

Summer 2023

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FREE

Brian Vincent  
MAYOR

Farmville  
2023

# FARMVILLE

*the Magazine*

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## A time for celebration

On the cover of this edition is Farmville Mayor Brian Vincent cutting a slice of cake at the 120th Birthday Celebration for the Farmville Train Station. Did you know that two national Pepsi commercials were filmed right here in Farmville, at the train station? Pretty cool stuff. Our thanks to the Farmville-Prince Edward Historical Society who holds a party every 10 years for the train station, keeping the memories alive and keeping us informed.



**Betty Ramsey,**  
Publisher

As much as I love warm weather, I have to admit, it can be a real challenge to keep cool during summer in the south. Humidity in the south turns the air into a hair frizzing, clothes sticking blanket that is relentless until the sun dips over the horizon. It's also a challenge for pets and our gardens. In this edition Dr. Cynthia Wood gives some really good advice on plants that will not only survive the summer heat but thrive in it. The hibiscus is a tropical plant whose bright colored blooms are perfectly happy in our sweltering summer heat and even better loves and needs the humidity! Turn to Page 14 for more summer garden tips.

If you are, plan to be, or know someone in the "family way" you will want to turn to Page 10 and read up on the Midwife Program that is available through Centra Hospital here in Farmville. When combined with obstetric professionals, midwives are making the experience easier and more

comfortable for everyone involved.

Speaking of Centra Hospital, Dr. Donkor is probably a familiar name to many area residents. During his 25-year time at Centra Dr. Donkor wore many hats — from medical director to chief of staff. Following his career at Centra, Donkor returned to his homeland of Ghana, building a medical facility to help the people. Always working to improve the lives of others his latest endeavor is building a mortuary this is desperately needed. Turn to Page 6 for more information about his ministry of love and how you can help.

*Farmville the Magazine* strives to tell the story of our community. We are blessed and grateful to be a part of this community and are thankful that there are so many great stories to share.

Within these pages you will find more stories and we hope you will enjoy reading them as much as we enjoy bringing them to you. This is a magazine about and for you, we welcome your ideas and invite you to share with us what you would like to hear more about by sending us a note at P.O. Box 307, Farmville, VA, 23901, giving us a call at (434) 392-4151 or sending me an email at [Betty.Ramsey@FarmvilletheMag.com](mailto:Betty.Ramsey@FarmvilletheMag.com).

We publish *Farmville the Magazine* in March, April, May, summer, September, October, November and December. We invite you to pick up a copy of the latest issue as there is sure to be someone you know inside — a neighbor, a family member, a friend or perhaps even you!

*Betty Ramsey is publisher of Farmville the Magazine.  
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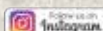
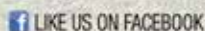


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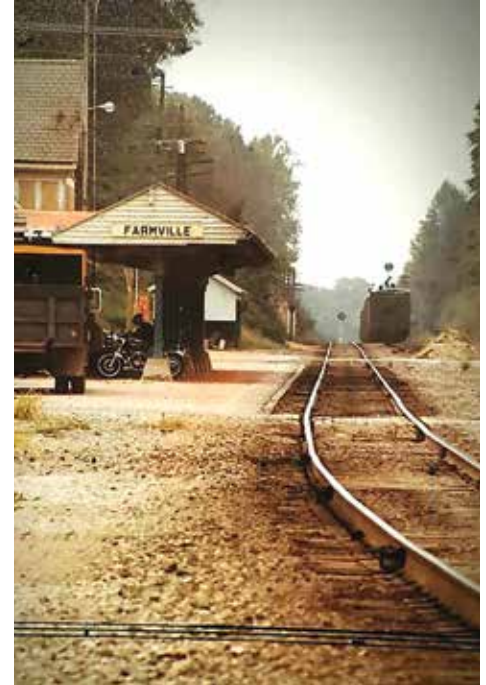
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**Midwife Program**

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**Train Station turns 120**

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On the cover: Town of Farmville Mayor, Brian Vincent, cuts the cake at the 120th birthday celebration for the Farmville Train Station.



