

Distillery's popularity grows

BY RENSS GREENE
Intern

Scott Schumaker, founder of Appalachian Mountain Spirits, is proud of his creation. A master electrician with over 20 years of experience in the trades, he's a real jack of all trades. He's a master electrician, an HVAC specialist, and an elder. So when he decided to build a distillery, he did it himself.

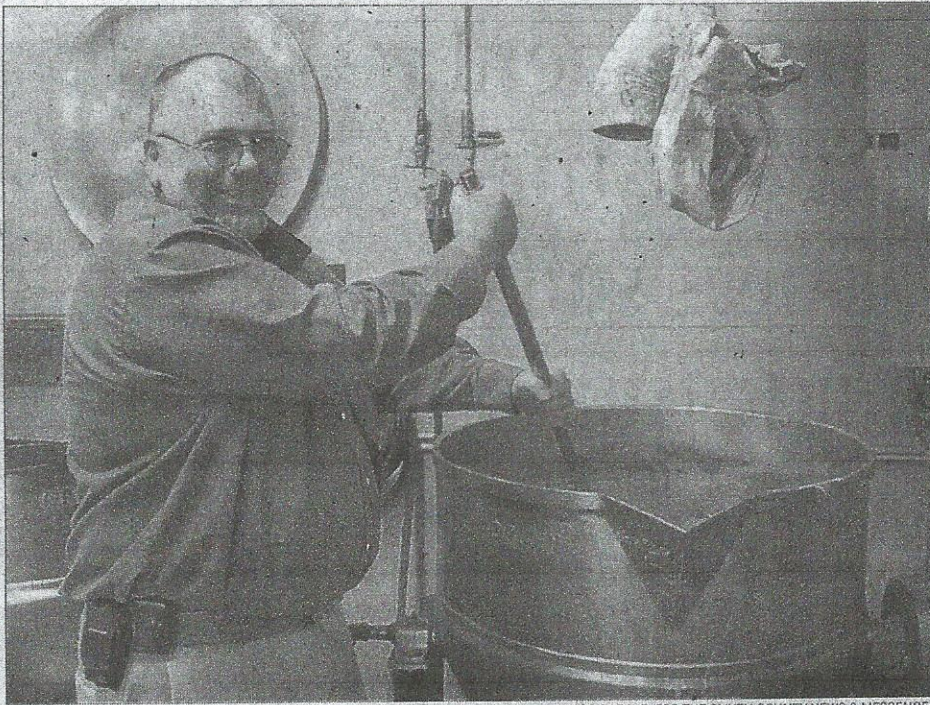
Schumaker never planned to get into the distilling business. He says he "just fell into it in a weird way."

"It's one thing I had no idea how they did, and it was very mysterious to me," he explained. "I just couldn't get my mind around it, so I learned it. That was incredibly complicated to me at one time and now extremely simple to me, and I like to share that information with people."

"Not that we want to make anybody a moonshiner," he hastened to add, "but it's something that has been part of the heritage of the mountains since the Scots and the Irish arrived here."

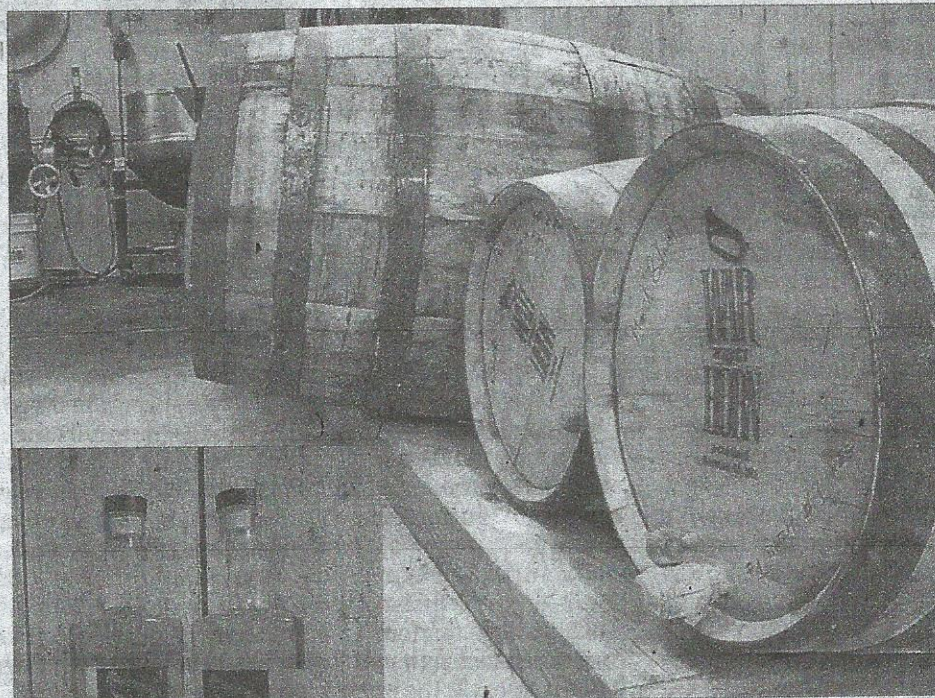
The prehistory of Appalachian Mountain Spirits is something nobody could have planned. When Schumaker and his wife found themselves with potatoes left over from selling homemade kettle chips, he had an idea. Schumaker and his wife and dogs live on a hill off the power grid, making most of their own power with solar and wind energy. They make up the difference with a gasoline generator. Schumaker had the idea to buy a still and use the leftover potatoes to make alcohol, with the idea of making an alcohol-burning engine or boiler to save on gasoline. But when he had it checked out, he was told that it was too good to burn and that he should sell it.

