

June 2020

WILLIAMSBURG'S

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VOL.14, ISSUE 6

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Our Parks

Lamont Bartlett



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Meredith Collins, Publisher

Reading these stories about Williamsburg's magnificent parks while we are still quarantined is like being the kid looking through the window of a candy store who can look, but not quite touch. Well, not exactly, but close! The parks are plentiful and expansive enough that we can enjoy them, and some of their amenities allow for safe, social distancing. As the COVID-19 situation improves and restrictions are relaxed, we will be able to enjoy them even more - and soon!

That is good. As you will learn in these stories, there are some terrific people investing their time and effort on the great outdoor facilities we are fortunate to have in the Williamsburg area. You don't have to have "love of the outdoors" imprinted in your DNA to get outside and enjoy the opportunities that being close to nature provides. Without exception, the folks we interviewed encourage all of us to get out there and enjoy our parks too.

Next Door Neighbors is slowly easing out from under the tightened conditions, too. With this issue we are pleased to bring back one of our department stories, Business. Hopefully, we will be able to add Sports, Arts & Entertainment, Health and Home soon. We look forward to returning to providing our neighbors with a more robust magazine soon.

Stay safe! NDN

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LAMONT BARTLETT



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Parks are a Happy Place

By Caroline Johnson

For Lamont Bartlett, his time in Williamsburg has come full circle to bring him back where it all began. Born and raised in Williamsburg, Lamont graduated from Bruton High School and joined the Navy in 1991. He spent his first five years of service in San Diego, his first big move away from home. He was even able to travel around the world three or four times. For the second half of his service, he was stationed in Norfolk. Upon receiving an honorable discharge, he moved to Virginia Beach before moving back to Wil-



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liamsburg in 2014.

Lamont found the position of James City County Park Ranger while looking online for a potential career change. After working as a Deputy Sheriff in the City of Hampton, he had reached a point where he was ready to see what else was out there. "When I saw this, I was all over it," Lamont says. After filling out the online application, he was excited to receive a call to invite him to interview. After two rounds, he was thrilled to be selected. As the Park Ranger position is typically highly sought after, he says it was an honor to be chosen.

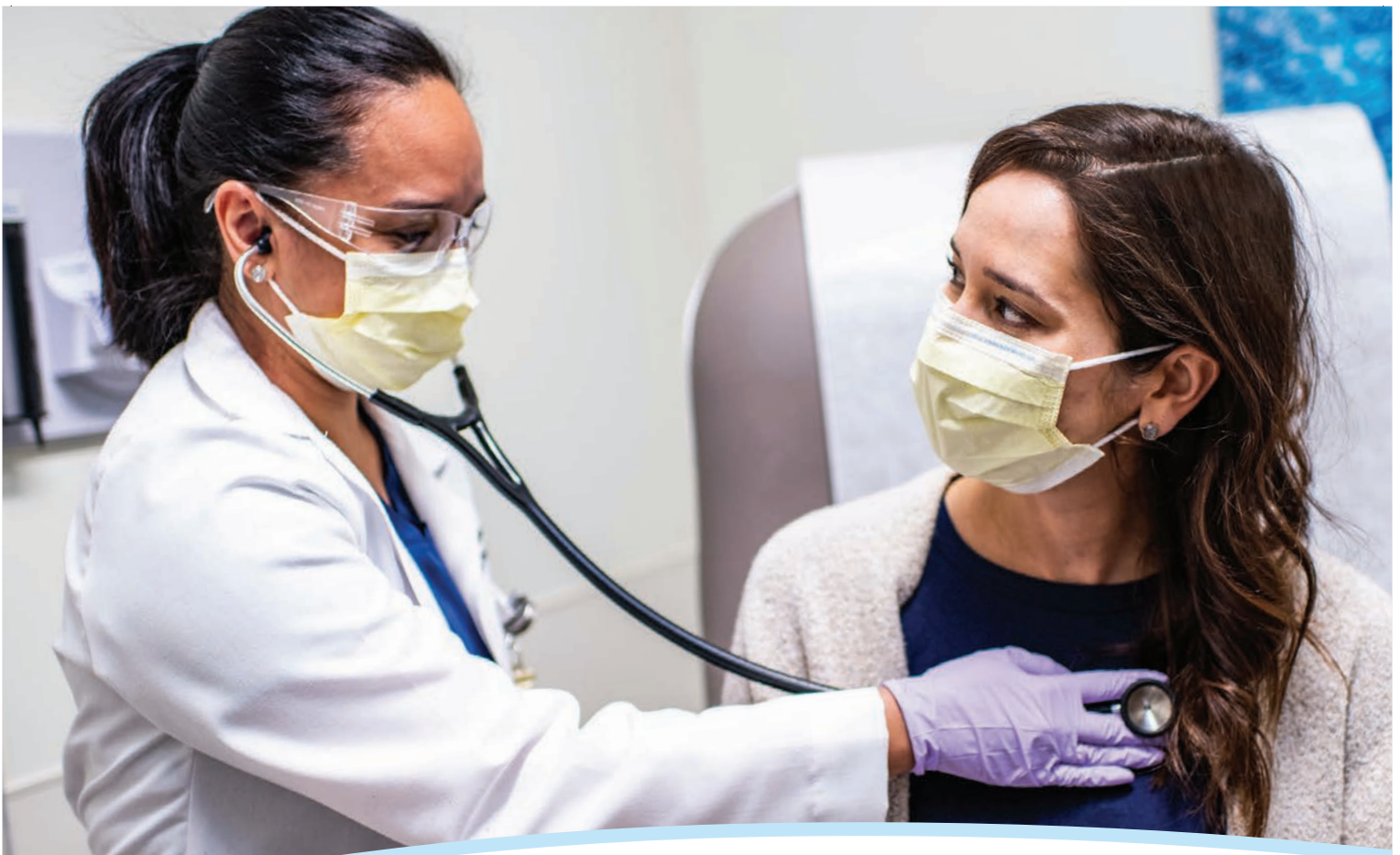
Now a Park Ranger for James City County since January 2019, he feels confident that he has found the perfect position to combine his love of nature with his love of people. Luckily for Lamont, much of the qualifications for training were already met through his previous work in the Sheriff's office, making the transition a smooth one. As a father of six with two grandchildren, his family agree that this position is the perfect fit. Before beginning his position, he went through week-long classroom training as well as becoming qualified on the range.

Though many may think Park Rangers spend all of their time outdoors, Lamont's day begins at the main central office where he checks his email and updates himself on anything that's going on. He then meets up with his Chief, the Lead Ranger, who gives Lamont a run down, then the duty phone is swapped and his shift begins. "I try to switch up my routine so it's not the same every day," Lamont says. "Sometimes I start at the top of the county first and then make my way throughout."

Though he patrols all of the parks in James City County, the main ones he visits during each shift are Chickahominy Riverfront Park, Freedom Park, Jamestown Beach Event Park, Upper County Park and Veterans Park. During his eight-hour shift, Lamont spends time driving his white Park Ranger truck from park to park as well as patrolling the grounds of each area. Some of his favorite memories from his time as a Park Ranger involve seeing people he knows out enjoying the parks. "Being able to get out, walk around and see people I know and talk with them, it makes them feel comfortable that someone they know is there," Lamont says. "It's a great feeling."

At each stop, he spends time looking to see if anyone is using the park, including time spent on foot and in his truck driving around the property. If there are no visitors, he'll head to the next park on his list. If he finds people, he'll stay for a bit to make sure everything is going smoothly before heading to the next park. People often come up and ask him questions or alert him to things they noticed while visiting the park. His presence is reassuring, and Park Rangers are typically on patrol until 9:00 p.m. or 11:00 p.m., depending on the season.

"I'm looking for safety hazards first and foremost," Lamont says. "Unfortunately, we do have to be the bad guy if someone is doing something they shouldn't, but mostly people just don't know the rules and I have to remind them of things they can do and things they can't." One of the most common rules that many aren't aware of is that all dogs must be leashed within the parks, which can be tough for those



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who see the open fields and want to use them. Luckily, for park goers with dogs, an off-leash area was recently added by Jamestown Beach Event Park for this use.

In addition to patrolling, Lamont also spends time as a resource at the park, observing, answering questions and getting out to walk the trails. Each ranger likes to know the trails so that they can step in whenever necessary. Knowing the grounds they work on helps them become familiar with each location so that they can assist park goers and ensure their safety while visiting the parks.

