**Thrill-seekers ready for derby**

| September 02, 2021

BY TAMMY MINNIGH • STAFF WRITER

MONTEREY — This year, the Highland County Fair will feature two events of the crowd favorite – the derby.

The Figure 8 Auto Derby and the Demolition Derby will be held on Thursday starting at 6:30 p.m. The bleachers are always packed with screaming fans cheering for their favorite cars, but the thrill is more significant for the drivers.

“Your whole world is different when you’re in the derby,” said Kelly Moats.

Derby drivers describe it as “thrilling,” “adrenalin rush,” and “more exciting than a 20-minute roller coaster,” but it takes a lot of work beforehand for a few minutes of jarring joy.

For some, crafting the perfect car is part of the joy of the derby. “Everybody stops in to see what you’re doing,” said Trey Williams. A group of derby enthusiasts gets together to work on their cars in Vanderpool.

“Within a five-mile radius, there’s probably close to a dozen derby cars,” Williams said. “Everybody kind of has a little clique or group that you get together and work with.”

For others, working on the car is a chore. J.D. Hiner said he doesn’t particularly enjoy fixing up the vehicles, perhaps because he does auto work for a living at Hiner’s Auto and Repair in Monterey. For Hiner, the lure of the derby is the event itself. “I like to win,” Hiner said.

Still, customizing his car is crucial, but he won’t share any tips for his success. “There’s secrets to the derby,” Hiner said.

Hiner’s son, Caleb, also sees the event as the best part. “It’s the adrenaline and the thrill,” said Caleb. This will be Caleb’s third year competing in what has become a family tradition.

Everybody has their style of competition, Caleb said, describing three types of derby drivers. “There are sandbaggers, who don’t hit others very much and just try and win,” Caleb said. “Another type of drivers are competitive drivers. They try and win, but they will try to put on a show for the crowd. The third type of driver are mad dogs. They go out and hit everyone as hard as they can and just want to put on a good show for the crowd.”

The crash and crush of the derby is a draw for Moats, one of the few women who have competed in this primarily male-oriented event. “I can tear stuff all to pieces,” Moats said.

Moats began at age 15 and competed every year until she had her son, Braiden. “I do want to run again.” Once Braiden is old enough to drive, she is sure he will enter, and she plans to join him. “It’s in Braiden’s blood. He absolutely loves the derby,” Moats said. “It seems like it goes through generations.”

Williams’ son, Colton, will enter the derby for the first time this year. Colton said he is very excited to be participating instead of just watching his father.

“He’s been helping me work on cars since he was big enough to carry wrenches,” Trey Williams said. Together, father and son have spent the summer welding, cutting, and modifying the car, which Colton will paint a flat black.

The derby is not only a tradition in families but in local businesses as well. Hiner’s Auto always enters a car, as does Gutshall’s Exxon.

“It’s a tradition for Exxon,” said employee Cory Turk. “Every employee has done it.”

This year, Turk and Andrew Terry will take their turn representing Gutshall’s with cars painted in the long-established red, white and blue.

Turk and Terry had already spent more than 100 hours on their cars at the beginning of August and still had more to complete.

Terry plans to enlist the aid of girlfriend Ginger Knight to give his car a patriotic paint treatment. Terry said he and Turk are excited and nervous about their first derby, fearing they might be one-hit wonders.

“My strategy is just to go in there and do the best I can and have fun,” Terry said. “In the end, I think it’s just all about fun.”

The derby at the Highland County Fair is a stock car event with limited modifications for safety.

“We try to stick to the basics,” Moats said. “Highland is like the holy grail for derbies. Everybody builds a car for Highland’s derby.”

Indeed, the derby is popular with county residents but a strong attraction for people from other localities, too.

Richard Hanger of Waynesboro operated the UPS truck in Highland for nearly 10 years and got to know many residents here. He was invited to try his luck in previous Highland derbies and entered the V8 class. “After 25 years of safe driving for UPS where I’m not allowed to hit anything, it was just awesome,” Hanger said. “I had a blast. I wish it would have lasted longer.”

Hanger was 61 years old when he last competed in the derby. “I felt like a kid all over again,” Hanger said. “I didn’t go into it to win it. I wanted to experience it.”

Hanger plans to watch the derby again this year, perhaps with his grandson and son, whom he thinks might compete some day. The derby lure runs his family, too.

“My father died when I was young, and it was one of the things he did when I was a baby,” Hanger said, adding it was always on his bucket list. “I would do it every weekend if I could,” he said.

**McDowell Presbyterian Church to unveil historical marker**

| November 11, 2021

BY TAMMY MINNIGH • STAFF WRITER

McDOWELL — McDowell Presbyterian Church will unveil a historical highway marker on Saturday at noon.

While church members have been working toward this goal for about 50 years, McDowell resident Will Crisp has been in charge of recent efforts.

He said the church had worked for recognition from Virginia and national historic registries since the 1970s.

“It was passed on to me four years ago,” Crisp said. “Once we got on the registries with Virginia and nationally, then we were able to pursue the historical highway marker.”

An avid historian, author, and former Virginia Military Institute instructor, Crisp conducted thorough research to verify the authenticity of the church’s historical claims.

“You’ve got to be as accurate as you can,” Crisp said.

He worked closely with the Virginia Department of Transportation, which approves historical highway markers. “They’re strict, but they’re good,” Crisp said. “They want to get it right.”

