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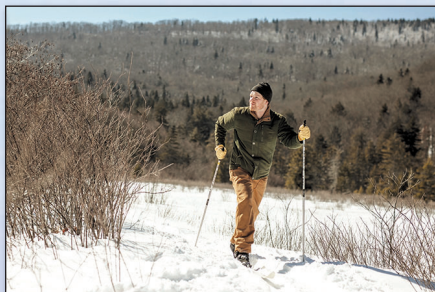
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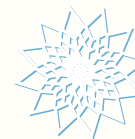
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Best local and regional talent at Opry Night 2024

Pocahontas County Opera House is thrilled to announce its highly anticipated annual Opry Night, scheduled for February 17, 2024, at 7:30 p.m. The evening is set to feature the finest local and regional talent in old-time music as they recreate beloved favorites with unique twists.

Leading the dynamic ensemble are locals Mike and Mary Sue Burns, revered musicians hailing from Pocahontas County, and members of the popular band Juanita Fireball and the Continental Drifters.

Joining them on the Opera House stage will be the music duo of Rick and Joanne Davidson, originating from Lewisville, North Carolina. With a rich history spanning several old-time mountain music bands, they currently share the stage as part of the group Appalachian Thunder.

Also gracing the Opry Night line-up are respected musical partners Andy and Toni Williams.



Photo courtesy of Kurt Schachner
Marlinton residents Mike and Mary Sue Burns have been playing old-time music together for years –as themselves and as Juanita and Lulu in Juanita Fireball and the Continental Drifters.

With roots dating back to The Plank Road String Band and the New Plank Road, they continue to enliven the music scene from their home base in Lexington, Virginia.

Rounding out this assembly of talent is Chris McGrath, a talented old-time fiddle and banjo performer who, after perfect-

ing his craft in New England and Ireland, has made significant contributions to the music community of Virginia.

This group of talented musicians, who have shared stages at numerous festival sessions, will, for the first time, come together as a single ensemble on the Pocahontas

County Opera House stage. Adding a new note to our Opry Night tradition, the evening promises to be an unforgettable display of regional talent and the very best of Old-Time Music.

The Pocahontas Opera House believes in making music accessible for all, which is why admission to

the Opera House performance is affordably priced at just \$10 for adults, and children, ages 17 and younger, can enjoy the performance free of charge.

Tickets can be purchased at the 4th Avenue Gallery in Marlinton, online via pocahontasoperahouse.org or at the door the night of the performance.

The Opera House Performance Series is made possible through the generous financial support of a grant from the West Virginia Department of Arts, Culture and History, in collaboration with the West Virginia Commission on the Arts. Additional backing comes from Pocahontas County Dramas, Fairs and Festivals, and the Pocahontas County

Convention and Visitors Bureau, emphasizing the cultural significance of this community event.

Emphasizing inclusivity and a family-friendly atmosphere, we ensure accessibility for disabled individuals at our performances, with special accommodations available upon request. Seats can be secured in advance via our official website or at the door on the performance day, following a first-come, first-served seating arrangement.

Don't miss this opportunity to join us for an unforgettable night of Old-Time Music. With the heart-warming harmonies, excellent collaboration, and unrivaled local talent to be showcased, we promise you an experience to remember.

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Cover: A skier catches some air at one of the terrain parks at Snowshoe Mountain Resort. There are four terrain parks on the mountain – Progression, Evolution, Mountaineer and Timberjack. Photo courtesy of Kurtis Schachner, Snowshoe Digital Media Producer

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Silver Creek ~ 40 years of family-friendly fun

Suzanne Stewart
Staff Writer

1983

started with a bang. The first day of the year was the completion date of the migration of the ARPANAET to TCP/IP – the beginning of the true Internet. Thirteen days into the year, *The Pocahontas Times* reported the announcement of a new ski resort – Silver Creek – which was planned to be in operation the following winter.

John Kruse, president of American Resorts Services, of Columbia, South Carolina, was the project developer, who said the resort was set to give some competition to Snowshoe

Mountain Resort, which opened a decade earlier.

The initial lodge that was to open the same year was just the beginning. The nine-story building was to have wings built on to it and along with the ski slopes and lifts, the resort was to boast an indoor-outdoor pool, indoor ice skating rink, 18-hole golf course, tennis courts, horse stables, riding and hiking trails, playgrounds and game rooms.

Construction began in September and in just 90 days, the lodge was built and ready for dedication.

On December 19, 1983, the resort was dedicated, with Kruse presiding over the grand opening and then-Governor Jay Rockefeller in attendance.

As reported in *The Poc-*



An aerial view of Silver Creek Resort shows the expansive lodge and snow covered terrain.

Photo courtesy of Kurtis Schachner

ahontas Times on December 22, 1983, “Governor Rockefeller welcomed the new resort to the growing West Virginia ski industry, saying we have over

300,000 skiers compared to a few thousand only a few years back. Tourism is the fastest growing industry in the state, a \$1.8 billion business. He pledged

help in training programs and all the support he could give to this promising half-billion dollar investment in excellence.”