**Ministry of Love**

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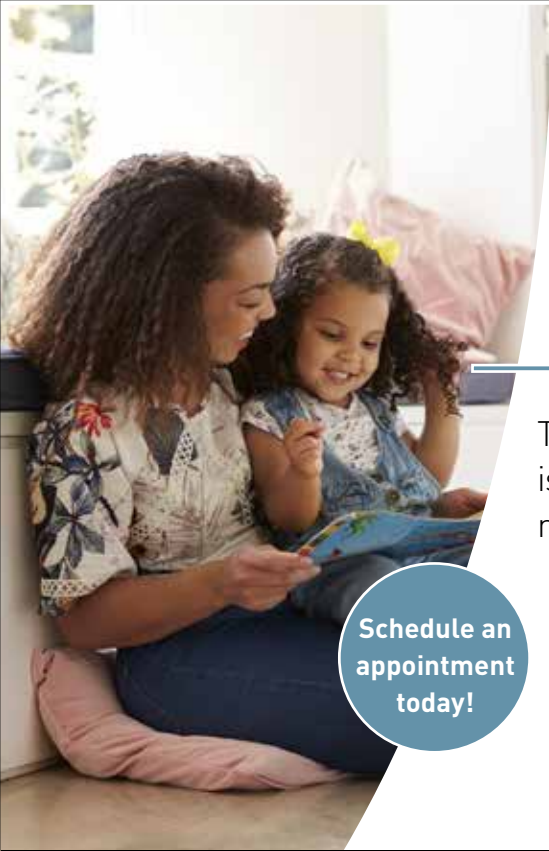
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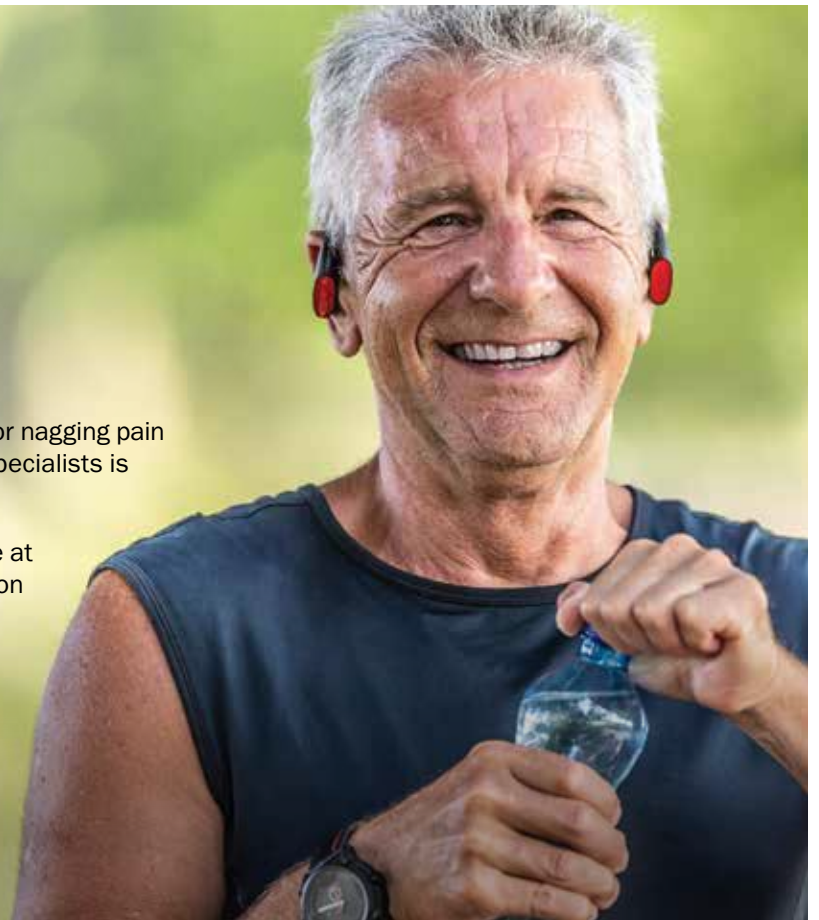
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# A MINISTRY OF LOVE





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By Brian Carlton  
 Submitted photos

It's always a seven-week period. Like clockwork, Dr. Kwabena Donkor always returns to Farmville for the same period of time. And every time, he has a purpose in mind. Actually, he has several. This is the only time of year he and his wife take a vacation, so there's time to see the family and visit grandkids, to travel and be the proud grandparents.

But there's plenty more to do in that timeframe.

"I come back every year, cramming everything into those seven weeks," Donkor said.

That includes collecting supplies for his medical work in Ghana, trying to recruit more people to get involved with the project and collect donations for special goals. It's that last part weighing heavily on his

mind right now.

