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On the cover: Hap's Grill owner and cook Jamie Gobbel displays a cheeseburger fresh off the griddle. (Andy Mooney photo)

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# Art that moves us

ur heads are round so our thoughts can change direction." Artist Francis Picabia shared several quotable quotes as he created art that has survived almost a century of relevance. Many of his

paintings are big — huge — and tower over the onlooker. The one at Waterworks, however, is a moderate size at three and half by four and a half feet.

Our regular Waterworks column this month was written by Stephen McCollum about Au Théâtre by Picabia. Enjoy these columns! We only have three more until the series ends!

The Museum of Modern Art in New York refers to Picabia's pieces as "audacious, irreverent and profoundly influential work across mediums" when they hosted a retrospective in 2017-2018.

Art and artists exist for the purpose of making us think and/or feel. They include musicians, writers, actors, — all artists. My own personal barometer of a good book or piece of music or painting or movie is whether I'm still thinking of it in the days that follow my exposure to it. If not, I discard it from my mental file. I think you'll see that Au Théâtre falls into the former category. I encourage you to go online and find his other works; some are unusual in their composition and others are true to our daily observations. All of them, I think you'll see, will make you think.

Ben White brings us a story about Hap's, the hot dog and hamburger stand so small that its address is 116 ½ North Main Street in Salisbury. His story is so true to life you can almost smell that secret sauce wafting from the pages. The shop is a local institution and White explores why.

Brenda Zimmerman brings us a story about china jewelry created by none other than Darrell Blackwelder himself. After his wife bought a piece at an arts fair, Blackwelder set about creating a lighter weight design than the one she purchased. Although his original aim was to make the jewelry more comfortable to wear, the thinner design also allows the translucent quality of finer china to show. Blackwelder's pieces are available for purchase just in time for Mother's Day.

Some churches seem to be inwardly focused while others look out to the community to see how they can help. Milford Hills United Methodist Church has developed a summer camp intended to provide the outdoor camp experience for kids who may not have the opportunity to attend one out in the woods. Aptly named, "Camp in the City," the program provides adult helpers almost on a one-

to-one ratio with the campers. It's an all day program of activities with lunch and snack provided, the last week of July. Scholarships are available, even encouraged, with the minority of last year's campers paying the full rate of \$99 for the week.

Margaret Basinger brings us a review of "West with Giraffes" by Linda Rutledge. As I was editing the review, I was so taken with the story concept that I immediately downloaded the Kindle version (free on Amazon) and read it in three days. It still haunts me. It's an adventure story that would be suitable

for bedtime reading to children maybe seven years old and up, a chapter a night. There's just a bit of language to avoid. It's got travel! It's got Depression-era poverty! It's got romance! It's got animals and animal lovers and it's got twists and turns that make you feel you are part of the adventure yourself. While I am usually a non-fiction reader, this fiction story stole my heart. Thanks to Margaret for introducing me to it.

I already knew Salisbury Fire Chief Bob Parnell from my past association with the city of Salisbury government. Over the years, I came to rely on him as a strong player who never sought the spotlight unless it was for his firefighters.

There's an inspirational speaker and TED presenter named Simon Sinek who once said, "Great leaders don't need to act tough; their confidence and humility serve to underscore their toughness."

Chief Parnell, or simply "Chief," as I have always called him, has shown himself to me to be one of those leaders. I hope you'll get a sense of that from this month's Rowan Original story.

And there you have it. I am in hopes that this month's book will cause your round heads' thoughts to change direction. See you in May.

Maggie

— Maggie Blackwell Editor, Salisbury the Magazine



#### BOOKISH

# The journey of unlikely companions

friend told me that "West with Giraffes" was a good book. Her recommendation was enough for me to put down what I was reading and dive right into it.

It is a GOOD BOOK, a book club kind of book. If you liked "Water for Elephants" by Sara Gruen and "Remarkably Strange Creatures" by Shelby Van Pelt, this is a wonderful book for you. All these books are about meaningful relationships between people and animals.

"West with Giraffes" is a historical fiction account of two giraffes sent from a London Zoo to New York City to be delivered to the San Diego Zoo. They endure a hurricane at sea and a 12-day trip across America in a ramshackle custom truck driven by a 17-year-old product of the Dust Bowl, Woodrow Wilson Nickel, known as Woody. Also along are an elderly zookeeper called Old Man and a woman who has heard of the bizarre road trip and wants to cap-

ture it in photos, known as Red. The giraffes are named simply Boy and Girl.

The novel is told from the point of view of Woody, now a 105-year-old resident of a nursing home. Upon watching a documentary about the near extinction of giraffes, he feels compelled to share his memories of this miraculous journey with the one person who will feel a close association with the travelers. Who is this person?

Set in 1938 with Hitler on the rise in Europe and the effects of the Great Depression lingering, Americans are looking for any bit of joy they can find. Seeing the heads of two beautiful giraffes popping through the windows of a rickety truck on their way to Cal-

ifornia does just that.

