

April 2008

WILLIAMSBURG'S

Next Door Neighbors[©]

VOL.2, ISSUE 4

PRICELESS

Discovering the people who call Williamsburg home

**Williamsburg's
Talented
Airbrush Artist
Jon Wooten**

**Meet Kingsmill Resort's
Sweetest Sculptor,
Uwe Schluszas**

**Discover
Marjorie Hilkert's
Artistic Passions**

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Victoria Racimo!**

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Meredith Collins,
Publisher

In this issue of *Next Door Neighbors*, we are bringing you stories about some of the creative talent in Williamsburg where the highlighted artists may not be widely known. When I started looking for story ideas a few months ago, I quickly learned that there is an abundance of creative talent here that would be a nice fit for this issue. In fact, I think I could have filled 100 pages or more with interesting stories about locals who put their

creative energy to work in exceptional ways.

Since we do not have the resources to interview them all, I have selected a few individuals that I have learned about recently that I believe are interesting, and uniquely and extremely talented. I also selected artists who represent a wide variety of mediums and creative expressions. I found them to be clever and innovative, deeply reflective and passionate about their work, and downright inspiring. I hope you will too.

Speaking of exciting and creative ways of expressing oneself, I am proud to introduce *Next Door Neighbors'* new website: www.wburgndn.com. I believe we have created a terrific website that will allow readers to interact even more with the magazine and our talented contributors. I look forward to hearing your comments and suggestions about the site and the magazine. I am always on the lookout for ways to make *Next Door Neighbors* more engaging and inspiring, and to make the website a better tool for you. NDN

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Jon Wooten Takes Airbrushing to Another Level

By Rachel Sapin
William & Mary Intern

In my initial Google investigation of Jon Wooten, local airbrush artist and owner of Air Dynamics, the first website that I stumbled upon was titled Art For Harleys. Upon entering the site, I found a meticulously airbrushed bald eagle, which in turn, stood sternly above a motorcycle tank portraying a nude woman peaking sensually out of a surreal, fiery landscape. A fender molded into the shape of a red-tailed hawk stands opposite the woman. Underneath her, a malicious-looking devil on a motorcycle helmet seems poised to attack.

I browsed through the site's array of bikes decked out in bright flames and ominous lightening bolts. I marveled at two military planes painted on the side of a trailer as they hovered in a mist of pillowy clouds and cobalt blue sky. As I scanned through photos of motorcycle helmets with skulls painted on them, helmets featuring reptiles and grotesque figures, and even one helmet with the claws of the infamous X-Men character, Wolverine, ferociously emblazoned on it, I thought to myself: 'Now this is some intense art.'

Being an admirer of gonzo journalist Hunter S. Thompson's writings regarding the Hell Riders, I was curious as to whether,

in interviewing Wooten, I too might be embarking on a ride for which I would be ill prepared. In the realm of extreme art, I am hopelessly clueless. Luckily for me, Wooten proved far less intimidating in person than what his Art for Harleys website may have led me to expect.

In a disheveled flannel shirt that often marks the cool demeanor of an artist, and computer in hand, Wooten helped me navigate what turned out to be an immense portfolio

Coast style. "I really like custom work of artists such as Craig Fraser and Jesse James," says Wooten. "It's a little bit on the extreme side and not so much a style you see on the East coast. It's only one style that I'm interested in though."

Having run his own airbrushing business for more than ten years, Wooten has been able to expand his horizons far beyond the West Coast style. His work encompasses a variety of subject matters as well as mediums. "When

that goes far beyond the ferociously meticulous to a trove of works that would impress even an airbrush aficionado.

"I try to direct people away from the Art for Harleys website," explains Wooten. "It's very outdated and not really representative of what my work encompasses now."

As for the approach Wooten takes to airbrushing automobiles, he explains it as being inspired by the West



Wooten stands in front of some of his recent airbrush work at his studio, Air Dynamics.

it comes to airbrushing, there's almost nothing that I haven't painted on," explains Wooten. "I use an acrylic water-based paint that pretty much takes to everything. Motorcycles and bike helmets are just a small portion of the things that I airbrush. I do portraits on canvas and metal, guitars, snowboards, murals for both homes and businesses. I've even painted on a prosthetic leg."

Wooten's portfolio runs the gamut from an electric guitar featuring a technically engaging front-and-back portrayal of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel to a humorous pair of Austin Powers-themed skis: Powers gives his signature over-the-top grin behind thick-rimmed glasses on the left ski while the right ski shows the mischievous, plotting figures of Dr. Evil and Mini-Me.

"There are only a handful of people in the area that do this kind of work," explains Wooten regarding his large and varied portfolio. "Airbrushing really doesn't pertain to anything. It's not broad, it's narrow, and there aren't many artists that you can imitate in airbrush in the same sense that you can imitate

someone in the fine arts."

Despite having to forge somewhat of his own guide-map in creating



Examples of Wooten's talented airbrush abilities.

works with airbrush, Wooten is well trained when it comes to the fine arts. He attended the Pratt Institute in New York, one of the leading art schools in the United States. After receiving a degree in Illustration from the Institute, Wooten went on to take design courses at the prestigious Rhode Island School of Design, the alma mater of famous names such as *Family Guy* creator Seth MacFarlane and rock intellect, David Byrne.

"Going to those schools helped me understand how to incorporate design work and illustration into airbrushing," explains Wooten. "What I do with airbrush comes from

my artistic training, as well as my artistic side. It's not just slapping color onto a t-shirt."

Wooten is not the only one who takes his airbrushing seriously. His technical abilities with an airbrush have won the admiration of top Hollywood figures. Going through Wooten's portfolio is a lot like reading off the list at a celebrity gala. Commissioned by the city of Norfolk, Wooten has airbrushed gifts for pop artists Kelly Clarkson, Josh Groban and Babyface.

"Every time a talent comes through town, the city gets me to paint the Norfolk logo on a specific item that they know the talent would like," explains Wooten. "We painted up a cymbal with the Norfolk logo airbrushed onto it for Josh Groban since he plays the drums. He really loved that. When Kelly Clarkson came through town, we heard that she loved NASCAR so we created a mini-NASCAR. She was tickled to death by that gift." For the shy, soft-spoken singer-songwriter Babyface who loves bowling, Wooten managed to adorn a bowling ball with the beloved Norfolk

mermaid.

