



Floyd

Still Sustaining After All These Years

by Beth Jones

The spirit of Floyd, kindled in the '70s and earlier, lives on in a new initiative called SustainFloyd. The "San Francisco of Southwest Virginia" is out to protect its identity while moving forward economically.

Woody Crenshaw doesn't worry the two-lane stretch of U.S. 221 running through Floyd won't be road enough to carry his town into the future.

Bigger isn't always better.

Crenshaw figures, after all, that it's the 22 miles standing between Floyd and the nearest four-lane highway that's kept Wal-Mart executives from picking Floyd for a new Supercenter.

Sure, a Hardee's and a Dollar General sit not far from the town's one stoplight, but locally owned shops and restaurants easily outnumber the franchises.

"We don't have a corporate influence imposed on the community," Crenshaw says.

As president of SustainFloyd, Crenshaw hopes to keep things that way.

The idea for SustainFloyd took root a few years back

when a group of area movers and shakers began talking about what the future holds for Floyd. Among the questions they debated: Were they OK with the area becoming a bedroom community to Roanoke or Blacksburg?

The answer was a resounding no.

To keep that from happening, they knew they would need a way to grow jobs and wealth in Floyd County.

But then, this is Floyd, the San Francisco of Southwest Virginia, a place where the populace tends to lean more to the crunchy-granola left than their counterparts in the Roanoke Valley. The founders of SustainFloyd had more in mind than localizing the economy.

"I'm one of those people who feel humanity can make the planet inhabitable for ourselves," Crenshaw says. "We have to be respectful of the natural world."

And so, SustainFloyd's vision statement places the same weight on developing the ecological health of the



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community as it does its financial health.

Mike Burton, a former lawyer turned farmer who became director of SustainFloyd more than a year ago, says the group's members initially talked about focusing their energies on one or two main goals. "But then we'd look at the bigger picture," Burton says.

The group's members found they couldn't, for instance, tackle protecting the area's water quality without also working on forest conservation. "We decided to keep it very broad," Burton says.

Keeping it broad means the members of SustainFloyd work on projects as varied as exposing kids to what goes into making the food they eat to making sure the Floyd of the future embraces things of beauty like pottery, painting and bluegrass picking.

Lydeana Martin, who juggles the roles of directing community and economic development as well as planning and tourism for Floyd, speaks enthusiastically about the nonprofit's work.

"A lot of people have the concern," Martin says. "They're actually trying to do something."

FARMING FOR THE FUTURE

Economic development professionals spend careers trying to entice businesses to bring their factories/stores/call centers to their city.

The folks with SustainFloyd decided to go another route. They wanted to capitalize on what Floyd already has: acre upon acre of fertile farmland. "We see agriculture as the way for us to grow," Crenshaw says.

As one of the first projects for the nonprofit, SustainFloyd took over a long-term lease of the Floyd Community Market Pavilion. A partnership of local business owners joined forces to build the market's distinctive timber-frame pavilion. "We sort of likened it to an Amish barn raising," Crenshaw says.

"That was kind of a unifying force from the beginning," Burton says of the market, which opened in 2010. "Everybody agreed we should try to do that."

"It was a 'build it and they will come' thing," Crenshaw says.

And they have. Burton calls the market's first season a success. It opened for 2011 on May 6 and will run through the fall. Shoppers can buy locally made arts and crafts on Friday afternoons and evenings (when everyone comes to town for Floyd's famous bluegrass jamboree) and local produce on Saturday mornings.

The members of SustainFloyd wanted a market primarily to give local farmers and artisans a place to sell their goods.

"But, there's symbolism to it too," says Burton. "When people drive by it's a sign people are growing food for our community."

Beginning this summer, Burton hopes the market will serve an even wider section of the Floyd. A portion of a United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development Grant received last fall went to buy an Electronic Benefits Transfer machine, which allows the market's vendors to accept benefits cards from people who rely on the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (formerly known as food stamps).

"We felt that farmer's markets tend to be a little high-end, a little new agey," Crenshaw says. "We thought it was important to offer local food to the entire community."

