

feature

Deep Roots

BY ERIN PESUT

Family &
Farming
Traditions at
McCormick
Farms



Photography by Kiara Love

Bruce Hammill, Olivia Hammill, Alex Hammill and Tom Brooks



Bruce Hammill is not only a farmer, he's a family man. At 27, he's a new father and he serves on the Board of Directors for North Carolina's Cattlemen's Association. Bruce manages McCormick Farms alongside the President, Tom Brooks, who is also his father-in-law. Just outside Fayetteville, the farm has been family owned and operated for over 200 years.

Bruce has been at McCormick Farms for four years. While he was studying marketing management at Virginia Tech, he met his wife, Alex, a member of the eighth generation of McCormick Farms. As someone who grew up always outside with his three brothers and working with horses, Bruce enjoyed the agricultural classes he took as electives. When it came time to look for job, he could relate to the personal side of sales, but he was a family man. He didn't want to be gone five days a week. He didn't want to be stuck behind a desk. Waiting on a plane.

"I've always been a family person," Bruce said, who now is a father to his one-year-old daughter, Olivia, "and this is the perfect blend. I get to see the sun rise and the sun go down every day and there's a great mix of farm work and business management."

While some people may be hesitant to work so closely with their family, especially their in-laws, Bruce enjoys every minute of Tom's guidance.

"In working with my father-in-law, I've found that he is an incredible businessman. He's taught me an unbelievable amount since I've been here. I owe a lot to him for the commitment he has made in teaching me and the way he has not only brought me into the family business, but the family as well."

And they balance each other.

"It's the perfect mixture," he said with a laugh. "The wisdom of his experience and my new energy, my willingness to work the crazy hours that we do."

This farm has its plate full. Not only do they oversee a grass-fed beef operation, they grow and sell hay, rake and sell pine straw, harvest timber, and manage property.

Bruce's mother-in-law, Lou Brooks, assists with community relations, beef sales and marketing. Alex, who earned a history degree from Virginia Tech and earned a second degree in accounting from Methodist University for bookkeeping at the farm, serves as both office and project manager.

"Managing a family business can have its challenges, but it's a great thing to be able to work together as a family and carry on something that has as much history as it does," Bruce said.

LIVE ON POST. GOLF FOR *FREE!*

For a limited-time, move into select Company Grade & Field Grade Officer home types and receive *one month's rent Free and an MWR golf membership.**

Come live and play near two of the Sandhills' finest courses, including a Donald Ross design.

Don't wait. Apply today!

**NOW
WELCOMING**

Active-Duty, Retired
Military, DoD Employees
& Guard/Reservists.



**For a Limited-Time Only. Offer subject to change without notice based on housing availability.*

Corvias®
— military living

426 Souter Place
Fort Bragg, NC 28307
(910) 495-0878

Bragg.CorviasMilitaryLiving.com





In farming, where the days can be long and the work can be difficult, at the end of the day, Bruce enjoys coming home to what he loves most: his family.



McCormick Farms was started by John McCormick in 1796, after he immigrated from Scotland three years earlier. Alex, Bruce's wife, is a member of the eighth generation of the family. Now, Olivia, their one-year old daughter, is the ninth. The past three generations retired to the farm after other careers, but Bruce and his wife are the first generation in a while to start a family at the farm.

"We think it's a valuable experience," Bruce told me. "We're grateful to have an opportunity to carry on something that was started 220 years ago and have that as a base from where we're starting. Plus, to grow a business at this point versus starting a business at the ground floor, it's a powerful tool."

But it's not just business that appeals to this young couple.

"We see the value of raising our daughter in an environment where she can see the value of hard work."

Bruce credits his parents, especially his father, for teaching him the value of hard work.

"Ever since I was young, my dad made sure to include my brothers and me in whatever projects he was doing. Whether it took him three times as long to fix our mistakes, we were always putting stuff in the wrong place, screwing stuff in wrong—while we were just creating a whole lot more work for him, he was including us and helping us understand the importance of a strong work ethic, of taking pride in your work. That was big for me, for my entire life. I want to pass that down to my daughter."

And he already has.

By the time Olivia was six months old, she had planted an acre of rye grass, run an excavator and baled hay, the whole time, riding on her father's lap.

"Anytime she's on a four-wheeler," he said, "she's all smiles."

Though Bruce and his family's close-knit heritage, in today's world, is not rare, their proximity to one another is. Brothers, sisters, mothers, daughters, fathers, sons oftentimes are separated by time-zones, work schedules, distance, fatigue. They may stay connected through e-mail or Facetime. A phone conversation once a week.

