

'Bee-based business'

Beekeeper provides everything customers need to raise their own hives

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

ABINGDON, Va. — A Washington County man has traded his farming career for beekeeping, opening what is probably the only bee supply retail store in the county.

He goes by the name "Tater," but most everyone along Walden Road in Abingdon knows David Miller farms honeybees.

A few years ago, the beekeeper — or apiarist — began studying the winged honeybees when he wasn't operating a greenhouse or growing tobacco.

"Once I became a beekeeper, I immediately became fascinated. The learning curve will probably remain vertical. It will never plateau because there's so much to learn about bees," said Miller, standing in a building on his farm where he keeps an abundance of bee woodworking supplies.

"The more I was drawn to bees, the more I realized this could turn into an enterprise," said Miller, who has spent the past few months preparing to open a retail business that will offer customers sweet deals on handmade wooden beehives. Eventually, he will stock other bee supplies, including beekeeping jackets, veils, gloves, hive tools, queen-rearing supplies and more.

"My goal is to establish a bee-based business that sells pretty much everything bee-related, except the honey."

Miller hopes more people will learn about his new business, Beekeepers Woodworking and Apiary Supply, through Highlands Beekeepers Association, of which he is a member.

He plans to open his new business on June 1.

Even though Miller has 20 beehives on his farm, he's discovering that honey production is only part of the rewards of beekeeping.

"We're trying to raise more bees because in 2020 we want to launch a commercial queen-rearing operation."

Miller will sell the queen bees to customers for profit and as a way to help more people become successful beekeepers.

Miller is also using the hives for bee research and as way to collect data to help improve the health of honeybees.

"I want to help people get their hives started, make the prices of supplies more affordable and offer educational services. We want to become an education center that works closely with the Washington County Extension Service.

"I plan to provide a place where



CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

Miller's bee-based business will sell all the supplies necessary for becoming a beekeeper. The wooden hives are handmade by Miller. He plans to open his store on June 1 on Walden Road in Abingdon.

people can get bee equipment and become educated through research-based information."

Miller constructed a 30-by-50-foot metal building for his new business venture.

"This is where the magic happens. We source local, sawmill lumber and process it into finished beekeeping woodenware."

Miller went through the process of building a beehive as he explained each layer and its purpose.

"This is a screened bottom board, which will be the bottom of the beehive, and everything else builds on this," said Miller from a room that will soon be his retail store. "I'm using poplar wood as opposed to pine because it's stronger and more durable, and it makes a classier-looking box.

"Next comes the hive body or brood chamber. These deeper boxes are primarily where they raise their young. The next parts are the frames, which

is what holds a wax foundation, which encourages the bees to build straight comb for better organization," he explained.

"The super sits on top and is used by the bees to store a surplus of honey. A beekeeper can only rob the surplus of honey in the fall because the bees need the remaining honey to survive during the winter.

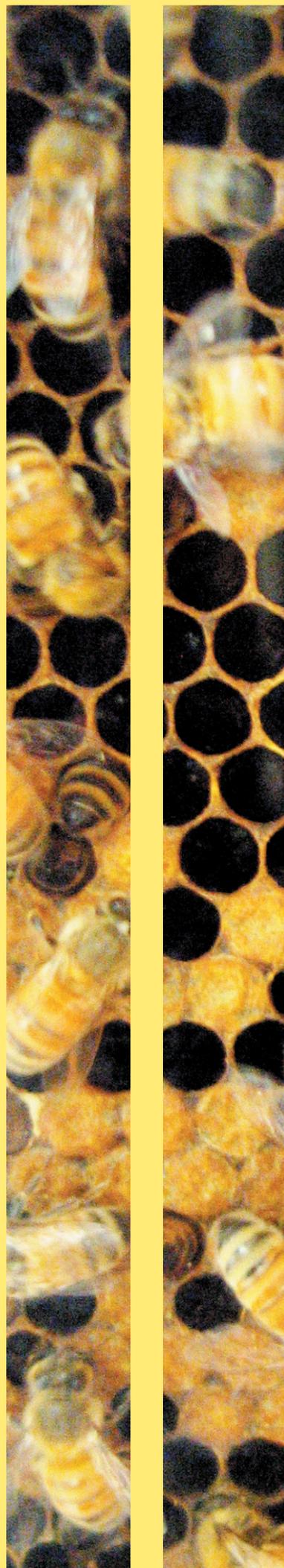
The inner cover is next, which provides the correct bee space on the top hive body and provides good air ventilation within the hive.