A job distilling for somebody else didn't work



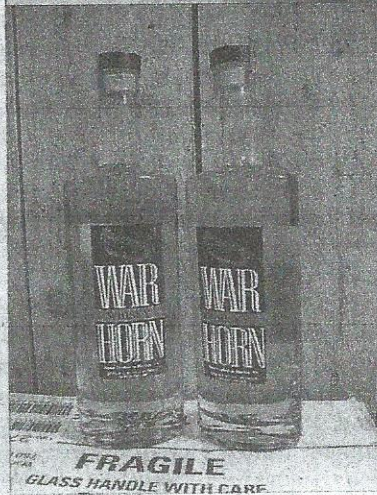
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Scott Schumaker, proprietor of Appalachian Mountain Spirits, stirs mash in the Virginia Sweetwater Distillery near Marion.



Casks of War Horn whiskey age in Schumaker's Virginia Sweetwater Distillery near Marion.

Bottles of War Horn whiskey, distilled in honor of Schumaker's late brother Col. Sean Schumaker.



"For straight-out-of-the-still moonshine, it's not me saying it, but there are moonshiners who have said it's some of the best stuff they've had."

Scott Schumaker

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Please see a related column on Page A5.

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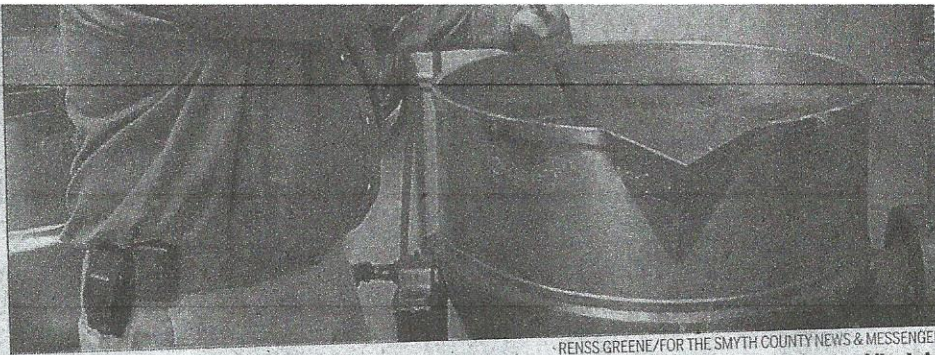
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A job distilling for somebody else didn't work out, but the fallout left him with all the distilling equipment he needed and the confidence that he could do it on his own. Within a year—a staggeringly fast time for a small business, especially a distillery, to get started—he had conceived of, capitalized, licensed, and built his distillery, and his products were on the shelves of ABC stores throughout Vir-



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ginia. Appalachian Mountain Spirits distills three liquors: War Horn whiskey (distilled in honor of his late brother, Army Colonel Sean Schumaker), Virginia Sweetwater moonshine, and Revelations single malt corn whiskey. "The product's been flying off the shelf," said Schumaker. "I actually have my cell phone number on every

bottle. People are calling to find out if they can get it in Florida, if they can get it in another state."

Schumaker is now taking appointments for tours, where visitors can see the distillery, including his 1947 C.S. Bell No. 2 mill, and meet Miss Kelsey, the still named after his daughter. He is also taking reservations for "Still

Nights," where he walks visitors through every step of the brewing and distilling process. Meanwhile, he holds down a day job as a mechanical systems engineer for the local hospital.

Schumaker describes his first batch of Virginia Sweetwater with characteristic gruff, modest pride. "For straight-out-of-the-still moonshine, it's not me saying it, but there are moonshiners who have said it's some of the best stuff they've had."

Please see a related column on Page A5.

3