

JUNE 2007

WILLIAMSBURG'S

# Next Door Neighbors

Where local viewpoints and experiences are shared

VOL 1, ISSUE 3

PRICELESS



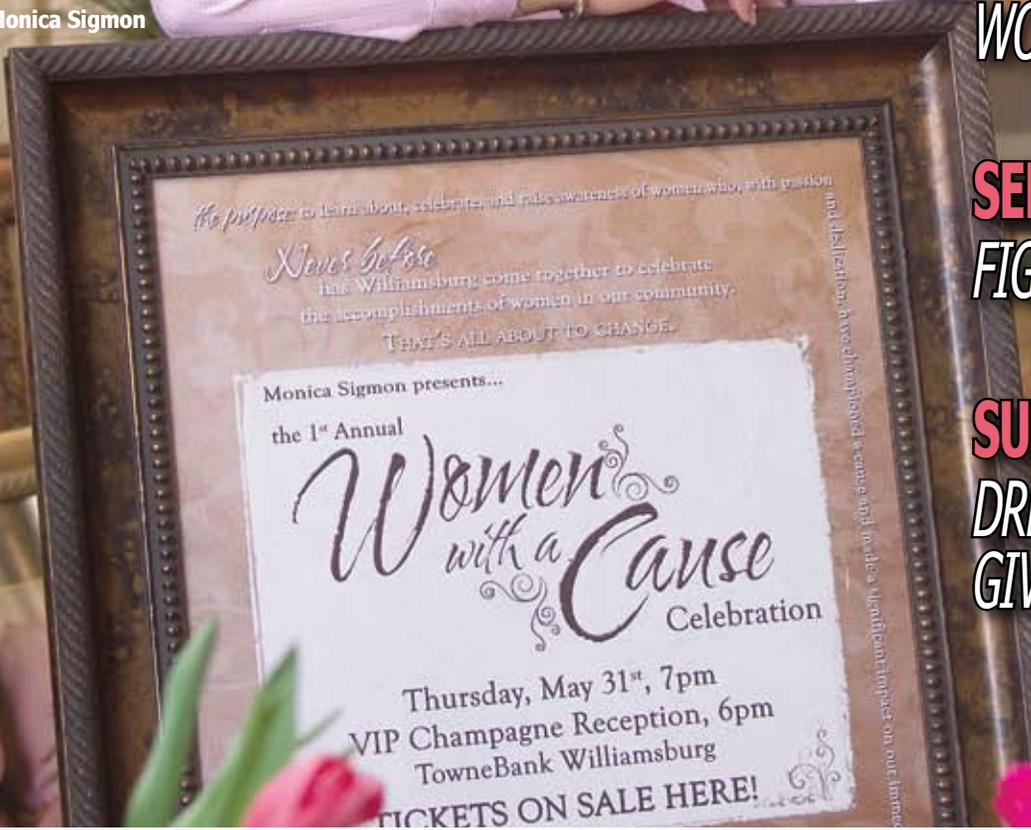
Monica Sigmon

## Williamsburg Women Making A Difference

**MONICA SIGMON'S**  
WOMEN WITH A CAUSE

**SENTARA VOLUNTEERS**  
FIGHTING BREAST CANCER

**SUE PEARCE**  
DREAM CATCHER VOLUNTEER  
GIVING HOPE TO FAMILIES



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In this issue of **Next Door Neighbors** you will read about women in our community who are making a difference in the lives of

ers. These women may be the only ones who know whether their acts of giving are motivated by the desire to touch the lives of others

## Williamsburg Women

Making A Difference in Our Community

others. There are so many wonderful stories that could be told that it would be impossible to print them all in one issue. Instead, we have selected a few women in Williamsburg who are demonstrating their willingness to serve others. Their stories could be anyone's story, and they serve to remind us of what more we could do for others with the time we have.

I have always liked Dr. M. Scott Peck's definition of love in his well-known book, *The Road Less Traveled*, and I share it with you here:

*Love is the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth.*

The women you will read about in this issue are women who are putting their love in motion by giving their time to nurture oth-

ers. These women may be the only ones who know whether their acts of giving are motivated by the desire to touch the lives of others

own spiritual growth in ways we never could by directing our energy only to ourselves.

As you read this issue of **Next Door Neighbors**, my hope is that you will evaluate your own life and assess the time you may have to extend yourself for another. One of the best ways we can contribute to our community is by offering a helping hand to someone in need. All it takes is a little

time and the willingness to give.

I hope you enjoy reading about these Williamsburg women who are doing just that, and are an inspiration to us all.



Meredith Collins, Publisher

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## What was that artifact?

If you read the article in the last issue of **Next Door Neighbors** about Jamie May, the archeologist, you may have wondered what was being uncovered at the dig site at historical

Jamestowne as you came to the end of the story.

The Mystery Object from the pit is a mortar, as in mortar and pestle. Similar objects are seen in labs for chemical processes.



Bly Straube,  
Curator, APVA



## MONICA SIGMON

# She's a woman with a cause

By Meredith Collins

**This is a story about Monica Sigmon.  
But not really.**

It's really about her passion. For those who know her, you might think I am referring to her photography since it is her life's work and it is exceptional. But I'm not.

If you spend any time with Monica, you will know that she has more than one passion and they are not one dimensional. Her vibrancy and energy flows – and not all in one direction.

And so this story is about Monica's passion for affecting the lives of others and taking a portion of what she sees as her responsibility to make Williamsburg a better place to live. More importantly, it is to recognize and generate awareness of local women who are devoted to good causes in the community that are touching others in a positive way.

"I think there comes a point when you realize you're a part of this community and you have a social responsibility to the town that you live in and it's kind of like it clicks one day and you say, 'It is up to me,'" Monica explained. "And if I have the time, the talent or the resources or the drive or the passion – or all of the above, to be able to do something – then shame on me if I don't."

And so with these thoughts, Monica began to harness her ideas and put them into motion. A couple of years ago, she saw an ad in a magazine that spotlighted a celebrity and a particular charity that she was involved in. She liked the concept because it encouraged the audience to give that charity some attention. The idea slowly fermented in the back of her mind.

Last fall, Monica began to think about the concept more seriously. She put a name to it: *Women with a Cause*. When she sat down to write the mission statement it practically wrote itself.

"The mission statement came out in one flowing sentence," Monica said. "I didn't have to re-write it. I didn't have to think about it. I just said, 'OK, Monica, put it on paper – what do you want this to do?' And it just came out and I thought, 'This is perfect.'"

Monica's mission is to raise awareness of and celebrate women who, with passion and dedication, are making a difference in our community. To accomplish that, she came up with a special event to serve as the centerpiece of her idea. What began as a small project has blossomed into a much larger, exciting celebration designed to recognize some well deserving women in Williamsburg and more importantly, to bring attention to good works that will serve to remind us all of what we could do.

"It's just something I haven't seen our community come together to do before," Monica explained. "About 95% of my time is spent with women. You just chat with them. You learn about what they are involved in – what they are doing and how they are juggling children, and schools, and families, and work, and then some of them on top of that are also charitably minded. And you just kind of think, 'Wow. All I do is run a business. This is a piece of cake compared to what these ladies do.' I just felt like there are a lot of stories out there that we don't know about and wouldn't it be interesting to learn about them."

Monica thought it would be important to create something that would involve the community and she knew that in order to get nominations from people in the area she had to have a way to publicize her plan. She approached Anne Conner, President of TowneBank in Williamsburg, to see if she could enlist her support.

"Anne, without hesitation, said: 'Absolutely. We will help sponsor this.'", Monica recalled, and at that point "I realized this could be a bigger deal rather than just an intimate gathering."

