

March 2012

WILLIAMSBURG'S

Next Door Neighbors®

VOL.6, ISSUE 3

PRICELESS

Discovering the people who call Williamsburg home

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As we go through life, it is easy to find a sense of comfort in the patterns and habits we develop. We go to work, run errands, exercise, grocery shop and maybe we find time to volunteer, enjoy a hobby or pastime, or perhaps drive the kids to their next sporting event. For most of us, our best place for finding comfort is our home where we are among family and friendly neighbors.



Meredith Collins, Publisher

Our day-to-day life gives us a perspective on our world that is shaped and fashioned by our individual lens. Oftentimes that world is comprised of people who are similar to us in many ways. Perhaps it is human nature that we gravitate toward those who are more like us than different...or maybe it is just that it is more comfortable to us. It's usually easier to stay with what is known.

However, differences abound in our community. I am amazed by the diversity that exists. If we were to define our entire geographic area from Williamsburg, James City County and beyond as one big city, this name would be appropriate: DiverCity. Everywhere around us there are people from all walks of life - those who have moved here from within the United States and many who have travelled a great distance from another country to call Williamsburg home.

When I read these stories of courage and risk, of opportunity and loss, of hope and hard work, I am reminded how fortunate I am to be an American. I am inspired by the stories we bring you this month. I hope you will be too. NDN

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A Turkish Delight

By Linda Landreth Phelps

When pronouncing Ebru Güven's first name, the "r" is given just the slightest trill of the tongue, and the softening umlaut makes it correct to say "Ay'-broo Gyoo'-vn." It's a lyrical and lovely name that ideally suits its owner, because Ebru is as pretty as a picture.

"The word 'ebru' in my country, Turkey, means a special kind of watercolor painting," the dark-eyed young woman says, flashing her trademark brilliant smile. "It started in the days of the Ottoman Empire, and is done by floating paint on water, then putting paper on top to...how do you say it...soak it up? Sorry, my English is not so good."

On the contrary, 24 year old Ebru shows an impressive command of English for a non-native speaker. Her plan to come to Williamsburg in order to further her career and improve her skills in that area has worked well over the last two years.

Languages are important in today's business world, especially in Ebru's chosen field of inter-



Lisa W. Cumming Photography

national hospitality. English is only one of several languages that Ebru studied as she earned her undergraduate degree in Turkey's capitol city of Ankara. Her college courses emphasized hotel management and tour guiding, but as an eager history buff, she also enjoyed her study of archeology. Now far from her big city home, Ebru lives in an apartment with several other

internationals, working for a three year period as an intern with Marriott Hotels.

"The next step in my plan is my master's degree, but I didn't realize it was so much more expensive here in the United States. In Turkey we pay \$300 a semester for college, that's it. If I'm going to stay here for my master's, I will need to work hard and save my money."

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Will she stay for the long term, past her internship? That's a question she can't yet answer. She is torn between her desire to stay, work, and learn more and the undeniable pull of home. Three weeks before this interview, Ebru's grandmother, with whom she was very close, passed away unexpectedly. She was devastated that she was not there.

"I miss my family," she says. "I have a brother who is 10 years younger. He is a little boy now, but growing up so fast. Every day he is calling me on Skype and we talk, but even with that I am missing so much."

But Ebru will be seeing her parents and extended family soon. She's looking forward to an upcoming trip to visit relatives in Vienna, Austria, and then plans to surprise her family in Ankara.

"I can't wait to see how shocked they will be when I show up!" she laughs. "I'll be spending six weeks there - three in Austria and three in Turkey - then I will come back."

With the knowledge that she'll soon be home, Ebru's mouth is watering in anticipation of her mother's cooking. One favorite meal in particular is on her wish list.

"Oh, my mother makes a dish I can't wait to taste again. She peels eggplant, cuts it up and browns it, then adds ground beef, garlic, onions, and special spices like a hot pepper that comes from eastern Turkey that is good for you and so delicious!"

The true heart of a Turkish home, according to Ebru, is the dinner table.

"Turkish women cook big meals every day; we don't often eat fast food or go out much. In my country, everyone entertains guests in their homes, where people love eating lamb and beef - big chunks of meat!"

Turkey is for the most part a secular country, and in the west where Ankara and Istanbul are located, a strong European influence is felt. Still, one thing you won't find on the typical dinner menu in Turkey is pork, which is considered unhealthy and forbidden for religious reasons.

"Most Turkish people are Muslim, but all Muslims are not the same," Ebru explains. "Some are conservative and religious, yes, but not traditional like Iran and Iraq. In my religion you must control yourself and how you speak, be respectful especially to your parents. I am an adult, but I would never stay out past 10:00 p.m. when I am at home, or behave badly."

"In Turkey there are two groups, the Sunni, who are more traditional, and the other, which I am, is called Alevi. As you see..." she gestures to her long, dark hair and sleeveless top, "...we don't all wear the hijab and cover ourselves up."

Alevi's acknowledge Jesus as a prophet, and admire how he summarized all of the teaching of the Torah, the Psalms, and the prophets in two simple commands: "Love God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength; Love your neighbor as yourself." This essential teaching of Jesus reminds Alevi's of their basic values of "Love of God and Love of Man", or in Turkish, Tanrı sevgisi, insan sevgisi.

"I just want to make people happy. Love: this is my religion," Ebru says with a smile.

These days, Ebru's dress and stylish makeup might lead the casual observer to think she is like any other modern American woman, but outward appearance is often deceptive. Cultural differences run deep, and Ebru had some major adjustments to make when she arrived here. She



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had to learn about new social norms to make a successful transition. In particular, Ebru found that the American tendency is to be direct. She has learned to navigate the social scene, but Ebru isn't in any hurry to settle down and look for a husband. Ebru prefers the company of friends to boyfriends.

"I never think about being married," she says. "Maybe in eight or ten years when I have had my career first."

She met her best American friend, David Moon, while they were both working in the Food and Beverage department of the Marriott.

"We have so much fun; he's hyper like me. We laugh while we work, and then we go dance like crazy - anywhere, even on the streets!" The two young people share something else other than their sense of fun. David is also very conservative, which appeals to Ebru.

"David takes me to his church with him whenever we can. His sisters are so nice, too. This year I went with his whole family to Christmas Town at Busch Gardens."

A common complaint among the younger residents of Williamsburg is that there is little

for their age group to do in the way of entertainment, especially in the winter.

"Some people think Williamsburg is boring, that there is nothing to do here, but I love it," she says. "One of my favorite things on my days off is to go to Colonial Williamsburg and follow a tour guide around and listen as they tell people about Virginia history."

Ebru is enjoying her time in Williamsburg in every way.

"Everyone at work is so nice to me," she says. "My general manager, Tom Custo, he is very helpful. I have so many questions always, and they take the time to answer. Nothing makes me happier than when I am learning something new."

It's easy to imagine that her curious and inquisitive nature will lead Ebru to much bigger things. Her blue-sky vision of her future is ambitious, yet not unattainable.

"In five years, I can see myself being the Food and Beverage manager at the 5-star JW Marriott Ankara," Ebru says. "It just opened last summer, and is so beautiful. Then one day - why not? - I want to be their general manager!"

Why not, indeed? Ebru Güven's got everything Marriott is looking for in its best employees. Her initial interview with the company was a Skype video conference. The Human Resources department had read her resume and was interested, but before bringing her to the United States, they had to see what Ebru had to offer in the way of personality and appearance.

Ten seconds into the interview she smiled, and it was a done deal; Ebru was hired on the spot.

I am always smiling," she says. "I can smile any time of day or night, because I am happy. But if I can make YOU happy, then it really makes my day."

This sunny attitude has recently caused one of her appreciative customers to comment to a Marriott manager,

"Ebru is like a cup of hot coffee at 6:00 in the morning!"

Pretty as a picture she may be, but pretty is as pretty does, as the old Southern saying goes. By that standard or any other, Ebru Güven is a vivid watercolor that would have made an Ottoman Empire artist proud. NDN

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Spiritually at Home

By Narielle Living

For a teenager, moving can be an emotionally trying event. For a sixteen year old girl, moving from Seoul, South Korea to the United States was life altering. Leaving behind family, friends and culture, Dr. Kelly Chun's parents moved her to a country that held the promise of great opportunities. As an adult, Dr. Chun has seen the promise of those opportunities come to fruition.

When Dr. Chun's family first came to the United States, they settled in Brooklyn, New York. At that time, they spoke a minimal amount of English. The significant language barrier made it difficult for her parents, who were middle-aged professionals, to assimilate into a culture that was so different from their own. It also made education and social life difficult



Lisa W. Cumming Photography

for Dr. Chun.

"It was a huge school, but there were no Koreans at the high school I attended," she says.

"There were kids from other areas, like China, and I remember one other boy from Korea but we didn't really talk to each other. I had no real peers." At the time, everything seemed an uphill battle for her.

Now, decades later, Dr. Chun has overcome her battles and found personal and professional success living in Williamsburg.

"In high school, my guidance counselor was the person who was the most influential for me," Dr. Chun says. "She taught English as a second language, and she helped me with all my college applications and getting ready for the SATs. I wouldn't have joined any of the extracurricular activities if it wasn't for her. She was the person who told me I could do anything I set my mind to."

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That idea, one of empowerment, was to become a theme in Dr. Chun's life that was carried all the way to Williamsburg. It is an idea that she tries to share with family, friends and patients. "It's important for people to believe in themselves," she says. "That makes a huge difference in how you live your life."

There was one other person at her high school that helped shape her future. "My English teacher was also very kind, and becoming a teacher was my second career choice." Ultimately, Dr. Chun would go through medical school to become a psychiatrist, a career that has taken her from the Northeast area of the United States to Virginia.

In addition to living in Brooklyn, New York, Dr. Chun also lived in Buffalo, New York, a place known for harsh winters. "That was difficult," she admits. "There's very little light there during the winter, and it gets extremely cold. I had a hard time with that."

With warmer weather at the forefront of her must-haves, Dr. Chun and her husband decided to move to Williamsburg in 1999 after she received a job offer to work at Eastern State Hospital. That lasted for a brief period before

she decided to open a private practice.

Opening her own practice was risky, though, as she was new to the region and had to invest herself in marketing and promoting her business.

"My husband asked how this was all going to work, how would we pay the bills if I opened a private practice," Dr. Chun remembered. "But I knew it was what I was supposed to do. And it worked out really well. I ended up exactly where I was meant to be."

Dr. Chun acknowledges that Williamsburg was very different when she first arrived. "It had a much more rural feel to it when I came here. Now, there are lots of traffic lights to deal with the congestion and it takes longer to get anywhere. That's not something I like, but I still love living here."

Perhaps one of the reasons Dr. Chun is happy living in this area has more to do with her personal journey than traffic lights or weather. "It's while I lived here that I think I completed my journey to God," she says with a smile. "I came full circle, from questioning to ignoring to understanding. It all happened gradually, but it did happen."

Despite being the child of a pastor, Dr. Chun did not have a particularly religious inclination when she was younger. It was her life's struggles with her own personal demons that changed her outlook. "My faith has grown exponentially," she says. "I went through a period where I felt I had no support for my spiritual beliefs, and that was very lonely."

Prior to moving to Williamsburg, Dr. Chun had an experience that would forever change her spiritual life. As a medical student, she joined a Christian student's club that gave free medical care to people in rural areas of the country. "During one of those trips I was standing in an area that had an open-air tent, and I looked up and saw a momentary vision of Jesus Christ. It only lasted a moment, but it was life changing." She didn't mention her experience at the time, but when she did mention it later her friends dismissed her. "I felt I had no real spiritual support."

Living in Williamsburg has eased that feeling of spiritual loneliness. "In this area, I've joined a group of therapists that have a Bible study every week, and I've found a church where I feel comfortable. I'm no longer ostracized for

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what I know is my truth.”

Like her high school days, Dr. Chun did not find a big Korean-American community to associate with in Williamsburg. “There’s a larger population in Newport News, but I never connected with them. I think it’s more important for me to be part of the American culture so I can work with my patient population,” she admits. “I don’t really see any Korean-Americans in my practice.”

