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and Holly Orel pose
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March is a point of transition

Ah, March. Emily Dickinson wrote, “Dear March — Come in — How glad I am — I hoped for you before —” and I can surely relate. Just when I feel I cannot survive another day of February, cold and gray, March comes with a promise of sunnier days.

Darrell Hinnant, the fourth mayor of Kannapolis, is the longest-serving member of its City Council. He initially ran for office with the intention of addressing the city’s perennial water issues and leaving, but in his first term, he saw the raw humanity of his citizens and had to stay. While he’s an active, hands-on mayor, he relies on his council and management team, who he says are top-notch. Under his leadership, the city has made some audacious moves — and they’re paying off. Kannapolis is booming.

Ben Haag and Holly Orel met five years ago and they’ve been together ever since. They share the same somewhat obscure hobbies: rebuilding planes, tractors and classic cars. They’ve crisscrossed the nation for high-end car shows and races. They’ve known the victory of a spotless rebuild and the agony of damage to their vehicles. They’ve fought a personal cancer battle and come out on the other side. David Freeze brings us this story of his neighbors and their fascinating lifestyle.

Classic cars abound. Pete Prunkl shares the story of his son John, who purchased a classic 1937 Cord without ever having touched it. What happened next was every classic car owner’s biggest nightmare. After a year-long rebuild, the car was ready for John to drive in a classic car rally in Indiana and Michigan, with Pete navigating. Despite having a virtually new vehicle, it wasn’t all smooth sailing.

Another classic, Bare Furniture in China Grove, has been serving folks around here since Bill Bare and his father Winfred built it in 1967. Michelle Pawlak started working there 25 years ago and bought the store when Bill retired in 2012. It’s now a family affair with Michelle’s husband and two sons all working there.



The sons joke that she had two boys so each could carry an end of a sofa. Susan Shinn Turner delivers the story of a business that has survived — and flourished — for 55 years.

What’s the counterweight to classics? How about youth? Romar Morris, John Knox and Kevin “KP” Parks are local football stars all grown up. They’ve graduated college, explored pro football and returned to Salisbury with a mission to make it a better place. Their program, Next Generation Defenders, is only a year old but already has 140 kids playing — and they have an AAU National Championship under their

belts! Yet this is not just a sports program. Read how this organization is thriving under the leadership of three founders with big hearts for youth.

Our Rowan Original is another story of youth: Hunter Safrit ascended to executive director of Salisbury Symphony Orchestra at only 28 years old. Hunter shared with me his love of music and his dream of making it accessible to all. Along the way, we learn of his surprising hobbies.

Deirdre Parker Smith brings us a review of George Saunders’ “Liberation Day,” an anthology of short stories that provoke thought. She provides us with a synopsis of each of the nine (quirky) stories.

So, bring it on, March! During this month of transition, we celebrate classics as well as youth. Enjoy.

Maggie

— Maggie Blackwell
Editor, Salisbury the Magazine

Discomfort part of the ‘Liberation Day’ experience

“Liberation Day” is a collection of provocative, alarming, bitter and amazing short stories, from the fascinating mind of George Saunders. Each of the nine stories prompts deep reflection of worlds that are painfully familiar, yet ones we fail to recognize. Each story is separate, strong, total.

In the title piece, “Liberation Day,” Saunders again uses a sort of Greek chorus, as he did in “Lincoln in the Bardo,” to expose the latest version of how we use others. In this case, wealthy, powerful people direct Speakers and Singers, human shells who exist only to perform the User’s creations for his friends.

The Speakers are the chorus, but their story is limited by their User. His speakers’ minds have been washed clean, so they only know and accept what he directs. Good performance equals well-placed storage and display for the Speakers. Mr. User recreates the Battle of Little Bighorn, a fitting story that shows the blind obedience of the soldiers. It also reflects the arrogance of man, especially white men. And it shows the screaming unfairness of the world, the endless, high-casualty battles fought to make change. It is the perfect example of man’s inhumanity to man, and shows, to borrow a recent phrase, that “resistance is futile.”

“The Mom of Bold Action” follows, with a neurotic would-be writer and overprotective mother of a 10-year-old. She obsesses about everything. But when her son is pushed down by a vagrant, she imagines bizarre acts of revenge and repentance, producing one essay that sends her neurotic, ineffectual husband into violent action. Call this one an exercise in self-absorption.

In the spooky “The Love Letter,” a man writes an answer to a question from his grandson involving some sort of undescribed, undesirable incident. The hints suggest a danger of exposure, punishment, vengeance on family members. The

grandfather writes, “Wisdom, now, amounts to making such intelligent accommodations as we can.” Meaning, lie to protect yourself and the rest of us. It reminds us of “1984,” when history is continuously rewritten.

“Thing at Work,” is sad, vicious, and funny. There’s a little stealing, a little affair, a little obsession with toy trucks, and lots of lies, lots of cover ups. It’s all to cover a little incompetence, all the way around, involving a down-on-her-luck woman, her two deadbeat adult children, and a long-legged mean girl. The boss, Tim, has a short name; he’s short on honesty, short on sense. He’s just shuffling around a bit of dirty laundry. You’ll relish the end.

Then “Sparrow” comes along, a quirky, sweet story about a sparrow of a woman and a dull man who is the son of a mean-spirited widow. It shows how a little attention can change even dull birds into a brighter future.

“Ghoul” takes us back to a created world, a different purgatory than the one Saunders creates in “Lincoln in the Bardo.” This is a manufactured stopping place before death, an underground utopia, where, again, it’s bad if you know too much or feel too much

or speak too much.

It’s all plastic, with fake water, fake grass, people living in a regimented state of denial. Everything is beautiful and nothing is wrong. Unless someone expresses a doubt.

“Just then, from near Bowling, I hear both hue and cry.

“And rush over to find a group informal-



‘Liberation Day’

by George Saunders

Random House, 2022. 235 pp.

ly gathered around my pal Rolph Spengler, Flying Spear Launcher Three, engaging in some kicking activity, as Rolph continues, despite the kicking, to emit such discredited ideas as ‘We pass our days enacting some insane ritual of denial with which I, for one, am done. Can’t we just admit and discuss? ...’ No. End of Rolph.

This story raises questions about how we live, what lies we accept, what lies we make up for ourselves, just to survive.

Brace yourself for “Mother’s Day,” which drips with so much bitterness you could get burned.

Two angry old women. Lots of angry language, piles of regrets and accusations and even more defiance. Bitterness usually ends badly, and, as these two women glare, not speaking, but thinking hate, retribution is swift.

The rather devastating “Elliott Spencer” features an old man reprogrammed to be a protester. It’s another story of humans used as tools, like robots, and of the punishment for remembering or discovering the past.

And yet, passing through a devastating test, our reprogrammed man can now reflect,

“World lay out before me new with each slick of step and swish of aspen leaves above for that I say thanks For as long as world is shiny new there is no death and what lovely may I not yet do?” (credit spacing and punctuation to Saunders.)

Saunders’ final story is the brief, “My House,” a short, direct hit like cold water thrown in your face.

Saunders draw readers into fantastical worlds and presses down to hold them there. Other times, he is shaking the reader and shouting.

His plucks open the mind and heart. Spending time with his creations is worth discomfort because he demands that you think. **S**



by

DEIRDRE
PARKER
SMITH



| Q & A |

Music man

Executive Director of Salisbury Symphony Orchestra Hunter Safrit

WRITTEN BY **MAGGIE BLACKWELL**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **SEAN MEYERS**

“I’m honored to be born in a community that has so much to offer.”
That’s Hunter Safrit, the 28-year-old Executive Director of Salisbury Symphony Orchestra. He’s been very intentional in his lifelong love affair with music. He earned his bachelor’s degree in music education from Catawba and his master’s from Appalachian State University.



Salisbury Symphony Executive Director Hunter Safrit shares a moment with board member Jason Keith, left, and board President Stephanie Potter prior to a Symphony Christmas concert at the Catawba College Omwake-Dearborn Chapel.

Q. *Were you always musical?*

Don Tracy played cello at my church for Christmas when I was young. I approached him and said, “Hi, I want to play that instrument.” He became my first cello teacher. Anne Sellitti was my longtime cello instructor, sadly now deceased. Our Education Director Beth Cook was my middle school chorus teacher.

How did you get started with the symphony?

As an undergrad at Catawba, I walked into the symphony office and asked then-director Linda Jones how I could help. I was privileged to intern there for two years. I’d been unaware of the administrative side of it so the position opened my eyes and made me aware of careers in the field. As a mentor, Linda taught me so much. She’s so kind and giving.

After I graduated, I was hired to be the administrative assistant to the executive director. That was James Harvey at the time.

When James left, I was asked to be associate ED with Bill Bucher. Bill and I split everything we did. This exposed me to the finance side.

Through the transitions, I was the one constant person and I was trusted to progressively bigger jobs. I’ve definitely worked hard at each job, but it’s almost happenstance that at age 28 I’m the ED of the symphony.

But initially I truly wanted to be a conductor.

