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FREE



# FARMVILLE

*the Magazine*

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# Editor's Notebook

## Fall is a season of change

I'm hoping that the 100 degree days are over. I know we're in September now and it's easy to say fall is here, but we have to remember, this is Virginia. False fall can sweep in, get you excited and then suddenly you're hit with another 100 degree day not even 48 hours later. But for now, I'm going on the assumption that the heatwaves are behind us.

So fingers crossed, we're going to say fall is here and it is by far my favorite season. You've got college football, right down the road at Hampden-Sydney. You've got church fall festivals and everyone starts making

pumpkin treats. It's also a season of change, seeing things develop in ways you may not have expected. And we celebrate that change in a number of ways.

September also means it's time to talk about one of those celebrations, the 'Grandfather of Them All', to steal a slogan from the Rose Bowl. I'm talking about the Five County Fair. Created more than 80 years ago, it's still going strong, with things both old and new to explore. We detail some of that, including the Power Wheels Derby, while also honoring the person who this year's fair is dedicated to. And the best part is, this isn't expensive. You can easily take every member of your family out to have a good time and I feel safe saying there will be something for each member of your group to enjoy. Do you like pro wrestling? That's on the card. What about carnival rides and mid-way games? They have that too. And yes, of course there's fair food to mention.



Brian Carlton, Editor

Speaking of food, Alexa Massey also has a way to help you out. If you're prepping for those football tailgates, either at high school or college, quick and easy is the way to go. Her chicken caesar salad subs solve that problem by both being ridiculously easy to make and also tasting great. You can give her the credit if that starts showing up as a regular on your tailgate menu.

Then, once you're done tailgating, Dr. Cynthia Wood can help you this month try something different. How about growing citrus fruit? Now there are many things I'm good at, when it comes to plants. I can keep a garden alive and most herbs survive through the year with me. But as for fruit? I'm not the best. How do you grow it, and more specifically, how do you grow it this time of year, when temperatures can rapidly shift in multiple directions? She can help you out with that.

I've also mentioned that fall is a season of change. Part of that change can be pushing forward with your dreams. In this edition, we talk with Chelsea Brinks and her family as they launch the Spoonful of Buttercream bakery downtown. Some change also means letting other people help you, after you've dedicated your life to helping them. That's what happened to Helene Blanton, who has spent decades serving the Town of Farmville as dispatcher, police officer and a number of other hats. And when Helene needed help, the community was there to say 'we've got you.'

So sit back, take a break and read through what we've got to say about this season of change. And we'll be back to share more with you next month.

*Brian Carlton is Editor of Farmville the Magazine. He can be reached at [Brian.Carlton@FarmvilletheMag.com](mailto:Brian.Carlton@FarmvilletheMag.com).*

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On the Cover: Our recipe for this edition is Chicken Caesar Salad Subs. Photo by Alexa Massey.



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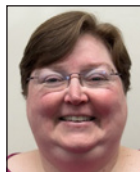
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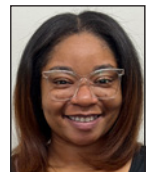
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# 'Carnival Lights and Country Nights'





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By Brian Carlton

It's almost been around for a full century, firmly entrenched as one of Farmville's traditions. Every year, once late September rolls around, you can head over to 209 Fairgrounds Road and enjoy carnival rides, games and everything from pro wrestling to beauty pageants. There's just something about the Five County Fair that makes people come back year after year, says its longtime general manager, Auburn Estes. While this is the 87th edition of the fair, he's been involved for 61 of those.

Auburn got started with the fair back in 1963, when he was 19. At the time, he was working at First National Bank with John Varner, who was then president of the fair association. Varner got Auburn involved with the fair and by 1969, he had become the fair's manager. And he's been doing it for the last 55 years.

This time around, the fair runs Tuesday, Sept. 24 through Saturday, Sept. 28 under the theme of "Carnival Lights and Country Nights." And

residents from those five counties that give the fair its name, Appomattox, Buckingham, Charlotte, Cumberland and Prince Edward, are able to come out and enjoy activities each of those five days.