A year ago, Donkor was approached by a tribal delegation. In addition to the medical hospital he runs, they asked if he would build a mortuary. He had the land, deciding to use part of a parcel bought 15 years ago. He just needed supplies and the money to buy them. And that's been his focus over the last 11 months.

#### 'A CRITICAL NEED'

It's a critical need, he says, because there's nothing similar in any one direction for at least 30 miles. And the families struggle to pick up loved ones on their own. Donkor gives an example of a period last

summer with several deaths. One of them had been a lady. Now if this patient died in Farmville, Donkor said, she would have been in a private room and then the morgue. But at his Amayami Memorial Hospital, the ladies ward is spread out in one room, with four beds, set up dormitory style. And so yes, that means if women are in the other beds, they had to share space with a corpse.

“Now, they don’t have air conditioning,” Donkor said. “Fans, if you are lucky. And there’s a dead woman in this tent. So we’re calling family, asking please hurry up and get this body out. Well, they say, we don’t have a way to do that.”

And therein lies what Donkor says is a common problem in the region. Often, people don’t have a bicycle, motorcycle or money to pay to have their relatives brought home. And so, the body can sit for a while at the hospital.

“Roughly 20 hours pass and this driver pulls up on a motorcycle, with a passenger carrying a blanket,” Donkor said. “They wrap the body in the blanket, put it between them on the motorcycle and drive away.”

And that, he said, is one of the best case scenarios. It can take days or weeks for families to come pick up their loved ones. In the current situation, that doesn’t exactly work out well for anyone.

Three days after the dead woman had been picked up, that’s when the tribal delegation came by, Donkor said.

“They asked me to make sure to build a mortuary at my hospital the first chance I get,” he added.

#### **A BIT MORE ABOUT DR. DONKOR**

Before we finish talking about his current project, here’s an introduction for the man himself. Donkor was born in Kumasi, Ghana, the son of a local chief. As he grew up, the former Farmville resident graduated from the University of Ghana Medical School and became a general doctor. Soon after, he arrived in the United States at age 29 to further his studies in medicine at Tulane University Medical School in New Orleans, Louisiana. It was here that he was inspired to become a pulmonologist.

It was then his mother in Ghana fell ill with what tribal healers referred to as a spiritual sickness. Once he got her to a regional hospital in Kumasi, the doctors found a very physical cause: a ‘tropical parasitic infection,’ caused by a hookworm. But while she recovered enough to go home, a couple days later Donkor’s mother

#### **A look at some of the work being done at the mortuary in Kumasi, Ghana**



passed on.

This was the beginning of the Ama Nyame Memorial Medical Center, as Donkor wanted to make sure no one else had to go through that. In 2004, he bought land near Kumasi and turned it into the current medical facility.

During his 25 years in Farmville, Donkor served as medical director for Central Southside Community Hospital’s Respiratory Department, helped establish a bronchoscopy lab, founded the hospital’s Pulmonary Rehabilitation Program and founded both the Sleep Lab and Sleep Clinic. He also worked as the hospital’s chief of staff for a time, as a mentor to (Longwood’s) College of Osteopathic Medicine students and medical advisor to Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs).

Donkor gave that up to return to Ghana and help people through his medical facility. Now he wants to help the community in a different way, looking to provide a place they can put dead bodies while families come up with ideas and figure out what will happen.

#### **THE FUNERAL PROCESS**

While a Farmville funeral might only take one hour, it’s not the same in Ghana.

“This can go on for months,” Donkor explained. “Let’s say the chief of a village dies. The whole village has to make sure there are certain cultural and traditional values that are upheld. They have to decide how and where to keep it, for how long and determine how it will be buried.”

Even the chief doesn’t automatically move to the front of the line. If the village hasn’t finished honoring the chief before him, then they have to find a way to put the current chief “on ice,” so to speak, while continuing with those plans for the first.

“If the funeral for the chief before him has not been done, the current chief’s funeral will not be done until the previous one happens,” Donkor said. “They need some way to store the body while this is happening.”

You also may get held up longer while the village members look for the right attire. And yes, this does matter in Ghana. For someone who died that’s either 100 or less, you must come to the funeral in either red, black or a mixture of both. There are no other options. If you’re 100 years or older, then you switch to white.

