

HandMade in America
SMALL TOWN
REVITALIZATION PROGRAM

NORTH CAROLINA

OLD FORT

WELCOMING VISITORS WITH

Living History

Established
1873

OLD FORT
at a Glance

Population (July, 2009):
960
(-.3% since 2000)

Median Age:
40.0 years

Median Household
Income (2008):
\$31,197

Median House/Condo
Value (2008):
\$78,472

Cost of Living Index (Dec. 2009):
77.9
(U.S. average is 100)

Zip Code: 28762



“About three years ago I heard that Old Fort had started a group to help with the downtown appearance. I was inspired and went to a meeting, ” explains Susie Painter, co-owner of Painters Greenhouse.

“I told them I just wanted to help out with planting some flowers in town and the next thing I know, I’m leading the Design Committee of the Old Fort Mountain Heritage Alliance (OFMHA), and I love it!”

Joining HandMade in America's Small Towns Program in 2007, OFMHA wanted their first project to be something that would stand out and let people know who they were. "Flowers always make anything look better and also make the person looking at them feel better either about themselves, the object or the place," says Susie. "We asked for volunteers and about ten members showed up and helped plant our first dozen planters." As anticipated, the planters filled with bright vibrant flowers and foliage are immediate attention grabbers for residents and visitors alike. "Folks are always talking about the planters and you can hear in their sentiments how much it means to them to see such beauty," Susie relates, "and they ask to be involved the next time. Visitors have made a lot of nice comments about our efforts to brighten our little town."



Old Fort has a vibrant downtown full of history and culture. The Arrowhead monument has been standing since 1950.

Benefits of membership

Carol Price, Executive Director of the McDowell County Tourism Authority (<http://www.mcdowellnc.org/>) echoes these sentiments in explaining the benefits of Old Fort's membership in the Small Town's program, "Funding sources and the partnership with the N.C. Rural Center's NC STEP (Small Town Economic Prosperity) program made it possible for the town to improve the downtown area's appearance, create new welcome signs, create a master plan for a proposed downtown greenway

and provide assistance to one of the town's primary attractions, Mountain Gateway Museum." Terrell Finley, Museum Director expresses it this way, "Being



Mill Creek runs through Old Fort from Andrews Geyser and provides an excellent public fishing area for visitors and residents.

privileged to participate in the Small Towns program has given Old Fort chances at success in many endeavors that would not be available otherwise." Debbie Smith,

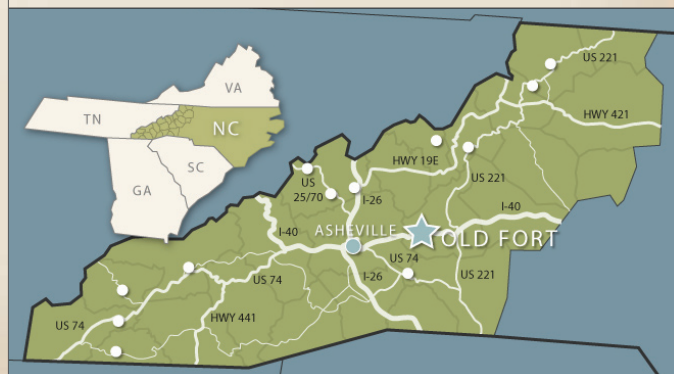
OFMHA secretary adds, "I believe that being a member of HandMade In America has opened many doors for our town to begin to reclaim the attention it once enjoyed."



Planter boxes add an accent of beauty to downtown Old Fort.

Steeped in history

In the mid 1700's, Old Fort was the western-most outpost of the United States. The town's name refers to the "old fort", or Davidson's Fort, that was constructed



in 1776 by the North Carolina militia as a part of their defenses against hostile Cherokees. Today, volunteers have replicated the fort at Davidson's Fort Historic Park as a living history site. (www.davidsonsonfort.com) The Mountain



See living history at Davidson's Fort Historic Park where time stopped in the late 1700's.

The train, the train!

When westward expansion brought the advent of the train, Old Fort was the last stop before it began the climb to Asheville. It's said that passengers always watched for the large granite arrowhead that signaled the station at Old Fort. Today's visitors can get a sense of that history while learning the meaning of the arrowhead and nearby Andrews Geyser at the railroad museum in the newly renovated train depot, which is also the home of the McDowell County Tourism Authority's Visitor Center and the Old Fort Chamber of Commerce.