This year's fair is also one done in tribute. It's dedicated to the memory of Cheryl Estes, Auburn's mother and someone who helped out at the fair however and whenever possible. She also worked with Varner at First National Bank. And just like her son, Varner got her involved with the fair operation. In an earlier interview, Cheryl said one of things she enjoyed most was getting to interact with kids. One example is selling tickets at the admission window.

"They get so excited when they come to the window," she said of the children. "(It's) very exciting for the kids."

The family and fair staff released a statement when announcing this year's dates for the fair, saying it was all being dedicated to Cheryl.

"She was a very faithful member of the fair association," the staff said in



their statement. “For many years she volunteered her time to make past fairs a success. She will be greatly missed!”

**COMING UP THIS YEAR**

So what will residents be able to see at this year’s fair? One of the biggest returning attractions is the Power Wheel Derby. Last year was the first time for the derby, with residents coming out to see their kids compete. This is like a demolition derby but on a smaller scale. Kids ages 3 to 8 can enter with their power wheel vehicle to win a trophy for best performance.

The event will kick off at 4:30 p.m. with a parade for all the participants to show off their decorated cars as everyone is encouraged to decorate the power wheel as a derby-style car. Then they will be let loose in the arena where they can run into each other until time is called. At this time it will just be one group but it may be broken into two if there is enough participation.

Judges will determine a winner based on derby-style driving, vehicle appearance and sportsmanship. The winner will receive a trophy and all who participate will get a



Johnna Stevens won the 2023 Miss Five County Fair Pageant. The event will return for this year’s edition of the fair. Photo by John Karratti.



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goodie bag and a medal for participating.

On that day, check-in will be from 3 to 4 p.m. to make sure the power wheels meet the criteria to participate. Parents are encouraged to check all rules on the Five County Fair website. A few of the rules include entering only regular power wheels and no type of four-wheeler style vehicle, required helmets and only having a secured up to 12-volt stock battery under the hood. These rules make sure the kids are able to have a safe and fair time and practice good sportsmanship.

The livestock shows will also be on hand, starting Tuesday, Sept. 24, with the beef cattle, sheep and goat shows and then the

dairy cow show on Friday, Sept. 27 in the Varner Building.

Cole Shows Amusement Company will also be back to provide the midway games and rides. According to Estes, the company brings different rides each year so even though it's the same company there is still something new to enjoy. There will also be educational exhibits, 4-H contests, Bruiser Wrestling Federation and numerous vendors.

#### **PAGEANT TAKES THE STAGE**

And of course, things will wrap up with the Five County Fair beauty pageant. Johnna Stevens won the 2023 Miss Five County Fair

Pageant. This marked the second win for Stevens at the fair. In 2019, she was crowned Junior Miss Five County Fair at the pageant. The winner each year of the Miss Five County Fair Pageant then goes on to compete in the Miss VA Association of Fairs Scholarship Pageant, held the following January.

Also winning at this past year's show was Emma Grace Tucker, who took home the Teen Miss Five County Fair title. In the younger competition, there was Ava Adams winning as Little Miss Five County Fair, Emma Irving as Petite Miss Five County Fair and Savannah Redford as this past year's Junior Miss Five County Fair.



# Recipe

## *Chicken Caesar Salad Subs*

**with thin and crispy chicken cutlets**



**Crispy chicken cutlets, garlicky sub rolls and tangy Caesar salad? Name a better trio!**

**Photos and recipe by Alexa Massey**

My family couldn't get enough Caesar salad this summer. The tangy, sharp bite of Caesar dressing just can't be beat, but I must admit that it's complemented quite nicely by a buttery and delicious homemade chicken cutlet. Throw a cheesy, garlicky sub roll into the mix and you have a trio like nothing else.

This month, I am sharing with you my chicken Caesar salad sub recipe. It's particularly popular with my boyfriend and brother, and I think you will enjoy it just as much. We're combining some of the best Italian food out there into one dreamy sammich. Plus I'm throwing in directions on how to make the thinnest, most mouthwatering chicken cutlets so good they'll make your nonna ask for seconds.

