



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

The Culpeper Horse Owners Association has proposed the creation of a Culpeper Heritage Horse Trail, a riding circuit in the Elkwood area that would make use of conservation easements. The trail's backers say it would bring tourism dollars to the county and protect it against excessive development.

Oregon crushes record number of grapes

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PORTLAND, Ore. — Oregon produced and crushed a record amount of grapes in 2007, the third year in a row it has hit such highs.

Experts say it's the result of the right mix of good weather and demand for Oregon wine.

"I think it's just another impressive figure to show the continued growth in Oregon," said Chris Mertz, director of the Oregon Field Office of the National Agricultural Statistics Service, which compiled the report.

Oregon wineries sold 1.7 million cases of wine for \$207.8 million in 2007. But there is still unmet demand, the report found, particularly for mature grapes such as pinot noir.

"Oregon wines have never been more popular around the world," said Ted Farthing, executive director of the Oregon Wine Board, which represents the state's wineries.

Pinot noir and pinot gris production both increased by 15 percent. Cabernet sauvignon production increased by 33 percent.

The growth in production doesn't mean quality will drop, Farthing said. The yield, which is often considered a measure of quality, has grown in pace with the acreage planted.

"If you talk to winery owners one-on-one they talk about quality, quality, quality," Farthing said. "To me, it is continuing a very thoughtful trend of responsible, steady growth."

Prices for Oregon wine go up each year, Farthing said, but it's a difficult thing to measure because of the variety across wineries.

The continued good harvests are a relief after weaker harvests in 2004 and 2005 that hindered growers and wine-makers.

Growing conditions in 2007 enabled yields of 2.8 tons per acre of grapes.

Oregon's 370 wineries reported producing wine under 442 labels. The number of wineries has grown, but most remain small.

"Virginia is for horse lovers"

Heritage trail would be a great boon to this county

The title is what the Tourist Board and VDOT advertising tell us, although after the public hearing in respect of the Culpeper Heritage Horse Trail (CHHT) last week, we were left wondering whether that slogan only applies to the rest of Virginia, and not to Culpeper County!

The CHHT is a proposal put forward by a local volunteer group — the Culpeper Horse Owners Association — to join a number of Culpeper's historical Civil War sites within a circular trail. The trail is intended to encourage and promote tourism and bolster the equine industry in the county.

In America, the equine industry as a whole accounts for over \$39 billion a year in direct spending (\$60 billion with indirect expenditure). When you consider how popular the horse is in this state, it doesn't take much to appreciate that a lot of that money should be coming into and staying in Virginia.

So you would be forgiven for thinking that we are true horse lovers around here. Not so, it would seem, from the meeting last Wednesday! Not only did we have objectors to the proposed trail, but we were also hearing horror stories from some of the people there about their riding experiences. They were rarely afforded the same courtesy as all other road users, and many a driver would speed up rather than slow down as they passed by horses.

Even worse, some think it is fun to sound their horns as they flash past, and others like to throw bottles out of the window to see if they can unseat the rider! The really frightening thing is that these people are actually allowed to get behind the wheel of a deadly ton of speeding metal in the first place. It is a sad fact of modern life that tolerance, common sense and decency are not as ingrained as they once were.

Anyway, enough of that gripe and back to the public hearing: The overriding factor that came out of the



DAVID AND ANITA HASBURY-SNOGLES

objections made at the meeting were financial, and, on closer inspection, would prove to be unfounded.

The first complaint concerned the impending commercial and residential development in the surrounding area (Elkwood). Landowners who had road frontage on the trail would have their potential lots devalued because of a recreational easement. Actually, the complete opposite is the case and has already been proven in other parts of the country, where the very fact that an equine trail runs along the outskirts of a development makes it more attractive to potential purchasers — not less so!

Think about it. In a world of ever-increasing concrete jungle, a little piece of nature on your doorstep is an extremely attractive proposition, and is one of the main reasons a lot of people currently look to Culpeper as a place to live, myself included! To be able to live in the countryside and yet still be just over an hour from a major metropolis is a dream come true for most people. The real balancing act though is to be able to retain that countryside feel without losing it to over-development, and the principle of enabling easements for recreational trails is one way to ensure that remains the case.

Think not just for yourself here, but for those children



The Culpeper County Planning Commission voted 5-2 to postpone action on the proposed trail last week after hearing from residents both in support of it and against it.

to come and their children after them — preserving the countryside and making it more accessible to all is one of the best legacies we could leave behind us.

Culpeper is at a crossroads in its development here. We can push on with this innovative and ultimately rewarding proposal (and remember we are only discussing the principle of a trail here), or we can dismiss the proposal and face an uncertain future of shrinking natural amenities and become just another suburb of the big city. Where will the people look to move then?

The other main concern of the commission (not so much the objectors, as they did not see this directly affecting their pocket) was the cost of maintaining the trail once it had been established. Despite being advised that maintenance costs would be minimal (since there were many volunteers within the CHOA who would willingly help to maintain the trails), and that for every dollar spent on tourism and recreation projects, \$15 was raised in revenue, the com-

mission failed to take this point on board. Indeed, it was made clear that revenue from commercial and residential development had actually cost the town — often twice as much as was raised in taxes.

I wouldn't dream of claiming to understand the nuances of the political scene here in Culpeper. What I am doing is simply voicing the opinion of many an "outsider" who are considering making a new life for themselves in the county, or just looking to visit.

More important, I am trying to listen to some of the younger generation of the town, one of whom spoke movingly in favor of the trail at the meeting. Most towns these days are losing their young to the big cities or other "more appealing" parts of the nation. How refreshing to hear of one young lady who really wants to stay in Culpeper, who loves her horses and who would love to be able to ride around her town, proudly showing it off to others who chose to visit. Younger families who had moved to Culpeper in recent

years in the belief they would have a better quality of life left the meeting unsure they had made the right move.

These people are the future of Culpeper, and they want to be able to show off the town's past to others with a sense of pride, a sense of well being and a sense of optimism for the years ahead. The CHHT is just the start of what could be something much bigger and better for us all, yet the commission voted 5-2 that night to do nothing — they didn't actually kill off the proposal, but neither did they have the courage to push it forward for further discussion. Those in favor of the proposal within the public heavily outweighed those who were against, yet the commission (save for two members) failed to notice that. If they had, how could they in all conscience as the "custodians" of future generations in Culpeper have turned this proposal down?

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Young Life holds mulch fundraiser

Young Life is selling double-shredded hardwood bark mulch (dark) now through March 22.

Mulch is available in 2 cu. ft. and 3 cu. ft. bags. Delivery is free.

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