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Davis Girls Peach Shed is a seasonal roadside fruit stand off U.S. Highway 19E in Roan Mountain.

For Davis Girls, summer means peaches

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For students, it's when school lets out. For kids, it's when the swimming pool opens. For Jessica Davis Sparks, it's not summer until there are peaches.

Sparks and her family run the Davis Girls Peach Shed, a seasonal roadside fruit stand off 19E in Roan Mountain.

Sparks' grandfather Hurley Davis started the Davis Produce Market 20 years ago out of retirement. The stand has expanded from selling South Carolina peaches to local produce, jams, honey and various fruits from the end of April through September.

Sparks, 22, began working at the peach shed when she was 12.

"I used to work at my other grandpa's farm (in Elk Park, N.C.), carrying strawberries out of the orchard," said Sparks.

But Sparks said Hurley, whom she calls Papaw, offered her more money to work at the fruit stand. She was sold.

Sparks has worked at the peach shed every summer since.

"When you're 16 and your friends are at the pool and you're throwing cantaloupes, it's not as fun. But now that I'm older, I realize it's not that bad," said Sparks. "You learn that what you have is from how hard you work. Papaw taught us that."

Hurley, who died in December 2009 at the age of 89, liked to sit in a lawn chair at the edge of the yard, talking to customers as they pulled in. Over the years, the stand became known for Sparks and her younger sister, Emily, who worked every summer, getting to know the regular customers. The name of the business was eventually changed to the Davis Girls Peach Shed.

Sparks said that her grandfather's passing only makes her more determined to keep the business running.

"Now that Papaw's gone, it's almost like we've got to do it now," said Sparks. "We'd go visit him at the nursing home, and he'd still ask 'what are you selling?'"

After marrying in June, Sparks and her husband, Luke Sparks, moved into her grandfather's house, which is right next to the fruit stand property.

"I am even more sentimentally attached now because I live in Papaw's house. I run Papaw's business," said Sparks. "I've been here since I was 12. What would I do if I quit? What would I do all summer?"

Sparks is an assistant teacher at Cloudland



The peaches sold by Davis Girls come from a farm in Chesney, S.C.

Elementary. She graduated from Milligan College last year.

"I almost wonder why I didn't go into business," said Sparks. "Maybe it's because I know how much hard work it is!"

Her father, David Davis, helps with the finances as well as pick up and delivery while her sister, Emily, and mother, Sherril, help with stocking, cleaning, presentation and sales.

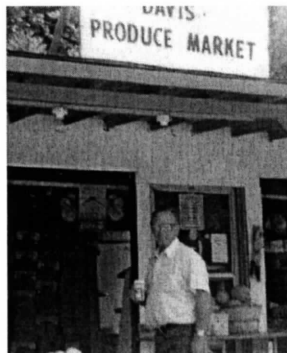
The family business prides itself on the quality of its produce.

"You never should leave our fruit stand with the wrong peach," said Sparks. "Every peach is touched at least once when it's sold."

Most of the produce is picked up from the Asheville farmer's market, and the peaches are ultimately sourced from a farm in Chesney, S.C.

In addition to loyal local customers, the stand gets a lot of tourist traffic from summertime hikers and visitors to the Rhododendron Festival.

"I get a little thrill out of it every summer, I won't lie," said Sparks. "It's made me and my sister just good, better people. It makes you appreciate what you've got."



Hurley Davis opened Davis Produce Market 20 years ago out of retirement.