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WRAL Small Business Spotlight: Clayton General Store is a step back in time

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By Jessica Patrick, WRAL Sr. multiplatform producer

CLAYTON, N.C. — The Clayton General Store on U.S. Highway 70 opened in 2017, but to owner Scott Eason, it's always been there.

Scott and his father, Steve, opened their first country store in the Flowers community in 2012 but closed it years later when N.C. Highway 42 was widened. That's when they reopened with a new name and a larger location off U.S. 70 near downtown Clayton.

Scott was born and raised in Clayton. He graduated from Clayton High School, which is minutes down the road, and said his old teachers and classmates visit the store.



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To the Eason family, the Clayton General Store is home, and Scott hopes the community feels the same.

"We wanted to create a quaint country store where the community can gather -- that was the most important thing for us. This is the country feel, where you walk in and you just feel like you've come to the house," he said. "That's what we love."



The Clayton General Store carries products from 43 local vendors, and Scott is always finding new items to sell that people can't find in other retail stores.

Once a month, the parking lot becomes a local market so more small businesses can showcase and sell their crafts and foods.



"As a small business ourselves, we want to reach back and support every small business around us," Scott said.

The most popular item in the store is glass bottled soda. The Clayton General Store carries 152 different flavors of soda, which you can buy off the shelves or cold and ready to drink.



"We try to find all the old ones," Scott said.

Another customer favorite is the store's selection of jams and jellies, which are hand-poured by two sisters in Asheville then bottled for the Clayton General Store.



There are local goods everywhere you turn, from T-shirts and hats to jewelry, baked goods, biscuit mixes, sauces, candies, snacks, coffee, signs, toys and more. The bigger draw, though, is the store's "crazy" milkshake bar, which features 35 different combinations.

The most popular milkshakes are the Oreo Overload, the Peanut Butter Cup Explosion and the cotton-candy topped Magical Unicorn, all served in glass jars with frosting-covered rims and fun toppings like sprinkles, candy and cookie crumbles.



Since the jar is yours to keep, kids and adults can get their milkshakes to go, but customers love to hang out on the front porch.

On March 20, the Clayton General Store backyard opens, becoming a space for free movie nights, family game nights and cornhole competitions, food truck rodeos, live music and more, especially on weekends and summer nights.

Scott, who has five children of his own, wants the store to be a place kids can get ice cream after school or after dinner. The backyard is open for everyone, a place where family and friends can relax and play.



"That's one of the things I love to see -- the families come out with their chairs, kids running around and having a good time -- that's the general store, that's the feel for me," Scott said.



The store is so beloved in the community that it is constantly expanding. A smaller version of the Clayton General Store opened in the Smithfield Outlet Mall two years ago (yes, you can get milkshakes there), in addition to two sister stores, The General's Shake Shake and an antique shop.

Scott wants to thank the community and his hard-working staff for their support over the years.

"Thank you to the community, thank you to Clayton," he said. "Thanks for supporting myself and my family, and continuing to do so. It's the reason we've been able to stay in business."



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