

# BLADEN COUNTY

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Erin Smith

***Thoughts of the past,  
present and future***

Robert G. Hester

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Print Edition

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# United Way of Bladen County supporting our communities

By Erin Smith

The United Way of Bladen County has been a strong partner for many organizations and the community over the years. Areas of focus of the United Way are education, income and health-the building blocks for a good quality of life and strong community.

Christy Sasser, President of the United Way of Bladen County, said she is excited for the upcoming year and is excited about the future for the organization.

She said her goal is to grow United Way of Bladen County through events and campaigns.

"I'm hoping to have one event per quarter at minimum. I really want to educate the public how through United Way support and funding, we can offer more funding to those in need in the county," said Sasser.

Sasser said several events are planned to take place throughout the year. One upcoming event for United Way this year is the St. Patrick's Day Fun Day, which is set for March 17, at Cape Fear Vineyard and Winery, from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m.

"It's fun for all ages," said Sasser.

There will be a corn hole tournament, live bands, carriage rides, face painting, and Sunset Slush will be present along with vendors. There will also be a 50/50 raffle.

Sasser said Jason Jackson and Randall Canady will play from 10 a.m. until 1 p.m. and Will Jones will take to the stage from 1 until 4 p.m.

The annual Day of Caring event is planned for November 2, 2018. Barbara Knight, with United Way of Bladen County said last year, volunteers constructed 11 wheelchair ramps, and distributed gift bags to more than 500 residents in the county's nursing homes.

Knight added teams of volunteers also prepared backpacks of food for children which were delivered to the Bladen County Schools. She said people were able to drop off canned food for the backpacks for students on the Day of Caring.

Once packed, the food bags were delivered by United Way volunteers and members of the community to the various schools throughout Bladen County. The students are able to take the bags of food home and know they have good, nutritious food for the weekend.

BladenOnline.com will donate 10 percent of the net profits from the second edition of Bladen County Beautiful magazine to this local organization.



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# Thoughts of the past, present and future

One advantage of growing older is to look back to where we were 50, 60, 70 years ago, think about the trip in the 2000s and where we go from here.

50, 60, 70 years ago, farmers were plentiful. Small farms, 30 to 40 acres was a good size farm. 3 to 5 acres of tobacco (#1 cash crop), peanuts, cotton, corn and soybean, all on one farm, as well as a few hogs and chickens raised for food.

The fields were covered by a team of mules, or horses or both, breaking ground with a turn plow, planting was a long, tiring process. Planting tobacco plants usually consisted of a male with a hand transplanter with water, and another individual (many times a female) walking backwards, dropping a single plant in the contraption, both water and plant being placed in the ground, one plant at a time, all day long, it was a slow, tiring process. Over time, tractors were introduced with one or two individuals placing plants in a hopper as the vehicle move slowly over the field, a much improved, less tiring process.

Peanuts, corn, soybeans and cotton were planted, for the most part, with a small planter behind a horse or mule. Jobs were readily available for youngsters hopeful of picking up a few bucks.

Over the years, as stated earlier, farm equipment changed everything. Today, farmers, for the most part specialize, growing one, two, maybe three types of crops, rotating them to make their fields more productive, using sophisticated equipment by fewer farmers and little outside help. And, less opportunities for youngster to earn a buck and learn about hard work.

Blueberries were introduced later, primarily on the north side of the Cape Fear River and today is the #1 cash crop in the county, so I am told. They have moved from all hand pickers to machines, with fewer pickers. However, blueberry farmers still provide a huge number of seasonal jobs.

Hogs and chickens were necessary over the years, but mostly for food, not for sale. Hog killing was a family affair, many times a neighborhood event.

Today, millions of swine and birds are grown in massive numbers that assist large industries to process and feed folks at home and abroad, and provide thousands of jobs for locals.

In the 40s, 50s and 60s, a large industry was a cotton mill, or a saw mill, peanut processing company, a cut & sew operation that made wearing apparel, usually ladies inexpensive apparel, Top Mode, Sportee and others. Workers had few if any benefits and pay was often determined by production.

Later, Dupont, Veedor Root, Smithfield Foods and other large industries began to locate in the county providing jobs in large numbers. Some were home grown businesses, example, Taylor Industries & Cape Craft to mention a few.

Today, there are more home grown businesses, also a NC DMV Call Center that pays well and provides a retirement plan for employees. Gildan has been a great local employer for many years and they are expanding across the state, maybe in Bladen some day. There are other good examples.

Education is another area of huge changes. Our public school population has dropped dramatically. Charter schools, home schooling, church schools are all cause for the change. Must point out that only public schools are required to provide an education for all, others can be more selective.

For our education leaders, a serious problem must be addressed related to how to proceed with the decreasing population. More consolidation, new facilities are on the horizon, and where schools should be located to best accommodate the decreasing number of students, across one of the largest counties, landwise, in the state. Just a few of their concerns.

To put it all into perspective, in the mid 70s, if my memory is correct, the public school system served nearly 8,000 students, today a little over 4,000, but they must be served, it's the law. New schools are expensive and citizens that no longer use them are not likely to be excited about helping pay for them.

Bladen Community College is one of Bladen's best sources for young and old to earn a better education to hopefully enhance their earning capabilities.

In the 40s, 50s, 60s and later, locally own businesses was big business. Today, retail outlets are mostly large chain companies. There are a few locally owned restaurants and some other small locally owned retail merchants, but the numbers are not as great as they once were.



.....Continued on page 6

Remember when country stores were the place to purchase gasoline? Today, nearly all gasoline is sold at chain owned convenience stores. It's just a sign of the times.

In the early years, many babies were delivered at home by a medical doctor, an independent business person. Today, just about all medical personnel are employees of a large regional medical provider and the system has changed drastically.

The county EMS service is a paid service, paid for by county government with tax dollars, volunteer rescue squads are having a difficult keeping an adequate number of qualified personnel to continue service. Some have ceased operation.

There are other examples of change, get the picture? It has been a process over the past 40, 50, 60, 70 years and some of us have been fortunate enough to witness the changes, some good, some not so good, and chances are there are more to come.

So where do we go from here? Not sure. For me, the road traveled is longer than the road ahead.

But, I enjoy life in rural Bladen County, NC, USA and have for the past nearly 80 years and looking forward to many more.

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## BladenOnline.com celebrating past, present & future

We made it 10 full years in existence with BladenOnline.com. Year 2018 starts year number 11 for our media outlet. We appreciate all our Readers, Advertisers and Team Members.

The project of BladenOnline.com began in the summer of the year 2007 after an idea was sparked between two good friends. Mike Simmons was a Bladen County resident who retired in mid-2006. He was a beloved Editor for the local paper. He wanted and needed an outlet for his creative talents and he saw a need in the county according to his life long friend, Robert Hester.

Robert was a man of many trades. Just to name a couple of things Robert did, he owned a radio station and was an award winning Bladen County Commissioner. Mike and Robert did their research and planning.

The duo decided to move forward with the news outlet idea they would call Bladen Online. Mike thought mid-October would be the time to launch the news site.

However, Mike was stricken by a fatal heart attack. The community was devastated and so was Robert. He had lost a long-time friend and a former neighbor and now his soon-to-be business partner.

Robert made a hasty decision to forget the entire project and move on. However, as time passed he had a yearning to continue the plan he and his friend started. It was a good project that needed to be completed according to Robert. Mike was the perfect person to launch the new media outlet, but he was no longer available. So Robert, being a former business owner made the decision to “charge forward” with assistance from Ken and Ellen Pervine to build the news website.

Robert, with the assistance of other team members grew BladenOnline.com to become Bladen County’s number one news and advertising source for the mother county.

