Hed: Ice cream dream

By Jeff Say

Culpeper Times Staff Writer

A local business has a sweet solution to the summer heat.

The Country Creamery, located inside the Ole Country Store along U.S. 29, offers ice cream, smoothies, pretzel rolls and milkshakes in a family-friendly atmosphere.

Sam Yoder, owner and operator of the Country Creamery, along with his business partner Blake Wagner said that the early response has been overwhelming so far from the public.

“It’s been really encouraging,” Wagner said. “Everybody says there needs to be a good family hangout, and that’s what we were really shooting for.”

The Country Creamery has a separate entrance alongside the side of The Ole Country Store - where the Amish Furniture Connection used to be, allowing it to stay open until 10 p.m.

Yoder, who is originally from Central Pennsylvania, worked for an Amish market in Baltimore that had similar offerings, and when he came to Culpeper he saw the opportunity to provide the community with that experience.

“It was kind of my dream to do a similar shop,” Yoder said.

“We first started talking about an ice cream shop last fall,” Wagner said, after they started Yoder’s Donuts in a food truck in the parking lot of the Ole Country Store. “I moved here for the donuts and then we started talking about the ice cream.”

The store offers ice cream - homemade by Kreider Farms in Lancaster, Pa. - pretzel logs, fruit smoothies, shakes and banana splits.

The pretzel logs have a variety of fillings - from hot dogs to chicken, bacon, swiss to pepperoni and mozzarella.

“It’s been popular so far,” Yoder said.

The scoops of the rich ice cream are generous to say the least, with two scoops encompassing a huge homemade waffle cone - made fresh daily.

“My goal was to be generous with the ice cream but keep our prices low as well,” Yoder said. “We wanted it to be affordable for families to come out.”

“A family of four will come in and they can walk out with a bill around $15,” Wagner said. “And everybody has a lot of ice cream.”

The store employs five, which includes a family feel as Yoder’s sister Jules works behind the counter on a warm spring day. To her left, people pick up orders at the outside window they’ve installed. Yoder said the line forms inside, but people are able to go outside to the porch area to wait and pick up their order.

“Anything in the store is available for purchase up to 10 o’clock, except the deli,” Yoder said.

Wagner said their milkshakes have been a big hit, with customers commenting on how thick and flavorful they are.

“The milkshakes are something we put a lot of thought into,” Yoder said.

Another huge hit has been the pretzel logs, and the homemade dips they offer - like the honey mustard sauce.

“We want to start making some of the others from scratch as well,” Wagner said. “We’re going to add some new flavors to the pretzels as well.”

“I think the biggest thing we’re going to do in the next couple of weeks is we’re going to start adding signature dishes, like pie and ice cream,” Yoder said. “There’s a girl that works for the store that’s going to make the pies in the store and we’re going to use that with the ice cream.”

Food is a common theme when it comes to the duo’s Amish roots.

“My dad was raised Amish, my whole family does food,” Yoder said. “There’s a very high quality and there’s recipes you can’t find anywhere else. There’s not a lot of other things they do, food is something we can all get behind and excel in.”

The store expects to offer live music in the future and community events, beginning with a car show fundraiser for the family of Ericka Estes. Estes, 20, died suddenly last month and worked at the Ole Country Store for four years. They will have a benefit car show June 22 from 5 to 8 p.m.

“We want to do it in memory of her and as a fundraiser for the family,” Yoder said.

Hed: Welcome home

By Jeff Say

Culpeper Times Staff Writer

When someone moves to The Culpeper, they are usually there for the rest of their life.

That’s why LifeSpire of Virginia wanted to make sure their stay will be one filled with comfort, care and camaraderie.

The Culpeper, a LifeSpire of Virginia continuing care retirement community in Culpeper, will celebrate the grand opening of its new building May 10 from 2-4 p.m.

“We are very excited to cut the ribbon and show off our new building,” said Jim Jacobsen, executive director of The Culpeper. The grand opening of the $33.5 million, 125,000-square-foot project is scheduled two years to the day of the groundbreaking.

The celebration will feature a short program and ribbon cutting with plenty of opportunity for guests to tour the building, Jacobsen said. Various food stations scattered throughout the building will provide guests the opportunity to sample sweet and savory foods prepared by The Culpeper’s chefs.

The new building replaces the original brick structure built in the1940s and faces the Blue Ridge Mountains. Residents in the current building will transition to the new building in April.

Jacobsen recently gave a guided tour through the new facility, pointing out all the new state-of-the-art amenities residents will be able to look forward to.

“When folks make a decision to move here, it’s because they want to move here,” Jacobsen said. “They want to move to a retirement community and not go to a temporary solution. This provides them the comfort for them and their families for the rest of their lives.”