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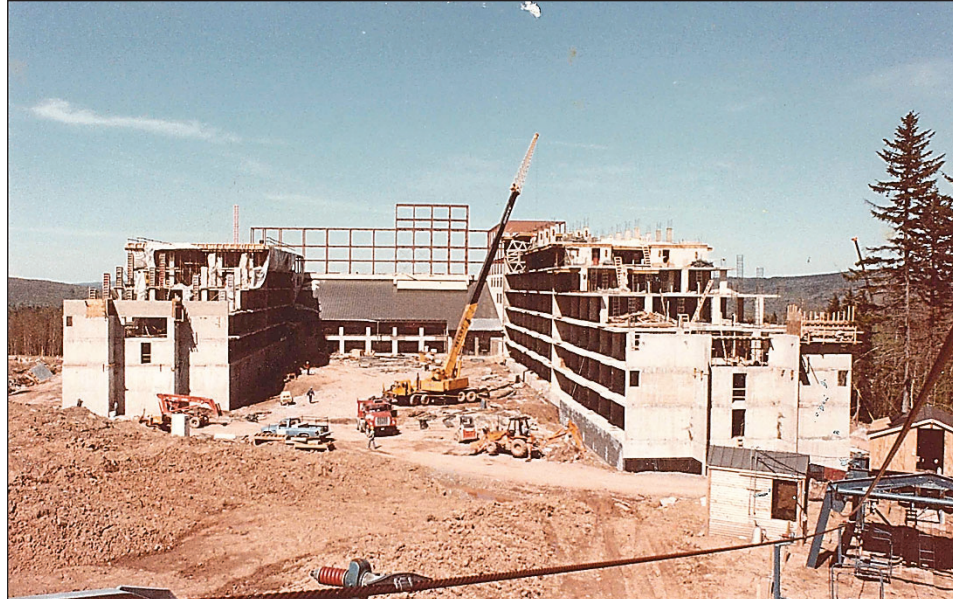


Photo courtesy of Dave Dragan

A view of the construction of Silver Creek Resort lodge in the early 80s. The photo was taken looking at the lodge from the current tubing hill.

SILVER from pg 5

The resort opened that day with the core main building, ten slopes and three lifts in operation.

Again, the plan was to expand, but over the years, plans changed.

The resort changed hands several times. It was initially operated by Quality Hotels and Resorts, but in 1993, Tokyo Tower Development Company purchased the resort. At the time, the Japanese company was also operating Snowshoe.

Silver Creek still operated as a separate entity until 1999. Snowshoe and Silver Creek were both bought by Intrawest in 1995 and operations were combined four years later.

During the resort's 30th anniversary, several members of the Homeowners Association shared the history of the resort as well as their personal histories there.

"The investors bought this property to compete with Snowshoe," resort resident David Dragan said. "They planned a whole entity – a village with shops, a golf course, tennis courts. There were

supposed to be additional wings built. Quite frankly, this was long before Intrawest brought the 'village' concept here. Local developers had that vision of creating a village here at Silver Creek. Then they lost all their funding." While the building never received its wings, the resort did get some



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additions, including more slopes and ski lifts, tubing hill and terrain park.

"Intrawest put in the tubing hill," Dragan said. "The Ballhooter upgrade [at Snowshoe] is what resulted in Cub Run being built here and the quad that's here now is the old Ballhooter lift."

Along with the Coca Cola Tubing Hill with five planes for tubing, the resort boasts 18 trails, six ski lifts, Kid's World and three mountaineer parks.

Silver Creek is also home to the only night

skiing on the mountain, with 12 trails open for starlit ventures.

In the lodge, visitors can enjoy meals at The Bear's Den during ski season and The Locker Room Sports Bar year round. There is also retail shopping on the ground floor of the lodge.

Adjacent to the lodge is the Adaptive Sports Program, which was founded by Dave Begg in 1983. The program, now directed by Carol Woody

after Begg's passing in 2018, works with individ-

uals with disabilities who wish to ski and mountain bike at the resort.

In 2017, Silver Creek and Snowshoe were purchased by Alterra Mountain Company and continue to operate together.

After 40 years of operation, the resort has seen a lot – and survived it all with the help of its people and its family-oriented appeal.

Dragan recently reflected on the longevity of

See **SILVER**, page 7

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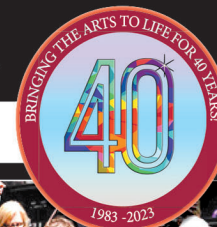
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SILVER CREEK TO PG 6

the resort and said it remains a place for families to enjoy the winter season together.

"First off, there are some original owners who have been there since day one, and they still own the unit," he said. "The other thing that comes to mind is it has a family atmosphere. I think that's one of the things - generation after generation is there. It's always been a great place for kids to learn to ski. And now, they're

bringing their kids."

Dragan knows from experience. In the mid 80s, he brought his daughters to Silver Creek to learn to ski and now his grandchildren come to the same place for the same reason. "At Silver Creek, you can turn your kids loose and no matter what chair they take back to the top of the mountain, they're going to end up at the lodge," he said. "It's that family atmosphere."

Even though some of the original plans for the resort were permanently

scrapped, the Homeowners Association is always looking at ways to upgrade. The newest idea is to take a portion of the parking lot and build an outdoor ice skating rink.

Who knows what may happen in the next ten years. One thing is for sure, the resort will continue to be a family-friendly getaway for those who love the outdoors and adventure.

