



Twilight Polo at Great Meadow

*greetings from*

## THE PLAINS, VA



# To put it plain and simple, visit The Plains in Virginia

You'll know you're near The Plains when open green meadows and tree-covered mountains replace office buildings, strip malls and housing developments.

The explosion shot fire and metal in all directions. Gas from the large tanker that crashed into a train going through town fed the fire. Black smoke billowing into the sky turned the cold February day into night. As the town's firefighters rushed to the scene, soaring blazes spread to what used to be the Orange County Hunt Club. The fire chief called in reinforcements before the dying town died completely.

For more than a day in 1967, firefighters from Fauquier County, four neighboring Northern Virginia counties, and Dulles Airport fought the enormous inferno. For some people the fire symbolized the end of what had once been a picturesque town of residents and visitors seeking rest and recreation in Virginia's rolling hills.

Miraculously, firefighters saved the historic Grace Episcopal Church that stood next to the old hunt club, now in ashes. The standing, soot-covered stone church seemed to say the Town of The Plains would survive. It did. Today it

attracts thousands of visitors every year.

To understand how this tiny crossroad town that almost died in 1967 became so loved by residents, visitors and even movie stars, you need to go there.

### GETTING THERE

When going west on I-66 from the national capital beltway, you'll know you're near The Plains when open green meadows and tree-covered mountains replace office buildings, strip malls and housing developments. Take Exit 31 and turn right onto Fauquier Avenue, Route 245.

You'll feel like you're going through a time tunnel as you pass farms and the highly regarded Wakefield School before entering a quaint village tucked among the trees. Plan to eat in a delightful restaurant or the English tea house. Visit art galleries, charming shops, and the museum. On a Sunday, attend one of four churches, followed by shopping at the popular farmers' market. From the heart of Main



**'What John D. Rockefeller did to restore Williamsburg, Nick (Arundel) did on a smaller scale for The Plains,' explains Jay Adams, the foundation board's vice president and Northern Virginia Electric Cooperative member.**



The little town that persevered.

Images in and around The Plains include (clockwise, from upper left) the highly regarded Wakefield School, historic Grace Episcopal Church, Main Street's Artful Life Gallery, and a horse stable at Beverly Equestrian Center in The Plains.

Street, Route 55, travel along scenic rolling hills to see farms and one of Northern Virginia's most popular attractions — Great Meadow.

### THE PLAINS' HISTORY

"The Plains has an inspiring story," says John "Jay" Adams Jr., whose family has lived and farmed there since 1890. The lawyer, former U.S. Army officer, and business owner has watched the town dive and thrive. "You need to know its history and how it became the town we all love today."

The village grew from just a post office in a store and one house in 1831. Once the Manassas Gap Railroad made a stop there in 1852, farmers could transport their produce to nearby markets, including Washington, D.C., 52 miles away. When the new Grace Episcopal Church's bell started beaconing families to Sunday worship in 1855, The Plains became more than a dot on the map.

### THE CIVIL WAR

With streets named Jackson, Pickett, and Mosby, a visitor has to know The Plains played a part in the Civil War. It

did, starting when someone wrote on the smokehouse wall, "May 1860 ... war and rumors of war." That writer could not imagine the horrors the War Between the States would start casting down on the region.

In the First Battle of Manassas in July 1861 and the second in 1862, Confederate troops traveled through the town on their way to confront Union soldiers. Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee's troops were so hungry before the second battle that they begged townsfolk for food. After a good meal, the nourished soldiers marched on to defeat the North again.

In February 1863, Col. John Mosby's raiders caused two Union trains to crash near The Plains. People in and around town hid the saboteurs. The crash, and the raiders' other "bullying ragging" throughout the region, brought Yankee retribution. Union troops burned the town's storehouses, smokehouses, barns, cornfields and stables. Food became scarce.

The Plains slowly recovered after Lee surrendered to U.S. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant in 1865.

### THE 20TH CENTURY

As the century turned, the little village in Virginia's Piedmont region began prospering, especially from wealthy fox hunters who traveled from New York in private railroad cars to spend the hunting season there. They loved it so much they built their own Orange County Hunt Club and helped finance the new Grace Episcopal Church. The growing village incorporated in 1910.

When the U.S. entered World War I in 1917, The Plains' chapter of the Piedmont Red Cross exceeded its quota of \$1,000 by more than any other chapter in the United States. It collected over \$15,000 and provided medical supplies, knitted socks and gloves for soldiers.

America and its allies won the war in 1918. The village enjoyed tranquility — until the stock market crashed in 1929. The Great Depression and World War II, 1941-1945, took its toll when the railroad curtailed services. Fewer hunters came to hunt and fewer farm products went to market.

