

James King Reflects on the Past and Future of Virginia Wine

September 2, 2022



James King of King Family Vineyards. Photo by Malcolm Andrews for the Crozet Gazette.

When James King was appointed to the Virginia Wine Board last month, he thought of his father, David, who served on the board from 2007 to 2009, and again from 2013 to 2018. When David died in 2019, members of the close-knit wine community spoke out about the significant impact he'd had on the course of the industry.

It's true, James said. After the family winery, King Family Vineyards, had a

few years of experience in wine production, they decided to build the carriage house for community events. "We found out the law allowed no more than 12 events per year," James remembered, "and we couldn't find out the reasoning." It turned out to be embedded in the state code, with no evident basis. The Kings—as well as other wineries in the state—could not justify the expense of an event space that was used only a few times each season.

"No matter what it looks like from the outside, this is farming, and it's hard," James said. "We're subject to all the risks farmers take and no matter how the year's crop turns out, we still have to buy the barrels, and the tractors, the new vines and the bottles." Having a related source of income allows a little more stability in an uncertain business.



David King is credited with transforming the Virginia wine industry. Photo by Justin Ide.

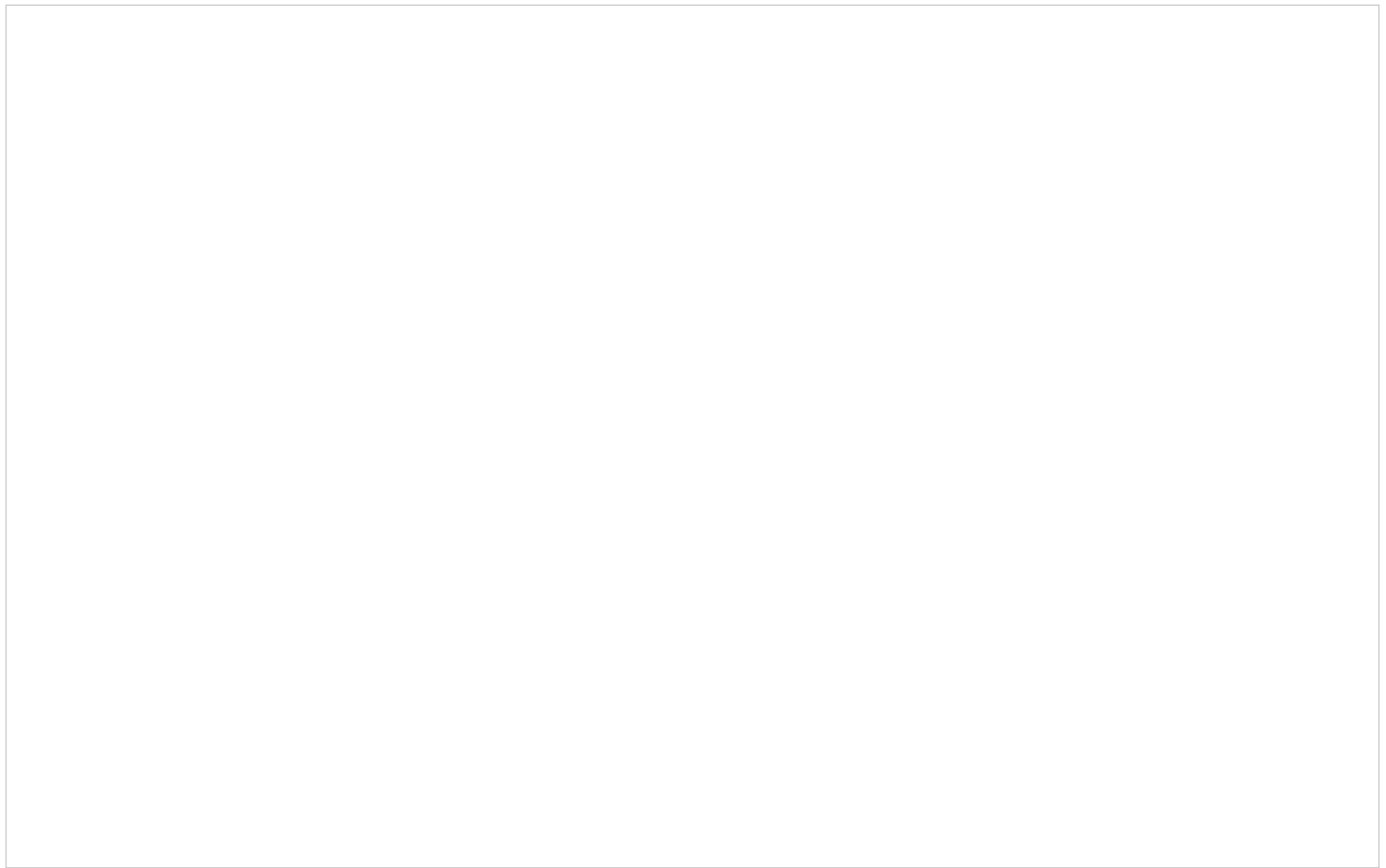
His dad, an attorney, spent years talking with his colleagues, lobbying the General Assembly and finally, helping to draft and pass a bill that essentially

allowed events at the wineries' discretion, so long as they have the appropriate space and location. Regulations governing impact on the health, safety or welfare of the public still apply. "This is something we should all be concerned with," James said.

"The new Virginia law allowed someone contemplating getting into the wine business in Virginia to think, 'I may have a shot,'" James said. "Its importance shows in the numbers." From 2015 to 2019, the number of Virginia state wineries grew by more than a third. David King also worked hard to create the Virginia Winery Distribution Company, which gave Virginia wineries and farm wineries an alternative to using independent wine wholesalers.

James King said that as a member of the wine board, he's committed to promoting all Virginia wines, and he welcomes those who drive innovation using hired winemakers and grapes from a number of growers to explore new blends and techniques. At the same time, he believes the public is better served by some regulation governing who is entitled to hold onsite wine events. The Albemarle Board of Supervisors consulted with the Virginia Wine Board to hammer out guidelines that stipulate a minimum of five acres of grapes, an on-site tasting room and an assortment of other stipulations for the right to hold events, limits intended to prevent any possible bad actors.

"Even planting one acre of grapes is a huge financial responsibility," he said. "The requirements present a low barrier, but a meaningful one. This helps keep the quality high and acknowledges the investment that farm wineries have in the community."



The King family has a history of supporting other farmers, wine growers and wineries. Pictured here in 2013, from left (all Kings): James L., Ali, Stuart C., Gus, Stuart, Corie, Gincy, Lellie, Carrington, Ellen, David (now deceased), Kelly, James, and Connor. Missing are the two younger children of Kelly and James King, Charlotte and Nate. Photo: Aaron Watson.

Covid was definitely a challenge for all Virginia wineries, but it also gave the community a reason to be thankful for the beautiful scenic places where they could remain outside and still get a sense of being with people and enjoying a glass of wine. "The direct-to-consumer and online sales really saved the industry," James said.

Inflation has been another factor that's made 2022 a little slower so far, he said. "People continue to come, but they spend a little less money. We all feel lucky to still be here."

On the horizon is another threat to the industry, a major one. "The lantern fly is here in the county," he said. "If we see them, we'll stomp 'em, but we're expecting big damage as we learn how to control them." He takes some comfort in the fact that some of the state's best minds are working on

prevention and damage control. He's very conscious that in his new role, he has multiple wineries to be concerned about.

"We're expecting the need to do 40% more spraying," he said. "That's terrible for all of us, but I can't help but think about Loving Cup Winery [in North Garden]. They're totally organic, and the lantern fly could cause them to shut down completely."

James said he is also mindful of the concern of rural neighbors about traffic, congestion and noise. "We had VDOT do a study of the traffic on Half-Mile Branch," he said. "The study found that vehicle traffic to the winery was about half of what it would be if the property had been developed into a 28-home subdivision."

Keeping the area rural is important to him and his family. "This is an amazing place," he said. "I grew up here, getting movies from Maupin's, jumping the fence to fish in a neighboring pond, working in the vines in the summer and fall." It's a wonderful place to grow fruit, he said, pointing out that tree and vine fruits have been grown here for centuries.

It wasn't the possibility of an orchard or winery that caused his father to choose Crozet years ago. He wanted property with enough flat land for a polo field, James said. He was approached by a would-be grape grower asking to lease some land, so he added wine production to his goals for the farm. After David died, James toyed with learning to play polo, "just so I could understand him a little better." He decided it would take him years to be as comfortable on a horse as his father, so chose to stick with vineyard management.

James King left Crozet for a while, studied history and played lacrosse at U.Va., joined the Marine Corps, was deployed twice—once to Iraq and once to Afghanistan—and lived in several states. "There are a lot of great places, but in the end, I asked my family if there was space for me in the business. I am so glad to be able to raise my own children here."

