

HOLIDAY 2020

SALISBURY

t h e m a g a z i n e

Welcome to **Carolville**

Salisburian makes sure
her holiday city
runs like a top

It's a wonderful life

- If it's Thanksgiving, Bangers, friends will be rabbit hunting
- Designer Kim Hardiman waves her magic wand over Christmas
- You can't go wrong with these holiday casseroles
- Ann and Reggie Hall's 'castle' is a study in river radiance
- Collector Elaine Howle finds Christmas a hoot

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by MARK WINEKA

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by MARK WINEKA

*On the cover: Carol Lewis' miniature city, 'Carolville.'
On this page: Designer Kim Hardiman gave a Christmas
touch to the High Rock Lake dock of Randy and Kris Hall.
(Jon C. Lakey photos)*

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Thinking outside the toolbox

The cooler weather of fall probably prompted it. But one Saturday I stepped into the garage, pushed the button to open the door and took on the task of sorting through the things on my workbench.

For any normal American male, this task would consume about a half-hour, hour tops. It took me the whole day. Our workbench sits next to the door leading into the house. In that spot, it tended to collect things through the years, in burgeoning layers as time went by.

And to call it a “workbench” — even though it held our crammed toolbox; a cabinet of nails, screws, washers and bolts; and a shelf full of paints, caulking, sandpaper and weatherstripping — is laughable given my utter disdain for work and lack of ability to put anything together.

So why do we have so many tools?

As the day wore on, my wife and I counted 37 screwdrivers, 12 putty knives and eight hammers. I stopped counting the exorbitant number of pliers and wrenches. I think I have three different socket sets and plenty of drill bits, but only one drill, which is a hand-me-down from my father-in-law and at least 40 years old.

My wife had bought me a pegboard to help organize this mess at least a decade ago. It was shoved behind the workbench, dusty and waiting. Comically tapping on the wall, we found studs on the wall and erected two furring strips to hold the pegboard.

By the end of the day, it was filled with tools, and the workbench below the pegboard was organized, leaving enough space on top to provide a flat place to work. Again, I laugh.

Swollen with pride, I sent a picture of the reclaimed workbench to photographer Jon Lakey, who is a skillful handyman on the side. He was impressed, and he sent back a closeup photo of a three-pronged electrical adapter in his own toolbox. It looked like a surprised face, and Jon added, “Even the plug adapter is shocked.”

Smart aleck.

I write about our workbench because we're heading into a good part of the year — Thanksgiving, Hanukkah and Christmas — to take stock of the tools we have, reorganize, throw some things out and delight in finding items we had all along.

This year has been something. We never anticipated a deadly pandemic, months of quarantine, masks, social distancing, shutdowns, cancellations and the effect an invisible virus could have on jobs, schools, churches, sports, businesses, nonprofits, the medical community, rites of passage and, of course, our lives and health.

We lost too many of our neighbors.

Throw in politics, weather, fires, earthquakes and civil discord, and we had a year that revealed the best

in us and the worst in us. 2020 has pummeled us with at least eight hammers.

But as with every year — pandemic or no pandemic — our survival, resilience and ability to go forward often come down to family, friends and faith. These tools have always been on our workbench, as has our capacity to care for one another.

So let's do that, no matter what shape the holidays take in 2020.

I hope you enjoy this Holiday issue of *Salisbury the Magazine*. This whole, crazy year would not have been possible without the talented photographers, writers, designers, sales personnel, advertisers and readers who have stuck with us.

I thank you. Now excuse me. I have to clean out my truck.



Mark Wineka,
Editor, Salisbury the Magazine

| *through the lens* |
by Josh Bergeron



In this long-exposure photo, a stream flows over rocks near the small town of Hot Springs, which is located on the Appalachian Trail.

Holidays bring us kid, food and home heroes

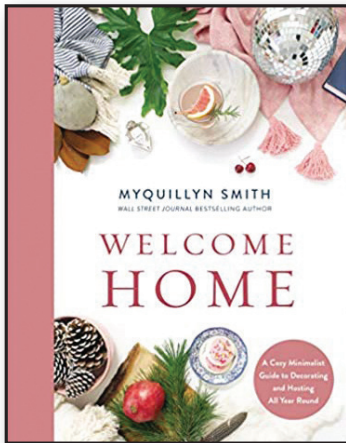
It has seemed at times 2020 would never end, and yet it has flown by all the same. I hope literature has brought comfort to you and your family during this most “interesting” of years.



by ALISSA REDMOND

Here are a few new titles I cannot wait to pass on to others as we celebrate upcoming holidays with a renewed focus on the most important things in our lives — quality moments with those we love. Each title listed below was written

by a fellow North Carolinian, in keeping with the year’s general theme of staying close to home.



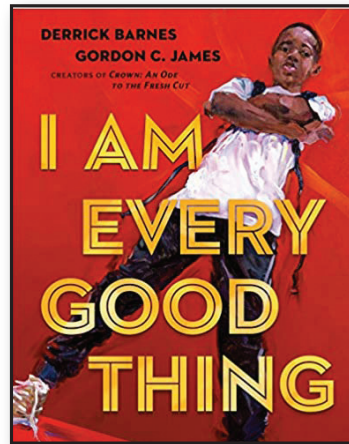
Myquillyn Smith, a stylist from the Charlotte area, has published her latest, **Welcome Home** (208 pages, Zondervan), which can serve as your guide to creating and enjoying a seasonally decorated home with more style and less stuff.

Drawing from principles outlined in her 2018 bestseller, *Cozy Minimalist Home*, Smith utilizes engaging how-to’s and inspiring photos to walk you through purposeful design decisions to cultivate a space where loved ones gather, meaningful connections are celebrated, and lasting memories are made.

This would make a great hostess gift, or subtle hint to those friends and family whom you hope

to spark joy within — while they declutter their living space.

For the kids, the incredible local team of Derrick Barnes (author) and Gordon C. James (illustrator) has produced **I Am Every Good Thing** (Margaret K. McElderry Books), which includes heartwarming drawings of families living



in our own community.

This gorgeous book has already drawn nationwide praise from Drew Barrymore among others; Barnes and James were featured during one of Barrymore’s first segments as the host of her eponymous talk show.

*I am
a nonstop ball of energy.
Powerful and full of light.
I am a go-getter. A difference maker. A leader.*

The confident young narrator of this picture book, perfect for a 4- to 8-year-old, is proud of everything that makes him who he is. He has big plans, and he will see them through as he is creative, adventurous, smart, funny and a good friend.

Sometimes he falls, but he always gets back up. Other times he is afraid, as he is so often misunderstood and called names. The moral of this story is to slow down and really listen to others, to notice the signs when someone reveals to you the truth of who they are.

We expect to soon have signed copies in the store of Vivian Howard’s latest cookbook, **This**



Will Make It Taste Good: Recipes and Stories from My Kitchen (Voracious). Howard’s first cookbook, *Deep Run Roots*, chronicled food from her home of eastern North Carolina and was named one of the best of 2016 by such publications as the New York Times, USA Today and Bon Appetit.

Here, Howard returns with a mission to make simple food exciting and accessible, no matter your skill level in the kitchen. Each chapter of *This Will Make It Taste Good* highlights a different “flavor hero” — a simple but powerful recipe like her briny green sauce, spiced nuts, fruit preserves, deeply caramelized onions and spicy pickled tomatoes.

Many of these recipes are kitchen crutches, dead-easy, super-quick meals to lean on when limping toward dinner. Nothing is complicated, and more than half the dishes are vegetarian, gluten-free, or both.

