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From Cheerwine to real wine, millwork to farm work, it’s all homegrown.

That’s one way to describe this section, the Salisbury Post’s third annual “Spirit of Rowan.”

Inspired by the “Be an Original” theme of the county’s rebranding campaign, we decided to take a look at the goods and products that have roots in Rowan soil — literally and figuratively.

We didn’t have to look far. Agriculture has always played a vital role in our rural community. This section includes stories on some of the newer twists.

The wine industry, for example, is a relative newcomer here, and it is thriving, as Deirdre Parker Smith writes in “Wines & vines.”

On the livestock front, Lee and Domisty Menius have plugged into the rising interest in animals raised in real pastures — “Fresh and local,” as the headline on that story says.

More than a third of the county’s acreage is farmland, and raising crops on that land is a little like a lottery, reporter Josh Bergeron learned. Find out more in “Golden harvest.”

Custom millwork from Salisbury can be found in some of the finest buildings in the state, thanks to the high standards of the folks at Goodman Millwork. Susan Shinn Turner shares their story in “Family affair.”

Bubbly and sweet, Cheerwine is one of Salisbury’s proudest claims to fame. With the fifth generation now involved, the company is celebrating “100 years of cheer.” Susan Shinn Turner tells their story.

Another kind of beverage is spawning new businesses here — craft beer. “Big things brewing” includes breweries and a new malt house, thanks to the reporting of Deirdre Parker Smith.

This county also produces college graduates. Rebecca Rider takes a look at two people who grew up in Rowan, attended Catawba College and went to work for the school system in “Homegrown.”

So goes the circle of life.

Consider this section a sampling of the countless good things that originate in Rowan County — and people who take pride in being homegrown.

— Elizabeth Cook
Editor
Wines & vines
Grapes have brought a new kind of business to Rowan.

Fresh and local
Wild Turkey Farms takes local food to new market.

Golden harvest
Row crop farming remains a vital industry for Rowan County.

Family affair
Goodman Millwork knows one way to do things.

100 years of cheer
Cheerwine: Born in Salisbury, raised in a glass.

Big things brewing
Craft breweries and malt house help boost local scene.

‘Homegrown’
Local educators work with their former schools.

Advertising index

Contents
Grapes have brought a new kind of business to Rowan

Written by DEIRDRE PARKER SMITH | Photography by JON C. LAKEY
Wine has become a part of Rowan County’s economy, as it has all over the state, with more than 100 wineries and even more vineyards.

Growing grapes, producing wine and opening a tasting room brings in locals as well as tourists, creating a destination that also attracts other businesses.

Raising muscadines or European grapes is a way for smaller family farms to diversify, says William “Biff” Yost of Cauble Creek Vineyard at 700 Cauble Farm Road, off N.C. 150.

In the case of Cauble Creek, which is surrounded by other crops, the muscadine vines have allowed the farm to produce a specialty crop that brings visitors from all over the state, country and even the world.

For Amie Baudoin, who, with her husband, Tommy, owns Morgan Ridge Vineyards and Brewhouse at 486 John Morgan Road in Gold Hill and Morgan Ridge Railwalk Brewery and Eatery at 421 N. Lee St. in Salisbury, grapes are a part of the entertainment business.

“We see it as an opportunity to bring people together,” Amie Baudoin says of their vineyard and brewery. “We look at it as something we enjoy and want to let others do the same thing.”

Amie and Tommy were told Amie’s family’s land in the Gold Hill area was not suitable for growing vinifera, or European grapes. The soil would work for muscadines, but not the harder-to-grow varieties they wanted to plant.

But both of them believed it would work. Their vineyard on a hill is touched by the sun for most of the day, and the hill improves drainage down the slope. They first planted grapes in 2004 and have produced wines for years.

Yost says the variation in soils, elevation and microclimates allows favorable growth of a number of varieties of grapes that are distinguished in taste and aroma and do well both in the fresh market and wine markets. He grows several different varieties of muscadines. He also grows soybeans, wheat, corn and hay and has a small fishing pond on his land.

“We were ambitious enough and like
challenges and we knew it would reward us in the end,” Amie Baudoin says of their decision to plant a vineyard and open a winery. “We were trying to keep up with the economy, the trends, what consumers will spend money on, what is the up-and-coming draw. We hope the wine industry stays steady along with the craft beer industry and make sure we are giving them some of the things to come.”