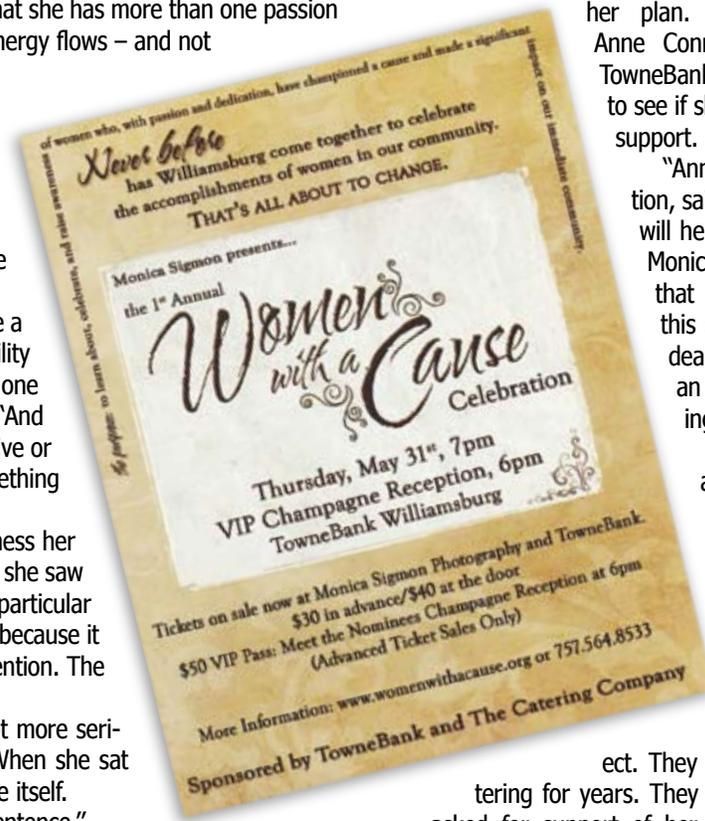
Next, Monica approached some friends of hers, Craig and Laura Reeves, owners of the Catering Company, to see if they would help with the project.

They had done her catering for years. They were in. She also asked for support of her right hand, Alice Agnello, and her framer, Kandice Higgins. They were in too.

"At that point, the entire scope of the event changed," Monica explained. "If we're going to do this, we're going to do this right. We're going to do this big."

To solicit nominations from the community, Monica ran some ads in the local newspaper. She sent letters to businesses and individuals explaining the idea and asking for nominations. She approached charitable organizations, churches and other associations looking for people who knew women doing amazing things.

Monica expected to receive 8 or 10 nominations. After all, it was an unknown initiative.



No one had ever heard of *Women with a Cause* before. To her surprise, she received four times that many nominations..

"We were astounded," Monica exclaimed. "We received 35 nominations. We were absolutely blown away." Twenty five of the nominations were submitted on the deadline day, which was totally unexpected.

The nomination forms were designed to be simple enough that it would not become laborious for the person completing them, but comprehensive enough to tell the story of the woman being nominated. What is she doing for her cause? If her cause involves her work, what is she doing above and beyond her day to day responsibilities?

"Even if we didn't have a party or an event, what a wonderful compliment, what a wonderful feeling," Monica said about the nominations. "Imagine that somebody thought enough of you to take the time out of their day to fill out this paperwork and nominate you. We have friends and family and all the time we may say, 'I love you', but how often do we say, 'I love you because...'? And I feel like even if we never had a party, if this never went a step further, 35 women got to witness how proud their friends and colleagues were of them."

Of the 35 women who were nominated for *Women with a Cause*, four to six of them will receive special recognition. To evaluate all of the nominations in the most objective way possible, Monica enlisted the help of six judges, five of whom are located in different parts of the country. One is an executive at Kodak in New York, and another is with a Los Angeles advertising agency that specializes in not-for-profit businesses. Only one judge is local to minimize even the slightest concern over politics or improprieties.

"Especially in a town like Williamsburg where everybody knows everybody and everybody is affiliated with something, it was important to

me to have judges that were outside of the area," Monica explained.

The Williamsburg *Women with a Cause* event will be held May 31st at TowneBank, and while there will be special recognition for the few candidates selected by the judges, the real intent of the evening is to show appreciation to all of the women and to generate awareness for the causes they have devoted their time to.

"That night, while we will certainly highlight the four to six honorees - our official 2007 *Women with a Cause* honorees - that night really, really, really needs to be about all 35 ladies," Monica emphasized. "And so what will we do that night that will make each of them feel special and bring awareness to our community about each of their causes? So that's our challenge now."

The idea is that not one of these women who have been nominated is any less valuable than another. And as far as that goes, any of us giving to others and making our community a better place should certainly feel valued in the same way.

"We knew we would hear about ladies that are really well known in our town, that really epitomize our mission statement in making a difference in Williamsburg," she continued. "And that's wonderful to give them some honor. The other thing we are hoping to get out of this is to learn about women who maybe are doing their work very quietly and that we haven't heard about before. That maybe aren't a household name."

Monica's vision for that special night is to not only give recognition to those being honored, but even more importantly to raise the social consciousness of those who attend. While everyone's lifestyle reflects different levels of personal income and abilities to give monetarily to charities, she points out that the one thing we all have an equal amount of is time. "I think that the gift of time is the most precious thing you can give because we all have the same amount."

"It's almost like this huge networking thing all charitably minded," Monica said. "We all go to business networking all the time. We're involved in business networking groups. And we pass out our business cards and that's great. But this is going to be a more charitable networking thing. And in a very fun, very celebratory environment and a very appreciative environment where we'll just go, 'Wow. You're doing that all by yourself? Well, I can't stroke you a check but I have this resource that might be able to help you. Or, I have a friend who... or, whatever.' You just never know how things get pulled together."

It remains to be seen how well *Women with a Cause* will "pull together" in the remaining few days before the event. With Monica behind it applying her uncompromising work ethic and "accept nothing less than the best" approach to business that has made her successful, the event is sure to be a resounding and appropriate tribute to the women being honored. I'm willing to bet it will not only be a night to remember for the honorees, but it will also provide an opportunity for all of us to reflect on how we, too, can make a difference in our community.

"I think that the gift of time is the most precious thing you can give because we all have the same amount."



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## WOMEN WITH A CAUSE NOMINEES

### Anne Anderson - CHILDREN

This "mother extraordinaire" has a passion for improving the lives of children throughout the community and beyond as an active member in her church and as a swim instructor and coach. Serving as a Sunday School teacher, Vacation Bible School leader, and being a foster parent to 5 medically challenged children from the Dominican Republic are just a few examples of her commitment to children.

### Gert Berthiaume - FREE MAMMOGRAPHY & BONE DENSITY PROGRAMS

In 1998, Gert designed and implemented the Auxiliary's Free Mammography Program at Sentara Hospital to provide free mammograms to women in the community who are without health insurance. Combined with the Bone Density program which was added in 2000, over 1300 patients have been served. At 81, Gert is still going strong and responsible for the management of both programs.

### Kerry Blekfeld - FIRE AND RESCUE

Kerry has graduated from the intense National Fire Academy, and serves as a full-time Senior Fire /Rescue Technician (Firefighter/Paramedic) with James City County. She will complete her Masters Degree in Emergency Management Administration in 2008 and is also currently enrolled in the Hampton Roads Regional Command School...all while continuing to volunteer with James City-Bruton Fire & Rescue Department, where she has been elected Chaplain and serves on their Board of Directors.

### Karen Bodett - SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN

Karen has worked diligently over the past several years to make Williamsburg more accessible and enjoyable for children with special needs, the impacts of which have been felt in local parks and playgrounds, as well as the new Virginia Capital Trail. She has founded an informal group, Mothers on a Mission, of mothers with special needs children who meet on a monthly basis to support and encourage each other.

### René Bowditch - GOOD HEALTH

As the Good Health Fairy, René spreads her love of life to people who are suffering in illness through laughter and good cheer. In addition to being a Reach for Recovery volunteer, providing support and compassion for individuals with cancer and their families, René has founded a special support group specifically for young women with Breast Cancer - affectionately known as Beyond Boobs! René is in the process of creating and distributing flyers to distribute throughout the Peninsula to support the group.

### Mary Brewer - HEALTH CARE MANAGEMENT FOR SENIORS

Having worked for 30 years in medical social work in Williamsburg/James City County, Mary creates a customized plan for each patient that includes feedback from the family while incorporating the patient's wishes. Mary then bridges the gap between the patient's and families' desires and the medical team's plan of care. This plan is unique as it is patient-focused and allows the patient to live their last years with dignity and purpose.

### Jan Brown - ADDICTION RECOVERY AND WELLNESS

As the founder of SpiritWorks Foundation Center for the Soul, Jan provides our community with a center that offers children and adults, programs and services specifically geared towards living in recovery. Jan was introduced to alcohol at the age of 4 and was an addict by 12. She is now sober and lives in recovery, and is dedicated to helping others.

### Camilla Buchanan - THE MAASAI AMERICAN ORGANIZATION

Camilla co-founded this organization whose number one priority is the provision of scholarships and the education of girls in Kenya. In addition, the MAO supports projects for the improvement of community health as well as the economic empowerment of women. Camilla's work with the MAO raises awareness in our community of those in need of basic necessities across the globe.