And because food is the language Howard uses to talk about her life, these recipes are accompanied by stories that offer a glimpse at the people, challenges and lessons learned that stock the pantry of her life. **S**

These titles are available at Salisbury’s independent bookstore, South Main Book Company, located at 110 S. Main St. Call 704-630-9788 or email southmainbookcompany@gmail.com to confirm store hours and events. Alissa Redmond is the owner of this store.

Stepping up

Jenny Lee says we all have a gift within us — to care for others

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK WINEKA

Jenny Lee returned home in 2018 to serve as executive director of Rowan County United Way.

She came to the job after serving as grant coordinator for the Lucille W. Gotham Intergenerational Community Center at East Carolina University, where she earlier had earned a master's degree in social work.

She also has been executive director of Rebuilding Together in Pitt County and program manager for the Good Shepherd Center in Wilmington.

Lee is a 2005 graduate of East Rowan High School and daughter of Steven and Sheila Lee of Salisbury. She earned her bachelor's degree in social work from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. Beyond her master's, Lee also has completed Duke University's Nonprofit Management Program.

This year, besides establishing a COVID-19 Relief Fund, the United Way is conducting its annual fall campaign to raise \$1.5 million, which provides grant funding for 19 Rowan County programs addressing widespread community needs.

Lee, 33, has two daughters, Hazel, 6, and Stevie, 4. She belongs to Shiloh Reformed Church of Faith, the Salisbury Rotary Club, the Rowan County Juvenile Prevention Council and is a FEMA board member. The United Way in Rowan has four staff members.

"We are a small but mighty team," Lee says.

Salisbury the Magazine recently caught up with this Rowan Original for a quick Q&A:



*Jenny Lee,
executive director
of Rowan County
United Way.*

Q *This year has been like few others, of course. If there's one lesson of inspiration or hope you've taken away from it, what would that be?*

Individuals stepping up to take care of their neighbors; many have made masks for distribution, grocery shopped for those unable due to compromised immune systems, and even what we have experienced from the COVID-19 Relief Fund. Individuals, churches, civic groups and so many others rallied together to support our local nonprofits and those seeking vital services.

In effect, the Rowan County United Way has waged two campaigns this year: one, an exceptional effort for COVID-19 relief; the other, its regular fall campaign for United Way Community Investment Partners.

How difficult has that been?

There are obvious challenges and barriers; however, I do believe current circumstances, because of COVID-19, will serve as a catalyst for creativity and future best practices when it comes to our annual campaign. We found that COVID has actually brought out a true sense of giving and caring for others in need. Many new givers have now contributed to both the relief fund and our annual campaign.

From what you've heard, what are some of the particular problems in the community that the pandemic has made worse?

This pandemic has touched everyone to some degree or another. Families are now suffering from job loss, childcare issues, inability to pay for bills and food and making tough decisions they never imagined. Communities have seen a rise in domestic violence, overdoses and suicide rates. These issues have always been prevalent but are more pressed upon now due to the strain of the pandemic.

Who do you think have been among the biggest heroes in Rowan County during the COVID-19 crisis?

One hundred percent frontline workers and first responders who put their lives at risk every day. Our Health Department and Emergency Services have continued to work tirelessly to stay at the forefront of this pandemic locally. Nonprofits continue to provide services to those most fragile and those who now find themselves in unforeseen compromised positions. Lastly, our educators who place the well-being of our children as a priority despite the challenges they all face.

How would you define the spirit or act of giving?

The act of giving is something that we all have within us, within our souls. We often exude some form of giving each day without even recognizing it. Something as small as giving a smile to a stranger you pass on the streets, offering a hand when someone needs it, or donating time and money to a special cause. We all have this unique and special gift within us to naturally care for others. It is simply about deciding what gifts you choose to share and how they align with the needs of others. It is always important to remember that no gift is too small and they often can be enjoyed more than once!

What are some of your outside hobbies or interests?

Pre-COVID, it was definitely going to concerts with friends and enjoying live music together. Now that is no longer an option (and yes, I was totally lucky enough to go to two shows earlier in the year). I find myself enjoying the good ol' country life and doing landscaping projects and working in the yard around our home. Most recently, we became proud chicken owners and I can express that has been an interesting journey.

Who has been a big inspiration in your life and why?

This is tough, as so many have left an imprint

on my life throughout the years whether personally or professionally. From my parents, friends, colleagues, professors or mentors, so many have helped to guide and shape me into the person I am now and continue to be. However, if I had to select just one person that really made a pivotal impact on my life, it would be a former professor at UNC-Wilmington, Deborah Bowen. She introduced me to the world of community development through social work, and not only her teachings but her life experiences and belief in me pushed me in a lifelong direction that changed me forever.

Name a couple of books and/or movies that are among your favorites.

I do love any literature around European history, such as the "Wars of the Roses." For movies, "Gone with the Wind" is and has been one of my favorite movies since I was a child. There is something about Scarlett's character that has always intrigued me. She starts out as a young, selfish and pretentious girl but then, when faced with adversity, she does unimaginable things to survive and to build the life that she so desperately desires.

What are one or two of your guilty pleasures when it comes to food?

I am big lover of most foods, but when it comes to guilty pleasures, it would definitely be my weakness for sweets, especially ice cream. And salt. I know it is bad for me, but I just find myself adding it to everything!

Give me five words to describe Rowan County:

I have always said Rowan County has a strong heartbeat but I suppose more specifically our county is innovative, charming, proud, resilient, and most importantly, home.

What's your pet peeve?

Not using your turn signals! I just can't wrap my head around it — it is literally one of the only ways our vehicles have to communicate to one another. So use it! **S**



Green bean casserole, made with fresh mushrooms and a rich sauce.



Left: No green bean casserole is complete without a sprinkling of fried onions. *Right:* You can prepare these casseroles a day ahead and then bake them all at 350 degrees. From left, the green bean casserole, a corn and bacon casserole, and on the lower shelf, a casserole of apples and butternut squash, topped with pecans.

The real dish

*With only a few great ingredients,
these holiday casseroles show off your cooking talents*

WRITTEN BY DEIRDRE PARKER SMITH / PHOTOGRAPHY BY JON C. LAKEY

The word “casserole” conjures up certain images for everyone. They warm us in cold weather, comfort us when we’re grieving, and make us smile when they show up on the holiday table.

They’re the first things to go at potluck dinners, if we ever get to have those again. And casseroles are a chance to show off what we can do with a few ingredients. But remember this — a casserole is only as good as what you put in it, so don’t think of it as, “I have some stuff in the fridge that’s getting old, I should do something with it.” If garbage goes in, well ...

Holiday casseroles are special, like grandma’s macaroni and cheese, or that ubiquitous, but irresistible hash brown casserole. And what self-respecting holiday meal doesn’t have a green bean casserole with those crispy onions on top?

Story continues on page 16.



Top left: Sprinkle some parsley on the green bean casserole to add color. *Above left:* Sauté the pecans for the butternut squash casserole in butter, then add brown sugar for a crispy topping. *Right:* The butternut squash and apple casserole, topped with the pecans, is an alternative to a sweet potato side dish.