Our Century Farms

June 3, 2022



The Chiles family farm was founded in 1912. The Chiles dynasty has more Henrys than the Tudors. From left, Henry X, Henry VIII, and Henry "Huff" IX. Photo submitted.

Love of the Land, Hard Work, and Innovation Preserve Family Farms

Before tourism, before the Interstates, before modern tractors, hard-working families turned the stony land of the foothills into productive orchards, forests and farms. Some of these families remain on the same land their great-great-grandfathers worked, and the state documents them in the Virginia "Century Farm" program. The program, which began in 1997, includes farms that family members have occupied and labored on for at

least a century, and that return at least \$2,500 from farm products or services each year.

"This is an important part of our history, and also our future," said Jennifer Perkins, who manages the program under the Virginia Department of Agriculture. "We should honor them."

Anyone who farms knows it's not an easy business, with more unforeseeable challenges than most of us are comfortable with. But the two Century Farms in the Crozet Gazette's coverage area have survived by adapting, changing when necessary, and raising children and grandchildren who want to continue.

Smallwood

That's not to say that farming is for everyone, said Peter Jones, who still remembers falling asleep on the tractor while baling hay at Smallwood Farm, just outside Crozet. "That was it for me," he said. After college, he went on to work in higher education and then property and casualty insurance. Jones loved the family farm, though, and after living and working in North Carolina, built his present home on the ancestral property. While he spoke, his son Alexander, 15, was taking an after-school shift making hay at the nationally respected horse breeding operation that also raises Angus cattle. Also pitching in was Peter Mellen, relieving his mother, Robin Mellen, who had just spent her day making hay in the late May sun.



Robin Mellen with Money Chaser and eight-day-old Caroline. Photo: Malcolm Andrews.

Peter Jones's and Mellen's father, Bernard Showalter "Pete" Jones, died in 2011, the result of a disastrous fall down the stairs. He was 89, but his children believe it was well before his time. At 87, he was still riding at Foxfield twice a year. "I put a stop to that when his horse reared up," Mellen said. "That wouldn't have happened with his favorite horse. I'm not sure he ever forgave me." One interesting thing about him, his children said, was his habit of going barefoot around the property. Jones said he didn't put shoes on until January and February.

Not only was he riding and jumping in his ninth decade of life, but he was gardening, joyfully overseeing life on the farm, which once included pigs and chickens, and fishing whenever he could. He was an enthusiastic hunter of

wild gobblers on Buck's Elbow Mountain and a key figure in the horse breeding that came to be the farm's main business in the '60s.

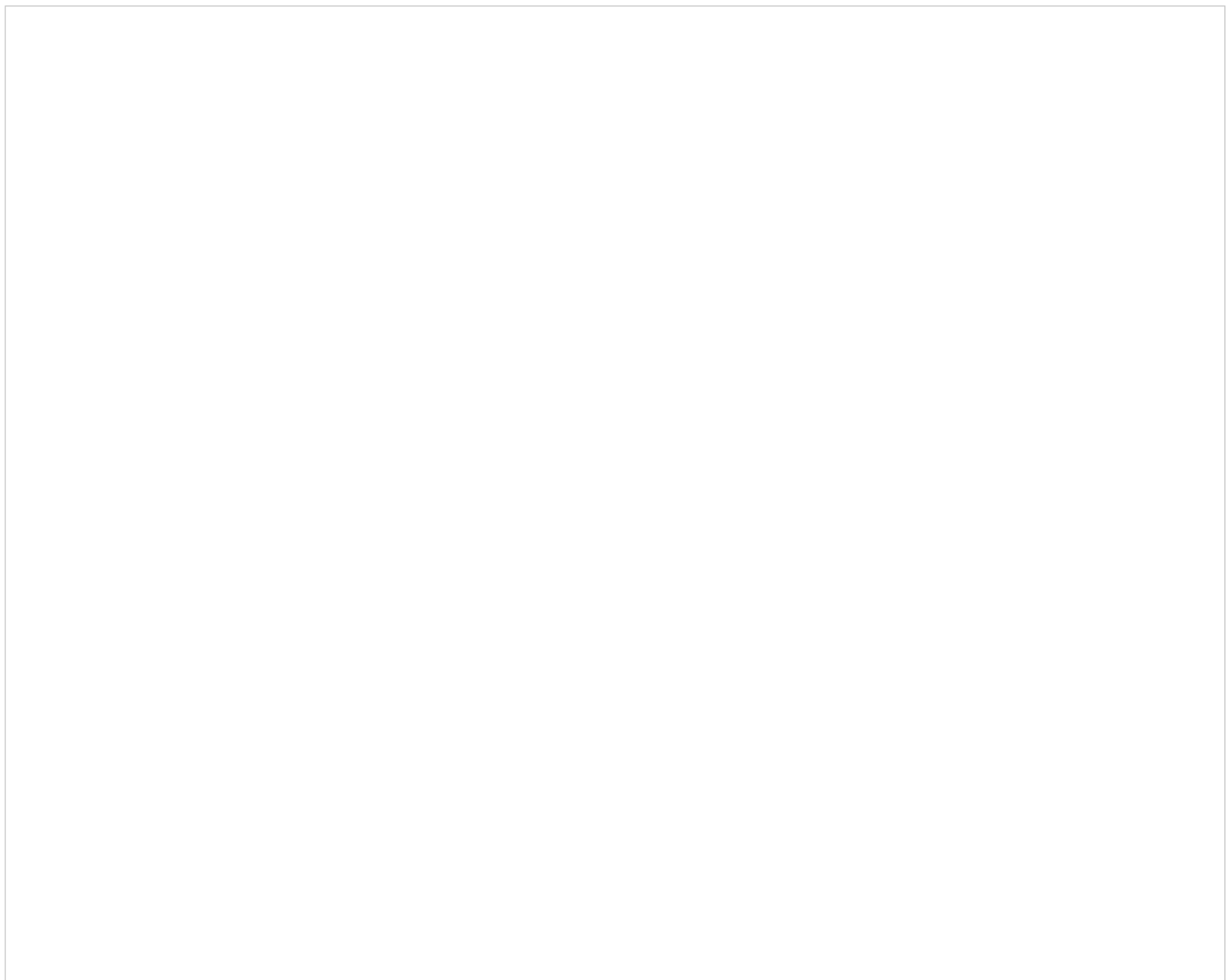


Phyllis and "Pete" Jones. Photo submitted.

Before that, there was a sizable dairy herd on the property, Jones said. The family milk business was a venerable one, probably started in the 1800s, before Smallwood split off from a much larger property called Rose Valley Farm and took its sensible name from a small patch of woods. In its heyday,

milk was marketed under the Jones family name, and the dairy cow operation continued through the lives of O. H. "Hess" Jones and Maude S. Jones, Pete's parents. In the mid-20th century the farm changed its focus.

This was partly the result of a blizzard in the early '60s, when much of the herd was lost to mastitis. The family turned their resources to horse breeding, the first love of Phyllis Jones, Pete's wife and, under her guidance, they've produced many fine sport horses. "We can handle everything from Welsh ponies to Clydesdales," Mellen said. They've also bred Australian shepherds.



Robin Mellen calms a mare with her newborn foal at Smallwood Farm. New mothers are protective, she said, but that diminishes over time. Photo: Malcolm Andrews.

The shepherds and ponies are striking, but it's hard for visitors to keep their

eyes off Friend or Foe if he's out of the barn. "Friendly," a huge, beautiful stallion, is remarkable for his size, strength and quiet temperament. He's won multiple stakes and his offspring, particularly "Mr. Buff," who recently retired, have won more than \$1.6 million.



