

November 2024

Vol. 9, No. 7

FREE



# FARMVILLE

*the Magazine*

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# Editor's Notebook

## Offering a helping hand

If there's been something positive to come out of the aftermath of Hurricane Helene, it's been the way people have responded. On a regular basis, strip miners from West Virginia, truckers from Michigan, engineers from Maryland and a pet rescue operation from Kentucky all made their way to North Carolina to lend a hand. You can add one more group from Farmville to that list, as Parker Oil sent their disaster relief team down. Reporter Nate Pentecost talks with Chris Parker about both the relief team and their experience down south.

It's something that runs through all of our stories this month, the idea of giving back, of helping others who need it. It's something that goes hand in hand with the month of November, as we head toward Thanksgiving, holiday donation drives are set up and people need help. Reporter Char Lavigne talks with Shirby Brown about the Mary Branch Heritage Center, and the ongoing efforts to transform it into a place that helps the community through a variety of programs. And then there's the mass project that includes a number of Farmville's nonprofits, all teaming up



Brian Carlton, Editor

to help make sure some residents are guaranteed to have some food this Thanksgiving. I detail that and many of the groups share what their role is in this first-time experience.

And as we're talking about helping others, it's a good time to highlight the Shrimp Fest held last month by the Lions Club. The yearly project helps fund vision and hearing screenings, funds for hearing aids and a new project to build a children's library at Madeline's House, the domestic abuse shelter. You can learn about that inside this edition as well.

Beyond the stories this month, we hear from Cynthia Wood, as she offers some help in planting and taking care of chrysanthemums during the fall season. The blooms have several different shapes, including the pompom, which is often associated with homecoming football games. Dr. Wood will help you not only keep the plants alive but help them thrive in the colder weather. And we wrap things up with a unique recipe to try for this year's Thanksgiving. Alexa Massey walks you through the steps of how to make brie and cranberry pastries for the holiday.

So take a break from the world for a minute and read through this month's edition, hearing how some of your friends and neighbors are reaching out to help others.

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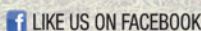


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# FARMVILLE

*the Magazine*



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On the Cover: Town of Farmville Police Chief Andy Ellington cooking shrimp at the Farmville Lions Club Shrimp Fest with help from Janet Copeland Bunnell. Photo by Betty J. Ramsey.



Fighting Hunger

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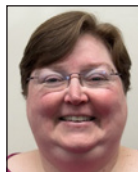
Parker Oil provides relief

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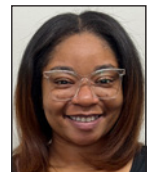
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Farmville the Magazine is published eight times annually by Farmville Newsmedia LLC. Copies are available free at businesses throughout the Heart of Virginia. For convenient mail delivery of each issue, cost is \$30 per year.




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The Center has become a place used by the community for a variety of events, including the annual Juneteenth celebration.



# Honoring the past, focusing on the future

By Char Lavigne

**T**he Mary E. Branch Heritage Center has a long and storied history of change. As work on it continues, staff look to help Farmville both remember the past and focus on the future.

“My mission for this project is to honor what my husband went through as a young man, to get where he ended up being,” Shirby Scott Brown said. She works as Vice President of the Heritage Center’s team. She was speaking of her husband Warren Brown, who was uneducated until the age of 10 during the years public schools were closed in Prince Edward County.

“He talked about it often,” Brown reminisced, “about what he had missed in his formative years. Our older children have been fortunate enough to go on to attain higher education, and it means a lot to me that they saw the importance of being educated, to be a part of society, and to be able to contribute something positive to society, because that’s what I want for all of our young people.”

Brown’s passion for education is clear in the Heritage Center’s plans for classes: the Center intends to provide after school tutoring and homework assistance as well as classes for cooking, financial literacy, basic computer skills, and more. Along with this, the team managing the Center intends to have social programs available for members of the community.

One roadblock to the Center’s success is the need for major repairs. “The roof is totally collapsed, but most of the inside is fixable,” Brown said, but funding is another issue. “We’ve applied for a couple of grants that we have not received yet.”

While grants are not currently



**A look at the Heritage Center as it currently stands today.  
Photo by Char Lavigne**



forthcoming, the Center is making headway with fundraising and donations within the community. Brown plans to begin a GoFundMe campaign once the team behind the Center has a better idea of the full extent of necessary repairs, which is a few weeks off.

