

February 2021

WILLIAMSBURG'S

# Next Door Neighbors<sup>®</sup>

VOL. 15, ISSUE 2

PRICELESS

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## Our Diversions

### Toby Papas



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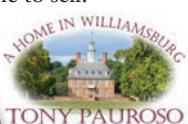
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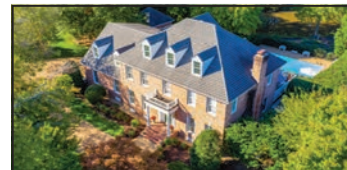
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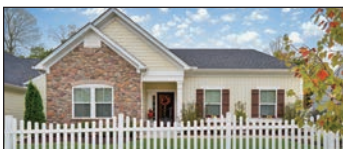


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Meredith Collins, Publisher

Who couldn't use a diversion right about now? Come to think of it, this issue is a diversion in and of itself! In these stories we meet people who have immersed themselves into diversions that they love. They are not simply distractions from the pandemic or the news. They are something more.

You can almost feel the excitement radiating off the page when Derek talks about learning how to properly build a boat, or when Krystal tells of finding a particularly rare glass insulator, or when Toby mentions making a new HAM operator friend. I can imagine sitting with Brandon over a nice cup of coffee and losing myself while watching his fish glide through the water, and I can see myself curled up with a good book recommended by Bob and Lisa.

Of course, the part that is really the best about these diversions is that they share them with other, like-minded enthusiasts. They treasure what they enjoy doing and see value in passing on their skills and traditions to others. That is what a good diversion is all about. NDN

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## TOBY PAPAS



Lisa Martin Lee Photography

# Passion & Purpose

By Narielle Living

People pursue hobbies for a variety of reasons, but generally because they are passionate about a particular subject. For some, however, passion intersects with purpose, and a hobby becomes a way to help others during times of disaster or need. Toby Papas, President of the Williamsburg Area Amateur Radio Club (WAARC), is doing just that with her ham radio.

According to Toby, ham radio has been

around for over 100 years. Back in the days before computers and cell phones, hams were on the cutting edge of technology. A lot of the first major advances in the radio art were made by ham radio operators and then the commercial industries would use that technology.

“A lot of people don’t think that ham radio is still a viable option,” she says. “However, it’s more popular than it has been in the past. There are over 760,000 licensed hams in the

United States and probably about a total of 2 million around the world. And, it’s something that you can do for free.”

Toby became interested in ham radio after she retired from her position in the military. Born in San Diego, California, Toby spent most of her childhood in Key West, Florida, a place she remembers with fondness. “When we lived there as children, it was not a tourist town, it was still very rural. The old railroad





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trestle was still there, and the kids loved to go there and catch fish and things like that. As my brother used to say to his college students, ‘I grew up like Tom Sawyer.’”

After Toby went to college and returned to Key West, where her mother still lived, she had difficulty finding a teaching position. “I was working part time, and all of a sudden I met a recruiter in the post office. He said, you know they need female officers in the Army. I filled out the paperwork, and lo and behold, I was commissioned in the Army. My first assignment was in Anchorage, Alaska.”

It was while she was in the Army that she met her husband, Dino, when she moved into the quarters next to him.

Dino had been involved in ham radio since he was in high school. “I’ve been a ham for over 50 years,” he says. “I was a ham when we first met.”

Toby’s interest in ham radio didn’t blossom until later. When she retired from the Army at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, she had more time to dedicate to this hobby. “I kind of tagged along to all the ham radio activities he went to,” she says, referring to her husband. “For me, after I was finished with the Army, I had time for something else.”

After living in a variety of places, including Hampton and York County, Toby and Dino moved to this area. “On the weekends, we’d come up to Williamsburg,” she says. “It was such a lovely little college town, and we would walk around the old Colonial Williamsburg area.”

The move happened after Toby’s mom was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s. “She came to live with us but the house in Yorktown was two story and wasn’t really well adapted for a 90-year-old lady. So, my mom and I went down to the Chamberlin at Fort Monroe, and my dad was in independent living.” At that point she decided to get a two-bedroom apartment. “I thought I’d be able to get her adapted, but she would never leave the apartment so that idea didn’t work out.” After a year and a half of care, Toby and Dino began to look in Williamsburg, eventually finding a suitable home.

As Toby became involved in the world of ham radio, she was pleased to discover that more women were participating. “It was kind of exciting, and it was a bit of camaraderie among the women.” As more women joined the ranks of the radio club, they trained and tested and passed their tests together. “It’s a very social club. As an example, every Saturday before COVID we would all meet for breakfast and every Wednesday we would meet for lunch.” The pandemic has changed things but has not taken away the social aspect of the club. “During the Safe at Home phase, we conducted a daily get together on our local ham radio, and we call it the coffee and radio net. We stay connected and it’s really turned into a great social networking kind of thing. And we’ve had over 180 different, unique people chime in to our coffee and radio net since late March, so it’s kept us connected and it’s kept us sane.”

Toby had to take specific steps prior to becoming a ham radio operator, including passing a test and getting a license. “The Federal Communications Commission, the FCC, sort of enters into a contract with ham radio operators.” The FCC allows ham radio operators to use the fre-

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quency spectrum, which is sought after by commercial enterprises, and they allow people to build their own radios with the caveat that they obtain a certain level of knowledge. In studying and passing an exam for a license, ham radio operators are then capable of assisting during emergency situations by augmenting a community's emergency communication system.

"The thing about ham radio is, it's really a hobby of self-accomplishment. It's the self-accomplishment of building your own radio, of being able to erect your own antenna and then talk locally and talk around the world. If you have a cell phone, you could dial someone in Kazakhstan. Dial a random number in Kazakhstan from your cell phone and see what you have in similar interest or language with that person. You're probably not going to have a lot of things in common." With the ham radio, however, an immediate connection is made, because the person on the other side of the world may not speak English very well, or at all, but hams can still communicate even across that

kind of language barrier. Also, both operators had to study for a license and work to put the radio system together.

One of the things Toby loves about her hobby is the level of community involvement. "We love to support community activities, and we support things like Pedal the Parkway [and] Hike for Hospice. We call upon our hams to volunteer with their radios, and there's stations around these different events."

The usefulness of having ham radio operators at community events cannot be overstated. With Pedal the Parkway, for example, if someone falls off their bike a ham calls the first aid station to give an initial report or request a relief car.

Toby Papas loves participating in all that the Williamsburg club has to offer, and she appreciates doing this with her husband. She is also proud of his accomplishments and notes one in particular that is an example of how they are involved in the community. "Dino was involved at the Berkeley Middle School a couple

of years ago," she says. "They wanted their sixth graders to be able to talk to an astronaut on the space station. Dino happened to have the antenna and the radio, and the other guys helped with putting it on the roof of the school. They prepared the sixth graders to ask the astronauts questions, and they hooked up the radio.

The lights started to glow, the radio was working, and these students had a chance to come up to the radio on the microphone and ask an astronaut a question and get an answer back. That's an example of the way we want to be integrated into our community. We want people to know that we're here to support you in many ways." NDN

*Anyone with an interest in learning more about ham radio can check the American Radio Relay League (<http://www.arrl.org/getting-licensed>). There you can also find links to local ham radio clubs in your area (<http://www.arrl.org/clubs>). Additional info about the Williamsburg Amateur Radio Club can be found at [k4rc.net](http://k4rc.net).*



Helena S. Mock, Managing Attorney

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## DR. BRANDON BABIN



Lisa Martin Lee Photography

# Fishkeeping

By Brandy Centolanza

When Dr. Brandon Babin first began fish-keeping last year, little did he know he would wind up with three fish tanks and caring for 60 fish. He took to the hobby quickly, and his fascination continued to grow the more he delved into it.

Quite simply, Brandon defines fishkeeping as “having an aquarium at home where you keep fish.” But for him, it’s more than that. “I just do it more seriously than most people.”

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Brandon, who earned a degree in biology from Ave Maria University in Florida, was looking for something to keep him busy during the winter months when he discovered fishkeeping.

“The more I looked into it, the more exciting it sounded,” he says. “It is a popular hobby and a diverse hobby, just not as well known. I started watching a lot of videos and doing a lot of research to see how it all worked.”

Brandon decided to start out maintaining an all-natural fresh water tank, using real plants, dirt and gravel and a natural biological filter with no chemical treatments.

“I did some research on which type of fish and plants go together and which don’t,” he says. “There are a lot of different fish that have a lot of different needs. I decided on keeping guppies. They are just really pretty fish. The males have a lot of really beautiful colors. They make a great display fish to have in the home.”

Guppies, also sometimes known as million-fish or rainbowfish, are one of the most popular freshwater aquarium fish species. Brandon ordered his guppies from a fish breeder in

Florida. One of the fish turned out to be pregnant. Eventually, Brandon’s school of fish grew into 60 fish, which are kept in three tanks: two 20-gallon tanks that are separately used for males and females and a five-gallon tank for the baby fish, referred to as fry. Brandon also has two small catfish, called *Otocinclus* catfish, as well as two snails.

Brandon changes some of the tank water once a week, avoiding soap or detergents that will harm the fish. Otherwise, he just lets them be.

“Fish are sensitive,” Brandon says. “You want to keep everything clean, but you don’t want to overclean so you don’t shock them.” For a fish, shock can be a life-threatening condition.

Brandon’s favorite part about fishkeeping is simply admiring them as they do their thing. “In the morning, I’ll have my cup of coffee and watch the fish,” Brandon says. “It’s very relaxing to me. There is so much about fish we don’t really know. Their habits, their behaviors, their environments, how they breed. It’s all so fascinating to me.”

