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*Waterfront Park along the banks of the Kennebec River welcomes boaters to provision as well as offering a scenic view for those on shore. This fall, the park will get a “face lift” after years of heavy use thanks to cooperation between MSB, the City of Bath, and the State of Maine.*

The Kennebec River, fouled for years by neglect and industrial pollution, has been cleaned up and is today part of Bath’s appeal. A waterfront park provides sojourners with a boardwalk for fishing and benches for lounging by the riverside. As one stands gazing west toward the vitality of Front and Center streets, it becomes clear that Bath has always had unique character, blending history with industry and progress with respect for the past. The combination of the sophisticated technology of Bath Iron Works with the lush nature preserves spanning 1,738 acres at the Kennebec estuary and the venerable architecture of the downtown makes Bath one of our Great American Main Streets.

## Bath by the Numbers

Main street began: **1991**  
 Population: **8,875**  
 Net new jobs: **212**  
 Net new businesses: **42**  
 Building Rehabs: **13**  
 New buildings: **2**  
 Vacancy rate when Main Street Bath started: **8%**  
 Vacancy rate now: **2%**  
 Public investment: **\$103,993,039**  
 Private investment: **\$144,137,924**

## Culpeper, Virginia: Be a Culpeper Local

Watched over by the ancient crests of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the streets of Culpeper were, like most of Virginia, surveyed by a young George Washington during his time as a frontier surveyor. Culpeper’s now thriving Davis and Main Streets made up the principal intersection of the town’s original 1759 layout, which is still dotted with scores of vernacular, Italianate, and neo-Classical style brick buildings. Trez S. Holmes, manager at the bank which has been on that intersection since 1901, relates endearing stories from her older customers who described how in the 1940s and 50s, “it was common...to get dressed up to come downtown. Ladies wore white gloves, and the gentlemen donned suits and hats.”

While visitors these days may not be as dapperly dressed as the men and women in the post-war era, they are equally eager to have a good time while out on the town—and, thanks to Culpeper Renaissance, Inc. (CRI), they are able to do so. After close to 25 years of continuous revitalization efforts, there’s lots to do in Culpeper’s downtown everyday—from dining at old stalwarts such as Cameleer, Knakal’s Bakery, or the Frost Café to checking out newer initiatives like the weekly Farmers Market and the annual wine, food and arts festival, the Taste of Culpeper. Today, everyone wants to “Be a Culpeper Local.”

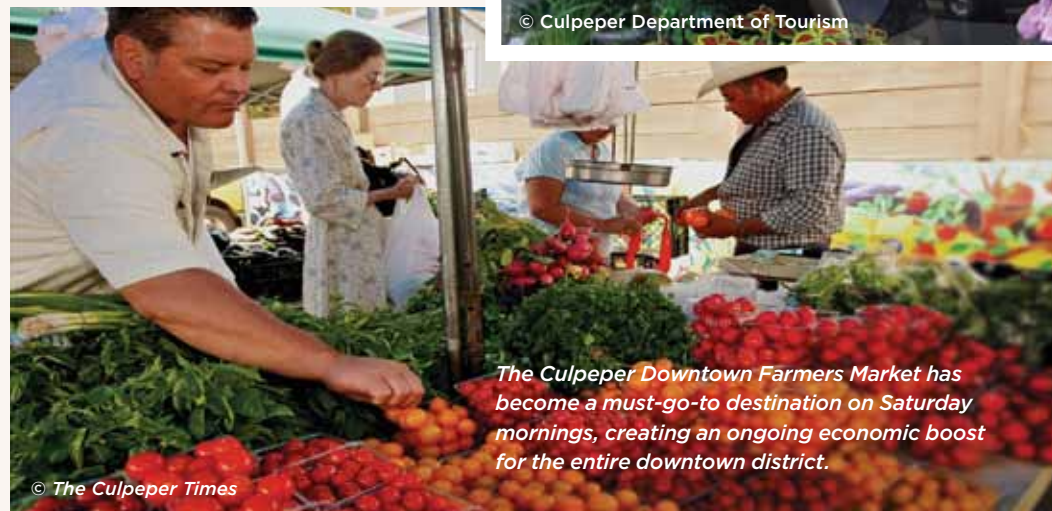
## “Don’t Tread on Me”

