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# The *Hot* TAMARACK Experience

Treat your senses at this one-of-a-kind cultural center in Beckley.

Written by Laura C. Wilcox  
Photography by Rick Lee

For nearly 15 years, Tamarack has provided a unique rest stop for travelers' eyes, ears, and taste buds, with 60,000 square feet of West Virginia arts, crafts, music, and food. This season, become one of the 500,000 annual visitors and bring the best of West Virginia into your home.

Whether you want to sit back and relax or shop until you drop, Tamarack's got it all. Enjoy a fresh meal from A Taste of West Virginia, managed by The Greenbrier, or relax in a rocking chair with some coffee or homemade fudge. Once caffeinated, you'll be ready for a stroll through the center's vast circle of culture and crafts, where you'll find everything from a rainbow assortment of hand blown glass and aisles of locally prepared food items to unique hand-thrown pottery and intricately woven baskets. Tamarack also offers a large selection of jewelry, home furnishings, and artwork. If you're looking for reading material, their extensive collection of cookbooks, fiction, and nonfiction makes Tamarack a hot spot for discovering West Virginia writers. It's the perfect place to get a start on holiday gifts.

"Tamarack is like a mall for the creative, and no two visits are alike," says marketing director Cindy Whitlock. "You can find just about any type of traditional or contemporary handcraft, and everything here is made by West Virginia artists," Cindy says. Built in 1996, the building itself is unmistakable, with its many red peaks and circular design, resembling West Virginia's own mountainous terrain. From above, the center is a reflection of deep Appalachian tradition—it looks like a starburst quilt pattern, appropriate consid-

ering the state's affinity for quilting.

Both Tamarack and the Tamarack Foundation were the vision of former Governor Gaston Caperton, as well as of the many citizens and artists who wanted to share West Virginia's best art, crafts, and cuisine with the world. According to Sally Barton, executive director of the Tamarack Foundation, the project encompasses economic development, education, art, and cultural preservation. Many have supported the initiative, especially those who saw the opportunity for small business development within the arts industry. "West Virginia artisan entrepreneurs are small businesses with big impact, contributing \$19 million annually toward our state's economy," Sally says. "By supporting the Tamarack Foundation, we can continue to create opportunities that keep our young emerging artisans and our master artisans creating artwork and jobs that keep our communities unique and thriving."

The name "Tamarack" comes from the Tamarack tree, known for versatility and beauty, and the name fits. Inside, displays are ever changing. Such variety and uniqueness strike many visitors, including well-known Tamarack glass artist Ron Hinkle. "It's almost overwhelming," says Ron. "I know so many of the artists, but I catch myself just going around and around in the long circle, never realizing that I've passed the door many times." Ron's own works—everything from Christmas ornaments to high-end vases—have been on display at Tamarack for nearly 15 years, and the Buckhannon native has been glassblowing for 37 years. He's seen a lot, but at Tamarack, it's always something new. "There are things to see everywhere—art, crafts, books, music, food. You could stay for days and not see everything."



Two-thousand artists are juried in Tamarack, where you can buy marbles for pocket change or spend thousands of dollars on a Burl Jones sculpture. Take a walk and you will likely stumble across resident artists demonstrating their crafts in observation studios. Every weekend also offers food tastings and demonstrations, and Tamarack hosts free concerts on Sundays at 2 p.m., featuring live music, dance, theater, and other performances.

Perhaps the most talked-about aspect of Tamarack, though, is the food, thanks to The Greenbrier-managed food court with great variety and prices. "People come back again and again and again for the food," Cindy says. The most popular food item is the fried green tomato sandwich, but bread pudding, cobblers, and much more also are prepared on the spot. "It has a home-cooked feel," Cindy says. "Not too many places serve kale anymore. The food we serve makes people think of home and of Grandma's cooking."

You can also take culinary classes at Tamarack—learn to grill in the summer, make tailgate and comfort foods in the fall, cook a turkey in November, and whip up sweet treats in December. Groups can call ahead to make arrangements for cooking classes of their own, too.