“Red and black are mourning colors,” Donkor said. “We’re angry, we’re sad. We’re grieving.” Then for the older funerals, the white symbolizes celebration or rebirth. “The forefathers thought, if you live to be 100 or more, you have accomplished something, so the white means celebration,” he added.

But until you find the proper color to wear, you can’t take part. And while family members are searching for the right clothes, while they set the time and date for the funeral, the dead body of their loved one has to be stored somewhere.

Within the last year, Donkor and his group have made progress. They started construction last summer and now have several walls and the building itself going up. Now what’s left to do,



Donkor said, is to find needed resources.

“Basically, what’s left is to buy the stuff to do the preservation, stuff for the refrigeration, the cement, the fixture and lights.”

And that comes back to part of his seven week journey, here in Farmville. Part of the goal is to raise money to buy those supplies while he and his wife are here.

If you want to get involved, monetary donations towards the Ama Nyame Memorial Medical Center can be sent to this address: Ama Nyame Memorial Medical Center Inc. P.O. Box 353, Farmville, Virginia 23901.

**‘VERY LUCKY’**

Overall, Donkor considers himself very lucky to be able to do the work. And every day is a learning experience for the chief’s son.

“I grew up in the culture, but I was young and I thought I understood it,” Donkor said. “Now when I get down there, I realize no, not really. So over the course of the last four and a half years, I have met people, I have been in vil-lages, I’ve met the poor, the illiterate, all of that. And I’ve been part of the culture long enough now that I’m beginning to enjoy it.”

A donated vehicle is used to help transport patients.



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**CENTRA'S MIDWIFE PROGRAM GIVES LIFE TO FARMVILLE**

**By Sarah McCormick  
Submitted photos**

At Centra Hospital, the midwives are hard at work ensuring expectant mothers get the care and attention they need – pre, post and during labor. The initiative frees up physicians to do the things only they can do, but the two entities work closely, hand in hand, to offer high quality, unmatched care to patients.

“First of all, I love my doctors,” said Erin Baird. She works as Executive Medical Director of Women’s and Children’s Services at the hospital. “They are amazing. The goal of the program is for midwives to be able to provide high tech, high quality, high touch care for our patients. By bringing the midwifery model in, we can be the experts in what is considered ‘normal’ births. Physicians can offer high risk pregnancy care, as well as regular gynecological care. They will be able to focus on the clinical side of things. Midwives can then focus on the 3 a.m. birth.”

On Jan. 4, 2021, the model in which patient care was given changed, and the midwifery program was implemented. Baird took the first 24-hour shift at the hospital.

“When the model changed and the original physicians left, we were able to offer midwifery services at the hospital for patients. Our goal is to provide excellent care and a compassionate experience for everyone. You are not just a number. You know your people. It’s been really fulfilling.”

The midwives are available to see some patients in the clinic, but their primary focus is in the labor and delivery unit.

Since implementing the midwifery program, the C-Section rate in Farmville decreased from 32% to just 17% - a huge improvement in what could be a major surgery for many women. There has also been an increase in patient satisfaction and an increased breast-feeding rate.

“The midwife program started here at Southside Birth Center in January of 2021,” said Callie Norris, Unit Manager at Centra. “Since that time, the nurse and provider relationship, both with the physicians and midwives alike, has strengthened and improved. As a collective team, we are able to provide a holistic approach to caring for mothers, babies and families. This team approach allows us to advocate for our families and helps us achieve positive birthing experiences. We love what we do, and we are extremely happy to be able to provide this service to our community.”

With 280 deliveries last year, the group hopes to grow that number by leaps and bounds in the years to come – especially with the closing of South Boston Hospital.

Clinical services provided by the OBGYN team have everything from maternal fetal medicine, in which highly-skilled doctors from the University of Virginia come in twice per month to offer specialty care, to pap smears and other gynecological services, birth control and more. No pregnancy termination services are offered at the practice.





“Midwives don’t care how you deliver. If you want an epidural, you get one. If you want to deliver naturally, we will support you. If you want to breastfeed, we support you,” Baird said. “Midwife means, ‘with women.’ We want people to have a great birth experience. The best care has been proven to be a collaborative effort between Obstetricians and midwives. We are trying to bring great OB and midwife care to you throughout your pregnancy.”

“A lot of people think of midwives as ‘crunchy’. But the modern American midwife can prescribe, make diagnoses, are able to admit to the hospital and more,” she added. “The goal is to always work with the Obstetric team to utilize each of our strengths. They are the experts in medicine, and midwives are the experts in normal. We’re a match made in Heaven.”





