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# Education

Panagiotis Tsigaridas





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Meredith Collins, Publisher

We talked to some very experienced and talented educators in putting together this issue. They represent a variety of specialties on a variety of skills and topics, and they work with learning audiences ranging in age from toddler to senior citizen. The sheer magnitude of education that is taking place continuously throughout our community is mind boggling to me. I believe that learning and education is truly the engine that powers community growth and success and that engine is clearly hitting on all cylinders here in

Williamsburg, thanks to these remarkable people and others like them.

What you may also observe is that in the past year nearly all of these educators were thrust into their own serious learning experience when they came face to face with finding ways to connect to and influence learners during the pandemic and social distancing restrictions. They faced a very sharp learning curve regarding distance learning technologies and techniques and had to quickly explore and implement new lesson plans and strategies to support those new technologies and techniques. The need and hunger for learning did not take a rest and these innovative teachers worked tirelessly to meet the challenge. I am so impressed with what they have accomplished and continue to accomplish day in and day out. I am also impressed with the learners who also had to adapt and learn how to engage in these new and unfamiliar learning environments. I learned we are very fortunate to have such amazing resources at our disposal and it makes me proud to be a part of a community that is served by such dedicated and innovative people. NDN

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FINE ART PHOTOGRAPHY  
by Mason Murawski

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# Leading and Learning in the pandemic and beyond

By Lillian Stevens

Panagiotis Tsigaridas was three years into his role as principal at Berkeley Middle School when Covid-19 brought the world to its knees. In an education setting, the entire day centers on lesson plans and schedules. There was, however, no plan for this.

Over the course of this past year, Panagiotis has steered the Berkeley community through some pretty turbulent waters, all the while maintaining course.

“It’s all for the kids,” he says. “Everything we do is for them.”

As the school RE-opened its doors to stu-

dents in mid-March, he reflected on lessons learned, silver linings and perspective.

“I think part of what we have learned from the pandemic is the importance of our partnerships with each other. The schools have to partner with the students and families, and the families have to partner with the schools. We have to cultivate that partnership, or the kids won’t be successful.”

Even though he describes himself as a proponent of change, Panagiotis admits that operating during the pandemic forced schools to change in ways that they couldn’t have imag-

ined. Everyone has had to learn new modes and quickly.

“Personally, I like change,” he says. “I think we grow when we stretch out of our comfort zones. Teachers have had to change their style of teaching, while learning new platforms like Zoom. They also had to get comfortable with a 360 degree webcam called Owl.”

Integrating the Owl cameras with Zoom allowed students learning from home to see what was actually going on in the classroom.

“Hey, for the first whole month of the pandemic, I felt like an IT person!” Panagiotis says



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with a chuckle. “There I was, trying to help with technological glitches while we were all learning Zoom.”

Teachers, staff, and the principal, have also been called upon to accomplish tasks that are not part of their normal jobs. Whether learning new technologies or disinfecting tables in the cafeteria, his team has been all-in because each piece is part of a larger whole.

“As I said, we are in this for the students,” Panagiotis says. “We’re so happy to be back in school, and for the most part everything’s going well. I have to say that some of these kids have really surprised us while they’ve been home all these months, taking up new things that interest them. Some have learned how to cook, others learned how to code, as in computer programming. And now, they want to build on these new talents in school. Covid threw us a curve ball, but I think that some things will come out of this that will lead our students to successful careers.”

Panagiotis is quick to say that success doesn’t look the same for all. As a young boy, for instance, he wanted to be a successful doctor. “I was good at science. And doctors make a lot of money, right? So, I thought I’d be a doctor and make a lot of money.”

After graduating from Bruton High School, where he was a straight “A” student, he set out to the University of Virginia where his heart told him that education, not medicine, would be his life’s work.

“I was beginning to look at success a little differently,” he says. “What I did know was that I wanted to make a difference with kids. So I kind of carved my own path.”

That path took him into education, teaching at the high school level. He was barely older than the students he taught. He taught at Woodside High School, in Newport News, for five years.

“The kids seemed to enjoy being in my class,” he says. “I was only in my mid 20s then so they were just a few years younger than I was. I understood them and took care to work each day with any who needed help getting caught up.”

He never had a child fail his class.

Eventually, a colleague suggested that Panagiotis look into an administrative leadership role, so he enrolled at the Newport News campus of George Washington University, earning his certification in one year. Soon thereafter, he accepted a position as an assistant principal at Denbigh High School. Prior to coming to Berkeley, he served as principal at Charles City High School.

Although a good part of his career thus far has been at the high school level, Panagiotis has also embraced middle school education. He has a nugget of advice for the parents of young teens.

“Encourage independence,” he says. “I think some parents still follow too closely behind, checking up too much. We can’t do their work for them, or they will fail later in life. They have to do it themselves.”

These are lessons he learned within his own family.

“I’m sure my parents didn’t expect me to go into education when there was a restaurant business waiting for me. Now, I’m in education and I have a sister who is a labor and delivery nurse. You have to like what you do every single day. I love this job. No two days are the same.”

Panagiotis’ parents were born in Greece, immigrating to Williamsburg in 1977 to join other family members working in the restaurant industry locally.



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“My parents were Greek immigrants who couldn’t speak a word of English,” he says “They learned English from me. I came home from school every day, and they sat with me and learned the alphabet with me in elementary school.”

The elder Tsigaradis owned Giovanni’s Restaurant in Williamsburg before buying the Peddler Steak House.

“My dad said to me don’t come home with anything less than an ‘A’ and since my parents did so much to provide me opportunities in this country, I wanted to make them proud.”

Unfortunately, his father passed away six years ago but he says his mother is very proud of her family. Panagiotis and his wife, Emily, have seven children, ranging in age from 9 months to 23 years.

“So, I’ve lost my hair,” he says with a hearty laugh. “But I think that having seven children gives me a unique perspective. When my school parents come in for advice, they know that I have first-hand knowledge, and that I speak from the heart. I have seven kids who were raised in the same house and in the same environment, and I can tell you they are all different. Each one has a different personality and a different perspective.”

No matter what their personality or perspectives, middle school is a time of transition. In three short years, these children will blossom into high school students who are, for the most part, treated like adults. According to Panagiotis, as they move from 6th to 8th grade, they will enjoy more freedom and more privileges. When they leave 8th grade, they are truly ready for high school. By that time, the students will have had an opportunity to explore their passions through the courses they choose.

“Sure, there are students taking Algebra in 6th or 7th grade here, but maybe your child needs to experiment with other classes? In 6th grade, we have a class called ‘The Wheel’ exposing them to the arts. There is one quarter when they take art, another quarter for choir, one quarter for band. Every year there is a parent who insists their child doesn’t want to be in that class, but I’d encourage them to let their children just experiment and resist the urge to pre-plan for their kids.”

Panagiotis offered a shout-out to the teachers at Berkeley Middle School. “The teachers here are great people,” he says. “I think we have the best teachers in the division. One reason I know things are going well here is because people don’t want to leave.”

He’s also delighted with the students’ performance academically.

“Each year there are accreditation standards. Depending on the content, the students need to score between 75 and 85 percent to assure accreditation. There have been difficulties in the past, but I’m really proud of our success.”

This past year, Berkeley Middle School was the only middle school in its division where there were no gaps in the gap groups.

“We had passing scores in every single group,” he says. “When they published the end-of-year scores, I remember walking into the meeting and being overwhelmed with joy. Our teachers and administrative team did a heck of a job.”

With these successes, the proud principal looks forward. Panagiotis Tsigaradis is delighted to say that the students seem similarly enthusiastic. NDN



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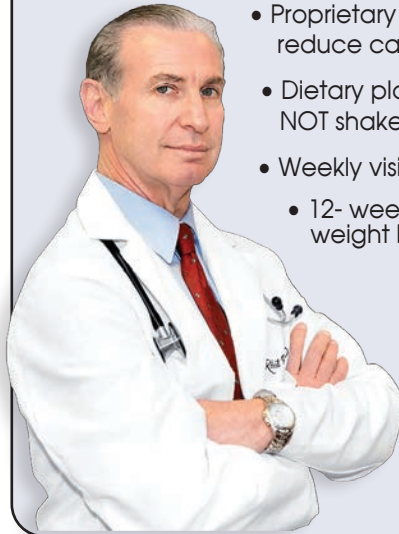


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# Guiding Students to Musical Goals

By Narielle Living



Mason Murnowski Photography

Carl Lundgren has spent his life focused on music and is equally versatile with a number of styles including jazz, classical, and commercial music. That’s not bad, considering his initial reaction to piano lessons. “My parents started me on piano lessons when I was kicking and screaming at seven years old, forcing me to practice and taking me to competitions and lessons and paying for all that for all those years,” he says. Today, his family is proud of his many accomplishments. “I would imagine there’s some level of satisfaction to see that it was an

investment.”

Carl was raised in Calgary, Canada, but has spent many years living in the United States. After applying and being accepted to the University of North Texas, where he received his undergraduate degree, he subsequently stayed for his master’s degree. “Then I remained in the area working for a number of years.”

While at the University of North Texas, Carl was an adjunct instructor of both trombone and jazz trombone, but his journey to the trombone was not typical and came via playing

the flute.

“I started on piano, and when I got to grade seven band, I picked the flute because I wanted to sit next to a girl that I had a crush on. It was theoretically a sound strategy, but we never sat next to each other in two years of playing flute in the same section because of course there were about 25 of us. Then I heard the jazz band play, and I’ll never forget they played ‘American Patrol’ and ‘Louie Louie.’ I thought it was about the coolest thing I’ve ever heard.” When he asked if he could join the jazz band, he was told

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yes, but not as a flute player. They did, however, need more trombone players.

The crossover from flute to trombone was made easier by Carl's desire to play jazz. "My flute skills didn't really map to trombone at all, but music is music and if you have a foundation, you have the gear. Learning a new instrument is not so different."

Music education is an integral part of what Carl does in Williamsburg today.

"I've been living here for about two-and-a-half years now," he says. "My wife is the music

and arts librarian at William & Mary. And since then, as a freelance musician, I've plugged myself in in a variety of ways in the community."

One of the projects that Carl has worked on is the Morning Music and Mindfulness Minute Project, a video project that Williamsburg Symphony has created in conjunction with Williamsburg-James City County Schools.

This collaborative project has had a profound impact on local students. "We've produced over 20 short videos, three minutes or so in length, and they're being played for every student K

through five during the school's morning announcements." Each video centers around one topic, issues such as goal setting, self awareness, self management, delayed gratification, social awareness, relationship building, responsible decision-making skills, goal setting and any number of other themes. "At the end of the video, we also play," Carl says. "We also show the instrument for a little show and tell. The idea is to help students connect to music and music practice concepts with actual real life kind of emotional, cognitive skills."

