

AUGUST 2020

SALISBURY

the magazine

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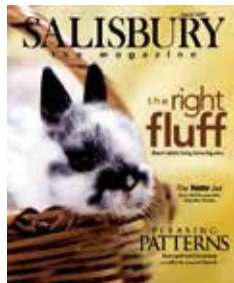
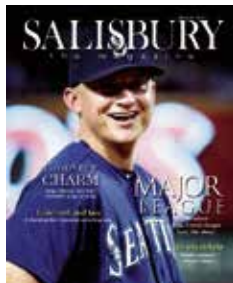
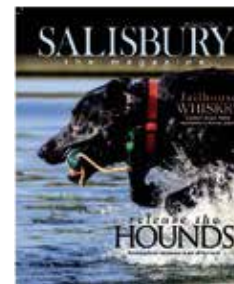
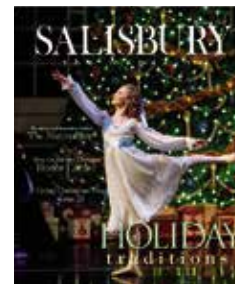
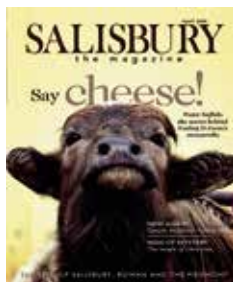
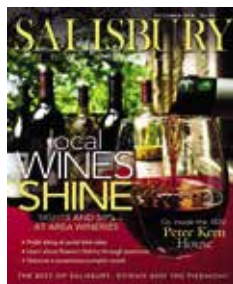
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On the cover: Ted and Cheryl Goins restored 101 S. Main St. in 2008 and have been among many tenants throughout the 147 years since the building was built. (Sean Meyers photo)

On this page: Actor and Catawba College graduate Jasika Nicole. (Claire Savage photo)



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Osborne's fervor takes in politics, sports, friends

To understand Terry Osborne's passion for politics and sports, you probably should start with his son, Tuck. Osborne guesses they have made 35 to 40 trips to Washington, D.C., just to take in the city's history.

They also took an excursion together to Dealey Plaza in Dallas, Texas, where the assassination of President John F. Kennedy occurred. They toured the Civil War battlefield of Gettysburg together and drank in the beginnings of this country by visiting places such as Boston and Philadelphia.

On the sports side of things, Osborne and his son have shared many trips to Yankee Stadium in New York, Lambeau Field in Green Bay and Cameron Stadium in Durham. Needless to say, father and son are fans of the Yankees, Packers and Duke Blue Devils.

As you page through this edition of Salisbury the Magazine, you'll see a long Q&A with Osborne, known to many as "T.O.," who is this issue's Rowan Original. When word spread that we were planning on featuring Osborne, an unusual thing happened.

Many friends of his started filling my email inbox with notes of



Terry Osborne

praise for the man, who over his career has been a teacher, clerk of court, director of Rowan Vocational Opportunities and, since 2003, general manager for the Rowan/Kanapolis ABC Board.

Stephen Bullock, president of Power Curbers, said Osborne was his U.S. history teacher and Student Council advisor at West Rowan High. "Terry's passion for 20th century U.S. history had a huge impact on me as a high school student," Bullock said. "His teaching style brought to life the major players of the Cold War, the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War."

Brenda Wilkerson knew Osborne from both the courthouse and Rowan Vocational Opportunities. "I found it admirable that he always strived to be fair by exhibiting a willingness to go a step further in helping those in need," she said.

Jared Safley has known Osborne as a teacher, coach, politician, advisor and friend. He still calls him "Coach." "He has been a blessing in my life," Safley said, "and in the lives of many others in Rowan County for many years."

Osborne was a family friend and history teacher to Jan Dowling, a 1991 graduate of West Rowan High. "He is and will always be one of my favorite people," she says.

Retiree Earlene Sifford, a 34-year employee of the Clerk of Court's office, used to work for Osborne.

"He promoted me to supervisor of the Civil Division when he took office," Earlene recalled. "He was open to ideas and very outgoing. He has a heart to promote young people and will give support whenever asked or needed."

One of those young people include her son, Chris, who works for the ABC office and appreciates Osborne's

giving him time to work with at-risk youth. Chris Sifford also noted Osborne's efforts in schools against underage drinking and drug education overall.

"It was T.O.'s idea to have celebrity athletes involved who struggled with drug and alcohol addictions," Chris said. "This method allowed students to connect with people they had seen or heard before due to their celebrity status. Brilliant!"


One of Osborne's favorite quotes comes from President John F. Kennedy, who said, "Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable."

Osborne adds: "I think we must work together and utilize our talents. We are put here for reasons we often neglect."

Brilliant.



Mark Wineka,
Editor, Salisbury the Magazine



| *through the lens* |
by Mary Ann Roberson

*Mary Ann Roberson of Old
Mocksville Road took her
camera extra close to reveal
the geometric beauty that can
be found in a dandelion.*

How Salisbury took preservation 'Beyond the Hedges'

Author Pete Prunkl faced a daunting task: Tell the story of Historic Salisbury Foundation and the preservation movement here over the past half century.

By the time Prunkl had finished, he walked away with the deepest appreciation for local preservationists — many of them now in their 80s — whose accomplishments are shocking when taken as a whole.

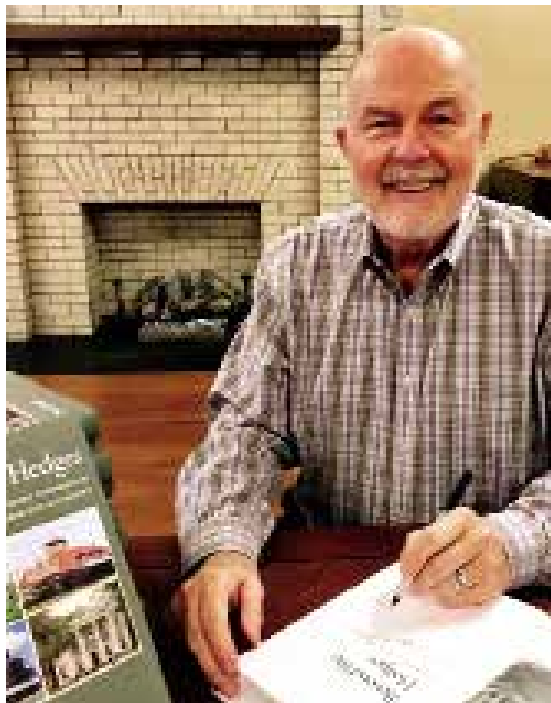
"The sheer persistence of these people was just amazing," he says.

Beyond saving landmarks such as the Hall House, Salisbury Station, Grimes Mill (before its fire), the Bell Tower and the Fulton-Mock-Blackmer House, the foundation used its revolving fund to save scores of other residential and commercial buildings.

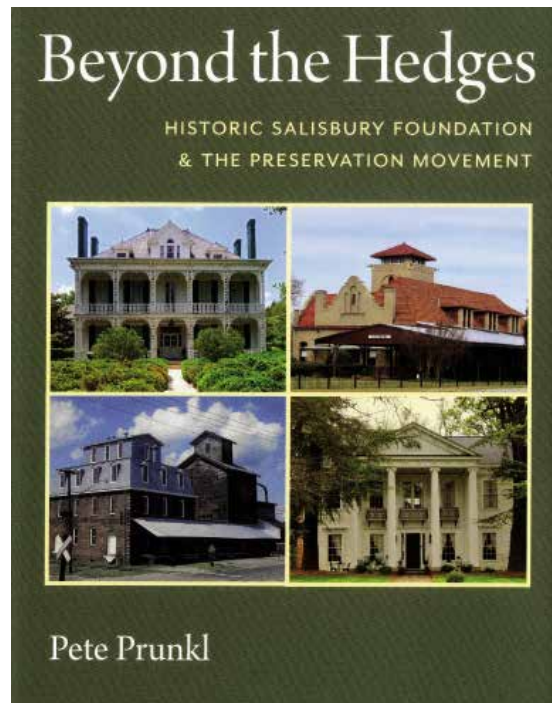
But maybe an even more impressive achievement came in countless hours at City Hall, doing the work at council, planning and zoning levels to establish not just a Historic Preservation Commission, but make Salisbury home to 10 historic districts recognized by the National Register of Historic Places.

As Randy Hemann, former executive director of Downtown Salisbury Inc., told Prunkl: In Salisbury, preservation is institutionalized. Prunkl says that's one of his favorite observations, along with appreciating the preservation force that is HSF founder Ed Clement, to whom the book, "Beyond the Hedges," is dedicated.

"His favorite word is 'we,'" Prunkl says of the modest Clement, and the book shows the teamwork



Author Pete Prunkl at a book-signing for 'Beyond the Hedges.'



which went into making Salisbury notable in state and national preservation circles.

"So many people played a starring role in the foundation, and they are mentioned," Prunkl says.

"Beyond the Hedges" ended up as a 350-page book with 118 illustrations and photographs, 26 appendices and an extensive bibliography and index. Prunkl divided the book into five sections and 26 chapters.

He made a conscious effort to write chapters 2,000 to 3,000 words, or say the equivalent of a magazine story. That approach, the illustrations and a user-friendly font combine for a highly readable book, sure to be an important resource in the future and a cherished volume in personal libraries.

"I like the way it looks, the way it feels and the way it reads," Prunkl says.

Prunkl credits three things for making his job easier — details provided in numerous Salisbury Post stories since HSF's founding in 1972, the archives at the foundation and interviews with people such as Clement.

The phrase "beyond the hedges" came from a talk Clement gave in 2015 when he described how the foundation's preservation work went well beyond the privet fences surrounding the HSF-owned Hall House.

In the beginning of the book process, board president Susan Sides laid out 20 things she hoped Prunkl could cover, and they served as an outline for chapters

and sub-chapters. Prunkl also gives loads of credit to a book committee of Barb Sorel, Diana Cummings and archivist Terri Jones.

They spent a year on editing, formatting, indexing and the like. The book sells for \$35 and can be purchased at the South Main Book Co., 110. S. Main St., and the Historic Salisbury Foundation office at Salisbury Station, 215 Depot St.

Consider "Beyond the Hedges" a pause for a deserved pat on the back of HSF, but the foundation knows how fragile preserving the architectural fabric of Salisbury can be. The past proves there is no time in the future to be complacent.

"The work never stops," Prunkl says. **S**



rowan originals

They call him 'T.O.'

At every stop in his career, Terry Osborne has pushed for positive outcomes

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK WINEKA

Most people who know Terry Osborne consider him a friend — and the feeling is mutual.

The current general manager of the Rowan/Kannapolis Alcoholic Beverage Control Board says one of his most enjoyable moments in life these days is getting together with fellow 1971 West Rowan High graduates at Hendrix Barbecue every other Tuesday.

But he also likes his lunchtime gathering every Wednesday at Christo's and his 2 p.m. coffee buddies at Koco Java. At all of these stops, most of the people in the room call him "T.O.," and he often has a good story or bit of trivia for them about the old days, politics or sports.

"These are the moments that make life still wonderful, as we all reminisce," Osborne says.

After high school, Osborne went on to study at Catawba College, graduating in 1977. He taught social studies, political science and civics at West Rowan High from 1979-1994. He also coached baseball, football, wrestling and softball.

He earned Teacher of the Year honors at West Rowan High and County Social Studies Teacher of the Year recognition, besides being Rowan County Baseball Coach of the Year in 1986 and 1987, and South Piedmont Conference Coach of the Year in 1988.

As a Republican, Osborne won election to a four-year term as Rowan County Clerk of Superior Court in 1994, but he lost re-election. From 1999-2003, he served as director of Rowan Vocational Opportunities and has been the ABC Board's general manager since 2003.