**HERE'S THE RECIPE:**

- Prep time: 30 minutes
- Cook time: 15 minutes
- Yields: Approx. 6 sandwiches

**INGREDIENTS:**

**CUTLETS**

- 2 lbs. chicken tenderloins (can substitute for chicken breasts)
- Approximately 1.5 cups flour
- 3 eggs
- 1/4 cup milk
- Approximately 3 cups Italian seasoned panko breadcrumbs
- 3 cups vegetable oil
- Salt to taste

**SALAD**

- 3 cups romaine lettuce
- 2/3 cup parmesan cheese, freshly grated
- Caesar dressing, to taste (can make it fresh or use store bought)
- Cracked black pepper

**CHEESY GARLIC TOASTED SUB ROLLS**

- 2 baguettes or favorite sub/sandwich rolls of choice
- 3 tbs. butter
- 1/2 cup parmesan
- 2 tbsp. extra virgin olive oil
- 1 tbsp. chopped or grated garlic
- 1 tsp. dried or fresh parsley

It's worth noting that if you don't feel like making your own chicken cutlets, you can take a major shortcut and just buy some breaded and fried chicken filets found in the freezer aisle of any grocery store. They won't be anywhere close to the same, but you don't lose any respect in my book by doing so.

If you aren't taking any shortcuts, begin your recipe by removing your chicken tenderloins or chicken breasts from their package and patting them dry with a paper towel. You then need to flatten your chicken pieces out until they are paper thin. To do this, I like to place one tender at a time into a large ziplock bag, place the bag on a cutting board and whack the tenderloin repeatedly with a meat tenderizer until it is very thin but is not torn apart. If you don't have a meat tenderizer, you can get the same



Shown is the before and after of a chicken tenderloin being pounded thin using a meat tenderizer. A thin chicken cutlet will fry up easily.



A simple dredging station for frying chicken should include one bowl or plate filled with flour, one with eggs and milk, and one with breadcrumbs.



A plate of breaded chicken cutlets waits for frying.

effect by pounding the chicken with a rolling pin. I've even used a hammer in a true pinch. Just be careful with your aim!

Once your chicken has been pounded thin, prepare a dredging station to bread the chicken and get it ready for frying. You'll need to fill one bowl with flour, one bowl with your eggs and milk (be sure to whisk the eggs and milk together) and one bowl with breadcrumbs. I use Italian seasoned panko breadcrumbs for this recipe, but in a pinch you could use any type of breadcrumb and season it yourself with parmesan and Italian seasoning.

Once your dredging station is set up, dip the chicken pieces one at a time in the flour, the egg mixture, and then the breadcrumbs. Make sure you coat each piece evenly – no bald spots! You can bread a variety of meats and vegetables using this same method to prepare them to be fried in oil. In fact, I use this same breading technique for homemade onion rings.

After your chicken pieces have all been breaded, heat your oil in a pot or tall saucepan on medium-high heat. If you have a meat thermometer at home, you're looking for 300° to 325° oil for perfectly fried chicken cutlets. If you don't have a meat thermometer, throw a little bit of the leftover breadcrumbs into the oil after a few minutes and see if they sizzle. If they do, your oil is ready.

Once your oil is to temp, use heat-resistant tongs to carefully drop the cutlets into the oil. You don't want to overcrowd your pan (causing



**When your chicken cutlets are nice and thin, they take only 1-2 minutes per side to fry until golden brown.**

the oil to cool down and not fry as well) so be careful to only fry 2-3 pieces of chicken at a time, depending on how big your pot/pan is.

Because our chicken pieces are so paper-thin, they will take mere minutes to cook thoroughly. Fry the chicken pieces for around 1-2 minutes per side or until golden brown. Chicken should be cooked to an internal temperature of 165°, which is easy to achieve on these thin cutlets.

When the chicken is done frying, remove it from the oil with your tongs, being careful to let excess oil drip off the chicken. Place each finished cutlet on a paper towel-lined plate or cutting board. Sprinkle each freshly-fried chicken cutlet with a bit of salt.

