

## Morgan Breeden honored for his love for Brentsville, his “native land”

By HEIDI M. BAUMSTARK  
Observer staff

“It is good to love one’s native land,” John Eston once said. Fourth-generation Brentsville native Morgan Breeden has proven his love and commitment for his land. Now, he’s trying to inspire others about the land called Brentsville.

Breeden received the Prince William County Volunteer of the Quarter Award for October-December 2007. Robert “Rob” Orrison, site manager of the 25-acre Brentsville Courthouse Historic Centre, which is overseen by the Prince William County Historic Preservation Division, nominated Breeden for the award for his consistent dedication to the Brentsville community and the Brentsville Courthouse Historic Centre.

The courthouse jail, Union Church, Brentsville School, Hall Cabin and nature trail that meanders by the waters of Broad Run make up the centre.

Breeden started volunteering with the county’s historic preservation division when Orrison was hired in February 2006. Breeden also worked part-time for the county for about 10 months but has since returned to volunteering.

Before his official volunteer days with the county, he spent



Heidi M. Baumstark / the Bull Run Observer

Morgan Breeden, named Prince William County Volunteer of the Quarter for October-December 2007, stands in front of the Brentsville Courthouse and jail to the right; both structures were built in 1822. He logged more than 1,000 volunteer hours in 2007 and has dedicated his talents and time in projects at the Brentsville Courthouse Historic Centre.

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Over the past few years, he has compiled over 25 “memory books”

house was undergoing renovation in 2006. During the centre’s May 5, 2007, grand opening celebration, he led visitors through the

“Giving tours is my favorite part.”

During the last “Sounds of the Season” Brentsville Holiday Concert Program, Breeden was instru-

District High School Chorus to sing for the 300 or so people who attended.

The Brentsville School reunion is also an annual county event, Breeden initiated. The one-room schoolhouse opened in 1928 when the courthouse stopped being used as a school and served first- to fifth-grade children. During the reunion, the building was open and hot spiced cider and cookies were served.

Breeden’s aunts and uncles attended this school; it closed after the 1943-1944 school year. This building is believed to have been built on the former site of a clerk’s office, which was destroyed during the Civil War,” according to “Prince William: A Past to Preserve.”

Breeden also succeeded in getting Boy Scout troops and other civic groups to complete the nature trail. In addition to researching Brentsville’s history, he also studied the site’s natural resources and wrote a self-guided nature brochure.

In July 2006, the historic centre was chosen by the popular History Channel to be filmed for its “Back to the Blueprint” series. “I was here the whole time they were filming,” Breeden said.

years taking photographs of the Brentsville area, researching the property and gathering old photos. He has done everything from construction and landscaping projects to volunteer training to research and writing, supporting staff in aspects of site management and conducting literally hundreds of tours for curious visitors.

According to Orrison, Breeden

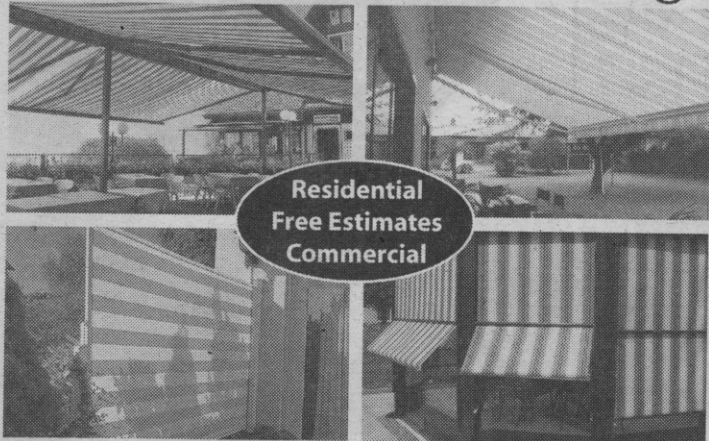
of photos and information about Brentsville into three-ring binders. These are displayed in the visitor center, located in the Brentsville School; these memory pages have received more complimentary feedback than any other feature of the Historic Preservation Division, Orrison said.

