

The Vision

And so the Guptons developed a vision for their new hometown that combined her roots in France and his roots in Colonial Virginia. They immersed themselves in a local group known as Gordonsville Crossroads Inc.

"At the beginning it was just an idea to work together with local people to help transform Gordonsville," says Bruce. But they soon realized "investment would be necessary to make the vision a reality. So, we formed a company."

That company is Gordonsville Preservation Associates. Bruce Gupton hastens to point out that since he has returned to work as a consultant, the company is run by his wife Jacqueline and their son Garrick. "My wife is doing this out of the goodness of her heart; it's really a lot of work and our son works amazingly hard. He's responsible for all the construction."

In the beginning, the Guptons set about purchasing buildings along the east side of Main Street. This involved making overtures to William Cook, the man who owned most of these buildings, and who, up until then, had steadfastly refused to sell any of them. But, somehow, with the help of a local realtor, they got through to Cook.

"We were afraid what would happen to downtown after he dies," says Jacqueline Gupton in her heavily-accented but perfectly understandable English.

As they acquired buildings they gutted and renovated them. "Every building there has a new roof, new HVAC, new electrical, new plumbing, new interior, and again that's setting up for 20 years down the road," says Bruce Gupton. "A lot of people would have wanted to just bulldoze some of the buildings, and we didn't want to do that because we wanted to maintain the history."

He pauses. "And so part of the approach that my wife and son and I have is to make it a model for other towns... For us what we were looking for was something that any town, if they really put their mind to it, could replicate. They have to see what's unique about them; what's unique about Gordonsville, of course, is all the history and the location. But there are lots of potential Gordonsvilles around...so we're trying to set an example that others could follow."

In case you haven't noticed, Gordonsville has been garnering a lot of press lately... from the slick monthly magazine, Virginia Living, to the Post's Washingtonian, where our sleepy little village was recently called "The next Middleburg?"

The great success story of course is Pomme, now in its third year, despite a devastating fire. This classic French country restaurant attracts diners from Charlottesville, Fredericksburg, Richmond and the valley. "I was missing my food," slyly winks Jacqueline.

Much of this was made possible by a pastry chef and restaurant owner and "character" the Guptons knew from Greenwich, CT named Maurice Clos-Versailles. Just two weeks ago, his bakery Cannelle opened on Main Street, to the usual opening night jitters.

Not everybody who has started a business in Gordonsville can claim success. The little Moroccan shop closed its doors in almost record time. There was an antique store that didn't last long either, and Limerick Fibers has been closed for a while now.

But Bruce Gupton remains optimistic. "I think it's been very successful," he counters to the comment that Main Street seems to be stumbling one step back for every two steps forward. "If you look at the statistics on the longevity of retail businesses on Main Street, it's much better than normal here." And indeed the space vacated by the Moroccans is now occupied by a jeweler.

Let's take a tour. Stand with your back to Bank of America and look at the buildings across the street from right to left. Out of sight from this vantage point is Country Gardens statuary. Then comes the old hardware store with the blocked out windows. There's a story here. It is to become a wine shop

during the day, "guess from where the wine will be," says Jacqueline again with that wry little smile. "At night we're planning on having a champagne bar."

They've already bought the bar. Apparently five American Presidents have bent an elbow and stood at this rail, all of them from Ohio. They could be any five of the following: Taft, Hayes, Harding, Grant, Harrison, and Garfield. And so, the old hardware store will be called, The Presidents.

Next up the street, in what used to be Limerick Fibers, may become a furniture store. Then there's the 1916 Blakey Building...four storefronts there, including Premier Virginia Properties, Homespun Antiques, and Li'l Off the Top. The fourth is slated to become Animal Crackers, "a shop that will sell really nice children's clothes, European and American."

Then there's the alley that leads to the various businesses that are behind Main Street such as Brushwood Dance Studio, a longstanding Gordonsville success

story. And now artist Maryvonne LaParliere has returned after a brief absence. She will be joined by Yvonne Waller (formerly of Keswick Hall) who will establish a therapeutic massage and beauty product business. Continuing up Main Street: Sharon Merrick's high-end women's clothing, Community Mortgage, which is not owned by the Guptons, and then an empty but thoroughly renovated store front, that "we hope is going to be a French antique store, but we're not sure." Next in line is Pomme; we know that success story, followed by Old Somerset Gallery and Stokes of England ironwork. Next, is the recently opened bakery and café, and the last building in that line will soon host an interior design center, thanks to Laurie Holliday. Further up the street is the longstanding Gentle Gardner, and across from there sits Sweetwater.