One of the most important things she tries to impart to people is the fact that mental health disorders do not make a person a freak. “This is an invisible disease,” she says. “Mental disorders are so lonely. People who are healthy think that others can simply ‘pull themselves together’, but these are true biological disorders that need to be treated.”

She says the stigma of the mentally ill is that they become ostracized in society, creating an atmosphere of shame and loneliness in their lives.

“Remember, just because you have a mental health illness does not mean you don’t count. You are a precious child of God, and you are important. There is help out there for you,” Dr. Chun encourages.

In her own life she has struggled personally, professionally and spiritually, but through hard work and determination she came through it all.

“If I can make it, you can too,” she said. “No matter where you come from, or where you are, you can have a life that is fulfilling.”

The isolated young girl that came to America speaking very little English has found personal and spiritual success as an adult here in Williamsburg.

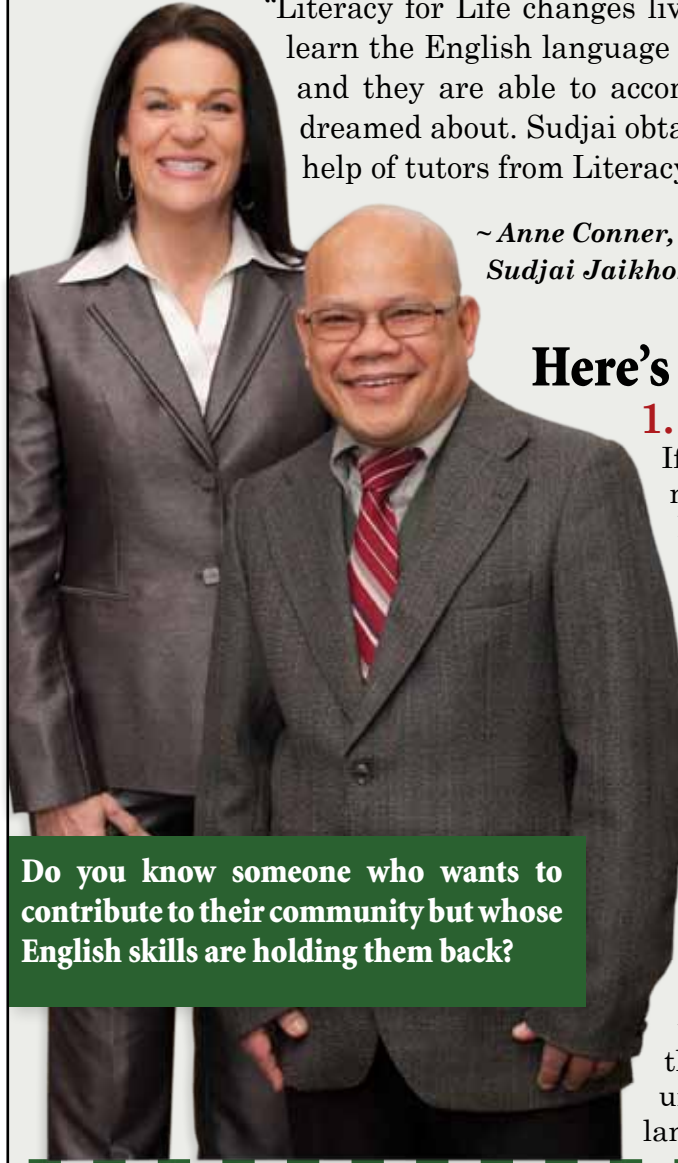
“It has been a journey to God, truly,” Dr. Chun says. NDN

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Nadia Ilardi

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Embracing Her Williamsburg Life

By Alison Johnson

Through Nadia Ilardi's eyes, America isn't the land of materialism, corruption and self-absorption that many Americans fear it has become. In fact, it's exactly the opposite: a place where people don't judge others based on how much money they spend, where bribes aren't a regular part of doing business, where volunteerism thrives.

It's a completely different mindset than the one people had in the Russia of her childhood, Nadia says. There, people kept their heads down and focused mainly on survival. Life was very structured and often stressful. Although Russians were warm and welcoming to people they knew, the "me" mentality didn't leave room for gestures such as smiling at a stranger on the street.

So when Nadia arrived in Williamsburg at age 21, she had to change the way she thought. "It was mind-blowing how different everything

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was,” she says. “Even having people saying ‘hi’ to me when I didn’t know them – I thought, ‘why are they doing this? What do they want from me?’ They were just trying to be nice, of course.”

Nadia, now 32, had no trouble deciding she wanted to stay in Williamsburg, where she came as part of a cultural program run by her university. Over time, she learned to speak fluent English, married an American, built a career as a piano instructor and opened her own business, Nadia School of Music, which now offers private lessons to about 70 students.

“This is such a blessed country,” says Nadia, who became an American citizen in 2006. “We live so well, even in a recession. And the freedom – you can just feel it. It’s difficult to explain the difference if you haven’t lived in both kinds of worlds.”

Nadia’s first world was her childhood home of Stavropol, a windy city in southwestern Russia that sits across the Black Sea from Turkey. An only child, she lived in an apartment with her grandparents and her mother, who holds a master’s degree in music and has more than 40 years of experience teaching piano. Her father was not part of her life.

The country’s Communist system emphasized obedience and discipline. “It was very important to be good, to have homework returned, to get A’s,” Nadia remembers. “We all wore uniforms. We didn’t have choice over what we could do. You had to watch what you were saying. Here, the schools are so much more relaxed and creative – the comparison is night and day.”

The same pressure extended to piano lessons, which in Nadia’s case began at age five. She quickly discovered a love and a talent for the instrument and enrolled in a music school in Stavropol. To memorize all the songs she needed to pass her exams, she had to practice two or three hours a day. There was no time for another hobby or instrument.

“I loved piano, but there were a lot of anxiety and nerves involved as well,” she says. She adds, “Despite all the negative things that are going on in Russia, we have a few great things: history, architecture, art. The best education in music, ballet and ice dancing you can get anywhere in the world. I am happy I was a part of it. It gave me a great knowledge of my profession.”

After earning a Bachelor’s Degree in Music, Nadia hoped her hard work would result in a career teaching music. However, the salary was very small: Her starting position at a music school paid just \$10 a month. Gas, housing and clothing, meanwhile, were so expensive that she could barely afford anything. One good pair of jeans, for example, might cost \$100 – and getting the “right” clothes mattered quite a bit.

“If you didn’t have a brand name, people would look at you differently and maybe not treat you as well,” she says. “In my opinion, people are not as materialistic here. Not everyone is always watching to see what you have and what you are wearing and how expensive it all is.”

Many Russian professionals, Nadia saw, had such trouble scraping by that they did whatever they could to get money out of others’ pockets. A sick person, for example, might have to slip money to a doctor or nurse before getting medical attention. “That doctor might only make \$300 a month, so he has to do something else to create a living,” she says. “It was very difficult to be honest with your business.”

Nadia’s frustration led her to enroll in a master’s degree program for computer science, which she thought might allow her a more comfortable life. Accepted into a work/travel program, she started out working at a local 7-Eleven store and living in an apartment with other students. She

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One of the lesser known benefits for veterans and their surviving spouses is the **non-service connected pension**. This pension is one of the most valuable benefits the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) offers. Designed to assist veterans and their surviving spouses by providing *tax-free cash compensation* to offset the costs of unreimbursed medical expenses, the number of applicants for this benefit has grown substantially in the past few years.

To qualify for the pension, the veteran or the spouse needs to meet five basic requirements: (1) at least ninety days of active military service experience, (2) one of those days of active service occurred during a wartime period, (3) a discharge from service under conditions other than dishonorable, (4) disabled or over the age of 65, and (5) possess less than the total amount of assets allowed by the VA for someone of your age and health.

The amount of the monthly benefit the veteran or the spouse receives also depends on the total cost of the unreimbursed medical expenses paid by them each month. In addition, the maximum pension rate available to a veteran or their spouse varies depending on his/her dependency rating; thus a claimant with no dependants is eligible for an amount between \$1,021.00 and \$1,703.00 per month, and a claimant with a dependant (a spouse or child) for an amount between \$1,337.00 and \$2,019.00 per month.

You probably noticed that the paragraph above refers to a couple of important additional ideas: unreimbursed medical expenses and dependency ratings. Unreimbursed medical expenses are simply those expenses that neither the veteran, a family member, an insurance company, or a government program paid for. They can include prescriptions, doctor’s

bills, and the monthly cost of living in an assisted living community if the community provides some medically necessary service, such as a protective environment.

A dependency rating is the VA’s categorization of veterans and spouses by their level of general physical need. It has three levels: “Basic” for a veterans or spouses who are over the age of 65 but otherwise generally in good shape and capable of living independently, “Housebound” for those who are unable to leave their homes because of physical limitations, and “Aid and Attendance” for veterans or spouses who require assistance with the day-to-day tasks of living. While a veteran or spouse can apply for whatever level of benefit he or she believes is appropriate, it is ultimately up to the VA to make the final determination.

So how does a veteran or spouse qualify for the non-service connected pension? You can download the application form from the internet, and send the completed form to your local VA office, you can contact a local veteran’s service organization (VSO) to assist you in completing the application, or you can engage an accredited agent to pursue the claim on your behalf. The VSO and accredited agents are required to do the application for free.

Perhaps the most important decision a veteran or spouse will make is choosing a representative. A good representative will ensure the application is completed correctly, that all unreimbursed medical expenses are included and the pension value maximized for the veteran or spouse, and be knowledgeable about handling excess assets that might make the veteran or spouse ineligible.

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later took a part-time job in the recreation department at Ford’s Colony.

At first, Nadia couldn’t imagine returning to her childhood vision of becoming a music teacher. Although Russian students begin learning English in elementary school, she initially struggled to speak the language. She also didn’t own a piano – and didn’t know teachers in America often worked with pianos at their students’ homes until two residents at Ford’s Colony filled her in. Excited, Nadia landed her first students by leaving flyers in mailboxes around town.

In 2003, as her business grew, Nadia launched her own music school and now works with two other Russian instructors, Natalia Ilyushko and Marina Hayes. Natalia is Nadia’s mother, who moved to America in 2007 and at age 61 is learning English with the help of volunteer tutors.

“Her favorite topic is how much better things are here than in Russia,” Nadia says. The family also includes Nadia’s husband, Jeff, a computer systems analyst from Yorktown – the two met through an online dating site after Nadia was in Williamsburg – and daughters Stefa, 8, and Katya, 8 months.

Nadia has fully embraced life in Williamsburg, from riding the Apollo’s Chariot roller coaster at Busch Gardens to visiting Richmond, Norfolk and Washington, D.C. “It’s a perfect place to raise a family,” she says. She loves eating at Bonefish Grill, going to performances at the Kimball Theater, taking beach vacations in North Carolina and seeing interpreters and horse-drawn carriages on Duke of Gloucester Street. She has been to California and New York City and wants to visit Boston and Chicago.

While Nadia misses her friends and hometown, she hasn’t been back to Russia since 2005. The trip is long, requiring a plane ride to Moscow followed by another plane or train ride to Stavropol. Russia also lacks many of the conveniences that people take for granted here, she says: sidewalks with steps don’t have an alternate path for strollers and wheelchairs, for example, and most stores don’t have public restrooms for changing diapers. “Everything is just easier here,” she says.

Nadia incorporates Russian culture into everyday life. Stefa, a third grader at Rawls Byrd Elementary School, can read and speak both Russian and English. Jeff, meanwhile, knows enough Russian to pick up when other people are talking about him. Nadia has a number of friends from Russia. She often eats soup and bread for lunch, a tradition in her native country. While she doesn’t crave the heavy mayonnaise-based salads popular in Russia, she happily digs into crepes her mother makes with meats, yogurts or jams.

Nadia also is happy to clear up misconceptions about Russia, such as the myth that it’s always cold. “That all depends [on] where you live,” she says. “Where I’m from, our weather is more like here, just a little colder,” she reports. And, she adds with a laugh, “There are no bears walking down the street.”