But Bruce makes a good point.

"If I'm bringing my daughter to work one day, it's my boss's granddaughter," he maintained.

It makes Bruce and his family seem like something out of a storybook, a throwback to an older time.

But the commitment of farming alongside family is no fairy tale. It is not easy work.

Bruce starts his day at 4:30 a.m. He does computer and office work until his wife and daughter wake up and they all eat breakfast together. Then, Bruce heads out to feed the cows. After that, every day could look different.

"One of the cool things with my jobs is there are no two days that are alike. I end up having several different types of jobs under the umbrella of farming. That can also be one of the frustrating things, but all in all, I tend to thrive off of it."

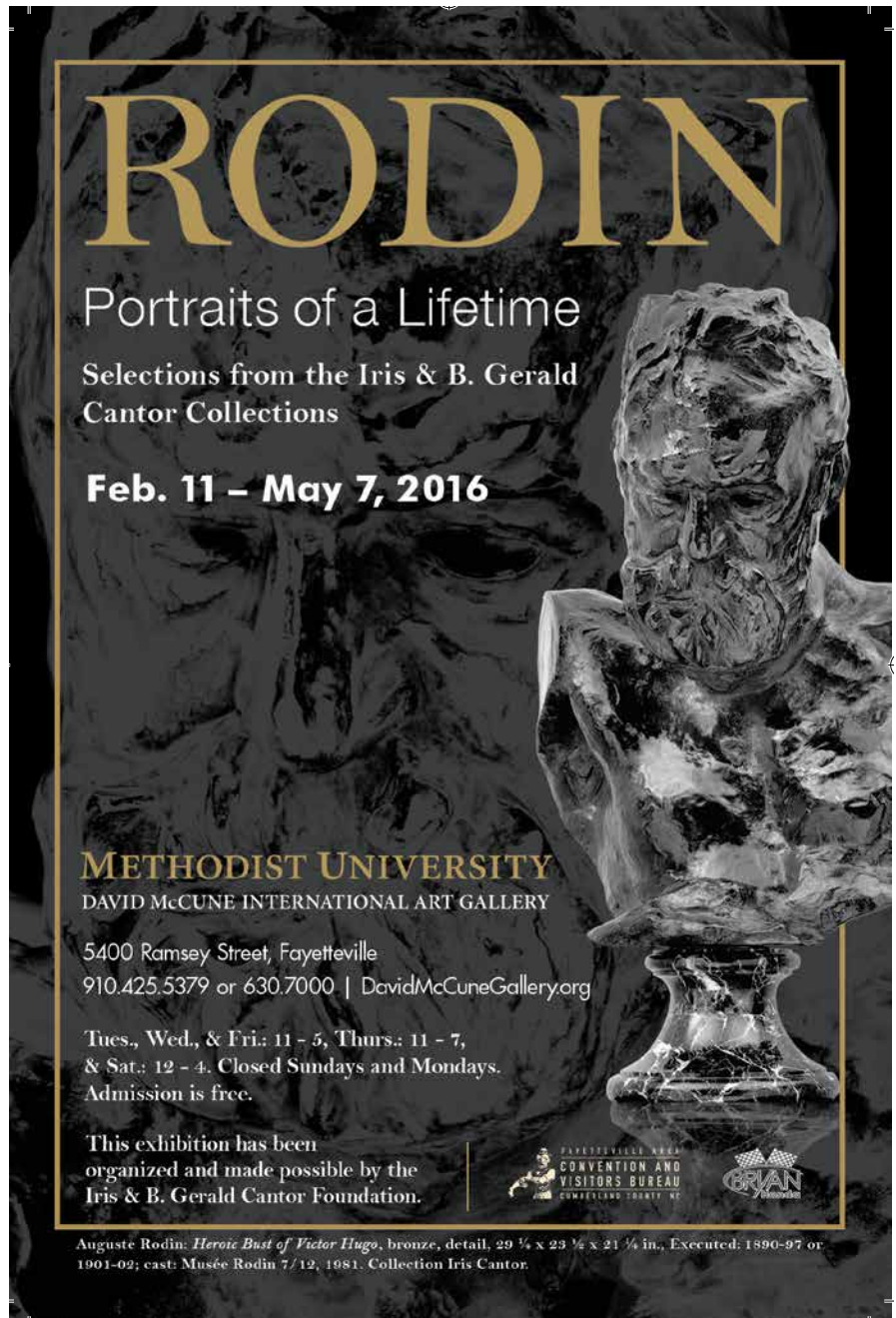
He continues, "I work 12-hour days. Our cows get hungry on Christmas and Thanksgiving and on Sundays. I work seven days a week and that's a sacrifice I have to make, but my wife and daughter have to deal with it as well."

