

## RURAL RETREAT REVIVAL



This month marks the Depot Foundation's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. During Sunday's celebration, there will be guided tours of the depot, old photos, refreshments and posters highlighting the building's transformation.

# Restored depot marks 10 years

BY MILLIE ROTHROCK  
Staff



The depot went from being "too far gone to save" to one of the county's favorite wedding and party venues.



The town of Rural Retreat grew up around the Depot, which dates back to the 1850s when the Virginia & Tennessee Railroad built it. By 2011, it was no longer in use and dilapidated.

Sunday, Oct. 24, promises to be a fun day in Rural Retreat, as residents celebrate two things close to their hearts: The Rural Retreat Depot and Dr Pepper.

This month marks the Depot Foundation's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary and the foundation will host a celebration from 2 to 5 p.m. at the historic landmark. There will be guided tours, old photos, refreshments and posters depicting the resurrection of the depot from rotting wood and cinders into the shining gathering place and museum it is today.

In addition to the depot's anniversary, Sunday is also Dr Pepper Day. Beside the caboose at the depot, there will be free drinks, T-shirts, vendors and perhaps music. One vendor will be giving out Dr Pepper sno cones.

The depot went from being "too far gone to save" to one of the county's favorite wedding and party venues.

The town of Rural Retreat grew up around the Depot, which dates back to the 1850s when the Virginia & Tennessee Railroad built it, according to a history on the foundation's website.

The railroad company was important to the South during The Civil War, so Union troops burned down the Depot in 1864. Three years later, it was rebuilt with Italianate style architecture.

The railroad company went bankrupt in 1870 and was bought by Norfolk & Western Railroad 10 years later. The N&W operated the Depot as a passenger and freight station until the mid-1900s, at which time it sold the building to a company that used it as a warehouse.

By 2011, the dilapidated depot's future was in question. The town wanted to take it over, but the idea was moot after a court



This month marks the Depot Foundation's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. During Sunday's celebration, there will be guided tours of the depot, old photos, refreshments and posters highlighting the building's transformation. SUBMITTED PHOTO

# Restored depot marks 10 years

BY MILLIE ROTHROCK  
Staff



The depot went from being "too far gone to save" to one of the county's favorite wedding and party venues. SUBMITTED PHOTO



The town of Rural Retreat grew up around the Depot, which dates back to the 1850s when the Virginia & Tennessee Railroad built it. By 2011, it was no longer in use and dilapidated. SUBMITTED PHOTO

Sunday, Oct. 24, promises to be a fun day in Rural Retreat, as residents celebrate two things close to their hearts: The Rural Retreat Depot and Dr Pepper.

This month marks the Depot Foundation's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary and the foundation will host a celebration from 2 to 5 p.m. at the historic landmark. There will be guided tours, old photos, refreshments and posters depicting the resurrection of the depot from rotting wood and cinders into the shining gathering place and museum it is today.

In addition to the depot's anniversary, Sunday is also Dr Pepper Day. Beside the caboose at the depot, there will be free drinks, T-shirts, vendors and perhaps music. One vendor will be giving out Dr Pepper sno cones.

The depot went from being "too far gone to save" to one of the county's favorite wedding and party venues.

The town of Rural Retreat grew up around the Depot, which dates back to the 1850s when the Virginia & Tennessee Railroad built it, according to a history on the foundation's website.

The railroad company was important to the South during The Civil War, so Union troops burned down the Depot in 1864. Three years later, it was rebuilt with Italianate style architecture.

The railroad company went bankrupt in 1870 and was bought by Norfolk & Western Railroad 10 years later. The N&W operated the Depot as a passenger and freight station until the mid-1900s, at which time it sold the building to a company that used it as a warehouse.

By 2011, the dilapidated depot's future was in question. The town wanted to take it over, but the idea was moot after a court

See **DEPOT**, Page A2

com  
treet  
382



Stay Comfortable

**All Season Long**

- PRECISION TUNE UPS PAY FOR THEMSELVES through higher efficiency, lower energy costs, and less breakdowns
- 24-hour emergency service
- Our CUSTOMERS ARE ALWAYS #1



# Depot

From Page A1

ruling meant the town could not take possession via eminent domain. The depot's owner, Jack Weaver, was preparing to move the building to his farm when Rural Retreat

Council member Scott Mecimore organized The Depot Foundation with a mission to acquire, restore and manage the depot for the benefit of the community.

