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SALISBURY

the magazine

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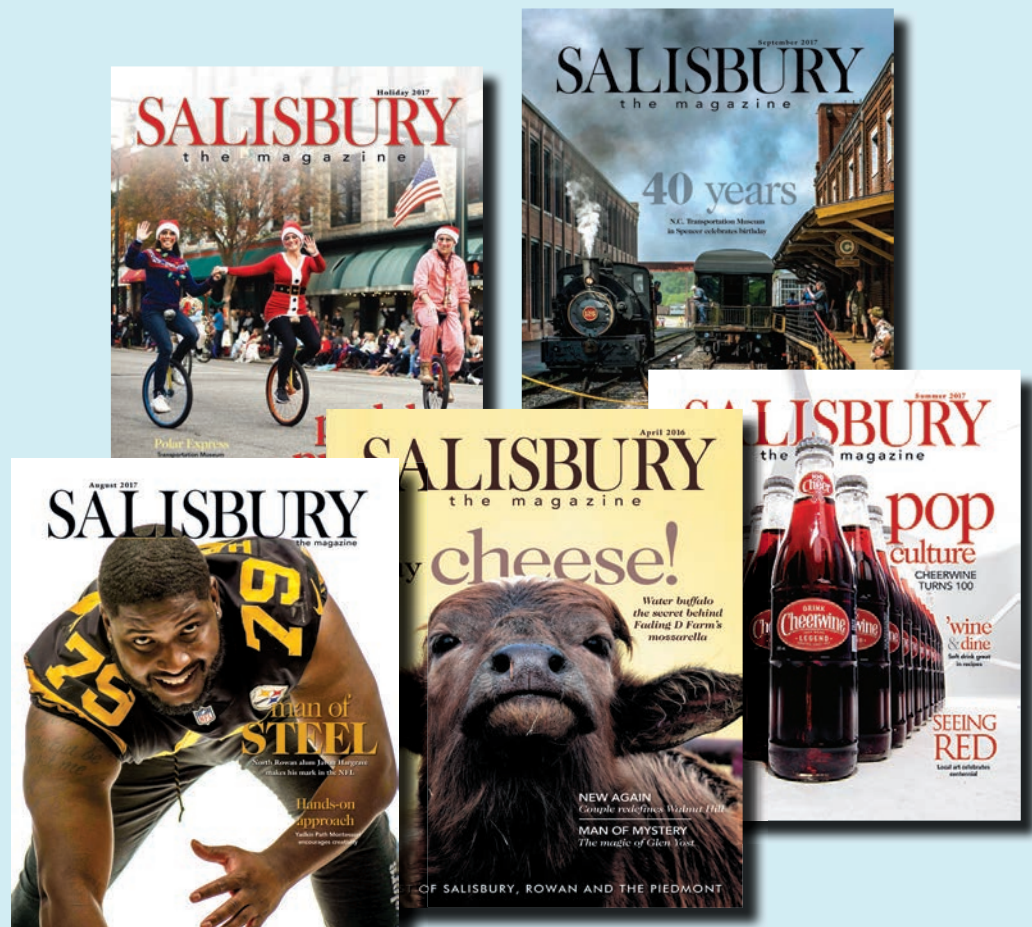
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gives voice to your yard*

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by BEN STANSELL

On the cover: Luke and Anna Allman, of Sign Dreamers of Rowan, created a yard sign to honor Salisbury the Magazine's 50th issue. Photo by Jon C. Lakey. On this page: The upstairs space at The Pedal Factory houses the numerous donated bikes, wheels and parts. Photo by Sean Meyers.



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Could it be 50 issues already?

The birth of *Salisbury the Magazine* five-plus years ago was hardly a much-heralded event, especially for those of us putting it together. When the Salisbury Post's parent company informed the editorial and advertising staffs they also would be responsible for publishing a regular magazine — in our case, nine times a year — there was no rejoicing internally.

Quite the contrary. A magazine didn't mean the Post employees were getting more pay for the new publication. Rather, it meant extra work for staffs already being depleted through the years because of the debilitating changes to newspapers. Many of us wondered whether diving into another print product was wise, while readers everywhere were fleeing print for online fare.

I'm guessing the advertising representatives, who in a small market such as ours call on the same businesses and organizations all the time, were not thrilled about trying to sell one more product. Meanwhile, the newsroom's experience centered on grinding out a daily edition, and we still marveled every day that somehow deadlines were met and the newspaper reached readers' homes.

Were we the grungy lot who should be putting out a high-end magazine with glossy photos?

There also were questions for others, not me, on how many copies to print, how to distribute, what printer and paper stock to choose, what arrangements to make with the post office, how to set up a subscriber base, what deadlines to set, what to charge (if anything) — well, you get the drift.

Today, you hold in your hands the 50th issue of *Salisbury the Magazine*. The moment that first issue — September 2015 — came out, I think a lot of us realized there were counter balances to all the concerns we had going in.

First, we discovered we could put together a useful, attractive product, if we dedicated ourselves to making it the best we could. With that as a calling card, photographers and writers wanted to contribute. Advertisers wanted in. People wanted to be featured on its pages.

As time went on, *Salisbury the Magazine* turned out to be something people looked forward to, a kind of *Our State* magazine for Salisbury and Rowan County, with my apologies to that fine North Carolina publication. It's the nature of magazines, of course, but you can save the issues, keep them lying around like pieces of furniture. read them more leisurely and appreciate the content more fully.



It's heartening to hear people tell me they have kept every issue, as if each one were a *National Geographic*.

I'll never be able to emphasize this enough, but we made it editorially as a publication thanks to the page design wizardry of creative director Andy Mooney and the hundreds of images supplied by photographer Jon Lakey.

They found, as did I, that they enjoyed doing the magazine and appreciated how it allowed them to work beyond the daily boundaries of the newspaper. It was mainly their work that has led to *Salisbury the Magazine's* being recognized this year and previously as the best niche publication in its category by the N.C. Press Association.

But the magazine has reached its 50th issue, too, on the shoulders of loyal advertisers and ad representatives, a dedicated production team, talented writers, local artists, dependable contributors and additional hard work by photographers such as Wayne Hinshaw and Sean Meyers.

Most important, you readers have stuck with us even during this most challenging of times. And in that, we do rejoice.

Mark Wineka,
Editor, Salisbury the Magazine

THROUGH THE LENS by Steve Combs

During some of the darkest days of the pandemic, the Rev. Steve Combs of Salisbury caught this Nov. 15, 2020, sunset in the western skies of Salisbury — a welcome moment of beauty. Combs took this photo while standing at the edge of Food Lion Store No. 1's parking lot.



How's it going? Together, we're winning

Many people enter independent bookstores questioning our collective financial solvency even in the best of times, given the relatively recent rise of Amazon. Now, nearly a year after COVID entered our lexicon, my staff and I are asked near daily, "Just how is bookselling going for you in the time of a pandemic?"



by ALISSA REDMOND

Well, much more of our sales are web and phone driven — browsers stand out in the most welcome of ways as customers. Our store hours are limited (used to be 10-6, Monday thru Saturday, now just 11-3), as there is less foot traffic downtown — and I (like nearly all parents) have experienced severe childcare obstacles that keep the store closed more often than I wish.

We pivoted to include local deliveries early last spring, and still provide this service most afternoons for clientele. We have not been able to host events with several local authors due to social distancing concerns, and these sales historically constitute a large percentage (10% or more) of our annual revenue.

But we have also been privy to incredible acts of generosity that have sustained and inspired us. The unity within Salisbury's community has been evident to my store and myself throughout this exceedingly difficult time for small businesses.

In the darkest days of the pandemic, I saw the same faces come through our door every week, buying stacks of postcards and books for the friends and family members whom they could not visit; I have come to feel these loyal customers are more family than consumers, and I worry if a few weeks go by and I do not see them in the store.

When we found ourselves on a boycott list last summer, suddenly our doors would not

swing shut as folks flocked in to show their support to my store and our neighbors. South Main Book Company (through the tremendous charity of our social network) donated over \$13,000 in new books last year to stock Rowan County's little free libraries with a goal of combating racism in the wake of George Floyd's murder and the controversy surrounding a Confederate monument formerly located downtown.



A generous donor has provided funds to restock these little free libraries again in spring 2021. We will use these funds to purchase new books focused on nurturing math and science skills in young readers. Find out more ways you can partner with us here: <https://www.gofundme.com/f/south-main-book-company-donates-to-roco-schools>.

We plan to include the following titles in our order for this project:

- **Nerdy Babies: Space** (24 pp, Roaring Brook Press) by Emmy Kastner — Board book readers will learn about gravity and orbits in this simple text written in question-and-answer format.

- **Double the Dinosaurs: A Math Read-**

er (32 pp, Random House Books for Young Readers) by Diana Murray — This Step 1 early reader introduces fundamentals of addition and the concept of doubling.


- **The Innings and Outs of Baseball** (48 pp, Simon Spotlight) by Jordan D. Brown — Learn the fascinating science behind baseball in this nonfiction, Level 3 Ready-to-Read, part of a series about the science of fun stuff.

- **Charlotte's Web** (192 pp, HarperCollins) by E.B. White — Classic tale of a spider who weaves messages into her web in an effort to save her friend, Wilbur the pig, from slaughter.

- **Hidden Figures: The Young Readers' Edition** (240 pp, HarperCollins) by Margot Lee Shetterley — The powerful story of four African-American female mathematicians at NASA who helped achieve some of the greatest moments in our space program.

- **The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time** (240 pp, Vintage) by Mark Haddon — Despite his overwhelming fear of interacting with people, Christopher — a mathematically-gifted, autistic 15-year-old boy — decides to investigate the murder of a neighbor's dog and uncovers secret information about his mother.

My first year as a bookseller has provided me with such an incredible learning opportunity, and my work is only just beginning. I hope my store's story has given you a little fire in your belly as well. Small steps can make huge ripples, especially in these interesting days, yet silence can halt these movements just as quickly. Let us not be silent. Let's flood Rowan County's Little Free Libraries with beautiful narratives of the world as we want it to be, and know that we can take action to achieve this together.

