

February 2014

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VOL. 8, ISSUE 2

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Reading about the people in this issue of Next Door Neighbors helps us to gain an appreciation for how diverse our community really is. When we travel in our circles of work, school, errands etc. each day, we may not be aware of those who are experiencing life here a little differently. In fact, we may have only limited experience with the many individuals who have brought their customs and cultures to the area while still celebrating life as an American.



Meredith Collins, Publisher

Williamsburg is a wonderful place to live for many reasons - history, tourism, the College of William and Mary, and much more. The fact that it is home for many people of diverse backgrounds makes it even more interesting.

While we can only bring you a few stories of the variations that exist in our community, the stories we did bring you are astounding. Many of our ways of life are ones we take for granted - including speaking the English language. This issue will introduce you to some of our residents who came here without many of the tools to communicate or work to earn a living. While cherishing their own heritage, they have also found ways to assimilate into our culture. They have found ways to integrate into our community. They now call Williamsburg home. NDN

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photography

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Six Flags, Six Countries

By Cathy Welch



Lisa W. Cumming Photography

Christiana Kallon, Assistant Dean of Admissions at the College of William and Mary, keeps a stand of six miniature flags in her office. “I’ve visited about 17 countries, but I’ve actually only lived in six,” she says. That range of travel and living experiences have made Christiana aware of embracing local culture and celebrating her own unique heritage.

Like her older sister, Edna, and her parents, Edward and Rosaline Kallon, Christiana’s country of birth is the African nation of Sierra

Leone. Her younger, 19-year-old twin sisters, Rachel and Esther, were born in Pakistan. Christiana’s father is a United Nations representative and diplomat for the World Food Program. Currently, he’s the country director for the program in India, and her mom works in international finance at the World Bank in Washington, DC.

When Christiana was three years old her father was transferred to Afghanistan.

“They have this policy that, if it’s a conflict

country, it’s not a family-duty station,” Christiana explains. “Family must live in a safer country next door.” As Pakistan bordered Afghanistan, it was a safer alternative for families. They lived there for five years and the two older girls attended the International School of Islamabad. “It was very much an American school with American teachers,” Christiana says.

In 1998, Christiana’s family moved to Nairobi, Kenya, for three years. Her father worked in Somalia at the time. When she finished sixth

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grade, her father was transferred to Kampala, Uganda.

"I love it there," Christiana says. "It's called the Pearl of Africa with lots of green and great safari places." She attributes her appreciation of this country's culture to her age at the time. "When you're younger, you're just hanging out with your parents and you haven't really processed it. I began to understand what it meant to travel and learn about different cultures at a more advanced level."

In 2005, while a high school sophomore, Christiana and her family moved to Bangladesh. She graduated from the American International School of Dhaka. The family visited Nepal, Thailand, India, Vietnam and other south Asian countries during their stay.

When Christiana was a senior in high school, Henry Broaddus, Dean of Admissions for William and Mary, visited her school in Bangladesh. The dean and the student bonded, resulting in Christiana's decision to attend college at William and Mary.

"He told me about the American Liberal Arts experience," she explains. "In other countries you have to know what you're majoring in and apply to that particular school." At William and Mary, she had the opportunity to try different things before declaring her major.

"I come from a very faithful family, and we prayed about the decision to come here a lot," Christiana explains. "We felt this was where God wanted me to be."

She dove into college life, involving herself in many student organizations. "I was president of the African Culture Society, one of the highlights at of my college experience. I also worked with the freshman orientation program making sure freshmen make the transition to college." She earned her Bachelor of Arts in Sociology in 2011.

Christiana worked as a multi-cultural recruitment intern while earning her undergraduate degree. "I spent my senior year trying to understand the admissions process and increase diversity on campus." She loved getting students who never thought of her school as an option to consider attending William and Mary. "This position opened up, but I initially wanted to do an international development job." This remains her long-term goal.

"I believe in the power of education," Christiana explains. "I know what William and Mary has done for me in terms of academic opportunities, social opportunities and the support for being so far from home." She only saw her parents twice a year, going home for winter and summer break. "The rest of the year, my college dorm was my home." She found support from the local community. "As trite as it sounds, they wanted to be my family."

Christiana became a Christian and connected to Christian Life Center through their student ministry. "My faith is valuable to me. I got connected through the church and that was an opportunity to learn about the Williamsburg community."

She began to combine the worlds of being a college student and a local resident. "Now I have neighbors who aren't students, who aren't 24 years old. My next door neighbor is a 70-year-old man. He's great."

The African Children's Choir came to William and Mary when Christiana was a student and president of the African Cultural Society. "I believe those cross-cultural experiences are so valuable, whether it's getting students to study abroad or getting a speaker to come."

Christiana traveled the world for 18 years and says she doesn't think she really understood what a unique privilege that was. In her grade schools, everyone traveled. "When I came here, I met friends who came from good families and never had a passport. It put that into perspec-

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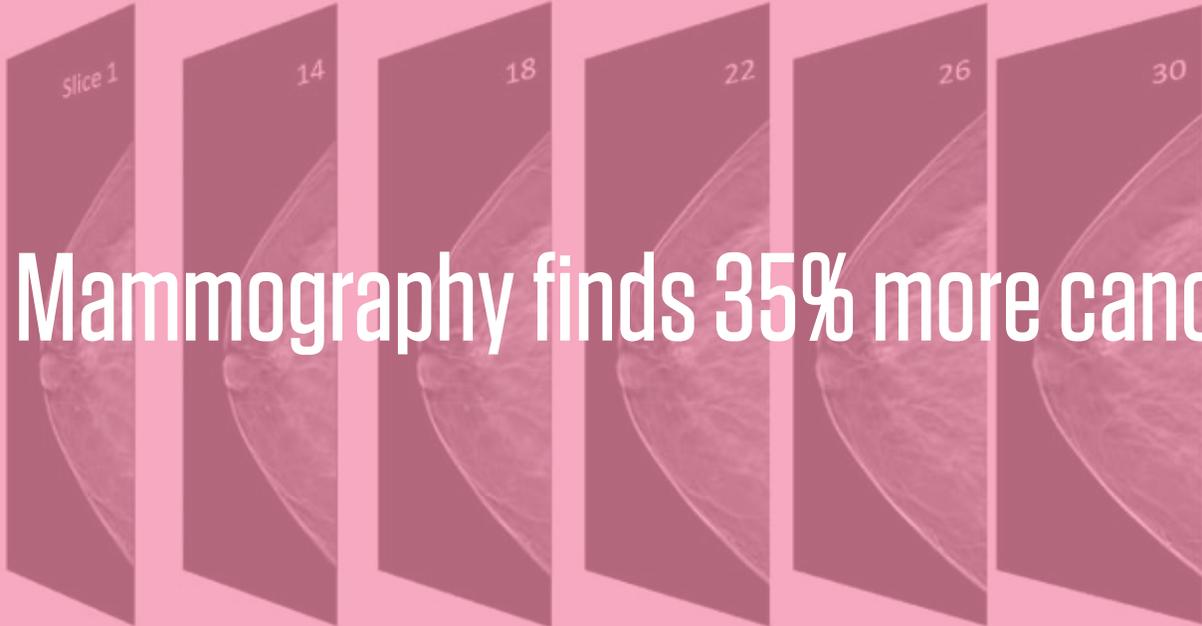
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tive.”

The admission’s office selects the incoming freshman each year. Since the college is a state school, most recruits come from Virginia. Christiana’s area of responsibility is reviewing applications from Florida and Georgia, as well as Virginia residents and international applications. “We all read applications and evaluate students for admission. This year I also assessed American students attending overseas schools.”

Each of the 12 deans has extra commitments. “One of mine is doing overnight programs for multi-cultural students. I love the diversity aspect of the college and seeing where that has grown.” Christiana also oversees special group visits to campus.

Last fall, Christiana’s younger twin sisters came to attend William and Mary. The whole family arrived to help them move into their separate dorms. She’s enjoying her role as Big Sister again.

“Williamsburg is such a small community that you’re going to have to meet people,” Christiana explains of her experience assimilating into the local community. “Where I’m from is always a conversation starter.” She enjoys talking to her friends and neighbors about how

she came here and hearing their stories as well. “I’ve seen people who come to retire here. I’ve met people at my church that attended William and Mary a long time ago and now have raised their families here. They stayed. I didn’t think people stayed in their college towns.”

Christiana realizes how much people love living here. She had wondered what was so special about this place, but now as a resident, she gets it. “Every day I see something different. Now I have to go to Farm Fresh, the DMV and gas station.”

One of the things she likes about Williamsburg is the pace and the time to reflect. “It provides time to appreciate the little things,” Christiana explains. “It’s a great place to slow down and allows me to put my life into perspective.” Her growing up years happened so quickly that she didn’t find time to absorb it. Being here for seven years, the longest time she has lived anywhere, gives her time to look back and appreciate her life and the people in it.

“The pacing and quietness allows you to value things here,” she says.

Christiana enjoys the family-oriented nature of Williamsburg. “My parents visit for summer vacations and we did Busch Gardens, the Great

Wolf Lodge, the outlets and the Williamsburg Winery.” She was pleased her family enjoyed her current city of residence.

“As an international student here, you have to search for diverse cultures.” Christiana works to find things that encompass her heritage and express her native culture. “I wear an African necklace or braid my hair – things that make me feel like myself within this monolithic identity.” She says wearing an unusual bracelet can start a conversation.

She finds the on-campus acceptance of diversity to be unique. “The kids love different cultures.” The college brings in speakers, arts groups like The African Children’s Choir and other diverse cultural activities.

“When I graduated and wasn’t at college anymore, I realized I had to find ways to infiltrate my culture. My roommate would see me cook something and I’d say, yeah that’s from my culture.”

Her extensive travels, living in different countries and melding cultures have made Christiana keenly aware of the challenges of celebrating diversity along with embracing local ways of life. “Self-identity,” she says, “is the key to who you are.” NDN



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A LITTLE PIECE OF POLAND

By Lillian Stevens

Don't think for a moment that you have to be from Europe to appreciate the vast array of items offered by Kielbasa Euro Deli and Market. No matter what your taste buds or culture, this is the place for authentic Polish food – especially kielbasa and pierogies.

Owner, Jozef Kuruc, immigrated to the United States 20 years ago when he was 33

years old. He says that he came to America in search of work and economic stability.

“Poland was going from the transformation of being controlled by Communist Russia to its own democratic country,” he explains. “You could find a job in Poland at the time – but the value of the money was low and inflation was high.”

Initially, Jozef and his wife, Grazyna, settled in New Jersey, but for the past 13 years they have called Williamsburg their home. While Chicago bills itself as the city with the largest Polish population outside of Poland, there is a large, thriving community of Polish immigrants in Williamsburg, Richmond, Norfolk and Virginia Beach.

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"We moved to Williamsburg because we like it here," he says. "Here, it is quiet, green and safe."

A welder by trade, Jozef found work in construction when he first came to this country. Pretty soon, however, he saw a need for a regular grocery store for European food. After hearing over and over again from members of the Polish community that there needed to be a place where authentic Polish and other European foods could be purchased, Jozef decided that he agreed – and Kielbasa Euro Deli and Market was launched. Located just off of Bypass Road on Palace Lane, the market features foods from Germany, Russia and the Ukraine to Central and Eastern Europe – and some Italian and British foods as well.

He operates two other Kielbasa stores in Virginia – one in the Ghent section of Norfolk and another in the Midlothian section of Richmond.

One might wonder why he named his store after a sausage.

"Everyone knows what kielbasa is!" Jozef exclaims with a laugh. "Most Polish businesses in America are named after various places in

Poland, but if you aren't familiar with those areas, then how do you relate to the store?"

His store is actually not an eat-in deli, though.

"The signs need to be changed," he says with a chuckle. "That's a mistake."

Visitors to Jozef's small store are greeted by the fantastic aroma of real smoked kielbasa. Regular customers include Polish immigrants as well as locals who have lived in the ethnic urban centers of the Northeast or Midwest. They know where to go for kielbasa as well as authentic pierogies, and breads like babka and paczkis, which are Polish doughnuts.

While these kinds of foods can be found readily in the ethnically diverse urban Northeast, that's not often the case here in the South. "In New Jersey, stores like this are everywhere," Jozef says. "But there's nothing like it here. So I saw a need to open this business. Because every time I would meet someone who was from a Polish background, or someone who had lived in Poland, there was always the same idea that came up – that there needs to be a Polish grocery store here. There was no place to purchase premium Polish goods here."

The business has been up and running since 2007. Measuring only 1,200 square feet in size, the store is reminiscent of traditional small-town grocery stores of Poland, as well as those in urban Northeast. Customers enter the store to find three aisles, each stocked with an abundant inventory from pickled vegetables to packaged sweets and treats – even coffees and teas.