The marker text reads: “This congregation, first known as Central Union Church, was organized in 1822. The present brick sanctuary, an interpretation of the Greek Revival style, replaced an earlier structure circa 1856. The entrance of the building’s south side was likely for the use of free and enslaved African Americans, who worshiped from the balcony. During the Battle of McDowell on 8 May 1862, the church served as a hospital. Union and Confederate dead were reportedly buried in the congregation’s cemetery across present-day Route 250. The church is listed on the American Presbyterian and Reformed Historic Sites Registry, the Virginia Landmarks Register, and the National Register of Historic Places.”

Crisp and the government agencies he worked with labored over the wording, encapsulating relevant and provable facts. “It was very constructive with a whole spirit of cooperation from Richmond of being very supportive,” he said.

Crisp and the church carefully chose facts referenced in primary sources, citing from church session records back to 1822 when the congregation first formed.

“By 1862, it was here during the federal occupation of the McDowell area,” Crisp said. “It was used as a hospital.”

Crisp found two primary sources documenting the Union use of the church as a hospital — a diary from the local pastor and a diary from a Union soldier.

“We had diaries of a Rev. William T. Price who was a local pastor who stated, ‘The enemy took possession of two churches,’” Crisp said.

The diary of Union soldier John Sosmann recalled how he was housed in the hospital in the church.

“Most often, McDowell Presbyterian Church is remembered for its role as a hospital for Union and Confederate soldiers during the Battle of McDowell,” added the Rev. Elizabeth Pyles, current pastor. “While that’s an important part of our history, the church has been a presence in our community both long before and long after the Civil War.”

Pyles noted it’s crucial to mark the church’s presence in the community throughout its history, from a few faithful gathering in the first modest wooden structure through today, when the playground is probably what most non-members would associate with the church.

Crisp gives credit to Clay Hamilton of the Highland Historical Society for preserving much of the church’s history. Hamilton transcribed the handwritten notes and church papers. “Without those transcripts, we couldn’t have done this,” Crisp said.

One oral tradition Crisp could not verify is the origin of the initials and dates etched into the church facade.

“It has been said that Confederate soldiers and maybe Union soldiers carved their names on the bricks,” Crisp said. He could not find any primary sources to verify this, but the script is correct for the time, and it was a known practice, he said.

The marker stands on the roadside at the south of the church, in sight of the door reserved for African American worshipers.

“What history doesn’t record for us is the contribution of slaves to the church,” Pyles said. “There is a balcony utilized by slaves, accessible at the time by a side entrance no longer in use today.”

Pyles said another oral tradition relays that the current brick sanctuary was built by church members, with the women of the church firing the bricks and the men of the church building the structure.

“Some of the members had slaves, but the historical record is silent as to their contribution,” Pyles said. “But it seems reasonable to believe that they, too, would have helped in building this place of worship.”

Crisp said he was inspired by the hymn, “For All the Saints Who from Their Labors Rest.”

“All we’ve been doing is to honor all those people who built a place to worship,” he said.

Betsy Marshall Faircloth and her family dedicated the marker in memory of her husband, Jerry Faircloth.

The church will hold a short ceremony at the marker, rain or shine, on Nov. 13 at noon.

**All-American fare offered on Main St.**

| August 05, 2021

BY TAMMY MINNIGH • CONTRIBUTING WRITER

MONTEREY — Hungry in a hurry? Monterey is now home to a mobile hotdog cart with a drive-through option — the first permitted mobile food stand in Highland County.

Joe Gallardo and Dustee Stone set up Patriot Dogs in April, and business has been picking up better than they expected.

“Word of mouth is what it is all about,” Stone said. “We’re catering to the locals.”

“The main idea for doing this was just to give people another option,” Gallardo said.

The couple saw a need for more meal options last fall and began working on their business plan, buying the cart, and getting the required health department inspections and permits.

They set up in the parking lot of the former Ernie’s Market at the corner of U.S. 220 and U.S. 250 for the central location. It’s in the center of town, and many locals often park there, so the stand had a ready-made clientele.

“Our selling point is that it’s quick,” Stone said.

“There’s the convenient service of drive-through,” Gallardo said, explaining that if cars drive up, he will take their order, make the food and hand it into their vehicle.

All-beef hot dogs with 11 topping choices began the business, but sodas and breakfast tacos soon joined the menu.

“We sell Nathan’s hot dogs, which are American-made,” Gallardo said. “We’re American-loving patriots.”

This love of America is how Gallardo chose the name, but he and Stone point out they are not making a political statement, just running a business.

And business is good, with new food on the way. Breastmeat chicken cheese taquitos are coming soon, and they are researching solar generators to run a coffee maker.

Stone is considering other menu options, always focusing on affordability and convenience. “We’re not trying to be fancy. We’re trying to be efficient,” Stone said.

Some customers drive through for a quick meal or snack, while others bring lawn chairs to sit and chat while eating. “They label this the ‘killing time corner,’” Gallardo said.

He enjoys spending time with the locals. “This is a great community. I love living here,” Gallardo said. “I love to give back.”

The cart is the first mobile unit in Highland County, according to Ken Hearst, food supervisor for the Central Shenandoah Health District.

Hearst has been with the department since 2006 and said that other counties in the district have had mobile units in the past. But, he added, “I have not seen a hot dog cart in at least six years in our district,” Hearst said. “It makes it kind of a unique thing there in Highland.”

Patriot Dogs sets up in Monterey Monday through Friday. Business there is enough to keep Stone and Gallardo busy even as they look to the future when they may buy a second cart for a friend to operate in another area.

While they add more items, hot dogs remain the core of their business. “Who doesn’t like a good hot dog?” Gallardo said.