

Fauquier Times

WHAT'S IN YOUR LUGGAGE?
Check out what some airline passengers bring in their carry-on luggage. **A4**

TAYLOR MADE FOR RUNNING
Liberty High cross country star Taylor Brown is a good bet to place in the Top 15 at states this fall. **A7**

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HAPPY ANNIVERSARY! 25 YEARS FOR LORD FAIRFAX



MAGNIFYING HIGHER EDUCATION: Lord Fairfax students Rachel Harned and Rachel Eden work in a botany lab during a Tuesday biology class at the Fauquier campus. Now boasting about 2,500 students, the campus has grown over the years to meet the higher education demands of a swelling population.

Fauquier's college grows from an alfalfa barn to a 21st-century campus

By MARK GRANDSTAFF
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Twenty-five years ago, Lord Fairfax Community College invited Fauquier residents to come and learn inside of an alfalfa barn.

College officials are planning an October celebration of the 25-year milestone, but classes started on Sept. 7, 1988 — 18 classes, mostly at night, for 17 students.

The college got its foothold in Fauquier County when real estate agent and former Fauquier Chamber of Commerce member Bob Sowder put up \$90,000, two and a half acres and a barn for classroom space.

In 1988, Sowder said he made the donations after having spent eight years taking community college courses at night, "after having been a dropout."

"I would like to repay my community in some way," Sowder had said.

Maryann Austin, an author and onetime resident of Warrenton, remembers taking classes in the old barn in the early days.

Signing up for classes back then was a leap of faith for her. There was no way, she thought, that there would be anything here for her.

She found an engaging and ongoing education that helped spur her into a career as an author. She learned from professors who took the time to get to know her and other members of their small, close-knit classes.

See **COLLEGE**, Page A3



Courtesy photo

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS: Lord Fairfax Community College got its start in Fauquier County in 1988 when community pillar Bob Sowder donated an alfalfa barn and 2.5 acres of land to be made into a campus. In its first semester 25 years ago, the campus offered 18 different courses and 17 students attended.

More inside on Lord Fairfax

- Comparing the world of 1988 with today, **A3**
- Check out the main hall, **A3**

Home-grown tree lover is new forester for Fauquier

By JAY PINSKY
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When trees speak, Fauquier native Kyle Dingus listens.

Dingus, a brand-new forester with the Virginia Department of Forestry's Warrenton office, says our trees, all trees, have a lot to say.

The Virginia Tech University graduate said he has been fine-tuning his ears to the language of the forest ever since he was a boy in Midland.

As a forester Dingus learned about a variety of specialty areas like forest biology, woodland management, outdoor recreation, timber procurement, hydrology, computer applications and spatial analysis.

"I loved Tech and Blacksburg, but there's no place like home."

Times Staff Photo/Randy Litzinger

Recollections of 'The Barn'

Maryann Austin, author and former Warrenton resident, shares her accounting of her time at Lord Fairfax Community College's Fauquier campus in the early days.

To get to the barn, you would take Route 29 south toward Opal. There was no light at the turn, and sometimes it would take quite a while before you could make the left onto the narrow dirt road leading up to the barn.

The turn was about a quarter mile down from the current light to the college. The driveway was rocky and dusty, and if there was a car coming in the opposite direction, you had to squeeze over to the side so they could get by. Sometimes when it rained hard enough, some of it would get washed away, causing more bumps and ruts.

I drove a small sports car back then, and I remember it bottoming out if I didn't make the approach just right. The parking lot, too, was just dirt and rocks and was quite dusty on dry days.

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COLLEGE

From Page A1

"You walk into the classroom, and I'm not kidding. Every class I took, there was someone I knew from somewhere."

The college has helped adults like herself, she said, folks looking for an ongoing education. It's also become the 13th grade for many Fauquier students, a low-cost associate's degree and groundwork laid for a four-year degree elsewhere.

Could the stars have aligned in such a way in 2013? Could a community college campus appear in Fauquier today, if one did not exist before?

Cheryl Thompson-Stacy, president of Lord Fairfax Community College, believes it could happen today. It would, though, be more of a fight, she said.

In 1999, the state assembly signed off on \$7.2 million to expand the Fauquier campus with a new, 60,000 square-foot building and 25 more classrooms.

But Virginia lawmakers have slashed funding for higher education over the past five years. Now, with 23 community colleges in existence, there are more institutions vying for slices of a shrinking pie.

"It's very difficult to convince the legislature that your project should stand out from other very necessary projects," Thompson-Stacy said.

In the 25 years since LFCC gained a foothold here, the community has embraced it as it has grown.

In the years to come, Warrenton residents will be able to walk from Old Town to the campus, thanks to a coordinated effort from the county's Parks and Recreation Department and the Piedmont Environmental Council.

