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## Amherst County mourns passing of Mary Woodruff, pie shop's staple, 'entertainer'

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Mary Woodruff does her part of the pie-making as she peels a bowl of apples at Woodruff's Café and Pie Shop in M Lee Luther Jr.

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**T**he matriarch of the Woodruff's Store: Café and Pie Shop and a staple in the Amherst County community, Mary Fannie Woodruff, died Tuesday at age 104.

Known for her welcoming presence and interactions with customers in the pie shop on Virginia 130 near the village of Elon in Amherst County, Woodruff recently had been in hospice care, the family announced.

“She loved life,” said her daughter, Angela Scott. “Her joy was being [in] the shop every day and greeting the customers.”

Scott said Woodruff’s role as a constant force of friendliness in the shop filled her with purpose after her husband’s death in 1998.

“I think it helped her live longer,” Scott said. “She loved people and that was her life.”

And the community loved Mary Woodruff.

Within minutes of the shop’s Facebook page posting the news of Woodruff’s death, hundreds of comments on the post poured in.

“It’s countless,” Scott said of the outpouring of support the family has received in recent weeks upon announcing her move to hospice care. “We’ve gotten so many letters during her illness because she touched so many lives.”

Woodruff was there for people who needed someone to talk to, Scott said. She recalled one lady who would come by the shop every day and do her knitting while talking to Mary.

“I believe she found a home here talking to mama,” Scott said. “There’re countless customers I could give you stories on.”

A person told Scott her mother was a “walking, living anti-depressant.” Mary Woodruff ran the store for 30 years and had a legacy of helping others, Scott said.

“So many people, she gave them food when they didn’t have anything,” Scott said.

Mary Woodruff also gained national attention while charming famed journalist Al Roker during a “Today” show visit, which aired in February 2020. The two hit it off during the interview and Roker shared his affectionate impression of meeting her as well as a raving review of the pie, which he shared during the show.

Roker had come across an article featuring the store in The Wall Street Journal and show producers reached out for the interview, Scott said.

The pie shop is housed in a small, two-story cinderblock building Scott’s father built with his own hands in 1952. The white-painted building was a grocery store for 30 years until 1982 and was used for other family businesses.

Scott, her two sisters and two brothers grew up in the store’s upstairs apartment and, in 1998, she opened the café and pie shop.

Scott’s great-grandfather was a freed slave who may have fought in the Civil War. With his pension, he opened a blacksmith’s shop near the current café’s location. Travelers on their way to Lynchburg would stop and camp overnight.

Scott said her great-grandfather had the first African American-owned business in the county’s history.

Mary Woodruff regularly started her days at the shop with coffee, a hearty breakfast and chatting up the customers, calling herself “the entertainer,” Scott said in a previous interview.

Debbie Habel, executive director of Amherst County Habitat for Humanity, said her late mother and Mary were friends. Mary’s sister-in-law and nurse, Edna Burton, and Habel’s mother were hired the same day in 1948 and often would get lunch from Woodruff’s, according to Habel.

One of Habel’s mother’s favorite things to do was to ride up to Elon, visit with Mary and eat an apple turnover.

“They would sit holding hands, smiling and remembering!” Debbie Habel said in an email.

Sabrina Kennon, of the Amherst County Chamber of Commerce, said the chamber was honored to recognize Woodruff as the Harry L. Day Jr. recipient for her service to Amherst County.

“Personally, I enjoyed sitting with her and listening to her vibrantly tell the history of the shop and her family,” Kennon said in an email. “She would warmly tell me about each family picture in the shop and share something about how the Good Lord had blessed her and her family.”