

# Old Farm Day draws thousands

SUBMITTED BY TRICIA JOHNSON

Thousands of visitors enjoyed Old Farm Day Saturday (May 4) under sunny skies at Pleasant Grove Park in Palmyra.

“With over 140 exhibitors and vendors, there was definitely something for everyone to enjoy at this year’s festival,” said Old Farm Day Committee co-chair Tricia Johnson.

Familiar favorite activities for children, like horse-drawn hayrides, pony rides and the petting zoo, put smiles on the faces of little ones. Live music, vendors and exhibitors of all sorts, and a wide variety of food trucks made all generations happy.

The preview of the Farm Heritage Museum, where about one-third of exhibits are complete, drew crowds to see the antique and vintage agricultural equipment. The new tasting garden, where visitors could sample offerings from local vineyards, a local brewery, and a cidery under shade trees on the lawn of the historic Haden House was a particular favorite.

“This truly is Fluvanna’s favorite family festival,” said Johnson. “It is a wonderful thing to see folks from our community – from the littlest children to our elders – celebrating Fluvanna’s agricultural heritage together.”

Old Farm Day is hosted by the Fluvanna Historical Society, and is organized and run by the all-volunteer Old Farm Day Committee and community volunteers.



Ryleigh Kavanaugh



Photos courtesy of Tricia Johnson, Theresa N. White and Valerie Ramos.

# Changing with the times: *Fluvanna Review* turns 40

BY CHRISTINA DIMEO  
EDITOR

From simple beginnings as a one-page monthly newsletter for Lake Monticello residents, the *Fluvanna Review* has grown into a thriving weekly newspaper covering news throughout Fluvanna County.

In the years since the first edition was printed in July 1979, the world has changed. While print once dominated the market, now many people get their news from TV or online. This shift has affected advertising, and with online ads selling for pennies on the dollar, necessity has driven many once-free newspapers to sell subscriptions to remain in business.

Through it all, the *Fluvanna Review* has spent the last 40 years publishing news affecting Fluvanna residents' daily lives – for free. Its coverage of local government, schools, business, art, human interest and crime is unsurpassed.

As the paper turns 40, the *Fluvanna Review* took the opportunity to look back through the years.

## Birth of the *Bulletin*

The first house at Lake Monticello was built in 1971, and four years later, 50 homes stood in the development – enough to necessitate a newsletter. So in April 1975, five Lake residents got together and started what would someday become the *Fluvanna Review*.

The first issue of the *Residents' Association News Bulletin*, a one-page monthly newsletter, championed the paving of Route 600, which was then a dirt road.

The newsletter hummed along for four years until one pivotal day in July 1979, when retiree Len Gardner, who had moved to the Lake a year earlier, volunteered to take over as *Bulletin* editor.

"There was a collective sigh of relief," Gardner said in a 2014 interview. "No one else wanted the job. And as it turned out, no one else got a chance at the job for the next 18 years."

The reason for the job's unpopularity, Gardner said, was the sheer amount of work involved in produc-

ing the *Bulletin*, which had grown to multiple legal-sized sheets. "The editor had to collect all the news, do most of the writing, do the typing, run off 200 copies on the Xerox machine, collate and staple them, and then stuff the paper into the mailboxes," he said.

## Becoming a newspaper

Four months after Gardner took over, the Lake Monticello Owners' Association decided it would no longer subsidize the *Lake Monticello Newsletter*, as Gardner now called it, either financially or through use of its typewriter and Xerox machine. Faced with the expense of printing in Charlottesville and loath to ask for donations, Gardner decided to sell advertising in the *Newsletter* to defray its cost.

"I had no trouble getting advertising," Gardner said. "The advertisers came to me because advertising in the *Newsletter* was the best and surest way to get their message to the growing population at the Lake."

The *Newsletter* played an important role in Lake affairs, helping to secure individual mailboxes for homeowners rather than clusters at the gates, and assisting in having Lake roads declared fit for school bus travel.

In 1985 Gardner changed the name of the paper to the *Lake Monticello Review*, joking later that he selected the title because the monthly publication schedule made it impossible to do anything other than "review" the news.

But Gardner made a more important change from the moment he took over: including Fluvanna County news, not just Lake Monticello happenings. After years of reporting on county Board of Supervisors meetings, Gardner decided to adjust the publication's name yet again to reflect its wider reach. And so, in 1988, the *Lake Monticello and Fluvanna County Review* was born.

Throughout the early years, Gardner relied on volunteers to keep the paper thriving. "More than 100 volunteers served with me in many

roles: typing, advertising, layout, editing, reporting, special columns, bill paying, photography and distribution," he said. "My wife, Doris, backed me up on almost all the jobs at the paper at one time or another."

Though the volunteers received no salary, the money generated by the ads was more than enough to cover the paper's expenses. So at the end of the year, Gardner would give his volunteers a share of what the paper had made.