Rose Meeks Wallace, Director of Marketing for The Culpeper, pointed out that The Culpeper is a true five-star continuing care retirement community, licensed by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. Only 20 percent of nursing homes in America are rated five stars, and The Culpeper is the only one within a 50-mile radius that is able to say that.

“With a continuing care retirement community, you go through four to five levels of care,” Wallace said.

Residents can start off with independent living, in one of the 27 cottages on the property. They can then progress to assisted living and there is also secure memory care with 32 residences that provide private, secure suites. Long term nursing care and a separate rehab to home program rounds out the levels.

The brainchild of Culpeper Baptist Church pastor Dr. James Thomas Edwards in 1931, The Culpeper opened in 1948 at the Milliman House in Culpeper. In 1946, 98 acres of land was purchased and in April 1951 the current location was opened. Now 70 years old, it was time to upgrade - but they wanted to be able to keep the rich history alive. They incorporated many familiar aspects of the old building - including a heritage wall as soon as you enter the front of the new building.

“One of the really important things is that we wanted to tell our story, we are a faith-based, non profit continuing care retirement community,” Jacobsen said. “One of the really important things for the community was to keep the heritage going. We never want residents to forget where we came from. What we’ve done here is we’ve done a heritage wall, we’re telling our story right here.”

The old facility will be razed come Fall, opening up a new view for residents to be able to see the Blue Ridge Mountains.

There are 133 units at The Culpeper with a wait list that’s truly impressive. Wallace said there is a priority membership list that has close to 40 people on it and they are actively working with about 300 people.

“There’s 10,000 folks turning 65 and older every day,” Jacobsen said. “That being true, the senior population continues to grow in Culpeper and surrounding areas. We are the only continuing care community here.”

“We have become a destination community,” Wallace said. “We’re off the I-95 corridor and we are also the eighth growing spot in Virginia. We have residents who move here whose children live in Northern Virginia.”

The old building faced Route 15, but the new building has been flipped so residents have a scenic view of the majestic Blue Ridge Mountain vista.

Walking through the main floor, the assembly room stands out as stained glass from the old building’s chapel shine with backlit LED lights.

“We met with the residents early on and asked what was important to them, they said they never wanted to forget how we were founded,” Jacobsen said.

Everything is state-of-the-art. Multiple dining venues greet visitors, whether they want a sit down meal in the spacious main dining hall or a quick snack at the Village Cafe.

“We created multiple dining venues,” Jacobsen said. “There’s a Village Cafe, named after Village Loop, that’s a comfortable casual opportunity for families to get steak subs and salmon and milkshakes.”

Further down the hallway, a salon offers residents a chance to be pampered.

The whole building is WiFi connected and areas are wired for Ipad connections.

“Ten years ago you wouldn’t think that, but now there’s a larger percentage of them into that,” Jacobsen said of technology savvy seniors. “They use that to communicate with their grandkids.”

The staff and residents are equally excited about the new building, Wallace said. She pointed out that many staff have worked here for 20 to 30 years.

“It feels like family here,” Jacobsen said. “We have so much longevity.”

“They’ve delivered five star care, now they’ll have a five star product to deliver it at,” Wallace said.

The Culpeper employs 150 people and is looking to add 45 new positions. The building is a true one-stop shop for residents, who never have to leave if they don’t want to.

“They are here for life, that’s probably 98 percent of our residents,” Jacobsen said. “They are here until they find a better place in heaven. With our community, you can come as an independent but when you need help we are a 24-hour operation.”

Wallace said they do direct admissions into higher levels of care, so a resident doesn’t have to start in independent care and move up. The secure memory facility is one they are extremely proud of - offering 32 rooms for those who may have dementia or Alzheimer’s Disease.

Walking through the building, visitors are greeted by the grand scale of the dining room - with vaulted ceilings and an exhibition kitchen. Residents can watch chefs grill steaks and there’s a private room for residents to host their families if they so choose.

Designed by THW, out of Atlanta, Ga., the entire building is modern, but yet has a homey feel.

Jacobsen pointed out the 16 physical rehab to home units, mentioning how they are in high demand.

“Those are dedicated residences for people who go to the hospital for a hip or knee replacement, and they need to go to rehab, they can come here to the five-star nursing home,” Jacobsen said.

“We have people schedule their surgeries around when they can get it,” Wallace said. “It’s like a five-star hotel.”

The new building has a very local feel to it, with photos of the mountains and local barns adorning the directionals that lead residents down wings called “Main” and “Davis” streets.

Wallace said a fundraiser is currently ongoing to sell stained glass windows for $10,000 to $25,000 to benefit their benevolent ministry.

