

WORD OF MOUTH

SHOEBOX SEASON

Samaritan's Purse International Relief, based in Boone, has been making steps toward worldwide hope and health for 35 years. With such strides — founded in the work of evangelist and journalist Bob Pierce — it was only natural for one of the organization's major efforts to revolve around a shoebox.

Beginning in December and sometimes continuing into March, Operation Christmas Child distributes roughly 8 million shoeboxes to children in 110 countries and territories on six continents. Each shoebox contains gifts and essentials, from teddy bears and toothpaste to soap and Slinkys.

"At the same time, we're gearing up for the next collection — always in November — with 3,500 volunteers," says Randy Riddle, Operation Christmas Child domestic director. Recycled all your shoe boxes? Not to worry; they also accept small plastic containers. — *Sarah Tuff*

Children in Kingston, Jamaica, receive their shoeboxes.



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Sheri Moretz of Mast General Store shops the original location in Valle Crucis.

COURTESY OF J.D. DOOLEY OF MAST GENERAL STORE

HIDDEN ASSETS

Fred Martin, vice president for operations at Mast General Store, turned down an opportunity for a career in the oil industry 23 years ago to work at Mast General's flagship location in Valle Crucis, North Carolina, and he works with great people who've left the big city to follow their dreams.

The powerhouse little chain has eight folksy outlets in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. "It's all about community," says Martin. "The foundation of Mast General Store and the spirit of the High Country is that people's individual passions and their activities are important."

After a brief closure, John and Faye Cooper purchased and reopened Mast General in 1980, transforming the 1882 rural landmark into a booming all-purpose country store complete with post office, pot-bellied stove, and checkerboard. Their formula of quality wares, helpful service, and good prices has been a hit with customers, while an "aggressive" benefits package works for the 375 employees.

"The organization has 70 employees in the back office, stuck back in a quiet hollar, and no one knows we're back here," says Martin. "It's very interesting to see people come in here from the bigger world." — *Nan Chase*

JAZZ PIZZAZZ

After a glance at the lively arts scene in Blowing Rock, it would blow you away to learn that the town's population is roughly 1,500. One of the community's highlights is the Blowing Rock Jazz Society, which offers concerts every second Sunday of the month at the Meadowbrook Inn. Unlike some societies, this one is both welcoming and affordable: a yearly membership costs just \$75. — *ST*

Meadowbrook Inn, 711 Main St., Blowing Rock, 828-295-4300, brjazzsociety.com

Michelle Amato, who tours with Yanni, appears annually in Blowing Rock along with other jazz artists.



PHOTO BY FRED GERMANN

Up, Up, and Away...



Ascend into the land of Watauga, and feel alive. Breathe in the clean, crisp mountain air, and let your eyes feast on beautiful vistas. Relax and enjoy the finer things including our award-winning fine dining, performing arts at Appalachian State University in Boone or the Hayes Performing Arts Center in Blowing Rock, spa treatments, a round of mountain golf and a wine tasting. Visit the original Mast General Store, Tweetsie Railroad and Grandfather Mountain. Explore trails, ski the slopes or brave the rapids. Shop downtown Boone, Blowing Rock and Valle Crucis for upscale boutiques, emporiums and outlets. And stay in stylish comfort at the range of accommodations from hotels to inns, bed and breakfasts to cabins, resorts to campgrounds.



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