As customers pass through the main aisles of the store, they come to the rear left where they will find a large glass refrigerator case stuffed with a variety of kielbasa and pierogies, as well as cheeses including Morski cheese, Podlaski cheese, and Mazowiecki cheese. Another case boasts shelves of smoked mackerel, pickled herrings, more cheeses and butter and flash-frozen Polish rye bread.

Josef explains that some Polish kielbasa is dark, smoked and tasty while another kind is light and "country style." There are also links of sausages like wiejska and kabanos. "We also have blood sausage, or kiszka," says Jozef. "A lot of people come in and say that they have not seen kiszka for years!"

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how he opened a store (making it sound as easy as picking up groceries from a market) he did face the same kinds of challenges that other small business owners also face. From locating distributors he could depend upon to ensuring compliance with health department and ABC regulations – not to mention taxes – the learning curve was steep.

“My advice for those who are starting their own business – whether you are an immigrant to the United States or whether you have lived here for your whole life – is to remember that nothing is free. You really and truly have to work hard for everything.”

Jozef suggests that potential business owners do their research and explore a variety of options for financing.

“You can’t rely solely on how the government promises to help small business,” Jozef says. “For example, a loan granted by the government for small businesses can be a lot more expensive than if you went through a private credit loan.”

Since he opened his business, Jozef has learned a lot but he works so hard that there is little time left for hobbies like making furniture. Still, he enjoys his trade and has found

that the demand for multi-regional products tends to grow, as does the size of the local community.

“My store caters to customers seeking authentic Polish kielbasa, golabki and pierogi,” Jozef says. “We have all of the Polish goods anyone could be looking for. The most typical Polish food is pierogi - and we have all kinds of pierogies,” he adds. “Some are filled with ground meat; others are filled with cheese, mushrooms, or potato and onion, sauerkraut, and even blueberries.”

Surprisingly, he does not order his inventory online. “I drive up to New York or New Jersey every week or so,” he says. “It’s the only way for me.”

Polish food isn’t the only attraction that has lured people to Kielbasa. Numerous customers have stopped in just to hear someone else speak their native language. Older people remember things from a time when they were young, while younger customers are eager to introduce their children to the sounds of their language. Germans, Latvians, Ukrainians, Czechs, Slovaks and Russians have visited the store – whether to speak a little Polish or because their native cuisines are all close cousins.

Most of his repeat customers have some European background but many customers don’t have any connection with central or Eastern Europe. Instead, they have lived in places like Chicago, Buffalo, New York or places in New Jersey where these kinds of stores are abundant.

Jozef and Grazyna have two daughters. The elder one works at a local resort and the younger one is finishing up her coursework at Thomas Nelson Community College while deciding where to transfer in order to complete her undergraduate education. Jozef also has two sisters and a sister-in-law who live in the United States; his other two sisters and the rest of the family still live in Lapsze Nizne, a village in southern Poland, close to the border with Slovakia.

He is happy to be an American citizen living in Williamsburg but will always have fond memories of his homeland.

“Of course I miss Poland and Europe,” Jozef Kuruc says. “I think that every person should remember where they are from, who they are, and their heritage. At the same time they should also remember where they moved to and where they live.” NDN

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An Arranged Marriage

By Linda Landreth Phelps

Sam Meyyar hasn't lived in the United States for long, but he recently discovered when he revisited his native India for his brother's wedding that he's traveled far down the road to Americanization. "It was hot, it was loud, and I'm used to more personal space now," he says. "In India, everyone is always pushing in line!"

At home he was known as "Pastor Sam," a respected staff member of a Christian church in Chennai with more than 40,000 congregants. He resigned his pastoral position and arrived in Virginia in 2010. How this happened is both the account of bold acts of faith and trust and a love story. He did so, he will gladly tell you, in obedience to God's voice. Sam says God often spoke to him directly and audibly, though Sam was the only one able to hear it. "I knew since I was a young man that I was to marry a woman who was not of my country," Sam says in his soft-spoken, lilting English. "I had to wait until I was 32 before God's plan was complete."

Things are slowly changing, but when Sam was a younger man, it was universally accepted that all marriages in India were arranged by the family. Sam was considered to be very eligible



Lisa W. Cumming Photography

since he was from good stock (his father was an army officer) and he was studying for the ministry. He was the eldest of three boys and was expected to marry well and quickly, but he wasn't interested in a wedding just yet.

"To avoid the hassle of matchmakers pestering me, I invented a fiancée in the U.S.," Sam admits. "That discouraged them, and they left me in peace." About six months later, a friend at seminary asked about Sam's supposed betrothed, and he had to confess to his white lie.

"You know, you are anointed and God will bring your words to pass," the friend told Sam, his statement giving Sam a chill down his back. Sam set the record straight and never again claimed a nonexistent betrothal.

Sam felt a strong desire to evangelize in the Middle East and knew that if he married a medical doctor, she would greatly simplify his access to Muslim homes. He was actively pursuing this goal when Sam heard something during a church service.

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“It was a deep man’s voice, speaking English, moving from my right side to my left. It said, ‘Your spouse is not in this country.’” Sam remembers. “I knew it was God speaking to me.” He then followed several ineffective blind alleys in his search for a suitable wife, even briefly putting his profile on a Christian Internet dating site. He got exactly one hit on his profile: his cousin in Dubai.

“In my culture, it could be seen as an insult to parents not to allow them to find a spouse for you, so he asked me why I was on the website. This was another time that I heard God clearly speak to me,” Sam says. “He told me, ‘I don’t need any help from you. I will bring her to you.’” Other prophetic revelations over the years, he says, informed Sam that his wife would have fair skin and would be named Rebekah, using the old Hebrew spelling.

Shannon Farino, born in Newport News and raised in Williamsburg, had from her earliest days evidenced a heart for the hurting and the helpless, a big heart that eventually led her to participate in her church’s 2007 mission trip to Chennai. During this brief trip, Sam and Shannon met only in passing, but he remembers being impressed when this American gave her own chair in a crowded room to an Indian and sat down on the floor. Shannon was there as a part of her church group, but she was so moved by a particular local ministry that she returned the next year for a longer trip with a specific purpose in mind.

For those six months, Shannon lived with and ministered to young girls who had been rescued from sex trafficking. She was known as “Shannon Akka” (or “Older Sister”) and her selflessness was noted by members of Sam’s congregation. When he returned from his own long mission trip to Dubai a month later, Sam was told all about the American woman who had been there, eaten the same food, slept with the girls on the floor and shared their lives as she ministered.



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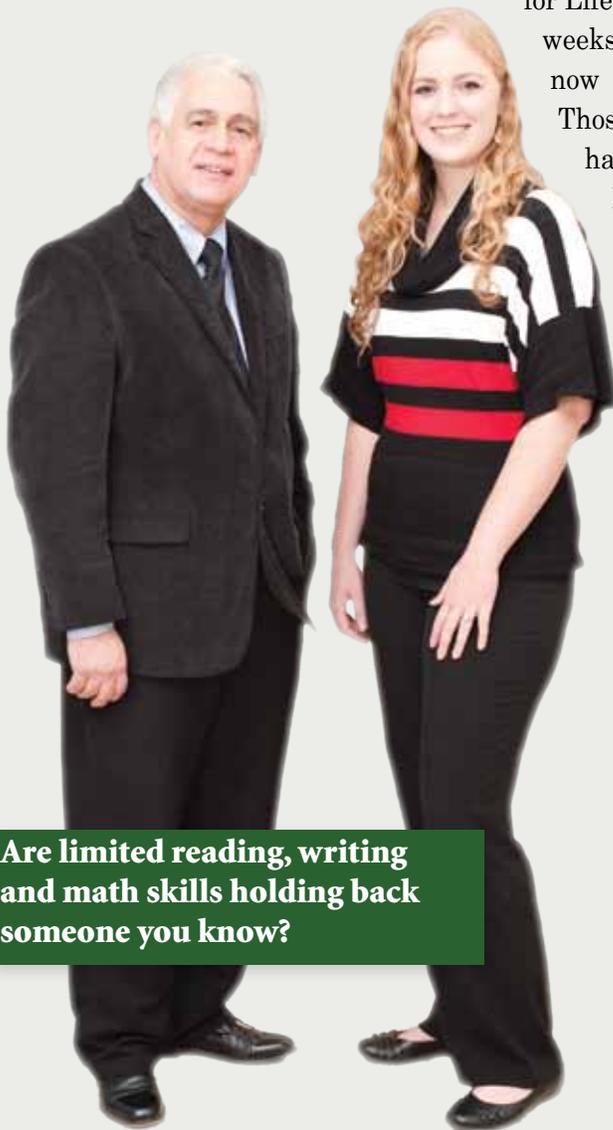
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On January 5th of 2009 an e-mail from Shannon arrived in Pastor Sam's inbox, saying she was coming back to India for a third visit in June, this time leading a team of five people eager to continue work with the rescued girls. Their relationship quickly progressed from email to texting to Skype video chats. Soon Sam's divine voice told him, "Take Shannon to be your wife."

On Shannon's 31st birthday, February 24th, Shannon, knowing it was highly unusual for an Indian pastor to be video chatting with any woman, let alone an American, asked him what was going on. Sam's answer shocked her to the core.

"God told me to take you as my wife," Sam told her. God hadn't been quite so clear with Shannon, so it took a while for her to catch up to Sam's confidence level. She prayed for a sign, she says.

"While I was driving one day in Orlando, where I lived, I was so confused; it was like there was a storm inside my head. A feeling then came over me and settled all the strife, a feeling that God was saying, 'I'm in this!'" Shannon, looking for added clarity and approval, then asked her parents, Bobby and Kandy Farino, to talk with Sam via internet video conference.

Bobby's only condition for his blessing was that Sam needed to come to the U.S. He knew the only way Sam could truly understand Shannon was if he lived in America and experienced her culture, as Shannon had experienced Sam's.

Sam's father welcomed her into their home with a blessing prayer that referenced the Biblical account of Isaac and his bride, Rebekah. After the meal, Sam's mother, in broken English, told Shannon, "I was praying for a daughter like Rebekah for my son."

Not knowing of Sam's prophetic promise, Shannon replied, "Well, my name is Rebekah." Her driver's license which listed her full name, Shannon Rebekah Farino, erased any lingering doubts that anyone harbored as the last piece of the puzzle fell into place.

Fast forward to Yorktown, September 9, 2010, Sam and Shannon's wedding day. "We married in obedience, but love came later," Shannon says. Over the last three years, they have gotten to know and love not just one another, but the families that each brought to their union.

For two people in their thirties to marry and submit themselves to each other was no easy task. Shannon's parents welcomed the newlyweds into an apartment in their home in Williamsburg. There was an especially steep learning curve for Sam, who was trying to accustom himself to his new role as husband as well as become assimilated into Western ways. No longer a respected pastor and teacher whose wisdom was sought on a regular basis, Sam experienced a humbling return to being a student. Sam found employment where he could, learning new skills along the way. He has hung drywall, wielded a paintbrush, and worked for a time share company. Sam joyfully welcomes each new task, considering it all preparation for the next stage of their lives. Sam is still very much drawn to a ministry in the Middle East, and Shannon shares his vision for Christian service, wherever that may lead.

Almost a year ago, baby Lucas Meyyar made his appearance, a delightful boy whose smile is the mortar that firmly cements his parents' two differing cultures. At his dedication service last summer, their church's platform was crowded with family from both nearby and afar, all there to support Sam and Shannon as they offered their son to God. Smiling faces in the group came in every shade of pale and dark, traditional Indian garb adding colorful visual punctuation to the portrait.

Sam Meyyar contemplates what the last few years have brought him. "I often say that if God isn't in a marriage, even the most compatible can fail. If He is its author, we can still, as humans, mess it up, but the most unlikely marriages can be a great success." NDN

CARLA DE CAO MOSES



Lisa W. Cumming Photography

Ciao!

By Narielle Living

One hour west of Venice, Italy is an area of farm country, replete with lush farmland and small villages. Carla Moses spent her childhood there, living on a farm in a town where she could see the hills of Vicenza. The region was flat, with fertile fields and a village center where the church bells tolled every hour. Way in the distance she could see the range of mountains that were about an hour away.

More than 30 years ago, with her mother's approval, Carla left her small town to see the world. She spent time in London and Long Island, New York, before finally settling in Williamsburg.

Carla has been living in the United States for 30 years and in Williamsburg for 26 years. "I came to the United States for love," Carla says,



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referring to the man who became her husband. “I came to Williamsburg for family. My sister lived here, and we thought it would be good to live near family.”