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**Charlotte Jones**  
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technical side of buying and selling a home involves its own language, that REALTORS® speak fluently. There are forms, disclosures and paperwork, which are very complex. A REALTOR® is an expert at navigating all of these so you get the best deal in the timeframe you want.

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**Objective Guidance and Information:** REALTORS® have the most up to date information on utilities, zoning, schools, and even more. Also, a REALTOR® has recommended resources for buyers in a "Buyer Beware" state such as Virginia. These resources will help you determine if a specific property is located in your desired area and has access to all the amenities you need. By knowing your specific criteria, a REALTOR® can help narrow the properties or neighborhoods that might suit you better than you thought.

**Expert Eyes:** For a REALTOR®, their everyday life is working within the housing market. They are constantly inspecting properties and dissecting listings and contracts. So, when they look at a listing, house, or contract they can easily spot any negatives/positives or even red flags. These skills can help you conduct your home search in an efficient manner and help you manage an effective and successful sale of your home.

**Skilled Negotiators:** There's a lot of details involved in finalizing a "contract of purchase" on a home. These conversations can be very complicated, and it's important to have an experienced professional on your side. A REALTOR® will use your viewpoint to look at the situation from every angle, including crafting a purchase agreement that gives enough time for you to finish inspections and investigations of the property before you are obligated to complete the purchase.

**Emotional Support:** Buying or selling a property can be a rollercoaster of emotions, because a house is more than just four walls and a roof. It is a home that can hold so much more meaning. Also, buying or selling a home is a huge financial obligation that can cause a lot of stress. It is important to have a concerned, objective professional to support you through the complicated maze of paperwork and required time related disclosures mandated by law to make buying or selling a home less complex.

If you are considering buying or selling your home, contact a local REALTOR®. It is important to list with a REALTOR® who can market or find a listing in the local Multiple Listing Service closest to the home you plan to sell or buy. In the greater Williamsburg market area this would include REALTORS® who belong to the Williamsburg Association of REALTORS® (WAAR) and the Williamsburg Multiple Listing Service. WAAR is a local REALTOR® Association that upholds the standards of the National Association of REALTORS® and provides a cooperative, equitable and accurate listing database for REALTORS® and consumers in the Historic Triangle.



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This year, education has been difficult. The pandemic has drastically changed everything. "Kids just aren't getting a chance to join band and be inspired by 'Louie Louie' and 'American Patrol.' So the thinking is, how do we get music into their lives, how do we inspire them to be excited about [playing] an instrument."

The Williamsburg Symphony is also running a coaching session program four times a year. These sessions teach middle and high schoolers on a variety of instruments. "I teach all the brass kids. It runs for about six weeks."

When he is teaching, Carl always has a game plan. "The most important thing is for students to walk away with ideas that stick, whether or not they apply them in the way that I feel they should apply them. One of my core, fundamental principles is that you need to build a relationship with your ear and build your own relationship with your instrument using your ear as a guide. I don't think there's such a thing as a teacher. I think that a teacher is a guide, and the student is really just teaching themselves. So with all that said, I go into the game plan and we have certain exercises we want to target for the brass players, slurs and scales, and we talk about key concepts, but the bigger takeaway is usually I want to have a kid playing melodies by ear. Learning to play without sheet music and not being afraid to try to express something on an instrument that is as of yet, unfamiliar. That's how they learn, by putting themselves out there and not being afraid to play a melody or try something new or imitate what they hear on the radio."

Carl's days are a mix of composing, teaching and playing. He has his own private students and also teaches trombone students at William & Mary. In addition, he performs with local bands. "Beyond that, the rest of the time I am doing a lot of writing and arranging and commissioned work. I spend quite a bit of time with computer arranging, and I've got a home studio where I also do home recording for various projects. There's a little bit of everything going on."

As parents consider signing their children up to learn an instrument, or adults think about taking that step and learning to play, there is one thing Carl wants everyone to know. "It's an exercise of delayed gratification," he says. "I think back to my own beginnings with it. I didn't want to practice. But there's not necessarily a right way or a wrong way. I think the most important thing is to build your own relationship with the music and learn your instrument in the way that you want to learn it, because that's something that you'll have with you the rest of your life. I think there's a misconception that there is a right way and a wrong way. And [sometimes people think] if you miss the boat, then that's it, you can't be a musician. I've got a student right now who's 78 years old, who has re-dedicated himself to the trombone in the last two years. He's had it around his whole life, but he's never really played. Now in his retirement, he is taking it seriously, and it's been incredibly cool to see the impact that's had on him and the kinds of conversations we end up having as a result. So, I'm a firm believer, music can be in your life, in whatever capacity at any point."

When he is not playing music, Carl is orienteering. Orienteering is a sport that requires extensive knowledge of using a map and compass to navigate. "That's actually a sort of a guiding principle behind some of my music pedagogy." In music, as in terrain, one should always know exactly where they are so they can get to where they want to be. NDN

A portrait of Sonia E. Hepburn, MD, a woman with long dark hair, wearing a white lab coat over a purple top, smiling. The background is a clinical office setting with a sink and cabinets.

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# Opening Gates to K-12 Education

By Kristine Hojnicky



Mason Murawski Photography

Throughout the pandemic, the state of education and how best to serve K-12 students has been a topic of much debate. For former teacher and administrator Mary Beth Preas, the last year presented an opportunity for her to make a large impact on a small group of Williamsburg students who needed extra help navigating a challenging learning environment.

Amidst the challenges thrust upon teachers, students and schools, Mary Beth left her

position as an assistant principal in Gloucester County to start Open Gates Learning Center. Having her own business had always been in the back of her mind and was something she planned to do in retirement, but after seeing first-hand how the pandemic and virtual learning were exacerbating the learning challenges for students already struggling with school, Mary Beth felt she could not sit idly by and watch them fail.

“I’ve been in education for over 30 years and have always wanted to serve where I could make the greatest impact. When schools started shutting down, I couldn’t help but think of the need this was going to create in the community,” Mary Beth says. “My heart went out to families and students who were going to have to figure out a plan for simply getting through the day and doing it successfully. The timing seemed right, and it was something I felt called to do.”



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Within a month of handing in her resignation, Mary Beth had secured a business license, renovated her office space on Jamestown Road, and signed up students in need of virtual learning support and one-on-one tutoring. She formally opened her doors in October 2020, and her clientele has grown to include students ranging from kindergarten to twelfth grade.

The concept of Open Gates is simple. It offers a safe, in-person learning environment that supports virtual and hybrid learning, as well as ongoing instruction for K-12 students. The instructors are all certified teachers and provide flexible blocks of time throughout the day for students to come and receive the accountability and instructional support they need to be successful.

“I chose to call Open Gates a learning center instead of a tutoring center because I didn’t want to limit our activities to intervention,” she says. “Many tutoring centers gear themselves to helping students meet a particular goal, pass a test or a class, and serve a purpose for a moment in time. My goal is to not only help students meet grade level expectations but teach them

how to learn to learn.”

The name “Open Gates” came to Mary Beth during one of her many walks through Colonial Williamsburg. An amateur photographer, she enjoys walking along the many streets and pathways and taking pictures of the historic area. She began to notice the beautiful gates that separate many of the walkways and made the correlation between those decorative barriers and the ones students often face in their education.

“When children face barriers in their education, they get stuck, they can’t pass through, they hit a wall. It’s the same idea with a gate. I thought, what a great way to represent that there is a way through. I can offer students a way to open the gates to their learning and give them strategies they need to be successful.”

Mary Beth’s passion for education began at an early age. As a child, her father was a director of their local YMCA and Mary Beth was constantly involved in activities and camps where she helped with other students and kids. Ironically, however, she disliked school.

“I did not like going to school because I felt like the whole process could have been done

better. One of the reasons why I went into education was because I knew there were a lot of other students like me who didn’t enjoy school and I wanted to identify how their different needs could be met using different styles of learning,” she says.

Mary Beth attended Virginia Tech, where she earned her Bachelor’s Degree in Early Childhood Education with a PreK-8 endorsement. She taught in the Roanoke City, Henrico County, and James City County public school systems, both as a classroom teacher and as a student support specialist for seventeen years before becoming an assistant principal in the Gloucester County public school system.

When she and her husband relocated to Williamsburg in 2005, Mary Beth took advantage of her proximity to William & Mary and returned to school to earn her Master’s Degree in K-12 Administration and Educational Leadership from the School of Education.

“My goal is to build relationships, discover each child’s learning style and to meet them where they are in their learning. I have always had a heart for students who are struggling or



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feeling down on themselves,” she says. “Because I spent most of my years as a first-grade teacher, I’m very passionate about early education. I just couldn’t imagine how children could learn how to read virtually not being in front of a teacher, so I created Open Gates to reach students who were struggling with reading and early foundational skills.”

What Mary Beth found as she began Open Gates was there was a pandemic-driven need for helping not just younger students, but older students as well.

“Home is very distracting for many students, so my thought was to provide a space with support where they could be guided throughout their day, or part of their day. It also gives them an opportunity to relearn or practice skills they struggle with. I want to be the person who can give them the confidence and the push they need.”

Open Gates offers virtual and hybrid learning support each weekday. She structured her center so parents can schedule their children for blocks of supervised sessions, though Mary Beth says she has several students who come for

the entire school day. The center also offers one-on-one tutoring and serves students who have Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and special needs because those students have especially been impacted by the lack of in-person instruction.


Currently, Mary Beth has one other teacher on staff who facilitates sessions on a part-time basis. As Open Gates continues to grow, she wants to bring on more certified teachers to help meet student demands. As she gears up for summer, she’s hopeful she will be able to add a Bridge the Gap group to prepare students for the next school year. She’s also looking at incorporating more enrichment activities into her programming such as book clubs and STEAM groups where a small number of students can gather for experiments and hands-on learning.

“I purposely called Open Gates a learning center so I would have lots of room to incorporate a variety of learning experiences. Now, more than ever, students are missing the excitement of learning. Engaging them in activities that encourage inquisitive thinking and creativity leads to lifelong learning,” she says.

With the little free time she has outside of running Open Gates, Mary Beth and her husband are empty nesters who enjoy exploring Williamsburg and the surrounding area. They frequently visit with their grown children who live in Richmond and are eagerly anticipating the arrival of their first grandchild later this year. In the summer months, they can be spotted jet skiing on the James and York rivers or strolling through Colonial Williamsburg with their dog.