Next, it's time to make our cheesy garlic toast. Take your baguette or sub rolls and slice your bread into whatever sized sandwich you'd like to eat. I usually slice my baguettes into thirds or fourths for this recipe. Place your sliced baguettes crust-side down on a lined baking sheet.

Now it's time to make your garlic-parsley-butter mixture. To do this, simply add your butter, olive oil, chopped or grated garlic and fresh or dried parsley into a microwave-safe mug or ramekin and microwave for about thirty seconds. Stir the mixture until it is completely melted and then brush it onto the open face of your bread, coating everything very well. Afterward, sprinkle your buttered bread with some freshly shaved parmesan. Our bread will broil on the low setting in the oven for about four minutes or until the tops are nice and toasted to your liking.

Now it's time to make the Caesar salad to go inside our subs. I must admit, I usually just pick

up a premade Caesar salad kit from the grocery store to use on my sandwiches. You're welcome to make your own dressing from scratch, but be warned that it is very time consuming. Also, if you enjoy Caesar salad but have never looked up the ingredients used to make Caesar dressing, you may be turned off by the abomination of ingredients used to make it. Let's be honest, though, you can't argue with the results!

Anyway, assemble your Caesar salad how you see fit. However you make it, be sure to add a lot of cracked black pepper!

Lastly, it's time to assemble. Atop the bottom



**A mouthwatering mixture of butter, olive oil, garlic and parsley is slathered onto some sliced baguettes.**



**Adding some shaved parmesan atop the buttered baguettes before they go into the oven brings the bread to life.**

slice of your cheesy garlic toast, place a few of your thin chicken cutlets. Layer on a nice mound of Caesar salad, sprinkle with some additional shaved parmesan and finish with your top slice of garlic toast. Serve with fries, onion rings, pasta salad, or more Caesar salad!

Voila! You just made an out of this world chicken Caesar salad sub so delicious that you may have to make it once a week. And you not only learned how to make some scrumptious on-the-fly cheesy garlic toast; you now know an easy method to fry up a variety of meats and veggies.

Let me know what you thought of this savory recipe.



A wise person once said, "I don't agree with the ingredients of Caesar salad, but I can't argue with the results!"



