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WINTER 2025

INSIDE

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77 YEARS ON THE AIR

Station marks another birthday

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Middle - The Slate Mountain Ramblers entertain during a previous WPAQ birthday celebration, which is always a popular gathering in Mount Airy.

Bottom - The Occudocs team interviews Greg Bohlen of Union Grove Farm as he discussed regenerative farming.

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The Mount Airy News

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Surry County Native FINDS COMPELLING PEOPLE, LEADS TO INTERESTING STORIES

Ryan Kelly
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Simply Mayberry Magazine

To the casual television viewer, the name Bill Hayes may not mean much. But his name has graced the credits of more than 1,500 television shows and documentaries in a 30+ year career that has allowed him to tell compelling stories about interesting people.

A Surry County native, Hayes is CEO and president of Figure 8 Films and CEO of Thunder Mountain Media, both operating in Orange County. Figure 8 currently holds the distinction of producing cable television's most watched show among women 'Sister Wives.' There are plenty of other shows his firm puts together, including 'John & Kate Plus 8.'

"Not only do I have Figure 8 Films, but also Thunder Mountain Media (TMM). That's because I live on top of a hill called Thunder Mountain to the west of Chapel Hill out in the country with a 24-acre farm a lot of blueberry bushes," he said. He lives there with his wife Diane and two young children ages 7 and 10.

Growing up in Surry County helped Hayes hone his craft, simply by listening to the chatter of life around him. "I grew up listening to people tell stories. My Grandma Dockery opened a little grocery store between Elkin and Dobson right past where Shelton Vineyards is. On a rainy day you'd sit around on old pop crates playing checkers and listening to farmers tell stories."

"My mom and dad were great storytellers. Stories are the way we communicate, to get people's attention, and get people to understand each other. I have always looked at storytelling as very needed and an important art form," he said.

TMM is currently creating a product called Occudocs.

"We've trademarked that. That stands for Occupational Documentaries. Our idea is four-



Mount Airy native Bill Hayes poses with a microphone from WPAQ. Hayes has produced more than 1,500 television episodes for such programs as 'Sister Wives' and '7 Little Johnstons' for TLC.

minute shorts for people to help them figure out what they want to do with their life." While the target audience is in the age range of 15 to 45, Hayes said people throughout their life wonder what sort of work may be best for them.

"So, we're creating short profiles of all kinds, and we are categorizing them into dream jobs, or jobs you don't know about, or can't live without, or side-hustles. We look at it more like it should not be a job, it should be your occupation if you find something



Bill Hayes (standing, right) in the production booth of one of his many projects. Hayes has produced hundreds of episodes of documentary television and films.

you really love because there is a difference between having an occupation versus a job.”

“Take me for example, I am one of the luckiest people on the planet,” Hayes said. “Twenty-some years ago, someone asked me to make a video for him and I did, and it worked... Then I took that and got a job actually creating videos and was lucky enough to help a guy at Bowman Gray School of Medicine create an interactive video to teach the surgeons wrist arthroscopy.”

What came next in 1992 was the show that started it all. The TLC show ‘The Operation’ was the launching pad that landed Hayes where he is today. “That was the very first of 1,500 shows. It was a series we did for six years, and we did 48 episodes and traveled all over the world profiling some of the great surgeons of the planet.”

He has logged an impressive amount of screen time for his many shows while several documentaries are underway as well on the film side of the business at TMM, which is how the business is split.

The team at Figure8 is work for hire, Hayes said. “We do work for television networks. We get and pitch them an idea, they say yes, we give them a budget, they say yes and then we go off and make one to hundreds of television shows. We work basically for Warner Brothers Discovery.”

“It’s not just me. I started it but the truth is you never get anything done by yourself. I have been fortunate to have a couple of partners named Kirk Streb who was sort of an editor and became in charge of production and Deanie Wilcher who was the financial person, which is terribly important to



Former N.C. State guard Dereck Whittenburg and filmmaker Bill Hayes are talking basketball with Hall of Fame high school basketball coach Morgan Wootten while working on a film about his career. Hayes said while he did not know about Coach Wootten beforehand, he is a big fan now and said the documentary ‘Morgan Wootten: The Godfather of Basketball’ is his favorite work.

get things done on a budget. As luck would have it, Deanie has had daughters and a niece work for the company as well.”

