

ELKHORN INN & THEATRE:

A base for recreation, food events and rail watching

By Ben Calwell

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Whatever your Appalachian outdoor yearnings might call for, you can find them and more while staying in the cozy confines of the historic Elkhorn Inn & Theatre in Landgraaf, McDowell County.

The inn was restored by owners Dan Clark and Elisse Jo Goldstein-Clark, who met while working for the Federal Emergency Management Agency in New York City in the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorists attacks.

They wound up in McDowell County in the spring of 2002 when FEMA sent Dan to the area, following devastating floods. While there, they discovered the old, boarded-up Elkhorn Inn.

Restoring history

"The Inn building, which was the last historic 'Coal Heritage Trail' building to survive in this area (built in 1922 as the Empire Coal & Coke Company's Miner's Clubhouse), had been flooded twice, was abandoned and boarded up, but Dan thought he could save it and restore it, and that if he could, we would not only have a home here, we could help kick-start the post flood tourism economy of McDowell County by opening our home as an historic inn," Elisse said in an email.

When the FEMA operation ended, they remained in

McDowell County with a new purpose in life: innkeepers.

"We bought the building, which had an interior water line 4 feet high from the floods. And starting in December 2002, Dan spent that winter gutting and then restoring the building: installing 240 sheets of drywall, laying marble and laminate flooring, installing woodwork and appliances, plastering ceilings, plumbing, wiring, painting, etc. In May 2003 we opened the Elkhorn Inn," she said.

Dan's restoration took five months and is continuing, Elisse said.

They added a gift shop/gallery and a small museum room featuring local coal mining and railroad memorabilia.

The Elkhorn Inn's restoration caught the attention of HGTV, which featured it in an episode titled "Building Character" that aired in 2004.

The Elkhorn Inn has been transformed into a comfortable and attractive bed-and-breakfast with 14 guest rooms that can host up to 30 people.

"And we offer Dinner at the Inn and special events by reservation," she said.

Outdoor activities

Relaxing at the Elkhorn Inn is a pleasure in itself, but for those with a penchant for outdoor fun, there are a number of activities nearby.

"As we realized when we first came here, McDowell County has a number of world-class and fun things



Chef Dan prepares many delectable dishes at the Elkhorn Inn & Theatre, including the Chicken Piccata with lemon, white wine and caper sauce over pasta. Courtesy photo

to offer tourists, including the best 'railfanning' (train-watching and photography), and wild trout stream in the nation and the best ATV trails in the eastern USA."

At the Elkhorn Inn, rail fans have found fertile ground for train watching.

"Guests who love trains, and there are a lot of them, come to the Elkhorn Inn from across the USA and overseas to take photos and film the railroads here. We have had guests from a number of countries, including Australia, England, Wales, Israel, Germany, China, and Canada."

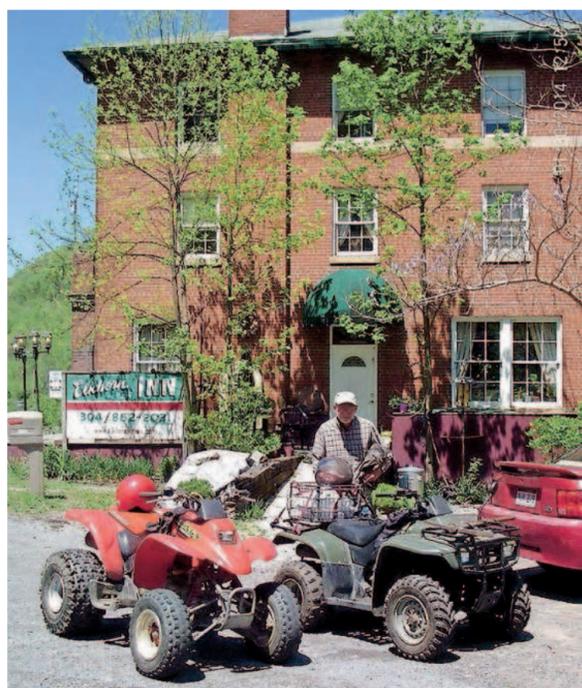
Elisse said that when the Elkhorn Inn opened in 2003, it was featured in "Railfan

and Railroad" as the best "legal train-watching location" in the United States.

"And railfans, who are also 'cultural heritage' tourists who love history, as well, make up a large percentage of our guests. We have a railroad scanner and monitor at the inn for our railfan guests, as well as 'rail-view' guest rooms. And now people across the nation can follow the trains that pass the inn 24/7 on www.railstream.biz, as well, as we have a 'railcam' on our balcony."

For anglers, the Elkhorn Inn provides some of the best fishing in the country.

"Elkhorn Creek, right behind the inn, has been called



The Elkhorn Inn & Theatre in McDowell County is located near world-class all-terrain vehicle trails. There are hundreds of miles of free trails, and the inn is also near the Hatfield-McCoy ATV trail system. Courtesy photo

"the best wild trout stream in the USA," with an abundance of very large, 24-to-32-inch wild brown and rainbow trout, and many of our guests are Trout Unlimited members and others who love to fly fish, and who catch and release 35, 60, and sometimes over 100 fish a day," Elisse said.

