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Cherri Fiorenza



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Meredith Collins, Publisher

I feel compelled to start my introduction to this issue on holiday cooking with a true confession: I don't cook. I can scramble an egg or whip up some spaghetti, and if I really set my mind to it I could follow a simple recipe.

So reading the stories in this issue are a real "peak behind the curtain" for me, and I found them fascinating. But the wonderful recipes that accompany these stories might as well be written in a foreign language for all the good they will do me! I am ok with that, because what I do bring to the equation is a love of eating, and I can recognize a really scrumptious looking dish when I read about one.

I am so impressed with the people we interviewed and their commitment to the culinary arts. I truly enjoyed the variety of cooking and baking styles and resources and techniques they've shared -as well as the recipes- and I hope you do too. They cook for family and friends and neighbors and even strangers, but mostly they cook for the sheer joy of it.

I hope your holidays are filled with love and laughter and family and that your homes are also teeming with the warm and comforting smells of delicious holiday cooking. NDN

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CHERRI FIORENZA



Murawski Photography

Baking, decorating & keeping family close

By Lillian Stevens

Cherri Fiorenza finds great satisfaction and fulfillment in adorning her Kingsmill home for the holidays. In fact, she decorates for each of the four seasons.

“Decorating brings me such joy,” Cherri says. “I start with Easter and spring. Then, as summer approaches, I’m ready with my beach-y décor.”

In October, her home was beautifully and whimsically festooned for Halloween. The focal point of the living room was a witch and a black cat sitting atop the stately fireplace mantle. On a table in the breakfast nook, pumpkins including fine china collectibles, candles, and tiny pilgrims graced a black and white plaid table runner.

“After Halloween, I’ll switch out some of these things in time for Thanksgiving,” she says. “And then comes Christmas.”

As the holidays approach, Cherri draws near to her family, taking comfort in the season’s rituals.

“My family is everything to me,” she says. “They bring me joy in the good times and have kept me going through the hard times. I’m so grateful for the closeness we all share.”

Cherri was widowed in early 2007. Having been married for 42 years, the loss of her husband, Bob, was a tremendous blow. Her family helped her weather the storm. Decorating and baking helped to lift her heart and spirits.

“When my husband was alive, I decorated but not to this extent,” she says. “I think it brings me fulfillment and helps to cheer me because it is hard with him gone. I do enjoy getting ready for Christmas though, and the children love to visit and see my decora-

tions. And I love going to their homes. It’s fun to look at holiday lights and decorations through the eyes of a child.”

Like other families, Cherri’s has traditions that are special, from baking her signature shortbread cookies, to decorating, to the wrapping of gifts.

The cookies, which are fabulous, are rolled slightly thinner, which makes them more delicate than a traditional shortbread cookie. “They look like sugar cookies,” Cherri says. “But they aren’t. They are fun and easy to make, though, and I’ve always enjoyed baking them for friends and family.”

On Christmas Day, the family will usually sit down to a dinner that features beef tenderloin as the main dish. With no shortage of great cooks in the family, the side dishes are sure to be similarly spectacular. When

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the time comes to exchange presents, Cherri prides herself on each gift she's lovingly wrapped.

"In our family, I'm known for my handmade bows," she says. "When I wrap a present, I like to turn it into a small decoration." As much as she enjoys decorating and baking, Cherri says she can't really remember how she got her start with either; she just always loved to do both.

"As a child, we always had a beautiful Christmas tree and decorations. My mom was very special. She was a single mom who worked very hard raising my sister and me. In fact, my sister Diane is an amazing cook. Our great grandmother was Italian, and Diane can remember being in the kitchen with her making spaghetti sauce."

Cherri's first dish wasn't Italian, however.

"It was fried chicken!" Cherri says. "But it's not like traditional fried chicken. You coat the chicken and that makes a gravy that turns into a crispy layer on top of the chicken. It's different, and probably one of my most memorable dishes."

Sadly, for readers, there is no recipe.

"It's just something we learned to do. We like to bake my mother's pound cake, too. The thing is, we can make it exactly like she did, but it's still not the same as hers. The texture of my mom's cake was so light and unbelievable."

Though it has since closed, for nearly a decade Cherri and her sister owned and operated a tearoom called Taste Tea Salon & Gifts, which was located in the Village Shops at Kingsmill. Their mother was almost always on the property as well. "We were known as the three ladies: my sister, my mom and me."

Through their small business, the sisters were able to combine their passion for tea and delicious food with unique gifts and pretty things.

"For years, friends had encouraged me to find an outlet for my creative side," Cherri says. "And Diane was always an incredible chef. So, we started a little tearoom. There are a lot of people in Williamsburg who love tea. We were very successful for the area."

"Everyone loved us! People would tell us they'd been all over the world and our tea was the best."

Cherri and her sister did all of the cooking. For the royal tea, there were scones, savories, teas and other signature beverages and desserts. "We had the best scones," she says. "And our savories included things like pork tenderloin, shrimp, and asparagus in phyllo cups."

A daily selection of desserts ranged from crème brûlée to cookies and cakes, always made fresh from scratch. "In addition to tea, we served a sparkling pear drink served in champagne glasses. It was very simple and a lot of fun."

After nearly a decade, they decided to give up their business. Cherri's husband was facing a terminal illness. After his death, her mother had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's, so Cherri and Diane spent the better part of the next five years caregiving for their mom. "We brought in home health care workers, but it was mostly just us taking care of her," Cherri says. "It was the least we could do. We look at it like this: our parents raised us and now it was our turn to



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care for our mom.”

Eight years after burying her beloved husband, Cherri lost her mother to Alzheimer's. She honors her mother's memory by participating in the annual "Walk to End Alzheimer's" which was held in Williamsburg on October 23 this year.

"I've been participating in the Alzheimer's Walk for 10 years," she says.

In addition to being involved in the Alzheimer's community, Cherri maintains an active lifestyle, but she laments that a neck injury keeps her from playing golf, a game she enjoyed for many years.

"Golf is such a great game," she says. "I still enjoy watching it, but I miss playing."

Though the death of Cherri's husband left her reeling, she has not let that sour her on life, especially at the holidays.

Cherri and Bob, both natives of Baltimore, were childhood sweethearts. She was 16 when they started dating. Three years later, the couple was married. In 1980, Bob's career with Liebherr Equipment Company brought the family to Hampton Roads.

"Our home was the first one built on Tutors Neck," Cherri says. "Over the years, we have seen many changes here in Kingsmill, as well as in the historic area and throughout Williamsburg. We raised our three daughters here. What a wonderful place to raise a family. I've always been so happy to live here."

As Christmas approaches, Cherri admits that her extended family has long since outgrown her home, so the torch has been passed.

"For Christmas Day, we rotate between my daughter Amy's house in Charlottesville, and Robyn's home here in Williamsburg," she says. "They both have larger houses with big kitchens and a lot of open space."

A third daughter, Jennifer, lives in North Carolina, outside of Raleigh. It's a farther reach, but Cherri is thankful her children and grandchildren are within an easy afternoon's drive. In fact, she drives to Charlottesville every Friday to help out with one of the grandchildren.

"On Fridays, I keep my two-year-old

granddaughter, Eliza," she says. "Then I stay over and visit for a day or two. I look forward to the visit all week! I think the little ones help keep me young."

With Cherri's influence, it's a safe bet they will grow up to be amazing cooks. NDN

Cherri's Shortbread Cookies

Ingredients:

2 cups flour

1 cup (2 sticks) butter, softened

½ cup confectioner's sugar

½ tsp. vanilla (optional)

Method:

Cream the butter and sugar, then mix in the flour and vanilla.

Roll out the dough (I like to roll mine thinner than traditional shortbread)

Use cookie cutters to cut out shapes

Decorate with colored sugars, gently pressing sugar to cookie to help it stick

Bake on silicone pad or parchment paper at 325 for 16-20 minutes

(I start looking at them at 16 minutes because I roll mine out thinner).



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CLARENCE RODWELL

Nutrition for All



By Susan Williamson

Murawski Photography

A quest for healthy living has brought a Virginia farm boy back home to agriculture, but on a much smaller scale. Clarence Rodwell grew up on a farm in Brunswick County. He attended Virginia State University and majored in physics. That led him to a career as a nuclear physicist involved in building reactors for naval vessels and then to an executive position in Silicon Valley.

While in California, he met his wife, Ruth, in San Francisco. She is a native of Nova Scotia who managed a nonprofit in Oakland. She spent thirty years with The New Oakland Committee, which endeavored to bring together minority populations, business, labor and law enforcement to work

collectively to build a better Oakland.

When the couple considered retirement, they decided they wanted to return to the East Coast. They considered Atlanta and Virginia Beach but didn't want to deal with the heavy traffic in those regions. Clarence remembered driving down the Colonial Parkway during a visit to his mother, who lived two hours from Williamsburg. He says, "It was so beautiful, that drive." That memory prompted the couple to research and eventually retire in Williamsburg.

As senior citizens, they decided to focus on eating a healthy diet, so they began to grow microgreens, which are vegetables and herbs that have not yet matured. This crop

doesn't require much space and produces what is known as a superfood. Superfoods are foods that are rich in nutrients. Once Clarence developed his labor-intensive process, he realized that there was a demand for microgreens by fine dining establishments. Llewedor Gardens was born, at one point selling the produce to seven local restaurants, two juice bars, a senior living facility and a Newport News restaurant.

Then COVID hit. Many restaurants closed, and Clarence shut down his production. He began to think of other places that might benefit from microgreens. He attended a 2019 Farm to School Conference in Hampton, where he met Lisa Winter, the



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Senior Director of Nutrition for Norfolk schools. He asked her if she might be interested in purchasing microgreens.

She answered by saying, "No, I want to grow our own."

After learning the high percentage of students who were food insecure in Norfolk, Clarence wanted to help. With the aid of a William & Mary graduate student and assistance from the Alan B. Miller Entrepreneurship Center at William & Mary, he designed an automated method for growing the greens, which are normally labor intensive. He installed the system in July 2021 right in the central kitchen. Norfolk Public Schools paid for the equipment, but Clarence's company donated the labor.

A special tank filters the city water, removing chlorine, then hydrogen peroxide is added to keep everything sanitary. There is a strict protocol for the operation. This system works on timers to water beds of microgreens planted in hemp mats on metal trays. The mats had to be imported from Canada as they were illegal in the United States at that time. The beds are watered from underneath and set on a rack with tiers of grow

lights.

The seeds are germinated in a heating unit salvaged from a Subway store in which the trays fit perfectly. A fogging system keeps everything moist until the seeds germinate, at which point they are put under the grow lights.

Examples of microgreens grown are lettuce, peas, radish, arugula, basil, cabbage, and broccoli. The greens taste like the mature plant but provide more nutrition. Scientists from the USDA have determined that microgreens have higher nutritional densities than their mature counterparts. The study was reported in the August 2012 issue of the Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry. They also have high levels of vitamin C and beta-carotene.

Once growing, the microgreens can be clipped and harvested to use in salads and sandwiches. When Clarence was selling microgreens, he didn't harvest or package them, but rather delivered the mats with the growing microgreens.

As restaurants return to pre-COVID levels, Clarence may reopen his commercial sales, but he has more ideas for the future.

He is considering starting a hydroponic lettuce facility in Williamsburg that would produce sustainable head lettuce. In hydroponic systems, the lettuce is grown in water, not dirt. The entire plant is then packaged and sold.

He would also like to see other schools use the systems he designed, and he has been approached by a Williamsburg church interested in helping put hydroponic systems in schools, as well as a retired surgeon who wants to volunteer for school projects.

