

Center Preserves Virginia's Agriculture, Wildlife Legacy

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Virginia Correspondent

HARRISONBURG, Va. — On Monday, Nov. 17, the Virginia Agriculture and Nature Center Foundation (a nonprofit organization), kicked off its Phase One campaign to gain financial partners with a "down on the farm" country supper at the Traditions Restaurant.

The perpetual mission of the Virginia Agriculture and Nature Center will be to "help youth and adults develop a better understanding and appreciation of agriculture."

Within its stated mission, the foundation is aiming to arm individuals who have limited knowledge of agriculture, with a growing recognition of and appreciation for the profound impact agriculture has on society.

In the startup phase, the emphasis will primarily be livestock, poultry, wildlife and conservation. Eventually field, crop and horticulture demonstrations will be added, as well as a greenhouse, a nature trail, and a primitive camping area.

A farm-house style restaurant designed to reflect a sense of being at Grandmas house, and a gift shop, are also in the works.

Susan Allen, foundations honorary chairperson, was the featured speaker. Allen is known to Virginians as Sen. George Allens wife. From 1994-1998, while her husband was governor, she was the states First Lady.

Allen was upbeat with an energizing attitude. She promotes her home state wherever she goes, including Asia, Europe, Egypt, and Israel.

She was once a cheerleader, Allen said of herself, adding, "Thats what I can do — yell."

The concept of developing an enduring center that maintains the past, yet stays abreast with the changing facets of agriculture in order to educate citizens of all ages, Allen likened to an observation Oliver Wendell Holmes made about a mans mind. Once it is stretched to new dimensions, it will never go back to its original idea.

"Fundraising is hardest part," Allen said. "You have to stretch a new idea into a wonderful reality."

Hobey Bauhan, president of the Virginia Poultry Federation and master of ceremonies, said, "The Virginia Agriculture and Nature Center, planned for Rockingham County "Virginias largest agricultural producing county and the turkey capital — holds much promise as a vitally needed opportunity to educate people about modern agriculture and the role it plays in feeding the world, and doing so in an ecologically sustainable manner."

Rockingham County is virtually the bulls-eye of Virginia agriculture, especially with regard to poultry and dairy production. It generates \$438 million in cash receipts, according to the Farm Bureau Federation reports.

"The center will also enhance tourism in the Shenandoah Valley and Virginia," Bauhan said.

Situated at 2490 Saddle Trail, McGaheysville, the Virginia Agriculture and Nature Center is in the shadow of the Massanutten Resort that sits atop the Massanutten Mountain range in the George Washington National Forest.

From previous eras, Civil War relics and arrowheads surfaced on the land, according to information from Eugenia Nelson, the



From left, dignitaries spoke at the Virginia Agriculture and Nature Center Foundations luncheon that kicked off a fundraising campaign to start the first phase of the project. From left, Linda Cox, board chairperson; master of ceremonies Hobey Bauhan, president of the Virginia Poultry Federation; Eugenia Nelson, secretary-treasurer; and Susan Allen, honorary chairperson. Photo by Gay Brownlee, Virginia Correspondent.

foundations secretary-treasurer.

Nelson reported that the first phase will see the development of 12-15 acres and farm buildings — barn and animals sheds. They will be restored to look as they did in the last century, when it was a 200-acre mountain farm in the early 1900s. The center project, however, involves

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