Osborne and his board oversee \$16.2 million in annual sales. "Many do not realize that at least 7 percent of our revenues have to go toward education each year and 5 percent to law enforcement," he says.

Rowan County government and local municipalities also receive distributions from the ABC proceeds.

Osborne collects and lives by a lot of quotes from famous people. One comes from legendary NASCAR (and Republican) Richard Petty who said, "Your smile is your logo, your personality is your business card. How you leave others after an experience with you is your trademark."

Salisbury the Magazine recently caught up with Osborne, a Rowan Original, for this longer-than-usual Q&A:

Q *As the ABC's general manager, you've crusaded against underage drinking, especially through the Game Plan for Life program. What kind of impact do you think it has had?*

There have been three phases to our programs. It began 17 years ago with a young man, Brandon Silveria, who was being recruited by colleges for two sports. After prom night was over, he had several of his friends with him. They drank heavily, and Brandon dropped his friends off before he crashed his vehicle and was critically injured, leaving him a scenario of barely surviving and also having to learn to speak again.

(As part of a message against underage drinking, Silveria made a 28-minute CD, telling his story in which he said, "I had a job, a car and a girlfriend. I had the world at my fingertips and that all changed because of a stupid choice I made.")

Phase two happened when Roman Gabriel III put us in contact with some major sport figures who have had various drug and alcohol issues. One of the individuals we hooked up with was Renaldo Wynn, who told his story about his battle with alcohol and almost losing his athletic scholarship at Notre Dame.

Renaldo then led us to his work with Joe Gibbs, which brought many high-profile personnel from all walks of life to us. Unfortunately, we were only one week away from our 2020 spring programs when the pandemic broke, and we had to postpone, but we already are putting our fall programs together.

Our programs have now reached approximately 206,000 individuals, and the impactful letters and correspondence we have received have been so very rewarding. We constantly get feedback from parents, teachers, community leaders and political figures who have attended. The program went before Congress on April 17, 2015, and became part of the Congressional Record. The impact that powerful figures like Al Wood, Renaldo Wynn, Mike Gminski, David Thompson, Clinton Portis, N.C. Supreme Court Justice Paul Newby and so many others

have been phenomenal in their work with our team, which features local individuals such as Chris Sifford, Nanette Dillon, Courtney Powell, Bill Belvin, Jerry Dean, Patrick Hampton and Jessica Lind.

How is the local ABC positioned these days? That is, are there any spots in Rowan County or Kannapolis that are underserved and in need of stores?

Currently, there are six stores: three in Kannapolis, with one location on the Rowan County side; one in Rockwell; and two in Salisbury, at Ketner Center and Jake Alexander Boulevard. With new growth anticipated in northern Rowan with the Chewy plant and other entities, there has been renewed interest directed toward us to consider that area. Although two failed attempts in western Rowan have taken place, there is an ongoing interest in that area also.

Are the condition of stores and current leases generally good, or are changes planned in the near future?

Generally, everything is solid. Our system leases three locations and we own three — Jake Alexander Boulevard, Rockwell and the Kannapolis store on the Rowan side. The Rockwell location has seen extensive growth and that location is now too small to accommodate the business. Other properties are being looked at for possible expansion.

The newly located Oak Avenue store in downtown Kannapolis has seen extensive growth, even without the anticipated impact that the new Cannonballers stadium would generate.

The new Jake Alexander store project will be paid off in January 2021, which is a tribute to our board for their planning and financial study.

During the restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, ABC stores were open. Overall, how were sales at our local ABC stores affected? Were they up, down or pretty much a wash?

I will not gloat about the record sales due to the pandemic bringing the sales on, but I will state facts. The May 2020 sales for our system were up 30.47% compared to about a 15% increase statewide. Our system is one of about only 50 out of the 170 systems to remain with our 9 a.m.–9 p.m. open hours. That being the case, we went to every extent to protect our employees with being one of the first to install plexiglass, use masks, install numerous sanitizers and have a temporary pay only with cards to reduce the germ transfer from cash. March through May saw record sales in our system, which is normally our lowest sales period. For example, Store No. 1's sales were up 28% during the last quarter; Store No. 2, up 44 percent.

You've worn many different hats during your lifetime — athlete, teacher, politician, government employee, community volunteer, director of a nonprofit and now manager for the local ABC board. What's the secret that keeps you going?

I have been fortunate in that I have totally loved every endeavor; I would not leave any until I reached a period which I felt we had reached a position plateau above where we had been. I was an all-conference, all-county player for West Rowan in baseball and played with many of my still-closest friends — many of whom were on opposing teams. I played against guys such as C.M. Yates, Clyde Fink, Perry Bernhardt, Randy Benson, Claude Bernhardt, Johnny Yarbrough, Jack Moore, Phip Sparger, and with guys like Stan Link, Dickie Myers, Keith Halloway, Bill Kesler and Kevin McNeely on both baseball and football fields. We all played together on either American Legion teams or Pony League programs.

Football had great moments, too. I will always relish some moments such as the last play of my career, making the tackle on the last play of the season against Mooresville that saved our 7-6 win over them as they went for two as time had expired. You never forget those moments.

How about teaching?

I loved every one of my teaching years as great moments shared with those I had such great respect for. Mr. George Knox hired me as a middle school teacher where I got to work with great friends such as Rick Hampton. Three months later the toughest time of my teaching career occurred when I had to go to Mr. Knox and tell him I had been offered a teaching/coaching position at West Rowan High. He said, "Terry, you don't need to apologize, you like new challenges and this is your next one." Earning the respect at West Rowan working with guys like Tom Wilhelm, Gary Safrit, Randall Ward, Ralph Shatterly, Gus Andrews and W.A. Cline were unforgettable moments.

And politics?

The political part of my life started with great interest in history and politics at an early age. I was honored that my classmates elected me as their president of Student Council in 1971. I always tell Tuck (his son) that it may be history in Rowan that I was president at West Rowan in 1971; his mother, in 1982; and Tuck in 2011.

Getting to serve as county party chairman, 12th Congressional District chairman and Clerk of Superior Court were great honors bestowed upon me by friends and voters.

Serving as director at Rowan Vocational gave me some of the most rewarding times of my life, as we took that facility to new levels to serve these students of all ages who had both mental and physical challenges. We brought congressional members, state representatives and state senators to the facility who honored those individuals. They were given great opportunities and were even taken to Washington, D.C., to meet some of the most powerful elected officials — which those students saw as some of the most rewarding moments of their lives.

How did the ABC position come about?

I was offered the ABC position one year before I accepted by the county commissioners, who wanted more attention brought to underage issues of alcohol and drugs. I had a few things I

wanted to bring to the forefront at Rowan Vocational and declined, but they re-approached me the following year. (It allowed me) to use my work with young people in this capacity with educational programs, which have now given me positive challenges for 17 years.

I've never seen anyone who networks with people like you do. Roughly, how many contacts do you have on your cellphone, and how much time do you spend a day on your phone connecting with people?

I have about 350 contacts on my phone — from some very famous political figures, very famous athletes and many of the most wonderful friends anyone could possibly have, as well as business associates.

I try to make time for anyone at some point. I may be in meetings when called on, but most will tell you I take time to return those calls or texts.

You have always enjoyed history and politics. Who are the four people who would be on your personal Mount Rushmore of governmental leaders of all-time?

I totally agree that Presidents Washington, Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt and Lincoln all would be on my list, but I would have to add one each from both Republican and Democratic parties with John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan. And add an honorary American citizen who served the world, Winston Churchill, who helped our initiative perhaps more than anyone in the World War II era. The other I would add as well was a great congressman, senator, majority leader and a great World War II hero — Bob Dole — and his bride (Elizabeth Hanford Dole), who was secretary of both transportation and labor and Red Cross president. Both could have easily been president. The other position would be the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King. I think we would also have to consider putting the Father of the Constitution there also, President James Madison, so Mount Rushmore would be

much larger!

You have led countless students, friends and Chamber of Commerce colleagues on tours of Washington, D.C. What are the two or three favorite places you like to take Washington visitors?

Many places of historic backgrounds on the way, such as Monticello (Jefferson's home) and Montpelier (Madison's home and his burial grounds with his wife, Dolly) and George Washington's Mount Vernon.

When getting to D.C., I love to take people to sights that many are not aware of but are instrumental in key periods of our history, such as the Occidental Restaurant, where meetings with Robert Kennedy, Soviet Envoy Anatoly Dobrynin and others such as John Scali and Aleksander Fomin met to discuss an end to the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Another place is the Lincoln Cottage, to which Abraham Lincoln would ride on his horse daily. It was near the hospitals where the men injured in the Civil War were brought. Lincoln wanted to "feel the pain with them." Many do not know that at that locale is where he basically wrote the Emancipation Proclamation.

Billy Martin's Tavern Restaurant (Georgetown), where LBJ and Sam Rayburn and the power brokers met to make critical decisions. JFK proposed to Jackie there and Nixon and JFK, elected to Congress in 1946, would meet to have lunch/dinner there, although on different sides of the political aisles.

I loved taking multiple students, leaders and friends to Arlington National Cemetery, which is so powerful. I would honor top students with the opportunity to participate in wreath-laying ceremonies there. They will never forget those moments, nor will I.

I like to point out the route of the JFK funeral procession to Arlington and Arlington National Cemetery itself as well, plus all the most visited places such as the White House, Capitol, Lincoln Memorial, etc.



In the warehouse at the Rowan/Kannapolis ABC Board's headquarters in Salisbury, general manager Terry Osborne, far right, stands with (from left to right) Colton Laws, B.J. Sherrill, warehouse manger Tommy Goodman, Dillon Simpson and assistant warehouse manager Patrick Hampton.

How did you become such a big Green Bay Packers fan?

As I reached 7 or 8, the age of Vince Lombardi was beginning. Green Bay won titles in '61, '62, '65, '66 and '67. They had a 98-30-4 record in a nine-year period under Lombardi. I started reviewing the history of a team I was growing to love with players such as Bart Starr, Paul Hornung, Jim Taylor, Ray Nitschke, Jerry Kramer and many others. I found where the Packers were founded as a team in 1919 but was more impressed when I realized it was on Aug. 11, which in 1950 was my birthday! I have grown to love that team, owned by their fans, which is unique in the smallest city in the NFL. That place is sacred. My cousins (the Link boys) all loved them in those days, and my son and I continue that love, as you all know, with visits to Lambeau Field and having met the legendary Bart Starr. Perhaps the greatest game of all-time was the Ice Bowl with the Packers defeating the Cowboys via Bart Starr.

Likewise, what made you become a devoted fan of the New York Yankees?

My first attraction to the Yankees was similar to that of loving the Packers, but the thing that drew me to them was Mickey Mantle (tape measure homers), Yogi Berra and Whitey Ford. The 1960 series where we lost to (Bill) Mazeroski and the Pirates was devastating as a 7-year-old, as we watched the seventh game of the World Series in the Woodleaf School cafeteria. We bounced back with our crush of the Reds in the five-game World Series in 1961 and the seven-game series in 1962 against Willie Mays, Willie McCovey and the Giants.

My son, Tuck, and I have been to countless Yankee games, getting to see many of the greats over the years. My "Link cousins" were Yankee fans, too.

What's a pet peeve of yours?

I would say my biggest pet peeve would be seeing talented people who do not share their talents with others in whatever endeavor which

would help make our community be more positive. Many of us are limited in talents, but regardless, you use those to enhance our well-being.

What book or books that you've read over time have had the most impact on you?

Many political books on JFK, MLK, Ronald Reagan, Winston Churchill, Paul Harvey and many others. My favorite was "The Angry Decade: The Sixties" because I see some of the same issues now as we did then.

What two foods are always in your fridge or pantry?

Sweet corn and tomatoes.

If you could go back 40 years or so, what advice would you give to a younger Terry Osborne?