The titles mentioned above 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. 

| Q & A |

Informed and engaged

*Linda McElroy says
public input keys success*

Written by **Natalie Anderson**
Photography by **Jon C. Lakey**

Amidst the chaos of a raging pandemic and nationwide racial justice protests last summer, and as the city confronted how to combat a public safety issue that arose from gunshots fired near the downtown Confederate monument, one woman was tasked with leading the city's communication to the community.

Linda McElroy, 47, has served as the city of Salisbury's communications director since September 2015. After her sister moved to Charlotte in 2006, McElroy fell in love with the Piedmont region during her visits to see her sister.

Though McElroy was born in Virginia, having a father in the Air Force allowed her to grow up all over the world in places such as Florida, England, Washington and Germany. In 1996, she graduated with a bachelor's degree in communications from Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania, which is located about an hour outside of Pittsburgh. A number of her college classmates from Pennsylvania, to her surprise, now live in Charlotte.

But in an effort to get to know her extended family members, McElroy moved back to Virginia and attended graduate school at Strayer University, where she obtained a master's degree in marketing in 2007.

McElroy had intended to move to the Piedmont region from Richmond, Virginia, when her daughter, Bailey, graduated high school. Luckily, the city's communications director position opened earlier than she expected.



*Linda McElroy
poses in the Council
Chambers at Salis-
bury City Hall with
her tools of the trade
— a microphone, a
cellphone and a ring
light. McElroy is the
director of commu-
nications for the
City of Salisbury.*

Bailey is currently a junior at Winston-Salem State University. McElroy's parents now live in Oklahoma.

Outside of her role with the city, McElroy enjoys running and racing, with an impressive collection of medals, she said. She's also active with her sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha, an African-American sorority founded at Howard University in 1908. She also loves sleep.

While each day brings new challenges, 2020 was especially challenging for McElroy. Besides navigating a pandemic, McElroy said leading the city's response to a swath of local protests and a public safety issue resulting from gunshots fired near the "Fame" Confederate monument last summer was especially difficult as an African-American woman who regularly keeps up with what locals are saying about the city and its policies. The divisive comments and discussions regarding a deal to relocate the statue and a proliferation of misinformation made the task even more challenging.

"Luckily, I have a great team who is dedicated to their work," she said. "When priorities shifted, they rolled with it. That was our playbook for last year, and will be this year as well."

Looking ahead in 2021, McElroy said the city wants to use a similar approach to be flexible, get things done, be careful with its words and start at a place of "yes" while working to bring the truth to light.

Salisbury the Magazine recently caught up with McElroy for this Q&A:

What are your three favorite things about Salisbury?

Its potential to be great, the restaurants and an incredible city staff.

What does an average day look like for you?

There is no average day in the City of Salisbury Communications Department. I begin my day before I even get out of bed by checking the city's mentions on social media platforms, along with any text messages received while sleeping. My official day begins with email and reviewing media mentions from the



City of Salisbury Public Information Officer Linda McElroy sits in the back of a police SUV crafting a press release after a police chase in 2017. (Jon C. Lakey file photo)

previous day. Then, it's anything from filming staff for projects, responding to resident requests, writing scripts, answering media requests or showing up to the scene of a crime to assist the Salisbury Police Department.

What would you say were the city's biggest challenges this year, along with its biggest accomplishments?

The biggest challenges this year were COVID-19, protests and the proliferation of false information deliberately spread by those with an agenda. Our biggest accomplishments were navigating and communicating about COVID-19 for and to our residents, navigating our challenges without structural damage in our downtown and the reduction of crime.

In what ways can the city continue to grow and progress?

I think there's always room for improvement. We've made great strides in reducing crime and hope to continue on that trend. We want to focus more on reducing our carbon footprint as an organization, and hopefully the community will do the same. Another focus is to increase our community engagement. We'd

love more feedback from our residents on projects like the Downtown Master Plan and other initiatives. An informed and engaged citizenry is important to the success of Salisbury.

What's your favorite food?

Seafood.

What are your favorite movies or books?

I can't say I have any favorites, but I love action films and autobiographies.

What's the best advice you've been given?

The best advice I've ever been given is, "Sometimes I'll be the most hated person in the room as a spokesperson. Don't take it personally."

How do you try to embody the spirit of Rowan County in all that you do?

I think Rowan County is a special place with a good heart. Our county is full of charm and a little wonky at times. But that's what makes it special. It's truly an original. I think that's me in a nutshell. I like to have fun, laugh and not take myself or my job so seriously. But I'm also going to fight to do and say what's right. **S**

FOOD

Smoke show

Long, slow cooking over wood coals key to Kevin Swicegood's barbecue

WRITTEN BY MARK WINEKA / PHOTOGRAPHY BY JON C. LAKEY





Top left: Swicegood depends on a trusty cleaver to chop his barbecue. Above left: Wood coals fall to the bottom of the burn barrel. Right: Kevin Swicegood says '90 percent of cooking barbecue is talking trash, and 10 percent is being good at it.'

Halfway through the morning, as he tends to his homemade cooker, Kevin Swicegood decides his wood coals are just right for adding something extra to the fire.

"I'm going to throw a case of wings on there," he announces.

The jumbo wings have a lot of meat on them.

"Yeah," Kevin says, "you almost have to treat these like chicken quarters."

Swicegood, 44, practices what he likes to call "roots barbecue."

"We smoke the old way, the hard way," Kevin says of himself and the man who has been his barbecue mentor through the years, distant cousin Jeff Swicegood. "I select and harvest my own trees for coals ... and I am using the original methods and recipes (rubs and sauces) from that era to bring back the 100-year-old style and flavor with a modern spin."

The "roots" in his roots barbecue go deep.

Swicegood traces his family line to Jesse Swicegood, considered one of the pioneers of Lexington-style pork barbe-

cue. Between 1916 and 1923, historians say, Sid Weaver and Jesse Swicegood brought tents to downtown Lexington where they pit-cooked pork shoulders over hickory embers and sold the barbecue to the public.

Weaver realized the hickory he burned to cure tobacco would be good for smoking his pork, too.

The Weaver and Swicegood enterprises were soon joined in Lexington by Will Johnson.

"These first eateries targeted the large crowds that came to the county seat during court sessions," William Keesler wrote in a 2003 Lexington Dispatch article. "According to legend, judges in the Old Court House would smell the barbecue cooking outside and recess for lunch."

The barbecue also became popular with cotton mill and furniture factory workers.

"The enthusiastic response gave Swicegood, Weaver and Johnson the confidence to enclose their tents with walls and establish the city's first full-fledged barbecue restaurants," Keesler added.

According to Robert Moss' book, "Barbecue: The History of an American Institution," Lexington-style also came

FOOD



Above: Using a shovel, Swicegood prepares to take coals from the burn barrel to the cooker behind him. *Right:* Wings on the grill. *Far right:* A heaping barbecue sandwich.

to mean that pork shoulders — as opposed to whole hogs — were smoked because shoulders were fattier and yielded more meat.

Hickory was the wood of choice, and the dip applied to the shoulders was a mixture of vinegar, water, salt and pepper. When the dip and fat dripped onto coals, the resulting smoke rose and permeated the meat, giving it a rich, smoky taste.

Other names became associated with Lexington-style, including Warner Stamey, Alston and Red Bridges and Wayne Monk. As you would expect, the name of Jesse Swicegood is among those on Lexington's Barbecue Wall of Fame. Yes, there is such a thing.

Today, in Rowan County, Kevin Swicegood thinks he's carrying on the best tradition of long and slow cooking over wood coals — but not



limiting the wood to hickory, not confining himself to only pork shoulders and giving his own twists to rubs and sauces.

"When you cook over real coals it makes a difference," he says. "When the grease hits those



coals and it comes back up, it changes all the flavors."

Increasingly, through word-of-mouth and catering requests, Kevin thinks Swicegood Barbecue is gaining a small but loyal fan base.



(He and Jeff used to go by Swicegood Bros. Barbecue, though they are cousins, not brothers.)

“We always make sure to get over here every time he cooks,” Stacy Jeter says while tasting some chicken on this particular Saturday morning. She had stopped by the Swicegood family’s homestead off Enon Church Road to pick up an order with husband Andrew and daughter Morgan.

Their samples came right off the cooker and earned hearty praise.

Kevin, who has been in the construction business since college, doesn’t barbecue full-time, but it’s a passion, and he’d like to see how far it can go.

“You can make good money doing it,” Kevin says, “but you’ve got to do it a lot. ... It’s been growing steadily. I’ve gotten into a groove.”

Over recent years, Kevin has cooked pork shoulders, brisket, ribs, chicken quarters and legs, ham, whole turkeys and turkey breasts — pretty much anything you can smoke long and slow — for church fundrais-

***Clockwise from top left:** Boston butts ready for delivery; Swicegood applies some finishing touches over a full grill; chopped barbecue, ready for a sauce; Russell Swicegood, Kevin’s dad, walks by the cooker.*



ers, holiday pick-up orders, company events, Super Bowl parties and even NASCAR and dragster race teams.

“A lot of this got going for me when I started going to the drag strip,” Kevin says of the zMAX Dragway in Concord. Dragsters such as Paul Richards and Tim Wilkerson took notice, and Wilkerson even put the Swicegood Barbecue logo on one of his funny cars.

Kevin hopes to expand his barbecue enterprise with a new food trailer, now under construction in his shop. Swicegood does his cooking under a long, narrow awning attached to the shop. He compares it to when his ancestor Jesse Swicegood cooked under a tent in Lexington.

Those old tents had sawdust on the floor. “We have sawdust on the floor here, too,” Kevin says.

Not too far away from his cookers, toward an old barn on the property, Kevin sets up his 55-gallon burn barrel.

The burn barrel has cross pieces inside that allow the burning coals to drop to the bottom, where Kevin opens up a door, shovels up some embers and layers them into the bottom of his cookers.

Kevin prefers the coals of hickory, oak and persimmon, but at construction job sites and other places, he’s always on the lookout for any available, flavorful wood, including cherry and fig. He often likes to spread what he calls his “magic hickory dust” (from hickory nuts) on his coals for extra smoke and flavor.

“It’s kind of a little bit of everything,” Kevin says of the wood he’s burning on this morning. “It (the burn barrel) kind of works like a wood stove.”

Kevin had started the cooking process about 5 a.m. He had a list of orders, and his cooker included chicken quarters, jumbo wings, Boston butt and a ham glazed with brown sugar and pineapples.

