andrey had never worked on this kind of project before. They were unsure of what the outcome would be, but he successfully refurbished the inside and out, including building the displays and 40 hours of polishing.

Today, the quaint, metal trailer is parked in a downtown Harrisonburg parking lot. While crouching through the doorway, the fresh smell of lavender, ported succulent plants and Irina’s Russian accent envelop the space.

Andrey and their kids support Irina and fully embrace the family-owned aspect, like shrink wrapping mascaras and labeling products together.

“My wife's happy; it’s her thing,” Andrey said. “That’s my favorite thing about it.”

Having experienced two different ways of life, Irina reminds her children not to take things for granted, like the convenience of having supermarkets and pre-packaged foods.

“I tell them that they need to appreciate stuff, you know.”

“One of the first products she tested was lip balm. After that, she experimented with bath products like body creams and scrubs then skin care and makeup.

Irina finds the creative, experimental process to be exciting, like researching the benefits of several oils and butters. She gradually developed formulas that she now follows to make the products consistent every time.

Originally, though, this process was trial and error. Figuring out the right consistency for her eyeliner was tough; some tests were too waxy, too temporary or not smooth enough. After discovering that the ingredients needed were Indian wood charcoal and a drop of water before being applied, she says that she “can’t imagine using any other form of eyeliner.”

She also learned from research that frankincense and myrrh are used for discoloration under the eye, rosemary is for tightening the skin and red raspberry seed is for sun protection.

“I’ve seen a lot of change in natural living in Irina when she had her kids and trying to be extremely careful about products that she used on them,” Alesya said.

Out of her 35 products, one of the most popular is the liquid foundation; it’s Aloe based and comes in five different shades.

When Irina realized that she could turn this hobby into a career, her friend encouraged her to start selling products on Etsy. From there, she devised the idea of making it a full business.

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“Whenever you become a mom, you kind of go through the phase of detoxifying your body,” Irina said.

She was paranoid about what kinds of toxins her kids would ingest, including her makeup when her kids would try to bite her chin while teething.

“So, do I want kisses from my kids, or do I want to be worried about what’s getting on them?” Irina said.

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When Irina realized that she could turn this hobby into a career, her friend encouraged her to start selling products on Etsy. From there, she devised the idea of making it a full business.

“I was nervous about that idea because usually when she has an idea, she usually goes for it,” Andrey said.

The couple’s plan A was to open the store on South Main Street, but because there was nothing available at the moment they decided to create their own space. Irina believes that downtown Harrisonburg suits the company well because of its young culture of health-aware students.

With their ingenuity of creating their own space, though, the couple faced a bit of a challenge: the airstream trailer. It was built in 1975 and Andrey had never worked on this kind of project before. They were unsure of what the outcome would be, but he successfully refurbished the inside and out, including building the displays and 40 hours of polishing.

Today, the quaint, metal trailer is parked in a downtown Harrisonburg parking lot. While crouching through the doorway, the fresh smell of lavender, ported succulent plants and Irina’s Russian accent envelop the space.

Andrey and their kids support Irina and fully embrace the family-owned aspect, like shrink wrapping mascaras and labeling products together.

“My wife's happy; it’s her thing,” Andrey said. “That’s my favorite thing about it.”

Having experienced two different ways of life, Irina reminds her children not to take things for granted, like the convenience of having supermarkets and pre-packaged foods.

“I tell them that they need to appreciate stuff, you know.”

“Whenever you become a mom, you kind of go through the phase of detoxifying your body,” Irina said.

She was paranoid about what kinds of toxins her kids would ingest, including her makeup when her kids would try to bite her chin while teething.

“So, do I want kisses from my kids, or do I want to be worried about what’s getting on them?” Irina said.

One of the first products she tested was lip balm. After that, she experimented with bath products like body creams and scrubs then skin care and makeup.

Irina finds the creative, experimental process to be exciting, like researching the benefits of several oils and butters. She gradually developed formulas that she now follows to make the products consistent every time.