Pace yourself a little more, T.O., but do all these venues of employment all over and enjoy them even more. **S**



Salisbury artist Mark Stephenson at his studio space in the Rail Walk Studios and Gallery on North Lee Street.

Suitable for framing

Stephenson's portraits bring his subjects to life

WRITTEN BY MARK WINEKA / PHOTOGRAPHY BY SEAN MEYERS



On the one-year anniversary of their wedding, Phil Byrd had a special present for his wife, May.

When they reached their home in The Crescent, Phil asked May to put on a blindfold at the front door. He then led her through the entrance foyer to the stairs before they took a sharp right to the upper landing. The blindfold came off, May looked down the stairs to the front foyer.

A 7-foot-tall, 4-foot-wide portrait of her in a sculpted wedding dress was hanging on the wall. It now greets her every morning and every night.

"It made me very happy," May says. "The colors, everything. I like it so much."

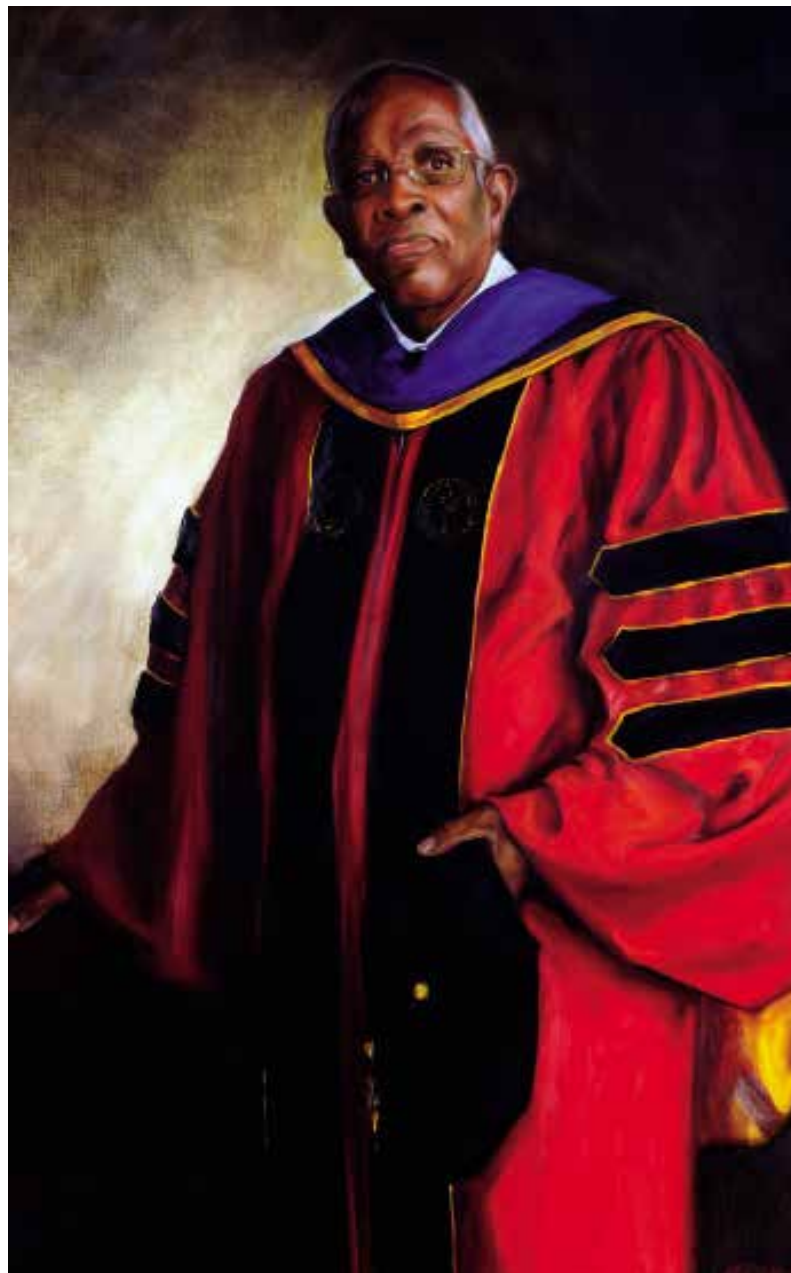
As she looks up at the portrait, May still can't believe her husband's gift and what the artist, Mark Stephenson, accomplished on such a large scale.

"It looks pretty good, if I say so myself," Stephenson says.

The commissioned portraits Stephenson has done locally are many. They include familiar names such as Dr. Albert Aymer of Hood Theological Seminary, singer Teresa Moore-Mitchell, writer Jennifer Hubbard, Salisbury Mayor Pro Tem Al Heggins, attorney Rivers Lawther,



Salisbury residents Phil and May Byrd pose with Mark Stephenson's portrait of May that was completed in 2019.



Left: A self-portrait and a tree study adorn the walls at Salisbury artist Mark Stephenson's studio space in the Rail Walk Studios and Gallery on North Lee Street. **Right:** Stephenson's portrait of Dr. Albert Aymer hangs at Hood Theological Seminary.

Piedmont Players director Reid Leonard, fellow artists Robert Toth and James Donaldson, baseball coach Joe Ferebee and Pfeiffer University President Michael Miller. For a string of about five years, Stephenson painted the official portraits for Miss North Carolina.

His artistry in figures and landscapes is informed by an eclectic background. Through life, he has been parts athlete, civil engineer, opera

singer, dramatist, financier and painter.

In more recent years, Stephenson has devoted himself mostly to commissioned portraits, while on occasion offering painting and drawing lessons for artist guilds, galleries and individuals. He and his wife, Caroline, also are raising their young son and daughter.

With his portraits, Stephenson aims at creating both an heirloom for families and a work of

art for himself and others.

A lot of factors go into a portrait. When he meets with a client, he wants to know where the portrait will be displayed, what kind of setting they want, the degree of formality and the stylistic preferences. He says the interview process greatly influences his work, going toward developing the pose and overall concept.

May Byrd knew a portrait was being done.



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She just didn't know when and the scope of the project her husband had in mind. Stephenson relied on scores of photographs he took of May, who posed for him on the interior staircase of the old post office and courthouse on West Innes Street.

Stephenson prefers having live sittings, so he can at least do an oil study and take more photos, all of which he relies on in the studio.

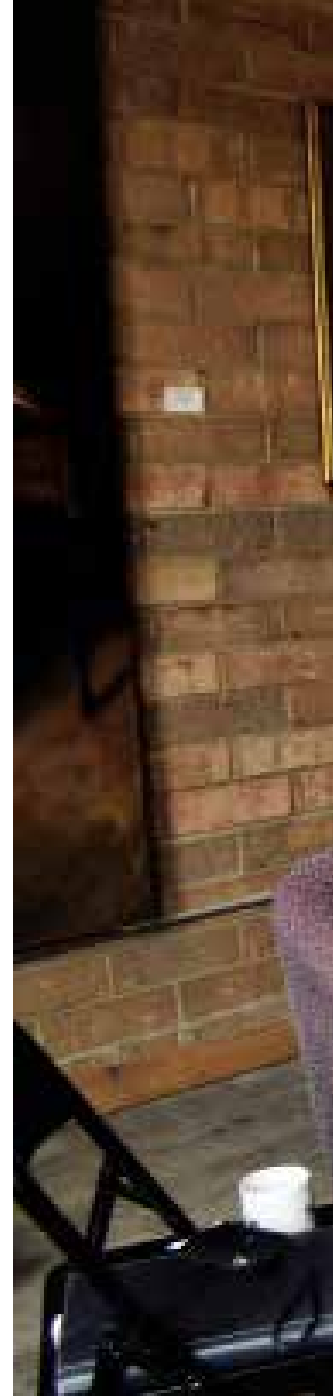
"Working strictly off a photograph is a big challenge," he says. "A good portrait's got to really convey the persona of someone. I love to be free to find that something that speaks to me, and I like to think like a sculptor when I'm working."

If any great painters have influenced his portraits, Stephenson says, it's the work of Rembrandt and John Singer Sargent. He thinks with Rembrandt's greatest portraits the viewer experiences an emotional contact that speaks to him or her, whatever their interpretation might be.

And as he starts a portrait, Stephenson borrows from Sargent, putting on his linen canvas blocks and planes of colors and staying away from specific things such as ears, eyes, mouth and straight edges — they all will come later.

"I want to get the effect as quickly as possible and not lose it," Stephenson says of this zones-of-color approach. "If you get all that right, the eyes become much easier. You just drop them in the sockets."

Stephenson remembers one of his vocal teachers who once compared singing to playing golf. He brings that



Fellow artist Robert Toth, left, did a live sitting for his portrait done by Stephenson. (Submitted photo)



analogy to his painting. As with a golf swing, he looks for flow, rhythm, “and you can’t muscle it,” he says.

“It helps me be rather sensitive to a lot of things.”

Stephenson’s father taught physics at Pfeiffer College. His mother was a pediatric nurse at Stanly Memorial Hospital in Albemarle, and Stephenson says she was “more of an artist type.” Both parents were “very musical,” he adds.

From an early age, Stephenson was always drawing, often doing caricatures of people. “I could just do it,” he says.

On the music side of things, Stephenson played percussion in the band at North Stanly High School and loved it. But he had an even deeper passion as a kid: “I was always artistic, but nobody said, ‘You should be an artist.’ I wanted to be a baseball player.”

Besides being a standout for North Stanly High, Stephenson played for legendary Coach Ferebee on the 1979-81 Rowan American Legion baseball teams that reached two state championships. He also suited up for Ferebee at Pfeiffer, where he also became heavily involved in music as a baritone vocalist.

The small college had a fabulous choral program that toured the United States and into Europe. An instructor told Stephenson he had what it took to make opera a career. Stephenson would not give up that dream for some time.

Meanwhile, Stephenson went after a civil engineering degree from N.C. State University, learning about transportation, structures, soils and municipal projects. Overall, he ended up with three degrees encompassing civil engineering and vocal performance from N.C. State, Pfeiffer and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Stephenson had a Charlotte civil engineering job with a big firm waiting for him on graduation from State. He jumped at the opportunity because he also wanted to take voice lessons on Saturday mornings from a well-known instructor at Winthrop University in Rock Hill.

In the spring of 1989, he was set to appear in an opera at Winthrop when his firm dashed those plans by reassigning him to its Miami operation for three weeks. A discouraged Stephenson recognized the engineering life wasn't for him, and he looked to do something more on his own terms.

In August 1990, he enrolled in vocal performance at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, from which he wouldn't officially earn his degree until May 1994. During this period he also sang in the apprentice program at the Metropolitan Opera and at Simpson College in Iowa. While living in Greensboro, he would drive to singing auditions in New York.

In addition, he auditioned for the Santa Fe Opera, but in a twist of fate, missed the call-back message on his home telephone. He often wonders how his life might have been different had he heard that message.

How did the painting side of Stephenson emerge? He says he had an epiphany of sorts in November 1994 while watching an "American Masters" program on Jim Henson, creator of the Muppets. Here was a happy, creative man who found success on his own terms.

Stephenson thought back to the drawings he



Stephenson pages through an album of some of his portraits.

was doing at age 6 in his Misenheimer home.

"I did it because I wanted to do it," he says. "That's what life is all about, doing creative things."

In December 1994, he walked into Davis Art Supply in Greensboro and asked to see examples of watercolors, then he bought six paint tubes and a brush and set out the next year painting and learning. It also was the year he played Lancelot in the Piedmont Players production of "Camelot," and in 1996, he acted in Piedmont Players' "The Secret Garden." He drove 53 miles one way from Greensboro to attend practices

and shows, and he was still auditioning at times in New York.

A friend from Iowa eventually invited him to share an apartment in New York City. In August 1996, Stephenson packed a Ryder rental van with his belongings and moved to New York, starting a 10-year adventure there with art, more than music.