Not only does Clarence hope to promote systems for better nutrition, he also wants to create entrepreneurship along the way. When walking in Colonial Williamsburg, he noticed the Mary Stith house. Since his mother's maiden name was Mary Stith, he decided to do some research. He learned that William & Mary operated a tobacco plantation in Brunswick County known as Nottoway Plantation which it acquired in 1718 and sold in 1802. There are records of slaves travelling between Williamsburg and the Nottoway plantation as assigned to various duties.

Clarence theorizes that his ancestors



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were enslaved Africans who may have been owned by some branch of the Stith family. Mary Stith, of the Stith house, was the daughter of a William & Mary president and bequeathed her property to her African-American freed slaves.

Clarence says, "Thanks to the help of many people along the way, I was the first generation of my family who was able to accumulate a bit of wealth. Projects which enable others to do the same would be a fitting way for William & Mary and other institutions to apologize for their contribution to slavery in the past." He goes on to say that while memorials are often removed and defaced, helping people would be so much more meaningful.

In all of Clarence's plans and visions, sustainability and entrepreneurship are paramount. He envisions a possible food outlet, perhaps a salad restaurant, that is employee owned, where healthy, locally grown food would be the basic product. He also wants to continue helping schools, especially those with low-income students who were heavily affected by the pandemic. "I'm looking for creative opportunities to give back. I'm hav-

ing so much fun, much more than I ever had working at my career."

Programs like Everytable in Los Angeles work to make nutritious food affordable and available. The organization offers meal subscriptions, cooking classes and more to aid in promoting food justice. He researches similar programs throughout the country looking for ideas.

Clarence and Ruth are both involved in the company, and that leaves little time for other activities. But they do enjoy spending time with their three grandchildren who live in New Orleans. They recently took the grandchildren to the beach in Destin, Florida and had a great experience.

Growing up on a farm gave Clarence Rodwell an awareness of food justice for the producer as well as the consumer. His physics education taught him to think in terms of efficient system design. And the many people who helped him along the way created the urge to step outside of his comfort zone and try to give back. His goal is to make good, sustainable nutrition available to all and sustainable income to those involved in the process. NDN

Grilled Cheese with Ham, Brie, Microgreens, Apple and Dijon

Ingredients

- 1-2 Tablespoons butter
- 2 slices Brioche
- 4 slices ham
- 6 thin slices Brie cheese
- 6 thin slices apple
- Handful of microgreens
- 1 Tablespoon Dijon mustard

Directions

Heat a skillet to medium heat and melt butter to coat it. Add slices of bread to the skillet, and place brie and ham on top of each slice. Cook until cheese begins to melt and the bread is golden. Top half of the bread with apple slices, mustard and microgreens. Flip the untopped slice onto the other so you have layers of bread, cheese, ham, apple slices, Dijon, microgreens, ham, cheese and bread. Transfer to a plate and cut in half.

Recipe Note: Place the cheese closest to the bread, with the microgreens in the center of the sandwich and keep an eye on it to make sure you melt the cheese without cooking the microgreens.

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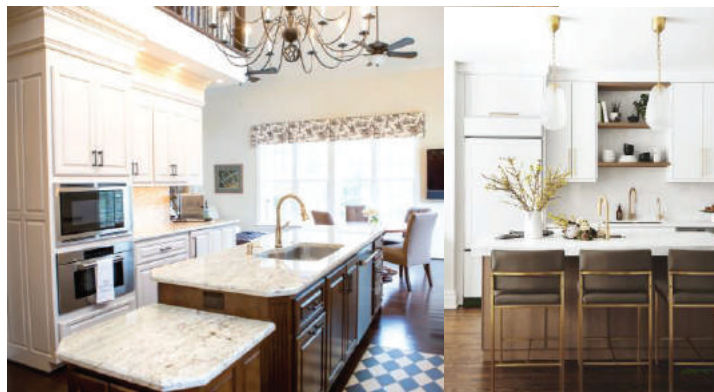


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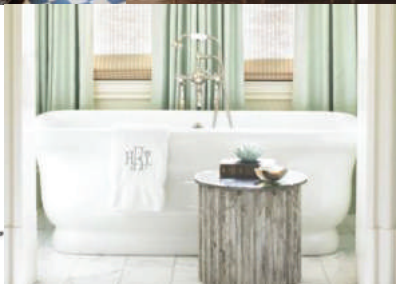
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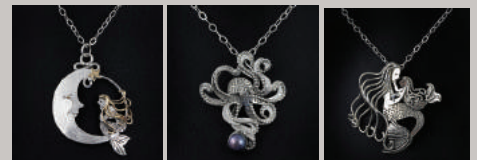
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KATHY DISHNER

Delightful to Look at, Delicious to Taste

By Kristine Hojnicky



Murawski Photography

For the last 40 years, Kathy Dishner has had a custom baking business that has taken several forms in the Williamsburg community. It started in 1996 when Kathy decided to establish a home-based baking business. She had baked from scratch for most of her life, starting with her parents' anniversary cake each year. In 2004, when she was between accounting jobs, she decided to open a storefront bakery in Williamsburg and bring her talents to patrons on a daily basis.

"I don't know what I was thinking," she says with a laugh. "I don't particularly like to get up at six in the morning."

She named the business "Kabbie's Bake Shoppe," a homage to a time when her nephew was unable to pronounce her name, Kathy. "It came out Kabbie," she says. She operated the brick-and-mortar bakery for two years before the strip mall where she was located came under new ownership. Instead of searching for another store front, Kathy

decided to move her business back into her home.

"I have two kitchens in my home. I am considered a cottage baker, which means I can bake goods at home and sell them on a custom basis or at farmer's markets."

Kabbie's Bake Shoppe's specialty is cake. Kathy is most frequently contacted by customers, new and returning, for custom cake orders ranging in occasion from every day to special events like weddings, graduations or

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birthdays. She has one customer who has returned every year for the last ten years for his son's birthday cake.

"Every year we look back at what I've made and come up with a new creation. One year, he asked for an ice cream cake but most years it's chocolate."

Though chocolate cake is her favorite to eat as well, Kathy says her favorite to make is a pound cake recipe she acquired during her first cake decorating class over 50 years ago.

"It's the oldest in my repertoire," she says.

"I can make it plain or add lemon zest or almond. It is so good."

The most challenging cake she ever created for a customer was a Mr. Met groomsmen cake. Mr. Met is the official mascot for Major League Baseball's New York Mets. He is a man with a large baseball for a head, so Kathy fashioned a base using half of a 36-inch Styrofoam ball which she secured to a board her husband made. She then built up the top part of the cake using sculpted carrot cake before rolling out fondant to cover it.

Before her grandson went off to college,

Kathy says he would also challenge her to create a custom design for his birthday each year. One year, she printed a picture he drew on a sugar sheet which she ran through her edible printer. Another year, she made a cake that was 36-inches tall and decorated it to look like the school from the "Way-side School" children's book series in which a school is mistakenly built 30 stories high with one classroom on each floor instead of the original design of 30 classrooms on one floor.

"That was a special cake," Kathy says. "The bottom third was cake, the middle third was Rice Krispies, and the top was Styrofoam."

In addition to cakes, Kabbie's Bake Shoppe specializes in sweet treats like cracker candy or "Krack," which is a saltine cracker covered in toffee sauce before it is covered in melted chocolate chips, as well as cookies. The best cookie recipe she has is a sugar cookie recipe she found and then tweaked so the dough can be used immediately.

"Most sugar cookie recipes have you chill the dough before you roll it out. This one is

versatile. You can flavor it however you want and use it right away, which is great when you're baking with kids."

During the holidays, especially, Kathy will make 20 to 25 different cookie recipes that are then packaged into boxed assortments that her customers can give as gifts.

"I love Christmas and enjoy making decorated cookies and assorted cookies. My customers are always challenging me to find new recipes with their requests."

In fact, there isn't much that Kathy can't make, as long as she can find a recipe for it. She tests out new recipes on the members of her business networking group who meet weekly.

"My motto is delightful to look at, delicious to eat, because it can look good but taste terrible. If I don't have a recipe, I'll find one and give it a go. If you can bake it, I can make it."

Another frequent taste-tester of Kathy's creations is her husband, a retired fire marshal and deputy chief for York County. They built their house near the Bruton Fire Sta-

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tion 26 years ago, with the two kitchens and a wraparound porch complete with rocking chairs and hanging ferns.

“That’s my southern influence,” she says. Kathy is originally from Biloxi, Mississippi, and today almost all of her family lives there or within two hours. Her father was in the Navy and was stationed in Norfolk for most of her life. But when her father was out to sea, her mother would temporarily move Kathy and her three siblings back to Biloxi to live.

After graduating from Norfolk Catholic High School, Kathy moved to North Carolina for several years. She eventually returned to Virginia and settled in the Williamsburg area in 1979, where she raised three sons and a daughter who have since moved to Richmond and Texas, respectively, and have blessed Kathy and her husband with four grandchildren.

“Williamsburg is a quaint community. It feels like a safer place to live. We like to sit out on our porch and wave to our neighbors as they pass. The community is very connect-

ed.”

When she’s not baking at Kabbie’s Bake Shoppe, Kathy enjoys cooking Cajun specialties for her family, cross stitching, sewing and traveling to Disney. “I am a Disney-holic,” she confesses. She also collects strawberry-themed items to add to her large collection of “strawberry things.” It began with strawberry wallpaper and then took on a life of its own.

“I rarely get duplicates though!” she says. An active member of the community, Kathy has taught classes for the Williamsburg Area Learning Tree (WALT), is wrapping up a term as president of the Women’s Club of Toano and serves as president of the Cake Decorators of Tidewater organization based in Virginia Beach. She is also the president of a national organization called the Cookie Cutters Collectors Club.

But out of all of these accomplishments, Kathy says the one she is most proud of is earning her degree in Business Administration from William & Mary.

“I started going to college when we lived in

North Carolina. My daughter was two years old, and I started part-time at UNC-Wilmington. Then we moved, and I didn’t pick school back up until 1984. I earned my associate degree in management from Thomas Nelson Community College and then I transferred to William & Mary and graduated in 1995. That was a big accomplishment because I was working full time and we were building a house. I always joke that I was in the 20-year program.”

William & Mary serves as the location for another one of Kathy’s most unforgettable memories. She attended an artisan craft show hosted at the university and had the opportunity to meet renowned chef, Julia Child.

“She had a cookbook that came out and I was able to have her sign my copy. That cookbook and my mom’s cast iron lamb mold are my two most cherished baking items.”

Baking has always been a way for Kathy to remain connected with her family. She has always made family occasions special by using her baking and decorating talents.



Happy Holidays!

The end of the year brings no greater joy than the opportunity to wish every member of our community the blessings of family, the gift of friends, and the very best of everything in 2022. May your holidays be filled with the joy that leaves long-lasting memories to fill you with happiness throughout the New Year. From all of us at The Peninsula Center, Happy Holidays.



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Through Kabbie's Bake Shoppe, Kathy Dishner hopes to do the same for her customers well into the future for many years to come.

"Baking for others gives me great joy," she says. NDN

Kabbies No Chill Roll Out Sugar Cookie Dough

Ingredients

- 1 lb. unsalted butter at room temperature
- 2 cups granulated sugar
- 2 large eggs
- 4 Tablespoons heavy whipping cream
- 1 Tablespoon lemon extract
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 6 cups all-purpose flour

Directions

In a heavy-duty mixer on medium speed Mix butter and sugar (do not cream) until well incorporated.
In small bowl, mix egg, cream & extracts Add mixture to butter & sugar Mix on low speed until fully incorporated Scrape bowl several times Add flour 1 cup at a time

Continue on low or medium low speed until all the flour is incorporated

Turn out onto a lightly floured surface.