### Jane Medlin Burton - THE WILLIAMSBURG SYMPHONIA

Early in her tenure as president of the Williamsburg Symphonia, Jane recognized that the orchestra needed to grow in stature and musical competency to meet the expectations of an increasingly sophisticated and well-educated audience within the greater Williamsburg area. Under her direction, the Symphonia has raised its reputation from an organization struggling to meet the orchestra payroll to one that is now fiscally sound and involved in several artistic collaborations throughout the community, including the Muscarelle Museum of Art, the Williamsburg Choral Guild, and the College of William and Mary.



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### Lynne Christensen - ANIMAL WELFARE

Lynne started volunteering at the Heritage Humane Society cleaning the kennels in 1994 and eventually founded the volunteer program there, serving as its coordinator until 1997. After serving on the Board of Directors for four years, Lynne became the Executive Director in 2001. She is an advocate for animal welfare and has personally touched the lives of over 10,000 animals and their owners during her career.

### Carolyn Cloninger - AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY

Three years ago, Carolyn's daughter, Hayes, was diagnosed with a brain tumor while in the first grade. After a year of treatments Hayes returned to school and she and her mother began to make bracelets to give the hospital staff as small tokens of their appreciation. News spread and their jewelry became a hot item. Hayes and Carolyn donated 100% of the money they made to Relay for Life...contributing over \$10,000 to the school's team total. This year, Carolyn has stepped in as the Relay for Life Team Captain, organizing more than 20 members, and Hayes has already surpassed her last year's contributions!

### Mary Diane Dawson - CULTURAL EDUCATION

Mary began collecting dolls representing a variety of cultures over twenty years ago. She has now housed them in such a way as to share them with our community, providing an education and history of various cultures.

### Sally Derrig - DREAM CATCHERS

Sally's passion for horses and their relationship with special needs individuals has guided her life for the past nine years. She has served as a volunteer, certified instructor and as the Executive Director at Dream Catchers, a therapeutic riding center serving those in need from Richmond to Virginia Beach. Through her efforts, the awareness of this program has been raised, volunteers and donors have signed on, and Dream Catchers is now serving additional children through the WJCC school system.

### Cathy Dogden - HUMAN AND ANIMAL WELFARE

Cathy is passionate about serving our human and animal population, both here in Williamsburg and beyond. She is an active volunteer in the Greater Atlantic Rescue Dogs group, a volunteer organization providing K-9 teams deployed to aid in searching for missing persons in Virginia and surrounding states. In addition, she works with the

K9 Connection Therapy Dog Group and the Blue Ridge Border Collie Rescue, also as a volunteer, providing safe havens and ultimately "forever homes" to countless animals each year.

### Dr. Lindy Dunn - BREAST CANCER AWARENESS

Lindy is passionate about educating, helping, encouraging and alleviating the "fear" of breast cancer for women. She first introduced the annual Breast Cancer Survivors' Retreat over five years ago. She has been active in getting the word out to women locally that they must be responsible for their own breast health ever since she started practicing radiology at the Women's Imaging Center here in Williamsburg. Lindy speaks to groups all over Williamsburg and beyond, such as local clubs, college groups, ladies' golf events, and community education projects.

### Nancy Fazzino - ADULT LITERACY AND EDUCATION

Nancy began her career with the Rita Welsh Adult Literacy Program in 2000 as a volunteer tutor and was hired as the Executive Director in 2004. RWALP provides free learning services to any adult 18 or over that lives or works in the greater Williamsburg area. There are currently 225 learners registered with the program.

### Cindy Freeman - EARLY CHILDHOOD MUSIC

Cindy is dedicated to making sure that young children have exposure to music. She strives, through the Early Childhood Music School (ECMS) where she serves as Director, to bring musical opportunities to children in our community. She was instrumental in developing Project Outreach, a program dedicated to providing (at no cost) 30 weeks of annual instruction to groups of preschool children for whom music education opportunities are limited because of social, economic or developmental factors.

### Julie Highsmith - QUALITY CARE FOR CHILDREN

As Youth and Family Services Director for the RF Wilkinson Family YMCA, Julie has been instrumental in the opening of the YMCA Family Fitness Center in Williamsburg and developing new programs that touch many members of the Williamsburg community. She feels that every family deserves to have quality care for their children, regardless of their ability to pay.

- continued on page 17

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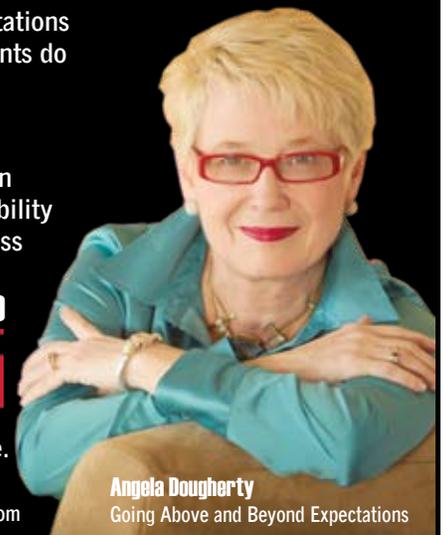
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Angela Dougherty  
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Mary Ann Lee would be thrilled to work herself out of a job. That would mean no more abused or neglected children or families in need of support in James City County. As social work supervisor for the James City County Division of Social Services, Lee's job is to supervise the county's social workers as they work to ensure that all area children are safe. Her life's passion, however, is to help vulnerable families become strong – strong enough not to need

When the girl became eligible for adoption, they adopted her.

That passion and conviction led her to get involved in social work 25 years ago. In 1982, Lee and other members of Williamsburg Mennonite Church approached James City County Social Services to start a respite day care program for families either identified as abusive or neglectful or at high risk. The program, which continued until 2001, offered parents regular

our legs, pick up an older child at school and maybe chat with the teacher, or even, meet a friend for lunch, take a bubble bath or grab a nap.

"But a lot of times in our society, families are very isolated from each other," Lee says. "It's an overused phrase – 'it takes a village to raise a child' – but it does. If you're single and you're out there with nobody and you're doing childcare 24/7 every day of the year and you have no one

## MARY ANN LEE WANTS TO WORK HERSELF OUT OF A JOB.

By Karen Haywood Queen

her and her staff.

This passion for saving children and families is what earned Lee the Dr. Anthony Shaw Award, a state award that each year recognizes one distinguished Child Protective Services professional for his or her contributions to preventing child abuse and neglect.

"That would be a grand day," Lee says of a time when her position would no longer be needed to manage such crises. "I'd think I had died and gone to heaven. I don't think we'll ever be there because there are some people who, due to whatever reasons, may not be able to make the changes that are needed. But I am convinced that most families can."

Lee herself grew up in a minister's family where there was often an extra plate set at the table and reaching out to people in need was a part of life. She realizes now that her family didn't have a lot of material wealth but what they had, they shared. That sharing continued with her own family. From 1985 to 1990, she and her husband served as foster parents, accepting into their home a little girl whose parents had multiple problems.

time away from their children so family stress could be reduced. The program won both local and national awards.

"When we talk about child abuse, too often we say 'These are bad people. I would never do that to my children.' We take judgmental attitudes," Lee says. "Usually the people who take judgmental attitudes have a support system."

Those of us with support systems can call on Grandma or Aunt Sharon to sit with

the baby and/or the preschoolers so we can go to the doctor alone, get groceries without rambunctious toddlers around

to call on, you can become quite overwhelmed. There are too many parents who don't have any time for themselves."

This can result in abuse or neglect. Every 11 minutes a child is abused or neglected in Virginia, according to state statistics. Every 49 minutes, a child commits a violent crime. Every 12 days, a child dies from abuse or neglect – last year 31 children died in Virginia as a direct result of child abuse or child neglect.

Lee's vision is to help these parents before they become overwhelmed, before court intervention is needed. In her letter nominating Lee for the award, Diana Hutchens, director of James City County Social Services, praised Lee for doing "a remarkable job educating the public on how to recognize abuse and neglect." Lee is a strong advocate for keeping families together and has provided intensive in-home services to families where abuse had occurred

“Every 11 minutes a child is abused or neglected in Virginia.”



or was at high risk of occurring, Hutchens says.

If your vision of social workers like Lee includes an image of people swooping in to whisk children away from their tearful parents, think again. The goal is to keep families together. Lee focuses on a family's strengths to help family members overcome their weaknesses.

"Child Protective Services gets called into families because of a report of abuse or neglect," she says. "We're looking at their worst weaknesses. If you go in and that's all you focus on, you're not going to make changes. You do have to look at the weaknesses. You have to make sure there's a plan in place that's going to create safety for the children. But if all you talk about is what they've done wrong, no one is inspired to make changes. If you build on their strengths, what they do well, you

empower them. I don't think there's one family or one person who couldn't look at their own life and pick out one time when they needed help and someone

was there for them. If you can recognize that in yourself, then recognize it in other people. Recognize it as reaching out in friendship, in caring, not with a judgmental attitude. People will be receptive to that."

