

Keeping the family farm intact: Alumna's savvy management, conservation strategies keep her on Cloud 9

Janet Peterson lives on Cloud 9, literally.

After a 31-year teaching career in Buncombe County schools, Peterson '76 (Literature/K-9 Education) has returned to her family's farming roots, and transformed her late parents' 200-acre Fairview farm, Cloud 9. With help from a variety of agricultural resources, Peterson has not only maintained the family farm but has managed it as a model of conservation and sustainability.

In 1965 Peterson's father, a retired airline pilot, bought what was then a neglected valley farm and mountaintop that had been scorched by an underbrush fire. When Peterson was 15, her parents built a home on the property, cultivated blueberries, raised Black Angus cattle and chickens, and kept bees. "My parents made it a hobby farm," Peterson says. "We always had friends from around the country who would come and visit."

The Petersons were ahead of their time in many ways, becoming the second farm in Buncombe County to join the Farmland Preservation Program in the 1980s. This program, which continues today, provides tax incentives to encourage family ownership of large parcels managed for woodlands, wildlife preserves and horticultural areas.

"I want to carry on their legacy to take care of the land and see this farm reach its full potential," says Peterson, who inherited the property in 2001 when her father died.

Peterson is always looking for ways to sustain the farm, generate income and put her creativity to work. "There's a lot of wonderful, free information if you know how to find it," she says.

In 2005 she enrolled Cloud 9 in the N.C. Forest Stewardship Program, working with foresters on a 50-year plan to selectively cut mature oak, yellow poplar and white pine, allowing other trees to increase in size and value for harvesting in future years. Her newest endeavor is to set up a sawmill for adding value to that timber. To help implement the plan, she recently obtained funding from WNC AgOptions, a grant program managed by N.C. Cooperative Extension Service to assist mountain farmers in diversifying their crops and transitioning from tobacco. Some of the timber will be used to build a gazebo at a pond where she offers a scenic outdoor spot for weddings and gatherings. She also rents a cabin and her family's renovated home to vacationers.

Last fall the Forest Stewardship Program recognized Peterson for her work. "Janet's energetic and innovative management style is evident throughout the property," Kelly Hughes, a stewardship biologist, told the Asheville Citizen-Times. "She has worked hard to make this a showplace for good management practices. This farm is an excellent example of a working farm and forest, and here in Buncombe County, that's getting harder to come by."

For information visit www.cloud9relaxation.com

—Karen Anderson



Janet Peterson '76

A-B College Alumnus Receives French Legion of Honor Award



Mark Sumner '46

Despite receiving one of the highest awards the French government bestows on foreigners, Asheville-Biltmore College alumnus and World War II veteran Mark Sumner remains humble, acknowledging the service of his fellow soldiers before himself.

"This award was a way of saying thanks to American soldiers. It had to do with service over a time period," Sumner said. "We were picked because we were representative of those who had been on the front lines."

Sumner and four other North Carolinians received the title "chevalier" of the Legion of Honor from France in a ceremony last Memorial Day, Nov. 11, 2008, at the N.C. Museum of History in Raleigh.

A member of Asheville-Biltmore's class of 1946 and the men's basketball team, Sumner was drafted into the Army in 1943 at age 19. A private in the 75th Infantry Division, he served as a reconnaissance scout in France and Belgium, earning the Bronze Star. His experiences have stayed with him to this day. "It was a long time ago, but many of those images of Belgium, France and Germany are like they happened yesterday. The