Serving under the Lead Ranger, Lamont is the only other full-time Park Ranger, though they do have two part-time employees. His hopes for the future of this position include continued growth individually and as a team, and potentially the addition of added training and responsibilities. The rangers work closely with James City County police, even marking on duty with their dispatch so they know who is on call. “When we hear a call

come out from one of the parks, we can call ahead so that the attendant is ready in case an ambulance or police car comes,” Lamont says. “We’re also able to help out with traffic control at times and have a great relationship with the county police staff.”

In addition to working closely with his team, Lamont serves as a resource for park attendants who are the ones with authority at their location. “We’re able to be there to get involved if someone isn’t complying with a park attendant or if they need back up to enforce something,” Lamont says.

As someone who spent the majority of his life living in Williamsburg, it’s safe to say he’s a fan. “I love the fact that you feel safe here, as it’s a great place to raise kids and a family without feeling like you’re in a crowded community,” Lamont says. “I always knew when I left home to join the military that I’d come back.” As an avid lover of being active, especially outdoors, he enjoys walking trails, going to the Rec center, going to the movies and

doing weekend getaways during his time off of work.

While it’s hard to pick a favorite park, his favorite recreation facility is the Rec Center on Longhill Road. Whether he’s working out or playing basketball there, he frequents this facility as often as he can. When it comes to advice for people who haven’t yet experienced the parks and recreation that James City County has to offer, Lamont suggests trying a trail first. “Every park is free for Williamsburg residents, and it’s great to get out and enjoy the weather,” Lamont says. “Try a trail, or even Go Ape at Freedom Park. It’s a great adventure.”

More than anything, Lamont Bartlett loves that his position as a Park Ranger allows him to be an ambassador to the county. “I enjoy being able to help folks. I just love the interaction with people overall,” Lamont says. “Parks are typically a happy place, and as a Ranger, I’m given the freedom to interact with people who are happy to be there.” NDN

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AL DAVIDOFF



THE WILLIAMSBURG BOTANICAL GARDEN

All Beauty

By Lillian Stevens

Lisa W. Cumming Photography

Looking for something new to do? Preferably outdoors?

Al Davidoff, local retiree and long-time volunteer at the Williamsburg Botanical Garden, has a suggestion. Come visit!

“Everything has been beautifully developed here,” Al says. “And the footpaths that go throughout the gardens have recently been widened to make them wheelchair accessible.”

Located just off Centerville Road, the Botanical Garden sits within Freedom Park.

Dedicated in 2006, the two-acre garden contains more than 2,000 trees, shrubs and other plantings including a butterfly garden, herb garden, native plant garden, perennial border, pinewoods and fernery, wetlands and wildflower meadow.

“Originally, it started as a native plant garden,” Al says. “Gradually, we introduced the bulbs. There is also an area with roses and perennials, as well as hydrangeas and other plants that aren’t native.”

The Botanical Garden is surrounded by a fence to protect from a prolific population of deer who also love to visit. Thousands of daffodils are planted around the outside of the fence.

“I call it the daffodil ring,” Al says. “Of course, the deer won’t eat a daffodil. No animal will because they are poisonous.”

Throughout the spring and summer, Al can usually be found at the Williamsburg Botanical Garden about four days each week.

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In addition to tending the butterfly and bulb gardens, he has eight bird feeders to keep replenished. He also serves as a member of the Board of Directors.

“Almost every other day in the spring I am filling the bird feeders,” he says. “Of course, people love the birds.”

Al and his fellow volunteers at the Botanical Garden are delighted to welcome visitors and show them around. With the exception of one paid employee, each of the different sections of the garden is maintained exclusively by volunteers.

At the center of the beautifully cultivated garden on a raised bed sits the butterfly garden.

“The butterfly garden is about 15 feet across and just beautiful,” Al says. “There’s hyacinths, daffodils and tulips which I replenish every January.”

In addition to the butterfly bed, Al also cultivates and maintains a bulb garden.

“This past January, I planted about 800 to 900 bulbs,” he says. Al replenishes his bulb inventory twice a year, in December and June, at the end of the season. In December,

he usually holds back half of the bulbs for the annual plant sale. Those bulbs are planted in small containers in his garage. This year, Al earmarked over 400 bulbs planted for the plant sale.

“We host the plant sale every spring,” he says. “Coronavirus has thrown a curve ball, of course.”

Rather than give up on the plant sale, they chose to pivot, so the sale is taking place through June 30. Visitors can purchase pollinator-friendly native perennial plants for five dollars at the Honor Box Ongoing Plant Sale.

Hopefully, by late summer and fall, programming will be back on track. As spring marches into summer, many locals look forward to the annual two-day Butterfly Festival hosted by the Williamsburg Botanical Garden. Typically held in August, this year’s Festival will be held September 26-27 instead.

“The butterflies are purchased from a professional grower,” Al says. “The Green Spring Garden Club provides funding, which helps to offset the cost. Last year, in two days, we had over 4,000 people attend the festival. Probably half of them were children.”

It’s a great time. And who doesn’t love butterflies?”

“We will have two butterfly tents,” Al says. “People can go in. They are each given a Q-Tip dipped in Gatorade. The Gatorade attracts the butterflies.”

The event provides a wonderful opportunity for both children and adults to see hundreds of native butterflies close up. “There’s all sorts of educational programs and independent activities and lectures for families, children and adults.”

The Williamsburg Botanical Garden is fortunate to have the support of so many local volunteers and experts, from the staff at Freedom Park to a small cadre of Virginia Master Naturalists and Master Gardeners.

“We look forward to our regular programming like the Learn and Grow Program on Saturday mornings,” Al says. “Different guest speakers are featured, and topics range from plant identification and propagation to growing specific flowers. A recent one focused on orchids. That attracted such a large crowd, we had to move it to the Library.”

For the past 11 years, Al has relished his



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role at the Botanical Garden, greeting visitors and answering their questions.

As much as Al is at home with nature and growing things, he spent his career in New Jersey, working as a mechanical engineer.

Over the years, though, he found ways to indulge his passion for flowers and plants, a passion he traces to his childhood.

His older brother served in the U.S. Navy after Pearl Harbor, and the family had a victory garden on their property, which ignited a lifelong love affair with raising things.

"I raised chickens and I always loved growing things," Al says. "I was eight or nine years old. I had three siblings, but I'm the only one who took to growing things. I learned from my parents, who loved to garden."

He attended Lehigh University, a well-known school in Pennsylvania, and studied mechanical engineering. After graduation, Al embarked on an engineering career in the northeast, working for several companies before landing at Picatinny Arsenal in Northern New Jersey.

"Picatinny is synonymous with R&D, research and development, for the Army," he

says. "I was hired to work on nuclear missiles in 1961."

Al spent over 30 years at Picatinny, retiring in 1994. He and his first wife lived in Wayne, New Jersey, in a house he built surrounded by plants and flowers he grew.

"I had three acres of woodland," he says. "I grew hundreds of rhododendrons and azaleas. I propagated everything."

After he retired from Picatinny, Al found work at a nursery where he spent 11 years selling shrubs and trees, essentially returning to his horticultural roots.

"As I said earlier, I love growing things! It's my favorite thing to do. Over the years, I had also studied horticulture at Rutgers University and the New York Botanical Garden."

Even though he was thoroughly enjoying his retirement gig, like so many of his peers in New Jersey, he was growing tired of the taxes and the traffic up north.

"My second wife (who passed away about eight years ago) and I took a month and scouted the whole South," he says. "We found Williamsburg to be the nicest place! So, we moved here to Fords Colony."

The extrovert, known within his inner circle as "our pal Al," quickly immersed himself in his new community, finding many opportunities to indulge his love of flowers and plants.

"I belong to the American Rhododendron Society," he says. "You could say that rhododendrons are among my favorites, although it's a little more difficult to grow them here than up north."

He also has 40 Japanese maples, as well as 80 or so boxwoods.

"Some of the boxwoods are only six inches tall," Al says. "I get cuttings from them at the Botanical Garden and I propagate them in my garage under florescent lights. It's fun!"

When Al Davidoff isn't gardening, he is out and about. When his second wife passed away, he joined a group at the Williamsburg Hospice House.