**WHO WAS MARY BRANCH?**

Just for a minute, let's sidetrack to focus on the center's namesake. Who was Mary Branch? She was born in Farmville in 1881 to Tazewell and Harriett Branch, both former slaves. Her father Tazewell served on the Farmville Town Council and was eventually elected to two terms in the Virginia House of Delegates.

Mary meanwhile got involved in education. After graduation, she became an elementary school teacher in Blackstone, specializing in English. She later joined the staff at Virginia State College, teaching there for 20 years.

Mary wanted to improve her own education, as well. She earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Chicago in 1922 and a master's in English from the same school in 1925. In 1928, she became the dean of women at Vashon High School in St. Louis, Missouri.

Mary has a place in history, however, for what she did after that. In 1930, the American Missionary Association came to her with a request. They wanted her to become president of Tillotson College — a college that was struggling in 1930, according to the Mary Branch papers at what is now Tillotson University.



**Mary E. Branch later in her life.**



“It had seen declining enrollment, and the United States Department of Education, because of its findings from a survey of all the African American colleges in America, was suggesting the school be closed,” a summary of Branch papers states. “It was into this moment that Dr. Branch stepped in and raised the school to heights it had never seen before.”

Why was Mary’s appointment important? She was the first African American female college president, serving 14 years at the school. Beyond this milestone, she also transformed the school. She had the first library built at the college and made more resources available for students, the papers say. Her work led the way for the two-year college to eventually become a four-year university.

**GROWING THROUGH THE YEARS**

Over the years, the Heritage Center’s name



A number of programs are held at the center for groups ranging from school children to senior citizens.

has changed quite a bit. It went from being named the Farmville Colored School in 1927 to Robert Russa Moton High School in 1931. In 1939, it was renamed Mary E. Branch Elementary school. After being purchased from the county in the 1980s it became the Prince Edward County Recreation Center. In 2022, its name returned to honoring Mary E. Branch.

Brown said she wants the Heritage Center

to be an educational, recreational, and community centerpiece for residents of Prince Edward County. She knows it will take time to achieve these goals, but she intends to have them fulfilled.

“What we are looking for is to continue to reach out in the community, to get their continued support, and for everyone to realize the importance of it – not to open old wounds, but to heal and move forward,” Brown said.



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Recipe

*Brie and  
Cranberry pastries*

**two ways, for Thanksgiving**

My delicious brie, prosciutto and cranberry pastries can be made two ways, perfect for a family that likes both sweet and spicy foods.

## Recipe and photos by Alexa Massey

**F**or any home cook, Thanksgiving is like the Olympics of cooking. You spend all day in the kitchen cranking out dish after dish in hopes of a perfect dinner. Unfortunately, many rookies in the Thanksgiving game who are cooking for their families for the first time may spend days preparing their plan of attack only to realize one problem – they’ve spent all their time thinking about how to execute the perfect Thanksgiving dinner without considering how to handle the mob of hungry friends and family waiting for dinner to be ready!

Yes, you’ve got to make sure your dinner guests have something scrumptious to snack on while you are whipping up Thanksgiving din-din. It should be tasty, quick and should please any crowd. What are you to do? Well, I’ve got the perfect recipe for you here in the form of my brie, prosciutto and cranberry pastries! They take about 30 minutes from start to finish, please a crowd and can be made two ways, spicy with the addition of candied jalapenos and hot honey or sweet and mild by instead using walnuts, regular honey and balsamic glaze. They are flaky, buttery and delicious and can be made in a simple cupcake tin. They also make for a great side to be served along Thanksgiving dinner or just any night of the week.

### HERE’S THE RECIPE:

Prep time: 15 minutes

Cook time: 14 minutes

Yields: Approx. 18 cupcake-sized pastries

### INGREDIENTS:

- 1.1 lb. package pastry sheets + 1 tbs. flour
- 8 oz. wheel of brie cheese
- 14 oz. whole berry cranberry sauce
- 6 oz. prosciutto
- approx. 2 tbsp. brown sugar, to sprinkle as a topping
- Rosemary, to garnish
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 1 egg and 1 tbsp. Water (for egg wash)

### FOR THE “HOTTIES”

- 1 small jar candied jalapenos or “cowboy candy”
- Hot honey (to drizzle)

### FOR THE “SWEETIES”

- ½ cup walnuts or walnut pieces
- Regular honey (to drizzle)
- Balsamic glaze (to drizzle)



Lightly flouring your surface before unfolding and slicing your pastry sheets helps to prevent any sticking.