The outer cover functions like a roof on a house, protecting the hive from rain and wind.

Miller examined a honeycomb in his shop, a mass of wax cells built in the shape of hexagons. The cells contain their larvae and also serve as a place for honey and pollen.

"The bees build a wax seal over

See **BEES**, Page B2



METROCREATIVE

Murders rattle, rally small Mendota community



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MENDOTA, Va. — It should be a happy time these days in the once-incorporated town of Mendota at the base of Clinch Mountain.

A much-praised new store is now serving this isolated Washington County community near the Scott County border. The Store @ Mendota opened to much fanfare, said Washington County Board of Supervisors Chairman Saul Hernandez at the board's May 14 meeting.

"I'd say we had 300 or 400 people there



Joe Tennis

during the course of a day go through there," Hernandez said. "I think the statistic I heard is that there were 300 hot dogs sold. That's saying a lot."

And, yes, you can say a lot about Mendota — with its breathtaking scenery along the North Fork of the Holston River. Unfortunately, the scenery and the store are not all that's making news these days.

Folks are also talking about the river — and the mystery that may lie within it.

On that same night that the Washington County Board of Supervisors met in Abingdon, Washington County Sheriff Fred Newman hosted a community gathering at the Mendota Community Center. In what was once an elementary school auditorium, Newman addressed residents' concerns over who Newman has labeled "a serial killer."

James Michael Wright, 23, of Mendota, has been charged with three counts of capital murder and is currently being held without bond at the Southwest Virginia Regional Jail in Abingdon.

More than 70 residents packed the Mendota auditorium on May 14 to voice concerns, hear updates on the case and pose questions, including how long before the missing body of one victim could turn up in the river.

"If you do see evidence, even a piece of clothing ... we'll be glad to come and check it out," Newman said on May 14.

"Contact our office. Don't tamper with any evidence if it happens to be her



JOE TENNIS/WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

More than 70 residents turned out to the old Hamilton Elementary School — now the Mendota Community Center — to hear Sheriff Fred Newman and other law officials speak on May 14.

body," Newman said.

"Certainly, let us know immediately. And that's a very valid point: We're hoping obviously with the attractions here in Mendota, with the river attraction, that there will be a lot of people who will be utilizing the river. That may very well be to our benefit."

That same night, about 24 miles away, Hernandez also addressed the Mendota murders — in Abingdon.

"It's been a tough week for a lot of the residents," said Hernandez, who represents the Mendota community on the Board of Supervisors.

"The folks there care a lot about their community, and they were pretty saddened and shocked. But they're a pretty resilient bunch," Hernandez said, "and they want the world to know that they're more than that."

Hernandez says he has even heard from some Mendota residents who say they want to help the families of the victims who lost their lives.

"So they're going to try to raise some money and do some things — for those families," Hernandez said with an emotional tone. "And I just thought, 'It's so typical for that community.'"



WANDERING AROUND WASHINGTON

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Facebook groups get boost from Pal's support

Just in time for the Fourth of July, the exploding popularity of a potential Pal's Sudden Service in Abingdon has blanketed Facebook with groups, polls, surveys and fan songs.

That's all been part of the community's response to five members of the Friends of Abingdon Inc., who have challenged the validity of the certificate of appropriateness awarded by the five-member Abingdon Planning Commission on May 20 to place a Pal's at The Meadows. The town council dismissed the appeal at its Monday meeting but not before hundreds of residents rushed to defend the fast-food chain.



Joe Tennis

Friends of Abingdon members said they have nothing against Pal's. In fact, they praised the award-winning company in a three-page appeal to Town Manager Jimmy Morani.

But their appeal implied that the signature teal-colored Pal's Sudden Service building — with a giant hot dog and hamburger — just does not conform to codes.

In the wake of all that, Washington County recently became the birthplace of the 2,700-member-strong Friends of Pal's of Abingdon, a Facebook group with a patriotic theme — "Life, liberty and Frenchie fries."

This "Friends" group owes its origin to 18-year-old Mary Walters and her father, Chris Walters, a 52-year-old financial adviser with an office in the old Washington County News building on Abingdon's Main Street, just across from the Martha Washington Inn.

This father-daughter duo lives in the Watauga section of Washington County on the outskirts of Abingdon.

And they both love Pal's.