What happened to your dream of conducting?

When the symphony decided to develop a chorale, I applied to be the director. All the candidates had to take a turn directing one concert. I really enjoyed it, thought it was wonderful — and the second I stepped off the stage, I realized this was not what I want to do for my life. I want to help music reach more people. It was my goal at that point to get a business degree, because every non-profit needs to be run like a business.

So you’ve ascended from volunteer to executive director in the span of a few years?

It’s been surreal.

Why music?

Music has the ability to transcend barriers that we create because of our differences. I’m glad to see our symphony and other symphonies across the nation are realizing we need to reflect all people. There are many healthy conversations about diversity, equity and inclusion.

How many cities our size have a symphony?

We’re definitely an outlier in that regard, population vs. amenities. We are one of six communities of our size in the nation that host a professional symphony orchestra.

How is it funded?

For most, it’s a 40-40-20 situation with grants, corporate support and individual support; for us it’s more like 60 percent individual contributors

— and all of that 60 to 70 percent comes from just 270 to 280 families! They are supporting our organization and allowing us to continue and thrive.

Are your benefactors aging out?

For us I don't think it's necessarily a scramble, although it is a concern. It's a challenge that's probably been on the horizon for a while. We've done an excellent job of maintaining support from people who have given over the years. But as we've grown our programs, we may not have grown our support throughout the community.

While we have guests from Mooresville, Statesville, Charlotte, Concord and Lexington, most of our ticketholders are from 28144. We noticed this trend a few years ago and developed a committee to expand our supporters. There is a very large gap between those who have given and those who will be newly giving. We have also made an effort to sit down and talk with stakeholders, not just benefactors. We listen and try our best to meet expectations. We anticipate support will follow.

Is the organization financially stable?

Thanks to our benefactors, yes. We have an endowment and have not dipped into it. We have ended our seasons with a profit. The challenge we all have as arts organizations — all organizations — is diversity, equity and representing all parts of the community. So now that we are including all sorts of voices, does our identity change?

How do you address reaching all parts of the community?

There was a disparity between our audience and youth programs and our community. We identified barriers, which include economics and locations. We developed a new ticket pricing structure that better reflects the average family of four in our community. We reduced ticket prices by 50 percent. Adults are now \$15, seniors \$13 and kids are \$5. We reinstated "balcony for a buck."

We've seen new people as a result of the price cuts. The balcony is still underused but we continue to offer it for just a dollar.

We figured, "If we lose \$3,000 in a year due to these cuts, can we recover?" It's a small amount relative to our budget of half a million dollars. The answer was, yes we can handle it. But in the end we wound up in the green, so the cut in prices paid off.

In the end I'd like to challenge the concept that symphony is just for old white people. We have to bring down the barriers that impede various communities from participating in our music.

So what's new?

Our goal is to introduce you to a wide range of music and you can decide what you like or not. I'm excited to see our orchestra and the industry moving towards playing music of living composers.

In October we played Florence Price's first violin concerto. Her music is American, influenced by Gospel and jazz. (Price is recognized as the first African-American woman to write symphonic compositions.)

The Serenade Series we developed is more intimate, in venues that seat 200 to 300 people. They've been very well attended. They're also less expensive for us, because we are using small ensembles from the orchestra. This has doubled our offerings. We've had some at the Civic Center, Hedrick Theater and the Livingstone culinary arts building on Jake Alexander Boulevard.

Next season we may schedule the Serenade Series earlier to accommodate people who don't want to be out late in the evening.

The concert trio has been going to all the third- and fourth-graders in the county; we are moving towards nursing home mini-concerts, as well. We want children and adults to hear music they love while exposing them to the challenge of new pieces.

What's home life like?

(laughs) It's a stark contrast to my work life! I love to garden and get my hands dirty. My boyfriend Nick and I have four cats and 14 chickens. I really don't have the chickens for eggs or anything — I just enjoy them. I share the eggs with friends and family.

I actually cook most of our meals. In college I had lost 120 pounds over two years, so I got to a point where I felt healthy and didn't want to eat pizza all the time. I did what I do with everything: I researched and studied how to cook. Thank God for the internet. **S**



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REMINISCENCE

CORD

On the road in Indiana

Father, son join tour in 1936 Cord convertible

WRITTEN BY **PETE PRUNKL**

SUBMITTED PHOTOS



When the kids leave home and retirement looms, some guys invest in a new sports car or bass boat. My son John, 58, had nothing like that in his pre-retirement investment plans. His dream was an old one, one that survived nearly five decades. At the age of 10, paging through a coffee table book at his grandfather's farm, he was mesmerized by photos of three classic cars from the '20s and '30s: an Auburn, a Cord and a Duesenberg. "Let's get one of those!" he exclaimed. The seed was planted.

In 2021, his dream became a reality. With ready cash and a supportive wife, John raised his bidding paddle at an auction and bought a black 1937 Cord 812 convert-

Above: The tour concluded at the Auburn-Cord-Duesenberg Automobile Museum, where John and Pete Prunkl had lunch. They were among the last to leave the museum.

Above right: Auburn-Cord-Duesenberg (ACD) Club members took every opportunity to show off their vehicles. Here the cars are in the parking lot of the restaurant, Essen Haus in Middlebury, Indiana.

Below: The Hoosier Tour took the Prunkls through Amish farmland. Ahead of them on the right was an Amish horse and buggy.





ible. Like his enthusiastic 10-year-old self, John bought the '37 without ever sitting in it, starting the motor or driving it.

That fall John arranged to have the car shipped from his home in Marietta, Georgia, to Auburn, Indiana, for the 2021 Auburn-Cord-Duesenberg (ACD) Festival. Unfortunately, a nightmare intervened. The transport company failed to leave enough room for the car to bounce on its super-flexible leaf springs. As a result, the Cord's windshield rebounded off the trailer's roof for 600 miles.

The battered Cord spent part of 2021 and most of 2022 in a specialized repair shop in Indiana. In addition to the windshield, the shop corrected several items on the dashboard

and under the hood to bring the car closer to original factory specifications.

To awaken the Cord after a year's rehab, John registered for the Hoosier Tour, a three-day, 300-mile drive around northern Indiana and southern Michigan. The annual tour always includes Indiana, the home state for Auburn, Cord and Duesenberg production from 1929 to 1937. The drive preceded the 2022 Auburn Cord Duesenberg Festival and was planned by the ACD Club, of which John was a member. I was delighted when John asked me to

Cameron Petersen from Wardell, Missouri, was first on the scene of the Cord's breakdown. The problem was not a clogged fuel filter as he suspected.

join him as navigator.

The 35 touring Auburns and Cords came from 15 states in-



cluding Maine and California. Among the classics were two 1929 Cord L-29s, America's first front-wheel drive car; three 1937 Cord 812s, like John's; two Auburn "boat-tails," and one Cord taxi that appeared in the movie, "The Shadow." All were buffed to an eye-dazzling shine.

Many of the drivers were older, experienced mechanics, but not one was as old as the car they drove. To these owners, the excursion on narrow country roads was like walking the red carpet at the Oscars. Their classic cars were movie stars with onlookers their excited and adoring fans.

For newbies like John and me, the tour orientation was both informative and shocking. The tour's first rule was, "If any car breaks down, only one car will stop and help." The rest would keep going. We had restaurant, museum and motel reservations to keep, and respecting our commitments to those vendors was important. Someone among the caring community of old car drivers, we were assured, would always stop.

There was also this omen: "Everyone breaks down." John and I exchanged confident glances. Surely that wouldn't happen to us. After all, John's '37 had spent over a year in a shop staffed by Cord

experts.

Well, you guessed it. On the tour's second day, on a county road 20 miles outside Mishawaka, Indiana, the Cord stopped working.

There was no explosion or metal-on-metal grinding. The breakdown was slow and silent. The car simply lost power. As navigator, I quickly spotted a curved driveway on our right near a farmhouse and barn. John steered the dying Cord up the driveway. We patiently waited for our promised rescue.

Within minutes, Cameron Petersen arrived in his 1935 Auburn 851 Club Sedan. He quickly diagnosed the problem. Perhaps the lining in the Cord gas tank had flaked off and clogged the fuel filter. This had once happened to him and, as preparation would have it, Cameron had a spare filter in his car. John was doubtful. Our fuel filter was new, and we had only covered 75 miles. Shouldn't a new filter last longer than that? Cameron was the voice of experience: "Just because something is new does not mean it will work." NAPA parts as well as new-old-stock parts made especially for Cords, have failed many old car drivers. But alas, it was not the filter that caused John's problem. The Cord still refused to start.

On the road again. At John's suggestion, the navigator snapped a few selfies.

REMINISCE

Cameron called for backup. Soon, Paul Richardson and Sid Meyer arrived in the support vehicle, a new Nissan SUV. They knew just the guy to get us back on the road, but he was at the next stop having lunch. Paul and Sid suggested that we do the same. After lunch, John could ask the expert for help. So, basking in the glow of a solution, we let our problem incubate.