In December 1775, the Culpeper Minutemen, a battalion of 350 proud Virginian Patriots, besieged the British fort at the Battle of Great Bridge, brandishing white rattlesnake flags that read “Liberty or Death” and “Don’t Tread on Me.” Keen-eyed Culpeper riflemen played no small part in bringing this first Revolutionary battle fought on Virginian soil to an overwhelming American victory—the only Whig casualty was a soldier with a wounded thumb. The Culpeper Minutemen rallied under the same flag for the Confederate States in the Civil War, and again under the 116th Infantry in World War I. In the 20th century, however, with the bloody battles of times past safely behind glass in the galleries of the Museum of Culpeper History (which uses the rattlesnake in its letterhead), a new kind of team was required to combat a new kind of problem.

Culpeper Renaissance, Inc. (CRI) was formed in 1987 by a group of concerned citizens roused to action by the Norfolk Southern Railroad Company’s threats to bulldoze over an important part of the town’s heritage—its once



© Culpeper Department of Tourism



*The Culpeper Downtown Farmers Market has become a must-go-to destination on Saturday mornings, creating an ongoing economic boost for the entire downtown district.*

© The Culpeper Times



bustling downtown train depot. First constructed in 1852, then rebuilt in 1874 due to the ravages of the Civil War and again in 1904 after a fire, the depot now had to survive its own declining passenger rail usage rates, which had forced Norfolk Southern to take cost-saving measures.

CRI astutely recognized that this new threat to the depot was, in fact, part of the broader decline of downtown Culpeper that had begun in the 1960s, when a bypass for U.S. Route 29 diverted travelers to newly constructed strip malls at the north and south ends of town. The resulting migration of locally owned downtown businesses into the suburbs, leading to an appalling occupancy rate of 14 percent, left historic buildings on the corner of Main and Davis crime-riddled husks with trees growing through the roofs. Downtown Culpeper, as one longtime resident put it, was beginning to die.

## The Heart of Town

Emergency rescue procedures were needed to revive the heart of Culpeper. In 1988, CRI found what Culpeper needed in the comprehensive practicality of the National Trust's Main Street Four-Point Approach® and promptly enlisted with the Virginia Main Street Program. A \$4 million bond issued through partnerships among CRI, town and state governments, and other private and public entities helped jumpstart downtown restoration efforts.

The town buried utility lines and pulled down telephone poles all along Davis Street, putting sidewalks and decorative period lamps in their place. At the same time, CRI and the town encouraged private reinvestment by providing matching grants and loans to property owners through the VMS Revitalization Block Grant Program. With the streets scoured of blight and crime, the improvement of streetscapes, and the restoration of storefronts, business and property owners began flocking back downtown. Today, with 324 net new businesses having opened since the Main Street program began, the downtown occupancy rate has shot up to 98 percent.

Of course, the train depot was not forgotten. In 1995, CRI successfully secured a \$700,000 Virginia Department of Transportation Enhancement Grant. Norfolk Southern transferred the deed to the depot to the town in 1998, allowing renovations to begin. The rehabilitated station opened in 2000, and where once it had served as a catalyst for the creation of CRI, it now became an anchor for future revitalization efforts.

"Before [the depot was fixed up] at this end of town," says Linda Corbin, "you wouldn't be caught coming down here." Corbin, who works at Raven's Coffee Shop—a favorite haunt of Culpeper Mayor Chip Coleman—also says that travelers coming from New York or Charlottesville often disembark at Culpeper to spend a few leisurely days on Davis Street before heading home.