"One of the things that's really hard, as nice as it is to be close, it's a pull when she and my wife are at home. I want to be with them, but I want to keep things going out here, too."

In the summer, during hay season, when he works until dark every day, Bruce loves that Alex and Olivia can come bring him dinner in the field.

"I can stop and take time to be with them. What's most important is our time together as a family. That side of it is something we make time for."

Though McCormick Farms manages different business areas, their cattle operation is the most time consuming. They do not have any dairy cows. Instead, they oversee a herd of 250 pasture-raised cows, a mix of Herefords and Black Angus cattle which they cross-breed to make "Black Baldies," normally black cows with white faces. For their grass-fed meat, McCormick Farms practices rotational grazing, dividing 200 acres of open pasture into smaller paddocks, which they rotate the cows through until the cows graze the grass down. In the summertime, the



RODIN

Portraits of a Lifetime

Selections from the Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Collections

Feb. 11 – May 7, 2016

METHODIST UNIVERSITY
DAVID McCUNE INTERNATIONAL ART GALLERY

5400 Ramsey Street, Fayetteville
910.425.5379 or 630.7000 | DavidMcCuneGallery.org

Tues., Wed., & Fri.: 11 - 5, Thurs.: 11 - 7,
& Sat.: 12 - 4. Closed Sundays and Mondays.
Admission is free.

This exhibition has been organized and made possible by the Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Foundation.

FAYETTEVILLE AREA CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU
GRIAN

Auguste Rodin: *Heroic Bust of Victor Hugo*, bronze, detail, 29 1/4 x 23 1/2 x 21 1/4 in., Executed: 1890-97 or 1901-02; cast: Musée Rodin 7/12, 1981. Collection Iris Cantor.



2016-2017
MEDICAL & DENTAL DIRECTORY
The Future Of Healthcare In The Sandhills

COMING THIS SUMMER
2016-2017
MEDICAL & DENTAL DIRECTORY
The Future Of Healthcare In The Sandhills



The Support You Need to Help Children Succeed!

Visit us in person at the

Partnership for Children Family Resource Center

Your first stop to receive the support you need!

The Partnership for Children would like to take the time to thank all of our generous sponsors for supporting the 2016 Soiree! Without these contributions, supporting families with young children in Cumberland County would not be possible.

CITYVIEW
Fayetteville's **Lifestyle** Magazine

mosaic
building networks of people and technology



EMBASSY SUITES

HOTELS*

The Mill End Store
Drapery & Upholstery Fabrics

PNC **Grow Up Great**



DOGWOOD KID ZONE:
The Partnership for Children of Cumberland County (the Partnership) is a proud partner with the Fayetteville Dogwood Festival and joins them in presenting another year of FREE fun and learning with bringing Partnership's KidStuff to the families and children of our community. Join Partnership's KidStuff on Saturday, April 23 from 12-6 pm and on Sunday, April 24 from 1-6 pm in Festival Park, along Ray Avenue, located in the grassy area by Cross Creek.



351 Wagoner Drive, Suite 200
Fayetteville, NC 28303
(910) 867-9700
www.ccpfc.org

PFC is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization supported by public & private funds through Smart Start, NC Pre-K, tax-deductible donations, and grants.



cows eat a mix of bermuda grass and a sorghum-sudan grass hybrid. In the winter, they feast on rye grass and oats.

"We do it in a way that's best for the cows and best for the grass, that way we're able to keep the cows grazing all throughout the year," Bruce said.

The benefits of McCormick Farm's grass-fed beef are impressive. First of all, there are no antibiotics, hormones or animal by-products. There are no preservatives. The literal make-up of the beef is different. If we are what we eat, then we are also what our meat eats. Since pasture-raised cows are feasting on grass, the meat is lower in calories and saturated fat, about 50 percent less fat than grain-fed cows. The beef is rich in Omega-3 Essential Fatty Acids, high in Vitamin B, Vitamin A and Vitamin E. It is rich in Zinc, Iron, and digestible protein and additionally, high in all nine essential amino acids.

"One of my biggest commitments is growing the healthiest animal possible. A cow's body is not designed to eat a whole lot of corn and they're not designed for supplemental hormones that they get in some conventional circumstances. When I'm selling a cow at the local level and I explain why our beef is good, I can 100 percent honestly say this is a healthy product. It hasn't been eating a whole bunch of corn its whole life and it hasn't gotten fat real fast."