Both Yost and the Baudoins have benefitted from increased visitors from all over. Yost thinks that public awareness of vineyards and wineries has helped, as well as the state agricultural and tourism departments.

Agritourism, as it’s called, is becoming a larger part of the economy, and as the wine industry grows, so do visitors. Both the Baudoins and the Yosts agree that one winery is good in an area, but two or more are better. “It gives people a place to visit,” Amie Baudoin says. People can plan a trip to visit Morgan Ridge, Cauble Creek and Old Stone Winery on U.S. 52 near Granite Quarry.

Yost says promoting your brand pays off when customers appreciate what is raised and produced locally. More customers mean better sales and profits.

Above: Three Weimaraners work hard to rid the vineyard of voles at Morgan Ridge. Left: Davis Almond places a bucket of grapes in the utility vehicle driven by Tommy Baudoin at Morgan Ridge in Gold Hill.
The tasting rooms and properties of the wineries also bring in diverse customers. As Yost puts it, “Every tasting room in the state is like an unopened bottle of wine, an unknown adventure or vacation where one may explore new products while being both excited and relaxed at the same time.”

While Morgan Ridge has already become a wedding venue with a pavilion for receptions or concerts, a gazebo by the pond and changing rooms for the bride and groom, Yost at Cauble Creek has plans to expand.

He is a cautious businessman and now sees greater opportunities developing in aspects of his business. “Our immediate plans will be to increase our retail business hours (currently just weekends) and incorporate a broader range of N.C. produced dry wines while provided more exciting venues for weddings, receptions, Biff Yost of Cauble Creek Vineyard uses a refractometer to check the sugar levels of the muscadine grapes during the harvest at his vineyard off N.C. 150 in Salisbury.
special reserved tasting events, birthday parties, family reunions and corporate meetings.”

“We want to grow our business for people to fellowship together,” Amie Baudoin says. “We want people to think of our places for beer and wine, and for special events, entertainment, reunions.”

Once they established the vineyard, they saw that people needed a place to gather. “We’re in the middle of nowhere, but in the middle of everywhere, we just had to get them here. … Once you’re here, you can enjoy lunch, the pond, all that. We give people a reason to hang out for a few hours.”

Chef Jason Nain makes high quality, locally sourced food at the vineyard and collaborates on the food at the pub-like brewery.

Amie Baudoin grew up on a farm and was used to people coming to the door, interested in their products. From that point, she wanted to share her love for the land and the lifestyle. “I didn’t want to keep it to myself. I wanted to share it and bring people together.”

“Seeing people enjoy themselves is my reward” for the hard work of maintaining the vineyard, the winery, Railwalk brewery and eatery and a second tasting room in the village of Gold Hill.

“We consider our customers a part of our family and in turn, we hope that they consider us their family,” Yost says.
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Lee Menius throws hay into the sheep pen. Menius and his wife, Domisty, are owners of Wild Turkey Farms in China Grove. The couple have been farmers in the pasture-raised meat market for several years. They are preparing to open a butcher shop in the town of Davidson. The sheep are kept penned in the spring lambing time to make sure that the pregnant ewes birth in a more protected area.

Fresh and local

Wild Turkey Farms takes local food to new market

Written by ELIZABETH COOK | Photography by JON C. LAKEY
Lee Menius tosses hay into the sheep pen at Wild Turkey Farms. The flock gravitates in that direction, except for the sheep beside the fence. They’d rather stick their heads through the wire fencing to nibble hay piled up on the other side.

The hay is always tastier on the other side of the fence.

And, for Wild Turkey Farms of China Grove, business has become more inviting on the other side of the county line — in the greater Charlotte region.

About 15 years ago, Lee and Domisty Menius started working his family’s 50-acre farm on Old Cress Road with an eye toward tapping the local food movement. At first serving farmers markets and clients who came to the farm, they sold beef, poultry, honey and vegetables grown on the farm where Lee grew up.

Through the years, they experimented with different crops and livestock — goats, rabbits, turkey, geese, ducks, assorted vegetables and mushrooms. What didn’t work well was phased out.

Now they have narrowed their offerings to pasture-raised pork and lamb and eggs from pasture-raised chickens. For the time being.