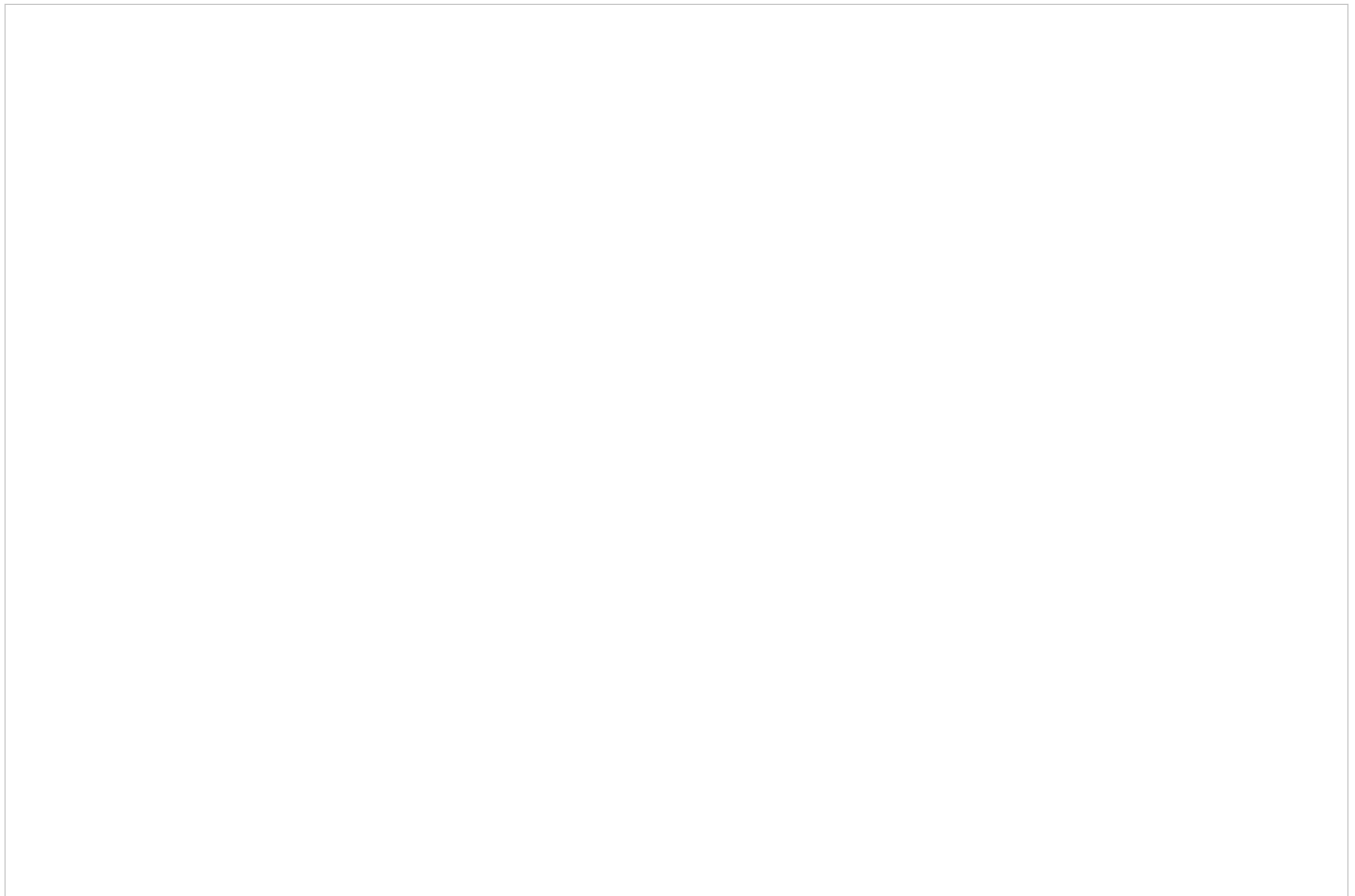
The original farmhouse at Smallwood Farm. Photo submitted.

Phyllis Jones is a matriarch who pitches in every day of her life, Mellen said. At 83, "She's up every morning and out at the barn by 7:30, cleaning stalls." One of her talents is the ability to size up every horse, an important skill, with unfamiliar horses coming in every day to be bred. "Every horse is different and she just knows how to read their signals."

The young Phyllis's introduction to the scion of Smallwood followed a tale of intrigue and international drama. Phyllis was an accomplished rider and enrolled in Hollins College under pressure from her parents. "She didn't

especially want to go to college, so chose the horsiest place she could," Mellen said.

While there, she became the protege of the mysterious Countess Judith Gyurky, owner of a number of Hungarian Clover horses. The countess had used various plots to survive two world wars with her horses and became convinced that neither they nor she would last long in the Soviet Union. She sold everything she had, came to Virginia, found a place near Batesville, and made a home for what was left of her horses. It wasn't long before the remnants of her once magnificent herd arrived: 13 mares, stallions and foals, half-starved from their ocean voyage. The countess sold her jewels, lived in a barn and took odd jobs to support the horses, plucking chickens and working as a line cook. She also took a job as a riding teacher at Hollins and convinced her star student to leave college and come ride for her at Port a Ferry Farm. Through the network that links even the most isolated of farmers, Phyllis met and married Jones.



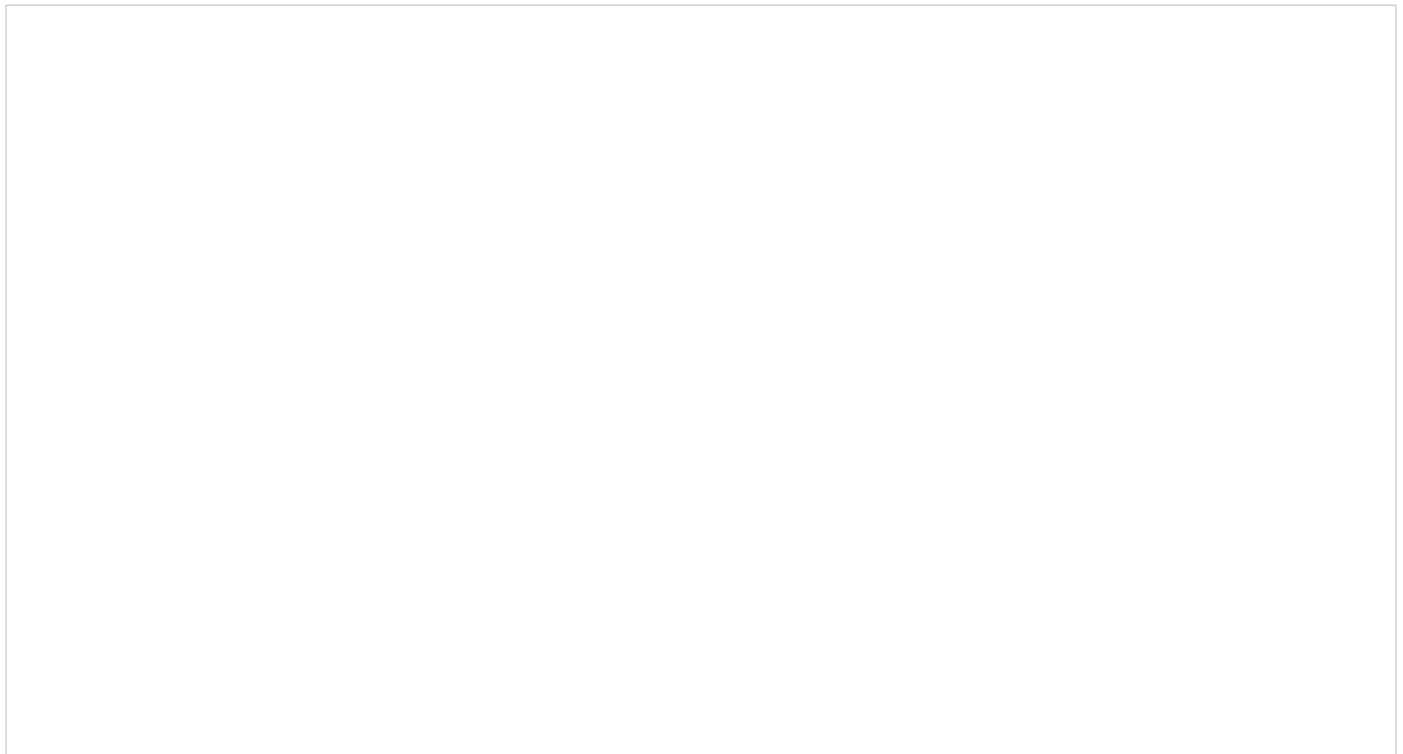
Money Chaser was bred at Smallwood and is shown here with her foal. Caroline, just eight days old in this photo, is destined to be a sizable filly. Photo: Malcolm Andrews.

Mellen inherited her mother's love of horses as well as her ability to communicate with them. "I grew up riding every day," she said. As she took over more and more of the breeding, she had no illusions about leading a glamorous life at high-stakes races. In reality, she spends a lot of time on a tractor, or in the barns, or supervising the breeding, or dealing with veterinarians. She's the one who's often there when a foal is born. "Theoretically, all should go well without much help," she said. But the way the baby is positioned (like a little diver, with its folded legs in front, she explained) means that intervention is sometimes necessary. There are plenty of other emergencies of every kind, her brother said, including when a cow or horse gets out, "most likely on a Sunday or holiday."

How do they see the future of Smallwood? Since at least two members of the next generation are already stepping up, both Jones and Mellen expect it will continue to thrive. "Then I'll retire and see the world," Mellen said. Then she corrected herself. "No, I won't. I want to be right here."