“Together we have just had a great run of telling stories but it’s really not about me. Its more about all the people that I have been able to talk into working

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Bill Hayes, right, is in surgical scrubs and behind a mask in this photo from 1995 during the filming of "The Operation."

with me, not for me, but with me. You find wonderful people and then you just do what you're supposed to do as a boss which is to help them and make sure you give them what they need to get their jobs done."

TMM, he said, was founded because his partners "really weren't interested in doing the documentaries that I was working on, so I started my own company to finish those documentaries," he explained.

Among those is one of his favorite works. "The thing I've done that I think I'm the happiest about was the film I did about the greatest high

school basketball coach ever, Morgan Wootten, the Godfather of Basketball. He was the greatest high school coach ever and was raising young men, not basketball players. He would say stuff like 'be quick, but don't hurry.'"

He said that the president of TMM, Erin Upson, "is terribly important in all this. She went from Greensboro to UNC Chapel Hill to then she went to work in Hollywood to make movies. She came back to raise her three kids here instead of Los Angeles and I scooped her up."

They created a series called 'The Uncommon Story, Notable North Carolinians' to tell stories from across the state. Hayes explained, "They are one-minute pieces that we have it on all the digital platforms in the school systems in North Carolina."

"We had the idea of putting these stories out there whether its Thelonious Monk or Stephen Curry or Morgan's grandmother, Bayard Wootten, who was the first women to take a picture from an airplane, like one of those Wright Brothers planes and then she coined the Pepsi logo," Hayes paused to catch his breath – with so many stories to tell he wanted to make sure he finished his train of thought.

Telling such stories can help other people navigate their own path through life and his newest project is meant for that purpose.

"That's why Occudocs is important, we want people to find out what they're best at. My advice is don't be afraid to try things and don't be afraid to work. Just because you're in retail sales, or a bartender, or a worm farmer, you can learn from everything you do. Just don't lose sight of your goal and don't be afraid to continue to dream."

He said that he has lived a dream: to be able to do the work he loves and tell stories. More than the product on the screen, Figure 8 and TMM are their



Filming is in progress for one of Thunder Mountain Media's Occudocs at Union Grove Farm in Orange County.

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own reward for Hayes.

“What I’m proudest of may be starting a company with a great ethos, which is to always be excruciatingly straightforward and honest and kind and treat everybody with humility and understanding and realize that if it’s somebody else’s story, then we are obligated to do a good job to tell their story and be good partners,” he explained.

To get people to want to share their stories, which for some of these shows involved highly personal issues, means Hayes and his team have to build a rapport with those whose stories they seek to tell.

“First of all, you have to build trust and promise them and then deliver that you will tell their story. Many people want to share their stories but it’s hard to have trust - particularly in the media. So, you know, you have to build trust and then you deliver time and time again,” he said. “You meet people and then befriend them and try to do a really good job of telling their story.”

Twenty-five years ago, he did a documentary called ‘Spinal Impact’ about the ways people lose their spinal abilities. He said one British woman, a young lady named Gemma Quinn, was completely paralyzed for life from the neck down. “I went there and made a film with her, and she became a lifelong friend. She comes and stays with us for weeks at a time still and she’s been to Mount Airy many, many times and hung out a Thirsty Souls. She just loves Mount Airy,” he said.

On his life growing up in Surry County he reflected, “I grew up in one of the great places on Earth, truthfully, and I had a great coach in Charlie Atkins at North Surry, and I also had great teachers. When people ask me why I got to be so successful I tell them I was loved a lot by my parents, had great aunts and uncles, great teachers, and great friends. I am the benefactor of a lot of other good people.”

At North Surry High he played football for Atkins on both sides of the ball on a team that was undefeated save for the state title game in the fall of 1972. He rattled off player’s names like Bernie Young, Jerome Penn, and future NFL player Ben Norman who went on to play for the Denver Broncos. “We had a lot of great athletes, that also helped me build a lot of confidence so when I went off to Duke I had no lack of confidence.”