BUTTERNUT SQUASH AND APPLE CASSEROLE

- 3 pounds butternut squash (about 3 cups)
- ¼ cup butter
- ½ tsp. salt
- Pinch of black pepper
- 2 Tbsp. butter
- 6 cups sliced, peeled apples
- 2 Tbsp. brown sugar
- ½ cup chopped pecans
- 2½ Tbsp. brown sugar
- 2 Tbsp. melted butter

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Cut squash (you may need two, depending on size) in half and remove seeds. Place on a baking sheet lined with aluminum foil. Roast squash for

about 30 minutes, until tender. Allow to cool slightly and scoop out the flesh. Mash with ¼ cup butter, the salt and pepper. Alternatively, you can buy already cut squash and roast; the time will be slightly less.

Heat 2 Tbsp. butter in a large skillet over low heat; stir in sliced apples and sprinkle with 2 Tbsp. brown sugar. Cover and cook until barely tender, about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Spread the apples in a 3-quart casserole and spoon the mashed squash over the apples.

In the same skillet, melt the 2½ Tbsp. butter and add the pecans and sugar, cooking briefly, being careful not to let it burn.

Top the squash and apples with the pecan mixture. Cook until heated through and pecans begin to brown, 20 minutes or more, if needed.

The squash can be roasted and mashed and

the apples can be cooked the day before baking. Make nut topping before baking, add topping and cook at 350 for 25-30 minutes.

FRESH GREEN BEAN CASSEROLE

- 1 pound fresh green beans, ends snapped off
- 8 Tbsp. butter, divided
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 8 ounces mushrooms, sliced
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 2½ cups half and half
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. pepper
- 2 Tbsp. flour
- 2 cups fried onions
- ½ cup Parmesan cheese, grated



Above: Use scissors to snip chives to top the bacon and corn casserole. **Above right:** Top the sautéed apples with the mashed butternut squash, spreading evenly. **Right:** Remove the butternut squash and apple casserole from the oven when it is heated through and the pecans begin to brown.



In a large skillet, heat 4 Tbsp. butter over medium-high heat. Add chopped onion and cook until tender, 7-8 minutes, stirring often. Add mushrooms and cook for 4 minutes longer. Stir in garlic and cook 1 minute, until fragrant. Transfer mixture to a bowl.

Using the same skillet over medium heat, add 4 Tbsp. butter and flour and mix quickly so no lumps form. Let cook, stirring often, for about 2 minutes. Stir in half and half, salt and pepper. Cook 4-5 minutes until mixture thickens.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Bring a large pot of water to a boil and cook green beans for 6-7 minutes. Drain.

Add onion mushroom mixture to cream sauce and stir, then add green beans, and stir to mix well. Pour into a 9-by-9-inch baking dish and sprinkle with Parmesan cheese. Bake 25 minutes, until bubbly. Remove from oven and top with fried onions, Cook 5 minutes longer and serve.

You may use frozen or canned green beans, but do not need to cook them first.

CORN CASSEROLE WITH BACON

- 6 bacon strips
- ½ cup chopped onion
- 2 Tbsp. flour

- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- ½ tsp. salt
- ½ tsp. pepper
- 1 cup sour cream
- 3½ cups fresh or frozen corn kernels
- 1 Tbsp. chopped fresh parsley
- 1 Tbsp. minced chives

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

In a large skillet, cook bacon until crisp. Drain, reserving 2 Tbsp. of drippings. Crumble bacon, set aside.

Sauté onion in bacon drippings until tender. Add flour, garlic, salt and pepper and cook, stir-

ring, about 1 minute. Remove from heat and stir in sour cream until smooth. Add corn, parsley and half the bacon. Mix well.

Put into a 1-quart baking dish. Sprinkle with remaining bacon. Bake, uncovered, for 20-25 minutes, or until heated through. Sprinkle with chives.

This is a thick, rich mixture that will coat all of the corn.

Variation: Add one small can mild diced green chilies to the corn and sour cream mixture. Top with ½ cup grated cheddar cheese and the bacon.


This recipe can be doubled easily.

Nobody wants to change up that precious holiday menu everyone's been looking forward to all year, but sometimes a new dish introduces itself and becomes the new party guest.

Casseroles have been around ever since human beings created their first earthenware pots. Casseroles were common pots, with everyone eating from them.

Food historians say the first casserole was likely made of pounded, pressed rice filled with some kind of meat. It's always been a dish that stretches ingredients.

The word casserole is French, meaning a sauce pan, and that word has Latin origins. The first written recipe for a casserole comes from the 13th or 14th century, from a French cookbook, and it describes an early form of lasagna — strips of pasta layered with cheese.

We're not offering lasagna here, but a few recipes with favorite ingredients — squash, apples, corn, bacon, and yes, green beans and French-fried onions. They're easy and flavorful. Enjoy! 

Top the squash and apple casserole with pecans that have been warmed in melted butter with brown sugar.



Deirdre Parker Smith is a freelance writer living in Spencer. A big thank-you goes to District Court Judge Beth Dixon for allowing Salisbury the Magazine to use her kitchen at the Fulton-Mock-Blackmer-Dixon House on South Fulton Street to photograph these casseroles.



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The Halls — all decked out

Couple's house along the Yadkin River takes on a holiday radiance

WRITTEN BY MARK WINEKA
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JON C. LAKEY



On any day of the year, the Yadkin River home of Ann and Reggie Hall in Spencer has a muscular quality to it.

The mix of stone, columns and arching windows make for a dramatic statement, going along with the house's sheer size of 6,000 square feet. Boaters passing on the river sometimes call it the Yadkin Castle.

Even with their 17 acres of built-in isolation off River Ranch Road, the Halls still go all out in decorating the house and grounds for friends and family who visit at Christmas. And they do it all themselves.

"Between the two of us, we make it happen," Ann says. "We make it work. It's fun knowing we did it together."

She relies heavily on Reggie's 50 years of experience as a machinist. He can build things, put things together and frame out anything Ann needs. He depends on Ann's artistic eye for how it's all displayed.

"She goes out and buys stuff and says, 'Make it happen,' " Reggie says, smiling.

The Halls' Christmas spirit starts at their front iron gate, bought at an antique shop in Myrtle Beach. The stone pillars

holding the gate are decorated with giant wreaths, and lighted toy soldiers stand sentry there and along the paved, winding drive leading to the house.

The Halls have their own custom street lights, and signs at Christmas designate their interior arteries as North Pole Road and Gingerbread Street. They provide a "Fairyland" halfway down the drive for the grandchildren to visit. It's a small shanty and at Christmas it happens to hold presents from the fairies, who make their deliveries after Santa.

Visitors can't help but be impressed with the main house as they drive up, "but I actually think it's prettier on the back side (river side) than the front," Ann says. At night, from the river, the house is aglow thanks to its walls of windows reflecting the lights of Christmas.

In her holiday preparations, Ann walks around the outside of the house with her iPad, taking photos and deciding where to put lights for the best reflections at night and how best to play off the shadows and sunlight.

"It's just fun to see how it changes," she says, watching it through the day.

Ann acknowledges the couple's outside decorations may

Ann Hall's art room includes the framed Christmas tree she made from costume jewelry.



seem muted, compared to what's inside. But that's mostly due to their home's not being visible from the main road. Some years back, she started collecting plastic blow-mold figures, and they set those out on the river side of the house where she can see their warm lights from the bedroom at night.

"I'm going to really hate taking those up," she says.

Inside, Ann's overriding holiday themes become apparent quickly.

"You can tell I love trees and houses and anything crystal," she says. "I'm really just into glass."

Pinocchio finds a good spot for reading on the stairs.

When she walks the beach on vacation, Ann collects sea glass and brings it home. And you quickly notice the house's stained glass, virtually all of it crafted by her, including 525 pieces in the stained-glass dome above the Christmas table near the kitchen.