"Painting took over," he says. "I stopped thinking about singing. My apartment became my studio."

He absorbed everything the city had to offer from an artist's viewpoint. He started at the Spring Street Studio, then discovered the Arts Students League in 1997, which included art classes four nights a week.

He took part in fabulous lecture tours to various galleries and exhibits, and certain instructors became mentors, opening his eyes to spatial theory, composition, color, design and materials.

Leonid Gervitz taught him how to "watch your warms and cools," a piece of advice Stephenson has never forgotten. A sculpture class helped immensely with anatomy and looking at things three-dimensionally.

"I draw and think like a sculptor when I paint," Stephenson says. "You've got to think 3-D. I worked really hard on that. Even if I'm





Stephenson, left, stands with the quick oil study he painted of then Salisbury Mayor Al Heggins in 2019. (Submitted photo)

working from photographs, I think of it as live.”

A job as an investment manager at Morgan Stanley allowed Stephenson to get his own apartment. Morgan Stanley was a big sponsor of the arts in New York, and his company connection allowed him to attend all kinds of exhibits.

He nurtured a membership at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and says he saved tags from the 360 different times he went to the museum, where he also was allowed to be a copyist. His Salisbury studio today includes a couple of paintings he copied there, including the “Juan de Pareja” portrait, originally done by Diego Velazquez.

The New York experience lasted from 1996 to 2006, but North Carolina called him home. “I didn’t think twice about moving back,” says Stephenson, noting the concern he also had for his aging parents, who both died in 2012.

Using his engineering experience, Stephenson became involved in some building projects

while continuing to paint. He also dived back into local theater productions.

In 2009, Stephenson had roles in four shows and designed and built the sets for several of them. He met Caroline that year when she was playing the role of Maria in the Uwharrie Players’ production of “The Sound of Music.” Stephenson played the lead opposite her of Baron Von Trapp.

While portraits have become his calling card — his studio at Rail Walk Studios and Gallery is filled with them — Stephenson has much broader interests as an artist. Many of his works have appeared in juried and solo shows. His past exhibits have included “Moments of Eternity,” a series of nature paintings at the Nature Art Gallery of the N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences in August 2015; the “Color Naturale” and “Flowing 2” exhibits at Rail Walk and the “Faces of Trinity Living” at Waterworks Visual Arts Center.

In May 2014, Stephenson participated in the LaMacina di San Cresci Residency for Artists in Greve-in-Chianti, Italy, and his works from the experience were exhibited that winter at Center for Faith and the Arts in Salisbury.

He created the artwork — mostly charcoal and pen drawings on paper — for the 50th anniversary of the Salisbury Symphony.

As he looks again at his painting of May Byrd, Stephenson remembers the trouble he had with the stairs his subject was standing on. “I didn’t like the straightness of them,” he says. “I must have painted several staircases to get a curve in.”

It mimics the artistic journey Stephenson has taken — the portrait of a man who has never taken a straight line. **S**

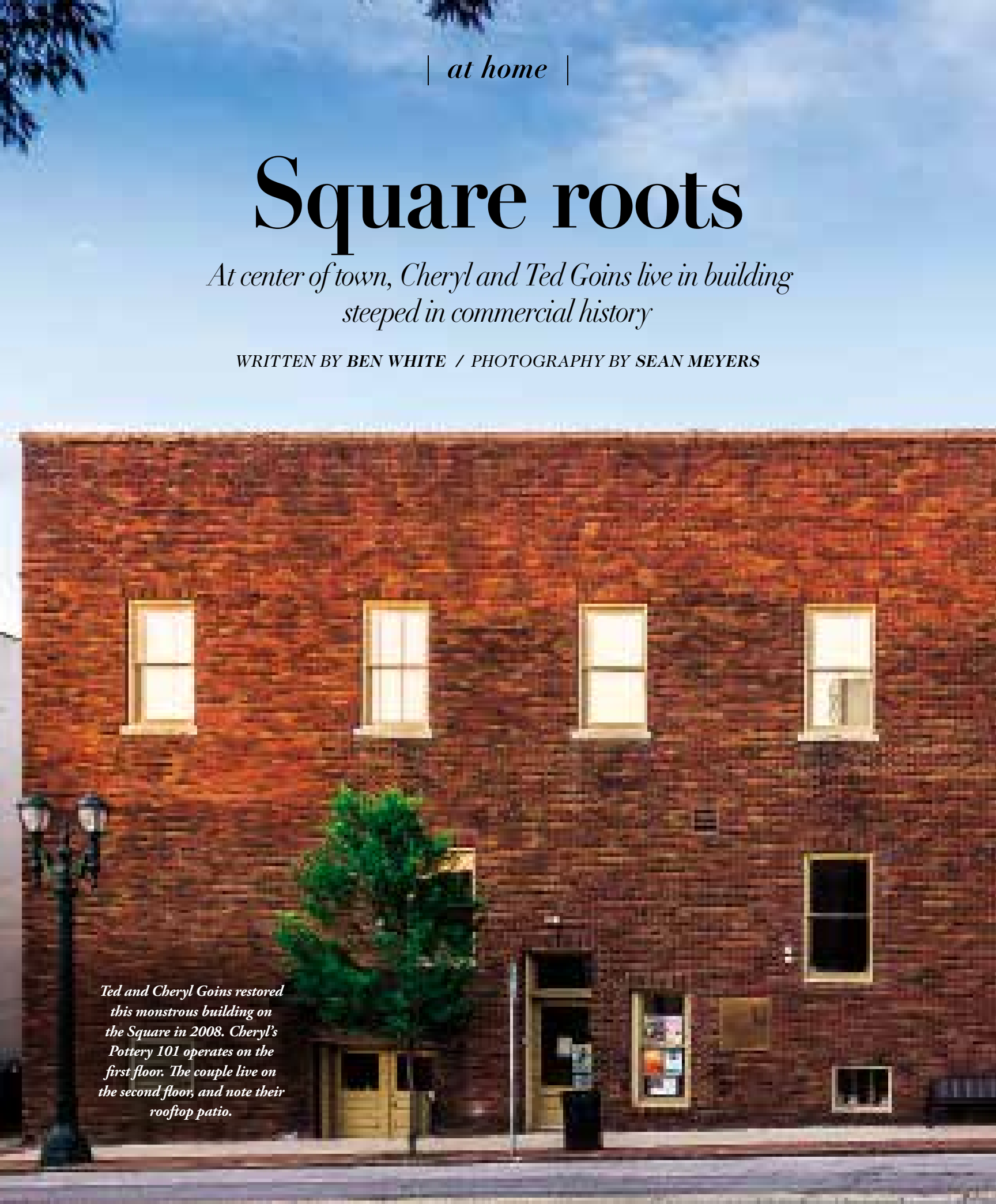
Information on contacting and commissioning Stephenson is available on his website at www.markstephensonfineart.com. His Facebook page is Mark Stephenson Portraiture and Fine Art.

| *at home* |

Square roots

*At center of town, Cheryl and Ted Goins live in building
steeped in commercial history*

WRITTEN BY BEN WHITE / PHOTOGRAPHY BY SEAN MEYERS



*Ted and Cheryl Goins restored
this monstrous building on
the Square in 2008. Cheryl's
Pottery 101 operates on the
first floor. The couple live on
the second floor, and note their
rooftop patio.*



POTTERY 101



The remodeled kitchen and hallway lead to the bedrooms in the Goinses' second-floor home.

Cheryl and Ted Goins' dream came true Dec. 5, 2008.

Nine months of painstaking work had wiped away years of neglect to bring their building at 101 S. Main St. — one of Salisbury's four corners on the Square — back to its former glory. Cheryl now had a home for her business, Pottery 101, while the couple also embraced a roomy second-floor apartment as their residence.

While in the works, the restoration project drew considerable skepticism.

"When I invited friends over to see it, I got the 'What are you doing? Have you lost your mind?' looks," Cheryl said. "But Ted and I loved it. We never thought of not doing it."

The Goinses are the latest of many tenants to do business in the 2,500-square-foot structure, built in 1873. For generations, the historic address has been at the center of Salisbury's hustle and bustle and variously the site for a mercantile, grocery store, confectionery, building and loan, barbers, camera store, pharmacy, jewelry store and soccer supply shop, to name a few.

When a commercial building is this old, reconstructing its history is much like working a 1,000-word puzzle; the border comes together with enthusiasm, but it's the remaining center pieces that are the hardest to place.

The original, unremarkable storefront shown in photos from 1889 had little personality other than a canvas overhang covering the sidewalk. The building



***Top:** Ted and Cheryl Goins enjoy magnificent views of Salisbury from their rooftop. The Plaza rises behind them. **Above:** Paige Paravano of Salisbury spins a pottery piece during lessons at Pottery 101. **Left:** An original door from the offices that were on the second floor.*



The living room has large windows that look over the Square in downtown Salisbury.

underwent an update in 1920 with offices added to the upstairs. The exterior was modernized with the addition of two false Spanish-tile, mansard roofs supported by decorative brackets and rounded windows. Much later, owners covered its façade with aluminum siding to follow similar changes to storefronts in downtown Salisbury.

Over the past 147 years, the building has featured quite a history. For a moment, imagine 10-year old William Graham beaming after permission to buy candy, or Minnie Barnes finding just the right bolt of cloth to make her new Sunday dress, or the perfect overalls and shoes for farmer Robert Lee Cowen. All were residents of Salisbury in 1907 who very possibly may have made Saturday afternoon shopping trips to the store.

The city's prominent Hedrick family built the structure, which at first housed Littmann & Lichtenstein Dry Goods Co. It had everything imaginable in groceries, cloth, hats, shoes, rifles, ammunition, pots, pans and tobacco. Coffins also were offered

for sale through local carpenters and possibly built by Elbert R. Cress who lived at 928 Jackson St. with his wife, Jennie.

Isadore Littman also operated Max Moses and Co. here in 1910, before eventually moving to 118 W. Innes St. as one of many dry goods establishments in Rowan County. Littman resided at 202 W Fisher St. with his wife, Lura.

From 1899 to at least 1901, Teiser's Grocery occupied one of the divided downstairs retail spaces. An early photo shows a Ferris Wheel on the dirt street out front when the fair came to town and took over that section of Main Street.

In 1915, John Young was a druggist in the building and by 1919, People's Drug Store operated out of this 101 S. Main St. address. The 1915-1916 city directory of Salisbury also lists 103 S. Main St. as the Main Theatre, renamed the Victory Theatre on Nov. 28, 1918. Operated by Wilby-Kinsey Theatres from 1913 until the mid 1950s, it was known as "the place to see moving pictures."

Three fires plagued the building, the latest being in 1956 that ultimately closed the movie house. No doubt, 101 S. Main St. sustained some degree of water and smoke damage during each of those fires.

Cheryl Goins used the theater's history to help with gaining information on her storied brick-and-mortar acquisition.

"The Victory Theatre was important for finding dates," Cheryl said. "One of the ways we traced some photos we found in the Salisbury library and in private collections was to read the name of the movie on the marquee that was playing and traced the year the movie came out to get a date for the photo."

A.B. Saleeby's Confectionary existed at 101 S. Main St. on July 14, 1915, according to the Salisbury Evening Post. The business was later moved to 105 N. Main St.

In 1922, the American Woolen Mills Co. occupied a portion of the building with E.L Russell as manager. Its slogan was "Suits and Overcoats Made to Measure."

By 1928, Murick's Men's Furnishings, a clothier, called 101 S. Main home. On the second floor were Pilot Insurance and Real Estate Co., Home Building and Loan Association, and the law offices of William Coughenour Sr. and Walter Murphy.

Pilot Insurance and Real Estate Co. did business on the Square for decades, prompting city residents to refer to it often as the Pilot building. Also in 1928, Richards Millinery operated out of a portion of the building making fashionable women's hats.