Guppies, which only grow to be a couple of

inches in size, typically live up to three years. Brandon, his wife, and their son named the first few fish, but then there came to be too many that joined the fold.

“We named our biggest fish Goliath,” he says. “There is one named Blaze and one named Ember because their colors look like fire. We named one Rocket because with its blue and red colors it looks like a rocket taking off. We named another one Hope because she almost died but we were able to save her.”

Brandon’s two-year-old son, Ben, is equally enthralled by all the fish.

“I love fishkeeping because I love the process of keeping the ecosystem,” Brandon says. “There is another part of it called aquascaping, which is designing the tanks. You design the tanks the way you want them to look. I love watching the fish in the tank. Ben also loves to look at the fish. It is a great hobby to have because the fish are a great addition for a family.”

Brandon and his wife, Heather, met at Ave Maria University. After graduating, Brandon moved on to chiropractic school at the Palmer College of Chiropractic, also in Florida. His

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specialty is in upper cervical chiropractic, which focuses on the top two bones in the neck.

Brandon pursued upper cervical chiropractic in part to help his wife, who at the time had been suffering from debilitating migraine headaches. "It was awful and really scary," Brandon says.

The couple exhausted every option to find a cure for Heather's migraines, then one of Brandon's professors, who specialized in upper cervical chiropractic, treated Heather and helped reduce her pain.

"Upper cervical chiropractic changed our way of life," Brandon says. "I knew then that it was also something that I wanted to do to help others."

Brandon went on to further study at the Clinical Neuroscience Institute and joined the Grostic Procedure Society. The Grostic Procedure relates to the care of the upper cervical spine. Today, Brandon is president of the Grostic Procedure Society.

Four years ago, Brandon and Heather were looking for a place to raise a family and decided

on Williamsburg, where Brandon once lived for a few years when he was a teenager.

"Williamsburg has a great balance of weather, culture, and family-friendly activities," Brandon says. "We both just fell in love with it. Everything about it is great. The community has really embraced us. I love having taken root here."

In 2018, Brandon opened his chiropractic practice, Via Vitae Chiropractic, on John Tyler Highway. Shortly after, their son, Ben, was born. Heather serves as the office manager, while Ben steals the show with his regular appearances in the office.

Brandon treats patients ranging in age from two weeks old to 98 who suffer from various conditions from neck pain to migraines to Meniere's Disease, a rare disorder of the inner ear that causes bouts of vertigo.

"There is no problem too big or too small," Brandon says. "We want to help you function to the best of your ability, whatever that may be. There are options out there to help you."

Brandon values the relationships he's been able to develop with his patients in the three

years he's been in business so far.

"Our patients are like our family," Brandon says. "Having those relationships is important for healing. The name of our practice, Via Vitae, means 'Way of Life' in Latin. We want to bring that way of life to our patients. It's a blessing to be a part of our patients' lives and to be able to help them."

Eventually, Brandon would like to hire new chiropractors and expand Via Vitae Chiropractic, opening more offices in the area. Brandon Babin would also like to incorporate his fishkeeping hobby into the business by adding fish tanks to the office.

Dr. Brandon Babin recognizes that fishkeeping, like any hobby, is a choice when deciding how involved he wants to be and how many fish he can raise. "You can go into fishkeeping as light or as deep as you want," he says. "It may seem intimidating and you'll make mistakes, but the most important thing to remember is to have fun. Eventually, I want to get a saltwater tank. I think saltwater fish are absolutely gorgeous. That is definitely my next step in the hobby." NDN

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# Collecting Crown Jewels

By Ashley Smith



Lisa Martin Lee Photography

Krystal Anderson arrived in Williamsburg courtesy of the United States Navy. Her father served in the Navy for most of Krystal's childhood. Originally from Baltimore, Maryland, her father's career kept them on the east coast between Baltimore and Virginia Beach, except for a brief assignment in Gaeta, Italy. Though their time in Gaeta ended abruptly due to her mother's sudden passing, Krystal has fond memories of Italy. "I think that's where I ex-

perienced real food for the first time," she says. It seems that at the tender age of seven, her enjoyment of rich fare sparked a further interest in cooking. One day, she hopes to travel there with her daughters.

Upon the family's return to the states and eventual arrival in Williamsburg, Krystal attended Bruton High School. She particularly enjoyed her food science and nutrition class because students had the opportunity to cook

and bake in the lab portion of the course. She excelled, and her instructor recommended that she look into a professional culinary career.

Encouraged, Krystal attended a luncheon hosted by the Culinary Institute of America at the Williamsburg Inn. "The food was excellent, but the tuition was not." At that time, the tuition was approximately \$40,000. Despite this setback, she continued to pursue a career in the kitchen. After high school graduation, Krystal



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Written by Toni Johnson, Marketing & Communications, WDC



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“begged her way into a job” at Ford’s Colony Country Club. She had no previous experience or training. However, her persistence convinced them that she was serious. She started as a general chef, learning every aspect of the kitchen. She enrolled in the J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College culinary program, and when the restaurant needed a new pastry chef, she stepped into the role. “I slowly gravitated towards becoming a pastry chef.”

After her time at Ford’s Colony, she became head pastry chef at the Blue Talon Bistro and finally, at the Trellis Bar and Grill, now known as La Piazza. Both restaurants are owned by David Elliott, and Krystal provided breads and pastries for each one, as well as for the DOG Street Pub. She enjoyed the excitement of the unpredictable workday and her boss’s generous flexibility regarding her schedule. Though the pandemic has required her to step back from the restaurant, she misses the atmosphere and energy in the kitchen. “Anyone who has worked in a professional kitchen can tell you that there’s nothing like it.”

Krystal hasn’t been in a kitchen for a few months, but she has remained busy. Her other business venture has done quite well. The Pineapple Picker is the name of Krystal’s booth at the Williamsburg Antique Mall, as well as her Etsy shop. She scours other antique malls, flea markets, estate sales, and more recently, online auctions, for pieces that catch her eye. She’s particularly fond of mid-century and modern finds. “I love glass and anything brown,” she says with a laugh. Her booth is filled with wooden objects, baskets and unique glassware.

While wandering an estate sale with a friend over a year ago, Krystal found an unusual piece of heavy, colorful glass. Her companion at the sale explained that the item was a glass insulator from the cross arm of a telephone pole. The vibrant piece of history intrigued Krystal and she began to search for more.

Glass insulators were originally used to protect homes from lightning strikes but began to be used to protect the wires on the cross arms of the telecommunication poles, beginning in the 1880s with the advent of the telegraph. When Congress passed the Rural Electrification Act in 1936, wires spread electricity across the country to individual homes and glass insulators were in high demand. Several companies began mass production of the insulators; some were glass companies such as Kerr Glass Manufacturing and Indiana Glass while others sprung up to fulfill the specific need. Each company had a different design, and each insulator style was unique. Colors vary widely, especially since many manufacturers were glass companies that simply used whatever glass they had left over from other products. Common hues include teal and clear; sought after colors include cobalt blue, amber, and even purple. Collectors have created several classification systems to describe each design, and they often have unusual nicknames such as “Gingerbread man” or “hockey puck.” While some recall the insulators as the perfect target practice, the earliest collectors began collecting in the late 1960s. Even the linemen who replaced the glass units with porcelain ones would pocket them to



take home. To the manufacturers, the old insulators were simply junk. People began to find the discarded glass in their yards or during walks about town, giving rise to a new collection habit. As far as enthusiasts are concerned, collecting glass insulators is a relatively young hobby.

Still, they host two regional and one national convention each year in the United States and publish a magazine titled “Crown Jewels of the Wire.” The description is apt; these brilliantly colored remnants from the technological past are at once beautiful, durable and fascinating. The National Insulators Association has a growing membership and helps to educate others about the role of the glass insulator in our technological history. Outside of North America, glass insulators can be found in Australia, France, Russia and other places around the world.

Krystal describes the thrill of looking for a glass as a “treasure hunt.” Though she enjoys hunting for the rarer pieces at flea markets and antique malls, the collection is easy and inexpensive for anyone to begin. Most of the more common insulators can cost as little as \$5, though the price does increase for the rarest items. She has found support for her hobby through online clubs, and there are several Facebook communities in which collectors gather to discuss their finds and even trade amongst themselves.

Krystal’s personal favorites include a carnival glass insulator of iridescent orange, but her most treasured find is a rare purple insulator from Australia. Most of her pieces are from the United States and Canada, making this piece quite special since within the U.S., insulators from Mexico and Canada are not considered foreign. She displays most of her collection in a china cabinet, but a few pieces are scattered throughout her home. Before her collection grew, it sat on her mantle. When an errant child slammed the front door, an insulator hit the floor. It’s a testament to the durability of the insulators that this is the only item in Krystal’s possession to have ever broken.

As Krystal stays home due to the pandemic, she runs her Etsy shop online and continues to search for more pieces for her collection. She misses the fast-paced energy of the kitchen, but the time she has been able to spend with her three daughters has been priceless. She’s grateful that her business has done so well and allowed her to focus on her children and their education. “I’m not yet certain of my plans when the pandemic has subsided,” she admits. “I miss the kitchen, but my other business is doing well, and I have loved being with my girls.”

When she isn’t attending to the remote learning needs of her daughters, or hunting for treasures at auctions, Krystal Anderson relaxes by walking along Yorktown Beach in the evenings and soaking in the serenity along the waterfront. She also enjoys reading and expresses her gratitude for the community of Williamsburg.

“I’ve been so glad to be in Williamsburg. My business does well here, and the traffic is nowhere near as heavy as Virginia Beach.” She’s certainly brought a focus on the remarkable beauty that can be found in ordinary things. NDN



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NEXT DOOR NEIGHBORS FEBRUARY 2021 15



# DEREK HARDY



Lisa Martin Lee Photography

# Living Life to the Fullest

By Narielle Living

Derek Hardy, a man who lives life to the fullest and does not hesitate to try something new. It doesn't matter how difficult the challenge is, or whether he has done it before. He's not afraid to tackle it.