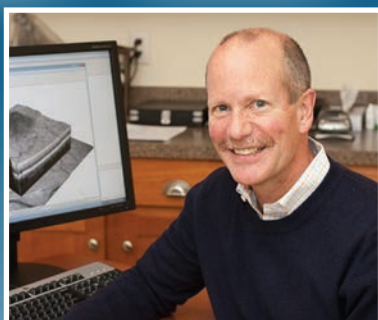
Despite being widowed twice, despite losing a daughter soon after birth, Al is incredibly upbeat.

"It's simple," he says. "Accent the positive, eliminate the negative, and don't mess with mister in between. Thanks to the Lord, I'm blessed every day." NDN

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DAVE GRAFT



Lisa W. Cumming Photography

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The Great Outdoors

Susan Williamson

Dave Graft loves the outdoors, so it's not surprising that his first field of study where he earned a two-year degree was parks and recreation. The retired teacher has come full circle to work as a Park Supervisor at New Quarter Park, which he describes as, "The perfect retirement job—no papers to grade, no lesson plans. Unlike teaching, it ends when I go home."

After completing the two-year program, Dave moved from his native city, Madison, New Jersey, not far from New York City, to Fairfax County, Virginia to work as a park

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naturalist at Colvin Run Mill Park Historic Site. The park is the home of a restored grist mill built in 1811 which operated until 1934. While there, he met his wife of 39 years, Conny, short for Conway. He also completed a bachelor's degree in Natural and Cultural History at George Mason University, training well suited for his interests as well as his then and future careers.

When Conny was offered a job at Colonial Williamsburg to be Director of Interpretive Planning, the couple happily moved to Williamsburg, a community they knew and enjoyed. Dave completed a master's degree in Education at William & Mary and began a teaching career with James City County Schools at James Blair Middle School where he taught science and math for sixteen years. He then transferred to Lafayette High School for ten years, first to teach earth science and later to take on a new course in oceanography. The school ordered the textbook and Dave developed the course. As an outdoorsman who loved the water, he was both well qualified for

and very interested in this challenge. One activity he initiated was growing oysters on the floating pier at New Quarter Park. Since most of his students were upperclassmen, they could drive, and he invited them out to the park on Saturdays to work on the oyster project. "I never knew how many would come," he says. "Sometimes it was only a few, but sometimes a large group." He developed a relationship with the then New Quarter Park Superintendent, Molly Neiler.

When Dave decided to retire from teaching after 26 years, Molly contacted him about an open position at the park which involved working three days a week as a park supervisor. He says, "She knew me and my background. She didn't need to interview me." He has been on the job for five years, working to maintain the 18-hole disc golf course, trails and other facilities at the 540-acre park. It's a bit of a change from the classroom. "After my teaching years, I enjoy the solitude of the park. I also like interacting with park visitors, but I love being out on the trails. The park has nest-

ing osprey and last week a bald eagle flew right in front of me. The birds are amazing. And in spring, the wildflowers are beautiful."

The park remains open during the pandemic, but the disc golf pro shop is closed. Basketball courts and the playground are also off limits and athletic fields are closed to group sports. The fishing pier is open with social distancing. The park has both kayak and canoe launching areas, but rentals are suspended during the pandemic. Various nature and archeological programs are normally offered throughout the year, but they too have been cancelled in the interest of social distancing. However, the number of visitors to the park has increased as homebound residents come out to play disc golf, hike, bike, or mountain bike on the various trails, fish or walk their dogs. Staff remain on duty, both in case of emergency as well as to continue normal park maintenance. In spring, summer and fall, from April 1 to October 31, the park is open from eight a.m. until dusk seven days a week. In the winter months, it opens from ten a.m. until dusk on Fridays and

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eight a.m. until dusk on Saturdays and Sundays. During inclement weather, the gates remain locked.

The park, located near Queens Lake, is off the beaten path and many residents don't know about it. Dave encourages people to utilize the park. He says, "They should go to the website and see all that the park has to offer." The park land was originally part of Cheatham Annex Yorktown Naval Weapons Station but was deeded for recreational use in 1976. The parcel was later developed into the park, which opened in 2005.

Dave's wife and two daughters, Caitlin and Liz, also enjoy outdoor activities. The whole family loves to hike and bike, and the girls grew up sailing with their parents on their 30-foot Bristol sailboat. Kaitlyn now lives in California and works as a dietician while Liz resides in Richmond where she is a veterinary technician, but they remain active in outdoor pursuits. When asked what he liked best about living in Williamsburg, Dave quickly replies, "The water. We love being out on the water."

Dave loved sailing so much that he obtained his commercial captain's license. But the sailboat sank, and Dave's license expired due to lack of time on the water. Dave and his wife have recently purchased a small Boston whaler motorboat. He grins when he says that as a sailor, he has gone to the other side. The couple lives off Jamestown Road and look forward to launching their new boat, to be christened the Conway T after Conny's maiden name, Conway Talcott Clough. He says with a smile, "They wanted a boy." The boat is currently on a trailer awaiting its launch at the Jamestown Marina which is only a few miles down the road. Conny no longer works for Colonial Williamsburg, since her job ended after 26 years. She now runs her own consulting firm for non-profits, giving her a more flexible schedule.

In addition to spending time on the water, the couple loves to hike, bike and travel. Dave says, "My boss, Michael Wilcox, is really good about letting me have time off." They have been to Spain and Puerto Rico twice,

Germany, Greece, Maui, New Zealand, Honduras, Canada, Cozumel and the Bahamas, where Conny's family lived for many years. They make annual trips to the Outer Banks, a 35-year tradition, and owned a house in Corolla for ten years, selling it when the upkeep became too much of a chore. In the United States, they have visited Maine many times, the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, Minnesota, Arizona and Key West. Dave says, "I loved them all." When not working or traveling, hiking or biking, Dave enjoys cooking and woodworking in his workshop.

The trajectory of Dave Graft's life has come full circle from his earliest interest in parks and recreation. Each step of his education prepared him for his various careers and allowed him to continue to indulge in his and his family's love of nature, the water and outdoors in general. Williamsburg provided a great location for his interests. Now, through his work at New Quarter Park, he uses his expertise to educate and facilitate others who share his love of nature and outdoor activity. NDN

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By Harmony Hunter

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Though he knows its dips and curves by heart these days, the skate park was as foreign as any spaceship to Max Pfannebecker when he first saw it in 2017. Today he is President of the Triangle Skateboard Alliance, but three years ago, he was just a dad helping his kid learn to ride his new skateboard. New to Williamsburg and eager to put down roots, this involvement filled his need to get back to a community.

Max had long hesitated to give in to his son's persistent wish for a skateboard, associating the sport with injury. But when he finally gave in and gave the boy a skateboard one Christmas, he was amazed at the subtle genius of it. It wasn't just great for his son, Max could see that it was offering profound benefits to all the kids gathered there.

"My son started skating at the James City County skate park when we moved to Williamsburg. He'd never skated before, and I didn't skate. But we hung out at the park a lot," says Max. These father-son park outings were the start of something big, though he didn't know it at the time. Through many

afternoons spent with the park's regulars, he came to know the kids who frequented the spot.

Skateboarding labors under a somewhat unsavory reputation for non-conformist kids, and it's an image its athletes have embraced and translated into a culture unto itself. But beneath that prickly veneer is a sport based on determination, discipline and dogged drive. Max saw his son's character strengthening before his eyes.

At the time, Max's third-grade son was facing down long division at school, and frustrating himself with the effort of mastering the subject. Max reminded his son, "You worked four hours on a hippie jump, and when you got it, you were on top of the world. You can think about math, or anything else really, with the same disciplined approach you have for skateboarding. Why are you willing to work for four hours on skating and not translate that lesson to the rest of your life?" Skateboarding had allowed a glimpse of the virtues it hides so well, teaching its acolytes to set goals, to try, to fail and to try again.

"That was where I fell in love with skateboarding," Max says. This epiphany became the key testimony of the Triangle Skateboard Alliance, a local nonprofit that works in cooperation with James City County Parks and Recreation. "I have witnessed no other sport that rivals skating in developing grit in its participants. Skateboarding builds the discipline required to persevere and succeed in life; to fall down and get back up repeatedly on the way to mastery."

Not only can it be a cornerstone of self reliance, but skateboarding is extremely accessible. Kids can enter the game for a low investment and they can ride almost anywhere. Seen in contrast to baseball clubs and soccer teams with dues, equipment and travel fees, the financial advantage is obvious.

Beyond being easier on the wallet, skateboarding offers an option for those who prefer solo pursuits. "It's a great place for kids who aren't stick-and-ball athletes," Max says.