Knead 3 or 4 times till smooth

Roll dough out 3/8" thick on a lightly floured surface.

Cut out your shapes with your cookie cutters Place on a parchment lined cookie sheet

Bake at 350 degrees for 11-13 minutes

Let cool on wire rack til fully cooled before decorating

This will make about 3 dozen 3" cookies

*** You can change extract but total should be 4 teaspoons*

*** This cookie dough does not get chilled*

*** Don't make dough until ready to use*

*** Cookies should be just lightly brown on the bottom. Bake one cookie to test time in your oven*

*** I usually cut the dough into quarters and roll each quarter out, saving the scraps. Combine all scraps to roll out again (dough can be rolled out two to three times as long as you don't add too much flour)*

Next Door Neighbors

Publisher.....Meredith Collins
Editor.....Narielle Living, narielleliving@gmail.com
Copy Editor.....Ginger White
Photographer.....Mason Murawski
Account Manager.....Anne Conkling

Writers

Linda Landreth Phelps, Caroline Johnson, Brandy Centolanza, Alison Johnson, Susan Williamson, Lillian Stevens, Melanie Occhiuzzo, Morgan Barker, Cathy Welch, Christopher LaPointe, Michael Heslink, Gail Dillon, Lauren Plunkett, Ben Mackin, Laura Lane, Dawn Brotherton, Dayna Hutson, Harmony Hunter, Wheston Chancellor Grove, Ashley Smith, Kathleen Toomey Jabs, Page Brotherton, Kristine Hojnicky and Cynthia Fellows Rich, Cathy Sliwoski, Jennifer Holden

Advertising Information

Meredith Collins

(757) 560-3235

meredith@williamsburgneighbors.com

www.WilliamsburgNeighbors.com

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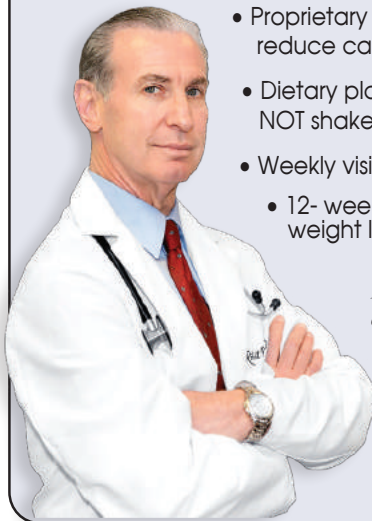


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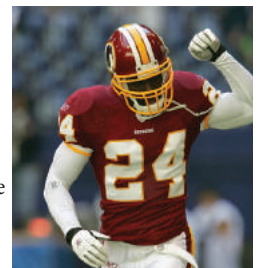


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DR. LINIA WILLIS

Cut the Crust

By Narielle Living



Murawski Photography

The small town of Moneta, Virginia, nestled in Bedford County and near Smith Mountain Lake, used to be home for Dr. Linia Willis. Today, home is Williamsburg.

“I always love going back home,” she says. “But I’ve been a resident of Williamsburg since 2012.” Her move to this area initially occurred because of school. “After attending James Madison University in Harrisonburg, I went to Hampton University for my master’s degree. So, my moves really kind of correlated with jobs. It seems like I kept kind of

moving west.”

Her job is her passion, and as a speech-language pathologist, Dr. Willis is on a mission. Her blog, dysphoodie.com, is a guide for people who love food but have difficulty swallowing, a condition known as dysphagia.

When Dr. Willis lived in Hampton as a graduate student, she worked for the Hampton City Schools. “The thing about speech pathology is that it’s so vast and speech covers so much. I enjoyed working with chil-

dren, especially around this time of year with the holidays.” Most of what she did, she says, is related to articulation, fluency and language skills. “A lot of times we’re known as the speech teacher, where there’s more of a pullout model of working on those things. At that time, I wasn’t really big into the dysphagia piece, but I knew that it was my goal.”

She later moved to Newport News and began working for Riverside Hospital, a career move that brought her into a more med-

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ical setting. “I loved the Williamsburg area,” she says. “And then, it just so happened that when I was looking for a house, being in Williamsburg worked perfectly.”

Dr. Willis says she was fortunate to work as a student intern with Dr. Arnetta Hamrick, another local speech pathologist. “I have a lot to thank her for, because she sparked my interest in the medical side of this profession. I got to see a different side of speech than I was traditionally used to. So, my goal was that after I graduated and completed my clinical fellowship year, I would dive into the medical side of things which includes more of the swallowing therapy and cognition.”

For about four years, Dr. Willis worked at Sentara Williamsburg Regional Medical Center.

“For outpatient appointments, I would perform a diagnostic called a modified barium swallow study. If you’re a PCP or a specialist, and your patient complains that they’re feeling like things are stuck or they’re having trouble swallowing, they sent them

over to me at the hospital so I could take a look.”

This procedure allowed Dr. Willis insight into what was happening as people swallowed. She had a range of patients, she says. “Williamsburg is very diverse, but a lot of my patients were older. Anytime someone came in with a stroke alert, we had to evaluate them within 24 hours per stroke code protocol. So, there was a range [of people]. The one thing that I saw was that there seemed to be an uptick of strokes with the COVID pandemic, because the virus can affect the vascular system. I had a lot of referrals for those patients too.”

The interesting thing, Dr. Willis notes, is that at some point many people experience issues with swallowing. It might be after surgery, or even from a common cold that results in laryngitis. “Sometimes you just need to sip some hot tea. People don’t refer to the medical term as dysphagia. Some studies show 15% of the population probably has undiagnosed dysphagia.” She explains that there are a variety of disorders where dyspha-

gia is a symptom of the condition. “Dysphagia is always a symptom of something else. But dysphagia can also be transient; it could last for a couple of days, a couple of weeks, or it could be kind of a lifelong thing. For instance, people who have Parkinson’s disease are expected to deal with that in the later stages of the disease.”

Dr. Willis’ journey, she says, is to shed light on this condition and educate people on how to deal with it and what foods they can eat. “I want to make dysphagia a household name so people understand it and know how to identify it. And then make it more of mainstream because I think it’s widely under-diagnosed and people don’t have a way to navigate through that process.”

In July 2021, Dr. Willis moved into her new role as an assistant professor at Hampton University after obtaining her clinical doctorate from Northwestern University in 2020. “I’m really excited,” she says. “I want to bring the real-life medical side of the profession alive for students, to encourage them that they can enter this field. I think for



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some people it can be a little scary when it comes to the medical setting.”

“In my experience, I find that after a while, people may start to normalize behaviors such as when food gets stuck in their throats. We naturally try to compensate, whether it’s taking smaller bites or sips or trying to avoid certain foods.” Often, she says, people will rationalize that if they simply stay away from popcorn or nuts or any food that gives them difficulty, everything will be okay. When they do this, they forget that they need to take things a step further to understand if there have been any physical changes caused by an underlying condition.


“There are so many things when it comes to swallowing that we have to separate. Is it a structure issue or a function? We don’t know until we look. Also, many things can change within the anatomy of the throat as we age, known as presbyphagia. It could be something simple. Swallowing is something that we’ve done since we came out of the womb, and it is one of the last things to go as we age. It is a reflexive process, and it should be

very simple, so any change to it is something that you don’t want to ignore.”

Dr. Willis has a vision and mission: to make dysphagia a household name. “I want people to know, especially patients or their caregivers or families, that they can have a seat at the table. There are many recipes or food that’s ready-made that can be simply modified so their loved ones can eat it despite having trouble swallowing. They can enjoy the food as well.”

Eating is social and can be an integral part of people’s lives and how they interact with each other. To be cut off from this type of socialization can be disheartening.

“One of my blogs, and kind of my catch phrase, is called ‘Cut the Crust.’ When it comes to foods like pumpkin pie, sweet potato pie or lemon meringue cheesecake, if you cut the crust, the filling of the pie is actually considered puree, or similar to a pudding or an apple sauce. So, if someone has dysphagia and can only eat puree or soft foods, there are many things that we can do to make it safe but not sacrifice taste and presentation.

I think that’s a big piece of having a better quality of life, so I want it to be more of an inclusive movement to give awareness to the public.” 

Cheers to this simple dysphagia-friendly recipe.

Ingredients

1 slice of sweet potato pie**

1 slice of plain cheesecake

4 tbsp of whipped topping

**may substitute for another pie such as pumpkin, lemon meringue, or chocolate cream for a pureed texture (does not require chewing, no nuts or chips- IDDSI Level 4)

Directions

1. Cut the crust off pie and cheesecake.
2. Scoop pie filling into bottom of martini glass.
3. Complete the second layer with cheesecake.
4. Spread whipped topping for top layer.
5. Garnish with whipped cream and a dash of cinnamon - enjoy!



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CHEF TIMOTHY GRAYSON

Food *and* Family

By Narielle Living



Murawski Photography

Sometimes events in our lives conspire to put us precisely where we are meant to be. For Chef Timothy Grayson, a job at Disney World did exactly that. “My first job in the food service industry was at Disney,” he says. “That was my first job coming out of high school.” Back then, Timothy says, jobs at Disney were a little different than they may be today. When he got the job, he didn’t know anything about working for the entertainment giant or food service. He says Disney would simply assign people wherever they were needed. “They put me in food service, and I did very well.” He says that in those years, Disney was not as big as it is now, and the people who worked there formed a close-knit community.

Originally from North Carolina, Timothy calls Orlando, Florida home. “I went to high school in Sanford, Florida and went to college at the University of Central Florida in Orlando.” He started working in the food service industry right out of school, and he has been in the business for about 40 years. Today, he works for Sodexo, the company that provides meals and catering management for a wide range of institutions throughout the world. “I’ve been with Sodexo for around 14 years.”

Prior to working with Sodexo, Timothy worked in a number of other ventures. “I co-owned a restaurant in downtown Orlando.”

Owning and operating a restaurant can be stressful, though, and there were times that

Timothy had to go the extra mile. “There were nights I’d sleep in there because we had a big wine inventory, and the burglar alarm would go off because of that. You couldn’t leave it.”

In addition, Timothy has spent time working as a chef on a variety of different boats, including river boats and cruise ships. The travel involved with working on a river boat was manageable, but when he began working for larger cruise ships, the hours became overwhelming. “When I started, I worked for a cruise ship management company,” he says. “I worked on river boats on the Mississippi and the Columbia River, and I would work for maybe four weeks, and then I’d come home for two weeks, so that

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wasn't bad. But when I started going international, I had to be away for months, with only a few weeks home. That just got to be a lot."

When Timothy accepted a job as a chef with Sodexo, he did not begin his employment in this area. Prior to working at William & Mary, he was based in Spokane, Washington. "For about five years, I was at a school called Whitworth University, which is a small religious school in Spokane. I worked at various universities throughout the northwest as far down as Los Angeles, supporting different places that needed help."

But it can be difficult to work and live on the opposite coast from family, so Timothy and his wife began to rethink their location. "I don't have any relatives in Washington state, which is beautiful, and I enjoyed my time there, but it's just not my home. I started looking for a position back east again." Although Sodexo is an enormous corporation, Timothy was happy to learn that previous co-worker Jason Aupied was on the east coast, and they would have the opportunity to work together again. "I've been at William & Mary now for about four and a half years."