Derek was born and raised in Hampton, Virginia, but has lived in Williamsburg for approximately 23 years. A master mechanical (HVAC), master electrician and master gas fitter, Derek owns and operates a heating

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and cooling business. When he was younger, he wanted to work with Anheuser-Busch. "I was in the maintenance business for many years, in hotels and so forth," he says. When trying to obtain a position with Anheuser-Busch, he began attending school. "I was going to school and taking classes and qualifications and certifications and then I realized I'd be better off just being in business for myself."

One of the things Derek has enjoyed most during his life is building boats. In the early 1980s, he watched a video that was produced by the Mariners' Museum and featured a well-known boat builder named Billy Moore. In this film, they documented the building of the Chesapeake Bay Deadrise. The educational component of this film documented the progress of the boat being built step by step. According to the film, these boats are unique because they have no plans to go by and the information on how to build them is passed down from generation to generation.

"I said to my dad how interesting and how much fun that would be to get involved with something like that," Derek says. At that point, it was simply a young boy's dream to build a boat. In high school, his opportunity arose. "They offered this boat building program and sure enough, it was the Moores." Derek was excited at this opportunity. "I jumped right on that and met the Moores." From that point, a friendship was born between Derek and the family, a friendship that has weathered many years and has held true. To this day, Derek maintains contact with the Moore family. "I'm part of the family, I guess you might say."

In addition to developing a relationship with the Moore family, Derek learned boat building from them. "They taught me a lot about boat building." Together, they built boats during the latter part of the 1980s. "And we built a couple of big boats there at the Mariners' Museum. Billy taught me how to build skiffs, and I've built several on my own." A skiff is a small, flat-bottomed boat with a pointed front.

When Billy's health began to decline, Derek wanted to do something for him. At that point, he had been talking to Dave Baum from Billsburg Brewery about the possibility of building a boat for the interior of the brewery. He wanted to share this project with Billy while he still had time. "I really wanted him to see that I still had it, so to speak, and his wanting to teach people how to build boats wasn't a total lost cause." Derek wanted him to know that his teachings would live on outside of the family, and he would use what he knew to carry on the tradition.

When he spoke with Dave from Billsburg, who has since passed away, they debated the merits of a number of different possibilities. "We went back and forth, talking about one way to build a boat and put it in the ceiling to keep the noise down and that kind of thing. But unfortunately, Dave died." Billy too died a couple of years ago, but not before he realized that Derek was carrying on his tradition.

"He passed away shortly after he saw the boat," Derek says. "He didn't actually get to see it physically, because he was bedridden. But he saw pictures and his sons passed the word on."

Although Derek has other hobbies, he feels boat building is the one that stands out the most. "Not everybody can build a boat," he says.

Derek has not found the time to build another boat these days, but it's something he would like to continue. In fact, he has the remains of one boat in particular at his place that he has plans for. The boat from



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the Mariners' Museum that Billy had worked on is currently in disrepair. "It's actually in pieces," he says. After it fell apart, one of Billy's sons and Derek brought it back to Derek's house. "The plan is to build another skiff out of the remains of that boat. It's going to be quite a fancy skiff when all is said and done. I've already got a name for it, so it's a matter of me getting the time and doing it." Once Derek begins working on a boat building project, he prefers to work straight through and finish the piece rather than work in stops and starts. "I don't mess around."

One of the aspects of Derek's personality that his girlfriend, Christy, loves is his ability to take a puppet and mimic a variety of voices. "I can do about 40 different voices and characters, and I seem to take on other people when someone hands me a puppet. I can take on that character, and it really entertains people. They think it's hilarious."

It comes as no surprise that Derek most enjoys the time he is able to spend at the Outer Banks. "I like to relax and just really have fun at the Outer Banks and go to the beach to enjoy the restaurants and atmosphere." He admits that the concept of being near the water is appealing, and he would never want to live in a landlocked state. "If I had to live in Kansas, I'd just go crazy," he says. "I can't be very far from the water." In addition to the opportunity to live near the water in this area, Derek appreciates the rich history in Williamsburg as well as the moderate weather.

Christy, is often greatly amused by Derek's abilities, especially when he decides to use puppets to act out various characters. Introduced by mutual friends, Derek appreciates her sense of humor. "We had known these people for a long time, and when they introduced us, she said she never laughed so much until she met me. And she has a contagious laugh."

Although Derek does not have pets, he is often entertained by the squirrels in his yard. "I have a couple of squirrels that like to come by on a daily basis, and they'll hold up picket signs if I don't feed them."

Derek is drawn to working with wood, whether it's boats or furniture. He seems to have an innate sense of carpentry. "I was working in a cabinet shop when I was like 19 years old. I was building furniture when I was 15 or 16 years old. When other kids were out buying toys and video games and that kind of thing, I was out buying table saws."

Through the years, he has made many pieces of furniture, most of which usually end up in other people's homes.

"I haven't built anything for myself in some time, but I do have some of it hanging around my parents' house," he says. "They call it the museum of Derek because there's so much in that house that I built."

Derek has two sisters, and both of them have also been the recipients of Derek's carpentry hobby. "Back in the day, when I was much younger and had time, they would really enjoy Christmas because I'd actually make Christmas gifts for them."

Derek doesn't usually spend time thinking about what he does, he simply does it. "I just know the Lord has blessed me with many talents, and I try to share with other people. Sometimes I don't think what I do is all that amusing or interesting but people really think it is."

Derek Hardy is a man who works hard but also knows how to use his talents to create things and have fun. "You know, I think one of the most important parts of life is just enjoying it." NDN



# The Indie Fragrance Collector

By Kristine Hojnicky



Lisa Martin Lee Photography

For Susanne Little, the pursuit of unique fragrances is more than a hobby, it's a passion. Susanne was born and raised in Germany and has spent all but six years of her life living outside of the United States, and the access she had to affordable, luxury perfumes in Europe fueled her passion from a very young age.

"My interest in perfume is as far back as I remember. I was a little five-or six-year-old girl carrying around a blue bottle of Tinkerbell

perfume in my purse everywhere I went," she says.

As a teenager, Susanne used her babysitting money to supplement her growing assortment of scents. Perfume was always number one on her wish list for Christmas and birthdays, and her fascination with the industry increased over time. In college, she used the money she earned from a work-study program to buy expensive designer fragrances like Chanel No. 5

and Hermes.

"Perfumes are generally less expensive in Europe. I think I topped out at 120 perfumes and thought it was a shame to have something sitting there when I'd never be able to wear that many. So, I whittled down my collection to 40, and that's where I like to stay," she explains.

Susanne's husband is a government employee and was relocated to Williamsburg nearly three years ago. Her interest in discovering

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new fragrances endured the move, and in addition to exploring local perfumeries, she has networked with other enthusiasts and perfumers worldwide through social media platforms.

“It’s a billion-dollar industry that has changed a lot in recent years. It used to be that people wore luxury fragrances that you could find on the shelf of a department store. But there has been a shift toward what’s referred to as ‘niche or indie perfumery.’ You have to go out and look for these scents,” she says. “I discovered online there is a whole world of people who share my interest in learning more, and I went down the rabbit hole of finding exclusive fragrances that are still affordable.”

Her research process begins with reading reviews of “indie” or independent perfumes found in industry fragrance review guides. Susanne says she takes each review with a grain of salt because the reviews are deeply rooted in the personal preference of the reviewer, but she can typically look at the notes and composition breakdown of a particular fragrance to accurately decide whether to research it further.

Then, she looks at the reviews on several

crowd-sourcing review websites and if her interest is still piqued, she will seek out a sample or decant.

“I’ll test it by wearing it for a while and if I like it, I will spring for the full bottle,” she says. “This whole process is just for myself. Fragrance is so personal. Purchasing for others is a nice gesture but what smells good to me may be something you absolutely turn your nose up at. Very rarely would I consider buying for someone else.”

Susanne says her scent preferences have evolved over time from the days of wearing her Tinkerbell perfume as a child, and sparkly, clean perfumes like Chanel No. 5 in her twenties. Today she has a penchant for heavy fragrances with woody, deep and amber notes. “I gravitate toward what you would refer to as a meditation-type fragrance. I like the ones that make me feel happy, at ease and at peace. I like to push the envelope because fragrance really does set the mood and the tone for the day,” she says.

Her newest acquisition, “After Every Ounce of Joy (Leaves My Body),” is what Susanne

describes as sad, moody, and smells like wet concrete.

“There’s a stillness about it and it puts me into a very focused frame of mind,” she explains. “It’s interesting because I’ve gotten quite a few compliments about it.”

Recently, Susanne was wearing this fragrance at the grocery store when a young male cashier asked her what it was called. She says he wrote down the name and commented that he had never smelled anything like it before.

“That is one in particular I wear for myself, and I’m really surprised when people comment on it,” she says.

Though their move to Williamsburg was initially daunting, Susanne has found friendly encounters with fellow Williamsburg residents like this have helped her adjust to the area. Purchasing a home in New Town also helped immensely with their transition to the United States because the neighborhood’s walkability is similar to that of the European villages she’s most familiar with.

“I realized that if we lived in New Town, I could walk with a destination, to the grocery

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store or to the doctor's office, which is what I was used to living in Germany. It felt more like home," she says.

When she's not researching indie perfumeries or walking New Town with her husband, Susanne enjoys discovering new fashion trends, traveling and spending time with her children.