On colder, more damp days, Kevin has to adjust the temperatures more often. “You’d be amazed now much the weather affects it,” he says.

He offers up four of his own sauces to try



with the Boston butt, which essentially is pork shoulder roast. For all of his meat chopping and cutting tasks, Kevin has a pearl-handled cleaver and knives.

“You have to have the right tools for the job,” says Kevin’s mother, Ann, who also makes many of his sides, such as slaw and baked beans.

Truth be told, Kevin says, Ann Swicegood additionally deserves credit for the rib sauce, the recipe for which she keeps a secret.

Kevin’s dad, Russell Swicegood, also helps out while Kevin’s cooking, and the parents see the passion Kevin has invested in barbecuing. “He enjoys it,” Russell says.

The Swicegood clan has resided on this Enon Church Road property a long time. Kevin lives in his grandfather Swicegood’s old home closer to the road. His parents’ house lies a bit farther back, but within shouting distance.

On the grounds, they refer to various structures such as a relocated barn or an old smokehouse as “The Building” or “The Shed.” “There are little stories about the whole place,” Ann says as her eyes take it all in.

A West Rowan High graduate, Kevin studied industrial technology at Appalachian State University, where he also has a master’s degree in building science. After school, Kevin stayed in Boone, going to work in construction.

When business slowed dramatically with the economic downturn in 2008-2009, Kevin re-

turned to Rowan County.

“Basically, I was trying to get started over,” he says, and he worked various jobs in construction, custom trailers and motor coaches.

Kevin first became smitten with the barbecuing process in the 1990s thanks to cousin Jeff, a barber. That interest intensified when he returned to Rowan.

“Jeff has always cooked,” Kevin says. “He got me back into this on a much bigger scale.”

Kevin proudly mentions the “Holy Smoke” cook team comprised of himself, Jeff Swicegood and John Goble. They won the Pit Masters Award in May 2011 during a competition in Spencer. Part of their motto was “The Real Secret’s in the Wood.”

Once the pandemic restrictions ease and the catering trailer is finished, Kevin is hoping he can cook at events at least every other weekend.

“Ninety percent of cooking barbecue is talking trash, and 10 percent is being good at it,” Kevin says of his formula for success.

And he can’t help but think back to Jesse Swicegood.

“If you see a family picture, you can tell he’s a Swicegood from a mile away,” Kevin says. “Maybe it’s in my blood.” **S**

Contact Kevin Swicegood and Swicegood Barbecue at kevinswicegood@yahoo.com or check him out on social media.

CHEERS

to a well-deserved award...



F&M Bank's own Steve Fisher has been named one of the area's "Most Admired CEOs" by the *Charlotte Business Journal*. Are we surprised? Not even a little bit.

As the third generation of the Fisher family to lead F&M Bank, he learned servant leadership from his father, Paul Fisher. Giving back to the community is part of the Fisher DNA, and Steve inspires all of us at F&M Bank every day to do the same.

Congratulations to Steve Fisher!

Steve and Paul Fisher at the 2019 event announcing a \$110,000 donation to the Bell Tower Green park in Salisbury to celebrate F&M Bank's 110th anniversary.




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AT HOME



Thanks to her gardening prowess, Julie Apone wraps her house in many colors.

A bouquet on Blair Street

Julie Apone charms her Fulton Heights house with flowers

WRITTEN BY MARK WINEKA / PHOTOGRAPHY BY JON C. LAKEY



As spring arrives this year and brings the burgeoning growth of a new season, you won't find Julie Apone doing one thing — mowing.

"I've never owned a mower," Apone says of the gardening tools she relies on around her Fulton Heights cottage. "I used a weed-whacker to mow for maybe two months when I moved in four years ago."

But that was it. To put it bluntly, Apone has left no room for grass. Instead, the Master Gardener has filled her yard — front, back and sides — with greenery and bright, aromatic annuals and perennials that attract the butterflies and bees she delights in.

"When I moved here, there weren't any pollinators at all," Apone says, pausing for a moment to also note the singing of crickets and cicadas. "Can you believe the noise?"

It's a good tune.

Above: 'I feel like I really lucked out getting this house,' Apone says.

Right: A sunflower preparing to open.



AT HOME



The explosion of color at various times in the spring and summer seems to make her whimsical, yellow dwelling on Blair Street even that more attractive.

"I feel like I really lucked out getting this house," Apone says.

The story goes that in 1936 a couple with a home on nearby Wiley Avenue built this cottage at the back of their property. It was for their recently married daughter and her new husband. The newlyweds "stayed in it until going to a nursing home!" Apone says.

"I have a lot of beautiful features inside by Goodman Millwork, which has some family connection, too. For a little house to get that kind of detail is cool."

The three-bedroom, 1,400-square-foot house is wide, but not that deep. With her local artwork, interior plants, antiques, comfortable nooks, original craftsmanship, personal touches and various improvements, Apone has made the place her own.

"When I moved in, I had to do a lot of work," Apone says, noting the cottage had been a rental for the previous 15 years before she purchased it.

She painted the house yellow. She fashioned an enviable garden room and laundry out of the



original garage. She refinished the wood floors. She added vinyl flooring in the kitchen. She repurposed one of the bedrooms into an office. One of her favorite spots became the screened porch in front.

The porch's yellow siding walls are a continuation from the outside. Apone loves the slate floor and beautifully designed door. With its wicker chairs and patio table, the porch is a great place to relax, read and have a quick lunch.

"Here's my super-cute kitchen," Apone announces, walking toward the back. "I love it. It's vintage, but it's fresh-looking."

She has accented the kitchen with yellows and grays.



Apone extended her renovations into the grounds around her house.

She laid the brick for a patio and removed an old goldfish pond. She found a way to repurpose clothesline poles to hold things such as lanterns and bird feeders. For additional landscaping, she added to some oyster shells and rocks laid down by the previous owners. She keeps a rain barrel to catch water for her many watering cans.

Apone installed picket fencing and removed the pointed tops of the pickets, just so the fence didn't detract from some of the beauty of her gardens.

"Sometimes it looks like a normal landscape, but not usually," Apone says.

When things get growing, she can pick a bouquet of flowers about anytime she wants.

All kinds of plants might be traded in and out during the year, which makes the place look different, depending on the season.

"That's the fun of it," Apone says. "You can change it all."

Apone usually heads into each spring with plans for renovating a section of her yard, the whole of which she views as being comprised of different rooms with different needs and decors.

She often works among her flowers in the early morning, but doesn't necessarily go crazy.

"If I spend an hour or two a week, I'm happy," she says.

A member of the Rowan Redbuds Garden Club, Apone can be perfectly happy reading seed catalogs or, say, magazine articles on bulbs. She enjoys browsing through places such

Left: Apone loves the design of her front door. Right: One of many butterflies that enjoy Apone's flowers.



Above: A repurposed clothesline pole provides a home for climbing plants, a lantern and a bird feeder. *Below left:* The vintage kitchen. *Below right:* Cosmos foliage readies to bloom.





as Godley's Garden Center (where she once worked and gave workshops), Garden Greenhouses and Lowe's garden section.

"I really love to garden," Apone understates, thinking the spark came when she was a little girl appreciating her grandmother's back-yard garden in West Virginia.

Walking around her house, she can tell you the three different types of black-eyed Susans she'll have in bloom, all of the Rudbeckia family.

To put it more on a novice's level, she says the "floppy" black-eyed Susans are out front, the tall cornflower variety a little farther down the street and, elsewhere, the "Henry Eilers" have pinwheel blooms.

Her butterfly-attracting favorites are the zinnias. "Monarch butterflies, in particular, love butterfly weed — asclepias — and they all love the huge butterfly shrub against the house," Apone says.

This side-yard path features pink zinnias and white garlic chives in bloom and at various other times, knockout roses, kerria, asparagus and hostas.

The front beds hold rosemary, garlic chives, coneflowers and marigolds. Later in the summer "evening sun" sunflowers will open up.

On the side of the house are Solomon's seal, purple phlox, paler anemones and salvia "black and blue," Apone reports. Her asparagus, bearded iris, knockout roses and day lilies enjoy the sunnier spots around the house.

"The back tends to be shadier, so perennials like hostas and coral bells live there, along with loads of Lenten roses that were pass-alongs," she says.

Coleus add splashes of annual color. A slope on the side of Apone's property has more pollinators such as golden rod, additional black-eyed Susans and reseeding annual melampodium.



Julie Apone stays busy — and always has.

She earned a degree in business from Merrimack College in North Andover, Mass., and moved to Salisbury with her former husband about three decades ago.

She has worked at places such as Mills Florists and Godley's. For a time, she managed the Salisbury Emporium when it was owned by Neal Sansovich. In the emporium, she also had two Carolina Lily booths of gifts and collectibles.

She eventually established a stand-alone Carolina Lily in northern Rowan County on Kern Carlton Road. The gift shop also included more than 3 acres — at least an acre of which was gardens — where Apone could host specialty luncheons, baby and bridal showers, garden tours and other events.

"I was in heaven out there," she says.

A Salisbury Post article on garden art from 2008 said, "Apone's whimsical gardens attract visitors from all over these parts, and folks just love to use her ideas."



Clockwise from top left: Sunflowers; a window in Aponé's 'office,' a space usually filled with houseplants that go outside in the summer; Aponé finds that things such as a rusty hand mower and old wheelbarrow make nice garden art; the back of the cottage; Aponé fills her walls inside with local artists' work.





Clockwise from above: Old metal lawn chairs add to a garden patio feel out front; rakes become art in Aponé's garden room; a sunflower; a picket fence wends its way through the gardens.





Above: Aponé's screened porch, looking toward Blair Street. Lower right: A cabinet shows off some of the original Goodman millwork. Lower left: Butterfly weed is a favorite of monarch butterflies.



AT HOME

“

I like to keep everything super tidy. My friends always tell me they should put me in charge of code enforcement.

”

After 15 years, Apone relocated Carolina Lily to a Depot Street location near Salisbury Station, but it's no longer in business. Again, that doesn't mean Apone isn't busy.

She has been a member of the Hurley Park board and participates in the once-a-month Hurley Park volunteer days. She volunteers for the city's BlockWork projects. During the growing season, Apone joins a dedicated group of volunteers who plant and tend to Rowan Helping Ministries' Garden of Eatin' which supplies fresh vegetables to the shelter's kitchen.

