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GENERAL MANAGER
SERENA BOWMAN
serena.bowman@mtairynews.com

EDITOR **JOHN PETERS**
jpeters@mtairynews.com

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS/
PHOTOGRAPHERS
TOM JOYCE

CIRCULATION & DISTRIBUTION
MANAGER **MARTHA EATON**
meaton@mtairynews.com

SALES CONSULTANTS
NATHANIEL BLEVINS
KIM CAGLE
SAMANTHA TURNER
BOB WARD

APG GRAPHICS DESIGN CENTER:
DONNA THOMAS
dthomas@apgcreate.com

GRAPHIC DESIGN
DARLA ALLEN

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ON THE COVER

Heart of Mayberry

For legions of Andy Griffith Show fans, a visit to Mount Airy is at the top of their bucket list, and once in the city of Andy Griffith's birth, there are enough Mayberry-related shops, activities, and other stops to keep them busy for days. Perhaps the center of it all is a few blocks off the center of town, a little bit down Main Street, where Wally's Service Station connects the real-life Andy Griffith hometown with the idyllic Mayberry shown on the TV show.

Mayberry Days

Every year they come -- and 2026 is no exception. This year, Sept. 21-Sept. 27 will see thousands of The Andy Griffith Show fans descend on Mount Airy for a week-long celebration of his show, its actors, and the hometown where Andy Griffith grew up. As always, Mayberry Days is chock full of shows, talks, events, movie screenings, and more -- giving fans a true Mayberry Experience.

Mayberry Days Calendar

Mayberry Days is so jam-packed with events and happenings this year, we've produced a special calendar focusing on just the Mayberry Days events.

Those we've lost

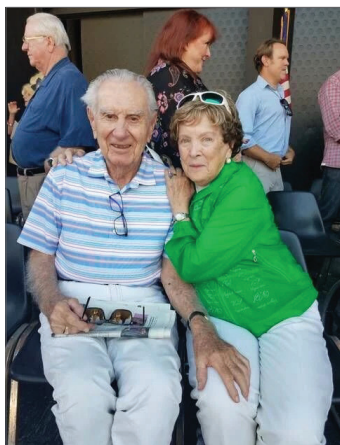
One of the hallmarks of the annual Mayberry Days is the chance fans get to mingle with many of the stars and guest actors who appeared on the show. This past year, the world of Mayberry lost three of its most popular and well known remaining actors -- Dennis Rush, Margaret Kerry, and Ronnie Schell. Here's a brief look at their careers.

Autumn festivals, fairs, and concerts

There may be no busier time of the year than autumn, especially in Mayberry world. While we've created a separate calendar just for Mayberry Days events in this edition, there's still plenty happening in and around Mount Airy through the rest of the autumn -- and we offer you the region's most comprehensive listing of those activities. Concerts, live stage shows, ghost tours, holiday dinners, and so much more, all in our calendar of events!

Wally's Service Station is a Mayberry landmark.

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Heart of Mayberry?



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Wally's Service Station, modeled after the one shown on *The Andy Griffith Show*, is the actual Wallace's Service Station where Andy and his dad visited during Andy's childhood days in Mount Airy. The site draws tens of thousands of visitors each year.

Wally's gives visitors authentic Mayberry experience

BY JOHN PETERS

JPETERS@MTAIRYNEWS.COM

It's a quiet late summer afternoon, hot but not stifling. A few folks mill about, both inside and out. In the parking lot a handful of folks stand around a squad car at the gasoline pumps, chatting the day away. Inside the store, an out-of-towner passing through the city ambles up to the counter, Yoo-hoo in hand. He and the clerk exchange greetings, and the clerk, in a slow, gentle draw, answers questions about best places for a meal around town.

The scene could well have played out in much the same way 80 years ago, in that same spot. It could have been a fictional encounter from *"The Andy Griffith Show"* 60 years ago.

This one happened to be just a few weeks ago, in August, at Wally's Service Station on Main Street in Mount Airy. That it could have taken place in so many different eras, in different ways, is part of the charm of Wally's Service Station. Its connection to Andy Griffith, both during his youth while growing up in Mount Airy and later as part of the ever-popular television show, is what has many folks calling the modern-day version of Wally's the heart of the Mayberry experience for tourists to the city.

Dwayne Cooke, owner of the store and, along with his family -- Stephanie Cooke and Timmy and Mandy Tucker -- owner of the grounds and other Mayberry structures at the Main Street location, explained that while some folks might think the



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Posing for a picture in the sheriff's office replica next to Wally's Service Station are, from left, Brent Gilkey, Tim Gilkey, Penny Gilkey and Julia Gilkey. The four, who were staying at Mount Airy's new Balladeer Hotel that evening, are from Hopkinsville, Kentucky. They said they were on their way to The Great Smokey Mountains, but made sure to leave time in their schedule to spend a day in Mount Airy.

modern-day Wally's Service Station is a case of life imitating art, it's actually a case of art first imitating life.

"This was built in 1937 as a gasoline station," he said recently while manning the counter at Wally's. The business, built and started by Duece and Mazi Hodge, was originally known as

Wallace's.

"Andy, and his dad, would get gas here," Cooke said. "They were good friends with the owners. That's where the name Wally's, comes from." Fans of the show will instantly recognize Wally's as the Mayberry service station where Sheriff Andy Taylor occasionally stopped, the place where first Gomer, then Goober, worked.

Cooke said he's been involved with the place in one form or another for 25 years or more -- stretching back to when he and his late friend, Wes Collins, decided to turn the building into its television namesake -- Wally's Service Station. They redid the outside -- complete with old-style gasoline pumps and a sign that looks like it could be straight from the 1950s -- and turned the interior of the facility into what looks like a general store from that same era, with the exception of a television high on the wall, playing episodes of "The Andy Griffith Show."