When Carla first moved to Williamsburg, she didn't meet many other people of Italian heritage. She found a job working for Colonial Williamsburg, first in the human resources department and later at the Williamsburg Inn. In her role at the Williamsburg Inn, she had to learn a detailed history of Colonial Williamsburg, enabling her to assist visitors and answer questions.

For Carla, finding employment was easier due to the fact that she spoke English. “If you speak the language, you're already ahead,” Carla says. “It's not easy for everyone that comes here to find a job commensurate with their experience and education, and it can be harder for immigrants because often their education abroad does not translate here in the States.” Carla adds that finding employment for some immigrants may be the biggest challenge they face in this area. Without the proper education required here in the United States it can be difficult to find employment that is comparable to careers in other countries.

Carla says that she had enjoyed working for Colonial Williamsburg, and also spent her time volunteering at her daughter's school and teaching Sunday school at her church. Every year she travelled to visit her mother, who remained in Italy.

As expected, Carla adjusted her life to some differences here in the United States. The regional cuisine is different, and the grocery stores didn't always stock the foods she was accustomed to cooking. When she first settled in Williamsburg, dishes such as polenta, codfish and risotto were difficult to find.

“I expected things to be different,” Carla says. She bought familiar food items in larger cities when she could and continued to meet a variety of people, including others from Italy or residents who were of Italian descent. Not long after she moved to Williamsburg, Carla decided to become involved with a new social club that was forming in the area.

On November 14, 1988 the first meeting of the Colonial Italian American Organization (CIAO) was held. According to Carla, there were 14 people in attendance that night, and the organization has continued to grow since then. “I thought a social club would be a great way to meet more people, and I love our name,” she says. The word, CIAO, means both “hello” and “goodbye” in the Italian language. Today, Carla is president of the organization. “We are a social club that values education and promotes a fuller understanding of the numerous contributions to America by Italian-Americans,” Carla explains. “People can see what their countrymen have done, and share stories, memories, food and customs.” Today, 25 years later, there are approximately 200 members of the organization, and they continue to expand.

Carla also recognizes that being a member of CIAO has given her an outlet for meeting others of similar background and customs. “Sometimes kids lose parts of their heritage, such as language, in the push to Americanize,” she says. Being a member of CIAO gives people the chance to reconnect to their Italian culture.

“Most people hear about us through word of mouth,” she says. Mem-

bers are not only people who have moved to the United States from Italy; they also include second, third and fourth generation Italians as well as their spouses. Fellowship plays an important role within CIAO; each month they hold a membership meeting, often at a local restaurant, and feature a guest speaker for attendees. Members also enjoy a yearly Christmas party as well as an annual family picnic. With each gathering there is food, stories and laughter.

Perhaps the most important aspect of what CIAO promotes is education. "Because of the influence of our parents, who placed a high value on education, we as a club want to give back to the community. CIAO gives back to the Williamsburg area by offering four scholarships each year to high school seniors who are furthering their education. We are open to giving these scholarships to students from public, private and home schools."

CIAO does fundraising activities throughout the year to support giving back to the community, but the main fundraiser is the Italian Festival held every October. Started 11 years ago, the proceeds from the festival allow the organization to give larger donations to the charities they support. "The festival has grown over the years, and now draws about three to four thousand people within two days," Carla says. "It is always held on the second weekend in October, so people know when to plan for it." The last festival was held despite inclement weather, but Carla adds that even though there was rain, people still attended. The festival showcases food, wine and family entertainment. "We've had many performers, singing and playing popular, traditional and classical Italian music. This year, talented young singers from the Virginia Opera returned to entertain the festival participants." There are 40 booths at the festival, with local vendors showcasing unique arts and crafts items or professional services such as home improvement and travel.

After 26 years of living in Williamsburg, Carla has seen a few changes in the area. "Williamsburg was smaller back then, more Euro-English. I liked that it was a traditional place, more conservative in customs, habits and expectations," she says. "My year in London gave me a flavor of England, and Williamsburg reflected that flavor. That is one of the things I like about living here."

Although she misses having her mother close, Carla feels that living here was a very good choice for her. "My sister is here, so I have family," she says. "Williamsburg is a beautiful area, and the climate, ambiance and cultural possibilities are good for both younger and older people." She appreciates having easy access to the mountains while living near the water, and likes the fact that this area has all four seasons.

"I grew up in a region that had more fog and cold, and the seasons were more defined than here, but I like this better," she says. "The thing is, I cannot really compare Italy with the United States, that would be like comparing apples and oranges."

She acknowledges that she is lucky to be able to return to visit her family in Italy so often, but also loves living here. For Carla, the abundance of history, the mild climate and the proximity to larger cities make Williamsburg an ideal place to live. NDN

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Invisible No Longer

Lisa W. Cumming Photography

By Sandy Rotermund

Underground. Separate and unequal. The “invisible churches” of the eighteenth century – the black churches – courageously met the needs of African Americans enslaved by a society that disallowed them to worship in their own way. The African American church became a physical and psychological refuge – a community with a shared hope for freedom.

“The African American church has helped African Americans to overcome a whole lot of

social issues,” says the Reverend Dr. Reginald F. Davis, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Williamsburg. “And naturally, we’ve had to go through the issue of slavery, racism and discrimination. The black church has really been that support mechanism for the African American community – to hold them together.”

Invisible no longer, the rich, dark wooden pews of this historical church integrate perfectly with the soft, white-painted interior. The

First Baptist Church of Williamsburg moved to its current home on Scotland Street in 1956. Its long history is documented both on Nassau Street where the church once lived in 1776, and in its present building’s entry foyer. The sturdy, high-backed chairs, the century-worn pulpit and Bible, plus enlarged sepia-toned photographs of congregation gatherings inhabit an alcove for members and guests to view.

Pastor Davis celebrates nearly ten years at

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Marlene Capps, MD

this church of about two-hundred and sixty parishioners. With its older congregation, the church is very different from his previous professional venue.

“I was the Dean of Students at a seminary in Evanston, Illinois housed on the Northwestern University campus. I was also a part-time pastor at a church in North Chicago.”

Pastor Davis decided to uproot when the university restructured, and the North Chicago church lacked the resources for a full-time pastor. At the urging of a friend, he applied for his current pastor position in Williamsburg and got it.

His personal history with the church, as a youngster in Memphis, Tennessee, was a good match to the layered history of the First Baptist Church of Williamsburg.

“I am the baby of seven in the family. My father has been a pastor for almost fifty years. So, when I came into this world, he was already preaching,” he says.

Pastor Davis leans forward a bit, his arms resting on his desk.

“I always had this love for preaching. I was emulating my father a lot. But I kind of didn’t want to be a preacher.” He looks up and smiles, stiffening his posture. “Because of the expectation of a preacher – you got to walk morally,

you got to always be right.” His back relaxes into his chair, his hands clasped together on his lap. “And I just felt like, you know, I didn’t want to do that because, like any other preacher’s kids, you want to go out on dates and stuff like that. And so I kind of figured if I didn’t have that stigma, I might have a good chance of meeting somebody,” Pastor Davis says with a full laugh.

“But I always had a love for it. I went on through seminary to earn my Masters of Theology and Divinity degree. I really didn’t accept the call to the ministry until I was matriculated into the PhD program at Florida State University. That was back in 1991.”

Marriage – to the congregation, that is – was not an unfamiliar liaison to Pastor Davis growing up.

“The black church has always been a second family for me. Quite naturally, the pastor is always married to the congregation and is always involved with community activism, involved with other families, other education, and the push for excellence.”

Pastor Davis recalls his childhood memories of seeing his father preaching.

“It’s the call and the response to the call. He would call, and they would say, ‘Amen!’ All of that fascinated me because that interchanging,

you know, of energy. The pastor would give out energy, and they would send it back.” He pauses in thought. “And then it was the place where information was given, challenges were given, more direction was given. I was fascinated by that.”

Marriage of the family-sort also appealed to Pastor Davis. His wife, Myrlene, manages their home and three children. They have a fifteen-year old son, a daughter, twelve, and then their “surprise” – as he describes it – a son who was born in 2010.

Pastor Davis chuckles and shakes his head as he describes his youngest son.

“He gets behind his little stool at home and says, ‘I call your attention to the Book of Acts.’ He just wants to preach.”

Pastor Davis’ mother, according to him, claimed that he “had the mark on him” as a child. That “mark” was that of a minister.

He told his mother that if that was so, he wanted it erased! Instead, the mark appears to be tradition – a gift passing down through the generations.

A love for preaching also encompasses the love of serving people. Pastor Davis says he has always had patience with people, especially older people. Love and compassion are prerequisites for becoming a pastor much like they



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once were for the ministers of the early black churches. That psychological and emotional refuge from the slaves' oppressive experiences was created by fellow slaves compelled to minister hope and inspiration to their suffering brothers and sisters.

"I think that the black community or African American community would not have been able to make it had it not been for the African American church," Pastor Davis emphasizes.

Church in the African American community provides much of this same nourishment even though slavery and segregation have been abolished.

"I think what has changed is that the families have changed. When you have father-absentee homes, and a market-driven society where both parents are trying to work, your kids are falling through the cracks. The black church cannot be what it really needs to be without the participation of the families in the community. So it's just a microcosm of the community."

Pastor Davis' concern for our youth today is deep – especially youth within the African American community. This compelled him to write the second of his four books. He urges the individual black churches to examine their

relevance in the twenty-first century.

"Being a person in the black church all of my life, I started seeing some things in the black community that really alarmed me," he says.

He refers specifically to the number of teen pregnancies, black-on-black crime and the joblessness.

"When I looked at what's happening in the African American community, I started looking at the black church. How are we going to address these issues? Have we addressed these issues enough or have we just decided not to address these issues at all? Have we decided to be so heavenly-bound that we've just decided not to look at the community and put our faith into action like the black church used to do?"

Pastor Davis doesn't answer these questions in his book, but instead, implores each black church to ask that of themselves.

Faith in action is vital to the First Baptist Church of Williamsburg. Among their many community outreach efforts is working with the United Way and the faith community in helping the homeless. Together, they provide shelter, food, clothing, showers and job resources to Williamsburg's homeless population.

Williamsburg's cooperative climate – people

working together toward a common goal – is getting better.

"It's improving," Pastor Davis says. "It is really improving. Like I said, when I see the community of faith getting together to serve the community regardless of race, creed or color – to me, that is significant improvement."

His church also launched a mentoring program within select schools. Retired men of the church mentor young men in the schools, encouraging them to pursue and accomplish their goals. This connection between the generations drives the program's success.

Connection through community – different ages, races, ethnicities and faiths – needs to be the template for our present culture. Without it, we risk falling to the perils of division. As a society, Pastor Davis emphasizes, we as people need to define our culture – or our culture will define us.

The black church – once an invisible refuge – continues to be a force of change. Its mission, according to Pastor Reginald F. Davis, remains true after hundreds of years.

"It stands as it always has done," he says, smiling. "as a place of hope, as a place of love, a place of support, and a place that challenges us to be the best human beings we can be in a society." NDN

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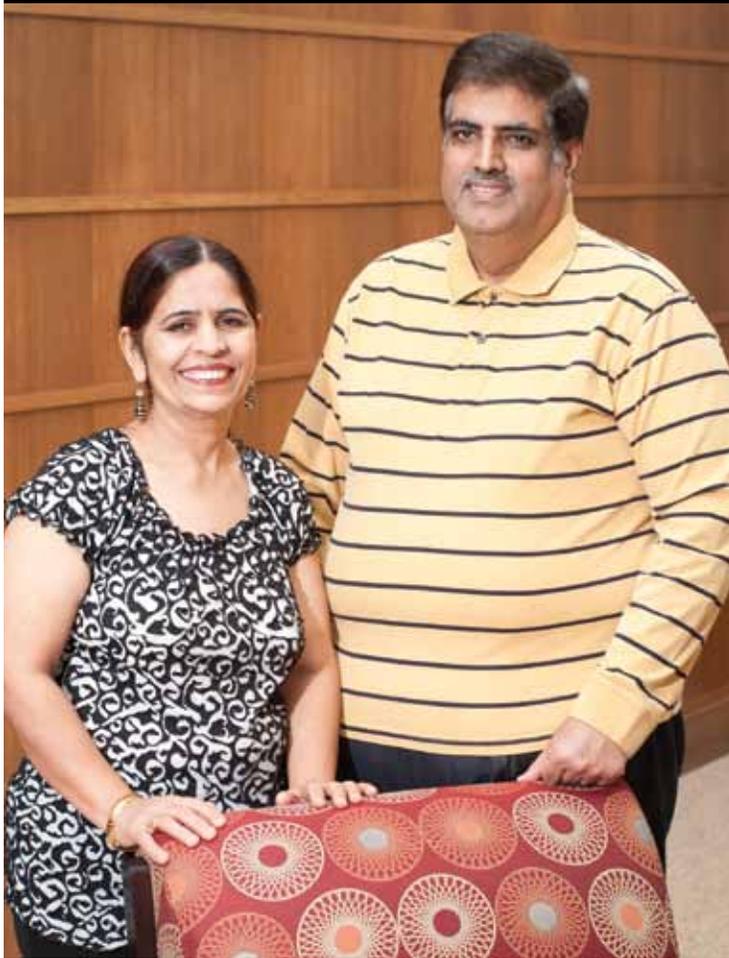
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AVANISH & NEETA RANI CHANDER



SHARING THE TASTE OF India

By Alison Johnson

Here's a fact that highlights Avinash Chander's passion for cooking Indian food: he can make more than 50 different kinds of breads, from the traditional naan – oven-baked, white flour flatbread – to loaves stuffed with meats, fruits and vegetables such as chicken, chili, cherries and mango.

