

Fall 2009

# BUCKHEAD

## *Living*

LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

Alan S. Dover Redefines  
Mountain Living  
in North Georgia

*Explore  
Blue Ridge,  
a True  
Arts Town*

**PGA Championship  
Returns to the AAC**

**"Gone with the Wind"  
Re-Premiers in Marietta**

**Have You Been Back to  
Callaway Gardens Lately?**

# Travels in a True Arts Town

*With a vibrant arts association, renowned festivals and a growing artist population, Blue Ridge is becoming North Georgia's premier art community*

*by Steffen Smith*

**T**aos...Provincetown...Jackson Hole...they are all locales blessed with stunning scenery and a vibrant culture that seem to nurture the creative spirit.

Much closer to home, one North Georgia town is establishing itself as an arts town in its own right, giving Atlantans a whole new reason to head for the mountains!

## **Arts in a Mountain Town**

The folks who define such things say that a true arts town has an “area of arts density”—a town center bristling with galleries, studios and crafts workshops, as well as live theater, cafes with locally produced art, and historical buildings. Of course, there should also be an arts council and daily classes in the arts that involve many of the townsfolk, and draw students and tourists.

“That sounds like us!,” exclaims Sarah Verner, executive director of the Blue Ridge Mountains Arts Association. Located in the scenic mountain town of Blue Ridge, this vibrant association rivals its big-city cousins—to the point that neighboring arts associations frequently send delegations to find out just what all the fuss is about.



*Lauded by Southern Living magazine as a leading regional event, the annual Arts In The Park festival draws artists and visitors from across the Southeast for a Memorial Day weekend's worth of arts, crafts, music and food in the downtown City Park.*

*Most photos courtesy of the Blue Ridge Mountains Arts Association.*



*The Historic Fannin County courthouse not only serves as a welcome home to The Art Center, but has also become a catalyst for a creative renaissance in Blue Ridge—housing impressive galleries, performance space and classrooms for the arts.*

### From Courthouse to Creative Catalyst

“There has been a strong culture of art here for centuries,” Verner muses, recalling the quilts and decorative dolls made by her own mother. “But the catalyst really is the building,” she says, referring to the historic Fannin County courthouse. After being turned over to the Arts Association several years ago, the crumbling building has undergone a remarkable metamorphosis.

The once-solemn courtroom now bursts with light and color as the home of a rotating gallery of local and regional artworks. Offices where county bureaucrats once fussed over their papers now house classes in everything from “conceptual impressionism” to kudzu basketry. And each month, clubs for artists, woodcarvers, poets, photographers and book lovers all gather for meetings.

### A Party in the Park

Perhaps the biggest celebration of the arts in Blue Ridge occurs over Memorial Day weekend, when some 20,000 art lovers descend on the tree-shaded downtown city park for the annual Arts In The Park festival. That’s not bad for what started out as a locals-only exhibit of area

*please continue on page 36*



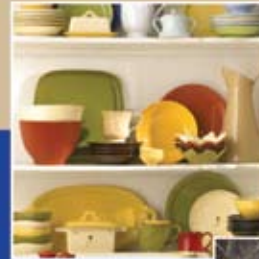
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*Gala exhibit openings in The Art Center are a much-anticipated part of social life in Blue Ridge.*

## Arts Town

*from page 33*

high-schooler's art several decades back. Another 10,000 or so visitors show up for the nature-themed Wildlife & Nature Art Festival & Expo in September.

### **The Smell of the Crowd**

Then there's theater. From humble beginnings some 10 years ago (early performances were held in an elementary school cafeteria), the Blue Ridge Community Theater has blossomed into a thoroughly professional group that offers 30 weekends of live entertainment each year.

At last count, the troupe was at 74 productions, 486 performances and a combined audience of 37,705! And that doesn't count the 400+ children who have attended the Theater's wildly popular Sunny D Summer Camp.

Of course, the stage has seen the likes of community-

theater-staples such as *Our Town* and *The Fantasticks*. But the group has also tackled the offbeat and ambitious (the buzz was so fierce during a run of *Della's Diner* that Tom Edwards, the play's Atlanta author, stopped in to experience the trailer-park kitsch for himself).