Originally, though, this process was trial and error. Figuring out the right consistency for her eyeliner was tough; some tests were too waxy, too temporary or not smooth enough. After discovering that the ingredients needed were Indian wood charcoal and a drop of water before being applied, she says that she “can’t imagine using any other form of eyeliner.”

She also learned from research that frankincense and myrrh are used for discoloration under the eye, rosemary is for tightening the skin and red raspberry seed is for sun protection.

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“I tell them that they need to appreciate stuff, you know."
"Q101," she says in a friendly voice into the mic. Her greeting is met with silence, followed by a dial tone.

“That happens a lot,” she said, laughing. Brandy Lindsey, 31, can be heard throughout the Valley as the drive-time host of Q101, Harrisonburg’s radio station that plays the top pop songs. Known as “Drive Home with Brandy,” her show airs weekdays from 3-7 p.m. and from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Sundays.

Even though she’s only on air at these times, Lindsey still works a 40-hour week at the station in addition to her six-hour Sunday show.

Although Lindsey works often, and not for a ton of money, she doesn’t regret becoming a radio personality. “I’ve always thought that if I’m going to pay tons of money in student loans, then I might as well do something that I enjoy doing so it’s worth it,” Lindsey said.

Lindsey, originally from Virginia Beach, Virginia, stumbled upon radio almost by accident. As a freshman at Radford University, she went to all the tables at the student organization night before landing at the radio club. She stayed with the club for all four years, and hasn’t left radio since.

“I didn’t think when I joined the radio club at Radford that it was going to turn into a career,” Lindsey said.

After graduating from Radford in 2008, Lindsey was living with her parents and needed to find a job. Hoping to work in media, she applied to a news station and a radio station. That radio station, Z104 in Norfolk, became her home for the next three years. She also worked at an ABC store, but ended up dropping that to fully engross herself in the station, completing every task thrown her way.

In December 2011, Lindsey jumped from Norfolk to the ‘Burg, holding the position she has now.

In addition to being a host, Lindsey is the assistant program director and the music director for the station. By balancing these roles, she’s been noticed by her colleagues. “Her attitude and work ethic is great,” said Steve Davis, the vice president and general manager of Harrisonburg Radio Group.

Aside from her work, Lindsey is also known as the comedic relief in the station. “Not crossing the line, but saying something that no one else would say in that moment. That’s Brandy,” Ruppel said.

Every time a memo comes out announcing someone leaving the company, everyone will pour their hearts out about how much they’ll miss that person, while Lindsey will respond to the email by saying “Who?” or “They’re still here?”

“It’s a common schtick that you can always count on her for that,” Ruppel said. “Like a lot of people in this business, she wants to be liked, she wants to be loved, and the idea that someone doesn’t feel that way about her really, really would hurt her feelings.”

That huge heart is shown through Lindsey’s charity work, most notably with Bowl’ for Kids’ Sake, a bowling fundraiser for the Harrisonburg-Rockingham County chapter of Big Brothers Big Sisters.

Community involvement is important to Lindsey. When she’s not on the air or volunteering, Brandy’s passions include singing at Ruby’s open mic nights and binge watching “The Office.” She also loves going downtown to the bars. “Alcohol is fun,” said Lindsey, who lists Capital Ale House and Golden Pony as two of her favorite spots.

Despite her enjoyment of the bar scene, she does at times get recognized when she goes out, but usually not until she talks.

“The weirdest part is people treat you like you’re a celebrity,” Lindsey said. “I’m like, ‘No, I’m not Justin Timberlake, but if you think I’m a celebrity feel free to buy me a drink.’”

Lindsey even had a woman avoid her at a Christmas party because she was too “starstruck” to talk to her. She’s also had fans tell her about how they were surprised by her physical appearance, saying things such as “I thought you were taller” or “Don’t take this the wrong way, but I thought you were white.” Lindsey’s not sure how people can make assumptions about her appearance based on her voice, but she likes the interactions nonetheless because she enjoys being a part of people’s daily lives.

She just has one thing to say to any of her listeners who want to know more about her. “I’m single, and if any of their wealthy sons would like a wife, I am here.”