At Nawab Indian Cuisine in the Monticello Shopping Center, Avinash and his wife, Neeta Rani, work long hours to bring fresh, authentic North Indian food to the Williamsburg area. Avinash is a chef and Neeta is a waitress at the family-operated restaurant.

The couple, who emigrated from India in August 2010, takes pride in showing customers – some newcomers to Indian food – how varied their cuisine can be. Avinash likes to whip up new creations for his staff and diners, going beyond dishes found at most Indian restaurants in the United States. He also follows the ancient Indian saying “Athithi Devo

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Bhava," which translates to "Guest is God."

"I love to cook for all of them," says Avinash, who is usually in the kitchen by 10 a.m. "Many American people I meet think all Indian food is only spicy. That is not true. If you like spicy, we make spicy. If you like mild, we make mild. We have five levels. I like spicy, but I can cook everything."

Avinash and Neeta, both 45, decided to move to America despite speaking almost no English. Avinash's business selling auto parts was not doing well, and he and his wife – she taught their native language Hindi at an elementary school – wanted a brighter future for their two children. Their daughter, Shaveta Arora, 18 and an aspiring cardiologist, is now a freshman at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond; son Nikhil Arora, 12, is in seventh grade at Berkeley Middle School.

Avinash's sister and brother-in-law established the first Nawab more than 20 years ago in Norfolk. The family since has opened locations in Newport News, Virginia Beach, Raleigh, N.C., and Denver, Co. One of Avinash's brothers works in the Newport News restaurant and another works in Norfolk.

With only a small number of first-generation Indian families living in Williamsburg, Avinash and Neeta have relied on their children (both studied English in Indian schools and speak more fluently), family members and staff at their restaurant as they have adjusted to a new country.

They also have improved their English by working with tutor Bettina Manzo, a volunteer at the non-profit organization Literacy for Life, where Avinash and Neeta began studying in 2011. "She helps us a lot," Avinash says. Both already have degrees from Panjab University in India, he a bachelor's in commerce and she a master of arts.

Now settled into an apartment near their restaurant, the two find Williamsburg "very peaceful," Avinash says. They loved seeing snow for the first time during a major storm that hit not many months after they arrived. "Very pretty," Avinash says.

"The people are very friendly here," Neeta adds.

"Yes," her husband chimes in. "If they do not understand us, they say, 'No problem, take your time.' They are very kind to us."

Still, life is much different than it was in Moga, a city of about 125,000 people in the northern Indian state of Punjab. Avinash and Neeta, who had an arranged marriage in 1994, are generally too busy at Nawab to have a lot of time with family and friends. Before they picked up more English, they were reluctant to run basic errands such as grocery store trips alone. "It was very difficult for us," Neeta says.

They still marvel at the "one-stop-shopping" experience in many American stores. "In India, our shops are smaller," explains Avinash, who often buys food for Nawab himself. "If you want vegetables, you go to a vegetable shop. If you want wine, you go to a wine store. Here, if you want food or wine, it is all at one place. It is very easy."

As for American food, Avinash and Neeta don't eat meat, fish or eggs and have found vegetarian options often are limited at local restaurants. The food in general tastes a bit bland to them, although Neeta and Nikhil have discovered the joys of pizza (Neeta gets hers with onions and peppers). "We like spicy," Avinash says with a smile. "American food is so mild. My son and my daughter both like hot food."

That's not true of many customers at Nawab (the name refers to rul-

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ers and aristocrats in several Indian states). About 50 percent of diners ask for “mild” seasoning, the least spicy option available, while 15 to 20 percent tackle the most spicy, “Indian hot,” Avinash reports.

Nawab runs a brunch buffet and a dinner service, with vegetarian, seafood, lamb and goat dishes on the menu. The wide range of sauces includes coconut, curry, mango and ginger and tomato and cream. Nawab also offers soups, salads and entrees featuring long-grain basmati rice flavored with saffron and cardamom (seeds from a plant in the ginger family).

Another specialty is food cooked in the tandoor, a barrel-shaped, clay oven fired with natural wood charcoal. Meats prepared in the tandoor sit in marinades overnight before they are skewered, roasted and served with grilled vegetables.

As for dessert, there’s kulfi – traditional Indian-style ice cream made with sweetened milk, nuts and cardamom – in plain, mango and iris essence flavors, as well as a rice pudding called kheer and pastry dumplings served with syrup and coconut flakes.

At home, Avinash and Neeta eat Indian food, speak mainly in their native language and watch Indian movies and television shows online. Not that they have much free time, Avinash in particular, although he does take a daily break between 3 and 5 p.m. “I like to work,” he says.

The family also celebrates Hindu holidays such as Diwali, an autumn festival of lights that celebrates the victory of light over dark, good over evil, hope over despair. During the festival, people often clean and decorate their homes, dress up in their best outfits, light lamps and candles, eat feasts, exchange gifts, watch fireworks and pray to deities such as Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity.

Avinash returned to India for 15 days in the fall of 2011, and a few family members have made the 20- to 22-hour trip to visit Virginia. Children Shaveta and Nikhil have stayed in touch with overseas friends via Facebook, Skype and phone.

“We do miss India,” says Shaveta. “There were so many festivals and events. We could talk so easily. We dressed up more often and went dancing and spent time with relatives and friends.” But, she adds, “We love America too. My family is happy to be here, and my parents have worked very hard.”

Nikhil, now almost a teenager, “likes America very much,” his mother reports. He has made plenty of friends at school and likes computer games, snacking on cookies and chips, playing soccer and swimming at the James City/Williamsburg Community Center.

The family is gradually exploring the Williamsburg area. Next year, Avinash says, he and his wife may try out Busch Gardens or Water Country USA. Meanwhile, they welcome Indian tourists who flock to their restaurant, especially during the busy Christmas season.

Avinash is happy that cooking, which he learned from his mother as a child and always did for his family, has become his career. Some days, he hands out free dishes to his staff or customers, often to get their opinion on new ingredient combinations.

If people like what they taste, the food might end up on Nawab’s menu.

“We like people to try many things,” Avinash Chander says. “We feel better here now. It is a good place for us.” NDN

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ALI IMRAN



Lisa W. Cumming Photography

A New Home

By Lillian Stevens

Ali Imran, owner of the Jamestown Road Shell Station, grew up in Lahore, Pakistan, the capital of the Pakistani province of Punjab and the second largest metropolitan city in the country.

With a rich history dating back over a millennium, Lahore is considered by many to be the cultural heart of Punjab and Pakistan. One of the most densely populated cities in the world, Lahore remains an economic, political, transportation, entertainment and educational

hub. Ali and his family love Lahore – and keep a home there – but they have found another home here in Williamsburg.

In 1999, Ali and his uncle and cousin came to America in pursuit of educational and business opportunities. Originally they settled in Northern Virginia but approximately four years ago, he and his wife, Sabeen Jaffree, who also grew up in Pakistan, settled in Williamsburg and started their family here. The father of two toddler daughters, Ali explains that he didn't

have a specific plan to move to Williamsburg – although he had visited and liked it – but in 2009, SML Oil and Gas offered an opportunity for him to purchase the Jamestown Road Shell Station here.

"It's an interesting story," Ali says. "I came here thinking that I might buy the business but then I learned that they wanted me to take it over immediately – the very next day!"

Because things were going so quickly, Ali needed a place to live locally, so he began a

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search that very day for an apartment close to the station. The Conway Gardens apartment community had one apartment being made ready that very day for a new tenant. By 6 p.m., Ali had signed a lease and had the key to his new home. Within hours (and after a visit to Bed, Bath and Beyond) he also had a foam mattress, sheets and pillows.

"I went to bed, got up next morning and went to work," he says.

Ali also has a house in Old Town Alexandria where he runs another gas station, so he is no stranger to the gas and service station business. He likes the way Williamsburg and the Old Town section of Alexandria are so similar in terms of their historic heritage and architectural beauty. But there, the parallels end.

"I like that Williamsburg is a small community where people know each other," he says. "And the pace is slower here than in Alexandria where everyone is in a rush. So this is a small town where people come back and forth to you and you build up your relationship with them and I really enjoy it. For me, the attraction to Williamsburg is because this area is nice and

quiet and small – it is pretty much crime free. Alexandria is metropolitan. And I place great value on my neighborhood and schooling, especially for my two daughters."

He and his wife of five years have Jannat, 25 months, and Noir, 14 months. "My wife Sabeen helps me in the business with bank deposits and some accounting tasks but our little girls keep her very busy."

Most locals recognize Ali's gas station, which was originally established in 1963, as somewhat of a landmark in Williamsburg. Formerly an Exxon station (Exxon has since moved from this region), it has always been – and Ali says that it will always be – a full service station, meaning that they offer gas for sale but they also have a full repair shop on-site as well as other courtesy services that they provide at no additional charge. From state inspections to tire repairs and brake installation, they are a one-stop auto shop.

"Mr. William Washington was the original Exxon owner," says Ali. "And they were a phenomenal family. But Mr. Washington died and then I believe that his son had a heart attack

and also died."

Over time, the gas station slipped in business results so Ali had a steep task before him – to build it back. He notes that long-time residents associate this service station with a place where they can come for a free air pressure or fluids check, knowing that they will be taken care of.

"We do that as a courtesy," Ali says.

When he bought the station, Ali was happy that all of the employees chose to stay but building the business started out slowly.

"It took me about two and a half years to build up my relationship with the customers. Slowly people got to know me. I put an 'Under New Management' banner out and then people start slowly coming. That first year, my volume was not increased. It went up a little in the second year. But by the third year, business more than tripled!"

Ali believes that his business has been good because of the quality, friendly services he offers, including free shuttle service and discounts for William and Mary students.

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drive you where you need to be," he says. "Lots of our neighborhood customers are pleased to get rides, especially the college students who have to get to their classes."

He loves living and working in the kind of neighborhood where customers sometimes invite him into their home for coffee as a way of thanking him for going above and beyond the call of duty.

"Sometimes, a customer will leave an interior light on in his car overnight and then in the morning, the car won't start. They know that I will come over and jump start their car." Through his business ("Everyone needs gas!") and through mosque, Ali and Sabeen have also become actively involved with the Pakistan community within the larger Williamsburg community, and they value the time they are able to spend with some 32 new friends – all from Pakistan.

"Just last Sunday, I invited all of them here to this small apartment," Ali says. "We had almost 30 people for coffee and refreshments – and karaoke!"

The group enjoys activities ranging from

picnics and barbecues in local parks to gatherings in private homes.

"We have fun, always!"

Ali says that his young daughters will someday be exposed to their Pakistani culture, but they will grow up as Americans. Language, however, is a whole different story. Ali and his wife are trilingual and believe that it is important for their daughters to be able to speak the family's native language.

"Urdu is our mother tongue and they are learning that," Ali says. "Children pick up language very fast. And because their parents are Pakistani, it's good for them to learn another language. If you go out and you can't speak your parents' language, I think that's a shame." Urdu means "warrior language" and a lot of the words came from different origins: Latin, Arabic, very few French and German too.

"It is a very rich language and has lots of scholars," Ali says. "The language has poetry – special words that you need to learn and then you know what's going on – intellectual words and so I really enjoy it."

"I want our daughters to know that they

can grow up and be anything they want," says Ali. "I would like to send them to William and Mary someday. My plan for my kids – no matter what – is that they will have good, top notch educations. I would cut out a meal a day if I had to – to save money for their educations. Education is good. I can't compromise that. No way. That's my goal."

Because educational opportunities for their daughters is the Imrans' main focus, the family plans to settle in for a long time. Jannat is already registered at Walsingham Academy where she will begin preschool later this year. Ali and Sabeen enjoy every aspect of nurturing their children and introducing them to their own heritage and culture, but are proud too that they will grow up in their American home.