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# From the Ground Up

## PLANTS FOR HOT, HUMID SUMMER GARDENS



And don't forget zinnias!

**Photos and article by Dr. Cynthia Wood**

By late June, summer in Virginia is usually hot and humid. Even dedicated gardeners loathe to venture outside after mid-morning. Unfortunately, many of our favorite plants aren't happy about the weather either. They just look tired and sulky. Fortunately, there are some hearty annuals that can be used to perk up even the droopiest of gardens.

The tropical hibiscus is a staple in many summer gardens. It has dark, glossy foliage and large, showy, trumpet-shaped blooms available

in a wide range of colors, including vivid reds, yellows, and oranges. "The Path" and "Voodoo Queen" have multicolored blooms.

The tropical hibiscus thrives in full sun, as well as in high humidity. Because it requires constant moisture, it's been described as a thirsty plant. Never allow this plant to become so dry that the leaves wilt. Grow tropical hibiscus in rich, well-drained soil that contains lots of organic matter. It can be used in containers or in mixed perennial borders. It's an excellent statement plant.

Group several pots of tropical hibiscus with bromeliads to create a mini tropical paradise on the patio.

Portulaca is a drought tolerant annual succulent native to the dry plains of Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil. It's an old favorite that southern gardeners used to grow in pots on the front porch or as edging along flower beds and that has been recently rediscovered. Portulaca is a creeping, crawling, spreading plant with tiny, fleshy leaves and cheerful pink, red, yellow, and

**Vibrant tropical hibiscus blooms can be single or double.**



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orange blooms that resemble roses. The blooms close at night and remain closed on cloudy days.

Plant portulaca in soil that drains well and where it will receive full sun. Portulaca will even grow well in sandy, rocky soil. It is especially attractive when used in hanging baskets, in mixed container plantings, and as a ground cover. To ensure that there are lots of blooms all summer long, deadhead the spent flowers at least once every week.

Lantana is another old favorite garden plant that thrives during our summers. Originally from South and Central America where it grows as a small shrub, it's drought tolerant and requires very little attention once it has become established. Equally important, lantana isn't generally eaten by deer, so planting it among daylilies and camellias helps prevent deer from grazing on them. Lantana is a pollinator magnet that attracts a steady stream of bees, wasps, and butterflies up until frost.

Lantana is available as an annual and a perennial, as well as sterile varieties that don't produce seeds. "Miss Huff" is a perennial variety that is a reliable grower in our area. It tends to be late breaking dormancy, so patience is required in early spring. All three varieties have clusters of small flowers in mixed shades of orange, yellow, red, and pink. There is even a creamy white variety, "Carolina Cream."

Lantana has a sprawling habit that makes it suitable for hanging baskets, mixed container plantings, and empty spots in perennial beds. It's especially attractive when planted in containers with petunias and Persian shields.

Need more ideas? How about zinnias or that old garden heirloom, the four o'clock, which blooms late every afternoon and fills the air with a heavy perfume. Gardening during summer heat and humidity isn't impossible; it just requires some creative thinking.



**Above, portulaca provides color and makes a tough ground cover or filler. Left, a study in Orange and yellow.**





In this garden, lantanas were used to fill in bare spots and to add reliable blooms from midsummer until frost.

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## A TWIST ON A CLASSIC FOR THIS YEAR'S JULY GRILLING SEASON

By Brian Carlton

We're in the middle of summer now in Farmville, with temperatures rising. The good thing is that there's plenty of time to fire up the grill and hold a backyard barbecue for friends and family. That's one of my favorite things to do, experimenting with different spices and rubs to get the perfect flavor on a cut of steak or a burger. We even have some options for the vegetarians in the family. But I'm not here to talk about vegetables. Instead, I'm making a slight suggestion. Let's

make a change to the usual plan of using just ground beef for your burger.

Instead, I'm reaching back to where I began for a recipe from the mountains of North Carolina. Don't get me wrong, we love our beef cattle. On my family's 315-acre farm, we typically have between 48-56 heads each year. But another thing that's very popular in the mountains is a slam venison burger. The majority is venison, with the beef acting as a filler.