After lunch, Paul and Sid ferried us back to the farmhouse. Cord expert Joe Leahy followed. Joe then checked the battery, air filter, coil, carburetor and gas filter. No luck. But when he replaced the condenser, the old car immediately sprang to life. We were back on the tour! We had missed a few stops and side trips, but we were moving forward.


The condenser kept the Cord working perfectly for the rest of the tour. Others were not so lucky. At almost every stop and sometimes

on the open road, other cars were temporarily sidelined.

Those who planned the 2022 Hoosier Tour included several stops along the way. Perhaps the most unusual was the Recreation Vehicle/Manufactured Home Hall of Fame in Elkhart, Indiana. A museum that memorializes old campers and trailers must be big and this place was 100,000 square feet big. With 30 RV factories in the area, it's no wonder that this was the right place for their product's hall of fame.

After three days on the back roads of Indiana, it was time to return to Auburn. At 11:30 on the morning of Day 3, every car but one made it to a staging area a few miles from town. There we closed the inevitable on-the-road gaps between cars. Now, with a police escort, we paraded through the streets of Auburn. It was an impressive lineup of gleaming, ancient vehicles! The

tour concluded outside the ACD Automobile Museum where crowds of well-wishers, lunch and a Dixieland band were waiting.

Like all such outings, it's not the destination that is important, but rather the journey. I was able to spend a week with my son and see him calmly solve problems in a pinch. This usually reserved engineer engaged and socialized with his fellow owners, answered questions, expressed opinions, shared stories, learned lessons and enjoyed the open road. His old car itch had been scratched, but that tingling sensation remains. Perhaps, one day, an Auburn and a Duesenberg will occupy the same garage as his classy Cord. 

During his 25 years in Salisbury, Pete Prunkl's usual road trips have involved covering North and South Carolina antique shows and auctions for Maine Antique Digest.

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Defining the next generation

Next Generation Defenders program has 140 kids, national championship

WRITTEN BY **MAGGIE BLACKWELL**

SUBMITTED PHOTOS

Locals may recognize the names Romar Morris, Kevin “KP” Parks and John Knox. They’re all local high school and college football stars who earned their degrees and came home to coaching jobs in Salisbury. What you may not know is how they spend their personal time: coaching children ages four to 13 to help the community become a better place.

“We met on the same football field we coach on today, play-

ing youth football,” Morris, a Salisbury High alum says. “Literally from that day on, we’ve been best friends.

“We left the city and saw the direction the city was going, not the best light. At one point, Salisbury was among the 10 most dangerous cities in North Carolina. We saw an opportunity and thought, ‘OK, what can we do to help?’ A lot of the kids in the African American community needed guidance.”

Parks, a West Rowan grad, had already started a program called



Next Generation Defenders 7-and-under football team, coaches and team mom from left: Head coach Craig Johnson, assistant coaches Christian Littles, Stanley Martin, Philip Wilson, Reggie Smyre, Ja'von Williams, team mom Tay Gray.



Next Generation Defenders 7-and-under player Brendan Johnson gives a helping hand at Rowan Helping Ministries.



7-and-under players packing fruit for Rowan Helping Ministries with Coach Littles.



Right: Next Generation Defenders 10-and-under player Kaleb Harris.

Below: Next Generation Defenders academic session day.



NGD

NEXT GENERATION DEFENDERS



Next Generation Defenders academic session day.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT NEXT GENERATION DEFENDERS:

- **Facebook:** Next Generation Defenders
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the Carolina Defenders. After Morris and Knox, also a SHS grad and football star, started Next Generation Saints, they realized they were duplicating efforts. They combined their program, calling it Next Generation Defenders.

“We all had experiences, both good and bad,” Knox says. “Why waste what we learned? We can help the next generation: hence the name. Things are going to happen; we can help them learn how to go on through it.”

They’re in their second year now, with 140 kids, 20-plus coaches, a National Champ trophy and five sports: football, basketball, cheer, track and baseball. They’d like to add wrestling to the mix soon.

Today all programs are held at the Miller Center and adjacent Hall’s gym in Salisbury. Kids come from West Rowan Middle, Erwin Middle, Knox Middle, North Middle, Isenberg Elementary, Overton Elementary, Salisbury Academy, Granite Quarry and North Elementary schools.

Although there is a fee to participate, scholarships are available, and parents can use a payment plan if they like.

Parents have eagerly signed their kids up because they know the men and their reputations. Whitley Bates has two children in the program. “I love it!” she says. “I was with them before they merged — and after they merged, it got even better. Now they’ve added academics to athletics, helping the children learn and grow in various situations.

Her four-year-old daughter Mourgyn-Raielle is in the cheer program. As the baby of the squad, Mourgyn required extra coaching, and got it. Bates says the coaches were very patient.

“She came home and practiced every night! She wanted to please her coaches,” Bates says.

Eleven-year-old Jourdyn plays football. He started in kindergarten. Bates says when Jourdyn made a “C” at school, Morris and Knox went to the school to see what was missing. Morris’ wife Chelsea tutored Jourdyn and helped him get his grades back up.

“We have teachers calling our personal phones,” Knox says, “telling us a kid has messed up or a kid has done a 360 — whatever you’re doing, keep it up!”

“We’re from here,” Morris says, “Born here. Raised here. We understand these kids better than an outsider. I feel like we’ve been through the mud these kids are going through.”

“And we know half the parents — same age as us!” Knox adds. “It takes a village. We are all communicating with each other.”

It’s not uncommon for kids to have transportation issues for after-school programs.



Next Generation Defenders cheerleaders and parents.

The three young men structured their program to include families. Parents get their kids and kids' friends to practice. Soon, they'll incorporate a mentorship program for the 12–13-year-old kids to mentor the 5–6-year-olds.

"They will have to think, 'I know I've got a little kid looking up to me,'" Knox says, "so I got to do the right thing."

Although the program is sports-based, it's by no means limited to sports. Their focus is on values and self-confidence with sports being the conduit.

The young people have volunteered at Rowan Helping Ministries and helped at the Turkey Run in Greensboro 5k and half-marathon. "There's always someone out there less fortunate than you," Morris says. "We can all help."

Morris, 30, earned a bachelor's degree in exercise sports science with a focus on sports administration from UNC Chapel Hill. He and his wife both coach track at Salisbury High.

Knox, 29, earned a bachelor's degree in sports administration from University of Charleston, West Virginia. Today he's the basketball coach at North Hills Christian School; he coaches football at Knox Middle School.

Parks, 31, earned a bachelor's degree in anthropology from UVA and works today as a trainer at Ultimate Performance, helping all ages with weightlifting and speed agility.

All three gentlemen were All-American players and racked up more awards, records and honors in football and other sports than this article can recount. In short, each was a shining star in high school and college sports.

Morris went on to a brief NFL stint after college. Knox



Next Generation Defenders flag team getting their rings and trophy for winning championship.



Next Generation Defenders football team at Salisbury High School Hornets football game for Youth Day.

played pro ball overseas.

Are they in competition with other youth football programs? They answer as one: Our eyes are on our program. We want to make it better and stronger.

“One of the things we are big on,” Knox says, “is parent involvement. It’s a big thing to see your parent at games and practice.”

With only two local games of the 10 in their season, getting to games could be a challenge. When they heard parents had a tough time getting to out-of-town games, they rented a van. Many kids had never been out of Rowan County. “When we went to Mooresville,” Parks says, “the kids were like, ‘Wow!’”

Now they’re seasoned travelers, having traveled to Florida, Virginia and much of North Carolina.

“We’re trying to expose them to different things,” says Knox. “There’s so much in this

world beyond the box of Salisbury.”

They took several of them to an Airbnb with a pool. “That’s where we really get to know the kids!” Parks says. The others chime in, “For sure, for sure.” They laugh together about driving four hours with a van full of kids.

“We have our fun, but at the end of the day, we want to teach them to be young men. If you cross the line, here’s the consequence,” Parks says.

The five-six-year-old team won the AAU National Championships for the 7 and Under category. Craig Johnson coaches the team.

“The past 3 years, we went to state championship, but we fell short,” Coach Johnson says. “This year, we went to Nationals at Davenport, Florida, and finally played the Georgia Grizzlies in Plant City, Florida. It was a defensive game. We both were going three and out, couldn’t score. We went into overtime. We were able to

get the ball first and capitalized on two plays. Erkyah Horne scored. Then we went on defense, and they were unable to score. We won.

“As far as the boys, they were just hyper to be there. Not many of them have had the opportunity to leave Rowan County. They were all calling their parents and grandparents, and they were so thankful for the opportunity to go.

“Because many parents couldn’t make it, we drove a van with 12 players. It was a tough season, but I just told the boys to be patient. It’s all part of teaching the guys how to handle challenges and be successful.”

They expect their numbers to grow. “We are getting lots of calls asking, ‘how can I get my kid in?’” Parks says. “The parents know the results we are having and the family feel. We make sure these kids are loved on with the right people around them and quality coaching.”