Indeed, the "Depot" has come a long way from its days as a defunct liability of Norfolk Southern; instead it ushers in more tourists and greater private investment in the town. According to Amtrak, in 2011, 10,930 train passengers used the Culpeper station, which is on the Crescent, Cardinal, and Northeast regional lines. A pocket park and plaza, which were created as part of the train depot's restoration, are used for popular farmers markets, summer concerts, and other community events. Even the unused freight section of the restored depot has found a use. Converted to a multi-purpose community facility in 2001, it now houses the town's Visitors' Center, Chamber of Commerce, Department of Tourism, and many conference spaces.

When author Norman Crampton recognized Culpeper as "One of America's 10 Best Small Towns" in 1993, many of these changes had not yet happened. Even then, Crampton had the foresight to note that "Culpeper has the three essentials: location, location, and location."

Through its train depot, Culpeper remains embedded in the transportation networks that link its heart to the nation's capital and onto the rest of the country. In October 2010, a partnership between the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) and Amtrak started a new daily service between Lynchburg, Washington D.C., and communities along the Northeast Corridor. Along with existing services on the Crescent and Cardinal regional lines that offer easy access to Culpeper, the downtown is poised to become a true regional hub for culture and entertainment.



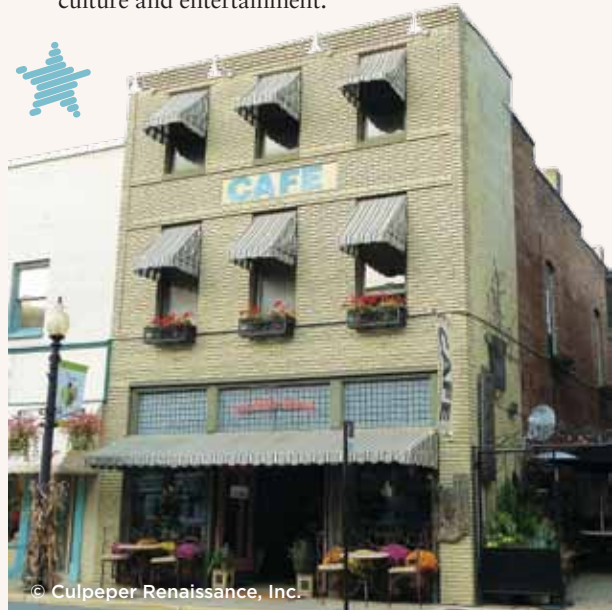
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◀ *Culpeper Renaissance, Inc., was formed in 1987 to save an important piece of the town's history, its 1904 train depot, pictured above left before renovation. Today, the restored depot (below left) sees thousands of Amtrak passengers a year and has served as a catalyst for revitalization efforts downtown.*

▶ *What was once the E.J. Nottingham Clothing Store in the 1930s has been restored and now houses It's About Thyme, one of many great destination restaurants in Downtown Culpeper.*



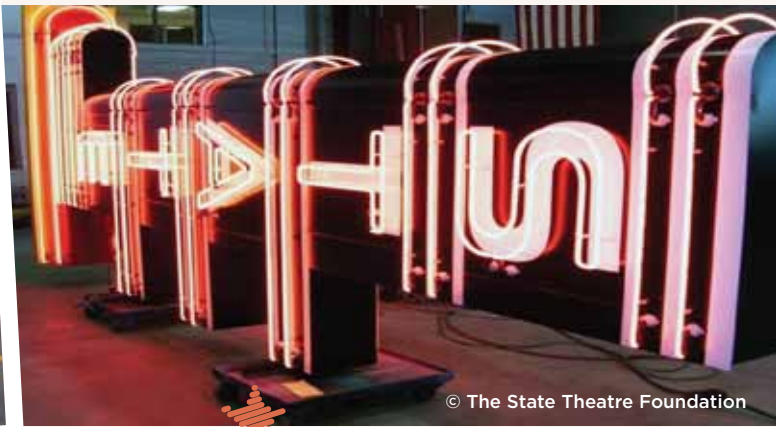
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## Old & New

Economics aside, Culpeper’s long history remains at the core of its enduring charm and is a key component of CRI’s preservation efforts. CRI had downtown Culpeper listed as a historic district in the National Register of Historic Places in 1987, a designation that allowed the town to regulate the sensitive restoration of Davis Street. An Architectural Review Board, formed to closely monitor the historic integrity of redevelopment efforts, engages the services of many talented consultants and architects.

