



Photo courtesy Frances Gonzalez

Children enjoy a hayride at the Blair Community Center.

Director wants Blair center to do more for community

By Bobb Hane
Staff Writer

BLAIR - Frances Gonzalez knows the Blair Community Center is serving Blair, but she wants to see it do more.

The main activity, the Parents as Teachers program is funded by the United Way and Success by Six.

The Parents as Teachers program is based on the vision that all parents will be their child's best first teachers.

Some of the goals include: To give the child a solid foundation for school success; to increase parents' competence and confidence in giving the child the best possible start in life; to increase

parents' knowledge of child development and appropriate ways to stimulate learning and to promote a strong parent-child relationship.

Components of the program are personalized home visits by certified parent educators trained in child development, group meetings of parents and children, periodic screening of overall development, and a community resource network.

"Specifically, the main purpose that the United Way wants this for is to use the Parents as Teachers curriculum," Gonzalez said. "In Parents as Teachers we serve children birth to five, but

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we also are trying to incorporate the whole community in this center."

There is no charge to enroll in the program. Approximately 30 children are participating.

During June, July and August, Gonzalez has scheduled a story hour and snack time each Thursday afternoon, adult computer classes, a movie and popcorn

night and a parent group meeting. The Fairfield County bookmobile visits the center on the first and third Monday afternoons of each month.

The center is located at 176 Highway 215 North in Blair. Gonzalez will consider allowing the community center to be used for community-oriented events.

For more information, call either 712-6437 or 712-9444.

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BLAIR

FROM PAGE B1

The marker for Blair is a stone's throw from the store, the only place of commerce hereabouts, and a trailer that houses the post office.

Several years ago, there was talk of closing the Blair post office, but the community rebuffed the attempt. Now, 27 boxes are rented by customers who include the volunteer fire department and a rock quarry nearby.

The sign outside the store reads R.M. Blair Inc. General Merchandise, but over the years the work clothes, hardware and groceries have been replaced by antiques.

Nice antiques, too, like the \$1,800 Edgefield pottery jar with six X's stamped near the lip, signifying that it holds six gallons.

Edgefield pottery is owner Bill Hendrix's current phase. At various times, he has collected washboards, paper-bag racks, pub tables and stringholders that hang from the ceiling like durable Christmas tree ornaments.

"I go from one thing to the other," Hendrix said.

Hendrix has a nice collection of Ro-seville vases acquired by his late wife, Nancy Blair Hendrix.

Her father, Ray M. Blair, ran the store for years while building a land and mercantile empire. Price tags in her handwriting are a reminder of the woman who loved to go on antique-buying trips with her husband to Ohio, Pennsylvania and Florida.

The majority of these antiques, though, are from Georgia and South Carolina, many from close by, such as a 100-year-old coffee grinder that came out of the old Barnes Grocery that once did business in Prosperity.

Hendrix engages visitors with his assortment of curious farm imple-ments and displays from general stores. Some of it he refuses to sell.

The year 1982, when the Wal-Mart opened in Newberry, was a turning point for the Blair store, he said. That's when Hendrix changed its focus from general merchandise to antiques.

He still carries canned meats and fruits for the hunting season and keeps a candy jar stocked with free pepper-mints for children.

But it's antiques that fill the main room and six aluminum-siding addi-tions.

Hendrix, 64, keeps the place open for the nostalgia of it. He figures the store, off S.C. 34 between Newberry and Winnsboro, will close for good once he decides to retire.

Most of the Blairs have moved

BLAIR

■ **Claim to fame:** R.M. Blair Inc. General Merchandise

■ **Population:** Hard to say, since Blair is a community, not a town.

■ **How to get there from the Midlands:** Take I-26 west to the Newberry/Winnsboro exit, which is S.C. 34. Go right, toward Winnsboro, about 14 miles. Once you cross the Broad River, start looking for a paved road to the left. Take it. In about two miles, there'll be a quarry on the right, fol-lowed by a stop sign. Go left. The road dead-ends at the store.

Blair, who live in Columbia, and their younger brother Larry, who lives in Beaufort.

Frank, 71, said when he was grow-ing up in Blair there were enough boys living within 3 miles of the store to field a couple of baseball teams.

Now, he doesn't see kids around when he comes back for weekend vis-its in Blair.

Pelham Lyles, director of the Fair-field County Museum in Winnsboro and a descendent of early settlers near Blair, said the landscape around the community is changing.

Big timber companies have squeezed out the one-man logging op-erations. Here and there along the two-lane highway, homemade signs warn drivers to watch for logging trucks.

Most of the big plantations in the area were cut up and sold by the turn of the century, but the Blair family held on.

away but keep up a proud connection to Fairfield County.

Among them are Frank and Bob

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FAMOUS TOWNS

Blair's country store keeps community rooted

Former general store has been converted into an antique store

By DAWN HINSHAW
Staff Writer

The bell over the screen door jangles as three men in workboots clomp across the worn wood floor.

Coming in from a July sky, the store seems awfully dim, but Wayne Hiller knows he'll find a cold drink in the cooler.

A railroad man, Hiller said he's been coming to the old country store

ABOUT THIS SERIES

Almost every town has some claim to fame. Whether the birthplace of a celebrity, the site of an important battle, or the home of a unique artifact, towns large and small can boast about being famous for something. Every Monday this summer, The State will feature a town in South Carolina and its claim to fame, or at least one of its claims.

To suggest a town for us to feature, write to Paul Osmundson, assistant managing editor, P.O. Box 1333, Columbia, SC 29202; or send e-mail to posmundon@thestate.com. The fax number is (803) 771-8430.

in Blair for 30 years.

"It's back in time," he said, settling into a rocking chair to pet the black-

and-tan dog called Mary Jane. "It's peaceful and quiet around here. There's no big rush."

This is where the road to Blair, S.C., leads -- a semicircle of rockers around a wood stove where old dogs, and old friends, rest easy.

No one seems to know when the Fairfield County community was given a name.

But it was named for the Blair family, who built the general store near a ferry crossing on the Broad River sometime around 1870.

The store burned twice. The current building, a cross between an antique store and museum of mercantile memorabilia, is dated 1933.

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TAKAAKI IWABU/THE STATE

The origin of Blair was a country store. The store burned twice before the current building was built.