They also built what is known as the courthouse -- a replica of Andy's sheriff's office and jail. While Wally's is chock full of Mayberry-related shirts, mugs and a host of other souvenir items, along with locally made canned goods, the courthouse is open free of charge for visitors to explore. Scores of fans, maybe hundreds, routinely visit the facility each day, taking pictures of themselves at the sheriff's desk or in one of Barney's jail cells.

Cooke said the idea of refurbishing the station to Wally's, as well as building the courthouse, was a bit of a lark fueled by their love of the show and the widespread popularity of Mount Airy as a tourist destination for Mayberry fans.



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The newly opened Ellie's Ice Cream Parlor, named for Sheriff Andy Taylor's first love interest on the show, Ellie Walker, has proven popular with visitors.



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"It was more of a gamble," he said. "We love the show, we grew up watching the show."

Visitors

That love of "The Andy Griffith Show" and all things Mayberry are shared by many around the world. If the annual Mayberry Days festival, along with copy-cat events across the South and Midwest weren't evidence enough of that, spending some time at Wally's would certainly be convincing.

On that recent August day, visitors were constant -- a family returning to their Pennsylvania home from having picked up their son, who just completed basic training in South Carolina; a couple from Tennessee; another family from Kentucky; and dozens of others filter in and out of Wally's over the space of about an hour. Some were just checking out the courthouse and related buildings, others were there buying goods from Wally's. Nearly all stopped to chat with Cooke, who was a veritable visitor's guide, relating the various menus and cuisine types from area restaurants, directing folks to motels, other shops and Mayberry-related businesses.

In between chatting with visitors, Cooke said he has no idea how many folks wander through his doors over the course of a year.

"It would be kind of neat to know," he said. "We have people coming in and out all year, but especially from April to November, a lot of people. I would say maybe a couple hundred thousand throughout the year. And from all over. We just had a family from Germany here a couple of weeks ago. They were really good people. They spent a lot of the day here. And we get a lot of people from Canada."

Cooke said the mix of visitors is probably equally split between those who make Mount Airy the main destination for their travels and others who may be going somewhere else -- the beach, visiting family, or the like -- and make sure to spend a day or two on their trek in Mount Airy.

"Many end up spending the night here, eating at restaurants



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Dwayne Cooke, right, chats with Lynn Chitwood, who is buying a Yoo-hoo at Wally's Service Station. In the background is Lynn's wife, Debbie, who is watching as the two talk about restaurants and other places to visit in Mount Airy.

here. Those who come here just for Mayberry, this is their destination, often stay two or three days. "

A good number are repeat visitors.

"We have several who come every year," Cooke said. "We have a lot of people who come back every year. It really surprises me how many come every year."

He said most of that traffic flows through from April to October, which is often the best month of the year.

Growing attraction

While the present version of Wally's Service Station dates back to the earliest days of the century, Cooke said they decided to add the courthouse close to 20 years ago.

"You had to have that," he said. "That was just a no-brainer. People get the most enjoyment out of that, the biggest kick out of that."

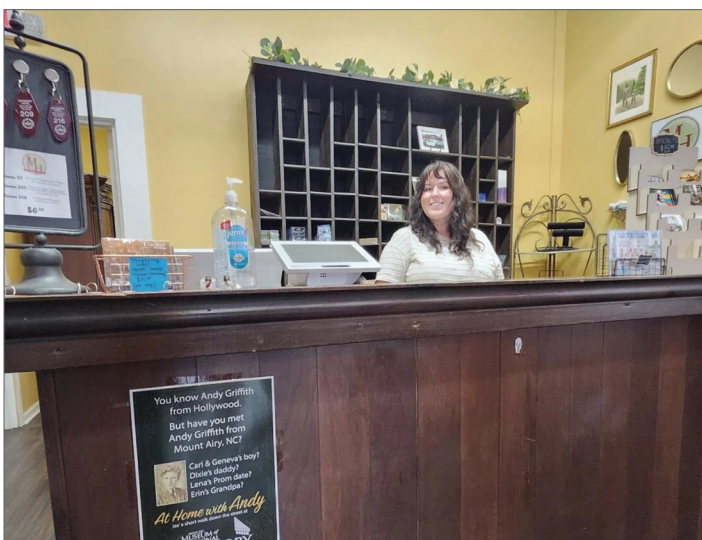
As if on cue, a family walks by, slipping into the courthouse, posing for pictures around the sheriff's desk, in the jail cells, and out front of the building.

"We keep that exactly like the courthouse was in the show," he said. "We don't have anything in there to sell, we want to keep it authentic." He even decorates the courthouse at Christmas in the exact manner as shown in "The Andy Griffith Show" episode Christmas Story, the only holiday-themed episode of the show's entire eight-season run.

Over the years they've made other additions -- the Mayberry Motel, the Darling cabin, and most recently, Ellie's Ice Cream shop. That has proven particularly popular -- "People like the ice cream," Cooke said.

Despite the fact that "The Andy Griffith Show" left the air in 1968 -- nearly seven decades ago -- Cooke said the show's popularity, thus the influx of visitors to his place, seems to be as strong, if not stronger, than ever.

"Our numbers have gone up every year," he said. While they



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Savannah Eaton works the counter at the Mayberry Motel gift shop.

worried a bit about the numbers with Andy Griffith's 2012 death, fans have continued trekking to his place, and the visitors are skewing younger.

"Fifteen years ago, our age group was probably average 65 or better...now we have so many who are in their 40s, their 30s, coming in with their children. it's great when you see families coming in and the kids are naming episodes of the show. That's pretty cool."

He said the show's continuing popularity -- most folks can find it multiple times a day syndicated on television stations across America, not to mention streaming services -- is behind the ever-younger fan base. That, and the fact that it's increasingly difficult to find clean, well-written, family shows on modern television, keeps folks viewing the show, and flocking to Mount Airy to get the Mayberry experience.