Apone also looks after plants and cleans up regularly at a pocket park near Jackson and Harrison streets. She hates litter and messiness.

"I like to keep everything super tidy," she says. "My friends always tell me they should put me in charge of code enforcement."

Apone enjoys attending auctions and yard sales and looking for old things, some of which might find their way into her gardens at home as features — things such

as benches, metal lawn chairs and rusty wheelbarrows. She actually does own a mower, but it's a vintage push mower that's seems to be the perfect art among her flowers out front.

Apone works at the front desk of the Hurley YMCA.

"It's a good fit, and I feel like I'm helping them," says Apone, who takes a look now and then at the Y's Memory Garden, just to make sure it's shipshape.

As you might expect, Apone has won residential landscape awards from the Salisbury Community Appearance Commission.

She appreciates her private street, which still allows her to be close friends with the neighbors. They often leave vegetables out for each other, and they share in a compost pile. If the pile becomes too big, Apone takes some of the excess compost to the Garden of Eatin' at RHM.

Of course, she does.

Apone has a sign on the wall that says, "Of all the roads you take in life, make sure a few of them are dirt."

For her, those are the roads most traveled. **S**

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Above: Anna and Luke Allman started their Sign Dreamers of Rowan franchise in August 2020.

Below left: Will Allman, 4, adjusts the 'S.' Below right: Will and Lily Allman sometimes help their parents with sign installations.





LETTER

perfect

Anna and Luke Allman have signs
fitting all occasions

WRITTEN BY MARK WINEKA
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JON C. LAKEY



Picture the iconic “Hollywood” sign looming high over the city of Los Angeles, and you get a taste for what Anna and Luke Allman do with their yard greeting business in Rowan County.

Do they have to spell things out? Well, yes. All the time.

To the Allmans, their world of letters sometimes has the feel of one big SCRABBLE game or a continuous appearance on “Wheel of Fortune.”

“We are always running out of ‘E’s,” Anna says.

Sign Dreamers of Rowan, a franchise in Rockwell, is the All-

mans’ sign rental enterprise, and its customers seek personalized signs for special occasions. The couple do all the installing and taking down of the signs. The messages are spelled out handsomely, letter by letter, in the front yards of homes, businesses and institutions, often as a surprise for whom they are intended.

The letters and graphics combine for birthdays, gender reveals, baby arrivals, graduations, welcome-home signs, salutes, inspiration and congratulations on a multitude of things.

“Heroes Work Here” was a message erected outside the hospital during these pandemic days. “No More Chemo” were the words a daughter asked to be placed in her mother’s yard, signifying the mom’s last day treatment for cancer.



Above: Luke and Anna Allman spread out some graphics on their basement work space, which is an old ping-pong table. *Above right:* Adam and Casey Ratledge used this front-yard sign to let people know a baby was on the way. (submitted photo) *Right:* Luke pulls out some of the graphics needed for a yard greeting.





***Above:** The Allmans install a 'Heroes Work Here' sign outside a Novant Health medical complex off Jake Alexander Boulevard.*

***Left:** Letters are stored in the basement.*



To accompany that sign, Anna specially ordered pink boxing gloves and a pink breast cancer ribbon.

"I just feel so fulfilled doing them," Anna says of all the uplifting messages. "There are so many things we never thought of."

The couple established their Rowan franchise on Aug. 21, 2020. By mid December, they had put up and taken down signs for 164 different customers. Anna and Luke quickly insert they haven't yet made back their initial investment for a franchise fee, letters and wire holders, but they will soon because they've been that busy.

In November alone, Luke and Anna had orders for 55 signs. December, a typically slow month in this kind of business, still had 35 customers.

"I'm not going to lie," Luke says, "November was rough."

• • •

It turned out the drive-by, social-distancing requirements of the pandemic fit well with the nature of the young couple's yard greeting business.



*Above left: Luke receives help from Lily and Will. Above right: Pegboard in the basement comes in handy for holding letters, graphics.
Below: Birthdays represent the most requested signs for the Allmans. Here, Morgan Rollins celebrates her seventh. (Submitted photo)*



Birthdays represent the most requested signs for the Allmans. (Submitted photo)



*Top: The Allmans' large basement has come in handy.
Above: Luke installs and takes down most of the signs.*

The Allmans, who hold down other full-time jobs, have established their sizable, unfinished basement as the Sign Dreamers of Rowan headquarters. Here, they organize, sort and hang onto pegboard more than a thousand letters and graphics such as emojis, candles, party hats, cupcakes, stars, sports symbols, hearts, fireworks, champagne glasses, balloons, rocking horses, exclamation points and musical notes.

“It forced us to clean our basement,” Luke says.

They use an old ping-pong table as a work surface for assembling the letters they need for each job.

“We’re super-blessed to have this space,” Anna says. “We can pull a sign in a couple of minutes.”

The Allmans have full-letter sets in colors such as silver, gold, teal and black. While the “E” is a letter always in demand, they had used an “X” only once. as of this writing.

The franchisees, such as the Allmans, buy the letters and symbols they want from the parent Sign Dreamers company, which was founded by two stay-at-home moms in Texas.

“After the first month,” Anna says, “we realized we



It's a rewarding business for the couple, and Anna says, 'I just feel so fulfilled doing them.'





needed about three of everything. Once you get them, they are yours. ... We just can't keep up with the demand."

The signs are rented for a day. If a customer wants it up longer, there's an extra charge.

The Allmans like to take a photo of every sign they install.

A lot of times, Anna and Luke might not even speak on the phone or in person with a customer. They provide a "Book Now" button on their website, Facebook or Instagram that takes the customer to a Google document asking all the pertinent questions for the installer, who is usually Luke.

He sends out a text to let the various customers know when he's arriving on their properties.

Because many of the signs are meant as surprises, the couple wait until after 8 p.m. the day before to install the letters in someone's yard. The messages stay up all day for the recipients and passersby to enjoy before Luke returns after 7 that evening to gather up the letters.


"This is my night job," he says.

Weekends tend to be Sign Dreamers of Rowan's busiest time. Luke had 13 installations on one of his busier weekends.



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“I got home at 3 that night,” he says.”... I would say every night we’re picking them up in some regard.”

The couple enlist the help of their small children (Lily, 7, and Will, 4) when it’s safe and a good family opportunity. The grandparents also get involved at times.

A standard happy birthday yard sign costs \$75 plus tax. It includes the letters spelling out “Happy Birthday,” a name, his or her age and some graphics.

Each additional phrase costs \$25. For rush jobs — within 48 hours of the event — there’s another \$25 charge. Birthdays are by far the most requested signs, and the graphics to go with them, for example, might be candles, cakes and presents.

“We try not to make any the same way,” Anna says.

Luke says his beard has been good insulation for the windy, 20-degree nights of winter when he has installed some of the signs. The couple carry bolt cutters in their vehicles, and those cutters come in handy if they have to adjust the height on some of the wire stakes.

Luke says the corrugated plastic letters and graphics, which fit into the stakes, have been pretty durable.

“They haven’t gotten damaged to where you have to replace them,” he adds.



Anna and Luke Allman are 2005 graduates of East Rowan High, and they first dated when they were 16. Both graduated from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington before marrying back in 2009.

Luke works as a certified public accountant

in the tax department for Food Lion Inc. Anna teaches at Rockwell Elementary School, where you could say the couple’s interest in signs took root.

During the summer, Anna and school colleagues investigated renting some kind of grand yard sign for Principal Jennifer Warden to thank her publicly for all the work she was immersed in connected to COVID-19 protocols.

“There was a lot going on, and we needed to do something for her,” Anna says.

They wound up renting letters from Sign Gypsies in Davie County. The cost was \$150, which included an extra \$70 for erecting a sign outside of the Sign Gypsies’ normal territory.

Right away, when he saw the visual impact of the sign, a light bulb went off in accountant Luke’s head. “I’m looking into this,” he told Anna.

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“When he said that,” Anna recalls, “I said, ‘OK, whatever.’”

Two days later, Luke had set up a meeting, and eventually his research led him to Sign Dreamers, a different but similar company to Sign Gypsies. Sign Dreamers had an available franchise for Rowan County, and Luke and Anna also didn't want to step on the toes of the sign business already established in Davie.

In fact, they have sent customers to each other. Anna isn't completely sure, but Sign Dreamers of Rowan might have been the parent company's first franchise in North Carolina.

“We definitely didn't think it would turn out this nice when we started,” she says. “We feel very blessed that it has taken off.”

Since the Allmans established their business, Sign Dreamers has awarded other franchises in Cabarrus County and in the Lake Norman area. The only zip code the Allmans don't have in Rowan County is the Mount Ulla area, which is assigned to the Lake Norman franchisee. Sign Dreamers of Rowan can still go into Davidson County if requested.

On occasion, the Allmans have donated their sign installa-

tions, such as two specifically for Anna's Rockwell Elementary, such as “Welcome Back, Rockets” and “Thank You, Parents.”

They laugh, noting that neighbors in their Hidden Oaks subdivision booked a sign from them without knowing they were renting from Luke and Anna down the street.

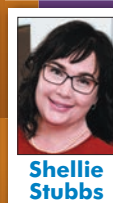
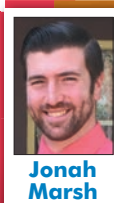
The couple have ordered extra graduation graphics to be ready for what they've been told will be a big seasonal demand this spring. “I feel like we're learning so much,” Anna says. “We have definitely learned a lot of tricks along the way.”

The Allmans say people who have rented signs constantly share photos of the finished messages on social media.

“They advertise themselves,” Anna adds. 

For booking purposes, Sign Dreamers of Rowan can be found on Facebook, Instagram and on its Sign Dreamers of Rowan website. The phone number is 704-239-5263.

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The Allman family — Will and Lily, front; Luke and Anna, back — pose with a finished sign.

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*Mary and Todd Rosser
at The Pedal Factory
on Council Street.*



CHAIN *lightning*

At The Pedal Factory, a growing bicycle co-op, you put something in to get something out

WRITTEN BY BEN STANSELL

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SEAN MEYERS



It was on the side of the road in North Dakota where Dylan Horne really learned how to fix a bicycle.