So what do all these stores have in common? Answer: they are all unique...one of a kind. And therein lies the controversial decision regarding the old Dollar General Store; it was not unique. The Guptons waited six or seven years before deciding to not renew DG's lease "because it was a vibrant business, but there are several others just like it in the area."

Bruce Gupton explains. "Our vision for Gordonsville is something where you're not having national chains that can go to any strip mall...What we're trying to do is encourage local products that are made in Virginia or made in the USA at least...upscale antiques, good quality of life. If you want to see a strip mall, go to the mall."

Jacqueline takes it from there. "We're not restoring the town to the normal Main Street, America. We want things made here by good artisans or very good European products also made in Europe. We're very much against..." she lets the sentence dangle, but the words "made in China," roar in noiselessly to fill the gap.

"Mass production," she snorts indignantly, "we have enough places everywhere that can sell mass production. We're not trying to do the town for money, but for showing people that you can still have a successful town using good products made in the western world."

It's Bruce's turn to pick up the lead. "It's important because it supports local business, keeps local jobs, keeps the dollars in the state. You get the multiplier effect." He pauses a beat. "We're not doing this for monetary reasons."

All this talk about quality products, Champagne bars and the French-ification of Gordonsville sparks the question: where does a good ol' boy find a cheeseburger and a longneck Bud these days in downtown Gordonsville. Jacqueline refers such inquiries to the Toliver House, which they do not own but which she calls, "a fabulous restaurant."

Bruce counters, "There's some very good value in



The latest addition to open in downtown Gordonsville is Cannelle, the "patisserie," which is the French word for bakery.

Photo by Phil Audibert

Cannelle was offering a mighty juicy hamburger for a mighty reasonable price.

The Guptons' physical vision for Gordonsville is "90 percent" done. Two buildings remain to be renovated, the old hardware store where The Presidents champagne bar and wine shop will go and the old Dollar General building. Bruce is not quite ready to make an announcement about that building, but it's obvious he's got something up his sleeve. And he adds, "There is some magnificent, top quality upstairs space available for offices above Limerick, above Somerset Gallery, and above one other one, so basically some fantastic office space." Business owners take note!

Speaking of businesses, Bruce Gupton has equal words of praise for Gordonsville's other benefactor, Paul Manning (see Feb. 7, 2008 Insider) saying, "He's doing a fantastic job...it worked out perfectly and we're glad we're both in town."

So, what about the future? Near term, Jacqueline says as soon as the physical work is done, she wants to "reach out," to the community. "I would like also to attract the other population that is living in Gordonsville," she says enigmatically, referring obliquely to the fact that the town is split by the railroad, living proof of the economic and racial differences that are literally on the other side of the tracks.

"Of course we want quality everything," she continues, "but at the same time there are people living here that we can't push away. We push away, yes, the drugs,

the crime, but good people from here, we want to also be with us and be proud of their town...You can go to Pomme. You can go to The Presidents. It's your town." Her hand flies nervously to her mouth. "We don't want them to feel that they are rejected; that would be horrible."

Bruce points to the bad old days in Gordonsville, with the 'wall' and the rest of it. "That problem is pretty much under control," he observes. "And so as we get the greenway and as we do the development, people will take more pride in their houses and the value of their houses will be rising notwithstanding the housing market. So I think it's good for everybody, plus we're creating jobs and there's the whole multiplier effect that we mentioned before."

Greenway? "It would be like a park that people could walk on and ride their bicycles," he envisions. Outside this belt of green he sees as much land as possible being put into conservation easements. "That would stop the sprawl and inside that would develop the high quality of life so that people and their children can walk into town and do their shopping and walk back."

Part of the greenway could buffer the town from a bypass that might go as far as from Rt. 231 near Klockner over to the Rt. 33/15 split south of town and on to Rt. 15 North near von Holtzbrinck. Although he thinks that's going too far, Bruce adds "We're hoping that we can get enough land to get a noise buffer for the bypass as well as something for recreation...Stop the sprawl, otherwise we're going to ruin the history that we have here."