Tamarack is truly a one-of-a-kind, multidimensional shop, eatery, and cultural experience in

a single location off of Interstate 77. The center provides a calming respite from travel and an escape from the ordinary, inviting people to walk around at their own pace or just pop in for a fresh lunch.

So stop in for some beans and cornbread, and fill a homemade basket with West Virginia chocolates and mountain-made wine. Or, just kick back with a cup of coffee in a rocking chair and watch the many people pass. "Part of being at Tamarack is the experience of being here," Cindy says, calling it a one-stop shop to see West Virginia. "You get a real idea of what the state is all about as opposed to the idea you may have come here with."

TAMARACK, ONE TAMARACK PARK, BECKLEY, WV 25801; 304.256.6843; 1.88.TAMARACK; TAMARACKWV.COM



#### WHEN TO GO:

*Open daily from 8 a.m.–8 p.m., except Christmas  
Closes at 5 p.m. on Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Eve, and New Year's Eve*

#### WHERE TO EAT:

*The food court is open  
Breakfast: 8–10:45 a.m.  
Winter Breakfast, beginning in January: 10–10:45 a.m.  
Lunch/Dinner: 11 a.m.–close*

RED SPRUCE | CHRISTMAS ON THE FRONTIER | TAMARACK FOUNDATION

# WONDERFUL WEST VIRGINIA





# *Helping Artisans to Thrive* The Tamarack Foundation

By Terry Pickett

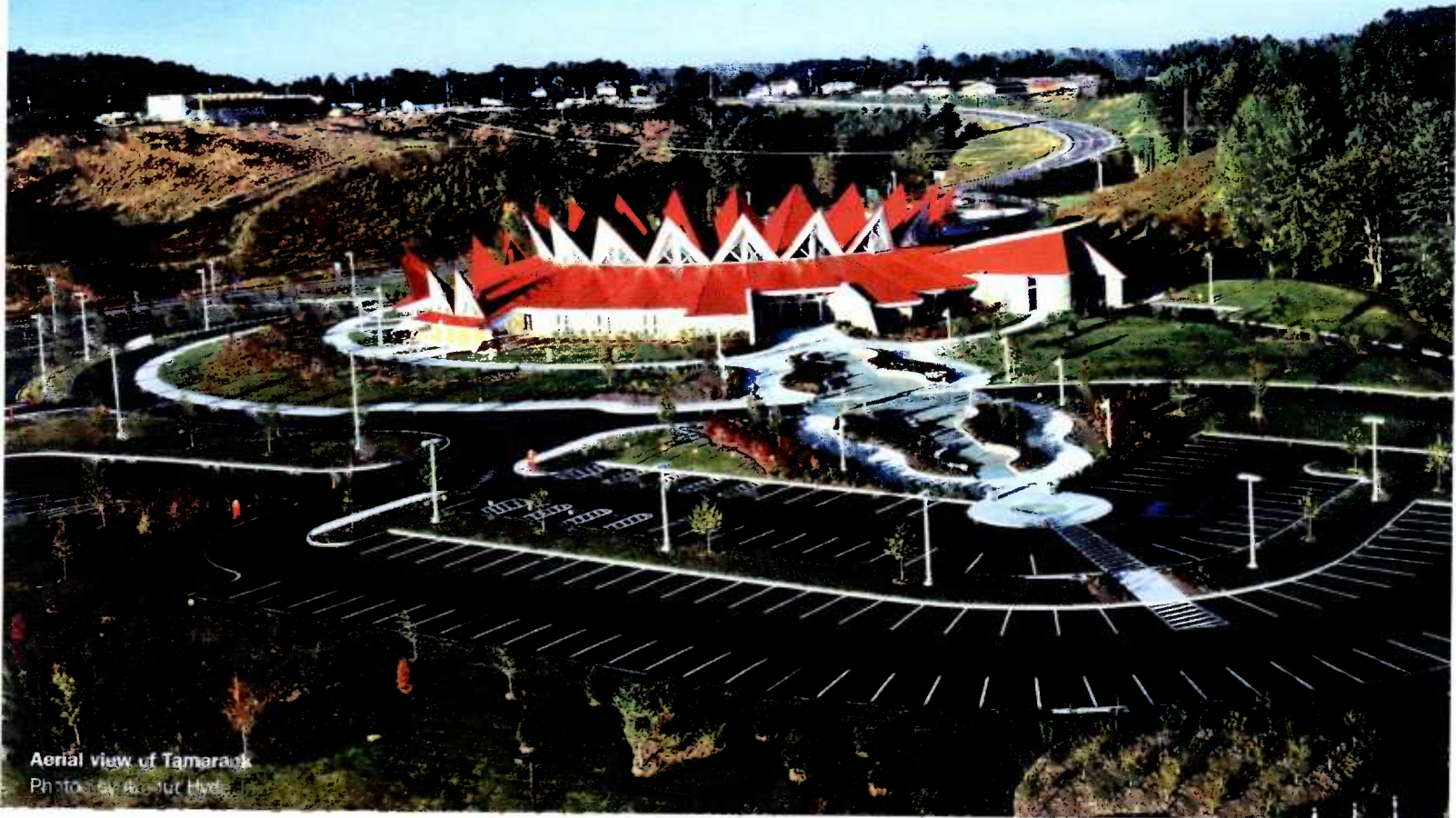
**W**hen most people think of Tamarack, they think of that wonderful construction off I-77 in Beckley, the one with peaked, red roofs that looks like a quilt pattern, or a spaceship, or a spiky, punk-rock haircut. The realization of Gov. Gaston Caperton's visionary "experiment" to showcase West Virginia's fine arts and crafts, Tamarack not only gives artisans a place to reliably sell their wares but also enhances West Virginia's image.

