



winemaker, Justin McNeill, about why fall is such a popular time to visit.

"We get a lot of leaf peepers anyways coming to the mountains to see all the color changes," says McNeill, the winemaker and one of the co-owners. "But fall is the craziest time for the winery. That's when all the year's worth of labor that went into growing the grapes is finally paying off, and we're bringing the grapes into the winery, and we start the process to make wine."

About 15 minutes away, fall is also a busy time at R&A Orchards, just off Ga. 52 in Ellijay (706-273-3821). But, then again, so is the summer, when you can find the must-munch, made-from-scratch and oh-so-fresh peach pies—"straight from the fields and into the kitchen," says Jennifer Futch, who runs the R&A Orchards retail shop.

This is a family business, dating to 1947. "We grow the apples, peaches, nectarines," Futch says as banjos and fiddles blast on the shop's sound-system. "Apples, a lot of people come up in September, and we do the you-pick. That's a big thing. And, on the weekends, everybody comes, and we have wagon rides through the orchards."

You can also attend Ellijay's apple festival, held on the second and third weekend of each October. "So that's a big deal," Futch says. "Ellijay is the apple capital of Georgia."

**WEST VIRGINIA**

I find perfect relaxation—in the "Salt Cave" near White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, where I'm ushered in with a small group and then practically told to sleep.

So I do, falling back on a lounge chair, covering myself with a blanket, and breathing in the salinity of the Gods: 17,000 pounds of Himalayan salt packed into this underground room.

"This is just very therapeutic," says Krisinda Lewis, the operations manager. "The salt just kind of travels through your system."

On my tour of Greenbrier County, the Salt Cave and Spa (304-536-2222) arrives between a tour of the Lost World Caverns (304-647-3663) and a late lunch of spicy soft tacos in Lewisburg at Del Sol (304-645-1717).

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**ABOVE:** *The Salt Cave is a therapeutic getaway in Greenbrier County, West Virginia.*

**LEFT:** *Legend has it the gravestone of Octavia Hatcher in Pikeville, Kentucky, sometimes moves.*



In between, I pick up tips on a great fall leaf tour: Drive U.S. 219 north from Lewisburg to Marlinton.

"You get everything in different stages, where it's yellow, and some is orange, and some is that dark burgundy color," says Steve Silverberg, owner of Lost World Caverns. "And then you have that green grass that's still there; I just think it's beautiful."

That same route is also a favorite for Valerie Colella, the tasting room manager at Smooth Ambler Spirits, a distillery at Maxwellton (304-497-3123).

"It's a great route to just drive," says Colella. "There are motorcycle tours that come through all the time, because it's so beautiful."

Many make stops at the distillery,

where you can take a taste of bourbon.

"And we have a very unique aging profile, being a part of the Appalachian mountain chain," says Colella.

"The Greenbrier Valley, itself, sits about 2,200 feet above sea level, which ends up giving you that aging profile. So we're a little bit cooler, which is great. But part of the reason why it was so desirable to make whiskey here is because we do get hot and cold swings, and that really helps drive bourbon in and out of oak."

In downtown Lewisburg, I dine on mussels at the Stardust Café (304-667-3663). I slumber in an apartment-style loft called The Escape (304-667-2213). Then I pick up a breakfast bagel with salmon—it's called "The Hipster"—at Corn + Flour (681-318-3603) on North Court Street.

All along, I cannot stop wondering about the only court case in West Virginia history that relied on the testimony of a ghost. That's the Lewisburg-area story of Zona Shue, who died in 1897 at the hands of her husband, Edward Shue. Only, nobody quite knew that—until Zona appeared as a ghost when her mother was dreaming.

"They dug her up on her mother's

**When her body was exhumed, it was found that she had appeared to have been trying to claw out of her coffin!**



request," says Toni Ogden, the curator at the Greenbrier Historical Society and North House Museum in Lewisburg.

After Zona's body was exhumed and examined, Edward Shue was locked in jail—in part due to what was told by "The Greenbrier Ghost."

"And they always frame it as 'Ghost gave testimony,'" Ogden says. "That's the publicity blurb."