In 2014, Robert decided he wanted to slow down so he made the decision to sell the business to Charlotte Smith. Charlotte and her mother, Cheryl Thurston, a graphic designer and author, created a new design for the news website all while loyal team members like John Clark, Joy Warren, Bethany Stephens, Norgie Hester, and Robert Hester continued reporting the news, sports, history, and more.

Erin Smith joined the BladenOnline.com team back in 2015 as the Editor to help grow the media outlet. Now she serves as the General Manager helping with writing, editing, advertising and more.



In 2017, during BladenOnline.com’s 10th year in existence the team expanded its services. Not only does the local online indie news outlet use its website to keep readers informed, but now it uses social medias, YouTube and has published Bladen County Beautiful magazine.

The team often reflects on something Hester says often, “The best is yet to come.” Now, in 2018 the plans to grow continue with new editions of the Bladen County Beautiful magazine and growing their sister online indie news outlet, SoutheasternTimes.com.



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# A look at Bladen County Sports

Want to shoot some hoops or play some tennis? Show your skills at Bladen County Park.

Looking for a sports league that your children can participate? There are plenty of fields at Bladen County Park.

Need a place for a family gathering, a spot to take a walk or jog along a paved trail or an area where youngsters can burn off some energy on a playground? Yes, it's Bladen County Park.

The 41-acre facility located off U.S. 701 about five miles south of Elizabethtown offers a lot for anyone wanting to spend leisure time outside.

There are four lighted baseball/softball fields, two basketball courts, lighted football field, lighted soccer field, batting cages, four lighted tennis courts, pair of picnic shelters and concession stands, walking trail, playground and a paved parking area.

The park is maintained by Bladen County Parks and Recreation.

Arriving at the park today, it's hard to imagine that 40 years ago the 70-acre tract owned by the county was essentially woodlands. Then, as it is today, the State Highway Patrol leased a portion of the land for its office and the county school bus garage operated.

The concept of building a county park began with the vision of former Bladenboro Town Manager Dave Barlett, who, in the mid-1970s, applied for and received a \$480,000 Community Block Development Grant that went to several towns and the county for various projects.

Bladen County's \$38,000 portion was designated for recreation. The county also received a \$45,000 grant from the state's Bureau of Outdoor Recreation and commissioners voted to provide \$6,600. That gave planners about \$90,000 to build the park.

Commissioners voted to use county-owned land for the new park, which, according to reports at the time, saved about \$70,000 compared to what purchasing land would have cost.

As is often the case with major public projects, there were delays. Originally, plans called for a lighted baseball/softball field, an unlit baseball/softball field, two tennis courts, restrooms, storage facilities, a multi-purpose court and picnic tables to be ready by fall 1977. However, work was still being done in October 1978 with work completed by spring 1979.

Sure enough, the park opened.

The work, however, goes on to this day.

In 1989, a federal Land and Water Conservation Grant allowed for Field No. 1, which is used for Dixie Boys Baseball, to be built and lighted along with construction of picnic shelter, playground and basketball court.

A North Carolina Parks and Recreation Trust Fund Grant in 2000 resulted in the construction of the lighted football and soccer fields, lights put on Field No. 2, the addition of two tennis courts, new playground equipment and a new basketball court.

In 2013, with another PARTF grant, a concession stand was added to serve the football and soccer fields, the walking trail was paved as was the parking lot and the tennis courts were resurfaced.

Over the years, the park has been the scene of thousands of baseball, softball, soccer and football games sponsored by the Recreation Department, and has hosted numerous district and state tournaments.

It's also been a place for kids to climb and swing and just be kids, for family reunions, a pick-up game of basketball, a set of tennis, or, just a place to relax and enjoy nature.

It's developed into what a county park should be and enhanced the quality of life in Bladen.

What's next for the county park?

Who knows?

But it's a safe bet that it will bring leisure time enjoyment to the citizens of Bladen County.



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## Where history hides beside the highway

By: Jefferson Weaver

There are times I simply cannot resist an old dirt road.

I do not mean the random dirt road running through a field. I mean the kind that is barely a whisper at the edge of the pavement, and not even a memory at the woodline. Roads that go places people once found important, people as forgotten as the roads they built.

I reckon I could be accused of being an inveterate trespasser, due to my love of old roads. I rarely if ever take anything with me on these semi-legal visits; perhaps I pick up a nail, a piece of glass, or

similar piece of debris. On the rare occasions I find a structure safe enough to enter (as long as there are no posted signs, of course) I will go inside, but I'd never take anything, tempting as it may be, wasteful and tragic as it seems to leave a treasure behind to rot and rust. Whether or not the owner would know or care is beside the point.

Every chipped green-glass jar or forgotten kitchen knife is the property of those named on the deed. Under some circumstances, if I know the owner, I'll fetch a certain item and let them know. I can recall only one rusted axe head that actually stayed with its family when I did so. Most of the time, people really don't care that much about the bits of their history lying forgotten beside their old roads.

Another axe head – one which I tripped over in the middle of a state-maintained dirt road – has a special place in my collection. It is stamped “CCC”, for the Civilian Conservation Corps.

A little bit of investigation led me to those who remembered the Great Depression, when the CCC worked those woods and even built a railroad there.

That history was forgotten – as was the history of the original residents of that section of high ground, one of whom was unearthed during the railroad project. The signs of those native people still turn up there, too: points from arrows and spears, occasional beads, and pottery.

I admit, I have far too many such treasures made of rusty iron and broken glass and tarnished tin. My wife has long since despaired of keeping my pockets clean. I once found a trash pile abandoned since the 1940s and went as crazy as a drunken sailor on payday. The owner appreciated my scavenging, but couldn't care less about the soft drink and patent medicine bottles, nails, hardware, and sundry parts of the lives of a family of sharecroppers. I think he kept a Quaker soda bottle, but the rest of the plunder joined my stash.

Few of my discoveries have real significance. Usually there is no back story, save a general recollection of those who lived there decades ago, and perhaps an anecdote about them. For example, I have a jar from the floorless pantry of a home where two old maids and their bachelor brother lived by kerosene lamp years after rural electrification.

The three siblings were gracious to the rare visitor, but they were popular for gossip. None had dentures, nor did the ladies cut their hair. They wore long black dresses made by their mother sometime in the 1890s. The combination of the ladies' stalagmite chins and stalactite noses, long white hair and wardrobe naturally bred whispers that they were witches. No one seemed to recall the brother's clothing preferences.

I had a Sunday school teacher who admitted that he, his brother and two other buddies sneaked into the pantry one night and stole what they thought were two jars of pear brandy. My mentor always laughed when he recalled the rebellious teenagers' faces as they gulped a drink of their clandestine liquor – only to discover the jars held nothing more Presbyterian than canned pears.

Sometimes we forget that life goes on after momentous events. I have a small collection of relics from the Aversboro battlefield, where we used to pick up bullets by the pocketful after a hard rain. For years I thought I'd found a real treasure – a fancy brass harness buckle. Was it off a gallant officer's horse equipment as he led his troops, either blueclad or gray, in a final charge?

I was a little disappointed when I found a true expert who almost sorrowfully told me that no, the buckle I had treasured was actually from around the turn of the century, and of a kind typically used on mule harness. I had forgotten that time doesn't stand still when something big happens. Fields are plowed again the next year after a battle. The bed where a famous person slept is made and remade. Trees regrow where a forest fire stretched from river to river.