Breeden gave hard-hat tours when the 1822 Brentsville Court-

various buildings and admits, mental in getting the Brentsville

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## Brentsville neighbor volunteers 1000+ hours to keep history alive here

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When the county seat moved from Brentsville to Manassas in 1893, the Brentsville area became less known. "I'd like to change that and want people to learn about this important place in history. My major thrust is to heighten awareness to Brentsville, which geographically, is located in the center of the county," Breeden said, whose roots were first planted here in the early 1890s by his great grandfather, William Henry Breeden, who served as a juror in the courthouse. He also owned land where the Brentsville Tavern was located. It is no longer standing but was built during the 1822 timeframe when the courthouse and jail were built "since people traveled far for court and needed a place for lodging," Breeden said. Interpretive signs explain the location of the tavern, which is roped off for archaeological studies and outlines where the tavern stood. "People called it the 'Breeden lot' since my great-grandfather owned it. I remember some of my family attended the Union Church, built ca. 1880, which stands near the tavern site."

Breeden also noted that Bristow Road, which runs in front of the historic centre, was the main

pictures, touches on personal memories and includes articles from local authors. Orrison noted this newsletter is "totally Morgan's initiative, and he generously pays for it out of his own pocket."

"The courthouse was used as a school from 1910-1928, and my parents went to school here," Breeden said.

When the courthouse was no longer used as a school, the one-room Brentsville School opened. First- through fifth grades were taught there until it closed after the 1943-1944 school year. "It was the last functioning one-room schoolhouse in Prince William County. When it closed, students were bused to Brentsville District High School in Nokesville, which covered grades one through 12. This is where I went to school, along with my wife, Kay, and our three children. My mother and Kay's mother went there, too," Breeden explained.

The two-story brick jail shares the courthouse's construction year of 1822. "We lived in the jail in 1954 for about a year when I was 12 years old," Breeden remembered. Breeden lived there with his parents and three brothers until 1955 and has memories of the courthouse being used as a com-

[of this award]. He has been an invaluable asset to not only the Historic Preservation Division, but to Prince William County as a whole. He received his award at the Feb. 19 Prince William Board of County Supervisors meeting."

"There's satisfaction of seeing people get interested in all the history here. Visitors have told me, 'I live in this area and just drove by it.' What I do here is a labor of

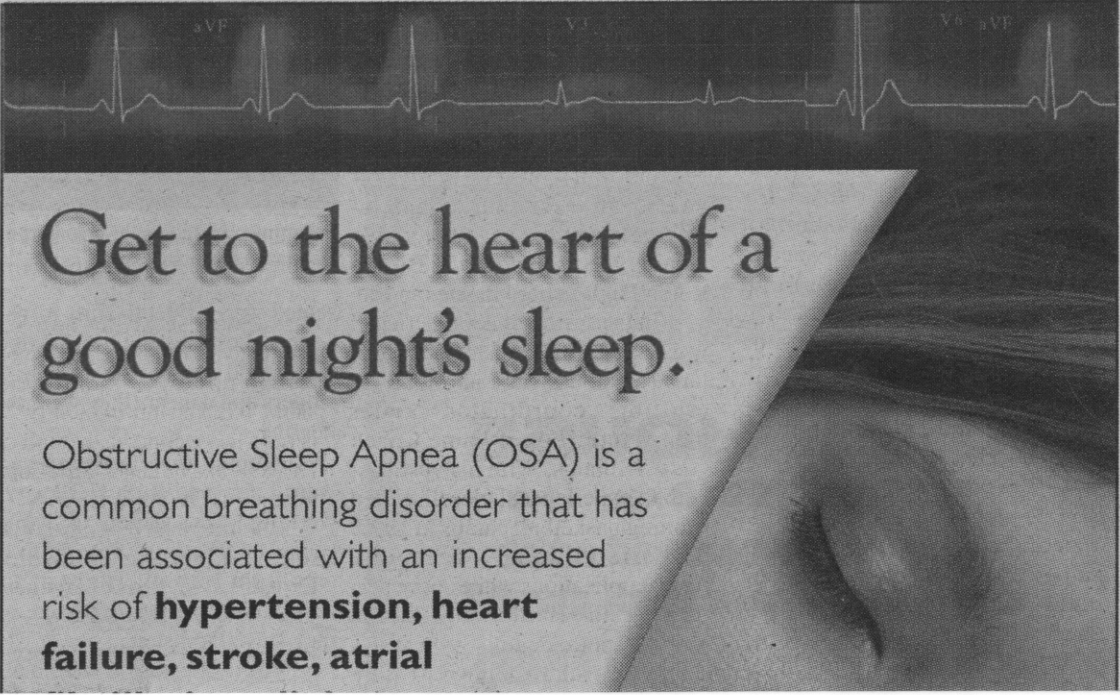
love," Breeden said.

Brendon Hanafin, chief of the county's historic preservation division said, "Morgan is an example of the very best in volunteerism. He has combined his love for Brentsville with a tremendous amount of knowledge of his community and his desire to help make a difference. He has been an invaluable part of the historic preservation team and is very

deserving of this award," Hanafin said.