For more information on Silver Creek Resort and its programs, visit silvercreekwv.net

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The Hammons Family, presently of Pocahontas County

By Henry Mitchell
 Reprinted from the *Washington Post*,
 September 18, 1973
The Pocahontas Times,
 September 20, 1973

“Now to get through this world in one piece and to keep up with things rightly, you have to do right smart talking, and that’s a fact. And if you’re going to do your share of the talking, and telling the stories about the old times and singing some, for the good of the lungs, well, there isn’t all that much time for anything else to speak of.”

Thus, it happens that for the past two centuries the Hammons family, in Pocahontas County, has kept good talk and good tunes alive, though as a fellow from the Library of Congress says, they haven’t entered all that much into “the cash economy” of the nation.

And who knows but what the Republic would be in better shape if the cash economy had attracted fewer money grubbers, thieves and poltroons along the way.

Be that as it may, the

Hammonses are still singing and telling stories in the mountains and this week the Library of Congress is making available its two-disc album, “The Hammons Family.”

What makes it different from the more usual recording of somebody banging away at “The Twa Corbies” is that the Hammonses are treated as more important than their art, and, in fact, the real subject is not folk music but (as the subtitle plainly says) “The Hammons Family – A Study of a West Virginia Family’s Traditions.”

It does not do to approach the album with a lot of preconceived notions about mountain folk speaking Middle English, and rooted for three centuries to some woody backwater.

The Hammonses are seminomadic, rarely staying in one place even for one generation. Their history begins from the point they choose it to begin – about 1800, when the family moved into West Virginia from Kentucky (earlier from Tennessee, and earlier yet from Southside Virginia.)

Their oldest family sto-

ries point back to Kentucky which takes on something of the quality of Canaan’s fair fields or a place of gold and harmony.

“Yessir, they made all them old tunes, them old pieces they made up,” Burl Hammons observes in the fascinating notes, equivalent to the 100-page book that accompanies the album.

“Now they made ‘em up and named ‘em,” agreed Maggie Hammons.

“And made words to ‘em,” adds James Hammons.

“Yeah, they originated away back down there in Kentucky, from where they was borned and raised, a batch of ‘em, they made a lot of them tunes and brought them here to this country.”



Photo by Carl Fleischhauer

Alan Jabbour recording Maggie Hammons Parker at her home in Stillwell, near Marlinton, West Virginia, April 1973.

“This country” is West Virginia, which is not a snit different from eastern Kentucky or Tennessee except gazing backward two centuries it may seem the sweeter place.

With the realism often associated with women, however, Maggie Hammons argues that songs just as good were com-

posed right there in West Virginia: “Plenty of them made right over here on Cherry, the north fork of Cherry.”

See *HAMMONS*, page 9



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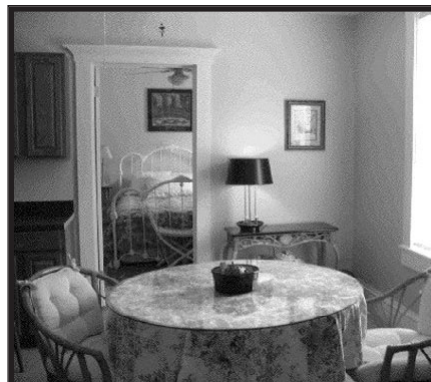
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The Hammonses like to say everything three or four times, and they like to ask each other rhetorical questions to which they know the answers thus permitting the thing to be said another three or four times, with grand effect.

The effect of their art, then, is leisurely, and they know few stories that do not include such phrases as “and so they went and they went. They went on and they come to...”

But first thing you know, you’ve heard about a man’s cow being witched, and his cure of the curse, and how he burnt up a live calf and how another man said he would have no part of that for all the cows in Christendom, etc., etc. And you’ve heard it in less time than it takes a newscaster to say it may rain tomorrow.

row.

Whatever else the Hammonses and people like them know, they understand drama in narration. They may say something three times over, but they leave out all those tiresome details that some would think important.

As Alan Jaddour, head of the Archive of Folk Song, put it, talking about the Hammonses to reporters:

“Their oral tradition is extremely rich. Talking and singing – that’s what life is all about for these people. For our archives, this was a chance to explore a single family’s tradition, a tradition preserved largely by stories and word of mouth. It was also an experiment in sound recording – they talk before and after their songs, and you can hear the floorboards creak. There is no effort made to get a “studio sound.”

These people do not just perform – they are caught in the act of living, which in their case involves stories and songs. You have me in there asking stupid questions – I may be over stating that.”

The Hammonses are basically a woods-life family. They now live largely on Social Security checks, but for generations they have gathered ginseng, hunted and fished.

The ginseng is a mountain plant esteemed in China as either an aphrodisiac or booster for fertility, and it has been exported from the American mountains at least since the 18th century, Jaddour says. Many of the Hammons stories refer to “sanging” which is collecting the ginseng roots. As farmers might say “when Tom was out mowing hay,” the Hammonses say, “while he was out sanging.”