How do they pay for everything? Each sport



Clockwise from top: Next Generation Defenders football team at Charlotte Hornets basketball game; Next Generation Defenders academic session day; 7-and-under Next Generation Defenders "Free Smoke" team; Next Generation Defenders flag team, from left: Head Coach Tyrone Miller, Brandon Broadway, Horatio Everhart.

has uniforms, equipment, registration for games, travel, accommodations and food. The small amount families pay can't cover everything, can it?

The men look at each other and burst into peals of laughter. "Grants," they finally sputter. "Yeah, and our back pockets." They laugh some more.

In addition to being short on funds, they are short on time. Each of the three has a full-time job and a family. In addition, there's two hours of practice Monday through Thursday with a game on Saturday. The first game starts at 8:30 a.m. so they're there at 7:15 to unlock the gates and get everything organized. The last game ends about 3 p.m. and they get out around 5 p.m. In addition to practices and games, they have planning meetings as well as following up

on the kids' academics.

Local attorney Bryan Wymbys helped the men get the necessary 501(c)(3) designation as a non-profit, usually a months-long project, made even longer during COVID. He says he gets many requests for help and cannot accommodate them all, but he helped Next Generation.

"It's because of their heart, and they're using sports to impact our youth through values. I don't care about football. But the kids are going to have connections with caring adults and will be stronger in our community," he says.


"John, Romar and Kevin are not doing this for the football either," he continues. "They're lifting up the kids and the parents. The sport is just the conduit to help impart values like accountability, ethics... and joy."

He smiles. "Yeah, I'd say, 'joy.'"

Wymbys introduced the men to Mark Ritchie, retired CEO of Cheerwine. He consulted with Morris, Knox and Parks, giving advice regarding the bigger picture.

"I got to know the hearts of these young men and wanted to help them thrive. It was easy to have conversations with them and connect for getting youth a healthy option for their time and meaningful mentoring for their lives. It's a great program and very much needed in our community."

Knox says, "At the end of the day, when you hear Next Generation, we want you to think of elite athletes and elite human beings."

Parks says, "We care about these kids, the community and we ain't going nowhere. We. Ain't. Going. Nowhere." 



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Bare Furniture owner Michelle Pawlak and former owner Bill Bare in front of the fabric section.



Left: A few of the finishes available on the woods in the Simply Amish furniture section of the store.

Right: Bare Furniture has a room of leather furniture and accessories.





Living room furniture and decoration are displayed in the store. In the center back is an old gas station pump from the 1930s or 1940s that belongs to Bill Bare.

Part of the furniture

Bare has been focusing on quality, service since 1967

WRITTEN BY **SUSAN SHINN TURNER**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **WAYNE HINSHAW**

On her first day of work, Michelle Pawlak told her boss, “I think I’d like to own this place someday.”

Her boss was Bill Bare, and the business was Bare Furniture in China Grove. Michelle, 58, has been working there since 1998; her family purchased the furniture store in 2012.

Husband Jim, 63, is in charge of maintenance and re-

ceiving. He retired from AT&T three years ago. Son Nik, 37, is visual designer and works in sales and advertising; son Tyler, 35 is in sales and service.

Both the men do delivery. They joke that their mother had two sons so each could lift the end of a sofa. They’re not afraid of hard work, Michelle says.

When the family reached the 10-year ownership milestone, they’d made more than 10,000 deliveries.



One of the massive showrooms of furniture with recliners in the front.



“They’ve done a good job,” says Bill, who retired in 2012 and now spends his days at High Rock Lake. He recently turned 80 but doesn’t look it.

What does he do?

Bill Bare has framed pictures of his parents, his restored car, and him at work and rest through the years.

“Whatever she wants me to do,” says Bill, looking over at Catherine, his wife of 32 years. Bill has five children (oldest daughter Michelle is deceased), nine grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

They love watching the bald eagles and other birds and wildlife that inhabit the lake.

The two couples have formed a close friendship over the years. It’s not unusual for them to go out to dinner together. And Bill likes to check in at the store once in a while, too.

This year Michelle celebrates her 25th year at Bare Furniture.

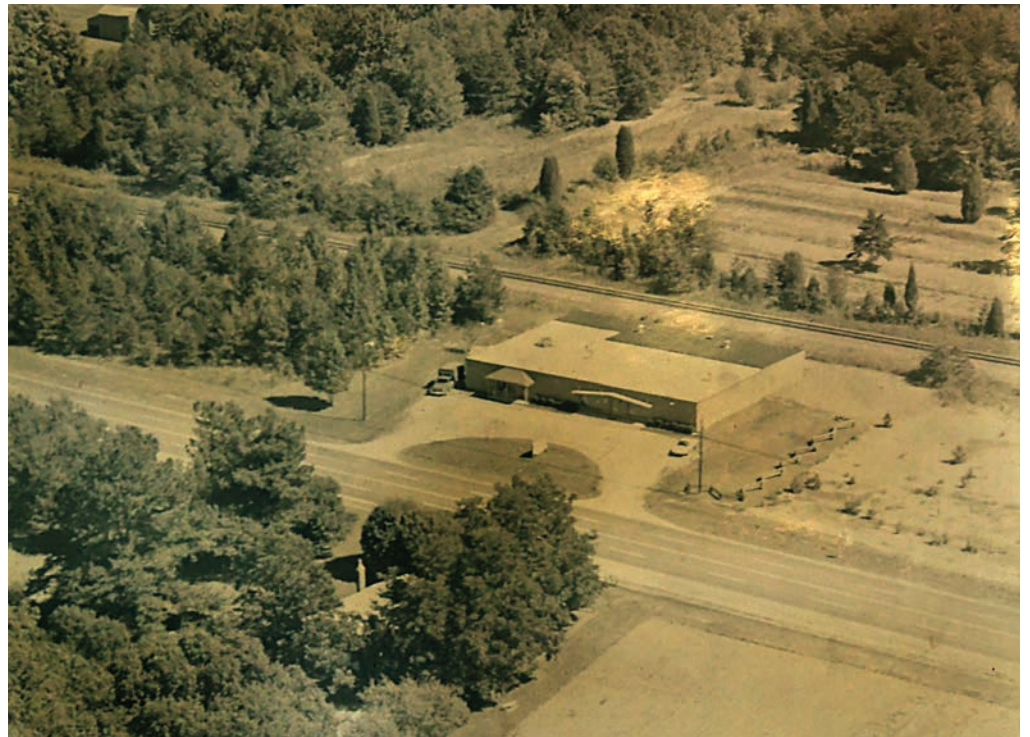
“I worked at another furniture store closer to Charlotte,” she says. “I wanted something that was a boutique and we could customize the furniture. As a designer, that was intriguing to me. It was a beautiful store. I met Mr. Bare and it’s been great ever since.”

“We had a La-Z-Boy salesman who told me about her,” Bill notes.

“I checked out the store, and he said, ‘If you want to work here, come in Monday,’” Michelle says, noting that driving from Moores-



Above: Former owners Bill and Catherine Bare sit on the left. Current family owners in front are James and Michelle Pawlak with sons in back Nik and Tyler Pawlak. **Below left:** The store has some items that might be hard to find, such as the horse feature on a lamp. **Below right:** An early aerial view of the first store. U.S. Hwy. 29 runs in front and the railroad in back just north of China Grove.





The Simply Amish furniture section of the store of finished hardwood items.



ville to China Grove was much nicer than the drive to Charlotte.

Bill recalls some interesting experiences when the Pawlak boys were growing up.

“The police called one day because they were shooting water balloons,” he says, chuckling at the memory. “What nice kids, though. We couldn’t find any better ones.”

Bill and his father Winfred built Bare Furniture in 1967, purchasing the property from James Ketchie, who lived across the street. Over the years they’ve expanded the store five times.

Its 16,000 square feet encompasses a 10,000-square-foot showroom with an additional 6,000 square feet in warehouse space, Michelle says.

Michelle started her own business, Lakeside Design, in Mooresville, and brought clients to Bare Furniture to shop.

That was about the time Bill was thinking about selling the store. Michelle knew she and Jim would need their sons, and they agreed.

“The key to working with one another is communication,” Michelle says. “We know what we are supposed to do, and we help each other.”

“We don’t do a lot of promotion of sales,” Nik says. “It’s a branding thing. We have a good store layout, and we have a good product.”

“We try to keep our prices low all the time,” Michelle says. “We sold about half of our furniture off the floor because of the pandemic.”

“We sell a lot of different brands and lean heavily on them,” Tyler says, noting La-Z-Boy, based in Tennessee, and upholstered and leather furniture lines from North Carolina.

“They are more flexible if they know we are a local dealer,” Nik adds. “We often go and

The store has a room of leather furniture and accessories. The furniture has many attractive tacks and designs such as these two chairs.

pick up furniture. It does help cut down delays and wait time.”

“If it weren’t for Mr. Bare always selling good quality and providing great service, we would not have the customer base he gifted us with,” Tyler says. “We know what we have and we are trying to maintain Mr. Bill’s legacy.”

Also, Michelle says, “Larger places can be overwhelming. We know all of the lines.”

