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Kelley's Acres growing off the beaten path

By **Gary Thomas**

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Green Acres was the place for Eva Gabor in the popular television series of the past, but Kelley's Acres is the favorite real-life setting for June Kelley.

Kelley, a Charleroi resident who lost her job at Corning Glass Co. in 2001 due to downsizing, didn't waste time in setting out for greener pastures, so to speak. "I had 23 years and was a training coordinator and supervisor, but then came the rumors of job cutbacks and job eliminations. I smelled the writing on the wall, so I took the company's severance and ran.

"I was already in the process of buying this," she said seated on a hillside overlooking much of the picturesque tree-lined setting. Her new business venture/career opportunity is being packaged as Kelley's Acres on a 30-some acre plot of rural land, on Maiden Street on the outskirts of Beallsville.

"This is our natural amphitheater area, and I see great things happening here," she noted of the six-acre timbered area that includes a newly constructed covered wooden performance stage area. "We've had this place packed for several prior musical concerts," she said.

The aspiring entrepreneur purchased the land in September 2001. "It was a vision," she said glancing out over the property again. "My dream is to put up a fence and barn, get several horses and work with handicapped kids. My granddaughter is mildly affected with cerebral palsy and my vision was to build this (business) up enough to make money to support the barn and horses for therapeutic purposes."

She has had the firm support of family in turning her vision into a reality. "It's a family project," she emphasized.

Although divorced, her son, Kenneth, 26, and daughter, Nakia Kelley, 28, along with her four sisters and friends, have been added helping hands. Even a granddaughter, Nakia Kelley's 6-year-old daughter, Tori Molnar, chips in to help. "My family backs me 100 percent. They are my employees -- they keep this place going."

Photo Gallery



[June Kelley, Tori Molnar, Nakia Kelley](#)

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"I did this in memory of my folks, Oviedo and Paul Kelley, who lived in Lover," Kelley said. "They previously resided just down Route 40 in Scenery Hill on my great-great grandfather's farm. That's where they started their married life and they often said how much they loved the area."

As for Kelley's Acres, situated along a road that leads to the Bethlehem-Center School District complex, the new owner said the land was previously a wooded, slate dump area. "It was a mess," she noted. "The property had sat idle since before 1940, and the only things standing other than the trees were the footer and chimney pieces of an old log cabin and the stone of an old water well. I would have liked to have preserved the well but the loggers tore it out before I could tell them."

After most of the trees fronting the roadway were timbered, a family friend who owns his own excavating business went to work clearing the land for a parking area, which today doubles as an antique and flea market and car cruise area. With the land also cleared for the amphitheater site, Kelley's "family crew" went to work and constructed the wooden stage. Country music soon had the new Kelley's Acres rocking.

A small wooden building to house a kitchen was also in the works to accommodate the hungry crowds. "It's all take-out food," Kelley said, "but we're getting jammed in there as well." Open Thursday through Sunday, a favorite are Friday's fish sandwiches, "hand-breaded, using my mother's recipe."

Kelley said her daughter, Nakia Kelley, is in charge of promotions and credited her with "keeping things rolling along here."

Nakia Kelley said the family has already discussed plans to expand the kitchen building. "We could have a full-blown restaurant here if we had the space, but as of now it's only take-out." A major drawback to that project is water, but the owner said the lines are in place.

Kelley said she opened the gates to Kelley's Acres on May 4, 2002, with a flea market the first venture. These, held on Fridays and Sundays, are reportedly drawing increasing crowds. The first car cruise held last year at the site had nearly 100 custom and antique vehicles lined up. An attempt at a wing cook-off was also chalked up as a success as have been several attempts with country music concerts.

Within a half-mile of the heavily traveled historic National Pike (Route 40), Kelley said she feels comfortable with settling off the "beaten path."

"Really, we wanted it that way," she said. "If we were on the main drag we could have problems with both traffic and parking, and if my dream of a therapeutic horse ranch materializes it would be better back here. It's more quiet and serene."

Nakia Kelley interjected, "And with the bands and such, the noise doesn't bother anyone."

Nakia Kelley has her own dreams for the property. "I can visualize a small village with cabins and retail outlets. It's such a beautiful place, we've even had people who wanted to camp here, which is another possibility."

"We have room to expand," they agreed.

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Among the upcoming events at Kelley's Acres is a County Music Fall Jam set for Oct. 5. Scheduled to perform from noon to 10 p.m. are seven local bands -- Ruff Creek, Sterling Run, In the Saddle, Country Cowboy, Boothill Gang, Beatrice, and Pure Country. Proceeds will benefit the United Cerebral Palsy Foundation.

Motioning to the amphitheater site, Kelley said "Ruff Creek's goal for the UCP benefit is to have the place covered with people and not be able to see one blade of grass out there. They know we're so blessed with Tori ... she does so well."

As for the beaming 6-year-old, her vision is to one day be the owner of Kelley's Acres. "My Grammy owns it now, and then maybe my Mom, and then maybe me. I love it here, it's so pretty."

For more information and future events at Kelley's Acres, check their Web site at www.kelleysacres.com or call 724-323-5694.

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