The members of SustainFloyd are crossing their fingers that another idea for making agriculture more profitable for Floyd farmers will pan out. Another grant from the USDA, this one for \$29,850, went to pay a consultant to look at whether it would be profitable to build a food processing facility in Floyd. The idea is that farmers could bring their crops (tomatoes, say) to be



SONNY CRENSHAW



WOODY CRENSHAW

Lighting the World

transformed into something else (say, tomato sauce). The products could then be sold to local universities, secondary schools or hospitals.

"The goal is creating a better and steadier market for farmers," Burton says.

Martin thought it showed maturity that the non-profit's members chose to do a study before jumping in feet first. She isn't 100 percent sold that a local foods movement can be a big money maker.

"It's smart they're checking to see if there's a business case to be made," Martin says.

ENSURING HEALTHY LIFESTYLES

To make sure all this hard work pays off down the road, members of SustainFloyd want to ensure the next generation of townfolk harbor a hunger for local produce. They partnered with organizers from other Floyd groups to win a \$59,841 grant from the Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth to use to hire a childhood-obesity prevention specialist.

Deanna Swartzel, who took for the job in October, brings to the position years of experience teaching young kids and years of working her family's orchard. "I've always lived that life of working in the gardens," Swartzel says.

Swartzel's major job duty is writing a plan to get the children of Floyd living healthier lifestyles. "If we could encourage our kids to step away from the TV or any kind of screen time and just be active," Swartzel says. "It might mean playing basketball for a few minutes or riding your bikes for a little while. It doesn't have to be a lot of structured stuff."

Burton hopes SustainFloyd will eventually work in cooperation with the local school systems to arrange for local farmers to provide 20 to 40 percent of the food served in school cafeterias. The goal, he says, is to get

When Woody Crenshaw got his driver's license in the '60s, he wasted no time climbing into his green 1953 Chevy wagon and driving from his Raleigh home to the Blue Ridge Mountains.

"I think there's something here for me," Crenshaw recalls thinking as he looked out at the scenic wonders.

Many years later, Crenshaw inherited his father's business, Crenshaw Lighting Company, which for years had produced hand-crafted, decorative lighting fixtures, mostly for churches.

Crenshaw and his wife Jackie knew they wanted to move the operation from Raleigh to the mountains. They drove the Blue Ridge Parkway from Asheville to Roanoke debating on where to settle.

Floyd won them over.

"It was a matter of finding the place we felt the most at home in," Crenshaw says.

It proved to be a smart decision. Crenshaw Lighting Company has grown. Today, the business can boast of placing hand-crafted, custom-made lighting fixtures in such prestigious buildings as the Boston Opera House and the United States Supreme Court.

"We never thought we'd be employing 45 people," Crenshaw says, his voice full of wonder.

The 63-year-old will give a tour of his company's 25,000-square-foot studio and talk about a certain scone as if it's a favored child. He's even more proud of the artisans at Crenshaw Lighting Company who make the fixtures.

"We trained a whole generation of local guys who grew up on farms," Crenshaw says. "Really talented young men who used to work on trucks and tractors are building chandeliers for the Biltmore [Estate in Asheville, N.C.]"

Crenshaw juggles running the business with working on projects to promote the creative arts or the economic development of the region. The Crenshaws bought and renovated the Floyd Country Store, home of the famous Friday night Jamboree, in 2005, and have invested in other commercial development projects in Floyd.

Crenshaw is actively involved with the Crooked Road, Virginia's Heritage Music Trail and 'Round the Mountain, Southwest Virginia's Artisan Network. Recently, he's funneled much of his energy into SustainFloyd, the nonprofit dedicated to building an environmentally sustainable, localized economy.

kids eating healthier foods and helping local farmers to make a living. "It's going to take time," Burton says.

Getting kids into the habit of eating the veggies in the cafeteria is part of the fight for Swortzel. As part of a health fair she organized at Floyd Elementary School in January, she brought in cut-up vegetables for kindergarteners.

"It was crazy to see how many kids didn't know what celery and broccoli was," Swortzel says, "but they would try it and then they loved it."

PRESERVING THE CULTURE

Maybe it's the scenic beauty. Maybe it's the groovy vibe.

Whatever the reason, lots of musicians, painters and poets call Floyd home.

Crenshaw's voice takes on an evangelistic tone when he talks about how these artists make Floyd a place

people want to visit and improve the quality of life for the locals.