But regardless of what she does recreationally, Mary Beth Preas’ heart and mind is always with her students as she looks at increasing the ways she can help serve the Williamsburg community through Open Gates Learning Center. “I get a little teary-eyed when I think of the incredible year that teachers have had. They need to be commended for their hard work, especially when I think about the patience they’ve demonstrated and their ability to adapt to ever-changing circumstances. They’re doing an incredible job, and I hope my work will continue to be in partnership with schools and in support of the teachers and students.” NDN

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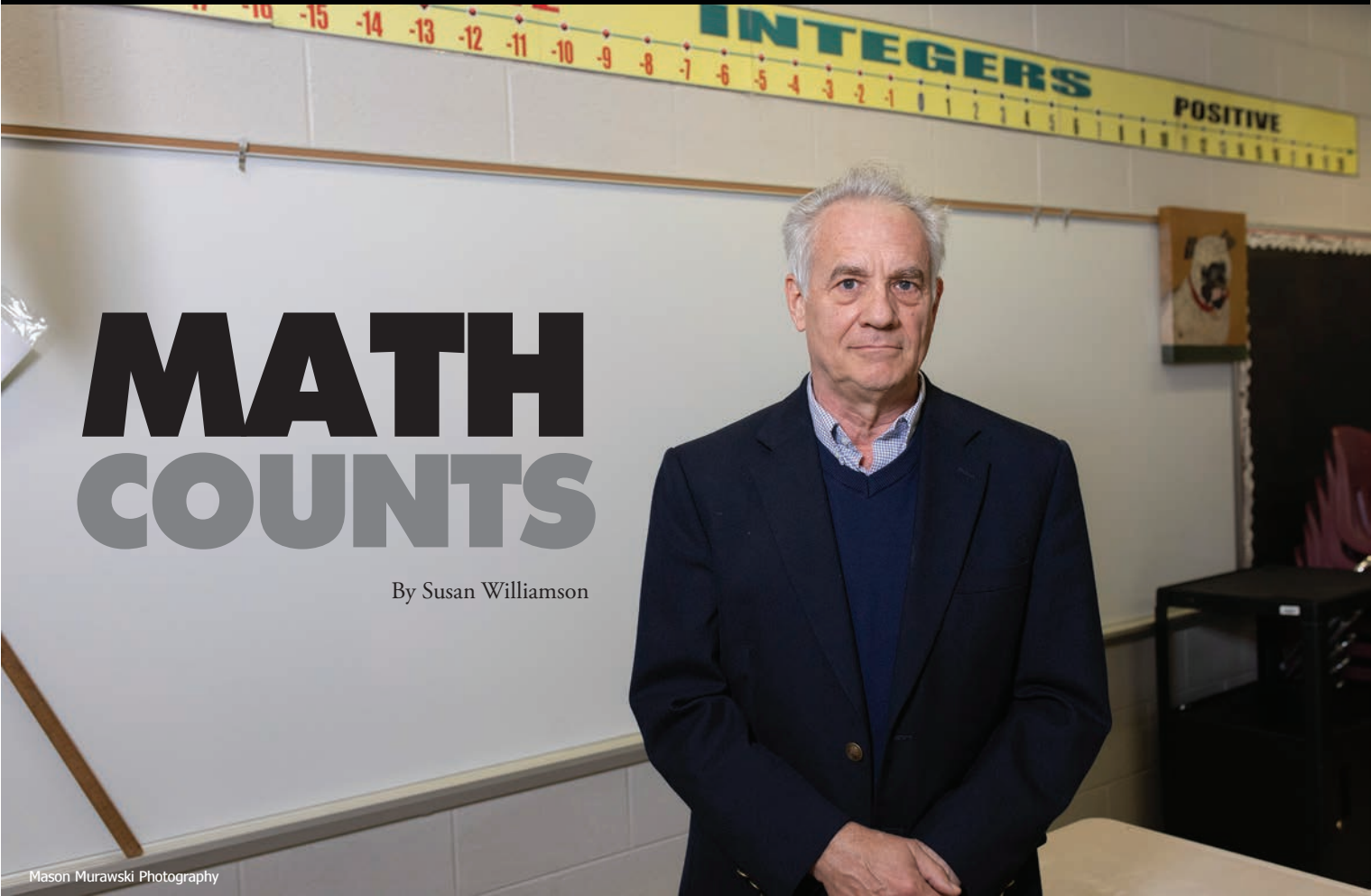
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# RAY HANSON



# MATH COUNTS

By Susan Williamson

Mason Murawski Photography

Ray Hanson has always liked mathematics. Consequently, he is the perfect person to coach the Berkley Middle School Math Counts team. In fact, he has been coaching their team of what he refers to as “Mathletes” for 30 years, with only a brief one-year hiatus to coach Hornsby Middle School when some of his students were assigned to that school.

Math Counts is a national middle school or-

ganization, founded in 1984, which provides, according to their website, “engaging math programs to U.S. middle school students of all ability levels to build confidence and improve attitudes towards math and problem solving.”

There are interscholastic competitions at the local, regional and state levels. The competitions involve three rounds. The first round has four problems for students to work on

their own; the second round has problems for which students are allowed to use calculators; the third round allows team members to work together; and the fourth round consists of a 45-second countdown round reminiscent of the game of Jeopardy.

Ray likes the fact that everyone’s scores are included regardless of the number of members on a team and the scores are averaged, so

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teams do not need to be composed of a certain number of students.

In addition to team competitions, Math Counts offers the National Math Club which provides resources and guidance to educators as well as the Mathvideo Challenge, a contest in which students combine math, creativity, art and technology to produce a video solving a math problem in a real-world setting.

In typical years, five to ten schools compete in regional matches on the peninsula. The winning team and two to four individuals then go on to the state competition in Hampton. Usually, 12 to 22 students from Berkley 6th, 7th and 8th grade classes will participate. They begin after-school practice in September and the season extends through March. But the pandemic changed things. Schools were no longer in session and neither practices nor matches could take place in person. Zoom practices and competitions were held, but the participation was way below normal years. Only three schools competed in the online regional competition. Ray plans to begin in-person practices again and is hoping for a live match against a local school, conducted in a socially distanced cafeteria, before the semester ends.

Ray recruits students from sixth through eighth grades by speaking to their classes and also receives teacher recommendations. Students can then try a few practices to see if it is for them. Another recruiting device is by providing snacks at the after-school practices, Ray says, "If you feed them, they will come."

Ray was actually teaching math at Berkley when a colleague told him about Math Counts. He started the program in the fall of 1991, and in 1992, Berkley won the regional competition. They have been very successful over the years, and that has created a lot of interest among parents and students. Often, he coaches siblings of former team members, and some high school and college students who are former team members have volunteered to return to help him coach. Not only are they helpful, but it means a lot to him that they want to remain involved.

The coaches have resources such as practice problems from previous competitions. Students who normally score high on math tests are often surprised when they may only solve three or five problems out of ten in a practice session, showing them that the problems are indeed challenging. But with practice comes a problem-solving learning curve. Ray enjoys seeing the "aha" moment when a student recognizes a particular type of problem and realizes the best way to go about solving it.

A sample problem might be: What is the sum of all positive integers from 1 to 100? Obviously, one method to solve this would be to add one plus two plus three, and so on. But that would take some time. The students have learned that this set of integers includes 50 pairs of numbers that add up to 101 (1 plus a hundred, 2 plus 99, 3 plus 98 and so forth). So, instead of adding all the integers, the students can multiply 50 times 101 to get the answer—a much quicker solution.

Ray grew up in Leonia, New Jersey, located only two miles from New York City. He attended Bucknell University in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania and majored in secondary education. When he asked to transfer to elementary education, he was told the quota for transferring into

the program had already been met. He later completed his certification at William Patterson College. Ray questions the wisdom of such quotas, especially, he says, "Looking at the scarcity, then and now, of male elementary teachers."

In 1975, he landed a teaching position in King and Queen County, Virginia, and he and his wife, Jane, prepared to move here. Since the county was very rural, they felt that they wanted to live either in Williamsburg or Richmond. Jane had visited Williamsburg as a child and they both had an interest in American history, so they moved to Williamsburg. Jane, a voice major, immediately found work as a singing historical interpreter with Colonial Williamsburg (CW).

In 1978, the couple moved to Franklin, New Hampshire, twenty miles from Concord, where Ray taught for five years. During a vacation visit to Williamsburg, Ray learned from a close friend of an opening at Bruton Heights Middle School. He applied and was hired. The couple happily returned to Williamsburg. Jane was rehired by CW, this time as a full-time interpreter singing in the Tavern, a career that spanned 35 years.

In 1994, Ray left his teaching career to work out of his home as a financial advisor for Cambridge Financial Research. But he continued to coach the Berkley Math Counts team, which he says is his way of vicariously enjoying math. He also, during non-pandemic times, tutors elementary and high school students in a program sponsored by Williamsburg Community Chapel. He and Jane both sing in the chapel's choir and during the pandemic have missed singing at church services as well as the annual Christmas performance.

In addition to tutoring and being a member of the church choir, Ray is involved with the Children's Ministry at the chapel. He is a member of a racial reconciliation group, which he feels is very important. He loves golf and in non-pandemic times, playing bridge. In addition, he is currently serving a term on his HOA board.

Williamsburg's history, the advantages of living in a college town and their church were all things that drew them to Williamsburg in the first place, and these are also the things that made them want to return. They currently live in the Rolling Hills neighborhood near the airport. "Williamsburg has certainly changed since we first lived here," Ray says.

The couple have two daughters, Lara and Amy, and both also attended Bucknell, as well as four grandchildren. Lara lives in Istanbul, Turkey, where her husband works for an insurance company. Amy lives in Duvall, Washington, where she has accepted a temporary position as a math instructor. Her son is in her class. Ray says, "I find that ironic because Amy herself was in my math class and a member of my Math Counts team."

Ray Hanson feels fortunate in that being self-employed allows him the time to volunteer with Math Counts as well as pursue his other interests. He says, "I've had wonderful students and families." Math Counts has teams at all four junior high schools in Williamsburg-James City County Schools. NDN



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# ANGIE BAKER



Mason Murawski Photography

# Finding A Place in Education

By Narielle Living

Although Angie Baker did not expect to be living in Williamsburg, Virginia, this is clearly where she is meant to be. She grew up in southern Arkansas and attended college in northeast Louisiana, where she lived until relocating to this area. “My husband’s job relocated us in 2008,” she says. Leaving her family and friends behind was difficult, but it was made easier by the fact that she enjoys being in this area. “I tell people Williamsburg is a great place to live.”