## KENTUCKY

Popping into Pikeville, Kentucky, I land in the middle of a war between the Hatfields and the McCoys. Actually, that famous family feud is over—after all the long-standing conflicts stemming from war, love and property. And, today, you can visit the peaceful grave of family patriarch Randolph McCoy at Dils Cemetery.

In another cemetery, on the Pikeville University campus, I learn the ghostly tale of Octavia Hatcher—a young woman who presumably died in 1891 of a mysterious sleeping sickness. As it's told, though, she was actually buried alive.

And, when her body was exhumed, it was found that she had appeared to have been trying to claw out of her coffin!

Today, as a ghost, legend says Hatcher's gravestone statue sometimes turns on its own.

For two nights in Pikeville, I make camp at the hulking Hampton Inn Hotel, rising high above Hambley Boulevard. Yet I cannot contain my enthusiasm to explore such sites as the 1936 Pauley Bridge, a pedestrian passage. I also venture to see an overlook of the "Cut-Through Project," where a mountain was removed and the Levisa Fork of the Big Sandy River was re-routed.

Near that cut-through, I take a horseback ride with Betty Tackett, the operator of Dreamz Stables (606-422-3107) offering equine, river and zipline tours.

"We're definitely a southern town," Tackett says. "And we definitely love company. And I think that when people spend a day with us in Pikeville, they go away feeling like they have just a little bit of ownership in it."

For lunch, I drop into the Blue Raven Restaurant (606-509-2583) for a crab-cake sandwich with Judi Patton, wife of a former Kentucky governor, Paul Patton, who served from 1995 to 2003.

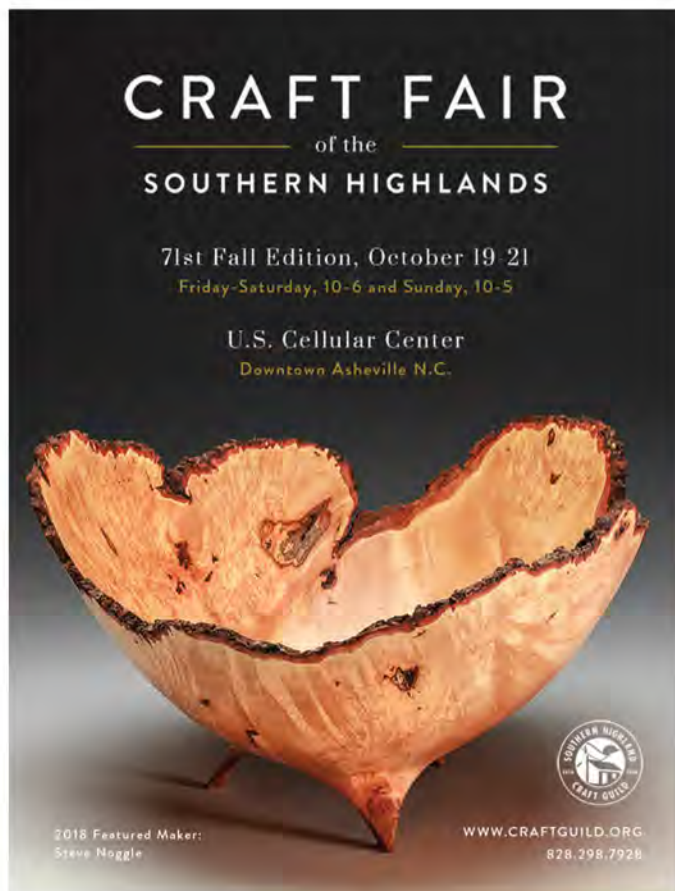
Judi Patton grew up in Pikeville, as a daughter of two sheriffs. But, just as that sounds odd, it's even more tragic: Her father, Roy Conway, was assassinated by an alleged bootlegger in 1950 when she was just nine years old.

"Then Mama became sheriff to fill out his term," Judi Patton tells me with a heavy voice.

Today, after years in the governor's mansion, the tough-as-nails Patton remains deeply in love with Pikeville.

"Our fall is beautiful. We've got the reds, the golds, the yellows. It's like somebody took a paintbrush and painted all these colors," Patton says.

"And you'll find that mountain people, our main love is family and our roots," Patton says with a smile. "And we always come back home, one way or the other." ▲▲




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