As an avid cyclist, Horne had tinkered with the mechanics of bikes before. But it wasn't until Horne's bicycle malfunctioned in the middle of nowhere in a rural stretch of the midwestern United States that Horne's skills were truly put to the test.

It was the summer of 2015 and Horne and Horne's brother were on a bike ride across the country. The trek was more than just a thrill-seeking adventure. Horne was on the way to Corvallis, Oregon, to visit Oregon State, where Horne was considering applying for graduate school. Instead of flying there, Horne thought it'd be more fun to cycle.

And it was, minus the occasional breakdown. But even those moments were good, because they forced Horne to

learn how to fix the machines Horne loves.

After traveling thousands of miles across more than a half dozen states, Horne made it to Corvallis. The visit went well and Horne ended up going to graduate school at Oregon State, earning a master's in mechanical engineering with a concentration in bicycle safety.

Now, on any given weekday night, you can find Horne within the walls of The Pedal Factory on East Council Street. Horne will likely be fixing a bike, or teaching someone else how to fix one. It's not where Horne expected to be at this point in life, but it's where Horne is happy to be.

"It's a home away from home for me," said Horne, who started volunteering at The Pedal Factory a couple of years ago.

A lot of people have that feeling about The Pedal Factory.

Five years ago, the idea for The Pedal Factory was hatched during a casual bike ride among cycle enthusiasts in downtown Salisbury.

*Todd Rosser
works on a
bike at The
Pedal Factory.*



Top: Dylan Horne, right, organizes the workspaces at The Pedal Factory. **Above:** A box of wheel washers and nuts. **Left:** Pedal Factory's Mary Rosser teaches 10-year-old Tin Yan Redmond how to ride a bike along the greenway in City Park.



“We joined a Sunday social ride and Todd (Rosser) and I had been talking about how this would be a great place for a co-op and apparently Rhonda and David (Harrison) and Sharon (Earnhardt), who were also on our board, had had the same conversation,” said Mary Rosser, director of The Pedal Factory. “It just came up after a bike ride. Karissa (Minn) was like ‘Oh, I have experience writing grants.’ It was like the stars all aligned.”

After that initial conversation among the fel-

low bike lovers, things started to move quickly.

“That ride was in August and by October we had our nonprofit letter and we opened the following February,” Mary said.

From the beginning, the mission was simple: increase bicycle awareness and use by allowing people to earn a bike by teaching them how to fix one.

Mary and Todd have championed that mission. Supported by a board of directors and countless volunteers, the Rossers have grown

the non-profit bike cooperative from a roofed-in alleyway on South Main Street to its current, more spacious home on East Council.

Along with filling the vibrantly painted two-story building with bikes, many of which will go to someone in need, the husband-and-wife duo have intentionally made it a place where everyone is welcome. Where you might meet someone who rode a bike across the country, or someone who’s never ridden a bike before.



Cyclists make their way through the N.C. Transportation Museum of Lights during The Pedal Factory's Sunday Night Lights Ride in Spencer in mid December.

Todd said bikes are just “the language they speak,” but what The Pedal Factory is truly about is fostering a culture of understanding where someone has to put something in to get something out.

GROWING TENTACLES

About a year into The Pedal Factory's existence, Mary and Todd Rosser came to a crossroads.

The other two people who had been inti-

mately involved with establishing the co-op left, leaving a bulk of the duties of running the organization on Mary and Todd's shoulders. At the same time, they were trying to figure out exactly what The Pedal Factory was going to be.

The mission was clear and concise when the organization was launched. The Pedal Factory would accept used bikes, some of which might have a busted chain, a flat tire, or a cosmetic issue. When someone was in need of a new set of wheels and didn't have the money to buy

a brand new bicycle, they could come to The Pedal Factory, learn how to fix a bicycle and ride away on one after volunteering some of their time.

That is and always has been the core of what The Pedal Factory does, but Mary and Todd wanted to do more. Not everyone felt the same.

“We were kind of warned not to grow tentacles,” Mary said. “That was the exact term. Keep it small, keep it manageable and don't overextend yourself because you're going to burn out.”



The advice was given in good faith, but it wasn't how Mary and Todd wanted to run the organization. Over time, The Pedal Factory has adapted to what the community needs, which has meant growing more arms and legs than an average cephalopod.

"Some of the things we've done that we felt were maybe out of scope really haven't been," Todd said.

The nonprofit now runs the Sunday ride where it was founded, has taught local high school students the principles of bike riding, hosts Halloween and Black History Month rides and offers "team builds" to local businesses who want to improve camaraderie among their employees. Its doors are open as a free workspace, or just a place for someone to hangout for a few hours.

The Pedal Factory even collaborated with Granite Quarry Mayor Bill Feather, who is on the board of directors, to help establish a bike park in the town to give local riders a place to go.

It might be a mere coincidence that a massive orange octopus

was painted on the wall in their building, but the mural is emblematic of what the co-op has become.

"It's been four years of seeing what works," Mary said. "That's part of the tentacles is if we felt like it had the ability to connect somebody else to what we're doing and our mission of making bikes accessible, or that we can make more bikes accessible by doing this specific program, that's what we're going to try to do."

The organization wouldn't have been able to expand, Todd said, if not for the community's support.

"It's amazing how much has fallen into place naturally because people like it," Todd said. "People appreciate it and that's been the thing that's made it grow. We've done a lot of stuff, but 10,000 people are doing a small percentage of input, whether it be donations or money or bikes that get donated. It's a huge amount of people doing a tiny effort to make it grow. That's it."

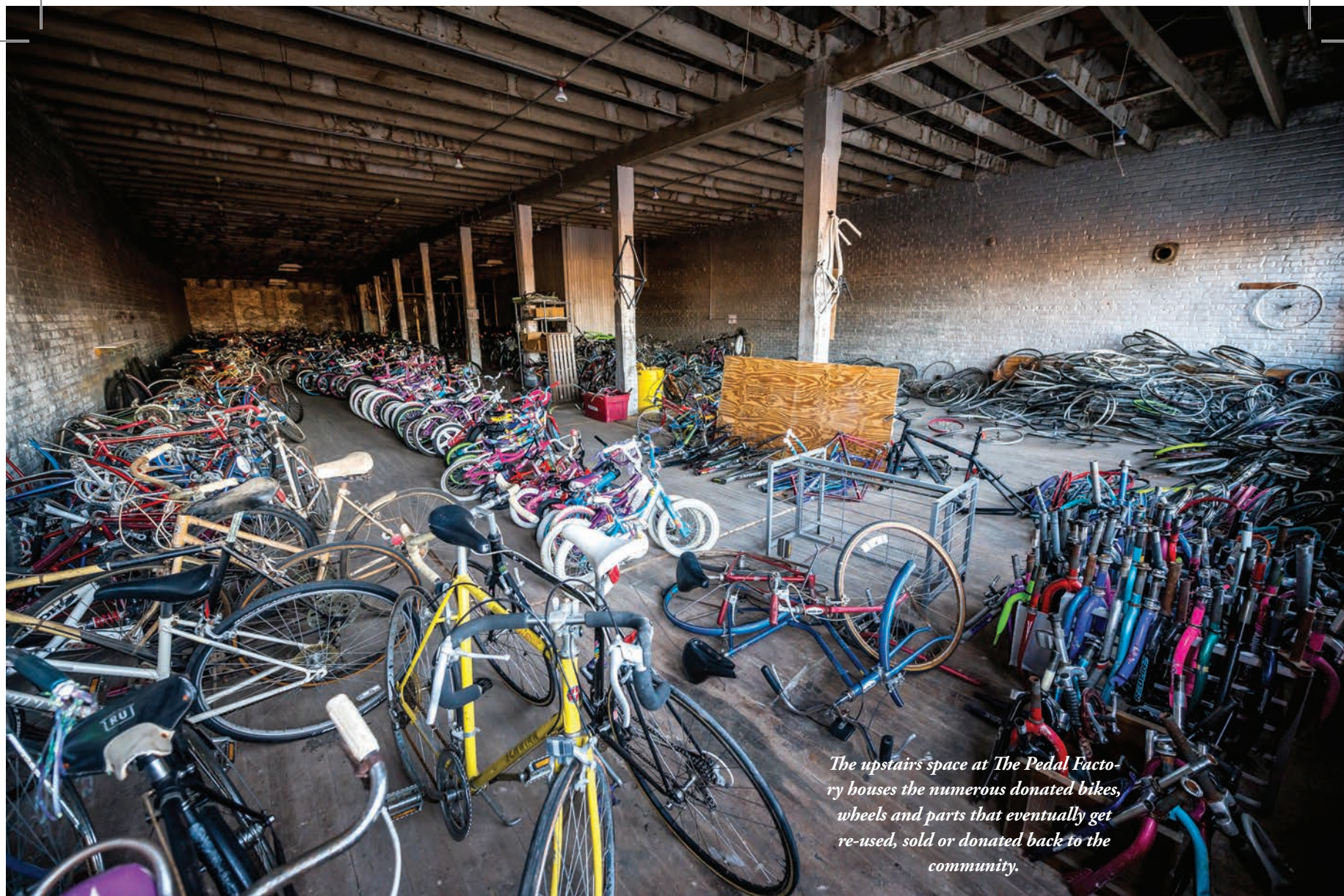
Among those who have been major contributors are David Post,

Mary Rosser and her father Joe Bartlett, both center, speak with the Church of Latter Day Saint's missionaries and volunteers, from left, Elder Dallin Prince, Elder Cole Neilson, Elder Carter Olson and Elder Josh Mortenson, far right.



Volunteer and bike mechanic Tim Faucette works on getting a fresh inner tube and tire onto a bicycle wheel during shop hours.





The upstairs space at The Pedal Factory houses the numerous donated bikes, wheels and parts that eventually get re-used, sold or donated back to the community.

who wrote the organization its first check, and Food Lion and Skinny Wheels bike shop, but the list doesn't stop there. Hundreds of bikes have been donated by local law enforcement agencies and individuals.

Thousands of people have supported The Pedal Factory as it has blossomed into one of the area's most prominent nonprofits, but the number of people who have benefited from The Pedal Factory has been far greater.

PEOPLE OF THE PEDAL FACTORY

Linda was in the process of getting back on her feet.