Over time, Gardner's life grew busier. Once a mayor of a small town in Maryland, Gardner felt his political interest return. In 1992 he won election to a seat on the Board of Supervisors.

## Passing the torch

"By 1995 the paper was running 56 pages monthly in magazine format," Gardner said. "It had become too big an enterprise to be run by volunteers. The Lake, and Fluvanna County as well, had grown into a significant market. A monthly publication was no longer adequate for news coverage or to serve the needs of the business community. There was so much going on – if we didn't go to a weekly paper someone else was going to come in and do it. I was just too busy at that point in time. I was the chair of the Board of Supervisors, and I couldn't handle a weekly paper. So that's when I recruited someone else to do it."

Eric Allen, a Lake resident, graphic artist and former newspaper advertising manager, joined the staff in 1995, and when Gardner offered to sell the paper, Allen agreed. He took over as publisher in 1997 while Gardner stayed on as a silent partner.

"The 18 years that I ran the paper were among the most satisfying years of my life," Gardner said. "I learned on the job how to run a paper. I learned that sometimes it can be difficult and unpopular, but necessary. I learned to stand up for ethical and accurate reporting, to edit out poorly thought-out commentary and unfounded accusations."

Now 97 years old, Gardner stays in touch with *Fluvanna Review* staff and still occasionally attends Board of Supervisors meetings. "I'm really pleased to be associated with the *Review*," he said last week. "It has developed into a real county newspaper. It does a great job for the county."

Allen made several changes when he took over, but three stood out with lasting impact. He switched the paper to a tabloid format, which the *Review* still uses today. He began publishing every other week rather than once a month. But most significant of all, he changed the name of the paper one final time: to the *Fluvanna Review*.

Over the next two years, Allen's responsibilities began to take a toll. "I was getting burned out," he said in a 2014 interview. "I was the ad salesman, the editor, the designer and the delivery guy." Plus, he said, he had never seen himself as a lifelong newspaperman. So when an opportunity arose for Allen to go into the computer business with a friend in Lynchburg, he decided to sell the paper.

## Dismal days

In 1999 Allen sold the *Review* to a man who lived in Martinsville. "He planned to move up here, but it wasn't working out," Allen said. "He tried to run it from Martinsville."

The task proved too difficult, and the paper started unraveling. Advertisers grew angry with mistakes in their ads and began dropping out. The *Review's* situation turned serious. "It was bankrupt on paper," Allen said. "It had more debts than it had assets."

Allen's business venture hadn't worked out, and merely a year after he sold the paper, he decided to return. "I bought it back for \$1 and assumed all that debt," he said.

## Growing the business

Allen immediately got to work. "When people heard that I had come back, the advertisers who had dropped out jumped back in. I mended fences and put creditors at ease," he said, noting that Gardner

helped significantly by giving the paper a loan to get it out of pressing debt.

Allen's new philosophy revolved around turning the *Review* from an essentially one-man show into a business. "I started hiring staff," he said. "That was the only way it was going to grow, because one person can only do so much. Over time I hired an office manager, a designer, an editor and additional salespeople."

In 2004 Allen also made the long-anticipated jump into weekly production. "We needed to be timelier with the news," he said. "Our competitors at the time were the *Central Virginian* out of Louisa, which had a Fluvanna section, and the *Rural Virginian*, which was mostly Scottsville but had a little Fluvanna news. They were weekly; we weren't."

As the *Fluvanna Review* grew, Allen kept its mission intact. "We reported both sides of any hot topic facing the county and let the readers decide," he said. "We tried to be unbiased. First and foremost our responsibility was to our readers, and secondly to our advertisers... We were the one paper that was all Fluvanna, all the time, and we wanted to be the best source of Fluvanna news."

## Monthlies

One competitor, the *Rural Virginian*, "started coming really hard after us in Fluvanna, trying to compete," Allen said. "I thought the best defense might be a good offense." So in 2002 he began the *Scottsville Monthly*.

"The *Scottsville Monthly* was literally an overnight success," he said. "On my first day selling advertising, I sold enough to cover the first year of expenses. People in Scottsville loved having their own paper."

In 2003 Allen started another monthly, this time in Buckingham. "Buckingham was the one county in Virginia that didn't have a newspaper," Allen said. "So I started the *Buckingham Beacon*. The people embraced it with open arms."

Pleased with the success of his two monthlies, Allen looked next to Orange County, and in 2005 started *OC Magazine*. "There was already a weekly paper there and I didn't want to compete head-to-head, so we went with more of a magazine feel," he said.

Then in 2008 Allen decided to go

into Louisa, again using a magazine format for *Louisa Life* so as not to compete with the county's existing newspaper. Next he looked to Greene County, but the Great Recession halted his plans. "I decided to batten down the hatches and ride it through," he said.

