

It Takes a Village ...

Creative Works Farm Makes Anything Possible



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CREATIVE WORKS FARM



From top: The makeshift 1950s village at Creative Works Farm features a pool hall, diner, gas station, general store, theater, barber shop, town hall and more. They were all built by founder Scott Balsley. Balsley said he's just a "big kid" who enjoys "making things that are fun and silly." Opposite top, from left: Camp LIGHT campers. The diner.

by Preston Knight, SVEC Writer

Search for Adaville, Virginia, on a map and you will come up empty.

The only way to find this tiny hamlet is to drive deep into the gated community along a gravel road, past a large barn on your left and swim complex off in the distance to your right. It's an unexpected spectacle of yesteryear, this 1950s-era village that has everything except humans.

There's a pool hall, diner, gas station, general store, theater, barber shop, town hall and, to literally top it off, a 14-foot-tall statue of a soda jerk keeping watch. If the whole place were to serve no greater purpose than to just exist, it would be one of the coolest spots in the Shenandoah Valley.

But it's much more than that.

Adaville is the main hub of the 160-acre Creative Works Farm outside of Waynesboro. Creative Works Farm doubles as the name of a non-profit organization that provides agricultural educational opportunities for anyone but primarily operates Camp LIGHT, which serves more than 150 children and adults with special needs each summer.

A carpenter by trade, Scott Balsley opened the farm and camp with his wife, Cathy, in 2014 and has progressively developed Adaville to be an integral part of both in the years since.

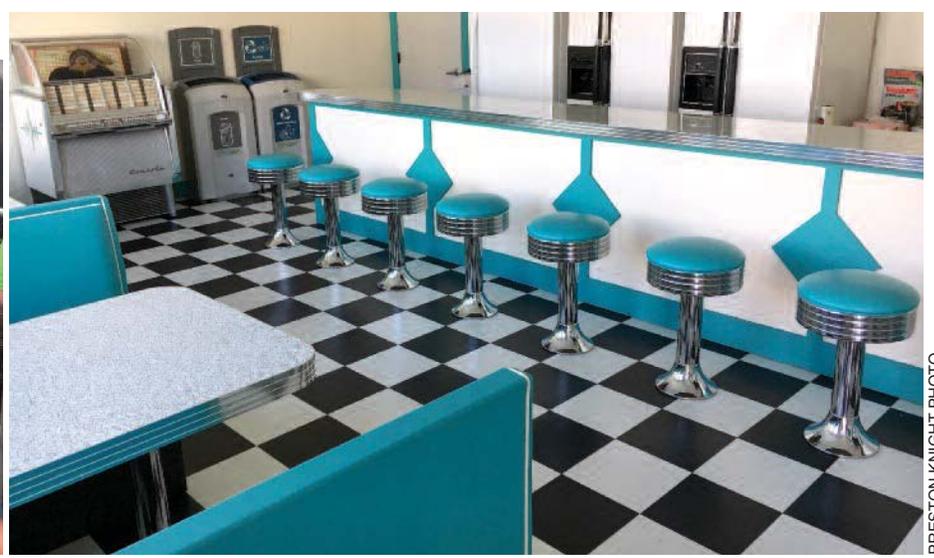
"Every building and every road, we built. It's been a true blessing," he said. "I'm just a big kid. I love being with the kids and hanging out with them, and hopefully making a small difference in their lives."

Camp LIGHT stands for "Love Inspire Give Hope Teach" and brings in youth ages 6-17 for weeklong experiences throughout the summer. An adult camp was introduced this year.

Children and adults with special needs are invited to attend the camp. More than half of them also have some level of behavioral diagnosis. This is one way in which Camp LIGHT shines.

"Some camps may not accept children with behavioral issues because it does change the dynamic, but we are fortunate to have counselors who understand how to work in these situations and how to help kids decompress," said Kelly Truxell, Creative Works' development director and Scott Balsley's sister. "It's important that the kids get to interact with others who are facing similar obstacles. They realize they are not so alone, and they build friendships with peers they wouldn't meet otherwise."