And there is much to save. As a staging area and hospital center for both the Union and Confederate armies, who occupied Culpeper in turn during the Civil War, the community has a rich heritage of monuments and structures left behind by both sides. A visitor to Culpeper’s historic district can relive moments of Civil War history, strolling into the boyhood home of Confederate General A.P. Hill, who led his famed “Light Division” on Lee’s First Invasion of the North; or paying his or her respects at the house on Main Street where another Confederate officer, “The Gallant” John Pelham, succumbed from artillery wounds sustained at the Battle of Kelley’s Ford.

When a 5.8 magnitude earthquake shook Culpeper, 36 miles from its epicenter, on August 2011, many of these precious historic buildings were damaged—a church that once served as a refuge for General Robert E. Lee and Civil War calvaryman Jeb Stuart is now riddled with cracks and fissures. The town rushed to save what it could. After surveying the damage, city officials determined that one historic building had to be razed. However, with a sensitivity borne of years of conservation awareness, great efforts were made to ensure that neighboring buildings with shared walls were kept intact. Even the original bricks from the rubble were salvaged to build a monument to the church on the site.

Culpeper’s concern for its heritage stems not just from love of its history but also from the warmth of its people. Owner of Raven’s Nest Coffee House, Jessica Hall, says that “the people in this town care not only about the physical well-being of the buildings, but about each other in a touching and heartfelt day-to-day existence.”

With more than 26,000 volunteer hours clocked with CRI, it is obvious that the residents of Culpeper, both old and new, are devoted to their town. Recognizing that a broad base of community support is necessary to achieve its vision for downtown Culpeper, CRI is an equitable partnership between public and private sectors, which establishes consensus among all downtown stakeholders and town residents. Thanks to this unity of purpose, any visitor to Culpeper, casual or frequent, will heartily agree that the town deserves the numerous recognitions and awards it has won for its vibrant downtown—one of “America’s Top 10 Small Towns,” the American Planning Association’s “Great Street 2011,” and, now, the National Trust’s 2012 “Great American Main Street Award.”

## Moving Ahead

Despite its many achievements, Culpeper Renaissance, Inc., is not resting on its laurels. Working with the Town of Culpeper and its Department of Tourism, CRI is now seeking to establish an arts and cultural district that will serve the whole region. The initiative began with the approval in 2010 of an Arts and Culture District Overlay, which offers tax incentives for arts-related businesses downtown. As a centerpiece for this new district, the town is renovating the State Theatre, an Art Deco cinema that opened on Main Street in 1938. Central to this project were contributions from the residents of Culpeper themselves, through the State

*Along with its success in attracting more than 300 new businesses, Culpeper is seeking to establish an arts and cultural district that will serve the entire region. As a centerpiece for this district the town is renovating the State Theatre, an Art Deco cinema that opened in 1938.*

Theatre Foundation’s “1,000 for 1,000” campaign. Launched in January 2011, the fund-raising campaign asked Culpeper locals to become a part of the renovation effort by contributing as little as \$25 a month over three years.

As Tad Loving, vice chairman of the State Theatre Foundation Board boasts, “When you consider all the good things the State Theatre will bring to the regional economy for years to come, it’s hard to come up with a better example of a community-based, community-supported stimulus project.” It is clear that even after all the obstacles it has successfully overcome, downtown Culpeper is still looking for the next new thing to pursue. With a long history that is continually being made, Culpeper remains an exciting place to visit and to live.

## Culpeper by the Numbers

Main Street began: **1988**  
 Population: **10,000**  
 Net new jobs: **683**  
 Net new businesses: **324**  
 Building rehabs: **390**  
 Housing units: **62**  
 Vacancy rate when Main Street started: **86%**  
 Vacancy rate now: **2%**