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# From the Ground Up |

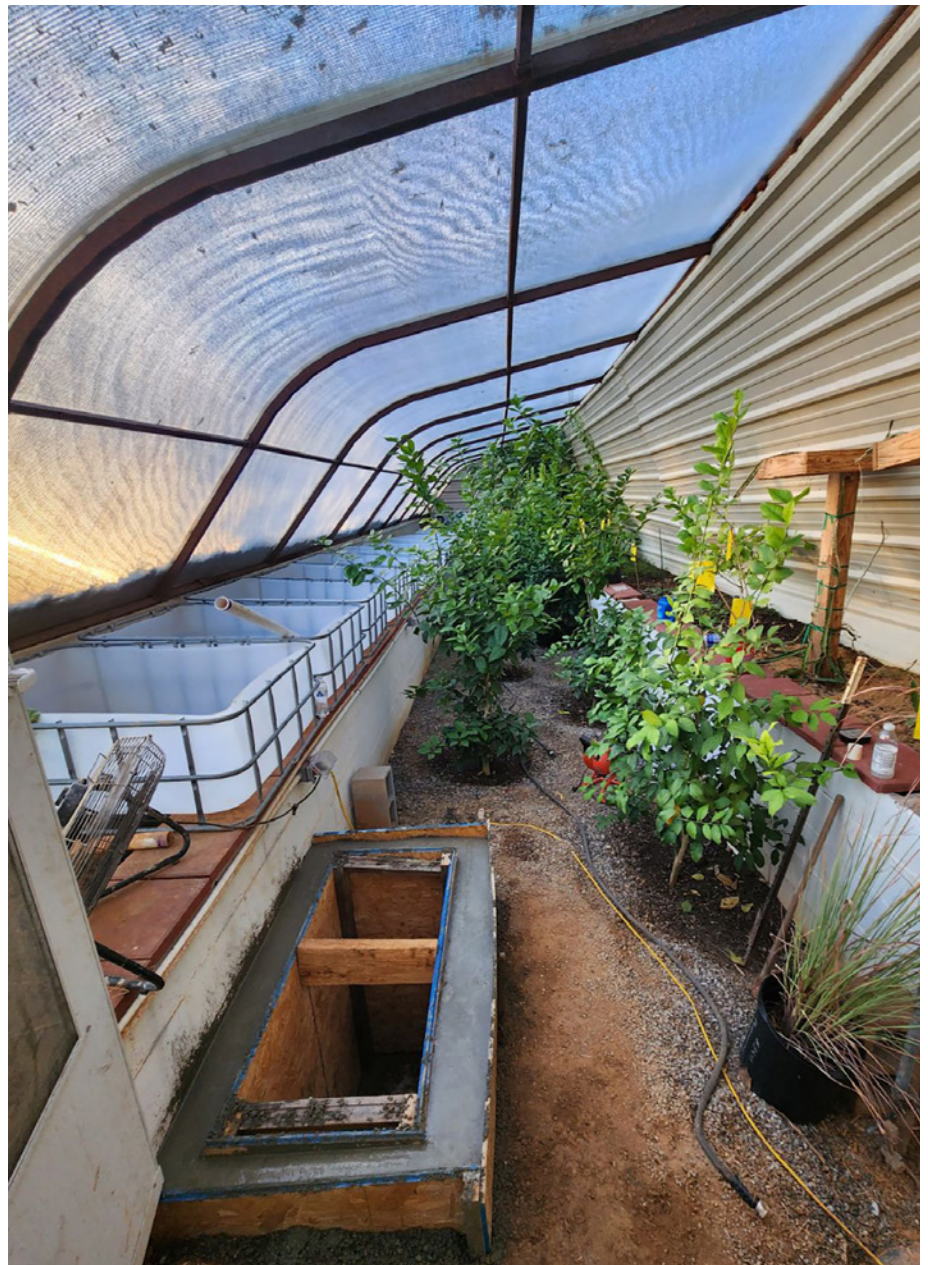
## Growing Tropical Fruit in Virginia

By Cynthia Wood

Gardeners have long been obsessed with growing tropical fruit in harsh, unpredictable climates. There's something magical about the scent of orange blossoms and the availability of home-grown pineapples. In the 18th and 19th centuries, wealthy English gardeners built orangeries for their delicate orange trees and developed pineapple pits, specialized growing environments heated by trenches filled with horse manure.

Even today when tropical fruit is readily available in most grocery stores, gardeners are still obsessed with growing the impossible. When local resident, John Fowler, began considering what he wanted to do after he retired, he bought a few acres of land, built a house, and decided that he would grow fruit trees and keep a flock of chickens. He even planted a small orchard of apple, peach, pear and cherry trees. And then he heard about a man in Nebraska who was growing citrus, vegetables, and flowers year-round, even during Nebraska's harsh winters. The secret? A geothermal greenhouse using the earth's steady underground temperature of 55°F at about 8 feet deep to cool the growing space in the summer and warm it in winter.

John's plans suddenly changed. He decided to build several geothermal greenhouses that would enable him to grow citrus and other fruit, herbs, hydroponic lettuce, and even fish. The first greenhouse has been completed. The greenhouse was dug 4 feet down in the center, and with an 8-foot ground-level height, it allows him to grow 12-foot dwarf fruit trees indoors. The north side is insulated, and light enters through the roof and south-facing side. To maintain an even temperature, seven large tubes leave one end of the greenhouse and continue underground for 250 feet and then loop back to the opposite end of the



**The first greenhouse has shelves along the sides and room for citrus trees in the center. The tanks on the left are for growing lettuce.**





**John Fowler's geothermal greenhouse is built into the side of a hill. (Photo by W. Witschey)**



**John Fowler's retirement plans include using geothermal greenhouses to grow tropical fruit, hydroponic lettuce and fish.**



