

## SHINING A LIGHT ON MOONSHINE



Lucas Owens is photographed at the South Mountain Distilling Company in Connelly Springs. PROVIDED BY THE CENTER FOR CULTURAL PRESERVATION

### Documentary film explores financial needs, traditions behind subject steeped in myths

**Latrice Williams**  
The Gaston Gazette  
USA TODAY NETWORK

Lucas Owens still remembers the day his father introduced him to moonshining. Bound by poverty, producing high-proof liquor illegally was necessary to generate an honest income. Simply put — it was a means to an end.

"One day when I was a kid, we were taking feed around to the farmers," said Owens. "He had a wooden box on top of the truck that had alcohol in it. I asked what it was for and he said that is what keeps shoes on your feet and oil in the furnace."

The Cleveland County resident said his family, known for moonshining, will be featured in a documentary called,

"The Spirits Still Move Them." Producer David Weintraub said he chose Owens because he needed an authentic, realistic moonshiner to connect with the audience.

And too, Weintraub wanted to clear up longstanding false narratives about moonshiners, saying the hallmark of the tradition was trying to survive.

"I've read so much about the stereotypes — lazy moonshiners drunk in the woods with his long beard and long arrest records," said Weintraub. "I knew that wasn't the case. I knew moonshining was about putting food on the table and having cash money to pay the tax man. Rather than make people a laughingstock like popular culture tends to

See MOONSHINE, Page 6A



The Cherry Bounce moonshine and whiskey recipes have been handed down through each generation. PHOTO BY LUCAS OWENS

## Job fair touts \$17 an hour wage

Employers scrambling as economy recovers

**John Boyle**  
Asheville Citizen Times  
USA TODAY NETWORK

FLETCHER — It is a sign of the times — a dollar sign.

Typically, local job fairs will promote the quality of the companies attending, career opportunities or solid benefit packages, and maybe mention "competitive pay" in passing. But this one puts the big hook right in the title: "\$17 per Hour and Beyond Job Fair."

"We normally have job fairs throughout the region on a regular basis, but this is the first time we have focused on a certain wage level and higher," said Nathan Ramsey, executive director of the Mountain Area Workforce Development Board, which is hosting the job fair on June 15. "It's important to note that we had a tight labor market before the pandemic, so even then it wasn't easy for employers to hire. At that time employers were raising wages and expanding their talent pool to add the workers they needed."

The job fair has just under 60 slots available for employers, and Ramsey said June 3, "We are almost completely maxed out; the demand by employers is overwhelming."

Unemployment down, but labor participation still low

The hiring market was tight already in early 2020, then the pandemic threw a wrench in everything. Ramsey noted that their most recent labor market data just came out for April 2021, and it shows the unemployment rate for April in the Asheville metro area (Buncombe, Henderson, Madison and Haywood counties) was 3.9%. The number of unemployed people

See JOB FAIR, Page 9A

## Moonshine

Continued from Page 1A

do, it puts them in context."

The piece tells the story of moonshining in Cleveland, Yancey, Transylvania, Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson, Polk and Burke counties. Owens and Weintraub were connected through Donor Services Manager Wendy Hamil from the Community Foundation of Henderson County. The film has been in the works since 2014.

The first premiere is on Thursday, June 17 at 7 p.m. at The Orange Peel in Asheville. There will be pod seating that allows families and groups of friends to sit together with enough space between them to feel secure. The program begins with music from Bandana Rhythm featuring local fiddler, Rhiannon Ramsey.

A drive-in theater hosted by North River Farm in Mills River takes place on Friday, June 18 at 8 p.m. featuring a performance by Apple Country String Band.

The final live premiere is on Sunday, June 20 at 8 p.m. at the Southern Appalachian Brewery downtown Hendersonville which will also feature a performance by the string band.

For those not yet prepared to venture outside to a public gathering, livestream options are also available. Tickets for all events are available on the Center for Cultural Preservation's website at SaveCulture.org or by calling us at 828-692-8062.

"Hamil told me she had the perfect person for me to interview," said Weintraub. "We are excited about him coming to the world premier and saying a few words."

Owens said he grew up dirt poor and was determined to prevent poverty from being passed down to his children.

"Most dads taught their kids how to play baseball," said Owens. "We taught our kids how to survive. And that's what we had to do. We were such a poor family."

Owens is related to Amos Owens who Lucas Owens said was a well-known moonshiner and produced Cherry Bounce, a popular beverage that was celebrated throughout the state and beyond.

"They would take the cherries off the cherry bounce, and they would put them in the barrel along with whiskey

"I am sure all the elders in my family have turned in their grave. But I am too old and pretty to go to prison."

**Lucas Owens**  
South Mountain Distilling Company

they made and age it for a year," said Owens. "When the second week of June came, they would have the Cherry Bounce Festival. They would have all kinds of events such as bare-knuckle boxing and horse racing. They did it every year to celebrate the next year's harvest of the cherry bounce."

Amos Owens fought in the Civil War but turned to moonshining after he got out of the military. He fell right into the Owens' legacy.

"The family has always been in moonshining even before the 1700s," said Owens. "He took the craft he was taught and started making Cherry Bounce."

Although a noble man who served his country dutifully, Lucas Owens described him as defiant, saying he refused to pay taxes on the liquor he produced.

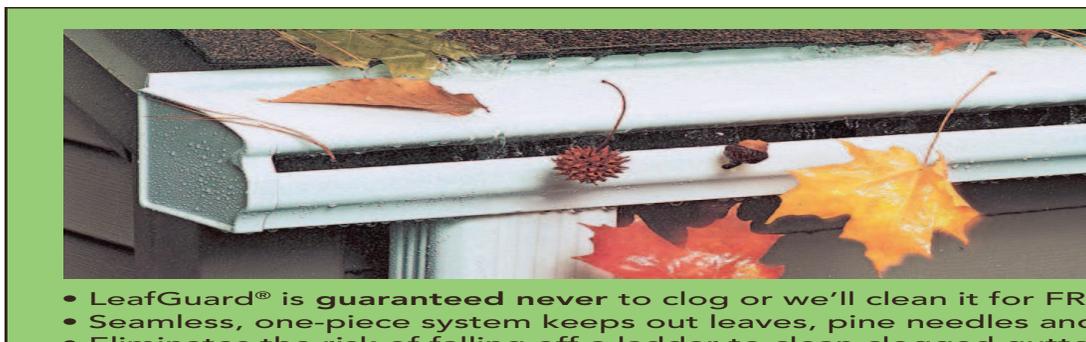
"He was angry at the federal government," said Owens. "He felt like that was giving in or bowing down to the federal government and he did not want to do that."

Owens is a label partner for South Mountain Distilling Company in Connelly Springs and teaches classes on moonshining for educational and historical purposes. He operates legally after having obtained his liquor license, a grave decision that many of his family members would have disagreed.

"I am sure all the elders in my family have turned in their grave," said Owens. "But I am too old and pretty to go to prison."

The film is set to be released June 17 at The Orange Peel in Asheville. To view the trailer, visit [www.youtube.com/watch?v=YaihWrhgmxE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YaihWrhgmxE).

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