Most children attend the camp from within a 40-mile radius, though with long-term plans to host overnight camps, the reach will likely expand. At that point, Truxell said the number of campers served would be able to increase to about 600 a year.



PRESTON KNIGHT PHOTO

That's quite a jump considering the humble beginnings operating out of one bay of a three-bay garage on the property. Then again, you can't stop progress when a burgeoning town needs the space.

Home of Fun and Silly

The Balsleys purchased the property from a stranger named Walton Thompson, who agreed to donate 40 of the 160 acres and finance the rest. He then surprised everyone at Creative Works Farm's ribbon cutting in 2014 by announcing he would forgive any remaining debt and donate the entire property to the non-profit.

In creating Adaville, the Balsleys returned the favor, as best they could, to Thompson. Ada is the man's late wife, the general store is called Thompson's and the road through the makeshift town is Walton's Way.

"He calls us his children," Scott Balsley said of Thompson, who is now 97 and lives in Madison County. "His gift was such a huge thing for us."

Balsley and Truxell grew up in a home environment that they said stressed the importance of giving back and accepting others, especially children with special needs. Creative Works Farm is the byproduct of that upbringing, and Thompson's generosity accelerated their

ability to make it come to fruition.

It's hard not to direct your focus to Adaville, and it's difficult to imagine a more stunning gift for children and "big kids" alike to enjoy. The gas station has a "ring bell for service" button that, when pressed, initiates an engine that revs and car headlights that flash. Kids build a pinewood derby car in the shop during camp.

A music store enables you to stand in front of a green screen, wear your costume of choice and create a music video to take home on DVD. You can get fun tattoos in a tattoo parlor, take photos in a camera store, hang out in a 1950s-replica diner and hold a theater production inside a makeshift television set.

Then there's the 14-foot "Sam the Soda Jerk," which is fashioned after the Midas Muffler Man. To make Sam, Balsley borrowed a mold of the Midas statue from his friend Mark Cline, a well-known artist who is famous for making whimsical, eye-popping works locally, such as the Foamhenge display now in Centerville.

"I like making things that are fun and silly," Balsley said, channeling his inner-Cline.

Truxell said birthday parties are welcome in Adaville since the pool hall makes for a perfect play spot. However,

during camp, that building is only open on the final day so it doesn't distract from other recreational opportunities kids would not normally have.

"People don't get enough of that, just enjoying the big outdoors," Truxell said.

With that, it's worth viewing Creative Works Farm as more than Adaville. It has a corn maze, hiking trail, garden, pool, fishing pond, archery area, horseback riding, and future plans to add many more amenities, including a zip line. The barn that you pass on your left upon entrance is nearing completion, and will be an additional educational resource as well as small event center.

School groups frequently visit the farm while special events are held year round to benefit Camp LIGHT. To those who have attended the program, they don't need to look for it on a map. It's home to them.

"For parents, it's a trusting place to send your kids. They overcome fears. They try new things and learn to stretch their limits," Truxell said. "Seeing kids do things they thought they never could, to go from, 'I can't do it,' to being able to do it is just really cool. You can't help but feel fulfilled after spending time with them. There are just so many moments that warm your heart."

For more information, visit creativeworksfarm.org.



PRESTON KNIGHT PHOTO

Creative Works Farm hosts several events throughout the year, with its biggest endeavor being "Farming in the Valley," through a partnership with the Greater Augusta Regional Chamber of Commerce. Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative is proud to be one of the sponsors of this event.

What: A family-friendly festival geared toward educating children about agriculture through a petting zoo, pumpkin painting, corn maze, pony rides and more.

When: 12-5 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 7

Where: Creative Works Farm, 107 Creative Works Lane, Waynesboro

Cost: \$5 for adults; \$3 for kids 5 and up; children 4 and under free. Tickets can be purchased at the gate on the day of the festival.

For more information, visit farminginthevalley.com.