“One thing our organization has always been known for is providing benevolence,” Jacobsen said. “When folks run out of money, at no fault of their own, we provide financial support for them for the rest of their lives. That’s something the foundation is very proud of. But it takes money.”

The whole new facility took $33 million to build, with Jacobsen pointing out it would have taken $20 million to refurbish the old building just to bring it up to code.

Now, they have a truly remarkable building that residents can call home.

For more information, contact The Culpeper’s marketing office at (540) 825-2411.

LifeSpire of Virginia operates four continuing care retirement communities and one membership-based at-home program in Virginia: The Chesapeake in Newport News, The Culpeper in Culpeper, The Glebe in Daleville and Lakewood and Lakewood at Home in Richmond.

Hed: Changing hands

By Jeff Say

Culpeper Times Staff Writer

There comes a time that every raven says ‘nevermore.’

For Jessica Hall, that time was last Monday.

It was announced on Facebook that the longtime Raven’s Nest Coffee House owner was selling her business to Brittany Mabry, co-owner of Grill 309.

Mabry will be leaving Grill 309 and will begin operating Raven’s Nest May 1.

Hall said it wasn’t a difficult decision to leave.

“Brittany asked and I said yes,” Hall said with a laugh.

The two have known each other for years, when Mabrey first came to town and opened Grill 309 she was meeting with sales representatives at Raven’s Nest.

That familiarity helped Hall make the decision.

“I don’t want to say I’ve been wanting to sell it for a while, but at this point I want to spend more time with my granddaughter and I want to get back to my artwork and travel,” Hall said. “(Having a business) is like having a dairy farm, you’re never off. Because I have a kiddo I didn’t let it grow in ways I know it needed to.”

By passing the torch to Mabrey, Hall said she knows that the energy will be there to take Raven’s Nest in a new and exciting direction.

“The freedom that is on the horizon by letting it go and the person coming to me I knew would carry it on and let it thrive,” Hall said.

Mabrey has admired Raven’s Nest since her family moved to Culpeper while she was in college in Florida.

“The two places that stood out to me were Beer Hound Brewery and Raven’s Nest,” she said. “I started coming in a lot and got to know Jessica. I was looking to branch out and do something different. Being able to buy the building as well was a plus.”

Mabrey plans minor changes to start - the upstairs will no longer be available for small events - but says she hopes to keep the heart and soul of the business alive. On a recent weekday afternoon, she was receiving baking lessons from Hall for some of the coffee shop’s delicious pastries.

“The foundation here is so solid,” Mabrey said. “I see potential for some new growth and new avenues that it can go.”

She plans to apply for a Virginia ABC license - in hopes of offering beer, wine and a Sunday Bloody Mary bar.

“She already has amazing drinks in here, but just adding to that and making it a little more full circle,” Mabrey said.

The two have been working together for the past week, sharing recipes, learning the espresso machine and talking with regulars about the change.

“I feel like the world is lifted off my shoulders,” Hall said.

“The transition piece is super important,” Mabrey said. “I wouldn’t feel comfortable with her walking out the back door while I walk in the front. There’s going to be a transition time. It’s reassuring to get to meet the regulars through her and get to see how she does things.”

The regulars - while not liking change - have been supportive Hall said. She pointed down the street to the Frenchman’s Corner, when longtime owner Marc Ast turned the business over to new owner Ed Hanlin.

“I think you’re seeing a changing of the guard on Davis Street and I don’t think that’s a bad thing,” she said.

She’s owned Raven’s Nest for 13 years, originally opening it where Moving Meadows is now on East Davis Street. She’s seen the lower half of East Davis Street stabilize.

“When I came in on lower East Davis Street, I was it,” Hall said. “Foti’s was there, the fly fishing place was there. If Cast Away came in now, they would rock. He floundered at the time because there was nothing to pull people down. What I hope for Culpeper is that we don’t become “anywhere” America. We are now nationally acclaimed for our Main Street, I’d like to see that continue.”

For Mabrey, she hopes to continue the legacy and add to the vibrant female-owned community on Davis Street.

Raven’s Nest for 13 years

“To me, what’s great about this street is that there are so many strong independent women on this block,” Mabrey said.

She hopes to continue the community-minded feel that Hall has fostered - one that Culpeper has come to love, like Hall’s morning videos from the Raven’s Nest.

“The one wonderful thing about the coffee house is you’re here at 5 in the morning and that’s why I started doing those good morning posts,” Hall said. “That ability to see it all the time. You’re able to stay more in touch with the flow of being downtown.”

It’s a feeling that Mabrey is looking forward to embracing.