Chiles

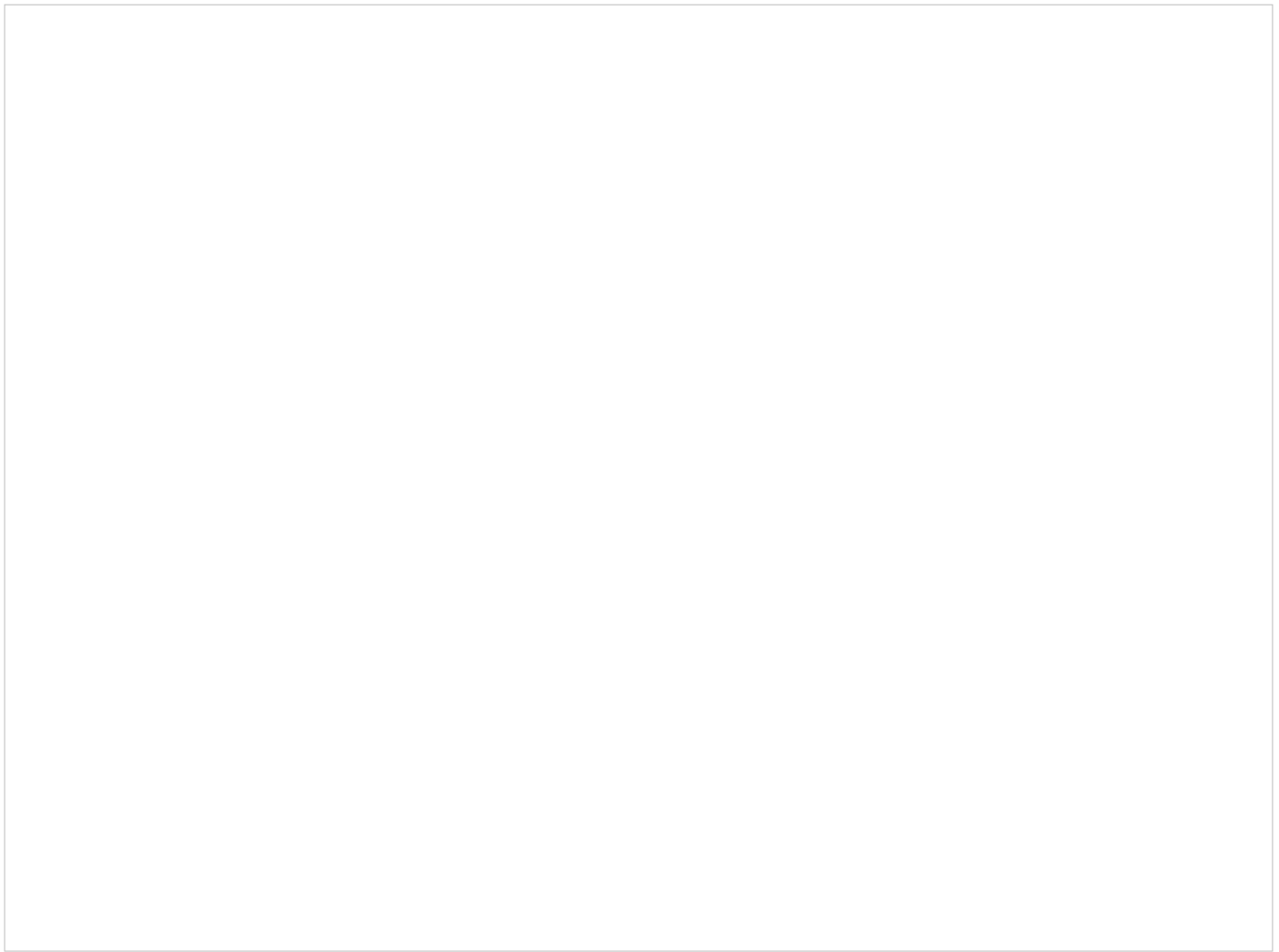
No one knows exactly why New Jersey osteopath Harry Chiles (Henry Linden Chiles VI) moved from New Jersey to Crozet, nor how he met John Wimbish Montague, who had been in the textile business in New York, but in 1912 the two men planted a couple of peach orchards on modest tracts in Batesville and Crozet that have blossomed into a multi-generational family business. Their partnership was solidified when Harry's son, Henry VII, married John's daughter, Virginia. The Montague family kept a home in New York, and that's where they married in 1923.



Ruth and Henry Chiles's partnership transformed the family orchard into a diverse and thriving rural business. Ruth, who made countless contributions to the community, died last year. Photo submitted.

The orchards, which as far as the family knows, did not have a name in the early years, expanded, adding apples to the thriving peach business. The firmer fruits could be shipped to Europe and family lore has it that the queen (either Queen Elizabeth, the queen mother, or Elizabeth II, the present queen) bit into an Albemarle Pippin apple, loved it, and ordered more. Pleased with this fact, the owners gave the growing business the name "Crown Orchards." Cynthia Chiles, granddaughter of Henry VII, said there's no way to prove this family story, but they've shipped internationally for quite some time.

The males in the Chiles family have been named even more consistently than the Tudors. Henry VII and Virginia named their son "Henry VIII," and he grew up in the fruit business. "Dad ("Dad" is Henry VIII) was in the army when his father died in 1956," Cynthia said. The army released him and the young man—just 18 or 19—had to make a decision about the future of the family business.



The peach bloom at Chiles Peach Orchard in Greenwood. Photo submitted.

“My grandmother and aunt told him they’d be glad to sell the business, so he had to choose,” Cynthia said. “They left it to him whether or not he wanted the life of an orchardist.”

Obviously, the teenager chose a life of hard work, overcoming obstacles as they came up, and is still at it 68 years later.

“Dad was the visionary, the one responsible for the expansion of the business,” Cynthia said. He was a one-man show for many years, then later with his wife, Ruth, and three children, whom Cynthia called “free and cheap labor.” She said for a long time, he’d drive the tractor, pick the fruit and pack it. He embraced technology, increased the acreage, supported other orchardists throughout the state, expanded the selection of fruit as well as the varieties, and was always looking for a way to do things smarter and

better. He believed there is always a way to make things work, his daughter said.



At 87, Henry Chiles is the first to get to work and the last to leave. Submitted photo.

“At 87, he’s still the first one to work and the last to leave, seven days a week,” she said. In his years guiding the business, he added cherries, blueberries and strawberries, then he and Ruth came upon the “pick-your-own” concept early in its introduction nationwide. “We lost a lot of the crop in the early ’70s, and it didn’t seem worthwhile to bring in a picking crew, so

mom put a notice in the Daily Progress, inviting people to come in and pick peaches." The next year—a better one—they thought they'd go back to hired labor, but even before peach season rolled around, they started getting calls from former pickers. They were amazed but said, "I guess we're doing this," Cynthia recalled.

Having people come and pick meant there were hungry crowds there all through the season, so the Chiles added ice cream, vegetables in season, popcorn, candy and all kinds of fruit-related products and activities, including the popular pancake breakfasts. For 30 years or so, they've grown grapes for other wineries and, just last year, began welcoming people at their own Chiswell Estate Winery.

The young Henry found a partner for life in Ruth Dollens, who grew up in Midway. "Not sure how they met, but I think they probably always knew of each other, growing up." Cynthia said. "She never questioned the life she married into." But her interests were as broad as Henry's were focused. She didn't just support the business, she worked at it in a dozen different ways and grew the retail outlets at Carter Mountain and Chiles Peach Orchard. She didn't just join the PTA, she became the president; she wasn't only the first woman in the Crozet Lions Club, she directed their blockbuster variety show for 50 years. She not only joined and generously supported Tabor Presbyterian Church, she played the organ, directed the choir, and volunteered whenever needed.

Like Henry, she had to make a choice, Cynthia said: "She could sit at home waiting for him to come home from fixing the tractor at midnight, or she could go bowling, or to choir practice, or to the Lions Club. She loved to laugh, loved to have fun, and really loved a good joke." It wasn't unusual for her—and sometimes the three children as well—to finish dinner and go back to the packing house in season.

Before cell phones, before texts, before e-mail, Henry and Ruth organized their complicated life by leaving notes on the kitchen table: Cynthia thinks

she still might have a few to remember her mother, who died last year.

The three children—Cynthia, Henry and Sarah—grew up picking up over-ripe fruit from the orchard floor and, like their parents, never shrank from hard physical work. Any child, cousin, niece or grandchild is welcome to work for the family business if they want to.

What's ahead for the century-old business? "We don't know for sure in these challenging times," Cynthia said. "Labor has been a problem for a while, gas prices hurt us, so we're perhaps more cautious these days." Still, she's very mindful that people are struggling to afford food, regardless of what it costs to produce it.

The family received a warm welcome from the regional wine world for their new wine venture, and recently dipped their toes into competition with the Monticello Cup, a local wine-judging event. "It was great to be there with our friends and neighbors," Cynthia said. All three of the Chiswell Estate wines they entered—the 2020 Cabernet Sauvignon, the 2020 Rosé, and the 2020 Petit Manseng—were awarded silver ribbons. Since she's new to this, "I don't know whether this is one of those things where everyone gets a medal, or not," Cynthia said. "But, whatever, I'll take it."

Sweet Season: Bakers Bring Out Their Best for Winter Holidays

December 2, 2022



Order your beautifully decorated Christmas cookies or hot chocolate bombs online from Jaclyn's Cookies. Submitted photo.