"My dad and I were talking, and we thought it would get some of the members of the town and give them a platform," said Mary Walters, a 2018 graduate of Abingdon High School. "I didn't realize how many people it was important to and how many people it would reach."

Chris Walters, 52, said, "It's been interesting to see how a lot of the younger folks who have raised a voice on this issue [are] just ready to move forward on this project."

Mary Walters praises the group's members.

"I think this is an example of people in the community taking a real role in their community and the citizens of Abingdon taking charge and speaking up for something that they feel is important to them," said Mary Walters, who currently attends the College of Charleston, South Carolina.

"I'm really proud how people have talked across party lines," Mary Walters added. "They have spoken eloquently and civilly to each other, and I hope that attitude carries."



JOE TENNIS/WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

A view of the Pal's in Bristol closest to Abingdon.

TECH IN AGRICULTURE



CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

Damascus farmer Adam Wilson operates a cow-and-calf operation and raises stocker calves, young steers and heifers. His farm-raised beef is highly regarded in the community, supplying meat to local restaurants Seven Trails Grill and Mojo's Trailside Cafe, both in Damascus.

The price of grain

Damascus farmer hopes high-tech rationing system will prove to be a game-changing, cost-cutting technique

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

DAMASCUS, Va. — Investing in new technology is helping a Damascus cattle farmer keep up with the times.

By the time cold weather rolls around, Adam Wilson plans to be feeding his thousand head of beef cattle with the help of a computer.

The second-generation farmer, who's well-known in Washington County for his innovative approach to farming, is stepping outside the box — or, perhaps, the field — and investing big money in a feed facility that will offer him substantial savings down the road.

Wilson's farm-raised beef is highly regarded in the community, supplying meat to local restaurants Seven Trails Grill and Mojo's Trailside Cafe, both in Damascus.

The farmer has laid out an automatic ration system that will allow him to customize the feed rations for his cattle while also having a greater influence on the quality of feed — all without even leaving the farm.

"I don't know of any other farms creating a feed system to this extreme, so I'm either crazy or innovative," he said with a laugh.

Commodity feeding from tractor-trailer load lots is often a practice primarily afforded by larger farms.

According to Phil Blevins, Washington County extension agent for Virginia Tech, the system is unique to the Washington County area.

"I'm not aware of another local farm making an investment like this. Usually you see these feeding systems on a company level rather than a farm level," said Blevins.

"I think it says that Adam is a farmer who's in it for the long haul. He wants to be an efficient producer so that he can survive in this industry.

"The farmer doesn't have a tremendous amount of control over prices because farmers are basically price takers. They can't hold their products to any extent to wait on prices to go up. They have to take what they can get. Their opportunity a lot of times rests on the cost-savings side for being more efficient to reduce their input costs. Adam is being innovative by maximizing his efficiency by managing his input costs and still getting the job done."

Saving time, money

The new feeding system will be a time-saving measure, allowing the



CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

Adam Wilson stands in front of four 30-foot steel bins that will hold different grains or grain by-products delivered to the farm by tractor-trailer loads once his feeding facility is completed.

local farmer to distribute the feed in a quicker and more efficient way.

Instead of purchasing premixed cattle feed, Wilson will use an automatic ration system to blend choice grains that contain the preferred nutrients without the additives. "I'll also use grain by-products from food and ethanol production that would otherwise be thrown away. This is just one example of how the beef industry strives to be sustainable," he said.

Once the system is up and running, four steel feed bins that tower 30 feet into the air will each hold different grains or grain by-products delivered to the farm by tractor-trailers loads. Each bin can hold 35 tons of grain for a total of 140 tons of grains kept on the farm.

"It's cost-advantageous to buy the grain by the trailer loads instead of buying it already mixed," said

Wilson. While Wilson learned a lot about agriculture from his father, he also pays close attention to the business side of farming and earned a business management degree from Virginia Tech in 2007.

A "Roto-Mix" will blend his selection of grains — corn, corn gluten, soy hull and distiller's grains — into a mixture without damaging or tearing the fibers. A separate computer operates the mixer, allowing the farmer to control the machine from his phone and through the internet.

An automated auger will send the grain mixture to a mixer before going into another bin for storage.

"All I will have to do is turn the auger on and fill my truck up with the feed and leave," he said.

A feed box on his pickup truck



WANDERING AROUND WASHINGTON

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Rail-to-trail projects can connect towns with their past

MENDOTA, Va. — Katie Harris runs a store that sits at the far end of the Mendota Trail.