Pass through the beveled-glass cathedral front doors, which have diamond-shaped crystals in the center, and your eyes meet a lavish holiday entrance display, which is a study in white. It has snow-covered trees, flowers, snow owls, a polar bear, Santa, a white squirrel and reindeer.

It all leads into the Halls' formal living room with a 20-foot-high wall of windows on the river side and, around a working fireplace, stands a hand-carved Indonesian mantel resting on a giant granite base. "It took five guys to bring that stone in," Reggie says, recalling how they had to reinforce the floor.

A crystal castle and trees provide a coffee table centerpiece. Ann did the embroidery on the sofa, which sits under the large windows.

Some years, you might see the Halls' 12-foot Christmas tree. Reggie says he spent more on the

Story continues on page 23.



Above: A beautifully decorated coffee table.

Right: When it comes to decorating their big house for Christmas, Reggie and Ann Hall make a good team.

Below: Nesting Santa dolls from Europe.





*Above: The massive fireplace and mantel in the den affords plenty of space for things Ann Hall has collected. **Below left:** Ann Hall loves anything that's glass. **Bottom right:** The kitchen's garden window holds a gingerbread collection.*





ladder to reach it than on the tree itself. “It takes three boxes to store it,” he adds. “It does look good in there.”

A couple of years ago, Ann had 30 Christmas trees on display in the Halls’ spacious house. “... When I put the (LED) lights on, it was like ‘Christmas Vacation.’ I thought, what have I done?”

Reggie finally complained. “I’m too old for that,” he says.

Still, Ann doesn’t exactly hold back.

“You feel like you’ve got the space, and if family comes, you got to put something here,” Ann says.

The couple usually start putting up their Christmas decorations before Thanksgiving. “Once you get them up you want to enjoy them for a while,” Ann explains. “I’m not really a Christmas person, I just like to decorate. Every single thing that you see, these two hands have done it, and I’m not too much into the traditional red and green Christmas. I go white and black more often.”

The Halls’ house seems to be filled with elegant holiday surprises in every room, around every corner, and even to the elf-filled Christmas tree on the screened-in porch, one of their favorite places looking out toward the river.

A life-sized Pinocchio — bought at Salisbury Square — reads a book on the stairs. Or look for all of Ann’s gingerbread houses in the kitchen’s garden window. Christmas trees sport Old World ornaments and Annalee elves. Down a hall, Ann has filled two levels of long tables with all of her ceramic buildings, making up a village pleasantly lit at night.

Many of the ornaments and sit-arounds come from destinations Ann has visited around the world, such as a replica of the 15th century Charles Bridge in Prague — “the coldest place I’ve ever been,” Ann says. “I like things that remind me of places.”

The Halls have been to Italy twice, Ireland, France, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary,

Above: The Yadkin River side of the Halls’ house is all aglow for the holidays. Right: Ann loves this tree on the screened-in porch.





Alaska and all over the Caribbean.

Ann halfway apologizes for all the Department 56 ceramics she has — way too many, she says, but she got a good deal from a friend, and the European scenes mix with Americana — ceramic buildings such as a Walmart, Krispy Kreme and a pizza parlor. A sign says, “You Are Now in Bedford Falls,” a tip of the hat to the movie “It’s A Wonderful Life.”

Top: *The Halls’ dining room china sits on blue charger plates and a handmade lace tablecloth from Budapest.*

Left: *The stunning front doors come even more alive at Christmas.*

“I tell everyone that’s my neighborhood, because I don’t have any neighbors.” Ann says.

The nesting Santa dolls on one table come from Europe, and make note that whatever you see is not hand-me-down stuff. Ann has purchased most everything somewhere in her travels — Calabash to the Caribbean to Central Europe — or made it herself. As for the crafted items, Ann says, “I came from a large family, and if you wanted something, you had to learn to make it yourself.”

Her art room upstairs is a good example. An easel holds a framed Christmas tree Ann fashioned 25 years ago out of antique and costume jewelry. It’s a showpiece. Also upstairs, but not necessarily decorated for Christmas, is

Reggie’s pool room/man cave, the envy of many visitors.

Over the holidays, the dining room features a formal table setting with pink china on blue charger plates. Beautifully decorated cloth napkins flow from white Christmas tree holders, and not surprisingly, glass trees are the centerpiece. It all rests on a handmade lace tablecloth from Budapest.

The den, where the Halls hang out the most, is less formal but still beautifully decorated.



Above: This decorative mantel rests on a huge granite slab in the formal living room.

Right: Ann has a large collection of ceramics, which make a nice Christmas village.



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A cozy sofa.



Above: *Gingerbread decorations strike a sentimental chord with Ann.*
Right: *The dramatic entrance to the Halls' home.*



A North Rowan High graduate, Ann operated a beauty shop for 20 years and taught cosmetology at Rowan-Cabarrus Community College. She knows a lot about skin, massages, aroma therapy and reflexology, besides being a talented artist.

She also worked several years for the late Dr. John Crawford, a Salisbury ophthalmologist. For at least 10 years, Ann says, Crawford would take his staff to Grove Park Inn every January, when the Christmas decorations were still in place. She loved the gingerbread houses there. When her mother turned 90, Ann and her sister took her to see those gingerbreads, so those adornments in her own house carry a lot of memories.

Married since 1984, the Halls designed and built this house almost 16 years ago. It took 18 months to finish, and the couple often camped out on the property over the weekends. They first lived at Elm and Stanley streets in Salisbury, where Ann had a beauty shop in the basement.

Reggie, a Boyden High and Rowan Technical School graduate, owns and operates Rowan Precision Machining. He does a lot of custom work for manufacturers, and as the main machinist, he helped to rebuild and

make parts for the 611 engine during its restoration at the N.C. Transportation Museum.

Reggie graduated on a Sunday at age 19 from Rowan Tech, went to work the next day and has been working ever since. His career stops have included Salisbury Machine Shop, Brad Ragan, Grinnell, Ideal Tool & Die, N.C. Machinery Parts and Rowan Precision Machining, which his father owned in Granite Quarry. Now Reggie's shop is not far from the river house.

Reggie fashioned much of the custom wrought iron for their home, which stands where the Cruse family once had a boathouse and it's close to a Spencer church's Boy Scout hut.

"I knew what I wanted to have, but you have to make it yourself," Ann says of how all the things came together for their Yadkin castle, and that includes whatever you do for Christmas. "Anyplace I have lived I have tried to make it look like a magazine."

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BARGERS AND THEIR FRIENDS MAKE RABBIT
HUNTING A THANKSGIVING TRADITION

written by MARK WINEKA | photography by JON C. LAKEY



*Jeff Barger releases the dogs,
eager to get going on the
morning hunt.*



Off in the distance, some of the Barger's beagles are yelping, likely catching the scent of a rabbit. Jeff Barger stops for a moment to savor the sound.

"It's just fun to hear the dogs run," he says. "As my grandfather would say, 'Boys, ain't that some pretty music?' That statement is so true. It's pretty music."

Barger is wearing an old sweatshirt that carries a picture of his late grandfather Leon, who some 60 years ago started this tradition of rabbit hunting on Thanksgiving Day morning, then going home for a big family feast early in the afternoon.

The family dubbed the ritual the "Barger Bunny Banger." One year, someone filmed their rabbit-hunting exploits, and when it came time to give the video a title, "Barger Bunny Banger" was it.

The story passed down now by generations says the name came from the moment when a neighbor asked Leon where he was going on Thanksgiving morning, and he answered he was going to "bang a bunny."

