

HandMade *in* America  
SMALL TOWN  
REVITALIZATION PROGRAM

NORTH CAROLINA

# MARS HILL

RURAL TRADITIONS

*Rich Culture.*

*Established*  
1893

MARS HILL  
at a Glance

Population (July, 2009):  
1,798  
*(+ 1.9% since 2000)*

Median Age:  
22.6 years

Median Household  
Income (2008):  
\$41,076

Median House/Condo  
Value (2008):  
\$177,070

Cost of Living Index (Dec. 2009):  
85.7  
*(U.S. average is 100)*

Zip Code: 28754



“In the late 1990’s, as we anticipated the coming of the interstate highway,” says former Mayor and current State Representative Ray Rapp, “we feared it might take something away from our town. As the Billy Ed Wheeler song says, I can’t help but blaming your going on the coming, the coming of the roads.”

When Mars Hill joined the HandMade Small Towns program in 1996, he found that, “HandMade served as a catalyst, helping us identify that which we wanted to preserve - our small town character - while anticipating the coming of Interstate 26 and the changes it would bring.”



Renovated Victorian-style homes like the Smith house pictured here, remodeled in 2010 and now home to a branch of Asheville Savings Bank, line Main Street.

### Beautification Projects Lead the Way

Rapp continues, “HandMade helped us formulate a downtown plan, and we decided that the gazebo would be the symbol for our revitalization. Then they helped



During Christmas time the town of Mars Hill is adorned with beautiful decor.

us get grant money to build it. It triggered a tremendous response and more projects.” And did it ever! The group led by beloved Mars Hill College professor, Evelyn Underwood, had begun by planting flowers and shrubs around town and campus. Since joining the Small Towns program, the town has completed an impressive list of additional beautification projects. “HandMade gave us the incentive to take small steps that had large results, some obvious and some subtle, but all making the town more attractive” according to town alderman, Bob Zink. The obvious results? The gazebo and its park that welcome visitors and provide a picturesque spot for

weddings and entertainment. Trees along the entry into town and in the downtown. Welcoming new entrance signs. Attractive new streetlights. The subtle? Removal of unattractive overhead power lines and new traffic signals. As Bob says, “Once they were gone no one thought about them anymore.”

### Strong Stewardship

It’s evident that good stewardship has played a large part in Mars Hill’s success. Although Ray Rapp went on to become a state legislator, he is still volunteering, still working on projects. “Right now, we’re thinking about having an art walk, and building the Bailey Mountain Inn on campus, which could become a venue for Elderhostel, or draw people for other reasons,” he explains. According to Bob Zink, “nothing happens in Mars Hill without innovative Town Manager Darhyl Boone, who has been successful

*“The unique relationship between the college and the town enlivens, enhances and enriches our lives.”*

– State Representative Ray Rapp, Former Mayor of Mars Hill.

in obtaining grant monies and matches” that have resulted in upgrades to the town’s infrastructure that are especially beneficial to small businesses.



State Rep. Ray Rapp with a class of students from Mars Hill College



### Mars Hill College Provides Culture

As Rapp states, “The unique relationship between the college and the town enlivens, enhances and enriches our lives.” The cultural diversity provided by the college

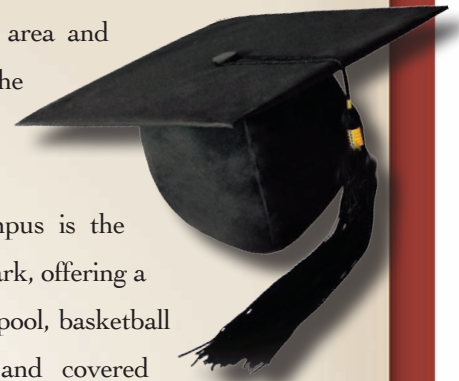


*The Owen Theater home of the iconic Southern Appalachian Repertory Theatre*

is striking. The iconic Southern Appalachian Repertory Theatre (SART) puts on world class performances in the historic Owen Theatre building in summertime. During the winter months, college drama students follow in their footsteps, also putting on plays in Owen Theatre. Music lovers always have choices, what with summer concerts, annual festivals and special events happening year-round. The Weizenblatt Art Gallery, the Southern Appalachian Archives and the Rural Life Museum round out the cultural scene with art, manuscripts, collections and rural life artifacts.