All four monthlies and the *Review* function under Valley Publishing, a company Allen created. While newspapers across the country are being bought up by media conglomerates, Valley Publishing remains a loyal Fluvanna company, located in Crofton Plaza off Lake Monticello Road.

## New era

As time stretched on, Allen felt the sense of burnout return. "I had been publishing for 12 years," he said. "My plan in life was never to be a publisher – it just kind of happened that way." He started looking for buyers.

Around the same time, two career newspapermen interested in running a local paper discovered the *Fluvanna Review* and liked what they saw. In 2010 Carlos Santos and Dave Ress, both former *Richmond Times-Dispatch* reporters, bought Valley Publishing. Santos took over as publisher and Ress stayed in the background as a silent partner.

One of the first things Santos did was establish a website for the *Fluvanna Review*. "It was primitive but it allowed us to have a daily newspaper," Santos said. "That was big, because suddenly we were competing with the local TV stations." Over the years Santos upgraded the website, culminating in last year's launch of a sleeker, more streamlined format that also includes the monthly publications.

Santos, who had 33 years of experience as a reporter when he took over, initially wrote many of the news stories himself, and over time the *Fluvanna Review* developed a hard news

edge. He doubled the number of color pages and focused on expanding the paper's reach throughout the county and into surrounding areas.

Now the five papers together have a monthly circulation of 46,000. The

**"The 18 years that I ran the paper were among the most satisfying years of my life. I learned on the job how to run a paper. I learned that sometimes it can be difficult and unpopular, but necessary. I learned to stand up for ethical and accurate reporting, to edit out poorly thought-out commentary and unfounded accusations." – Len Gardner, *Fluvanna Review* founder**

*Fluvanna Review* prints 6,300 copies each week delivered directly to homes at Lake Monticello, Broken Island and Sycamore Square, and available at over 100 key locations throughout Fluvanna, Albemarle, Louisa and Charlottesville.

One of Santos' more influential decisions was to enter the *Fluvanna Review* into the Virginia Press Association's (VPA) yearly competition for journalism and newspaper design excellence. While the awards that began accumulating gave the *Review's* staff a sense of accomplishment, their impact went further than mere validation. The paper's journalists and designers started pushing themselves to meet a higher standard – by writing better, digging deeper, asking harder questions, and designing with elegance and creativity.

The *Fluvanna Review* has won 88 VPA awards since 2010 for breaking news writing, investigative journalism, government coverage, column writing, advertising design, news layout, cover illustration and photography.

## Looking forward

The news world has changed since the *Fluvanna Review* began in 1979. Local news in particular has suffered a tremendous blow, with many communities around the country already finding themselves without reliable, objective information about what's taking place in their hometown government, schools and law enforcement agencies.

Producing a newspaper each week isn't free. Staff members make modest salaries to support themselves and their families, and the costs of printing, distribution and overhead don't come cheaply.

Residents who value having a local newspaper – who appreciate not only the information provided but also the accountability enforced among those in power – need to speak with their dollars. It is a simple economic reality.

In the case of free newspapers like the *Fluvanna Review*, that means purchasing advertisements rather than asking the paper to make repeated gifts of its time, print space and publicity. Community newspapers like the *Review* do as much as they can to help the myriad worthwhile endeavors throughout their readership areas, but in the end – just like any other company – they need money to survive.

Santos reflected on that changing dynamic as he looked ahead to the paper's future in the Fluvanna community.

"The *Fluvanna Review* has covered Fluvanna County news, good and bad, for four decades and we are celebrating that achievement. I'm proud of the paper and how hard our staff works every week to publish a lively, well-designed newspaper that accurately reflects life in the county," he said.

"No other media covers the county with our breadth and depth in news. No other media offers our reach for businesses that need to advertise.

"Newspapers all over the country are struggling and some are gone. We plan to be around a long time, but in the end it's the community – both readers and advertisers – who make the final decision as to how long. I'm hoping for another 40 years."



BY **BLAKE BERRY** AND **TYLER HARRIS**  
FLUVANNA COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL JOURNALISM PROGRAM

THIS ARTICLE WAS WRITTEN WITH THE OVERSIGHT  
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## Tennis

The Lady Flucos' match against Louisa was part of a complete sweep of opposing teams across all varsity sports April 23. Girls' tennis beat Louisa by an overall score of 7-2, with wins in singles from senior Adora Gamage (9-7), junior Sarah White (9-7), freshman Anja Bajs (8-2), senior Lydia Napier (8-2), and sophomore Molli White (8-3). In doubles, Sarah White and Nika Ackenbom took second (8-5), and White and Bajs took third (8-4).

The boys' team also took a win against Louisa April 23, with big singles wins from senior Eugene Chow and sophomore Billy Ruffa. The match ended in dramatic fashion with the team having to win a doubles match from a tie, which the Flucos took in the end, reaching seven points first. "This definitely shows that we're getting better this season. Multiple comeback wins have shown that we're learning and going to be successful," said Coach Mitchell Pace.