But not everyone is receptive. Occasionally, the job can be dangerous. "I am aware that on several occasions, she was stalked by dysfunctional parents, with threatening comments being made," says George C. Fairbanks, Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court judge, says in his letter of support. "She has always handled these situations in a calm, professional manner."

Lee reminds us all that we can help too. In fact, she'd rather this entire story were

about these ways instead of about her. "As a community, we have to be there to support families, not condemn families," she says. "I feel very strongly and passionately about that."

She suggests that we start helping within our own families, offering to help when and where we can, expand it to the local school and our neighbors either one-on-one or through programs such as Girl and Boy Scouts and Big Brother/Big Sister. "Too often we look at child abuse and child neglect as 'It's too big. I can't make a difference,'" she says. "There are plenty of children who need mentors, someone to help them with homework. Perhaps the parents don't really have the time to do it. You can make a difference to the one family you know." ■

“There are plenty of children who need mentors, someone to help them with homework.”

**For more information about James City County Social Services, call (757) 259-3201 or visit their web site at:**

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Whether in college classrooms, elementary schools or special education departments, Sister Mary Jeanne Oesterle feels wherever her path has led her over the years, she has always been in just the right place.

"I have had such beautiful experiences in my life. Everywhere I have been, I feel that, at that time, I was meant to be right there," Oesterle said. "Throughout my life I have valued every person I have met, so if I changed them, I just used the gift God gave me."

During Oesterle's 40 years as an educator with the Religious Order of the Sisters of Mercy, her calling has taken her from classrooms in Philadelphia's inner-city to the those filled with the children of active-duty Marines and Sailors just outside Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune in Jacksonville, N.C., as well as many stops in between. Most recently, it has led her to the helm of Williamsburg's Walsingham Academy where she has served as the school's president for five years and among the administration for seventeen. And it is here that she feels truly blessed to be.

"Everyone should have the opportunity to be someplace so warm and welcoming," Oesterle said of the Williamsburg campus that is the daytime destination of more than 700 students, pre-kindergarten through 12th-grade. "It is a wonderful institution and I am very passionate about the work we do here."

As president of the Catholic school, it is Oesterle's mission to keep the school on the right path, leading the staff, administra-

tion, faculty and student body. Though her life as a Sister of Mercy has led her many places and into the lives of even more people, these days, "Most of my ministry and contacts are focused here at the school."

Since taking on the role of president, Oesterle doesn't spend as much time in classrooms as she did as an elementary school teacher in Levittown, Penn., where she began her career 40 years ago, but she

still views her mission and that of the educators around her as one of the most fortunate duties anyone could be called upon to perform.

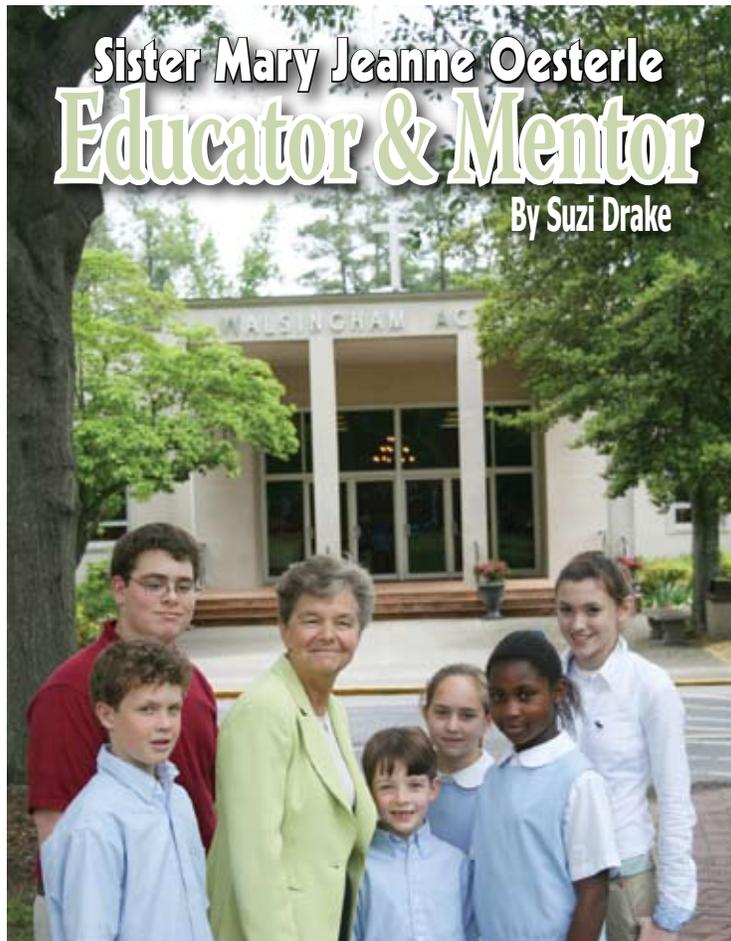
"The role of an educator, I truly believe, is a ministry in itself," she said. "You have the opportunity to help form young lives and help them realize the good people they are. What an awesome responsibility – but what a gift."

This "awesome responsibility" is one Oesterle accepted quite knowingly and very readily when she took her vows and entered the religious order. While a small percentage of Sisters of Mercy go into the nursing field, the order is predominately comprised of educators.

"I felt the call while I was in high school in the '60s," she said. "I graduated in June and entered the community in September."

Since then she has been on the path to spread the benefits of the Christ-centered education that she feels when incorporated with traditional curriculum, and a continuously developing arts and athletics program, really focuses on "the whole child."

"We are able to touch so many lives. And we are able to give them a spiritual basis," Oesterle said. "Each one of us, I believe, has such a spiritual nature. Here (at Walsingham), we have the opportunity to talk about God, pray, and answer questions about this spiritual part of each child's life. And, most importantly, give them a great love for their God. No matter what religion they are, children can really get to know their God."



## Sister Mary Jeanne Oesterle Educator & Mentor

By Suzi Drake

Sister Mary Jeanne Oesterle with students attending Walsingham Academy.

From Left to Right: Joshua Easop (in back), Matthew Wallin, Sister Mary Jeanne Oesterle, Joey Riva, Logan Haynie, Alexis Hatch and Katy Ingles.



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As the president of the academy, Oesterle has the unique opportunity to interact with the entire Walsingham community, as

ing accident that left her seriously disabled and resigned her to a life in nursing facilities – until now.

every student exceeds these hours because they receive so much from their experience. They go out there thinking they are giving

**“You have the opportunity to help form young lives and help them realize the good people they are. What an awesome responsibility – but what a gift.”**

well as act as its representative in the Williamsburg community.

“I have the blessing to know every age level here,” she said. “I get to work with so many young people and their families, and this really is the greatest joy and inspiration for me – the love these parents have for these children.”

Because Walsingham is such a close-knit community, students have been able to accomplish some truly remarkable service projects with parents, faculty, staff and neighbors providing a strong support system. In fact, they recently built a house from the ground up.

The totally handicap-accessible home has been custom-built for a woman named April, her two children and her mother. It will be the first home April has shared with her children since she was a young mother, still in high school. She suffered a debilitat-

“It’s called April’s House of Mercy and we are to the point that we are now planting flowers,” Oesterle said.

Where service is concerned, this is just a small piece of a much larger service-oriented picture painted by Walsingham students.

“Our students raise money for the American Cancer Society; they have adopted a portion of the highway; our outreach programs take the lower grades to visit a local nursing home once a week and the upper grades to volunteer at the soup kitchen,” she noted. “Service is an important piece of the educational process.” So important, in fact, that Oesterle not only encourages students to become involved in service, but she requires it as part of the school’s curriculum.

“Students must complete a certain number of service hours,” she said. “But almost

back, which they are, but they find that they get so much back from their efforts.”

This is just one way the school has made its place in the Williamsburg community.

“We are touching young lives and sending them back into the community,” Oesterle said. “And the entire community knows they are always welcome here – if they need a place to gather, a place to pray, a place to mourn or a place to celebrate.”

In October, Walsingham will celebrate its 60th anniversary. With Oesterle at the lead, it seems clear that the future of the school as well as the community it serves has much to look forward to.