It's helping people find that experience which is a driving force behind what Cooke does. It is a business, yes, with ice cream and tourist souvenirs and knick-knacks for sale, and enough of those items have to move to keep the business open. But Cooke and his family are determined to make it a fun experience -- there's no charge to walk the grounds, check out the filling station, step inside the courthouse and take pictures, visit the Darling cabin. The grounds are often used for photo shoots by various groups at no charge, and some Mayberry fans have even used the courthouse for their wedding.

"We're always going to keep it genuine," he said. "It's not



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Posing behind the canon in front of the Mayberry Courthouse are, from left, Kristen Miles, Joel Miles, Julie Miles, Dadi Miles and David Miles. The family was on their way home to Erie, Pennsylvania after picking up Joel after he completed basic training in Fort Jackson, South Carolina, but planned to spend a day or two in Mount Airy during their trip.

about making a buck, it's about the experience. It's about meeting the people. Gracious, meeting the people, that's what I enjoy."

And that, more than anything, is perhaps why Wally's Service Station and the surrounding grounds really are known as the Heart of Mayberry.

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Mayberry Days Parade

Mayberry Days

returns to Mount Airy

BY JOHN PETERS | JPETERS@MTAIRYNEWS.COM

It's far more than a tradition.

For some, it's almost become a way of life, or at the least an annual rite, something to build a good portion of their lives around.

"It" is Mayberry Days, the yearly festival that celebrates

"The Andy Griffith Show," held in the late actor's hometown of Mount Airy.

This will be the 37th rendition of the event. The very first celebration was a one-day, supposedly one-off event held in 1990, marking the 30th anniversary of the show's debut. Public demand brought the event back in 1991, and it's been a part of September every year since, growing along the way to a full week filled with concerts, comedy routines, meet-and-greets with actors from the show, along with presentations, talks, and seminars given by authors, a professor, and others who have become authorities on the show. This year's gathering is planned for Sept. 21-27.

Even though the festival is not far from marking its 40th year, the sponsoring Surry Arts Council -- under the direction of Executive Director Tanya Jones and an army of volunteers -- seems to find new activities for the legions of Mayberry fans who visit Mount Airy during the week.

Of particular interest to some this year will be a presentation by author, publisher and Mayberry authority Randy Turner, commemorating Andy Griffith's 100th birthday, which took place June 1. He'll have a number of pictures

from Andy's life and career, along with a plenty of trivia and stories.

Randy Turner will also be doing a couple of other presentations, including a retrospective on the lives of Dennis Rush, Margaret Kerry, and Ronnie Schell, all of whom were on multiple episodes of "The Andy Griffith Show." Each passed this year.

"People love learning more about 'The Andy Griffith Show' and meeting people involved with the show, but more than that, they like participating in activities that make them feel like they've stepped into Mayberry, as if they're experiencing the culture of the show," Tanya Jones said of the still-increasing popularity of Mayberry Days. Even now, nearly six decades after the show left the airways, fans of all ages still watch -- it's among the most popular syndicated productions in the U.S., and is available on a multitude of streaming services.

Dwayne Cooke, a local resident who operates the tourist site Wally's Service Station, recently said he believes the show is still popular -- even among younger adults and children -- for two reasons. First, there is a lack of clean, family-friendly shows that an entire family can watch together, and "The Andy Griffith Show" fills that need.

Second, he said the show's writing and acting has stood the test of time in a way few other shows have.

"The writing was just way beyond its time," he said. "When I look back and watch some of the old shows I grew up with, like 'Gunsmoke,' it's good, but the writing just isn't as strong." The way "The Andy Griffith Show" is structured, the way the characters are developed, along with humor and "you learn something from every show" keeps "The Andy Griffith Show" relevant today.

And the cast, he said, was perfect for their roles, for their relationships with one another.

Jones, of the Surry Arts Council, echoed what Cooke said, though added more about Andy's involvement in all aspects of the show and its relationship with

"In my opinion, the show has lasted because of the genius of Andy Griffith – plain and simple."

- Tanya Jones



JOHN PETERS | MAYBERRY MAGAZINE

Floyd the Barber, portrayed by tribute artist Allan Newsome, addresses a packed Blackmon Amphitheatre during the Mayor's Proclamation and welcoming ceremonies of the 2021 Mayberry Days Festival. This year's ceremony is slated for 9 a.m. Sept. 27 at the Blackmon Amphitheatre.

his hometown, Mount Airy.

"What makes TAGS enduring? Watch it and you will see. Laughing is timeless and we all need to laugh. Getting to laugh out loud - and learn a life lesson in 20 minutes is rare. I've recently been focusing on the brilliance of Earle Hagen in putting the music in after the fact - I can't imagine the show without it. I watch Andy beside a carefully choreographed (mostly his own) Barney, an unchoreographed Ernest T., and Andy - perfectly reacting to all. I listen to the Darlings and

am amazed by the musicianship of each one. And the list goes on."

That, she said, keeps the show fresh and relatable to modern viewers, but there is more to the popularity of Mayberry Days.

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"In my opinion, the show has lasted because of the genius of Andy Griffith – plain and simple," she said. "Mayberry Days occurs in Andy Griffith's hometown. When developing the show, Andy was involved. He was involved throughout his career with everything – at every stage. Andy surrounded himself with brilliant and talented actors, writers, producers, composers, and more. Instead of being intimidated by this environment of excellence – he was empowered by it and sought it out. The more I watch the show, the more impressed with Andy I am."

"Although Mayberry is fictional, the street names are all in Mount Airy. The surrounding neighborhoods are all recognized as being close by, we recognize landmarks...He made it real. No other town celebrating Andy or Mayberry can offer a more authentic experience to guests than Mount Airy can offer. The Snappy Lunch remains iconic...The Surry Arts Council has worked hard to tell Andy's story as accurately as possible and we continue to do that."

That makes fans feel like they really are visiting Mayberry when they arrive in Mount Airy, all during the year but especially during Mayberry Days.

That also keeps those associated with the show coming to town during the festival for a chance to meet with fans, interact with old friends and maybe revisit in their own lives just a few moments of their time on the show.