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In college, Angie majored in Chemistry Education. "I really liked chemistry," she says. "I was a career chemistry teacher. I had done some administrative work back in Louisiana and was able to teach part time and be the middle school administrator in Louisiana, and then I came here and was thrilled to go back to the classroom full time."

When teaching, Angie loves connecting with her students. "There's just something about be-

ing in a classroom with students that's rejuvenating. It reminds you about all the things that are good in the world and all the hope that we can have for the future because if you're watching the news only or sitting around talking with friends sometimes the conversations are not very positive and the outlook is not very positive. But if you spend a lot of time with a lot of young people, you find a lot of things to be positive about."

She taught at Walsingham Academy from 2008 until 2016, and then her role shifted. "Sister sort of tapped me on the shoulder and said, 'we need you for an interim, could you do it for a little while?' I'm not Catholic, but it's very hard to say no to a nun," she says.

Today, Angie is the Upper School Director at Walsingham. "We're a small school and so I know all of the kids and can touch base with them and speak to every kid every day."

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"After she would put us to sleep, she would stay up and continue studying and complete all her homework. I am so proud of her." - Kristen

"She has the mindset of a warrior and is the most inspirational person I know. She inspires me to continue studying and never give up, and I hope her story inspires many others." - Jackeline



When Wendy Romero enrolled at Literacy for Life, her goal was to improve her English so that she could help her daughters with homework and support them in their activities. The more she learned, the more motivated she became.

With her tutor's help, she recently earned her high school diploma through the National External Diploma Program (NEDP), and now she plans to continue her education and pursue a career in health care!

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A typical day for Angie has been a bit different this year. “It’s kind of different in a private school because we don’t have a large administrative team,” she says. “In the mornings right now we’re scanning temperatures of every teacher, so I scan temperatures until my secretary can get here because she can’t get here as early as teachers want to come into the building. Then I may do observations in classrooms for the morning or I may have meetings, but if we have disciplinary issues or kids who are struggling with something right now, I’m usually the one. The guidance counselors do some of that too, but because I crave the connection with the kids, I often volunteer to do that kind of stuff.”

Angie’s road to working in a private school was not planned. When she lived in Louisiana and was preparing to student teach as part of her process of becoming a teacher, everything changed for her. “I had been assigned to student teach at one of the local public schools where I actually knew a lot of students who

went there from working with my youth group at church. Then maybe a couple of weeks before student teaching was to begin, I got a letter that I was reassigned to Catholic school. I had never been to a mass. I’m not Catholic. I didn’t know anything about Catholic school, and I was petrified.”

Despite her apprehension, she did her student teaching there. “I taught social studies, which was my minor. That was very unsettling because I always thought I was going to be student teaching chemistry.” Ultimately, the experience was overwhelmingly positive. “It was a really, really good experience for me,” she says. “I think the discipline and the structure that were the hallmarks of Catholic education, but also the rigor and the cooperation that you get from parents, were really helpful. When I moved here in 2008, the first thing I searched online was to see if there was a Catholic school in the area.” When she found Walsingham, she contacted them and was able to join their team.

Angie loves the philosophy at Walsingham, and says she especially loves, “The mission of the school, the fact that education is for the whole child. It’s about making sure they get what they need academically, and spiritually and physically.” Angie notes that about 89 percent of their students play a sport, which she says helps round out their development.

The irony of a last-minute change in her student teaching job is not lost on Angie. “I probably would not have chosen to interview at a Catholic school on my own because I had not had any exposure. I went to public school, but there’s just something about a Catholic school environment that’s very community focused.”

When she discovered that she and her family had to relocate for her husband’s job, she began thinking about the best way to settle into a different environment. The first thing she considered was where to find her “village,” and the answer was simple: find a private Catholic school. “I interviewed with a Catholic school because that’s what I know. And then we found

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a church home. I'm still in the same church. I'm still in the same school. I didn't want to hop around, I wanted to find a place where I can put down roots and be a giver to the best of my ability."

Each summer, Angie and her husband and children return home to visit relatives, a trip she looks forward to very much. In 2020, that did not happen. "This past year was the first year in my life that I didn't get to go home for Christmas or Thanksgiving. Usually, I will go home for one or the other. This year, I didn't get to go home at all, so we are really looking forward to trying to go home in June."

She enjoys spending time with her two children and husband, and family is very important to her. Her oldest, daughter Emma Grace, will be a high school senior next year, and her son, Porter, is in fifth grade. The kids play sports and Angie and her husband have spent much time on the sidelines watching soccer, baseball, lacrosse, volleyball and basketball. In addition, the family is very active in their church.

Angie is clear about what she believes makes Walsingham Academy a special place: the people. In an era where teaching has been complicated and academics have new layers of stress, she notes the resiliency and stamina of everyone involved in making this school year a success.

"Walsingham is a very special place, and it is a special place because of the faculty. The teachers are amazing. They go above and beyond and especially this year. We asked them to return in August, and they stayed in the classroom, despite everything that was going on. They have been courageous and reasonable." Despite fears of health issues, despite complications for face-to-face teaching, and despite other challenges to overcome, Angie says the faculty has handled it all with grace and determination. "The caliber of teachers is high. They're just amazing people."

It may have been an accident, but the student teaching job that led Angie Baker to work at her current job seems almost fated. NDN

## Next Door Neighbors

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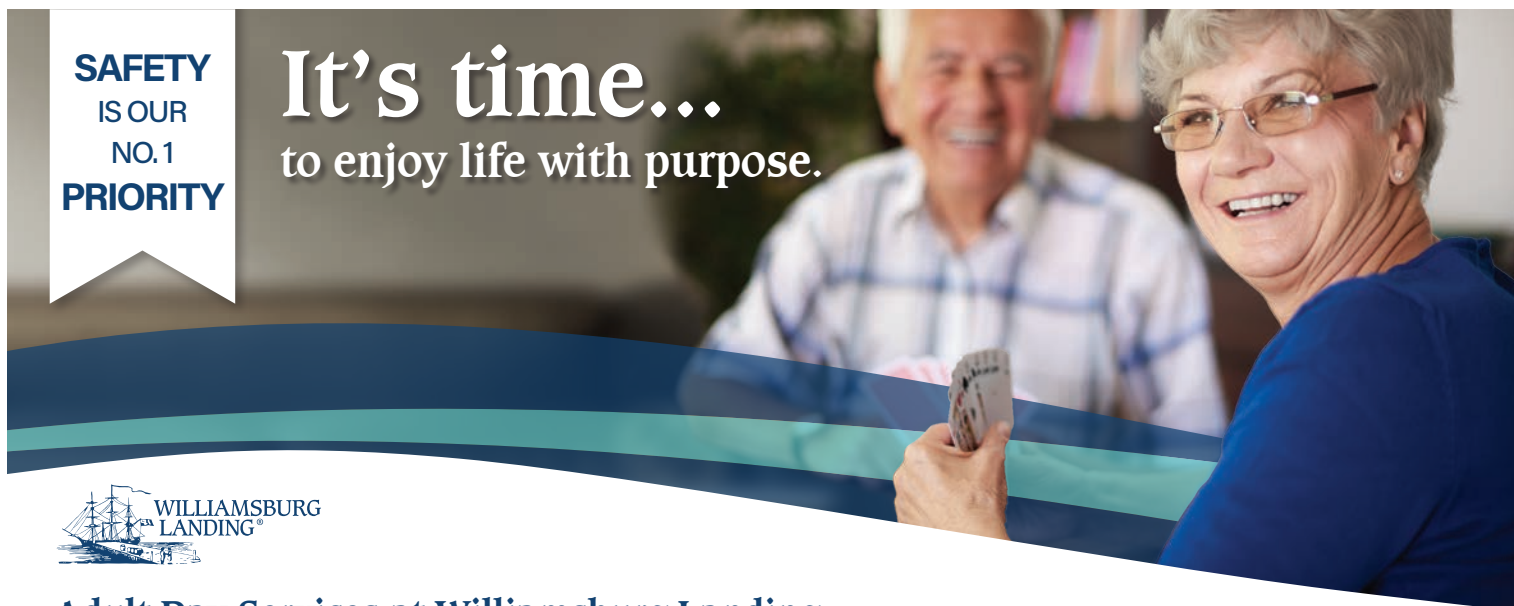
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# JOHN GRAHAM

# SERVING AT SCHOOL

By Alison Johnson



Mason Murawski Photography

Johnny O. Graham doesn't tell people he "works" as the Head of School at Williamsburg Christian Academy (WCA).

Instead, he "serves."

A man of deep faith, Johnny aims to honor both God and his students at the small, private Christian day and boarding school. His mission for himself and all of his staff members: learn each student well enough to know how to push that child to succeed.

"All children deserve at least one adult in their lives who expects them to pursue greatness," he says. "I like to challenge young people beyond what's comfortable, because most of them don't really press themselves to get the most out of their abilities. I want them to know that the easier road isn't always the best one."

At 44, Johnny arrived at Williamsburg Christian Academy in 2019 with 21 years of experience in independent secondary educa-

tion. The father of four boys had previously led two other private schools, one of which he founded himself.

With a personal background in both arts and athletics, Johnny believes in nurturing a wide range of talents both in and out of the classroom. That includes mental health, spiritual development, global citizenship, service to others, and life skills such as communicating effectively, dealing with adversity, and main-

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taining a positive mindset.

“If a whole child comes to you and comes into your school, then you need to minister and address the needs of that entire child,” he says. “Helping students grow and bringing their families into better situations through education is what drives me every day.”

Johnny grew up as a “small-town country kid” in Lemon Springs, North Carolina, about an hour outside of Raleigh. His extended family is full of educators, including multiple aunts and uncles. His mother was a special education teacher for more than three decades.

By the time Johnny was in high school at McCallie School, an independent boarding school in Chattanooga, Tennessee, he knew he wanted to work in education, too. “My mom had made such a difference in the lives of her students, and I didn’t want to do anything else.”

His father, meanwhile, was a school janitor with his own landscaping side business. Johnny credits him for passing along an intense work ethic.

Johnny was the definition of a well-rounded teenager: a gifted student, a cellist in his school

orchestra, and a basketball player who had been able to dunk on a 10-foot-tall goal since he was 12 years old. He was 6’1” by sixth grade but topped out at 6’3½”.

While Johnny had offers to play basketball at several small colleges, he chose to focus on his academics at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. There, he majored in History and African-American Studies and sang in a popular a capella group called Harmonyx.

“I am a huge proponent of the arts,” he says. “They brought a lot of meaningful connections and joy to my life from a very young age.”

Johnny went on to earn a Master’s Degree in Educational Leadership from George Washington University. He currently is pursuing a Doctorate Degree in Education in Organizational Leadership online from Grand Canyon University, with a concentration in Ministry.