Pre-pandemic, Timothy might have moved around and assisted at other institutions in the area as needed. However, since COVID, that has not been the case. Instead, he has remained on the William & Mary campus more than in "normal" times. "I've been focused on this location," he says. "Because of the shortages in labor and things of that nature, last year, we didn't have a chef at one of the resident dining halls. So basically, I was the chef at one of the resident dining halls last year. Prior to COVID, I was moving around a lot more." Of course, if he has time, he lends a hand where needed. "Occasionally, when there is time on the breaks, I'll help other schools. I went over to Virginia Tech and helped them for a week."

Twice a year, Sodexo chefs from around the world venture to the United States on a four-week tour of select cafes and dining halls in which Sodexo provides food service, participating in a program called the Global Chef Program. Timothy participates in this program in a couple of ways. "Pre-COVID, we had it at William & Mary twice a year. We had two chefs come from different countries and showcase their recipes."

In addition, he was chosen as the Global Chef from the United States to go to China. "My team and I went to China, where we were hosted by the dad of one of the Chinese students. We saw a lot of the techniques and went to the kitchens Sodexo operates throughout Hong Kong." Unfortunately, prior to COVID, he had been scheduled to return to China with Sodexo to be the Global Chef, but the emergence of the virus forced his plans to change.

Food is integral to Timothy's life, not just because it's his occupation, but also because he recognizes the deeper emotional importance of food. "Food really connects a lot with memories," he says, including childhood memories of family meals. "I'd have to say Southern food is my favorite because that's part of my memories. Church picnics and stuff like that."

When he's not working, Timothy and his wife Iryna love to travel. "The thing that we do the most is travel. We like to see different places. That's probably our number one hobby."

Fortunately, when they travel, they have a multitude of relatives

throughout the world they can visit. “My wife is Russian, and she has relatives throughout Europe. We have relatives in Italy and Spain and Ukraine and Russia... everywhere, really.” This year they are considering travel to someplace warm for the holidays, perhaps Nassau in the Bahamas.

For Chef Timothy Grayson, food and family are the most important things in his life, and not necessarily in that order. Now that his daughter is grown, with children of her own, his life has changed a bit. He offers a kernel of wisdom during this hectic holiday season: “It’s different for us than when we had small children. It’s nice for the holidays when you have little ones around and they are into the wonderment of Christmas and looking for Santa. I miss all that stuff. When you have little ones, enjoy your time, because it goes quickly.”

Today, he’s looking after other people’s kids by feeding them in the best way possible. “The kids at William & Mary are good kids. They got there because they had to work hard academically. It’s not an easy school to get into, and we try to do the best that we can for the kids because it’s important to have good food.” NDN

Colonial Style James River Oyster and Giblett Dressing

(Recipe for a 12 lb. Turkey or Six People)

Timothy Grayson, Campus Executive Chef William and Mary

3 Cups of well chopped Boneless Turkey Giblett Mixture

3 - 9 ounce day old French Bread loaves torn into small pieces

3 Tablespoons of Olive oil

1 Pint of shucked local oysters with their liquid

1 10.5 ounce can of Campbell’s or similar chicken broth soup

1 ½ Cups of finely chopped onions

1 Cup of chopped green bell pepper

1 Cup of chopped Red Bell Pepper

1/3 cups of finely chopped Shallots

1 Cup of chopped celery

3 Tablespoons of chopped fresh parsley

1 Tablespoon of Poultry Seasoning

3/4 tablespoon of Salt

½ Tablespoon ground Black pepper

4 large Eggs Beaten

Directions

In a saucepan, cover the turkey giblett mix with water (if not enough giblett, add additional chopped chicken livers) and boil until tender over medium heat. Then save with the liquid and set aside.

Strain the liquid from the oysters and mix the liquid with the turkey and giblett mix and with 1 can of chicken broth soup. Then take the torn French bread and soak it in the liquid mixture.

In a large skillet over medium high heat, sauté onions in olive oil. When brown, add the shallots and then the celery, then add the bell peppers and Poultry seasoning. Then chop up the oysters and add to mix with chopped parsley, and sauté for two to three minutes more. Then mix all with bread mix, and after cooling slightly, incorporate the beaten eggs and add salt and pepper.

Can stuff turkey with mixture or can put in large greased casserole dish and bake at 350F for 35 minutes and heat throughout.

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WDCo staff pictured with Congressman Rob Wittman during his visit to our pharmacy in September. He congratulated us on our COVID-19 vaccination response and received a tour of our PCAB accredited compounding lab.



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JASON AUPIED

A Journey with Food

By Narielle Living



Murawski Photography

Jason Aupied loves where his life has taken him and where he has ended up. He came to Virginia five years ago for a job opportunity in food service at William & Mary. “I’ve been with Sodexo for 25 years,” he says. “I started at my alma mater, Nicholls State University in Louisiana, and then had opportunities to move as my career grew. Plus, I was blessed with a wife who was willing to go on that journey, so we’ve lived everywhere from Georgia to Washington State and ac-

tually spent 12 years out west before coming here. Montana, Wyoming, Washington, and we were in Phoenix immediately before coming here.”

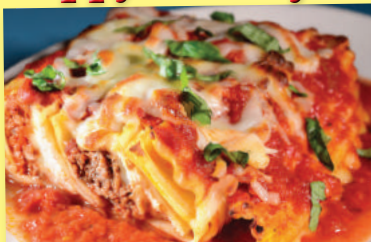
When the opportunity to move to this part of the country came up for Jason, he considered it to be a good move for him and his family. He is originally from south Louisiana, an area drenched in good food and good music. “I was born and raised in the south Lafourche area and when I was older

and got married, we lived in the Thibodaux area.”

For Jason, that will always be home, but he feels like he has come to an area that has an echo of his native region. Today, he is excited about the prospect of the upcoming holidays. “We’ve got our first trip planned. It’s been a few years since we’ve been back home, so we’ll be heading down for Christmas.”

He started at his job in Virginia as a resi-

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dent district manager and has recently moved into the role of district manager. “When I came here, my whole district was William & Mary. With COVID, we had managers who were at a point where they were on the cusp of retirement anyway and the timing just worked, so a couple of district managers retired, and I temporarily took on additional accounts to help support them. William & Mary is my largest property, but I also support University of Mary Washington and Virginia Wesleyan.”

Jason and his wife of 26 years, Chantell, enjoy living here. “We really enjoy all the outdoor opportunities,” he says. “We like to hike and bike, and we’ve found a lot of places in the area to be able to do that and stay active.”

Jason’s role within his company is to oversee the entire dining portfolio on campus. “It’s the whole thing, from managing our relationship with the university to overseeing the day-to-day operations throughout the dining halls and the retail, restaurants and our catering program.” In addition, he says,

a lot of what he does is focused on providing a positive guest experience and the student experience. “The role that I’m in now encompasses the whole dining program.”

A chef by trade, Jason worked in restaurants prior to landing in his current role. He spent two years in corporate services managing the on-site catering and restaurant at a chemical plant in Louisiana. “I couldn’t get back into campus work quick enough,” he says. “I didn’t know it was Friday breakfast and lunch. I didn’t work weekends, I didn’t really work nights, but I gave that up to get back onto campus because it just encompasses such an energy to it. This is a dynamic environment, and that’s part of what I like about it. One of the challenges in my position is being strategic and making sure that our program is staying on trend and evolving as our students do.”

The landscape of university dining has changed drastically over the 20-plus years that Jason has been working in this field. “It definitely doesn’t look the same today as it did 20 years ago, and I think part of

that is driven by the students. The students are more food savvy and know more about food.” He says that he strives to provide variety in food sources to keep students interested and give them diversity and choices. “Anybody would get tired of the same food in the same place every day.”

In addition to their outdoor activities, it is no surprise that Jason and his wife enjoy cooking. “We like to cook,” he says. “We do the majority of our cooking at home, but we also like to try local restaurants. We’re very much food oriented, partly because of what I do for a living, but it’s also a part of our culture. Growing up in South Louisiana, it’s a very food-oriented culture that we have. So, we definitely enjoy hanging out at local restaurants as much as we enjoy cooking at home. And of course, if there’s an opportunity to go out and listen to live music and have a couple of beverages and try some good food, we’re always down for something.”

Working in the food industry is not a job for everyone. “It’s definitely something you have to love. It’s definitely a labor of love and

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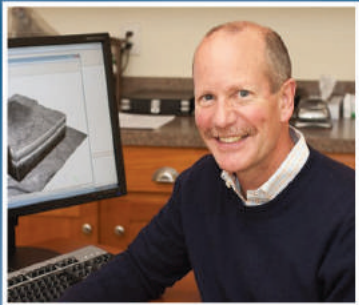
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something that you have to really enjoy. And for me, I do.” Jason says that the beauty of his current role is that it allows him to cook on his own terms. “I’m not in the kitchen every day, but I still have opportunities to create. But a lot of what I do is creating at home. It’s really an expressive outlet for us to be in the kitchen to be able to cook.” Jason and his wife discussed sharing a recipe with readers, and they decided to share a very special family recipe for tea cookies. “This is actually one of Chantell’s grandmother’s recipes that we typically make around the holidays.”

Jason and Chantell have two children, both grown. Against their father’s wishes, both children are now working in food service. “This type of job can be a hard road. I asked them if there was something else they wanted to do. But no, they’re both in the industry. Our son is at Blue Talon and cooks there, and our daughter works at Precarious Beer Hall.” He notes that this was what they grew up with, so that is probably what steered them toward their current jobs.

As he mentioned earlier, Jason Aupied and his family spent many years moving around the country for his job. He believes this was a good thing for his family to experience. “We moved when they were fairly young the first time, but I think it has been great for them.” He emphasizes that they taught their children to value travel and explore new places. He also notes that they handled the moves with maturity. “I was blessed,” he says. “I had a wife and kids who were willing to go on that journey with me. When we moved to Virginia, my son was wrapping up his senior year of high school.” Because of the dates they came here, his son had to fly back a couple of weeks after the move and take his final exams. His daughter was in high school as well, and he says that the fact that they were willing to pick up and move across the country was great. Of course, the rewards of living in a variety of places have been high as well.

“They got to live in Montana for eight years and experience that, and I was at Gonzaga for four years, so they got to experience being in Washington state and the basketball games at Gonzaga.” Jason is proud of the fact that his kids befriended a multitude of people and today, they still remain in touch with many of their friends in other states. “We got to meet a lot of different people and try a lot of different food and I think that’s probably been the most rewarding thing about this journey.” NDN

Tea Cookies

(makes 6-7 dozen)

Ingredients

- 1 cup Crisco
- 2 sticks butter
- 4 cups sugar
- 8 eggs
- 12 tsp baking powder
- 2 tsp vanilla
- 2 ¼ lb flour

Cream butter and Crisco together. Add sugar, eggs, baking powder, and vanilla. Mix well. Separate into 4 equal parts. On floured surface, roll out one part of dough to ½ inch. Use desired cookie cutter to cut out cookies. Bake at 350°F for 9 minutes on center rack.



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A Special Cookbook Returned

By Alison Johnson



Murawski Photography

Twenty-six years ago, Leigh Anne Langston received a cookbook as a wedding gift from a longtime family friend named Ola Mae Richardson.

Ola Mae, a grandmotherly figure to Leigh Anne and many other Toano residents, wrote “Best wishes for a happy marriage and with this cookbook happy meals, Love ya, Nannie Ola,” inside its front cover.

The paperback, titled “Bread of Life,” was a 1993 collection of recipes from members

of York River Baptist Church in celebration of its 10th anniversary. Leigh Anne wasn’t a congregant but knew several of the authors, some of whom have since passed away.

The book symbolizes what Leigh Anne, 53, loves most about cooking: connecting with loved ones through mostly simple, unfussy, low-stress dishes.

“It truly is a treasured gift,” she says. “It’s got a lot of sentimental value and is my go-to when I am planning meals, especially

when I want to try something new. Honestly, it might be about the only wedding gift I still have.”