“We are a resource for the community,” Tyler says, and Michelle notes that her sons are the future of the business.

Bare Furniture has been a part of Salisbury the Magazine from day one.

“As soon as they introduced Salisbury the Magazine, we were over the moon,” says Nik, who does all the photography for the full-page ads, which receive prominent placement in the magazine.

Nik and Tyler keep each issue for reference. For example, when the magazine featured Grant Wood, who owns a grandfather clock repair service, they kept his contact information for their customers.

While the Pawlaks are looking to the future, they also honor Bare Furniture’s past. Believe it or not, they still have the first two chairs Bill sold, a set of traditional upholstered chairs made by William Allen. The salesman was Lloyd Owens, and Marie Lomax came in and bought the chairs before the store was even open.

Bill was happy to help. It was good customer service. **S**

Bare Furniture is located at 1660 N. Main St., China Grove, NC 28023. Call 704-857-2619, email info@barefurniture.co or go to barefurniture.co.



Bill Bare’s mother and father Winfred, who started the furniture store years ago.

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Mayor Darrell Hinnant is in his third term as Kannapolis mayor.



Mayor Darrell Hinnant, right, chats with Cabarrus Brewing owner Steve Steinbacher during a recent walk downtown.

man of VISION

Kannapolis Mayor Darrell Hinnant has overseen growth of city, keeps sights on future

WRITTEN BY **MAGGIE BLACKWELL**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **SEAN MEYERS**



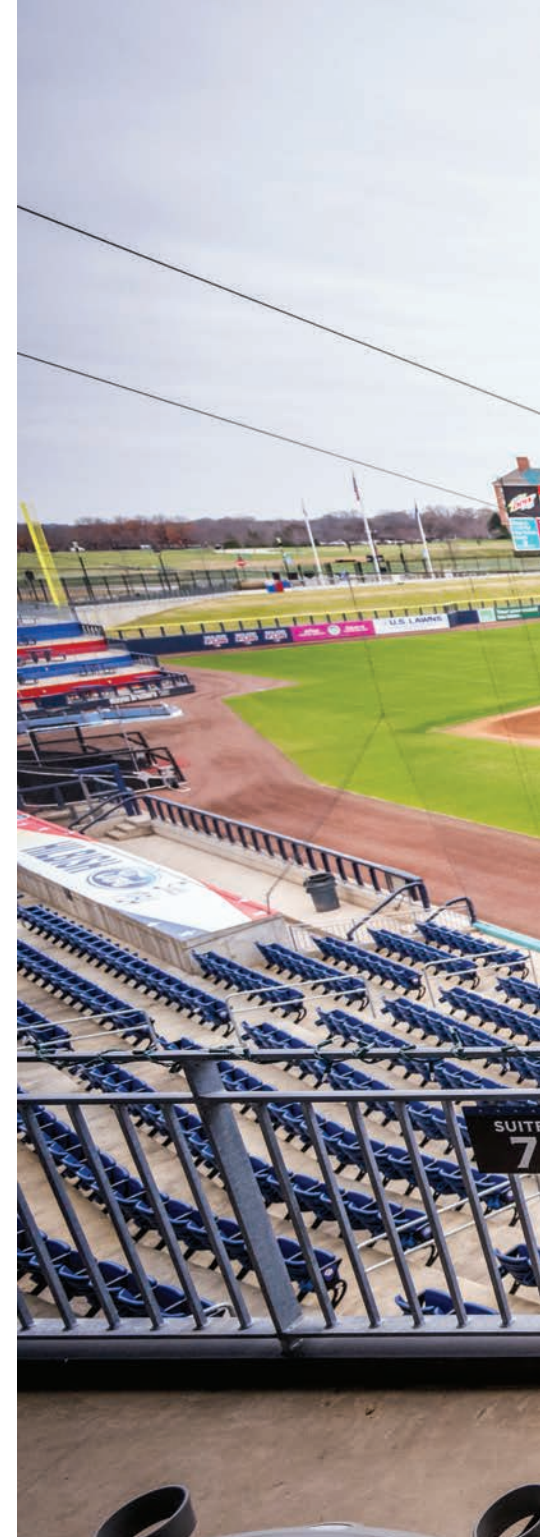
Darrell Hinnant, the fifth mayor of Kannapolis, vividly remembers the night that changed his life. He'd been elected to city council just a couple of years prior. As a chemist specializing in water and waste systems, he was on a personal mission to resolve the city's drought crisis.

Cannon Mill had just shut down.

"After the mill shut down, we went from meeting twice a month for an hour, to multiple meetings, many hours. One citizen came to speak to us, a big guy, tears dripping off his chin, and he said, 'I don't know anything but working at the mill.' His parents and grandparents had worked there.

"That night changed my life," he says. "I realized being on council wasn't about pipes or drills: it was about people. About seeing their needs and finding ways to meet their needs so they could proceed with their lives."

He's the first mayor of Kannapolis to exceed two terms, and at 21 years of service, he's the longest-term council member. He's been on city council for more than half of the city's short life. His energy and drive at age 75 are remarkable. And Kannapolis is booming.



Clockwise from top left: Artwork adorns the newly revived downtown; Mayor Darrell Hinnant stands inside the Kannapolis Cannon Ballers stadium during a recent walk downtown; the North Carolina Research Campus sits on the 350-acre plot where the old Cannon Mills once stood.



Most locals know the city's backstory. James William Cannon founded Cannon Mills in 1905 and owned the entire town of Kannapolis, including the library, police department, roads, water, sewer and schools — even the churches. His son Charles took over in 1921. Kannapolis was the nation's largest unincorporated town.

The mill was booming. They recruited high school graduates straight out of school, and

most never knew another job. They rented their homes from the mill. In the first half of the 20th century, Cannon Mills was the largest producer of sheets and towels in the world.

Times changed as foreign mills made similar wares far cheaper. The mill started to struggle. David Murdock, a California billionaire, bought the mill and town in 1982. The town incorporated as a city in 1984. In 2003, the mill shut

down and more than 4,000 workers lost their jobs overnight. It was the largest layoff ever in North Carolina.

Workers without higher education scrambled to find work. Murdock focused on building the North Carolina Research Campus, a \$1.5 billion complex with stately brick buildings where the mill had once stood. The Research Campus offered jobs to highly educated workers, most



from outside the city. The downtown was virtually shuttered.

Kannapolis City Council partnered with Rowan-Cabarrus Community College to offer training for displaced workers.

“We spent a lot of time with RCCC,” Hinnant says. “I think it is the premier resource in our state. We got employment training; lots of people in the mill didn’t have any computer literacy. One lady learned computer skills and got a job in a doctor’s office. She was so excited about what she had learned, how life had turned around for her! Her tears were tears of joy, of what could be. That experience is what changed my life, and it’s why I’m still here.”

Hinnant says the biggest accomplishment he and city council have made is not buying their downtown; it’s not buying the Gem Theatre or tearing down the mill. He says it was creating a vision and getting the support of that vision from the people of the city. They envision a new community while retaining the charm of the past.

“The single most important thing was to understand we had to do more than one thing,”

he says. “It wasn’t just about the Research Campus. It wasn’t about moving the ballfield. It was multi-faceted.”

He’s passionate about partnerships. He recently met with mayors from Charlotte, Salisbury, Concord, Huntersville and Mooresville. They share ideas and collaborate when they can.

He’s also passionate about leaving no one behind. “We could put our heads in the sand and

celebrate how wonderful we are,” he says, “but we would leave some of our citizens behind. I won’t have that. We must serve every area. We have food deserts, areas that need improved. We must address the mental health needs of our citizens as well as transportation.

“It’s so important to be sure our growth and opportunity don’t benefit one group of people. Diversity is a strong issue for me. We are a diverse community. The U.S. is becoming more diverse every day. I have to approach it, engage it, and I want every segment of our community to feel included. It would be sad to leave anyone out — I won’t do that.”

He says his driving force is his grandchildren. He has seven in all, three in Kannapolis and four

Hinnant takes a moment to gaze around the large rotunda of the main NC Research Campus building.

in Greenville, N.C.

“I say to people all the time, the work we do in Kannapolis is not for me. I won’t be around to enjoy the benefits — but my daughter and her husband, their three kids, they can go get an education and then come back here. Retain our small town charm and provide everything that will attract them back here to enjoy a full life.”

Hinnant was born in eastern N.C., where his family were tenant farmers, moving from house to house to follow different crops. He attended a county high school in the largest graduating class ever — with 61 graduates.

“What I learned from that upbringing,” he muses, “was you have to work hard, aspire, you have to dream. Life doesn’t promise you a rose garden. You have to work hard, go out and get it.”

It seems he’s applied those lessons in his own life. His parents drove him to his first job at 14. At age 16, he got a construction job and continued to work through college.

He’s the first from his high school to graduate from Chapel Hill. He notes his brother was salutatorian of his class, but never pursued higher education. It was just not a priority in the community.

Hinnant married high school sweetheart Connie while he was studying at Chapel Hill, and they stayed there until he completed his master’s degree. They moved to Kannapolis in 1975.