He attended Duke on a full scholarship and played lacrosse while there. “I met a lot of fascinating people in my life at Duke. It opened up the world

to me and to what was possible; life is just an adventure.”

He recalled, “Mount Airy is just a brilliant place to grow up because not only is it beautiful but it’s a hard working place. We had ten acres of tobacco, picked 10,000 eggs a day, and had 15,000 chickens. I grew up on a working farm and we had to milk the cows and all my uncles over between Elkin and Dobson had chicken and dairy farms, too.”

“If you weren’t working on your farm, you were working on somebody else’s farm. Work became something that was just sort of second nature. I think you can certainly attribute my crazy work ethic to Mount Airy.”

Hayes said he wanted to be a teacher when he was young because of his love of learning, but fate took him down another path. He observed, “If a chicken and dairy farmer from Surry County can make 1,500 TV shows, you know, anything’s possible.”

Andy Griffith may be the best known name so far to come from this area, but Hayes and his team are leaving their own mark on the industry with each episode or film produced. He pointed out his recent successes in television and production are not the

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only ones of merit from a Surry County native.

Said Hayes, “Ken Lowe is the guy who started HGTV, and he started the Food Channel and Travel Channel, and then he sold to Discovery... but he’s from Westfield and oddly the guy that introduced me to Ken, the guy from across town, was David Zaslav,” the CEO of Warner Brothers Discovery.

To the young people, Hayes said the sky is the limit and to reach for what they want. “I go back to what Coach Wootten would say: it’s all about the fundamentals. What are the fundamentals? Its working hard, being nice, being honest.”

“Gene Rees is a great example of that. You know I couldn’t afford any clothes and back when I got out of high school I needed a suit to get a job. Gene gave me one and said pay me when you can. That’s sort of Mount Airy to me,” Hayes said.

He feels that leaning into those fundamentals and focusing on the people and stories will carry his companies through a changing media landscape.

“It’s a different world now in terms of how we disseminate and watch our content, so you’ve got to stay up with the times. I’ve got a 7 and 10 year-old teaching me a lot about attention span. You’ve got

to recognize that short form is the way. Particularly with kids, give them a minute to four and they’ll watch it, but give them 30 minutes and good luck unless its animated.”

Coming down the line for TMM is a documentary about ADHD, “because my whole family has been diagnosed with ADHD. We’re also working on a documentary about regenerative farming. I guess I’m just a serial documentary producer; I can’t give it up.”

“People pitch me things, every day, you should see the development list Figure 8 has. We’ve got a dozen shows in the development pipeline that could end up being something,” he said of what comes next.

Hayes said it’s been quite a ride thus far and he is looking forward to telling more compelling stories. “It’s been a great 32 years of meeting fascinating people and then getting to tell some great stories. The stories we try to tell are about the human condition and you don’t have to drill down terribly far to find we’re mostly alike.”

“I have found most people are more alike than we are different. We just, for some reason, look at the difference and forget the likenesses.”

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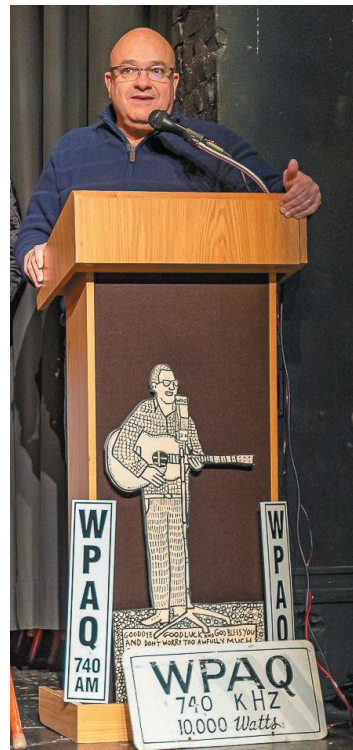
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WPAQ founder Ralph Epperson is seen in the early days of the radio station.



Present station owner Kelly Epperson, Ralph's son, speaks during last year's birthday celebration.

WPAQ TUNED IN TO TRADITION

Since 1948

Radio station marking 77 years

Tom Joyce
tjoyce@mtairynews.com
Simply Mayberry Magazine

Lasting 77 years is a major accomplishment for any business, but even more so where a commercial radio station is concerned – given all the changes in listener tastes during that span.

