

## Massies Mill Ruritan Club

# Ruritans work to improve community

BY KATRINA KOERTING  
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For the past 60 years, Massies Mill Ruritan Club has served the surrounding community and Nelson County as a whole.

"The Ruritan movement is very simple, very forthright," said Carrington Wilkerson, the immediate past president of the organization. "All we're about is to improve communities to build a better America by doing three things: fellowship, goodwill and community service."

Over the years, the group of about 36 members has donated more than \$10,000 a year to more than 15 organizations in the county, especially youth organizations like 4-H, Boy Scouts and Future Farmers of America. The club also awards an annual \$1,000 scholarship to a student in Nelson. All of the money raised is split between donations and paying the bills for the building, including electricity, heating, cooling and insurance.

To raise money the group rents out its building, which was built in honor of its first president who died in Hurricane Camille, for activities like weddings and family reunions. The group also hosts several fundraisers throughout the year including serving hundreds of hamburgers, hot dogs and other food at Relay for Life and the Silver Creek Cr-

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chards Apple Festival.

The club also hosts a four-day carnival at the end of June where different organizations have the opportunity to have booths or help out to raise money for their cause. For example, the Piney River Fire Department runs the parking, so all of the parking donations are given to their department.

"We help organizations help themselves," said David Hight, the treasurer for Massies Mill Ruritan Club.

Their donations extend beyond monetary. They also participate in a program that provides supplemental snacks to elementary school students that would not have enough food on the weekend otherwise, as well as continued support of the Nelson County Food Pantry.

Aside from donating food and money to local organizations and community members, the club also provides entertainment for the county with its six dances throughout the year.

The dances feature a band and are open from 9 p.m. to 1 p.m. The admission costs also provide money for the

club to donate to local organizations. One of these dances will be this Saturday at the Ruritan Club.

The biggest challenge and change the club has faced over the years has been in membership. Since the employment opportunities in the area dwindled to three local businesses, most younger people are leaving to work and so don't have as much time for clubs like the Ruritan club, Hight said.

Anyone is welcome to join the Ruritan club, but they must obtain a sponsor and fill out an application. Their potential membership is voted on at the monthly meetings, which happen on the first Tuesday of every month. Each member is required to pay the \$40 national dues.

"You have to be willing to pay money to give your time away," Hight said. "Personally though, I get back more than I give with friendship, fellowship and community service."

The membership ranges from retired college professors to independent business owners. The majority of the members are retired

with the youngest members in their 40s.

Even though Ruritan National is a national organization with about 30,000 members across the country, each club has its own goals and purpose geared towards the locality they serve. Even within Nelson, the three Ruritan groups differ in the projects they help.

Massies Mill has occasionally worked with the Rockfish and Lovingson Ruritan groups, although the clubs tend to function more individually.

Massies Mill Ruritan Club was organized on May 2, 1951 with one of its primary goals to help create the Piney River Fire Department. The club purchased the department's first engine, a 1954 GMC fire truck, which the department still has.

Aside from the community service and fundraising, fellowship among the members is also important.

Every summer, depending on the success of the carnival, the members will have a picnic for them and their families. Only about two percent of the money raised from the year is spent on the members in the form of this picnic.

Hight said the relationships are strong among the club and his fellow members were there to help him when he broke his hip.

He said, "We consider ourselves an extended family that helps each other."