Her daughter lives locally and is pursuing her education in veterinary medicine while gaining field experience working with the Clydesdales at Busch Gardens. Her son is 25 years old and lives in Tennessee.

Their travels as a family have led Susanne to discover some of the most treasured perfumes in her collection. She says she especially enjoys sampling local perfumeries and learning from perfumers around the world about their processes in developing fragrances.

"I like to strike up conversations with employees or the in-house perfumer. The noses, or perfumers, they're the actual rock stars in the industry, and I have had so many interesting conversations with people who share a passion about the process of creating a fragrance," she says. "My family knows if I say I'm going to pop into a place quickly, they may as well talk a walk to explore because I won't be back for a while."

Her favorite locales to explore include France, Italy, The Netherlands, Prague, and of course, every small town and village in Germany with a little perfume shop. But don't expect Susanne Little to hold on to a fragrance for sentimental reasons alone.

"It's my passion, my hobby, and it's just for myself. I have a whole wardrobe of fragrances for different occasions in my life, but if something no longer tickles my fancy, I sell it and move on to the next," she says. NDN



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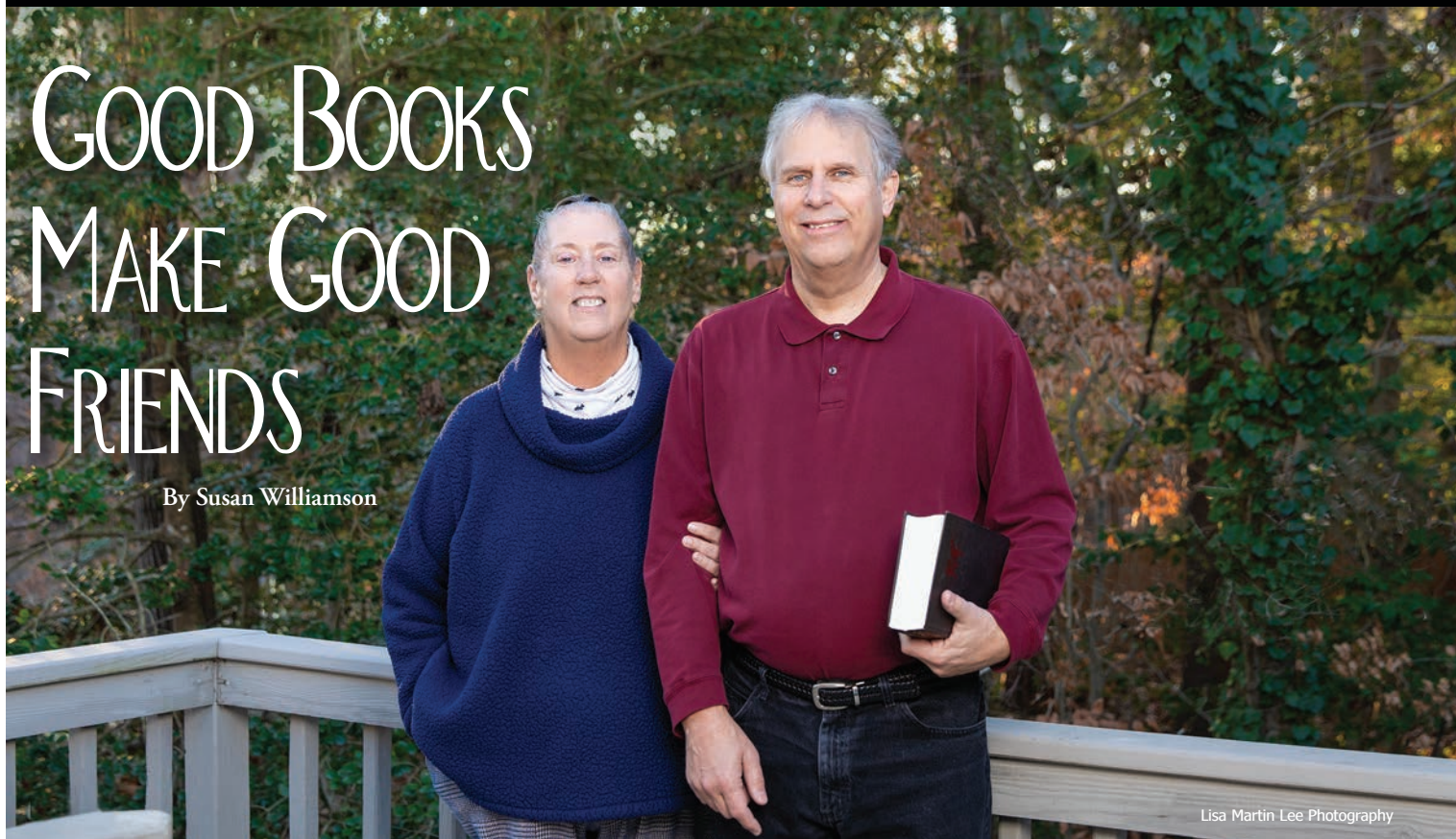
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## BOB & LISA PIKE

# GOOD BOOKS MAKE GOOD FRIENDS

By Susan Williamson



Lisa Martin Lee Photography

Reading is a popular hobby among Williamsburg area residents and generally considered a solo activity. But local resident, Bob Pike, along with his wife, Lisa, use their love of books to grow their social life. In 2009, the couple had just returned from a sabbatical on the West Coast and were looking for ways to meet people. They looked for a book club, thinking that people who read and discussed books would be interesting companions. They searched online but didn't find any clubs with hours suitable to working people. Rather

than give up, they decided to start a Meetup group and thus the New Williamsburg Book Club came into existence.

When starting the group, both Bob and Lisa decided they could host the book club in their home. The first meeting was held in April 2009. At first, no one was willing to suggest a book to discuss. It seems that there are either no titles submitted or one person makes all of the suggestions. The first book discussed by the group was Dan Brown's thriller "Angels and Demons" at the end of May, followed by

Orson Scott Card's "Enders Game" in June 2009.

That initial reluctance has been shed, however, and they have organized the club to make things easier. The group now has a running list in several genres: fiction, non-fiction, classics, sci-fi-fantasy, historical fiction, and mystery/suspense/thriller/horror, and the genres are rotated each month. Each month the group votes on the genre and then narrows down the book by a series of votes. The books are selected two months ahead of their discussion

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date. This gives members time to secure and read the book. They try to limit the books selected to those which are readily available at the public library and/or in a reasonably priced paperback or e-reader form.

Meetings are usually held on a Saturday evening at seven and last about two hours with time for snacks and socializing. Occasionally the group will screen a movie based on the book. Of course, movie screenings are held after the discussion in order to avoid ruining the book. Movies they have watched are from well-known books, including "The Martian," "Gone Girl," "The Name of the Rose" and "The Shining".

The group grew rapidly and over the years the members have numbered from 100 to 1,000, but of course not nearly that many people come to any given meeting. "There is always someone new," Bob says. The Meetup presently claims 141 members, and anyone is welcome to join by going to Meetup.com.

Lisa keeps track of the members and eventually removes people from the contact list if

they never attend a meeting. Attendees are asked to sign up for each meeting and remove their name if they later realize they will be unable to attend.

The difficulties of 2020 made in-person meeting difficult. The group stopped meeting in March due to the pandemic, but resumed in June with windows open and masks worn by all to discuss "Blue Latitudes: Boldly Going Where Captain Cook Has Gone Before," a memoir by Tony Horwitz. "Only six or seven showed up," Bob said. The July meeting featured the timely historical fiction selection "Year of Wonders: A Novel of the Plague" written by Geraldine Brooks. The August meeting was canceled due to lack of sign-ups. The Pikes realize that during the time of the pandemic, people have different comfort levels. At the November meeting, the group discussed the non-fiction book "Salt: A World History" by Mark Kurlansky.

A meeting is scheduled for the first Saturday in February at seven p.m., but it will only happen if the weather is suitable for open

windows. The selection for February is Stephen King's "The Stand" (horror). For March, the group chose two short comedic novels by P.G. Wodehouse, "The Adventures of Sally" and "Love Among the Chickens." A complete list of the books they have discussed so far can be seen by going to the club Meetup page, <https://www.meetup.com/The-New-Williamsburg-Book-Club/> and then clicking on "More" in the "what we're about" section.

By day, Bob is a chemistry professor at William & Mary. Lisa works as a medical transcriptionist from home. They came to Williamsburg in August 1992 and they enjoy living here. Bob, a native of Philadelphia, says, "I love teaching at the college. We like the reasonable cost of living and housing here in Williamsburg. And I can bike to work."

"We like the friendliness," Lisa says, referring to the community. "We host these meetings and never worry about any of these people coming into our home. These are nice folks." The couple enjoy walking and biking and their two rescue dogs, a Border Collie mix

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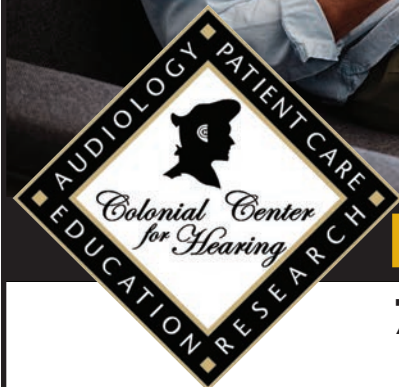
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and a terrier mix. Adopting dogs has been a tradition ever since they've been together.

Bob met Lisa, a New Jersey native, in a Christian Fellowship group when they were both undergraduates at George Washington University. Bob completed graduate school and post-doctorate work at Brown University. The couple lived in St. Louis before moving to Williamsburg.

Although there are alternatives to meeting in-person, the book club has avoided those choices. "Technology connects us, but it also isolates us," Bob says. "Social dynamics are important." For that reason, the group has not elected to meet via Zoom or any other remote platform.