"Visitors are always asking how we find so much talent in such a small town," notes Pat Webb, one of the theater's founders and a long-time volunteer.

"That's the miracle of it. This area draws so many talented, creative people." As the theater settles into its new 5,600-square-

foot, 150-seat home, it appears the sky's the limit.

### **Potters, Painters and Poets**

Of course, an arts town without artists is like a brush without paints. But there's no shortage of potters, painters and poets in Blue Ridge. "Creative people like to surround themselves with creative people and live and visit areas with creative opportunities," explains Webb. "Many, many smart people understand the productivity of working in less stressful, more natural environments."

One of those creative folks is noted painter Anthony Abreu, who traded in the hectic pace of South Florida for

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*There are very few venues like this...a small town where you can come and stroll through high-quality galleries, take in live theater and visit artisans.*

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I came to these mountains for the awesome beauty and inherent kindness of the people. To be blessed in a way that allows me to capture this spirit on canvas is a magnificent bonus.

- Anthony A. Abreu



*Anthony A. Abreu*

Abreu Fine Art Gallery - 497 East Main Street, Blue Ridge, Georgia 30513

[www.anthoniabreu.com](http://www.anthoniabreu.com) [www.abreufineartgallery.com](http://www.abreufineartgallery.com)



From theater to dance and summer jazz and blues concerts, the arts seem to embrace everyone in Blue Ridge. At last count, the Blue Ridge Mountains Arts Association had offered a total of 91 classes in the arts, including ongoing classes in dance and music.



the solitude of a mountaintop studio. His, warm, evocative paintings of simpler times are incredibly popular with vacation-home-owning Atlantans and collectors alike. “The mountains speak to me...they give me stories to paint,” explains Abreu. “Since moving to the mountains, I’ve painted with much more freedom.”

### The Gallery Life

While Abreu paints, wife Christine is busy running the Abreu Fine Arts Gallery in a distinctive downtown space that once housed the town’s shoe repair shop. “We were originally thinking of opening a gallery over in Highlands (NC),” Christine recalls. “But when we saw what Blue Ridge had to offer, we saw it as our opportunity to get in on the ground floor of an area that is destined to become the next Highlands.”

Down the shop-lined street from Abreu’s gallery lies High Country Art & Antique, which epitomizes the eclectic mix that is the arts in Blue Ridge. Owner Cheryl Engledow prides herself on the bright, funky feel of her gallery, now the oldest on downtown Blue Ridge’s “gallery row.”

“There are so many galleries that come across as very quiet, very intimidating places,” she notes. “We really try to provide something for everyone.” An experienced portrait photographer, Engledow has created a truly magical melange of international and regional artists, such as Wen Ze Chen, Clifford Bailey, Marsha Savage, Carol Christie, Mark Gould, Melody Boggs, folk artist C.W. Conner and many more.

### The Gallery Life

Of course, it helps that all of that art is also good for business. No one understands that better than George Slusser, co-owner along with wife June of Coldwell Banker High Country Realty. “People from Atlanta and Florida are greatly surprised at the level and quality of cultural activities here,” he says. “It’s a big selling point.”



## Upcoming Blue Ridge Events

### Blue Ridge Community Theater:

(706.632.9223 / [www.blueridgecommunitytheater.com](http://www.blueridgecommunitytheater.com))

- Art by Yasmina Reza—Oct. 2-11
- An Evening with Frank Sinatra—Sept. 18-19
- A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens—Nov. 6-29
- The Life and Adventures of Santa Claus (Sunny D Children’s Production)—Dec. 11-20

### The Art Center:

(706.632.2144 / <http://blueridgearts.net>)

- 2nd Annual National Juried Art Show —Oct. 17 - Nov. 14
- Annual Holiday Art Show & Sale—Nov. 21 - Dec. 19

### Festivals:

- 10th Annual Wildlife & Nature Art Festival & Expo (downtown city park)—Sept. 19-20
- Mountain Harvest Arts & Crafts Sale (Blue Ridge Farmers Market)—Oct. 17-18 & Oct. 24-25