Nadia still plays piano when she has spare time; she played at Tabernacle Baptist Church in Newport News for five years and performs in benefit concerts to support young musicians in the Williamsburg Music Club. She also enjoys tennis and going to the gym. Her daughter Stefa is following in her footsteps as a gifted piano player, but the girl’s experience is very different.

“Stefa practices piano about an hour a day, which would have been nothing for me,” Nadia says. “It’s a whole other mode from what I had as a child. It’s more relaxed, and I think more joyful.”

In Nadia’s eyes, that’s just one more reason to love America. NDN

Finding Opportunity

By Narielle Living

Christy Dong is an amiable, warm-hearted woman, the type of person that can make anyone feel welcome at the dinner table. That's a good thing since she and her husband are the new owners of the Rainbow Buffet Restaurant on Richmond Road.

Originally from the southern part of China, Christy came to the United States ten years ago. "It was for the same reason most people come here," she admitted. "I came for the American dream. I knew if I worked hard and did my best I could be successful."

Christy is no stranger to hard work, and spends the majority of her time promoting and managing her new business.

Her immigration to this area was not a direct one. Before coming to Williamsburg, Christy was fortunate to have traveled and lived in oth-



Lisa W. Cumming Photography

er parts of the United States. She has lived in several regions of the United States, including New York, New Jersey, Ohio and Oklahoma. Williamsburg, however, is one of her favorite places.

"We came here because a friend of ours knew

the area," Christy admitted. "We were looking for this exact type of place, where it's peaceful and quiet. It also seemed like a great place to raise our children."

For now, Christy's two children, ages six and three, are living with her in-laws in New York while she and her husband focus on their restaurant business.

"They come here to visit, but I miss them." Christy knows, however, that the many hours spent running the restaurant would require her to have some sort of child care. "I don't think my in-laws are quite ready to move here yet," she says with a smile. "They like living in New York, so for now we'll just have to get through this."

Christy's career has always involved some type of restaurant work. Prior to coming to Williamsburg, she managed a restaurant in

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Oklahoma. "That felt like it was really far away," Christy says. "We wanted to be someplace closer to New York, so we could have more contact with family."

While in Oklahoma, she connected with friends who eventually helped her start her current business venture. Their ongoing support and advice has been instrumental in the success of the Rainbow Buffet. "Although there have been other friends who've helped with support and advice, too," she adds.

Christy has worked hard to meet new people in Williamsburg. "It's easy to do because people here are really nice," she says. "Sometimes it's hard for me because my English is still not good. I worry about saying the right thing, or understanding what others are saying."

Christy believes the key to making friends is simple. "Be nice," she says with a smile. "If you're nice to others, they'll be nice to you. It's important to treat others the way you want to be treated."

Although Christy communicates very well, she still feels like she has much to learn about the English language. She recently enrolled in a

Literacy for Life program in the hopes that she will learn enough to feel comfortable having casual conversations with people. "I love that everyone is so friendly here. I want to be able to just sit and talk, get to know people." She attends class once a week and will continue until she feels she's learned enough to be completely comfortable talking to strangers without an interpreter nearby.

Perhaps it is because Christy and her husband have been so focused on working in their new restaurant that she has not yet met many other Chinese immigrants in this area.

"Sometimes it can make me feel a little disconnected," she admits. "It's very different here than it is in a place like New York City."

New York is famous for neighborhoods such as Chinatown, areas where various ethnic groups live and work in their own communities. The suburban flavor of Williamsburg means people live in less congested, more diverse neighborhoods, making it difficult to assimilate into specific cultural groups.

Always positive, Christy maintains that this diversity is a positive aspect of living here. "It's

nice because I get to meet new people."

Even without a cohesive Chinese culture, Christy enjoys living in Williamsburg. "There's so much to do here," she says. "And it's safe and peaceful. I really like that about this place. The kids are really going to like living here, too." The weather doesn't seem to have been much of a factor in their decision to come here, but Christy admits she does enjoy the milder climate. "It gets really cold up north, but it's nice here, not nearly as bad."

Despite having her children and in-laws living in another state, Christy and her husband have some family members living in this area. "They work with us in the restaurant, which is great. That means we get to be together for holidays, and we can celebrate right here."

This past month, the Chinese New Year was ushered in, prompting Christy and her family to have a celebratory dinner together. "That holiday is sort of like Thanksgiving for us," Christy says. "We come together as a family for a meal, grateful for each other and the gifts that we have in this life."

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be a risky venture. Christy feels, however, that she has enough experience and drive to make her restaurant a success. She and her husband have worked in this business for many years, and the opportunity of moving into the available space in Williamsburg seemed too good to pass up. With encouragement from others, they realized the time had come to branch out on their own.

“Restaurants really are the best place for relaxing and enjoying yourself,” she says. “You get to be with friends, and it’s a good way to have fun.” More importantly, Christy’s main focus is health, and she sees her restaurant as a way to provide the community with a healthy food choice.

“In China, people say you’ve got to eat foods that are good for you and enjoy what you eat. That means eating lots of vegetables, tofu and lighter foods. Healthy, clean foods are important for your body, not greasy or heavy foods.” Christy has taken this to heart and she and her husband try to provide these types of foods on their buffet.

Christy smiles as she explains her ideas.

“This way, everyone gets a real choice about their meal, and they can have as many healthy things as they want instead of just choosing one thing from the menu.” A fit and trim woman, Christy has always had a passion for healthy lifestyles and cooking. “Cooking is fun, and it’s even more fun when you can share it with people.”

Is she worried about the economy? “A little,” she admits. “But I think once everyone recognizes the benefit of what we’re offering it will work out.”

On the rare occasions she’s not working, Christy enjoys reading and watching movies with subtitles. But the one thing she’d rather do most in this world is be with her family. “My favorite thing to do is spend time with my children,” she says. “For me, family comes first.”

With a new restaurant and plans to bring her children to the area, Christy sees herself as a long term resident in Williamsburg.

“It’s nice here, and I know we’ll be staying for a while.” NDN

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David Cohen

AMERICA

THE LAND OF OPPORTUNITY

By Ryan Jones



Lisa W. Cumming Photography

Tel Aviv is known as the city that never sleeps.

Ranked by National Geographic as the ninth best beach-city in the world, this coastal hub of Middle Eastern culture is recognized as a gathering spot for locals, cosmopolitans and tourists alike. With all of the perks that accompany life in Israel's second-largest metropolis, one might wonder what sort of circumstances would inspire a successful businessman to pull up his roots and move his small family halfway across the globe with only his wits, a handful of friends, and a small savings account to get him started.

"They say America is a land of opportunity," David Cohen says with a smile, "and it is; but only if you take advantage of it. In Israel, we love the United States. America has always been like an older brother to us. That's why I felt comfortable moving here. Without the support of America, Israel wouldn't exist."

Since arriving in Virginia Beach in 1991, David has become somewhat of an expert in recognizing and making the most out of the opportunities around him. In his native Hebrew language, there are two different ways to spell the word opportunity: hizdamnut, which represents the singular form of the word, and hizdamnuit, which represents the plural form. After listening to David share some of his experiences about becoming a successful entrepreneur on American soil, there can be little doubt which of the two words is appropriate for his circumstances.

"I have been here (in Virginia) for twenty years and experienced a lot of excellent things," he says. "But I started out in a very negative position. When I moved here, I had a partner in the diamond wholesale business who was also my best friend from high school. We grew up together. His family was like my family. A couple of months after I arrived, our wholesale office was robbed and my friend was killed. I was devastated. The robbers stole everything, so we had no money. I had a wife who was terrified, a son who was four years old, and I spoke very little English. When my mother heard about it, she sent my older brother to

come get me."

As David struggled to come to terms with this tragic turn of events, he was buoyed by the support of a couple of friends who were attending classes at Old Dominion University. Taking their advice, he made up his mind to stay put and pursue his dream of living in America.

"It was hard," David remembers. "I couldn't function for at least a month. But then, slowly, I started to get back on my feet. I moved to a different office and started to see customers again. I had a good friend in Israel who was a diamond-dealer. He gave me a bunch of diamonds, and said 'David, go to work.' He knew that there were no guarantees, but he said, 'When you get the money, then you can pay me.' That helped me a lot."

In addition to receiving help from friends, David credits much of his success as an entrepreneur to hard work and adherence to good moral principles. Before coming to America, he cultivated the ability to multi-task as an air traffic controller in the Israeli armed forces and also spent time working as a diamond cutter. After twenty years of building relationships in the Williamsburg and Southside communities, he is now the owner of Boyers Diamond and

Gold Source in Lightfoot, the proprietor of two restaurants in Virginia Beach, and continues to work as a global diamond wholesale dealer. In order to keep up with his assortment of business ventures, David splits his time between his home in Virginia Beach and his home here in Williamsburg. He also makes periodic trips back to Israel to visit family and to stock up his inventory of wholesale jewelry products.

"I go back to Israel two or three times a year to buy diamonds," he says. "The people there are very warm. When you visit, you don't go to a hotel; you stay at someone's house. In the beginning, I was confused by how I felt when I went back. I didn't lose my identity, but it was hard. After a while, I didn't feel like I was a part of (what was happening over there). I had become an American. I will always feel I have two homes, but I have to say that America is my home now. I think I have become a lot more patriotic than some of the people I know who don't care as much. When I go to basketball games and they play the national anthem, I get the chills. I feel like I am part of it."

David's zeal for living in America was rewarded several years ago when he got a call from a friend who had ties in the political com-

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“One day, a good friend called and asked if I wanted to meet the President,” he remembers. “I said, ‘Are you kidding?’ It is hard to explain, but when you grow up in a small country like Israel, and there is so much war, you are very appreciative that there is someone watching over you. The President [George W. Bush] was scheduled to come to Virginia Beach for a private brunch at someone’s home. When I met him, we shook hands, and I told him Shalom (peace) from my family in Israel. After that, we took a picture, and talked for a few minutes. He asked what I thought about this and what I thought about that. I thought, ‘Oh my gosh....I’m giving advice to the president.’ When I left, I felt like I was walking on air. The first thing I did was call my mom!”

Though George W. Bush is probably the most prominent personality David has met in his travels, he has come across many other people who turned out to be just as interesting in their own way. Recently, David bumped into a man who was the keynote speaker at the Jewish Community Center in Virginia Beach. The speaker was actually a reformed terrorist who, during a long period of incarceration, had changed his mind about Israeli citizens and was seeking to promote peace in the Middle East. David listened intently to the man’s message, and wondered if there could be a connection between him and an older brother who had served in the Israeli secret service. After the talk was over, David walked up to the speaker, introduced himself, and asked him if he had ever heard of his brother. When he told the speaker his brother’s name, there was instant recognition.

“Of course I know him,” the man said. “Your brother is one of the men who arrested me!”

Both men got a good laugh out of this strange coincidence, and David commended the man for his commitment to standing up for Israel. “It’s a small world,” he says, laughing.

Talking with David about his life over the past twenty years brings to mind an ancient Hebrew legend. As the story is told, there once lived a phoenix named Milcham who, because of good deeds, was awarded the gift of immortality. After enjoying a peaceful millennial existence inside the walls of a sanctuary, Milcham heralded the end of his life cycle by rising up and bursting into flames. When the heat of the fire dissipated, a new phoenix rose from the ashes to live again for another thousand years. Over time, this mythical story of rebirth has evolved into a parable of hope and healing for those who suffer from afflictions in the modern-day world. Today, both Milcham and David serve as a reminder that even the scorching heat of present adversity cannot keep us, at last, from rising out of the ashes into a new day.

Looking back, David remembers the rough start he endured his first year in the United States.

“I was at the bottom of the pile mentally, physically, emotionally, and financially,” he says. “I tell my story to a lot of people to teach them that if you are committed; if you are an honest person, you are not lazy, and you have good integrity, you can make it. God will give you the tools, but He will not do it for you. You never know how strong you are until you go through something like that. But when things happen, you find out that you have a lot of strength that you didn’t know about. If I did it, so can you.”