The center wall and staircase were vital for both separation and access to businesses on both the first and second floors. Sometime over the years, the center wall and original staircase were removed, requiring the Goinses to place a large steel beam the length of the building to secure their upstairs living space.

Also located at 101½ South Main was the Julian Sandwich Shop, most likely just inside the front entrance. Years later, Tucker's Coffee Shop operated at some location inside the building. During that time, the city directory lists business occupants as J.L. Julian; Walter Murphy, a lawyer; William C. Coughenour, a

An early photo of the Littman & Lichtenstein Dry Goods.



Old pool balls rest in a bowl in the second floor apartment.





An old Royal typewriter rests in a workspace on the second floor.



A basement wall highlights the work space at Pottery 101.



Above: A door sign reflects when Hugh Pinkston had his construction office here. Below: A mounted deer head rests on the wall in the stairwell leading to the rooftop patio.



lawyer; and J.D. Frick, a tailor.

The Coughenours operated a law office there for more than 40 years. Glenn Ketner Jr. worked for the firm in the summer of 1961 before graduation from Duke University Law School in 1963.

“Well, I kid Ted and Cheryl that I was in their bedroom before they were,” Ketner said. “Prior to Home Savings and Loan, there was Home Building and Loan. It was the Pilot Building for a long time, and I remember the big round Pilot sign that featured a ship on top of the building.

“The Coughenour Law Firm did legal work for Home Building and Loan and later Home Savings and Loan. I learned how to search titles under Bill Coughenour’s tutelage. I was eager to learn, and Bill was very good at what he did and was a real credit to the law firm. Those were the days when the courthouse was open on Saturday mornings. Walking there on Saturdays or any day, you could get a good whiff of Bamby’s Bakery and T&F Barbecue just off of Council Street.

“I remember to get to the office upstairs you had to walk up a creaky and rickety set of steps where the Goinses’ elevator shaft is now.”

The side entrance Ketner referred to was located at 105 E. Innes



Left: An old door leads to the living space on the second floor. **Right:** The long hallway on the second floor.

and also played a significant role in the building's history. In 1907, the address led to Littmann & Lichtenstein Dry Goods Co. and later the Max Rose and Co. The space was later rented to shoe cobblers who kept the sewing machines and polishers humming.

In 1924, H.T. Cook operated his shop at 574 Salisbury Ave. in Spencer, but by 1928 he occupied 105 E. Innes. His advertisement in the 1928 Salisbury City Directory enticed customers with the notation, "We give S&H Green Stamps."

By 1935, a gentleman by the name of Dan Vann ran his shoe repair shop from the space and lived with his wife, Winnie, at 801 S Church St. Notably, there were 15 shoe repair shops operating in Salisbury in 1935.

Fred Winecoff, a lifelong resident of Rowan County, recalled the shoe business in operation in the early 1940s. Vann's Shoe Repair had Monday-through-Saturday hours, with Saturday being one of his busiest days prior to Sunday morning church services. Vann was busy sewing, gluing and answering his phone, listed as 9225.

"I was born May 12, 1928, and just recently turned 92," Winecoff said. "As a young teenager, my Dad, R.L. Winecoff,

Julie Meyers of Lexington takes advantage of the lessons offered at Pottery 101.





would bring my shoes and my brothers' and sisters' shoes to the repair shop below what is now Pottery 101. We would have a pair for the farm, a pair for school and a pair for church. Sometimes the school pair became the church pair. I don't remember his face, but I remember the man to be in his mid 30s."

Sang Nam Kung operated City Shoe Shop out of the shoe repair space for decades until his death from cancer in 2016. The Goinses' inherited all his buffers, polishers, sewing machines and tools, as well as the Meltonian shoe polishes still in racks. A few years after his death, the entire contents of the store were sold to Pat Weddington, owner of Patman's Shoes, which currently operates out of his home basement on North Fulton Street.

Ott Pinkston, a career insurance salesman, remembered the upper offices where his uncle Hugh had the Hugh D. Pinkston Co. contractor's business in the upstairs area in the 1950s. In the early 1950s, James T. Ketchie also had a barber shop using the side entrance.

In 1951, Carolina Camera Supply leased space in the main building. Earnhardt Brothers brick contractors and Carolina Collection Agency also had offices on the second floor some 70 years ago.



*Top: Art from Salisbury artist Syed Ahmad on the wall next to a stairwell leading to the roof.
Above: Cheryl Goins dusts some pieces in the gallery space at Pottery 101.*



The Pottery 101 gallery offers room for plenty of art.



Above: Old shoe posters adorn the walls in the shop space in the basement area of Pottery 101.

Right: An 1894 photograph of South Main Street and the Littman & Lichtenstein Dry Goods store where Pottery 101 stands now.



| *at home* |



Clockwise from above: The basement is used for teaching and storage; Light shines through a hallway skylight; the original tin ceilings in the gallery for Pottery 101; a piece of art depicting the building.



“That building has a long, long history in Salisbury,” Pinkston said. “I remember our family always used Home Savings and Loan to borrow money to build a house or what have you. I don’t remember too much about visiting my uncle when he had his business there but everyone called him ‘Pinky.’ I was young and he was eight years older than my dad. My dad and uncle were good friends with the Harrisons, and they ran the insurance business and Home Savings and Loan businesses.

“I also remember Dale Ketchie had Ketchie’s Barber shop in the 1950s that was there maybe through, I believe, the mid-1970s. You would go down a couple of steps and to the left for the shoe shop and to the right before going up the steps of the back entrance of the main building to the barber shop. There were two doors there,

which were 105 E. Innes and 106 E. Innes.”

While Sang operated quietly out of the lower Innes Street space, Friedman’s Jewelers kept customers coming in through the doors in late 1970s and 1980s. The last tenant to occupy space before the Goinses was Strictly Soccer, operating for 14 years through the 1990s and into the early 2000s. Cheryl’s pottery studio is now in the old barber shop space.

After 12 years, Ted and Cheryl feel right at home, amid a vast amount of history that encompasses such a special place. An old “Shoe Repair” sign from the late 1920s or early 1930s hangs in their upstairs home, along with the “Gentleman” and “Ladies” signs on two original restrooms. Original company office identifications remain on glass bedroom doors.

Most recently, the couple have added a roof-

top patio.

“When you have a building that’s well over 100 years old, you have to have everything new,” Ted said of the 2008 remodel. “For our lifestyle, it’s perfect. We have the convenience of being downtown. When we put the patio on the roof, I realized how much I love being outdoors. We stay pretty secluded when we’re up there.

“Even though it was meant for office space, it’s laid out nicely for a home.”

Cheryl agrees: “It’s felt like a home from the minute we walked in for the very first time. We’re very happy here and wouldn’t want to live anywhere else.” **S**

Ben White, an award-winning writer on NASCAR, lives in Rowan County.

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The Sweet Potato Queens put aside time for a group picture at their Mardi Gras dance earlier this year. Standing, left to right, are Jerri Peeler, Stacey Evans, LeNea Goble, Linda Lyerly, Karen Mitchell, Jeannie Misenheimer, Ann Miller and Cindy Miller. Sitting are Judy Lefler, Fran Simpson, Margaret Basinger, Kaye Brown Hirst, Linda Brown and Ann Teague.

‘There are no SLACKERS’

SWEET POTATO QUEENS USE THEIR SILLY-BUT-SERIOUS WAYS TO HELP NEW CANCER CENTER

by SUSAN SHINN TURNER | submitted photos

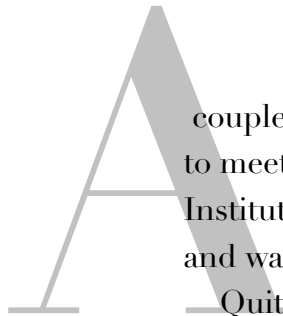


*Riding in an antique fire truck in 2003, the long-established Sweet Potato Queens wave to a parade crowd in Spencer.
(Jon C. Lakey photo)*



Above: The Sweet Potato Queens pause for a photo in the fellowship hall of Organ Lutheran Church. From left, standing, are Sherry Funderburke, Linda Brown, Ann Miller, Ann Teague, Jerri Peeler, Janice Murray, Beverly Cobb, Linda Lyerly and Kaye Brown Hirst. Sitting are Stacey Evans, Margaret Basinger, LeNea Goble, Judy Lefler and Fran Simpson.

Left: Clothing racks serve as good devices for drying noodles in preparation for the Sweet Potato Queens' fund-raising supper.



couple of years ago, Margaret Basinger and Ann Teague asked to meet with Rick Parker regarding the new Wallace Cancer Institute. They were representing the Sweet Potato Queens and wanted to make a donation on the group's behalf.

—Quite frankly, Parker, who serves as executive director of Novant Health Rowan Medical Center Foundation, had no idea who the Sweet Potato Queens were.

He was about to find out.

For 17 years, the queens raised money for the American Cancer Society through Relay for Life. Through yard sales, chicken noodle suppers, sales at Relay, and their annual Mardi Gras dance, they raised \$250,000.

"We all know somebody who has had cancer," Basinger says. "That's why we're all so dedicated to it. There are no slackers. No slackers."

When they heard about the Wallace Cancer Institute, says Basinger, the group's leader who's known as the "Boss Queen," "we changed our strategy."

"We had an opportunity to help out with this new cancer center, so that's where we wanted to focus our fundraising," Teague adds.

So over the past two years, the Queens have raised \$25,000. A plaque with their names on it will be placed outside one of the patient rooms.

Teague became active in the group when her first grandson was born. He's now getting ready to graduate from high school.

"It is work," admits Teague, who's served as the group's longtime secretary. "But my parents both died of cancer. It just resonated with me, and I thought it would be a good thing to do, with fun as well as work."

Teague was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2009 and has been cancer-free since.

"I felt a lot of support from those women during that time," she says. "It's really one of the best groups I've worked with."

The current roster includes: Margaret Basinger, Linda Brown, Phyl Castor, Beverly Cobb, Stacey Evans, Le-Nea Goble, Kaye Hirst, Judy Lefler, Jane Luther, Linda Lyerly, Ann Miller, Jeannie Misenheimer, Karen Mitchell, Janice Murray, Lisa Murray, Jerri Peeler, Carolyn Shive, Fran Simpson and Ann Teague.

The group's dance in February was its last, Basinger says. "After we do this, we'll continue to support hospital outreach to people who need it."

In other words, they're not just hanging up their tiaras.

That pleases Jill Conner Browne of Jackson, Miss., who years ago proclaimed herself the Sweet Potato Queen after learning she lived near the sweet potato capital of the world.

Hilarity ensued.

Browne has since written nine books, is available as a speaker, and also does her share of fundraising.

"I have been aware of their efforts," Browne says of the Salisbury group. "If at all humanely possible, I will be there (for the center's dedication). This is their moment."



The Sweet Potato Queens with one of their former parade entries.



Linda Brown, Judy Lefler and Kaye Brown Hirst make noodles for a fundraiser.



The flamboyant Sweet Potato Queens have always been able to draw attention, as they did with this Charlotte television crew during a Spring Night Out in Salisbury in 2004. (James Barringer photo)



Margaret Basinger addressed the crowd when the Sweet Potato Queens gathered for their annual Valentine's Dance at the F&M Trolley Barn in 2010.



If she is there, you'll know it.

"I do dress distinctly," she admits.

Some of the Sweet Potato Queens are just social groups, Browne says, which is fine. "Many of them do fine charitable work, and that just thrills me."

Of course it thrilled Parker to meet Basinger and Teague.

"They've done a terrific job and they crossed the goal in May," he says. Wednesday, Aug. 12, is the first day of patient care.

Parker does not describe the women as a grassroots group but rather community activists.