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- Debbie Smith, OFMHA Secretary



Accomplishments: Old Fort renewal since 2007

- 36 flower urns decorating the downtown
- New entrance signs
- Designation as a Mountain Heritage Trout Waters city

Volunteer time and jobs created:

2,000+ hours donated

Investments:

\$100,000 in public investments, and more than \$500,000 in private investments

Market Analysis:

A Market Analysis conducted in 2010 identified business opportunities for a grocery store, restaurants, bookstore, music store and outfitters. For a complete report go to <http://handmadeinamerica.org/economic-development/small-town-revitalization>

For further information:

Contact the Old Fort Mountain Heritage Alliance: <http://downtownoldfort.org/>, or call the McDowell County Tourism Development Authority at 828-668-4282

Gateway Museum, explains Terrell, "is a branch of the NC Museum of History in Raleigh and focuses on educating and entertaining regional residents as well as travelers along the highways. It also works with local businesses to offer visitors to Old Fort opportunities for food, comforts, entertainment

and a pleasurable experience through contact with the local and regional culture."

Music has long been a staple of Old Fort. Early Bluegrass instruments are on display at the Gateway Museum.



Mountain recreation

Every Friday night, musicians gather and put on an authentic old-time, toe-tapping, mountain music show at Old Fort Mountain Music. Point Lookout and Kitsuma Trail have become known as the place to hike and bike. Three rivers attract visitors: the Catawba with its spectacular waterfall, Curtis Creek, offering primitive camping, hiking and fishing and Mill Creek, which runs through town from Andrew's Geyser and the Old Fort Picnic Grounds, and also, through the Mountain Heritage Trout Water City program, offers three days of public access fishing for \$5. http://www.ncwildlife.org/Fishing/Mountain_Heritage_Trout_Waters.htm





Visit Old Fort, and your imagination is immediately fired with the history around you. Curiosities such as a geyser and a giant pink marble arrowhead just have to be explored. The red caboose at the

Andrews Geyser is one of the many experiences unique to Old Fort. Not something to be missed, you can find the geyser on Mill Creek about 5 miles from town.

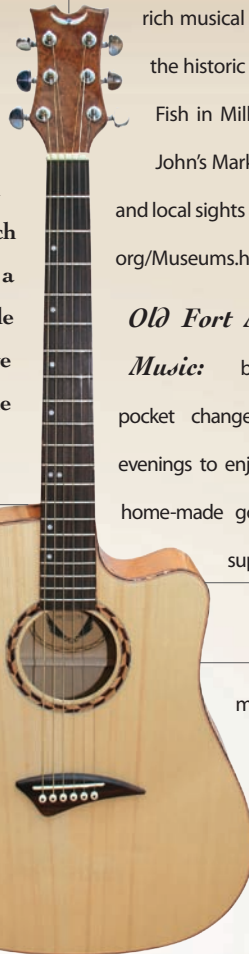
Welcome Center and railroad museum beckons. Nearby, Old Fort Mountain Music, the Mountain Gateway Museum and Davidson's Fort entice you with their unique interpretations of history. Indeed, the diverse tales of Native Americans, colonists, gold in "them thar hills", mountain music, and the mystique of the Blue Ridge mountains pull you in, encouraging you to stay awhile and soak it all in. Must sees include:

Andrews Geyser and the Inn on Mill Creek: the Inn's property contains the original dam constructed by the railroad in the late 19th century and the pond formed by the dam with the water of the Long Branch of Mill Creek. Two miles below the inn the town of Old Fort maintains the grounds of the geyser as a public park, offering a shady picnic spot.

The Mountain Gateway Museum: watch the history video.



Peruse the pioneers' tools, household items and the inside of a frontier days log cabin. Learn about Old Fort's *Get a sense of early pioneer living at the Gateway Museum.*



rich musical heritage and the North Carolina Birding Trail. Explore the historic log cabins on the grounds with their weaving display. Fish in Mill Creek. Take a moment to walk across the street to John's Market where many photographs of the geyser, waterfalls and local sights are posted and can be purchased. (<http://www.oldfort.org/Museums.htm>)

Old Fort Mountain Music: bring your pocket change on Friday evenings to enjoy soda and home-made goodies while supporting the



Bluegrass musicians from across the globe come together at the Old Fort Mountain Music venue.

musicianswhomayhavetraveledfromasfarawayasEngland to provide the best in bluegrass and traditional mountain music to the public...just for the love of it. Old Fort's Chamber of Commerce is also located in this building. (<http://www.oldfort.org/music/>)

Old Fort Train Station and Museum:

look for the brightly colored yellow building with the red roof and the giant arrowhead out front, marking the renovated train depot, to find the railroad museum, the and the McDowell County Tourism Authority's Visitor Center.



The renovated train depot of Old Fort serves as a museum allowing visitors to peer into their rich rail history.



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