Johnny’s educational career began as an Advanced Placement United States History teacher and dorm parent at Christ School in Arden, North Carolina, and later at McCallie. He also has worked in athletics and coached basketball. His first Head of School job was at Brandon Hall, a co-educational middle and

high school day and boarding program in Atlanta, Georgia.

In 2016, Johnny moved to New Windsor, Maryland, where he followed a calling to create a new private school, Springdale Preparatory. Springdale Prep would be another co-ed, international boarding and day program for middle and high schoolers, with an emphasis on lifelong learning and individualized academic attention.

Setting an aggressive opening target of August 2017, Johnny collaborated with local leaders, businesses, community organizations and educators to transform the grounds of what was an abandoned university and deteriorating middle school building.

At times working 20-plus hours a day, Johnny recruited staff members before the school had even set up a phone number or classrooms. He and his family initially rented rooms, slept on air mattresses and cooked noodles for dinner to save money.

Johnny’s grit paid off as Springdale Prep opened on time and drew students locally and from other states and countries. “We had a good number who had fallen through the

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cracks at their previous schools but thrived in a simpler learning environment,” Johnny recalls. In 2018, the hometown publication Carroll Magazine named Johnny as its “Carroll County Person of the Year” for his work building Springdale Prep, creating new jobs and boosting the region’s economy.

Despite his successes in Maryland, Johnny is the type of person who willingly accepts a different challenge. That was delivered by WCA, a school established in 1978 with a current enrollment of about 220. While Johnny had never heard of WCA before interviewing for Head of School in May 2019, he quickly realized it was a perfect fit.

“It was a ministry that sat on the precipice of a profound growth period and needed consistent leadership,” Johnny says. “We were called by the Lord to serve in this season here. Believers will know exactly what I mean when I say it was a God thing.”

WCA serves students in kindergarten through 12th grade, and Johnny has helped add a boarding program based on his background in residential life. Beyond hands-on experiential academics, athletics and art pro-

grams, WCA’s offerings include college advising that begins in middle school and an environment billed as “a culture of grace.”

“Every child is seen, heard, known and loved,” Johnny says. “Students are taught the example of Christ and to honor him through service to others and love of their global ‘neighbor’.”

Thanks to its small size, WCA has been able to remain fully in-person this year despite the coronavirus pandemic. Still, Johnny has placed extra attention on mental wellness: “Students bring what we are all dealing with in society into school, and educators need to pay attention. That means working to understand them and the full ministry associated with their needs.”

Outside of school, Johnny is a dedicated family man. He and his wife, Kimberly, a homemaker, have four sons: Christopher, 23, who serves the Hampton Police Department; Julian, 21, who is pursuing his electrician’s certification; and Jeffrey, 16, and Ashton, 15, both students at WCA.

Christopher and Julian also attended the same high schools where their father was Head

of School. While the dual administrator/dad role has proven difficult at times, Johnny is careful not to micromanage his sons at school. “There’s a boundary I don’t cross,” he says. “I give them space and allow them to make their own decisions, maybe to make mistakes, and to be who they are. If needed, they will face the natural consequences of their choices like any other student would.”

In his free time, Johnny enjoys fishing, reading, dining out, cheering for the UNC basketball team, and taking walks in Colonial Williamsburg, York River State Park, and Chickahominy Riverfront Park. His family attends Williamsburg Christian Church.

Educating children and chasing personal dreams both take a village, Johnny stresses. He is grateful to his family and countless co-workers along the way, and he notes that employees at small schools such as WCA often must take on multiple roles in a child’s life.

But that’s not work, remember. To Johnny O. Graham, it’s service.

“It’s incredibly rewarding to help make someone else’s day brighter,” he says. “I can’t imagine a better type of job.” NDN

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# SHARI WILTSHIRE



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## Educating with Purpose

By Ashley Smith

Shari Wiltshire's earliest memories originate in Fayetteville, North Carolina, where her family was stationed after their time in Germany. However, when Shari finished third grade, her parents wanted to move to the island of St. Croix to be closer to their aging parents. Part of the U.S. Virgin Islands, St. Croix is tiny compared to many other Caribbean islands such as Puerto Rico or Jamaica. At only 22 miles long, it takes roughly an hour and a half to drive from one end to the other.

As a nine-year-old, Shari resented being

ripped away from her friends, and it took some time for her to adjust to the changes. Throughout elementary school, she struggled with finding new friends and endured some teasing about her lack of an accent. In hindsight, Shari shares that her life in St. Croix was a blessing. She grew up as part of the dominant culture and did not experience the same racial tension as so many did on the mainland U.S.

The downside to living in a beautiful paradise is that there is little to do for locals. "There's not a lot of entertainment other than the annu-

al events, and once you've done them, they can become stale." Though island life is peaceful and relaxed, it could be stifling for some young people eager to start their adult life.

Shari was no exception, and she decided to pursue her undergraduate studies on the mainland. She attended Ursinus College in Pennsylvania and earned her bachelor's degree in English.

Upon her return to the island from the mainland, Shari became a news reporter for one of the oldest newspapers on the island, St.

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Croix Avis. Her natural assertiveness and confidence were a perfect fit for the role, and she gained valuable experience interviewing local politicians and community members. In the short two years she worked for the paper, she made lasting friendships and even met the man she would eventually marry.

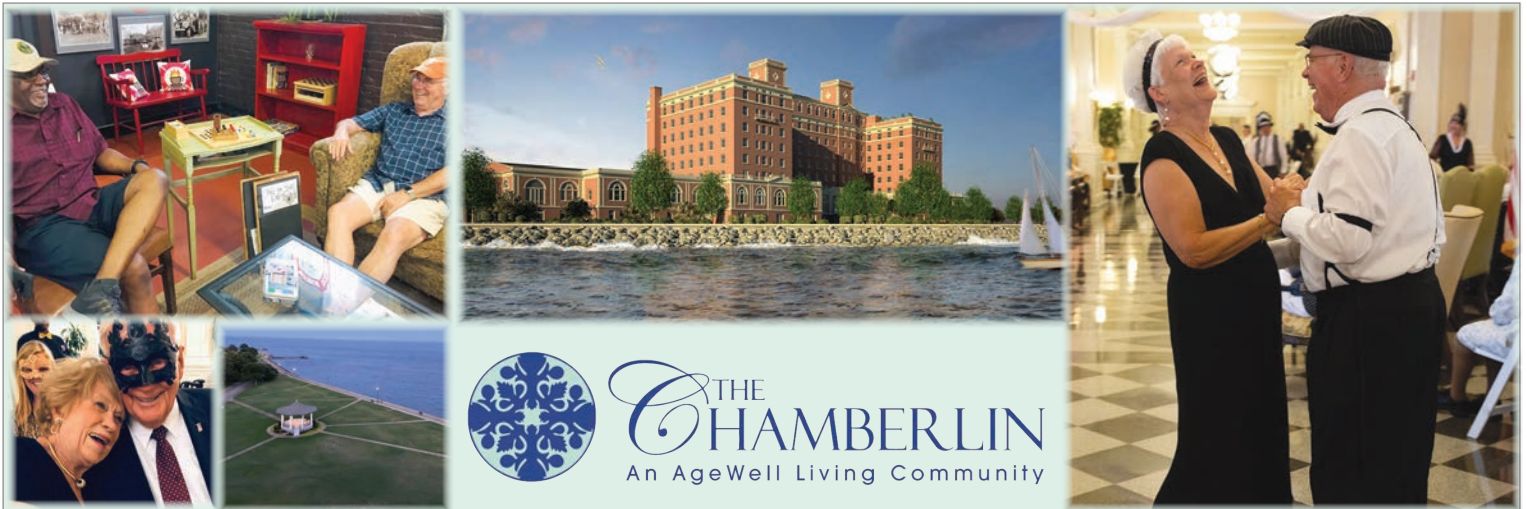
She had always planned to serve with the Peace Corps, and when she began to feel the familiar restlessness that the island inspires, she joined without hesitation.

Originally, she wanted to go to Africa to feel a connection to her lineage and ancestral homeland. Unfortunately, the program for Africa was not due to leave for a year, and Shari wanted to leave sooner. So, when they offered her an opportunity to go to Ukraine, she quickly agreed.

Assigned to the village of Napolokivtsi, in the Chernivetska Oblast region of western Ukraine, Shari brought a new perspective to the villagers. Napolokivtsi, a village of approximately 2,000 people, is considered upscale because it had several factories that employed many from the surrounding, smaller villages.

Shari made great friends and impacted a community in a unique way. “It was a great experience and a hard one. People were new to my race and had difficulty believing that I was an American.” As a youth development volunteer, it was Shari’s responsibility to teach civic education at universities and high schools. In this case, civic education meant individual independence and the individual’s duty to their community as well as the skills to empower communities. Topics often include alcoholism, understanding family dynamics, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic. In the Ukraine, intravenous drug use had led to a spike in cases of HIV. Shari developed a curriculum that taught this civic engagement but also addressed female independence, HIV/AIDS, as well as racism and diversity. The curriculum she designed was successful, and Shari traveled around the Ukraine to other villages to teach it to other volunteers and communities. She considers one of her most meaningful accomplishments to be the lessons on diversity that she designed to discuss the stereotypes people create about one another. The impact was powerful, especially for Jew-

ish and Roma citizens living in the Ukraine. Eventually, however, Shari’s time in the Peace Corps ended, and she returned once again to St. Croix. Shortly after her arrival, she reconnected with an old friend from her newspaper days, and they began dating and then married. Shari had applied to several master’s programs and was accepted into Virginia Commonwealth University’s (VCU) social work program. Again, she left St. Croix, this time accompanied by her husband and bound for Williamsburg, where his parents had made their home. After earning her Master’s Degree in Social Work, Shari was hired by the Virginia Department of Health to provide services to people living with HIV. In 2019, her contract with VDH ended, and 2020 arrived with a vengeance. 2020 provided Shari with time to reflect upon her future and her goals for her professional and personal life. She realized that she has always been focused on change work, and understanding people, how they live and what they need to live and further still, what supports do they need? These



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and



questions have always driven her, but they became more important after she graduated from VCU.

In 2021, she accepted the coordinator position with the Greater Williamsburg Trauma Informed Care Network (GWTICN). No longer involved in direct client work, she has switched to the macro-focus, or big picture viewpoint. This position allows her to build on her strengths to educate and facilitate for a higher purpose.