This year, a number of folks associated with the show are scheduled to be in town. Among those are Rodney Dillard, who was one of the Darling boys; Margaret Teele, who portrayed Agnes Jean Parker in one episode; and actors Joy Ellison and Keith Thibodeaux, both of whom appeared in multiple episodes as child actors. Karen Knotts and Bill Knotts, daughter and nephew of Don Knotts, respectively, Laura Hagen -- wife of the show's musical director Earle Hagen -- Dreama Denver, wife of Dud Wash actor Bob Denver, along with Kathy Garver, are scheduled to attend. Garver is a first-time guest, best known for her time as Cissy on "Family Affair." She worked with Betty Lynn, who appeared on two episodes of "Family Affair," narrated the audio version of Betty Lynn's autobiography, and appeared in one episode of Andy Griffith's "Matlock" series.

Additionally, there will be a number of talks and presentations by authors and others who have become authorities on the show, along with concerts, comedy shows, film screenings and more. As always, there will be plenty of games, and of course the big Mayberry Days



JOHN PETERS | MAYBERRY MAGAZINE

Visitors never know what they might see during Mayberry Days. During the 2023 gathering a real-life wedding was held with the bridal party dressed up as Andy Griffith Show characters. The wedding took place at the Blackmon Amphitheatre shortly after the conclusion of the Mayberry Days Mayor's Proclamation ceremony.

parade on Saturday morning. Other activities include the world championships of "The Andy Griffith Show" trivia; "The Emmett" golf tournament, Mr. Tucker's apple peeling contest, Ernest T. Bass rock throwing contest, Goober says "Hay" bale toss and Chester Jones checkers tournament, along with plenty of other fun games.

There are a few new activities for Mayberry Days visitors.

"The Surry Arts Council is working hard to cut a ribbon on the expanded lobby of the Andy Griffith Playhouse this year in honor of Andy's 100th birthday. There will be new exhibits and touchscreens as part of the new lobby experience."

There is also a new exhibit at The Andy Griffith Museum which was unveiled earlier this year. Through the work and generosity of Cindi Griffith and Terri Forrest, the display shows a Western-style Matlock outfit and related items Andy Griffith wore during an episode of "Matlock."

For more information and a full schedule of events visit the Surry Arts Council at <https://www.surryarts.org/mayberrydays/index.html>



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SPECIAL Mayberry Days

Calendar of Events

This is an overview of some of the major events scheduled for Mayberry Days, Sept. 21 - Sept. 27. This is not a comprehensive listing, and times are subject to change. For the latest information, or to purchase tickets, visit <https://www.surryarts.org/mayberrydays/schedule.html>.

SEPT. 21-24

John Floyd, The Mount of Mayberry. Four shows, Monday through Thursday by Floyd, who has entertained people in all 50 states and on the high seas, over the years opening for such luminaries as Frankie Valli, Milton Berle, Chubby Checker, and Martina McBride. His family-friendly clean comedy is a perfect early start to Mayberry Days. Each show is at 2 p.m. at the Historic Earle Theatre. Tickets are \$20.

SEPT. 21

Randy Riggle presents Nostalgia: A Comedic Tribute to the 20th Century. In this one-man production, Riggle takes the audience down memory lane with a '57 Chevy as "we remember the times and people who changed our lives in the 1950s and 60s," show organizers said. Randy entertains his audiences with clean humor about this nostalgic era and his show is complimented with more than 50 impersonations and a special tribute to veterans. The entire revue is backed with a multi-media presentation from this comedy veteran. on a trip filled with songs and laughs. Show starts at 7 p.m. in the Historic Earle Theatre. Tickets are \$20 for preferred seating, \$15 for balcony seating.

SEPT. 23

Randy Turner will present "Celebrating 100 Years of American Icon Andy Griffith." This will be a video clip-filled presentation on the life and career of Andy Griffith, celebrating the centennial of his birth. This will be an entertaining overview of Andy's life, from Mount Airy to Los Angeles to Manteo, and of his career on Broadway, in film, television, and the music industry. A question and answer session will follow the presentation. Randy, an expert on "The Andy Griffith Show" series, is the author of books on the classic series and his writing has appeared in "Nostalgia Digest" and "Mayberry Magazine." He is an experienced public speaker who gives presentations on the show. This presentation will be at 10 a.m., general admission tickets are \$15.

SEPT. 24

Mayberry Memories of Don Knotts. Bill Knotts will put on a one-man show about his famous uncle, Don Knotts, showcasing cherished family photos. While attending the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in the 1970s, Bill had the opportunity to live with Don and his wife in Beverly Hills. In this nostalgic and entertaining journey, Bill ushers his audience into a simpler time, back to the idyllic, fictional



CORY SMITH | MAYBERRY MAGAZINE

Karen Knotts shares a photo of her father, Don Knotts, as a high school student during her show "A Deputy's Daughter" during the 2018 Mayberry Days festival. She returns this year, appearing in several shows.

town of Mayberry. His theater and acting background is on full display as he regales the audience with numerous personal tales and family anecdotes of his time spent with Don over the decades. Sprinkling in family pictures and plenty of video clips of some of the greatest scenes from The Andy Griffith Show, Bill reintroduces the iconic and lovable characters and the actors who made them come to life. Show is slated for 10 a.m. at the Historic Earle Theatre, tickets are \$35.

Randy Turner will present "A Tribute to Dennis Rush, Mayberry's Howie, and Our Friends Margaret Kerry and Ronnie Schell," three Andy Griffith Show cast members who passed away over the past year, 2 p.m. in the Betty Wright Room of the Surry Arts Center. In addition to being a recognized expert on The Andy Griffith Show and an author, Randy is the publisher of The Andy Griffith Show Ambassadors Magazine and has made appearances on the podcast Two Chairs No Waiting Podcast. General admission tickets are \$20.