During the next year, the foundation scrambled to make money, holding fundraisers and introduc-

ing residents to the idea of remodeling the broken down landmark.

"It went back and forth," said local dentist Michael Spraker, an early foundation president. "Half of the citizens wanted to tear it down and half wanted to

See **DEPOT**, Page A3

# Depot

From Page A2

try to restore it. I had some tell me the best thing to do was light a fire and let it burn."

The depot was old and rickety, but it had good bones. Bead board covered the walls and some of the 20-foot ceilings. The doors were tall and wide. They, along with the

old ticket windows, were framed with thick, decorative wood. The floors were strong and the windows numerous. Foundation members knew it was worth saving.

Eventually, through fundraisers and private donations, the foundation purchased the depot, and immediately started raising money again – this time, to pay for the renova-

See **DEPOT**, Page B2



# Depot

From Page A3

tion. Determined foundation members held events and opened up the depot so residents could see its potential.

After the foundation held some activities and started the farmers market, the mood began to shift.

"The more people we got to go through the depot and see the small stuff that was going on (cleaning up and painting), the more people got interested," Spraker said, adding that the foundation wanted residents to see the depot as something more than an eyesore.

Even though momentum was building, the foundation was still "nickel and diming it," Spraker said.

Then successful businessman Jerry Hurt, who had recently retired in Rural Retreat, attended a foundation meeting just to see what was happening. A natural leader, he was soon the foundation president.

"When Jerry Hurt took over, that is when it really started," Spraker said. "He was a strong businessman and leader and put forth full force and effort. All the credit goes to him."

Hurt died in December 2018, a year after unveiling the renovated depot.

The total cost to renovate the depot was about a half-million dollars and only 11 percent came from grants. The rest of the funding, 89 percent, came from private donors.

Restoration of the Rural Retreat Depot required extensive structural repairs, and the installation of modern heating, ventilation and air conditioning equipment as well as state-of-the-art audio-visual and communications capabilities. The former waiting rooms are now a museum, while the former freight area provides a comfortable and well-equipped meeting and event space available for civic meetings, reunions, receptions and other community activities. The Evelyn Layman Museum provides displays of depot and community history.

Spraker said the depot has surpassed all he imagined it could be.

"I knew it would be successful once we got the town behind it and the citizens behind it," he said.

The Depot was added to the Register of Historic Places in 2014. A grand opening was held in 2017, and a Memory Walk and Garden were added in 2019.

Now, instead of being an eyesore, the depot is an

attractive welcome into downtown Rural Retreat. Operating as an event venue and museum, it has become a popular wedding location, and hosts a variety of meetings, showers, parties, and more.

The Depot sponsored a series of The Crooked Road's "Mountains of Music Homecoming" events. It also just completed its ninth Farmer's Market season.

"It is important to note how much the depot restoration effort has impacted the people of our community," said Frank Akers, charter foundation member who shares a rich history with the depot. His grandfather worked at the depot for four decades and his parents ran a store across the railroad tracks.

"As soon as I saw the Depot Foundation had been formed, I joined," he said just before the restored depot was unveiled in 2017.

"Many have stepped forward to volunteer their time and energy for construction, cleaning, planting, watering, and entertaining," Akers said. "They have organized concerts, yard sales, auctions, bazaars, fund-raisers, and more. They have come to the farmers market as producers, vendors, artisans and entrepreneurs. The

Continues on the next page...



Depot attracts over 3,000 visitors each year, from all over the United States."

Starting this year, the Depot offers visits and volunteer guided tours of the building and museum during the farmers market and on alternate Sunday afternoons.

The Evelyn Lahman History Museum houses many

exhibits of local railroad and community history, including Dr Pepper, Rural Retreat as Cabbage Capitol of the World, O. Winston Link Photography (two of his famous photos feature the depot and Akers' grandfather), and much more. Included in the history is a document dated 1893, still attached to the

inside of a freight door.