The Greater Williamsburg Trauma Informed Care Network (TICN) was established in 2019. Its mission, according to their website, is to “leverage the science of Adverse Childhood Experiences and trauma to build relationships, convene regularly, and advocated a common agenda around resilience.” The TICN of Greater Williamsburg includes Williamsburg, James City County, Yorktown, and Poquoson. Trauma Informed Care Networks focus on trainings that support and implement new practices in schools, courts, health and social services departments; spreading awareness; and connecting people and private agencies. In 2021, the

network was able to secure a grant that allowed them to hire Shari to the coordinator position. While the network in this area is new, Shari explains that this work is ongoing. “Being trauma aware means being aware of how people’s interactions with systems and family affect their lives. This work is dynamic, and while trauma has been a part of the conversation for years, 2020 has really brought the subject of racial trauma to the fore.”

General membership is for anyone who is interested in the work of becoming trauma informed and supporting this work moving forward. Members receive information about trainings and opportunities to do that. GWTICN is continuing to solicit feedback on how the network can develop further and integrate ideas and ways to better serve the community of greater Williamsburg. Strategic planning meetings have taken place in March and April, and the GWTICN have invited their membership to put together a plan on how to be purposeful and actionable around trauma aware. Resilience Week runs from May 2 through May 8, and the network has planned speakers,

training and virtual events to encourage and support resiliency training in schools, health-care settings and the criminal justice system.

In addition to her work with the Greater Williamsburg Trauma Informed Care Network, Shari has put her 2020 lessons to good use and developed a business model in which she teaches the art of storytelling to others. She teaches at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute and has received interest from Virginia Commonwealth University. Her long-term plans include starting a nonprofit to help people engage in personal development through storytelling. “If I can help teach youth how to publicly share a story in an engaging, informative and empathetic way that would draw an audience, that would excite me.”

In the far future, Shari Wiltshire plans to retire in St. Croix. It is, she says, “the best place for me to wrap my life around.” She still has family there and the island remains a place of respite and beauty. For now, she eagerly continues to serve the community of Williamsburg in a multitude of ways from trauma care to storytelling. NDN

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# An Education in Gardening

By Susan Williamson



Mason Murawski Photography

Gardening has always been a hobby for James City County resident Martin Oaks. Even when he was stationed in Germany with the U.S. Army and had to deal with cold, wet summers, Marty tried to grow his favorite “southern” vegetables: tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers. In January 2021, Marty took his gardening interest to a whole new level by be-

coming president of the James City County (JCC) Williamsburg Master Gardener Association.

Marty enrolled in the Master Gardener training in 2015. This is a two day a week, three-month, fifty-hour training session covering a variety of areas, some of which include botany, pathology, entomology, landscap-

ing and weed recognition. Once a candidate completes training, he or she is considered an intern and then, after completing 50 hours of volunteer work, is certified as a Master Gardener and becomes a volunteer educator who can share knowledge of, and a passion for, gardening with others.

Prior to becoming president, Marty served

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for several years on the educational committee which helps to select and provide educational programs for the community. While he enjoyed that experience, he says, "I think it was time for me to rotate off so that other Master Gardeners with fresh ideas could plan future programs."

One of Marty's favorite programs is Seeds of Learning, which is normally conducted in every first-grade class. The students study horticultural principles and learn about growing vegetables. They are introduced to unique plants and plant sunflower seeds. Several local elementary schools have garden plots and actually grow vegetables which are used in the school's cafeteria. Blayton, Matthew Whaley, Clara Byrd Baker and Stonehouse Elementary schools all have garden plots. Because of the pandemic, Seeds of Learning had to be canceled during the last school year as well as this year.

Marty enjoys teaching others about growing vegetables, including what to grow and when to plant it. He also provides information so gardeners can choose environmentally healthy practices and avoid pesticide use. "People want to know when to set out tomatoes," he says, "and our average last frost date is April 15 to April 20."

Like most things in the world, many Master Gardener events and programs had to be canceled in 2020 and early 2021, but some educational programs were conducted via Zoom or video training. Normally the local group does many home visitations in which "Lawn Rangers" show a homeowner and others attending how to manage lawns in a program known as Turf Love or how to select plants for particular locations in a program called Landscape Love. These programs as well as the pruning clinics were replaced by videos which are now available on the organization's website. Another program known as Garden Love assists homeowners in constructing rain gardens.

Marty is hopeful that home visitations can resume this summer as we begin to open up within the community. Other agencies such as Stormwater and Resource Protection Division and Colonial Soil and Water Conservation District are also involved in the educational programs.

In normal years, the local Master Gardeners Association holds a spring plant sale as their major fundraiser. Last year, the sale had to be canceled and this year it is an in-house sale open only to association members on May 1. "That way we can keep the numbers low and adhere to social distancing," Marty says. "Hopefully next spring we can have an open sale." Most of the plants sold at the sale are grown by local Master Gardeners, although they do purchase a few plants for resale.

In addition to their numerous programs, the Master Gardeners man help desks at the Williamsburg Farmers Market and at the James City County Cooperative Extension office in Toano, which is currently being staffed remotely. The Master Volunteer program is conducted under the auspices of the Virginia Cooperative Extension Service, which is a function of the land-grant universities. In Virginia that includes Virginia Tech and Virginia State Universities. Founded in Washington State in 1972, there are now Master Gardener programs in all fifty states and four Canadian provinces. There has not been a professional

extension agent working in James City County for some time, so, a regional director has been working with the county. However, funding has been allocated for an agent to serve both James City County and New Kent County and hiring is underway. There is also an extension office located in York County and a York County Master Gardener Association.

There is no rule about what chapter a person can join when considering becoming a Master Gardener. Master Gardener volunteers may join whatever program is most convenient for them. Although the local organization serves primarily Williamsburg, James City and New Kent Counties, several members of the James City County-Williamsburg association actually live in York, New Kent or Charles City County. In fact, the Master Gardener community garden on Waller Mill Avenue is actually located in York County. Marty says, "I live in an almost zero lot setting, so I have a plot in the community garden." He grows his favorites, tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers along with a few bush beans in his plot. "It's not very big," he says, "so there's not room for squash and some of the other plants I might want to grow."

In a normal year, about twenty gardeners are accepted in the James City County-Williamsburg Master Gardener program. Since so much of gardening is hands-on, the group elected not to have Zoom training for the initial training class, but volunteers were able to keep up with their annual requirements of eight hours of continuing education via Zoom classes and videos. Master Gardener Volunteers are also required to perform 20 volunteer hours annually to maintain their certification. Marty says of the local program, "It is easy to work with nice people who want to share their knowledge."

Marty and his wife of 49 years, Jacque, met while they were both students at William & Mary. Marty pursued a career as a pediatric dentist in the Army while Jacque worked as a middle and high school French teacher. The couple lived in Fayetteville, North Carolina when Marty retired from the military at Fort Bragg. He worked for a while in Fayetteville as a dentist after his retirement from the military. But as a native of Hampton, and with his wife having family roots in Norfolk, the couple decided to move to Williamsburg. Their daughter, Elizabeth, works for the Department of Defense at the Pentagon, but is moving to London, England to work, and their son, Noel, who inherited the gardening gene from Marty, lives in Richmond. The couple enjoy living in Williamsburg because of the four-season climate which is ideal for people who garden. "We are close to the ocean and the mountains and I-95 for traveling," Marty says. He and his wife love that there is so much to see and do in this area.

Martin Oakes still works one or two days a week in pediatric dentistry at the VCU dental school. When not busy with Master Gardener activities, he does a bit of salt-water fishing, although he doesn't have a boat, and he also plays pickleball. Jacque works with flowers in their yard but is not much involved in growing vegetables. "You know how it is," Marty says. "Gardeners get together and want to talk about how their plants are doing." NDN



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# Teaching Suzuki

By Dawn Brotherton

Mason Murawski Photography

Not many people have had the chance to travel around Europe with a rock band when they were only three years old. Mei-Li Beane considers herself fortunate to have had such an unusual educational experience as a foundation. Now she shares her love of music with others, playing in a band and teaching.

While her family traveled with her father's band Smash, Mei-Li studied violin formally

using the Suzuki method. This method is founded on the belief that musical talent can be developed the same way children develop the ability to speak their mother tongue: through listening, not reading music.

As a music teacher at Providence Classical School, she employs these same methods with her students. "The point of Suzuki is really to train the mind to be a beautiful mind, and

whether you end up being a musician or not is not the point," Mei-Li says.

Although she was born in Spain, Mei-Li came to the United States when she was an infant and stayed in Connecticut until she was three. When her family moved back to Spain, she picked up Spanish rapidly but forgot her English just as quickly. That made her reintegration into New York schools tougher

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when she returned to the U.S. in sixth grade. “I remember sitting in class just staring at the board, having no idea what was going on for a couple of weeks, other than in math. So, for the first time in my life, I was good at math,” she says.

Just as she was adjusting to English, they moved back to Spain. Fortunately, her violin instructor was English, so Mei-Li was able to keep up with both languages.

The stories of her childhood sound like a dream come true for adventurers. “We lived in southern France for a little while, and I have very vivid memories of running around in the wine fields picking grapes.” That’s how the band earned extra money between gigs to survive.

“We actually lived on a boat in Amsterdam, on the canals there, and I went to a little Dutch preschool.” She used to interpret for her mother in the stores, although she can’t remember any of the Dutch she learned as a child.

“I think my mom was a hero, putting up with that kind of touring life with infants,” Mei-Li says. As the children got older, they settled in Seville, Spain for school and traveled

during the summer with the band.

In addition to attending high school, Mei-Li also attended the Conservatory of Seville when her regular classes for the day had finished. They had instruction in music theory, orchestra and choir. When she graduated from high school, there wasn’t a college-level music option for her in Spain, so she joined Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University in New Jersey. Once there, she decided she had been studying music her whole life and wanted to study something new, which wasn’t an option at Mason. William & Mary gave her the opportunity to double major in music and history, her second love.

Shortly after returning to the States to attend college, Mei-Li met her husband, Doug, while visiting her grandmother in Kilmarnock, Virginia, and they dated long distance while she finished her schooling. Then they married, and she moved to Kilmarnock.

“I wasn’t really sure I wanted to be a musician, and I knew that I liked teaching,” she says. She had been teaching violin since she was 17 to earn a little money and enjoyed working with children. Out of college in

1993, she didn’t have any particular prospects, so when a friend offered her a position as a kindergarten aide, she accepted. Then the position quickly expanded to teaching Spanish in the afternoon, then music for first and second grade.

“I had a particular affinity for the kindergarten when we were working with reading. I found I was really good at finding what the problem was with the child. I think it’s all related to my musical training, in the way I could see them trying to decipher a word and realize they weren’t hearing the sounds, or they’re not identifying these as individual things, so I got very interested in reading.” She enjoyed teaching so much, she started working on her master’s degree in special education with a focus on reading.