Needless to say, the housing crunch has done more to stop development than the sprouting "Don't Super-size Gordonsville" signs. Nothing seems to be happening at Coniston Manor, and the first bulldozer has yet to start at Annadale. Recent talk of annexation also seems to have stalled. "We do not favor housing developments in this area," continues Gupton. "There are lots of other places to put them." Concerning Annadale, he says, "If they do the whole development, regardless of whether it's in the town or not, it's going to be bad news."

Ten, 20 years from now, the Guptons see a vibrant and thriving Gordonsville that continues to improve. "It's like landscaping a garden, as it matures, if you've done the original planning correctly, it becomes more and more appealing. In Gordonsville, one part of the strategy is to make it sustainable," says Bruce. "And I think the businesses will be thriving; and I think, assuming the town council will protect us from sprawl...if we can contain the growth, then I see nothing but an increased quality of life for all people."

So what does the 'O' stand for?

You may be wondering how a French girl who was born and raised near the famous French palace, Fontainebleau near Paris, met and married a Virginia boy who grew up in Greensboro and went to school at Wake Forest.

It was 1967, and Jacqueline was living in Germany. She reluctantly agreed to go out on a double date with her sister who was married to an American serviceman. She remembers purposefully ignoring the polite U.S. Army Captain sitting across from her. He did something with computers. "I didn't want to talk to him...and I didn't say a word the entire evening." She laughs. "I had a roommate who needed a boyfriend." She rubs her hands gleefully together, the consummate matchmaker. But then her shoulders slump in mock disappointment. "He didn't want that woman, so I sacrificed."

Big laugh all around.

Back in the states. Bruce Gupton already has a degree in Accounting from Wake Forest. He's attending UNC Chapel Hill. They marry in Greensboro, his home town, and while he works on his MBA, she teaches French. Later at New York University, Bruce Gupton goes for his PhD in Accounting and Computer Applications and Information Systems. "I was ABD," he says. Huh? "I never finished the dissertation... All But Dissertation."

No matter. Gordonsville could choose another sugar daddy, but not one as eminently qualified and educated. Bruce Gupton transformed this education in numbers into a brilliant career, serving as a senior consulting partner at Price Waterhouse and forming two management consulting firms, including his latest, Gupton Marrs International Inc.

When asked what is it exactly that a consultant does, he responds unhesitatingly, "we're like a shrink for corporations." His specialty is "risk management, which is anything that threatens the accomplishment of their objectives." He points to disasters such as Enron, and most recently the \$7+ billion fraud case at Societe Generale. He describes his work with corporations as "transforming their operations to avoid accidents."

Meanwhile, somewhere along the line, Jacqueline picked up a degree in Comparative Lit, History and French from Columbia, where she graduated Phi Kappa, Summa Cum Laude. So, the rumor that she can barely speak English came from where???

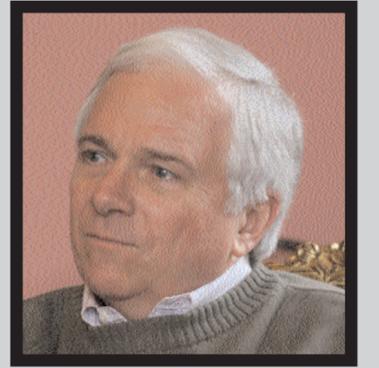
"It's getting worse," she laments, adding that she learned English in England, could translate Shakespeare on the fly, "but as far as speaking (without an accent)...zero. Understanding the spoken language was very hard." She admires her daughter-in-law, Anais (also from France) who after less than 10 years in this country sounds "almost like an American."

The Guptons have two children, Garrick and Karena. Both are married; both have two young children, making the Guptons doting grandparents. And one day the grandchildren will ask their grandfather, what does the 'O' stand for. You see, Bruce Gupton's real name is O. Bruce Gupton. So what DOES the 'O' stand for?

Bruce laughs and says it stands for, "Oh No." In other words, he's not telling. "One time in my previous consulting firm we were doing work for the FBI and they had this form, 'Tell us what the O stands for,' and I said, 'You're the FBI, you figure it out.'"

Jacqueline knows, but she won't say either. "We made a pact," she says. "If he tells my age, I tell his first name."

Finding out their ages is easy; just Google them. But you won't have any luck with the O. One thing's for sure, however; it does not stand for zero.



Married in Greensboro, North Carolina, the Guptons have lived in France, New York City, and Greenwich CT, among other places, before settling in Orange County ten years ago.

Photos by Susie Audibert