WPAQ, located on Springs Road in Mount Airy and at 740 on the AM dial, has never lost sight of its mission even as rock and roll, classic and modern country, soul, hip hop, rap and other genres have dominated the music scene.

The local radio station still broadcasts old-time, bluegrass and gospel sounds as it did when first hitting the airwaves in early February 1948.

"It's the music of our people," said Jennie Lowry, a 10-year employee of WPAQ whose announcing roles include hosting a "Merry-Go-Round" show broadcast

live each Saturday from downtown Mount Airy.

"There are very few stations playing traditional music still," Lowry added. "That's not something every radio station has."

Which would be music to the ears of the late Ralph Epperson, who founded WPAQ in the late 1940s.

With service to the community as his primary mission, Ralph Epperson set out to inform and entertain those living in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains when he created his beloved WPAQ.

Despite Epperson's death in 2006, the station continues to operate using those values and much of the same programming.

The 77th birthday of WPAQ will be celebrated on Feb. 1 with a concert open to the public at the Historic Earle Theatre in downtown Mount Airy.

"Usually, we have four or five regional bands" Lowry said of the birthday event to begin at 5:30 p.m. that day.

"It's always free."



The radio station has operated from this site on Springs Road since it originated.

ONE MAN'S DREAM

Growing up in the foothills of Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains during the 1920s and 1930s gave Ralph Epperson an appreciation of the traditional string music long associated with the area, according to historical information provided by WPAQ.

Epperson's dream of building a radio station stemmed from his desire to take the music of the Blue Ridge to a wider audience.

With the support of family and friends, that dream became a reality as construction began on WPAQ in early 1947.

Months of hard work were rewarded when the station's first official broadcast occurred on Feb. 2, 1948.

The Green Valley Boys performed during that maiden event.

In 1954, WPAQ became the most-powerful radio station in the Northwest Piedmont.

From Day One, Epperson's commitment to serve his community with news and entertainment was paramount as he saw that the station's programming reflected the cultural and musical values of the region.



This display pays homage to Ralph Epperson and the history of WPAQ.

Live performances of local, regional and national musicians, many of which were recorded by Epperson, fulfilled his pledge to bring listeners the best in bluegrass, old-time, and gospel music, along with other religious offerings.

It also was a source for tobacco market and other agricultural pricing and news which were extremely important during WPAQ's early years.

The station additionally was on hand for live remote broadcasts of numerous business grand openings including the debut of Mayberry Mall in the late 1960s, along with airing every Autumn Leaves Festival since that time.

Another longstanding tradition at WPAQ involves local sports, including its Friday night broadcasts of Mount Airy High School football games.

Even Big Band music from the World War II era has a place at WPAQ.

Ralph Epperson's promise to preserve the traditional string music of the Blue Ridge region in particular and promote local talent has survived to this day with son Kelly Epperson at the station's helm.

Musicians continue to be encouraged to share and develop their skills as they perform live from

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It was a packed house at the Historic Earle Theatre in Mount Airy for the 2017 WPAQ birthday celebration.



Folks hit the dance floor during WPAQ's 2023 birthday concert.



Ralph Epperson, founder of WPAQ, the county's first radio broadcast station, was dedicated to promoting local artists and preserving the old-time music he loved. Several hundred records of local, regional, and national artists, as well as public service and other messages, were recorded at WPAQ in Epperson's lifetime. The recording machines shown here were manufactured by Presto Recording Corp. The unique collection represents, in some cases, the only known recording of certain songs or artists from Virginia and North Carolina's Appalachian Mountains. That collection is preserved today as part of UNC-Chapel Hill's Southern Folklife Collection at the Louis Round Wilson Library.

the station's Studio A or the stage of the Merry-Go-Round. It is the nation's second-longest-running live weekly musical show of its type, which has existed since WPAQ's beginning.

The Merry-Go-Round originates on Saturdays from the Historic Earle Theatre.

"I'm just so thankful to be able to have a place where we can have live music unique to our area," Lowry observed.

SOME MODERNIZATION

Although WPAQ is firmly rooted in tradition, the small-town radio station has embraced modern trends that serve to promote its core mission.