Olympic athletes have sought out Wooten's work as well. In 2002, Wooten painted the helmets for the U.S. Olympic women's bobsled team. In 2006, he painted the helmets for both the mens' and womens' U.S. Olympic luge team.

"It's not often that you get to be involved with something like that and that you get to see your work on TV," says Wooten. As



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a token appreciation, the Olympic luge team invited Wooten to take a ride on their training course in Lake Placid, a venue that has been host to both the Winter Olympics in luge and the FIL World Luge Championships. "I was going so fast, I knocked the second hand off of my watch!" remembers Wooten of the experience.

When the Olympic luge team decided to give one of Wooten's painted helmets to a sponsor for a gift, the sponsor agreed to

support the team for four years with a donation of \$25,000 each year. When the team decided to give a second helmet to the owner of the New York Mets, he decidedly kept it in his office.

Despite its obvious perks, Wooten does not use an airbrush merely to garner the attention of celebrities. He is also drawn to use an airbrush rather than to hand paint because of the sense of detail it allows him as an artist. "I love the realism that you can get when you use an airbrush," says Wooten. This quality of realism shines in Wooten's

work. His portrait work on both canvas and metal is meticulous down to the crease of a brow. One portrait showing an exotic frog painted on metal is so physically real it makes you want to reach out and feel the slimy texture of its skin.

Wooten attributes his interest in airbrush to growing up in an artistic family. His father, Vernon, worked as an illustrator for Colonial Williamsburg for many years and now owns an art gallery. "My dad was a traditional artist doing fine art," explains Wooten. "As artists we're very different but my dad has always



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supported me. He even steered me towards trying out the airbrush." Wooten's mother, Elaine, in turn, owns an advertising agency. Wooten's own blend of illustrative and graphic art is indicative of being brought up in a home that incorporated both artistic elements. Even Wooten's 9 year old son seems to be following in the artistic footsteps of his family. "I have a son who is far more into art than I am," explains Wooten proudly. "He'll draw endlessly for hours. I don't think I ever drew as much as he did. You know, it's great that I get to do what I love and then see my son carrying it on."

Although having taken on what he describes as thousands of projects over the years, Wooten believes that he has only begun to scratch the surface of what he wants to accomplish. "I never guessed ten years ago that I'd be where I am today," says Wooten. "I'd like to grow as an artist and I think I am. Each day of work brings something new to work on and teaches me something new."

Wooten's penchant to continually take his art to new levels stems from his own views on creativity. "I believe creativity is a gift that allows you to think outside of the box," ex-

plains Wooten. "I just like doing things that are a bit unusual, a bit radical; that's what I'm attracted to. How often do you see a luge team wearing painted helmets? I like taking on the projects that no one thinks I can do."

For Wooten, being creative isn't just about sitting in front of a computer either. "Pretty much 90% of the things I do, you can't do with a computer," says Wooten. "Taking a portrait of someone and putting that on a motorcycle tank, you simply can't do that with a computer." Wooten recently took on such project when creating a memorial bike for a customer whose son had died serving in Iraq. "When the customer came to pick the bike up, there were just no words for it. He couldn't really express himself because he was so overwhelmed by his son's portrait that had been painted on the side," explains Wooten.

Wooten's newest project has been putting together a brochure of his work that

he hopes to approach the National Hockey League with regarding possible future collaborations. "The nice thing about being willing to take on anything is that it leads me

to find so many projects," says Wooten. "I started off with projects as simple as painting on t-shirts, but I kept building. One project led to another and soon enough, I built up a reputation that led to the Big Kahuna opportunities, like doing Olympic luge

"I just like doing things that are a bit unusual, a bit radical; that's what I'm attracted to."

- Jon Wooten

helmets."

For an airbrush artist who is as technically engaged, talented and open-minded as Wooten, another Big Kahuna project seems not far off in his future. If the art of air brushing needs a standout in order for other artists to imitate a style, Wooten is well on his way to becoming the artist to aspire to. NDN

Want to find out more about Wooten's work?

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Victoria Racimo - An Artist in Residence

SHE CALLS CHARLTON HESTON "CHUCK" AND WILLIAMSBURG "HOME"

By Suzanne S. Lanier

When my publisher asked me to take this assignment, I almost refused. One of my children was recovering from a nasty virus, the other was beginning to display early symptoms, and I was feeling pretty peculiar myself. Had I turned her down, I would have missed meeting the lovely, creative, passionate and gifted artist, Victoria Racimo.

We met at a local coffee shop and I recognized her instantly. I pass her frequently walking with her dog as I drive to and from home. When we realized we were neighbors, we exchanged small talk and caught up on neighborhood news. I would never have guessed that this new found friend attended New York City's Juilliard and has worked with some of the en-



Victoria Racimo inside the Kimball Theatre in Williamsburg.

tertainment industry's most talented people. She is, in fact, one of them. Racimo is a multifaceted woman who moves in and out of various social and cultural circles as smoothly as a swan glides

across ripples in the water. She has danced, sung and acted on stage, on television and in movies and has written, directed and produced on local, national and international levels. When I asked her to answer some initial questions via e-mail, she responded: *Your assignment to me - to write answers to questions about me - is a first for me. As an actress, I always spoke other peoples' words; as producer, I promote and foster other people's talents; as director I work a play that was written by someone else and which has to include many other depart-*

ments of expertise.

Nevertheless, she completed the assignment and we are introduced to a woman who lives in an unassuming home in an older neighborhood in Williamsburg, and stages

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productions from Carnegie Hall to James-town.

Racimo's natural gifts and talents would seem to lead to a career in entertainment, but her determination and love for

her craft propelled her career from the very beginning. She captured her first role as a child in 1958, in the original stage production of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, *Flower Drum Song*. She saw an ad for the show and decided she wanted to be in it. With pluck that appears inbred,

Racimo played hooky from school, snuck into the theater through an alley door, past

the watchman and into the backstage area. She asked the first man she saw to direct her to the general manager and he replied, "I guess that would

be me." She explained why she was there, and the gentleman took her by the hand to a spontaneous audition with a cast that was already in rehearsal. Racimo laughs as she raises her right hand and promises "on Clancy's life" that this story is true. Clancy is Racimo's 16-year-old Jack Russell terrier,

and the man who led her into the audition that day was none other than Oscar Hammerstein.