While Crozet and its neighboring rural villages haven't quite the reputation as Vienna or Paris for outstanding bread and pastries, there are a surprising number of wonderful baked goods available. Outstanding cakes, cookies, fruitcakes, cheesecakes, cupcakes, pies, breads and even French macarons are available in Crozet and nearby. Many of our bakers make holiday specialties and have plenty of advice for home cooks, too.



Flavors of spice, eggnog and chocolate show up in Fox Hollow cookies during the holidays.

Holiday Flavors Spice Up Fox Hollow Christmas Cookies and Cakes

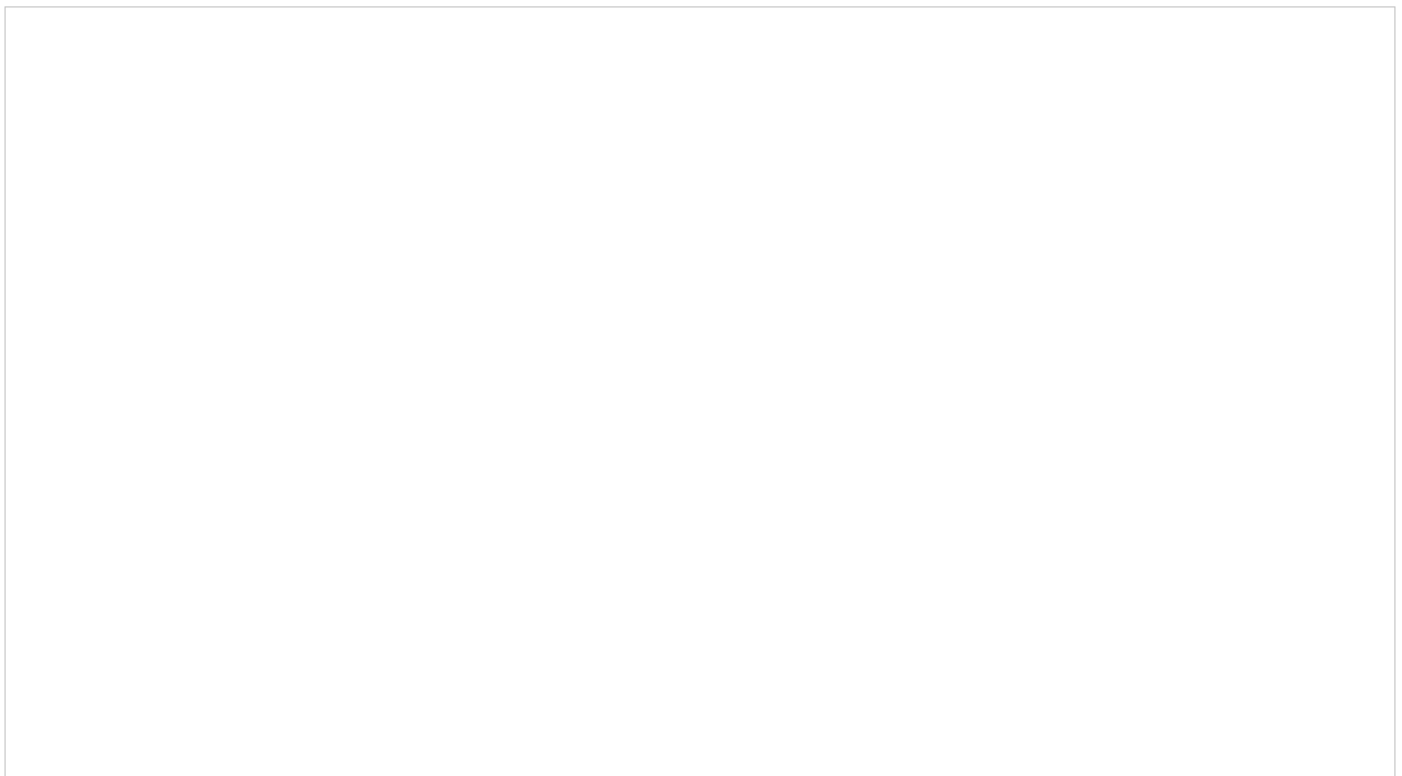
During December, Leanne Fox adds the classic flavors of the Christmas season—egg nog, peppermint, ginger and cinnamon—to the hundreds of cookies and cakes that she produces every weekday, year-round, from the kitchen at Tabor Presbyterian Church. Her offerings sound like a sweet


winter's-night dream: classic European dark gingerbread, chocolate gingerbread cookies, cakes with lemon and lavender glaze, tender eggnog cookies coated in sugar and spice. Fox works from orders placed by customers, with pick-up at the church or local delivery every Friday. Fox Hollow Baking Company began as a way for Fox to add some joy to the tense dynamics of her job in national politics. Now, she marvels at the generosity of her supportive Crozet community.

What she makes: Cookies and cakes, with special holiday offerings at her website, foxhollowbaking.com. Order there, or find at Bluebird & Company, The Yellow Mug, Starr Hill or Blue Ridge Bottle Shop locally; others on web site.

Why she does it: "I've always loved to make things with my hands. It's my biggest joy to have my creations featured in someone's family gatherings, and I'm humbled by the small part I play there."

Advice for home bakers: "In baking, careful measuring is especially important. I wish everyone would switch to using a kitchen scale for cookies, cakes and other pastries."





Rachel Willis makes stunning one-of-a-kind wedding cakes right here in Crozet. She was captured last summer with a spectacular summer-flower cake.

Cakes by Rachel: Widespread Demand, Rooted in Crozet

People come from everywhere to commission custom wedding cakes created by Rachel Willis and her small staff, who operate out of a small cottage on Jarmans Gap Road near downtown Crozet. Willis has been a professional chef for more than 30 years. "It's all I've ever done," she said. She worked in restaurants in France and then in Charlottesville; then married, bought a farm in Crozet's mountains, and had a family. As if designing,

baking, building, decorating and transporting wedding cakes is not physically demanding enough, she also raises sheep and chickens, with some of the fresh eggs going into her beautiful, one-of-a-kind creations. Although her work is sought after from all parts of the state and beyond, she always tries to have a little something for Crozet. During the fall, she dipped local apples in caramel and nuts, selling all she could make. She'll participate in the Holiday Market December 10 (see page 1) with packages of cookies, bars and cupcakes, and will take online orders for macarons.



Rachel Willis of Cakes by Rachel always tries to have something for her Crozet neighbors. Macarons will be available Dec. 10.

What she makes: Breathtaking wedding cakes, personally designed with her clients, with a variety of fillings, frostings and trimmings; and seasonal pastries and sweets for Crozet customers. See her work at mycakesbyrachel.com.

Why she does it: "I do love it, creating every day with my staff, focusing my full attention all the time, and still trying get better every week."

Cookies for Crozet: Purchase little boxes of pastries prepared for the Dec. 10 event, or order macarons online through the website.