The history before and after “historic events” is even more important, in my opinion. It's a really big deal that Cornwallis and his men ended up fighting a series of running battles from the Bladen-Cumberland line to outside of Wilmington. But the history of the folks who plowed and tilled and fought and nurtured and despaired and celebrated over that land, their story has a much longer-lasting impact than that of the uppity commander who spent a few hungry weeks along the Cape Fear back in the spring of '81.

What was supposedly one of Cornwallis' camps, by the way, was also a stopover for both Indians and explorers before colonists found it. Later on, it became the last stand of the Confederate Navy in North Carolina. A steamboat blew up there as well, in 1884 or thereabouts. What matters most, however, was the family who opened their home to me one cold, rainy day and shared generations of folks who far outlasted Redcoats, rebels and riverboats.

The entrance to this popular piece of real estate looks like nothing more than a forgotten dirt road. It's just another path disappearing into just another forest, where history hides beside the highway.

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## The beauty of the Organic Farming Industry

By Cheryl Thurston

Everyone is eating more organically produced foods these days, and Bladen County's farmers are ahead of the curve. Many area farmers have adopted organic practices, and not just for the sake of eating organics; their efforts also make them good stewards of the Earth. Organic farmers are using the land in the way nature intended, taking all eco-systems into consideration.

In a nutshell, organic farmers use only natural substances to replenish the nutrients in the soil, control weed growth, and deter insect populations. The naturally rich soil grows the vegetation which attracts insects, and the insects pollinate the crops, just as nature intended. Farmers harvest the crops which feed the human population; and after harvest, the stems, stalks, weeds and waste materials from the field are composted and returned to the field to replenish soil nutrients. Isn't that a lovely cycle? It's the circle of life.

Organic farmers use manure and plant matter as fertilizer, and don't use any synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, or fungicides; so those synthetic chemicals never touch organically grown foods or the soil they grow in. It might be helpful to mention that most of the produce that is sold fresh has been washed very little between the farm and the local store, whether it is organically or conventionally grown.

Conventional farming techniques require that lots of chemical fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides are sprayed directly on the soil and growing vegetation, to negate the need to rotate crops from year to year. Though you may wash fresh produce well before you feed it to your family, trace amounts of residues of synthetic chemicals were detected in half of all samples tested in 2015 by the FDA. cite (Fruits and vegetables account for 58.7% of domestic samples.) If you choose organically grown produce, you can rest assured that those chemicals have never touched your food.

Organic farmers combat nature's pests by natural methods like preventing conditions favorable to insect infestation and plant diseases. If conditions warrant, organic farmers may lay down a thick layer of mulch to smother weeds, or release a competitor species to eradicate unwanted insect populations.

Organic farming is more labor intensive than industrial farming due to the differences in fertilizing and weed management. Organic farmers rotate their crops so that the soil can recover after a growing season, and they work stalks and stems from a previous harvest back into the soil, which provides the environment for the soil microbes to thrive. Organic farmers don't use chemical herbicides either, so their weeds must be pulled out of the field by farm workers, and used to

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Organic farming offsets global warming too. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, (EPA) composting one ton of organic material results in the net storage of 600 pounds of CO<sub>2</sub>. If those green house gasses are trapped in a ton of stems, stalks, and weeds they will not be added to upper atmosphere. So, organic farming improves the air we breathe.

But wait, the benefits of organic farming don't stop there. Organic farming helps to keep our ground water clean too. Organic farming employs composting and mulching, which helps the soil retain moisture and requires less irrigation. Some of the biggest threats to clean water in North Carolina are non-organic fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides; and large-scale chemical dumping by corporations.

Organic farming, (also known as sustainable agriculture,) is regulated by the USDA, and helped along by resources like the NC Cooperative Extension and Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (CFSA), among others. These regulations guide farmers to the best practices and ensure the safety of the local food supply.

To become a certified organic producer, a farmer must establish and implement a plan and permit annual inspections by a third party. That may be a lot of hoops to jump through, but the result is worthwhile because the yield is healthy, whole food that is produced in the way nature intended. This keeps the soil, air and water in good shape, and sustains the planet for future generations.

Did I mention the naturally juicy and delicious flavors you'll find in organically grown produce; and the health benefits you will gain by eating organic? According to a study published by the British Journal of Nutrition in 2014, researchers found that organically grown produce contains 18% to 69% higher concentrations of anti-oxidants than conventional or industrial farming. When you fill your diet with naturally grown foods you are promoting your own good health, and protecting the planet at the same time.

Organically grown produce, though once hard to find, is popping up in stores and produce markets all over Bladen County these days. If you really want to eat clean wholesome foods and be a good steward of the Earth, thank your local organic farmers.



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## Education in Bladen County: Past, Present, and Future

Valerie Newton

The history of education in Bladen County began soon after the first Scotch immigrants began settling in the area in 1729. Few records are available to show where or exactly when the first schools were conducted. However, records dating to the early 1800s indicate various schools known as academies were constructed in various communities. Elizabeth Town

Academy was built in 1808. Other academies followed throughout the 1800s, the 1900s until 2001 when the current East Bladen and West Bladen high schools were constructed and opened.

It was the aim of the academies in the 1800s to give thorough and practical instruction to furnish educational advantages and to give students a preparation for entering any of the leading colleges of the state. Yet also, at the same time, they wanted to make work practical, and to fit the students for a life of usefulness to man and God.

The goals of public education in 2018 have not changed much from the goals established in the 19th century: Every student in the North Carolina Public School System graduates from high school prepared for work, further education and citizenship; Every student has a personalized education; Every student, every day has excellent educators; Every school district has up-to-date financial, business, and technology systems to serve its students, parents and educators; and, Every student is healthy, safe, and responsible.

What has changed though are the government mandated programs now required to be taught in public schools. When public schools first appeared in the early 1640s and were operated by churches, the students were taught basic reading, writing, and arithmetic. During the 1700s, some civics, history, science, and geography were added, but the curriculum was limited and remained focused for 150 years. Fast forward to 2000, where the number of programs being taught in schools has increased and is mandated by the federal government, the state government or both.

New curriculums such as career and college preparation, Internet safety, bullying prevention, lessons in texting and social media etiquette, childhood obesity, eating disorder counseling, suicide awareness, organ donor awareness, steroid abuse prevention, voter registration, media literacy training, expanded early childhood wraparound programs, financial literacy development, intruder lockdown training, advanced placement courses, dual-enrollment, health and wellness programs, leadership training, contextual learning and skill development, driver's education, entrepreneurial skill development, credit recovery programs, online learning requirements, Common Core standards, STEM - Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, and STEAM – Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics, to name just a few are now part of the public education system.

Combine new curriculum programs with the growth of diversity in our schools and Bladen County Schools is the largest and most inclusive public education system in the county. Among its' 4,500 students Bladen County Schools is home to approximately 10 different ethnicities and five to seven languages other than English.

Academics aren't the only thing that's changed in Bladen County Schools over the last two centuries. Flash back to the early 1800s when students carried their breakfast and lunch in a metal pail to their one-room school house. In 2018, students in Bladen County Schools are provided breakfast, lunch, and after-school snacks at no cost. Additionally, many of the primary schools provide mid-morning snacks as well for students.

And who can forget walking to school, in the snow, up-hill both ways? Today, Bladen County Schools transports approximately 2,500 students each day to school – and at no cost to parents. The district has 72 school buses that travel the over 880 square miles of Bladen County safely delivering students to school and back home daily.

Bladen County Schools was one of the first rural districts in the state to embrace digital learning while it was still in its infancy. East Bladen and West Bladen high schools were among approximately a dozen high schools in North Carolina to successfully implement a 1:1 laptop program for students and staff. Today, digital teaching and learning is evident in all schools, even as early as kindergarten.