“When you stop, look around and realize where we are going, you can see that what is good today will become so much better tomorrow,” she said. “If you stop moving, you begin to die. We are constantly moving forward.” ■

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# Classy Angels

By Joe Collins

ORIGINATORS OF THE FREE MAMMOGRAM PROGRAM AT SENTARA WILLIAMSBURG

If you scratch the surface of a successful charitable program you will almost always find a pair of hard working, unsung heroes making it all happen. Such is the case with the Sentara Williamsburg Regional Medical Center Auxiliary's Free Mammogram Program. While several dedicated volunteers and generous medical professionals support the program, the auxiliary's Gert Berthiaume and Dot Bickmore make up the driving force responsible for founding and sustaining this remarkable gift to local women.

Gert and Dot are each energetic, caring, and formidable women on their own. Taken together they are a force to be reckoned with. There is a tireless determination and enthusiasm to their volunteerism and specifically to their passion for the Free Mammogram Program. In conversation they tend to complete or overlap each other's sentences, complement each other's thoughts, and add details and remembrances

to one another's stories. But they coalesce into one voice in their conviction that the greatest reward they receive from the Free Mammogram Program is the knowledge that they are helping to save lives.

The Free Mammogram Program provides mammogram screening and, for approximately 15% of those screened who require it, follow up diagnostic screening and ultrasounds. The program is open to uninsured Williamsburg area women who are between the ages of 40 and 65 (or under 40 with a family history of breast cancer). Since its inception in 1998, the program has paid for over 1,500 evaluations at a cost of over \$120,000.

It all started with something Gert overheard on the evening news. A native of Massachusetts, longtime hospital and auxiliary volunteer, and avid fan of Peter Jennings, Gert was busy making dinner one evening with the TV on in the other room. When she heard the anchor mention a free mammogram program in Massachusetts it caught her attention and she went to watch and learn more.

Even though she had missed most of the story her interest was peaked. She dashed off a letter to ABC and followed up with several phone calls to the station until she was put in touch with two Boston area hospitals involved in the program. Her excitement grew as she learned more about the Boston area program. She was undeterred when she learned that the program in New England was funded by taxpayers, for she was certain the Auxiliary could find a way to sponsor the program and she was equally certain she knew someone in the Auxiliary who was a wizard with financing and funding. She was right on both counts.

Enter Dot Bickmore. Another long time hospital and Auxiliary volunteer, Dot also has a talent for organization and financial management that complements Gert's skills at scheduling, communicating, and marketing. "It works so well," Gert says, "I don't like to do what she does and she doesn't like to do what I do! And they both have a knack for

persuasion which they put to work immediately on the hospital's directors and the Auxiliary leadership to get their approval for the program. They also had to talk to the radiologists who interpret the mammogram and ultrasound results.

As Dot explains it, "When you get a mammogram you get two bills, one from the hospital where the equipment and the technology is then one from the radiologist who reads it. So we had dual organizations to work with and we now pay both of those organizations. But both of them were very accommodating and very generous. They gave us a very good price and the radiologist with Tidewater Diagnostics has been very, very supportive of our program for these past 9 years."

Once they had the support of the hospital and radiologists and an initial grant of \$6,000 from the Auxiliary, Gert set to work getting the word out about the program. She drafted flyers and distributed them throughout the Williamsburg medical community and sent letters to every doctor's office and clinic in town. She followed up those letters with phone calls and personal visits. Meanwhile, Dot worked on the process for obtaining and paying for services and a strategy for future funding of the program. Their hard work paid off immediately; the program was an instant success. It is a credit to their ongoing hard work that almost a decade later the program grows stronger and larger every year.

Today the Auxiliary funds this program from the hospital's Pineapple Gift Shop proceeds and other fundraisers throughout the year (the Mistletoe Market, The Festival of Lights, the July 4th Ice Cream Social, the Gently Used Clothing Sale, book sales, uniform sales, jewelry sales, and computer sales). And while applicants come from all over, over 95% of the program's patients come from Old Towne Medical and the Angels of Mercy Clinic.

To date, over 1,020 patients have been provided for by the Free Mammogram Program. This represents a dramatic achievement in the ongoing fight against breast

cancer.

As Jeffrey Black, Chairman of the Board of the Angels of Mercy Medical Clinic points out, "Breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer and the second leading cause of cancer deaths among women in our nation. It is the leading cause of death for women ages 40-59. The value of this program has not only had an impact on those whose lives have been saved, but it has also brought peace of mind to countless individuals who had wanted to have a mammogram, but could not afford it. To better understand the value of this program the National Breast Cancer Foundation states that "When breast cancer is found early, the five-year survival rate is 96%."

The success of this program resulted in the Auxiliary's decision to expand in 2000 and provide free bone density

screenings for community members at risk for osteoporosis. Like the mammography program, the Free Bone Density Program pays for uninsured or underinsured men and women who are referred by a physician to receive preventative health care through bone density testing. Funded by the Williamsburg Community Health Foundation, the free bone density program has provided nearly \$19,000 to test more than 131 patients since the program's implementation in July 2000.

Gert and Dot could have stopped at founding the program and they still would be considered angels. But they didn't. Their tireless devotion (a combined 38 years!) and continued management of the program along with the many other volunteer efforts they contribute to the hospital, library, and Colonial Williamsburg, puts them in a class of their own.

Yet they can't help being modest and sharing the credit with the many others who support the program including two supporters who are perhaps even further behind the scenes than they are: "We both should say we have the most courteous and supportive husbands and that really helps; they help us with everything."

Classy ladies, classy angels. ■

**"It was devastating when my husband lost his job and insurance. People like you and your organization still make me have faith there are still those who care."**

- Patient



Gert Berthiaume and Dot Bickmore

## Want to volunteer? at Sentara Williamsburg Regional Medical Center

### VOLUNTEERS

The Sentara Williamsburg Regional Medical Center volunteer team is comprised of adults, college students, and junior volunteers (must have completed 8th grade and be at least 14 years of age). Volunteer opportunities are available in clinical and non-clinical settings both onsite and offsite hospital locations. Adult volunteers are offered flexible schedules to accommodate their lifestyles. The college volunteer program is structured according to college semesters. The Junior Volunteer Program is structured as a two-week summer camp program with (4) two-week sessions available each summer. Each session offers 50 hours of volunteer service to the hospital. All junior volunteers must complete at least one of the (4) two-week sessions to qualify for volunteering during the school year.

**Volunteer Office  
(757) 984-7194 or 7195**

### AUXILIARY

The Sentara Williamsburg Regional Medical Center Auxiliary, nationally recognized recipients of the 2002 H.A.V.E. Award (Hospital Award for Volunteer Excellence) is the fundraising branch of the volunteer team. Many members volunteer in the hospital as well. Membership includes nearly 350 male and female volunteers, and is open to community members at least 17 years old. Members attend general membership meetings, assist in a variety of fundraising events (such as the July 4th Ice Cream Social, the Mistletoe Market, the Festival of Lights, the Gently Used Clothing Sale, the Gently Used Computer Sale, etc.) or assist in the hospital's Pineapple Gift Shop fundraiser to benefit the hospital and community.

**Auxiliary Office  
(757) 984-7192**

**For more information  
on how you can volunteer go to:**

[www.sentara.com/Sentara/HospitalsFacilities/Hospitals/Williamsburg/volunteers.htm](http://www.sentara.com/Sentara/HospitalsFacilities/Hospitals/Williamsburg/volunteers.htm)

# SUE PEARCE

She's giving hope  
to children and  
parents.

*By Suzanne S. Lanier*

J. J. can't walk or speak. He needs both a cane and adult support just to stand. His parents, John and Yolanda Fisher, weren't sure this activity would benefit him, but they decided to give it a try. For the first few weeks, J.J. wouldn't tolerate being anywhere near Habou, a 14-year-old Arabian gelding. Then, he tentatively reached out to caress him. The following week, he allowed the volunteers to lift him onto the back of Habou, but he immediately wanted down.

Finally, the week came when volunteer assistants pushed his wheelchair up a ramp, brought Habou alongside and lifted J.J. safely into the saddle. As J.J. held the reins, the horse leader held the guide rope and the side walkers took their positions.

The command "walk on, Habou" was given and the Arabian stepped off gently and slowly, understanding in his horse's heart that he was carry-



*Photo by  
Suzanne S. Lanier*

ing a special child.

When their ride was over and J.J., in a state of elation, was strapped back into his wheelchair, his equine friend lowered his beautiful head to J.J.'s, nuzzled him for a moment, then licked his arm as it rested on the wheel chair. "Good job today. I'll see you next week", he seemed to whisper.

Mr. and Mrs. Fisher watched in wonder, overcome by the sight of their son's dazzling smile as he sat unaided and rode Habou around the ring. They admitted that, if they had been told a year ago J.J. would ride a horse, they would have replied "no way" with complete dismissal.