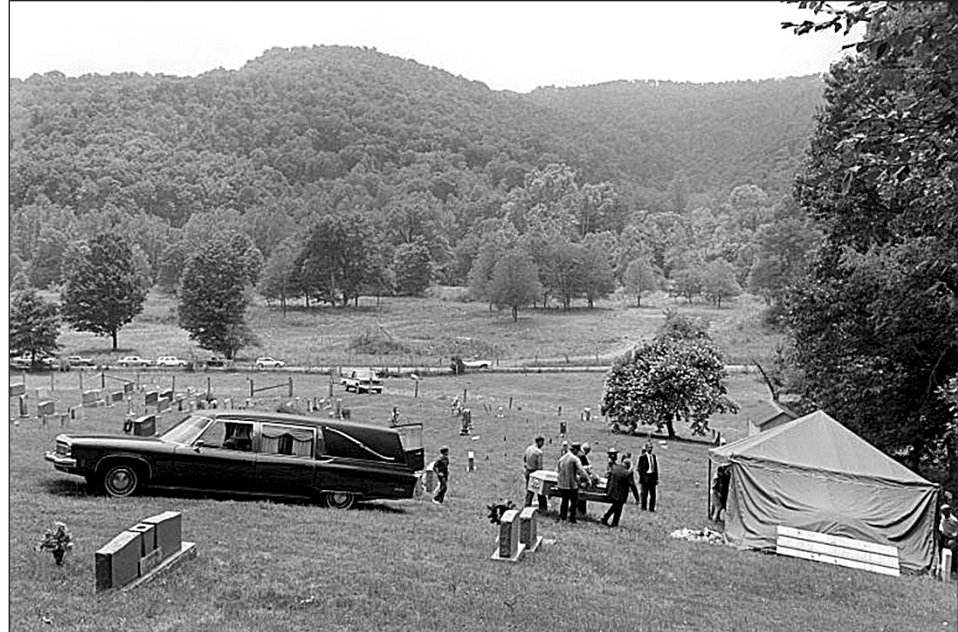


Photo by Carl Fleischhauer
Pallbearers carry Maggie Hammons Parker’s coffin to her grave in the Cochran Cemetery, not far from Edray, West Virginia, July 30, 1987. The Williams River watershed lies one mountain ridge away, to the west. In this photograph, Alan Jabbour stands just to the right of the coffin, wearing a dark suit and necktie.

Their stories reflect a skeptical fascination with the supernatural, as witness the tales of witchery,

but a feature of all their narration is that they do not themselves say whether they believe the story. There the story is, that’s the way they learned it, and you can take it of leave it.

One uncle cured a bewitched man by giving him a hoot owl to eat (efficacious in nearly every case) and in another story, the hex was lifted by making a cross with two hairs over the bore of a rifle.

In case you don’t know it, it will be a grand year for chestnuts and beech most if your house drips on Old Christmas.

“If what?” asks an ignorant fellow.

“The house drips,” ex-

plains Maggie Hammons patiently. “If she’s warm enough for your house to drip.”

Old Christmas is January 5, whereas New Christmas is December 25. The newfangled date was dreamed up in a calendar reform of 1752. The Hammonses have moved Old Christmas to January 6 instead of January 5, doubtless because of the pull of Twelfth Night which is 12 days after Christmas, whereas Old Christmas was 11 days after.

Anyhow, it makes no great difference, since the

See **HAMMONS**,

page 10

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HAMMONS from pg 9
chestnuts all succumbed to fatal blight in the 1920s, and there aren't any, nowadays.

But where would civilization be if you forgot Old Christmas and the chestnut harvest merely because somebody switched dates on you in 1752 or the chestnuts all died in 1929?

What the Hammonses choose to remember is the sort of thing Homer chose to remember about the Trojan War – specific bits of drama, not some long tiresome analysis of trends.

The Civil War sort of passed the Hammonses by, like the economy and book learning and other such stuff.

They do remember their ancestor who was minding his own business when soldiers grabbed him and took him off to

kill him. He escaped through the kindness of one of his captors who had mercy and sent him off to shoot a wild turkey. No Hammons was ever so dumb as to return with the turkey, of course. This is all recounted vividly, though such details as why the captor was merciful, or why they wanted to kill him in the first place or which army it was – such trifles are missing from the story, but the drama is not. Pressed on the matter, Burl Hammons said:

“This here was them Yankees, the Rebels and the Yankees, ary one. It didn't make no difference...”

The Hammonses, once dispersed, are now, through circumstances, more or less reunited with the passage of years. They have electricity, though they get water from a well.

“They had a TV set once,” Jaddour recalls. “It

worked for a year or two, then broke and that was that.”

Nowhere in their songs, nowhere in their speech, is there any of that corrupt vocabulary or flabby tone prevalent among the “educated.”

In a time of great smog, you may think a breath of clean air is splendid. Hence, this album. The Hammonses have logged, they have had 18 acre farms, they have sometimes grown beans and corn, but never have they been tradesmen of – God save us all – effete folk. They have been too busy being some kind of backbone, or preserving some kind of culture, to have got much more than a few coppers from the gilded country.

But what they have, apparently, is solid oak, solid rock, and a language that sounds like language.