She was asked to return the following

day, which meant skipping school again. After her second audition, the director of the show walked down the aisle and up onto the stage, knelt down beside her and asked if her mother knew she was there. Racimo replied, "No, sir." "Then," the director responded, "we'll have to call her. We want you to begin rehearsal this afternoon." Imagine her mother's surprise when she got a phone call from Gene Kelly asking if her daughter could be in his show.

Racimo began her work on film through commercials - Kellogg's Corn Flakes, Hawaiian Punch, and Alka Seltzer. Remember the ad campaign, "No matter what shape your stomach is in?" Hers was the hula dancing one. She boasts that that commercial is now in the Library of Congress.

A local project that she is particularly proud of was *Journey of Destiny*, which she wrote, directed and cast. It was commissioned by Jamestown 2007 for Anniversary Weekend and played to some 20,000 people on May 13, 2007. "It was a grand project," Racimo recalled. "The dance department



Racimo, as Running Moon, with Charlton Heston in *The Mountain Men*.

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of William & Mary joined Native Americans from Virginia and some local actors in an original drama that I researched for 1 ½ years. We had 45 performers on stage and, at the end, enjoyed a nearly 5-minute standing ovation.”

Racimo considers that production one of the highlights of her career. “I am very proud of the way three cultures came together during the long rehearsal process and of that one and only performance that incredible night. There we were, black, white, Indian, all together, holding hands and smiling at who and what we had become together. We all knew that we would never experience anything quite like this again – that what we had done and accomplished came together in that singular special moment – shared, as one. It was beyond words.”

Racimo’s current focus is to discover and promote exceptional new talent, and to put new projects, people and productions together. Most recently, her production company, Palomino Entertainment Group, staged the Carnegie Hall debut of 22 year old Chinese

pianist, Xiayin Wang. Wang’s second professional performance took place right here in Williamsburg at Kimball Theater.

“It truly was a phenomenal event,” Racimo said. “Classical music, a performer nobody had heard before, a nearly sold-out event on a cold, rainy night in Williamsburg. That tells me this town is ready for a performing arts center that is devoted entirely to theater, dance, music, etc. Having been a resident of Williamsburg for four years and having produced, directed and written many theatrical productions with the Players, at the Kimball, and at the Library Theatre, I am convinced more than ever that we need a center that is in step with the expanding and sophisticated tastes of our city’s burgeoning population. The venues I mentioned have been and continue to be lively, important theatres that offer quality, diverse and interesting programs for the community. But Williamsburg is fast outgrowing these venues. Artists and performers are scrambling to find homes for all sorts of programs and productions.”

Racimo is Producing Artistic Director of

Palomino Entertainment Group and, along with TanNa Young, her Managing Director, is determined to help build an even greater appreciation for the performing arts in Williamsburg. “We have discovered a wealth of local actors, musicians, designers, and theater personnel. I am constantly amazed at how many gifted, creative folks live here. So whenever we bring in specific talent from New York or Washington to work with and alongside the incredible store of talent we have here, everyone wins. Artistic horizons are broadened and by sharing, everyone’s experiences are enhanced,” Racimo said.

Just as Hammerstein took her hand and led her on stage, Victoria Racimo is now taking the hand of other gifted and talented artists to lead them into successful careers, and Williamsburg is all the better for it. Thank you, Mr. Hammerstein! NDN

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MARJORIE HILKERT Makes Modern Day Mosaic Masterpieces

By Rachel Sapin
William & Mary Intern

The day we met for an interview, local Williamsburg artist Marjorie Hilkert offered me a cup of English breakfast tea while I admired the deep red walls of her dining room and the beautiful wood cabinet that housed her ornate china. Little did I know I would later see Hilkert in her studio break a similarly ornate plate just as nonchalantly as one cracks open a chestnut. "I go to garage sales and I buy a lot of dishes that I then break up and use for mosaics," explains Hilkert happily.

Hilkert's studio is brimming with cheerfulness. The room is airy and peaks out onto a view of the forest and its burnt-orange winter leaves. Jars sparkling with seashell, gems, river rock, and turquoise shards of glass gather neatly on a shelf in the corner. Every type of adhesive, from Elmer's glue to grout sealer sit unperturbed on an opposing shelf while large shards of red glass and rulers lay sprawled in angular arrangements on a nearby wooden table.

Entering Hilkert's studio is a lot like entering an arts and crafts wonderland. "One of the reasons we bought this house was for the great studio space," explains Hilkert. "I teach classes to about seven or eight students here. I go through what I call a mosaic class, but what it ends up being is sort of a multimedia, with glass and shells and riv-

er rock. Some of the things you'll see around the studio reflect this kind of work."

Past projects Hilkert has created with students are scattered about the space like goodies at an Easter egg hunt. An earthy flowerpot with river rock and seashells tastefully pasted about its base sits on a nearby table. "A lady that I walk with in the morning came and took one of my classes and created a project like this flowerpot," remarks Hilkert. "She made a little vase with river rock. It was a very simple project but she was so proud of it. She told me after class how surprised she was because she didn't even think she could glue anything together and make it look decent. I love to spark somebody's interest in art who has never done anything with it before."

In addition to teaching, Hilkert has always had an interest in garden art. She showed me an album containing pictures of elaborate mosaics she has done on birdbaths and other outdoor materi-

als. "I like to use shells and river rock because I feel that they are a natural element that you're adding to a piece," says Hilkert. "It's great to put them on a pot and then put the pot outside with a beautiful flower in it. I like the nature part of it. I love the outdoors and that's why I like most of my things to be able to go outdoors."

Most of Marjorie's art is created from found materials, whether it's an antique dish from a garage sale or buttons from an old jacket. "It's not only that these materials are being reused," notes Marjorie. "I'm especially taken with the history that goes along with people who once used these materials in their everyday lives."