Bob reads the eleven books suggested by the group. He usually reads about six additional non-fiction books a year, not counting what he may read for work. He says, "The book for February is 'The Stand' and I've been reading 'Hamilton,' so that's a lot of pages." Lisa began using a Kindle which she received for her birthday in November and usually reads at

least two or three books a month.

Playing music is another hobby the couple enjoys, and they organized a second Meetup group, Williamsburg Acoustic Music Club, in 2014. Bob and Lisa also host this group, usually on their deck. The group comes together to play and sing, just for the fun of it. Bob plays guitar and bass while Lisa plays drums. They favor folk and rock music from the 1960s through the 1990s, but enjoy all music. Anyone who plays acoustical or acoustical-electric instruments or sings is welcome. COVID-19 and the weather have limited recent meetings, since this group usually meets outdoors as well.

Bob says, "We have no aspirations to play professionally, we just play and sing for fun." However, a few of the group members did get together to form a band known as Winsome. The band plays pop, folk, blues and vintage music at venues around the area, including the Williamsburg Farmers Market.

Interested singers and players can go to Williamsburg Acoustic Music Club (Wil-

liamsburg, VA) | Meetup to join and sign up for a meeting. Currently the group has 199 members, but only ten attended the mid-December, socially distanced outdoor jam. The plan is for outdoor jams to resume in the spring.

Bob says, "We call ourselves acoustic because we want to be able to hear ourselves sing over the sound of the instruments. And our neighbors might not appreciate wailing amps broadcasting to the neighborhood."

In more normal times, the Pikes enjoy travel, attending concerts, theater and baseball games, none of which they have been able to enjoy during the past year.

Among friends is where you find them, and Bob and Lisa Pike worked to organize two groups around their interests in books and music, thus widely broadening their circle of acquaintances. They welcome others with similar interests to their home on a regular basis. Many people speak of Williamsburg as a friendly community, and the Pikes are good examples of why that is true. NDN



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# CARL HAYDEN

# A “Hoppy” Hobby

By Caroline Johnson



Lisa Martin Lee Photography

Back in 2008, newly graduated Carl Hayden was sitting at a bar with his cousin talking about how cool it would be to make their own beer. At that point, his cousin had just gotten a basic homebrewing kit, and they began experimenting with it. “When you make your first beer on your own, it’s the best,” Carl says. “Even if by today’s standards it was probably pretty bad!”

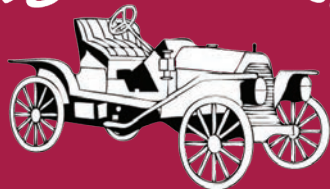
Like all hobbyists, Carl’s skills in this particular hobby grew as time went on. He began experimenting with new ingredients, following new recipes and trying to make different styles of beer. He took a class at a homebrew shop in Delaware, where he was living at the time, which only increased his interest in homebrewing.

For Carl’s first post-college move, he found

himself in Williamsburg living with a friend while working a job in Newport News. In 2013, he met his wife, Christina, at the Williamsburg Craft Beer Festival. The two moved to Texas for Carl to advance his career and eloped in New Orleans in 2017. But their minds always came back to Williamsburg, which had become a special place to them since they had met here and enjoyed living

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here so much.

They moved back to Williamsburg in 2017 and purchased their home, with a garage that lends itself to homebrewing all in one place. An engineer by trade, it's no wonder Carl enjoys the technical details behind making good beer. "I focus a lot on the equipment, which has evolved quite a bit since I started," Carl shares. "I use a homemade 10-gallon electric HERMS system that consists of three half-barrel kegs converted into kettles and an electric control panel to power heating elements, pumps and temperature controllers." Carl purchased his equipment used from a homebrewer and brewery owner in Texas and completely overhauled it.

While the equipment alone takes up about a fourth of their garage, brewing can take up more space as he spreads out. Last year, Carl's goal was to brew a new beer every month, and this year it has been about one every two months. "When I brew a beer, it takes me a few hours of research to make a recipe for the style I want," Carl says. "I look at statistics and examples from previous homebrew competitions to determine things like the water profile and use a special spreadsheet to set it up to make the best beer I can."

Following the initial preparation, he spends a half-day getting it all set up, estimating using around 20 gallons of water for the whole process and then he begins to clean. "A lot of homebrewing is cleaning," Carl says. "You want the equipment to be clean from other flavors, especially while working in a garage." Cleaning is immensely important because once the beer is done boiling and has cooled, it becomes vulnerable to infection and any wild strings of bacteria can ruin beer or give it an unintended taste.

Though he enjoys brewing a variety of beer, his favorites are porters and stouts. Whether he's brewing beer for himself or special occasions, he begins by making five gallons at a time and has more recently been making 10 at a time. "What usually happens is I'll fill up a growler to take sailing with friends or bottle some of it up and give it to others," Carl says. "I don't have any trouble getting rid of it!"

In his early beer making days, Carl remembers a particular homebrew gone wrong that he laughs about now. While making an Oktoberfest style beer, he added too much corn sugar at the end of the process while bottling. "With too much pressure in the bottles, they started to explode," Carl says. "I got a call from the owner of the house I was living in that there was beer leaking from the pantry and broken glass all over. After that, we changed the name to 'Exploderfest.'"

When it comes to homebrewing, one of the parts Carl enjoys most is the community. "I knew about Colonial Ale Smiths and Keggers (CASK) for years while first living in Virginia, and when I moved back, I knew it would be a good time to join," Carl says. "For me, it's about learning and getting involved in the local craft beer community, and they're the perfect people to geek out about beer with." Before the pandemic, meetings were held in person and members could talk about announcements for events in the area, styles of the month and technical topics as well as conduct a raffle. One of the best parts was the abil-

ity to taste each members' homebrews.

"There are all kinds of people involved, from mid-twenties to retired," he says. "We've got a lot of engineers but also a lot of people who just like to drink craft beer." One of Carl's favorite parts of being a member of CASK was learning how to be a beer judge at homebrew competitions. CASK puts on homebrew competitions each year and are joined by local beer clubs in the state and beyond. "I got to judge a competition and had a lot of fun tasting other homebrews and getting to think about it and score it," Carl says. "There's a technical aspect of judging."

Last year, Carl was able to help out at a lot of beer festivals, spending time helping breweries and cideries to help pour. "As CASK members, we get priority to volunteer and get to meet people attending from all over, which is a huge part of the club," Carl says. While many events and opportunities have had to change due to the pandemic, CASK still has its monthly meetings virtually, typically with around 30 Zoom attendees.

Being a part of CASK has expanded his homebrewing knowledge and allowed him to learn new things as he sharpens his skills as a homebrewer. He has built many friendships since joining in January 2019, and the club serves as encouragement in his current homebrewing endeavors. His current focus isn't on upgrading capacity but on upgrading equipment itself. "I want to make the process more repeatable and the clean-up process faster and more sanitary," he says. "Those are the things I'm focusing on right now."

The process itself can range in complexity. "I always tell people homebrewing can be as simple or as complex as you want it to be," Carl says. "You can get out of it what you're interested in, whether you want to tinker with things and build your own equipment or just replace beer you like to drink." Carl enjoys the fact that homebrewing is a multifaceted hobby, utilizing aspects of science, engineering, art and cooking. "It's a great hobby for all types of people," he says. "Now is a great time to try homebrewing, and I'd encourage anyone interested to inquire about CASK or any beer club to get connected."

Aside from homebrewing, Carl enjoys spending time sailing, typically going on Wednesday nights after work or to weekend races at Hampton Yacht Club. He also enjoys fishing and shares a boat with a friend, spending time on the James and York rivers. "There's so much water around here," Carl says. "Williamsburg really lends itself to that." To relax, Carl also enjoys online computer gaming with friends near and far.

"Williamsburg is full of rich history and culture, and there are always fun events going on," Carl says. "Within ten minutes of my house, there are plenty of great restaurants, breweries, parks, shops and some of my closest friends." Together with Christina, they enjoy making the most of their time here. "We still talk about how we'd love opening up a brewery one day when the stars align." Until that day, Carl Hayden plans on continuing to expand his knowledge and focus on making the best homebrews he can. NDN

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# DENISE HUNLEY



Lisa Martin Lee Photography

# There's Always Knitters

By Paige Brotherton

Williamsburg is home to a college, amusement parks, retirement homes, and museums alike, making our community one bursting at the seams with a variety of activities for people with diversified interests. Between the clubs, sports teams, and committees, everyone has a chance to find their passion. For those who love a multitude of subjects, it's a promise of everyday excitement, and Denise Hunley is certainly never bored.

One of Denise's primary interests has al-

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ways been history, which is what led her to the town with Colonial Williamsburg in its midst. After initially moving to the area for a brief time, she and her family left for Boston. But Denise returned to Williamsburg before long, missing its small town, historical underscore and all of the friends she had made.

“I fell in love with it because of Colonial Williamsburg, the Jamestown Settlement, and the Jamestown island,” Denise says. “It’s nice to have it all right here in our backyard.”

Though she has never pursued a career in history or museum work, Denise found a way to involve her love of her hometown and its history in her occupation. Like many small business owners, her craft is unique to the place it’s bought. When crocheting totes for her online shop, Denise uses the same fabric seen on the costumes worn by the interpreters in Colonial Williamsburg. “People that come here to visit can take a little of the experience back with them,” she says. “There’s a modern aspect of it, and it incorporates a historical element. It keeps us connected in a way to the past.”

Mixing the past and the present is very important to Denise. When she’s not installing solar panels to the roof of her house or admiring the brickwork of the area’s historical sector, Denise takes classes in programming, mastering new concepts and techniques each week. Her current go-to language is JavaScript, but she’s fascinated by each new discovery she makes. “I’m probably going to fall in love with everything I learn,” Denise says. “You can do a whole lot with very little.”