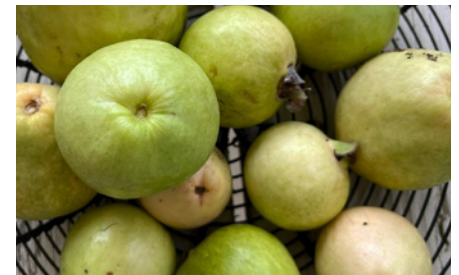
**The new "fish hut" at the entrance to the greenhouse has tanks for growing fish.**

greenhouse. An industrial blower is used to push air through the system, and the air exiting the tubes is around 55°F. This allows the greenhouse to maintain a temperature of around 40°F in the harshest winter conditions for only about \$1 a day in electricity costs.

Inside the greenhouse, both the north and south-facing sides are lined with benches where dragon fruit, herbs, and strawberries grow. The tall central space is filled with lemon, orange, lime, and guava trees. John is currently experimenting with key limes, Meyer lemons, juice oranges, navel oranges, and blood oranges, as well

as guavas, which are his mother's favorite fruit. So far, the guavas have been very productive, and the citrus trees are beginning to produce abundant fruit. The dragon fruit, however, has not been successful. John says that "Everything here is an experiment. Some things work, some don't."

This year, John is working on a new aquaponics system that will allow him to raise fish, as well as hydroponic lettuce and strawberries. Water from the fish tanks will go through 2 clarifiers; nutrients will be used to fertilize the lettuce and strawberries, and the water will be returned to the fish tanks. He anticipates that he will be able



**The first crop of guavas was very successful.**



**Fruit beginning to grow on the lime trees.**

to raise romaine lettuce in 30 days. The fish tanks should be operational by this fall, and the first crop of lettuce will probably be planted next spring.

Ultimately John plans on adding several more, longer greenhouses, probably about 100 feet long each. A greenhouse this large can accommodate 23 trees. He's not rushing to build all of them at once. There are lessons to be learned from each new construction project. John isn't going to have to worry about what to do in his retirement. He's going to be growing tropical fruit and feasting.

# *New spot provides some ‘buttercream’ in downtown*

**By Tracy Agnew**

A new business open in downtown Farmville is a sweet addition that grew out of a home-based business for a local woman and her family.

Owner of Spoonful of Buttercream Custom Cupcake Creations, Chelsea Brinks, and her mom, Pat Simon, have baked together since Chelsea was a child. The family recently relocated here from central New York so Pat and her husband, Aaron, could retire.

“We decided this was the best time to put a little home business together,” Brinks said. “We outgrew my kitchen very quickly, and we knew we needed a space.”

They looked for a commercial space for a while and didn’t have much luck, but then it all came together when fellow business owner Caryn Kayton let them know she had a space available — directly across from the courthouse at 113 N. Main St.

“Caryn is a big supporter,” Brinks said. “She believed in us from day one. She definitely was our main reason why we’re in this building that we are. She gave us the opportunity of a lifetime.”

Brinks said she enjoyed making over the building to become her own.

“Caryn was like, ‘How do you want this to look?’” Brinks said. “We talked about how we

wanted it to flow. We want happiness while you’re in there.”

The makeover aimed for the farmhouse feel and incorporated turquoise, as it is Brinks’ favorite color.

“The construction guys were able to take our drawings and make it come to life,” she said. “It was definitely a family effort. We love it here and we get so many compliments on the store itself and the colors we used. That’s always a good feeling.”

The brick-and-mortar location opened on June 8, only about a year after Brinks and her mom started their home-based business.



Custom floral cakes and cupcake bouquets are among the unique offerings of Spoonful of Buttercream Custom Cupcake Creations.



Pastries like cookie cakes are available.



A makeover building incorporates turquoise colors and a farmhouse feel.

“The coolest part is the local support and the support from other business owners,” Brinks said. “It feels like they have our back.”

Besides Brinks and her parents, also heavily involved in the success of the business are Brinks’ husband, Jonas, as well as pastry chef Katelyn Jones and baker Kim Simpson, who are sisters. “They’ve really helped bring our dream to life,” Brinks said of the pair of sisters.

