

Architecture a big draw for downtown walking tours

By **Rebekah Carter**

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Come see **Staunton's** nationally renowned preservation, and experience and learn about town's 19th century architecture at the Historic Staunton Foundation's Free Saturday Walking Tours. The foundation is celebrating its 26th year of giving free tours in Historic Downtown Staunton, sponsored by Blue Mountain Coffees.

Tours begin at the Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library and end at the Tourist Information Center in the parking garage.

Frank Strassler, executive director of the foundation, said the idea behind the tours is to celebrate the preservation and revitalization of downtown and surrounding historic neighborhoods. "Preservation has brought vitality to these areas," Strassler said.

"On the tours, we discuss Staunton's history and development, such as the importance of the railroad, the effects of the Civil War and how the city grew from the original plots around the Courthouse into a vibrant Victorian town," he said. "Along the way, we note significant buildings, and also note our vast and eclectic inventory of Victorian architecture and architectural styles."

Strassler said the tours focus particularly on the architecture firm of T.J. Collins and Son, which designed the Augusta County

Courthouse, White Star Mills, The R.R. Smith Center for History and Art, the Switzer Building, the National Bank Building and more than 200 projects within the Staunton area. Of Staunton's six historic districts, the tour takes tourists through four of them: Gospel Hill, Beverley, Newtown and the Wharf.

"We talk about how the district got their names, who Beverley, Frederick and Augusta streets were named for, and other Staunton historic trivia that broadens our understanding of our town and its information," Strassler said.

Karen Hudson, who has been giving the tours for more than 10 years, said the foundation is a satisfying organization, because the mission is so worthwhile.

"It's been a lot of fun and it's always interesting because you never know how many people will show up," she said. "I've had as few as three people and as many as 20 or more people."

"Some local people come in the tours because they want to know about the history of the town, while others are visiting from out of town," she said.

Hudson said it's always interesting to know why people come to

Staunton, whether it be for events, curiosity for something interesting to do or simply coming to visit family. "That part of it is always interesting," she said.

She adds that with Staunton being a hilly town, the walking tour is sometimes a little strenuous, so walkers should wear comfortable walking shoes.

"Everyone always seems to have good time and enjoy the special things that Staunton has to offer, especially the architecture," she said.

"At the end of the tour you have a good feeling that people enjoyed it."

IF YOU GO!

» **what:**
Free Saturday Walking Tours of Historic Downtown Staunton

» **when:**
10 a.m. Saturdays from May to October

» **where:**
Downtown Staunton

» **cost:**
Free

» **more info:**
For more information, call Historic Downtown Foundation office at 885-7676 or the Tourist Information Center at 332-3971 or visit historicstaunton.org

GO!

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