Wild Turkey Farms turned its focus away from farmers markets about two years ago. Now Lee trucks goods directly to retailers and restaurants whose chefs insist on fresh, local food. Other than Sweet Meadow in downtown Salisbury, most clients are in the Charlotte area.

Wild Turkey’s biggest change is taking shape off Interstate 77 in the town of Davidson, where Lee and Domisty are preparing to open a butcher shop, Carolina Craft Butchery. It will feature natural and pasture-raised meats from Wild Turkey and other small farms.

The shop will be beside an organic juice bar and across from the Harris Teeter supermarket in Davidson Commons.

The Meniuses believe the demand is there.
Lee says people in the food business are encountering more and more customers who are educated about food sources, cook for themselves or a restaurant and want the highest quality.


The sheep bleat their hellos and complaints. Baa-baa. Baaaaaa.
At the moment, the pen holds about 30 sheep ranging from 10-day-old lambs to ewes ready to give birth. Much of the year they graze out in the field, but Lee doesn’t want to risk losing newborn lambs.

These Katahdin and Dorper sheep grow hair. Lee says the farm started with wool sheep, but he hated shearing.

Domisty pets Pickles and points to Goody, sheep she bottle-fed as lambs when their mothers rejected them. The Meniuses don’t name all their sheep, just the ones they bond with.

Lee and Domisty met when they were both studying animal science at N.C. State University. She had grown up in the Wilmington area; he had graduated from South Rowan
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Lee says he knew he would go into farming of some kind. When he graduated in 1996, though, returning to the farm that has been in his family since the 1800s was not the plan.

“At that time, small-scale, direct marketing was not on the radar,” he says.

High-volume, industrial farming dominated the food chain. Animals crowded into crates and pens were fattened up with growth hormones and synthetic feed. They died without ever roaming a pasture, eating grass or scratching the ground.

“Everything was quicker, better, faster, cheaper,” Lee says.

Eastern North Carolina’s struggle with hog farm waste lagoons helped open eyes to the environmental and animal-welfare aspects of these gigantic operations — aspects that aren’t pretty to people on the outside looking in, Lee says.

After college, he taught agriculture at Allegheny High School and began hearing about alternative agriculture. Working on a pasture-raised poultry project helped make him a believer.

Eventually, he went to work for the Center for Environmental Farming and started working the farm part time. His parents, Alan and Bunni Menius, and grandmother Hazel Menius still live on the farm. He and Domisty and their two boys live down the road.

Now Lee farms full time, and Domisty works for the Department of Transportation.

The locavore movement has grown exponentially in the last eight to 10 years, he says. Large producers such as Smithfield and Perdue have started touting the same claims as many small farmers, he says, such as antibiotic-free and sustainably...
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The local ABC Board has now taken it’s Drug & Alcohol awareness campaigns to over 100,000 students!
Row crop farming remains a vital industry for Rowan County.

Written by JOSH BERGERON | Photography by JON C. LAKEY
Look up the deed for your property, pay your taxes, look at the map of the county and more!

www.RowanCountyNC.gov
As Phillip Sloop moved through soybean fields in his combine, a wealth of information lay at his fingertips. He could tell the moisture level of the soybeans, and the current and average yield of the field he was harvesting.

It’s not your grandpa’s combine.

But, as farmers have done for generations, Sloop was harvesting soybeans in western Rowan County. After finishing with one field, the combine lumbered across U.S. 70 — near the Iredell County line — to another field. With its 30-foot-wide cutter, the combine sliced soybean plants in a methodical pattern. Sloop monitored computer screens inside the combine as a hopper at the rear of the machine slowly filled with freshly harvested soybeans.

When it reached capacity, a green tube extended from the combine and poured a flood of soybeans into a nearby grain cart.

The 2016 soybean season for Darryl Corriher, Sloop and farmer Tom Hall, who are partners in company called C&H Grain LLC, wasn’t the best it’s been. It also wasn’t the worst. Just one year earlier, drought drastically reduced yields for a number of crops.

“It’s a little bit like playing the lottery,” Corriher joked as he
stood in a freshly cut field of soybeans.

That lottery is a sizable one.

In Rowan County, soybeans are one part of a row crop trio that dominates local agriculture. Others include corn and wheat. N.C. Department of Agriculture statistics show soybeans comprised 18,800 acres of farmland in 2015. Corn sits at 7,600 acres. Wheat comprised 7,300 acres in 2015. Altogether, there are 121,145 acres of farmland in the county. That’s more than a third of the total acreage of all land in the county.