In 2013, only a couple of months before he swore in as mayor, Connie passed away.

“I’m a scientist by training,” he says. “I figured I could outsmart grief. That tells you how dumb I am.” He smiles. “You have to go through all the stages of grief. I was no exception. I could be fine one moment, then fall apart in the next.”

Years passed. He wasn’t necessarily thinking of marrying again, but his daughter and her best friend had other plans. The best friend’s mother-in-law was recently widowed and the girls began encouraging Hinnant to take her to lunch.

“Finally, I think we just said, ‘We will go out and shut them up!’ We met for lunch and we’ve been together ever since.”

Hinnant and Mary married during COVID and feel “the good Lord brought us together.”



Above: Hinnant reads a proclamation honoring Kannapolis resident Amos McLorey during a recent city council meeting. **Below left:** The Dale Earnhardt statue stands tall in downtown Kannapolis. **Below right:** Hinnant chats with Chop House restaurant owner Carlos Hernandez during a recent walk downtown.



They worship at Trinity United Methodist Church, across from A.L. Brown High School. Hinnant has taught Sunday school there for 40 years, in what used to be the young adult class.

He says their staff is one of their biggest successes, saying, “If you don’t have a great staff, you can be unusually unsuccessful! We are just the opposite. This is a creative place. The top 10 people in our city could go anywhere tomorrow and get a good job. They choose to stay here.”

Buying their downtown for \$10 million was, of course, a big leap of faith. So was building a new City Hall, with a price tag of \$33 million.

The state of North Carolina works to keep cities from drowning in debt. The Local Government Council, a state agency, reviews cities’ investments and requires several steps before approving loans. One step is holding public hearings to gauge citizens’ feelings.

“The LGC required one public hearing,” Hin-

nant says, “but we held six. Citizens were tired of driving all around town to pay water bills or go to planning. The number of citizens who have complained about the new city hall, I can count on two hands.”

The city has debt for 20 years and the property tax rate, combined with Cabarrus County, is \$1.37 — on the higher end of the scale statewide, but certainly not the highest.

Kannapolis City Hall combines the police department, all city offices and public meeting space. On any given day, the public area throbs with activity while the offices upstairs are a tranquil retreat. Citizens have one central location to handle any city business.

Council repeated the public hearing process when they considered buying the downtown. “The night before we opened the gate, there were 2,500 people waiting to go through downtown.”

Kannapolis is still very much a bedroom com-

munity for Charlotte, with the outward morning traffic significant. “My vision, and I believe council’s vision, is that we are going to be a very fast growing community, maybe 60 to 70,000 by 2030. We are 53,000 now, so it’s not that big a leap. By that time, we will have inward commuters rather than outward. We have three big commercial locations out on the interstate with 2,000 jobs and the Research Campus continues to grow.”

In the next few months, there’ll be two more cranes on the Kannapolis horizon. One of the new buildings will stand 12 to 15 stories high, with mixed use on the bottom floor, four levels of parking, condos above parking, and a restaurant on the top floor.

Remarkably, Hinnant also works as the general manager for Handy Sanitary District, the water system in Denton. He makes the 41-mile drive several times a week. They’re developing a

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(Left-to-Right): Mechelle Kuld Lauren Robison Teresa Rufty Landen Cavin Jill Dickson Jason Shrader Tara Setzer Janet Edwards Shellie Stubbs



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water line to Albemarle now, and he is proud to have been a part of addressing their issues. After an initial one-year contract, the Denton town board asked him to stay on and continue to help resolve their water problems. He's been working there seven years.

In a moment of reflection, Hinnant says he thinks his dad would be proud and surprised. His dad only had a fifth-grade education. "I could show him the ballfield, all that," he says, "but for him to understand why it's important that I have a strong relationship with the folks at Atrium Health, he wouldn't necessarily get that."

"I'm 75 years old," he says. "I used to think that was old, time for wheelchairs and an afghan on the knees. My brain is still 50. The visions I have for this community, the opportunities we are working on, that's the mind of a 50-year old, paired with the wisdom of my age. And I see plenty of work to be done." 



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OLD SCHOOL COOL



Ben Haag and
Holly Orel in front
of Ben's 1932 Ford
three-window
coupe.

Couple bonds over love
for 1930s Ford coupes

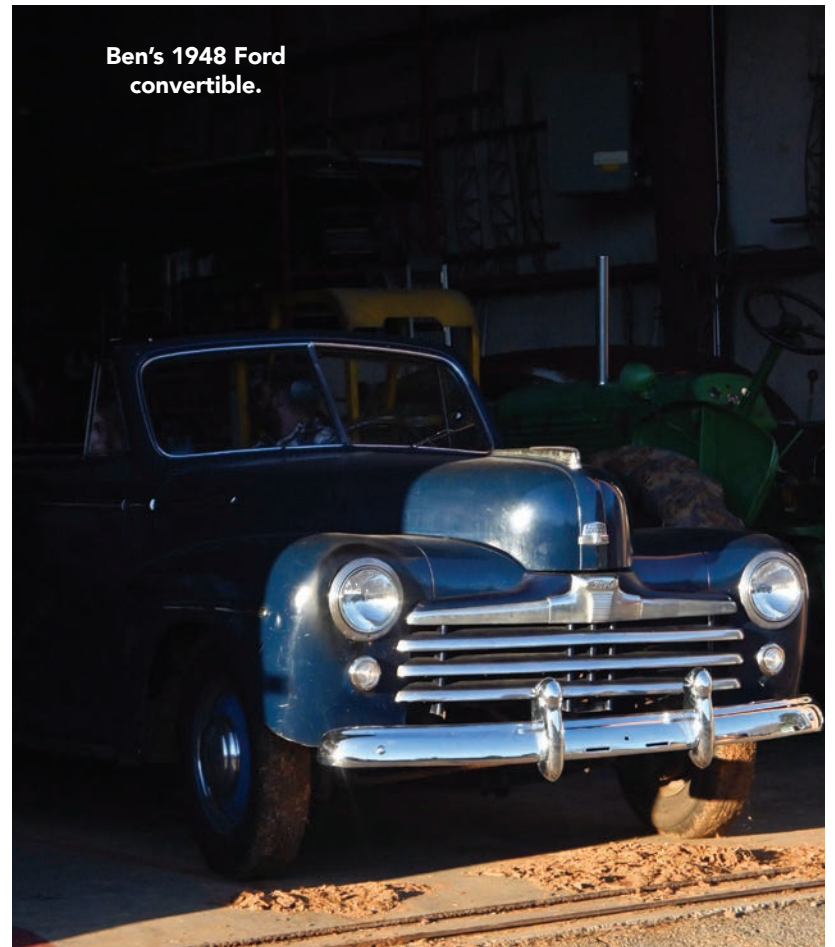
WRITTEN BY DAVID FREEZE | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDY MOONEY



Ben Haag and Holly Ore's shop that houses their collection of 1930s hot rods.



The Mercury flathead V8 in Holly's 1930 Ford Model A coupe.



Ben's 1948 Ford convertible.



Ben drives his 1932 Ford three-window coupe.

Ben Haag's happiest memories go back to when he was 10 years old, restoring old tractors with his grandfather Nathan in a cow barn. He rode his bike eight miles in Sandy Lake, Pennsylvania, to get there.

"Just being together, him and me," he said, "that was the thing." Working on tractors started something special.

At age 18, Ben started to get into old cars — and soon bought his first one, a 1930 Ford Model A coupe. Ben transformed the car into a hot rod and eventually raced it on the beach at Wildwood, New Jersey. His next purchase was a 1966 Ford truck just like his granddad's. He brought both vehicles when he moved to Rowan County. Ben says he didn't have a real plan, but met some car guys from Concord and Rockwell and really liked the area. He got into airplanes at the Rowan airport, where he began working in the paint shop and eventually managed the maintenance hangar.

Ben met Holly Orel in 2017. Ben was a member of the Iron

Lords, a vintage car club. Holly was invited to "shop night" and the rest is history. They quickly found they had an almost uncanny list of similar interests. They drove similar 1990s Ford trucks and had the same tools in their toolboxes. Holly said, "We even had the same odd and specific tools that most would never use. We both knew horses and flying."

Ben had built a '32 Ford three-window coupe and drove it cross-country to the Bonneville Salt Flats. Bonneville is the birthplace of hot rods and they go every year for the start of the dry lakebed racing season. They test the cars to see how fast they will go.

Then on the way to El Mirage, California, a bad accident totaled the car. "The car was so badly damaged that everyone said it couldn't be fixed — except Holly, and she wanted to work on the car."

"We really bonded over Ben's '32 Ford car repair," Holly said. "He had already bought another one to replace it, but we were able



to fix the car. We aren't married, but that is up to Ben. He's my guy, whether we are married or not."