"We think having a thriving artist community makes the community a better place to live," Crenshaw says.

SustainFloyd is one of the partner organizations planning the Floyd Artisan Trail Tour, which takes place annually in June. Visitors stop at more than 50 trail stops at home art studios, wineries and farms where they'll get to do things like learn to make a craft, take a cooking lesson or hear a poetry reading.

"They created what I think is going to be a dynamic artist event," Crenshaw says.

Martin knows many Floyd artists who have to travel to sell their work. She's thrilled the trail tour will give them an opportunity to showcase their art at home. "It's just brilliant," she says.

*For more information: sustainfloyd.org, [---

Keeping The Bees Alive](http://floydcounty-</i></p></div><div data-bbox=)*

Scholars disagree over whether it was really Albert Einstein who predicted humans would live no more than four years following the extinction of bees. Maybe someone else said it. Either way Gunther Hawk believes that timeline is "pretty close."

"We all depend on the bees," Hawk says. "If we lose them it'll affect everyone no matter how wealthy or how poor they are."

Hawk hopes to avoid such a grim scenario with his work at Spikenard Farm Honeybee Sanctuary, a nonprofit organization he and his wife Vivian Struve-Hawk brought to Floyd in November 2009.

In Floyd, the sanctuary holds a 99-year lease of 25 lush acres next to the Little River. Here, 20 bee colonies sit on a plateau overlooking 4.5 acres Hawk and Struve-Hawk planted with clover and other plants that satisfy the bees' hunger.

Hawk runs the sanctuary with a "work with nature" philosophy inspired by the insights of Rudolf Steiner, who developed a holistic type of farming called biodynamic agriculture that emphasizes soil health, natural regeneration of the land and paying heed to lunar cycles. Hawk, who was born in the former Yugoslavia, was first introduced to beekeeping and the biodynamic method when he worked in Germany as a young adult teaching at the Steiner-developed Waldorf Schools.

"Everything interconnects," Hawk says. "Everything in nature. There's nothing iso-

lated."

By 1996, Hawk had moved to New York, where he was busy building a training program for biodynamic farmers. One day, he happened to read an editorial in *The New York Times* called "Hush of the Hives," which was written by a beekeeper distraught over massive die-offs of bees.

"I realized, 'OK, I know about noninvasive beekeeping,'" Hawk says. "I got bees right away."

Hawk also began leading sustainable beekeeping workshops, passing what he knew to others interested in the plight of the honeybee. His book "Toward Saving the Honeybee" was published in 2002.

Today, Hawk continues that work, traveling the country to discuss Colony Collapse Disorder, the name scientists have given for the mysterious disappearance of tens of billions of this country's bees in recent years.

Often, Hawk pairs his talks with a screening of "Queen of the Sun," a documentary released this spring that features Hawk and other beekeepers trying to make sense of the disappearing bees. Hawk and others interviewed in the film attribute the death of the bees to a number of factors, all of them man-made, including monoculture (the practice of growing acre upon acre of the same crop), migratory beekeeping, invasive beekeeping methods and pesticides.

"Right now we're so much into this para-

digim of control," Hawk says. "It's the male paradigm. Control and fight. To grow our food now we have to switch to a more female paradigm. Care and nurturing and not thinking the bottom line is the most important thing."

Hawk believes bees will ultimately be able to survive the environmental challenges, but cautions many more colonies will die before that happens. "I wouldn't be working at this if I didn't think [they will survive]," he says.

Over the next five years Hawk hopes Spikenard Honeybee Sanctuary will be able to raise enough money to build an educational center and to buy the land they're currently leasing. Hawk and his wife take a small salary from donations, which he says ends up being an hourly rate below minimum wage when considering the couple toils for the bees six days a week.

"But that's all right," Hawk says. "We love it and we have enough to eat. Can you imagine anything more wonderful than to spend your retirement in something that's utterly needed?"

On August 27 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Spikenard Farm Honeybee Sanctuary will host a workshop on preparing hives for the winter, harvesting honey, and mite treatment. \$65. Reserve a spot by calling 745-2153 or emailing info@spikenard.org.

The honeybee sanctuary is funded by donations. To make a tax-deductible gift, visit