.....Continued on page 14

The key components of today's education are the tools and technology used to help others learn. These technology tools have come a long way and continue to improve every day. Technology is playing an increasingly large role in education in Bladen County Schools. There are two major needs to be met: Using technology to help improve the learning experience for students; and, Getting students prepared to use technology to better navigate the world.

Let's take a look at where our education technology used to be, where it is today, and where it is headed.

Here are some of the key technologies that made education work in the 20th century in Bladen County Schools' classrooms: fountain pens, pencils, markers, chalk boards and erasers, 3-ring binders and Trapper Keepers, folders, ditto machines, filmstrip machines, metal filing cabinets, overhead projectors with transparent slides, and early computers (remember the floppy disk?).

Here are some technologies that you will see in the classrooms in Bladen County Schools these days: modern computers, electronic files and storage, computer networks, major role of the Internet, major role of email, the Cloud, including Google Apps for education, Smart boards, teleconferencing – Interactive, Virtual, unified communications, STEM Labs, MakerSpaces, and mobile devices and tablets.

Just imagine where technology will take us in the future. You can imagine how information technology in education will change the learning experience. If classrooms have smart boards, the Internet, and the cloud today, what will they have in 25 years?

By infusing robust technologies with advanced academics and well-rounded extra-curricular activities Bladen County Schools is developing higher order thinking skills in students and providing them opportunities to make connections between learning and the real world. Starting in August 2018, Bladen County will open the doors of the new Bladen Early College High School on the campus of Bladen Community College; evidence of continued growth and advancement opportunities for students. At the Bladen Early College students will earn a two year college degree along with their high school diploma in four to five years.

Bladen County Schools are helping students grow by acknowledging their present, setting specific goals for the short and long term, and then developing concrete steps to get to those goals. Instead of ushering students toward an ill-defined grouping of skills for a 100-year span, we help students define their own future goals and identify what skills are needed to meet those goals. That's the Bladen County Schools way!



# Solar is a buzz word in Bladen County

By: Charlotte Smith

Solar farms are being produced in rapid speed around the rural areas and have been growing. Ammon received the first one in Bladen County according to our reports back in 2015.



A new solar law passed in North Carolina was big news for the local power companies. The “Competitive Energy Solutions for North Carolina” law signed by Gov. Roy Cooper positions the state for continued solar growth while saving customers money according Randy Wheelless with Duke Energy.

“North Carolina is already No. 2 in the nation for overall solar power and the bill would allow 2.6 gigawatts of new solar over 3-1/2 years,” Wheelless said in a report.

However, not everyone is supportive of the solar farms. Some Elizabethtown residents wanted the Town of Elizabethtown Council members to vote against solar development in the area. In late 2016 town council members heard from concerned citizens asking about erosion, radiation and the appearance of solar farms. The town did approve a new Solar Energy Development Ordinance in February 2017.

Some areas in the Bladen County are embracing the new form of energy and economic boost with gusto. The Town of Clarkton council granted conditional use permit in August of 2017 to gain another solar farm in their area.

The solar farming industry is continue to grow in Bladen County and across the nation.

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## Satisfy your appetite hankerings

Eating is an everyday part of life, so it is important to know where to find good food. Bladen County has some very fine establishments to satisfy your tastebuds.

The legendary Melvin's Hamburgers & Hotdogs has been providing hot meals since 1938. In the past few years Bladen County has gained several more food stops.

Bladenboro, Elizabethtown and Tar Heel now all have Hardee's offering fast food. Also in recent years Taco Bell and Arby's set up shop in Elizabethtown. Word on the street is there will be more new restaurants to come in the near future.

Folks wanting a pick me up don't have to look far. The county has two coffee shops available. The Dragonfly Coffee House in Elizabethtown and Over Yonder in Bladenboro offers coffee and ice cream.

The newest eatery in the mother county is Crazy Snacks across from the county court house offering a unique variety on their menu such as juices, shakes, tacos and burritos.

If you are not in a rush and want to relax a little while and enjoy your food, Bladen County has more than a few places for you. Dowless & Company in Dublin, Pizza Palace in Bladenboro, The Log Cabin in Tar Heel, Cape Fear Winery & Vineyard and Giorgio's Pizza in Elizabethtown are just some honorable mentions.

Only a hand full of the county's restaurants have been listed in here; however, BladenOnline.com has a monthly column written by Cheryl Thurston about the local food establishments and their grades.

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# Bladen County's Beautiful Farms

By: Cheryl Thruston

Pigs, and Chickens, and Turkeys, oh my! Bladen County has a lot of farmers, and farms. According to the Census data from 2012, Bladen County has 492 farms, consisting of 117,323 acres of land. This land produces many edible fruits and vegetables, as well as hogs, chickens and turkeys galore.

Did you know that there are 1,583,952 chickens living in Bladen County?

There are also 728,808 turkeys and 650,749 hogs. Yes, our little corner of NC feeds a good deal of the nation, and many parts of the globe.

Still, Bladen County farmers aren't getting the same subsidies from the federal government that they once did. In 2007, NC received \$2,260,000 in farm subsidies from the government, but by 2012, that vital assistance had fallen to \$1,102,000. A difference of 51%. Naturally, some farms couldn't remain in business under those conditions, especially during the financial crisis of 2008. They were faced with having to sell out or to consolidate with other existing farms. This effected the whole county. Today, Bladen County's farmers are making it work.

The Pork Production industry requires 6 separate stages: Research & Development, Hog Farming, Meat Processing, Finishing & Packaging, Product Distribution, and Retail. This industry brings more than a billion dollars per year to North Carolina, and employs 46,000 people. During the 1990s, the hog population in North Carolina exploded from around 2.5 million to over 8 million, even though the number of hog farms in NC decreased from 15,000 in 1986 to 2,300 in 2006, the change was largely due to the consolidations of small farms into large farms. Today, North Carolina ranks second in the nation in pork production, (Iowa comes in at #1).



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In 1992, Smithfield Foods, Inc., opened the world's largest meat processing plant right here in Bladen County. Over the years, there have been many new regulations put in place to govern hog farming, swine houses and the associated waste lagoons, and our local farmers have made changes to comply with federal regulations. I don't think any one wants to stop eating bacon, so our local hog farmers are doing what they can to be good neighbors.

A 250-pound hog can produce 15 pounds per day of waste. In the mid-1990s, the legislature responded to public outcry and set minimum distances between farms and nearby homes, property lines and private wells. In 2007, they established a permanent moratorium on new and expanded farms. Hog farmers now must hire waste management specialists, and file odor management plans with the government.

Why? Because the fragrance of the hog farm waste isn't as delicious as the smell of frying bacon.

But it's not all



.....Continued on page 18



about the bacon. Here in the southeastern area, and beyond, we love fried foods, and many folks here and there are fond of pork chops, pork roasts, tenderloins, and ham. Just ask the people at Murphy Brown. They are the largest

producer of hogs and pigs in Bladen County.

Another big farming enterprise in our county is poultry, like Prestage Farms, which employs around 1800 people. They have expanded to become the area's largest poultry producer with chickens and turkeys, (they have hogs too, but not as many as Murphy Brown) and they continue to grow year after year.

Prestage Farms produces 425 million pounds of turkey annually, for the Prestage Farms label, and other "private label" sales. Private label sales allow other companies to market their own labels, with the knowledge that they are supporting a wholesome product, raised under specific conditions.