### Abundant Nature

Opportunities to enjoy nature are abundant here as well. Sandy Stevenson, Director of the Madison County Visitor Center, knows what area visitors enjoy. “The Mars Hill Disc Golf Sanctuary, skiing or snowboarding at Wolf Ridge Ski Area are popular pastimes. And, road bikers can choose from the many paved roads and trails in the area and hikers can pick up the Appalachian Trail at Sam’s Gap.” Adjacent to both town and campus is the Mars Hill Recreation Park, offering a playground, swimming pool, basketball court, baseball fields and covered pavilions in a serene wooded setting.



*Mars Hill has seen 20 new businesses created and 26 buildings renovated.*



### Accomplishments: Mars Hill renewal since 1999

- Built a gazebo in the center of downtown, and a park around it
- Removed overhead power lines and power poles from downtown
- Installed downtown decorative lighting
- New downtown traffic signals and tree planting
- Created a downtown landscape, library landscape and building design plan
- Built a downtown parking lot to support merchants
- Decorative lighting and trees installed along
- Hwy 213 entry to town
- Placed entrance signs into town

### *Volunteer time and jobs created:*

14,500 hours volunteer hours and 111 jobs created

### *New businesses:*

20 new businesses created

### *Public Areas & Facilities*

26 buildings renovated

### *Market Analysis:*

A Market Analysis conducted in 2009 identified business opportunities in retail, restaurants,

craft and residential development. For the complete report, go to [http://www.townofmarshill.org/Final Report Market Study-MarsHill.pdf](http://www.townofmarshill.org/Final%20Report%20Market%20Study-MarsHill.pdf)

### *Investments:*

\$420,661 in public investments leveraged more than \$12 million in private investments

### *For further information:*

Contact Darhyl Boone, Town Manager,

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With its setting of stately brick buildings and spires framed by the misty blue mountains, Mars Hill has the feel of a Norman Rockwell painting. Time seems to slow down, so that the visitor can unhurriedly enjoy attractions such as:



*The Bascom Lamar Lunsford Festival is an all-day festival held in Mars Hill during October celebrating regional music and culture.*

***Southern Appalachian Repertory Theatre (SART):***

SART began in 1975 as a means of putting the knowledge and experience of Mars Hill College faculty and students to use beyond the school year. Far surpassing its founders' hopes, it has become a professional theatre company that attracts actors, directors, playwrights, and technical

professionals from all over the country each summer. Recent productions have included *The Foreigner*,



*Big Criminals* was the winner of SARTS Script Festival in 2009 and premiered that June. The play featured three desperate men planning a kidnapping, never realizing that their jobs as school crossing guards hadn't quite prepared them for a life of crime. For schedule and ticket information, contact SART at 828-689-1259 or [www.sartplays.org](http://www.sartplays.org)

Steven Sondheim's *A Little Night Music*, *Tuesdays With Morrie*, and William Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. Performances are put on in the historic Owen Theatre building on campus. [sartplays.org](http://sartplays.org)

***Rural Life Museum:***

the museum, housed in the stone Montague Building on campus, is a significant component of the college's cultural and educational services,



*The Rural Life Museum housed in the historic Stone Montague Building, part of the Mars Hill College Campus.*

offering tours, workshops, lectures, and internships. It features exhibits depicting the early life and culture of the region's early settlers including a sizable William Barnhill collection of photographs of western North Carolina mountain life, and a special section on the region's hooked rug industry. <http://www.mhc.edu/ramsey-center/rural-life-museum>

***Madison County Farmers Market:*** on Saturday mornings, farmers, crafters, visual artists and musicians vendors congregate on Route 213/Cascade Street to share their wares and creations in a good neighbor atmosphere. Among the offerings are locally grown seedlings and the freshest eggs, breads, cakes, honey and home made goat cheese available.

*The Madison County Farmers Market is based in Mars Hill. The Good Measure Bakery is one of the many vendors participating in the market.*



[www.handmadeinamerica.org](http://www.handmadeinamerica.org)



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