For years, Mei-li juggled teaching, homeschooling her five oldest children, and going to school herself. When their youngest daughter was ready to start school, the others were years ahead of her, so Mei-Li felt she would benefit from being around other children. She and her husband started looking around.

As it happened, she had made a musical

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connection with a teacher from Providence Classical School who invited her to visit. She fell in love with the school and jumped at the chance when a position came open teaching music for the lower grades as well as Spanish. “Everything just literally fell into place,” she says.

Since Mei-Li joined the teaching staff at the Providence Classical School, all kindergarten, first and second graders have received violins as part of the music program. “The time to train a musical mind is when you’re little,” she explains. She creates videos for the parents so they can help the students with practice at home. “They come to class and they’re just beaming. They can’t wait to take their little violin out and play ‘Hot Cross Buns’ and ‘Mississippi Hotdog’ or different pieces.”

Everyone knows that a child’s speech is not limited based on their ability to read. In a similar manner, the Suzuki method starts with listening. “It’s the way we learn to speak with a violin, and then eventually, when we’re developmentally ready to understand sound-symbol relationships, we learn to read music, just like

you learn to read English.”

Each student has private lessons as well as group lessons. She teaches them that music is more than just notes and rhythms. “We play a very easy piece, and I’ll say, okay, let’s play it like it’s a lullaby to a baby—soft and mel-low and beautiful. Then, play it like you’re an angry giant. They’re getting the idea we played the very same notes, the very same rhythm, but it was an entirely different feel.”

She also plays games with them to get the right brain and the left brain engaged at the same time. Sometimes they’ll march around the room, other times it’s practice reacting to a conductor, but every time, it’s fun. “They really get comfortable playing alone for a group, and playing as an ensemble, so that when we do recitals, the anxiety level is so much lower,” she says.

In addition to the many children in her classroom, Mei-Li has six of her own ranging from six to 23, although none of them were interested in the violin. But as a family, they can create their own music with two pianists, a cellist, a drummer, and a ukulele player. The

youngest has her heart set on fifes and drum.

For people who do not have children attending Providence Classical School, Mei-Li can be found around town as one of the Poisoned Dwarves. The Poisoned Dwarf is a Celtic music group that plays virtuosic, innovative and passionate renditions of traditional Irish and Scottish music on acoustic instruments.

She found them on Facebook and called the manager out of the blue. It only took visiting one of their St. Patrick’s Day concerts for her to know the group was a great fit for her. “During intermission, we played together a few tunes that we had in common, and then they invited me to come on stage and play with them for those two tunes during the actual show, which was really nice.”

The one thing Mei-Li Beane misses is interacting with people while playing her instrument. “The violin is first and foremost a social instrument. In folk music, it’s used for dancing, for accompanying singers and for providing background.” She looks forward to getting on the road again as soon as COVID restrictions are lifted. NDN

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# Education for the World

By Narielle Living



Mason Murawski Photography

Stacy Hasselbacher Hernandez is a long way from home. Today, she is a Digital Content Manager with Colonial Williamsburg, but she grew up in Peoria, Illinois, a long way from this area. She ended up living in Williamsburg due to what she describes as a “fluke.”

“I had friends from college who were coming to this area for summer jobs, and on a whim I decided to come out here as well. I knew very little about Colonial Williamsburg, but I applied for a summer position, and I absolutely fell in love with Colonial Williamsburg. I returned the next summer as a summer hire and

then came straight here after college, and I have come and gone a few times and worked in other places, but I am back.”

While in college, Stacy was a double major in anthropology and theater. She later shifted into a different realm: educational technology. “At a certain point, I got really interested in educational technology and I got a Master’s Degree in Instructional Design and Technology from Old Dominion University (ODU). I did that while I was working here.”

Instructional Design and Technology is a systematic approach to the way people learn and

the way that learning materials are created. The program Stacy enrolled in focused on technology. “At the time I was working in what used to be called educational media department,” she says. “That department doesn’t exist anymore, but back in those days I worked on our electronic field trips, which are videos and interactive activities that went online and teacher lesson plans, things like that.”

In hindsight, this type of interactive, online learning was exactly what the world needed as educators had to quickly pivot and figure out a way to educate during a pandemic. Stacy had



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returned to work at Colonial Williamsburg in October 2018 after having been away for a few years, working in the Teacher Institute department. “I was doing not so technology-heavy teacher professional development programs, but I still had that experience in my background.” Initially, when the pandemic hit the area, they had to develop a method to continue to engage teachers, students and the general public while staying closed to on-site visitors. The opportunity to reach out to teachers, students and parents who had students at home, who maybe weren’t expecting to have students at home, was immense. “We quickly adjusted existing materials to make them more easily accessible by opening up our Education Resource Library to anybody who was willing to log in with a shared universal password, whereas before items had been password protected,” she says. “We also started live streaming educational programs and more general public programs over Facebook Live. There was a while there, during our closure, where we were doing live streams up to five times a week.”

This programming has built a new online audience of people who are really interested in

learning from Colonial Williamsburg. “Even now that we’re back open, although of course not everything is open, we’ve kept up our online programming. It’s not quite as much as we were doing when we were closed, but we are doing quite a lot.”

During a challenging time of parents trying to figure out how to enrich the virtual learning experience, Stacy and her department filled in the gaps.

“We’re looking to do more of that. Everybody works in education in some way, shape or form at Colonial Williamsburg. For those of us who focus on students and teachers and parents who are teachers, whether they’re official homeschoolers or they are partial homeschoolers because of the way things are right now, we’re all working together to get on the same page and make a plan for next year.” Stacy says that the plan is to remain as efficient as possible with their digital education content, so different departments have been collaborating on the best approach. “We’re making sure we’re on the same page so that we can be as effective as possible going forward with students and teachers be-

cause we’re still a little bit in pandemic response mode. We’re being responsive and planning, but now we’re moving into a new planning phase, so that we hope we can be even more helpful in the future.”

Currently, Stacy says she is involved in planning a number of Facebook Live events for the general public audience. “A lot of the things that we’re doing that are not as broadly public are in collaboration with other organizations that have specific target age groups.” Of course, the largest audience is the elementary groups who study the revolution in Virginia.

“One thing I’m really excited about, and this is something that has sort of been emphasized over the years at Colonial Williamsburg, is the relationship between history and how history can mainly inform our actions as a modern society. I’m really grateful that we seem to be moving into a phase where we recognize that we need to understand our history and need to understand our government.” For Stacy, the question she faces as she develops teaching modules is how to integrate history and civics and make relevant connections between everything for



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students. “I’m hoping we’re able to really hit more grade levels. We’ve got a lot of planning to do, and I’m very excited about the direction we’re going.”

It is clear that Stacy loves her job. When she speaks about digital content, her enthusiasm is infectious. “Ever since the first distance learning program I was involved in, I’ve loved seeing the light bulb go off that a student has learned something or you have changed their feelings about something,” she says. Stacy had been an interpreter for Colonial Williamsburg when she first worked with them. “For the first several years, I was an in-costume person and not tech savvy at all.” But as she expanded her knowledge about the digital world, she began to see the possibilities it provided. “And the magic. You don’t necessarily have to be in the same room. The first moment I realized you could reach anywhere and do a lot, it was amazing.” She notes that it’s never quite the same people who tune into her programs, and that’s not a bad thing. In a recent program on Facebook Live, she says that one person posted a comment about the performer, stating she wished that the performer had been

her middle school teacher. “I don’t know that person’s story, the person who posted that comment, but they might be somebody who could never come here. But the fact that we could still make that connection for that person, that meant so much to me.”

Of course, there are challenges in this position, too. “The most challenging part has been rebuilding essentially an educational media unit during the pandemic. I don’t want to say it was really hard because we’ve had so much support. But we have all had to learn new things, and we’ve had to experiment and try new things.” It took a lot of collaboration between her colleagues, the historians, interpreters and the technical department to make it all come together. And thanks to colleagues not only, you know are brilliant historians and interpreters and the people who are knowledgeable about, you know the history, but also to IP. And, you know Historic Areas support team who help us kind of organize things. “It took a lot of people from a lot of different areas to make it happen. It took a village.”

Stacy has tried to be a responsible citizen dur-

ing the pandemic and has largely stayed to herself to avoid spreading COVID. “Pre pandemic, you would likely see me doing local theater on stage and salsa dancing, which is also a non-pandemic activity. I mostly have to drive all the way down to Norfolk to do it.”

Despite having roots in Illinois, today Stacy doesn’t have to travel far to visit family. Her love of this area spread to her family and they relocated. “My family largely followed me here,” she says. “My sister lives in the area with her husband, and my nephew and my father actually live with her, so they’re all in James City County. And then my mother is in Newport News.”

Stacy says she is excited to have the opportunity to address civics and history and how they are interrelated. Because she does this via outreach media, she is able to touch the lives of people around the world.

“We have had folks chime in and say that they are from several different countries in Europe and Asia. We have a reach. I would like to continue to build it, and I would like to focus more of our energy on students and teachers going forward.” NDN



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# Community Over Competition

By Caroline Johnson

Mason Murawski Photography

For Jacquelyn Liebler, life in the restaurant industry has always been about community over competition. As the General Manager of Revolution Golf and Grille, Jacquelyn has worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic to foster a community of support in her restaurant and for all restaurants in Williamsburg.

Revolution Golf and Grille was opened by her father in 2017 and is family-owned and operated. Though she originally was set to do marketing and advertising for the restaurant, her role changed early on. “My family had no

background in the restaurant industry, and we quickly realized the whole family would need to be a part of it,” Jacquelyn says. “My position changed within the first year and now my role is making sure everyone has a role and is familiar with their duties and responsibilities.”

Revolution Golf and Grille is unique in that it boasts not only a restaurant but also entertainment for the entire family. “We provide six rooms of interactive games that started as golf simulation and have expanded to other games including golf, hunting, archery and putt-putt

for the kids,” Jacquelyn says. “It’s a family-friendly way to enjoy technology in a way that’s not sitting behind a screen. It lets you enjoy time together while doing something different.”

Before the pandemic, Revolution Golf and Grille played host to nonprofit events and school fundraiser nights, always looking for ways to think outside of the box and benefit local nonprofits, schools and businesses in the community. Though unable to host in-person events currently, Jacquelyn has worked with her employees and community to find unique ways

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to serve, calling the team at Revolution Golf and Grille extended family as they navigate these uncharted waters together.

As General Manager, Jacquelyn makes it her goal to support each employee. "I want to ensure that everyone who is a part of our team knows there is an endless amount of opportunity and potential here," Jacquelyn says. "I want to challenge them and help them be the best version of themselves." Though her previous career opportunities never took place in a restaurant, she has always enjoyed learning new skills and as many trades as possible.