“There are really a lot more agricultural acres than you might ever think about,” said Ben Knox, a local farmer who sits on the state’s soil and water commission.

Local farming operations generate millions of dollars annually in revenue and hundreds of millions of dollars in tax revenue. Once row crops get combined with other agriculture businesses, the result is a sizable industry.

“It makes up a substantial part of our economy in this area,” said Rowan County Extension Director Amy-Lynn Albertson. “I’ve seen estimates as high as 19 percent, and that’s pretty all encompassing, including feed stores and things that you might not immediately think of with agriculture.”

The 2012 census of agriculture found that local farming operations employed 1,076 workers. When compared to the list of employers that elected officials traditionally tout, agriculture would be the fifth-largest employer in the county, according to the latest statistics from Rowan-Works Economic Development.

Compared to other businesses, farming offers a notable benefit, Knox said.

“You don’t have to run water and sewer lines and provide other services,” he said. “All you need is a certain amount of open space.”

Once that open space serves its purpose and crops are harvested, the products of local agriculture don’t often make their way overseas. Corriher says C&H Grain LLC sells corn to mostly local mills. There’s a crush mill in Kershaw, S.C., that the company sells soybeans to. Still, products of local agriculture mostly stay in the country.

The rapid pace of technological change is one major change in local agriculture in recent years. Extension agents in Rowan County, for example, recently applied for a grant to obtain drones. Other changes have led to large increases in crop yields. In the 1920s, local farmers expressed excitement when the first combine could produce 35 bushels per acre of wheat, Albertson said. Corriher says the local, modern average for wheat is about 60 bushels per acre.

No-till technology is another important advancement for agriculture, Corriher said. The practice involves growing crops without tilling the soil. Simply put, no-till farming makes better use of rain and slows the degradation of equipment, he said.

“No-till has really saved Piedmont agriculture in terms of making us more efficient and giving us the opportunity to compete in the world market,” Corriher said.

Knox noted other benefits to no-till farming — it results in less erosion. Because erosion is reduced, streams stay cleaner, too, Knox said.

Even as a rural county that’s inching toward becoming more metropolitan, Rowan County still ranks near the top of the state for row crop production. The 2012 census of agriculture placed the county in among the top 30 for soybean, corn and wheat production. In other categories, Rowan ranks even higher. It’s in the top 10 for fruits, tree nuts and berries, and milk from cows.

The state of agriculture in Rowan County ranks highly in another area, too. It contains one of the state’s 18 agricultural research stations. The Rowan County location is known as the Piedmont Research Station. Established originally as the Piedmont Test Farm, the local station conducts crop and livestock research. It also reports weather data to the State Climatology Office.

“It’s a great opportunity for us as extension agents to do research, applied research, because that’s what we’re about, taking stuff straight to a grower to use,” Albertson said. “What happens at our research station is even better because we can say ‘This is Rowan County and this is the Piedmont and we know the result of this research will work here.’”
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FAMILY AFFAIR

Goodman Millwork knows one way to do things

Written by SUSAN SHINN TURNER | Photography by WAYNE HINSHAW
Benjamin and Nicholas Goodman remember growing up at Goodman Millwork, tearing across the shop floor on Big Wheels, tossing the football around outside — and throwing rocks at each other. Nicholas Goodman bears a scar over his left eye as proof.

That was a while back, of course. Now, the brothers are preparing to lead their family business into its fourth generation — a rarity these days.

After the housing market collapse in 2008, the company — which still builds homes from time to time — changed direction, finding its niche in custom millwork for high-end homes. Franco Goodman, their father, says that being flexible is nothing new to the 107-year-old company.

“We were the big box store before there were big box stores,” he explains.

The focus is now solely on architectural millwork — any type of wooden finishes for interiors or exteriors. They had also

Story continues on page 36.
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Transitional Living Program

Purpose: North Carolina has undergone major changes in many youth welfare systems. This program ensures that families and children are provided with the tools and support needed to transition into the child welfare system. Nazareth Child & Family Connection has implemented a transitional living program for at-risk youth. The program is designed to provide a safe environment for children and youth to learn and grow. The program's goal is to help youth develop the necessary skills to succeed in the workforce and in their personal lives. The program consists of full-time staff who provide guidance and support to help youth achieve their goals. Youth are provided with opportunities to participate in community activities and to develop social skills. The program is designed to be a short-term program of up to 9 months, with the goal of helping youth transition to independence. The program provides a structured environment that promotes healthy development and encourages youth to take responsibility for their lives.