The Hail Mary, a movie starring Daniel Roebuck, 8 p.m., Historic Earle Theatre. The film tells the story of Sister Kathleen (played by Marsha Dietlein Bennett) who sees divine purpose when she meets Jake Bauer (Daniel Roebuck), a broken man needing redemption. She offers him a job at Mary Immaculate School for Boys, then convinces the grudging man into creating a football team for the troubled teens. Evolving into a father figure, Bauer starts to face past decisions that haunt him while reigniting his faith. Daniel Roebuck portrayed Cliff Lewis for the final three seasons of Matlock and has played "second banana" to many famous faces like Dennis Hopper (River's Edge), Harrison Ford and Tommy Lee Jones (The Fugitive) and Kathy Bates

(The Late Shift) during his nearly four decades and nearly 500 movies and television episodes in Hollywood. He will lead a question and answer session after the movie.

SEPT. 25

Professor Browner presents "Andy Discovers America." An entertaining audio-visual presentation celebrating America's 250th and Andy Griffith's 100th birthdays at 11 a.m. at The Andy Griffith Museum Theatre. Features a monologue about the "shot heard around the world" that is reminiscent of Andy's early monologue style made famous in his monologue "What It Was Was Football." Features Aneta Corsaut making her first appearance as Helen Crump and Dennis Rush making his first series appearance. Neal Brower has acquired a wealth of knowledge about "The Andy Griffith Show" from his years of correspondence and contact with the writers, directors, cast, and crew. He is the author of Mayberry 101 and The Essential Mayberry: Behind the Scenes of the Andy Griffith Show. Both are available at the Andy Griffith Museum Gift Shop. He taught "The Andy Griffith Show: An In-depth Study" at community colleges throughout North Carolina for many years. His lectures are also presented at the Andy Griffith Museum during the summer months. General admission tickets are \$15.

Karen Knotts, "Tied Up In Knotts... Untied!" Author-actor-comedian and daughter of Don Knotts, Karen Knotts returns to Mayberry Days with even more new stories and entertainment. Her latest book is available at the Andy Griffith Museum Gift Shop and Historic Earle Theatre. She will be autographing her book and photos after the event. 11 a.m. at the Historic Earle Theatre. Preferred seats are \$35, orchestra seats are \$30, balcony seats are \$20.

Rodney Dillard and the Dillards. Rodney Dillard, one of the original Darling Boys from "The Andy Griffith Show," returns with his band to Mayberry Days for another bluegrass concert, filled with songs performed on the show and original Dillards hits. Rodney is a member of the International Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame and two time Grammy Nominee. 1 p.m., Andy Griffith Playhouse. Tickets are \$50 for preferred seating, \$45 for orchestra seating.

Tim White & Troublesome Hollow, a dynamic bluegrass and Americana band from Hickory Tree, Tennessee will be on stage at the Historic Earle Theatre. The band performs everything from hard driving traditional bluegrass to newgrass, old time music, ballads as well as Americana and comedy. They have six recordings to their credit as well as appearing on many television shows and recently on Song of the Mountains seen across America on PBS. 3 p.m. Tickets are \$20 for orchestra seating, \$15 for balcony seats.

Randy Turner will present The Seldom Seen Uncut Episode "The Darlings Are Coming," an audio-visual presentation filled with clips from the show. Did you know that the version of this classic introduction to the Darling family is only available in all digital and streaming formats heavily edited and missing several minutes? Don't miss this opportunity to watch the original, complete episode with an emphasis on the missing songs and dialogue. Andy Griffith Museum



FILE PHOTO | MAYBERRY MAGAZINE

Daniel Roebuck, who performed with Andy Griffith as a series regular on "Matlock," rides in the 2023 Mayberry Days Parade. He returns this year for several events.

Theatre, 4 p.m. General admission tickets are \$15.

Michael Hoover: Memories of Elvis with Denise Glass as Patsy Cline, 6:30 p.m., Historic Earle Theatre. Michael Hoover returns to Mayberry Days with another evening of music and memories of Elvis Presley with Special Guest Denise Glass as Patsy Cline. You'll hear all the favorites from Elvis' favorite gospel songs to the hits that made him the King of Rock-n-Roll. The show has expanded to 90 minutes this year. Denise Glass as Patsy Cline will join Michael Hoover for special selections. Tickets: preferred \$30 / orchestra \$25 / balcony \$20.

The Cleverlys. Dr Digger is the master churner of all things buttery and smooth. "His comedy is a hybrid of Homer and Jethro and the office" said Rolling Stone Magazine. "If Dolly Parton, Earl Scruggs, and Spinal Tap spawned a litter of puppies, it would be The Cleverlys" said the New York Times. "The group has evolved over the years and the comedy and musicality is the best it's ever been. Our show is now on the top shelf." says Digger Cleverly. The group is comprised of Dr. Digger, his son, Ziggy Cleverly, his nephews, Steven Tyler Dale, Plug, and Sock Cleverly, giving a master class of comedic timing, showmanship, and world class musicianship. Andy Griffith Playhouse, 8 p.m. Tickets are preferred \$60 / orchestra preferred \$55 / orchestra \$50

SEPT. 26

A Mayberry Cast of Characters with Daniel Roebuck. A new show this year -- join Matlock's Daniel Roebuck as he takes a deep dive into the long and fascinating careers of some of Mayberry's most familiar faces -- and some of the less familiar ones, too. A question-and-answer session will follow. Andy Griffith Theatre Museum, 11:30 a.m. General seating tickets \$15.

Mayberry Melodies. The songs from "The Andy Griffith Show" come alive with Mayberry Melodies. Did you know that there are lyrics to The Andy Griffith Show theme song? Did you know there were 117 songs during the eight seasons of the show? How did Andy Griffith

choose the music? Experience this and much more as Mayberry Melodies brings you the familiar songs as well as the hidden gems and the stories behind them. Andy Griffith Playhouse, 2:30 p.m. Tickets: Preferred \$30 / Orchestra \$25.

