



## HUNT COUNTRY

*Blackthorn & Brook introduces Virginia to its luxury English riding holidays.*

**R**ED JACKETS GLOW IN THE WINTRY ENGLISH sun. Horses paw frosted grass. A horn calls out, the hounds take up the chase, and the hunt is off. For hundreds of years, the call of the foxhunt has drawn many to the English countryside where, during the winter months, riders show their mettle following chorusing hounds through woods and farmland. (The practice of chasing and killing foxes was banned in England in 2004, so hunts use synthetic scent to create trails.)

Lately, thanks to a determined pair of young British entrepreneurs and hunting enthusiasts, Virginians have been joining them. Blackthorn & Brook's luxury hunting and riding tours see guests participating

love hunting and love all things English." Today, Corp and Darlington hope to make Virginia horse country their American headquarters.

Charles Luck IV, CEO of Virginia-based Luck Stone Corp., hired the business recently for a vacation centered around his daughter's love of riding. "Each day was unique," he explains, "the conversation, pubs, history, food and special touches." (Guests stay in local pubs and hotels.)

An eight-day tour can run \$13,000 per person, airfare excluded. But those dollars have a wider impact says Darlington: "Every dollar our guests bring over helps assure a future for rural England." *BlackthornAndBrook.com* —By Greg Weatherford

in full-day hunts, including hundreds of horses and dogs leaping through woods and brush, or in riding outings of just a few hours. (Riders are matched with mounts appropriate for their skill level, Blackthorn & Brook promising that guests will be "neither under- nor over-horsed.")

The business started about three years ago when Ben Darlington and a friend, Megan Corp, found themselves at sixes and sevens. Both had grown up in England hunting and riding, and after graduating university (he from Oxford, she from Trinity College Dublin), moved to London for work that turned out to be unfulfilling. So, the pair hatched a plan to host luxury hunting and riding holidays in the ancient forests and fields of Somerset, where Corp's family has lived for two centuries. Their business has grown through word of mouth.

The pair's interest in Virginia began after Corp spent time in the Middleburg area and noticed there a keen interest in English traditions. She says she saw "this little pocket of Americans who

## BOOMING BLOOMS

**Garden Club of Virginia publishes new study.**

**IN OCTOBER, THE** 81-year-old Garden Club of Virginia received the results of its first economic impact study and discovered something many of its 3,400 members already knew: Historic Garden Week packs a big punch.

"While complete data wasn't available all the way back to the very first tours in 1929, the Garden Club of Virginia was able to provide reliable figures estimating the cumulative impact of Historic Garden Week over the last 45 years to be \$425 million," says GCV executive director Lynn McCashin. In 2014 alone, the country's oldest house and garden tour, which saw nearly 30,000 visitors to the 234 private houses, gardens and historical sites that comprised its 31 tours

around the state, had a total economic impact of \$11 million. (The survey was conducted by Richmond-based Chmura Economics & Analytics.) Data was collected for visitor spending on food and hotels, as well as the costs of preparing homes and gardens for tour day (which often begins several years in advance), and the financial benefit that GCV's garden restoration projects reap from the annual week-long event. "It's the largest ongoing volunteer effort in the state," says Karen Miller, HGW director. "We felt an economic impact study would validate that work." *VaGardenWeek.org*



## CIDER WEEK RULES

*It's simple. All cider, all week.*

**LONG LINGERING** in the shadow of that other fermented fruit beverage, hard cider is having its moment in the sun. The preferred libation of American presidents (Thomas Jefferson was a passionate producer, and John Adams an equally ardent consumer) has seen an average national increase in production of nearly 400 percent since 2009.

The Commonwealth will celebrate the craft during Cider Week Virginia Nov. 14-23, with ticketed dinners that pair dishes with cider, free tastings, and cider-making workshops at restaurants, cideries and bars across the state.

And just like cider on the national scene, Cider Week has undergone recent and rapid expansion, says event organizer and Foggy Ridge Cider owner Diane Flynt, who explains that events were at first concentrated in and around Charlottesville, where most of the cideries are located: "But in the last two years we've really expanded. Floyd, Abingdon, Roanoke ... we're really trying to blanket the state."

Highlights include Richmond Cider Celebration at 17th Street Market, which features tastings from cideries like Albemarle Cider-Works and Blue Bee Cider; a home



cider-making workshop in Dugspur hosted by Foggy Ridge; and Cider Fest 2014 at Castle Hill Cider in Charlottesville.

Though Virginia is the nation's fifth largest producer of apples and hosts the country's first official cider week (thanks to

Gov. McAuliffe), the beverage has not yet reached the same level of popularity as beer or wine, a barrier that Cider Week organizers hope to knock down. "There is something Virginians can do every day ... to explore the world of Virginia cider." *CiderWeekVa.com* —By Eden Stuart