Hilkert's most recent found materials are old windows. An especially compelling window looks as if it came from the imagination of Melville in his musings on the mysticism of Nantucket. Each panel of its rustic frame contains alternating patterns of syrupy maple and honey-colored glass. The glass serves as a warm contrast to the congregation of marbles and pearly river rock that climb diagonally along the window's center. "I've been a decorative artist where you paint on objects and I've always done something as a hobby," says Hilkert. "But until I started working

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Pete Childs, Owner

It's a good thing Uwe (pronounced Oo-uh) Schluszas didn't pay attention as a child when his mother back in Düsseldorf, Germany said to him, "Uwe, stop playing with your food!" Playing with food is what the pastry chef at Kingsmill Resort does best. One recent afternoon I watched as a perky little penguin came to life under his nimble fingers, created from a formless blob of sugar candy that's brittle and hard at room temperature, soft and pliable when heated to just the right degree. With the help of the kind of bulb and tubing usually used to pump up a blood pressure cuff, Chef Uwe Schluszas coaxed the white candy into a basic pear shape, much like the

ature of the sugar isn't uniformly warm, bubbles and lumps appear; too cold and it becomes hard and no longer malleable." It's a delicate dance employing tools such as a full sized blowtorch used to heat the mass, a



miniature one used for pinpoint work, and a cold air spray to harden and set the warm sugar so it will hold its shape.

The next step is the paint - in this case food coloring, since everything used in this art form must be edible in case

someone decides to break off a piece to try. There are many different methods of applying color, such as using a delicate air brush and artist's brushes of all sizes and shapes. Uwe employed several of these in crafting a beautiful apple he presented to me at the end of the afternoon's interview. Even though I watched it take shape step-by-step, it was still hard to believe it wasn't really a crisp, juicy Fuji just begging to be eaten.

An incredibly detailed traditional Chinese dragon (sculpted from a rich chocolate mixture that Uwe describes as being 'the con-

glassmakers do at Jamestown. Then,

with some gentle tugs of the hot mass, a couple of snips of the scissors formed stubby wings. With the addition of some glossy black paint, the cute little guy soon perched on his own personal ice floe.

The blowing of sugar is a tricky, temperamental art form which has taken Uwe years to master. "This is a seasonal thing," he explains. "You can't do it in humid weather because the moisture ruins it. If the temper-



The Sugar Chef

Kingsmill Resort's Uwe Schluszas
Sculpts Small Figurines from Sugar!

By Linda Landreth Phelps

sistency of Tootsie Rolls') graced the table at a recent Kingsmill dinner for a corporate client who requested an Asian-themed event. An elegant swan gliding over a lake of multi-hued blue, a transparent, cantilevered structure supporting tidbits of chocolate candy and pastel cookies, a pear sporting a cartoon worm...if he can imagine it, it's likely Uwe can make it.

Not all of Uwe's duties are as esoteric as sculpting and blowing glass-like sugar concoctions. In season, many of his duties are supervisory and administrative as he heads up a staff of nine whose job it is to keep the guests at Kingsmill Resort supplied with memorable sweet indulgences, from breakfast coffee cakes to bedtime snacks. It's not at all unusual to go through 500 pounds of

sugar in a week during the summer rush.

Uwe certainly has led an interesting life as a pastry chef; his job gave him the opportunity to travel to places he might not otherwise have seen. "I was born in Germany and trained as an apprentice chef as a young man," he says. "The European apprentice system is wonderful; it means you get hands-on experience plus a small wage as you're learning your craft from the very best teachers, such as my own, George Maushagen, a Master Pastry Chef in Germany, and Sedar Yener, a chef at the InterContinental Hotel in Düsseldorf."

His career took him initially to Bermuda, where he met his wife, Elisabeth, a native of Austria who is also a trained chef. They moved on together to Atlanta (known as

'The New York City of the South', says Uwe), then Texas and Colorado.

Uwe, Elisabeth, and their three children have made their home in Williamsburg since December of 2000. When he has the day off, Uwe likes to cook for his appreciative family, "But not pastry!" he says with a smile. "That would be too much like work."

After having lived in other places, Uwe sings the praises of Williamsburg. "I'm hooked!" he exclaims. "It's a wonderful climate here, not too extreme in the winter. It's small, friendly, a good place to raise children. My commute is short and when I get to work, this..." he gestures out the panoramic back window of the resort's dining room, where the green swath of grass meets the blue of

the wide James River, "...is what I see! It's the whole package."

According to Uwe, it's a good life, being a pastry chef - the life of an artist who has the option of eating anything that doesn't measure up to his standards.

So, a word of advice to you who are parents: If your child is constructing mashed potato volcanoes with erupting gravy at the dinner table, don't be too quick to send him to his room. Maybe he is merely expressing his creative energy with food. Perhaps you should hand him a bag of Tootsie Rolls. Who knows...there's always the possibility he could be the next Uwe! **NDN**



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- continued from page 10

with glass, I didn’t really get passionate about it.”

Hilkert’s passion for glass also reveals itself in her work’s use of light and color. “I recently took a trip to Barcelona and discovered the work of Gaudi,” notes Hilkert. “He was one of the creators of the technique. I studied a lot about him and starting getting excited about his work and it influenced a bit of what I did.” Gaudi was well known in the Art Nouveau movement for his fantastically stylized buildings and use of organic shape and line to reflect nature.

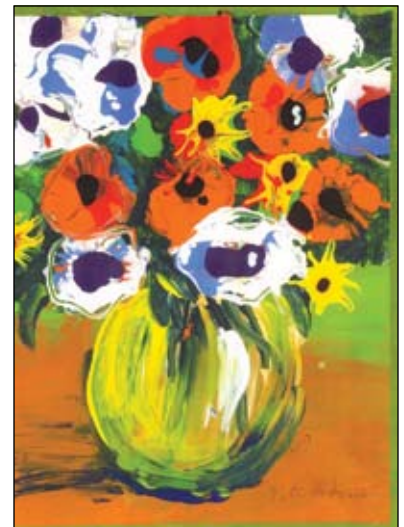
In terms of being creative, Hilkert compares her experience to that of a runner’s high. “When I’m working, I absolutely lose all track of time and it gives me a little bit of an endorphin release,” says Hilkert. “I love people and I love to be around people but I don’t need to when I’m working on projects in the studio.”