From eggs to whole turkeys, Prestage Farms completes the whole turkey life cycle from poult to plate. Prestage Farms purchases supplies and services from local sources whenever possible as part of their plan to shop local and buy local. This reflects their "community responsibility" and their intention to build a bright future in Bladen County. Yes, Bladen is a rural county, but that doesn't mean that the folks around here spend their days rocking on the front porch. Farmers are some of the hardest working people you'll ever meet. They rise early and work late. Why do they do this? Because we all must eat, and there's something special about knowing that your dinner was never frozen, and that it originated right here in Bladen County, North Carolina. As our local Chamber of Commerce would suggest; shop local and buy local, whether it's hogs or chickens, or turkeys. Oink, cheep, gobble.

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# Vineyard Golf At White Lake Becomes One Of North Carolina's Finest Golf Courses

By Norgie Hester

In the early 1960's there was talk about building a golf course in Bladen County. A county-wide meeting was held with interested folks from all corners of the county attending. A large group got together and discussed the possibility of building a course for county golfers. Some folks thought the course should be built in the center of the county, while other folks thought the course should be built near White Lake. When it became clear that a site could not be agreed upon, a group of Elizabethtown-White Lake area businessmen decided to form a corporation to build the course about a mile from White Lake. Dixon Brisson was president of this group.



The White Lake Golf Course was opened in the early sixties. The course was laid out by Stuart Gooden with help from golf pro Charlie Benson.

During the sixties and seventies there was a lot of activity at White Lake Golf Course. The Carolina's Section of the PGA held many one and two-day tournaments there. The course was also very popular with leading amateurs in the state and held quite a few tournaments welcoming some of the top ams.

The course was sold in 1979 to Dr. Dave Allen and Norgie Hester. The course name was changed to Carolina Sands Country Club.

In 1985 the course was sold to Houston Brisson of Dublin, owner of Houston's Peanuts, and brother of Dixon Brisson, the original developer of the course. At that time Mr. Brisson changed the name of the course back to White Lake Golf Course. In the late 1990's Houston turned the management of the course over to his son Nile Brisson.

Around the year 2000 Nile sold the course to Ted Parker of Lumberton. Parker closed the course for eighteen months and completely refurbished it. When it opened, with great fanfare, the course had over 350 members and was busy year around. Parker had changed the name to Carolina Sands Golf Course.

The next owner of the course was Donald Britt of Clarkton. Britt bought the course from Parker and then, in March 2014 closed the course.

The course remained closed until August 2014 when blueberry farmer Bill Augustine purchased it. Augustine did a tremendous job by getting the course back in great shape and open on November 1, 2015. Augustine redid the irrigation system and installed miniverde greens throughout the course.

Augustine named the course Vineyard Golf At White Lake, and the past three years has seen the course gain a reputation as one of the best golf courses in eastern North Carolina.



## Finer facilities in Bladen County

By Erin Smith

Bladen County has seen many changes throughout its history. In 2017, the county debuted a new, state-of-the-art law enforcement and detention center. It is the fourth such structure documented to have been built in the county for the purpose of housing inmates.

According to historical accounts, the very first jail was reported to have been a wooden structure though no official date of construction or dates of use were located. It was replaced by a jail constructed of brick in 1902 and that structure was demolished in 1964 to make way for a new facility. The third jail known to have served the county was constructed in 1965 and is adjoined to the current Bladen County Courthouse. The entryway for that jail facility was located on Courthouse Drive.



The new Bladen County Law Enforcement and Detention Center was constructed on Smith Circle in Elizabethtown. The official groundbreaking ceremony was held in April 2016. The new facility replaces the former jail at the courthouse and also replaces the Bladen County Sheriff's Office building which was originally built in 1947.

The new facility was officially dedicated on September 8, 2017, and cost \$16 million to build. The facility, which features many automated systems when compared to the former facility, can house up to 220 inmates. The detention facility is laid out with five individual pods and one dormitory.

The new facility includes a video conference center for visitors as well as a medical treatment area, a kitchen and laundry area. There is also office space in the new facility for the North Carolina Highway Patrol and the E-911 Call Center.

The Law Enforcement Center houses all of the Bladen County Sheriff's Office personnel.

The front lawn of the new Law Enforcement and Detention Facility features a Fallen Officers Memorial which includes the names of the officers who lost their lives in the line of duty. They include Dwayne Hester, Jamie Collins, Brian Joe Ramey, James Bell, and Roy Fores.

The new facility is located at 299 Smith Circle in Elizabethtown.





## Bladen's Got Talent

One thing is for sure, Bladen County has plenty of talented people. You name the talent and someone from the area has the gift. Writers, singers, actors, painters, instrument players are only some of the gifts we have here in our citizens.





## **Some of Bladen County's Community Clubs and Civic Organizations:**

Serving others is important to a lot of people in Bladen County. There are many clubs and civic organizations in the county. Below is a list of some of the clubs and civic organizations making Bladen County a great place.

Bladenboro Rotary Club  
Bladen County Shrine Club  
Boost the 'Boro, Inc.  
Bladen Masonic Lodge No. 646 A.F. & A.M.  
Cape Fear Masonic Lodge No. 300  
Clarkton Lions Club  
Classic Crusiers Car club  
Dedicated Soulz Motorcycle Club  
Disabled American Veterans Robert Curtis Hester Chapter #99  
Elizabethtown Kiwanis Club  
Elizabethtown Rotary Club  
Elizabethtown Optimist Club  
Foxglove Garden Club  
Jethro Lodge No. 374  
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Southeastern Cruisers Car Club  
Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 8062  
White Oak Community Club

BladenOnline.com publishes information and photos of these clubs and more when they are submitted to [bladenonline.com@gmail.com](mailto:bladenonline.com@gmail.com).



# Economic Development forecast looking bright for Bladen County

By Erin Smith

Communities are always looking for ways to attract new businesses and create new jobs for their citizens. Bladen County is no exception, according to Bladen County Economic Development Director Chuck Heustess.

He said the Bladen County Economic Development Commission, the Bladen County Commissioners and Bladen's Bloomin' Agri-Industrial are all working together with Economic Development Attorney Ernie Pearson on product development.

"We hope that this will lead to another speculative building," said Heustess. "All of our existing buildings are gone now."

The proposed building would measure between 24,000 and 27,000 square feet. He said one company has visited Bladen County and they are in a position to wait for the construction of a speculative building to be completed. He said he could not reveal the name of the company or any other details of the project but he did say they are involved in machining.

Heustess said Bladen County's biggest economic development issue right now is the fact the county does not have any "product" meaning there are no empty buildings suitable for manufacturing.

"One of our biggest goals for this year is figuring out how to escalate our building schedule," said Heustess.

He also said the Economic Development office is working with the town of Bladenboro to determine what can be done to expand the town's sewer capacity.

"It's not just a matter of building a larger facility," said Heustess.

He said options being explored include determining if any specific measures can be taken with regards to the efficiency of the existing system.

"In order to expand (the Bladenboro Industrial Park), the town has to have more sewer capacity," said Heustess.

There is also good news in the future of Economic Development with Bladen County. Heustess said the small business incubator, which will be located in the former Post Office building in Elizabethtown, has an anticipated opening date of early summer 2018.

He also said work is being done to create a multi-tenant health care facility for the town of Bladenboro and they have recently been invited by the Golden Leaf Foundation to submit a full grant application for the project. The county is continuing to assist Smithfield with the company's expansion plans. The company and NC Department of Transportation are working closely on improvements to NC Highway 87 and the plant site.



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# Elizabethtown upgrades

By: Charlotte Smith

There are many changes coming to Elizabethtown in the upcoming months and years, according to officials. Elizabethtown's Town Manager, Eddie Madden, and local architect Terry Cox explained several upcoming projects.

The first project was renovations to Tory Hole Park. Grant funding of \$600,000 has been received for the entrance, to add Frisbee golf in the park, and a boardwalk trail from the park to the river, among other items, according to Madden.

