

## Easement Donor Profile

*Thomas and Francie Rayfield, Rayfield Farm, Birdsnest, VA*

Mr. Thomas Rayfield is a descendent of the Carpenter Family, who once owned much of the land between Franktown and Birdsnest, Virginia. While most of the original land grant passed out of the family, Mr. Rayfield was able to purchase and conserve 76 acres of his family heritage.

Located in Birdsnest, Northampton County, Virginia, just off of Seaside Road, Rayfield Farm consists of farm and forestland, including migratory bird habitat. In addition, the Carpenter family cemetery, where Mr. Rayfield's great grandparents and grandfather are buried, is located on the farm behind the new house.

Although his family no longer owned the farm, growing up Mr. Rayfield visited the family cemetery on every holiday with his mother. "My mother was so worried about the disrepair of the cemetery," noted Mr. Rayfield, "No one was taking care of it." So, every holiday they came to clear off the gravestones, cutting back honeysuckle and other foliage.

Mr. Rayfield left the Shore for college where he met Francie, who is originally from Winchester, Virginia. The couple was married in 1963. Mr. and Mrs. Rayfield both graduated from the Medical College of Virginia and lived for several years in Matthews County. In 1974, when Mr. Rayfield began working as the pharmacist at the Nassawadox hospital, the couple returned to the Eastern Shore. In 1975 the Rayfields purchased a pharmacy in Nassawadox, now Rayfield's Pharmacy.

In 1994, the Rayfields bought the family land, becoming the first blood relatives to own the property since Mr.

Rayfield's great grandfather passed away in 1891. They could finally take proper care of the family cemetery and make plans to protect their family history.

Mr. Rayfield first learned about conservation easements at a Rotary Club meeting. Mr. Peter Henderson, VES Land Trust Executive Director, spoke to the Rotary Club about local land preservation efforts. "We wanted to keep it all in one piece. I thought a conservation easement sounded like a really good idea for what we wanted to do with the land," expressed Mr. Rayfield. In 2008, the Rayfields donated a permanent conservation easement on the farm. "Even if there were no tax

incentive, I'd still do it," said Mr. Rayfield.

The Rayfields rent out their farm land. They built a single family home and a detached garage with a small apartment, and constructed fence around the family cemetery. "The easement allows us to do everything we want with the land," noted Mr. Rayfield, "I think that's a fear people have when considering easements. We laid it out ahead of time and made sure it was included

in the easement."

A tour of the property includes the Rayfield's favorite spots: the cemetery, the graves aged and inscriptions fading, and the well. Mr. Rayfield's grandfather was born in a little house near the well. While that house is no longer standing, from the well you can look back at the new house and the cemetery noting how both are located on a rare Eastern Shore hill.

*"Francie and I want to be buried here and we want it to stay as it is: a farm." –Mr. Rayfield*



Francie and Thomas Rayfield standing by the well with the house and cemetery (to the right) behind them. Photograph by Hali Plourde-Rogers