"Manhunt" in-depth presentation with input from special guests, by Neal Brower. He has acquired a wealth of knowledge about "The Andy Griffith Show" from his years of correspondence and contact with the writers, directors, cast, and crew. Don't miss this year's fascinating interviews and discussions with answers to insightful questions and clips from the show. Neal Brower is the author of Mayberry 101 and The Essential Mayberry: Behind the Scenes of the Andy Griffith Show. Both are available at the Andy Griffith Museum Gift Shop. He taught "The Andy Griffith Show: An In-depth Study" at Community Colleges throughout North Carolina for many years. His lectures are also presented at the Andy Griffith Museum during the summer months. 2:30 p.m. at the Historic Earle Theatre. Tickets are \$20 for orchestra seating and \$15 for balcony seating.

Mayberry Memories of Don Knotts. Bill Knotts will put on a one-man show about his famous uncle, Don Knotts, showcasing cherished family photos. While attending the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in the 1970s, Bill had the opportunity to live with Don and his wife in Beverly Hills. In this nostalgic and entertaining journey, Bill ushers his audience into a simpler time, back to the idyllic, fictional town of Mayberry. His theater and acting background is on full

display as he regales the audience with numerous personal tales and family anecdotes of his time spent with Don over the decades. Sprinkling in family pictures and plenty of video clips of some of the greatest scenes from The Andy Griffith Show, Bill reintroduces the iconic and lovable characters and the actors who made them come to life. Show is slated for 6 p.m. at the Historic Earle Theatre, tickets are \$35.

Colonel Tim's Talent Time, the variety show like no other with performances and appearances by Mayberry Days special guests, along with local and national entertainers and the Mayberry tribute artists in an evening of Mayberry fun and entertainment at the Andy Griffith Playhouse. Hosted by Allan "Floyd the Barber" Newsome. 7 p.m. start time. Tickets are \$30 for preferred seating and \$25 for \$30 orchestra seating.

SEPT. 27

Mayberry Melodies Gospel Show. There were more faith-based songs on The Andy Griffith Show than any other genre, so they must have been very important to Andy. Join Mayberry Melodies as these classics as well as other gospel and contemporary favorites are brought to life. Andy Griffith Playhouse. 2 p.m. Preferred seats are \$30, orchestra seats are \$25. There were more faith-based songs on The Andy Griffith Show than any other genre. Join Mayberry Melodies as these classics as well as other gospel and contemporary favorites are brought to life.

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3 stars from the show

While Mayberry Days is a time for fun, joy, and reminiscing about the good old days, it's also a time to remember those from the world of Mayberry who have passed away.

This past year three Mayberry luminaries passed -- Dennis Rush, Margaret Kerry, and Ronnie Schell. Tanya Jones, executive director of the Surry Arts Council, which runs Mayberry Days, said the three will be memorialized this year with a presentation by "The Andy Griffith Show" authority and author Randy Turner.

Dennis Rush

A frequent guest star at the annual Mayberry Days Festival, Rush was known by millions for his time on "The Andy Griffith Show," where he played Howie Pruitt, the boyhood friend of Ron Howard's character Opie Taylor. Dennis died May 9, just weeks before his 75th birthday, a few months after he was diagnosed with leukemia.

"I'm just glad that I was able to pray with him last month at one of the festivals when he found out that he was diagnosed with leukemia," fellow Mayberry child actor Keith Thibodeaux posted on social media at the time. "Mayberry has lost a great citizen and a great friend!"

Rush was a fixture at the annual Mayberry Days festival in Mount Airy, a man who seemed to genuinely appreciate and enjoy his time with fans of the show. He could often be seen posing for photos, signing autographs, and spinning yarns from his days on the show with fans.

In addition to his regular appearances in Mount Airy, Rush traveled the Mayberry circuit, often appearing at festivals, day-long events, and other gatherings of Andy Griffith Show fans around the nation. He was most recently in Granville, Tennessee, in April, for the annual Mayberry-I Love Lucy festival.

Visiting such festival wasn't always on his itinerary. Once he moved on from his acting days, Rush spent time in the U.S. Marines, then worked in the telecommunications industry before settling on a 36-year career in the hospitality industry, much of that time at La Jolla Beach & Tennis Club in San Diego, eventually retiring from the post of director of operations.

Tanya Jones, of the Surry Arts Council, said she tried to get Rush to attend Mayberry Days 35 years ago, but given his full-time work status and schedule, he declined. She tried again, nearly a decade ago, and he accepted the invitation in 2018, opting to "try it" once.

"I put Dennis in one of the Ram trucks for the Mayberry Days Parade that year and he stood up in the back. At the end of the parade, he told me that when the truck topped the hill at Oak Street and he saw the hundreds and hundreds of folks lining the

street and was in disbelief. He told me that he got tears in his eyes because he had no idea there were so many fans of 'The Andy Griffith Show.' He has been every year since.

"I have never heard him say an unkind word. He was a true gentleman and a really, really special person...Mayberry has lost a wonderful actor and friend...He will be missed," she said in the days after his death.

Born in Philadelphia before his dad moved the family to California shortly after Rush's birth, he was discovered by Hollywood luminary James Cagney during a chance encounter.

In 2018, Rush told The Mount Airy News that his father worked on the same studio lot as some of Tinseltown's biggest stars, and one day when he was 5 years old he was eating lunch there when "James Cagney was having lunch at the table next to us. He looked over at my dad and said 'Your son looks like me.'"

Cagney was in the midst of filming "Man of a Thousand Faces," the story of Lon Chaney. Cagney was starring in the title role and needed someone to play a young Lon Chaney. He chose Rush for that role, and that lunchtime meeting launched a ten-year career.

Rush was on eight episodes of "The Andy Griffith Show," spread over three seasons. By the time Rush was appearing on the show, he was already a television and movie veteran. He had roles in the movie "My Living Doll," as well as two episodes of the serial Alfred Hitchcock presents, and handled dozens of appearances in other television shows popular at that time, with a resume filled with a Who's Who of iconic television shows.