It brings to mind that special word again - the name for difficult trials and obstacles that are successfully overcome: Hizdamnuot. NDN

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Wanda Penn

Lessons

From Mom

By Linda Landreth Phelps

Wanda Penn, Vice President of Operations at Kings Creek Plantation, a local timeshare resort, feels that Williamsburg has been very good to her. In 2001, Wanda and her daughter left their large family and familiar life behind in the small southwest Virginia town of Bassett. They arrived in Williamsburg anxious for a fresh start after a marriage that had faltered.

"It's my home away from home now - a great place to live and bring up kids," she says. Home has always been important to Wanda. It's where she experienced love and absorbed the skill and spirit that have contributed to her success in the hospitality industry.

Wanda's mother, Claudia Preston, raised 14 children and managed to make each one feel special. Claudia's nurturing arms reached far past her own doorstep; there was always room for another plate at her table and all the neighborhood kids called Claudia "Mom."

"There was always an abundance of love, good food and fun at our house," Wanda says.

After Wanda's father, a farmer and logger, fell sick and died when she was 15, the widowed Claudia raised the four siblings still left at home (including Wanda, the next to last



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child) by herself. She did it with hard work, style and grace. At the age of 85, Claudia is still a lady who loves to share the bounty of her vegetable garden when she cooks for a crowd, which is as often as possible. No wonder Wanda considers her mom to be her hero: Claudia's example of hospitality, strength and tenacity has served her daughter well.

When Wanda arrived in Williamsburg she was nervous, but excited and eager, too. She came at the urging of two of her brothers who lived in the area. One brother, Kevin, worked at King's Creek Plantation. Soon Wanda found employment there, too, and the skills she learned at Claudia's knee would contribute to her eventual success in a new field.

"Speaking as both an African-American and a woman, this company has been great," Wanda says. "They gave me a chance to excel, and I took advantage of it. I started out in reservations and over the next ten years worked my way up to my present position as a vice president. When I first came, I needed a crash course - Timeshare 101," Wanda laughs. "I learned a lot about the hospitality industry and was also offered study opportunities to increase my knowledge of management techniques that I had gained in my former job."

Her sedentary days at the reception desk now long behind her. Wanda's busy work day involves zipping around the property in a golf cart overseeing the many day-to-day operations that keep the resort functioning smoothly - housekeeping, laundry, and maintenance. She also handles the budget for these services. Wanda manages a staff of 75 people from many different countries and ethnicities who look to her for leadership. The company employs Hispanics, Asians and African-Americans as well as Caucasians, some of whom are from Eastern Europe.

"Several summers ago we hired a young woman from Slovakia. She spoke six different languages, which was so helpful with the guests and owners who travel from distant places," Wanda says.

With many employees hailing from different countries, there's often a learning curve regarding American life and culture. Part of Wanda's job is to be a "mother hen" and help them navigate that curve successfully. She does her best to keep her work family happy as well as productive.

"I especially like taking a challenging situation and turning it around. I live for that and thrive on it!"

Over a typical week in high season, King's Creek Plantation will see as many as 600 check-ins, and a good number of them have been returning for Williamsburg vacations for as long as Wanda has worked there. Some will ask for her by name and have become what she considers to be personal friends.

Wanda says she has found a permanent home at King's Creek Plantation.

"We have been approved for 1500 keys - and by 'keys' I mean units - on our 100 acres, and that expansion should be complete within the next 15 or 20 years. My plan is to still be here then," she says. Since Wanda is just in her early forties that could certainly happen.

When Wanda reflects back to the day she first arrived in Williamsburg, a single mom fearful about the many unknown challenges that lay ahead, she realizes just how far she has come. The true distance is more than the miles between Wanda and the tiny town of Bassett. It's more about how much confidence and competence she has gained in those ten years, and that makes all the difference in the world.

"I love helping people and love my job," Wanda says with a big smile. "I feel as if I'm giving back."

And that, as Wanda learned from her mom, is what happy families are all about. NDN

Wilda Crespo-Fleming

DEVELOPING ROOTS. MAKING FRIENDS.

By Brandy Centolanza



Lisa W. Cumming Photography

Though Wilda Crespo-Fleming has been a part of the Williamsburg community for nearly 15 years, she still occasionally misses her life in her native Puerto Rico, especially her family.

“Extended family is different there than it is here,” notes Wilda, whose parents, Max and Daisy, and a sister reside in Puerto Rico, along with numerous aunts, uncles and cousins. “My mom is one of ten and my dad is one of eight, and most of my uncles and aunts lived close by. It was great having that extra support. Whenever we had a family reunion, it was a big family reunion.”

Wilda, who is currently a service coordinator and speech language pathologist for the Infant-Parent program at Child Development Resources (CDR), grew up in a small town on the west side of the island about two hours from the capital of San Juan and spent most of her childhood outdoors. Family celebrations for birthdays and holiday gatherings took place at the beach, and she often frolicked in her backyard among the fruit trees and the flowers.

“I would say living in the outdoors is one of my strongest memories,” she says. “The weather there just allowed us to do that kind of thing. We would just play. I remember having a dollhouse in the backyard, and I enjoyed nature. It was so easy to grow your own garden there.”

Wilda remained on the island to earn a Bachelor’s Degree in Social Work from the University of Puerto Rico, then decided to venture state-side for a graduate degree. She settled in Boston to attend the University

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of Massachusetts, but the transition was tough.

“When I first went to grad school, I was not completely fluent in English, so it was extremely difficult,” she recalls. “I literally woke up, ate, studied, ate, studied and went to bed. That helped me become fluent very fast. Obviously, if I was going to be a speech therapist, I had to learn fast.”

Eventually, she became accustomed to life in Boston, and married her husband, Kevin, during her last year of graduate school.

After earning a Master’s Degree in Communication Disorders with a specialty in speech language pathology, Wilda went to work as a speech language pathologist at Massachusetts General Hospital.

“That was a great job that really prepared me,” she says. “They had excellent therapists there that were real role models for me in many ways.”

Wilda remained in that job for nearly four years before she and Kevin decided to move closer to family. Kevin’s parents had recently retired to Williamsburg, so the pair decided to follow them here.

Wilda and Kevin have three children, and she balances caring for her family with working part-time at Child Development Resources. She came to CDR after stints as a speech lan-

guage pathologist at Williamsburg Landing, Williamsburg Community Hospital and the Rural Infant Services program on the Northern Neck.

Wilda’s expertise at CDR, a non-profit organization that serves young children and their families in Williamsburg, James City, York and Poquoson, is in the field of Early Intervention. She serves children from birth to age three who have developmental delays and disabilities. Wilda works with her clients and their families in their natural environment, usually in their home, a day care setting, or sometimes even the playground.

“I help families to become the best teachers they can be,” she shares. “I work with the families to develop the skills they need to care for the child with special needs as well as to help them find the community or medical resources that they may need.”

Wilda assists a lot of military families as well as a lot of Spanish immigrants, noting that the number of Latino families in the area has grown in the past five years. As a bilingual speech language pathologist, she says it can be hard to distinguish whether a child is having normal difficulties with speech because of having to learn two languages simultaneously or if it is a developmental delay.

“That is a challenge,” she says. “It helps to determine what is typical and what is not typical. I’m glad I am able to help children and their families, and to help parents see that they are able to provide excellent care for their child. I always knew I wanted to work with people. It’s always a great feeling to help any individual, no matter what their age, become a stronger individual.”

With a great job and family life here in town, Wilda can happily call Williamsburg home.

“This is where I am raising my own family,” Wilda points out. “I think wherever you are raising your family, you develop roots and friendships. What I like about Williamsburg is that it is not just small-town natives. There are a lot of retirees, and a lot of students and professors at the College of William and Mary who come from all over the country. There are so many people from so many places who call Williamsburg home, and to me that makes it very diverse.”

Wilda’s advice to those in a similar situation is to “embrace your new home. “Being an immigrant, I just want what everybody else wants. I came here for a better life, a better education, a better life for my family. I think that’s what everybody who comes into this country wants,” she says. NDN

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Nami Nam

Annyeong haseyo!

(Hello!)

By Rachel Sapin



Lisa W. Cumming Photography

If you wanted to say hello to Nami Nam, co-owner of the recently opened, natural dry-cleaning business, Hometown Cleaning, in her native language, you might say something like, "Annyeong haseyo". That's a formal way of greeting someone in Korean. Nami comes from a small island in South Korea where the population, as she recalls, numbers around 3,000, and fishing is the rocky island's primary source of industry.

Nami, who is 52, has been living in the United States since 1986. It was 26 years ago that she braved thousands of miles of continent and

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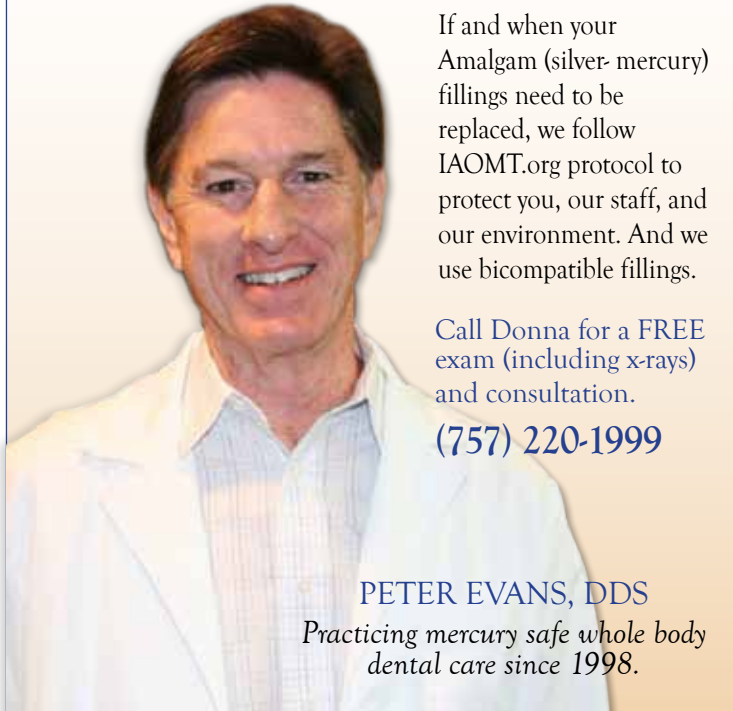
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ocean with her then four-month old son to be with her husband, Young Nam, who had moved from South Korea a year earlier to work at the Pepsi Bottling Company in Newport News.

“It was pretty hard to move,” Nami says of the experience. She remembers being initially overwhelmed by the size of Virginia, coming from such a close-knit island community.

But Nami, like many immigrants who have come from far away shores to this country, adapted to the demographic and cultural shock of living in the United States, and eventually found work in Williamsburg in alterations. It was through this work that she decided, along with her husband, to open a new dry cleaning business in Newport News. The experience soon motivated the couple to sell their first cleaning business to open a dry cleaning plant in Norge. With a central plant, the couple was then able to open other dry cleaning drop-off sites in the Williamsburg area. The dry-cleaning chain was fittingly called Nam’s Cleaners.

Since moving to Williamsburg over two decades ago, Nami has built quite a life for herself in the community. She has raised two children who have gone on to attend William and Mary and Virginia Tech, respectively. Nami’s son currently attends Appalachian Law School, and her daughter is completing a two-year master’s program in Korea with a focus in International Studies. Nami explains that the distance between herself and her daughter has been mitigated thanks to the help of Skype and other technology.

Being able to communicate with her children is important to Nami. She taught them how to speak Korean to ensure that she could have meaningful dialogue with them while they were growing up. For Nami, learning English was, and sometimes still is, the most difficult part of living here.

“It’s really hard because I work all the time,” she explains in reference to the fact that she has not been able to learn English as comprehensively as she would like to. There is however, a certain aspect of English that Nami understands quite well. “Golf language is not that hard,” she says with a laugh, pointing out her membership at Williamsburg National Golf Club.