For Hilkert, the power of art goes far beyond a hobby or pastime. In 2002, Hilkert’s father, Pete Badowski, was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease. Hilkert has discovered her father’s superb talent in painting - a skill that he never displayed before his diagnosis - and she is harnessing it to try to help others who are also affected by Alzheimer’s.

Recently, after five years in the primary care of his wife, Mary Jane, Badowski was put into an Alzheimer-based Community Day Care Center with a Mneme Therapy program. The program consisted of art, music and other creative stimulants designed to improve Badowski’s cognitive skills.

With encouragement from an art teacher at the Center, Badowski created astounding paintings that Hilkert now sells as note cards to raise money for Alzheimer’s. Badowski’s artistic penchant came out of left field for the family. “My father was never college-educated,” explains Hilkert. “He was from a very poor family of twelve kids and he had to work from the time he was able to see above the bakery counter.”

The sheer motion of Badowski’s paintings takes one aback. According to Hilkert, his art serves as a powerful reminder that there is still passion existing in those who live with identity-destroying diseases. “When people think about Alzheimer’s, they think about it as being depressing,” says Hilkert. “When they’re looking at my dad’s



One of Badowski’s colorful paintings that Hilkert now has printed on notecards.

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artwork though, they think, 'wow, this is something wonderful that has come out of an awful thing.' It's about giving somebody hope, either that their loved one could do something like this, or that their loved one may be appreciating far more than you know, in their prison that they're in."

There are many connections Hilkert finds between her father's work and her own. "I see color and vibrancy in what I do," explains Hilkert. "When I look at my father's paintings, I can't believe the vibrancy and passion in his works. Unfortunately he doesn't know that he painted them." Although Badowski is unable to remember creating the paintings, he often titles them with family memories. Two pictures are even named after his wife. "I'm interested in leaving a legacy for my dad," explains Hilkert. "Getting the word out about his artwork and selling the note cards to raise money for Alzheimer's is my way of doing that."

Hilkert's efforts to raise money for her Alzheimer's are not surprising given the current price of nursing home care in the United States. According to a survey by Genworth Financial, the national average cost of nursing-home care for one person is estimated to be \$75,000 per year. One year of care for one person in an assisted-living facility averages \$32,573 nationally.*

"There's an estimated 46,000 suffering from some form of dementia and Alzheimer's on the Peninsula that we know of that can be served by our chapter," explains Hilkert. "By putting that branch out into the public and selling my father's cards, I'm trying to get the word out about Alzheimer's. I'm hoping that other day care programs or programs in assisted-living will be encouraged to try this kind of art therapy with people suffering from dementia and Alzheimer's."

In regards to Pete Badowski's work, there is also a sense of a walled-in community being brought back into the public sphere through art. "To me, having a disease like Alzheimer's is to have a silent disease," says Hilkert. "Usually the people are very quiet, or they're repetitive or they don't know what they did five minutes before. But if they can use art therapy to bring out emotion and some passion through putting colors together, it seems like that would be a release of some sort. It shows that despite the disease, there's still somebody inside there with some vibrancy."

As far as her own art, Hilkert remains modest and cheerful about where she would like to end up. "I don't care if I'm ever famous," says Hilkert. "I don't even care if I make money from it. I just want to be able to do it. It sounds crazy, but I just get so much joy and I think it keeps me young. It's something I can do no matter how old I am. That's another thing that my father's art has shown me. I might be 103 years old and I can still be doing this." NDN

Want to know more about Art for Alzheimer's?

With support and encouragement from friends, Marjorie Hilkert and her family want to preserve their father's artistic legacy and help others suffering from Alzheimer's as well. They have placed four of Badowski's paintings on 4x6 note cards and are selling them in a box set of eight with all proceeds going to the Alzheimer's Association and its initiatives. Badowski's paintings and note cards are currently on display at Aromas Coffeehouse and Bakeshop in Williamsburg. Four of Badowski's prints will also be auctioned off at the annual fund-raising affair of the Alzheimer's Community Care organization on Saturday, April 19, 2008. Hilkert and her family will attend this event and have her father's cards on display and available for donations, too. For more information regarding Pete Badowski's cards, contact Marjorie Hilkert at marjoriehilkert@yahoo.com or call 757-345-6977.

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NEXT DOOR NEIGHBORS APRIL 2008

Floor Cloths Express Lifetime Urge to Create

By Sara E. Lewis

"My philosophy of creativity is that creative challenges are a learning experience; the more I accept, the more I learn." – Peggy Price

When her life changed directions several years ago, Peggy Price decided it was time to follow her dream. She had always imagined living in a white farmhouse on a bit of land where she would indulge her creative instincts. Now that she has the space of her dreams, she is honing

in on the craft of painting floor cloths.

From her studio in the midst of a large and sunny room she loves to tell the story of the house. "My sister said, 'You can't live there,' and I told her, 'Yes I can!'" Peggy moved into the neglected farmhouse in Tono and spent

her spare time cleaning, repairing, and painting. She remarried and her husband encouraged her creativity by building the large table where she designs floor cloths in the natural light that flows into the home's tall windows. Trees and flowers bloom in the side yard and she can stop to watch birds at the feeders. It is indeed a perfect habitat for the creative creature.

"I've always been driven to create," Peggy said. "I've always dabbled in crafts." She's never met a craft she was afraid to try. "I don't limit myself." Throughout her career in home furnishings and accessories, she has been asked to paint whimsical plant stands and end tables shaped like nutcrackers and colonial butlers. She has designed and painted chair backs with commemorative symbols. "Whenever someone has asked 'do you think you can do this?' I always said, 'I think I can.' It is so satisfying when you take on a challenge and can do it."

Initially, the painted floor cloth that she saw displayed in one of the stores where she worked caught her attention. For a long time, she thought about trying her hand at crafting a similar floor cloth and looked into the particulars. Finally, she is at work on her chosen delight. "I love it. I love the design." Price is drawn to the rustic and peaceful. She is attracted to the romance of a past way of life. Floor cloths express a simpler way of living and the images that she paints on them are of special memories like a pet or a pattern from nature.