They may have a silly name, he says, "but they're very serious about what they do. I'm floored by their attention to detail."

Parker understands that. In a thank-you ad to some 1,200 donors in December, he says, not one name was misspelled.

(And by the way, the Queens made Parker an honorary Spud Stud, the nicknames of their husbands.)

When Parker and others set the fund-raising goal for the cancer center, they knew they'd need \$12 million. Using the familiar pyramid guideline, he says, "I knew we needed to have donors who would make significant contributions."

Lee and Mona Wallace serve as the lead donors to the cancer institute, named in their honor. The Sweet Potato Queens are part of the major donors group who have given \$10,000 and above.

"But in the end," Parker says, "it's really the community as a whole."

"It's been a great ride," Teague says. "There have been a lot of dances and a lot of chicken-and-noodle dinners. I'm so glad I've had these women in my life." **S**

Seen here during a Relay for Life ceremony, the Sweet Potato Queens have raised some \$250,000 toward cancer research over the past 17 years.

Susan Shinn Turner is a freelance writer living in Raleigh.

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Striking a **BALANCE**

JASIKA NICOLE AUGMENTS HER ACTING CAREER
WITH DO-IT-YOURSELF SKILLS ANYONE WOULD ENVY

by KRIS MUELLER

Actor Jasika Nicole brings balance to her unpredictable television career by retreating into the calm, controlled environment of the craft room in her basement. There, she enjoys making all her clothes, designing and cobbling shoes, and building furniture for her Los Angeles home.

The 2002 graduate of Catawba College has appeared for three seasons as Dr. Carly Lever in the hit television series, “The Good Doctor.” In Season 3, she stepped up to a regular role as Carly began dating lead character Dr. Shaun Murphy, a surgeon with autism.

While their relationship was a bit rocky at first, it seemed to be gaining ground midway through the season. But then, in true television style, sudden changes in the storyline left Carly’s fate uncertain. The couple broke up, a massive earthquake toppled the city, and the season finale closed with Shaun in the arms of Lea, his female roommate and best

friend.

“It’s really hard to plan anything with the nature of the industry that I work in — it changes so quickly,” Jasika said by telephone in May while under COVID-19 stay-at-home orders. Like the rest of America, she watched the final few episodes of the show at home, not knowing how the season would end since she did not appear in the last few episodes.

“It’s something I am very used to at this point,” Jasika said. “For someone like me who craves stability, it is a very bizarre industry I have gotten myself into because there is not a lot of stability in being an actor.”



Actress and popular blogger Jasika Nicole is a graduate of Catawba College. She has played characters in several television shows, including 'The Good Doctor' and 'Fringe.'

(Claire Savage photo)



She laughed. “But the heart wants what the heart wants,” she added. “What can I say?”

The ups and downs of an actor’s life fuel her need to inject consistency and positivity into her life, but her background also plays a part. She grew up in Birmingham, Alabama, in the 1980s as Jasika Pruitt, the daughter of a white mother and a black father who were separated.

“I grew up poor and had a very active brain and imagination,” she said. “I really liked to be busy doing things.

“We could not afford for me to have piano or dance lessons, so I just learned how to entertain myself. I would teach myself how to dance in my room in front of my toys. At the time, it did not seem like it was a big deal, but now, as an adult, I can realize that I was trying to feed myself what I didn’t get from my environment. And it has served me well. I feel lucky to be able to have hobbies and keep doing things that creatively

feed me and make me feel good about the world.”

She lived with her mother on weekdays, attending a predominantly white school where she stood out as a biracial child. She heard the other children’s comments and felt their stares. Only when she was on stage performing in school and summer theater groups did she feel confident and noticed — because of her talent, not because she was different. Her weekends were spent with her father, who lived in a black neighborhood.

“There was a real, like, divide I think between my identities, and it was not because of my parents — they were really compassionate, sensitive and understanding — but it was because of

the environment that I lived in,” Jasika said. “I felt like there was so much to discover about myself in the world and that I would not find any of it if I stayed in Alabama.”

Her dream was to attend New York University to prepare for a career in musical theater. Her parents could not

Jasika Nicole, left, as Dr. Carly Lever on the ABC television series “The Good Doctor.” She plays a pathologist who has a romantic relationship with Dr. Shaun Murphy (actor Freddie Highmore), who is a surgeon navigating the demands of his autism. (YouTube screenshot)



*Jasika Nicole's popular
Try Curious Blog often
highlights clothing she has
sewn and made herself,
such as this 'Starry Dress'
from 2019.
(Claire Savage photo)*

afford to take her there to audition for a theater scholarship, so she mailed her application and audition tape instead.

“When I got the rejection letter from NYU, time seemed to stand still,” Jasika remembered. Devastated but determined to attend college, she learned about Catawba College’s theater arts program while attending a college fair. She visited and immediately accepted her scholarship offer.

“It ended up being just a really, really, good fit for me,” she said. “It’s like external circumstances brought me there, but it was my actual connection with the theater faculty and the kids I was going to school with that kept me there.”

Among her teachers were current Catawba professors Christopher Zink and David Pulliam, who directed her and taught her all elements of producing a show. She learned to sew while tak-

ing a costume design class taught by former professor Jan Evans. On their first day of class, the professor handed each student a huge stack of fabric and a Butterick pattern, instructed them to read the directions, and wished them luck.

“I made Lady Capulet’s gown and it was stunning,” Jasika said. “I don’t think I had been more proud of something in my life until then. That jumpstarted my whole interest in sewing.”

Years later when she brought her wife, Claire, to Salisbury, Claire was charmed by the campus and its peaceful environment.

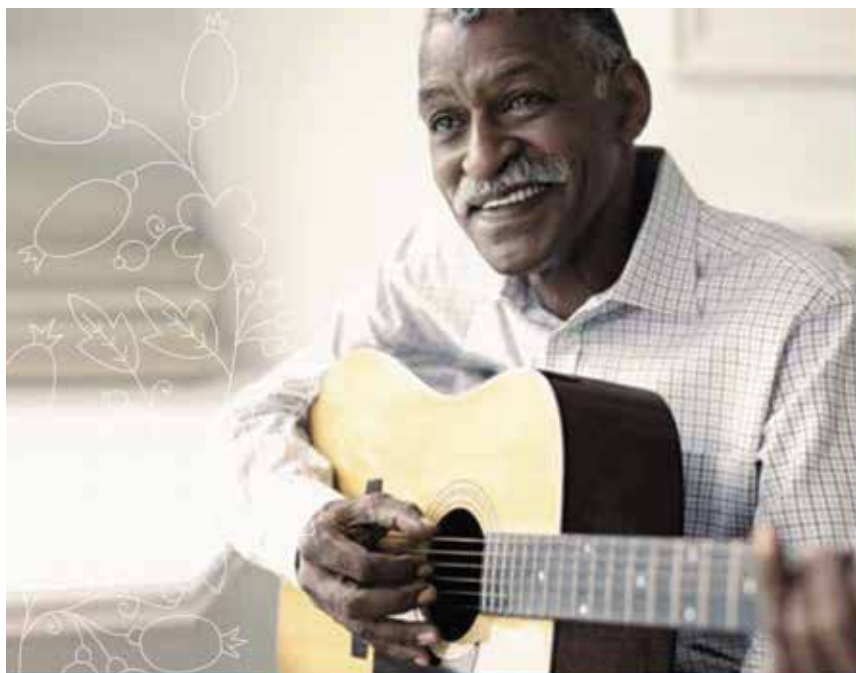
“It wasn’t until she started talking about it like that that I realized how lucky I was to have spent four years in such a lovely, nurturing environment,” Jasika said. “When I come back, it feels like home to me in ways that Homewood (a suburb of Birmingham) does not. ... I had a great support system in Salisbury, so when I go

back there, I feel such a deeper attachment to that place than I ever did in the place I grew up.”

Catawba College has the same affection for Jasika, asking her to give the graduation commencement address in 2006 and inducting her into its Blue Masque Hall of Fame in 2016.

After graduating, Jasika moved to New York City to audition for musicals and plays. Along the way, there were plenty of rejections and she did her fair share of table-waiting and odd jobs to support herself. She worked in off-Broadway productions and, in 2005, had her debut role in television on a segment of “Law and Order: Criminal Intent.”

A year later, she was cast in “Take the Lead,” a film about inner-city teens learning ballroom dancing and starring Antonio Banderas. She did commercials and eventually began getting more roles in television and film than in theater.



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She had a big break in 2008 when cast as Astrid Farnsworth in “Fringe,” a popular science-fiction series on FOX that starred Joshua Jackson (Pacey on “Dawson’s Creek”) and ran until 2013. That same year, she landed a recurring role for three years as Kim Munoz on “Scandal.”

Jasika has expanded her work to recording voiceovers for podcasts. “Alice Isn’t Dead” was created for her as the narrator and became a best-selling novel. Jasika won an Audio Book Award for her narration of the novel.

The longer she is an actor, she said, the more important it is that she have a creative life outside of acting that can provide her therapeutic activity and self-care. In the home she and Claire own in a quiet suburb of Los Angeles, they have a craft room with six types of sewing machines, a large cutting and craft table, and supplies for knitting, pottery and other crafts.

Jasika shares her creations and sewing advice on her regular blog, “Try Curious,” which has a large following. She also is a writer, illustrator, an advocate for the LGBTQ community and environmental issues, and creator of small-budget films with some of her friends who share that interest.

Nicole sports the silk velvet pants and Adrienne blouse she detailed in her May 22 blog post. (Claire Savage photo)



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As Jasika ponders the next goals for her acting career, she is ready for a lead role in television. She also would enjoy hosting a do-it-yourself show to teach crafting and promote its benefits in maintaining life balance, particularly during a pandemic.

Jasika Nicole spreads her arms to reveal an inside look to her 'Judi Dench coat.'
(Claire Savage photo)

"I feel lucky that I am not bored in quarantine because I have plenty of things to do," Jasika said. "What has become a bigger task for me is trying to figure out how to quiet the anxiety, worry and stress about all the people who are not going to be OK and all the people who do not have a choice other than to work and can't quarantine, specifically the black and brown community of this country that has always taken the biggest hit when something huge like this happens.

thing huge like this happens.

"It is a lot to contend with on a day-to-day basis when you don't have your normal coping mechanisms. Each day feels like trying to find a new balance." **S**

Kris Mueller is a freelance writer living in Salisbury.

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On April 3, 2009, Jasika Nicole, who was then in the cast of the FOX series 'Fringe', speaks to Sarah Drinkard's drama class at South Rowan High School. (Andy Mooney photo)



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(Jon C. Lakey photo)

UNDER CONTROL

A GOOD SOLDIER TAKES TEAM APPROACH
TOWARD FACING HIS DEMONS

by **DEIRDRE PARKER SMITH**



An Army veteran of three tours in the Middle East, Casey Benson still battles with PTSD. (Jon C. Lakey photo)

*Learning skills as a chef— here at Morgan Ridge Railwalk Brewhouse in Salisbury — has become Benson's passion, and best therapy.
(Jon C. Lakey photo)*





Casey Benson saw too much during his Army years in Afghanistan and Iraq. He was a good soldier, he says, and that was part of the problem with his post traumatic stress disorder or syndrome, as he tried to reintegrate into “normal” life and use his culinary training and new skills to build a future.

After completing a reconditioning program as an inpatient at the W.G. “Bill” Hefner VA Medical Center in Salisbury, Benson is all smiles now, with plans and ambition.

But he understands there is no cure.

“I’ve got to learn to live with this,” he says.

Benson and his PTSD team agree: Even 15 percent better makes a big difference.

The VA’s Brandon Bryan says the hospital’s residential treatment program encompasses a six-week period with up to 23 veterans, who stay in groups of four to eight people. The program includes a variety of classes and therapy sessions, and the veterans can be from any combat era.