With a handicap of five, Nami isn’t kidding. In fact, it was not having time to play a game she loves so dearly that concerned her when her husband came up with the idea to open a new chemical-free dry-cleaning business in Williamsburg. The couple opened Hometown Cleaning a couple of months ago, having sold their remaining Nam’s Cleaners drop-off sites. Although Nami still laments her lost golf time, she is happy with the decision to switch to a chemical-free, water-based form of dry cleaning. She remarks that it makes for a more pleasant environment inside and outside of the business.

It seems rather fitting that Nami’s new dry-cleaning business would be named Hometown Cleaning as that is what Williamsburg has become to her over the years. Although she still misses family in Korea, Nami couldn’t imagine being anywhere else today.

“It feels like another hometown,” she says. NDN

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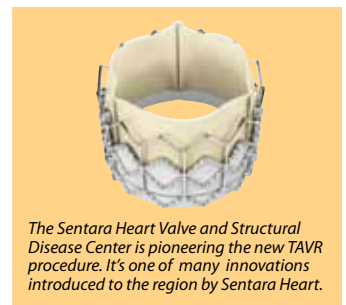
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Bruce Wilson

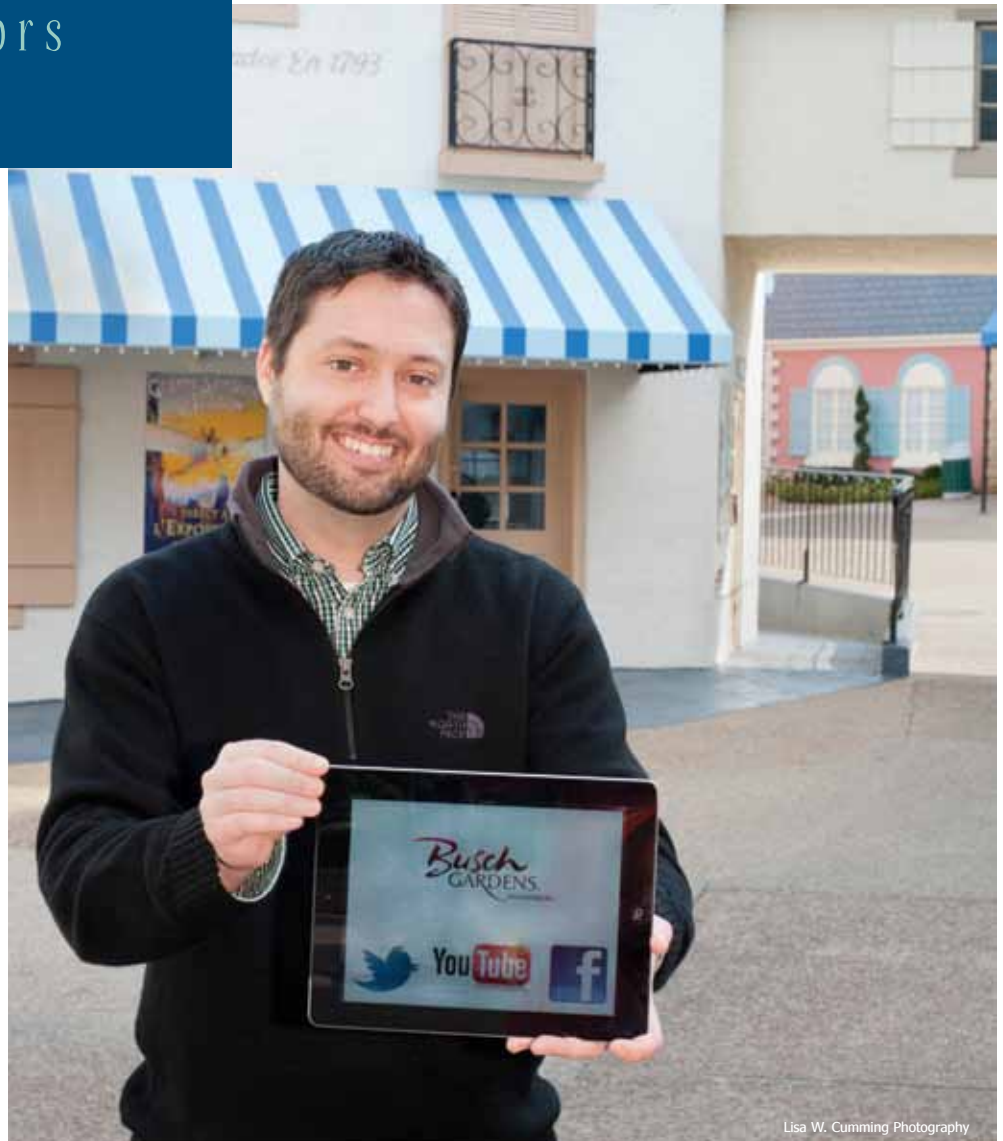
NEW TECHNOLOGY AND Customer Interaction

By Greg Lilly, Editor

“Social media is just a way for people to stay in touch through technology,” Busch Gardens and Water Country USA Interactive Marketing Manager Bruce Wilson says. “That’s how we use it and how I think everybody uses it. It’s cool to catch up with friends at your own leisure, at your own pace.”

He says the advantage of websites like Facebook and Twitter is the ability to communicate with people. “I have friends scattered across the country, and I probably wouldn’t trade e-mails or talk to them by phone every day, but it’s nice to see them broadcast their updates to their networks. That’s what social media is all about.”

Small and large businesses often wonder how to incorporate social media into a marketing plan. Some jump in and others hope it goes



Lisa W. Cumming Photography

away, but Bruce says every business can benefit from social media.

Originally from Detroit, Bruce has worked at Busch Gardens for the past five years. “Through equal parts good luck and great people and my own experience, I’ve ended up as the Interactive Marketing Manager. We have a really good team here in marketing.”

Bruce started his career in journalism. “I studied journalism and was a television report-

er for a few years. I made the switch to Busch Gardens’ Marketing department. As the company started to embrace social media, so did I.” Bruce and his team handle all the interactive marketing, which includes social media, websites and mobile apps.

The Busch Gardens marketing team first looked at Facebook, the dominant social network, in 2008. “I thought it was so exciting to be talking with our guests directly,” Bruce says.

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“We had hired an agency in 2008 to help guide us into the waters of social media. They started us off on a Facebook page. In the presentation I found a few days ago in the files, they were so proud that they had accumulated 400 fans for the page. We were proud of that too. But to think how much we’ve grown, not just in a fan base, but our commitment to it with the team we have in place, I think we do it well. We’re proud of that.”

Today, between the Busch Gardens and Water Country USA Facebook pages, there are over 300,000 fans (or “likes” as the terminology goes).

“It’s become a powerful communications tool for us,” Bruce explains. The types of messages they send out can run the gamut from promotional to informational to safety-oriented.

“We provide customer service by answering people’s questions,” he says. “We can relay urgent messages, like if a storm is coming through the area. We can relay a lot of cool information as well. We give out fun stuff about a new ride or a new show, Howl-O-Scream or Christmas Town events. It’s been very powerful for us.”

The key that most businesses miss is that

social media is broader than just marketing to a customer. “It’s more than that. I think it is definitely a communications tool,” Bruce adds. “On our Facebook page, we seldom push a product, a ticket or a pass. Our fans want to be closer to the park, to know what it’s like to work here, to know what’s going on the days they aren’t here. They want to be connected to the park. Our job is conversing with them, engaging with them, interacting with them, and the sales will follow. That’s advice I would offer anybody on using social media.”

Since social media is more of a communications tool than a sales tool, measuring success can be tricky.

“Most people would say the number of people following your page determines success. If your audience continues to grow, you must be doing something right, right? I think there is more to it than that. I gauge engagement. Someone said: ‘Social media is not about the media, it’s about the social.’ There needs to be conversations happening, back and forth, between you and your audience. That’s the better indicator of success.”

Bruce describes that every company can take advantage of social media. “Every company or brand is an expert at what they do. That’s

why people will follow you. I like to fish,” he says. “If I sign up to follow my favorite fishing rod or reel manufacturer, as long as they keep giving me more information about fishing, I’ll follow them forever. If they get off course and don’t talk about fishing, why would I follow them?” Every company has an area of expertise that can be used to strengthen its relationship with customers by offering information, tips and advice.

The social media options keep growing as the concept becomes more popular. Bruce suggests two ways to decide where to focus your efforts.

“One - go to where your fan base is. So whether that is blogging, Facebook, Twitter or anything else, you should identify that and go to that.” Secondly, he suggests looking at popularity and the number of users of a certain network. “Numbers would suggest that Facebook isn’t a bad place to start,” Bruce adds. “It’s definitely the most popular social media network in the world. You could find a niche there for what your brand represents.”

Busch Gardens hasn’t tried to be on all of the different social media, but has focused on a few.

“We’ve seen an organic growth of fan bas-

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es on that handful of networks that we use,” Bruce says. “We try to meet our fans where they already are.”

Bruce offers four main tips to guide a business to be successful with social media:

One: “If you go into it, be dedicated to it,” Bruce advises. “You need to have a regular presence there or you lose credibility with your audience.” A once or twice a month posting will not keep your business engaged with the followers. Don’t be an absentee friend.

Two: “Try to be content rich. Instead of a single text Tweet (on Twitter) or a text status update (on Facebook) once a day, don’t forget to provide things like pictures, videos, trivia or polls. Be content rich and that will help with engagement.”

Third: “Listen just as much as you talk – and make sure you answer too.” Social media is communication, engagement and interaction.

Four: “Be focused,” Bruce says. “Back to my fishing rod example: If I follow a fishing rod company and suddenly I didn’t get much fishing information from them and they would rather talk about the weather in their state, I’d be pushed away from that. Know what your product is and stay focused on that. That’s why people follow you in the first place.”

Bruce admires the social media direction of local companies and organizations like Colonial Williamsburg and Virginia Beach. “They stay on target and do a great job.” With a wider perspective, he’s a big fan of the Detroit Tigers’ implementation of social media. “I’m from Detroit. I like what the Detroit Tigers do,” he says. “I can get an update through Facebook and Twitter, updates on the games and stories on players. It keeps me connected with my network back there.” That connection is the goal of a good social media strategy.

The next step for Bruce and his Busch Gardens team is a focus on the new roller coaster Verbolten. “We’re all excited about that,” he says. “There’s always a lot of energy when we get a new coaster of this magnitude. I’m excited about riding it and the ideas our team has to get the word out. You’ll see us using all of our social media channels to talk about that. That’s what our fans want and expect.”

Bruce and his associate manager, Virginia Williams, plan to ramp up the usage of Foursquare in the park. “We’ve had a minor presence on Foursquare in the past year,” Bruce states. “Our fans are going to that site in bigger numbers. You can expect for us to elevate our involvement on that channel as well this year.”

Foursquare is a check-in, GPS/location-based service and game people use on their smartphones.

“Busch Gardens is a great arena for Foursquare,” Bruce adds. “Not only can you check into Busch Gardens, but you can check into the Festhaus or Verbolten or Sesame Street Forest of Fun... There’s literally dozens of check-in locations throughout the park. That will be a lot of fun.” The social media application allows people to see where their friends are in the park and helps them locate each other.

Bruce feels this is the beginning of a technological era. The melding of technology, business and community has resulted in social media. “I like to think this is like back when television started to become a medium and how exciting that must have been. I hope that in five years, I look back at this timeframe and say it was so exciting to be there when social media really came into its own. That will be neat to tell people about one day.”

A company doesn’t have to be the size of Busch Gardens to take advantage of social media networks and technology. It’s open to everybody. “All you need is a computer and a camera,” states Bruce Wilson. “The technology is there, just try it.” NDN

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Detric Smith



Sports Conditioning

By Greg Lilley, Editor

Lisa W. Cumming Photography

“Sports conditioning should be a year-round routine to get the edge on the competition and to prevent injury,” Detric Smith says. Detric is a personal trainer, elementary school teacher and sports performance coach. He runs a fitness boot camp through his business Results Per-

formance Training. He explains that fitness is not a one-time class; it’s part of your daily routine.