When I asked Bruce how often he eats McCormick Farms beef, he said, honestly "All the time."

His favorite way to eat it? Steaks. Burgers. Roasts. In the oven. On the grill.

"Just put, 'anyway my wife makes it,'" he said, smiling. "She cooks some amazing stuff."

Historically, McCormick Farms sold beef at a commodity level. They sold larger quantities to the public: a half-cow, a quarter-cow and one-eighth of a cow. But, most people didn't have the freezer space. Bruce saw an opportunity recently to begin their first Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) at the gym where he and his wife are members, Evolution Athletics, formerly known as CrossFit Fort Bragg, in Spring Lake.

"I saw a demand for high quality grass-fed beef that people weren't able

to get in the area, but they just didn't have the freezer space. That was one of the road blocks I was running into. People were already coming to the gym, so I put in a freezer and sold our beef there."

Every two weeks, Bruce would bring in an assortment of vacuum-sealed cuts. The program will be starting up again soon, but even if you're not a member of this gym, you can always call Bruce directly.

"I'd love to see local sales grow," he said.

McCormick Farms relies on word of mouth and their Facebook page: McCormick Farms.

As they compete with grocery stores, "The King of Convenience," Bruce calls it, he believes that people have started to lose their connection with the land. When you go to pick up your order, you will see the pastures where the cows graze. You may meet the three Great Pyrenees-Maremma dogs that protect the cows from coyotes and strangers. You can get a glimpse at the wide open sky. You can see elements of the whole operation at work.

"We think it's important to understand where food comes from. People are becoming more and more removed from the farm, so we want to get people back to the farm, back to understanding that food doesn't just come from the grocery store. We want people to see that relationship again."

Agritourism is a budding way of inviting people back onto farms and reminding them where real food comes from.

Though diversification has always been key in the way McCormick Farms operates, this past fall they tapped into hosting weddings at the farm, a special manner of participating in Agritourism. As you pass through the black gates of McCormick Farms and drive over the rolling hills, on one side of the dusty road is a cul-de-sac of timeworn wooden buildings. Nearby, McCormick Farms has hosted several weddings beneath the ancient trees. During a sunset, under the cover of the stars or even in the middle of the day, it's clear to see why people might want their photographs, their memories to be near the



SAY YES TO THE DRESS

Get rid of varicose and spider veins at the Valley Radiology Interventional Clinic

At Valley Radiology, our specially trained vascular and interventional radiologists offer quality, local care for varicose and spider veins. We perform advanced, non-surgical procedures to restore your legs to their healthy good looks, with effective, long-lasting results. Call us today to schedule an appointment.

Compassionate Care, Quality Imaging

Valley  Radiology

3186 Village Dr., Suite 201 • Fayetteville • ValleyRadiologyNC.com

910.486.5700




green pastures, the wooded vistas, that open sky: nature's simplest pleasures remind us who we are.

For the community, McCormick Farms does more than host weddings. They participate in Cape Fear Youth Days, an event up in Linden, offering children in the area an opportunity to partake in outdoor activities. The kids can go fishing, shoot BB guns, dog hunt and witness falconry demonstrations. McCormick Farms also works with the Cumberland County Agricultural Extension office to coordinate farm visits for children and soldiers and business people in the community.

"There are so many family farms here, it's such a tight-knit community. And seeing other folks put the same value on family is pretty cool. Family, that's the most important thing. The time it takes to get your kid to school. The baseball game. The soccer game. Those are non-negotiable."

And in farming, where the days can be long and the work can be difficult, at the end of the day, Bruce enjoys coming home to what he loves most: his family.

"Oftentimes with farming there's a to-do list that's longer than any day out there. You're never done, never finished, which can be defeating at times. We've had times baling, cutting hay when it's past dark, 9:15, 9:30 at night and you're just getting off the tractor and you've been going since 4:30 in the morning and you get home and say, 'I've been working my butt off,' but that time, getting home, spending it at home with my daughter and my wife, I wouldn't change it for anything in the world." 



CAN IT!

The City of Fayetteville wants you to **can the waste!** With our **can do** commitment to service, we make curbside pick-up convenient for household waste, yard waste and recyclables.

You Can Make the Difference

To encourage City residents to make recycling second nature, we make curbside recycling easy. Just **can** all types of recyclables together in your blue cart.

When it comes to littering, please **Keep it . . . then can it!** Make "responsible" trash disposal a habit and help keep our great city clean and beautiful.

City of Fayetteville
North Carolina
ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

FayettevilleNC.gov
433-1FAY (1329)