Recent years have brought the new features of 106.7 FM, providing enhanced sound quality, and wpaq740.com. The latter represented a major breakthrough allowing WPAQ to be heard anywhere in the world via the Internet.

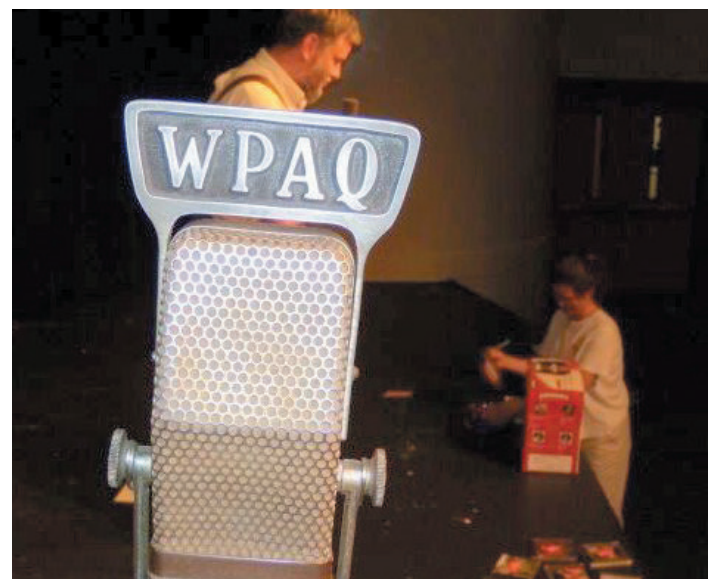
Both outlets offer 24-hour programming.

WPAQ now has about 10 employees.

It offers tours to allow groups such as school classes to learn about its operations from the inside.

"We just had St. Paul School there with Santa," Lowry said of students from a campus in Carroll County, Virginia.

"Though the facade is worn, the equipment replaced and the personnel changed, an unwavering commitment to preserving the culture of the region promises future generations the same informational and traditional music programming which their parents and grandparents enjoyed on 740 AM since 1948," says a statement from the station.



A familiar WPAQ microphone seen at many performances.



A display from the Andy Griffith Museum showing the suit Andy Griffith wore in his later iconic series, "Matlock."



Visitors constantly stream into The Andy Griffith Museum to check out artifacts from his life.

THINK WINTER'S A DOWNTIME? *Think again*

By John Peters
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Simply Mayberry Magazine

Mount Airy, Surry County and the surrounding area is a relative beehive of activity most of the year -- fairs and festivals dominate the local calendar spring through autumn; one of the region's best summer concert series brings live music to Mount Airy two or three times a week when the weather's warm; and even the holidays are chock-full of events.

Winter, though, is when life slows down just a bit. Right?

That might be a common misconception, but truth is there still more to do in Mount Airy and Surry County than most could ever take in. Concerts, shows, and even music festivals continue on, giving folks plenty of reason to visit the real-life Mayberry even when the trees are bare and the weather a little chilly.

MUSIC FESTIVAL

One of the largest gatherings during this time of year is the annual Tommy Jarrell Festival, set for March 1 in 2025, the 124th anniversary of Jarrell's birth.

For "The Andy Griffith Show" fans, it's clear that music was a big part of Andy Griffith's life. Mount Airy and the surrounding region is known for its old-time mountain music, which evolved over the generations since the region was settled.

Tommy Jarrell became one of the masters of the

genre, developing what those in the field call the Round Peak style of fiddle playing, named for the Round Peak area of Surry County that Jarrell called home. His style became so well-known in the industry, musicians from other parts of the world were known to visit Surry County, seeking to talk with and study under Jarrell's tutelage. Many of the stars of old time and even bluegrass music from the past 50 years point toward Jarrell as one of the early influences on their development as musicians. Although Jarrell died in 1985, just a few weeks short of his 84th birthday, his legacy lives on in the music of other musicians and in the annual festival sponsored by the Surry Arts Council.

This year's festival, as those in the past, will include free youth lessons, including flatfoot dancing, fiddle, guitar, banjo and mandolin. There will be a beginning banjo workshop led by Wayne Erbsen, a youth music competition, an old-time jam session, and the always-anticipated Tommy Jarrell Birthday Concert and Dance at the Historic Earle Theatre. The concert will feature performances by Wayne Erbsen as well as The Round Peak Boys.