Relationships with local customers has also been a highlight of the first few months of business, Brinks said.

“To even say we have regulars is really awesome,” Brinks said.

The bakery specializes in custom cupcakes and cakes. Each day, there are 10 varieties of cupcakes available as well as about half a dozen

different types of pastries including cookies, brownies and dessert bars.

“I don’t really think there’s anything we haven’t tried,” Brinks said.

“It’s fun to experiment.”

There’s also Homestead Creamery ice cream available. The shop takes custom orders for weddings and other functions and is known for cupcake floral bouquets that look like flowers but are completely edible.

Brinks said the family is enjoying their time as new business owners in Farmville.

“I love being in a small town,” she said. “We’re just a small bakery into doing big things, and we’re very family-oriented.”



About 10 flavors of cupcakes are available each day.



Chelsea Brinks and her staff at Spoonful of Buttercream Custom Cupcake Creations are available for custom wedding cakes.



# *Blanton follows the 'family tradition'*

**By Brian Carlton**

She started out at 19. Helene Blanton got involved with the Town of Farmville's police dispatch operation because she was too young to serve with the department in other ways.

"(I was) too young to be a police officer," Helene said. "It was a job that I felt comfortable starting since I was familiar with police radio. I had been listening to it my whole life."

That's because you might say law enforcement, and public service as a whole, is a family tradition for Blanton. Her great uncle, Swope Blanton, was a Cumberland County sheriff's deputy. Her grandfather, Henry A. Blanton III, became a deputy as well, before eventually serving as

Cumberland County Sheriff in his day. Helene's father, Henry A. Blanton IV or "Andy" as he's known, started as a dispatcher with both the Town of Farmville and Virginia State Police, until becoming old enough to go through training and become a Virginia State Police Trooper.

"All serving the public as best they could," Helene said of her family. "(So) I was naturally born into public service."

And serve she has. While some people might measure their time working for Farmville in years, Helene can do it by decades. After getting started with the dispatch operation, she then served as an officer in the department for several years. And for the past 16 years, she's been a part

of the Farmville Emergency Communications Center.

"I enjoy helping people with emergencies, information requests," Helene said. "Helping them with the life issues that law enforcement and fire/rescue services can work on for them."

When you ask what she likes about serving with the police in general, Helene says it's all part of the family tradition.

"I enjoy trying to continue the Blanton family honor of helping people as much as I can," she said.

## **INSPIRED TO HELP THE COMMUNITY**

And in her time of need, that community responded, saying it's our time to help you.

It was back in April that Police Chief Andy Ellington issued a challenge. Helene had recently been diagnosed with stage four brain cancer, going through surgery a few weeks prior. Her work family wanted to make sure she had plenty to cover those medical bills.

“(Helene) is not just a colleague but a valued member of our close knit team,” Ellington told the Farmville town council. “During this time, it’s crucial we come together to support her in every way possible. Thoughts and prayers are with her and her family.

He put out a call for fundraising, but also issued a challenge. If donations reached \$5,000 by May 23, Ellington would shave his hair at the

town staff picnic. Town Administrator Dr. Scott Davis added to that. If the donations reached \$10,000, he would also get his hair shaved.

As the May 23 deadline came closer, not just town staff, but members of the public started contributing. In time, the \$10,000 goal was met and passed. By the time the picnic rolled around, a total of \$15,358 had been raised. And that’s the amount Ellington gave Blanton.

And while town employees wanted to give to help someone they’ve known in some cases for years, Ellington said he was also just amazed by how many gave to help someone who’s a complete stranger.

“It started out challenging the town employees

to raise money to help her,” Ellington said. “Then we challenged the community. And everybody did their part.”

That includes beyond Farmville. People from outside of town, from Cumberland, from Charlotte and Lunenburg counties also gave donations.

Growing up, she was the oldest in her family, being helped by others. And it was that experience that inspired her to continue to work with the community, Helene said, to stay in Farmville and help as much as she can.

“I was helped growing up here by strong, dedicated community members and I work to do the same for others,” Helene said.




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