

Marion Scene

Classic cars, coffee bars
Make a night of it in Marion. Head over to the Historic Marion Depot Saturday for the first of the weekly Classic Car Cruise-Ins for 2006, which will take place from 5:30 p.m. until dark every Saturday through Sept. 30. Call 668-4282 or (888) 233-6111 for more information on the cruise-in. Then head down Main Street to The Crooked Door Coffee House to listen to music performed by Aaron Burdett from 8 to 9 p.m. Call 652-6216 for more information on the performance. Visit www.aaronburdett.com to check out his music and www.uniquegalleriesnc.com to check out Crooked Door Coffee House.

We want to know about your shows, benefits and other happenings of note. Send information to Andre Rodriguez, P.O. Box 2090, Asheville, NC 28802, or e-mail arodriguez@CITIZEN-TIMES.com.

■ EDITORIALS

New Arts and Heritage Gallery offers a captivating overview of WNC's riches

Many people who have lived in Western North Carolina for most of their lives either don't know about or take for granted the cultural and natural attributes that make the region unique.

But those same attributes have made North Carolina's mountains a tourist destination for generations, and they are worthy of being documented and preserved.

An exhibit at the new Grove Arcade Arts and Heritage Gallery does an outstanding job of providing a comprehensive overview of the region's treasures, natural and made by people.

The gallery is a nonprofit established with the goal of increasing visitation to cultural and educational sites across the region and encouraging more traffic to the arcade and the businesses there.

The gallery will also serve as the first marketing hub for the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area. Congress established the heritage area in 2003 to recognize and celebrate the natural abundance and varied cultural history of the state's mountains.

The exhibit, a state-of-the-art Maps in Motion, is the centerpiece of the gallery, designed to educate visitors and residents about the region's assets and to promote tourism by enticing visitors to get off the beaten path and wander along back roads and through small towns that have special attributes they might otherwise miss.

The interactive map allows the viewer to touch a screen and play short videos about everything from the Biltmore Estate and the mountain music festivals to the deepest gorge in the east. Meanwhile the location is highlighted on the map.

"We have the highest mountain in eastern North America, the deepest gorge and the highest waterfall east of the Mississippi, the oldest river and more biological diversity than the whole of Europe," Penn Dameron, the executive director of the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, told a Citizen-Times reporter recently.

The map features them all: Mount Mitchell, Linville Gorge, Whitewater Falls and the New River.

The display not only gives visitors a lesson in the region's dramatic topography, its videos and music clips make them aware of the region's arts, music, dance and crafts.

The gallery displays and sells many regional arts and crafts including Cherokee masks, baskets and carvings not usually found outside the Qualla Boundary.

A separate gallery hosts traveling exhibits, and is currently featuring wood carvings on the theme of the Land of Oz by 40 artists who are members of the American Association of Woodturners.

The Grove Arcade Arts and Heritage Gallery received funding from a Save America's Treasure's grant, administered by the National Park Service, the Janirve Foundation, the Cherokee Preservation Foundation, a number of other foundations and businesses and from Asheville and Buncombe County.

For visitors and newcomers, it's a great place to get oriented. For the rest of us, it's a place to test our knowledge of Western North Carolina and to find once again that there are never-ending opportunities to explore. The new gallery should be a great asset to the arcade.