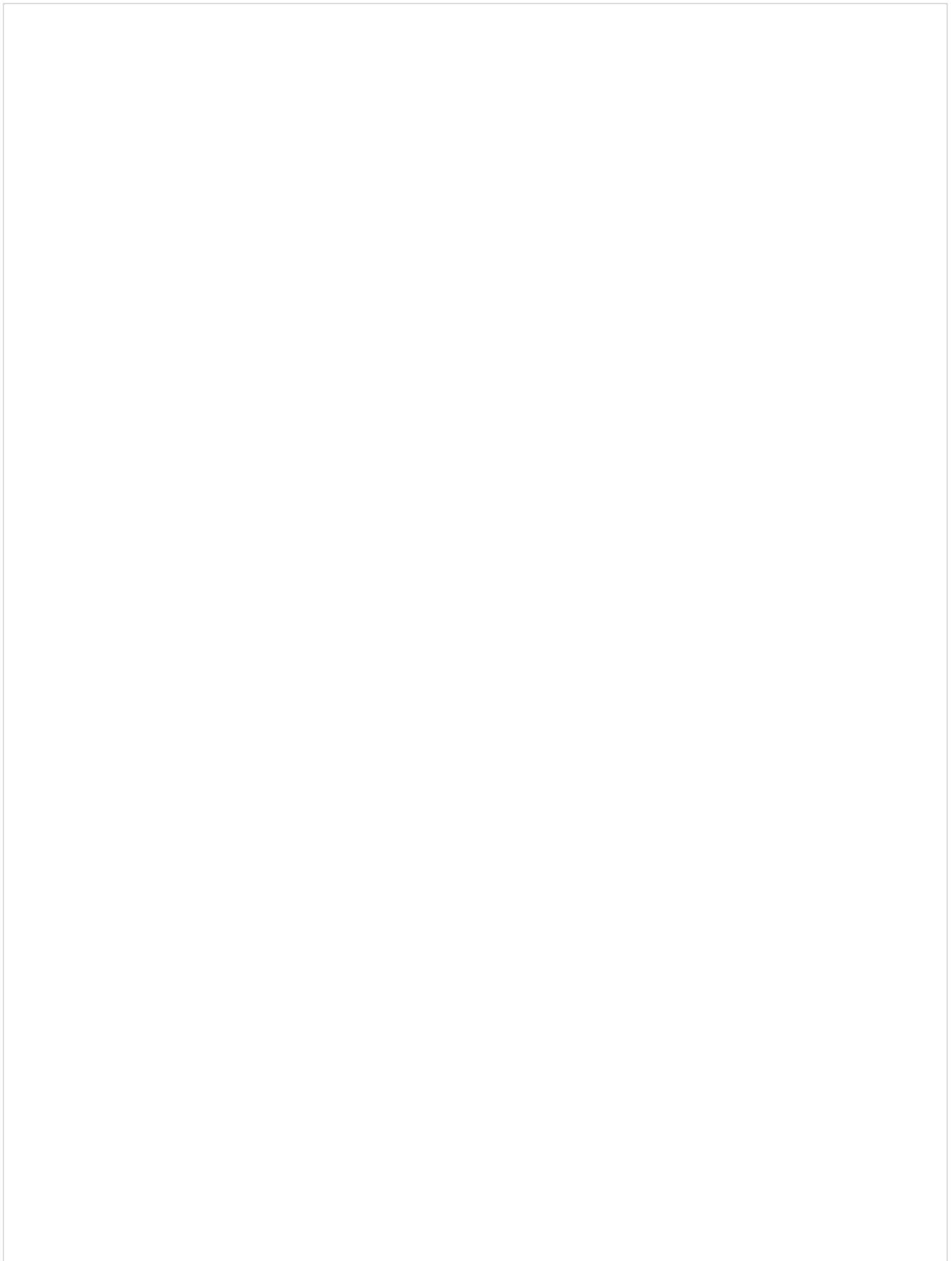
Advice for home bakers: "Remember that it's the browning of the butter, flour and sugar that develops the flavor, so don't be afraid to see a golden-brown color in your baked goods. And baked goods need salt, even if you can't taste it."



Kay Campbell mixes three times the normal amount of fruit into her Christmas fruitcakes. Photo: Lynn Coffey.

Kay Campbell's Fruitcakes Honor Her Mother

Santa may be bringing you a sleigh full of hundred-dollar bills, but you won't get one of Kay Campbell's fruitcakes unless you're one of the lucky nine or so people on her list. "Mama always baked for Christmas," Campbell said. "Mama" was Frances Miller of Afton, who baked everything in a wood-stove oven and made extra candy, cookies and cakes, storing them outside on an unheated porch as Christmas approached. Campbell bakes her cakes in November, wraps them in cheesecloth, stacks them in a lard tin, and doses them with peach schnapps a couple of times over the next month or so. "My sister always asks for the one on the bottom, where the schnapps kind of settles," she said.



Fruitcakes are aged in peach schnapps for a month or two and brought out for the holidays. Photo: Lynn Coffey.

What she makes: Fruitcakes with three times the normal weight of fruit and nuts. She also makes cookies and custards for her family.

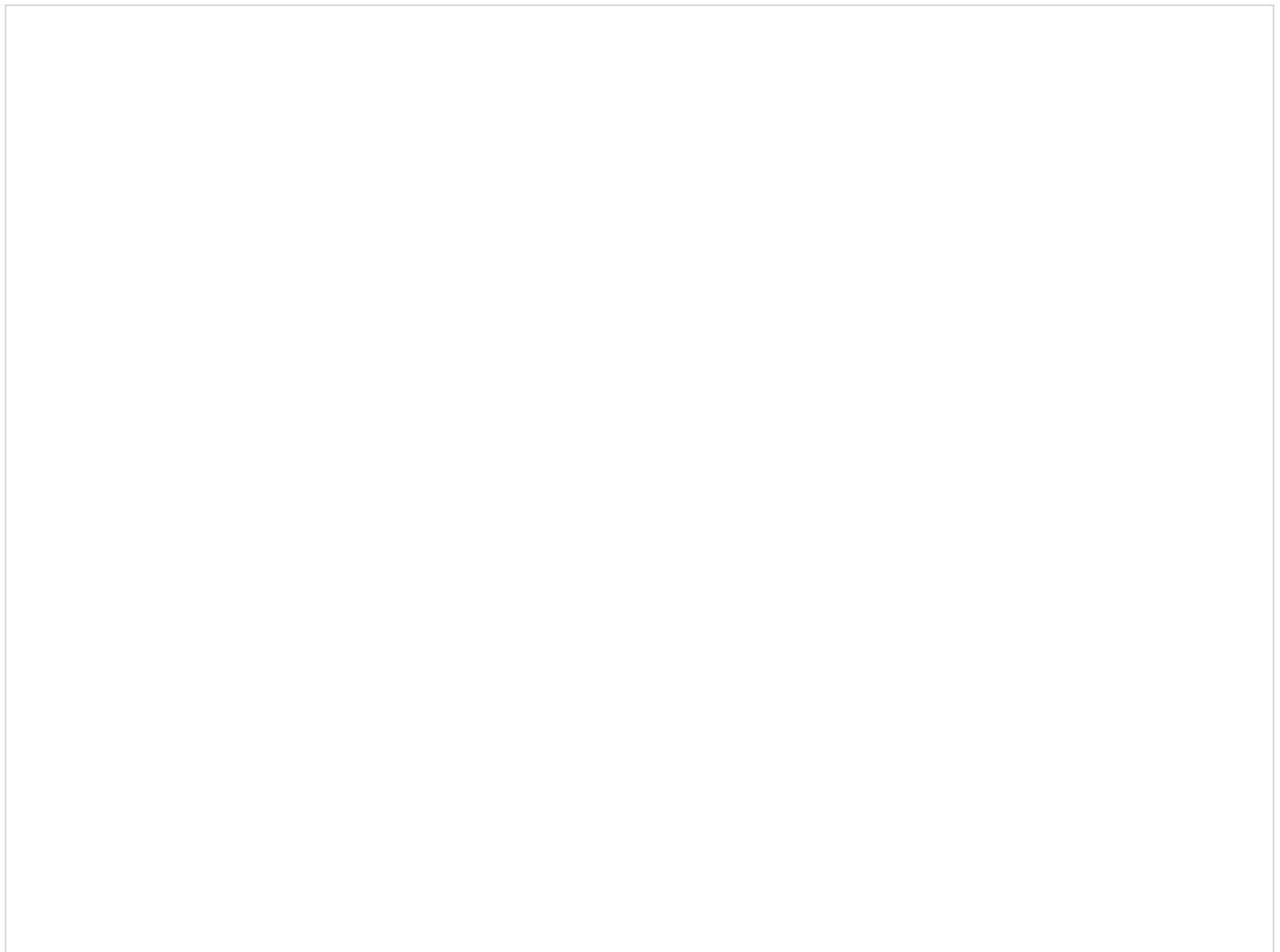
Why she does it: "It's fun!"

Advice for home bakers: "For the fruitcakes, prepare your pans with butter and sugar instead of butter and flour to give the outside a nice, sweet crunch, and remember to bake them for a long time at low heat."



Marissa Kalo Creates One-of-Kind Cutie Pies

Traveling through Scotland and England by train, Marissa Kalo tasted plenty of little pies. "When you'd stop at a station, they'd offer you a selection," she said. "They're considered traveling food." She was enchanted by the trays of miniature pastries, with ground meat, vegetables and cheese, or fruit and custard tucked inside a rich crust. Shortly after she returned to her home in Crozet, she worked out a pastry-shell recipe without gluten, so she could enjoy them, too. Kalo is an artist who majored in art in college and studied further in New York City. She's published a children's book and has exhibited her work locally. Her little pies are edible works of art, shining like jewels, studded with cranberries or blackberries, or golden with butternut squash or spicy vegetable curry.



Order Cutie Pies online and pick them up in Crozet.

What she makes: It changes with the season. Right now, find apple-cranberry, pecan, French walnut, pumpkin cream and chocolate orange pies for a sweet dessert; or choose spinach-feta, Mexican poblano, Indian curry or butternut squash pies for a savory bite.

How to find her: Kalo publishes each week's offerings on the Cutie Pies Facebook page, takes orders by text or email, and puts each order in a cooler outside her Jarmans Gap Road home on Friday and Saturday for pick up. She appreciates a week or two notice for large orders during the holidays.

Advice for working with gluten-free dough: Kalo uses a mix of gluten-free flours for her creations. "There are plenty of recipes online now," she said. "Experiment until you find the one you like best."