Sue Pearce was Habou's leader the day J.J. rode him and she beamed with pleasure at his accomplishment. As a volunteer who gives 15 to 20 hours each week to Dream Catchers at the Cori Sikich Therapeutic Riding Center just outside of Williamsburg, she witnesses extraordinary events on a regular basis.

"I have always enjoyed working with kids - my undergraduate degree is in child development," Sue explained. "My graduate degree is in nutrition, and I worked predominantly in pediatrics before moving to Williamsburg. But my interest in special needs individuals, both children and adults, has truly been developed through Dream Catchers."

Emily Pearce, Sue's daughter, began volunteering at the center in 2001 after visiting a booth at Family Fun Fest. Sue was introduced to therapeutic riding when she took Emily, not yet old enough to drive, to the center. She started to observe while Emily worked and quickly became drawn in herself. She began volunteering by pulling weeds and mucking stalls, learning more about the center and its mission each time she was there. "I loved horses when I was a kid, and took riding lessons at a local college on and off for a while. Now, I'm living vicariously through Emily, who has ridden for more than ten years. If you want to see a beautiful rider and jumper,

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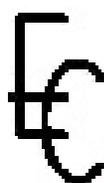
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watch her!"

Sue became more involved as the years passed. She trained as a volunteer side walker and horse leader, learned to groom the horses and manage the barn. The center relocated twice until it found its permanent home on 22 acres at the end of a meandering country lane, with lots of fresh air and the satisfying smell of horses and leather. Along the way, she was asked to serve on the board of directors and currently serves as its president. Dream Catchers recently hired a new executive director, Nancy Pascall, complete with executive dog, Zeke. Sue was a member of the search committee. "We wouldn't have been able to keep going these past years without Sue", said Melissa Connor, program director at the center. "She does everything around here."

Sue walks the grounds, in and out of the stable, the barn, the pastures, as comfortably as she covers the floors of Sentara Williamsburg Regional Medical Center as an employee of the Health Education Center. "This one," she said with a laugh, "is my paying job". She serves a different population as a registered dietician – those whose health depends upon good nutrition. "My job involves outpatient nutrition counseling, which includes working with diabetic patients, those with weight control issues and eating disorders. There is a huge component of community health education. We go out into the community to teach nutrition and how to live a healthy lifestyle. There's a ton of variety, which I really love. I just celebrated my fifteenth year with the hospital", she proclaimed.

There is an unusual connection between the dietician and the volunteer. Cori Sikich, for whom the riding center was named, was a proficient rider and horse lover who died at age 25 from complications of an eating disorder. When Cori's parents learned of the Dream Catchers organization, they bought and donated the land for the permanent therapeutic

riding facility as a way to keep Cori's memory and love of horses alive and to give children in need the opportunity to benefit from this extraordinary program. Sue never met Cori, but knows her sisters and serves with her parents on the board of directors of the riding center.

Sue has been nominated for recognition at the upcoming First Annual Women with a Cause Celebration, presented by local photographer Monica Sigmon. This organization's stated purpose is "to learn about, celebrate, and raise awareness of women who, with passion and dedication, have championed a cause and made a significant impact on our immediate community". Sue Pearce has certainly made an impact on the people in this community, although she would be the last one to say so. Her disarming smile and calm demeanor serve her well, whether she's chastising a patient for not sticking to his prescribed diet or teaching a little girl with sensory integration problems how to feel the grooming brushes and choose the soft-bristled one. Her passion and dedication spill over into every realm of her life, even the family vacations. "We are probably considered National Park junkies", she joked. They have toured most of the parks in Colorado, Wyoming and Utah, although their favorite is Shenandoah National Park, right here in Virginia.

Sue Pearce, volunteer, dietician, wife, mom, backpacker, board president. She's easy to find. Just take a drive to the riding center and look around. She'll be the one mucking the stalls, pulling the weeds and encouraging everybody else. ■



## Want to know more about Dream Catchers?

Recreational venues and opportunities are very limited for special needs youth in the Williamsburg area. For older children and adolescents, the options are even more restricted.

The scope of Dream Catchers' program services extends across the spectrum of special needs. Therapeutic horseback riding can be an accessible option for children or adults of any disability type.

### Here's how you can help:

- Sponsor students and/or horses. (Rider fees only cover about one-third of their annual costs.)

### - Make a donation.

Contributions are used to feed and care for program horses, maintain the quality of facilities and staff the program with NARHA (North American Riding for the Handicapped Association) certified instructors. In addition, these funds are used to increase capacity at all levels to serve more children who will greatly benefit from therapeutic riding.

For More Information Visit [www.dreamcatcherswilliamsburg.org](http://www.dreamcatcherswilliamsburg.org)

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### Judy Knudson - HEALTH CARE

Since Olde Towne Medical Center's (OTMC) opening in July 1994, it has provided quality medical and dental care to our uninsured and underinsured population. OTMC is under Judy Knudson's leadership. Over 14,000 patients have been treated with a staff of 30 supported by 65 volunteers. OTMC is a public-private non-profit agency providing cost-effective, comprehensive primary and preventive health care (including obstetrical) to uninsured, Medicaid, and Medicare patients in Greater Williamsburg. The heart of their mission is the provision of preventive care and early intervention services to a vulnerable and disadvantaged population with services to children and their families a priority.

### Sandy Lenthall - LIFE HISTORIES

Sandy believes in bringing attention to people whose life stories are worthy of recording and sharing, adding to the communal archives of lives well lived. She has published two books, specifically about women that serve to remind her audience to do what they can to preserve their own stories for the generations to come. She has stated that her goal is to have people look at the women in their own families, groups, or organizations, and see how remarkable many of them are.

### Debbie Maddocks - MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

When a friend of Debbie's was diagnosed at 36 with MS, Debbie signed on for the MS marathon. She trained all summer and convinced her friend to walk with her, raising over \$14000 and walking 31 miles! Debbie also works for Snow and Associates, a medical marketing firm in town dedicated to MS patients.

### Barbara McNamee - SYNCHRONIZED SWIMMING

Barbara has been coaching the synchronized swimming team at William and Mary as a volunteer for 11 years. The team is nationally ranked in the top ten in the nation and over three-quarters of the swimmers were named Academic All Americans last year.

She also volunteers nationally and internationally for the sport, as an Olympic judge and as President of the Continental Federation Synchronized Swimming Committee.

### Sue Pearce - DREAM CATCHERS

Sue began her involvement at Dream Catchers after her daughter, Emily, began working there as a volunteer five years ago. A "jack of all trades" there, she volunteers in lessons, helps clean stalls, serves on the Board of Directors, and has recently stepped in as its interim President. She is active in the community making presentations for Dream Catchers, and critical to the Annual Horse Show and the Barn Party Fundraiser.

### Gail Peck - WOMEN'S FITNESS

Gail's mission is to empower women to find their strength, both physical and spiritual, and to help them have a positive outlook in all areas of their life. She knows the value of a healthy life and how it can lead to greater vitality, energy, and enable women to age successfully and gracefully. Her personal goal is to become strong in mind, body, and spirit and to lead a healthy and robust life. As she has found this in her own life, she has found a way to help others achieve this as well.

### Lois Polifka - SENIOR CITIZENS

Lois has said that there is nothing more satisfying than seeing the impact one person can have on another. She began volunteering with Meals on Wheels 15 years ago and her volunteerism grew to include the Historic Triangle Senior Center, where she teaches a variety of classes, and the Senior Service Coalition, where she has become a part-time employee over two years ago. In addition to many other positions she holds in various organizations dedicated to seniors, she still volunteers for the RIDES program, providing non-emergency transportation to medical appointments for seniors and disabled residents.

- continued on page 19

*"In my career I have been so influenced by other women - both in my philanthropic work and my professional work - that this presented a wonderful opportunity to recognize women who are most likely influencing others; Inspiring others to do good things in their career and for their community."* - Anne Conner, President of TowneBank, Williamsburg

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An interview with

# Gretchen Tisone



Gretchen Tisone loves children and has dedicated her life to giving to children in a myriad of ways. She has been a school teacher for 21 years, fifteen of which were spent in Norfolk Public Schools teaching kindergarten and first grade to inner city kids. She and her husband adopted one very special child, Summer, whom she came to know from her time teaching there.

Eight years ago, Gretchen and her family moved to Williamsburg and she decided to leave teaching in public schools to minister to children in a church environment. She became the Director of Children's Ministries at New Town United Methodist Church and in addition to working with 80 to 90 children and handling all of the children's programs for grades 5 and under, she has also started a church pre-school, a School of the Arts and finds time to lead exercise classes for Body & Soul Ministries. In addition, Gretchen involves herself with community outreach and she always has a few moments for a youngster who just needs someone to listen.