Much like swimming and running, skateboarding is a sport for those who prefer to compete against their own best.

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It was a fantastic discovery for Max and his son. Together, they found their way to a solo sport suited to kids who aren't drawn to typical team athletics. They were building skills that would assure success in many of life's challenges. They found a welcoming community and a great spot to practice, right in their hometown.

But there was a problem. The park had a reputation to overcome, and it was outgrowing its space. Max noticed the growing need, and the absence of leadership. "They wanted something, but they didn't know how to do it. So, we really found a purpose with expanding the skate park," he says. Thus, the Triangle Skateboard Alliance was born with Max at the helm. The mission to build and improve skate parks in the area was of equal importance to creating what Max calls "a culture of service."

The first lesson he wanted the park's constituency to grasp was that in order to get something, they'd have to offer something of value in return. And they didn't have to look far to find a way to take their first step toward demonstrating their willingness to share stew-

ardship of the park.

"Our first event was in March 2018, and it was a park clean up. We had about 50 volunteers show up. They picked up the bottles and cans that were well into the woods and cleaned up every bit of trash. We had a skate contest with some prizes afterwards, but in to be in the contest, you had to come and clean up."

That spirit of work and giving back flowed into a subsequent event when skaters won entrance to a competition by donating school supplies for the Gloucester Resource Council. Max says, "We filled a car full of school supplies and delivered that to Bethel Elementary." Both events were repeated the following year, and Max saw a new culture beginning to take root in the park's community. New skaters benefited from the guidance of seasoned skaters, and etiquette developed around making room for everyone.

"It's the county's park, but it's the kids' park, too. I like that idea of building a sense of ownership."

The county provides a place for the skateboarders, scooter riders and even roller skaters,

and the kids give back to the county. An even larger interaction benefits them both, and that's skateboard tourism. The more events a regional park holds, the better their culture and their facility, the more people will come visit. And that's traffic that stands to benefit a much larger portion of the community.

"We really want to promote not just skateboarding, and not just expanding this park locally, but skateboarding in Virginia. There are 62 skate parks in Virginia. Kids go, they stay for the day, they grab food somewhere, they might stay overnight. It's coming from all walks of life," Max says.

Thanks to some strong leadership from Max Pfannebecker and all of the members of the Triangle Skateboard Alliance, this burgeoning sport brings a wealth of benefits to Williamsburg. It's fitting that in the town where democracy got its DNA that skateboarding should flourish. It's a hobby anyone can enjoy.

"Skateboarding is not a rich kid sport. It's not a poor kid sport. It's not really racially driven or anything like that. It is as diverse as a sport can get." NDN

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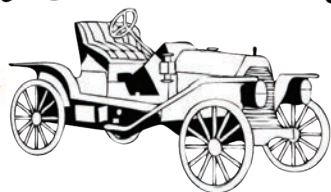
Keeping Close to the Heart of Nature

By Ashley Smith

Before he was a highly sought-after attorney, Brian Pristera had an exciting career as an engineer with DuPont where he was involved with Kevlar manufacturing and applied ballistics, focusing on the real world mechanics of bulletproof vests for first responders. He enjoyed the work immensely but after a while there, he became far more interested in the in-

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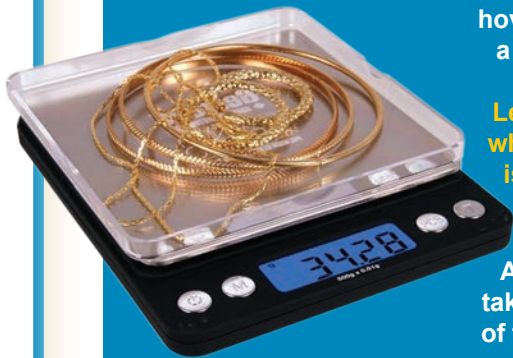
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tracacies of patent law. "In manufacturing, engineers often deal with the legalities of patent law," he says. Soon his interest led him to attend law school with the intention to become a patent lawyer. Although he received his bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering from Virginia Commonwealth University, he chose the University of New Hampshire for law school.

As Brian studied the law, he came to realize that while he enjoyed the sometimes dry intellectualism of patent law, the courtroom was his true passion. Patent cases rarely make it to the courtroom. During his three years of clerking for Gary Meyers, Daniel Conway & Associates, he learned about the Judge Advocate General Corps that serve as the court system for United States military. In 2010, he was commissioned into the U.S. Army as part of the Corps. Brian spent six years on active duty, serving with the U.S. Army Trial Defense Service. He also served as the Chief of Legal Assistance and a Special Assistant United States Attorney as well as a contract and finance law attorney. Brian had great success serving as a legal counsel for the Army, among them being one of the few Captains in the U.S. Army to represent a General Officer in a criminal case. He earned a reputation as a stellar and dynamic attorney.

Despite leaving active duty service in 2016, Brian continues to serve as a Major in the U.S. Army Reserves working as a criminal defense attorney for the 154th Legal Operations Detachment.

As he returned to civilian life, he also returned to his old firm. Gary Meyers, Daniel Conway & Associates is a military law firm that represents servicemembers in court-martials, separation boards, discharge review boards, and federal court proceedings. "Our firm has been around since the 1970s and has an excellent reputation. Military personnel from every branch seek us out to represent them." The firm is unique because although it is headquartered in New Hampshire, most of the attorneys live elsewhere. "Since we travel about 75 percent of the time, it's not necessary for us to live near the firm's headquarters." In 2019 alone, work took him to South Korea, Japan, and even Europe seven times, not to mention the 48 contiguous states and Alaska.

In addition to his legal career, Brian is also an adjunct professor at William & Mary Law School. He teaches an upper level writing course focused on criminal law. The class teaches about the impact of brevity when filing requests, motions, and briefs with a court. "While in law school, I was taught the fundamentals of writing, but I truly learned them by putting them into practice," he says. He considers himself blessed to have been mentored by his first boss at Myers, Conway, and Associates. The senior practicing attorney took the time to cultivate the young lawyer's writing skills. "He would have me write a brief and then discuss with me how it could be more concise." Brian enjoys passing on that guidance to young aspiring attorneys and continuing his mentor's legacy.

An avid hiker and rock climbing enthusiast, Brian never misses an opportunity to explore somewhere new. All the worldwide travel has allowed the Pristeras to hike in locations around the world. Although recent events have caused him to cancel a planned trip to Brazil in July, he is still looking forward to a scheduled backpacking trip to Patagonia

in late 2020.

Brian's love of the outdoors can be traced to his childhood in Chesterfield County, Virginia, an area filled with opportunities to explore nature. His adventures in rock climbing began with the Peak Experiences Climbing Gym. In fact, Brian met his wife, Janis, through rock climbing at the gym. She had been a regular at the gym for about three years prior. Together, Brian and Janis enjoy several outdoor pursuits, including mountain biking and hiking. "Janis is the trip planner. Whenever I travel for work, she plans the recreation to coincide with my destination, and she loves to go with me."

Closer to home, Brian enjoys York River State Park and New Quarter Park. Though travel has been curtailed for now, he visits New Quarter Park at least five days a week. Normally, to prepare for a backpacking trip, the Pristeras hike the Appalachian Trail to train but for now they have utilized the park to stay physically active through hiking and mountain biking. During the stay-at-home order, both Pristeras are still working; Janis is a registered nurse and Brian has been working from home. However, they have been spending as much of their free time outdoors as possible, exploring new hiking spots throughout Virginia. "Janis has a list of new spots for us to explore, such as Smithfield Castle," Brian says. "We are not the type of people who just sit and relax. We need to move." The couple spends time outdoors every day, often biking seven miles in one trip to get the most out of this time at home. They've also taken up gardening to stay busy.

Among the many reasons that the Pristeras enjoy living in Williamsburg are the numerous options for recreation in the area. "Williamsburg has stellar recreation and right now, people are taking advantage of that more than ever." He is excited about how many people have returned to the parks. In his view, the more often people utilize the parks, the more attention the country will pay to them. New Quarter Park is his current favorite. "It's unbelievable what we have available to us: disc golf, historic trails, monuments, and little traffic compared to bigger metropolitan areas," he says as he expounds on his favorite outdoor spaces. As he and Janis spend more time than ever at New Quarter Park, he has noticed that fellow park goers are still kind, and everyone is respectful of each other's need for extra space. The large park never feels crowded, even with the recent increase in visitors each day.

