

# PROGRESS & REVIEW 2011

THE FUTURE OF THE ALBEMARLE FROM THE GROUND UP

## Two area festivals celebrate big cash crops

By **ROBERT KELLY-GOSS**  
*Albemarle Life Editor*

You might say it's a case for any reason to throw a party.

But two festivals named for two distinct crops in the Albemarle region seem to do more than offer a good time. They do in fact celebrate the production of a tuber and a pea family favorite, the peanut.

The Potato Festival and the Peanut Festival have been area favorites for decades. Each festival, one in Elizabeth City and the

other Edenton, offers distinctly different activities but both have one thing in common — a good time.

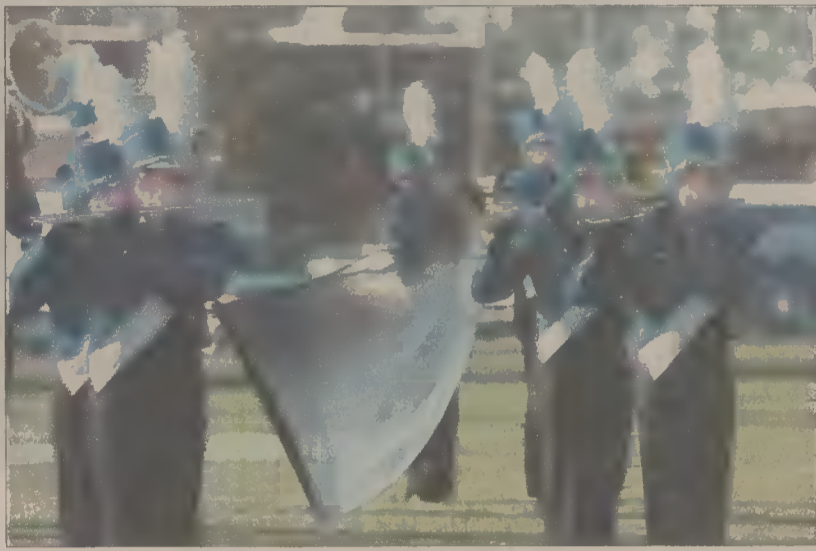
In Elizabeth City, the celebration of the potato goes back to 1940 when it was promoted by a 240-mile motorcade. The purpose was to bring together people for one big celebration, including a parade, marching bands, a beauty contest crowning the potato queen, and dancing to the sounds of the big bands.

The festival was such a success that organizers, according to Daily Advance

reports of the day, pulled off a second year of festivities. But World War II was just on the horizon and Elizabeth City would put off celebrating its favorite cash crop until 1950.

In 1950 another motorcade rolled through 11 towns, recruiting an estimated 10,000 people from nine area counties. Enthusiasm for renewal of the festival was high in Elizabeth City and shops displayed signs and flags welcoming the hordes.

See **FESTIVALS**, 18



FILE PHOTO  
The Battle of the Bands competition is part of Chowan County's annual Peanut Festival, which this year will be held on Oct. 1.



FILE PHOTO

Jesse Vick uses a scroll saw to make Christmas ornaments during the 52nd annual Albemarle Craftsmen's Fair at Knobbs Creek Recreation Center in Elizabeth City, Oct. 29, 2010.

## Valued crafts reflect a farming past

By **ROBERT KELLY-GOSS**  
*Albemarle Life Editor*

Basket weaving, broom making, canning, cornhusk dolls and quilting; these are just a few of the craft skills celebrated by artisans these days. These skills, however, were once necessary to the farming families that populated the Albemarle, or any rural region.

"It wasn't anything special to them," says Lisa Winslow, president of the Albemarle Craftsmen's Guild. "It's what they did.

It's how they survived."

Once upon a time, farm families largest relied on subsistence living. If they needed it, they grew it, or made it.

"They didn't have the money to buy these things," says Winslow.

But life changed for many farm families. They either took on jobs off the farm, or left farming altogether. Their handy crafts were no longer something they found necessary, and the skills that were once passed on one generation to the next began

to fade into history.

But women like Elizabeth Byrum, Gladys White or Emily Harrell understood the significance of those crafting ways.

They worked to keep the skills alive for a new generation, one that would celebrate the artistic aspect of something that was likely taken for granted by farm families.

Women like Byrum discovered that the North Carolina Extension Agency was not only offering agricultural assistance, but also working to keep these old

craft ways alive. In a 2008 interview with The Daily Advance, the then 89-year-old Byrum recalls going to Gates County's extension office to learn some of those old crafting ways.

Byrum, like White and Harrell, would eventually bring other people into the fold and they would make up the beginnings of the Craftsmen's Guild.

The crafts used by farm families are not only celebrated as works of art, but they are also recognized as culturally and historically significant, according

to William Ferris, Ph.D., a professor of folklore at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Ferris, in an interview for the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Craftsmen's Guild, explained that the preservation of such crafts not only keeps the history alive, it also keeps the skills that have been passed from one generation to the next intact.

"Everything is at risk," said

See **CRAFTS**, 19



STAFF PHOTO BY THOMAS J. TURNEY

The vineyards at the Cotton Gin in Jarvisburg, shown Tuesday, opened in 2008. Vineyard owner John Wright said he grows 10 varieties of grapes on about 14 acres.

## Wine making on the rise

By **WILL HARRIS**  
*Sports Writer*

Wine making in the Albemarle area is rather new. However, wine making in North Carolina is hundreds of years old.

According to the North Carolina Department of Commerce, North

Carolina is the home of the nation's first cultivated wine grape — the scuppernon. Giovanni de Verrazano, a French explorer and navigator, discovered the grapes in the Cape Fear River Valley in 1524 and first noted the fruit in his logs, surmising

See **VINEYARDS**, 22

## Photographer, bird house builder use barns for art

By **TOBY TATE**  
*Correspondent*

To Elizabeth Bateman of Perquimans County, an old barn is more than just a ramshackle building waiting for a wrecking ball; it's a piece of history.

"When I see something old I wonder, 'OK, who lived there? What did it do? How old is it?' I could see an old tree in the middle of a field and think, 'I bet there used to be a house there or a farm,'" Bateman said.

For Bateman, old barns are more than just a disappearing piece of the landscape. They're subjects for her art.

Bateman has been snapping photographs of old barns, among other subjects, for the past ten years. Over the last year, she's also been



STAFF PHOTO BY BRETT A. CLARK

Local artist Elizabeth Bateman displays several framed samples of photographs she's taken of old barns, Tuesday, Feb. 22.

showing her photographs at local art galleries and been fortunate to sell several of them.

"I love photography and I just wanted to share it with

See **ART**, 18