Today, private donations fund the continued operation and maintenance of the building, while rental fees provide partial coverage of the operating expenses. Information on the depot can be found on [www.therrdepot.com](http://www.therrdepot.com) and current events are posted on the Facebook page.

This is the last page, printed in its entirety. You read it already in the above two frames.

## Depot

From Page A3

tion. Determined foundation members held events and opened up the depot so residents could see its potential.

After the foundation held some activities and started the farmers market, the mood began to shift.

"The more people we got to go through the depot and see the small stuff that was going on (cleaning up and painting), the more people got interested," Spraker said, adding that the foundation wanted residents to see the depot as something more than an eyesore.

Even though momentum was building, the foundation was still "nickel and diming it," Spraker said.

Then successful businessman Jerry Hurt, who had recently retired in Rural Retreat, attended a foundation meeting just to see what was happening. A natural leader, he was soon the foundation president.

"When Jerry Hurt took over, that is when it really started," Spraker said. "He was a strong businessman and leader and put forth full force and effort. All the credit goes to him."

Hurt died in December 2018, a year after unveiling the renovated depot.

The total cost to renovate the depot was about a half-million dollars and only 11 percent came from grants. The rest of the funding, 89 percent, came from private donors.

Restoration of the Rural Retreat Depot required extensive structural repairs, and the installation of modern heating, ventilation and air conditioning equipment as well as state-of-the-art audio-visual and communications capabilities. The former waiting rooms are now a museum, while the former freight area provides a comfortable and well-equipped meeting and event space available for civic meetings, reunions, receptions and other community activities. The Evelyn Layman Museum provides displays of depot and community history.

Spraker said the depot has surpassed all he imagined it could be.

"I knew it would be successful once we got the town behind it and the citizens behind it," he said.

The Depot was added to the Register of Historic Places in 2014. A grand opening was held in 2017, and a Memory Walk and Garden were added in 2019.

Now, instead of being an eyesore, the depot is an

attractive welcome into downtown Rural Retreat. Operating as an event venue and museum, it has become a popular wedding location, and hosts a variety of meetings, showers, parties, and more.

The Depot sponsored a series of The Crooked Road's "Mountains of Music Homecoming" events. It also just completed its ninth Farmer's Market season.

"It is important to note how much the depot restoration effort has impacted the people of our community," said Frank Akers, charter foundation member who shares a rich history with the depot. His grandfather worked at the depot for four decades and his parents ran a store across the railroad tracks.

"As soon as I saw the Depot Foundation had been formed, I joined," he said just before the restored depot was unveiled in 2017.

"Many have stepped forward to volunteer their time and energy for construction, cleaning, planting, watering, and entertaining," Akers said. "They have organized concerts, yard sales, auctions, bazaars, fund-raisers, and more. They have come to the farmers market as producers, vendors, artisans and entrepreneurs. The

Depot attracts over 3,000 visitors each year, from all over the United States."

Starting this year, the Depot offers visits and volunteer guided tours of the building and museum during the farmers market and on alternate Sunday afternoons.

The Evelyn Lahman History Museum houses many

exhibits of local railroad and community history, including Dr Pepper, Rural Retreat as Cabbage Capitol of the World, O. Winston Link Photography (two of his famous photos feature the depot and Akers' grandfather), and much more. Included in the history is a document dated 1893, still attached to the

inside of a freight door.

Today, private donations fund the continued operation and maintenance of the building, while rental fees provide partial coverage of the operating expenses. Information on the depot can be found on [www.therrdepot.com](http://www.therrdepot.com) and current events are posted on the Facebook page.

## Need Some Extra \$\$\$\$?

Earn up to \$1200/mo  
depending on size of route for 2 to 3 hrs a day.

### Routes available in:

- Clifton Forge
- Roanoke
- Lexington
- Shawsville
- Elliston
- Blacksburg
- Eagle Rock
- New Castle
- Bassett Forks
- Wytheville
- Covington

### Requirements:

- Must be at least 18 years of age
- Valid Driver's License
- Reliable Vehicle
- Available early mornings
- 7 days a week: deliver by 6:00am weekdays and 7:30am Sunday

Interested applicants  
please call

**540-981-3167**  
for more information.

**THE ROANOKE TIMES**

**THE ROANOKE TIMES**  
Know now.