Brian Pristera encourages the residents of the historic area to slow down and enjoy the abundance of natural riches and historic wonder that surrounds Williamsburg. Though there are many incredible outdoor adventures waiting across the globe, some of the most fantastic views and rugged trails can be found just down the road on the Appalachian Trail and some are as close as York River State Park. "Enjoy the sunshine and fresh air." It remains excellent advice at a time when everyone is focused on their health and safety. Despite the current world climate, Brian is keeping up with work, and focusing on his physical, emotional, and mental health. For him, the cure for whatever ails humanity can be found in the great outdoors almost every time. It is certainly keeping the Pristeras in good spirits these days, despite the stress of Janis's career as a healthcare worker or the burden of keeping up telework. NDN



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OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

By Dayna Hutson

What could be better to spark a boy's imagination than the discovery of a creek close to his home? Add a canoe to the scene, bought with money from mowing lawns, and young Keith Wright felt like anything was possible.

Keith says he loved growing up in Hampton, Virginia, where despite its urban reputation he could explore and fish the neighborhood tidal

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Laura Kinsman, Owner

creeks. “You never knew what was just around the corner,” he said. Paddling along in his canoe, Keith would suddenly be investigating something he “had no concept of.” His innate nature to discover new things only grew as time went by.

Keith joined the Cub Scouts when he was in elementary school. After moving through the ranks, he eventually met all of the requirements to earn the Arrow of Light award and then moved on to the Boy Scouts, an organization that provided him with ample opportunity to continue his encounters with the natural world. He enjoyed the challenges that came with being a scout. In middle school and high school, he experienced new activities like white water paddling, rock climbing and rappelling, skiing, snowboarding and mountain biking.

Like many in this area, his summers were spent at the community pool, where Keith worked as a lifeguard. He then became a water safety instructor and a lifeguard instructor. He said, “My time in scouting helped marry my love of aquatics with many different types of outdoor activities.” Right before turning eigh-

teen, Keith attained the rank of Eagle Scout, an achievement marked by hours of work as well as coordinating a final project. Eagle Scout is the highest rank a boy scout can achieve.

Like so many people, Keith was fortunate to have been greatly influenced by his teachers, and one in particular. “I had an absolutely remarkable history teacher in high school,” he says. That is when he realized that teaching was in his future. After graduation, he attended Christopher Newport University and earned a bachelor of arts degree in History. When it was time to get licensed as a teacher, Keith needed to determine his career direction, meaning which grade he would teach. “I decided to pursue middle education, or grades five through eight.” In order to attain his teacher certification, he had to spend a certain amount of time as a student teacher. “I absolutely loved it and realized that middle education was, indeed, the right fit for me.”

Keith was assigned to Queens Lake Middle School in Williamsburg and so he relocated to Williamsburg. After a few years of teaching, he returned to school to obtain his Masters of

Education Degree in Educational Leadership at William & Mary. He graduated with honors and was promoted to Assessment and Compliance Coordinator at Queens Lake Middle School.

His new administrative role challenged Keith to become involved in special programs, such as Gifted Education Services and working with the Middle School Arts Magnet Program. He says, “All of these roles seem to fit together in fueling my passion for seeing students foster their creativity. Students learn to take calculated risks, become unconventional problem-solvers and discover and pursue their own passions.” He finds his work with the students to be “intoxicating.”

While on a lunch break in 2014, Keith read a magazine article about the upcoming movie, Les Miserables. In the biography of one of the actors, Hugh Jackson, geocaching was listed as one of his hobbies. Keith had never heard of such a thing, so he did some research. Much to his surprise, geocaching was described as an adventurous outdoor activity. Keith had to ask himself, “How have I not discovered this soon-



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er?" After all, it has pieces of everything that draws him to the outdoors.

Geocaching is sometimes defined as a great big treasure hunt, an activity where people use GPS to find and hide a variety of containers in specific outdoor locations. Keith knew immediately that this fit with his love of adventure and the outdoors. "There are 81 levels of difficulty in this activity. Difficulty is based on both the terrain where the cache is hidden and the difficulty of finding the cache."

Items are put in a container, and the container is hidden. Each container must withstand the elements because inside is the logbook that a finder signs when they find the cache. Then that person may or may not switch out what is inside the box, but they do have to hide it again for the next person to find. Keith said, "Some of the best containers are handcrafted."

This is a family-friendly outdoor adventure or something a person can do alone. Some searches are labeled as dog friendly or horse friendly. "There is something for everybody," Keith says.

His love of the recreation is evident. "The creativity of a challenging, well-hidden and

well-themed geocache can be so much fun." In order to reach certain levels of accomplishment, Keith has traveled. "The activity has taken me to places I never, ever would have seen if it were not for geocaching."

There is a goal in every search, but once that goal is reached, there is always another. It's not a game to be won. "There is always another challenge around the corner."

Geocaching can be done in numerous locations around Virginia, including state parks, Colonial Williamsburg and James City County. Local rules and ordinances apply, so be certain to check before searching an area. There are a number of online resources and apps as well as a Facebook group, Geocaching Hampton Roads, to assist people in this outdoor adventure.

Ever since discovering the creek in childhood, Keith Wright continues to believe that with time, effort and good problem solving, anything can happen. Maybe that is why, after many years, his original canoe still resides with him where he can see it every day. It is a source of inspiration to continue to challenge himself on his high adventure outdoor activities. **NDN**

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PATTI MCGRATH



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SHE GOES TO THE WOODS

By Dawn Brotherton

Patti McGrath has the best office in Williamsburg. As the Parks Superintendent for the City of Williamsburg, she is outside in various parks on a daily basis.

Patti is passionate about her job. "I love to be in nature. And I love to get people to see the same things that I see, to just sit and watch the water and see the fish and to teach people things that they didn't know about before," she

says.

She has an environmental biology degree as well as a marine biology degree, both from Rutgers University in New Jersey, which she puts to good use. "I've done a lot of water testing and invertebrate sampling. And I teach kids the different types of fish. I really enjoy that. There's nothing better than watching a kid catch his or her first fish. There is joy on their face."

While still in college, she took a job as a coral reef biologist teacher for the Central Caribbean Marine Institute in Little Cayman. "You really can't get much better than that on your first try," Patti says. When the institute lost their funding after 9/11, Patti returned to New Jersey.

A short while later, she came to Virginia. When she moved to Gloucester in 2002, she

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wasn't able to find a position in her field, so she worked for Lowe's Home Improvement. "It was a really great job, and I learned a lot of things about improving houses, home improvement stuff you would never try on your own like ceramic tile, just because they teach you all those things."

To get back into nature, she started volunteering for the Gloucester Parks Department on the weekends. When the park manager job came open at Beaver Dam Park, she jumped at the chance. She quickly moved into the superintendent position for Gloucester Parks which she held for four years, managing seven parks and ten boat landings.

In January 2020, Patti started her position with the City of Williamsburg Parks and Recreation Department. "I had two months to kind of figure it out, and then we went into lockdown." But Patti is using this time to really get to know each of the ten parks she now oversees.

The City of Williamsburg has three passive parks, four neighborhood parks and three big parks. "Passive parks aren't manned," she says. "And there are parks that are set in little niches

in the neighborhoods. Strawberry Fields has a playground in the middle of their neighborhood complex. We maintain the playground equipment and cut the grass because it's city-owned property."

The three passive parks are Bicentennial Park at the corner of Nassau Street and Newport Avenue, Redoubt Park on Quarterpath Road and College Landing Park down the street from the campus of William & Mary.

"Redoubt Park is our historical park with interpretive panels and a walking path with flowerbeds and green space," she says. Bicentennial Park has a brick walkway surrounding a green area perfect for a picnic. College Landing Park is a quiet spot for viewing College Creek or launching a kayak.

Most people only think of the three large parks: Waller Mill, Kiwanis and Quarterpath Recreational Center. "Waller Mill is our freshwater reservoir. We do a lot of boat rentals and shelter rentals. We've got multiple playgrounds and swing sets there. One of the things that I'm looking to do is to really amp up their programming." Patti has many ideas she would like to introduce.

"When I worked for Gloucester, we had eight weeks of summer camp that we used to do, and we'd have our walks and kayaking classes." These are things Patti hopes to energize in Williamsburg.

Quarterpath has softball fields, a gym, dance classes, volleyball, basketball and pickleball. "They love their pickleball here," Patti says with a laugh. And there's more. "People come every day to the little walking track around the gym to exercise."