"I've always believed that tourism was key in building the economy of West Virginia," says Caperton, now president of the College Board. "And I've always loved West Virginia crafts and artists. If artists in fairs across the state had to sit

there spending time selling, they couldn't spend time doing their art. We needed to create a spectacular place to sell arts and crafts retail, so that state artists would be allowed to do what they do best."

Tamarack's retail store, the Caperton Center, provides an excellent outlet for the goods of West Virginia artisans. But Tamarack is much more than a "spectacular place"; it's an entire system that includes more than 2,300 artisans, aided and buttressed by the Tamarack Foundation. The foundation was established in 2003 to solidify and expand Tamarack's mission to educate, train, and provide needed support for artisans, so that they can become entrepreneurs.

"The Tamarack Foundation is the research and development arm of the Tamarack system, although we're more service and development," says Sally Barton, executive director of the Tamarack Foundation. "The foundation has established



Aerial view of Tamarack  
 Photo by Andrew Hyde

itself as an effective driver of small business development in West Virginia in all 55 counties. Our programs give artisans the resources and training to grow.”

The foundation receives funding from multiple sources, including the Appalachian Regional Commission, the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation, and the West Virginia Parkways Authority. “The funding from the Parkways Authority has provided the necessary leverage to attract an additional three million dollars in support over six years,” says Barton. “That leverage is particularly attractive to out-of-state funders.”

The Tamarack Foundation is centered primarily in the Artisan Resource Center in Beckley, but it is taken “on the road” as much as possible. Services and programs the foundation offers include prescreening, for artisans to determine if their work is likely to meet Tamarack’s standards. Whatever

the outcome, artisans receive basic business and marketing consultation and advice on how best to develop their products, whether they’re geared for Tamarack or other markets.

The Tamarack Foundation also offers an apprenticeship program that partners a master artisan with an apprentice. The foundation pays half the apprentice’s salary. In addition, the foundation sponsors the Tamarack Foundation Artisan Relief Program, which provides financial help for artisans who experience career-threatening emergency situations.