June Morris makes beautiful

Fresh, Frosted Cookies Made in Afton

June Morris was raised on her family's land in Afton, where her parents, Junior and Hester Fox, farmed. After experiencing a fire at their home, Junior got the ball rolling for the Rockfish Valley Fire and Rescue. Junior was also a contractor, and Hester was a great cook, Morris said, and also did some baking. Her homemade rolls, in particular, were very well received. Morris loved baking and did it as kind of a hobby on her days off as the office manager for McDow Funeral Home in Waynesboro. During the pandemic, she found herself with too much time on her hands. "I knew I had to do something," she said. "I started making sugar cookies for family and friends." Soon she was taking and filling orders from friends of friends, neighbors and, eventually strangers. Thus was born Fox Farm Cookies, named after her childhood home.



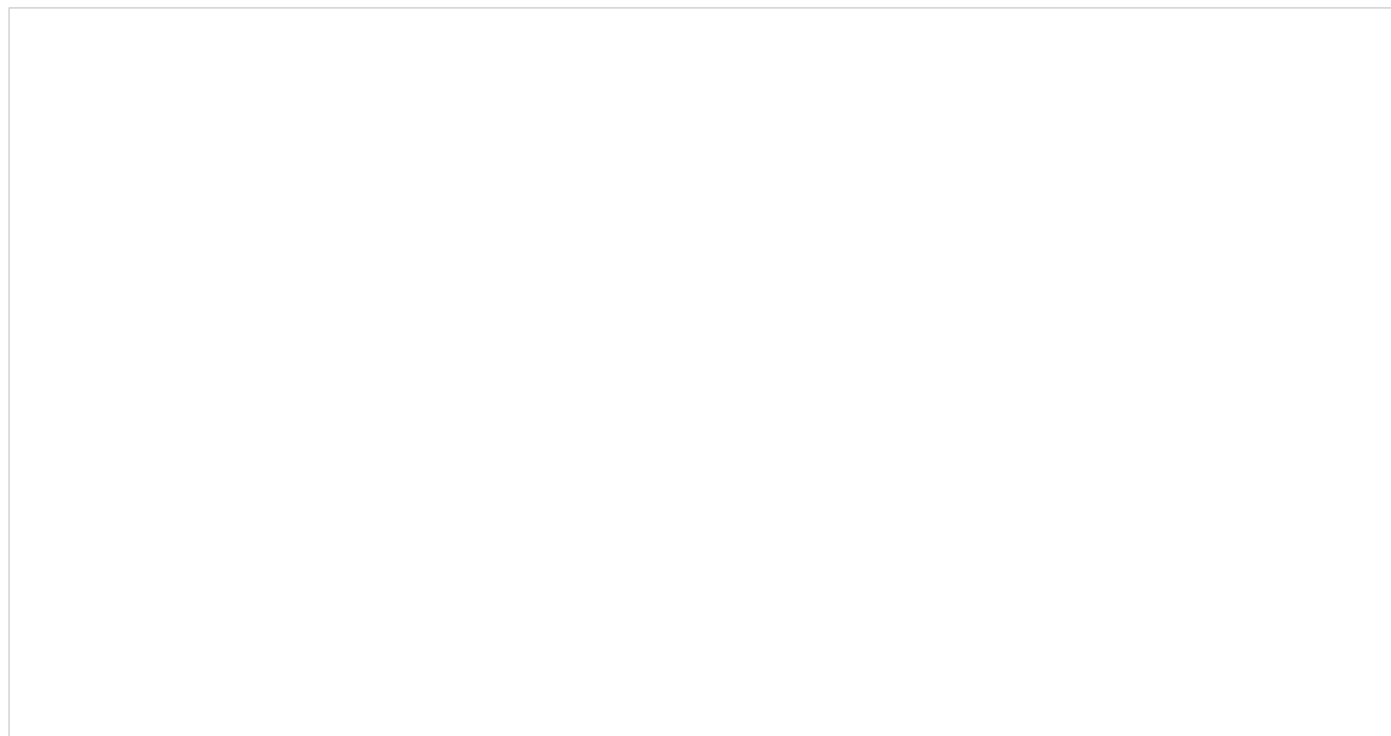
Creativity and whimsy make Fox Farm cookies special.

What she makes: Beautifully decorated sugar cookies made from farm fresh eggs and real butter.

Where to find her: She takes orders through her Facebook page, with pick-up at her home.

Advice for home bakers: Her first efforts at elaborate frosting were not successful, she said. "I figured, this is it for me, but my children told me to

keep at it." Her advice is the same as her children's: "Keep at it," she said. "Different designs need different consistencies of frosting." You'll learn as you go along."



Ben Stowe and Heather Coiner farm and bake bread at their Little Hat Creek Farm in Nelson County.

Little Hat Creek Farm Promotes Local Grains

There was a time, Heather Coiner said, when you'd find a mill around here wherever there was enough water to turn a wheel. "That was before they all became Bed and Breakfasts." She's one of the founders of the Common Grain Alliance, a group of people interested in planting, growing and using local grain for local baked goods. At Little Hat Creek, she's made wonderful artisanal bread for almost six years. As Coiner became more aware of the different types of available grains, and the way they work together to make growing wheat sustainable, she's added cookies, crackers and granola to the bread made and sold by Little Hat Creek. "Flour has different qualities," she said. "Something that's not suitable for bread might be perfect for cookies." She's excited about the idea that Virginia bakers can make their products from grains grown in the mid-Atlantic, adding to the independence and security of the region.



Part of the mission of Little Hat Creek Farm is to find ways to use grains that compliment wheat in Virginia. These cookies are made with locally grown rye.

What she makes: Little Hat Creek sourdough bread, crackers, cookies, and

granola.

Where to find it: Breads by order (See the Little Hat Creek website) or at Integral Yoga in Charlottesville; dry goods at Greenwood Gourmet Grocery and selected Charlottesville sites.

Advice for home bakers: Don't be intimidated by sourdough bread. You can hold the starter, feed it and use it without stress. "It can definitely fit into your life," Coiner said.



Nancy Hellerman of Goodwin Creek Bakery advises home bakers to avoid using so much flour that the dough is

dry.

Goodwin Creek Bakery Bakes Early-American-inspired Bread

Unlike home-based entrepreneurs who have a steep growth plan in mind from the time they sell their first product, John and Nancy Hellerman have cut back production and they couldn't be happier. Ingredients as well as employees became hard to find, so the proprietors and now sole employees of the Afton-based bakery currently produce what they can each week without the worries of hiring, supervision, and expansion. It's a relief, John explained, after years of pulling hundreds of loaves a day from their ovens. "This gives us time to home school our children and even to travel a little bit." Almost everyone is familiar with the breads under the Goodwin Creek label, baked with only the best organic flour: oatmeal, French country, challah, Italian farmhouse, cinnamon-raisin, great seed, seven-grain, wildflower honey, ciabatta and farmhouse white.