Detric grew up in the Hampton Roads area and has always had a strong passion for fitness and sports training. “I played about every sport, recreation-wise, and now I compete in

power lifting; I’ve done that for the past several years.” He went to Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) in Richmond for his degree in exercise science. “After graduation,” he says, “I assisted as a strength and conditioning coach at VCU. I did personal training in several dif-

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ferent settings and worked as a sports performance specialist at Velocity Sports Performance in Richmond.”

He enjoyed the aspect of teaching athletes how to achieve their goals and that prompted him to return to school to become a teacher. “I taught middle school for four years in Surry, and now this is my third year at Matthew Whaley Elementary School,” he says.

Before and after the school day, Detric teaches fitness boot camps. “That’s my passion,” he says, “the sports performance aspect, and weight loss is my specialty, too. There’s a wide range of people at the fitness boot camps, as far as their fitness levels – everyone from a Division I athlete to someone who has not worked out in years.” He uses different variations of each exercise to accommodate the different levels. “I meet with each person before they start to get an assessment, to see where they’re at physically.”

The main aspect of the boot camp in a group setting is the people pushing each other to reach goals. “The people meld together naturally, but I make sure they all know each other,” he explains. “Everyone works together to reach their goals, even though each person’s goals are

different because each person’s abilities are different.”

The group is a big help in the motivation and accountability of achieving individual goals. “That’s a huge component to keeping someone on track: They’re accountable to me, and they get motivation from everyone else in the group,” he says.

Detric is not just a class instructor; he is a partner in reaching the fitness goal. He utilizes text messages, e-mails and phone calls with each member of the group as a check-in to answer questions, offer advice and encouragement.

He says sports conditioning can be for the high school or college athlete, the amateur competitor or for the person preparing for spring golf or tennis. Depending on the audience, conditioning encompasses different aspects.

“For the athlete, it is extremely important to condition year-round to get the edge on the competition, to prevent injury, to get stronger and faster,” he says. “For the amateur, it’s to be ready for that marathon or for the summer league. For a seasonal sports enthusiast, I really focus on areas that need more flexibility while

addressing muscular imbalances.”

In his text messages and phone calls, Detric likes to reinforce the person’s understanding of why they’re doing the exercises and routines and to keep their goal in focus. At the boot camps, he takes assessments of each person during the dynamic warm-ups.

“Every time someone comes in, it’s an assessment,” he explains. “The dynamic warm-up is a series of movements specific to the sports and activities they do. I look for flexibility. I check for muscular imbalances, and then set up a program to address that individual’s strengths and weaknesses.”

The focus on dynamic flexibility and the functional assessment is an important aspect of Detric’s philosophy. “You can get the cardio-respiratory endurance in a lot of different classes and programs. In strength training, not everyone addresses the muscular imbalances, or they don’t address the program year-round. My classes are set up so I know what we’re doing 12, 16, 20 weeks down the line. It’s a long-range plan.”

He admits not everyone works out on a year-round basis. “But look 12 to 16 weeks out, especially for competition. That’s what you need

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to ramp up your performance safely.”

Sports conditioning requires a plan to make gradual progress. “For example,” he adds, “some people try to run five miles their first time out, after not having run for a few months. Have a progression so you don’t get injuries, so you don’t get frustrated and quit.” An advantage of the boot camps is the group setting. “Other people going for similar goals really help out with the motivational aspect of training.”

In his boot camp setting, Detric works with each person to set their goals. “Realistic goals,” he states. “It’s a progression. For example: The first four weeks, people will notice an improvement in how they feel and recover from the sessions. They will notice certain movements within the dynamic warm-up become easier along with improved strength and endurance. They get through the movements very well compared to those first few sessions.”

Not only does the routine become more familiar, but physical changes happen as well.

“I usually see the inches drop during those first four weeks or so,” he describes. “Body fat percentage gets better. The scale might not move too much because you are regaining muscle you might not have used in a while. At eight

to twelve weeks, you usually see rapid results in weight loss and performance continues to improve.”

As a Physical Education teacher at Matthew Whaley Elementary School, Detric sees some common aspects between the youngsters and the adults. “Teamwork in a huge part,” he says. “Seeing the team work and the magic of people coming together to reach a goal. I teach the elementary students about goal setting and give them confidence that they can achieve their goals. I also do that with the adults.”

The children have taught Detric as well. “Definitely,” he states. “They have reminded me to teach the fundamentals. I’ve worked with college athletes and professional athletes, but from teaching the elementary school students the basics, that has made me a better trainer and strength conditioning coach. Really they remind me to focus on the fundamentals, so I can teach it at all levels. Teaching at the elementary level really makes me break things down. Once I teach the fundamentals of anything, I know people will be successful at it and see improvements. Plus, the kids are more open-minded to trying new things.”

The boot camps can focus on different sub-

jects. Detric teaches sports performance and weight-loss. For the sports performance branch, the program outside of the classes is more intense. “That’s a group with more in common – a certain sport, although a football quarterback has different conditioning requirements than a lineman or a kicker. I look at common injuries in a sport to see what might need to be addressed. You need to look at the basic aspects of the sport, combine this with the individual’s assessment, and then set measurable goals.”

In both branches of the boot camp, diet is addressed as well as the exercise routine. “The exercise portion is easier than the diet,” he says especially in the weight-loss groups. “The benefit of the group session is that they hold each other accountable. The group sessions are fun. There’s a sense of accomplishment after every session, after every goal is reached.”

Detric takes each goal with each student – child or adult – as a personal goal for himself. “I have to be passionate about it and care that they reach their goals. That’s how I measure my success, when we reach their goals. That’s why they come to me. I’ll do everything possible to help them reach that goal.” NDN

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Suzanne Neely

Music

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By Greg Lilly, Editor

“The Williamsburg Choral Guild does a little bit of everything,” Suzanne Neely, president of the board of directors, explains of the group’s style. “One thing Jay BeVille [artistic director and conductor] has brought to the organization is his really creative programming ability – both from the perspective of the audience and for the chorus. We do more challenging works that attract more singers and a bigger audience.”

Suzanne says the Guild pairs well-known pieces with lesser-known works to help introduce a wide range of choral music to the area. “We feel it is our mission to present the finest choral music to the community. In the fall we did the Mozart Requiem, which is a very well-known piece with orchestra, and paired that with some surprises that the audience might not have heard before.”

Suzanne graduated from the College of William and Mary in 1991

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Arts & ENTERTAINMENT

Lisa W. Cumming Photography

with a double major in music and German. "I moved back to the Washington D.C. area, which is where I'm originally from. I grew up in Arlington," she explains. "When I moved back there, I joined a symphonic choir called The Choral Arts Society of Washington." Singing, touring and helping out the group, she learned that arts administration could be a good career for her. "I had done that on the side at William and Mary. I started an a cappella ensemble at William and Mary called the Christopher Wren Singers, which is still in existence."

She enrolled in graduate school at Indiana University for her Master's Degree in Arts Administration. "I spent some time in New York then back to Washington working for The Choral Arts Society," she says. The Washington group held performances at the Kennedy Center and consisted of a two hundred voice choir with a large budget. "And a staff of ten," she adds. "Now, compared to the Williamsburg Choral Guild, which is all-volunteer with a small budget, there's a big difference in managing the organizations."

Suzanne met her husband in The Choral Arts Society of Washington. "He's also a musician and singer, but he's not actively doing that right now. He's the resort manager at Great Wolf Lodge. The hotel business brought us back to Williamsburg."

They moved to Williamsburg in the fall of 2003. "I left Choral Arts to come here. At that time, I was pregnant with our second child." Once the baby was born and about a year later, Suzanne began craving a night out. She found the Williamsburg Choral Guild and auditioned.

"I've been a member of a choir since I was five. Choral music has always been a part of my life," she says. "My mother had brought home a tiny electronic organ when I was little and I started playing it. My kindergarten had a choir and I joined. I've been singing since."

She came to the College of William and Mary to study German because of the strong reputation of the languages department. "I had lived abroad growing up and really wanted to be a translator. My dad worked for the State Department. We had lived in Vienna, Austria for a few years while I was in middle school and I took German then. I took music classes too because it is in my blood, and ultimately did the double major of music and German."

During her first season with the Williamsburg Choral Guild, singing on her "mother's night out," the Choral Guild's director heard about her background and asked her to help with the organization and administration of the Guild. "It's an all volunteer organization," Suzanne adds, "and we have a board of eleven that performs like the staff."

Last season, the Williamsburg Choral Guild celebrated its 35th anniversary. "One of the things we were blessed to receive was an anonymous donation two years ago to do something artistically that we had not been able to do before," Suzanne explains about the special program they did for that anniversary. "We talked about it and decided for the anniversary we'd commission a piece for the Choral Guild. It premiered last year. That's something we were really excited about."

Artistic Director, Jay BeVillie, had heard a composer's work at a conference and told Suzanne that the composer, Dan Forrest, could be the man for the commissioned piece. "He's a young, rising American composer in his thirties," Suzanne says of Dan Forrest. "Jay heard one of Dan's works at that conference he attended and was really taken with the work." They discussed what text should be set to music for the anniversary commission. "We wanted something celebratory. The composer was drawn to our connection with Williamsburg and the history here.

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Dan Forrest came up with two colonial folk songs. The text was preexisting. One was called 'The Nightingale' and the other was 'The Girl I left Behind Me' – two small movements of a larger work. That sparked him. He's working on more folk songs now. Ours was the seed to start him creating."

For this season, March 3rd and 4th brings a program called "Mass Appeal" to be performed at Williamsburg Presbyterian Church at 215 Richmond Road.

"The centerpiece of the program is probably a piece people aren't familiar with," Suzanne states. "It's from Argentine composer Ariel Ramirez. He wrote this piece in the 1960s when the Vatican had opened up so people could write mass in the vernacular. Mass had only been written in Latin, then he had the opportunity to write it in Spanish. It's called 'Misa Criolla' – a Creole mass – with some very folk rhythms. It's very, very infectious."

As with the Guild's method of presenting lesser-known and well-known pieces in the same performance, Suzanne says "Misa Criolla" is the foundation piece of the performance, but they have added others that the audience will find more familiar.

"We found that piece and thought about what to put with it. We're adding Fauré's Requiem, which a number of people are familiar with, and John Rutter's 'Gloria.' We hope to give the audience both pieces they may be familiar with and some surprises. I hope the audience walks away intrigued by the selections."

In May, there is more variety with "Opera Cabaret" at the Hellenic Center.

"We've done opera choruses before, but the setting will be different," Suzanne explains. "We're having tables for people to sit around with hors d'oeuvres and a cocktail – a cabaret setting for the performance. This year, we're involving the Williamsburg Youth Chorale that we founded last year for the anniversary. They'll be joining us with a couple of children's numbers from operas."

In the summer, the Williamsburg Choral Guild presents a series of "Summer Sings." Suzanne describes the events where the audience is the chorus.

"We hire a guest conductor and a soloist," she says. "The concerts are held at the Unitarian Church. We hand out music to the audience to sing the chorus. If they want to just listen, that's fine, but there is no choir.

The audience becomes part of the music. It's a lot of fun. Some people are great singers who couldn't normally give the time to be in a choir, but this gives them the chance to sing these great works."

A feature that the Guild has recently implemented and has become popular with audiences is the pre-concert lecture.

"We started a couple of years ago to help concert goers learn more about the pieces we're performing," Suzanne explains. "For example in March, we have one of the priests from Saint Bede talking about Vatican II and the mass, specifically to the Vatican decisions and cultural changes that led to such opportunities as Ariel Ramirez composing 'Misa Criolla.' That is interesting to understand the background of the piece."

Suzanne invites everyone to attend a concert by the Williamsburg Choral Guild during its 36th season to hear familiar and new works by the talented and dedicated volunteer choir.