There will be a second phase to the Tory Hole Park improvements which will include more boardwalk trails according to Madden.

“We also secured the lock and dam property,” Madden stated. The Town has used funding to improve the area at the Lock and Dam in Elizabethtown. Madden explained he hopes to continue improving the Lock and Dam area to attract campers during the Cycle NC event which will bring close to 1,000 people to the town.

Madden did report the Dam will be closed November 2017 through March 2018 for repairs due to damages the Dam received during Hurricane Matthew.

The next project was the property beside the Cape Fear Farmers Market and across the street from the market. Madden said that the vacant lot, which has been used for overflow parking, is expected to become a community garden with a gazebo.

The corner lot directly across the street from the Farmer's Market has been purchased by the town and, Madden says, it will be used for parking.

The airport renovations is another exciting project for the small town. The new taxiway planned at the airport will extend air capability. Madden announced the project, which is being funded by \$1.1 million in grants, should be completed in 2018.

Madden and Cox also detailed the upcoming renovations of the old Jessup building. Hurricane Matthew significantly damaged the old Emergency Responders building. The Town has since received a grant around \$2.5 million from the Golden Leaf Foundation to fund renovations.

The work will result in a shared space for both the Emergency Responders and the Firefighters. The old rescue squad building will not be able to be used due to all the damage done by Hurricane Matthew. The building currently being used by the Fire Department will be used for the Public Works office once the shared space is available for the Emergency Responders.



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# Pets are treasured in Bladen County

Pets are an important life to many in Bladen County. Two animal hospitals, two animal shelters, many rescuers, volunteers, and pet owners work hard to make Bladen County a great place for furry and feathered friends.

Dr. Norfleet Midyette, founded the Bladen Animal Hospital in 1953 and was a beloved Veterinarian working hard for the animals of the county. He came up with the Rabies Clinics to help keep rabies down in Bladen County. The rabies clinics still carry on today.



The Bladen County Animal Shelter was named after Dr. Midyette in 2011. He was a veterinarian for over 50 years and even served on the Bladen County Board of Health. After he passed in 2013 Dr. Sheila Hanby took over at the Bladen Animal Hospital in Elizabethtown. She says she aims to uphold the same values as Dr. Midyette did during his time.

Dr. Hanby has held free rabies clinics and collected monetary and product donations for the local animal shelter. Karen Suggs, the manager of Bladen County Animal Shelter, is very appreciative of the donations.

Suggs has worked at the shelter for seven and half years. The building was remodeled and hopefully will soon have an exercise area for dogs according to the Bladen County Animal Control Advisory Board members.

The cost to adopt a dog is \$50 and \$40 to adopt a cat which includes the animal's first required shots. The adoption hours at the shelter are Monday to Friday at 12:00 noon until 5:00 p.m. Donations of dog food, treats, toys, and cat litter are accepted by the shelter.

Last but not least, Dr. Douglas Genesel and the staff at Elizabethtown Veterinary Hospital work alongside the local non-profit, A Shelter Friend, providing Spay and Neuter Clinics. In 2017, the group celebrated their seventh year providing the clinics.



# Bladenboro stays busy

By: Charlotte Smith

The annual Spring Flings, Fun Days, and Beast Feasts are only a few of the things Bladenboro is known for by citizens all around. The Town of Bladenboro along with Boost the Boro, Inc. and the North Carolina Department of Commerce are working together to develop a five year strategic plan according to John O'Daniel.

The town's economic development growth is important to many according to Don White, President of the Boost the Boro, Inc., a local non-profit. According to the reports the Beast Fest, Spring Fling and Fun Days have had record breaking years recently.

Last year in 2017 the Bladenboro Historical Society threw a large celebration in honor of the Farm Life School Centennial and 25 years of the Fun Day event. The day was a huge success with the day starting with the Bladenboro Rotary Club Pancake Breakfast. There was plenty of food, drinks, rides, games, and visits to all the museums.

The Town Museum, Art Museum, Craft Museum, Military Room, Genealogy Room, and the Bladenboro High School Trophy and School Museums were all on display. According to Ricky Walters the school's initial cost of constructing the building in 1917 was \$35,000.

Currently the citizens are not just working on the strategic plan for economic development. The Farmer's Market will be alive with farmers soon. The Bladenboro Historical building offers a trip back in history and a place for artists to showcase their work. Last but not list, Boost the Boro members are planning the next Spring Fling. When you are wanting something to do, check Bladenboro because they always have something to offer.



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## Events you should not miss

Below are honorable mentions of events going on in Bladen County. However, for a complete list visit [BladenOnline.com](http://BladenOnline.com) and check out our Events page.

### January 2018

**Jan. 15 :** Dr. Martin Luther King Junior Parade, Downtown Elizabethtown. This year's parade was said to have been the biggest in the parade's history according to some.

**Jan. 21:** Lu Mil Vineyard held their annual Lu Mil Bridal Show. Over 125 brides registered for the event. Guests had the chance to learn about the services offered by the vendors at the show

### March 2018

**March 3:** If you love games such as Texas Hold'em, Roulette or Craps, then the second annual Casino Night should be the perfect opportunity to put your strategies to a test. The Casino Night is planned for Saturday, March 3, at Cape Fear Vineyard and Winery and tickets cost \$50 each.

**March 23 & 24:** The 26th annual Old Fashioned Planter's Day is scheduled for Friday, March 23, and Saturday, March 24, at the Graham farm in Ammon. Gates will open at 9 a.m. each day. On Friday night,

there will be a Chicken and Rice Dinner and cost is a donation. A museum is now open. There will be a saw mill, hit and miss engines, old tractors, live music, food and drinks and much more. There will be Country and Gospel singing both Friday and Saturday nights. There will also be crafts vendors, children's games and rides, antique farm equipment and primitive tool displays and horse drawn equipment on display. A Blacksmith will also be on site and there will be a swap meet. Admission is by donation and all proceeds go towards college scholarships, fire and disaster victims, needy families and the Ammon Volunteer Fire Department. The Graham Farm is located at 9252 Old Fayetteville Road, Garland. For vendor and entertainment information, contact Rebecca Haircloth at 910-978-0456 or via email at refrn4@yahoo.com.

## April 2018

**April 28:** The Kelly Spring Festival is planned for Saturday, April 28, 2018, at the Kelly Ballpark in Kelly. The event will kick off with a parade at 10 a.m. Parade entrants are asked to line up on Cassius Smith Road beginning at 9:30 a.m. The parade will travel down NC 53 towards the Kelly ball field. The North Tower Band will offer a variety of music beginning at 11 a.m. The band plays a variety of Top 40, beach music, funk and oldies. In addition to the band, there will be various food and craft vendors available. Come out and join us for beach music, bounce houses, crafts, raffles and food along with lots of family fun! For more information contact us at Kellyvolunteerfiredepartment@gmail.com

## May 2018

**May 19:** The 40th annual White Lake Water Festival will be a lot of fun this year. Check out our article on page 29 or their ad on page 8 for all the details. The White Lake Water Festival is the 3rd weekend in May every year.

## June 2018

**June 2:** The annual Ammon Blueberry Festival is always a hit. The day kicks off with a pancake breakfast offered by the Ammon Volunteer Fire Department and then a parade follows. Live entertainment is offered all day. Food, drinks crafts and more are always enjoyed at the day of celebration.

**June 26:** Sunset James "Alive after Five" kicks off. There will be three concerts in all with some really great bands at Goldston's Beach in White Lake. Check out page page 15 for more information.