"You know what?" Ali Imran asks. "Whatever society I live in, it's like a house. If you live in a house, that house has other people too and so you follow those rules. You can make your own home within a house – and that is what I did when I chose to make my home in America." NDN

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Helping International Students Succeed

By Brandy Centolanza



Lisa W. Cumming Photography

If anyone knows about the excitement and challenges involved with adjusting to a new culture after moving to a foreign country to study, it is Eva Wong. Eva is the international student and scholar advisor for the College of William and Mary's Wendy and Emery Reves Center for International Studies, and she knows exactly what the current crop of international students is going through, since she was once in the same boat.

Eva grew up in Malaysia in Southeast Asia and first came to the United States as a college student in 1996, arriving to study at California State University at Fresno.

"Education was definitely a priority in our family," Eva says. "My parents really stressed higher education and wanted me to study abroad. I am so lucky to have parents who were really supportive of me."

The biggest adjustment to America for

Eva was the educational system. In her native country, the educational style is more lecture-based and memorization of material, whereas here, "you need critical thinking skills to participate, and to be friendly with your professors," Eva says. "It was very challenging for me at first. I was very intimidated."

Adjusting to the English language was also difficult in the beginning.

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a little overwhelming,” Eva says. “It took a while to get used to the slang and regional usage of the language. That required some time. Social situations were hard, wondering ‘How do I jump into a conversation?’ It was awkward in the beginning, but it was also a lot of fun to learn.”

What helped was connection to the university’s international office and the students who knew exactly what she was experiencing.

“Everyone was very welcoming and they were a good support network,” Eva says. “They knew what it meant to be away from family. Being away from my family was very hard at first. I couldn’t just drive home or fly back.”

Eva overcame her hardships, earning a Bachelor’s Degree in Psychology and then a Master’s Degree in Education. She then moved on to the University of California at Santa Barbara to pursue a doctorate in education. There, she met her husband Max, who was also working on a PhD.

The pair moved across the country in 2009 when Max accepted a job as a professor at the

College of William and Mary.

“Moving to the East Coast was a huge adjustment for us,” Eva says. “Williamsburg was much smaller than what we were used to, and I think that was our biggest adjustment. California is just so diverse. You could be walking along the beach and you’d hear people speaking so many different languages. The food and the weather are different too. We had to figure out what kind of coats to get and if we needed gloves.”

Eva spent a year acclimating to life in Williamsburg before landing a job at College of William and Mary herself, at the Reves Center for International Studies. Her primary role as international student and scholar advisor is immigration advising and programming. That includes setting up international students and scholars with writing and communication workshops, career workshops and social programming.

“I help them with their transition to the college,” she says. “International students face similar issues as domestic students, but their challenges are magnified because their family

and friends aren’t here, and they can’t just go home. It can both be an exciting and stressful time. I would say that the language is the biggest challenge for them, and socially, making friends is hard. It can become so overwhelming, and they don’t know where to turn to.”

That’s where the Reves Center for International Studies comes in. The center offers a variety of programs and events to help international students, scholars and their spouses find their fit at the college. This academic year, 580 students from all over the world are enrolled at College of William and Mary.

Perhaps the biggest event for the Reves Center is orientation.

“Our goal is to be welcoming and to make these students feel like they really belong at the college,” she says. “They are international students, yes, but they are College of William and Mary students, and we want them to know that we are invested in helping them succeed.”

Eva also works closely with the college’s other departments to ensure that the students have what they need. The Reves Center even



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reaches out beyond the college to the Williamsburg community to help international students with their transition through the Global Friends Program.

The Global Friends Program matches up students with community members who aid with the understanding of the American culture and society. In turn, the American learns about the culture and traditions of the international student.

“You don’t need to leave a country to have a global experience,” Eva says. “It can happen locally. A lot of the students in the Global Friends program have formed great relationships with some local folks, and the local folks have gone on to visit the students in their home countries.”

Eva takes pride in ensuring an easier transition for the students who walk through her doors.

“I’m so lucky to get to meet students from all over the world,” she says. “My job is very rewarding. It reminds me of my time as an international student. I had a very positive experience and I feel like now I am really able to

give back. I’ve come full circle.”

Eva and Max also hope to provide a positive cultural experience for their 16-month-old daughter, Ella, by sharing with her some of Max’s Jewish traditions as well as Asian traditions from Eva’s heritage, including the Chinese New Year and the Harvest Moon Festival.

“Growing up, those were such big celebrations for my family and me, and now that I have a daughter, those family traditions seem so much more important to me,” Eva says. “Every year, I try to make a real Malaysian dinner here for family and friends to celebrate the Chinese New Year.”

Eva’s experience not only as an international student but also working with other international students has enhanced her life and she encourages anyone who is able to study or travel abroad to do so.

“There is just so much to learn from different cultures and different people,” Eva Wong says. “Opening up to different cultures makes life richer, it expands our world view and our experiences and makes us better people.” NDN

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Publisher.....Meredith Collins
 Editor.....Greg Lilly greglilly@cox.net
 Copy Editors.....Al White, Ginger White
 Photographer.....Lisa Cumming
 Graphic Designer...Sue Etherton, Lara Eckerman
 Account Manager.....Anne Conkling

Writers

Linda Landreth Phelps, Rachel Sapin,
 Brandy Centolanza, Sandy Rotermund,
 Alison Johnson, Ryan Jones, Lillian Stevens,
 Erin Zagursky, Erin Kelly, Narielle Living,
 Natalie Miller-Moore, Morgan Barker,
 Susannah Livingston, Cathy Welch,
 Susan Guthrie

Advertising Information

Meredith Collins

(757) 560-3235

meredith@williamsburgneighbors.com

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MONDE RODJANA SAOCHAN

To talk with Rodjana Saochan - to hear her quick and lively answers to all kinds of questions - one would never guess that two years ago, she struggled to have even the briefest telephone conversation in English. She beams as she tells the story of her new life in Williamsburg - a story of hard work and remarkable assimilation.

Rodjana, who goes by her long-time nickname "Monde," grew up in the small Thai city of Chiangkhom Phayao with her parents and two older sisters.

"I'm the youngest, so I was spoiled, right?" she says, laughing.

In fact she says her father often told her that she's the "older" sister, being stronger by nature and gifted at taking care of other people. One of Monde's sisters now lives in Bangkok while the other splits her time between the U.S., Thailand and Saudi Arabia, where her American husband works for an oil company.

Monde earned a Degree in Political Science at Ramkhamhaeng University in 1998, but she knew she wanted to work in a field that helped people directly. She studied the ages-old techniques of traditional Thai massage therapy, which,



Lisa W. Cumming Photography

knees and feet, as well as hands. Soon Monde was working in a massage clinic in Bangkok. Fortunately for her, she had embarked on a career that would prove eminently portable.

Monde came to the States in 2005 with her husband, a native of Puerto Rico who was serving in the U.S. Navy. They lived in Portsmouth and, by her own admission, Monde depended on him for just about everything.

"I could read when I came here but listening and speaking was bad. My husband did everything for me," she says. The couple divorced not long after settling in Virginia, though they have remained good friends, and after that, Monde says, "I did everything on my own." When she started working at a Thai restaurant in Norfolk, it became clear that her English skills were holding her back.

"I was waitress, cashier, cook - I did everything," Monde says. "But oh my gosh, bad English. Even when the plate was empty, I asked 'Are you finished?' For two months I said 'I'm sorry, I'm new here!'" She said she

HARD WORK Made the Difference

By Susannah Livingston

like yoga, emphasizes stretching, and which requires the therapist to use his or her elbows,

I asked 'Are you finished?' For two months I said 'I'm sorry, I'm new here!'" She said she

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would memorize the names of the dishes, but if anyone asked her a question about them, she was lost. Talking on the phone was nearly impossible. More than once, Monde cried tears of frustration and embarrassment.

Monde took some adult English classes at Granby High School that she says were very helpful. But big changes were in store: when she returned from a trip to Thailand, the restaurant where she had worked had closed. She also found out that she and her new partner were expecting a baby.

As so often happens, unlooked-for change became an opportunity to start anew. After staying home to care for her daughter during her infancy, Monde decided to take the steps needed to establish herself here in the field she had loved in Thailand: massage therapy.

But this time, it wasn't just Monde's English speaking skills standing in her way. "I went to a day spa, and they said they can't hire me," she explains. "The woman said 'I would love to put you on our team but I can't - you need a Virginia license.'" Monde had already taken and failed the licensure exam, mostly because of her poor reading comprehension and writing skills. The owner of the massage school she attended told her, "You know this stuff, but the English is holding you up."

By this point, Monde and her partner had moved to Williamsburg and received Next Door Neighbors magazine. Monde's eyes had lighted on an advertisement for Literacy for Life's services. "I saw oh my gosh, I need to study, I need citizenship," Monde says excitedly. "I opened it and I saw the ad. I called [the] next day!"

It was the beginning of an entirely new chapter of Monde's life. With her characteristic energy and enthusiasm, she signed up for nearly every class offered at Literacy for Life. "I wasn't working then, so I did health literacy classes, book club, everything." She says she realized she wanted to become a citizen "because I want to participate - to vote. It's sad if you can't do that." But there was a waiting list for citizenship tutors, so while she waited to pursue that part of her dream, she worked hard on her English. Her tutor, Karen, helped her with everyday English skills but also with the medical terminology - even Latin words - that she needed to know for the massage certification exam. On her third try, in March 2013, she passed. "I was so happy - I screamed, 'I'm ready to go! I'm ready to go to work!'"

Her certification in hand, Monde is now employed at three massage therapy centers where, she says, she "works with the greatest people." She sees four or five clients each day, many of whom always ask for her by name, and she enjoys chatting with them and finding out about their changing therapeutic needs. Whenever she has a new client, Monde must ask questions as she fills out a lengthy intake form, so she gets plenty of on-the-job English practice. This year, she'll switch to a four-day work week so she can devote Mondays to working on her English. Monde readily admits that she and her Literacy for Life classmates, who hail from all over the world, "sometimes don't understand each other -but we laugh and keep trying."

Life is good in other ways, too. As she'd hoped, Monde is now proud to call herself an American citizen. The exam was "very nerve-wracking," she says, laughing as she recalls how she missed a question about the Statue of Liberty and New York Harbor -facts now imprinted in her memory for all time. She was sworn in during a ceremony at the colonial courthouse on Duke of Gloucester Street on December 17, 2012, with Karen and her husband delightedly looking on. "It was very emotional and special," Monde says. NDN

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In discussing estate planning with clients who have a child or a grandchild with disabilities, our firm has learned that most have very strong and definite ideas as to how their "special needs" child should be provided for and reared. These are children (young or older) who have a physical, mental, or emotional difficulty that makes them dependent on someone (parent, family member or spouse) throughout their lives. Estate planning for families with a member who has a disability is different from other types of planning because there is so much more that needs to be done. Parents (or grandparents) must plan their estates regardless of size, their age or their marital status to ensure the loving care and well-being of their child. For example, future caregivers must be selected, living arrangements investigated, and alternatives discussed and selected if a parent dies or becomes disabled. Otherwise, the Probate Court will appoint a Guardian and Conservator for the child and control the process.

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Lisa W. Cumming Photography

Saying **'Hola'** to Hispanic Customers

By Greg Lilly, Editor

Dustin Kilgore and Pedro Ramos manage a popular Spanish market and have just celebrated the first anniversary of their adjacent restaurant, El Sabroson. They attribute their success to knowing their customers – personally as their neighbors and commercially as their provider of goods and services.

“We listen to the customers. I constantly ask what they need,” Dustin explains. “When someone is in the store, we tell them if we don’t have it, we can get it.”

Dustin and Pedro are in the store daily and interact with each person who walks in the door. Simple customer service tasks such as greeting people as they enter the store, asking

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if they found what they needed and thanking them for their business aren't always voiced in other stores – according to Dustin.

“Sometimes when the Spanish speaking people would go to other stores, they were not always greeted with the same respect,” Dustin says. “For example - the state lottery. The clerk behind the counter didn't want to take the time or couldn't speak the language to explain how it's played.”

Dustin saw this when he worked in a local gas station. “I had moved into the Spanish community and became friends with them. They would come into the gas station because they saw a friendly face. The owner spoke some Spanish and interacted with the Spanish customers.” Dustin and Pedro saw the difficulty some Latino customers had finding the items they wanted or understanding the labels on the products.

Dustin kept asking the gas station owner to open a Spanish store. “He never did, so I talked to Pedro about it. We wanted to do something with the Spanish community, but opening an only-Spanish market was a little scary for us. We found a place inside the Outlet Mall. The rent there allowed us to start with a small investment. We opened with American and Spanish convenience items like cigarettes, Spanish phone cards and services,” Dustin says.