Her ultimate goal of creating a web platform for small business owners like herself will combine three of her greatest passions: knitting, history, and programming. In searching for a site to sell her items, Denise found that most websites offered only one piece of the puzzle most crafters are looking for, whether it’s a shopping experience, a user-friendly blog, or an easily navigable online display. When it comes to local businesses, Denise feels that the entire experience is important.

“A lot of clients don’t just want to buy a bag from you,” she says. “They want to buy a story that incorporates the process.” Explaining

how she integrates pre-production fabric from Colonial Williamsburg makes the bags more precious to her customers, and she wants to be able to get that across online. “You see a bit of a story instead of just a product.”

Fiber arts may seem like a far reach from computer coding, but Denise has found incredibly eye-opening similarities between the two. After delving into the history of both subjects, she discovered how knitting and weaving patterns inspired early programming.

“We use loom cards for big woven items, and they used those with early programming as a jumping off point,” she says. “It’s crazy, because it just looks like a card with a bunch of holes punched in it, and you wouldn’t think that this is early programming, but it is.” The deeply rooted connection between coding and knitting only heightens Denise’s excitement about her classes. She’s found quarantine the perfect opportunity to take the time to grow her knowledge base so when the world opens up once again, she and her website will be ready.

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isn't Denise's favorite part about knitting, however. Like many people, the best part about her hobby is the friends she shares it with.

"There are a couple different groups that meet, but a couple people are in all the same groups, so we're like one big group that meets on different times and different days." Though getting together is far more complicated now, the clubs have risen to the challenge. "Yarn Matters is the shop that's just down the road from me, and they host virtual knit nights where everybody gets on Zoom and knits together," Denise says.

The owners, Kevin and Marina Hayes, have been hard at work making sure everyone has access to Zoom and knows how to find their friends on whatever device they have available to them. "They have been instrumental in keeping the community together during COVID." With her beloved knitting groups, even little comments can inspire much-needed socially distanced events. "I made a joke at a show saying, 'I miss you guys so much, I would knit in a parking lot with you.' And my friend Rhonda said, 'Let's do it! We can put

on our masks and sit in the sunshine.' And we did," Denise says with a laugh. Getting together and seeing her friends spread out across an empty parking lot in their lawn chairs was the highlight of the week. They all pull out their yarn and needles to make plenty of progress on their various projects, but most of all, they just enjoy each other's company. "We've been friends for years," Denise says. "They know your grandkids' names that they've never met. They'll ask, 'well, how is so-and-so doing with football?' and that's really sweet."

Most importantly, the members of Denise's knitting clubs are always there for her. They do far more than ask about her life; they contribute to it. When Denise's daughter got her first American Girl Doll, the group came together to knit all sorts of little items for her to fill up her wardrobe.

"A couple of my friends knit a couple of things for her dolls, and she treasures those things. She remembers every little piece that somebody made for her." Over the years, Denise herself has made plenty of gifts for her daughter, each one well worth the time and love poured into it. "Some people say don't

sew or knit for your kids because they don't appreciate them, but I feel like you have to frontload that by trusting your kid with precious things," she says. "That's how they learn to appreciate things."

Denise is not surprised by how close she is to her knitting friends and how much she depends on the time spent together to recharge. Once again, she turns to history to find that, throughout the years, the nature of knitters hasn't changed all that much.

"Knitting has such a community behind it, and it always has," Denise says. "If you look at any global crisis, there's always knitters present. If somebody gets cancer, you're going to have knitters showing up with chemo hats. If there's a war, you're going to have knitters showing up with socks and blankets to keep soldiers warm."

Now, during a pandemic, the knitting groups make sure people have a safe way to stave off loneliness without endangering their health. When the next sign of trouble arises, Denise Hunley and her group are ready to make a difference. "There's always knitters," she says with a smile. NDN

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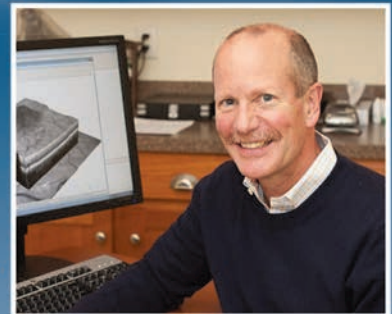
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# BARBARA BURRIS



Lisa Martin Lee Photography

## Spreading cheer with **Painted Rocks**

By Lillian Stevens

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"I thought it was a really cool concept, and so easy to do. Whatever someone may be struggling through, finding one of these rocks can really brighten their day."

The inspiration came from a visit with one of Barbara's grandsons, then living in Oahu, Hawaii. "We were together when we found that first rock, and it said 'Live Aloha' which is perfect. Aloha means breath of light; living aloha is to share kindness, caring, peace, all of those things."

Barbara says her grandson was so excited to find two rocks, and she knew she was on to something. "I had to do my research first, though," she says. "I learned that if you want to start a rock group in your town, you must check first to make sure there isn't one already."

That was in April 2017. Barbara's research revealed no such group existed in Williamsburg. That was something she quickly changed.

"We started with a Facebook presence, four people and a few rocks," she says. "And it's funny because for a few months, there wasn't much response but today we have over 6,200

members. It's been way more than I could have imagined."

Loosely based on the Kindness Rocks project that originated in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, rocks are painted and shared outdoors in a variety of places in and around town.

"Megan Murphy started Kindness Rocks by putting out one rock with the simple message: 'you've got this,'" Barbara says. "A friend of hers found the rock on the beach, and the rest is history."

Designs are as diverse as the artists who create them. Whether inspired by the sea, a favorite band, the season or just a vibrant color or message, anything goes. Here in Williamsburg, typical hiding spots include the Historic Area, New Town and local parks. Some rocks have traveled cross country and even internationally.

"If you find a rock, you can either leave it intact, move it to a new location, or just keep the rock," she says. "Whatever you do, we hope you'll take a picture of your rock and share it on our Williamsburg VA ROCKS! Facebook page."

Painting the rocks doesn't require a lot of skill or talent, although some folks certainly bring both to the table.

"Some prefer to write messages or decorate their rocks with stickers, while other make elaborate art with their rocks," Barbara says. "Some paint animals on their rocks, others paint nautical scenes or something significant to them. One of my favorite rocks was painted by my three-year-old grandson. It runs the gamut and they're all precious."

"It melts your heart to see some of the posts from people who have found our rocks. Someone might say they were having the worst day or that they just had a cancer treatment when they found their rock."

Rock artists typically include some identifiers on the bottom of the rock, perhaps their initials and the year. If they are with a particular rock group, that might be included as well.

One word of caution: never take a rock from personal property or leave one in a federal park. "Some people have started leaving rocks along the Colonial Parkway, and that's not allowed."

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If you leave rocks there, the park rangers will take them up.”

Barbara marvels at the many wonderful people she’s met over the span of these few short years.

From rock fundraisers to benefit the Heritage Humane Society, one of which, unfortunately, was canceled this year due to the pandemic, to rock painting events, she and her group have also collaborated with local studios like Artfully Yours Studio and Sentiments by Shannon, as well as the Community Kindness Project, Williamsburg Police and James City County Police. There’s a rock garden at WISC, and a rock pot at the James City County Recreation Center.

“The idea to open a rock garden at the Williamsburg Indoor Sports Complex came from Dr. Matthew Eppright, an orthodontist with Williamsburg Orthodontist,” she says. “He was painting a giraffe on a rock with his young daughter at an event we hosted when he realized that this was something he wanted to be

involved with.”

The rock garden was built by Coleman Nursery and “planted” with several dozen decorated rocks.

“The idea is to raise awareness,” Barbara says. “because a lot of people don’t know about the rock sharing and how it works.”

She has always loved art and has dabbled at it over the years. But she says anybody can have fun with their unique creations.

“We’re all artists! And it doesn’t cost much. It’s truly a win-win situation. I just hope people find joy and love in this because that’s what it’s really about. The really cool thing is I probably painted and hid 300 rocks before I found my first rock.”

Barbara sources most of her rocks at Luck Stone, but emerging rock artists can find pebble stones at Home Depot or just about any garden center. In terms of supplies, the paints themselves are very inexpensive and can be found at Walmart, craft shops like Michael’s, or on Amazon.

“You’ll want to use an acrylic paint,” she says. “Then use an acrylic sealer to make your creation weatherproof.”

For Barbara, the takeaway has been the wonderful people she’s met.

“You never know what someone’s journey is or how a neighbor’s day is going,” she says. “I love to see the happy faces, whether they are children or adults. So many of them will post on our Facebook group page that they found their rock at a time when they really needed it.” Barbara has lived all over the world, so that makes this endeavor all the more meaningful for her.

“I have taken rocks to Brazil and Spain,” she says. “They’ve really traveled all over, so that’s amazing.”

The native of Macon, Georgia was educated at the University of Georgia and later married a man she affectionately calls a “military brat.” “My husband, Doug, grew up in a military family and then he, in turn joined the U.S. Army where he served as an engineer for 23



  
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years. His career has taken us all over the United States and the world.”

The couple has three children and eight grandchildren. Before landing in Williamsburg, they lived in Yorktown.

“Yorktown was the last place Doug was active duty,” Barbara says. “When he retired from the Army, he continued his work as a civilian.” Ultimately, the couple designed and built their home on 26 acres in Williamsburg.

“We love it so much here,” she says. “Williamsburg is such a cozy, friendly place.”

Like their parents, Barbara and Doug’s children have lived all over the United States too, one as far away as Korea.

“After having them all over the country, it’s nice that they are a little closer.”