"I did a lot of westerns, I worked with Lucy (Ball) on the 'Lucy Show,' 'My Favorite Martian,' 'Gunsmoke,' I did eight or nine episodes of 'Wagon Train,' 'The Virginian,' 'Laramie.' I never got on 'Bonanza,' though I tried out a couple of times."

"They were always looking for certain types," he said of show producers selecting children to guest star. "They always needed a tall kid, a fat kid, a freckle-faced kid. Well, I was the freckle-faced kid," he said.

Rush said he enjoyed his time as a child actor.

"As a kid, 8 or 9 years old, playing with cowboys and Indians? Oh, you really couldn't get much more fun than that."

In numerous interviews, Rush said his time working on "The Andy Griffith Show" set was his favorite periods in his decade-long career. While it was serious work, he said Andy Griffith and the others gave the kids time to have fun, and Andy always kept the set relaxed. He also praised the other child actors.

"And for kids, I got to work with Hollywood royalty," he said, referring to Ron Howard, playing Opie, and Keith Thibodeaux, who had spent several years playing Little Ricky on The Lucy Show prior to periodic appearances on "The Andy Griffith Show" as one of Opie's friends.

"Some kids in Hollywood got a big head at times, but not there, it was just a genuinely fun situation," he said. "Ron was just such a treat to work with. I worked with a lot of kid actors, but when you work with Ron Howard and Keith Thibodeaux, these were the two giants of kid acting, and two of the nicest guys you could ever imagine."

Margaret Kerry

Of the many memorable episodes of "The Andy Griffith Show," one that especially stands out is "Christmas Story" -- and a key

reason was an appearance by guest star Margaret Kerry.

Kerry, who played the mother of a family who took up residence in the Mayberry Jail for what would be a wondrous holiday after her moonshiner husband's arrest, died June 11, one month after her 97th birthday.

Energetic and fun-loving, Kerry stayed active, still traveling the country, doing shows and talks until shortly before her death. That included coming to the annual Mayberry Days celebration in Mount Airy last September, one of many appearances at the annual festival.

"She was filled with energy right until the end," the Surry Arts Council's Tanya Jones said.

Besides "Christmas Story," she also appeared in the episode "Andy Forecloses," from Season Two, which helped cement Kerry's legacy among lovers of the series.

"Margaret Kerry has been an enormously huge presence during Mayberry Days," Jones said. "She was an absolutely lovely lady – she was filled with positive energy and loved her fans."

Kerry was grand marshal for the annual Mayberry Days Parade on multiple occasions, typically perched atop the back seat of some vintage convertible while waving to appreciative onlookers.

"It meant a lot to her to be the grand marshal," Jones said.

Margaret Kerry had a distinguished career apart from her appearances on "The Andy Griffith Show."

Perhaps her biggest claim to fame involved serving as the human model for the animated Tinker Bell in the classic Walt Disney movie "Peter Pan," including all the character's mannerisms.

"That's why I can say I was Tinker Bell and men in white coats won't take me away," Kerry once joked during an appearance in Mount Airy.

Her Hollywood career began in the 1930s as a child actor.

Kerry ventured into TV work when that medium was taking hold, appearing as a regular on a series from TV's earliest days called "The Ruggles," which was broadcast live on ABC from 1949-52. She also ventured into audio work, voicing hundreds of characters for cartoon shows, movies, and other outlets.

In 2016, she published her memoir, "Tinker Bell Talks! Tales of a Pixie Dusted Life."

Kerry's advanced age didn't stop her from remaining active, which even included dancing onstage during a Mayberry Days event last year, as well as traveling the nation for talks and presentations.

She lived in Wilmington, North Carolina, with husband Robert Boeke, an acclaimed military veteran in World War II who helped liberate the Dachau Concentration Camp in 1945. He died, at age 100, about three weeks before she passed.

Kerry said in 2013 that the family atmosphere of Mayberry Days, evident among both fans and celebrities, is what kept her coming back year after year. "You are the best family I could ever imagine being part of," she told those gathered for a dinner then.

Ronnie Schell

Acclaimed comedian and actor Ronnie Schell, a regular visitor to Mayberry Days for many years, passed on June 12, just a day after Margaret Kerry.

Ronnie Schell is best-known for his long-running role as Duke Slater in the "Gomer Pyle, U.S.M.C." television series, a popular

spinoff from "The Andy Griffith Show."

But Schell also guest-starred in two episodes of the latter, including "The Foster Lady," portraying the director of a TV commercial Aunt Bee stars in to promote furniture polish.

The other was "Emmett's Anniversary," in which Schell played a character named Bernie the furrier.

Schell built a long string of guest appearances which reads like a Who's Who list of TV show credits from the 1960s to the 1990s. Included were "The Golden Girls," "Saved by the Bell," "The Love Boat," "Mork & Mindy," "Charlie's Angels," "The Dukes of Hazzard," "Sanford and Son" and "Happy Days," along with scores of others. He also was the central character for a season in the sitcom "Good Morning World", in which he played a drive-time morning disc jockey.

He also went into audio work, voicing a number of characters over the years, including Jason in the series "Battle of the Planets."

"Ronnie had worked with a huge number of people in Hollywood," Jones said.

Schell became one of the regular guest celebrities for Mayberry Days.

"Ronnie was a huge presence during Mayberry Days," Jones said. "He was a huge presence wherever he was."

This was the case even as the years crept up on Schell.

"He had some challenges with mobility, but he was determined to do shows," Jones said of his personal appearances during Mayberry Days. "And the fans loved him."

Schell regularly rode in the Mayberry Days Parade, occupying the passenger side of a Jeep driven by local resident and veteran Randy Moore.

"He loved that, because that was him on 'Gomer Pyle,'" Jones said of the military tie-in as a TV Marine.