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Painted floor cloths are often seen in Early American paintings, such as those exhibited in Colonial Williamsburg's Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection at the DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Museum. Floor cloths were advertised in Colonial American newspapers. Some of the earliest floor cloths were made from discarded ship's sails and were designed freehand. By the nineteenth century, floor cloth designs were frequently stenciled onto the canvas. Such floor coverings were used instead of expensive carpeting and provided a welcome covering in common areas and beneath dining tables to shield feet from drafts and to collect dirt and crumbs from being ground into wood plank floors. Painted floor cloths served the function of modern linoleum: floors covered with the painted cloths were easier to maintain.

Price, like many early floor cloth painters, is truly self-taught. "When you have this creative urge you can't wait and don't follow a manual," she says. She understood the basics, but plunged ahead by sheer instinct and plenty of experimentation. It didn't hurt that her two children and her husband are trained artists and designers. "I would call one of

my children and ask, 'Now, how do you draw rope?'"

But painting floor cloths involves so much more and the process taps Peggy's other native skills. Before she begins painting, Peggy meets with her client to make sure that she understands his or her decorative style. She wants a cloth to fit into the homeowner's surroundings. "I work with clients to decorate their spaces and make the design their own."

Peggy looks into the client's soul. "Feeling – it's all about feeling," she says. "Color and design that makes them feel good." She enjoys going into homes and helping people discover what they want in their surroundings. Peggy has ideas, but she is able to check them and draw on her people skills to get to a blueprint that expresses the client's desires.

Next, Peggy takes that information back to her studio and paints the design on paper. She goes back to the client again to get a reaction, tweaks as necessary, and gets final approval on the design and color before cutting the canvas.

As she prepares the canvas her patience and organizational skills come into play. She shrinks the high quality, heavy weight cloth

by applying hot water with a sponge and scrubbing the surface, front and back. After it dries, several coats of primer are applied. At last, she sketches the design and applies the color. Every color is applied again and again and is built up to be three of four layers thick. The work is then sealed beneath as many as seven coats of clear polyurethane varnish on the top. At least two coats of poly are painted onto the bottom. While oil varnish was used on early floor cloths, she uses poly because it is gentler to her health and that of the environment.

A useful painted floor cloth needs to be maintained, so she suggests an annual touch up to her clients. She cleans the floor cloth's surface, repairs any cracks, and then reapplies several coats of polyurethane.

Peggy and her husband plan to use the wide farmhouse hallway of the house that they call Two Cedars as a gallery to display their work. Peggy is living her dream, but she still looks forward to learning more and keeping her creativity flowing. NDN

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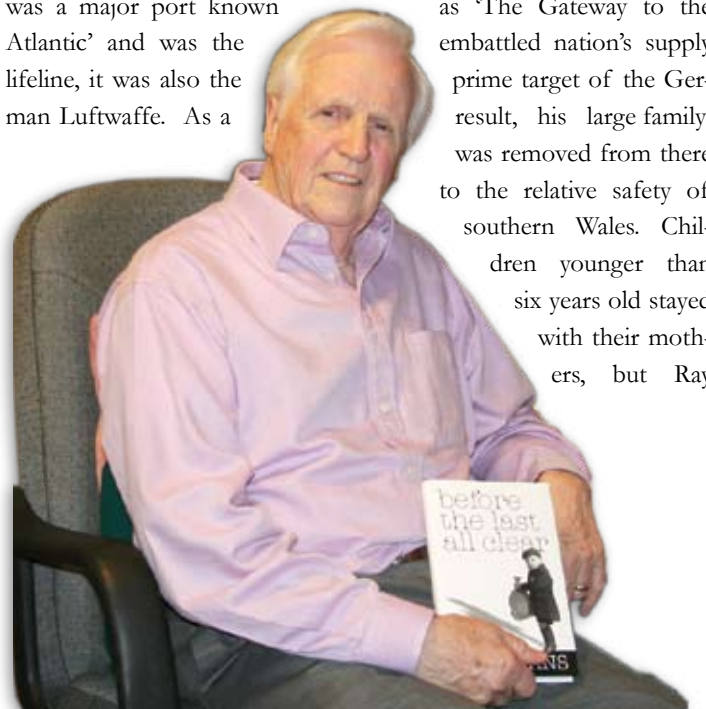
By Linda Landreth Phelps

Ray Evans can identify with fellow author Frank McCourt, who says in his Pulitzer Prize-winning memoir, *Angela's Ashes*, "When I look back on my childhood, I wonder how I managed to survive at all." The loneliness, danger, and deprivation Ray experienced during his early years of displacement as a World War II evacuee often meant that for him, childhood was something to be endured rather than enjoyed.

You have to look very closely these days to see any remnant of Raymond, the little English boy illustrating the cover of his book, *Before the Last All Clear*. In that 1939 picture, the solemn six year old in short pants and a schoolboy cap, clutched all his worldly goods in a rough haversack. Today, Ray's friendly smile, thatch of white hair, and blue eyes that twinkle with gentle humor define his appearance. He and his wife, Lilian, live together in a beautiful home filled with the memorabilia of 52 happy years of marriage.

During World War II, Ray was just one among the massive waves of almost four million women and children evacuated from England's larger cities to places hoped to be out of harm's way. Since Liverpool was a major port known as 'The Gateway to the Atlantic' and was the lifeline, it was also the man Luftwaffe. As a

as 'The Gateway to the embattled nation's supply prime target of the Ger-result, his large family was removed from there to the relative safety of southern Wales. Children younger than six years old stayed with their mothers, but Ray



wound up separated both from her and the rest of his older siblings. He was alone in a land whose language was foreign to him, assigned to live at first with a cold, cruel landlady who neglected, exploited, and abused him.

Before the Last All Clear is the book Ray has written that chronicles the years he spent as an unwanted evacuee being shuffled from one place to another, until he finally found safe harbor during the last two years of the war. Those years were spent with the Williams family, who loved Ray as a son and took him into their hearts as well as their home.

When Ray's two children were growing up, "They would beg me for stories about that time of my life, so I obliged." Ray says. "When

"It took me eight years, but I did it."

- Ray Evans

my daughter, Debbie, became an adult and we were living close by her in the United States, she had an idea. 'Why don't you write a book?' she asked me. 'You need to preserve these stories for your grandchildren'. It took me eight years, but I did it."