Residential Level III

Purpose: The Residential Level III program is designed to address the needs of youth who have experienced trauma and adversity through the active creation of a community, Nazareth has a long proud history for every child, individual and family. In providing a safe and nurturing environment for children who, for various reasons, may stay in foster care for a short period of time or for several years. If a child cannot provide safe and nurturing homes for children who, for various reasons, may stay in foster care for a short period of time or for several years. If a child cannot live with their parents, temporary homes for children who, for various reasons, may stay in foster care for a short period of time or for several years. If a child cannot live with their parents or family, they are referred to the program. The program is designed to help children develop the necessary skills to succeed in the workforce and in their personal lives. The program consists of full-time staff who provide guidance and support to help children achieve their goals. Children are provided with opportunities to participate in community activities and to develop social skills. The program is designed to be a short-term program of up to 9 months, with the goal of helping children transition to independence. The program provides a structured environment that promotes healthy development and encourages children to take responsibility for their lives.
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been heavily involved in the furniture industry, building a large number of showrooms. Other projects now fill that gap.

The brothers don’t think about the history of their company on a daily basis. Nicholas Goodman admits, “I don’t know anything else.”

“The microscope is always gonna be on you,” says Benjamin Goodman, who joined the company in 2001 and for the past decade has served as plant manager. “Being the boss’ son comes with its own set of challenges. Everybody already has an opinion on who you are and why you are here. Expectations are higher for family, and the employee-employer relationship is different.”

Benjamin Goodman acknowledges that family members do treat one another differently throughout the 15-member operation. “It doesn’t help that we Goodmans are notoriously stubborn, so you do have to have a thick skin. But the satisfaction is mostly worth the sacrifice.”

The two wear a lot of hats, he continues. “Some days, I push paper with computer work. But other days, I’m out there with my hands on the wood, doing what needs to be done, just like everybody else.”

Nicholas Goodman oversees the company’s construction division. He heads the myriad small projects for homeowners. One recent day had him finishing a portico for a Salisbury family and scheduling an estimate for a master-bedroom closet.

Out in the shop, the expansive room was filled with a single job — cabinetry, a large island, and other kitchen and household storage pieces for a 4,000-square-foot home in Columbia, S.C., recently damaged by flooding. Yet there was also a single floating shelf for another client, made from beautiful reclaimed wood.

“I see the stuff we’ve made, and there is a ‘wow factor’ to it,” Goodman says.

Most of the company’s business is by word of mouth. Leads also come through the company’s impressive website, goodmanmillwork.com. Its specialty is residen-
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tial work, and commercial leads tend to stem from that.

Local commercial jobs have included St. John’s Lutheran, First Methodist and First Presbyterian churches, the John Steele House, Henderson Law Office, Rowan Public Library’s old well and First Citizens Banks throughout North Carolina and Virginia. The company has worked with the Carolina Inn in Chapel Hill for some 25 years, through its long-term, multiphase expansion.

They’ve done quite a bit of work at mountain resorts, in the second or third homes of existing customers. In town, the company has made doors and windows for Catawba College’s renovation of its residence halls and Goodman Gym. Yet more than 90 percent of its work takes place out of town, and indeed, all over the country.

Even with a company founded more than a century ago, you can’t just hang your hat on that, Benjamin Goodman says. “You still have to prove yourself every time,” his father adds.

As their dad has experienced with wife Brenda, the younger Goodmans, too, have the full support of their wives. Nicholas and Jessica have two daughters; Benjamin and Kelly have a son and daughter.

“We’re both in it together,” Nicholas says. “She supports me and I support her. We both work. My job is not more important than hers.”

Benjamin Goodman adds, “Kelly’s father ran a business, too, so she knew a little bit about what was involved. We try to balance work with school plays, sports, and so forth, but this is true for all families whose parents work.”

At the core of the company’s operations are its employees, “good people who have made us what we are,” Goodman says. “We’re not lowering our standards to meet volume. We don’t know but one way to do things, and that’s the best way.”