Finally, the foundation provides Tamarack artisans with professional development grants, fellowships, and funds for craft business equipment. The foundation is sometimes able to sell equipment to artisans at a hefty discount for start-ups or business improvement.

In 2008, the Tamarack Foundation commissioned the Marshall University Center for Business and Economic

Research to conduct an extensive study on the economic impact of Tamarack. According to the study, Tamarack is unique among the 50 states and “provides the most comprehensive and extensive program, primarily under the auspices of the Tamarack Foundation.”

The study found that in one year, the Tamarack system, comprising the Caperton Center retail store and Tamarack’s artisans, with the support of the foundation, generated \$18.6 million for West Virginia’s economy. Of that, \$400,000 went back to the state in sales tax and \$1.4 million went to state and local income taxes.

“Tamarack is a national example for economic development in the arts,” says Barton. “It puts forward our proud, highly skilled artisans and transforms the perception of who is a West Virginian. The Tamarack Foundation is the catalyst that allows Tamarack to renew itself and our artisans to thrive.”

#### Ceramic Artist and Businessperson

Ceramic artist Lindsay Philabaun of St. Albans is one of Tamarack’s youngest artisans. Once a belly dancer during Charleston’s FestivALL celebration, she holds a bachelor’s degree in fine arts from Marshall University. She met her husband, Jason, a graphic designer, in a weaving class. They have a baby boy, Evan, and Philabaun’s studio is set up beside his bedroom.

Philabaun at first thought she wanted to major in sculpture. “Welding was fun and I thought pottery was for the wussies,” she says. “But then I had to take a pottery class. I loved the feel, the tactile quality of pottery. You could play with it and move it. It was more flexible than metal.”

Philabaun changed her major and stayed an extra semester at Marshall. “In school I always liked science, history, and chemistry,” she says. “Ceramics filled all those interests. With glazes there’s lots of chemistry. Pottery started in Egypt 4,000 years ago. I like being part of that long tradition. And pottery is functional. We use it in our daily lives.”

Philabaun was juried into Tamarack in 2008. She went to a prescreening in Huntington with Ron DeWitt and Steve Cassle of the Tamarack Foundation. “They said I needed to fix a few little things and bring my piece to their office,” she recalls. “I had originally shown them a pitcher, but I brought back a vine plate. I had taken a big leap. My design was simplified, much cleaner. On jury day, I got in, immediately had orders from Tamarack for April, and delivered my pieces at the end of June. It was kind of a whirlwind.

“Ron and Steve helped me set up my business and got me working with a CPA,” Philabaun says. “They provide a real support system. I can call them whenever I want. I consider



**Ceramic artist and businesswoman** Lindsay Philabaun  
Steven Wayne Rotsch

**(Next page) Diverse artists**  
**Phil and** Teresa Holcomb  
Ron Gaskins

myself to be both a ceramic artist and a businessperson. You need to be both or you’re not going to make it.”

Philabaun is making it. Named best new out-of-state exhibitor at the Kentucky Crafted show two years ago, she is “as busy as possible now,” with orders from Tamarack and many other clients.

Visit [www.lindsayphilabaun.com](http://www.lindsayphilabaun.com), e-mail [lindsay@lindsayphilabaun.com](mailto:lindsay@lindsayphilabaun.com), or call 304.546.1986.

#### Banjos, Bookmarks, and More

Phil and Teresa Holcomb live in Spencer with their daughter, Sierra. They, along with blacksmith Jeff Fetty (see p. 15), are part of a growing colony of artisans in the area. Both are Spencer natives. A noted *luthier*, or maker of stringed musical instruments, Phil has been featured in numerous newspapers and magazines and appeared on PBS’s *American Woodshop*. Teresa, an award-winning artist, has been featured in *Inside Weddings* magazine. She sells her work to more than 100 galleries across the United States, as well as abroad.