The girls' tennis team hosted top rival Monticello April 25. According to Coach Feda Morton, it was a "historic day for the Lady Flucos as they won three matches, the most they have won in recent years against Monticello." The final score was 3-6 Mustangs, but Morton noted that "two very close matches could have easily gone our way."

In singles, number two seed White and number three seed Bajs won 8-4 and 8-6, respectively. Sixth seed White tied at 8-8 and lost the tiebreaker 7-2. In doubles, Napier and White won 8-4, while White and Bajs dropped a very close match 6-8 at the end. The team's overall record is 6-4.

## Softball

The JV softball team took a loss during their game against Louisa April 23, going 2-11. Freshman Shelby Clements said, "I think we need to pick ourselves up when we get that low, and need to keep going."

In another game held April 26, the JV team lost 4-15. "We didn't play like we normally do. We just had an off day. Personally, I was a little off. Mistakes are like a chain reaction," said freshman Laci Kelley.

The varsity Lady Flucos won at Louisa

April 23. The game was a 0-0 tie until the fifth inning, when senior Gracie Walton hit two runs, then made another in the sixth inning. "We had a really good game," said Walton, adding "Catera Marsh had a really amazing play in center field, and Lindsey Ward had a huge diving catch."

## Girls' soccer

Varsity girls' soccer took on Louisa April 22. The game was moved to an earlier time than the team was used to, forcing the team to play in much warmer weather. Sophomore Kaitlin Bower scored the first goal five minutes into the match. After staying tied for the majority of the match, senior Madi Nazar scored in the last four minutes, bringing the score to 2-1 and winning for the Flucos. "We played really hard and worked well together," said Nazar. In their second game of the week, the Lady Flucos lost in a home game against Monticello by a score of 0-3.

The JV team also played a home game against Monticello, in which they tied after a long battle with a score of 1-1. In the first half, nobody on either side scored, but 20 minutes into the second half, the Flucos were able to score a goal off of a penalty kick. Unfortunately, right after that, the Monticello team scored a goal of their own. "We played a lot harder than the previous game. We didn't know what to expect going into the game because we lost against them earlier in the season," said sophomore Gracie McWilliams.

## Boys' soccer

Varsity's game against Louisa April 22 brought the team a major win, with a 6-0 victory. "We knew going in that we were the better team, and that we just needed to play hard," said senior Finn McLaughlin. The first half of the game brought one goal for the Flucos, but the real success came in the second. "The first half didn't go as planned, but we worked for what we were going to do in the second half," McLaughlin said.

## Baseball

The JV team took a loss at Louisa April 23. At the third inning, the team was losing 0-2,

but managed a comeback thanks to Nathan Dieter, Pierson Barnabei, and Daniel Campbell, who all hit doubles, bringing the score to 5-2. However, in the end, the Flucos lost 5-9.

In the April 25 game, the team won by a score of 11-8 in a home game against Monticello. "We started off slow, but towards the end of the game we made a comeback and I was relieved when we won the game," said freshman Augustus Jones.

Meanwhile, varsity took a major win at Louisa April 23. Junior Kevin Ward pitched the entire game, striking out nine, with a final score of 2-0.

In their second game April 25, the team won by a landslide, with a score of 11-0. "The bats finally heated up, and we hit the ball better than we have been. We came into the game confident that we were going to win," said sophomore John Travis.

## Track

The track meet held April 24 was more of an informal duel between Orange and Fluvanna since the Flucos have Districts coming up next week. Still, the Flucos came out on top of Orange. In the throwing events, junior Eli Hartzog got first in shot put and discus, senior Joshua Elliott got second in shot put, and sophomore Aydon Duenas got fourth in shot put. "Personally, it's been a rough season, but I'm glad I'm

still able to compete," said Duenas.

Coach Rose Brogan noted that the team did very well overall and a few individuals also earned a few personal records. "We had the advantage being on our track," junior Kieri Hart explained. "You feel more confident on your own track. The heat was bad. I was really happy with my 200, but could have done better in the mile and long jump," she added.

## Boys' lacrosse

In anticipation of their away game against Monticello April 25, sophomore Jacob Collier said, "Going into this game we've had some doubts about Monticello, but our energy is incredible and I think we can take a w[in]." Reality, however, struck hard as the team took another devastating loss to the Monticello team, with a score of 2-19.

The JV team also played an away game against Monticello, which they lost with a score of 1-6. "We played well, but we need to work on defense," said freshman Joseph Sawyer.

## Girls' lacrosse

The Lady Flucos' game against Orange went sour April 24, with a loss of 8-17. "We got outrun, and we just need to come together as a team to win in the future," said senior Sadie Connor.