**NDN: What do you like most about working with children here at the church?**

**GRETCHEN:** They have a lot of enthusiasm. They're very excited to learn and they're excited about God. I love to teach anyway. It's a great job because I can teach as much as I want to teach and I have lots of volunteers who help me too. We try to do a lot of outreach to the community too and I like that. So it's better than teaching full-time because I have the opportunity to do a lot of outside things that I couldn't do when I was teaching in a classroom.

**NDN: What kinds of things do you do that reach outside of the church to minister to children?**

**GRETCHEN:** Well, I sub for Williamsburg Christian Academy and I go in and help them. I'm a room mother to my children and that keeps me pretty busy. One of the things I'm real proud of is an outreach we do here at Christmas time called Elves Corner. It's an outreach to underprivi-

leged children and we open it up to the community. We decorate the entire building like a Wonderland and the children come in and they get to shop for free for their families.

**NDN: Even though your focus has been on teaching children, we both know that children also teach us. What have you learned from working with children in the many ways that you have?**

**GRETCHEN:** Patience. To slow down a little bit and to listen. They have taught me to really enjoy the moment. Kids are great at that. It's been great to watch these children grow and grow in their faith too. It's nice to be a part of that.

**NDN: Have you ever had a challenging situation with a child that turned around and became a real blessing?**

**GRETCHEN:** When I taught in Norfolk, some of the children were from the inner city and so we had lots of children that were very needy. There was one little boy in particular who I really thought, 'This is going to be a long year', and with a lot of love and a lot of discipline he really blossomed.

We used to do a thing called an Author's Tea where the children would have the chance to write a book during the year and we would invite the parents in four times a year and the children would read their published book. We had highlighted songs and plays, and we would highlight these authors and they would get their book signed. And this little boy couldn't read when he first came to me.

I saved him until the very end (at the Author's Tea). And he was so excited. His mother came and this was the first time she came to the Authors Tea. He got up and he read his book beautifully and got his book signed. He was a part of the whole group and I didn't think anything of it.

His mother came to me a couple of years later and said that her child had turned around because of that one moment when he was featured to do something. Someone thought enough of him to highlight him. He ended up becoming a leader in the school and turned his whole life around from just someone spending a little time with him. To this day, he has gone on to college and he's gotten a great job.

That was kind of nice. ■

### **Penny Pulley - PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Penny co-founded the Williamsburg/James City Education Coalition in an effort to organize parents and help the community to become involved in our school division. Penny believes that education should be the best it can be for everyone.

### **Sarah Serra - COLONIAL CASA**

Colonial CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) provides child advocacy services by way of well-trained community volunteers who advocate on behalf of community children who have been found to be abused and neglected. Colonial CASA works to ensure that while these children are within the court's supervision, they are safe, receiving the necessary services in a timely manner, and ultimately will live in a safe and permanent home. Sarah, working as Program Director, provides coordination and monitoring of the volunteers throughout their involvement on each case.

### **Cook Shaw - HEALTH CARE**

The Lackey Free Family Medicine Clinic grew out of a desire that Dr. Jim Shaw and his wife, Cooka, had to serve the indigent, uninsured working poor on the Peninsula. Since then, Cooka has served as a full-time, unpaid volunteer, including her involvement on the Board of Directors, volunteer office worker, and the coordinator of the clinic's annual fundraising event. In 2006, through their many volunteers, provided free medical, dental and pharmacy services for over 4100 patients visits valued at over 3 million dollars of care.

### **Debbie Smith - H-E-A-R-T FOUNDATION**

On March 3, 1989, Debbie Smith was kidnapped from her home while her husband, a police officer, was sleeping upstairs. She was dragged into the woods behind her Williamsburg home and raped. The traumatic effect of the assault remained with Debbie and her family for six and 1/2 years, and then her perpetrator was finally caught through a DNA database known as CODIS (Combined DNA Index System). Prior to her direct involvement, Williamsburg had no vehicle to treat rape victims or properly collect evidence in these cases. Now, the Forensic Nurse Examiner Program is in place at Sentara Hospital. Through her own experience as a victim of a violent crime, she has become an unwavering advocate for the use of DNA analysis to solve crimes both at the local and national level.

### **Stephanie Smith - HEALTH CARE MANAGEMENT FOR SENIORS**

Stephanie's cause is to improve the quality of life for seniors. Because of her own frustrating experiences as her grandmothers each developed Alzheimer's, Stephanie founded her own local care management business, Senior Advocate. She is actively involved with the Historic Triangle Senior Center, the Williamsburg Alzheimer's Leadership Council and hosts a monthly Alzheimer's support group. She also publishes the Senior Advocate Resource Guide, a "one-stop" shopping guide encompassing all kinds of services specifically for seniors.

### **Brenda Snow - CHRONIC ILLNESS**

Brenda is passionate about educating and empowering patients to better manage their own health. She learned this lesson first-hand after her own doctors were unable to recognize her symptoms of MS. Since then she has founded Snow and Associates, deeply rooted in helping others with chronic medical conditions, providing hope, inspiration, and the education they need to take control of their treatment.

### **Leslie Stanton - CHILDREN**

Leslie works with other Mothers on a Mission to advocate and assist with the education of all children. She has worked with the PTA at her school developing and facilitating the program "Parents and Teachers: Partners in the Education of all James River Students". Leslie has served in developing, preparing and securing interactive curriculum and programs for the students at no cost to them. She develops in-service opportunities, as well as support for parents to interact with the school, teachers, staff, and their children as educational volunteers.

### **Robyn Sulanowski - HUMAN AND ANIMAL WELFARE**

Robyn has been active in the Williamsburg community for over 10 years through her involvement in various organizations including Relay for Life, K-9 Connection Therapy Dogs, and the Heritage Humane Society. Her dogs have been trained as therapy dogs, and are well known at the Cancer Treatment Center and Sentara Hospital. She and her two dogs also participate in the reading programs at the Library, special events for the WJCC School, and events at William and Mary.

- continued on page 22

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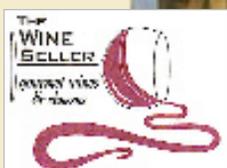
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# A Caring Face in Law Enforcement

By Muna Killingback

As a young graduate with a bachelor's degree in business administration and secondary school education, Victoria Thomas, or "Vicki" as friends call her, could not have imagined she would soon begin a career in law enforcement.

Raised in Louisiana, she was visiting a cousin in Williamsburg and decided to look for a job here. She applied for a position as a police dispatcher, but Chief Larry Vardell noticed her qualifications and asked if she'd be interested in police work.

The next thing she knew she was graduating from the police academy and joining

**"You have to be compassionate in a lot of different ways, in every situation."**

the Williamsburg Police Department as one of only two women officers at the time.

Now a Deputy Sheriff responsible for serving papers and a range of court orders, Vicki can look back over 25 years in law enforcement knowing she did the right thing: "I've enjoyed my work," Vicki said with a smile. "In law enforcement, you come into contact with all walks of life."

Coming in contact with all walks of life can also come at a price. Vicki has witnessed a lot of human suffering. "You see a lot of things that tear at your heart - accidents involving kids or senior citizens, or shooting victims still in pain," Vicki says. "We've even had rape cases where the elderly have been affected."

"You have to be compassionate in a lot of different ways, in every situation," Vicki continued. "For example, in a domestic violence situation, you have to be able to talk to the kids and reassure them."

"You also have to use your own discretion to decide what course of action to take," she added.

Vicki is a total professional on the job. But with her big heart and devotion to children, it was inevitable that she would oc-



asionally get personally involved in some cases. In one case, a woman who was dealing drugs had her children taken away from her by social services. Vicki eventually became a Big Sister to the children through the Big Brother-Big Sister program.

When she started in police work there were still few women on the job. "Back in the 80s when I started there was only one female law enforcement officer and she left soon after I got there," Vicki explains. "I was the only one for quite a while. There are now four women officers and one lieutenant in charge of communications in the Williamsburg Police Department."

Vicki has also noticed a change in the public's attitude toward women police officers over time.

"When I started out some twenty some years ago, some older people hadn't gotten used to the idea of women being in law enforcement," she remarked. "Some preferred to talk to a man because they were used to men. But now, people are more accepting of women being able to do the job."

Sometimes being a woman has advantages in police work. "In some cases, women can get more information out of people," Vicki says. "For example, in cases of assault and battery, domestic violence, or rape or in cases involving kids. People may open up more to a woman and feel more comfortable talking to a woman because they may see her as a mother figure, or someone who can relate to them better because they are also female."