As for what the college has done in return, LFCC does not yet have any economic impact



Times Staff Photo/Randy Litzinger

CAMPUS FOCAL POINT: Wolk Hall, the main hall and most prominent part of Lord Fairfax Community College's Fauquier campus, was built in 1999 after a \$7.2 million infusion from the Virginia General Assembly. It was named for leading benefactor Sheila Wolk.

studies for its Fauquier Campus, Thompson-Stacy said.

She described the college's benefit to Fauquier County as a subtle, rising tide.

Someone with an associate's degree will tend to earn \$18,000 more per year than someone with only a high school diploma, Thompson-Stacy said.

About 87 percent of people with at least an associate's degrees say they have a healthy and generally good life, she said — due to having a better job, more income and more ready access to health care and a lower likelihood of ending up in jail.

"If you ask someone without a high school diploma if they're happy and healthy, less than 50 percent say they have a happy, healthy life, and that's kind of sad," Thompson-Stacy said.

The campus's most popular course is an associate's degree in

THEN AND NOW

Tuition in 1988: \$25.95 per credit hour

Tuition in 2013: \$125 per credit hour — but closer to \$152 after activity, technology and auxiliary fees.

Attendance in 1988: 17 students

Attendance in 2013: about 2,500 students

Classrooms in 1988: 3

Classrooms in 2013: 25

Top radio song in 1988: "Faith" by George Michael

Top radio song in Sept. 2013: "Roar" by Katy Perry

nursing, she said. LFCC has been a long-standing partner with Fauquier Health, and the school's nursing program puts its students in a good position to try for a living wage in the county's hospital or in other medical facilities.

In the years to come, LFCC wants to add a new building to its Fauquier Campus, one devoted

to the science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) disciplines that form the underpinning of northern Virginia's economy.

The college needs the new building, Thompson-Stacy said, and its students need more avenues to reach the jobs that are in demand in the region.

BARN

From Page A1

Arriving to class early was a good idea. There were only eight to ten parking spaces, and if there was no more room, one had to park somewhere along the driveway and walk the rest of the way up the hill.

The barn was a small building, indeed an old barn it seemed. The inside was divided into a hallway down the middle and a few classes along the left and right sides. You could usually find a desk or two positioned outside the doors of a couple of the classrooms.

I sat in one to take a make-up test once. There wasn't an abundance of space. There was a small break room with a microwave in the back of the building. But not much else.

I remember taking a Psychology class in which there were only five or six students. We pulled our desks together in a tight little circle each time we met and we talked about Sigmund Freud and Phineas Gage and how he lived for years with a metal pipe through his head.

It was more like a coffee klatch, but it was a unique experience and we learned a great deal. I remember Dr. Vandivere leaving open the side door, and I recall watching a little barn cat wander in and stroll around during class.

Although I was not the typical student (Is there such a thing anymore anyway?), my experience was always this: I would walk into class on the first day and find a seat somewhere

in the back of the classroom. One by one, the others would wander in, looking much like me, unsure on the first day.

And it never failed that before class had begun I would see them: neighbors, people from church, the lady from the grocery store. Even us uncool older folks would find a familiar face and send a friendly wave from across the room, and it didn't feel so scary anymore.

I had the pleasure of taking art classes with Laurie Marshall. She would abandon the confines

of the classroom and let us sit on the grass and sketch the hillside. There was nothing much there back then. Just a few cows and a rolling hillside, maybe a house or two.

Our class painted a mural. It was, we were told, destined to be hung over the doorway at the barn. I don't know if it ever was, and I wonder if it sits collecting dust in storage there somewhere. It was a painting of a diverse group of students emblazoned with the words Lifelong Learners in a Global Society.

Such truth. I was in my twenties when I took my first class at Lord Fairfax, and I was almost forty when I took my last one. But I never felt too old to learn something there. And that's good because I am not even fifty, and I still have a lot to learn.

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SEPT 18TH-HOME AND GARDEN EXPO
Come by the Expo at the Fairgrounds from 4-7pm!!

SEPT 24TH - CAPITAL CARING
Please help us welcome Capital Caring for an encore presentation on Palliative Care. We will again host this exciting lecture about Palliative Care and the benefits of this program. We will be joined by a clinician, as well, so if you have questions about this topic or are interested in how it can help you or your loved one, please come! This presentation is FREE and open to the public.

SEPT 25TH, 7-8PM - GERIATRIC DEPRESSION
Please join our support group and help us welcome our guest speaker, Sallie Morgan. This is an extremely informative FREE presentation and it is open to the public!!

SAT. OCT 19TH - THE WALK TO END ALZHEIMER'S
Team Oak Springs is gearing up for this walk! Join our team and walk with us at the Harris Pavilion in Manassas!!!

RSVP's for all events can be made to Amanda Rosier-Baker at 540-347-4770
or by email to arosierbaker@oakspringsofwarrenton.com

For information on upcoming events in all five counties, please log on to www.gingtogether.org

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