The picture of Leon on Jeff Barger's sweatshirt shows him wearing his worn-out blue toboggan (knit cap) with a yellow stripe and smoking a cigar.



Above: Garrett Barger offers a hunting tip to his son, Ridge. Below: Mallory Maycock and Daniel Moose keep to a trail.



Jeff Barger encourages the dogs to keep checking out this thicket.

“It was cold that day,” remembers Buddy Barger, Leon’s son, who is wearing a ballcap identifying him as one of the Barger Bunny Bangers.

Buddy is now patriarch of the family, and he represents one of four generations of Bangers on this particular hunt.

“It means a lot to us,” says Randall Barger, a son. “The kids enjoy it, and we enjoy it. ... This is our Thanksgiving tradition.”

The four generations of Bangers hunting include Buddy; his sons Randall, Jeff and Cory; Cory’s son, Caleb; Jeff’s son, Derrick; Randall’s son, Garrett; and Garrett’s sons, Keegan and Ridge.

But there are others making up the morning’s group of 15 rabbit hunters.

Moose family members also are regulars on the hunt. Jake Moose, Buddy’s first cousin, has brought his daughter Amanda and son Daniel, along with Daniel’s girlfriend, Mallory Maycock.

Todd Lingle and his daughter, Anna, also are part of the tradition.

Randall Barger calls Todd Lingle “a brother from another mother” because of their longtime friendship. A lot of these same people also have been taking fishing trips to the coast for some 35 years.

One of the guns Lingle carried along for

this hunt was his first shotgun as a boy. “It has missed a lot, and it has killed a lot,” he says of his original 20-gauge.

Most everybody started hunting when they were much younger. Amanda Moose shot her first rabbit on one of these hunts. The Barger Bunny Banger used to go to Mount Pleasant to hunt on Thanksgiving, but lately the location of choice is John Peeler’s property in Davie County, not terribly far from Greasy Corners at U.S. 601.

Everyone meets for a quick breakfast at the Bojangles’ near West End Plaza in Salisbury, then they caravan to the hunting spot.

When he was 6 or 7, Cory remembers, it was



Amanda Moose stops for a moment to chat with Buddy Barger, patriarch of his family and this hunt.

so cold on a hunt that Jeff had to build a fire to warm Cory's feet.

"You were always cold," Randall complains to Cory, and it serves as evidence throughout the morning that the Barger boys give each other a hard time. It's brotherly love.

The Bargers tend to look on Jeff as the real rabbit hunter, or at least the hardest working. He's always in the thicket, trying to scare up some rabbits. Much of the time, he doesn't even have a rifle, just a good, long stick. "The rest of us are road huggers," someone says.

Garrett Barger compares it to a government job. One guy works, while the others stand around and wait for the action.

Jake and Daniel Moose brought two beagles: Bo and Holly. It's the dogs' first year hunting, and Jake says Bo did especially well during his two weeks of training at a dog college near Yadkinville.

"I don't know how he's going to do now," Jake says.



Keegan Barger waits for the dogs to flush a rabbit.



Randall Barger makes a point.



Above: Buddy Barger brought five of his beagles: Belle, Suzy, Frisky, Trouble and Daisy.

Below: Coming off a year when he had a knee replaced and pacemaker installed, Buddy Barger brought along his golf cart.

“If they ever jump one and get them going, that will get them fired up, hopefully.”

Buddy brought five of his beagles: Belle, Suzy, Frisky, Trouble and Daisy.

“Sometimes the dogs don’t cooperate,” Randall says as an early warning that would prove prophetic.

Buddy Barger has brought along a golf cart for some of the longer, back trails ahead. He still participates in the hunt, but he needs his golf cart more than usual because over the previous year he has had a pacemaker installed and a knee replaced.

“But he enjoys hearing the dogs runs as much as we do,” Randall Barger says.

As usual, Buddy keeps a bag of roasted peanuts in his golf cart, and it’s not uncommon for the hunters to stop by and grab some. On this hunt, Garrett Barger has brought along a video camera, and he’s taking footage of the family rabbit hunt that he hopes to put on YouTube as an episode.

“Sometimes we don’t call these hunts, we call them adventures,” Cory Barger adds.

From the beginning, things don’t go well for the hunters or the dogs.

“Get in here, let’s go!” Randall yells to the closest beagles, who seem to want to check out everything but the thickets.

“Most of the time, we jump two by the time we get to this spot,” says a discouraged hunter.

“Normally, down here,” Randall adds, “we jump a lot.”



Soon, there seems to be some action.

“Hey, hey, hey, hey,” Jeff Barger yells from the briars, confident he has jumped a rabbit.

“He must still be in there,” Caleb Barger yells back.

“They (the dogs) should pick it up right there,” Jeff reports, but nothing happens.

“They’re not doing so good,” Garrett Barger says of the dogs.

It’s not too long afterward that the young beagles start hollering and head off in another direction.

“They’re not off on a deer, are they?” Cory Barger asks. “Once they’re off on a deer, they’re gone.”

The hunters and dogs come up with nothing during the first 20 minutes, which is unusual.

“Pop, what do you want to do?” Randall Barger calls out to Buddy Barger.

All they can do is to move on, hoping their luck is better farther back on Peeler’s property.

As an aside, Randall adds, “Some rabbit seasons you jump a lot; others, not so much.”

The hunters will tell you that coyotes, foxes and hawks have combined to hurt the rabbit population. Peeler, who stops by at one point to make sure Buddy has whatever documentation he needs to be hunting on the land, reports he saw a red-tailed hawk poised like a sentry over the field just the day before.



This old truck saw as many rabbits as the hunters.



Left: Randall and Buddy Barger plot a new strategy for the hunt. Right: Jeff Barger wore an old sweatshirt with a picture of his grandfather Leon, who started the Thanksgiving hunts.



From left, the hunting entourage included Mallory Maycock, Jake Moose, Daniel Moose, Amanda Moose, Garrett Barger, Ridge Barger, Keegan Barger, Randall Barger, Buddy Barger, Anna Lingle, Derrick Barger, Todd Lingle, Jeff Barger, Cory Barger and Caleb Barger.

And coyotes also have been in this area, he confirms.

You look for other reasons why you're not seeing rabbits. The barometric pressure might not be right. Or the magnolia leaves from all the trees on this former nursery property might be throwing off the dogs.

The bad luck continues as the hunters and dogs push on.

A frustrated Jeff Barger looks for some help. "Y'all need to do something different," he yells, trying to rally the troops. "I've jumped the only two that have been jumped."

At one point, with the 15 hunters and seven dogs gathered in one area, a hunter calls out to any rabbit that might be listening, "We've got you surrounded."

"Come out with your hands up," Jake Moose adds.

After a while, the hunting party resigns itself



to a bad day, but Randall says it's still good to hang out with family and friends in the great outdoors.

"This is a rabbit hunt," Jake Moose says, "but it's a social thing, too."

Todd Lingle looks at it this way: "A bad day hunting beats a good day at work," he says.

In the end, not a shot is fired, save for a successful target shot Ridge Barger made at a hanging bottle of water. Chalk this hunt up to the rabbits.

Has the Barger Bunny Banger ever been skunked?

"It's been a long time," Randall says.

Buddy Barger acknowledges his dogs didn't do well, and it was something he expected. He had replaced three of his veteran dogs, "and I should have waited until they (the new dogs) were running better," he says.

Jake Moose is somewhat philosophical.