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Laura Dean Bennett
Staff Writer

If you haven't experienced Chef Andrew Dean's cooking at his Dean's Den location in Frost, let me just say – it's high time you did. But now you don't need to travel up to the Hill Country to do so. Dean has opened a second location right in downtown Marlinton, at the old Dorie's Restaurant location on Second Avenue. One thing you can definitely say about both Dean's Den locations is that the food is never boring – each dish bursts with creativity – and the portions are very generous. Okay, that's really two things – but two things worth saying. An exciting, unusual menu and huge portions? Oh, boy. Oh, boy. "I like to experiment with exotic dishes," Dean said. "My wife, Isabella and I often try things at home and if and when I think it's something that will go over with my customers, I might offer it as a special and see how it goes. "I use as much fresh, local food as I can and am always looking to expand that aspect of the menu. I'll be working in local ingredients more and more, especially with my specials." The restaurant serves Wilfong Farms' beef and local vegetables, as available. Care is given to the presen-

tation of each dish, yet another indication that there's a professional in the kitchen. So far, one of the top sellers at the Marlinton location is the Open Faced Roast Beef entrée. I tried it, and I can only say that it was a feast, and I fell in love. Although the shredded roast beef was served on toasted sourdough bread, it bore little resemblance to a sandwich. It was much more like a real roast beef dinner, complete with fresh green beans and real mashed potatoes "with the skins on." Another delicious entrée which I got to sample, thanks to the forbearance of one of my dinner partners, was the Braised Lamb Shank. I could clearly taste the Cabernet flavoring the lamb. Its gravy paired beautifully with the meat, the roasted veggies and mashed red potatoes. All cooked to perfection – not overdone, but not too al dente. Never have I tasted a better shank of lamb - nor even a tastier carrot, for that matter. The Chicken Marsala was a tour de force. This dish is famous around the world. It features a gravy made with Marsala wine which brings with it a nutty, brown sugary aroma. The tender chicken cutlet (not dried out in the least) was covered in cremini mushrooms and nestled on egg noodles. This is comfort food at its finest! The ever-popular Gen. Tso's Chicken, a dish that is a frequent special on both the Frost and Marlinton menus, is a favorite among diners. It was the special the night my friends and I dropped in for supper, and not surprisingly, was already sold out when we asked for it. But our accommodating waiter went to the kitchen to ask the chef if there was enough left for just one more serving. And we were in luck. This spicy dish can be ordered three ways – mild, medium or hot. I like a little spice in my food, but not enough to burn off my taste buds. I found that mild was too mild and hot was too hot, but in true Goldilocks fashion, the medium version was just right. During my initial conversation with Dean, I asked why there were no burgers on his Marlinton menu. "It may be that one day we'll add burgers to the menu here, we'll have to see," Dean said. Well, Dean's Den fans, that day has come. The new menu, just released this week, features all kinds of burgers – Smokehouse, Steakhouse, Bacon Cheeseburger, Mushroom Swiss, All American, Black and Blue, and for those who like to spice it up – a Jalapeno Burger.



Photo by Laura Dean Bennett

To explain why he had a change of heart about having hamburgers on the Marlinton menu, chef and owner of Dean's Den Marlinton Andrew Dean said his customers gave him no choice. It was either put hamburgers on the menu or they were going to chase him out of town with pitch forks.

See DEAN'S, page 14



Photo courtesy of Dean's Den

Dean's Den has two locations in Pocahontas County. The first, in Frost, opened in 2019, and the second is on Second Avenue in Marlinton.

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DEAN'S pg 13

While Dean is an artist in the kitchen, Isabella finds her creative outlet at the easel and potter's wheel.

The restaurant is decorated with her paintings and pottery, and some are available for sale.

Dean's education background would not have suggested that he had a future as a chef.

He graduated with an IT degree from Stratford University in Washington, D.C. and became a certified Microsoft systems engineer.

Disillusioned with working with computers, Dean did a stint of construction work until he finally found his calling.

"I guess my inspiration for being a chef came from my grandfather," he said.

"He had a Greek restaurant in Northern Virginia

– a rather famous place called The Lamplighter. I must have inherited his love of cooking.

"After college and while I was trying to fit into the computer world, I kept finding myself wanting to cook," he recalled.

"Finally, I thought, 'Why fight it? Just go cook.'"

Dean is always on the lookout for talented and experienced staff – front and back of house. He's employed several graduates of Pocahontas County High School's Pro Start class and he speaks highly of the program.

The chef is keeping the Frost location open- no worries, Frost customers.

And he's also still doing some catering out of the Frost location and, in the future, will be doing some small, private event catering from the Marlinton restaurant.

"I enjoy being able to offer that service to cus-



Photos courtesy of Dean's Den
Along with the delicious menu at Dean's Den, there are a variety of specials each week, including, clockwise from top: Coconut Chicken Curry, Seafood Pasta and Open Face Roast Beef Sandwich.

tomers, although it's a bit of a stretch right now while we get things going here at the new location," Dean explained.

Going back and forth between the two restaurants hasn't been easy.

"We're still working the kinks out," Dean said.

As marvelous as the Dean's Den dining experience is right now, something tells me that when the kinks get worked out, Dean will have brought to Marlinton an unusual restaurant experience that can't be beat.