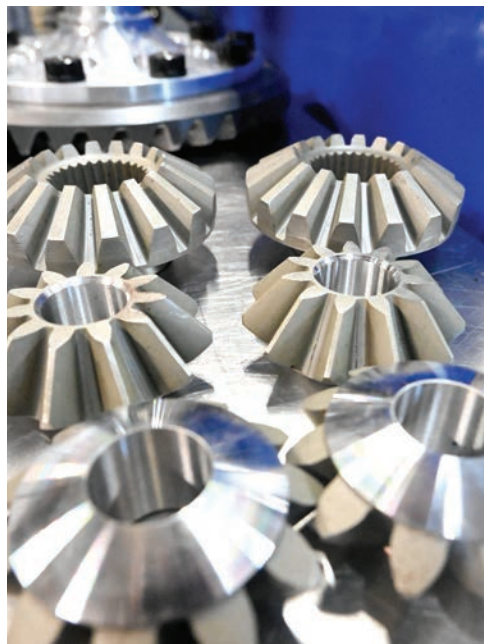
Raised in south Charlotte, Holly's early passion was showing horses, which involved lots of traveling on weekends. She also became interested in diesel trucks, sometimes racing them.

Holly began flying at age 11. Her mom Leslie flew often and dad Carlos loved being around airplanes. Holly said, "Both flying and horses were so time-consuming and expensive that I had to concentrate on one or the other. For 10 years, I concentrated on horses."

Originally planning a career as a nurse, Hol-

ly went to school for collision repair, which led to extensive training and certification as a journeyman machinist. Currently she operates three CNC lathes producing valve train components for Joe Hornick Enterprises in Mooresville.

Ben and Holly leased the Enochville airport for more than two years. Ben said, "We did



From left: Ben hones a connecting rod; axle parts sit on a counter; a rolling bones radiator cap on Ben's coupe.



Clockwise from above: Holly drives her 1930 Ford Model A coupe; Ben Haag's 1932 Ford coupe; Ben's 1946 Cessna 140 in front and Holly's 1991 Experimental J3 plane in back.





The couple's 1974 Ford F-350 ramp truck that Ben found on Facebook.



A customer's car undergoes restoration



A plaque that certified the roadster achieved 124.65 mph at the Bonneville Salt Flats in 1952.



Ben works on a Flathead engine block.

fix the car and we began working on cars and planes, about half of each. We got the airport operational.”

Meeting Ben had relit the airplane spark for Holly. She bought a 1991 J3 kit plane, almost identical to a Piper Cub, removed the wings and trailered it back to Enochville. She said, “My plane is all of the old fun, but none of the rust

problems.” Ben’s plane is a 1946 Cessna 140.

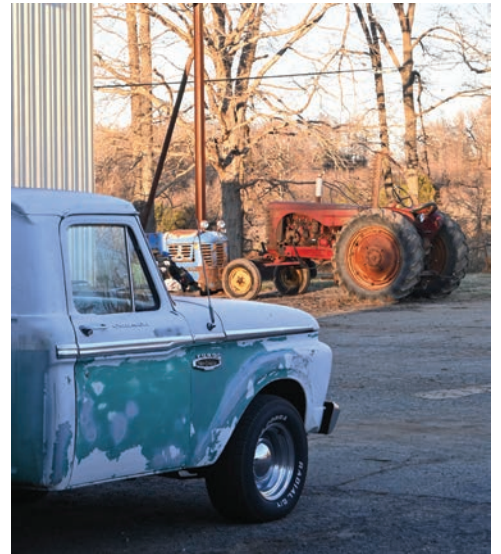
But they wanted their own place and in 2019, Ben and Holly were able to purchase a grass landing strip off Bradshaw Road in western Rowan County. The airstrip had been reportedly used for drug running and neighbors were not sure what the new owners planned to do. Both the J3 and Cessna 140 are hungared at the airstrip.

In 2020, Ben was diagnosed with Stage 4 lymphoma and returned to the Hillman Center in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, for treatment. He spent over a year there, eventually beating the cancer, and headed back to Rowan.

“After cancer,” Ben said, “I decided that I wanted to work for myself. Bluefield Vintage Engine Works was my new business, and I was



Above: Holly turns a part on the lathe. **Below:** Photos of Ben and Holly's travels out to Bonneville hang on the wall of the shop.



Ben's 1966 Ford truck with a tractor in the background.

never going back to working for anyone else. We bought the Blue Weber machine shop, meaning that we could do everything we wanted here. We wanted to focus on anything old.”

In 2021, Ben and Holly returned to Bonneville, driving Ben's white '32 Ford across country. He raced a flathead-powered 1929 Ford Roadster. In 2022, they made the trip again, each with a car.

Ben said, “We drive the cars, sure they will make the trip because we built them. We have touched every nut and bolt and we use old parts. The cars are powered by 90-year-old engines and the flatheads are some of the most reliable ever built. We rarely have issues, but when we do, we are confident that we can make the repair. Nobody knows how to work on the old engines anymore. I once rebuilt the bottom of an engine overnight in a motel parking lot and everyone was surprised when we could race the next morning.”

The trips out west average about 6,000 miles roundtrip and take about 25 days. Ben and Holly do carry the spare parts in the cars because 90 percent of the cars are still original parts; access to replacements wouldn't be easy.

The round trip to Utah, Nevada and California becomes a caravan as other friends join them along the way. Ben and Holly see friends from all over the world — some of whom they consider family, along the way. Sometimes they visit other car shops on the return journey.

Other ventures include visiting high-end car



Ben's 1932 Ford coupe.



shows as far away as Amelia Island, Florida and Greenwich, Connecticut. "Most of those cars are complete restorations and spotless, trailered to where they go," Ben said. "Ours are used and driven, but we build them to be comfortable. We have driven them as much as 1,000 miles a day, particularly when we are getting close to home."

Ben said, "Tractors and cars: cars are a luxury, but tractors are used to make a living. My favorites are the tractors because they link me to my granddad. I have spent the last several years finding all his old tractors that I can. My favorites are the 1954 Model 20 Ferguson and 1950 Model 30 Ferguson, one owned by my grandfather and the other owned by my great-grandfather. My favorite vehicles are the '66 Ford truck and the Model A coupe."

Holly also owns two antique tractors, a 1941 Oliver 60 from Woodleaf, like the one Ben had when he was young. Ben loved the styling and performance of it. Her other tractor is a 1940 John Deere B, a Christmas present from Ben



Top: Ben and Holly in their 1948 Ford convertible. Above: Ben's pair of family Fergusons. A 1950 model 30, left, and a 1954 model 20. (Photo courtesy of Ben Haag)

that he found in Pennsylvania.

Holly's favorite car is a 1930 Ford Model A coupe that she considers her "first child" since she built it herself. Holly said, "The biggest challenge was modifying the frame to fit the engine. It has a Mercury V8 engine and uses 90 percent of old parts. We built the seats and it has a great suspension. The car is chopped, meaning that the roof has been lowered, something not easy to do. I love finding out the history of these old vehicles."

Ben and Holly plan to develop the airstrip and host events. Near-term future projects involve building a house and hangars on the property and registering the airstrip so that others can use it. They already enter antique tractor pulls and eventually want to host their own.

"The airstrip is a hobby turning into a business," said Ben. He continued, "We want to have hangars here for the type of pilots we expect to attract. Older planes and taildraggers (planes with a wheel behind the main landing gear, underneath the tail) will be a good fit here. The airstrip is being extended to 2,500 feet in length and a width of 100 feet. It will remain as a grass strip because the grass stabilizes the surface and absorbs moisture. We want to have fun with sto-



ries from the plane owners and look forward to meeting them.”

The core business for Bluefield Engine Works is the modification of the hot rods that Ben and Holly prefer. Ben said, “We build them as far as the customer wants us to. We have four cars on the property now that are projects. A customer from Las Vegas told me that he wanted us to build him cars that could be driven across country, just as we do.” Holly added, “One friend said that the cars look like they are going 100mph while sitting still.”

The fun continues almost daily. The couple’s most recent project is a 1974 Ford F-350 ramp truck that Ben found on Facebook. Holly said, “We got it on Christmas Eve. The truck hadn’t been maintained, needed some wiring and timing work. When we get excited, we can’t stop, this time staying up till 1 a.m. working on it.”

Ben, now 36, and Holly, 27, are just where they want to be. Their neighbors know them now and often help with projects. Ben said, “I couldn’t be happier. I live my dream every single day. I’m in my perfect place, preserving all these old pieces. Often, I feel like we are living in the 1940s. If it’s old, it’s us!” **S**

Above: Ben’s 1932 Ford three-window coupe, left, and Holly’s 1930 Ford Model A coupe.

Right: Ben has collected a number of stickers from their travels around the country.





From left: Salisbury City Council member David Post, Catawba College President David Nelson and NC Rep. Harry Warren.



Outgoing chair Brad Wesler passes the gavel to the new chair Elaine Holden. (Brad Dountz photo)



Dana Walsler, incoming Chamber President Elaine Holden, Starling Johnson from Johnson Concrete.



Orlando Lewis, vice president for student affairs at Livingstone College, and Mrs. Miriam Rush.



Tonyan and Antione Schoefield of Fit for a Queen.