"It looks like Jeff is the best dog we've had today," he says. "He's jumped more than the dogs have — but that didn't come from me."

The hunters get back to Rowan County in




Todd Lingle and his daughter, Anna.

plenty of time for an early Thanksgiving dinner.

For stretches during rabbit season to come, the Bargers and friends go hunting about every Saturday. In fact, the hunters and the dogs had much better success in Rowan County on a following weekend.

"We went Saturday and jumped 13 or more

rabbits," Randall Barger reports. "The dogs ran all day. What a difference."

Now that's a Barger Bunny Banger. 

Randall Barger says his group is always looking for good places to hunt rabbits. If you know of one, he can be contacted at randall.bar42@yahoo.com.

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THE 'WOW' FACTOR

DESIGNER KIM HARDIMAN SAYS 'PUT A LITTLE
TWINKLE IN YOUR DAYS'

written by MARK WINEKA | photography by JON C. LAKEY



Kim Hardiman has her ladder and tool bag ready to go as she decorates the living room of Becky and David Preslar.



Above: A heavily adorned palmetto tree at the lake. Below: A fireplace display at the home of Kris and Randy Hall.





Hardiman puts finishing touches on a holiday window display for Barnhardt Jewelers.



During the weeks leading up to the holidays, interior designer Kim Hardiman is covered in glitter. It's an occupational hazard.

"Everybody should twinkle in November and December," says Hardiman, whose business, Hardiman Design, does staging, color consultations, furniture selections, window treatments, accessories, artwork and interior design for new construction and existing homes.



But come the latter part of the year, longtime friends, family and customers turn to Hardiman for help with their Christmas decorations, and it becomes one of her busiest times.

Homeowners seek her help with decorating inside and out. Storeowners rely on her expertise for their front display windows. You could say she also specializes in Christmas trees, decorating upwards of 60 each season.

“That’s the good thing about my job,” Hardiman says. “Everybody is different, and they just let me loose to do my thing.”

Year to year, she always looks to add a new twist to things. Clients like the element of surprise, she says.

Last year, Hughes Supply called in Hardiman. The business had not decorated for Christmas in years. Hardiman put Santa in one of the display floor’s tubs, taking a bubble bath.

“The plumbers were getting a kick out of that,” she says.

Hardiman does everything in many of the places she returns to regularly. She unpacks the decorations, puts them up, takes them down and

Above: Kim Hardiman, left, with her sister, Kris Hall. Hardiman spent four days decorating Kris’ home for the holidays. Below: A handsome nativity scene in the Preslars’ home.





A holiday reindeer stands watch outside the Hall's house.

stores them away.

Kim had helped Becky and David Preslar do a complete, two-year makeover of the eastern Rowan County home where the couple have lived 32 years. Becky, who describes that work as transformative, then asked Hardiman back last year to help with decorating at Christmas.

"I had some stuff, and she shopped for some more stuff," Becky says. "I told Kim I don't know that I can just use my same old things."

But the Preslars had some good items to work with, including handblown Chris Radko and Old World ornaments. Hardiman added a distinctive tree topper and ribbons to the Preslars' tree, and Becky also turned over the living room mantel to her.

"I'm going to get fired," Becky said as they worked on hanging the ornaments together. "Kim's faster than me."

With the tree topper, Hardiman started with single pieces called picks and designed a masterpiece one pick at a time. "You just start putting it together," she said.

After working on the tree and mantel, Hardiman started moving the pieces of a nativity scene onto the top of an antique ice box. Simple changes can make a difference.

Hardiman makes a lot of her bows, wreaths and tree-toppers at home before heading out for the next job.

"It's a labor of love — a God-given talent," she



Above: A steel tree proves strong enough to hold the explosion of decorations Kris Hall has.

Left: Hardiman reaches into her holiday tool bag.

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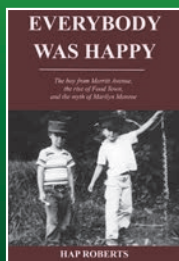
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Becky Preslar readies her Chris Radko and Old World ornaments on a bed to help Hardiman decide their placement on the tree.

said of trying to explain her decorating acumen. “I did a quick audit of what Becky and David had, and we’ve just added a few things to the collection.”

Elsewhere, Hardiman also found yuletide ways to incorporate the Preslars’ collection of seashells from the couple’s treasured trips to Santa Belle Island. In addition, she included her homemade bows on outside wreaths, railings and the mailbox and set up the dining room table for the holidays.

“So many people want their table set formal for Christmas — and Thanksgiving, as well,” Hardiman said.

Becky Preslar said Hardiman is fun to work with: “She’s not pushy, but she gets you outside that box.”



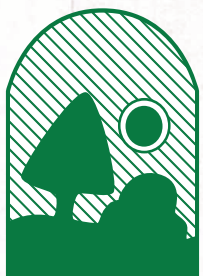


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for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy
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Hardiman and her sister, Kris, are surrounded by Christmas in the living room of Kris' High Rock Lake home.

Hardiman emphasized, however, “it’s not all about what I want them to have.” She asks many of her homeowners to do a lot of their own research on what they’re after. Hardiman added she’s up front with her clients, and they in turn trust her with their Christmas keepsakes.

“But I have to be honest with them when I see something bad,” she said.

Hardiman has a monogrammed DeWalt tool bag for her holiday decorating work, and she always has a ladder handy. A tote bag, decorated with Santa’s belt, holds other stuff necessary for her holiday work.

“This is where the magic comes out of,” she said of the tool bag.

Before she starts a holiday decorating job, Hardiman takes out a pink magic wand and waves it majestically in the air for good luck.

“You’ve got to have a little twinkle in your days,” Hardiman said.

“She got it out first thing this morning,” Becky Preslar noted.

• • •

At Barnhardt Jewelers, still located last year at its longtime spot in Spencer, Hardiman routinely does the Christmas window displays, as she does for several other stores.

On this particular holiday, she incorporated a “Nutcracker” soldier, snowflakes, candy canes, prisms, glimmering Christmas balls and strands of lights that resemble diamonds and a gift box that said, “This holiday,



all that glitters is good.”

“Anything that sparkles and twinkles I felt would be good,” Hardiman explained.

Owner Debbie Barnhardt Basinger, who has been a friend of Hardiman for some 30 years, said she never really tells Hardiman what she wants for the windows, and Hardiman said she has never duplicated any scenes.



Clockwise from above left: The stairs at the Halls' house are filled mostly with items from Glitterville; Hardiman waves her magic wand; Homeowners usually have things that make beautiful displays when put in the right locations.

Looking at this version, Hardiman said she didn't want to use the word perfect, but she acknowledged it was a nice presentation.

"Don't let her fool you," Basinger^o said. "It's perfect."

...

Hardiman enjoys color, texture and lights when it comes to Christmas decorating. She formerly worked as a visual merchandise manager for Belk until that position was eliminated.

She is the daughter of Janette and Herman Hardiman, who loved to decorate their home for Christmas, and Janette still does. Kim and her sister, Kris Hall, inherited that passion. Not so much for their brother.

"He doesn't understand all of this," Kim said, chuckling. "He just shakes his head."

One of Kim Hardiman's labors of love is helping Kris decorate her High Rock Lake home for Christmas. Last year, Hardiman took on the work inside and out, and it turned into a four-day job.

One of the centerpieces to Kris and Randy Hall's house at Christmas is a giant spiral tree made of steel, which can support the ton of decorations the sisters put on it. Looking at the huge tree, crammed with all kinds of decorations, you wonder if one more thing could be squeezed in.