The writing of it was as much cathartic in nature - an attempt to integrate his painful childhood into the man that he is today - as it was a response to his daughter's suggestion. His first drafts brought nothing but frustration because he was trying to write in the third person in order to distance himself from the power those memories still held. The simple way that Ray recounts his story, amply illustrated with telling details that engage the reader's interest and concern, might look to the uninitiated to be easy, but initially Ray struggled to give the book direction and definition.

"Once I realized that I had to tell it as if it was happening now, in the voice of the child that I was then, being completely honest and allowing myself to feel those strong emotions again, the story just poured out," he explains. "One of the most poignant scenes in the book for me was recalling how I stood on the train tracks, looking back and longing for the place I had come from, almost brave enough to follow those tracks and walk back to Liverpool alone, bombs or no bombs. But there was nothing left of my home there, you see. Dad was away fighting in the war, and Mam and my older brothers and sisters were scattered."

Ray and Lilian Evans have now found a permanent home in Williamsburg. Ray, after leaving school and serving a two year stint in Egypt with the Royal Army Medical Corps, began a wholesale clothing enterprise which he built into a successful career. Thinking that it was time to retire, they sold the business and moved to the United States to be near Debbie and the grandchildren. Long, leisurely days didn't materialize, however, since he and Lilian were soon waking long before the sun six days a week to help Debbie get her wholesale bakery up and running. Retiring yet again, the family came to the Williamsburg area, enjoying its close historical ties to England and milder climate.

Though not really intending to start another career, he was quickly

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recruited to sell vacation ownerships at Williamsburg Plantation, where he was a stand-out from the very beginning. "I'm a believer in the concept, having made the plunge myself in the 1970's by buying an ownership in Portugal, and my family and I subsequently visited quite a few fascinating places," Ray says. A large part of what makes him successful (21 awards in 8 years, including Top Salesperson of the Year) is his genuine love for this region. He gives prospective clients a personally guided tour of Colonial Williamsburg, using an original script that includes many little known, interesting details about the Colonial era. His charm, soft English accent and low-pressure sales strategy are definite assets, but, as he modestly says, "This area sells itself!"

One of Ray and Lilian's prized possessions is a letter from Buckingham Palace, complete with impressive royal crest, saying how much Queen Elizabeth enjoyed Ray's book. She'll be happy to know that what was once a relatively obscure British book has now drawn

the attention of a large American publisher that has big plans for marketing it, both as a book and possibly a movie. With their encouragement, Ray is already hard at work on his sequel, *It's All Over*, in which he tells of the new and difficult adjustments he had to make after the echoes of the last all clear air raid siren faded and he was once again displaced by circumstance.

If you finish *Before the Last All Clear* without a tear in your eye, you just might be the first one who has read it to do so. I'm guessing that even Her Majesty may have dampened a monogrammed hankie or two. NDN

Want to meet the author?

Ray Evans will be at a book signing at the Williamsburg Regional Library on April 24th from 7 pm to 8:30 pm. To find out more about the author and his book, please visit his website at: www.beforethelastallclear.com

Next Door Neighbors

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She's Jo

Of Me & JO Vocal/Guitar Duo

By Brandy Centolanza

When Jocelyn Oldham was a little girl, “My mom told me that I used to sing instead of talk,” she says with a smile.

Singing remains her passion to this day, and she is popular among children for her *Music Together With Jocelyn* music classes, and among adults, who know her better as a member of Me & JO. The duo plays cover songs frequently to audiences throughout Hampton Roads.

“I see music as a language,” Oldham remarks. “If you grow up speaking the language, it becomes a part of you.”



Oldham at one of the local establishments where she performs.

Music has always been a part of Oldham’s life. As a young child in New Hampshire, her mother introduced her to the guitar, piano, and singing. Oldham eventually taught her-

self to play the guitar, by reading the notes from the songbooks her mother had lying around the house. She bought her first guitar at age 15, and still uses it today in her music

older sister.

“The music was really challenging, and it just really made me a better singer,” she recalls. “I started to take voice lessons after

classes.

In middle and high school, she played the clarinet, trumpet, and oboe, but it’s when she left for college that her talent for singing fully emerged.

“Singing is my forte,” she says. “It’s what I’m most confident in and what I believe I’m the best at doing.”

At Virginia Tech, Oldham joined the vocal jazz ensemble, *The New Virginians*, with encouragement from an

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that. I always felt I had a pretty voice, and just really learned how to use it.”

After graduating with a degree in music education, Oldham taught for a year in New Hampshire before making her way to Williamsburg in 2001 to be a part of the Music Theatre of Williamsburg. When the theatre closed two years later she and a co-worker, Ted Pollard, joined the local group, The Rythmn Kings, a six-piece horn cover band with Oldham as lead vocalist. Oldham and Pollard later left after a year to form Me & JO.

“We play a lot of popular music from just about every genre,” Oldham says. “We play the Beatles, Gwen Stefani, Joni Mitchell, Dave Matthews, country, jazz.”

Me & JO perform multiple times weekly at various venues, and have regular gigs at the Firkin & Frigate in City Center in Newport News on Wednesdays and at Kincaids at the

MacArthur Center in Norfolk on Saturdays. Locally, the duo has played at JM Randall’s, Berret’s, the Merchants Square Farmers Market, and private functions. Eventually, Oldham and her partner want to record a CD.

“She is one of the best singers I have ever worked with,” says her partner, Pollard. “She is very musical.”

In addition to Me & JO, Oldham teaches music classes to infants, toddlers, and pre-schoolers. Inspired by her sister, she began offering the *Music Together With Jocelyn* program to children from birth through age five and their parents or caregivers in 2004. The nationally recognized program believes that all children are musical.

“It’s not about teaching music, it’s about experiencing music,” Oldham states.

Currently, 70 children are enrolled in Oldham’s class, which integrates song, instruments, and movement. She often bumps into parents of previous students who say their children still enjoy singing along to her songs.

“It’s really neat when they tell me they are still into the music,” Oldham says.

Carolyn Miller believes the class was a

great benefit to her daughter. “She loved singing the songs and we would sing them together in the car, at bedtime, at bath time,” Miller says. Miller describes Oldham as “extremely talented in many ways. Her musical abilities are amazing. She can pick up any instrument and play it so well. And her singing voice is so beautiful. She has a terrific rapport with children. They flock to her and she is so patient.”