Kiwanis is another softball complex that also has tennis courts and a playground. They have recently remodeled the playground with new equipment and rubber matting instead of mulch. Patti explains it is easier to maintain and cheaper than adding mulch every year. "Then they've got the exercise equipment around the edge of it which is a great marriage of two things. You can exercise while your kids swing, and everybody's doing something and nobody's getting bored."

James City County and the City of Williamsburg have divided up some of the sports specialties to ensure better coverage for the triangle. Williamsburg focuses on softball fields

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while James City County hosts baseball and soccer. Patti says it works great because the two parks' departments collaborate well.

Patti's maintenance team of one full-time and one part-time person take care of all ten locations. "They're both awesome," Patti says. "They've been helping me with some projects at Waller Mill. We're painting, fixing stuff, and building things in addition to maintaining all the grounds. They've also been doing flowerbeds and cutting grass."

COVID-19 has renewed interest in parks. "Because of COVID-19, we became more relevant. People are out in the parks more now than they were before because they can't go anywhere else. So, you find more people walking at Bicentennial Park. You find more people fishing at College Landing Park. You find them going out to these places so they can get some fresh air, and they can move and not be cooped up in the house."

All of the parks with playgrounds are closed, though. There is no safe way to keep the equipment sanitized, and kids don't necessarily understand social distancing.

Patti is looking forward to when they can

reopen the parks, and she's planning ahead. "I want to get some birding programs in. There are a lot of beautiful hawks that I've seen since I've been here, and there's bald eagles, Ospreys and herons. There are all these beautiful birds. It's something that anybody can do. You don't have to have a certain activity level. I'd like to do some night programs where we call owls, which is always a fun program. Even if you don't see anything, you're out in nature at night, and it brings that whole mystery aspect to it, and kids usually really like that."

She also hopes to add more to the water program at Waller Mill. "I'm a certified kayak instructor, so I'd like to bring kayak camps and programs out here. Kayaking is my favorite thing to do." They already rent boats, kayaks and canoes.

While working in Gloucester, Patti learned that if the park teaches archery programs, the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries will provide equipment. She is now an archery instructor and trainer. She is hoping to partner with the local schools to bring more kids into the parks.

"My other goal is to increase the safety and

accessibility of the parks. I would like to increase the trail signage so that it has a clearly defined path and provide ADA accessible trails throughout the park. I always think, if my grandmother can roll her wheelchair on the path, then I am doing it right," she says.

Patti's fiancé, Max, also appreciates the outdoors. When Patti worked for the Gloucester Parks, Max reached out to her for information about skate parks. Eventually, she joined the board for his nonprofit organization and moved to Williamsburg. The rest is history, or will be once they set a date. Everything is on hold for now.

When she isn't kayaking, fishing, swimming or scuba diving, Patti enjoys sewing for her ten-year-old niece and helping with various nonprofits in Williamsburg. She recognizes that she has so many interests, she needs to start being more selective about where she spends her time or she's going to spread herself too thin.

But for now, Patti McGrath is enjoying exploring the beautiful parks in Williamsburg and dreaming of new programs to add. She welcomes suggestions from residents to best meet the needs for Williamsburg. [NDN](#)

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Enjoying Wildlife & Outdoor Recreation

By Alison Johnson



Lisa W. Cumming Photography

Growing up, David Norris was the type of kid who stepped off the school bus and played outside until his mother called him in for dinner.

David's backyard was a 100-acre cow pasture on an Iowa farm. He spent hours playing at a creek on the property, catching crawdads and minnows and surrounded by deer, quail and other birds. He headed to college without a profession in mind but knowing he wanted to work outdoors.

Mission accomplished. Today, David's job is all about protecting animals and their habitats and helping people connect safely with creatures great and small.

"Everybody loves some type of wildlife," says David, Regional Wildlife Manager, Wildlife Resources, for the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF). "That makes everyone in the state a constituent of our agency, whether they know it or not, because we cover everything from reptiles and

amphibians to falcons and elk."

David's position includes managing VD-GIF's popular Watchable Wildlife Program and three district biologists, who help establish and maintain habitats on private and public lands. They cover an area from north of Richmond to the North Carolina state line and west to Petersburg.

Launched in 2001, Watchable Wildlife promotes nature appreciation and offers guidance on finding and observing wild creatures with-

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out harming them. Its mission mirrors that of VDGIF: Conserve, Connect, Protect.

One highlight is the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail, an organized network of more than 600 publicly accessible hiking routes, parks, rivers and scenic overlooks where people can spot birds, reptiles, amphibians, mammals and insects.

An interactive online map (dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife-watching/watchable-wildlife-program) allows users to search by locality or wildlife type, as well as report their own sightings. Virginia is home to a huge variety of species: 400-plus birds, 150 mammals, 150 amphibians and reptiles, 250 fish, and hundreds of dragonflies, butterflies and other invertebrates.

“There’s so much available land for people to look at wildlife and get outside for recreational opportunities, and we’re here to help them with all of that,” David says. “We just want people to be able to enjoy and appreciate what we have.”

Watchable Wildlife, which recently added a second wildlife biologist, provides specifics such as where to find elk in southwestern por-

tions of the state, black bears in the Blue Ridge Mountains or bottlenose dolphins along the Atlantic Coast.

“Birders tend to be particularly passionate,” David notes. “So, if I’m someone who wants to see a loggerhead shrike, a songbird, I can go here. Or if I want to see a red-cockaded woodpecker, which is rare and endangered, I need to know that the only places they will nest are forests with big pine trees, and here’s where those are.”

VDGIF’s popular Falcon Cam, meanwhile, follows the breeding season of a Peregrine Falcon pair in downtown Richmond. Reports on mating, nesting, egg laying, hatching and feeding are accompanied by a biologist’s blog.

“It’s a great way for people of all ages to connect with them without negatively impacting their lives or their environment at all,” David says.

The department is now developing a “Marsh Cam” for the Hog Island Wildlife Management Area, which should be ready sometime next year. The 3,908-acre site, which covers three tracts along the lower James River in Sur-

ry County and Isle of Wight County, is full of waterfowl, shorebirds and eagles.

“We hope it will be a good resource for schools, as well as individuals,” David says.

Other tasks on David’s watch are helping homeowners develop natural habitats based on personal goals, organizing workshops and print and online resources on urban wildlife issues, guiding hunt clubs on population management, and coordinating sponsorship of the Master Naturalist Program for citizen educators, scientists and environmental stewards.

Still another is writing grants to acquire land for conservation purposes. One example is the Ware Creek Wildlife Management Area in New Kent County, a 2,600-acre mix of wetlands, open fields, and hardwood and pine forests.

VDGIF, formed more than 100 years ago, is funded largely by fees for hunting and fishing licenses and boat registrations and a federal excise tax on firearms and ammunition, as well as with donations.

David, 55, began to discover his life’s path at Peru State College in Nebraska, a small school where he earned a football scholarship as a

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defensive lineman and studied for a degree in Biology with an emphasis in Wildlife Ecology.

"I was always interested in animals and their habitats, so I never considered another major," he says. "I just hoped I could build a career, because it's a pretty tight job market."

After obtaining a Master of Natural Science Degree at Southeast Missouri State University, David worked for five-plus years as a district biologist for Nebraska Game and Parks. In 1996, he moved to Virginia to serve as Wetland Project Leader for VDGIF, a job he held for 23 years. He switched to his current position about a year ago.

Protecting wetlands is crucial for the many benefits they provide. Marshes and swamps that are saturated or covered by shallow water, usually defined as no more than three feet deep, help prevent flooding by holding water like a sponge.

Wetlands also filter pollution to improve water quality, control erosion, and provide a habitat for a highly diverse collection of species, sometimes draining seasonally so native plants and vegetation can grow. For humans,

they are great spots for fishing, taking photographs and seeing wildlife such as ducks, rails and wading birds.

As a wetland biologist, David frequently advised homeowners on restoring or preserving those habitats, using aerial maps that reveal existing drainage ditches. He persuaded some callers to choose that path rather than install a fish pond, a project on which VDGIF does not assist.

"The biggest way to impact wildlife is to give them places to eat, rest and have their babies," he says. "It's an 'if you build it, they will come' type of situation, and often we could align a property owner's goals with ours."

The VDGIF also helps smaller and more urban property owners and schools on projects such as butterfly gardens, although David isn't involved in that program.