Previously homeless, she'd finally found a place where she and her son could live. And with a steady job at Starbucks, things were looking up. Then her car broke down.

Without a reliable form of transportation, Linda turned to Mary and Todd, who she'd heard were thinking about launching a bicycle cooperative aimed at helping people exactly like her.

At the time, The Pedal Factory was still more of an idea than a real thing. Before the nonprofit even took its first baby steps, it helped Linda secure a bicycle — an old yellow Schwinn that weighed a ton.

"It was like a boat anchor," Mary recalls. "But she rode that sucker and ended up working at Starbucks for three years."



From left, Dillen Lutrell, Estela Sandoval, Shelia Teamer and McKiara Worth volunteered their time to work at The Pedal Factory sorting and recycling parts, cleaning and organizing the shop.

Linda eventually moved away, but not before coming back to The Pedal Factory from time to time to volunteer.

"To me, she's been really special in that sense because she was first and she always felt very connected," Mary said.



Jesse Castillo of Woodleaf picks up his refurbished bike from Mary Rosser.

The Pedal Factory has a way of doing that — bringing people back time and time again. Just ask Rashid Muhammad.

After hearing about The Pedal Factory several months ago, Muhammad stopped by one day to see what the operation was all about. He was immediately teleported back to his teenage days in southern New Jersey, when he spent hours tinkering with his bike.

“As a teenager, I had a newspaper route. My investment was my bike,” Muhammad said. “I had to make sure that my bike was running right so that I could put my newspaper bag on the front of the handlebars and be able to move. I had to make sure my brakes were good, my chain was good. Then I just did it for fun.”

Once Muhammad visited The Pedal Factory, he didn’t want to leave.

“One whole week, I was in here every day,” Muhammad said.

When Muhammad’s 8-year-old and 5-year-

*Pedal Factory’s
Todd Rosser
delivers bicycles
to the J.F.
Hurley Family
YMCA during
last year’s holi-
day donations
to the Y.*

old sons had bike problems, he jumped at the chance to bring them to the factory.

“The little one, his pedal broke and the older one, his chain popped off,” Muhammad said. “It was the perfect opportunity for me to get in here, bring them with me, have some fun in a nice family-oriented environment.”

Over the past five years, Karissa Minn, who was a part of the organization’s founding group, has heard the stories of people visiting The Pedal Factory. Minn said not everyone offers up the reason why they might need a bike, but that

most people are more than willing to share.

“There’s so many different ways people use this,” said Minn, who was the organization’s first grant writer and still serves in an advisory role. “Some have been told by their doctor that they need to get fit and this is their way of doing it. Or, they only have one car in their family or their car is broken down and they need another mode of transportation.”

The people who volunteer at The Pedal Factory come for an almost equally diverse number of reasons. There are those who went through the “earn a bike” program themselves. There are those who, like Horne, have a passion for promoting bicycle awareness. Then there are those like Elder Josh Mortinsen, who is more than 1,000 miles away from his home in Colorado on mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

“As missionaries, we have to ride bikes a lot to lessons and stuff, so we thought it’d be good to learn how to change a tire or something like that,” Mortinsen said.

Mortinsen is one of several missionaries with the church who are currently stationed in Salisbury. It’s their goal to do good in the world and there’s no better place to do that than The Pedal Factory. Almost every Tuesday night for the past four months, they’ve come to East Council Street and have broken down bikes that are in





OUR STATS		2020	TO DATE
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BIKES REPAIRED	18		11651
BIKES DONATED	22		1368
#S METAL RECYCLED			9140
LETS RIDE PARTICIPANTS	4		52
BIKE-BASICS PARTICIPANTS	5		29

Above: Bicycles and parts frame the work station area as Todd Rosser and Charlie Brown work on a bike. *Left:* A door in the shop on East Council Street with stats on The Pedal Factory's progress. *Right:* Mary and Todd Rosser look over receipts and related items before closing the shop for the night.



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Joe Bartlett loads up a trailer with old bicycles and parts from The Pedal Factory to be recycled.

too poor of shape to be used again, but that still have usable parts. "I love it," Mortinsen said. "You get to meet cool people, get to see cool bikes."

The Pedal Factory has relied on volunteers from every walk of life to grow as an organization. And for its first five years, the non-profit has run solely on volunteer labor. But in 2021, that's going to change.

NO TIME FOR PAUSE IN THE PEDAL FACTORY

Before Mary and Todd moved back to Salisbury from Birmingham, Alabama, about five years ago, Mary spent most of her time being a mom and part of her time being a fitness instructor.

With a degree in kinesiology and exercise science, Mary always appreciated the fitness benefits of riding a bike. It wasn't until she became the director of The Pedal Factory that she appreciated the full value a bike brings.

Todd, who grew up working on and around cars at his family's Jeep dealership, had always been the one who focused on the

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Proactively we do programs to teach our community that: **"The preparation for the game of the life does not include the practice of underage drinking"** ~ Terry Osborne



mechanical side of things — the kind of person who takes something apart just to put it back together. As director of The Pedal Factory, Mary decided that it was her turn to learn what makes a bike spin. So a couple years ago, she spent two weeks at the QBP Women's Bike Mechanic workshop in Oregon where she learned almost all there is to know about a bike.

Todd is still the one who spends most of his time at The Pedal Factory "hiding" in his workstation, fixing cables and pumping tires, but Mary can hold her own when it comes to repairing a bicycle.

Along with learning how to fix a bike, Mary has learned how to run a nonprofit, from writing grant applications to running events. Over the years, she has spent more and more time at The Pedal Factory, or thinking about it.

That's why it's only fitting that she's the organization's first paid employee.

It's a major step for the organization — a sign of more growth to come.

"It's a big deal," Mary said. "I have a lot of guilt about it, because we didn't start out that way. We started out as this being a volunteer-run thing, but the demand is way more than we have volunteers for. Somebody has to answer the phone, somebody has to answer emails, somebody has to coordinate projects and programs."

Horne was also recently approved by the board to become a paid employee. Horne will continue to help fix bikes and teach others how to.

Having two paid employees will help the organization sustain its growth at a time when bikes are sought-after. Even though the

COVID-19 pandemic has forced The Pedal Factory to adjust how it operates, it's also caused the increase in demand for bikes to spike.

"Bikes are in really high demand right now, to the point where we're having trouble sourcing parts sometimes, which is great," Minn said. "We've seen a boom in cycling this year, just people wanting a healthy activity they can do outside."

Todd is happy to harness that momentum and he wants to let the organization "grow as much as it wants to grow."

No matter how high the demand for bikes goes, or how big The Pedal Factory gets, there will always be a bike and a place for everyone.

"If you're having a bad day, come to The Pedal Factory," Muhammad said. "You'll feel much better." **S**

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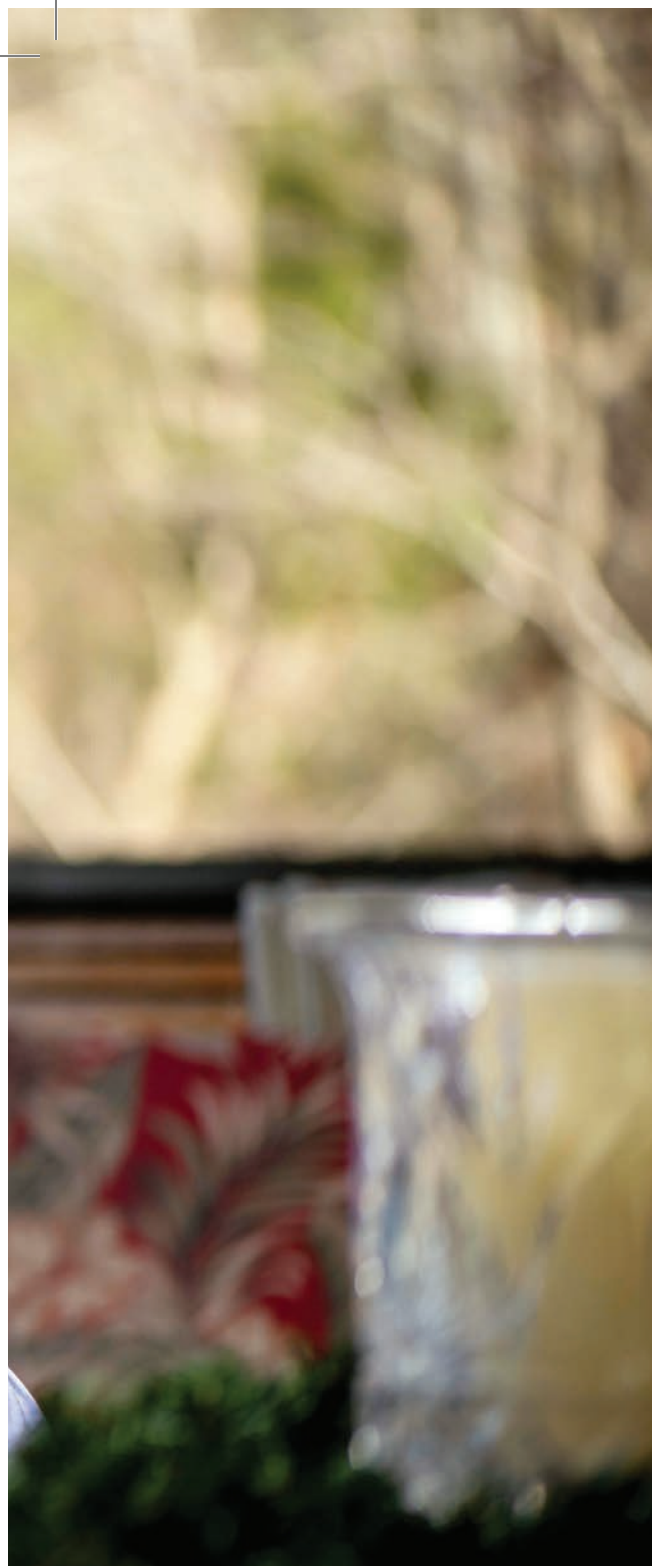
WELLNESS



Fighting an epidemic

*Rowan native Sigmon nationally recognized
for her work in opioid treatment, research*

WRITTEN BY KRIS MUELLER / PHOTOGRAPHY BY JON C. LAKEY & SUBMITTED



Stacey C. Sigmon, Ph.D., of the departments of Psychiatry and Psychological Science at University of Vermont, is the director of the UVM Center on Rural Addiction.