“It’s completely voluntary, they can leave any time,” Bryan says. “We hope they don’t fall back to simple avoidance, which is typical for PTSD patients.

“We want treatment to make a difference, specifically to their problems. This works well for PTSD. They face traumatic things, and we don’t want them to forget it — suppressing it is unhealthy. In the program, they are somewhat removed from everyday life, but they can do concentrated work.”

*Benson speaks during his graduation from the PTSD program at the Hefner VA Medical Center in Salisbury.
(Photo courtesy of the VA)*



Bryan describes PTSD as a broad phobia associated with what happened to the veterans.

“The sight of trash on the side of the road may trigger fear of an explosive device, or seeing dead animals,” Bryan says.

Benson himself has had a problem with seeing things in the road. It took him a couple years just to get used to driving in the United States again. In the Army, he was assigned a driver for six years — so he just didn’t drive for that period. Instead, he was on the lookout for IEDs, and he got too used to taking in everything on the side of the road and expecting the worst — explosions.

Benson says his years deployed in the Middle East made him numb. He didn’t receive

things. He didn’t face things. Because he was always on rotation, he was constantly vigilant. Just seeing an erratic driver today can be very upsetting.

“The vigilance paid off while he was in the military, but it doesn’t work at home,” therapist Amanda Vaughn says.

“It’s bad for parenting,” Benson adds as an example. In dealing with his children, he treated them as though he was preparing them for combat. If a soldier doesn’t have it all together, that’s bad, Benson acknowledges, but if a kid doesn’t have it all together, that’s normal. “Everything felt like a safety issue” for his kids, he says.

With some culinary training already in his background, Benson found working in a

kitchen to be good therapy.

He has cooked at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, where he had the chance to work with Robert Irvine of Food Network fame. Irvine helps raise money for veterans’ programs, and Benson met him and his sous chef. He also accompanied Irvine on one of his trips.

Benson is the cousin of Chef Jason Nain at Morgan Ridge in Gold Hill. When the VA found out about the connection, Benson was able to work there and at the Morgan Ridge Brewhouse in Salisbury three to four days a week. He was especially busy during last year’s Queen’s Feast, an annual restaurant promotion in the Charlotte area.

With a schedule and a menu, Benson fits



Casey Benson, left, prepares some meat under the supervision of Chef Jason Nain at Morgan Ridge in Gold Hill.
(Deirdre Parker Smith photo)

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into the chef's flow and is unfailingly polite, saying "Yes, sir" to every instruction. It relieves much of the stress behind his trauma.

"I think I found the key, the niche," he says of cooking. "If I hadn't, I would have been just walking around ..."

The confined space of a kitchen and the limited number of people and lists of tasks are all part of Benson's treatment and make him feel more comfortable. Nain shows him what to do and gently corrects him if needed.

And he does several things. Nain says Benson would be frustrated doing one thing over and over again. "This is like having another sous chef," Nain adds.

Benson experienced multiple deployments, including 26 months in Iraq and 11½ months in Afghanistan. Benson had just turned 20 when he went to Iraq, and it turned out he spent

his 21st and 22nd birthdays there, his 24th at home, and then his 25th in Afghanistan.

Part of the time, he served as a .50-caliber gunman "all over Iraq" and with transitioning the bulk of the military work to the Iraqi army.

His second assignment was security in the hot spots of Iraq, then for his third, he was promoted to staff sergeant and went into Kandahar, Afghanistan, in 2010 to "smoke out the Taliban."

There, he witnessed 22 casualties in the first two days.

"It was a rough transition," Benson says. "I felt zero emotional connection."

He didn't go to the memorials, but stayed behind to prepare the next group for battle.

"That's defensive," Vaughn says, noting the non-emotional response is normal.

Part of his therapy now shows Benson he needs to grieve over what he has seen.

Benson remembers his sergeant when he first went to Iraq for 13 months told everyone to be prepared to die. Benson came back after that 13 months and did another 13-month tour. He wanted to go to his sergeant and say, "I survived."

Planning to come back to a normal life "was like planning what to do with my lottery winnings — it just doesn't happen," Benson says.

A graduate of A.L. Brown High, Benson went to culinary school in the Army and has always wanted to go to culinary school outside the military. "I want that now more than ever," he says.

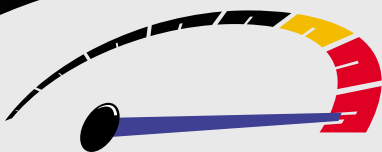
Benson also has studied at Austin Peay in Tennessee. He connects with Irvine because of the chef's support for the military and hopes to get a chance to shadow him one day.

Benson's treatment for PTSD has includ-



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ed two months of brain wellness training, which includes brain mapping, showing where he has damage from six concussions he suffered while in the Army.

He also has been treated in Bethesda, Maryland, and went to a Caring 4 Heroes camp in Fairmont, North Carolina, working for Andy Woodhall who treated him as the chef.

After his six weeks of residential treatment at the VA, Benson knows some memories will surface and that his brain will be able to process them. He is grateful he can be treated at the local VA.

“It’s a different atmosphere to be close to home and close to the VA,” he says.

Benson notes a big change in how people receive him now. He hasn’t had a really bad day since he’s been in treatment. But he’s had time to think about how the rough times define his



VA therapist Amanda Vaughn poses with Benson at his graduation ceremony from the reconditioning program. (Photo courtesy of the VA)

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(Photo by Deirdre Parker Smith)

character and how he can make life more pleasant.

“This is the definition of growth and recovery,” Vaughan says with a smile. “With the culinary interest, he’s found motivation and enjoyment and fulfillment.”

Bryan again points out that PTSD is not cured, but managed.

“The advantage to inpatient treatment is the therapists can really get to know the vet and offer other help, too,” Benson adds. “A lot of vets don’t want go out in public, but vets have a lot to

offer. They have training and discipline and they can handle things.

“I think I can talk to people and vets dealing with similar things. If I save one life through my experience, that’s good.”

Bryan looks at it this way: “When you can

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change yourself, you can check on others with more compassion and care,” he says, and the efforts of the veterans become more important than what therapists can do.

Benson says he’s working on developing faith — “You gotta believe in something bigger than yourself. It’s been a long journey, but I’m very excited about the future. You have to be at peace with yourself to be successful, to give yourself to others. It’s all about finding your peace.”

Peace — another trigger. Benson remembers the freshest air he ever smelled was in Afghanistan, because he was near fields of pomegranates. It made him feel at peace. Now the same smell returns that feeling.

Benson has found ways of looking at the bright side, when there’s so much darkness.

This year has not been an easy one for Benson, but he’s

putting his new culinary skills to use and trying to decide about a couple of job opportunities, including one as a wounded warrior liaison, since he is himself a wounded warrior.

For now, Casey is catering for the N.C. National Guard in Raleigh, three meals a day. “It’s a lot of stress, but I can handle it,” he says. “Or I can tell someone, ‘You, go make lemonade in that corner.’”

He has a friend who is a government contractor who promises he can keep Casey busy.

“I can handle that,” Benson reports. “I’ve got it pretty much under control.” **S**

Deirdre Parker Smith, who worked at the Salisbury Post for 35 years, is a freelance writer living in Spencer.

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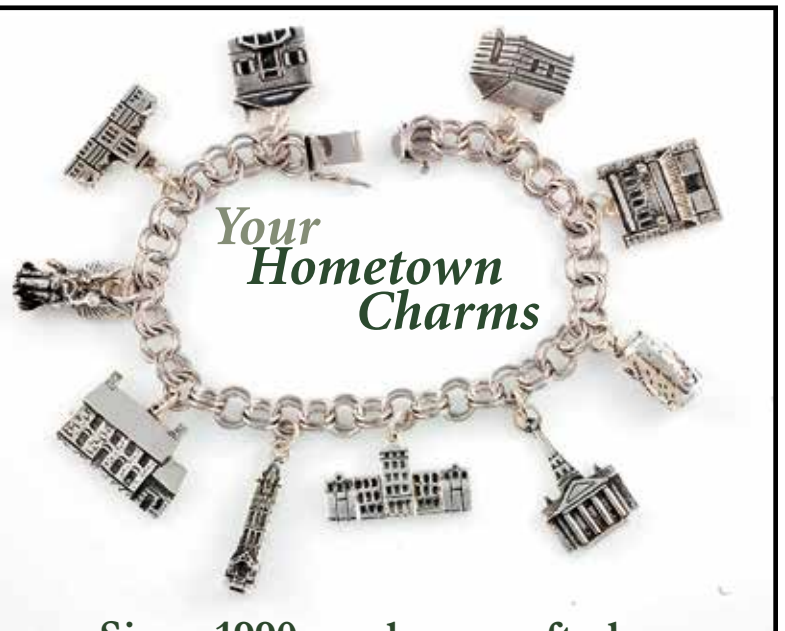
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Physical therapist Kayla Morrow Jester, a standout athlete at South Rowan High and Lenoir-Rhyne University, heads a PT office in China Grove.

All the right movements

Jester applies athletic instincts toward making her patients feel better

WRITTEN BY MIKE LONDON / PHOTOGRAPHY BY WAYNE HINSHAW



Above: Jester has Tony Stirewalt raise his leg with ankle weights.

Below: Jester works with patient Diane Deal.

Kayla Morrow Jester, small-town girl who became a doctor of physical therapy, has landed in the perfect profession.

The 28-year-old gives a patient his or her life back every work day — and that's not overstating things.

“When someone comes to me who's been bedridden, but I can get them into a wheelchair, and then I can get them walking out of this office with a cane, that's an awesome feeling,” Jester said. “I've made a positive impact on their future. I've helped them function again.”

Compleat Rehab and Sports Therapy is the official name above the entrance, but people in China Grove think of it as the place where Dr. Kayla makes people feel better, mentally and physically.

In a building across the highway from Gary's Barbecue, a couple of blocks from her home, Jester works





with a wide range of patients. There are 70-somethings with joint transplants or stiff muscles, but there are also teenage athletes battling to make their way back to fields and courts from knee, elbow and shoulder injuries.

Jester was one of those athletes once. She played four sports at South Rowan High, five minutes from her office. She graduated in 2010.

Now she is on all the advertising signs for her business. People see her face in prominent places like the outfield fence at South Rowan's baseball field and the China Grove Middle School gym.

"My license on the wall says Kayla Jester (she married Catawba graduate and former South Rowan soccer player Jacob Jester), but China Grove is a small town," she said. "A lot of people remember me from South Rowan

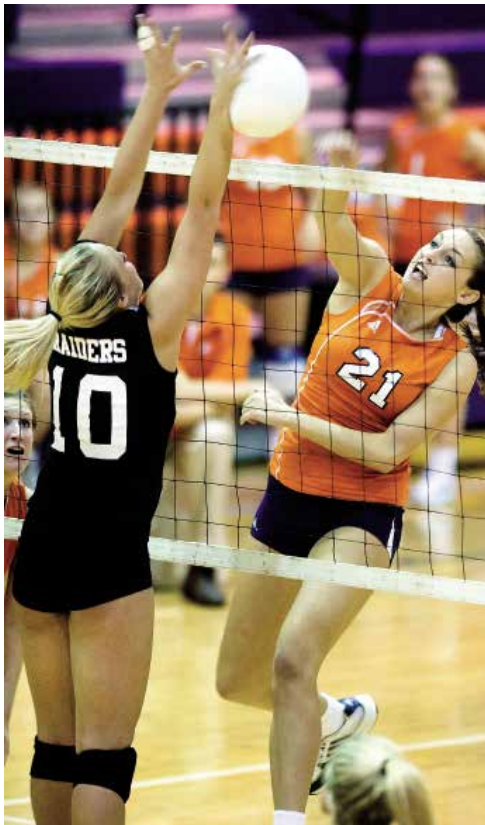
as Kayla Morrow. I had a lot of teammates in a lot of different sports. A lot of my patients are their parents and grandparents."