For a full schedule and more information about The Tommy Jarrell Festival, visit <https://www.surryarts.org/shows/tommyjarrell.html>

MUSEUMS

While the weather might be a bit chilly outside, there are plenty of indoor activities for those considering a trip to Mount Airy during the winter.

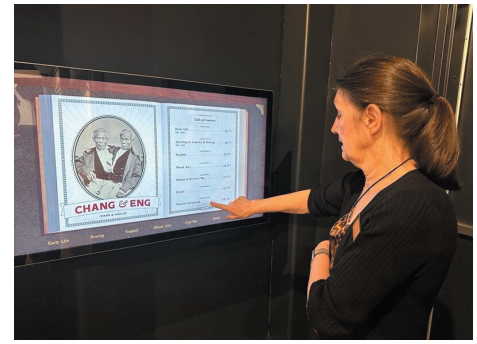
Chief among those are a host of museums devoted to



A young musician takes part in a past Tommy Jarrell Festival youth competition.



A display from the Siamese Twins museum shows different artifacts and photos from their life in Surry County.



Surry Arts Council Executive Director Tanya Jones demonstrates one of the interactive displays in the Siamese Twins Museum.

Andy Griffith, the famous 19th Century Siamese Twins, a rich retelling of the story of Mount Airy and the surrounding region.

The best-known of those museums, The Andy Griffith Museum, is devoted to showcasing the life of Mount Airy native Andy Griffith, with heavy emphasis on his time on “The Andy Griffith Show” and other television and movies roles he had over the years.

The museum grew out of the private collection of the late Emmett Forrest, a Mount Airy native who was a boyhood friend of Andy Griffith. The two remained close throughout their lives, with Griffith often quietly visiting Forrest. He likewise began sending memorabilia from his career, with a healthy dose of “The Andy Griffith Show” artifacts included.

As the collection grew, and was put on display at various locations around Mount Airy, other Andy Griffith Show actors likewise began donating items to Forrest, growing the collection far beyond what one person could handle. He donated the collection to the Surry Arts Council, and the museum was opened in 2009. The museum draws thousands of visitors each year, and while many come during the warmer months, the museum is open to visitors throughout the year.

Its normal operating hours are Monday - Saturday, 9 a.m. until 5 p.m., Sunday, 1 to 5 p.m. The museum is closed on Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day. For more information visit <https://www.surryarts.org/agmuseum/index.html>

SIAMESE TWINS MUSEUM

The newest museum in Mount Airy is devoted to the famous Siamese Twins. Many know of the conjoined twins born in Siam -- modern day Thailand -- in 1811. They famously toured the world as part of several traveling shows, but eventually the two -- Eng and Chang Bunker -- split off on their own from the shows, doing their own touring, eventually settling in Surry County, just outside of Mount Airy.

The brothers married, each raising a large family while operating expansive, profitable farming

operations, leaving an indelible mark on Surry County history. Today their descendants make their way to Mount Airy each year for an annual Bunker Family Reunion, which often involves a delegation from the Royal Thailand Embassy.

The museum outlines their lives, from what is known of their time growing up in Thailand to, their time traveling the world, but focuses intently on their time in Surry County.

MUSEUM OF REGIONAL HISTORY

The Mount Airy Museum of Regional History is far more than a collection of artifacts from a hundred years ago. The facility is an expansive telling of the area’s history, from the Native American Sauratown tribes who first lived in the area down through early European settlement, through 19th and early 20th century growth to the modern Mount Airy and Surry County.

Artifacts from those centuries, displays and exhibits fill the museum -- which has the look and feel of the type and quality one might find in a much larger city, with the occasional traveling exhibit also gracing the museum’s halls.

The museum brings plenty of activity to downtown Mount Airy throughout the year, with the annual Moonshine and Racer’s Reunion lining Main Street with old-time NASCAR and similar race cars every September; the annual Dia De Los Muertos Celebration which draws hundreds to the museum and street festival; as well as the assorted activities.