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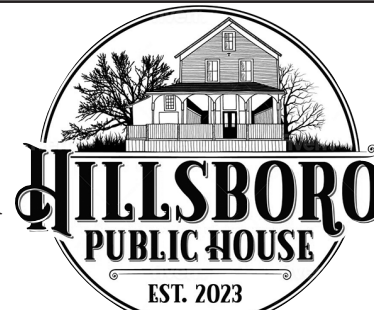


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Snowshoe Slope name origins

If you've been to the Shoe, you might have been baffled by the names of the slopes, lifts and lodging units around the mountain. Names, such as Powder Monkey, Widowmaker and Hootenanny, make you wonder just who it was that came up these strange names. We're here to help set the record straight. But first, you'll need some details on the Mountain's history to make sense of these unique names.

The land on which Snowshoe now stands was previously home to loggers and railroaders. The time between 1901-1910 and 1945-1950 were periods of the most intense activity. A steep railroad up Cheat Mountain from Cass was graded in order to log the virgin forests on the mountain for the West Virginia Pulp and Paper Company. A special 40-ton Shay locomotive was developed to tackle the steep grades of 5 to 10%. The Cheat River was also named because its wilderness reaches many miles downstream, and has cheated many a man of his life – the same was true for Cheat Mountain logging.

With the logging and railroading history, the developers of Snowshoe naturally turned to these memories when naming things throughout the resort.

Ballhooter

A man who rolls logs down a hill to a skid road or landing.

Choker

A loop of cable that is used in skidding logs with a steam skidder.



This aerial photo shows the 20 ski slopes at Snowshoe Mountain Resort.

Photo courtesy of Kurtis Schachner

Crosscut

Typical big-toothed two-man saw used to cut trees, usually six feet long.

Cupp Run

A small stream named for the family that owned this valley years ago.

This trail plays host to our annual Cupp Run Challenge.

Dinkey

A small locomotive.

Gandy Dancer

A man who lays and maintains railroad tracks.

Gangway

The inclined plane up which is used to move the logs from the millpond into the mill.

Grab Hammer

Hammer with a pointed end or ends used to knock out grabs or couplers from logs.

Hootenanny

A small device that is used to hold a crosscut saw while sawing a log from the underside.

J Hook

A special type of grab or

coupler that's used on steep slopes. This type of grab permits the skidding teams to step aside (jay-off), become disengaged, and stand while the logs continue down the slope.

Knot Bumper

A man who cuts limbs from a felled tree using a double-bit or poleax.

Leatherbark

A shrub, once common along the creek of this same name of the Cass side of Cheat Mountain.

Powder Monkey

A dynamiter.

Skidder

A machine with winches for skidding logs from the stump to a landing beside a railroad.

Spruce

1. Red Spruce is the dominant evergreen tree on the highest ridges in West Virginia. Very common in the forests of Eastern Canada.

2. Spruce is the name of the now-abandoned pulp mill town just north of Snowshoe.

This trail plays host to our annual Berming Man competition.

Stemwinder

A Shay or other geared railroad locomotive.

Tail Tree

In steam skidding, the tree at the end of the skid road to which the rigging used in skidding logs attaches.

Widow Maker

A broken limb hanging loose in the top of a tree.

Information courtesy of Snowshoe Blog

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Across the Kitchen Table

Laura Dean Bennett
Staff Writer

The attractive millennial couple is dressed in what could have been modern attire – a hundred years ago.

Their lifestyle also reflects a bygone age.

The house features hand-crafted woodwork, the décor augmented with family heirlooms, hand-me-downs and vintage thrift store finds.

Meet Philippe Willis and Vivian Blackwood, who look as though they stepped out of the pages

of *Harper's Weekly*, one of the most popular magazines of the 19th century.

"I felt instantly at home here," Blackwood said. "West Virginia is wild and untamed, and that's the whole attraction for me."

The couple collects curiosities, vintage pieces and found items from nature.

"Philippe is always coming home from the forest, bringing me some treasure," Blackwood said. "And I love finding something old and forgotten and cleaning it up and giving it new life."

"We treasure old things.

We like to take the shabby and make it look chic.

Blackwood is from Auckland, New Zealand.

She was a painter who'd been working as a public school art teacher in New York City and volunteering at the Guggenheim and the Metropolitan Museum of Art when she met Willis, a graphic designer and illustrator from northern Virginia.

They discovered they had a lot in common.

Both artists find their inspiration in flora, fauna, history and folklore.

They both enjoy outdoor adventures and both, as it turned out,



When Vivian Blackwood, a painter who specializes in portraiture, and Philippe Willis, an illustrator and graphic designer, met, they discovered they had much more than art in common. They both loved history and yearned for a life built around old-fashioned traditions.

See **TABLE**, page 17

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JUST
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TABLED from pg 16
 yearned for a life in the country.

The decision to leave the city behind for a new way of life in the country took them to Virginia.

They moved into a cabin close to Shenandoah National Park and began exploring the outdoors in the Shenandoah Valley and the surrounding region.

Their outings included caving trips and road trips through Virginia and West Virginia. It didn't take long for them to fall in love with this part of the world.

And, as is so often the case with many of our visitors, it wasn't long before they decided to make Pocahontas County their home.

"Not only is this a wonderful place to create art, but it's the perfect place to learn about herbal medicine, gardening, canning, growing our own food and foraging for wild food," Blackwood said.

They bought a house near Huntersville in March 2021.