The Jesters' first child is well on the way, due in September. The baby and the coronavirus, which shut down her business for several months, have made this an interesting, challenging year. She's taken an old-fashioned approach to her first-born. It's still "Baby Jester." Kayla and Jacob have chosen not to know the child's gender until it arrives.

"People think we're crazy," she said with a laugh. "But we want to be surprised."

Jester's sports were softball, basketball and track and field, but then she was introduced to volleyball as a 14-year-old by one of her softball teammates.

Jester puts Deal through some strength exercises.



South Rowan's Kayla Morrow, left, blocks Carson's Breckin Settlemyer in 2009. (Jon C. lakey photo)

That was an advanced age to be a novice, but her 29-inch vertical jump made her stand out, and volleyball became her athletic focus. She was a natural, a prodigy. She already had the physical gifts. She put in the hours in the gym with coaches such as Jan Dowling and Trish Hester to acquire the necessary skills.

"Kayla was one of the best players I ever had the pleasure to coach," Dowling said. "She always played with heart and desire and hated to lose. She was an awesome player and young lady."

At 16, Jester survived a series of tryouts and evaluations in a grueling, three-day camp in Greensboro and became part of the 10-girl team that represented the Carolinas in the USA High Performance Championships held in Arizona. That was in the summer of 2008. She returned home with her eyes wider at the level of talent nationwide and with the realization that at 5-foot-10, she wasn't tall, at all. But her love for the sport was undiminished.

She experienced a memorable 72-hour



Jester addresses patient Terri Jones' knee pain.

stretch in the fall of 2009, her senior year. She was crowned as South's homecoming queen a few days before she committed to Lenoir-Rhyne University's volleyball program. The folks at church were stunned by that crowning. She was known in the neighborhood as the tomboy who was better in sports than the guys.

She also was in the top 10 in her class academically. She received a nice scholarship for volleyball, but she got more money in academic scholarships.

"College is such a huge decision, but I believe I've made the right one," she said when she

signed. "Sports are what I do and who I am, and I think I'll have a chance to earn playing time right away at Lenoir-Rhyne. I wouldn't be happy sitting on a bench somewhere."

She didn't sit in Hickory. You're not supposed to be able to play in the middle in the South Atlantic Conference at 5-foot-10, but Jester had the explosiveness — she not only jumped high, she jumped quickly — to serve as the Bears' primary middle blocker. Over four seasons, she totaled 596 kills and 223 blocks. She was team captain her senior year. She led the Bears in hitting percentage in 2012 and 2013. She was Honorable Mention on the All-SAC team.

"I loved the four years I competed at L-R," Jester said. "Volleyball made it challenging off the court because you're always juggling games



and practices, sometimes two a day, with study. You're traveling on weekends. But you learn to multi-task. You learn strong time-management skills. You learn those skills so well as a student-athlete that it gives you an advantage over a student who isn't an athlete."

Jester majored in health and exercise science and explored her career options.

"At first, I wanted to be an athletic trainer," she said. "Then I considered taking it further, becoming an orthopedic physician. I actually did internships and shadowed doctors. But occupational therapy and physical therapy offered the best of everything. It was the way to help the most people."

She was accepted by Wingate's physical therapy school, ironic in that Wingate always had been her bitter volleyball rival. "They were the superstars of the South Atlantic Conference,"

Physical therapist Kayla Jester works to strengthen Tony Stirewalt's legs.

Jester said. "We beat them once, and it was a really big deal."

She needed to take a few courses before she could enter PT school, such as a general chemistry class. She was able to come home and take those courses at Rowan-Cabarrus Community College. That interval in her life also gave her a chance to assist Dowling with South Rowan volleyball in 2014 and Jenna Horne with South volleyball in 2015 after Dowling moved over to West Rowan. She found she had a passion for coaching. It was an important transitional time

for Jester as she switched gears from student-athlete to just plain student.

She was in physical therapy school at Wingate from 2016-18, cheerfully wearing her Lenoir-Rhyne gear to the arena whenever Lenoir-Rhyne's volleyball team visited Wingate.

"I was still a Bear at heart," Jester said.



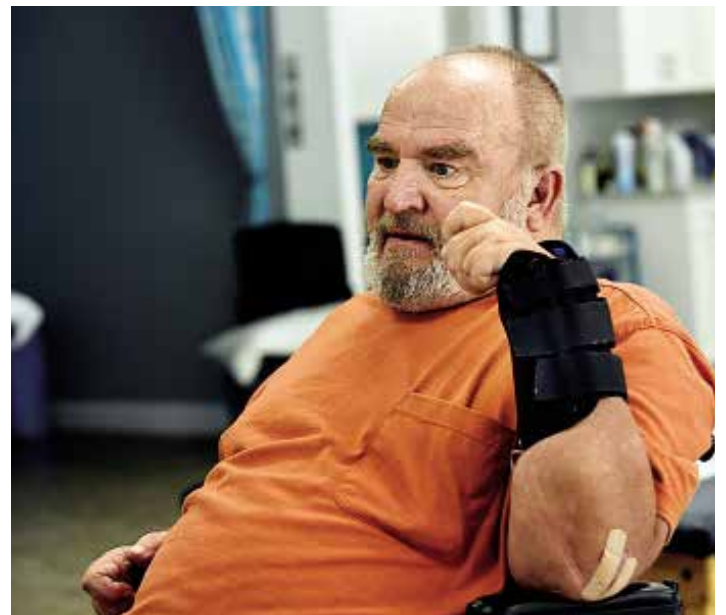
South Rowan's Samantha Goins, Kayla Morrow and Libby Sides in 2009.



Physical therapist Kayla Jester helps Diane Deal with her balance with a stepping-off-the-curb exercise in front of Compleat Rehab and Sports Therapy in China Grove.



Jester applies pressure to Terri Jones' leg.



Tony Stirewalt came to Jester for the stiffness and weakness in his fingers and legs.



Jester focuses on one of Deal's shoulders.



There was a whirlwind month for Jester as the calendar pages turned from 2018 to 2019. Life-changing events. Graduation from PT school, marriage, passing the PT boards.

She wanted to stay in the area, maybe Mooresville or Charlotte, but being able to work in China Grove wasn't a possibility she'd even dreamed about. But opportunity knocked. She got started in February 2019.

"The office had been open about a year and a half and was doing OK," Jester said. "I was offered the lead position here and I took a chance.

The thinking was that my being from China Grove might make a difference, and I think it has. It was a huge decision for me to take it. It was just a front-desk person and me when I started, and I was seeing 45 patients a week. Then we built up to 70 patients a week before the coronavirus and we were able to add a second physical therapist."

Patients flock to Compleat Rehab and Sports Therapy, not only from China Grove, but from Salisbury, Kannapolis, Mooresville, Rockwell and Concord.

Jester said it's important for people to realize that physical therapy isn't just rehab and pain relief.

"We're passionate about educating people with regard to injury prevention," Jester said. "People go to primary care for an annual check-up, so why not come to a physical therapist at least once a year."

The Jesters attended their 10th reunion at South Rowan. Kayla said she and Jacob are the only members of South's Class of 2010 who married another member of that class.



Physical therapist Kayla Jester, right, applies some electric stimulation to Jones' knee. On the left is physical therapist Mackenzie Gilliss.

“We were just friends in high school, but then we reconnected later,” she said.

At reunions, Kayla will always have the best stories.

“I love all my patients, but there was this lady that was really down when she first came in and couldn't do much,” Jester said. “I helped her get to where she could stand up without assistance. Then one day she came back to the clinic with her husband who had just had a knee replacement. She kept smiling at me, standing up and sitting back down in her chair, standing up and sitting down again, just showing me she could do it. It sounds like a simple thing, but sometimes a simple thing can mean so much.”

Sometimes a simple thing gives someone his life back.

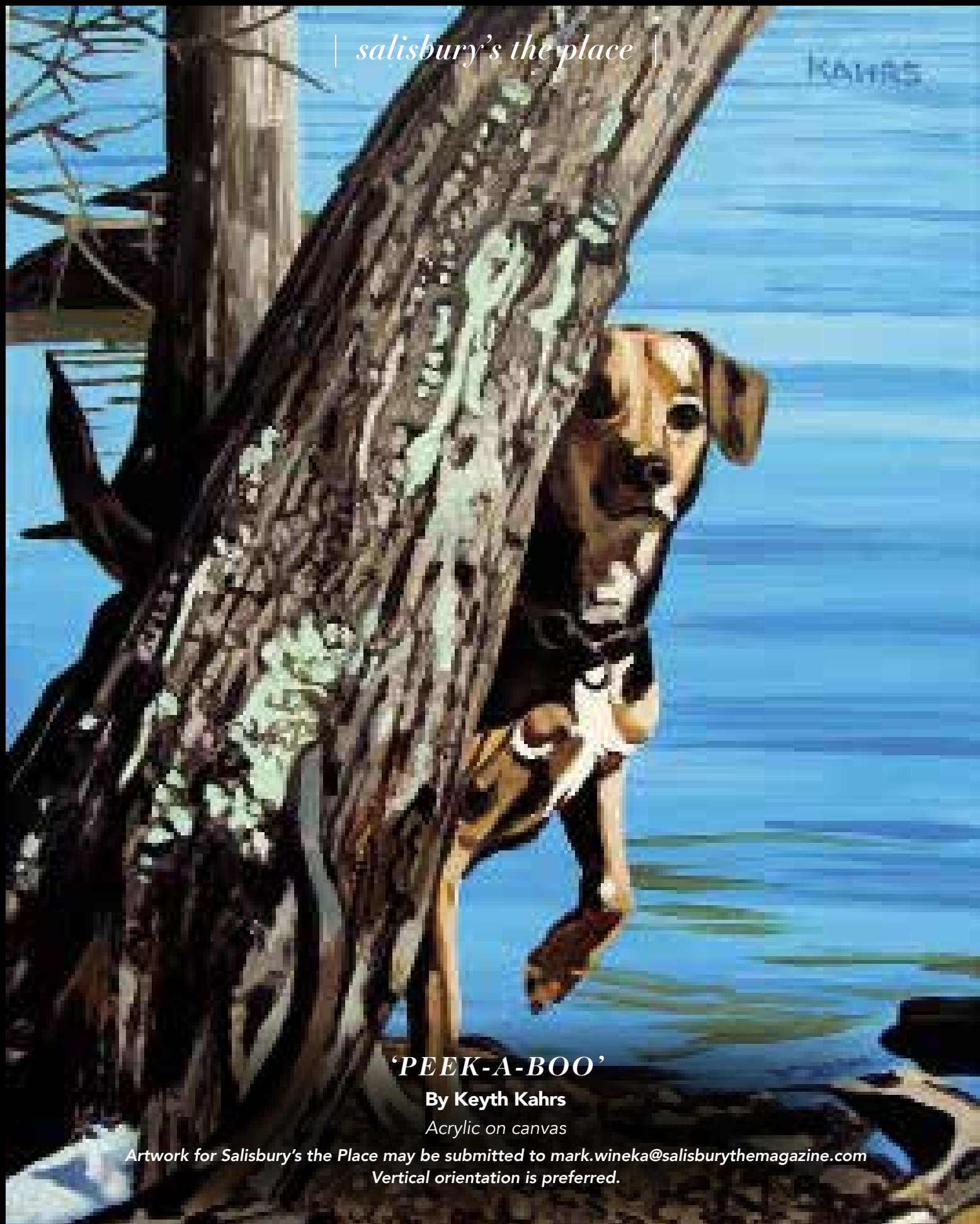
“I've got the best career,” Jester said. “There's no better reward than helping someone get back to a normal life.” **S**



Morrow works to strengthen Tony Stirewalt's fingers.

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KAHRS



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