Vicki encourages anyone interested in police work to take advantage of the "Ride-Along Program" offered by both the Williamsburg and James City County Police Departments. Citizens can ride along with the officers and go with them to their calls, although they cannot get involved in any way. She also recommends the James City County Senior Police Academy to the public as a way to learn more about police work. "Go for it!" is her advice to young people wishing to pursue careers in law enforcement, noting it helps to be "well-rounded and a people person."

Vicki is well known throughout the

community, but only partly for her police work - she is also an active volunteer. Currently she serves on the board of the Colonial TRIAD and the SALT programs. She has been a Boy Scout leader for the past five years and served as Treasurer of the James River Elementary School's PTA for

three years. Active in her church, Vicki has also assisted with United Way projects and the Reading Program for Community Connections.

Her friend of 25 years, Pam Hickman, who is the 911 Supervisor at the Williamsburg Police Department says that, "When we go anywhere, she knows everybody. She is a really genuine person—she is

exactly what you see and people like her for who she is."

Vicki is also the organizer of the annual Senior Santa program, which collects and brings gifts to seniors in nursing homes. She says it is "a great feeling to see the happiness in their faces when they get something special."

She is also the organizer of the annual Thanksgiving Meal "Operation Share" for seniors. She notes that, "It is a good way to give back to the community. A lot of older people come here from other areas and don't have family around."

Recruited by Vicki to help with the preparations, her friend Pam observes that, "At Operation Share, Vicki is telling people what they need to do, but you don't feel bossed around at all. She can really organize well and manage details. We're always laughing and having a good time and she's the ringleader."

Vicki sees the results of broken and stressed families up close and she knows how hard it can be to keep ones priorities straight. But she is not just a sideline observer. As a mother to an 11-year old son with a career in law enforcement and a second "career" as a volunteer, Vicki has her hands full too and knows how hard it is to keep kids on the right track.

She believes that kids today "have a lot of freedom. They are exposed to a lot of things and have peer pressure. They see temptations. They may be good kids, but they can be influenced by what their friends

do. It's the way it is in our time."

Keeping tabs on what your kids are doing is really important she emphasizes: "When kids get bored, they might be tempted to do things they shouldn't."

One word could not possible describe Vicki, but one word that would certainly help capture her qualities is *balanced*. She manages to touch a lot of lives in very positive ways and still prioritizes her time so that she can be the best mom and the best officer she can be. Vicki is truly one of those remarkable women that helps define the quality and character of our community. ■

## Want to know more about the Colonial TRIAD and SALT programs?

SALT, or Seniors in Law Enforcement Together, is a part of a larger TRIAD program that serves six different jurisdictions from Williamsburg to the lower peninsula.

According to Paula Ogiba, Executive Director of the Retired & Senior Volunteer Program, the organization works to keep seniors safe in their homes, educates them about predators on the Internet, how to keep their computers safe and provides other relevant services to our retired community.

In addition, they work to find senior volunteers who are willing to devote volunteer for the police department so that the officers can spend more time in the field and less time on paperwork. There are presently 800 volunteers throughout the peninsula and 100 in the Williamsburg area.

**If you would like to find out more about these programs or how you can volunteer, call (757) 595-9037.**

**"She is a really genuine person - she is exactly what you see and people like her for who she is."**

- Pam Hickman

### Suzi Williamson - THE HAT TRADER

After surviving breast cancer and experiencing the emotional challenge of hair loss, Suzi realized she had accumulated a large collection of hats and wigs that she no longer needed and thought there may be others in the same situation. She collects, hats, scarves, and wigs through donations and sets up private appointments with the women who need them. As "The Hat Trader," Suzi opens her home and heart to women who are experiencing chemo-induced hair loss. She has publicized her cause with flyers at medical offices and other organizations that provide resources to cancer patients.

### Jeanne Zeidler - THE COMMUNITY AT LARGE

Jeanne began her community involvement when she joined the PTA at her son's school. She was elected to City Council in 1994, 1998, 2002, and 2006, serving as Vice-Mayor from 1996-1998, and elected Williamsburg's first female mayor in 1998. Additionally, Jeanne serves as the Executive Director of Jamestown 2007. Jeanne cares deeply for the well being of everyone in our community and for the future of Williamsburg. She strives to provide the best community for ALL of our citizens and to insure that the community will prosper into the future.

## Want to go?

**These 35 area women will be honored at the first annual *Women with a Cause* Celebration at TowneBank-Williamsburg at 7 p.m. on May 31, 2007.**

This event is open to the public; proceeds from ticket sales will be donated to the causes of these honorees. Tickets may be purchased at Monica Simon Photography and TowneBank. \$30 in advance/\$40 at the door. "Meet the Nominees Champagne Reception" is at 6 p.m. for those who purchase a VIP Pass for \$50 (Advance sales only). **For more information, visit [www.womenwithacause.org](http://www.womenwithacause.org) or call (757) 564-8533.** ■

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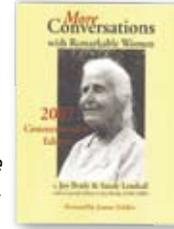
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## Want to learn about other remarkable Williamsburg women?

Joy Brady and Sandy Lenthall, authors, give you insight into the accomplished lives of 32 area women in their book, *More Conversations with Remarkable Women*.



"This book has been very affirming for many of the women who read it. After reading the stories they could see that they, too, are remarkable in many respects." - Sandy Lenthall, co-author

### For More Information Email

Don Brady, [ldbrady1@cox.net](mailto:ldbrady1@cox.net) or  
Sandy Lenthall, [sanron1@cox.net](mailto:sanron1@cox.net)

The 2007 Commemorative Edition can be found at these locations:

**Barnes & Noble, Nancy Thomas Gallery,  
Colonial Williamsburg Visitor's Center,  
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### Remarkable Women

- Mary Apperson
- Betty Babb
- Judy Baker
- Sister Berenice
- Carolee Silcox Bush
- Elizabeth Callis
- Sue Donaldson
- Caroline Dozier
- Betty Dye
- Mary Ellis
- Corinne Garland
- Madeline Gee
- Judy Hamblet
- Rev. Willetta Heising
- Lois Hornsby
- Genevieve McGiffert
- Barbara C. Baganakis
- Mildred Redcross
- Colette Ringgold
- Barbara Rockwell
- Peg Smith
- Nancy Thomas
- Madelyn Watkinson
- Millie West
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**Marney Brickhouse,**  
Williamsburg

**A.** "I think the person that made one of the biggest impacts on me was a dear nun whose name was Sister Mary Jan and I remember going to her one day and telling her that I wanted to become a nun just like her. And she looked at me and she told me that she thought God had other plans for me. And now I have six children and ten grandchildren, and I have enjoyed a rich and wonderful life. And so I feel like maybe she was right. God did have other plans for me."



**Krystal D. Allyn,**  
Williamsburg

**A.** "That would have to be Dr. Gwen Thornton who is a professor of social work at Christopher Newport University where I did my undergrad. She is remarkable. She was a single mother who went to school later on in life and ended up getting her doctorate in social work. She has worked in adoption and foster care and now she instill the values of social work in young people who are going to school to be future social workers. She is just a very influential and remarkable person."

# intheopen

**Q. What female, excluding immediate family, has been the most influential in your life, and why?**



**Pauline Gray-Snitwongse,**  
Williamsburg

**A.** "It was my friend, Louise. I worked with her when I was 19 years old. She was 50 at that time. She used to sew all the clothing for her husband and her daughter. I had never sewed before I met her, and now I am a seamstress. She taught me how to sew and she was a very lovely woman. She was a very nice woman. She became a good friend of mine. I bought a sewing machine and then went to dressmaking school when I lived in Thailand for three years. We were very good friends for almost 30 years. She died two years ago at the age of 80."



**Hope Phillips,**  
Williamsburg

**A.** "Rhonda O'Connell. She was my manager here (Candle Factory Restaurant, which is now Candle Light Kitchen) when I was a teenager. She was like my mother figure. She was there when I needed her. She taught me how to drive. I was like her second daughter. She used to tease me and say, 'Yeh - I had you when I was 18.' She was eighteen years older than me and I was 18 at the time."



**Lizbeth Dye,**  
Williamsburg

**A.** "Bobbie Sanders who was formerly of Williamsburg and who has just moved to New York state. She was my Friday volunteer at Williamsburg Presbyterian Church. She did the newsletter and we just worked well together. She mentored me in, "Yes, I can do that" or "Yes, you need to get out and do that." She and I've traveled together and she's been like my second mom, and she's definitely my inspiration faith-wise, health-wise and spiritually."

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