But she's anxious, still, with anticipation of someday seeing the Mendota Trail connected from Island Road in Bristol to The Store at Mendota.

"It's coming," said the 65-year-old Harris. "It will be a great little community when this finishes up. It will revitalize it."

The store, which Harris inherited from her father, used to have gas pumps in the late 1980s and a sign saying, "Welcome to Mendota." Harris reopened it in recent months to revitalize a community landmark.

This summer, Washington County's newest rail-trail project added 3.1 miles to its proposed 12.5-mile length with a ribbon-cutting ceremony in Bristol, Virginia.

More than 100 trail supporters flocked to a parking area off Island Road to check out the new section of the Mendota Trail, which slips beneath I-81 on an abandoned railroad grade and heads north through Washington County, Virginia, near Haskell Station, to reach Reedy Creek Road.

Back up in Mendota, near Clinch Mountain, trail builders opened a not-yet-connected section of the Mendota Trail, spanning 1 mile, in 2017.

Turning rails to trails is nothing new in Washington County. The county is also home to the Salt Trail, connecting Glade Spring to Saltville, and the Virginia Creeper Trail, linking Abingdon to Grayson County.

To date, the Mendota Trail is one of about 50 rail-to-trail projects across the Old Dominion.

Early on, the Mendota Trail hit resistance as seemingly strong as the force of the locomotives that once ran on its path, connecting Bristol to rail stops at Benhams and Mendota.

For years, landowners claimed that the skinny, linear trail property was actually a right-of-way that reverted to them when trains stopped running.

The city of Bristol, Virginia, made plans to build a trail on this property more than a decade ago but ultimately put the brakes on the project when facing resistance from landowners and mounting legal costs.

About three years ago, the trail became the property of Mountain Heritage, which began working to turn the old railbed into a trail, said Frank Kilgore, the legal counsel for Mountain Heritage.

A 2-mile span from Reedy Creek Road to Benhams is slated to be completed next spring, according to Kilgore.

In all, the Mendota Trail is slated to feature 17 trestles, including a crossing on the North Fork of the Holston River.

And, when finished, according to Harris, it will be a dream come true.

"It's alive in my heart," Harris said. "But it needs to keep alive in other people's hearts as well."



JOE TENNIS/WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

The Store at Mendota, reopened in recent months, hopes to benefit from a boom when a rail-to-trail project connects with Bristol.



Joe Tennis

OUTDOORS



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Lily Clair, 10, holds up a young buck that she was able to shoot from 200 yards away. Her father, John Clair, (right) has taken her hunting for several years and says he has seen Lily grow more mature and responsible each year.

A-hunting girls will go

Local youth part of rising numbers of female hunters in Virginia

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

GLADE SPRING, Va. — Hunting season is underway, and this year, there may be more women taking a shot at the outdoor recreation than expected.

According to NRA Family, more women are choosing to hunt as a way to put meat on the table. In 2001, there were 1.8 million registered female hunters in the country, but by 2013, that number nearly doubled to 3.3 million.

But it's not just women who are totting rifles into the woods. Many children say they enjoy the sport, as well as being surrounded by nature and spending time with a hunting parent.

The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) created Youth & Apprentice Days as opportunities for youth to learn about the sport by accompanying a licensed hunter. A \$10 license for youth is good for two years and can be purchased at Walmart and other licensing agencies in Virginia.

"It's an excellent opportunity for youth and first-time hunters to have a fairly high success rate during the Youth & Apprentice Days," said Lee Walker, outreach director for DGIF in Richmond.

"An interest in hunting and being outdoors is generally passed down from family to family," said Walker. "Unfortunately, many kids these days spend more time in front of a computer or mobile device instead of outdoors. We've had a lot of good response from the weekends of hunting."

Walker said the current youth electronic checks indicate there have been 1,758 total harvest of deer this season and 120 total harvest of bears throughout Virginia.

Two local youth have bragging rights when it comes to bagging big game this season.

Madelyn Fore

Fifteen-year-old Madelyn Fore had no idea what awaited her on a hunting trip when she left the house early Saturday morning nearly two weeks ago.

The teen didn't come home with a deer or turkey that day. She pulled up to her Glade Spring home with a black bear in the back of her father's Ford 350.

Her first bear — but not her first bear hunt.

She went bear hunting last year, too, but didn't get one.