Yes, the rind of your brie cheese is edible! Some people prefer to only eat the gooey center of the brie. If you need to cut the rind off of your brie to make this recipe work for you, be my guest!



“Cowboy candy” is a delicious way to prepare jalapeno peppers. It makes them sweet and delicious while retaining the spice. I like to get mine at a nearby farmers market.





Begin by allowing your pastry sheets to thaw to room temperature for 30-40 minutes or until easily handled. Set your oven to 400° before unfolding your pastry sheets onto a lightly floured surface.

Cut your pastry sheets into evenly-sized squares that will fit well into a cupcake dish (about 3x3 in.) and lightly press each square into a greased cupcake dish. For me, a 1.1 lb. package of pastry sheets makes 18 perfect squares.

Carefully cut your brie into 18 small chunks and place one piece in each pastry square. Do the same with your prosciutto, which will add a delicious salty bite to each pastry. Add a dollop of cranberry sauce, as much or as little as your heart desires!

To finish building your tiny pastries, I recommend topping with “cowboy candy,” otherwise known as candied jalapeno/ chili peppers. They can be bought in jars at the supermarket or at most farmers markets, and the little bit of heat and sweetness added by the peppers pairs amazingly with the tart and sweet nature of the cranberry sauce.

If you’re not into hot food or would just like a little variety, top your pastries instead with whole or chopped walnuts.

Once you add your toppings of choice, beat your egg and water in a small bowl, then use a small brush to lightly coat the exposed edges of your pastry with this egg wash which will help them become a pretty golden brown while baking. Lastly, sprinkle each pastry with a very light dusting of brown sugar.

Pop your pastries in the oven for about 14 minutes, watching carefully to make sure they do not burn. Once removed from the oven, allow the pastries to cool for 10-15 minutes before removing them from the cupcake tins. Garnish the pastries with some chopped rosemary. For the candied jalapeno pastries, drizzle on some delicious hot honey which you can find at the local grocery store or make yourself at home using honey, apple cider vinegar, peppers and chili flakes. For the walnut version of your pastries, drizzle on some regular honey and balsamic glaze.

Let me tell you, people will not be able to stop eating these little pieces of heaven. They are so easy to make, are deliciously buttery and flaky, and they do not stray too far away from the traditional Thanksgiving flavor profile. With that being said, you may find everyone wants you to make these things year-round. It’s a risk we home cooks have to take!



Topping your pastries with walnuts and drizzling with honey and balsamic glaze creates one sweet bite of gooey goodness.



Adding candied jalapeno peppers and drizzling with hot honey gives your pastries a divine kick that pairs so well with tart cranberries on Thanksgiving.



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# Farmville groups join up to fight hunger

By Brian Carlton

It's meant as a holiday gift, a way for thousands of people to have a better Thanksgiving this year. As Farmville residents gather for the holiday, a group of hunters, farmers and nonprofits in town will get together as well, with the goal of helping fix food insecurity.

The Piedmont Health District, FACES Food Pantry, Hunters for the Hungry, Feed More, Prince Edward Extension and Prince Edward County are partnering for a bit of cooking. The groups plan to produce and distribute 800 cans of venison stew.

Why venison stew? One, they can get the supplies locally, thanks to Hunters for the Hungry.

"Our mission is to provide an essential high protein, low fat, lean, red meat resource to those facing hunger in local communities throughout Virginia," said Gary Arrington. He's the Program Director for Hunters for the Hungry. "We are blessed to be a part of this feeding effort."

Founded in 1991, the group of hunters takes deer meat to area processors, who convert it into hamburger meat. That hamburger meat, which is processed and packaged, is then distributed to area food banks.

Arrington added that his group is not just collecting the venison, through their deer hunting, but also processing it, to make it easier on the rest of the operation.

Second, beyond just being easy to secure, this kind of meal is very healthy, providing important nutrition that some residents might not otherwise get.