"It takes about six hours to do this tree," said Hardiman, who also does a tree of 2,500 lights for Dr. Myron and Mary Goodman.

"When someone comes in," Kris said of the finished product at her house, "they say, 'Wow.'"

When you take in all of her house's decorations, it's like "a controlled explosion," Kris said, but Hardiman has the courage to mix





A corner dedicated to the Grinch.

and blend non-traditional colors and themes.

Through the years, Kris simply has bought what she likes — and that’s a multitude of things — and leaves it up to Kim to make it a bit different each year.

“It’s never the same, ever,” said Kris, an accountant at Food Lion. “I get it out and let her do her magic. She has all the talent.”

Kris has, for example, a lot of elves to work with. Various elves, some of them part of the Katherine collections, often show up in the nooks and crannies of the kitchen, dining room and family room. “This year, they’re on the tree,” Kris added.

Decorations are “toned down” a bit in the kitchen so Randy has counter space for his cooking.

Santa figures and faces are spread throughout, along with other Christmas trees, a corner dedicated to the Grinch and Whoville,

carvings, gift boxes, oversized candies, beach Christmas stuff, fairies created by Mark Roberts and outside-the-box designs from Glitterville in Tennessee, such as the majority of decorations on the stair railings.

“We stay outside the box,” Hardiman stressed.

Even the dog beds are decorated with lights. The Halls’ dalmatian dogs are Jaz and Woody.

Kris adores her Michael Simon miniature sweater tree, and many items have been bought through the years from local businesses such as Stitchin’ Post, Textile Products and Queen’s. Kris says many of her friends come by, saying, “Let’s see what Kim did this year.”

Hardiman said it’s really “go time” for her from October to the second week in January, when she packs away the last of her clients’ Christmas decorations. “My house is done the first of October,” she said. “If I don’t do mine

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first, it's not done."

She keeps a file and photos on everyone's house or business so if she returns the next year, she doesn't duplicate what she has done before. When she stores things for clients, Hardiman labels all the items and makes notes for herself where they are located. She also includes swatches of the ribbons she has used in the past.

Hardiman said she works most efficiently by herself, but she welcomes when clients want to hand her ornaments for the tree or help her in testing lights. Husbands sometimes hire her as a gift for their wives, who often are saddled with the decorating duties.

"People seeing the work I've done is my calling card," she said.

Outside, Kim also decorated and lighted the Halls' pier and lakeside decks for Christmas.


At the end of the Halls' dock, Hardiman erected a lone, lighted Christmas tree, brilliant

in its simplicity against the stark beauty of the lake.

On the house end of the long pier, a boat oar was decorated in lights to be a different kind of Christmas tree. Palmetto trees were adorned with oversized ornaments. Adirondack chairs and tables on the deck held stuffed elves and bears.

At the front of the house near the driveway, Hardiman installed a wiry pink reindeer with a black-and-white scarf (one of her favorite color combos), and the reindeer pulled a sleigh with monogrammed water skis, a black-and-white Santa's bag and "Stitches" the dalmatian — among other things.

Along the sidewalk leading to the front door, a large triangular-shaped Santa greets visitors.

"The majority of stuff I did out here I made," Hardiman said. "When you love what you do, it's not hard to work." 



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Life is good in Carolville

Salisbury woman's holiday town stokes the imagination of all who see it

WRITTEN BY MARK WINEKA
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JON C. LAKEY



Met Carol Lewis, mayor and chief planner of a city where — with apologies to Garrison Keillor and Lake Wobegon — all the women are strong, men good-looking and children above average.

Welcome to Carolville.

For the past 15 years during every holiday season, Lewis has returned to lay out the streets, erect the buildings, spread the snow, set up the lights, arrange the people and animals and create the neighborhoods and even “counties” of what is not your typical Christmas village set along model train tracks.

No, Lewis has recorded a history of Carolville for many years. She keeps minutes of town meetings and writes an annual report for her city. She knows the first Walmart arrived in 2008 or that “we built a museum of natural history in 2018” and welcomed the Lewis Candy Factory last year.

Carolville added an airport “because the train depot was simply overrun,” the imaginative mayor says.

You can read about local news in the Carolville Gazette,

grab a bite at Betty’s Diner or visit the lakefront.

Sprawling before you, Carolville seems to be both cosmopolitan and small-town America at the same time.

It has a professional football stadium, children’s hospital and entertainment district with a casino, winery, movie theater, opera house and music hall.

“But it’s still kind of a small city,” Carol says. “We have two traffic lights. The economy’s pretty good. You’ll see a lot of people shopping.”

A rural, farming area supplies the horses for town carriage rides, and the dairy provides milk delivery for Carolville residents.

The city has three churches, not counting a new cathedral.

Carol says the police station is mostly for reporting fender benders, “because we don’t have any crime in our neighborhoods.”

“Hey, I want to live in my own town,” Carol adds with a shrug.

Life is good in Carolville, and it often mesmerizes Carol’s husband, Dr. Orlando Lewis, vice president of student

A family dairy provides the milk for Carolville.



Above: Dr. Orlando Lewis and his wife, Carol, stand inside the layout of her holiday city, Carolville. Below: A couple is dressed warmly for a snowy day.

affairs at Livingstone College. He likes to walk home from the college to their house on West Marsh Street, sit down next to the city his wife has created and let his eyes wander across the landscape.

“This is my rest and relaxation here,” he says. “It’s so pretty at night. I just sit here an hour, hour-and-half, and you just escape.”

For both Carol and Orlando, the magical town is their not-so-secret getaway — peaceful and idyllic.

“I have never grown up,” 54-year-old Carol says in trying to explain her devotion to Carolville every year.

The miniature city in lights is a hit — and draw — for the couple’s three grown children, Anthony, Tyler and Lindsey and a must-see for granddaughter Destiny. Friends and special guests also stop by the house each year to see what’s new in Carolville.

“And you really put smiles on people’s faces when they come in,” Carol says.

You can’t help but note some of the details, such as raccoons rummaging through garbage near the pizza shop, or curious bears on the fringe of another neighborhood. Kids in treehouses have a good view of the city.






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Carol Lewis takes about four weeks to set up every piece of Carolville and its neighborhoods.



One of many street scenes.



A coffee and doughnut shop.



A horse farm on the outskirts of town.

| *reminisce* |

The waterfront community with its lakeside cottages, boathouse and lighthouse is reminiscent for the Lewises of the North Lake Shore area of Chicago, their longtime home.

Carol even includes sand and shells on the beach.

She points to the mayor's house, and you know she has pictured herself inside, writing those annual city reports. The town square has a wishing well, and many real wishes have gone up over that well through the years.

A local pawn shop.

"It takes me about four weeks to do it," Carol says of setting up her city each year. She keeps all the pieces stored in original boxes, many of them within 55-gallon storage bins and computer boxes.

She usually starts Halloween night and likes to have Carolville up and thriving by Thanksgiving. She keeps it up until the first week of January.

Last year in the Lewises' sunroom/dining room, the city rested on the tops of four 6-foot tables, four 5-foot tables and two 4-foot tables. Orlando



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The Lewis Candy Factory is a busy place.



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Buddies enjoy some ice-fishing on the lake.

solicits the help of a couple of Livingstone College football players in moving and setting up all the tables.

Otherwise, Carolville is a one-woman project.

“No one’s allowed to help,” Orlando says.

Carol draws up a “floor plan” and changes things around every year to serve as a guide — “not that I stick to the floor plan,” she acknowledges.