On his own two-acre property in Toano, near Little Creek Reservoir, David is surrounded by waterfowl and enjoys growing his own vegetables and flowers. He often spies eagles flying overhead and has a pair of hawks nesting in his front yard. He also owns a black Lab.

"And obviously, there are deer galore," he says with a laugh. "I've got deer fences around all of my gardens."

Beyond the outdoor life, David's biggest joy is spending time with his two daughters, particularly cheering them on at sporting events. He lost his wife of 27 years, Libby, to breast cancer in 2015.

Daughter Colby, 23, was a softball star for Warhill High School who earned a partial college scholarship in the sport. Her 6-foot-3-inch sister Dylan, 16, is a standout volleyball player at Warhill who also hopes to be a college athlete.

For wildlife lovers in the Williamsburg area, David recommends Ware Creek, Chickahominy Wildlife Management Area in Charles City County, and Game Farm Marsh Wildlife Management Area on the Chickahominy in New Kent County as spectacular observation spots. Whether people are at home or out and about across Virginia, David Norris encourages them to always respect the natural world.

"We can share our spaces," he says. "We can do it in a way that is good for all of us." NDN

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Lisa W. Cumming Photography

At Home *Among* The Trees

By Paige Brotherton

People who walk along the trails of our local parks have a good chance of running into Charles Clark. Underneath dappled tree canopies and beside the best fishing waters in the area, Charles can be found making the most of every sunny day. He's traveled far to finally find his home in the green spaces of Williamsburg.

Charles was born in Saigon, Vietnam, but his parents returned to America right after his birth.

"I grew up in the United States, but I've been halfway around the world," he says. "And I've been through around half of the United States already since my dad was active duty military." No matter where they traveled, Charles always had a home under the same blue sky. "I was an outdoorsman from the get-go. I always loved anything that involves being outside, camping, fishing, biking, boating... anything!"

In high school, he participated in the Girls and Boys Club of the Peninsula, which arranged for the mentorship of younger students

by their older peers. It emphasized the importance of academics and career access, along with the impact of devoting time to help others. In a similar vein, Charles also joined a vocational education club that jumpstarted his love for engineering and mechanics. “It led me to do an internship over at NASA,” he says. “That was a good opportunity. I got to see how the engineers and technicians build satellites.” Charles continued on to get degrees in computer science and mechanical and fabrication engineering from Thomas Nelson Community College. Despite living all over America, Charles had undeniable roots in the area, so it was no surprise when he settled in Williamsburg.

Though Charles moved to James City County several years ago to be better equipped to take care of his parents, he has found the tranquility and quiet atmosphere instrumental in his own happiness with the area. In addition to the obvious draw of tree-lined roads and green fields, Charles also appreciates some of the most popular spots in Williamsburg. “One of my favorite things is the Premium Outlet Malls,” he says.

“I’m a lot closer to them now, so I love going out there!”

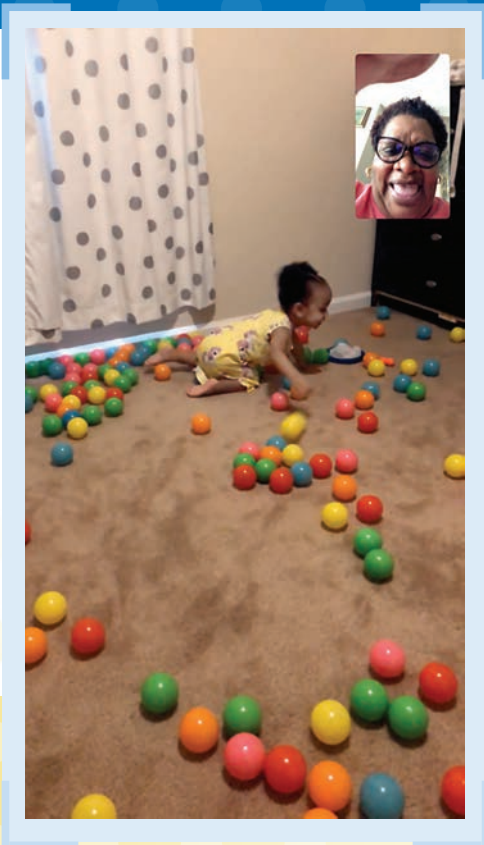
While staying close enough to take care of his parents, Charles worked in logistics at the Newport News Continental plant. Now he works as a manager at the Walmart distribution center, but only on the weekends, leaving him plenty of time to attend to what he truly loves. “Tuesday through Friday, I’ve got four days off,” Charles says. “I do outdoorsy stuff, remodeling, building, construction, yard work, fishing, whatever comes to mind!”

Sometimes his hobbies overlap, and the expertise he acquires in one field strengthens his appreciation of another. “A lot of the trees I can look at and tell what kind they are because I was in woodworking, and I had to know what types of wood I was dealing with.” While keeping a balance between his various passions, he also makes plenty of time for family.

Charles grew up with three brothers. Now he lives with his wife, Julie, and frequently visits his niece and nephews. When not in quarantine, Charles enjoys his wife’s support of his

various hobbies. “She attends a lot of my outdoor events, and I do the same in return,” he says. “We do lots of outdoor activities together. I took her camping once a few years back and she enjoyed that, but we went at the wrong time of the year. We went on a July weekend, and it was hot!”

Currently, Charles’s favorite spot in town is Waller Mill Park. Though he loves the natural beauty, the activities offered by the park officials and associates are what really interest him. “They have tournaments, they have boating and kayaking, and they have a dog park,” he says. “They’ve got a lot of interesting stuff, and it’s one of my favorite parks in Virginia.” Of course, Waller Mill isn’t Charles’s only natural oasis. He ventures out to any green space in the area, including Little Creek Park, Chickahominy State Park, and Bethel Manor Recreation Area. After spending plenty of time at each location, Charles knows the areas well, comparing the quality of their picnic shelters, children’s playgrounds, and RV parks, so he knows where in town would be the best spot for whatever



In tough times CDR is **MAKING A DIFFERENCE**

When the COVID-19 pandemic first arrived in the community, Raquel Walters wondered if her daughter, Katalina, would continue to receive services through CDR’s Early Head Start’s home-based program. Fortunately, Raquel didn’t have to wonder for very long.

“Before I knew it we were having our sessions online with Ms. Monique, our CDR Early Head Start Family Advocate,” said Raquel. “Through Facetime, Katalina and Monique work on skill building, socialization, color recognition, and other skills. Ms. Monique even gives me activity ideas so that I can continue to work with Katalina at home between our virtual home visits. I am so thankful for CDR!”

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“Katalina is enjoying her virtual home visits and it is helping me keep her on track with her development.”

–Raquel, Katalina’s mother

outdoor activity he'll be pursuing that day. No matter what his plans are, his reason for loving the parks he visits remains simple. "I'm a big fan of the scenery. If you just pay attention when you go out to these areas, you'll be amazed by what you can see."

Though he's encountered plenty of animals on his park ventures, including opossums, skunks, beavers, raccoons, and even a red fox once, Mother Earth still has some surprises in store, even for him. "I was kayaking with a friend of mine from work, and we decided to pull side and have a sandwich and a soft drink. I looked up and all of a sudden, I saw this buck just jump off the side of the shore and start doggy-paddling across the lake! I turned to my friend and said, 'Do you believe this? That deer's swimming across the lake!' It was the first time I'd ever seen something like that in my life."

Of course, Charles's outdoor adventures don't stop with his own exploration. After visiting, and being delighted by, the Jamestown Marina, he hopes to carry his love of nature into a whole new kind of job. "Maybe I can be some kind

of tour guide with either fishing or sightseeing, because I'm getting more familiar with this area. There's so much good knowledge to share."