## A NEED DURING THE HOLIDAYS

Also, yes, this is needed, both during the holidays and throughout the year. A [foodbanks.org](http://foodbanks.org) map shows that this entire region is what's known as "food insecure." Now to be clear, that doesn't mean no options exist. It does mean however, there are obstacles in the

way of buying food. It's hard to plan on a weekly grocery run if you have no vehicle and nobody to give you a ride. Or maybe you've been laid off and don't have the money. Maybe you have a job and it pays just enough to cover the bills, but not enough to eat without help. The map we mentioned shows that between 17% to 27% of Farmville residents and those on the outskirts of town are dealing with this type of problem. And that's why the groups are teaming up, to help everyone have a good Thanksgiving.

On Nov. 23,

volunteers from the partnering organizations will come together at the Prince Edward Cannery and work alongside cannery staff to prepare and can venison stew.

"The county is proud to contribute the use of the cannery and our talented cannery staff," said Douglas P. Stanley, Prince Edward County Administrator. "It is vital we all come together to support families facing food insecurity. This partnership is a testament to the power of community and teamwork."





### PROCESSED AND DISTRIBUTED

So how does this process work? Well, after it's been canned, the venison stew will be distributed through FACES Food Pantry, making sure that it reaches families and individuals who are struggling to make ends meet in time for the holiday.

"Food insecurity continues to be a pressing issue that affects many families in our region," emphasized Sharon Carter. She is a member of the FACES Board of Directors and Venison Stew Project Lead. "The venison stew project is a step toward ensuring that everyone has access to nutritious food."

And that nutritious food helps. The Virginia Department of Health reports that the population of the Piedmont Health District, Farmville

and surrounding counties, has higher rates of obesity, diabetes, heart disease and stroke compared to the overall population of Virginia. The latest Community Health Needs Assessment outlines needs for greater food security, better nutritional food, as well as for efforts to address chronic disease. That's why the groups came together to make this happen and provide folks with a happy Thanksgiving.

"We are thrilled to partner with such dedicated organizations to provide a nutritious meal to those facing food insecurity in our region," said Sarah Kott. She works as Population Health Manager for the Piedmont Health District, of which Farmville is part. "This project underscores the importance of collaboration and compassion in ensuring that every resident has access to nutritious food."

# From the Ground Up |



*Chrysanthemums*  
**for Fall Color**





Chrysanthemums, gourds, and pumpkins are a classic fall arrangement.

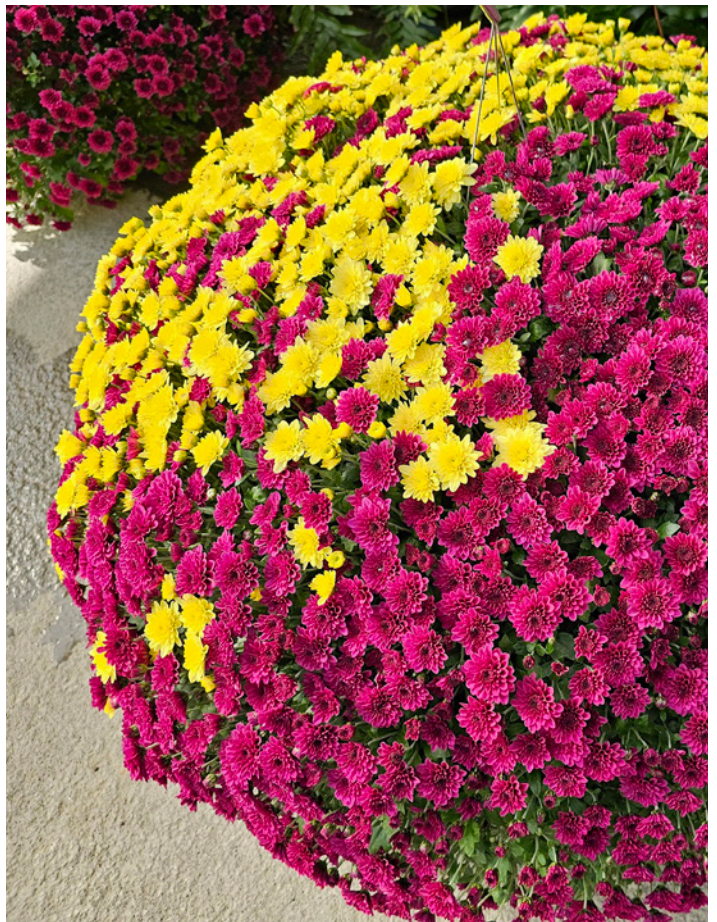
**Story and photo by Dr. Cynthia Wood**

Chrysanthemums have been much loved plants in Asia for hundreds of years. The flowers are used to brew a golden colored tea, while the tender leaves are eaten and used in various herbal medicines. Chrysanthemum leaves are supposed to have life enhancing properties.