Don't worry. I'm not asking you to go the full traditional way and hunt one of your own. Family members have been known to save a specific cut for weeks or months, writing their name on the package as we store it away. But store bought venison will work just fine here. Now the recipe I'm sharing, you won't find in the store. This was pulled off the shelf, taken from a church cookbook my grandparents contributed to for Little Rock Baptist Church, back in 1992.

**VENISON BURGERS**

Serves 8

2 pounds venison meat  
1/2 pound ground beef  
1/2 pound slab bacon  
2 tablespoons, A-1 steak sauce  
1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce  
1/2 teaspoon onion powder  
1/2 teaspoon garlic powder  
2 tablespoons yellow mustard  
1 teaspoon kosher salt  
1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Making the burgers:

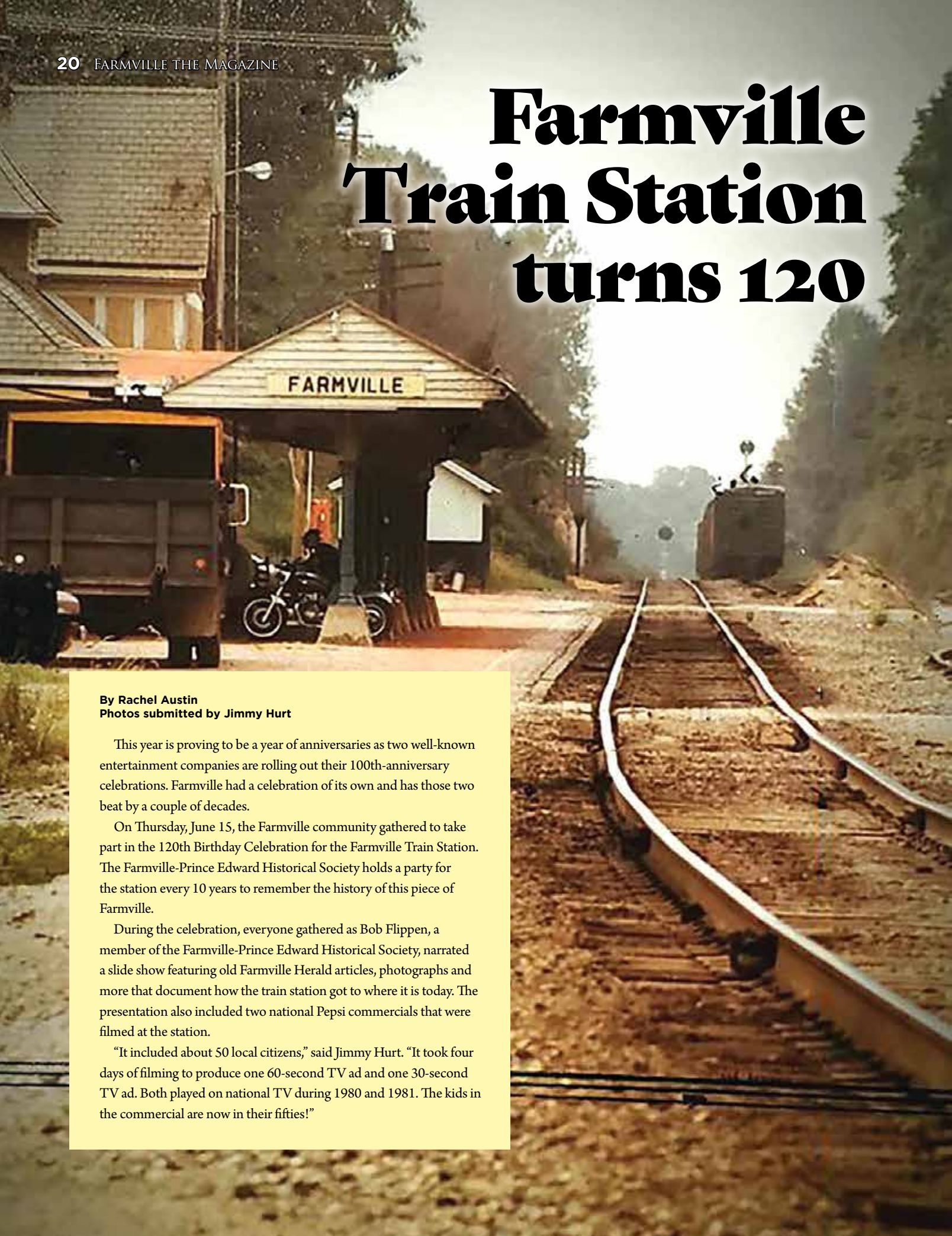
I've always been told a good burger has about 10-20% fat.