Born in Panama City, Florida, in a military family, much of her childhood was spent moving. The family planted roots in Yorktown where Jacquelyn attended middle and high school before going to college at Radford University. After college, Jacquelyn moved to Raleigh and started her own family before moving back to Williamsburg five years ago this summer. "I've done a lot of different things. I actually was a flight attendant after college when my dad was a pilot, so I got to start my first career with him,

and now I'm hopefully in my last career with him, too," Jacquelyn says.

Since her time as a flight attendant, Jacquelyn spent time in television and advertising sales, customer service, group fitness instruction, personal training and now serves as the General Manager of Revolution Golf and Grille. Family is an integral part of her life and the reason she and her sons, Tristan and Landon, returned to Williamsburg. With her parents, Ken and Betsy Terry, and two brothers, Trevor and Taylor, the whole family plays a unique role in supporting the business as they grow.

Because of this extensive family support, it's no wonder the restaurant has found innovative ways to stay strong during the pandemic while lifting other local restaurants in the process. When it comes to looking back on the last year, Jacquelyn says the best way to describe it would be a "rollercoaster" due to the highs and the lows. "Shutting down indoor dining in March was one of the scariest moments for business," she shares. "Before that day, we had only sold a handful of meals to-go, so it was scary wonder-

ing about the survival of the business and also of our employees."

This pandemic and the utmost concern for her employees helped Jacquelyn grow both as a person and a General Manager, jumping into action to do what she could to keep their employees employed and keep others healthy.

"The blessing in all of this was that it puts you into survival mode and challenges you individually," Jacquelyn says. "I realized we can't go through this alone, and there are incredible restaurants in the community who are dealing with the same thing."

This realization, and conversations with local restaurant owner Michelle Sealing, led to the creation of "Williamsburg Eat Local," now a successful Facebook group with over 11,000 members thanks to its online creation by Brandi Walker. "We wanted to make restaurants feel less alone, and it's truly been a beautiful thing in a scary and ugly time. Since we all rely on tourism and locals, we knew we wanted to do what we could to not close."

The page is extremely active, with posts high-



*Helena S. Mock, Managing Attorney*

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lighting specials, deals, reviews and recommendations from locals and tourists alike to support the restaurant industry amidst a trying time. It's a positive place that fosters community support to as many local restaurants as possible to keep their doors open and give community members ways to eat, drink and enjoy all that the area has to offer.

Jacquelyn's involvement with Williamsburg Eat Local goes hand in hand with her passion for Williamsburg Area Restaurant Association (WARA), an organization she has been a part of for over two years. This past March, she assumed the role of President. "I hate titles, but I love to advocate and be a voice for a lot of restaurants," Jacquelyn says. "The purpose of WARA is to connect restaurants with the community and be a branch to the public so that all the things that are already happening can be continued."

WARA accomplishes its mission in a variety of ways, including selling gift certificates to be used at any member's restaurant as well as promoting Restaurant Week. "Our board could see

that during COVID there was so much need and the voice of restaurants needed to be heard during this," she says. "We were able to hear what local restaurants were going through this past year and give them an opportunity to be supported through gift cards as well as sharing unique specials offered to the community during Restaurant Week."

In addition to the board at WARA, organizations such as the Greater Williamsburg Chamber of Commerce have played a huge role in promoting WARA activities and local restaurants. "They were receptive and proactive as they listened to our concerns and allowed restaurants and businesses the opportunity to thrive."

The community over competition mindset has helped Revolution Golf and Grille, along with many local restaurants, as they make it through the pandemic. "I would love to see the continuing support of local businesses. It has always been there but is now highlighted and just goes to show how unique Williamsburg is as not a lot of other communities are support-

ing each other like this."

Jacquelyn and her kids make it a point to support other restaurants each week, advocating for people to either order to-go directly through local restaurants or dine in depending on comfort level. "Restaurants can only survive with the support of the community, especially until tourism can be built back up," Jacquelyn says. "I personally couldn't have done this without the staff and family we have at Revolution Golf and Grille, many who made sacrifices during the pandemic to help because they treat the place like their home, too."

Going on more than a year since the pandemic first took its toll on the industry, Jacquelyn Liebler can reflect on the highs and lows and smile at how her restaurant, and the entire local restaurant industry, adapted during this time thanks to each other and the community's support. "When COVID hit, we all felt like we were thrown into the water with no life jackets on. Our first reaction was to flail but instead we slowly tread on. Our arms are tired but our heads are staying afloat." NDN



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# LESS IS MORE

By Narielle Living

To sell a product, advertisers often create a message that appeals to consumers. To sell a home, the message is communicated in numerous ways, and very often the services of a home stager are the most effective means of showcasing a home. Trez Robinson of Staged 2 Sell knows this best of all.

Trez is a home stager, which means she will create an interior design within a home to bring a faster sale for top dollar. Make no mistake, however, Trez is not a designer. “The principles of design, like space and balance and color and textures and putting things together, carry over to staging,” she says. “The big difference is design, or designing to live, is personal because it’s for that particular person living in that home. It’s their style.” While design is a reflection of personality, staging acts as a mirror for buyers. “It’s much more pared down, it’s much more of a clean look.” The idea behind staging is that less is more. “Staging focuses on the home, the bones of the house. It’s about marketing and merchandising the home for sale.”

This is actually a second career for Trez, who retired in 2005 from a military career. “I was trying to decide what I wanted to be when I grew up,” she says with a laugh. For a second career, she knew she wanted to start her own company. She says her time in the military taught her a number of things, including how to deal with people and dealing with business. “I was fortunate to have a military career where I had to run some businesses. I got a lot of my business sense from my service in the Air Force.”

In 2006, Trez visited her sister in California. Her sister had just started a staging company. “I looked at what it was all about and literally found my passion. I knew this was what I needed to do.” Despite never having taken a design class, she forged ahead. “A lot of artists



don’t learn because they took art classes; you just have that natural artistic ability.”

A career in the military usually means many moves for a family, and this was also true for Trez. She believes this was also a factor which influenced her decision to go into staging. “I think having that emotional separation is important when moving from house to house and always downsizing,” she says. “I’m very much a minimalist, and I don’t move things unless I have to. I’m not really a big collector and if I’m going to have to move a box every time we move, it better be something I need.” In addition, having to set up repeatedly in different houses with the same furniture gave her a sense of how to accommodate pieces in a variety of space. “I definitely think I wasn’t conscious of it but looking back I was doing all those staging things. It just wasn’t called staging, and I didn’t even know that existed.”

What is the most important part of home staging design? “We want to connect buyers emotionally.” In order to do this, Trez makes recommendations on everything, including landscaping, the front porch, windows and

general curb appeal. “All those things that make the house have the best first impression. It really is within the first seven seconds that people start making decisions,” she says. “When they’re walking up to a home and they’re walking in the home, they make a decision about that property they’re looking at purchasing.”

A home does not need to be vacant for Trez to work her magic. “There’s two types of staging. There’s vacant staging, where the person has already moved out of the home.” In this scenario, Trez and her team go into the vacant home and bring in all the furnishings to showcase the house. “Like staging a model home,” she says. “That’s what we’re doing with a residential property.” The other type of staging occurs when a home is still occupied but on the market. “We come in and do a consultation with them to help them prepare the home for sale. It’s the same concept as merchandising and marketing products.” In this case, the product is the home on the market.

To ensure a house looks its best, Trez and her team remove as much of the personal as possible. This could be a wall of family photos, or

even bright colors. “Maybe red or purple is their favorite color, and that’s what they’ve painted their rooms and there’s multiple colors in the house that we want to neutralize. We give them advice on things that they can do.” This could range from changing wall colors to replacing worn out flooring or upgrading small things in the home. “The last is the furniture placement and where we want to have art and furniture so we have a really good shot of the house.”

Sometimes people become very attached to objects in their home, and maybe they even believe that they will be able to sell their home with a neon green couch in the center of their living room. Trez works to educate people about the reality of what a buyer wants. “I’m a big fan of building trust and educating. Those are two things that I feel are very important as a stager. We have to build trust with a client in a pretty short period of time because we’re not working with them for long hours and days and days. We build a relationship by educating them on the things that they need to do and the reasons behind why they need to do that. We never make it personal, it’s really not personal for me. I want to help them sell their home.

Most importantly, the seller is going to get the most money in their pocket.”

Once everything is complete, and the rooms are staged in a home, Trez warns people everything is going to look and feel different. When homeowners tell her the space no longer feels like their home, she says that’s when she knows she’s done her job.

Over the years, Trez has had a lot of her family work for her. “Family is wonderful but they’re not always going to be there working in your company,” she says. “They’ve got other things that they’re going to move on and do. It’s all about finding good, qualified people who want to work and have a buy into your company.” Her daughter and sons have all worked in her business in various roles, and she says it was great having them on board with her.

As many business owners can attest, maintaining a work-life balance can be difficult. “I have found that sometimes it takes a little while because we all start on our own, and we think we can do it all. Then we’re working 80 hours a week and weekends and then you get to the point where you realize you need to find those areas that you can delegate.”

Today, Trez says her life is in a good place. “I’m blessed that we became empty nesters and downsized to a condo. We have a boat, and we live in a condo off the water, so that’s kind of our relaxing thing.” In addition, when she’s able to travel, she returns to visit family in the California desert.

Since her kids have left home, Trez notes that this has opened up much of her time. “I went from running the company and being a mom with kids and soccer and activities, and now it’s like, oh my gosh, we don’t have a full weekend of soccer. They really do fill your life.” With all this extra time, it’s given her a chance to consider other activities she can pursue. “I used to golf, and now my husband and I can travel a little more. We like to travel.”

Trez Robinson has worked hard to help home sellers and realtors understand the value of home staging. “People respond to things that are beautifully set up, that are styled, that are set in a way that shows the absolute potential of the square footage of the home. That’s really what staging is all about. It’s no different from merchandising, so buyers can emotionally connect and fall in love with that space.” NDN

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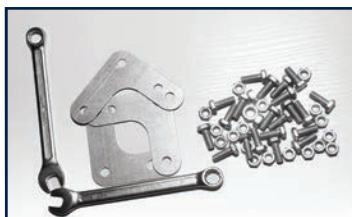


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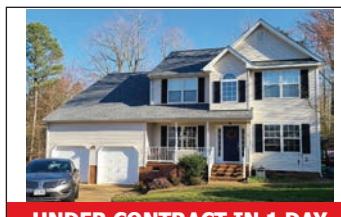
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