On July 12, Leigh Anne brought the cookbook to Harris Teeter in Lightfoot to shop for ingredients for a recipe. As she left, she forgot to grab it out of her shopping cart.

The first time Leigh Anne inquired at the customer service desk, the book wasn’t in the lost and found box. After she posted



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about the situation on Facebook, several people offered to look during their shopping trips. One even gave her a new copy, but it wasn't the same.

Eleven days later, Leigh Anne decided to make one more visit to customer service. To her surprise, this time the cookbook was behind the counter. "I was so relieved, and the employees were so excited that I had come back," she says. "I actually cried."

Since then, Leigh Anne has enjoyed making "Bread of Life" recipes even more, while also trying out recipes from other cookbooks in her growing collection. She encourages people to treat the preparation of meals and desserts as a fun experiment, not a pressure cooker.

"It shouldn't be an, 'Oh gosh, we'll go hungry and everyone will laugh if this fails' type of thing," she advises. "Nothing has to be gourmet or complicated. Just start doing it, and always have backup food. It's perfectly fine to have grilled cheese or macaroni and cheese in the end."

Born in Richmond, Leigh Anne lived in Hampton and Newport News as a young child before her family settled in Williamsburg when she was 11. Her mother and grandmother cooked basic meals that they served in an informal eat-in kitchen.

Leigh Anne was also 11 when she went to an Easter Sunday church service and wanted to receive Jesus Christ as her Savior. The pastor directed her to a smiling woman sitting in the front row, who asked her if she believed Jesus died for her sins, if she repented her sins, and if she accepted Jesus into her heart.

"I answered yes to all these questions," Leigh Anne says. "That nice lady is now my mother-in-law." She would meet her future husband that day, too, then a young teenager, although they didn't become a couple until after college.

While Leigh Anne always found cooking interesting during home economics classes at James Blair Middle School and Lafayette High School, sewing was, and remains,

along with quilting, her favorite hobby.

After graduation, Leigh Anne earned a degree in Business Administration from Bridgewater College and a Master of Education: in Educational Technology and Online Instruction from Liberty University. Now a stay-at-home wife and mother, she has worked in human resources at a bank, as an assistant to a real estate agent, and as a teacher and school development leader.

Leigh Anne also homeschooled her son Hunter, 18, for eight years. Hunter, a recent graduate of Liberty University Online Academy, is taking a gap year to decide on his future educational plans.

As a homemaker, Leigh Anne gradually figured out cooking by closely following recipes. Experimentation was not her strong suit, and there were plenty of kitchen mishaps.

"I've definitely burned pans," she admits with a laugh. "My family had a joke: 'When the smoke detector goes off, dinner's ready.'" Leigh Anne naturally gravitated toward

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baking, which involves more precise mixes of listed ingredients for proper chemistry. When Hunter was growing up, she made special themed cakes for his birthday, including a spaceship and a tugboat.

"I have a friend whose husband made themed birthday cakes, so we tried to outdo each other," she says. "It was so much fun."

Leigh Anne also has aimed to cook at least one family meal a day. Sometimes, she has mapped out meal plans for an entire month, but nothing is elaborate: fried or baked chicken after Sunday church, Taco Tuesdays with tacos, burritos or enchiladas, steak on Friday, and frozen pizzas, burgers, pastas and Chick-fil-A pickups in the rotation.

Ideas and guidance have come from YouTube videos, TV cooking shows and online sites such as Pinterest. "I enjoy eating, and therefore I cook," Leigh Anne says. "It's also nice to be able to provide for the guys in my life. Our dinners have really brought us together."

Favorites from "Bread of Life" include a breakfast casserole with eggs, sausage, cheese, cubed bread, Worcestershire sauce and mustard, which Leigh Anne serves Christmas morning. The dish is a make-ahead recipe, leaving little effort or clean up on the holiday.

As for the chicken casserole recipe that she chose to share, she says, "It is a comfort food. No frills, no fuss, just throw together and bake. It is so yummy, and we have leftovers. Bonus! I can use either packaged chicken breasts or chicken from a can."

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Leigh Anne took her baking to the next level by developing her bread-making skills, much to her family's delight. She relied largely on a Williams-Sonoma kids' cookbook, which is filled with detailed instructions and photos.

Leigh Anne has whipped up bagels, loaf white bread, artisan style bread in a cast iron pot, dinner rolls and braided bread, with plans to tackle soft pretzels soon. She also has worked more with spices, making her own taco seasoning and "everything" bagel topping.

In addition, Leigh Anne has canned her own salsa, apple butter, tomatoes and more, sometimes teaming up with friends to share produce from their gardens. One year, she and a friend won a top prize for their salsa at a James City County fair.

"I've just realized that there's a lot I don't need to get at the store," she says. "I can do it myself. I like being able to make and store our own food. It's a cool feeling to think, 'Hey, I did that!'"

One of Leigh Anne's favorite holiday traditions is exchanging homemade cookies with family, friends and neighbors. Not surprisingly, her go-to recipes are uncomplicated.

"Nestlé Tollhouse Cookies with chocolate chips, right off the package," she says. "Or peanut butter cookies with the Hershey's Kisses pressed in the middle. I love when it's cold outside and you turn on the oven and heat up the kitchen and do something that makes people happy."

Amidst all her baking and cooking this holiday season, Leigh Anne Langston will give thanks that her special cookbook is back.

"It's brought me a lot of joy," she says. "It reminds me how food connects people, even people who are no longer with us. That's what cooking is about for me, not trying to be perfect." NDN

CHICKEN CASSEROLE

From "Bread of Life" from York River Baptist Church, 1993

Ingredients

2-3 chicken breasts*, cooked, shredded

1 medium onion, chopped

1 can mushroom pieces, drained and chopped

2-3 cups Pepperidge Farm stuffing, blue bag

1 stick of butter, melted

1 soup can of chicken broth

1 can cream of chicken soup

1 can cream of mushroom soup

Instructions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Cook chicken breasts, boiling them for 15-20 minutes until done. Mix butter with stuffing until coated well. Place half of stuffing on the bottom of a 9x13 baking dish (Square baking dish may be used.). Layer onions, mushrooms and shredded chicken. Combine chicken broth and soups together until mixed thoroughly. Pour over chicken. Cover with remaining stuffing mixture. Bake for 30 minutes uncovered.

*Substitution: 2 cans of chicken may be used to replace chicken breasts.

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HEATHER HULBERT

Having Fun with **Healthy Cooking**

By Brandy Centolanza

FINE 茶



Murawski Photography

Heather Hulbert, owner of The Spice & Tea Exchange in downtown Williamsburg, first became interested in the company about nine years ago following a weight loss journey. Heather, who grew up on her grandmother's Southern cooking, had lost 100 pounds and was looking for ways to incorporate healthier cooking into her new lifestyle.

"I had to relearn how to cook everything," Heather says. She started using The Spice & Tea Exchange spices and blends at home,

particularly the Tuscany Spice Blend.

"The Tuscany Spice Blend is my personal favorite," Heather says. "You can use it in everything when you are cooking. I also like the Tandoori Roasting Spice Blend. We have so many to choose from."

Heather was raised on the Northern Neck in Tappahannock. Prior to owning her business, she had been an employee for the Riverside Health System for 10 years, working as an X-ray and CT technician. But eventually she decided to step out of her comfort

zone and become a business owner by buying The Spice & Tea Exchange franchise in Williamsburg.

Heather was familiar with the company, and not just as a consumer. Heather's mother, Penny Rehling, also happens to be the Chief Operating Officer and Owner of The Spice & Tea Exchange parent company, which is based in Florida, and has provided support and encouragement throughout Heather's business venture.

"My mother has been a great mentor for



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me, for sure,” Heather says.

Heather bought The Spice & Tea Exchange from a couple who was retiring, and she recently celebrated six years as owner in October 2021. The Williamsburg location is one of roughly 80 franchises across the country, and only one of two in Virginia, with the other one located in Alexandria.

When Heather first purchased the business, they had a storefront in downtown Williamsburg on Prince George Street. Last year, the business moved to Duke of Gloucester Street next to the La Piazza restaurant where The Trellis used to be. Heather and her team moved during Black Friday weekend of last year.

“The expansion has been extremely beneficial,” Heather says. “Here, we have more exposure. I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to move in such a weird year.”

Heather’s job also provides flexibility in her schedule, enabling her to spend more quality time with her three daughters, Johanna, 13; Catherine, 12; and Virginia, 7.

“It allows me to be with my family more and allows me to be the mother I want to be,” she says. “The girls like to help me when I am cooking, and they help me out at the store.”

Heather’s favorite aspect of the job is spending time with her customers, who are a combination of locals and tourists as well as William & Mary students.

“I love the customer interaction,” she says. “I love sharing new flavors and new recipes with people and introducing someone new to loose-leaf tea and different spices.”

Being located downtown in the heart of Williamsburg has also afforded Heather the opportunity to get to know other business owners as well as other members of the community.

“Everyone has really embraced us,” Heather says. “We have a lot of regulars who know me now by name and know my children’s names. It’s been nice.”

The Spice & Tea Exchange works frequently with other businesses such as local restaurants and breweries on a variety of collaborations. Heather is often called upon to offer her expertise on what flavors pair well with dishes or beers depending on the season.

“In August, Billsburg Brewery used one of our sugars and one of our teas to make a hard seltzer,” Heather shares. “We also work with the Precarious Beer Project. They use a lot of our teas and spices for The Bake Shop, Amber Ox, and Electric Circus. Businesses will come in here with a vision and I help them tweak it. It’s been a lot of fun.”

Heather and her daughters like to spend time traveling as well as dining out to sample different foods.

“We go to Florida a lot, and to Shenandoah,” Heather says. “I love to give my kids experiences rather than things. My kids are foodies like me. We enjoy trying different flavors and ethnic foods, so we like to go anywhere where there is good food.”

Locally, Heather’s favorite restaurants include Electric Circus at Precarious Beer Hall and the new Masala Craft Indian Kitchen in

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Courthouse Commons here in Williamsburg as well as Java Jacks Coffee House in Tappahannock.

"I really like Java Jacks," she says. "The Northern Neck is riddled with lots of small, wonderful places to eat."

Heather also frequently likes to experiment with cooking at home, coming up with new creations using The Spice & Tea Exchange products. Her favorite dishes include a slow cooker Butter Chicken and Garden Chili. One of her personal recipe creations, Adobo Pork Bake, is now also on file with the company and shared with guests around the country.

The holidays, of course, are a special time for enjoying meals with loved ones. On the night before Christmas, Heather and her family indulge in tacos, a tradition started years ago by her mother.

"We always have a taco bar using our Fiesta Taco seasoning on Christmas Eve, and then we have a brunch on Christmas morning," Heather says. "This year, I am looking forward to Christmas in Williamsburg, and all the extensive lights, Grand Illumination, the presence of Santa on Duke of Gloucester Street, The Fifes & Drums playing. It's going to be a lot of fun."

She sees herself as a role model, since, at the age of 34, she is among the youngest female business owners within The Spice & Tea Exchange company. "I am a firm believer in personal growth," Heather says. "A lot of people think that entrepreneurship is hard. I jumped in with both feet, and I've learned a lot and I've grown a lot."

Heather Hulbert's future goals include a possible expansion, opening another location of Spice & Tea Exchange in either Richmond or Virginia Beach.