The standard for the pre-ground package is 15%, so we're just going to stick with that. You want to cut the venison, ground beef and bacon into large chunks. Mash everything all up together in a large mixing bowl and then let it marinate for about an hour in the refrigerator.

Now you're ready to make burger patties. Just a reminder. These aren't meatballs, folks. It's completely up to you, but I've never seen a densely packed venison burger turn out well. You form those by hand and get them ready to put on the grill. For this, we're looking to cook to medium well, right around 155 F internal temperature. Once that's done, just remove from the grill and top with your favorite cheese or burger toppings.



# Farmville Train Station turns 120



**By Rachel Austin**  
**Photos submitted by Jimmy Hurt**

This year is proving to be a year of anniversaries as two well-known entertainment companies are rolling out their 100th-anniversary celebrations. Farmville had a celebration of its own and has those two beat by a couple of decades.

On Thursday, June 15, the Farmville community gathered to take part in the 120th Birthday Celebration for the Farmville Train Station. The Farmville-Prince Edward Historical Society holds a party for the station every 10 years to remember the history of this piece of Farmville.

During the celebration, everyone gathered as Bob Flippen, a member of the Farmville-Prince Edward Historical Society, narrated a slide show featuring old Farmville Herald articles, photographs and more that document how the train station got to where it is today. The presentation also included two national Pepsi commercials that were filmed at the station.

“It included about 50 local citizens,” said Jimmy Hurt. “It took four days of filming to produce one 60-second TV ad and one 30-second TV ad. Both played on national TV during 1980 and 1981. The kids in the commercial are now in their fifties!”

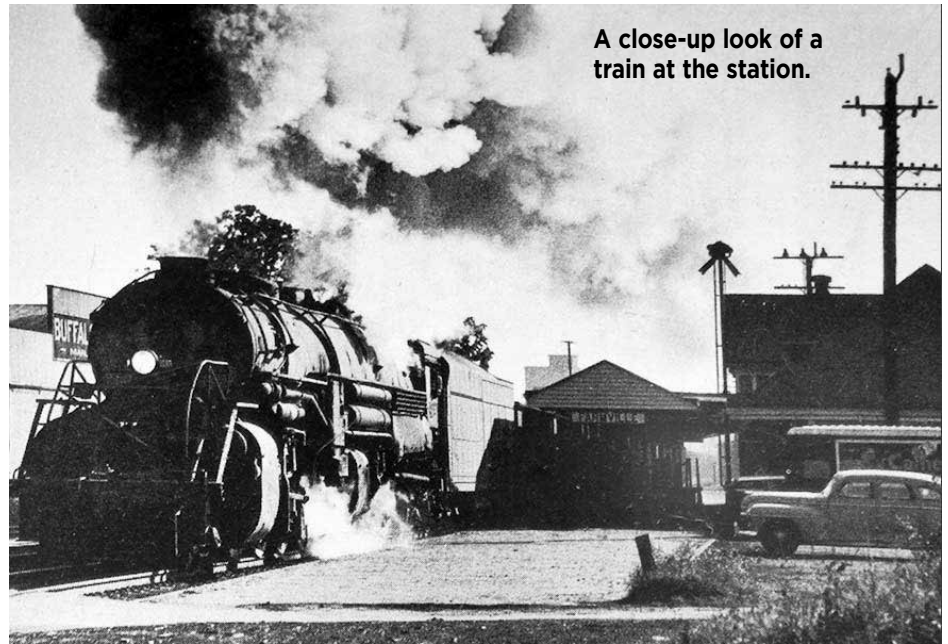
Since this was a birthday party the usual birthday festivities were also a part of the evening. Local singer Chris Thackson led everyone in singing “Happy Birthday” and Mayor Brian Vincent cut the birthday cake. A drawing was held for several door prizes and refreshments were served, including strawberry cheesecake, homemade cookies and Pepsi.

**HOW IT STARTED**

The station opened to the public on April 28, 1903, as part of the Norfolk and Western Railroad on the corner of Third and Appomattox Streets.

“This is the third train station constructed in Farmville,” said Hurt. “The first is still standing on Main Street in Farmville next to Walkers Diner. The second was on Appomattox Street in Farmville.”