The men say that customers bring in ideas, then affordability and design dictate the outcome. And it’s a one-stop shop — Goodman Millwork offers everything from designing to manufacturing to installation and finishing.

“You figure out what works and how it can work,” Nicholas Goodman says.


“The beautiful part of what we do is to create something unique and custom,” Goodman continues. “We always say that our products can last a lifetime if they’re taken care of properly. We’ve been very blessed to be here as long as we have and do the quality of work that we do. I take pride in that. It’s a big deal.”
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100 years of cheer
Cheerwine: Born in Salisbury, raised in a glass

Written by SUSAN SHINN TURNER | Photography by WAYNE HINSHAW
In 2017, Cheerwine soft drink is celebrating its 100th anniversary. It's a safe bet, however, that you won't find Cliff Ritchie kicked back at his desk drinking a bottle of Cheerwine.

“We'll see if we can do it again,” says Ritchie, president and CEO of Carolina Beverage Corp. and Cheerwine Bottling Co., who is guiding his family’s fifth generation in the business.

Ritchie and his wife, Amy, have three children. Their daughter, Joy Ritchie Harper, has been with the company for seven years and is now its director of marketing. Son Carl is a district manager, and their youngest son, Ben, is a student at University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

If you look around Salisbury — and indeed, the country — you’ll see few companies that have made it to the 100-year mark, still fewer that are still family owned.

Story continues on page 44.
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“I think we’re off the charts as far as the fifth generation,” Ritchie says. “I’ve heard that less than 2 percent of companies make it past the third generation.”

Ritchie’s great-grandfather, L.D. Peeler, started the company in 1917. His grandfather, Clifford Ritchie, led the company through the Depression and World War II. Ritchie’s father, Raymond Ritchie, spent his entire career there after serving in the Army.

“My great-grandfather would be pleased to see it’s lasted this long,” Ritchie says. “I don’t have any idea what his expectations were, but we do have a great sense of accomplishment and pride. We’ve been able to carry it on and pass it on to the next generation.”

“It’s exciting to be part of a family business,” Harper notes. Her father is entering his 40th year of service, but many of the company’s 450 employees have 10, 20, and yes, even 40 years of service.

“People have made their careers here,” she says.

“We’ve always had lots of long-term, lifetime employees,” Ritchie says, “and we owe a lot of our success to them.”

Those employees are spread over eight distribution centers — one of which is in Salisbury — in North Carolina and South Carolina. Beyond that, the company franchises its bottling operations, Ritchie says.

Cheerwine’s expansion started in the 1970s, when Ritchie and his brother, Mark, began working for the company. Mark Ritchie has since retired.

“My grandfather was happy to be a Piedmont Cheerwine distributor,” Cliff Ritchie explains, “but we had a desire to go beyond where we were comfortable. My grandfather ran the company through the Depression and World War II, and he became very conservative to survive through all that. We wanted...
to see where we could go, with his blessing. We always felt like the brand had a lot of potential to grow. We were young and we brought new energy.”

And grow it did. Cheerwine is now available in nearly all 50 states, and through specialty stores like World Market and Cracker Barrel. Each day, new customers discover Cheerwine.

“All ages, of course, drink Cheerwine,” Harper says, “but the millennial demographic is our core market. That’s who we talk to on social media, and they want to have a conversation with us. Our fans enjoy talking to us. There’s a sense of pride in the brand.”

Harper hopes these customers discover Cheerwine and become lifelong customers.

Harper doesn’t remember when she drank her first Cheerwine. It’s always been a part of her life, but she didn’t think about working for her family business until she went to college at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

“Something began to click, and I thought I might actually be interested in working for Cheerwine,” she says. “I became interested in the business world and in marketing, and I was glad to be able to join the company. I’m very proud to be working for Cheerwine. I never felt pressured that I had to.

“When I first came to work here, I wanted to show that I’m just like anyone else. I’m here to do the work. I started from the bottom. I didn’t feel any sense of entitlement.”

Neither did her father.

Ritchie worked at the company during the summers. “I did a lot of jobs nobody else would do. I did all types of things, and I didn’t think I’d want a career here. But like Joy said, you grow up, go to college and get a business degree, and you think about it differently and come back to it. It’s a great opportunity, there’s no question.”