For 20 years, Rowan County native Stacey Sigmon, Ph.D., has watched the rise of opioid use in America and its subsequent explosion into a national epidemic. As more citizens died from overdoses and lethal injections of street drugs, she began working to expand treatment, especially in rural areas where options are limited.

Through her roles as a clinical researcher at the University of Vermont and director of the largest opioid treatment clinic in that state, Sigmon has developed new ways of delivering opioid treatment using technologies created for other fields.

Last year, Sigmon's important work caught the attention of international magazine Fast Company, which named her to its annual list of the Most Creative People in Business. She joined 73 other innovators recognized for using creative thinking to address societal problems in new ways.

Actor Ryan Reynolds was the most recognized name on the Fast Company list. Known for his marketing prowess with hit movies, Reynolds was singled out for his creative marketing techniques and for delivering an "honest message" for companies he owns, including the affordable wireless company Mint Mobile. Also on the list was the news-making computer scientist who exposed racial bias in facial recognition software used by Big Tech and law enforcement.



Over the Christmas break, Stacey Sigmon and her children, Claire and Liam, visited Stacey's mother, Cathy Sigmon, far left.

But like Sigmon, most of the honorees have been quietly working under the public's radar while making significant advances in their fields.

"I was really surprised and excited," Sigmon said of the award while visiting her mother, Cathy Sigmon, in Faith at Christmas. "It is exciting to bring addiction treatment and research in front of new audiences and be seen as doing some innovative work. I don't know if addiction-focused work had been in their pages before. It's not the sexiest work, but with the opioid epidemic, it certainly is urgent."

Sigmon has brought to her field technologies that can be used with patients who have limited access to opioid addiction treatment, particularly those in the rural areas of New England.

"The treatment is very effective," Sigmon said, "but our clinic can only take so many new people who need it. There is a big backlog of people waiting. The people in treatment are far more stable — it's the folks who can't get treatment who are not stable."

In rural areas, most doctors are reluctant to work with

opioid-addicted patients, fearing misuse of the treatment medication, relapse, and overdoses. Transportation is another barrier for those needing treatment in larger cities.

Sigmon received grant funding for a clinical study for her treatment ideas and found a computerized device used in geriatrics to remind the elderly to take their medicine at designated times. The device — a medi-wheel — could be adapted and programmed to distribute one day's dose of Buprenorphine (or Suboxone) to patients in the study. Buprenorphine is particularly effective in reducing withdrawal symptoms and cravings for opioids and minimizing relapse, which allows patients to focus on therapy and treatment.

To provide patient monitoring, Sigmon's team developed a check-in process using an interactive voice response phone system (IVR), like that used in the credit card industry. The IVR system is programmed to call the patient and ask for answers to a preset list of questions. A random callback process also was created using IVR to direct patients to bring the medi-wheel to the clinic for pill checks and other monitoring activities.

“That is what Fast Company found to be innovative — the innovative uses of technology to support the appropriate taking of meds,” Sigmon said. “I am not saying it is better than the full-scale treatment, but if it is between that or nothing, we can still triage patients and, while they are on the wait list, give them meds in a safe way.”

If you look at Sigmon’s history and resumé, it seems she was always wired for and focused on pursuing this field of work.

“Definitely some foundation was certainly from Mom and Dad — from both of them the enjoyment of learning in general and also some grit or persistence,” Sigmon said. Her late father taught at Erwin Middle School for 35 years, and her mother used her master’s degree in counseling in her work in Rowan County schools.

An honor student, Sigmon learned to love

“If you can head off death, overdose, sepsis, crime, HIV, hepatitis, and so many (other problems related to drug addiction), why not do it?”

science from teacher Jerry Peck at East Rowan High School. In her first year at UNC-Chapel Hill, she took a class on behavioral pharmacology (the intersection between behavior and drugs) and then volunteered in a pre-clinical addiction laboratory doing experiments on rats and pigeons. She earned advanced degrees in experimental psychology/pharmacology at the University of Vermont and spent two years at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine

as a National Institute of Health fellow.

Sigmon’s influence within her field is widespread. As director of UVM’s opioid treatment clinic, she guides treatment for 1,000 patients. She also serves as director of the UVM Center on Rural Addiction, working with rural doctors in New England to expand treatment in their communities. She mentors doctoral students, consults with the Food and Drug Administration and state legislators on drug addiction issues and serves as president of the oldest and largest organization dedicated to advancing the scientific study of substance abuse.

Through those roles, she also is working to decrease the stigma associated with drug addiction, which she believes should not be viewed as a moral failing.

“Heroin addiction hijacks the wiring in the brain,” she said, noting that the overprescribing of pain medications created the gateway to



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This is a computer screen shot of Dr. Stacey Sigmon speaking from her office at the University of Vermont.



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heroin addiction. “It destabilizes your whole neurochemistry. It is truly a physical and brain-based phenomenon.”

The most effective treatment is the medications used — Buprenorphine (Suboxone) and Methadone — paired with counseling and a range of supportive services patients need to get their lives back on track. Due to the lifestyles they fall into, many patients also need help with basic needs like food, childcare, transportation and financial assistance.

“It sounds great to think you can detox someone and just send them to Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous, but the data shows that relapse is almost certain,” Sigmon said. “Many more people succeed with at least medication in the picture plus those other pieces.”

“If you think about other health problems like diabetes, there is no weakness in taking a medication that works,” she continued. “That is the tool that you can use to make all the long-lasting, lifestyle changes you need to get back on track and then taper the medication. It’s like managing a health problem that might always be with you.”

Another important tool in the medicine bag is Narcan, the overdose reversal medication that is administered as nose spray.

“I would like to see us sharing and using more Narcan,” Sigmon said. “You can’t help someone if they overdose and die. I carry Narcan with me

in my bag, in my car. It is an immediate life-saving tool ... and it won’t hurt a person if they are not having an overdose.”

In giving patients these available treatments, Sigmon said, “if you can head off death, overdose, sepsis, crime, HIV, hepatitis, and so many (other problems related to drug addiction), why not do it?” **S**

Kris Mueller is a freelance writer living in Salisbury.



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*For newly retired Rick Parker,
cancer center just one highlight
of accomplished hospital career*

WRITTEN BY BEN STANSELL
SUBMITTED PHOTOS

It was the early 1990s and Rick Parker, then the manager of patient relations at Rowan Memorial Hospital, had his eyes on a fancy new device.

“There was this new gadget that had just been developed and it was called a fax machine,” Parker said.

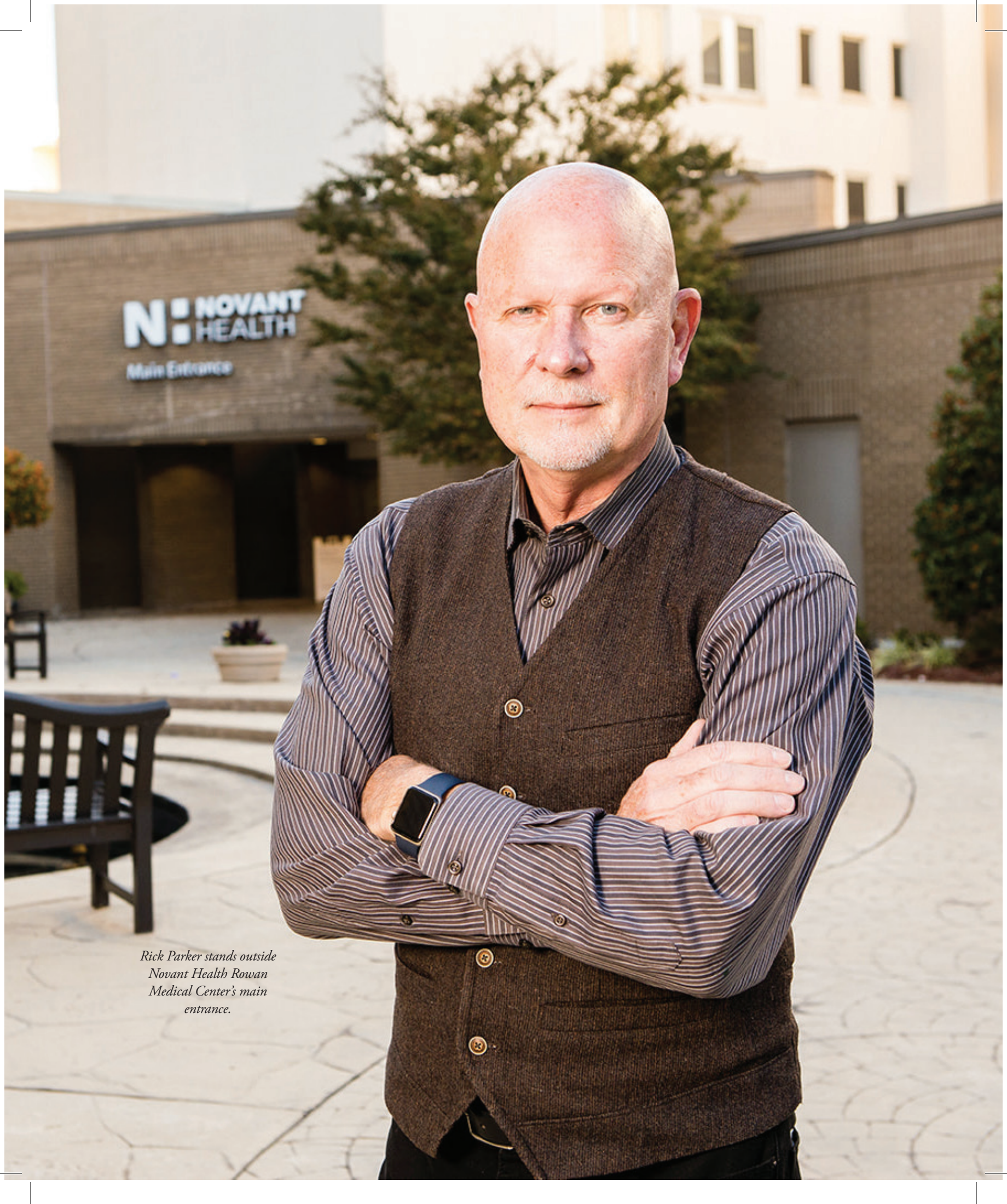
Parker coveted the emerging technology because it would allow the hospital to more easily and efficiently communicate with skilled nursing facilities when looking to place discharged patients. Parker went to the hospital’s administration to request funding to buy the device, but was told that money for the fax machine simply wasn’t in the budget.