Their oldest son lives in Apex, North Carolina with his wife and their three-year-old son. One of their daughters lives in Utah with her husband and their six children. Their youngest, her husband and their three-year-old son also live in North Carolina.

Not surprisingly, all of the grandchildren enjoy painting rocks.

Even though the rocks are intended to be whimsical little ambassadors of happiness, sometimes a rock can hold a deeper meaning. Recently, a member of the community reached out to Barbara with a special request.

“I was honored to paint some really special rocks for her children,” she says. “This was a young mother of two who had lost her husband to cancer. One of her children wanted a rock with a rubber ducky painted on it; the other one wanted a slytherin from Harry Potter.”

Another rock featured the likeness of the Muppets character “Animal,” the wild and frenzied red head who played the drums.

“There have been so many special rocks. But those really do have a special significance for me.”

Barbara Burris looks forward to more painted rocks, more smiles and good cheer.

“That’s what it is all really about.” NDN

## Next Door Neighbors

Publisher.....Meredith Collins  
Editor.....Narielle Living, [narielleliving@gmail.com](mailto:narielleliving@gmail.com)  
Copy Editor.....Ginger White  
Photographer.....Lisa Cumming  
Graphic Designer.....Sue Etherton  
Account Manager.....Anne Conkling

### Writers

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

### Advertising Information

**Meredith Collins**

(757) 560-3235

[meredith@williamsburgneighbors.com](mailto:meredith@williamsburgneighbors.com)

[www.WilliamsburgNeighbors.com](http://www.WilliamsburgNeighbors.com)

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Lisa Martin Lee Photography

# Football in Williamsburg

By Alison Johnson

When the clock ran out at his final high school football game, Dave Willis figured his time playing his favorite sport was over. Taking off his uniform, pads, helmet and cleats that day wasn't easy.

Little did teenage Dave know that as an adult, he would find teams where he could still play full-contact tackle football. Or that he would twice create and coach semi-pro teams of his own, the latest a new local team called Williamsburg Colonials Football.

As the New Year begins, Dave is working to build a roster of 40 to 50 players and about 10

coaches for the Colonials, planning to compete this spring in the Atlantic Coast Football Alliance (ACFA). Home games would be at the Warhill Sports Complex near Lafayette High School.

"There's no professional football team nearby, and there are a lot of talented players at the local high school level who don't get a chance to go to college," Dave says. "I want to give them an avenue to keep playing if they love the game and are willing to put in the work."

Barring COVID-19 disruptions, the 2021 spring season likely will kick off with a pre-

season game on Feb. 20 and run through early May, with playoffs and a championship game. Dave also hopes to play a fall season in the ACFA, a semi-pro league with 24 teams from New Jersey to North Carolina.

Dave, 42, will be the Colonials' owner and head coach, bringing plenty of experience with him. Before moving to Williamsburg in May 2020, he coached a youth team for five years in Delaware and was an offensive coach for a middle school team. He also built a semi-pro team from scratch, the Delaware Fury, and was an owner/player/coach for 10 years.



As a coach, Dave describes himself as a straightshooter with a “what you see is what you get” personality, as well as a “schemer” on the sidelines.

“It’s like playing chess or solving a puzzle to me,” he explains. “I see what the other team is doing and try to adjust. I often have a slow start where people are like, ‘What is he doing?’ But by the end of the game, we’re turning it

on. I’ve had lots of fourth quarter comebacks.”

Dave is lining up business sponsors for the Colonials and has a silent partner based in Baltimore who has already covered the cost of uniforms. The team’s blue and white helmets are adorned with an eagle, in honor of Williamsburg’s rich history in America.

Sports have always been a huge part of Dave’s life. Born in Towson, Maryland, he

spent hours playing games outside with his two brothers and occasionally his sister, or just tossing a ball around by himself. He also turned a swing set into a field goal post. “I would kick the ball from one side of the yard through the uprights,” he recalls.

Dave started in organized football and baseball at age 7 and was involved in football, wrestling and track through high school.

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Football, though, was his first choice of sports, whether he was at running back, wide receiver or quarterback.

“Football has always been an escape for me,” he says. “As a kid, I was a little guy who had a real short temper, and on the field, I could be a different person and release all that energy inside. It kept me calm and kept me from doing dumb stuff and getting into trouble.”


After graduating from high school, Dave joined the Navy for four years. He worked as a gas turbine systems tech, responsible for upkeep in the ship engine room, and played football for a base team. He also spent three years in Japan, getting an opportunity to travel through much of Asia and even to Australia. The highlight for him was traveling to Hong Kong.

“My family didn’t have a lot of money growing up, so I went into the Navy thinking I would get money to pay for college,” he notes. “Well, turns out I didn’t ever go to college, but I got to see the world. I would never trade those experiences.”

Once Dave left the military in 2001, he took a construction job with his father and has stayed in the field ever since, happy to be

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working outdoors rather than in an office. He lived in Delaware for 16 years and now serves as a superintendent for a Richmond-based siding company.

The itch to run another football team hit suddenly, as Dave drove past Warhill for a job. "I thought it was a beautiful complex and fell in love with it," he says. "I got home and told my girlfriend if I ever had a team again, I would make Warhill our home. She said do it. So, I did."

Dave adds that he has learned from mistakes he made with the Fury. "I threw that team together real fast, too fast. I had too few players; actually, I joined the league before I even had a roster. And I needed to advertise more to build interest."

The Colonials team is recruiting men 18 and older, although Dave says he won't discriminate if a woman comes out to play. So far, interested players have ranged from recent high school graduates to men in their 20s and 30s.

"We want dedicated ballers, people who

will really commit to the effort and not just do it to get a uniform or brag that they made a team," Dave says. "This is for people who aren't ready to give this sport up, and obviously it's also a great way to get exercise and make friends."

Many older players get a major mental boost, too. "Whatever is bothering me, real world problems or whatever else, football allows me to leave it all for a few hours and be happy," he says. "I think it's even more important for adults for those reasons."

Dave chose to join the ACFA, founded by six owners in 2008, for its emphasis on quality competition, fair play and good sportsmanship. The league is especially interested in expanding to towns not near major cities, as long as they have lighted fields.

Outside of football, Dave is a father of two girls, Kierra, 14, and Kailyn, 10, from a previous relationship, both of whom prefer soccer but are content to watch football with their dad. He also enjoys spending time with his girlfriend, and original Colonials fan, Lori

Wood.

Free time activities for Dave include fishing, learning about local history, going to Busch Gardens and cheering for his chosen football teams, the Philadelphia Eagles and University of Florida Gators.

Another hobby is working on cars, an interest first sparked as Dave watched his father fix vehicles for resale during childhood. "He had a kind of mini-junkyard out in the front of our house," Dave remembers. "A '71 Camaro was my first car, and I'm now rebuilding a '69 Camaro. It's slow progress; I've had it since 2003. But it's a fun challenge."

It's a fun challenge just like bringing a new football team to town. And Dave Willis can't wait to get the ball rolling on the Colonials.

"The interest here has been really good," he says. "I have people coming up to me or reaching out on social media to talk about it. It would be a new thing to do on Saturday nights, especially in the spring when there's no football on TV. I'm excited. I feel great about our chances." NDN



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Lisa Martin Lee Photography


# The Life of a Writer

By Narielle Living

Patti Gaustad Procopi has lived in many places around the world but considers herself to be a Virginia native. “I’m an army brat who has lived all over the world including Thailand, Germany and England. But I can claim to be a ‘real’ Virginian because I was born at Ft. Monroe.”

Moving often can be disconcerting, but children often have a way of finding the good in any situation. “There were ups and downs to moving so often,” Patti says. “I didn’t even go to the same school twice until seventh and eighth grade. I was fairly shy and had a hard time making friends.” Like many youngsters, she learned to adapt and found the one hobby that would stay with her for life. “I quickly discovered the library at each post we were assigned to. Reading became my salvation.”

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Patti's love of reading became a passion that, like so many, led her to new worlds and new people. Each story gave her a way to live inside a new world, even if only for a day. Because she loved books so much, she knew from an early age what type of career she wanted. "I always wanted to be a writer," she says. "I was fascinated by books and wanted to create one of my own. If I couldn't write, I wanted to be a librarian."

After graduating from high school in Frankfurt, Germany, Patti attended her first two years of college at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia. She remembers the challenges of deciding where to go to college at that time. "Imagine trying to find a school to attend with only brochures," she says, reminiscing about the pre-computer era. "This was long before the day of the internet!" For her second two years of college, Patti attended Schiller European University in London in order to be closer to her family. In addition, she had always wanted to live in London. "My secret fantasy was that I would meet Paul McCartney and he would marry me! I've always had an overactive

imagination, which is good for a writer," she says with a laugh.

After graduation, Patti returned home to find a job. "Home for me was in Frankfurt, Germany. I got a job as a tour planner for the USO." Her job with the USO was as a tour and program planner. "My main focus was to try to introduce Americans to German culture," she says. "Once a month, I ran a tour that introduced military spouses to the city of Frankfurt: how to use public transportation, a German meal and the history of the city. We took Americans on tours to German festivals, but the program I am most proud of was taking American families to spend the weekend on German family farms."

The farms were in small German villages in the state of Hesse, where the Hessian soldiers who fought in the American Revolution came from. "The Germans did not speak English, and the Americans did not speak German. We dropped them off and said we would pick them up in two days. When we returned, everyone said they had the most wonderful weekend and had made great friends with their host families despite the language barrier." Patti considers this

to be an example of how people learn they have more in common with our fellow humans than they realize.

Patti's husband, Greg, worked for the Department of Defense in Frankfurt. "After he graduated, he wanted to see the world," she says. "We met through mutual friends. Our first date was on New Year's Eve on a boat in the middle of the Main river."