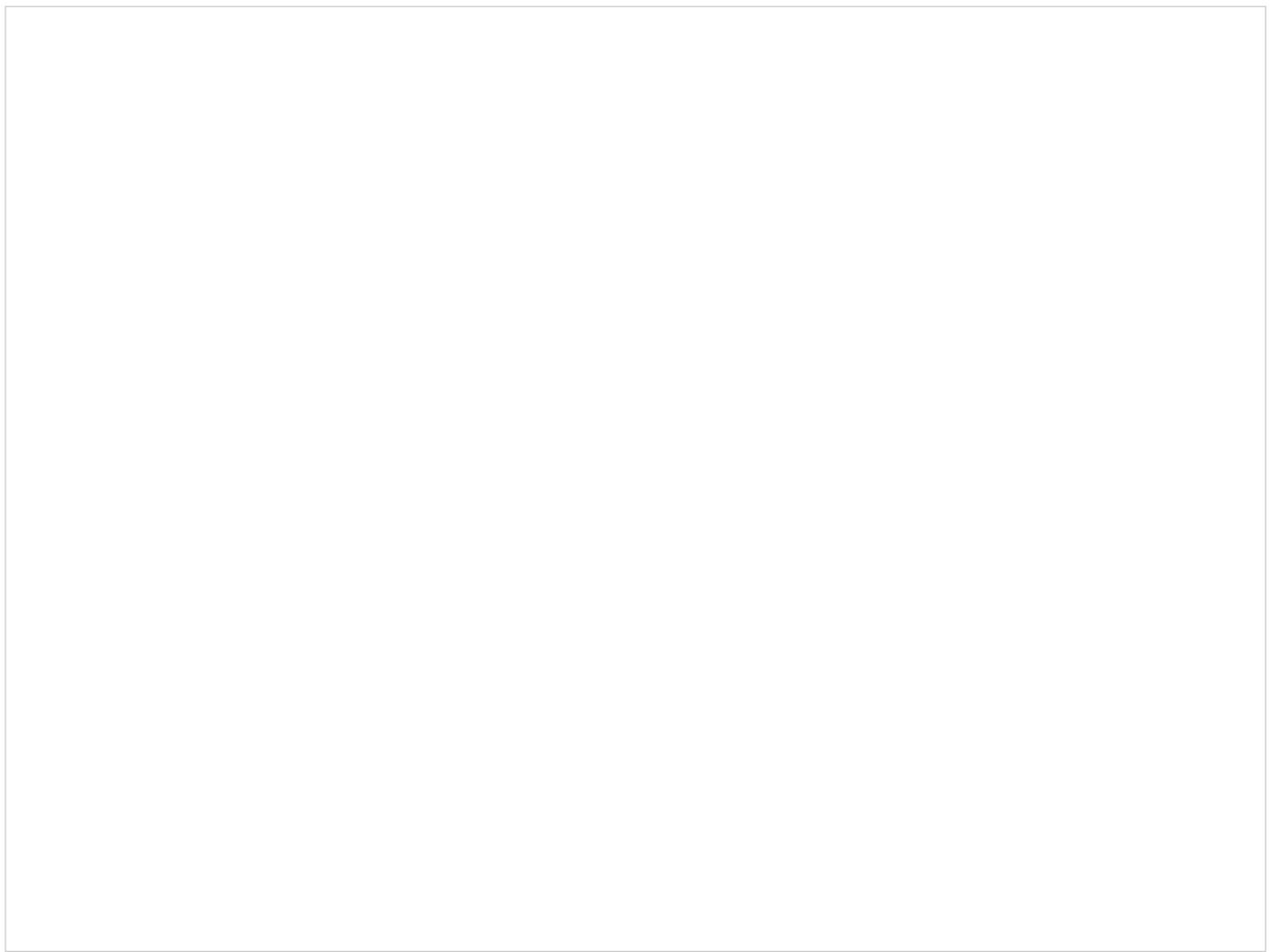


Goodwin Creek Bakery will have festive cranberry pecan bread for the holidays.

What they make: All those listed above, plus pecan-raisin bread and dinner rolls for the holidays.

Where to find it: Crozet Market, Greenwood Gourmet and Blue Ridge Grocery.

Advice to home bakers: Be gentle with yeast dough, Nancy Hellerman said. "Do not punch it down. Fold it instead like an envelope." And choose your ingredients: instant yeast and flour that's at least 12.7% protein. Avoid overworking, as a wetter dough will yield fluffier bread.



Lisa Swinson of Sweet Bliss Bakery with pieces of her French-style raspberry swirl cheesecake.

Find Sweet Bliss in Nellysford

Lisa Swinson was only 12 when she attempted her first cheesecake at her home in North Carolina. She adopted the same cheesecake style as her mother, who baked the rich concoctions for sale. They were made in the French style: "They're different from most cheesecakes," Swinson said. "Most people are familiar with New York-style cheesecakes, which use both the yolks and the whites of eggs." "French style" means there are only egg whites in her creations, Swinson said, so they're a little lighter than those you might be used to." She said cheesecakes are her first love, but all kinds of pastry and desserts, including bread puddings, as well as quiches, sandwiches, salads and soups, are available in the Sweet Bliss Bakery shop.



Handmade rosemary focaccia at Sweet Bliss Bakery in Nellysford.

What she makes: Sandwiches, soups and pastries as well as bread pudding, cookies and cheesecakes.

Where to find it: Find individual pastries and lunch items in Nellysford, or special order a whole French-style cheesecake in one of dozens of flavor combinations. Visit www.sweetblissbakery.com, or find Sweet Bliss on Facebook.

Advice for home bakers: "Don't be scared! Just follow the recipe exactly. Once you master the basic ingredients, you can invent new flavors."



Jaclyn Shaffer has grown her Crozet business by offering something for every cookie lover. Photo Beth Kagarise.

Cookies for Everyone by Jaclyn

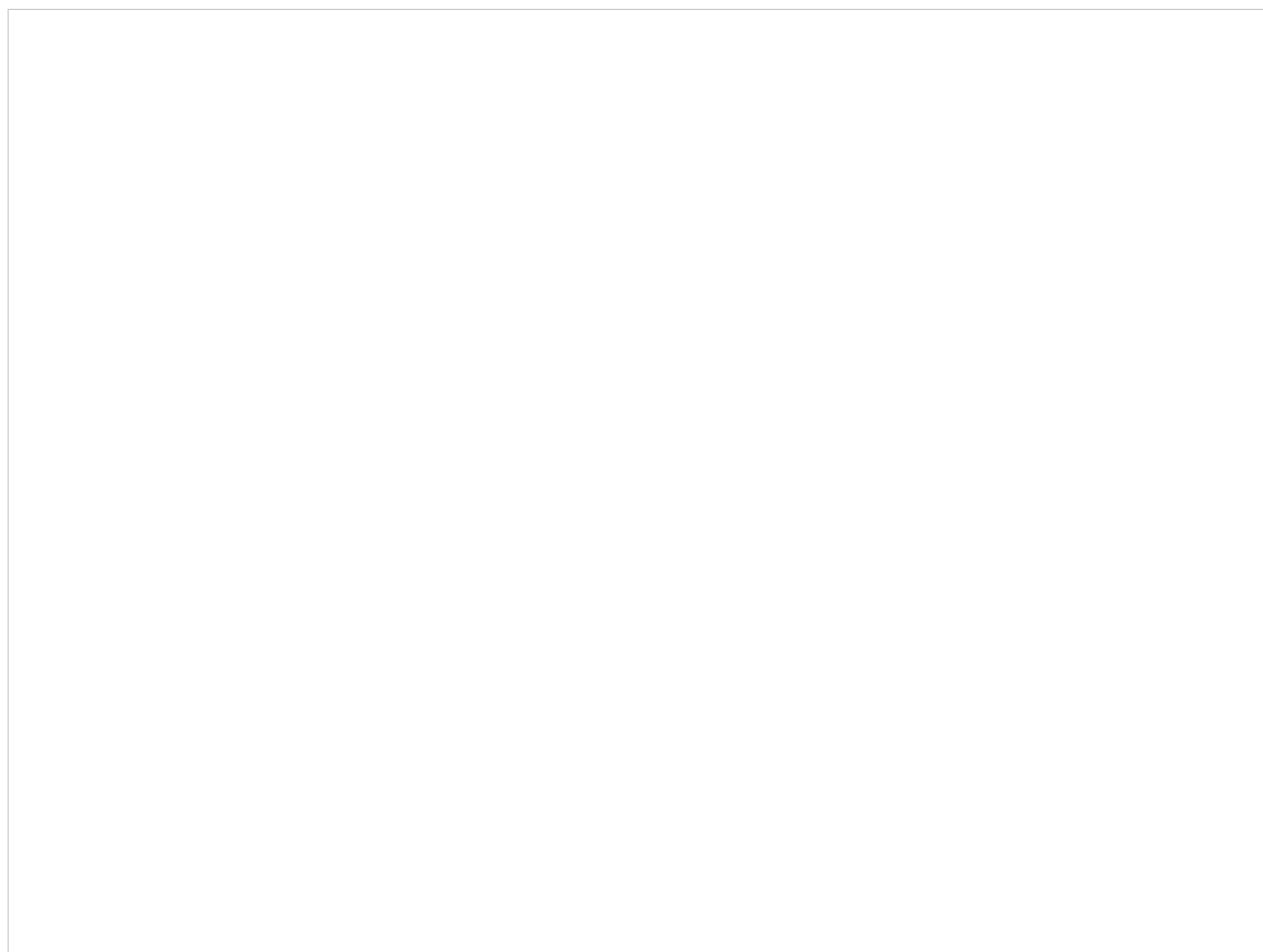
Jaclyn Shaffer is glad when people are delighted with her colorful decorated sugar cookies, and she offers beautiful seasonal designs as well as custom decorated cookies. She's not one to hoard her knowledge, though. She's been teaching classes in cookie decoration at Bluebird & Co., and also offers classes at private homes for groups of would-be cookie artists. And for those who prefer the more creative part of cookie production rather than the nuts and bolts of mixing, rolling, cutting and baking, she offers do-it-yourself cookie kits with already-baked sugar cookies and pre-filled frosting tubes. These vary with the season: she just closed her Thanksgiving cookie orders and is open for Christmas orders. Shaffer had a bit of a head start with the scientific demands of baking—she was a biologist before becoming a baker. She's employed her knowledge to concoct a new product, "Hot Cocoa Bombs," that chocolate lovers can transform before their eyes into a

steaming cup of hot chocolate with marshmallows.

What she makes: Seasonal cookies, special orders, pre-packaged cookie-making kits, hot cocoa bombs.

Where to find it: Through her website at jaclynscookiesva.com, or look for the hot cocoa bombs at Bluebird & Co.

Advice to home bakers: "When you decorate, don't hold the pastry tube like a pencil against the cookie. Let the icing flow freely down onto the cookie."



Order your beautifully decorated Christmas cookies or hot chocolate bombs online from Jaclyn's Cookies.

Submitted photo.