This year's harvest is especially important for the teen because it's the last year she qualifies to participate in the Youth



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Madelyn Fore, 15, shot a 193-pound bear during a Youth & Apprentice Bear Hunting Day earlier in October, an event to give youth and first-timers an opportunity to learn to hunt with parents and other mentors.

& Apprentice Bear Hunting Day — an opportunity to hunt before the official season begins. She's hunted with her father, Jesse Fore, since she was a little girl and has killed two bucks, a turkey and a coyote.

Accompanying several friends and their children, Madelyn said her bear hunting adventure this year is one she will remember.

Madelyn and her father were hunting together in Smyth County when they received word from hunters in their party that dogs had treed a bear on Clinch Mountain, more than 2 miles from their location.

"It was very exciting," said Madelyn, who still has sores on her feet from walking the distance in cowgirl boots.

Once she arrived, she was given first dibs on shooting the bear 40 feet up in a tree.

After arriving at a check station, the teen learned the male bear she harvested weighed 193 pounds. She also was required by law to submit a premolar tooth from the bear, which will be used to determine the bear's age. This helps DGIF better monitor and manage bear populations.

The bear was skinned and the meat processed on the farm following their trip.

The next day, Madelyn returned to the hunting field closer to home and shot a turkey with her favorite Ruger .243 rifle.

"I just feel thankful — and proud — to have these hunting opportunities," said Madelyn. "I'm sure I'll enjoy hunting for many years."

A taxidermist is mounting the head of the bear in a rug that she plans to display in her room.

Keep deer away from homes with these deterrents

WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

To address frequent deer sightings in Abingdon, Virginia, the town has released documents encouraging homeowners to avoid planting anything that deer like to eat and to try deterrents that can help keep deer in their natural habitats.

The document cites the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, saying that "deer are generally considered a nuisance when they eat gardens or expensive landscaping plants." Another concern for many residents is car collisions involving deer, which can be dangerous for drivers and deer alike.

The document urges homeowners to be "persistent" and willing to try a variety of methods. Among some of the suggestions are:

» Using deterrent methods early in the year as deer begin forming feeding patterns.

» Using a combination of products and methods to maximize effectiveness.

» Reapplying liquid deterrents weekly or after rainfall.

» Using spray detergents every morning after dew dries.

Gardens that include juniper, hawthorn and other prickly plants are less likely to be attractive to deer. Planting these early will decrease the chance of deer making a habit of eating from gardens.

Natural deterrents include chili powder, peppermint extract, human hair, Irish Spring soap and ammonia. Mixtures or shavings from all of the above can be sprinkled in gardens to prevent deer from feeding from residential properties. Dogs also pose a strong deterrent, and deer can smell urine from dogs or other predators and know to keep away.

Some non-natural deterrent methods include motion-activated sprinklers, predator control lights and deer sprays made from ingredients that deer avoid.

The document also includes some recipes to create your own deer spray, using rotten eggs, garlic, peppers and yogurt. Spraying around the property perimeter regularly can keep deer out of the yard.

Find the full guide at www.swva-today.com with this story.

Lily Clair

Ten-year-old Lily Clair is on her way to rivaling some of the best hunters in her neck of the woods.

The Marion, Virginia, youth harvested a six-point buck at Mitchell Valley in Smyth County during Youth & Apprentice Deer Hunting Days the end of September.

Hunting from a ground blind with her father, John Clair, the young hunter said she spotted the buck coming down the mountain before taking aim. She later captured a spike — a young buck — at only a 213-yard vantage point.

"These are the first deer of mine that will get mounted," said Lily, who has harvested a total of four deer since she began hunting with her father at age 7.

"It's fun to get up early and hang out with my dad. I like being out in nature. It makes me happy."

The father said he's seen his daughter become more mature and responsible with each year of hunting.

"Lily is 10 years old and shot the deer at 200 yards. That's amazing but not nearly as amazing as how hunting has helped her mature. Her resistance to suffering has increased. She can sit in the ice cold for hours waiting to take aim. She's crawled up a field in the snow.

"Hunting also creates intimate relational family time. We were both so excited, we were crying when she shot the deer this year," said the father.

"The time we spent together is important because she owns that accomplishment. She put in all the effort, and she connected with her goal. She has this moment of ownership that truly belongs to her."

After the deer head is professionally mounted, Lily plans to hang her trophy in her room to help her keep the memory of her accomplishment alive.

Carolyn R. Wilson is a freelance writer in Glade Spring, Virginia. Contact her at news@washconews.com.