In fact, Ritchie went to work for another soft drink company following graduation from Le- noir-Rhyne College and gained experience that way.

“Then my grandfather offered me a job,” he says. “It was a point where they needed me and asked me to come into the business and be manager of the Greensboro distribution center.”

Now, two of his three children have joined the family business.

“The reason it’s so rare is that you have to have the next generation that’s interested, and on top of that, they have to be capable,” Ritchie says. “That’s been our blessing.”

Cheerwine will host a 100th anniversary celebration on Saturday, May 20, in downtown Salisbury, complete with live music, a barbecue competition, children’s activities, and, of course, free Cheerwine.

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Aaron Goss, left, and Steve Bauk’s new malting facility is an exciting addition to the Rowan County landscape and is nearly operational. There are several uses for malt, but craft breweries will be a large part of the customer base.

Big things brewing

Craft breweries and malt house help boost local scene

Written by DEIRDRE PARKER SMITH | Photography by JON C. LAKEY
Rowan County’s craft beer industry seems as if it sprouted overnight. But it has a full head of foam now, with two craft breweries in downtown Salisbury and Carolina Malt House, a start-up that will provide malted grain locally and to craft beer makers throughout the state.

New Sarum Brewing renovated what was an old tractor dealership on Lee Street, behind the Gateway Building. Going from a dirt floor and bare brick walls, members of the Moscardini family and brewmaster Andy Maben envisioned a state-of-the-art, large capacity brewing system and a tap room, complete with plans to self-distribute their products.

Maben had been making beer in an office space next to Salty Caper, and the small system meant he was constantly brewing. Demand and a business plan grew.

The Moscardinis own Salty Caper here and in Concord and La Cava restaurant. Maben’s skills fit their idea of making a product that would appeal to more than diners in their restaurants and the audience at Lee Street theatre, where it was also served.

Edward Moscardini, the chief operating officer, joined his brother Gian and father Gianni to plan the best way to make their idea successful and profitable. Edward had been watching the craft brew industry taking a bite out of the macro-breweries, the name brand beers that dominate the supermarket shelves.

When the Moscardinis and Maben saw that growing market, they decided to move forward.

At about the same time, Tommy Baudoin, who had added craft brews to his local wine at Morgan Ridge Brewhouse and Vineyard, was looking to expand, with an eye on craft beers and a restaurant.

Leasing a building on Railwalk in downtown Salisbury from the Ketners, he, too, started with a dirt floor and bare bricks. Again, he determined to get the best equipment and expand on what was a tiny brewing operation at the vineyard.

When Morgan Ridge in Gold Hill developed a wedding venue at the vineyard, Baudoin found that most male guests would rather have beer than wine. He added craft brews to the menu and demand increased. He, too, was constantly brewing to meet demand.

He and wife Amie consider themselves part of the hospitality industry and wanted a way to bring more people together for a good time.

With 16 taps and brewmaster Nikki Koontz, Morgan Ridge Railwalk Brewery & Eatery opened to a steady stream of customers, as well as a place for special events.

On trend with the growing interest in beer, Aaron Goss and Steve Bauk conceived Carolina Malt House, a facility on the western edge of Rowan County where barley can be malted — processed for use in making beer — and customized to the brewer’s desires.

Both Baudoin and Maben make seasonal beers. Maben likes to experiment with flavors like mango and grits and his...
wildly popular Hurley Park blood orange wheat beer.

Bauk and Goss had other interests, but Goss liked to make beer; Bauk had been working in soft drinks. They first planned to make beer, but with all the breweries popping up, they rethought the plan.

“Aaron had malted his own barley to brew,” Bauk said. Rowan and its five surrounding counties are part of the state’s grain belt, with barley, wheat and rye growing.

“What we’re doing now,” Bauk says, “is one step in the supply chain. We can support every brewery in the state this way.”

He believes that as breweries become more competitive, they’ll need more and different malts to make their beer distinctive.

Bauk said much of the beer brewed in the state now uses malt imported from the Midwest, Canada and Europe. “It’s a very bulky
item to ship,” he says. And you can’t make beer without it. “It provides the fermentable sugar” that makes the alcohol. Malting, Bauk explains, exposes the energy in the grain.

Having a malt house that can customize and can save on transport costs should appeal to beer makers in North Carolina and to people who want to buy local. A beer brewed in North Carolina with grains from Canada is not local, Bauk says.