## Some events to remember to check [BladenOnline.com](http://BladenOnline.com) for details are:

**Bladen We Care:** Dates are to be announced. There is usually a dance, live and silent auctions and a golf tournament.

**Bladenboro Spring Fling:** The date is to be announced but there will be a lot of food, entertainment and crafts for all to enjoy.

**Cycle NC:** Cycle NC is coming back through Bladen County this year. Check with the Elizabethtown-White Lake Chamber of Commerce or [BladenOnline.com](http://BladenOnline.com) for more information.

**Summer Sounds:** Summer Sounds starts in July. Check page 11 for the details.

# White Lake Water Festival Celebrates It's Past Present and Future

Written By: Tonya Bockover

Contributed photos by: Bill Watson

The White Lake Water Festival will mark it's 40th year this May.

Thought by many to be the start of the summer season, the Water Festival can trace it's roots back to 1967 to the now extinct North Carolina Blueberry Festival. The Blueberry Festival was a state wide event that had a pageant and exciting parade. Bill Watson of Carolyn's Court, a resort on White Lake, fondly remembers some of the big name Grand Marshals that the Blueberry Fest had, such as David Soul from the hit TV show Starsky & Hutch. "I also remember David Hartman as a Grand Marshal", states Watson.



Another a big part of the Blueberry Festival were the ski shows held on the lake. According to Cathy Kinlaw, local historian and author, the Blueberry Festival gave local skiers the chance to show off their skills to the crowd. The last Blueberry Festival was held in 1973.

In 1978, the White Lake Area Chamber of Commerce brought a new festival back to White Lake. The new Festival was christened the White Lake Water Festival, the festival we know today. The early festivals were centered, once again, around the ski shows.

Many events were added along the way, such as a 10K race and firefighter's tournaments only to be dropped as new events emerged. "Those events will not be seen at this year's festival", states Dawn Maynard, Executive Director of the Elizabethtown-White Lake Chamber of Commerce. Maynard says many new events will be added this year, such as a volleyball tournament and a K-9 fashion show.

Maynard says she has also increased the vendors from 12 to 75 that will be offering their wares at this year's festival. Maynard also was proud to say that they are adding a golf tournament on May 17th. The golf tournament will be held at Vineyard Golf at White Lake. "We are looking for someone to Grand Marshal this year's parade who has strong ties to the first festival in 1978", says Maynard. She says if anyone has any suggestions, please contact the Chamber office.

As for the future of White Lake Water Festival, Maynard only sees the event getting stronger and growing bigger each year. "Because the festival is so important as a kick off to the summer tourist season for both White Lake and Elizabethtown, it is crucial that folks embrace it and help it grow", says Maynard. She says one of her concerns is that the same group of volunteers has been on the committee year after year. She thinks it is time to get some new faces and fresh blood in, to learn from the seasoned committee members.

The White Lake Water Festival is held May 19, hope to see you there.

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## East Arcadia Senior Center houses history, fond memories

EAST ARCADIA – On a display hanging on a wall in the East Arcadia Senior Center there are some old photographs displayed that give one a glimpse into what life was like in the early days of the community.

The photographs depict life in East Arcadia from the 1940s and 1950s and were taken by Photographer Mack Munn. The Lower Bladen Columbus Historical Society and the UNC-Wilmington Public History Program teamed up to research the photos and create a traveling exhibit and other educational programs.

The building itself is unique in that it once served the community as a school. When asked how the community felt about the school, Dr. Delilah Blanks said, “They took advantage of it.”

She added the members of the community took pride in themselves and the community though times were often hard.

“They didn’t have indoor plumbing. They took baths on Saturday. They had big iron pots outside to heat the water with and they made their own lye soap. They believed in the church,” said Blanks.

She said in 2006 a movement took place to bring the garbage out of Myrtle Beach and some people wanted to convert the senior center site to a landfill.

“We had to do some work to keep that thing from coming here,” said Blanks.

The senior center offers the community several programs. They include but are not limited to serving as a nutrition site; lunches are served Monday through Friday at 11 a.m.; they can play games, watch movies and take part in other activities.

Blanks said that food is prepared off site and brought to the senior center each day. A grant also provides personal hygiene items and food.

Blanks said the senior center recently experienced the passing of three of its members.

She added that she takes seriously her role as an advocate for the community.

Blanks said, “I try to be an advocate. I believe in our Bladen County people. We try to take what little we do have and make the most out of it.”

Blanks public service does not end there.

She said, “I taught at UNC Wilmington for 22 years. I started the social work program over there. When I started there was only one program. It has really grown. It’s internationally recognized. I recruit for Chapel Hill.”

Blanks has a Masters degree in Social Work and doctoral degree from UNC Chapel Hill in Health Education.





## Bladen County citizens help impact the world

From West Bladen High School Principal setting the example on a mission trip in Moldova to the McElveen sisters helping with a spay and neuter clinic in Granada, Nicaragua Bladen County citizens are making a difference all over the world.

Bladen County citizens in the photos:  
Peggy and Reagan Hester, Moldova  
Joe Jackson, Moldova  
Tavonda and Freddrianna McElveen  
Tanner Allen in Haiti.

Katie Galyean Casamassa in Uruguay





Athletics has a profound effect on our community. It bridges gaps, brings people together and can be life altering. Our athletes and coaches help make Bladen County a wonderful place. Check out [BladenOnline.com/Sports](http://BladenOnline.com/Sports) for all your local sports news from our sports writer, John Clark. We now offer a college sports page as well.



# Wisdom from 100 years in the life of Ms. Mae Ola Hair Melvin Sheridan

By Erin Smith

One Bladen County resident has seen many changes in her 100 years of life. During that time, she saw the effects of the Great Depression first-hand and saw many modern conveniences as they were invented. Her favorite thing to do is sewing.

Mae Ola Hair Melvin Sheridan's long life has given her much wisdom. She says two things to always remember: Always tell the truth no matter how bad the situation may be and don't complain about troubles or you ups and downs. Complaining only fertilizes the problem and makes it grow.

Mrs. Sheridan was born on January 5, 1918, in the community of Beaver Dam in Cumberland County and recently celebrated her 100th birthday. Her parents were Troy Adkin Hair and Lizzie Jane Avery. She was the fifth of five children born to the couple. Mrs. Sheridan had eight brothers and sisters. Her grandparents were slaves.

She attended school at The McClemore School until she reached the eighth grade. She married Richard Melvin in 1936 and they moved to Bladen County in 1937. They were married for nine years before Mr. Melvin passed away.

She then married William Thomas Sheridan and that marriage lasted 50 years. They had one daughter, Ruth Helen, who passed away in 1987 and four grandchildren, six great-grandchildren and four great-great-grandchildren.

Mrs. Sheridan has faithfully attended First Baptist Church of Elizabethtown since 1939. She has served as Usher, Sunday School teacher to early teens, Cafeteria staff, and a Senior Choir member. Her favorite scripture is "Do unto others and you would have them do to you."

Mrs. Sheridan also worked in the Bladen County Schools for a total of 32 years. She believed in hard work and worked at the Elizabethtown School as a Cafeteria Cook/Pastry Maker, at the Bladen County Training School (Bladen Middle School) as a Custodian, Bladen County Hospital as a cook, Kemp's Cleaners performing sewing and alterations, and was a farmer's wife for 57 years.

Some thing she says she thought she would never see: her 100th birthday, integration of public schools, first time voting around 1950, election fo the first black President, the benefits of modern conveniences (she said she came from an age of horse and buggy travel and the toilet tissue was a catalog), and modern medicine cures.

Mrs. Sheridan said out of fear she learned to pray and trust in the Lord for survival and to meet needs and she also said she has never seen the righteous be forsaken.