Parker didn’t let that stop him. He applied for an outside grant to buy the fax machine himself and was approved. As a result, he was responsible for purchasing the hospital’s first fax machine.

Securing the fax machine was helpful, but it paled in comparison to some of the other ways Parker contributed to Novant Health Rowan Medical Center over the 39 years he worked for the healthcare provider.

At the end of December, Parker retired from his position as executive director of the Novant Health Rowan Medical Center Foundation. Parker closed the door on an illustrious career, leaving behind a legacy that won’t soon be forgotten by his coworkers or the countless patients he helped along the way.





*Rick Parker stands outside
Novant Health Rowan
Medical Center's main
entrance.*



Rick Parker's path to being involved in healthcare started when he was riding his motorcycle. He was hit by a car and sustained traumatic injuries, for which he spent a month in the hospital.

"You cannot replace a Rick Parker," said Gary Blabon, president and chief operating officer of Novant Health Rowan Medical Center. "We will replace and fill the position, but you cannot replace a Rick Parker."

Parker's path to becoming an integral part of healthcare in Rowan County started on a winding road in Cullowhee, North Carolina, when he was a sophomore at Western Carolina University. Parker's main method of transportation at the time was a motorcycle, which he was riding one night when he went to meet some friends for pizza.

On the way, Parker was hit by a turning car, which sent him sprawling.

"That led to traumatic orthopedic injuries to my upper and lower legs," Parker said. "That was my introduction to healthcare."

Parker spent a month in a hospital in Charlotte, during which he said he became fascinated with the inner workings of hospitals. Prior to the accident, Parker had thought about becoming a teacher or a coach, but after several weeks recovering in a hospital, he had a new passion — healthcare.

"It gave me purpose and focus at that time as to what I

wanted to do with the rest of my life," Parker said.

An internship with Thoms Rehabilitation Hospital in Asheville further confirmed his interest in the medical field. After graduating from college, Parker eventually found his way to Rowan County, not far from where he was born and raised in Stanly County. He worked as an emergency room technician at then Rowan Memorial Hospital for two years, but decided it wasn't the role that suited him best.

Parker temporarily left the hospital, only to return in 1981 with a proposition: He wanted to create a patient advocacy program, the first of its kind at the hospital.

"It was Richard Hurder who was the administrator, and he said 'OK, we'll give you a try. But I'm only going to give you six months to make this work,'" Parker said.

Six months passed, then seven, and the patient advocacy program was working exactly the way Parker envisioned.

"It did work out," he said. "After a period of time, little by little they gave me more responsibility at the medical center and I began to grow with the organization. It was fun. I made a lot of mistakes along the way, and I learned a lot in doing that and I met some interesting people."

Over the coming decades, Parker served in several different roles at the hospital, from working in professional and support services to discharge planning. As healthcare changed around him, Parker continued to adapt and became an expert on the hospital, its staff and its needs.

That knowledge made him the ideal candidate to take the mantle as executive director of the Novant Health Rowan Medical Center Foundation. “The Foundation,” as most call it, serves as a fund-raising entity for the hospital, raising capital from private donors for major construction projects or to supplement much needed supplies.

Blabon said Parker was perfectly suited for the role given his breadth of experience and mastery of the hospital.

“I think what made him well-equipped for that is his passion for people and for patients and knowing what he’s doing with the monies that he is asking for and monies he is raising is going directly to patient care,” Blabon said.

When Parker became executive director, he oversaw the completion of the Glenn A. Kiser Hospice House — the first of many projects he would help guide to fruition through fundraising and planning.

Tracy Smith, the incoming chair of the Rowan Novant Health Rowan Medical Center Foundation, has watched Parker raise funds for various projects over the past several years. She said his knowledge of the hospital allowed him to communicate the foundation’s vision to donors.

“If Rick were to knock on your door and you’re a potential donor, what he wants to do is educate you about what we’re doing,” Smith said. “At the end of the meeting, you’ve never been asked for a dime. That’s the beauty with how he has maneuvered. He comes to the table with 40 years of experience at the hospital and has a mastery of the operational side, which to

me, is invaluable.”

Bill Graham, who worked with Parker for six years as a member of the foundation’s board, said Parker’s knowledge of the operational and philanthropic side of the hospital was a “rare combination.”

“When you’re talking to a donor about the nature of what they’re considering contribution to, having that width and breadth of knowledge about the value of what that’s going to bring to the hospital is completely invaluable,” Graham said.

While the fax machine only lasted a decade, many of the projects Parker worked on will make a difference in the lives of patients for years to come.

Although Parker said it’s difficult to choose an accomplishment he is most proud of, the Wallace Cancer Institute stands out. The new institute, which opened its doors just a few months ago, was made possible in large part due to Parker’s fund-raising efforts.

For Parker, raising money for the Wallace Cancer Institute was personal. It was the fulfillment of a promise he made to Tippi Miller, who was a longtime member of the foundation’s board until she died from cancer in 2017.

“Tippie made Rick promise when she was passing away that he would see that this got done,” Graham said.

And for Parker, a promise made was a promise kept. He spearheaded efforts to raise \$12 million for the project, which was matched by Novant Health. The building was constructed at a rapid pace in a little over a year and the first patient walked through its doors for an appointment last August.

“Once the cancer center was completed, I think Rick thought ‘OK, my job here is done,’” Smith said.

The spacious, airy facility is full of natural light and of art that Parker helped procure. Dozens of patients have already received treat-

ment in the state-of-the-art facility.

“I never knew that we would be able to do something like the Wallace Cancer Institute,” Parker said. “I know that (God) had that in mind for me because it was a remarkable project that I’ll never forget.”

Having made a positive impact gives Parker peace as he prepares to transition to a life with more fishing than fundraising.

“In the back of my mind, I always had this process of, when I leave, I want to make sure I’m leaving it in a better position than when I arrived,” Parker said. “I can honestly say that is the case now.”

In his retirement, Parker plans on visiting every state park in North Carolina and is excited to spend more time raising Monarch butterflies. He said he hopes to spend as much time with his grandchildren as possible. Blabon has a suggestion for how Parker could spend an afternoon with them.

“I told him that ‘When you’re driving around with your grandchildren, you can point out different things that you made possible for our medical center, one of them being the Wallace Cancer Institute,’” Blabon said.

Recently, Novant Health launched a new Cancer Survivor Fund to honor Parker. The fund will provide assistance to the patients and families receiving care at the Wallace Cancer Institute. Smith said the fund, which will continue to help patients for years to come, is a fitting way to honor Parker.

“To me, this is the icing on the cake. It means so much to him,” Smith said. “That patient care is so important to him. It’s that community and continuity that he felt was so important.”

As chair of the foundation, Smith will be involved in finding Parker’s replacement. Whoever is hired, Smith said, will have some big shoes to fill. The new executive director will have a great resource in Parker, who has assured Blabon and Smith that he is “always just a call away.” **S**

To find out more about the Cancer Survivor Fund, visit SupportNovantHealth.org/HonorRickParker.

“You cannot replace a Rick Parker. We will replace and fill the position, but you cannot replace a Rick Parker.”

THE SCENE



Architect Gray Stout takes a selfie, holding up his copy of the 2015-2016 Winter issue.

A 50th issue for Salisbury the Magazine

To mark this edition as the 50th issue of Salisbury the Magazine, readers and a few of the people who work behind the scenes took time to submit a photograph of themselves holding or scanning the magazine. A dog or two joined the fun, too. Salisbury the Magazine first published in September 2015 with the historic Fulton-Mock-Blackmer House on the cover. The magazine publishes nine times a year.

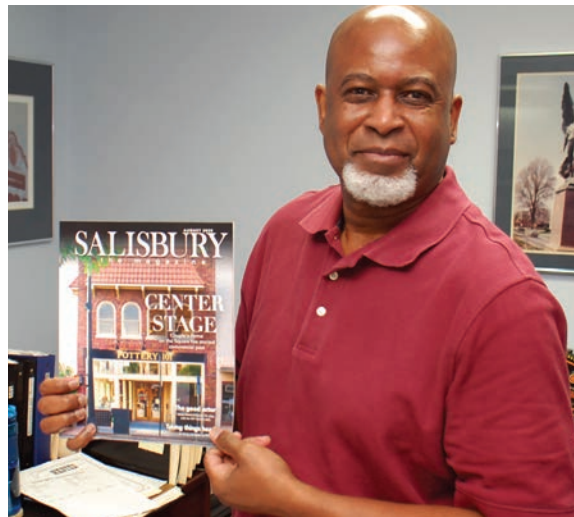
— Photos submitted and by Mark Wineka.



Jayne Queen, left, and Misty Crook pause for a moment during a trip to Myrtle Beach to read their copy of a recent Salisbury the Magazine.



Lisa Humphrey, part of the magazine's production staff with Susan Baker, holds a May 2020 issue at her work station.



Winfred Mention, operations director for the Salisbury Post and troubleshooter for Salisbury the Magazine, holds an August 2020 copy.



Audrey Eudy, philanthropy director for Rowan United Way, pages through a recent edition.



Celeste Ward thinks she has kept every copy of Salisbury the Magazine. Here, she pulled out the September 2017, left, and Holiday 2016 issues.



Cooper Holshouser Jr., a dog in the Linda and Derby Holshouser household, found the September 2020 issue of the magazine of particular interest.



Over a holiday vacation, Katie Queen reads the magazine with her 3-year-old son, Solomon.



Sporting her Salisbury Post mask, advertising representative Andrea Flegel shows off a winter 2020 issue. Salisbury the Magazine is a publication of the Salisbury Post.



Above: Andy Mooney, creative director for Salisbury the Magazine, holds up the first and 49th issues. Mooney has designed and laid out every editorial page of the magazine since its beginning in September 2015. Left: Cindy Noell, dressed as an elf at Christmas, stands with her Winter issue of Salisbury the Magazine.



Jason Slusser, an advertising representative for Salisbury the Magazine, lifts up an April 2020 edition.



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