In Japan, horticulturists have produced many different bloom shapes that aren't available here. They also train the plants into bonsai type shapes, as well as extraordinary long single stem, cascading plants that produce more than 1,000 flowers.

By the 1600s, the flowers had been taken to Europe, but they weren't very popular. By the late 1700s, chrysanthemums had arrived in the United States where they were popular. By 1900, there was a very active chrysanthemum society.

Visit any garden center here in late summer and you're likely to find hundreds of pots of young chrysanthemum plants being prepped for



**Be bold and mix two vibrant colors in one container.**

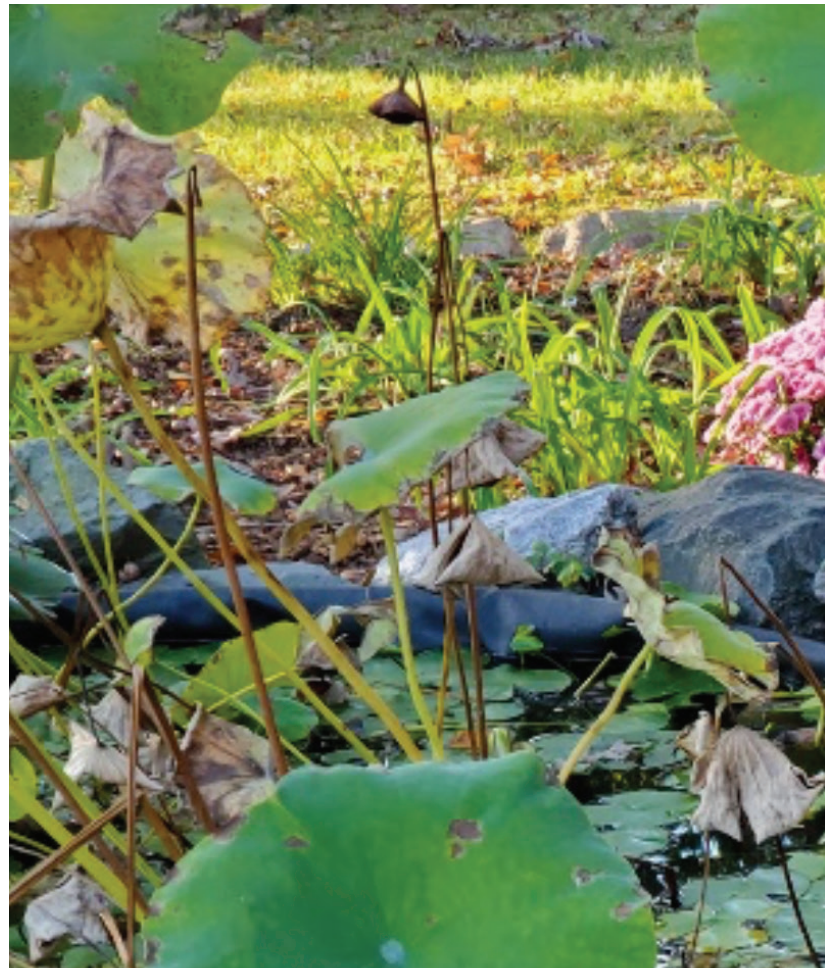
fall sales. They're the potted plant most frequently associated with fall and Thanksgiving.

The plants are tough and have abundant blooms in a wide range of cheerful colors that perfectly complement fall leaves. For example: gold, bronze, deep red, pink, lavender, cream, yellow, and rust. It's not unusual for the nursery trade to introduce several new colors every year.

The blooms also have several different shapes, including the pompom, which is often associated with homecoming football games; the daisy shape, which can be single or double; the anemone; the spider, which has long, thin petals that curve at the ends, and are said to resemble fireworks; and blooms with spoon or shaped petals that curve up and resemble spoons.

