

# The Suffolk News-Herald

## Retaining a link to the past

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Two of Suffolk's historical icons are in jeopardy, and their fate raises a point about the need to protect the elements of the city's bygone eras, as well as the hard work that some folks are doing on behalf of Suffolk's history.

The Gwaltney Store in Chuckatuck and Arthur's General Store in Driver are both in rough shape, physically in the case of the former landmark and financially in the case of the second. In both cases, however, people for whom the stores hold many memories are rallying to the cause.

The Chuckatuck store has been decaying for years and was at risk of demolition following a long list of code violation notices by the city of Suffolk. Historians believe the present building dates back as far as the early 19th century and that some type of trading post may have existed there far earlier than that. The Greater Chuckatuck Historical Foundation has records of transactions there going back at least to the early 20th century, and the organization has learned much about how the old store operated during that period.

In recent years, the building has fallen into disrepair, prompting the city to issue the code-violation notices. But with a \$10,000 façade renovation grant from the Suffolk Economic Development Authority in hand, along with financial help from the historical foundation, the owner has begun stabilizing the property. There are plans for it to one day reopen with office space for the owner and the foundation and, perhaps, a small museum area.

In Driver, Arthur's General Store has been a beloved village institution since 1929. It's still a place that takes visitors back in time the moment they step through the door. But recent years have not been kind to the store. First, the closing of the King's Highway bridge reduced traffic through Driver to a tiny fraction of what it had been in previous years. Then a tornado destroyed the store's roof, porch and windows. And then came the Great Recession. All those things, combined with the change in shopping patterns that has caused so much trouble for so many small retailers, have left the general store's owner fighting to keep it open.

But Driver has always been a close-knit community, and residents are banding together to try to help save Arthur's General Store. They're planning a fundraiser — hoping to raise \$20,000 — today from 1 to 7 p.m. There will be live music, food and games for the kids. If the effort succeeds, the owner plans to make improvements and changes that he hopes will result in the general store becoming a destination once again.

Both efforts are great examples of communities working to save their shared historical artifacts. That's exactly the kind of intervention Suffolk needs to retain its important link with the past.

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