"People come to a concert and are just blown away that this is a community choir," she says. NDN

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Health



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Chronic Pain Relief

By Greg Lilly, Editor

Laurie Fuith's daily life changed with a car accident in 1998. The accident left her with chronic pain. The road to finding relief led her through various therapies and medications until she found cold laser treatments.

"I just kept having shoulder pain and fatigue and these off-the-wall symptoms," she describes of the time after the accident. "It took six months for the doctors to find I had a torn rotator cuff. In another six months, I had surgery to repair it. By that time, it was more complicated." Her injury caused her many sleepless nights and days of irritation and pain. "The most ridiculous things would set it off," she says, "certain types of chairs, being the passenger in a vehicle, even just looking down to read. It was always a struggle to understand that I just couldn't do certain things."

After her surgery, Laurie still experienced chronic pain in her shoulder. "I think I tried almost everything to correct it," she says. "I had the surgery. I tried physical therapy, and then I tried aquatic therapy. I

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participated in a 'work hardening' program."

A work hardening program is a systematic therapy of gradual and progressive activities using proper body alignment and movements to recondition the body. She would re-learn tasks step-by-step to see what activities would generate pain. "I had trigger point injections," she adds.

"During this time, the various doctors had me on a lot of different drugs, especially for pain, and some were muscle relaxers, plus anti-inflammatory drugs." Laurie was not a fan of taking so many medications and worried what the side effects could be.

"Then I came across something called prolotherapy, that was quite helpful, but it plateaued," she explains. Prolotherapy is from the words "PROLiferation" and "therapy." Injections into the injured area try to stimulate the body to repair itself, to proliferate healing.

"After that, my shoulder seemed to go back to getting worse," Laurie says. "By that time, I had Complex Regional Pain Syndrome. It's my understanding that after some sorts of injuries, especially with a shoulder that moves in so many different directions, many different things can be causing the pain." She knew that pinpointing the causes of the pain was a dif-

ficult task because of the many different factors involved. "It was like all that time that passed before my first surgery, fluid and a lot of different things had built up in my shoulder making the treatment more complicated."

She had gone as far as she thought prolotherapy could take her. "There was no reason to continue with that," she says of the diminished results, and she was at the point of thinking she would have to go on medical disability from her job.

Her last hope surfaced with a new technique that her chiropractor was investigating. "Dr. Wade Quinn had mentioned cold laser therapy to me when he was first looking at cold laser equipment. He gave me a few things to read about it." Laurie read the information and did some research with reputable organizations' websites. "I asked one of my doctors and he said that it certainly couldn't hurt anything to try it. After reading what I had, and after so many years of dealing with my shoulder and being more knowledgeable than I was in the beginning, I thought it would be a good fit."

The treatment, Laurie describes, is a small instrument, shaped somewhat like a microphone, attached to a small computer, which the doctor runs over the area to be treated, in

her case, her shoulder. "It's not painful," she says. "It's just a noticeable feeling, soft and a little warm as it moves over my shoulder."

Laser can penetrate into the body to reach the injured tissue, Laurie explains the process. Part of the repair mechanism is to increase the cell membrane permeability. "By making the cell membrane permeable the cells can exchange fluids removing waste and taking in proper cell nutrients, repairing the cell and reducing inflammation. It makes things work as it should."

Laurie had been a patient of Dr. Wade Quinn for many years. "He's my chiropractor," she adds. "He used to say that for certain things with a lot of pain, you put ice on it. When you take the ice off then fresh blood will flow into that area. That's probably why I understood the process of making the cells permeable for my shoulder – it seemed very much like that. Most people, if they have back pain, want to put heat on it. If that's all you do, it can't change. You have to get things moving and flowing through there."

The cold laser therapy really got things moving for Laurie. A problematic byproduct from her injury was that her hand would swell.

"That happened from the beginning of the



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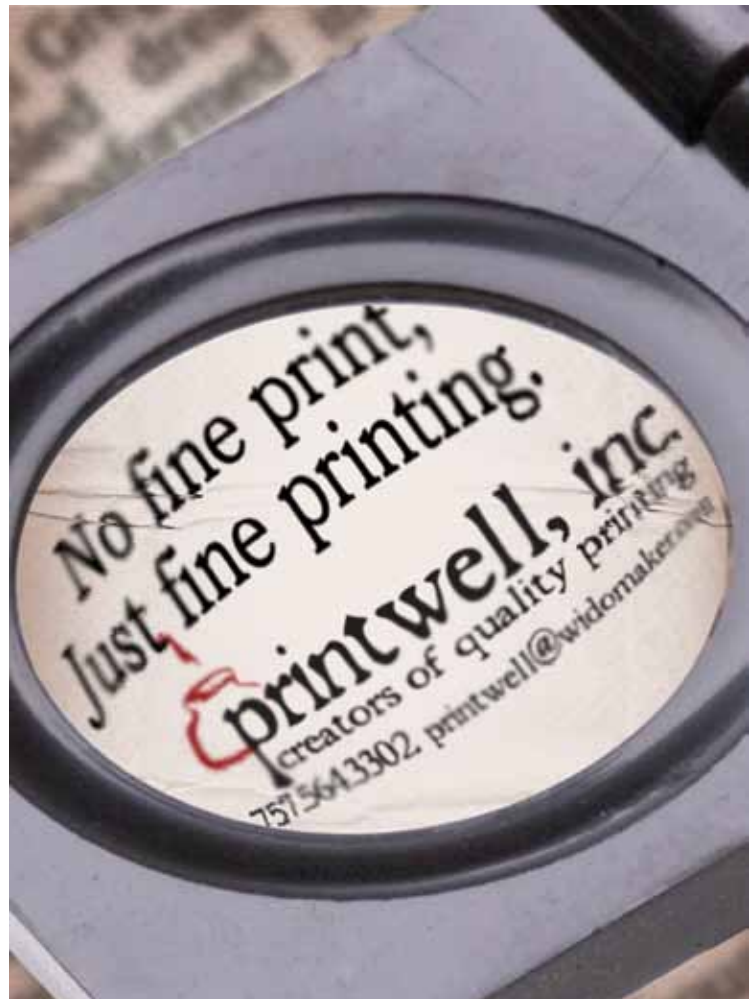
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injury," she says. "It could get very, very uncomfortable. That was a signal to me to stop what I was doing and to take notice of what was going on." On her way home from her first cold laser treatment, she noticed that the swelling in her hand was decreasing. "Probably within fifteen minutes of finishing that first treatment, the swelling in my hand started to go away. I thought this was certainly the right decision."

She started the cold laser therapy in May of 2010 and had it about two or three times a week. She has gradually decreased the frequency as her shoulder pain flare-ups have lessened. Today, she has the therapy about every three weeks. "If I wait too long to go in for therapy, the pain tends to creep back," Laurie says. "I get extremely fatigued from the pain. It's gone on for so long that I sometimes don't register it until it's too late. If I have waited too long, when I go to Dr. Quinn's office, the cold laser starts helping right away." She realizes this is not a cure, but a treatment for her chronic pain.

She says her general practitioner is happy that she's found something that works for her and that it has affected the amount of medications she takes.

"I've been able to stop taking the pain medications, the muscle relaxers and the anti-inflammatory meds. I just don't need those any longer," she states. "The flare-ups are less frequent. I have physical restrictions I have to follow, but when I do have a flare-up – it used to be a few days to a couple of months in duration – now they are shorter, maybe a couple of hours."

The pain had changed her life. "Like folding clothes, for instance, would absolutely set off the pain in my shoulder. It took me years to remember that I shouldn't be folding clothes. That's such a simple thing, but I had to stay away from it." That simple task would cause a flare-up of pain in her shoulder for over a week. "Just from doing some everyday chores that I thought I could do," she says. "Now with the laser, I can do those tasks, without fear of days of pain."

Laurie recommends anyone who has chronic pain should talk to their own doctor about the possibilities of cold laser therapy. "I understand from Dr. Quinn that it's not for every area in the body," she admits. "But for some of us, it's a life changing therapy. It controls it," Laurie says. "It's like a gift to find this." NDN

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Lisa W. Cumming
Photography

Cheré Harper

Let's Get Planting!

By Greg Lilly, Editor

Before digging, tilling or fertilizing this spring, Cheré Harper suggests learning as much as you can about your particular yard. Cheré is a Master Gardener and the project chairperson for the Huzzah Plant Sale to be held on April 28 at Freedom Park.

The Huzzah Plant Sale is an annual fundraiser the Master Gardeners use to support their programs. "The plant sale is each spring, in time for the growing season," Cheré says. "We chose our seeds in January. In February, we propagate them. For example, we select that special type of tomato we want to try and start the seeds growing so it will be just the right size by the end of April. The sale will be held in Freedom Park, just opposite the new Interpretive Center. That's a lovely new facility."

Chéré became involved with the Master Gardeners a few years ago. “My husband was still overseas with the military, and I came back early to start building the retirement house,” she says. “The military had taken us to quite a few places – we quit counting locations at thirty. I came to Williamsburg to begin building while he finished things overseas. I saw an advertisement for the Master Gardeners class and thought I’d love to do that.”

Master Gardeners are volunteers who complete extensive training to “educate and communicate environmentally sound horticultural practices to the community,” Chéré explains.

Her gardening education started early. “I remember squirting mineral oil in corn plants when I was barely old enough to do it, but that kept the bugs from eating the corn,” Chéré describes. “When I became a teacher later, that got me Brownie points with my very first principal because something was eating his corn, and he was complaining in the teachers’ lounge. I told him about it. He was very happy with the advice and never forgot that I’d helped him. I realized then that sharing your knowledge is a good thing.”

While Chéré and her husband moved all

over the world with the military, she learned to garden in many different environments. “Conditions are never the same in those different places. Where I have grown hundreds of tulips in single locations, I don’t dare put one outside now or I’ll have more deer than I have already. I don’t need to attract any more. I need to subliminate my tulip desire with a daffodil desire.”

The deer population is hard to dishearten when hungry. Chéré likes thorny plants to discourage nibbling, but that doesn’t always work. “Even if you put in a nice prickly holly, the new growth is still tender and the deer will trim it,” she says. She advises to protect young trees as well. “With a new tree that has a bare trunk at the bottom, for approximately five years, you need to put protection around the trunk about two weeks before Halloween and keep it on until after February. The bucks like to use those tender young trees to rub their new antlers on.”

Along with learning what natural predators the plants have in the area, she found other environmental features affected her gardening. “You need to learn your soils, your weather conditions, the hot and cold days,” she lists. “We used to only look at the last frost date and

the first frost date, but now we know we have to look at some of the heat days too.”

Soil conditions are always an issue. “We have so much clay here,” Chéré states. “Sometimes your very best intentions can be foiled by outside factors. When we began the house, we took all the wonderful topsoil from what used to be the barnyard at the old farm at Stonehouse. We moved it aside to keep and put back at the end of construction. But that winter during construction, a big storm washed the topsoil into the woods. I’m going through the steps of bringing in compost, manure, all those good things to build the soil back. I see the improvement every year.”

The Master Gardeners’ Help Desk is housed at the James City County office of the Virginia Cooperative Extension in Toano. Soil test kits can be requested and processed by the office. “The results tell you what you should amend to the soil so that it’s best for the plants you want to grow,” Chéré says.

She also advises to know how sunlight affects your yard. “Where is the sun? Where is the shade? The best way to determine that is to watch it throughout the year,” she explains. “Most of us don’t have that time, but you can

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Q & A

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What is the housing market forecast for 2012?

RICHARDSON:

Housing market predictions for 2012, are popping up everywhere and almost every day by experts and the general public. For instance, the 2012 housing market predictions as posted on CBSnews.com (December 7, 2011) came as a glimmer of relief and left room for some hope that the market is starting to slowly, but surely, bounce back. According to CBSnews.com, Fannie Mae's November National Housing Survey surprisingly found that homeowners believed that the value of their homes would go up in 2012 by 0.2%, which is the first time this prediction has moved from a negative to positive in 6 months.