Carolville ends up with everything you can imagine: Fast-food stops such as White Castle, McDonald’s and Chick-fil-A. Department stores such as Kohl’s and Menard’s. Home improvement places such as Lowe’s and Ace Hardware.

The football stadium is a replica of Chicago’s Soldier Field, again owing to the couple’s love of the Bears and Chicago. In 2018, Carol added a fairgrounds with pony rides and a petting zoo.

There are gas stations, a five-and-dime, hotel, post office, City Hall, fire stations, fish market, furniture store, bakery, coffee house, bank, pawn shop, greenhouse, high school, parks, skating rink, bed and breakfast, toy store, flower shop, bicycle shop and even a gourmet popcorn factory and winter wonderland section.

You can go ice-fishing in Carolville.

Back in Illinois in 2005, Carol Lewis started all this with five 50-cent Victorian houses. The ceramic houses were bought as Christmas tree ornaments at the local dollar store, but they were too heavy for the Lewises’ Christmas tree.

So Carol arranged them as a village of sorts on the coffee table in front of their couch. From that point on, there was no saving her, especially after she started col-

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The farming area has plenty of animals — a delight for visiting children.



Carolville includes a replica of Chicago's Soldier Field, packed with football fans.

lecting people figures.

Carol's birthday is just three days after Christmas, so friends and family began giving her new things for Carolville as gifts for both the holiday and birthday.

Items also have come from places such as Lowe's, Kohl's, Sears and Michael's, as well as through online clubs and sites.

Orlando came to Livingstone about eight years ago, and the couple first lived on South Caldwell Street, where Carolville also prospered. When she's not serving as mayor of Carolville, Carol works as director of business services at Rowan-Cabarrus Community College.

By the way, Orlando serves as mayor pro tem of Carolville.

"He doesn't get to be mayor," Carol says.

Orlando hears this and knows it's true: "I can never unseat her." **S**



As a rule, things are quiet and peaceful in Carolville, according to its mayor.

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*Elaine Howle at her
owl-filled home in
China Grove.*

When Christmas is a hoot

An unrivaled collector knows even owls celebrate the season

WRITTEN BY MARK WINEKA
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JON C. LAKEY



Plenty of people know about Elaine Howle's affection for owls.

At her West Hillside Drive house in China Grove, every room, shelf, drawer, door, display case, cabinet and countertop holds owls, whether they be made of glass, wood, ceramic, paper mache, shells, lava or some other material.

Owls appear on her shower curtain, dish towels, refrigerator magnets, glasses, dishes, jewelry, welcome mats, bottles, letter openers, doorstops, cookie jars, trays, coasters, keys and — well, you get the drift.

She essentially lives in an owl museum. Over there is an owl mustache comb. She has stuffed toy owls. She hangs framed pictures of owls, and they show up on rugs, sleepwear, sheets, pillows, chairs and blankets.

The woman likes owls.

"I'm not addicted," Elaine says, pleading her case, "but I get excited when I see something different."

An amazing thing is that Elaine often re-focuses or changes up her owl displays, depend-



Of some 10,000 owls in Howle's collection, she judges that around 800 relate to Christmas or the season. Above are some examples.



Who knew owls could be so cute?

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ing on the holiday. She has owls for Valentine's Day, Easter and July Fourth. She often is host for "Owl-O-Ween" — an open house where people can come in and marvel at all her owls — many of them Halloween-related, of course.

Christmas is no different. Elaine has two utility buildings out back where she stores her extra owls, and at Christmas she brings out her yuletide-themed owls and puts them on display, with the help of neighbor Jeanette Shell.

"Not that it's as pretty as other people's decorations, but it's all owls," Elaine says. "I like all of them — anything that's different, and there are some pretty ones on the trees, y'all."

Last year, Elaine was able to decorate three large and 15 small Christmas trees with owl ornaments. She otherwise fills flat surfaces, mainly in the kitchen, dining room and carport, with many of her other Christmas owls.

"Oh, I love this — it's a reindeer owl," Elaine says of one of her gems, never questioning how an owl could be a reindeer.

But why should that be a question? Turn around, and you see an owl nutcracker, owl Snowbabies, owl angels, owl Santas, owl snowmen and owl cookie jars. Even a Christmas tree skirt has owls on it. She has an old Red Owl supermarket, a chain once popular in the Midwest, lighted and decorated for Christmas

| *reminisce* |



Owls make great Christmas tree ornaments, as seen above and at left.



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Another one of her Christmas favorites is a motorized winged owl, carrying Santa.

“Here he is,” Elaine says, spotting him among all the other displays. “I think he’s amazing. My niece sent him to me from Colorado years ago.”

She then points to a winter owl clenching a hot-water bottle.

Red Owl stores were popular in the Midwest.

“I know Hallmark had this one made for me,” she says, “because I’m cold-natured.”

Elaine estimates she has some 800 owls or owl things connected to the Christmas holiday season or winter. And at one time, back at her 2016 Owl-O-Ween, she guessed the number of owls or owl things in her house stood at about 12,000 items.

Since then, she has catalogued much of her collection, and last year she put the figure of owl-related items at 9,407. They have a value, Elaine estimates, of more than \$115,000.

“I don’t have any money,” she says, “but I’ve got a lot of owls. I claim to have the world’s largest (collection), and I haven’t had anyone file a disclaimer.”

Beyond her owl collection, Howle is maybe better known as Rowan County’s veterans service officer. She is a two-tour veteran of Desert Storm,



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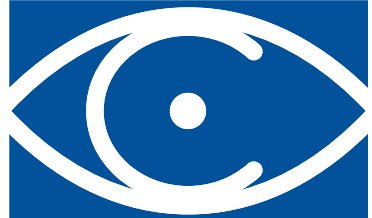
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having served in the 846th Transportation Co. of the Army Reserve. She previously worked 37 years in payroll for the former Fiber Industries plant outside of Salisbury.

Her love of owls serves Elaine well in helping people remember how to pronounce her name. Despite the spelling, it's "Owl," not "Howell," and she always corrects offenders.

Elaine married a man named Joel Howle in 1966. As a way of welcoming her to the family, Elaine's mother-in-law, Lois Howle, gave her a first owl — a fierce-looking ceramic owl that Elaine name "Lois."

In fact, Elaine gave names to her first 300 ceramic owls, until that exercise became futile as her collection kept growing. Her marriage didn't last, either — only a year — but Elaine kept the

Here is one of Howle's more dramatic displays.



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name and continued adding to her owls.

So she has been collecting some 54 years and acknowledges she has had to slow down.

"After a while, it's work." Elaine says. "... When I went to Hallmark, I'd get all they had. If there were six, I'd get six."

Now she limits herself to buying one owl at a time. She has bought most of the owls herself, though many of her friends and family members, when they go on trips to all ends of the world, bring to her owl knickknacks they found



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on their travels.

Elaine still likes to go “owling” on the weekends, and she thrills in finding something in person she hasn’t seen before — owl-wise.

“I like to get excited about it.”

Howle has lived in her China Grove home for 46 years. Thanks to her travels and those of her friends, the place holds owls from places such as Peru, Greece, Cuba, Italy, France, England, Iraq, Iran, Portugal, Belgium, Canada, Mexico, Estoria, Russia, Poland, Sweden and Finland.

Howle’s dining room and den are wall-to-wall owls.

What happens to all these owls when she dies?

“Not my problem,” Elaine says matter-of-factly. “I had fun getting them, I’m not going to worry about their future.” **S**



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