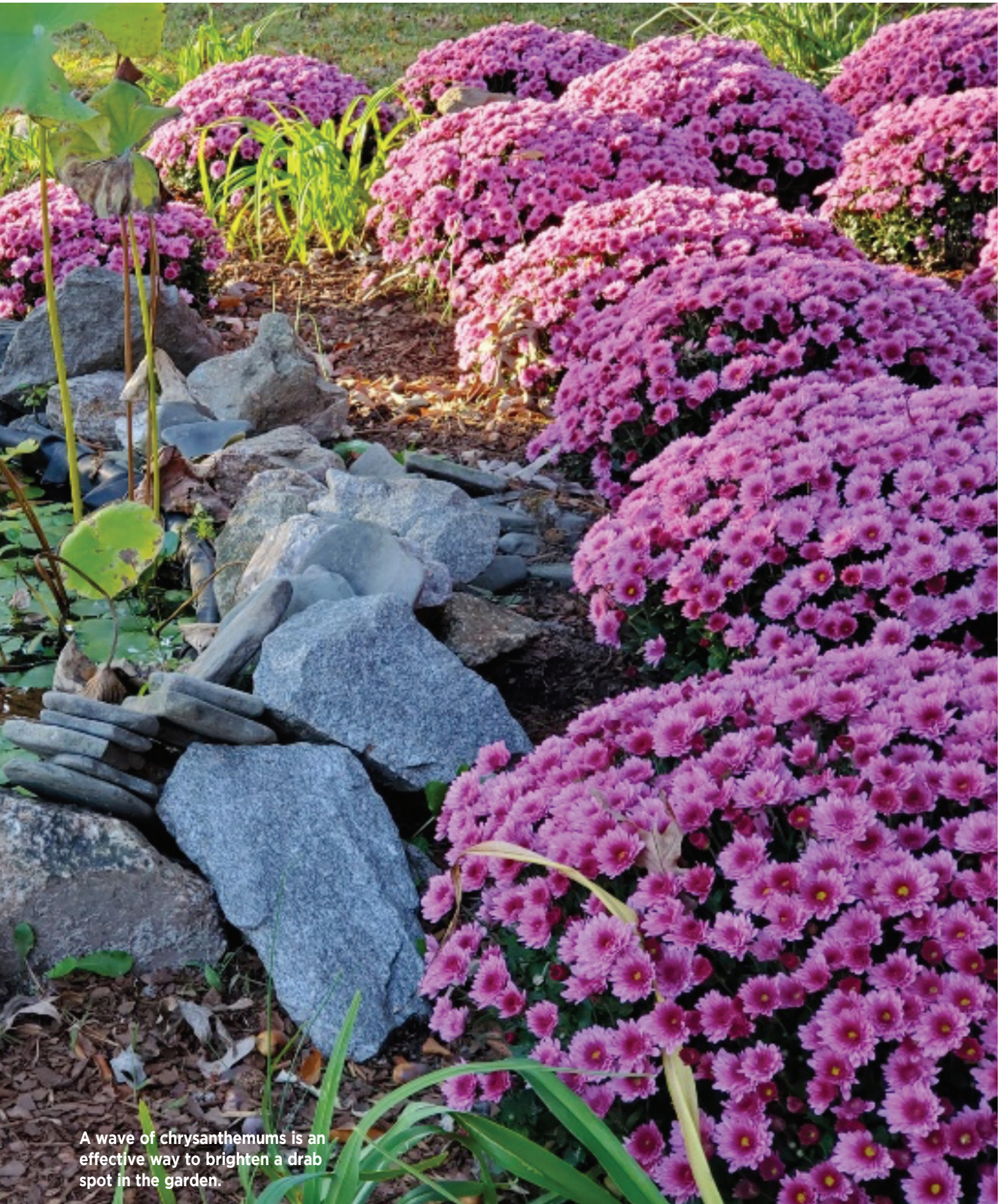
For the best results in adding chrysanthemums to fall garden displays, purchase them as early as possible so that they can settle into their new location. Plant them in well-drained soil that contains plenty of organic matter, and keep them watered. A wave of the same color of chrysanthemums in a perennial border is an effective and easy way to extend brilliant color into late fall. A group of three different size pots of chrysanthemums by the front door makes a bold statement.