Rowan Chamber of Commerce 97th Annual Gala

Rowan County Chamber of Commerce held their 97th Annual Meeting in January at West End Plaza. The theme was, "Bourbon, Bling & Bowties."

— Photos by Maggie Blackwell



Left: Rachel Joyce of Rachel Joyce SKIN, Gretchen Peterson.

Below: Downtown Salisbury Director Sada Troutman, Salisbury City Council Member Harry "Mac" McLaughlin and Salisbury Mayor Pro Tem Tamara Sheffield.





Kayleigh Resino looks like a pro on the ice skating rink.



Rowan Rowdy dancers with a special guest.



August Kiefer takes time for a little art.

Winterfest

The town of Spencer held its second Winterfest in December, offering a German-like Christmas experience including bonfires, ice skating and wooden huts with gifts for sale.

— Submitted photos



Zion Gillespie gives ice skating a go.



Balian and Sabine Witt in the Doo-Dah Kids' Parade.



Raylan Roseman is fascinated by the sights and sounds at Winterfest.



Bob, Caroline and Dudley Johnson give ice skating a whirl.



Above left: Former Salisbury Councilmen Mark Lewis and Bill Burgin are both board members and supporters of the United Way. **Above right:** City staff Kaisha Brown and Rodney Harrison. **Right:** Elia Gregorek, Salisbury City Manager Jim Greene, Novant President/CEO Gary Blabon and Rowan/Kannapolis ABC General Manager Terry Osborne.

United Way annual meeting

At the annual meeting in January, the Rowan County United Way recognized all who helped make the \$1.29 million goal a reality. Outgoing president Dr. Andrew Smith presented the gavel to incoming president Eric Slipp.

— Photos by Maggie Blackwell



Gary and Deirdre Blabon with United Way board members Desiree Dunston and Greg Alcorn.

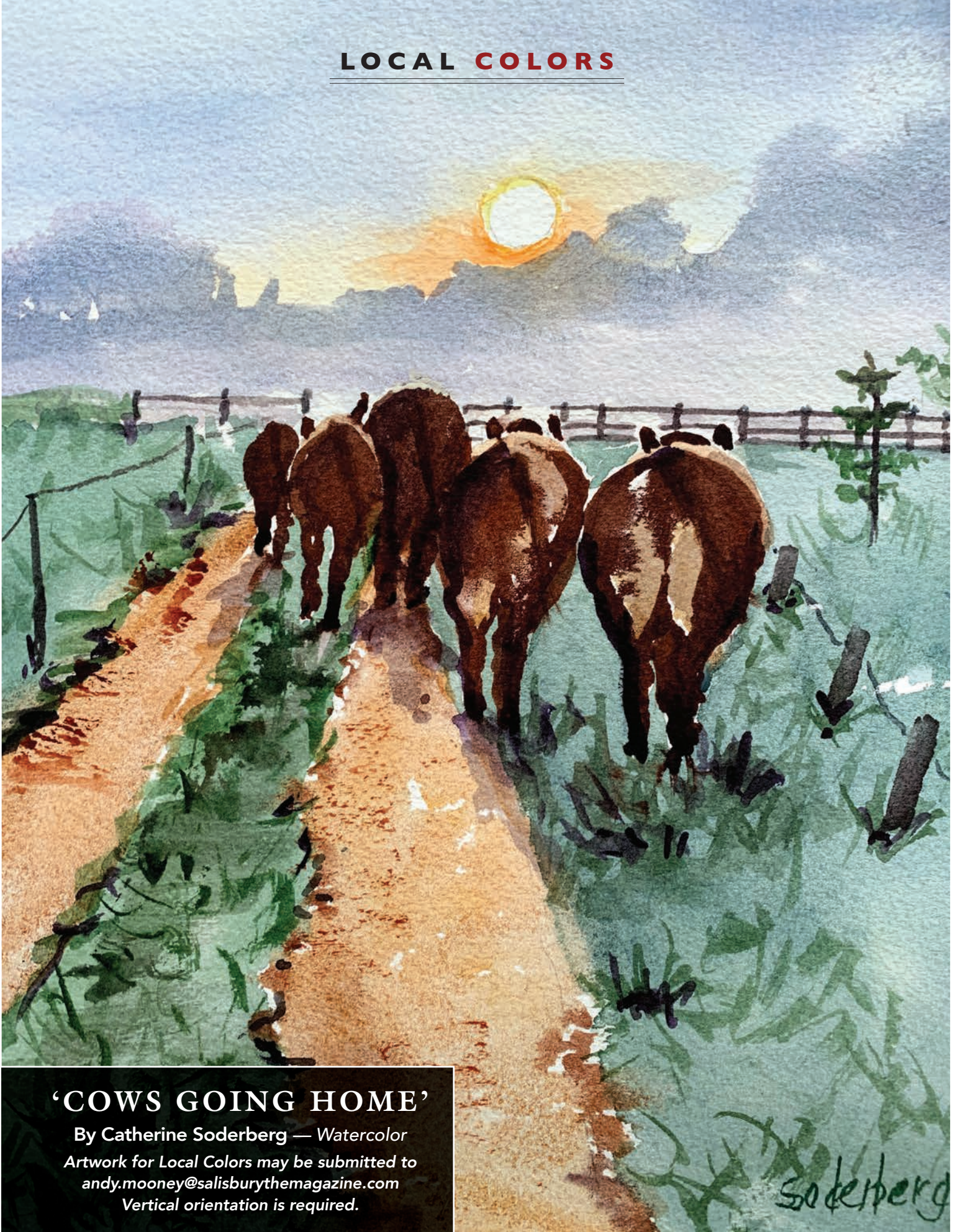
Cure Violence

Cure Violence Global helps communities implement violence prevention programs. CVG partners visited Salisbury in January to assess the area for need, holding over a dozen meetings with community stakeholders.

— Submitted photo



Salisbury City Council Member Anthony Smith with Cure Violence Global team members Eric Johnson and Demetrius Whatley. The team held an assessment of the community in January.



‘COWS GOING HOME’

By Catherine Soderberg — Watercolor
Artwork for Local Colors may be submitted to
andy.mooney@salisburythemagazine.com
Vertical orientation is required.

Soderberg

Getting married?

Announce your nuptials in SALISBURY the magazine's

WEDDINGS section!

SALISBURY the magazine is all about life in and around Rowan County and the Piedmont. Readers get the true flavor of the area through features about people, places, food, homes, history, recreation and more — something for every season. The magazine is filled with beautiful pictures by award-winning photographers. SALISBURY the magazine is distributed in racks throughout Rowan County or by subscription.



Withorn & Wineka
RIO GRANDE • PUERTO RICO CAROLINE PETERS PHOTOGRAPHY

Melissa Darby Withorn and Bennett William Wineka were united in marriage on June 3, 2016, overlooking the El Yunque Rainforest, Rio Grande, Puerto Rico. Officiant: Cynthia Moss presided over the 5:30 p.m. ceremony.

The bride's parents hosted a fantastic reception that included authentic cigar rolling and a special Pleneros band with dancers.

The bride is the daughter of Gloria and Thomas J. Withorn Jr. of Marietta, Ga. She is the granddaughter of Jean 'Dinky' Withorn and the late Thomas J. Withorn and Hazel and Ernest Hale.

Melissa is a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Portfolio Center of Atlanta, Ga. She is an associate creative director at Public School, Atlanta, Ga.

The bride was given in marriage by her father and attended by four of her dearest friends: Laura Ritchie of Durham; Claire Conarso of Atlanta, Ga.; Lauren Hughes of Atlanta, Ga.; and Sarah Whitworth of Washington, D.C.

The groom is the son of Lindsay and Mark Wineka of Salisbury. He is the grandson of David Robert Alford III of Oak Ridge, Tenn., and the late Dorothy G. Alford and the late Nancy and Charles W. Wineka of Dover, Pa. Benn is a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is a local broadcast manager at INFORM. He was attended by four best friends, including Samuel Have Wineka of Falls Church, Va.; Kyle Conarso of Atlanta, Ga.; Benjamin Cox of Raleigh; and Seth Leonard of Raleigh.

They will celebrate again in the fall of 2016 with a trip to California.

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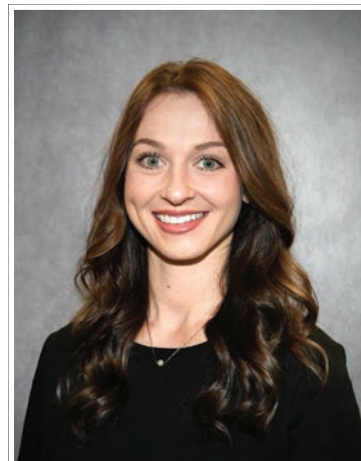
TIPS: We can use images from CD, DVD, USB drive or by email: celebrations@salisburypost.com. Files should be a minimum of 300 dpi. Do not scan; please get digital files from your photographer. Write-ups that are too long will be edited at our discretion, so it's best to stay within the word count. Double-check all name spellings. Remember, our format requires the exact number and orientation of photos as shown above.

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