Oldham hopes to continue the program, and is looking for a partner to help teach the classes. “I like being an inspiration for the kids, and bringing music into their lives,” she states. “It’s really great being a role model. I’m like a rock star for the under five crowd here in Williamsburg.”

And that suits Oldham just fine.

“I love to perform,” she beams. “It’s really satisfying. It’s great to be able to do what I love and get paid for it.” NDN

Want to hear her perform?

To listen to Jocelyn’s music go to: www.myspace.com/meandjo. You can also view her calendar to see where she is playing. The next performance of **Me & JO** is March, 26 2008 at Firkin & Frigate, 711 Thimble Shoals Blvd, Newport News.

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Hey Neighbor!

2ND ANNUAL COMMUNITY EASTER EGG HUNT

MARCH 22, 2008

King of Glory Lutheran Church. Join us as we celebrate our 2nd Annual Community Easter Egg Hunt! Egg hunt, games and crafts for all ages. Saturday, March 22nd 10:00am-11:00am, rain or shine! King of Glory Lutheran Church, 4897 Longhill Road, Williamsburg. Don't forget to bring your own basket. Call 258-9701 ext 35 or www.dyfm@kingofglorywilliamsburg.org to register your child.

Hey Neighbor!

CAPERNAUM PANCAKE BANQUET

MARCH 26, 2008

Capernaum is a ministry to high school kids with special needs in Williamsburg. Come see first hand what has been happening with Capernaum over the past 9 months. Join us for a pancake dinner at the Gazebo Restaurant on Wednesday, March 26 from 5:30 p.m. until 7:30 p.m. to meet some of our special Capernaum friends and "Buddies" (volunteers). There is no charge to attend, but we do need to know you are coming! Dress is casual. To attend or for additional information contact Ben at 784-8607 or email me at benjaminconner@yahoo.com. Ben Conner, Director of Capernaum Ministries.

Hey Neighbor!

HEAD START ENROLLMENT DAY

MARCH 29, 2008

WJCC-CAA Head Start Program will host their Fall 2008 Enrollment Day for children ages 3 – 5 years old. Enrollment

will be held at the Historic Triangle Center on Saturday, March 29, 2008. Enrollment time will be from 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 and again from 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. The Historic Triangle center is located at 312 Waller Mill Road, Williamsburg. Please call the Head Start office at 757-229-6417 to find out about required documents that will be needed and for directions.

Hey Neighbor!

LEGAL OUTREACH PROGRAM

MARCH 29, 2008

10 am to 1 pm. Toano Middle School, 7817 Richmond Rd., Toano. Legal Outreach Program Provides Free Legal Services. Sponsored by the Williamsburg Bar Association and W-JCC Community Action Agency. Uncontested divorce, child custody and support, landlord/tenant, consumer law, employment law, will/estate law, immigration law, bankruptcy, restoration of driving privileges and voting rights. For more information or if you need transportation call: Linda Wallace or Yvonne Joseph at 229-9332, W-JCC Community Action Agency.

Hey Neighbor!

JOURNEY TO TRUE FINANCIAL FREEDOM

MARCH 29, 2008

Williamsburg Community Chapel invites you to attend a Crown Financial Ministries "Journey to True Financial Freedom" seminar on Saturday March 29, 2008, 8:30-4:30 at the Chapel on John Tyler Highway. Free childcare is available for children 3 months to 5 yrs. of age and a special children's program will be offered for K-5th graders whose parent(s) attend. Whether you're a

recent or soon-to-be college grad, newly married, struggling with credit card debt, or getting ready to retire--this seminar offers life-changing principles about becoming better managers of our time (our most precious commodity), our talents, and our finances. Cost is \$25 per adult and lunch will be provided. Call 565-5435 or visit www.chapel.org for more information or register online now at www.crown.org.

Hey Neighbor!

15th ANNUAL QUEENS LAKE

5K RUN/WALK

APRIL 12, 2008

Come join Avalon, Colonial Sports, and Colonial Road Runners April 12 at New Quarter Park as we promote Healthy Minds, Healthy Hearts, Healthy Relationships for the Historic Triangle! The flat, out-and-back course through Queens Lake makes this 5K perfect for all levels. Experienced runners have a chance to set personal bests; families and businesses can set a well-being example by entering as "Teams". No cost for the 1-mile Fun Run/Walk at 8:30. \$20 pre-registration by March 28 for the 5K Run/Walk at 9:00 (late and race day registration will be \$25). The first 200 entrants in the 5K Run/Walk receive t-shirts. Registration forms available for download at www.avaloncenter.org or at Colonial Sports, 513 Prince George Street. Erin Pitre, Resource Development Coordinator, Avalon: A Center for Women and Children, (757) 258-5022.

...continued at www.wburgndn.com!

ATTENTION NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS!
Please email heyneighbor@cox.net on or before Tuesday, April 8th to be considered for inclusion in the April 24th issue of *Next Door Neighbors*.



Rotary Club of James City County

proudly presents its

Ninth Annual Charity Auction

MARCH 29, 2008 • 6:30 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.

Historic Triangle Community Services Center - 312 Waller Mill Rd.

Auction will benefit **Colonial CASA** and will provide **College Scholarships** for Williamsburg/JCC High School graduates.

\$25 Donation. For tickets or more info call: (757) 220-1245

The Case Against Waiting to Buy.

Historically, finance costs rise as the economy recovers, so trying to time real estate might not pay off.

	TODAY	TOMORROW	FUTURE?
Typical home price	\$350,000 Put 20% down and get a 30-year fixed-rate mortgage	\$350,000 Same Price	\$332,500 Possible price reduction
Interest rate	6% Current rates after recent declines	6.5% Possible rate as market changes	6.5% Possible rate in the future
Monthly payment	\$1,679.07 Principal & Interest	\$1,769.78 Principal & Interest	\$1,681.30 Principal & Interest

Source: Towne Bank Mortgage

“As a buyer, you are emotionally ready to purchase a home, you have good credit and a solid down payment, and you’re just waiting for the right time to get the best price at the best interest rate. But how do you know when that is? There’s no way to tell. One thing is for sure, as home prices stop falling mortgage rates will push higher. **Maybe the time to buy a home is right now.**” *Angela Dougherty, Managing Broker*



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