After Patti and Greg got married, her husband had to pick a stateside assignment. Patti knew exactly where she wanted to live. "I convinced him he would love living in the Tidewater area," she says. "He was assigned to Fort Monroe, which was a homecoming in a way for me."

She worked at the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation for over thirty years. During that time, Patti held various jobs. "My last job was as the Product Development Manager for the Gift Shops," she says. "My proudest achievement in those years was the creation of a series of children's books that depicted a day in the life of children who came to Jamestown in the early 1600s, including an English girl, an Indian



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girl, a cabin boy and an African girl taken from her home and sold into slavery before ending up at Jamestown Settlement. The books are photo story books with real children photographed in the recreated area of Jamestown Settlement. Two of the stories were written by Education department staff, one was written by one of the historic interpreters and I wrote the last one, *Mukambu of Ndongo*. They are all still in print and are available at the gift shop at the museum."

Although she retired in 2016, Patti continued to follow her first love: writing. Writing can be a lonely occupation, and she knew she needed to reach out to her peers in that field. "I had been writing since I retired, but I didn't seem to be getting anywhere with finding an agent or getting published," she says. "I thought I needed to start over. I needed a group of fellow writers to read my work and give me insights." She decided to join the Chesapeake Bay Writers, a group for aspiring and established writers. Through that group, she discovered the Williamsburg Critique Group, which consisted of writers who helped each other through the writing process.

"That really was life changing."

For Patti, that was when her work began to go in the direction she wanted. "The most valuable part is having people who are not your friends or family read your work and give you constructive feedback. People who are also writers and know things, things I needed to learn."

In addition, she felt it was helpful for her to be able to read other writer's work and provide comments and suggestions. "Everyone in our group writes different genres, and while some of them are not things I would pick off a library shelf to read, I have enjoyed the experience very much."

When it comes to writing, Patti is drawn to the act of creating a world with characters that people can relate to. Her goal with her work is to make people laugh, cry and think. "And maybe make them change things about their lives."

Her recent debut novel, *Please... Tell Me More*, has garnered a number of positive reviews. "*Please... Tell Me More* was inspired by a phone call from my sister about her boyfriend that she met on a dating website," she says. "The story just kind of exploded in my head, and

my fingers couldn't fly across the keyboard fast enough. And while my work is fiction, I am inspired by real events that happened in my own family. I like to take those events and twist them and tweak them so that while the original events are altered, the emotions are still there."

Currently, Patti is working on a sequel to the novel which she expects to have finished soon. Patti loves the communities of Williamsburg and James City County. "While I didn't become a librarian, I minored in history which was another love of mine, probably from moving around so much, and I was thrilled to get a job at the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation."

Patti says before she retired, she was able to get her history fix while driving to work on the most beautiful road in America: Colonial Parkway. Patti Gaustad Procopi's love for the area shines through when she talks about her life here.

"I love Williamsburg, and for over thirty years our family has spent every Christmas Eve in Williamsburg, dining out and walking through the restored area. I feel blessed to live in this place." NDN

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# Regenerative Farming

By Narielle Living

Lisa Martin Lee Photography

Kathy Stewart was raised on a farm in the Midwest, and she knows how to grow things. She knows soil and she knows farming, and as she says, “It’s in my blood.” Therefore, it was only natural that after years of working in public accounting, it was time to go back to what she first knew: growing things. That is how Toano Botanicals was born.

Prior to moving to this part of the world,

Kathy’s husband had been in the military, which meant they moved around a lot. Once he retired and was offered a job in this area, they looked around for the best location. “We always had the desire to have a little land at some point and get our fingers dirty,” she says. “We bought some property out here in Toano and weren’t sure what we were going to do with it but knew we wanted to have a little land.” Their property

is a little over nine acres, so they are somewhat limited in what they are able to produce. “We raise a couple head of grass-fed beef every year.” There is more to farming than keeping livestock, and Kathy decided to pursue something that has always been close to her heart. “I got interested and active and more educated about the regenerative farming movement and had several different connections with people grow-

To submit a person’s name that you think we should interview, please email our Editor, Narielle Living, at:

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ing flowers.” Flowers, she thought, would be an ideal product for her farming venture.

Regenerative farming, Kathy explains, is improving the soil through agriculture, which in turn allows the soil to give back more to agriculture. Essentially, this is a conservation approach to farming. “I would say regenerative is kind of a mindset,” she says. “Both of us grew up on farms, both of our families were Midwestern crop farmers and both of our fathers were in agribusiness selling fertilizers and chemicals.” Kathy is particularly interested in the shift away from chemical-based farming to a more biological, natural lifecycle production. “It is trying to get [the soil] back into balance with nature so it actually does what it needs to do. I use the example with my kids that if you want your food to give you certain nutrients, or minerals, or trace minerals, if those are not in the soil, they’re probably not in your food.”

Kathy believes that regenerative farming is an important update to older farming practices and is excited to be on the forefront of this change. She notes that during their years in the

military, farming changed drastically. “When we went back to farms, most of the farms are now owned by conglomerates.” She remembers knowing 50 farmers within 10 miles of any given area in the Midwest, but that has all shifted. “Now there’s maybe one or two farms farming all that land because this is the way things have changed.”

When planning her business, Toano Botanicals, around regenerative farming, Kathy first had to assess the soil. “We were quite depleted,” she says. Some of the reason for this is that the soil around their farm is sandy, rather than the usual clay-like soil found in much of this area. So how did they address this issue? “We had already learned that the loss of carbon in the soil was key, and we knew we were going to have to rebuild the carbon in our soil in order to get it back to doing anything.”

Through a process of trial and error, they have been working and studying ways to restore the soil. “It’s much easier now to find that information than it was 15 years ago,” she says. In addition, they have reached out to other

farmers who are doing the same kind of work. “There’s a big movement in the country.”

Through all of her research, Kathy’s husband Greg has been a big support as well as a wonderful resource. “My husband actually has his degree in plant and soil science.” She notes that although his degree is in plant soil science, his studies mainly focused on the use of chemicals to enrich things, which is what Kathy is now avoiding. “He uses that example that it is a very different way of managing.”

Currently, Kathy’s focus is on growing flowers. “We have about 1,000 peony plants that we started putting in a year ago last fall. Those take about three years to mature, so I’ll have a little bit of a crop this year but it won’t be full maturity. [The year] 2022 will be our first full harvest on that, and those will continue to grow and just get bigger and produce more. My focus has pretty much been perennials at this point.” Kathy’s children and grandchildren do not live close to them, so she and her husband plan their schedule to allow time to visit with them. Planting perennials is part of that plan. “If

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you're doing a lot of annual flower farming, it's a lot of time on the farm." She notes the process of switching things up, pulling things out and putting things in becomes extremely time consuming. "We do need to be able to have some blocks of time to travel to see our family."

Her children and grandchildren also visit them on their farm. Although her kids do not necessarily have memories of their grandparents' midwestern farms, they fully support Kathy's endeavor and have enjoyed watching it grow. Initially, they may have been mildly concerned that she was taking on too much and they would never get to see their mother, but she easily reassured them. "Being a working mom and military spouse all these years, I have a lot of experience with balancing schedules," she says with a laugh.

Regenerative farming takes a lot of work, but the results of the effort include restoring the land and combatting climate change. In addition, Kathy has another long-term goal: to serve the local community, including local designers and florists.

"We've learned during this past year the importance of keeping our local businesses and supply chains going," she says. For instance, the flower industry took a hit during the pandemic. "Events came crashing to a halt but there was still a need for flowers. But they were coming from overseas, and they were not able to be imported." That's where local businesses became integral to the community, she says, and small farmers were able to step in and help when the supply chain broke down. "There's a lot of small flower farmers cropping up, even here in the county, and that interests me too."

Kathy recognizes that there are a number of other possibilities for Toano Botanicals, and she says that perhaps at some point in her future she can add to the business. Agritourism is one option, but she says that it would have to be on a small scale. "We're only 10 acres, and we have neighbors fairly close so we're not going to be able to have big events. I really have an interest in educating people, or at least answering any questions they would have about regenerative farming and why it's so important to us and so

important to our children that we try to do this. With all the concern about carbon in the atmosphere and limiting carbon, we really need to look at our soil and sequestering carbon in the soil as much as we need to worry about carbon emissions from fossil fuels."

Kathy's philosophy related to regenerative farming and business in general is simple: "We're not out here on our own," she says, referring to her farm. "Regenerative farming is what drives us, but supporting local, whether it's artists or small businesses or people producing food." This effort to support local industry is what connects people and creates a self-sustaining community.

For Kathy Stewart, connecting to her community is part of a broad focus she has, whether it's through bringing people out to see their flowers and where they're grown, or working with other farmers to make the community more aware of what's going on. And as she connects to others, she continues to heal the earth and grow beautiful things, one shovelful of dirt at a time. NDN

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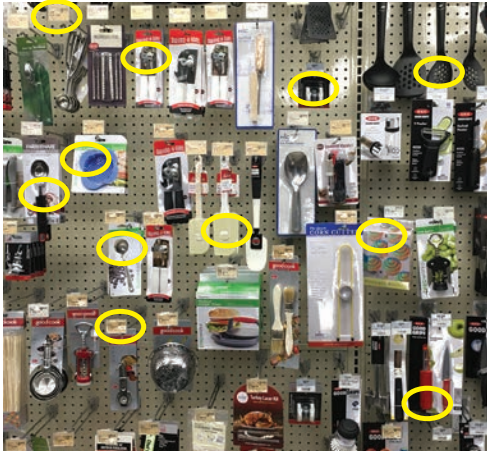
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