“I had always wanted to open a store,” he adds, “but without somebody by your side giving you confidence and support, it's hard to do. Pedro wanted to do the same.”

They had worked in the Outlet Mall before and knew what products were available in the other stores and identified the gaps. “We started with convenience items, knick-knacks based on the season. Like at Valentine's, we had Valentine's roses; at Easter, Easter candy and small toys,” Dustin says. “We always had our staples of cigarettes, snack foods, international phone cards, money orders, wire transfer systems.”

Pedro's knowledge of the Spanish community and Dustin's experience from the gas station convenience store helped them stock the right items. “When we outgrew that original 12 foot by 12 foot kiosk, we moved to a larger space,” Pedro says. “We found that we sold cologne, so in the bigger space, we expanded that selection.”

When the economy crashed and the recession hit the area, Pedro and Dustin found that the Spanish snack foods that lined their shelves were non-necessities for their customers. Their customers wanted basic groceries with Spanish labels. “That's when we decided to start looking for a storefront,” Dustin says.

When a Spanish language person comes into the store and sees the labels on the groceries, those are recognizable name brands from their countries, Pedro explains. “They know exactly what the item is. Like we have the same spices here in the U.S., but the label makes it difficult for Spanish language customers to know what it is.”

“We opened up here in the shopping center [Kingsgate Shopping Center]. We decided to bring in more Spanish groceries. Our customers told us what items they wanted. My partner, being Spanish, knows a lot of what we should order,” Dustin adds.

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He explains that most Spanish stores have a window counter for prepared food. “The customers asked for prepared food. When we started looking at the cost of meeting the food preparation regulations, we thought we should do more than a small counter,” Dustin says. “That’s when we decided to open a full restaurant.” The investment in the kitchen led Dustin and Pedro toward something bigger. An added business advantage was that since they had an established customer base for the grocery, the restaurant could benefit from those returning customers.

Pedro had always wanted to open a restaurant, and Dustin had some management experience. They realized there were Mexican restaurants around the area, so they concentrated on the variety in Latin culture. “When we say Latin food, many people don’t understand. Latin food is from the Latin countries. We have more than Mexican or El Salvadorian. We have Peruvian and other cultural dishes. The different cultures have different styles. Not all Spanish food is hot and spicy. Peruvian is rarely spicy,” Dustin explains.

“We weren’t going to advertise outside the Spanish community to the Americans because there were already so many other Spanish restaurants in the area. We thought the market was flooded with Spanish/Mexican restaurants. Basically, we were doing it for our grocery customers,” Dustin adds. Word spread, and today the restaurant attracts people from all over Williamsburg as well as tourists.

Just like in the grocery side of the business, Pedro, Dustin and their employees are always asking the restaurant customers what they would like to see added to the menu. Dustin admits that sometimes it’s difficult to get a customer to tell you exactly what is on their mind. Many times they look and leave if they don’t find what they want.

“Sometimes you have to ask directly. One advantage is that Pedro and I and the employees know our customers personally,” Dustin says.

Pedro adds, “They say that they can find things from their country here. They remember and find their favorite brands here. It reminds them of their families.”

Even with items that are cross-cultural or commonly found in area groceries, the Hispanic brand names are reminders of home. “Like the snack foods,” Dustin says, “we have the same things in American stores, but the brands are different. Spanish people see their brands, that reminds them of home and gives them a little bit of comfort here in the U.S.”

In the future, Dustin and Pedro would like to expand the restaurant portion of their business.

“Our employees play a big part in the success of the business,” Pedro states.

“The Spanish culture is very hard working,” Dustin says of his employees and of his core customers. “They see opportunities. They have a positive outlook even if they are at a disadvantage because of English language skills or because of education or because of experience, they still have hope for opportunity. Isn’t that what keeps all of us going – hope?” 

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For more information contact Bill Bean at 757-221-7825 or email webean@wm.edu.

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Wednesday, February 12th Speaker:



DAVID HUNT

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David Hunt is an entrepreneur, owner and Chief Executive Officer of Landon IP, Inc., a professional patent search, analytics, translation and patent education company in Alexandria, Virginia.

Landon IP employs 200 people with offices in Washington DC, Tokyo, Japan, London, England, Shanghai, China, and Southfield, Michigan. The leading patent legal support company has customers in 39 states and 44 countries.

Under his leadership, Landon IP has grown from \$1 million to \$30 million in revenues since 1998 with minimal external financing. During that time he has directed the integration of four acquired companies into Landon IP, Inc., representing \$6 million in revenues.

Mr. Hunt holds a B.A. and M.B.A. from the College of William & Mary. Prior to Landon IP, he worked as a project manager and senior business analyst in the areas of corporate strategy, market research, and competitive intelligence at Freddie Mac in McLean, VA.

Mr. Hunt lives with his wife, Amy, and their two teenage children in McLean. Prior to living in McLean, the Hunt family were long time residents of Great Falls, where the children attended Forestville Elementary School.

He is the editor of the book, *Patent Searching: Tools and Techniques*, published by John Wiley & Sons.

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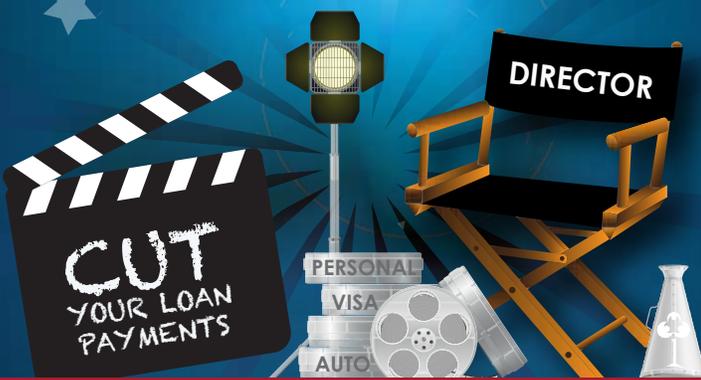
By Greg Lilly, Editor

DeRocke Croom, Jr. of Williamsburg Parks and Recreation, says sports are an important part of his life, and he wants to show Williamsburg's youth the fun of playing on a team.

DeRocke went to high school in Hampton. "My parents were in the military. We travelled extensively when I was young. My father retired at Langley, and I grew up in the Hampton school system." He was a star football player at Hampton High School. "Sports have always been a big catalyst in my life. I was fortunate to get a football scholarship to Hampton University."

At Hampton University, DeRocke's major was physical education

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and recreation. "During spring breaks and summers, I would work at summer camps," he explains. "After my playing days were over, I started work as a recreation leader at summer camps for Hampton Parks and Recreation."

He soon became the football coach at Bethel High School. "We had a state championship team that included Allen Iverson; that was in 1992. I went on to coach at Hampton University."

He enjoyed his time coaching at Hampton University, but had to travel extensively. "I was on the road recruiting for the university – a lot. I have a vivid memory of one December 23rd and I'm in North Carolina recruiting. It's Christmastime and I'm not at home." That spurred DeRocke to make a change so he could spend more time with his family.

"I was fortunate to get a position with the Parks and Recreation department in the North Hampton Community Center. After six years there, I moved to Norfolk Parks and Recreation where I was in charge of athletics. I stayed in Norfolk for about five years."

A position opened up here in Williamsburg, and DeRocke saw it as a better fit for his in-

terests and skills, plus the commute was much better for him.

His responsibilities were for the youth softball, youth basketball and adult softball programs. "When Lewis Edwards retired, I assumed his programs. Now, I'm in charge of youth volleyball, adult volleyball and tennis plus adult basketball."

DeRocke says that at the Quarterpath Rec Center, he wants to provide high-quality youth and adult sports programs as well as valuable classes. "We want to make sure we give them what they want and the best service that we can. Customer service is our business," he says.

The goal is to have fun and a good experience playing in the leagues. "We're non-competitive, so you don't have to worry about coaches being over-zealous. We have playing requirements, so you don't have to worry about the amount of time your child gets on the court or field. We make sure that all the kids get to play. We want to make sure all the kids have a good time."

He stresses to the volunteer coaches to teach the fundamentals and to teach teamwork in the youth programs. "Just have fun playing the

game," DeRocke says. "We don't worry about wins and losses. There is plenty of time for that later on in life. We want the kids to get a solid foundation." This attitude allows the children to get together without the pressure of winning. The coaches and staff focus on learning and having fun.

"There are competitive leagues in town," he says for the more experienced and spirited players, "but our common goal is for the kids to enjoy playing. I grew up in the competitive leagues and coaching in high school and college, so this is a nice change for me."

Professional journals about the recreation field, DeRocke explains, report that some kids stop playing sports because of over-zealous coaches and the stress placed on winning.

When young players are only allowed time on the field or court based on their current skill level, some may not gain any experience.

"They can get the feeling that they're not good enough and then they quit," he describes. "Maybe it's just not their time. Maybe down the line when they develop their talent more, they'll be better. At six years old, you can't determine if they're on the road to middle school

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and high school play. Just let them play.”

This spring, the Rec Center has plenty of opportunity for learning and playing. “We have youth volleyball in the spring and youth softball. We’re holding spring break youth volleyball and basketball camps. We have spring tennis leagues and spring adult softball. We have a lot of dance programs year-round, as well as karate and tai chi adult classes. There is a mixture of classes.”

The city of Williamsburg and James City County’s parks and recreation departments coordinate well together so that they do not duplicate program offerings. “James City County does baseball. We do softball,” DeRocke says. “They do football. We do basketball. It’s complementary. They do a lot of summer camps. We don’t. They do playgrounds where we do camps and clinics. That works well. We collaborate with James City County about the programs so we don’t overlap.”

That collaboration sets a foundation of the programs and each department works within their programs. But there is some flexibility in adding new options. “For example we have youth softball, and there was some talk of a fall

league.” DeRocke discussed that with the kids and with their parents to gauge the interest. “Now, we have two seasons of softball. Same thing with basketball: We’ll do the fall season and if needs be, we’ll have a spring season of basketball.” The summer will bring sand volleyball and three-on-three basketball for adults. Although the programs are set, he has the option to grow a program with an additional season or with added camps and clinics.

One instance of adding a potential new program is DeRocke’s interest in lacrosse. “I’d like to look into lacrosse. One concern is that we’re limited on space and would need to work with the schools to use their fields when they’re available. With a new program like that, I would check with James City County to see what they have planned.” Cooperation and collaboration between the parks and recreation departments creates a balanced array of sports and recreation classes for local neighborhoods. The locals enjoy the sports offerings at the recreation center. “Our most popular youth programs are basketball and volleyball. For the adult programs, it would be softball, volleyball and tennis.”

The spring youth volleyball program can only accommodate a limited number of participants. “Because of that limitation, we’re at capacity within six hours of opening registration. Our registration starts February 3rd, and we’ll have a line outside the door. It’s big.”

DeRocke’s favorite programs – in his old position – were youth softball and youth basketball. “Those were my favorites because I was able to interact with so many people: our volunteer youth coaches, the parents and kids. It’s fun. In this new position, I just finished up youth volleyball and adult volleyball. I like tennis too. I won’t say I have a favorite yet, but I’m intrigued by all of them. I’m still getting my feel of these new responsibilities. I’m a football guy by heart.”

After inheriting a new set of programs when Lewis Edwards retired, DeRocke Croom, Jr. wants to ensure he maintains the level of excellence in the programs and grows them.

“Lewis has done a magnificent job in these programs, and I want to continue that tradition. We want to make it so that everyone can participate in some form or fashion. We want the kids to learn and have fun.” NDN

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Irish dance

By Greg Lilly, Editor

“A lot of the dancers I teach know about Irish dance because of their Irish background. The other large percentage are people who have seen a show like Lord of the Dance or Riverdance. They like it and want to try learning the dance,” Daniel Nelson explains about the allure of Irish dance to his students. Daniel, along with his mother Kathy, teach at The Nelson Academy.

The academy teaches dancers for competition and for performance, along with producing a show created by Daniel called “Irish Mystique.”

Daniel says he wasn't the typical student himself. He has Scots/Irish heritage, but his focus growing up was rock and heavy metal music. “I wanted to be a rock star and play lead guitar for a band. That's where I wanted to be as a teenager.”

He explains that the Irish dance chapter of his life started when his mother Kathy saw television advertisements for Riverdance. “That was when it first came out,” he says. “She did ballet, tap and jazz when she was a kid, as well as being into color guard and anything rhythmic and dance. She wanted to go see Riverdance.” Daniel's father and brothers scoffed at the idea of spending their time watching a dance troupe, but Kathy didn't give up.



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“The Irish dance show at Busch Gardens started not long after that. My mom wanted to go see it. We had season passes, and she kept going back to the show. She told me, ‘You have to see this show. It’s awesome.’ So, I reluctantly tagged along.”