Breeden hopes that others, too, will come to love his "native land."

Brentsville Courthouse Historic Centre is at 12229 Bristow Road in Brentsville. To volunteer contact Orrison at 703-365-7895 or [historicpreservation@pwcgov.org](mailto:historicpreservation@pwcgov.org).



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route from Dumfries, stretching all the way west into the Shenandoah Valley. Jim Burgess, museum specialist at the Manassas National Battlefield Park, noted, that since Brentsville was the county seat during the Civil War, local militia companies were organized here and began drilling. "The Prince William Cavalry got [its] start here in January 1860 in response to John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry in October 1859.

"Confederate troops camped near Bristoe Station after the south's victory at the First Battle of Manassas, July 21, 1861. The official records of the war mention numerous cavalry reconnaissance and minor skirmishes in the vicinity of Brentsville throughout the war," Burgess said.

Breeden continues to live in Brentsville with his wife, Mary Katherine, known as "Kay," who is a fifth-generation Brentsville native, stemming from the Keys family, another familiar name in the annals of Prince William County history. The Breedens have three grown children, two still in the Brentsville area and one in Charlottesville, where their three grandchildren live.

Since October 2005, Breeden and Nelson Keys, his wife's uncle, have published a free, monthly newsletter called "Brentsville Neighbors." Each month, the publication focuses on a building with

munity center. "There was a wooden fence separating the old jail from the courthouse. I remember dances being held in the courthouse," Breeden said.

Near the nature trail is the recent restoration of the Hall Cabin, constructed ca. 1830 of logs, according to Orrison, and moved in 2000 to the Brentsville Courthouse Historic Centre. It originally was near Broad Run in the Braemar housing development in Bristow and has recently been restored to reflect how it might have appeared. Breeden has taken it upon himself to invest countless hours of research in the Hall Cabin. His findings have led to the furnishing, interpretive signs and the development of educational programs.

His research found that John W. Hall was a courier on Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee's staff during the Civil War. Linton Hall Road, Breeden said, may have been named for the Hall family. A Linton family cemetery is in a wooded section of the Braemar subdivision. "It could be very likely that Linton Hall Road was named after these two families, but this has not been substantiated," Breeden noted.

It is this speculation and, more importantly, its associated research that prompted Orrison to nominate Breeden for volunteer of the quarter. Orrison said, "Morgan was very happy and is very deserving

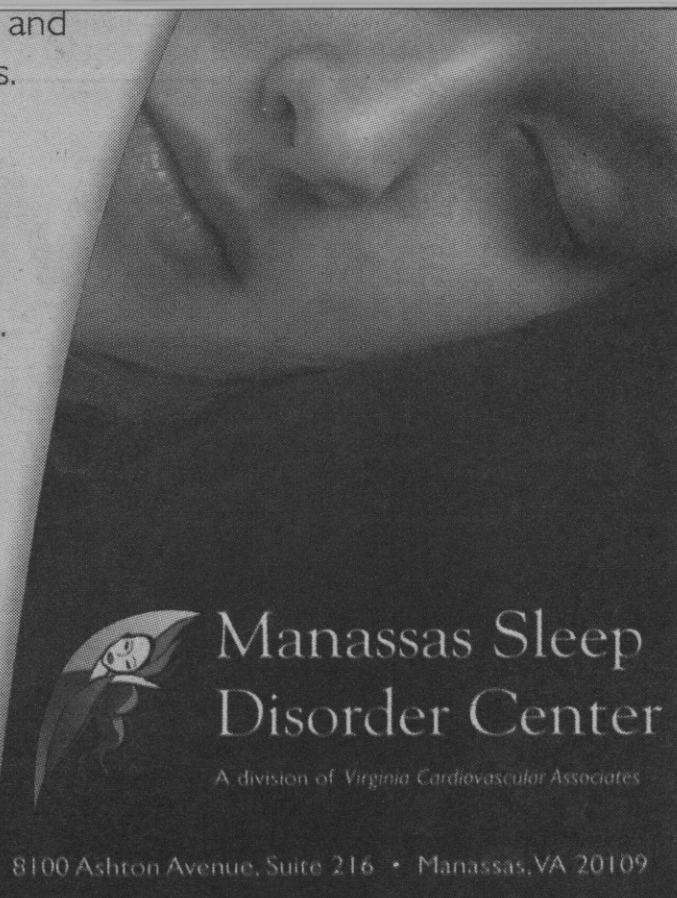
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