"I'd also like to continue with more business-to-business collaborations and do more community outreach," Heather says. "Of course, we also always want to continue to deliver the best products and customer service that we can." NDN

Spiced Red Sangria

Ingredients

- 4 Tbsp. The Spice & Tea Exchange Cinnamon Plum Herbal Tea
- 32 oz. Filtered Water
- 1 Bottle Pinot Noir Wine
- 4 oz. White Rum
- Sliced fruits (your choice)
- Cinnamon Stick (optional garnish)

Preparation

1. Heat filtered water to boiling. Steep the herbal tea for five minutes. Strain and allow to come to room temperature.
2. Mix brewed tea, pinot noir, rum, and sliced fruits in a large pitcher.
3. Allow sangria to chill in fridge for at least four hours or overnight before serving.
4. Serve in a pitcher accompanied by wine glasses or tumblers. Make sure to scoop some fruit into each glass. Garnish with a cinnamon stick.

KELLY SUPPLEE

A Place to Stay

By Lillian Stevens



Murawski Photography

Part of the uniqueness and charm of Williamsburg is the relative ease with which one can be in the country within minutes of being at any one of the touristy places like Duke of Gloucester Street, Busch Gardens or even New Town. That is a certainly a draw for some of the area's bed & breakfast establishments, including Mallardee Farm.

Mallardee Farm, owned by Kelly Supplee, has an even more unique angle, however.

Aptly named for the ducks on its pond and chickadees on the property, Mallardee got its start as a small farm and hunting

lodge. While it is no longer a hunting lodge, the B&B is the only one in Williamsburg that is home to rescue animals.

"We have four dogs, two cats, four pigs, five sheep and three goats," Kelly says. "I rescued each one. From the start, I knew I wanted to have animals, and it turns out my guests really enjoy them too."

The property is zoned for agritourism, meaning there's a focus on the rural lifestyle. This sometimes attracts urbanites who are interested in visiting rural areas and understanding that lifestyle.

"We're just a short drive away from all the places tourists want to visit," Kelly says. "But we also have 57 acres and a recreational pond to offer for those who want to get away from the hustle and bustle."

Kelly and her husband, Paul, a local home inspector, live in the back part of the house. Guests have a private bedroom and bathroom, as well as free rein over the common spaces which include a kitchen, expansive back sunporch and living room. There's also an outdoor patio and dining space.

On Christmas morning, Kelly and her

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family will dine on one of her show-stoppers: French Toast Bread Pudding.

"I found this recipe years ago, but I've changed it to make it my own," she says.

Kelly says her mother was a gourmet cook, as was her grandmother.

"Cooking has always been a big part of my family," she says. "I'm of Italian heritage, so I love cooking, especially Italian food. My mom was full Italian. She was probably my main cooking influence. I remember being in the newspaper when we were little, making cookies for Christmastime."

Fast forward to the holidays. Kelly says that she and Paul will take a pause as Christmas Day approaches.

"We stay busy year round, and we have a lot of repeat guests who come in December. But we keep Christmas for family. It's just about the only time guests aren't on property. Paul comes from a really big family, so they'll be here. By the time we get the table set in here and in the formal dining room we're up to 25 to 30 people."

A large Christmas tree will grace the expansive sun porch on the back of the house. Other decorations include items Kelly has

collected over the years.

"I have some things that were my mother's and grandmother's," she says. "I always incorporate those. I also have some of the most beautiful things that guests have given me over the years, which I like to put out at Christmas."

Much of the holiday decorating, however, happens on the exterior.

"Paul loves exterior illumination, as he calls it," says Kelly. "So, we do a lot of outside lights."

The couple has been at the helm of Mal-lardee for about seven years now, but Kelly and Paul learned the ropes when they launched another bed & breakfast in the city, back in the 1990s.

"We owned and operated the Indian Springs Bed & Breakfast, near William & Mary's campus," she says. "We did host guests at Christmastime back then."

"We have wooded walking trails and a large pond that's popular with a lot of our guests," Kelly says. "We also provide complimentary fishing poles, as well as a canoe, row boat and kayaks to use on our seven-acre pond."

The animals love visitors, but people are not allowed inside the pens.

"My pigs weigh about 650 pounds," Kelly says. "And the goats are sweet as can be, and so are the sheep. All of my animals are girls. I call the sheep 'the biddies' because they scream at me every time I come around."

Kelly and Paul also do their own landscaping and tend to several vegetable gardens. She grows watermelons, especially for the pigs.

"My pigs enjoy my watermelons and whatever else we have left over!"

Kelly got her start in the business many years ago when she was looking for innovative ways to earn an income while being a stay-at-home mother.

"After Paul and I got married and started our family, we put our heads together to try to figure out something to do to make money. My parents were the ones who came up with the B&B idea."

Kelly's mother passed away in 2005. Her stepdad John Jamison, former dean of the School of Business Administration at W&M (now known as the Mason School

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of Business), died ten years later.

"Mallardee Farm belonged to my parents," Kelly says. When Kelly Supplee inherited the property, she knew exactly what she wanted to do.

"My mom was really good at interior design, so this place came ready, willing and able when it was my turn," she says. "The first thing I did was build a barn so I could keep animals here."

At the time, there was a full-time housekeeper and a gardener who had worked for Kelly's mom on the property, and they both lived close by. "Ruby, the housekeeper, taught me everything about this house. I could not have done this without Ruby."

Ruby has since passed away. With the exception of a person who helps with the small cottage, Kelly and Paul tend to things themselves, so there's a lot to keep the empty nesters busy. The couple's three children are grown now with flourishing careers, and there's a grandchild on the way.

"We have a son in Richmond, another one just moved down from New York, and our daughter lives in Seattle," Kelly says.

"I'm so proud of them!" NDN

Kelly's French Toast Bread Pudding

Ingredients

- 1 large loaf plain brioche bread
 - 8 eggs
 - 2 ¼ cups of half and half
 - ¼ cup maple syrup
 - ½ brick cream cheese
 - 1-2 medium sized apples
 - 1 tsp. ground cinnamon
 - 2 capfuls bourbon
 - 2 Tbsp. butter
- Method*
- Spray an 8x8 ceramic or glass baking dish with Pam
 - Cube bread and add half of it to baking dish
 - Cube cream cheese and dot half of it on bread cubes
 - Chop apple and dot half of it on bread
 - Sprinkle with cinnamon
 - Repeat with remaining bread, cream cheese and apple
 - Dot bread with butter
 - In a large mixing bowl, combine eggs, half and half and bourbon; mix vigorously

Pour mixture over bread and make sure bread is pushed below liquid

Refrigerate overnight

Next day: take mixture out of fridge for about 15 minutes prior to cooking

Preheat oven to 350 degrees

Place pudding in oven and cook for 45 minutes (cook time may vary slightly; check for doneness with a clean knife)

Apple cider topping ingredients

2/3 cup sugar

1 cup apple cider (or apple juice)

2 Tbsp. butter

1 Tbsp. lemon juice

4 tsp. corn starch

½ tsp. cinnamon

In a small pot, combine everything but the butter and cinnamon; bring to slow boil

Lower the heat and add the butter and sprinkle cinnamon

Cook until desired consistency

Cut the bread pudding into squares to desired size

Top each serving with apple syrup

Garnish with red raspberries or strawberries

Enjoy!

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BARBARA SCHERER

Cooking Then, Cooking Now

By Narielle Living



Murawski Photography

Food, a necessity of life, has nurtured and inspired people for generations. The evolution of what we cook and how we cook makes for interesting study, especially when creating meal plans today. The Colonial Williamsburg Historic Foodways program offers people insight into the 18th century methods and flavors of this area from the perspectives of both the palace as well as the common people's food. Barbara Scherer, one of the chefs for this program, loves being able to demonstrate historic food for

visitors.

"Historic foodways is where we cook in the 18th century style," she says. "We have over 200 cookbooks from the 18th century that we go by. We are very lucky to have these cookbooks."

Barbara is enthusiastic and cheerful about the food she prepares. One of her favorite recipes, listed below, comes from a cookbook written by Hannah Glasse dated 1747. "I like to call Hannah Glasse the Julia Child and the Mrs. Beeton of the 18th

century. She was in reprint for 150 years." According to Barbara, today, people can use Google to learn about Hannah Glasse and access one of her cookbooks for free.

The one thing that Barbara notes about cooking today is that methods of cooking and the way recipes are written are very different than they were in the 18th century. Back then, Barbara says, people had to know how to cook. Today, people follow a recipe.

"Everybody learned how to cook. To

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what extent was up to you. But everybody learns how to cook. If you're a daughter of the governor, you learn how to cook so you can run your household." When she refers to learning how to cook, Barbara is referring to learning skills such as roasting, broiling or braising. Because the recipes from the 18th century were written in paragraph form, with some steps left out or vague such as "put enough salt" or "bake until done," people needed to understand the art of cooking rather than simply following directions.

An example of this is in the recipe listed below. The first portion is the recipe as written for the 18th century, with the assumption that the cook knows how foods are candied or how to make a simple syrup. "Today, we simply don't teach cooking the same way, so our instructions are detailed differently," Barbara says. The recipe below does not contain sugar. "Because of it being candied, you don't need to have the sugar." When she discusses this recipe with visitors to the Foodways program, she is often asked why sugar is not used. "I tell them, you don't need it."

It is immediately obvious from her lovely lilting accent that Barbara was not raised in America. "I am not a local lass," she says with a laugh. "I'm a professional chef by trade, and I did a three-year college degree. I learned the English and French cuisines in England, as you can hear from my accent." She got a job working with Colonial Williamsburg as a professional chef and has been here for 22 years. "I think I'm staying."

Today, Barbara works in two kitchens, the Governor's Palace Kitchen and the Armoury Kitchen. "We work four days a week at the palace kitchen open cooking for Governor Dunmore or Governor Botetourt," she says. "We're showing you the kinds of foods that you would have had in the palace. Now when we go to the Armoury, we're just there one day a week, on Thursday right now. We cook common people's food, which is also eaten at the Armoury at this time."

One of the main differences in 18th century cooking, according to Barbara, is that most people only had one pot to cook in. But that certainly didn't make life easier in a building without heat or air conditioning.

"I'd like to invite you in the summer to sweat with me as long as you need to," she says, smiling good-naturedly. "In the winter, because we're using charcoal, our doors and windows are always open at the palace, so sometimes you can see my breath when it's really cold." Because they cook with charcoal, it is important for them to maintain air flow. Charcoal is used because that is historically accurate. "It's quite common for people to come in and say, Oh, you're not using wood. No, we're an English kitchen."

One of the benefits of working within the Colonial Williamsburg organization is that when they need new equipment, there are blacksmiths on hand to create what is needed. "We're very lucky," she says. "We have a phenomenal connection with all our trade shops."

A traditional Christmas in the 18th century would look very different from today's holiday season. "Christmas in my time period is more of a religious holiday. There's always plenty of food." Because people cooked with only one pot, if a family killed a bird for their Christmas dinner, rather

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than put it in a pot, they would hammer a nail into the hearth above the fire and tie the chicken's feet to it with strings. Once that was done, they could hook it to the nail and spin it, creating a kind of rotisserie that roasted the bird.

Cooking, for Barbara, is something most people in her family know how to do. "My mom was a phenomenal cook," she says. "My boys know how to cook. They've known how to cook since they were knee high to a grasshopper."

Barbara loves to cook. "I really do; I find it relaxing. My boys know that if I'm upset, we'll have 10,000 cakes and things like that because it calms me down."

Both of Barbara's sons graduated from Warhill High School. Her oldest is aged 29 and her youngest is 27.

When it comes to cooking for her family during the holidays, Barbara goes all out. "I love to do an English Christmas. It's a traditional meal, either beef or turkey or even duck with roasted potatoes and sprouts and carrots and turnips. In fact," she says with a

laugh, "it's a lot of the foods that we had in the 18th century. I have Christmas crackers and make a Christmas pudding."