While most chrysanthemums available at garden centers in the fall aren't reliably hardy, they can often be overwintered successfully. Mulch the plants and allow the dead stems to remain on the plants all winter. When new growth emerges in spring, then it's safe to remove the dead stems. To ensure that the plants are thick and bushy, pinch back the stems several times before late spring and fertilize the plants.



**Chrysanthemums with daisy type blooms work well in pots or perennial borders.**





A wave of chrysanthemums is an effective way to brighten a drab spot in the garden.



Members of Parker Oil's disaster relief team work to distribute oil in western North Carolina after Hurricane Helene.

# Parker Oil provides relief

By Nate Pentecost

For more than a decade, if there has been a natural disaster happening on the East Coast, Parker Oil has been there to help. The operation, which has an office in Farmville, runs a disaster relief team, providing help and emergency oil supplies when areas take a hit due to a storm. But what happened to North Carolina and Eastern Tennessee was one of the first situations they've come across.

"This is the worst storm I've seen, in my opinion," said Chris Parker. He's the owner of the Farmville operation. "Roads are washed out, houses are swept down and creeks turned into full blown rivers. The amount of destruction is unreal."

And notice we said "are" not "were." That highlights how bad the damage was, in that cleanup is still continuing as you read this from a storm in late September. Some of those roads in Western North

Carolina and along the border with Tennessee aren't expected to be reopened until the Fall of 2025.

The Parker Oil team took off to Asheville, North Carolina after Hurricane Helene made landfall on Sept. 26. Helene caused tornadoes, knocked out power, and breached the banks of creeks and rivers leaving widespread damage and loss of life in Florida, Georgia, North and South Carolina, and Tennessee. The Federal Emergency Management Agency deployed more than 1,270 rescuers to assist.

"We don't deal with the public directly, but we're in the shadows helping out," Chris Parker explained.

Helene killed more than 230 people, making it the deadliest hurricane to strike the U.S. since Hurricane Maria in 2017. With some estimates putting the economic impact of Helene as high as \$200 billion, the hurricane could also be the costliest in the country's history.



Parker said he felt compelled to aid in disaster relief knowing what an important resource his company is able to provide. In addition to Hurricane Helene, Parker Oil took to Florida to provide services during the aftermath of Hurricane Milton. The company also traveled to New York after Hurricane Sandy, and to the Gulf Coast after Hurricane Irma. In total the company has helped with relief efforts for more than 10 national disasters.

**HELPING ON THE LOCAL LEVEL**

Locally, Parker Oil provides energy products during severe weather as well. Notably, the company was active in helping during the Valentine’s Day storm that rocked the area in 2014.

“Knowing that even the littlest bit of help goes a long way,” Chris said. “We’re not doing search and rescue, but to know what we do counts, matters. Commodities that are everyday items become scarce and you see people sometimes line up for miles to get them. You realize how important those things are in those moments.”

Even though Hurricane Helene didn’t cause as much damage here as in Western North Carolina, it still led to

flooding, schools being closed and roads being shut down due to rivers and creeks overflowing their banks. And in the aftermath of situations like this, that’s where Parker Oil and their disaster relief team can step in.

**SOME BACKGROUND ON PARKER OIL**

The Parker Oil Company has been with us since 1935, when Lewis W. Parker Sr. founded the original operation in South Hill. He saw a need and started delivering heating oil and other petroleum to the region.

The company is now heading into the third generation of family ownership. Lewis brought his sons, Lewis Jr. and Charles, into the business and now the founder’s grandson, Charlie Parker, heads up the operation that his grandfather built. They’ve expanded past the original limits of South Hill and surrounding areas. Now the group has 71 businesses, spread out along both southern Virginia and northeastern North Carolina. And that term “southern Virginia” covers a lot of ground, starting in Norfolk and Virginia Beach, running through places like Dinwiddie and Blackstone, covering Farmville, Drakes Branch and Clarkville, among many others.

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# PARTY *Pix*

## FARMVILLE LION'S SHRIMP FEST 2024

A great time was had by all at the third annual Shrimp Fest, held Thursday, Oct. 24 at the Fireman's Sports Arena. Proceeds from the fundraiser are used to support the community through various service projects such as vision and hearing screenings, partnering with Madeline's House to develop and maintain a children's library at the shelter, supply the food pantry at PECHS and support of local agencies such as the YMCA, PEFYA, FACES and more. PHOTOS BY BETTY J. RAMSEY





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