The first time Daniel saw the show, he thought it was okay. The next time they were at Busch Gardens, Kathy convinced him to watch it with her again. “I thought it wasn’t so bad,” he admits. “By the third time, I was completely hooked. I had never heard music like that before. I was into heavy metal and hard rock. The rhythmic similarities got me. Heavy metal is about speed. Irish music and rhythms are about speed – a lot of syncopated rhythms and different, unique timings, very structured, powerful – I was moved by it.”

Kathy started taking classes in Irish dance. Daniel thought if his mother could do it, he could do it too. “It went on from there,” he says. “The teacher who had taught us left the area, and she asked us to take over the classes. Mom had been the assistant instructor. We’ve been holding the classes in Yorktown for ten years, and now we’re in Williamsburg.” The new Williamsburg studio opened in January.

“I enjoy Scottish festivals and the Irish and Scottish culture, but musically, there is something very unique about Irish dance and melody. That’s what drew me.” Music and dance are integral parts of Irish culture, but other cultures have found out about it, mostly through the world-wide Riverdance phenomenon. “Irish dance is huge in Russia,” Daniel explains. “It’s really big in the Orient. It’s in South Africa now. There are schools in South America and Mexico. All nationalities do it because it is so different from any other dance type. Irish dance is an art form, but it’s a sport too. The dance of 20 years ago is different than it is today. The dancers are pushing the envelope, trying to do more. It’s like the Olympics – people are trying to break the record, do more than before, jump a little higher, do something crazy.”

Irish dance is physically hard. The steps are intricate movements of hops, leaps and taps. Daniel explains that some movements from other dance steps may transfer over to Irish dance, but the style is very different. “I almost prefer teaching someone who hasn’t taken dance before – almost. There are positives for someone who has taken ballet for a few years. Technically, things like pointing toes are important and cross-over. Tap is the same way. Tap dancing isn’t as competition-oriented as Irish dance. Tap is about flowing and the art form. Irish dancers are trying to out-do the other person – technically, rhythmically and volume-wise.”

He describes the first competition he attended in a large gymnasium with about six different stages. “I heard this thunderous trilling of taps against the hardwood stage,” Daniel says. “Everybody turned to look. I moved through the crowd to see this little boy. He couldn’t have been more than seven years old, a little kid, but he was on point and loud and hitting the steps. He was amazing. He outdid the others with volume and power. So when you think of tap dancing, it’s more relaxed and flowing. Tap dancers take a little more time to get the structure of Irish dance. Shuffles and some of the steps are the same. It’s just done differently.”

Irish dance is a folk dance cranked up. “There are several funny stories about the origin,” Daniel says. “The British were very involved in

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the Irish development. The Irish had a rather barbaric culture on their own for many years. The British were much more advanced and came over to Ireland where they began pushing the Irish out, taking the better land, repressing the Irish culture and forcing British culture.” The British discouraged unifying cultural activities like Irish poetry, music and folk dance.

“There are several stories, but my favorite was that the British would not allow the Irish to gather to dance. The Irish would stand around together in a big circle. Those in the middle would dance, but with their arms down and straight posture so they would look like they were just standing there.” He laughs at the description. “That’s one of the stories.” He adds that the form developed over the years. “A lot of the movements came from France, where the dance masters would travel around Europe. They would come into a town and take a door from a house, lay it down on the street and dance on it. That’s how they would make the rhythmic sounds. The dance master would teach the locals a few steps and then move on. You see folk dancing in every culture, similar in many ways, but with regional differences. It developed over many years.”

Shades of Irish dance can be found in the Virginia mountains and southern Appalachians in the form of clogging. “The Irish came here and settled in the Appalachians.”

When Daniel choreographs a show, he also composes the music to tell a story. He started playing the guitar at the age of nine. His father constructed a recording studio for him, and he began experimenting with putting music together.

“I started getting into symphonic metal, which is a combination of modern rock, hard rock, heavy drum and guitar rhythms mixed in with classical orchestration,” Daniel explains. “When I listened to Irish music, I thought about how the same technique could be applied with it: combining different types of music to make something more powerful. I found I could take the orchestration of classical music with the beauty and earthiness of the Celtic instruments then add in a little rock and roll underneath it. Then I could mix that with some electronic beats.”

He learned to play Celtic music traditionally so he could mix it with other music he enjoyed. “That’s the concept of the show I have. The music is very orchestrated with the overtones the Celtic instrumentation and a strong beat. It’s been received very well.”

The show Daniel developed is called “Irish Mystique.” It tells the tales of Celtic myths and legends. “The show illustrates legends like the warrior maidens; the selkies – the Irish equivalent of a mermaid, caretakers of the sea; the fay or sidhe, the fairies of Ireland – more like Lord of the Rings elves – inhabitants of Ireland before humanity showed up; the will-o’-wisp – an impish creature who likes to play pranks; Grace O’Malley, the female pirate who organized Irish rebellions against England and raided English ships – she’s popular. I have very famous historical and fairytale characters presented on stage.”

Daniel Nelson has combined the power, athleticism and the intricacy of Irish dance with modern metal, rock and Celtic music to create a new concept with his dancers. “Irish Mystique” will be at the Kimball Theatre March 29 and 30. NDN

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Is it time to give up the car keys?

By Greg Lilly, Editor

All families face this decision: When is the time for Mom or Dad to give up their driving privileges? Sometimes the answer comes when the older person decides for themselves they'll stop driving, but usually, it's a hard discussion to initiate – one with potential resistance, anxiety and feelings of betrayal. Rick Jackson says it's best to leave the evaluation of senior safe driving skills to an impartial expert.

Rick, the executive director for the Riverside Center for Excellence in Aging and Lifelong Health (CEALH), explains that a "silver tsunami" is encompassing the country as the Baby Boomers age. The organization he leads gathers best practices for



Eric Carlson Photography

communities to promote well-being and independence for people as they age. One of those programs is the Driver Rehabilitation Clinic.

The driver rehabilitation program includes

four areas: senior driver safety assessments, adaptive driver assessments and training, driver training for teenagers with disabilities and DMV medical reviews by Certified Driver Rehabilitation Specialists.

"This driver rehabilitation program is the only one in the region," Rick explains. "When physicians and family members of older adults see that the older person is in a cognitive or a physical decline, and they now question that individual's ability to drive safely, there isn't many places to turn."

The staff at the CEALH evaluate an individual's ability to drive and make a recommendation to the patient, the family, the doctor

Next Issue

"Welcome"

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and the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV).

“From the evaluation, one of three things happen,” Rick lists, “First and the best: You’re fine – good vision, memory, range of motion, reaction time; or the evaluation indicates there are some declines in your health that would suggest you should restrict or amend your driving [no night driving, no interstate driving, no long drives]; and lastly, there are many cases where we say to the individual that it isn’t safe for them to drive anymore.”

The last outcome is when the person has significant physical or mental impairments that are not likely to improve, and they put themselves and the community at risk when they get behind the wheel.

“When we suggest someone retire from driving, we take that very seriously because we know it is the most essential ingredient for that individual to remain independent,” he says.

When you suggest a person shouldn’t drive, you need to think about what they will do instead. “Will they use taxis, the Williamsburg Area Faith in Action services, the Handi-Ride

from the Williamsburg Area Transit Authority?” Rick says the discussion should have alternative transportation methods ready to offer.

“Sometimes, the decision to stop driving means going to assisted living,” he adds.

Rick says his organization doesn’t take the evaluations lightly. “We know how important it is. The flip side is also unacceptable – to allow an individual who is impaired to remain on the road. We see it all the time: people driving into an open air market or crossing the center line or driving the wrong way on a divided highway. This can’t be ignored.”

CEALH acts as an objective consultant. “Physicians have revealed to me that they don’t really want to undertake the subject of driving,” Rick says. The physician has been a partner in the person’s healthcare and does not want to be in an adversarial position with the patient. “They’re reluctant to tackle it. I say let us be the ‘bad guy.’ If you are the spouse, the child, the doctor, the lawyer – and you don’t want to get into this potential adversarial debate, let us be the objective evaluation.”

Sometimes the evaluation is not voluntary. The DMV may receive an anonymous call ex-

pressing concerns about an older driver’s ability. Rick explains that when that happens, the DMV will send a letter to the individual to suggest the driver take an evaluation of their driving skills. “Typically, the license may be suspended if they do not receive a positive evaluation from a third party. We have a lot of individuals walk in here with ‘the letter.’ As you can imagine, they are not happy. But, it’s the right thing to do.”

The state of Virginia sets evaluation standards to ensure consistent tests. “The Virginia credential is CDRS (Certified Driving Rehabilitation Specialist),” Rick says.

“I took the driver evaluation to see what it was like,” he explains. “It’s long and involved – vision, memory, range of motion, reaction time... We evaluate depression and substance usage. A good portion of it is a clinical evaluation.”

After those assessments comes the actual driving evaluation. “We have the only state-of-the-art driving simulator in the region. We use the simulator or our specially-equipped car to observe the person driving for their level of skills.”

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With this thorough, objective and comprehensive evaluation, if the driving evaluator says a person should restrict or stop driving, then they should. "This process is not subjective," Rick stresses. "We have no horse in the race except to keep people safe. We're certainly impartial. At the end of that evaluation, we communicate back to the DMV – whether the individual tested from the request of the DMV or not."

If the evaluation reveals that the person should stop driving, this is communicated to the DMV, and the DMV will suspend the driver's license. "We tell people that before they take the first exam. We want to protect the community."

The name of the program is Driver Rehabilitation Clinic, so the rehabilitation aspect of the program is to help people return to safe driving after a medical issue. "Some people who come here may be temporarily unable to drive. The best example would be a stroke victim who is in rehabilitation," Rick says, "or we get young people with Autism or Asperger's Syndrome who have never been behind the wheel of a car. They're curious and their

parents are curious. We can train them in the simulator to take the test. This also happens for people who have lost appendages – veterans, for example, who might have lost an arm or leg. We can train them and help them with adaptive equipment."

The program is not just about evaluation of senior driving, but about rehabilitation so people can get back to driving.

Rick came to CEALH on January 5, 2009. "I had been involved in managing and marketing programs for older adults since the early 1990s." He had worked at several hospital systems. In 2008, he was the geriatrics services administrator for the Hampton Newport News Community Services Board. He attended a meeting at the Senior Services Coalition here in Williamsburg in the fall of 2008 when someone started talking about the Center for Excellence in Aging and Lifelong Health agency and the vacant executive director position. "I thought it was a good fit for me. I haven't regretted it a minute. We've grown a lot."

The agency came into existence 12 years ago when a number of visionary individuals and organizations looked at the demographics of

this area and of the country. "They saw a doubling of the number of people in our country 65 and older. At that time we had about 12.5 percent of Americans 65 and over – roughly 31 million," Rick describes. "They knew that in a couple of decades that number would double and there would be approximately 25 percent or over 60 million."

He explains that the founding organizations saw the "silver tsunami or age wave" coming and reached the conclusion that as a society, a community, a healthcare delivery system, we were not ready. They decided that research should be conducted in our region to help healthcare workers and organizations prepare for the age wave.

"Back to the demographics," Rick Jackson says, "Williamsburg is already there at 24 percent of adults over 65 years old. We're a retirement Mecca. We're where the country is headed." That statistic makes CEALH programs for older adults, such as the Driver Rehabilitation Clinic, a proven model for other parts of the country. "Implementing these programs was a challenge. It is still a challenge. But, I enjoy every minute of it." NDN

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Next Door Neighbors Home



Eric Carlson Photography

HOUSING PARTNERSHIPS **Safe, Warm and Dry**

By Greg Lilly, Editor

“Our motto is safe, warm and dry,” Abbitt Woodall says of the non-profit Housing Partnerships. The mission of Abbitt and the people who work with Housing Partnerships is to repair or replace substandard housing for low and moderate-income homeowners in the greater Williamsburg community. “Is the project making you safe? Is it keeping you warm or dry? If it fits one of those categories, then it’s something we’ll probably take care of.”

Abbitt started with the non-profit when he came to Williamsburg from New Kent County to attend the College of William and Mary. “I wanted to volunteer my time while I was attending school. My dad owned a cabinet company, and I grew up on a farm, working with my hands and had knowledge and skills in construction,” he explains. “I had heard of Housing Partnerships and volunteered with them.”

A part-time position opened up at the non-profit, and Abbitt was

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hired. “

“Half the time I was volunteering and the other half I was working – it all just ran together.” During his four years studying at William and Mary, he also worked/volunteered with Housing Partnerships. “I hadn’t planned on making a career out of it.”

He studied finance at college, planning to go into the banking field. “When I graduated, no one was hiring. The previous director for Housing Partnerships suggested I talk to the Virginia Department of Housing. The state hired me. I figured out, from that job, that I really enjoyed helping people with their housing needs.”