Christmas Crackers is an English tradition that is just starting to become popular in America. The small cardboard tube, covered in a brightly colored twist of paper, is shared by two people, each holding one end. When the two people pull, the cracker makes a small popping noise. The cracker tears apart to reveal things like a bright paper hat, a small gift, a balloon and a motto or joke. Nobody expects the jokes to be good, and in fact, it is understood that all the jokes and mottos in crackers are not in the least bit funny or memorable. Similarly, in most standard commercial Christmas crackers, the "gift" is just as terrible, although sometimes wealthier families, such as the royal family, order custom crackers with higher quality rewards. "You've got to buy a good one, you can't buy a cheap one," Barbara warns. "When you put your hat on, you're going to be a king or a queen for the day. That's how the poor used to think of it."

After 22 years of cooking with Colonial Williamsburg, Barbara Scherer is just as excited and affable as when she began. She loves meeting people and explaining the world of 18th century cooking. "Come on out and see us. Come on out and have a great time. Learning is fun. A lot of people walk in the kitchen and are surprised to learn that we are making things people eat today. So come join us. I would love to see you in the kitchen."


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18th Century

Take your orange, and cut a round hole in the top, take out all the meat, and as much of the white as you can, without breaking the skin; then boil them in water till tender, shifting the water till it is not bitter, then take them up and wipe them dry; then take a pound of fine sugar, a quart of water (or

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in proportion to the oranges), boil it, and take off the scum as it rises; then put in your oranges, and let them boil a little, and let them lie a day or two in the syrup; take the yolks of two eggs, a quarter of a pint of cream (or more), beat them well together, then grate in two Naples biscuits, or white bread, a quarter of a pound of butter, and four spoonfuls of sack; mix it altogether till your butter is melted, then fill the oranges with it, and bake them in a slow oven as long as you would a custard, then stick on some citron, and fill them up with sack, butter and sugar grated over.

— Glasse, Hannah, "The Art of Cookery Made Plain and Simple," 1796. 21st Century

21st Century

Ingredients

- 6 medium oranges
- 1 lb. sugar
- 1 quart water
- 4 oz. butter
- 4 oz. cream

- 2 eggs
- 4 tbsp. sherry
- Sponge cakes or white bread — the equivalent of two large muffins in size
- For topping: 3 oz. each of citron and candied orange peel and a sauce of 2 Tbsp. each of Sherry, melted butter and sugar heated and mixed together.

Instructions

1. Take your oranges and cut off the tops of each about one fifth the way down from the stem.
2. Scoop out the inside of the orange as best you can including the white. If you use a small tea spoon and hold the orange in your palm, it will be easier to scrape it out.
3. Boil the orange shells and lids in the water until tender but not folding or falling apart.
4. Take them out, let them cool some and pat them dry gently with a cloth.
5. Take half or more of the water the oranges were boiled in, add the sugar and bring to a boil in a medium stew pan.
6. While it is boiling add the orange shells

- and lids and let them boil a few minutes.
7. Take the pot off the heat and let it cool.
8. Put the oranges and water in a covered container and set them in the refrigerator for a couple of days to saturate with the syrup, stirring them a couple of times a day.
9. When they have saturated you are ready to fill them.
10. In a mixing bowl, beat your eggs very well, add the cream, cake crumb, butter and sherry. Mix this together well with a spoon.
11. Gently fill your orange shells with this "cake" mixture.
12. Bake the oranges and their lids in a 350° oven for close to half an hour or more. They should not get dark brown on the outside, but a deeper orange color. The "cake" should bake as well.
13. After coming from the oven, place the chopped citron and candied orange peel on top of each cake. After heating up the sherry, butter and sugar sauce spoon that over each cake to let it soak in. Send them to the table with lids on or next to them on the plate. NDN

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The Craft of *Jewelry* By Narielle Living

Murawski Photography

Melissa Sweet recently moved from the rugged coastline of Cape Cod, Massachusetts to the bucolic setting of Williamsburg, Virginia. She came because her husband, who has been in the Coast Guard for the past seven years, is now stationed at the Yorktown Training Center.

Although they have only been married for one year, Melissa and her husband first met in college. They both attended the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, which is located just to the west of Cape Cod. Af-

ter graduating from college with a degree in Liberal Arts, her husband decided his next step was to join the Coast Guard.

When Melissa was in high school, she took her first class to learn how to make jewelry. All it took was one class, and she was hooked. Determined to make a career out of this, she sought out programs that would further her education in this discipline, which is why she chose to attend UMass Dartmouth. "I specifically found a jewelry program that had a bachelor's degree, and

that's what I went and did," she says. "My major was Arts and Design, and the concentration was jewelry metals." In addition to the typical mix of college classes, she learned the intricacies of jewelry making, as well as other art forms using paint, mixed media and ceramics.

The jewelry and metals facilities at UMass Dartmouth are extensive. According to the school, students in the program are provided with individual tool kits, benches, and storage. The main work room is stocked



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with bandsaws, milling machines, and other equipment. The program also provides a casting room, grinding room, annealing room, welding room, acid room, finishing room, lapidary room, and ample studio space. All of this, combined with her more traditional college classes, prepared Melissa for not only a career in jewelry making but her current business focus as well.

In addition to being educated on gemstones and settings, she learned to shape and create with a variety of metals. "In school, I started with brass and copper and a little bit of silver when I could afford it. And then when I started out in my professional career, that's when I first started using gold." She notes that for her, gold is easier and nicer to work with than silver. "And then platinum is even a little bit nicer," she says. Platinum, a silver-white metal, is considered a transition metal and is rare, making it more expensive than other metals. "But not too many people wear platinum, because gold is more common."

After receiving her college degree, Melissa advanced her craftsmanship from apprentice to master jeweler when she worked for the largest diamond jewelry retailer in the United States. Today, she loves working with jewelry of all types. The one kind of jewelry she does not handle, she says, is costume jewelry. Often the materials in costume jewelry are not conducive to the type of repairs she is used to performing.

Melissa also studied diamonds and became a certified Diamontologist with the Diamond Council of America. She advanced her craftsmanship from apprentice to master jeweler while working for the largest diamond jewelry retailer in the United States, which is something that sets her apart from other jewelers.

Today, she owns and operates Milestone Jewelry, LLC, and performs a range of jewelry services including repair, restoration and alterations. "I do repairs in platinum, gold and silver and iterations, which would be a combination of repairs needed to restore the

jewelry to the appearance and the durability of the day it was created. I also do enhancements and alterations. I can add stones, like a halo of diamonds, and I can convert any jewelry into other pieces. And then finally I can create custom jewelry. I can just do a custom piece with a brand new design or I can replicate a missing piece like a missing earring."

Melissa's pieces are timeless, and she shares that there is not any one era of jewelry making that she prefers.

When she lived in Massachusetts, Melissa operated a thriving jewelry business in that location. Moving to Virginia meant that, although she could ship items, she was basically starting from scratch. To ease the transition, her husband built her a workspace for their new home. They had discussed the possibility of building a shed on their property for Melissa to use as a workspace, but because her husband is in the Coast Guard, any move they made meant she lost her space.

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“That is a part of why I decided on an enclosed trailer,” she says. “If I built a shed and had my workshop in there, in four years, we would have to build another shed. And you know, the good thing about the cargo trailer is firstly, I can be where my customer is and secondly, I don’t have to rebuild for every Coast Guard move.”

After her husband built her studio in an enclosed cargo trailer, it only made sense for Melissa to offer same-day repairs, she says.

Despite the obvious differences between Cape Cod and this area, notably differences in weather, Melissa finds that living here reminds her of home. “I love Virginia. It is similar to home but the weather is a lot warmer. In October, it was already freezing back in Massachusetts. We had to call our renters and make sure they knew how to winterize the faucet.”

As she begins to integrate into the community, she has found ways to get out and meet people. “I recently started doing Pure Barre to meet people in the community

here. So I’m enjoying that, and I am a beach girl. My husband’s job has always been by the ocean.”

Of course, hailing from a northern climate means snow sports are expected in the winter, which she enjoys. “I like to snowboard,” she says. She is especially excited to travel for the holidays this year. “We have a ski trip planned when we go home for Christmas.”

Melissa’s immediate family here in Williamsburg includes her husband and two half-Maine coon cats named Minnie and Hugh. This breed is known for their larger sizes, which is why one of her cats is named Hugh. “His name is Hugh because my maiden name is Mongo,” she says with a laugh.

As Melissa and her husband and feline family settle into life in Williamsburg, she notes that her business is starting to take off in new and wonderful ways. “I enjoy being able to help out the small businesses. So, for instance, I’ve been working with The Mole Hole because they sell jewelry and they don’t have a way to get it sized for the customer.

So I came in and I’ve been doing repairs for them and that’s been really nice. And I’ve expanded to places like area pawn shops and small stores that don’t have a jeweler onsite that could use the help for their business.”

The hard part, as any small business owner knows, is that this is definitely not a nine-to-five job, especially since she offers same-day turnaround on certain jobs. “I work as needed and I just try to give the best service possible.”

Melissa Sweet is happy to be settled in this community. She takes her job seriously, and her commitment to same-day repairs comes from understanding the emotional impact jewelry has on people’s lives.

“I know from being in the business for the past 11 years, my entire professional career, that many people have sentimental jewelry, pieces that just irreplaceable. The norm is having to leave your jewelry for maybe two weeks to have any kind of work done to it. And sometimes that’s not feasible for a lot of people.” NDN



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Growing Up With Dance

By Ashley Smith

Murawski Photography

Even before she was born, Ainsley Carpenter was dancing. “There are photos of my mom teaching dance classes while nine months pregnant with me,” she says with a laugh. “Dancing has always been the biggest part of my life.” But for a brief stint in middle school, when dancing conflicted with her desire to be more social, Ainsley has loved every moment of it. “I wanted to be able to attend Friday night football games,” she recalls. “But looking back, I loved dancing, and this is my second home.”

Her earliest memories related to dance include helping her mom demonstrate movements during the Mommy and Me classes she attended with her mother. Her mother, Adelle Carpenter, helped Heidi Robitshek found the Virginia Regional Ballet (VRB) when Ainsley was still in preschool, and since then the studio in Williamsburg has been her home.

Tucked away near William & Mary’s School of Education, the studio is adjacent to the Williamsburg Community pool and

though the pool has been covered for the cooler seasons, the studio is bustling with activity. Music wafts through the air, costume racks line the halls, and dancers stretch and prepare to rehearse the most popular ballet in Hampton Roads.

While the Williamsburg studio has been in business since the early 2000s, the staff at Virginia Regional Ballet have presented The Nutcracker Ballet for audiences on the peninsula for over 30 years. It remains one of Hampton Roads’ most enduring holiday

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traditions. The Nutcracker is a classical ballet written by Pyotr Tchaikovsky that tells the story of a magical Christmas when a young Klara receives a nutcracker doll from her godfather, a talented toymaker.

Ainsley, herself, has been performing in the ballet since she was six years old. Her first role was that of a child under Mother Gigogne's skirt. She laughs as she recalls the performance. "My dad, Andrew, plays Mother Gigogne. He wears the makeup, puts on the big dress, and manages the stilts." Her dad also participates in the party scene with many of the other studio parents.

Though the experience may have been a bit unusual, since not everyone gets to hide under their father's skirt and dodge stilts during a ballet, it was a thrilling experience, and led to Ainsley wanting to perform in the Nutcracker every year since.