The Elkhorn Inn is also known for its convenient access to many nearby all-terrain vehicle trails.

"As many people know, McDowell County also has the best ATVing in the eastern USA, with hundreds of miles of free trails, as well as the Hatfield McCoy trail system trails. Guests come from across the nation to stay with us and ride here, as has 'ATV Illustrated Magazine,' and as it is legal to ride our roads, you can ride your ATV or UTV right from the inn to

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Jackson County distillery making moonshine a family tradition

By Clint Thomas

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Former coal miner Dwayne Freeman drew upon his mountain roots -- and family tree -- to launch the Appalachian Distillery three years ago, and business is still brewing and booming.

Located near Ripley and Cedar Lakes, Appalachian Distillery specializes in premium sour-mash moonshine, bourbon and whiskeys. The down-home, high-powered potables are crafted on site, from fermentation to distillation and bottling.

The "misty taste of moonshine" John Denver extolled in song is available in a variety of flavors at Appalachian Distillery. There's a straight, 90-proof moonshine blend for purists, as well as lower-proof Orange Stuff, Caramel Apple, Apple Pie, Paw-Paw, Spit Fire, Peach, Blackberry, Strawberry and Strawberry Lemonade consumption options.

From 'white lightning' to legitimate

Freeman, a descendant of "Devil Anse" Hatfield of the storied, feuding Hatfield-McCoy clans, said that several generations of his family members made and marketed moonshine from clandestine locations in the Shenandoah and Appalachian Mountains; his grandfather was imprisoned for distributing "white lightning" years ago, he said. Freeman spent part of his childhood in Matewan, where he learned some of his ancestors' secret recipes and techniques that he continues to apply to his now totally legitimate business.

He said in a 2016 Charleston Gazette-Mail Metro East



CLINT THOMAS | Metro

Taylor Freeman, 24, received her master distiller certification in September at Moonshine University in Kentucky. She and her father and stepmother run Appalachian Distillery.

article many Appalachian Distillery visitors are surprised to discover the true nature of genuine moonshine's content or "kick." "This is part of our heritage. A lot of people think this is not real moonshine. They think it's got to be 180 proof. No moonshiner ever made a 180-proof whiskey. That's a misconception, that moonshine's got to be 140, 150 proof. You can't drink that -- although some people try.

"My goal is drinkability. I go for quality, drinkability, and I know where it tastes good, where you can drink it and not tear your head off or take your breath away, Freeman said in the article.

He has also become a master distiller to hone his craft and shore up his professional credentials. And so has another generation in the bloodline; his daughter, Taylor, earned her master distiller bona fides last fall.

Master distillers

Along with her father and stepmother, Sandra, Taylor is keeping the art of moonshine-making all in the family at Appalachian Distillery. A Ripley High School graduate, the 24-year-old South Charleston resident confided, "I really started out doing nothing here, to be honest. I didn't know the process. I didn't know how to make it. But, as I started learning things, it was really interesting. It's a lot more than just making alcohol; it's a scientific process, really.

"We found out there weren't really many female master distillers around, so that just got me more intrigued. It's really cool to have a job that nobody else has, doing something that nobody else really knows how to do," Taylor said.

She said she is the youngest female master distiller in West Virginia, and to her knowl-

edge, there are only five or six women in the profession around the United States.

Taylor obtained her master distiller certification upon completion of a week-long, advanced distillery course at Moonshine University in Louisville, Kentucky, in September.

"The master distiller has to know how to do everything," she explained, "from the grain to the shipment process. I started from the bottom and worked my way to the top."

Tours and tastings

Family tours are available at Appalachian Distillery, as are free tastings for those 21 and older, during regular operating hours. Tours cost \$5 per person; the fee is waived with the purchase of merchandise. Taylor said the tours take, typically, 10 to 15 minutes, depending on the wait time involved with the number of visitors.

The distillery's expansive, country store-evoking gift shop features a number of

moonshine-related items that make unique souvenirs and conversation pieces.

Adding to the distillery's accelerating acclaim, Taylor said, a Travel Channel television crew came to Appalachian Distillery recently to film a segment that will air on the network this spring.

For more information, go to www.appalachian-moonshine.com, or call 304-372-7000 between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday.



More than \$979 Million in proceeds to parks and tourism since 1986.

West Virginia's scenic natural beauty, and wide-range of outdoor activities, attracts visitors from around the world. Since 1994, more than \$209 million in revenue generated by Racetrack Video Lottery has been directed to advertising funds for the state tourism industry through a matching grants program established with the West Virginia Division of Tourism. In addition, Lottery revenue appropriated from other gaming sources is used to help the Division of Tourism, the Division of Natural Resources and the State Park Improvement Fund. In fiscal year 2016, \$16.2 million in lottery proceeds were directed to tourism related areas, bringing the total amount of Lottery proceeds invested into the state's tourism industry to \$979 million.



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