After the war, Northern Virginia began to rebound and grow. More trucks and travelers toiled through town at high

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speeds on Route 55. Families concerned about safety and rattling windows began to leave. With fewer residents, many businesses closed and left deserted buildings. A town policeman tried to control rampant robbery, illegal drugs, and street brawls in the 1960s. After the fatal fire in 1967, even harder times followed. The Plains almost became a ghost town.

### ARUNDEL REVITALIZES 'A HAMLET FALLEN ON HARD TIMES'

The tide began to turn in 1974 when media-publisher Arthur W. "Nick" Arundel (1928-2011) and his family moved to Merry Oak Farm near The Plains. That year, the former Marine Corps captain organized the Village Steering Committee to revitalize the town. In 1977, they received from the government a \$19,000 Depressed Town grant. With this money and Arundel's own, the Village Trust started to acquire and renovate derelict properties, replace wells and septic fields with water and sewer systems, and plant trees along restored sidewalks.

Heavy traffic moved off Main Street in 1979 to the newly expanded I-66. Feeling relieved and inspired, townsfolk collected 230 tons of junk and rubbish during The Big Cleanup of 1981. The Village Trust lured restaurant and shop owners. Visitors noticed, including Sen. John Warner and his wife at the time, actress Elizabeth Taylor, who lived nearby. *The Magazine of Virginia* declared "A Heart Beats Again in a Hamlet Fallen on Hard Times."

### PRESERVING LAND AND NATURE

Arundel, who started all-news radio broadcasting, particularly loved newspaper publishing. He moved to The Plains after buying *The Fauquier Times-Democrat*. In his first editorial, the Harvard University graduate praised growth for creating jobs and opportunities, but he wrote: "Growth must not and shall not happen at the price of destroying this county's beauty, natural

heritage and its vital farm industry."

Arundel lived these words when in 1982 he rescued from development a 700-acre dairy farm near the town and donated the land to what became the nonprofit Great Meadow Foundation to "preserve open space in service to the community." Great Meadow began hosting the spring and fall Virginia Gold Cup steeplechase races. Today it also hosts Twilight Polo, July 4th fireworks, Virginia Scottish Games, wine festivals, rocketry events, search-and-rescue police dog training, Virginia State cross-country tournaments, hound competitions, bike and horse trail rides, and scientific research projects.

"What John D. Rockefeller did to restore Williamsburg, Nick did on a smaller scale for The Plains," explains Jay Adams, the foundation board's vice president and Northern Virginia Electric Cooperative member. "Nick wanted to create a park for the community. That's what we're doing. We're providing a place where people in towns and cities can come and enjoy outdoor activities and nature."

### ARUNDEL'S LEGACY

"In the first part of your life, you learn," Arundel wrote. "In the second, you earn, and in the third, you give it all back."

In addition to revitalizing The Plains, Arundel gave back by serving with more than 20 historical, journalism, educational and conservation groups, including Friends of the National Zoo, which he founded. The Virginia General Assembly named Arundel the Outstanding Virginian of 2011.

Because of Arundel, Adams, and many other like-minded people in The Plains, the little town that almost died now welcomes visitors from around the world. Be one of them! ■

Sources: [theplainsvirginia.org](http://theplainsvirginia.org), [greatmeadow.org](http://greatmeadow.org), [patch.com/virginia/ashburn/obituary-arthur-w-nick-arundel-1928-2011](http://patch.com/virginia/ashburn/obituary-arthur-w-nick-arundel-1928-2011)

### THE PLAINS ATTRACTIONS

**Archwood Green Barns Farmer's Market** on Fauquier Avenue features fresh produce, barbeque, and homemade local products from the last Sunday in April to the second Sunday in November, and twice in December, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

**Afro-American Historical Association of Fauquier County**, 4243 Loudoun Avenue.

**Girasole** (Italian) and **The Rail Stop** restaurants, **Front Porch Market & Grill**, and **Crest Hill Antiques & Tea Room**. (Actor **Robert Duvall** once co-owned The Rail Stop. He lives on his farm near town because he likes "the vibes" in Virginia.)

**Art galleries and shops** for people who love arts, crafts, gardening, knitting, antiques, coffee and bicycles.

**The Great Meadow Foundation**, 5089 Old Tavern Road, hosts many outdoor events including the Land



The Rail Stop

Rover Great Meadow International July 8-10. This competition will be the final prep for the U.S. Olympic Team before the 2016 Summer Olympic Games in Brazil in August. This first Fédération Equestre Internationale Nation's Cup™ CICO\*\*\* of Eventing held outside Europe will bring the world's finest horses and riders to Virginia. "Great Meadow is a lovely facility with the best footing I have seen in this country," says Capt. Mark Phillips, chef d'équipe and coach, U.S. Olympic Equestrian 3-day team. ■