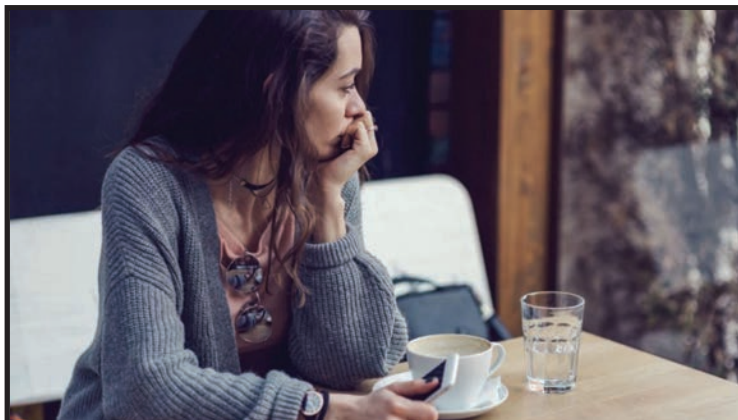
However, the ideas he finds most important to share are those relating to a healthier environment. "I'm a firm believer in keeping our local waterways and parks clean and litter-free," he says. "I always have some kind of trash bag with me. If I see any trash or garbage lying around, I'll pick it up and throw it into the correct bin." Charles is also a fan of the Clean the Bay initiative that encourages Virginia residents and visitors alike to keep the area clean so generations to come might enjoy the beautiful natural spaces Williamsburg has fought so hard to protect.

When he's not enjoying the beautiful back trails of Williamsburg, Charles can be found in his garage, working on his second great hobby. "I started getting back into car shows," he says. "I picked up my dad's '84 Corvette Coup, and it needed a little work. That's my project, just the minor things, and I hope to take it to some of the local car shows." For Charles, fixing up

the car is about more than just his love for classic automobiles. "That car has got some history from back when I was in my twenties," he says. "It's like an old friend."

Also important to Charles is his Cherokee heritage. He enjoys visiting the Pamunkey and Mattaponi reservations in his free time and greatly values the conversations he has with the residents. As someone with a unique ethnic background, with both Cherokee and Asian traditions, Charles finds it crucial to stay connected to his past even as his present evolves and changes. One thing is for sure, however: his love of the outdoors has followed him through all his adventures and will surely carry him to the lakeside for many years to come.

As the pandemic continues, Charles Clark is eager to return to his home in nature. As for his fellow Williamsburg residents, he encourages them to take advantage of the beautiful scenery around them. From boating to fishing to hiking, there's something for everyone to enjoy in the great outdoors. "Venture out," Charles says. "There's a lot to see." NDN



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Until then, our virtual programming page offers fun activities for all ages to do at home, in your yard or in our parks. We can help - learn a new craft, take a virtual tour, explore nature and science and discover the beauty of our community. To get started, visit our website at jamescitycountyva.gov/recreation and look for Virtual Programming under "Quick Links."



Our parks and trails are open - visit and connect to nature to help maintain your mental wellness. You can follow social distance guidelines while still getting exercise and reducing stress - come hike, bike, fly a kite, boat or fish! Dogs must be leashed and under the complete and immediate control of their owner at all times. Some park amenities are closed to promote safety and social distancing; visit jamescitycountyva.gov/recreation or call 757-259-5360 for details.

As this issue goes to press, the James City County Recreation Center and Abram Frink Jr. Community Center remain closed. Please call us at 757-259-4200 for updates. We look forward to seeing you soon!





Lisa W. Cumming Photography

FAMILY MATTERS

By Kristine Hojnicky

Piper's passion is her frisbee. When she's not out on house calls with her dog-dad, Derek Worstell, she's likely in her New Town neighborhood backyard playing with her frisbee during friendly lunchtime games of fetch.

"She really likes retrieving. She's gotten good enough that she will do acrobatic jumps in the air to get it," he says.

Derek is an estimator with Pyramid Roofing. His father, Dan Worstell, founded the company in Dallas, Texas with the help of his father, Jerry, and they relocated it to Williamsburg when Derek was four years old. It has been a family affair since. Derek's grandfather stayed on with the company for many years, and Derek's uncle Dave came on board as a general manager. Now, Derek has joined them despite the fact that growing up he didn't envision his career would include working for his

father full time in the roofing business.

"I've followed in my dad's footsteps in many ways throughout my life. He went to Louisiana State University (LSU), so I did too. He enjoys fishing, golfing and playing sports so I got into those things," Derek says. "But when I got out of school, I wanted to go to a bigger city like Houston because that's what my friends were doing."

Derek studied business management at LSU, and his academic success coupled with the time he invested into several organizations outside of the classroom afforded him several job offers upon graduation.

"I didn't really want to pursue those, so my dad offered to have me work for him until I landed on my feet and found the job I wanted."

Derek moved back home to Williamsburg and began working for the family business.

Each day, he responds to calls throughout the area and meets with homeowners to diagnose whether a leak is roof-related. He's responsible for developing a solution for the repair along with a cost-estimate for the customer in addition to calculating cost estimates for customers looking for roof replacements.

He was surprised to find that he really enjoyed the work he was doing. Every day was unique, meeting with different people, using detective work to solve challenging problems, traveling throughout the region, and working with his father, uncle and grandfather. So, when several months into this new role he received the job offer he had been waiting for, Derek made the easy decision to decline it.

"I told them I really liked what I was doing at Pyramid, and I wanted to stay to pursue this instead," he says. "What was supposed to be a

temporary thing has turned into a more permanent situation.”

Now fully invested in working for Pyramid, Derek set an aggressive goal to reach \$1 million in sales in his first year at the company. Estimators who achieve over \$1 million in annual sales are flown to an industry awards gala and honored in front of their peers.

“Everybody kind of looked at me and said, Derek, it’s your first year. It takes a bit of time,” he says. “But in my first year, I was able to hit that million-dollar mark which is something that I am really proud of especially since all the other contractors up there with me at the awards ceremony were in their thirties and forties, and I was 23.”

But professional success aside, Derek says his biggest accomplishment is marrying his high school sweetheart, the former Jackie Chisam. The two met while attending Walsingham Academy here in Williamsburg, where they both excelled in school athletics and were supported by their close-knit families. The couple endured four years of a long-distance relationship while Derek attended LSU and Jackie

studied at James Madison University. They returned to Williamsburg after graduation, Derek to work for his father while Jackie pursued a career as an English teacher at Warhill High school.

“I don’t think we could have done [long distance] without our friends’ and families’ support along the way,” Derek says. “Our parents helped pay for flights home to see each other. It made it easier that both of our families lived in the same town, but it was by no means easy. Personally, it’s what I’m most proud of.”

The couple bought a house in New Town and after several months, they started talking about adding a four-legged addition to their family. After much debate, they decided to find a border collie breeder.

“Border collies are highly trainable, so we found a lady who had a litter. She said she had one left. It was the runt,” Derek says. “So, we drove five hours to get Piper.”

Since bringing Piper home, Derek says they’ve really enjoyed having her as part of their family. He says she’s a lot of work, but they’ve made large strides in training her. Her

best, and arguably most convenient trick, is running to her bed when the doorbell rings instead of barking at the door.

“We’ve also done some agility training with a woman down in Gloucester. It’s a bonding experience we have with her,” Derek says. “She knows the basics really well. But the frisbee is her passion.”

Derek takes time between appointments each day to take Piper out during lunchtime and throw the frisbee around. He says as Piper’s catching abilities have improved, so has his throwing.

“I’ve had to practice,” he says with a laugh. “It’s as much on the thrower as it is on her to catch.”

Derek is also known to take Piper on customer calls, which have led to some interesting adventures. He recounts one notable visit with a customer who had sheep grazing in their yard. Knowing border collies are natural herders and that Piper’s lineage includes a grandfather who was a master herder, Derek asked the customer if he could throw Piper in with the sheep and see what happens. The customer



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agreed, and without any previous training, Derek was surprised to see Piper pen all the sheep within a matter of minutes.

“It was really cool to see her natural instinct to put all the sheep in the pen,” he says. “We haven’t done any more herding training because where am I going to get sheep? So, the only thing she is herding these days is our Roomba vacuum. She will herd that all day long.”

With Piper at his side, Derek plans to continue working for Pyramid Roofing as an estimator until his father is ready to retire. Eventually, he says there will be a succession plan put into place. Derek’s younger brother Drew is an undergraduate student at William & Mary and has yet to decide whether he will join his brother in running the family business. But for now, Derek Worstell is content and happy where he is.

“I just couldn’t imagine myself leaving what I’m doing now,” he says. “I get to spend time with my dad every day. This business is a family tradition and I really see myself with a future here.” NDN

Williamsburg's **IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD** photo challenge May Answers

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(bottom).



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





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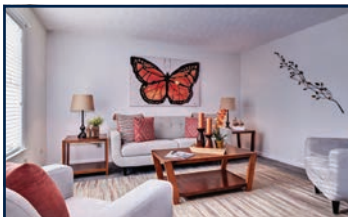


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