## Birthdays offer celebrations of the future

Births offer times of celebration for the future. Every year the first baby born in the year is celebrated.

Cape Fear Valley-Bladen Healthcare welcomed their first baby of the year 2018! Trashawna Melvin and Donald Mitchell, II welcomed Aisha Royalty Mitchell on Monday, January 1, at 7:55 p.m. weighing 6 pounds, 8 ounces. Dad says, "Her name means life, and we are thrilled!"

Aisha's siblings, Donald III, Takye, and Tyese are excited with the new addition to their family. Mom & Dad are very thankful for the wonderful nurses and all the staff at Cape Fear Valley-Bladen Healthcare – we are blessed. Aisha was delivered by Dr. Paul Spartzak.

In 2017, Cape Fear Valley-Bladen County Hospital finally welcomed their first baby of the year and she was worth the wait! Teddie and Joshua Hunt welcomed Maelyn Grace Hunt Saturday, January 7, at 7:53 a.m. weighing 7 pounds, 8 ounces and measuring 22 inches in length.



Maelyn's paternal grandparents are Raymond & Michelle Kinlaw and maternal grandparents are Ted & Dee Dee McKee. The Hunts said that everything went better than they could have ever expected and they are very thankful for the wonderful nurses and doctors at Cape Fear Valley- Bladen Healthcare. Maelyn was delivered by Dr. Allan Boruszak.

The Hunts were the first family to take part in the Expectant Mothers Program which started January 2017. This includes a diaper bag full of the essentials, a steak dinner or sibling party before the new family heads home and a new car seat.



## 100 years of life defined by hard work

By Erin Smith

A lot of changes have occurred over the past 100 years including landing a man on the moon. For Prudie Strickland Waddell, who turned 100 years old on December 5, 2017, hard work has defined her life.

Mrs. Waddell was born in Columbus County on December 5, 1917 to Volly and Alice Strickland. She was one of nine children and one brother, Everett Strickland, who is still living. She married Paul Waddell and they initially resided on a farm in Columbus County. The couple moved to Savannah, Georgia, in 1945. The couple had a son, Jimmy Waddell, who passed away, and a daughter, Mildred Cummings and several grandchildren.



Mrs. Waddell said she resided in Savannah for 66 1/2 years and worked at Tetley Tea and at the shrimp plant before retiring. She attended Trinity United Methodist Church in Savannah for 65 years. Mrs. Waddell used to love to walk to her favorite places in Savannah.

When asked what her secret to a long life is, Mrs. Waddell initially said, “I don’t know.” After some thought, she volunteered she likes watching television and enjoys eating fish. She was also a very hard worker. Mrs. Waddell said her favorite television shows are Wheel of Fortune and the 700 Club. She also enjoys playing Bingo and attending the worship services with the other residents of Elizabethtown Healthcare and Rehabilitation Center.

Mrs. Waddell returned to her native North Carolina 10 years ago.

## Success at Bladen Community College

Bladen Community College was established as Bladen Technical Institute on October 5, 1967. It formally opened on December 16, 1967, and offered a limited number of classes by January 1968 in rented buildings in Elizabethtown.

In 1969 a site was secured near Dublin, N.C. that would become the main campus of the College. The College was fully accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools in the fall of 1976. The College added a center in the Kelly Community in 1975. This 5.25 acre campus was deeded to the college by the Bladen County Board of Education. In 1995 the college opened a center in the East Arcadia community.

A health education building was completed in 1997 to house the practical nursing, nursing assistant, and biological sciences, as well as other health and medical-related courses offered through the continuing education department.



Today the college has a thriving nursing program. Last year a partnership between the College and Cape Fear Valley Healthcare was established to assist dedicated nursing students succeed and have a job at the time of graduation.

Another program to note at the local higher learning establishment is the welding program. Savannah Doyle Schmidt, a non-traditional student is a shining example of the great opportunities the local community college offers students and the local businesses.

In May of 2017, Schmidt won second place in Job Skills Presentation at the national SkillsUSA competition in Louisville, Kentucky. The national SkillsUSA competition is the world’s largest showcase of skilled trades. More than 15,000 students, teachers, education leaders, and representatives from 600 national corporations, trade associations, businesses and labor unions participate in the event.

The SkillsUSA experience encourages professional growth and creative expression. While Schmidt does not consider herself to be an artist, she does enjoy working with metal.

“The fusion of metals is very fascinating, and seeing what you are creating through your shield is sometimes unbelievable,” she stated. “I have come to love and enjoy everything about it.”

.....Continued on page 37



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## A small rural town still thrives

By: Erin Smith

Time seems to stand still in the town of Dublin. The pace of life in the small town is slow and relaxed on most days. That wasn't always the case according to Marie Storms, David Hursey and Jane Carroll.

Dublin was once a bustling town with a set of train tracks and numerous businesses. One curiosity is how the town got its name. David Hursey said, "I'm told that the wife of the engineer with the railroad was from Ireland and she was homesick. So he allowed her to name the train stops along the way and she named them for places in Ireland." Hence the names of communities such as Dublin, Duart, etc.

At one time, there was a train stop in Dublin. Hursey said he could recall being a young child and the railroad had a spur that went to the peanut plant. Hursey said the train would regularly deliver rail cars to the plant and back them onto the spur.

When asked what the biggest asset to the town is, Jane Carroll immediately said, "The Peanut Festival." The Peanut Festival was begun as an effort to raise funds to build a gym/multi-purpose building for the Dublin School. According to Carroll, at the time there was no gym and the students had to go outside unless there was inclement weather. In 1992, a group of citizens came together and discussed the issue and met with the Board of Education. An agreement was reached and in September 1993 the first Peanut Festival was held. It was deemed a success and the gym was completed five years later.

Today, the Peanut Festival continues to grow and be successful. The Peanut Festival Committee now issues college scholarships to high school seniors to assist them with college and supporting the community.



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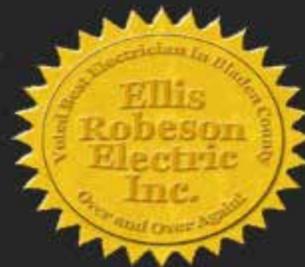
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Schmidt has been awarded the North Carolina Space Grant Community College Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Scholarship. In May of 2018, Schmidt will receive both an Associate Degree of Applied Science in Welding Technology and an Associate Degree of Applied Science in General Occupational Technology from Bladen Community College.



Bladen Community College presently offers 18 curriculum programs as well as occupational and vocational courses through the Continuing Education Department.

In January of this year the President of the College, Dr. William Findt announced he would be retiring in January 2019. Dr. Findt said his time spent at Bladen Community College has been both successful and rewarding. He added the faculty and staff he has had the privilege of working with all have the best interests of the students at heart.

Bladen Community College celebrated its 50th anniversary during Dr. Findt's tenure as President. The school marked the occasion with various events including a talent show, the burial of a time capsule, a walking challenge, a concert and other activities.

Bladen Community College is preparing to construct two new classroom buildings—one is a Continuing Education building and the second will be a STEM classroom building. The buildings will provide needed laboratory space as well as classroom space. There will also be space for classes dealing with machining.

Bladen Community College has entered into a partnership with Bladen County Schools to create Bladen Early College. The early college will be housed on the campus of Bladen Community College and will allow students to study on the campus as well as completing their required high school credits. When they graduate, the early college students will have both an Associates degree and a high school diploma.

The College is also preparing to begin the process of creating a new 10-year Master Plan, said Dr. Findt. This process will help to establish goals and objectives for the upcoming decade for the board.



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