Among the more popular events are the ghost tours offered both in Mount Airy and nearby Pilot Mountain, from spring through November, taking folks on a walking (or trolley) tours of the town towns, while guides regale the tour members with ghostly tales from Mount Airy’s (or Pilot Mountain’s) past.

For more information on the museum and its schedule of events, visit <https://www.northcarolinamuseum.org/>

Simple HAPPENINGS in 2024-25

Your guide to live concerts, shows, and other entertainment in Mount Airy and the surrounding communities. For additional information on all Surry Arts Council Concert Series shows, performances at The Historic Earle Theatre, or shows at The Andy Griffith Playhouse, please see www.surryarts.org/shows/menu.html.



DOM FLEMMONS



ELKIN BIG BAND

CONCERTS & EVENTS

Note: For tickets to all concerts that are part of the Surry Arts Council Summer Concert Series or the Blue Ridge And Beyond series, or to purchase season tickets, visit <https://www.surryarts.org/shows/menu.html>, or call 336-786-7998. Season ticket prices, good for admission to any or all of the summer concert series shows at the Blackmon Amphitheatre, are \$160. Tickets for individual Summer Concert Series tickets are \$17, with children 12 and younger admitted free. Prices vary for the Blue Ridge And Beyond series. Concessions are on sale at each of the Summer Concert Series shows. Those attending the concert are encouraged to take lounge chairs. Concessions will be available for purchase.

JANUARY

4

Breaking Up Christmas with Trish Fore and the Wildcats in concert

7 p.m.

Historic Earle Theatre

in Mount Airy
Tickets: \$12

An old-time tradition, Breaking Up Christmas, was a time when families got together in the days after Christmas to celebrate, play music, dance, and rest up before the cold of winter set in. For more information visit <https://www.surryarts.org/shows/blueridgebeyond.html>

11

Dom Flemmons as part of the Sounds of the Mountains Series

7:30 p.m.

Willingham Theater, 226 E. Main Street in Yadkinville
Tickets: \$30

The Blue Ridge Music Center, in partnership with the Yadkin Arts Council present Dom Flemmons as part of the Sounds of the Mountains Series. Dom Flemmons is known as "The American Songster" since his repertoire covers over 100 years of American roots music. He is a folk musician, black country artist, songwriter, multi-instrumentalist, music scholar, historian, actor, slam poet, record collector, curator, podcaster, cultural commentator, and the creator, host, and producer of the American Songster Radio Show on WSM in Nashville, Tennessee. He is the co-founder and original member of the

groundbreaking Carolina Chocolate Drops, the first ever black string band to win a GRAMMY Award. For more information, or to purchase tickets, visit <https://www.blueridgemusiccenter.org/concert-events/som-2025-dom-flemons/>

18

Sister Sadie, part of the Sounds of the Mountains Series

7:30 p.m.

Willingham Theater, 226 E. Main Street in Yadkinville
Tickets: \$35

Sister Sadie brings raging hot bluegrass combined with breathtaking instrumental drive and awe-inspiring vocals to the stage. Comprised of original members Deanie Richardson (fiddle), Gena Britt (banjo & vocals) along with Jaelee Roberts (guitar & vocals), Dani Flowers (guitar & vocals), Maddie Dalton (acoustic bass & vocals), and newest member Rainy Miatke (mandolin, vocals), Sister Sadie has combined the varied talents of each of the individual women in the lineup to create something that is far more than the sum of its parts. The International Bluegrass Music Association (IBMA) has awarded Sister Sadie the Vocal Group of the Year award 3 times (2021, 2020, and 2019), Entertainer of the Year (2020). IBMA has also named band members Jaelee Roberts Female Vocalist of the Year (2023, 2024) and Momentum Vocalist of the Year (2021); Deanie Richardson Fiddle Player of the Year (2020, 2024); Maddie Dalton Momentum Instrumentalist of the Year (2023); and Gena Brit Banjo Player of the Year (2022). For more information,

visit <https://www.blueridgemusiccenter.org/concert-events/som-2025-sister-sadie/>