"I was doing illustration and design for companies from all over, but it wasn't long after we moved here that I was working on projects for local organizations, too, such as the Yew Mountain Center on Droop Mountain, Shady Grove Botanicals in Mill Creek and On the Level Farm in Hillsboro," Willis explained.

Many of his clients are farmers, herbalists and small hunting and fishing companies.

Willis designs logos and event posters for fairs and farmers markets. His illustrations can be purchased in print form and on T-shirts.

He explained that his inspiration comes from the natural world, history, hunting and Appalachian folklore.

Blackwood started her artistic career at an early age; she was painting and selling pet portraits as a teenager. And she is now a professional portrait artist.

"You could say I always

is really looking closely at things," she said. "My life here is giving me the space to focus on what's important and do good work."

Her work includes commissioned portraits and giving old, sometimes damaged, family photographs new life as paintings.

Although they're millennials, they are not totally tech-dependent.

"We came along just before everyone in the world went online. We were some of the last teenagers not to grow up with a cell phone," Blackwood explained.

Maybe that's why they



Photos by Laura Dean Bennett

When not out in the woods honing his field skills, or working around on the farm, Willis can most often be found at his desk creating lifelike illustrations of local flora and fauna.

feel it's no bother living in a place where not everyone has cell service.

"I love that there's no cell phone service at our house," Willis beams.

They may not have cell phones, but thankfully, they have reliable Internet service, which has enabled their art-oriented careers to thrive.

"We're grateful for it," Willis said. "Our art careers depend on it. It means we can market our

See TABLE, page 18

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had a bit of hustle," she said with a chuckle.

"I've always had to think practically. I needed to pay for college, and then I had college loans to repay," she explained.

Her love of history and figurative drawing and painting have both found expression here in Pocahontas County.

"Part of being an artist

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work to a world-wide audience.”

Whether Willis is indoors at his drawing board, working around the farm or honing his field skills, his faithful dog, Betty, is always at his side.

She's a squirrel hunting dog – an old Appalachian breed perfectly suited for country life.

“I'm glad we chose Pocahontas County,” Willis said. “My main reason for wanting to move here was to learn more about hunting and trapping, and I haven't been disappointed.”

Willis' uncle's family gave him his first introduction to hunting, an avocation which has provided the couple with a constant source of pro-

tein. They are proud that this past year they bought no meat – only eating what Philippe hunted or trapped.

“Last year was the first year that we managed to eat only game meat – venison, squirrel, beaver and bear meat,” Willis said.

“Except for a few sausages,” Vivian inter-

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Photo by Laura Dean Bennett

Blackwood believes there's a particular beauty about handmade things and old things from the past. Here, she stands in her kitchen beside the couple's collection of dried medicinal herbs and little collectibles.

jected. “We did have to buy a few sausages,” she laughed.

Willis particularly enjoys hunting deer with his muzzleloader, and he's developed an interest in antique guns.

As for fishing, Willis said he does enjoy it, but only occasionally.

“I don't fish much,” he

said.

“I have an old timer friend from Virginia who is teaching me about fly fishing. He's taken me fishing for blue gills, which is just about the most relaxing way to spend a summer afternoon.

“But I use most of my time in the summer to work on art and illustration, so that when winter comes, I can focus on squirrel hunting and trapping.”

He's also been trying

his hand at beaver trapping with some success.

“I'm still a novice, with a lot to learn.”

Every animal that Willis harvests is put to good use, from the meat to the fur and everything in between.

As time goes by, they are finding more and more uses for the “everything in between.”

“Bear fat is good for so much; it comes in handy for lots of things around

ping.” See **TABLE**, page 20

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the house," Vivian said.

"We cook with it and we use it to polish our boots.

"I even use it as a conditioner on my hair," she laughed.

Willis is fortunate to be able to learn a lot of helpful skills from his mother.

"She's an herbalist and a gardener who makes herbal medicines and balms," he explained.

"She's teaching me about foraging for food and medicine and a lot about gardening.

This is their second year of gardening. Their first year was very encouraging.

This year – not so much.

"Our first year of gardening, Philippe grew Cherokee White Eagle dent corn." Blackwood said. "It's an old variety and rare these days,"

"It was so beautiful- with blue and white kernels. We ate some and dried the rest. It makes excellent cornbread," she added.

It also makes a lovely addition to the autumnal arrangement sitting in the middle of their kitchen table, a recent find from The Cackling Hens shop in Marlinton.

As any experienced gardener will tell you, gardening is hard work. And while it can be one of the most fulfilling pursuits, it can also be quite frustrating.

This year their corn crop failed.

But, as she points out with pride, Blackwood's herb garden has done very well, and she's taking steps to ensure its survival during the winter months ahead.

To ensure their own survival, the couple relies on an old wood stove.

"We heat the house with the wood stove during the winter, and I absolutely love it," Blackwood insists.



Vivian Blackwood and Philippe Willis dressed to the nines at Huntersville Traditions Days this year.

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"It's one of the best things about winter."

She and Willis credit their Pocahontas friends and neighbors with helping them with advice about all of the skills they want to acquire.

"Everyone here has been so generous and supportive," Blackwood said.

She is looking forward to continuing her painting and to doing some art education, maybe in the public school system.