Schell's flair for comedy was a constant, including his remarks to a crowd before the start of a Mayberry Days golf tournament in 2017

"It's great to be here," said Schell, then 85, "taking time off from my usual schedule of sleeping and eating."

A situation in 2025 foreshadowed what was to come regarding Schell's health, before his usual appearance in Mount Airy for Mayberry Days.

"We knew that he had fallen before Mayberry Days and had to cancel the week of," the local arts official explained, preventing him from attending the festival that year.



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What's Happening In Mayberry

Concerts, shows and more!

Whether visiting Mount Airy for a day, or staying a week, there's always something going on -- concerts, shows, displays, and more. Unless otherwise noted, tickets for shows that are part of the Surry Arts Council Summer Concert Series at the Blackmon Amphitheatre are \$20, or a season pass for \$175. For concert series shows, those attending are encouraged to take blankets or lounge chairs. Beer, wine, and food are sold at selected events. No coolers are allowed. Information on the concerts, or ordering tickets, can be found at <https://www.surryarts.org/shows/amphitheatre.html> There is a separate special Mayberry Days calendar on page 13.

CONCERTS & EVENTS

September 22

Too Much Sylvia will be back in concert in Mount Airy, on stage for a 7:30 p.m. show at the Blackmon Amphitheatre. Voted into the Carolina Beach Music Hall of Fame, this crowd-pleasing variety band delivers a dynamic and interactive show that spans multiple genres, from soulful Motown and funky '70s hits to classic rock, country, and today's top 40. Tickets are \$20 or a Surry Arts Council annual pass.

September 23

Area favorite The Embers featuring Craig Woolard will be in concert beginning at 7:30 p.m. at the the Blackmon Amphitheatre as part of the Summer Concert Series. Dance the night away with the legends of Beach Music at a concert featuring The Embers and lead singer Craig Woolard. As North Carolina's official Ambassadors of Music, The Embers have been creating unforgettable memories since 1958 with their signature blend of "heart and soul, rhythm and blues." Tickets are \$20 or an annual pass.

September 24

The Band of Oz returns to Mount Airy, bringing its popular brand of Beach Music to the Blackmon Amphitheatre stage beginning at 7:30 p.m. as part of the Surry Arts Council Summer Concert Series. "Whether you're a longtime fan or discovering their magic for the first time, a Band of Oz concert is an essential experience for anyone who loves great music and a fun, festive atmosphere, especially at the Blackmon Amphitheatre," concert organizers said. Those attending the concert are encouraged to take lounge chairs. Concessions will be available for purchase. Tickets are \$20 or a 2026 Annual Pass

October 10

Craig Southern & Phoenixx will be in concert in a show slated to get underway at 7:30 p.m. at the Blackmon Amphitheatre as part of the Surry Arts Council Summer Concert Series. The band will bring its eclectic mix of Beach, Country, Classic Rock, and Soul to the Mount Airy stage. This show is free as part of the Autumn Leaves festivities.

October 2

The Bellamy Brothers will take the stage at 8 p.m. at the Andy Griffith Playhouse. "Get ready to experience a night of legendary country music as The Bellamy Brothers celebrate their 50th Anniversary Tour throughout 2026," organizers said. "This iconic duo, known for chart-topping classics like 'Let Your Love Flow' and 'If I Said You Had a Beautiful Body (Would You Hold It Against Me)' will be taking the stage...Don't miss this chance to sing along to five decades of timeless storytelling and harmonies." Tickets are \$90 for preferred



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seating, \$85 for preferred orchestra seating, and \$80 for orchestra seating.

November 7

Lonesome River Band will be in concert beginning at 7:30 p.m. at the Historic Earle Theatre. "Experience a night of pure, high-energy bluegrass with the legendary Lonesome River Band," organizers said. "This iconic group has been defining the modern bluegrass sound for over four decades. Their signature blend of tight harmonies and fiery instrumental mastery sets a standard for acoustic music. Get ready to be captivated by their award-winning sound and unforgettable stage presence for an evening of authentic, toe-tapping music that honors tradition while forging its own path." Tickets are \$30 for preferred seating, \$25 for balcony seating.

December 5

Travis Frye & Blue Mountain will bring an evening of Bluegrass with Appalachian roots with a modern twist to the Historic Earle Theatre stage in a 7 p.m. concert. Travis Frye & Blue Mountain is a multi-generational bluegrass band that honors the Appalachian roots of the music while adding a modern twist! With members spanning from Virginia to North Carolina, the band incorporates spirited fiddle, and banjo tunes along with modern selections from country, bluegrass, and gospel traditions, as well as original material. After 18 years of playing across the United States, come celebrate with Travis Frye and Blue Mountain where it all started - The Historic Earle Theatre, at the final show on the Farewell Tour. General admission tickets are \$10.

December 20

Elkin Big Band will be bringing Big Band Christmas Classics to the stage for a night of holiday-themed music. "A perfect night to get the whole family in the holiday spirit," concert organizers said. Show begins at 3 p.m. at the Andy Griffith Playhouse, Tickets are \$25 for preferred seating, \$20 for orchestra seats.

December 21

A Very Embers Christmas featuring The Embers Craig Woolard. "The world-famous Embers Band with Craig Woolard presents their Christmas show featuring holiday favorites and a few visitors, like Frosty, Rudolph, and friends," organizers said. "The stage is magically transformed into a holiday showplace, setting the mood for holiday cheer and maybe, just maybe a little snow. Perfect to get you in the mood for the holiday season." The show begins at 7 p.m. at the Andy Griffith Playhouse. Tickets are \$35 for preferred seating, \$30 for orchestra seating.

Weekly Events

Experience the Merry-Go-Round, the second-longest continuously running live radio broadcast in the nation, with a live show every Saturday at The Historic Earle Theatre from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. each week. Doors open at 10:30 a.m. Admission is \$8 or a Merry-Go-Round Annual Pass is \$20, or a current Surry Arts Council season pass.



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