And the farther that malt has to travel, the more expensive it becomes. “Breweries would love to have all North Carolina grain in their beer,” Bauk says, but the supply is limited.

That’s the niche Carolina Malt House wants to fill. Bauk ticks off the advantages of its location: “We’re dead center in the middle of the state, the big cities are all within a short distance” and another malt house in Asheville uses a 100-year-old system for processing. It’s artisanal, but not fast and not consistent, Bauk says.

Carolina Malt House will be larger, able to produce a 22-ton batch.

The system is not complete, Bauk says, because they are taking their time and using the best equipment they can find.
Mandy Mills and Carlton Jackson are two educators who didn’t fall far from the tree. Born in Rowan County, both grew up calling the walls of still-standing schools home. They graduated from the same high school — even ran on the same track team — and when they set their sights on a college degree, both chose to attend Catawba College. And both found themselves working with the same schools they attended.

“I always said I was leaving but I never did,” Mills said.

Mills, 38, graduated from Salisbury High School in 1996. Before that, she attended Knox Middle School and Isenberg Elementary.

Now, she serves as the school system’s director of career and technical education, but she wasn’t always interested in school. Mills said that in high school she was always getting into trouble, and the assistant principal had her mother on speed dial.

After graduating from high school, Mills worked as a restaurant manager for Waffle House and IHOP in town. But soon, she began to desire a change, and signed up for night classes at Catawba.

Mills’ story is echoed by Jackson, who attended the same middle and high schools and also didn’t seek a career in education — it found him.

Jackson went to Catawba to study sociology after graduating from Salisbury High in 1994.
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But he married young and had a baby, so after earning his degree he got a job as a credit manager at a local Rent-A-Center. It didn’t take long for the daily grind of the job to wear him down.

“I said, ‘You know, I’m kind of stuck, I’m in a rut,’” he said.

After seeking advice from a local professor, Jackson applied for a job in the school system. He’d worked with handicapped adults while at Catawba, so he put in for a job teaching math and a Salisbury High EC class as a lateral entry teacher.

“And I loved it from day one,” he said.

Jackson took to teaching like a fish to water and said it was the first time he’d tried something that felt so natural.

But teaching at his old school was a strange experience. Jackson’s former high school principal, Windsor Eagle, was now his boss; and several of his former teachers were now his co-workers. But in a way, it was like coming home.

“Whether you know it or not, we’re family,” he said Eagle told him when he started.

And walking through campus, Jackson found he sometimes still thought of himself as a student.

“There were times where I was walking down the hall and the bell would ring and I would think, ‘Oh, I’m late for class,’” he recalls, laughing.

But he thought that perspective made him a better teacher.

“If I were sitting there, how would I want this to be taught to me, how would I want this to be presented to me,” he said he would think.

Jackson said he always tried to teach students good morals, to teach them about life and to help them socially and emotionally when he could. He wanted, he said, to instill hope in every child he came across.

“On any given day, any kid is going to give up,” he said, “and I didn’t want to be that factor.”

During his last year at Salisbury High, Jackson was named the school’s Teacher of the Year.

Mills’ life took a slightly different turn. After graduating from Catawba, she took a job working as a computer support specialist at North Rowan High School.

There, she realized her calling. “I feel like it’s all advantages,” she said of being local.

Now, she works with all the county high schools, managing programs that will lead students to direct employment or career certifications — hopefully with local businesses and companies.

“We want our students to stay here,” she said.

And it allows her to visit her old high school, walking the halls and dreaming of the classes and opportunities she could help bring to students who are, like she once was, trying to find their way in the world.

Jackson also chose to move up, hoping he could inspire adults, as well as children. Now he works as a compliance specialist in the district’s EC department, providing supports to teachers, principals, parents and students with disabilities.

He said he still runs into people he knows — old teachers, classmates and students.

“Why do you never leave? How are you still here?” he said they ask him.

Jackson smiles and said it’s taken him 40 years, but he’s finally learning how “rich” Salisbury is, now that he’s older. He loves the art, the opportunities, the colleges and the way the city has grown over the years.

“You’d be surprised by how beautiful your community is,” he tells them.

And now, he and Mills have woven themselves into that tapestry, inspiring the next generation of teachers, artists and dreamers.

“We’re homegrown,” he said, laughing.
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