Though the ballet took a hiatus in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic, Virginia Regional Ballet, along with the Williams-

burg Symphony Orchestra, has leaped back onto the stage for this year's production. Members of the Pennsylvania Regional Ballet and talented guest soloists, Nicole Graniero and Simon Wexler, will also join VRB this season.

In this year's performances, Ainsley has several roles. In the first act, she will perform the role of Columbine, the ballerina doll who dances with the harlequin character when Herr Drosselmeyer presents the party guests with entertainment. She also will be a part of the party scene, which she enjoys immensely.

"The party scene has the most acting, I think. It certainly has the most interaction with the other dancers of all ages," she says. "I'm always sad when I don't have the chance to be in that scene."

In Act Two, Ainsley will dance as a lead in the Russian, Arabian, and Chinese dances that the Nutcracker prince and Clara view during their time in the Land of Sweets.

As a lead, she will be one of between two and four principal dancers, depending on the dance, on which the audience will be focused. The principal dancers will be supported by the corps de ballet. These dancers help form the foundation of both a ballet company and the Nutcracker performance. Ainsley spent many years performing as part of the corps de ballet and enjoys watching other dancers progress through these titular roles. She does not let her familiarity with the ballet interfere with her desire to continually improve. Each year, she focuses on developing her craft and perfecting her technique for whatever her role is at that time. Though she has performed the most of her current roles previously, the Chinese dance is the newest. "This is my first year as a lead, and the last time I was in the dance, I was in the corps de ballet as a seven-year-old," she says. Still, she is confident that her hard work and years of training will help her deliver a flawless performance.

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In addition to her first love, ballet, she has trained in a variety of dance techniques, including tap, jazz, lyrical, character, contemporary or modern, and even hip hop. “I trained in hip hop for a couple of years, but as a ballet-focused student, hip hop is not always the right fit,” she admits with candor. Ballet remains her favorite, and though she truly loves all types of dance, other favorites include tap and character. “In tap, you are able to be really loud, and character allows me to act and be over the top, as opposed to the delicate beauty of ballet.”

The love of character theater, however, is what helps her to elicit each unique personality of the roles she performs in the Nutcracker ballet.

When Ainsley is not preparing for performances, teaching classes, or helping at the front desk of the dance studio, she is studying to become a dental hygienist at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) in Richmond. She chose VCU in part because her

sister attends the school and also because she wanted to remain close to home. “I’ve always been someone who is a little more quiet and enjoys staying near family,” she says. She further discloses the reason for her decision not to pursue dance as a major in college. “I’ve always found when I have to dance for a grade or because it is required, it takes the joy out of it.”

Currently a freshman, she explains that the transition to college has been a little easier than she anticipated. “Since school was online last year, and I still have two online classes at college, it hasn’t been as difficult as I thought.” She commutes to Richmond for a couple of in-person classes, but the hybrid schedules allow more flexibility than she expected. Thus far, she enjoys her Human Spirituality course, but she’s looking forward to the rigor of her upcoming courses.

Though she plans to continue teaching at Virginia Regional Ballet, she chose dental hygiene because it is common for a hy-

gienist to have part-time hours. This type of work will leave her plenty of time to pursue other classes, as well as dance, teach, and explore what the world has to offer. When she isn’t attending classes, she continues to rehearse and teach at the studio.

In her limited free time, Ainsley Carpenter enjoys exploring places that are off the beaten path and hanging out with her friends, though she admits to being distracted at times.

“I’m often multitasking while we hang out, finishing homework and things.” She is also looking forward to future performances with Virginia Regional Ballet. In the past, the studio has put on a spring show in addition to the June recital. She anticipates that the spring show will return soon, but in the meantime, she hopes that Williamsburg will come to celebrate the return of VRB’s Nutcracker Ballet and the hard work of the dancers, instructors, and parents who helped make it happen. NDN

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Dream Catchers

FOR THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY

By Cathy Sliwoski

Dream Catchers at the Cori Sikich Therapeutic Riding Center in Toano is a “magical” place where “horses hear the unspoken words” in the hearts of participants, donors, volunteers and community members who visit the 22-acre property. According to its mission statement, Dream Catchers “enriches the lives of children, adults, and families through equine-assisted services offering education, empowerment, healing, and hope.”

Nancy L. Williams, Esq., became executive director in January 2021, after serving on the board for several years. As a lifelong equestrian, Nancy knows the healing pow-

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er of horses and is looking forward to expanding programming at Dream Catchers to envelop the entire community.

“Dream Catchers is a sanctuary for everyone who comes here,” Nancy says. “People want to be here for the comfort and healing it provides. We want to provide programs that engage the community to lead healthier, happier lives.”

Accredited by the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International, Dream Catchers serves more than 800 participants a year, representing 180 different diagnoses. Founded 28 years ago under a different name, Dream Catchers has called the property on Fire Tower Road home since 2004, thanks to the Sikich family. They established a trust for the land to honor the memory of their daughter, Cori, an equestrian who lost her life to an eating disorder. Another important contribution came in 2006 from Angie and Wade Johnson, MD, providing capital improvements to make the facilities state-of-the-art, including doubling the size of the barn to 20-stalls and adding a lighted indoor arena so programming can continue year-round, in inclement weather.

“Like any nonprofit, we rely on donors, volunteers and participants,” Nancy says. “Donors have distinct reasons for giving. It is the whole package they fall in love with. We’re all here because of a passion for what Dream Catchers provides.”

Staff members include several Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructors, Equine Specialists in Mental Health & Learning, Licensed Professional Counselor, Therapist, Speech Language Pathologist, Registered Art Therapist and a dedicated barn crew making sure the horses receive “gold star” care. Programming includes therapeutic riding and horsemanship, equine-assisted learning and psychotherapy, speech therapy, art therapy, community health and wellness activities, summer camps and sessions for at-risk youth. Nancy says they hope to expand services next year to assist veterans, as well as dementia patients and caregivers.

“Many therapeutic riding centers did not survive the COVID shutdowns. We had to get creative with fundraising,” Nancy says. “We had to cancel two years of in-person events. But we have phenomenal donors. We are strengthening our financial position. In 2022, we’d like to enhance our offerings to meet other needs.” A fundraiser called “Cowboys Uncorked,” featuring celebrity “arrestees” raising “bail” money, remained virtual this year. If all goes well, another fundraiser called “Bridles and Boots” is set for May 21, 2022, Preakness Saturday.

The herd of “hoofed heroes” has 19 horses, great and small. The largest is a chestnut-colored draft cross named Ranger who stands 16.3 hands and weighs approximately 1,350 pounds. Closer to the ground are an adorable mother/son mini horse duo named Mandy and Pepper. According to Barbara Schuler, office manager, seeing Pepper in his diminutive bridle and saddle, carrying his four-year-old rider, is an instant cure for a bad day.

Many of the horses are “free leased” to Dream Catchers, some are purchased with grant funding, and some are donated. Pete, a retired Colonial Williamsburg carriage horse, was donated a year ago. Pete suffered a ligament injury in retirement that caused him to lift his heel when he walks. He needed a special shoe to help him walk normally.

“Many participants have a unique bond with Pete because he needs an accommodation like they do,” Nancy says. “Through a

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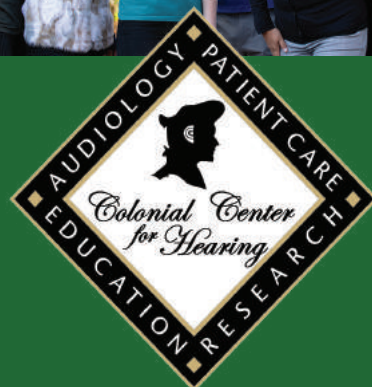


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grant purchase, we now have a lift to help participants out of their wheelchairs safely and mount them on the horse. Not every horse could tolerate such a procedure, but Pete can keep his cool.” Just two reasons Pete is earning the title of “Rock Star.”

Horses come from varied pasts and disciplines. Some were Western pleasure or trail horses, others garnered blue ribbons in the hunter-jumper ring, while others were excellent fox hunters. Temperament is key for a therapy horse. Some are extremely tolerant of children and adults who have verbal outbursts or have difficulty controlling reflex and muscle actions. Cooper, their Tennessee Walking Horse, was chosen for his gait.

“The real talent is out in the barn,” Nancy says. “What they put together for each person is amazing. Participants go through an intake process to evaluate their needs and are then paired with the horse that will be the best fit. The horse becomes a partner.”

Like many little girls, Nancy’s love of horses began early. She started taking riding lessons in fifth grade in a Maryland suburb, where she spent her childhood. She’s always been an “animal person” and jokes that she “has a target on her head” for anything in need of rescue. Her menagerie of pets includes cats, dogs, horses and a bird.

“Horses have always been special to me,” Nancy says. “My mom hired pony rides for a birthday party, and from that moment, I was hooked.”

Nancy returned to horseback riding as an adult. On a whim, she went to look at horses one day with a friend, intending only to “window shop” at a nearby barn. She took one look at a retired off-the-track Thoroughbred and “had an instant connection.”

“He was in bad shape,” Nancy says. “I couldn’t ride him yet, so I went to visit him every day to read to him and bring him apples. I named him Curran, which is Celtic for hero.”

Many pieces of Nancy’s past come together in her job as executive director. Nancy earned a degree in biology from William & Mary. She did graduate work in exercise physiology and biomechanics. She worked as an athletic trainer and a teacher with broad experience, having taught chemistry and biology in special education classes. Later, she earned a law degree from the University of Maryland. She worked with nonprofits and her niche practice is equine

law. Nancy moved back to the Williamsburg area from Pittsburgh 11 years ago. It was while giving an equine law presentation in Richmond that she was approached by attendees from Dream Catchers about joining the board of directors. “This makes me feel whole,” Nancy says.

Volunteers are essential to Dream Catchers’ success. They rely on 300 active volunteers for 20,000 hours of service each year. Some volunteers have 20-plus years of service, forming lifelong bonds with participants, staff and even the horses. “It’s addictive,” Nancy says. “It’s so heartwarming to see the joy on their faces when they are riding. It makes such a worthwhile volunteer experience.”

Equine-assisted therapy can be beneficial for anyone. Horsemanship classes offered there teach riding in a safe, non-competitive and judgement-free way. Nancy recalls an email she received from a man who had participated in an eight-week riding lesson program. Even before he could begin riding, the man came out to the farm to visit with the horses, bringing them apples and talking to them while they were in the pasture. “He said that being here was the highlight of his week, and that the horses helped him keep his sanity,” Nancy says.

Their work with at-risk youth is particularly inspiring to observe. These youngsters may have self-esteem or trust issues, but bonding with a horse who responds with unconditional support can turn that around.

“It’s fascinating to watch the horses, to watch the relationships unfold,” Nancy says. “They are coming to a safe place where there are no threats or bullying. That’s how many people describe being here: a safe place where they feel special. Kids want to feel special, not be kids with special needs.”

Testimonials to the excellence of Dream Catchers abound. Parents and caregivers are thankful for the much-needed break. They receive “renewed hope” from watching their children achieve, and Nancy Williams is hopeful that their new programs will reach even more people who can benefit from working with the horses.

“The scope has blossomed in terms of what therapy we provide,” Nancy says. “We want to offer programs that serve the general health and wellbeing of our whole community.” NDN

Williamsburg's IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD photo challenges

NOVEMBER 2021 ANSWERS



Williamsburg's
IN THE
NEIGHBORHOOD
photo challenges

SMALLCAKES
A CUPCAKERY

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



ADVANCED

SEE THE ANSWERS TO THE
THREE PHOTO CHALLENGES
FROM NOVEMBER'S ISSUE ON
THE PREVIOUS PAGE.





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