At the 2011 Realtors® Conference & Expo in Anaheim, California, Lawrence Yun, chief economist of the National Association of Realtors®, stated home sales should be stronger in 2012. Yun further stated "Tight mortgage credit conditions have been holding back home buyers all year, and consumer confidence has been shaky recently, nevertheless, there is a sizeable pent-up demand based on population growth, unemployment levels and a doubling-up phenomenon that can't continue indefinitely. This demand could quickly stimulate the market when conditions improve."

Yun also stated that housing affordability conditions, based on the relationship between median home prices, mortgage interest rates, and median family income, was at a record high in 2011, and very favorable affordability conditions will dominate next year as well, which will probably be the second best year on record dating back to 1970. His hope is that credit restrictions will ease and allow more home buyers to take advantage of current opportunities.

Based on NAR's current housing projection model, existing-home sales were forecasted to edge up about 1 percent in 2011, and then rise another 4 to 5 percent in 2012. For 2013, a 6% growth in home sales and a 3% increase in prices are being predicted. In addition, a 3.5% increase in rents and a rise in the mortgage rate to 4.8% is also expected. In 2014, home sales are projected to increase 6%, prices to grow 4%, rents to rise 3.5% and the mortgage rate to increase to 5.5%. These predic-

tions are further indications that now is a good time to buy.

Additionally, another boost to the housing market is that mortgage interest rates remain under 4% for a 30-year fixed-rate mortgage. Also if buyers will consider 15-year mortgages, some loans are available for about 3-3.25% and some lenders have even offered loans at 3% or less for 10-year loans. These mortgage rates are at an all time low, which should encourage new homebuyers to buy and also save homeowners who can refinance their existing loans. The key to consider is that a 10-year or 15-year mortgage loan will mean a higher amortized monthly installment than a 30-year mortgage loan.

David Stevens, president and CEO of the Mortgage Bankers Association thinks there is sunshine on the horizon and it may be here sooner than anyone realizes. Stevens take on the real estate recovery is that markets are stabilizing; many markets are experiencing real home-price growth; and now is the best time ever to buy.

However, we must remember that all real estate is local and a national report is an artificial construction and does not always reflect our local market. On the local front, according to Williamsburg MLS, the December 2011 stats for zip codes 23168, 23185 and 23188 compared to December 2010, show the total housing inventory for sale decreased 15.38%; days on the market decreased 10.40%; median prices dipped 7.85%; closed versus listed trends yielded an 87% ratio, up from last year. December 2011 the ratio was at 67.9%, a 29.07% upswing. Also, Closed Sales for December 2011 versus last December increased 14.86%.

This strong finish for December 2011 seemed to concur with National predictions giving further indication that our local housing market is swinging in the right direction. Also according to the Housing Predictor, Real Estate News and Forecasts in the Public Interest, the housing market in Hampton Roads should recover sooner than many other areas of the State of Virginia with a higher demand for homes in the area. In viewing the housing market research, the one common thread from most reports is that this is the time for buyers to embrace today's housing market prices, capitalize on the low interest rates and engage a good Realtor® to purchase their piece of the American dream.

ask your neighbors what they know and what they see. You can also check with the Master Gardeners for what they are seeing for sun/shade patterns. Some of our lots here have almost nothing but shade. You need to take that into consideration. If you want to put out a plant that really needs a lot of sun, you're setting yourself up for heartbreak – unless you're willing to make some changes in how your sun patterns fall in your yard." That means clearing out the tree canopy.

Along with the sun and shade of your plot of land, Cheré suggests knowing the changes in temperature, specifically last and first frost dates. Just because we have the plant sale on April 28, doesn't mean that all the plants can be planted outside then. If you get a plant that has been in the greenhouse, it needs to be hardened off, to get used to the outdoor conditions. Take it out a few hours each day to adapt it to the outside temperatures."

Cheré says to investigate a new plant you might want to add to your yard. "If you have a plant you really like or the homeowners association says you should plant, go check it out," she advises. "I found out I was allergic to arborvitae by having my hands in it to find the tag. I broke out into a rash." Especially when you have children with sensitivities, check plants to be sure they will be compatible with your family.

"I can remember as a child," she adds, "castor bean plants were in everybody's yard, but then we found out that all parts of the plant are poisonous. I don't know of anyone who kept that plant in their yard after that. You need to know the properties of the plant – if they're poisonous, if you have sensitivities... Some plants have these lovely berries that will stain your deck. You need to know the properties and how it will fit into your landscaping."

The Huzzah Plant Sale is also an educational opportunity. The Master Gardeners will be available to answer questions about deer-resistant plants, soil testing, sun-loving versus shade-loving plants, frost dates, harvest times and just about any lawn and garden question.

Cheré promises that the variety at the sale will be strong and surprising. "We'll have outdoor plants in several categories. Some of our plants come from Master Gardener digs. For example, if one of our members has strawberry beds that need thinning, a group of Master Gardeners will go out and have a dig. We'll prepare pots for the various things and will have information at the sale about what is needed for the propagation of each plant."

The Master Gardeners will have things you don't see every day. "Why not get heirloom tomatoes and rare herbs that are hard to find? Get them at the plant sale along with information on the best practices on growing those, where to put them, when to harvest. These are things you won't find at the big box stores' garden centers."

The Master Gardeners also answer questions at their help desk phone number (564-2175) available Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. – 1 p.m. "We also have a popular booth at the Farmers Market in Merchants Square," Cheré states, "as well as our website: www.jccwmg.org."

Cheré has pulled together the knowledge and hard work of about 230 Master Gardeners to provide a fun and informative plant sale for her neighbors. I encourage everyone to come out to Freedom Park on April 28 to find those perfect plants for your yard. Let's get planting! **NDN**

You can call the James City County/Williamsburg Master Gardener Help Desk at 757-564-2175 or visit www.jccwmg.org

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Hey Neighbor!

Please visit www.WilliamsburgNeighbors.com and click on **Hey Neighbor!** for a complete list of current community announcements.

To submit your non-profit event to Hey Neighbor! send a paragraph with your information to: heyneighbor@cox.net

Hey Neighbor! ‘THROUGH THE EYE OF A NATURALIST’ EXHIBITION Now - 29, 2012

The Williamsburg Regional Library, 515 Scotland Street. Free and open to the public. For more information 757-259-4040.

Hey Neighbor! REGISTRATION FOR WALT SPRING 2012 COURSES Ongoing, 2012

Registration is open. The Williamsburg Area Learning Tree (WALT) is offering more than 65 courses this spring for anyone who wants to “Try Something New!” A complete

list of course descriptions and instructor bios is online at www.wuu.org. For more information: call Jill Whitten 757-220-9975.

Hey Neighbor! FREE TAX PREPARATION AND ELECTRONIC FILING February 2012 – April 17, 2012

Experienced IRS-certified volunteer tax preparers of the Greater Williamsburg Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program will provide free federal and state income tax preparation and electronic filing at several convenient locations. Bring driver’s license, social security cards, W-2s/1099s, receipts for deductions, bank account

information, amount of economic stimulus payment, and last year’s state and federal tax returns. For information email vitawb@cox.net. (Locations are listed online at Hey Neighbor!)

Hey Neighbor! GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT February 17 – 20, 2012

A great opportunity for beginning and expert birders to enjoy and record the variety of birds. This is a self-guided event. The York River shoreline, Taskinas Creek, and our miles of trails provide excellent birding and other mid-winter adventures. The park is open from 8: a.m. until dusk. <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc>

Hey Neighbor! MUSIC UNDER THE STARS, REVISITED February 18, 2012

7:30 p.m. The Williamsburg Lodge. Steve Lippia in “Simply Sinatra” blends “classic” with “today.” His first-rate performances introduce young audiences to traditional pop music and appeal to long-time listeners of this timeless music. For more information, call The Wil-

liamsburg Symphonia at (757) 229-9857 or go online to purchase tickets at williamsburgsymphonia.org.

Hey Neighbor! STARGAZING

February 18 and March 24, 2012
York River State Park. 6:30-11:45 pm. Join the Virginia Peninsula Astronomy Stargazers for a night of wonder and discovery. Away from the city lights, the broad cliffs above the York River are perfect for observing constellations, planets, and other features in the night sky.

Hey Neighbor! AUDITIONS – “NOISES OFF” Feb. 19 & 20, 2012

7:00 pm. Cast: 4W ages 20-55, 5M ages 25-65. English accents required. Show requires a lot of physical comedy. Auditions will consist of readings from the script. Show Dates: April 19 - May 5, 2012. Visit the Williamsburg Players website at www.williamsburgplayers.org to purchase your tickets today!

Hey Neighbor! NONPROFIT BOARD TRAINING SERIES February 21 – March 27, 2012

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This 6-week class is designed for community members interested in learning more about the roles, responsibilities, and rewards of serving on a nonprofit board. For registration information, visit www.NetworkWilliamsburg.com or contact Karen Dutro, karen@networkwilliamsburg.com, 757-945-1285.

Hey Neighbor! NETWORK AFTER HOURS

February 23, 2012

This is a great opportunity to meet local business & nonprofit leaders. If you are interested in setting up a table to display information about your services and/or products, contact Karen Dutro, karen@networkwilliamsburg.com, 757-945-1285.

Hey Neighbor! CHOCOLATE CHARIOT RACE

February 25, 2012

Proceeds benefit local charities. New location this year: Williamsburg Hellenic Center, 4900 Mooretown Road. Online ticket sales begin January 9, 2012. maryk@williamsburgeventrentals.com

Hey Neighbor! DESTINATION RECREATION

EXPO

February 25, 2012

9am-noon. Your one-stop-shop for everything James City County Parks and Recreation and its programming partners have to offer! Raffles and discounts awarded. James City/Williamsburg Community Center. For information, call 259-5353 or visit www.jccEgov.com/recreation.

Hey Neighbor! BOWL FOR KIDS' SAKE 2012

February 25, 2012

Held at the Williamsburg AMF Lanes. All money raised goes directly toward supporting a unique one to one relationship between a mentor and a child throughout our communities. To learn more about how you can get involved; contact us at 757-253-0676.

Hey Neighbor! GCA'S 1ST ANNUAL ROYAL AUCTION

February 26, 2012

Greenwood Christian Academy's live and silent auction. To reserve tickets, call 345-0905. 5251-37 John Tyler Highway-Williamsburg Crossing Shopping Center.

Hey Neighbor! TICKETS ON SALE – PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

March 1st - March 17, 2012

Visit the Williamsburg Players website at www.williamsburgplayers.org to purchase your tickets today! (757) 229-0431.

Hey Neighbor! "THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA"

March 2-3, 9-11, 2012

Hampton Roads Academy Performing Arts presents Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical, "The Phantom of the Opera" in the Svein J. Lassen Auditorium, 739 Academy Lane, Newport News, VA. Tickets \$10 adults; \$5 students. Contact Jim Gandolfo, 884-9139 for more information or visit www.hra.org.

Hey Neighbor! AUDITIONS HELD FOR MUSICAL HIT COMEDY "GEORGE M"

March 4 and 5, 2012

The Smithfield Little Theatre, located at 210 N. Church Street in Smithfield is holding auditions from 7:00 pm until 9:00 pm. Both days. The show is about show-biz song and dance man legend George

M. Cohan. For additional information contact the director, Peter Natale, either on Facebook or email at peco@cox.net.

Hey Neighbor! GETTING TO KNOW US

March 4 and 11, 2012

2:30-3:30 pm. Are you new to the Williamsburg area? Perhaps you are looking for a location for a family or organization event. Take a guided tour of York River State Park's day use area to see what our park has to offer. Picnic shelters, playgrounds, boating, and access to the York River shoreline are just a short drive from Virginia's Historic Triangle.

Hey Neighbor! FARMERS MARKET OPENS FOR WINTER MARKETS

March 10, 2012

In Merchants Square, open 8:30 am – 12:30 pm. Shop with 25 watermen, bakers and producers of meats, seafood, hydroponically grown vegetables, ethnic foods, cheeses and forced bulbs. Full season opens Saturday, March 31. Visit www.williamsburgfarmersmarket.com or call 259-3768 for more information.

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