Willis is expanding his illustration and design business.

The couple is planning a 2024 wedding, and although they don't yet

have a precise date or place in mind for the ceremony, there are no worries about an engagement ring – it literally came to them out of the blue.

Blackwood extended her left hand, proudly displaying the garnet set in an elegantly simple gold band.

"Some caving friends had told us about the Sinks of Gandy. We were exploring the cave when Philippe looked down and

noticed something on the ground," Blackwood recalled.

He said, 'What's this?' and picked up this beautiful ring," Blackwood said.

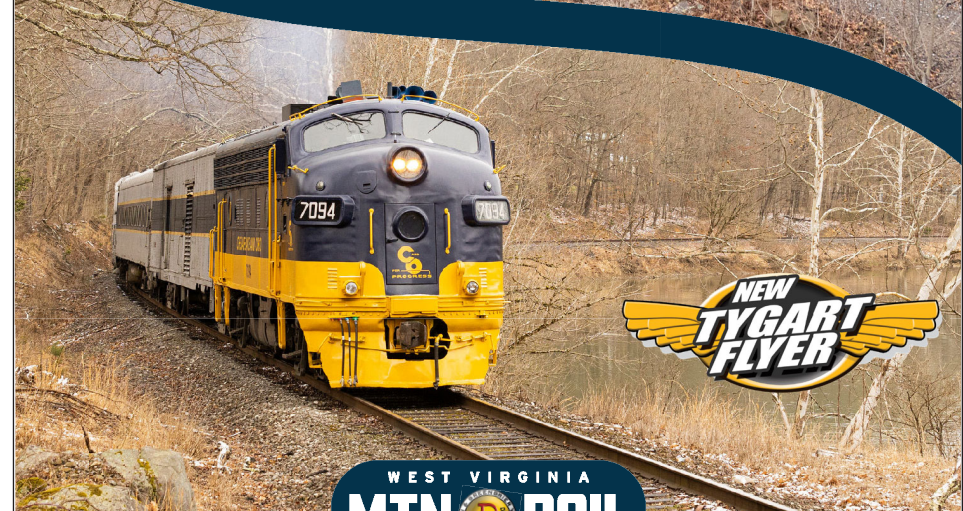
"I always said when the time came, I wouldn't want a diamond ring, I'd want something more unique. And there it was, so perfect for me."

The couple was invited to participate in Huntersville Traditions Day this past fall.

See TABLE, page 21

Winter Train Rides! Beginning Mid-January.

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Blackwood demonstrated portrait painting, and Willis discussed trapping and displayed some of his furs.

"It was a real privilege for us to take part in that special community event," Blackwood recalled.

Willis and Blackwood hosted two students from Denmark for Thanksgiving, treating them to a meal neither will likely

ever forget.

It was truly an old-fashioned Appalachian-style feast.

Raccoon sliders and bear chili.

A neighbor told Willis about cooking raccoon.

"It needs to be cooked for hours, boiled three times, draining the water each time," he said.

"We made raccoon sliders, tucking the meat into homemade, Danish-style muffins which our guests

Photo by Laura Dean Bennett
Blackwood and Willis enjoy not only living much as they might have in the 19th century, but also wearing clothing from that era. The handsome couple was invited to participate in Huntersville Traditions Day this past October, where she demonstrated portrait painting and he discussed hunting and fur trapping.

had brought," he continued.

"We served the sliders with homemade barbecue sauce, homemade fermented pickles and a side of bear chili."

And, of course, the meal was complemented with homemade wine.

"I believe it was Mark Twain who, when asked what he missed most while traveling abroad, said that he most missed raccoon meat," Willis joked.

"We didn't find out until after Thanksgiving that raccoon was long a traditional part of many rural Thanksgiving feasts.

"In 1926 President Calvin Coolidge 'pardoned' a raccoon destined for Thanksgiving dinner at the White House," Blackwood added.

See **TABLE**, page 22



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TABLE from pg 21

"We were historically accurate and didn't even know it," she laughed.

"We want to be part of the community and are learning whatever we can from our friends and neighbors."

With everything else they are learning about homesteading, just about the only skill they haven't yet taken on is canning, but don't worry, the couple assured me that's defi-

nately next on the list.

Philippe Willis can be reached at ournuminous nature.bigcartel.com and

Vivian Blackwood may be contacted at www.vivian blackwood.com/commis sions

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Snowshoe Opening Day
(weather permitting)

DECEMBER 10
West Virginia
Ski Free Day

DECEMBER 15
Silver Creek
Opening Day
(weather permitting)

DECEMBER 24
Village Christmas
Celebration

DECEMBER 23 - 31
Holiday Celebrations

DECEMBER 31
New Year's Eve Parties

FEBRUARY 5
Cupp Run Challenge

FEBRUARY 10
Uphill Thang &
Randonnée Race

FEBRUARY 23
Boardercross &
Skiercross Camp

FEBRUARY 24 - 25
USASA Boardercross
& Skiercross

MARCH 2 - 3
Banked Slalom Race

MARCH 8 - 10
Snowshoe
Pride Weekend

MARCH 15 - 16
College Weekend
& Pond Skim

MARCH 17
West Virginia
Ski Free Day

MARCH 31
Closing Day



Snowshoe