FEBRUARY

14

Sean of the South, part of the Blue Ridge and Beyond concert series

Historic Earle Theatre
in Mount Airy

Tickets: Preferred Tickets

\$55, Orchestra Preferred \$45,
Balcony Preferred \$35

Sean Dietrich is a multi-instrumentalist, novelist, and stand-up storyteller known for his commentary on life in the American South. His work has appeared in Newsweek, Southern Living, Reader's Digest, Garden and Gun, The Tallahassee Democrat, the Birmingham News, The Mobile Press Register, and his column appears in newspapers throughout the U.S. He has authored 18 books, he is the creator of the Sean of the South Podcast, and makes appearances on the Grand Ole Opry. His stories can make you laugh and cry, sometimes within the same sentence. Join him for a night of laughs and good ole southern entertainment. After the show Sean will do a meet and greet, signing books and taking photos. Books and other merchandise will be available for purchase before and after the show.

15

American History: The Black Experience
6:30 p.m.

The Andy Griffith Playhouse



SEAN OF THE SOUTH



THE MORRIS FAMILY BAND



AMERICAN HISTORY

in Mount Airy
Free Admission

American History: The Black Experience, part of the Blue Ridge and Beyond concert series, featuring Winston-Salem State University Inspirational Voices. This will be a night of history, music and celebration for all.

MARCH 15

The Morris Family Band
7 p.m.
Historic Earle Theatre
in Mount Airy
Tickets: \$15

The Morris Family Band is comprised of five members of the Morris family from Davidson County; Aaron Morris, Debbie Morris, Jessica Morris, Joshua Morris, and Jacob Morris. For the past 15 years, the group has delighted area residents with its Irish-American sounds during St. Patrick's Day festivals, at local cafés, and in shows at regional amphitheaters. All Morris family members are trained with most string instruments, which comes in handy for the family's distinct, Celtic style. Guitars, violins, flutes, whistles, cello, mandolin will all be part of this performance. To date, the family has released two albums, "Farewell to Summer" and a self-titled release from 2000.

APRIL 26

Rhonda Vincent and the Rage
7:30 p.m.

Historic Earle Theatre
in Mount Airy

Tickets: Preferred Tickets \$80, Orchestra \$75, Balcony \$55
To date, Rhonda Vincent and her band, The Rage, have won one Grammy, nineteen IBMA Awards (including the top Entertainer of the Year honor in 2001 and consecutive Female Vocalist of the Year wins between 2000 and 2006), and eighty-nine SPBGMA Awards.

WEEKLY EVENTS

The Merry-Go-Round Live Show every Saturday
11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Doors open at 10:30 a.m.

Historic Earle Theatre
in Mount Airy

Admission: \$8, Merry-Go-Round Annual Pass \$20, or a current Surry Arts Council Season Pass

Experience the Merry-Go-Round, the second-longest continuously running live radio broadcast in the nation, with a live show every Saturday.

ONGOING EVENTS

The Old-Time Music Heritage Hall, Historic Earle Theatre
Open Daily

Exhibit Hours: 1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Sundays, noon to 2 p.m. Monday through Friday, and on Saturday WPAQ's Merry-Go-Round and exhibits are on display from 11 a.m. until 1:30 p.m.

Self-guided tours: \$8 per person plus tax, includes admission to the Andy Griffith Museum, Betty Lynn Exhibit and Siamese Twins Exhibit

LIVE PLAYS AND STAGE SHOWS

MARCH 1-2

Disney's ALADDIN, JR.

2 p.m.

Andy Griffith Playhouse
in Mount Airy

Tickets: \$20

Disney's Aladdin JR. is based on the 1992 Academy Award-winning film and the 2014 hit Broadway show about the "diamond in the rough" street rat who learns that his true worth lies deep within. Tickets can be purchased at <https://www.surryarts.org/shows/livetheatre.html>

5

Mike Wiley's "Brown vs. Board of Education"

7 p.m.

Andy Griffith Playhouse
in Mount Airy

Free Admission

In 1952, the Supreme Court heard a number of school segregation cases, including Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas. It ruled unanimously in 1954 that segregation was unconstitutional, overthrowing Plessy v. Ferguson (1896), which set the "separate but equal" precedent. This play recounts the effects of the decision on the families who participated in the original court case, the impact of the ruling on school systems at the time and the challenges still being made today.



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