The station held many uses during its time, one being deliveries. The Farmville Train Station was part of the Railway Express Agency where packages would come in on the trains to be picked up at the station or delivered to homes and businesses. Later, the red and green delivery carts and trucks were recognizable as they delivered packages that came to the station.



**A close-up look of a train at the station.**

Being built a decade before cars, the train was used for all kinds of travel. The train would take passengers to numerous locations. College students would use it to go to class, families would come aboard to take trips and employees would use it to go on business trips. The train was also used to transport the men going off to war in

World War I and World War II.

Throughout the years, many special trains visited the station, including a famous Class J steam engine, an 1855 vintage locomotive and the Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey Circus.

Through the years, as the world changed so did the station. The Greyhound Bus station



**Pictured are some of the large crowd that came to the train station birthday celebration.**



Above, the Farmville train station in 1942. Left, two national Pepsi commercials were filmed at the train station. This is a scene from a commercial filmed in 1979.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF FARMVILLE VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

moved in across the street providing the town with more options for travel. The bus station moved into the facility in 1965 after a fire at the original location.

In 1971, The Pocahontas had its last run. The Pocahontas and the Powhatan Arrow were the two Farmville trains. This led to January 1978 when the last ticket was sold to eight-year-old Thomas McCombs ending the era of the Farm-

ville Train Station.

Then in 1986, the station was bought by the Town of Farmville, who received the key from Norfolk and Western Railroad in 1989. In July 2005, the last Norfolk Southern freight train left the station creating an end to an era.

"The station for many years provided both passenger as well as freight service," said Hurt.

In 1995, the station was turned into a venue

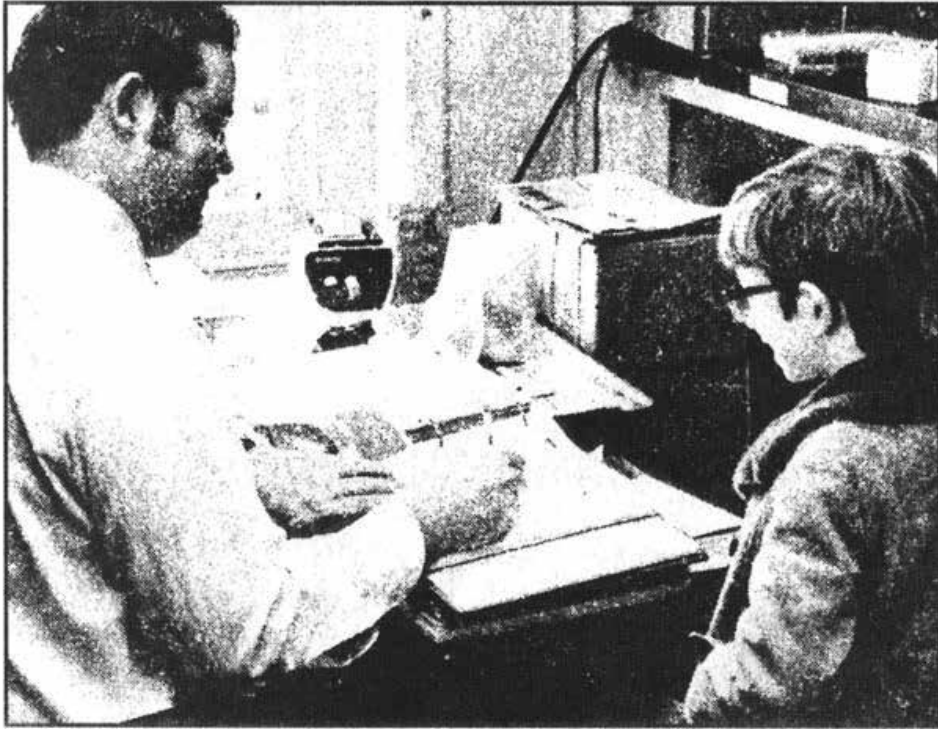
and has stayed a part of town events in a different way. Instead of being a means of travel, the station became the destination spot people travel to.

"Today the station plays host to local civic meetings, wedding receptions, family reunions and local events," said Hurt. "The railroad tracks were removed years ago but the station building lives on."

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WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 1978

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**Amtrak Ticket Agent Steve Farrar writes the last ticket sold at the Farmville ticket office for Thomas McCombs 8, of Farmville, at the station on Monday, January 30.**

**A group of women in front of the station in 1917.**



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