At the Department of Housing, Abbitt focused on federal Community Development Block Grants and neighborhood revitalization projects. “I worked all across the state doing telecommunications, housing, everything to benefit low and moderate income people through several different funds.”

The previous director at Housing Partnerships had the opportunity to relocate out of state. “She and the Board asked if I would be interested in applying for her position,” Abbitt says. He enjoyed his work with the state, but the chance to come back to Williamsburg, to limit his traveling and to be close to his family in New Kent made it an attractive offer. “There aren’t many opportunities to be the director of a non-profit, particularly when you’ve been out of college for a short time. So, I took them up on it.” He’s been with the non-profit for over ten years.

“My sister is handicapped. It’s nice that I’m near the family. I can help when they need me. I think that’s also part of why I do what I do,” he says. “One of the things that we do here at Housing Partnerships is handicap accessibility. Growing up, I would see my sister not be able to get into some buildings or stores. Or the wheelchair ramp was in the back where we had to really search to find it – instead of putting the ramp in front so everyone gets treated the same way. You know, all those experiences go into making you who you are.”

He explains that along with accessibility, visibility is important. “You shouldn’t be treated like a second-class citizen and have to go to the back door.” A program through the state called the Livable Homes Tax Credit is for anyone, not just people with mobility issues. “The idea is that homes and buildings should be visitable. It’s not that my house needs to be accessible for me, but accessible for my sister to come in or for my dad who’s now in a wheelchair for medical reasons. All buildings need to be accessible with a wheelchair.”

Most of the work of Housing Partnerships is in repairing houses, but when they need to replace a home, Abbitt ensures that the house is wheelchair accessible. “We make it accessible with things like widened doorways, close to grade foundations for a low sloping ramp, walk-in showers. We’re all going to get there sooner or later. When I built my own house, I made sure I had a first floor bedroom and bathroom. Why set yourself up to have to move later? You want to have the option to age in a structure – whether you do or not, have that option.”

Housing Partnerships was formed in 1985 and most of the work is volunteer labor. “We replace roofs, install ramps, fix rotten floors, windows, siding – you name it. It’s not cosmetic repairs we do, but anything that affects the health and safety of the resident.”

When the organization was originally founded, they built over 18 outhouses. “We built a lot of pit privies for people because there were so many folks in this area with no indoor plumbing,” Abbitt says. “We decided to help get indoor plumbing instead of building outhouses. That’s

one of our programs now: we're the regional administrator for the Virginia Indoor Plumbing Rehabilitation (IPR) program to bring indoor plumbing to all residents."

Locally, the LEAD Historic Triangle (LHT) class of 2007 raised money with a concert for the local PIPE program. "The LHT group came up with that name – Providing Indoor Plumbing for Everyone (PIPE). Over the last few years we've performed several million dollars in work to the community in the PIPE program." The PIPE program is the local version of the state's IPR program. PIPE's locally raised funds are used for our local homeowners.

"Within a 15 minute drive of downtown Williamsburg there are houses with no indoor plumbing," Abbitt describes. "It is more common than most people think. Many of these houses were built in areas with poor soil drainage. If it had been a simple straight septic system, people would have probably put it in."

"Some of the houses are back in the woods and others are right on the road that you may pass every day and not know the house has no plumbing," he explains.

Housing Partnerships is just that: partnerships between municipalities and non-profits and volunteers to help homeowners stay safe, warm and dry. Representatives of social services from James City County, York County and Williamsburg – as well as the housing offices from James City and York Counties meet with Abbitt and his team to review cases. They estimate costs of what needs to be done and discuss the priority and funds needed.

"We view these as community resources; it's not just us deciding what to do. Our peers and community members help decide the emphasis." Funds come together from the municipalities and from grants and donations. "It's challenging in that the past few years resources have become very limited. There is an increase in projects we have to walk away from because we don't have the resources." Housing Partnerships brings agencies together to accomplish something bigger than the individual agencies can do on their own.

"Certain funds only go to municipalities, so they work with us to accomplish more. As a non-profit, we bring in volunteer labor to do as much as possible. We leverage the dollars we have." Because of the volunteer labor, Abbitt is able to keep home repair costs low. "Also as a non-profit, we can bring in private donations. We are not reliant on government money – we will use government funds when it's available, but we're not solely reliant on it. The strength is that we work so well together."

The opportunity to help people keeps Abbitt working hard with Housing Partnerships. "You get to connect with folks. The other day, I made a phone call to let a lady know that we had secured the financing to rebuild her house that had burned down." The woman is a cancer survivor with two children and no insurance. "We're bringing a lot of different resources together and rebuilding her house," he says.

"I get to be there when we do the ribbon cutting. I get to be there when we show people their new bathroom – people who have never had indoor plumbing before. Knowing that we made that happen, that's rewarding. Making a change in someone's life... where they're living in a safe and accessible home, it makes it all worthwhile." NDN

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what's up in real estate



I would like to wish the readers of Next Door Neighbors a happy and prosperous New Year and my hope is that the housing market will continue with its recovery.



By
Andrew Nelson
President
Williamsburg
Area Association
of REALTORS®

Q: The Federal Reserve has announced that it's tapering its support of the markets. What does this mean for interest rates?

This means that interest rates will start to rise, but this will probably be gradual. Interest rates are still at levels which over the past 10 years are still very low.

Q: How has the Virginia market fared over the last 12 months?

Virginia's typical seasonal decline has set in. November sales and prices were down and there were no changes in unemployment or interest rates to counteract this seasonal trend. Year-over-year metrics are also down since Virginia experienced an unusual uptick in sales last November (a break from tradition). Nonetheless, Virginia's housing market is poised for full recovery and there are a number of reasons to look forward to 2014. First, the U.S. Census reported increased housing starts in November, especially in the U.S. South which includes Virginia. Confident builders and a record number of starts signal that there will be more inventory in the months to come. Second, the Federal Reserve signaled its confidence in the economy by announcing its plan to taper its quantitative easing program. Finally, Congress passed a two-year spending bill which should boost confidence throughout the U.S. and stabilize a large part of the Virginia economy.

Q: Some people who have had a short sale or foreclosure are now finding that this may be subject to tax. What is happening about this?

On December 31, 2013 the Mortgage Cancellation Tax Relief expired. The National Association of Realtors has been working with Congress since early this year to extend this important real estate tax provision. Without an extension, homeowners who have any amount of a mortgage forgiven by a lender either in a short sale or foreclosure would be subject to paying "phantom income tax" on the amount of the forgiveness. Homeowners shouldn't be forced to pay tax on money they've already lost with cash they never received – and never will receive.

Q: What can we expect in the local housing market for 2014?

Currently the \$200,000 to \$300,000 price range is still the most active seller in the local marketplace with the number of days, on-market, ranging from 80-100. There is evidence of multiple offers on properties which is indicative of the smaller inventory. In view of the economic upturn the likelihood is that the market will continue to improve for 2014. This may encourage more sellers to list their properties in 2014.

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WATA ANNOUNCES CHANGES TO HUB AND CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTER

Ongoing
Due to the Williamsburg Outlet Mall closing at the end of December, Williamsburg Area Transit Authority (WATA) has moved its northern hub to Wal-Mart at 731 Rochambeau Drive and the customer service center to the Williamsburg Transportation Center at 468 North Boundary. The current stop at Wal-Mart will be the new hub and is located on the northern end of the parking lot near Sonic. Purple 1 continues to go to Warhill High School and Thomas Nelson Community College on the way to Wal-Mart, making the right hand turn off Centerville Road, down to Warhill High School and then back to Richmond Road. This is the only time these stops are serviced because Purple 2 no longer has stops at Warhill High School and Thomas Nelson Community College. Two stops are transferred from the Tan line to Purple 1. The stops at the Miller Mart on Richmond Road and on Lightfoot Road transfer to Purple 1. The Tan line goes to the Great Wolf Lodge before going to Wal-Mart. The WATA Customer Service Center provides customers with easy access to transit information and advance ticket sales. The location at the Transportation Center includes an employee lounge where drivers may eat and relax during breaks. Hours of operation are Monday – Saturday 10 am – 7 pm. Updates will be posted on goWATA.org throughout the month as well as on our Facebook page by searching www.gowata. WATA provides safe, efficient and accessible public transit to residents and visitors in James City County, Williamsburg, and

the Bruton District of York County. For more information about WATA, visit www.goWATA.org or call the WATA office at 757-220-5493.

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Hey Neighbor!

BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS' BOWL FOR KIDS' SAKE FUND-RAISER

February 22, 2014
Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Greater Virginia Peninsula (BBBSGVP) is holding its signature fund-raiser, Bowl for Kids' Sake, from 10:15 am – 5:15 pm. Location is AMF Williamsburg Lanes, 5544 Old Towne Road. For each bowling event, grand prizes will be awarded to individuals who raise the most funds and include (1) an outdoor living set provided by Walmart Distribution Center 6088/4896 – a grill and a six-seat patio set with a table and umbrella; (2) an iPad mini;

and (3) an overnight stay at Great Wolf Lodge provided by Great Wolf Lodge. Participants are to form teams to bowl, a maximum of five bowlers per team. Each team is asked to raise \$250, which can be raised however each team decides to do its own fund-raising. Sponsors of the event are (1) Perfect Game Sponsor - \$2,500 from Northwestern Mutual and the Virginia Peninsula Group; (2) King Pin Sponsor - \$1,000 from Anheuser-Busch, LLC and Williamsburg Brewery; (3) Lane Sponsor - \$500 from Sentara, Walmart Distribution Center 6088/4896 and Williamsburg Floral. Sponsorship opportunities still exist. All proceeds from this event will be used to support existing programs at Big Brothers Big Sisters. For more information about either of the events or sponsorships, you can call the Big Brothers Big Sisters office at 757- 253-0676. To view the event website or register your team, go to www.BowlForKids.org. Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Greater Virginia Peninsula (www.Bigs4Kids.org), a non-profit organization, has offered one-to-one mentoring relationships since 1979 in which a volunteer provides guidance and friendship to a child who needs a positive adult relationship outside of the child's family. Big Brothers Big Sisters offers its services to those in Williamsburg, James City County, York County, Poquoson, Gloucester, Hampton and Newport News.

Hey Neighbor!

HISTORIC TRIANGLE SENIOR CENTER TRIP

February 25, 2014
Join us as we visit Edgewood Plantation with an historic tour and luncheon in Charles City, VA. Call the Historic Triangle Senior

Center at 259-4187 for more information.

Hey Neighbor!

JOSEPH AYMOND IN CONCERT!

February 28, 2014
Join us at 7:30 pm at Wellspring United Methodist Church (4871 Longhill Road), for a concert based on Joe's recently released CD “I'll Fly Away.” Joe sings popular hymns with a contemporary twist and accompanies the music with his alto saxophone. Come, bring a friend and spend an evening being uplifted by song. No charge for the concert but a love offering will be given! Questions, contact office@wellspringmethodist.org or to find out more about Joe's music listen at www.josephaymond.com

Hey Neighbors! is published at no charge to non-profit organizations, civic clubs and churches. To have your message included in Hey Neighbor!, please email your submission by the advertising deadline for the month you want. You can find 2014 advertising deadline dates and publication dates online at www.WilliamsburgNeighbors.com, or you can send me an email to request it. Meredith@WilliamsburgNeighbors.com. Please do not send your requests for information to the Hey Neighbor inbox as that inbox is checked only once a month. If you have any questions, please call me at 757-560-3235. Thank you for reading Next Door Neighbors!

Meredith Collins
Publisher

Williamsburg's
IN THE
NEIGHBORHOOD
photo challenge

CORNER
POCKET
RESTAURANT
IN NEW TOWN

Find the 12 differences between the original photograph (top) and the altered photograph (bottom).

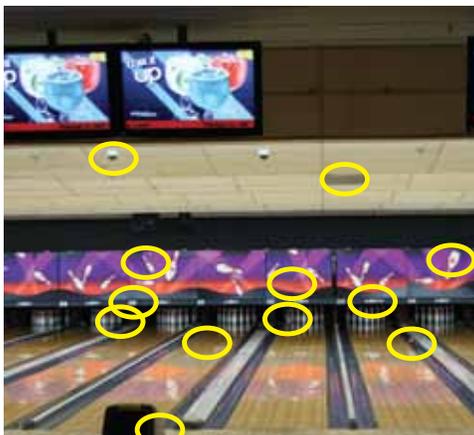
Enjoy!

Look for the answers in the next issue of Next Door Neighbors.

January 2013
In the Neighborhood
Photo Challenge



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For more info, visit it on the web at www.LizMoore.com/297LittletownQuarter.



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