The Daily Progress

OPINION / COLUMN

ALERT TOP STORY

MORE THAN A PLOT OF LAND

What makes Foxfield a 'beloved tradition' | Mark Lorenzoni

I am confident that Foxfield founder Mariann de Tejeda would be proud of what Foxfield Racing has accomplished since she established the beloved steeplechase course.

MARK LORENZONI

"A beloved tradition." When I moved to Charlottesville in the late '70s, I was introduced to what I quickly learned was that commonly used Charlottesville phrase. I've been hearing it ever since and even now find myself attaching it to everything from Bodo's to the Boar's Head Turkey Trot. But what does it actually mean, and what does it take to truly earn it? Having now lived in Charlottesville for almost a half-century, I've personally learned just how much goes into building the foundation of and then the nurturing and shepherding of a trusted and honored tradition.



MARK LORENZONI

As a small business neighbor and public servant, I've had the honor of inheriting, and therefore being charged with preserving, the "tradition" of several iconic community events, like the Charlottesville Ten Miler. And even more exciting, I've had the privilege of being present as a board member at the creation of an organization like the Virginia Institute of Autism and as the director of a brand-new event like the Women's Four Miler, and then experiencing the joy and thrill of having a front-row seat in witnessing those organizations and events becoming "beloved traditions."

And it's at this time of year I'm reminded about the "beloved tradition" of not only the Foxfield Fall Races but also what the longtime legacy of that magnificent 175-acre preserve means to our overall community. I'm also reminded of just how much hard work and care has gone into keeping this tradition healthy and growing.

For over a half-century, dating back to when Mariann de Tejeda, the pioneer matriarch of Foxfield, laid out the future of her beautiful property by boldly stating that it be preserved as

a steeplechase course "for perpetuity," this magnificent venue has been the home, the birthplace and the trusted tradition to countless community memories. There are many stories of chance meetings at the Foxfield Spring Races blossoming into longtime marriages and then, many years later, that same couple returning to the lush grounds of Foxfield to experience that same safe, enjoyable and welcoming atmosphere with their children or grandchildren for the family-friendly fall races.

Since the passing of de Tejeda in the early '80s, not only have hundreds of thousands come to experience and enjoy the spring and fall races, but just as importantly, Foxfield has hosted countless enriching experiences like the Women's Four Miler and Jackfest. These wonderful, all-volunteer events, that have entertained over 50,000 neighbors over the years, are now not only treasured traditions but also huge fundraisers for many community organizations, having raised over $5 million for special not-for-profits like Habitat for Humanity, Camp Holiday Trails and the University of Virginia Cancer Center.



Horses jump over a hurdle during the Virginia Equine Alliance Maiden Hurdle race at the 45th Foxfield Fall Races on Sunday, Oct. 6, 2024, in Albemarle County.
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The years surrounding 2019 and 2020 marked an important new chapter for Foxfield. Just before COVID hit, a new not-for-profit organization, Foxfield Racing LLC, the independent group that runs the races and activities, was formed and a new board of respected stalwart community leaders came together to not only continue these longtime traditions but also, under the sage and experienced leadership of caring folks like Reynolds Cowles, Jack Sanford and Ann Horner, to magnify the wishes of de Tejeda and, even more importantly, to expand

and enhance Foxfield's reputation of being a beloved tradition. Not only have jockeys, trainers and steeplechase horse enthusiasts been impressed with the ongoing enhancements, so has the overall community. As a longtime Garth Road neighbor, I have been continually warmed by how hard this group has worked to steward and nurture this iconic property and enhance its reputation as one of the East Coast's respected steeplechase venues.

And as a father and grandfather, I've personally witnessed just how much that ongoing community partnership has meant to families like ours, as we've not only enjoyed the fall races together but also have shared wonderful family memories at Jackfest, the Bill Steers 5K, the Women's Four Miler and the annual community holiday walk over the beautiful rolling meadows. These mutual community partnerships were forged by the careful and thoughtful leadership of Foxfield Racing over the last seven years, and they continue to remind me of the vital importance of this wonderful organization in the fabric of our community.



Spectators line the racetrack at the 45th Foxfield Fall Races on Sunday, Oct. 6, 2024, in Albemarle County.
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So, whether you're being calmed by the panoramic view of this stunning, lush, green property as you drive by in your car, you're being thrilled by the pageantry of the races as an up-close spectator or you're a participant running or walking in one of the community events, you always leave the fields of Foxfield a happier person. And therein lies the ultimate value of the tradition of this iconic park: bringing happiness to generations of countless people.

I am confident that de Tejeda would be proud of what this not-for-profit organization continues to accomplish as they're constantly evolving and improving upon a tradition she

started long ago. And I invite you, your friends and family, whether it's your first or 25th time, to join us Sunday for the fall races and to see for yourself why Foxfield continues to be a "beloved tradition."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark Lorenzoni, along with his wife Cynthia, is the co-founder of the Ragged Mountain Running and Walking Shop in Charlottesville. In addition to having served on numerous community boards, he has organized hundreds of charitable footraces and coached thousands of local runners, on a volunteer basis, over the past 45 years. When not coaching or directing, he can usually be found spending time with his three grandkids. Cynthia Lorenzoni sits on the Foxfield Racing board.