

# High Rock Farm: chestnuts & more

By **ASHLEY RAMEY**

Special to *Creekside Chronicle*

Sitting quietly off High Rock Road north of Gibsonville, passersby may not realize the history, past or present, of High Rock Farm. The farm has existed since 1807 when the McCain family built a homeplace.

The home was built by Joseph McCain, U.S. Senator John McCain's fourth great-grandfather, and features many large rooms, eight fireplaces, antique furniture, and beautiful landscaping. Beyond its historic heritage, the historic home is an operational farm that cultivates chestnuts for a variety of commerce in local markets.

"Our first chestnut tree was planted in 1991 and it was mainly planted as a hobby crop," shares Brianne McAlister, marketing director for High Rock Farm. "We planted it to diversify the pecan tree crop that was already located on the land."

Current farm owner Richard Teague wanted to improve the pecan crop on his acreage, and it was thought that the pecan trees would benefit from the cross pollination with chestnut trees.



"The opposite happened," McAlister explains. "We were told that pecan trees do well in the area, but when we planted those first chestnut trees, the chestnut crop flourished."

With his house on the National Register of Historic Places, McAlister says owner Teague enjoys seeing the fruits of his labor. A former chemical engineer, nut farming was a new endeavor in retirement after his wife acquired the historic home in the 1990s.

"My late wife was deeply involved with historic preservation, and this home interested her," Teague recalls. "We had lived in Winston-Salem and found that this place was in poor shape and in need of repair; we spent three years fixing it up before moving here."

Purchased in the early 1990s, the Teague couple continued to work on the

family that date back three generations," Teague says.

When the couple applied for historic register of the property, Preservation North Carolina asked that it maintain its agricultural heritage. Rather than be divided into a house and small lot and the surrounding farmland sold, the society asked that the couple become caretakers of the 130-acre farm.

"It was then that I decided to try and plant nut trees while I was still employed," Teague says. "I planted pecans and chestnuts because they do well in this area."



Richard Teague presides over High Rock Farm north of Gibsonville; the house (above left) dates from 1807. The most recent innovation is the planting and harvesting of chestnuts (pictured at left).

home until 2007.

"My wife wanted to display her family heritage in its rooms, and, to this day, it is filled with heirlooms of her

According to McAlister, it takes approximately 10 years to fully produce a

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**EASTERN GUILFORD HIGH SCHOOL**

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# Farm

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chestnut crop. Although the trees will begin producing as soon as five years after planting, it takes those additional five years to cultivate a crop that can be harvested and marketed.

“Over the years, Richard has added other crops to the farm, and we have really benefited from harvesting multiple types of produce,” McAlister explains.

With the chestnut crop, High Rock Farm has been able to sell to local and national breweries that use the flour made from chestnuts to cultivate beer. The farm’s main outlets are a brewery in Durham, a St. Louis brewery, and a brewery in Pennsylvania.

“Our brewery in St. Louis likes to take the chestnut flour and make a special kind of beer called ‘Fruitcake,’” McAlister says. “It is marketed during special times of the year.”

The farm also has a crop of blackberries and strawberries, which are harvested and produced into sweet dessert wines with Grove Winery in Gibsonville.

“We basically have 48 working acres that we maintain, and we have maintained them



tor rain amounts and climate.

“We keep up with how much rain we have because if it rains a lot, then pollination will decrease and we will not have as large a harvested crop,” McAlister explains. “There really is a science to it all.”

Each harvest, the farm collects 28,000 to 30,000 pounds of chestnuts. Most of these are picked up by hand, daily, in September and October.

The chestnuts fall to the ground when their burrs open, signaling they are ripe. The nuts are then cleaned and sorted before being shipped to stores or harvested for flour.

“Despite these numbers, the United States will never be able to harvest as many chestnuts as there are a demand for,” McAlister explains. “Each year, the nation im-

ports 40 million pounds of chestnuts, but only produces one million.”

“We just try to provide locally from Boone to the coast,” McAlister adds.

To extend their harvest season, the farm makes value-added nut products like gluten-free chestnut flour and sugar-toasted pecans. The individual chestnuts are gathered by hand, heated, and cleaned prior to being ground into flour.

In addition to their chestnut crop, the farm has events open to the public annually. Tours are available by appointment and there are wine-tasting events held every Saturday from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. In November, the farm holds a Chestnut Roasting Festival that features food-trucks, house tours, and plenty of chestnuts.

For more information on High Rock Farm, visit the website, [www.high-rock-farm.org/](http://www.high-rock-farm.org/).

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Most of the farm’s produce is sold locally in markets, such as Company Shops in Burlington and Weaver Street Market in Hillsborough and Carrboro. They also sell sugar-coated pecans in gift boxes at local Hampton Inns in Burlington and Greensboro.

“With our chestnut crop, we have used wind pollination in the spring and summer to harvest our crop,” McAlister says. “Once harvested, we dry the chestnuts and grind them into a gluten-free chestnut flour that is used in brewer-

## Market Day in Gibsonville

Visitors are invited to come to the Gibsonville town green on Saturday mornings from through September, 8:00 a.m. until 12:00 p.m., for fresh produce, crafts, and more. The town green is located at the intersection of Main Street and Burke Street.

## Summer Fun in the Park

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"We also sell our produce crop of strawberries, blackberries, and pecans to local markets to be made into wine and gifts," McAlister adds.

With each new season, the farm operators closely moni-

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## Summer Fun in the Park

Gibsonville Parks and Recreation will host a mini Summer Camp for kids ages 5-11 on Tuesdays, July 12 through August 16. Themed sessions will include camp crafts, bugs and nature, survival camp, therapy dogs, and comic book camp. Camp will be held at Moricle Park in Gibsonville. Register through July 8 online at [www.gibsonville.net](http://www.gibsonville.net) or at Gibsonville Parks and Recreation, located at 119 West Main Street in Gibsonville. Call 336 449-7241 for fees and more information.

## Animal shelter

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Concerns about the expense of the new animal shelter had prompted local municipalities to negotiate with Alamance County manager Craig Honeycutt over changing the formula used for determining municipal contributions to support both the construction of the new animal shelter and revising each municipality's expected contributions for the day-to-day operational expenses for it.

Gibsonville officials have repeatedly emphasized, as have some other Alamance municipalities, that animal services is historically a county function, not one for

read from one section of the current contract, which seemed to indicate that any town or city must give six months notice of any intention to terminate participation in the agreement.

Aldermen ultimately decided to have town attorney Doug Hoy, who was not present during the meeting, to review the language and make a judgment on whether Gibsonville could withdraw immediately, effective July 1 with the start of the new fis-

cal year or have to wait six months until January 1, 2017.

It was unclear as of press time what the financial impact on other Alamance County municipalities or county government itself would be from Gibsonville's decision to exit the Alamance County animal services agreement and future construction of the Alamance County animal shelter. Based on the current formula, all might be expected to pay more to offset Gibsonville's departure.

## Creekside Q & A

# Is anyone riding the bus?

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