MARGARET

BASINGER

Rutledge paints a beautiful landscape of Dust Bowl America as the giraffes are transported from sea to sea and each character is well-developed with his/her own backstory.

Woody is a Dust Bowl orphan. He watched his baby sister and his mother succumb to the sand- and dust-filled air that destroyed their lungs and suffocated them. With no family and no home, he sets his sights on "Californy." When he hears Old Man recruiting a

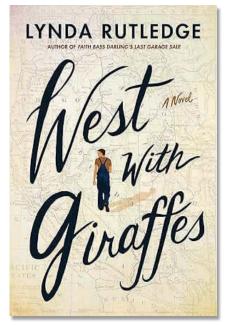
driver to carry his precious cargo, two African giraffes, to California, he jumps at the chance, even though at his young age he has little driving experience. He has no concept of the dangers this job will entail.

Red, whose real name is Augusta, is nicknamed for her wild mane of red curls. A woman with many secrets, she follows the giraffes in her big, green Packard taking their pictures whenever she can. She hopes her photos will land her a position

at Life Magazine as a photojournalist. She, Woody, Old Man and the giraffes form strong bonds of friendship as they struggle along their journey.

Old Man keeps his life's stories close to his vest. He is focused on getting the giraffes to Belle Benchley, the first female zookeeper in the world. Although he plans to trade Woody for a more experienced driver in Memphis, he changes his mind, becoming convinced that Woody can finish the job.

The giraffes are the most loved characters in the book. Rutledge captures the love and support that animals can give to each other and to humans. They endure many hurdles and near-death experiences as they cross the



"West with Giraffes," by Lynda Rutledge Published 2021, 341 pages

1938 countryside of America.

Woody learns life-transforming lessons from Old Man, Red and the giraffes as they confront problem after problem riding together. Their experiences along the journey demonstrate the friendships that can be developed among unlikely companions and the depths of love between people and animals.

Bookbrowse, a book review source I like says, "West with Giraffes explores what it means to be changed by the grace of animals, the kindness of strangers, the passing of time, a story told before it's too late."

"West with Giraffes" is a well-written, uplifting novel. The reader will enjoy this gut-wrenching wagon ride with this unlikely quintet. Do they make it to San Diego? Do Woody and Red develop a love interest? What kind of people do they meet along the way? Read this thriller and find out.

It is a GOOD BOOK. **S** 









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# Burning desire

Salisbury Fire Chief Bob Parnell has been with the department for 40 years

STORY: MAGGIE BLACKWELL | PHOTOGRAPHY: SEAN MEYERS



e chose to wear a sweater with the Salisbury Fire Department emblem, saying his dress coat and hat were in the truck if we insisted he wear them. His first remarks were in recognition of "the greats before me" who had mentored him; Marvin Yost, his first direct supervisor; Tom Lowman; David Alexander; Rick Fesperman; Sam Brady; Tim Lackey. "All greats," he says.

Salisbury Fire Chief Bob Parnell is many things but egomaniac isn't one of them.

He says Yost "took this Jersey kid and grew him up. He was fatherly but could be a boss pretty quickly."

"They were greats because I aspire to do what they were doing. They kept the Salisbury Fire Department first class — always top priority, squared away, with flawless customer service: the attributes the community expected."

Chief Parnell was all but predestined to become a fire chief. His dad was a fire chief in Oakhurst, N.J., and his granddad, a fire chief in Marlboro, N.J. He has uncles on both sides who were chiefs.

Today, son Bobby is the chief of the Rowan County Rescue Squad and son Adam is a captain in the Charlotte Fire Department. In case you weren't counting, they're the fourth generation of firefighters/department leaders in the family.

Chief's son Bobby Parnell is a star in his own right. After pitching for 10 seasons for the New York Mets, his elbow "blew out" and required Tommy John surgery. The surgery resolves the issue 90 percent of the time, Chief says, but Bobby was a 10-percenter. He came home to have a family.

Growing up in a New Jersey town about 45 minutes from Manhattan, Chief Parnell was pretty much like any boy in his generation, playing baseball and riding bikes until the streetlights came on. He played varsity football in high school. He "got by" in school, not really applying himself as he already knew what he wanted to do: fight fires. He worked as a volunteer firefighter in his dad's fire department his senior year in high school.

Rowan-Cabarrus Community College's firefighter program was so highly respected, its reputation reached all the way to New Jersey. Chief had a mentor who had attended the program, so



Photographs of past fire chiefs rest on the floor in Chief Parnell's office.

he came south to attend — and never left.

While working at Salisbury Fire Department, Chief met wife Tonya. They married two years later and have been married 42 years.

Chief is proud of the programs the department has implemented over the years, including hiring a more diverse staff and safety programs. He explains that firefighters have an elevated cancer risk due to the exposure to products of combustion, heat and smoke. As an example, he points to the results of 9/11. FDNY lost 343 firefighters on the day and since then, have lost more than twice as many among the firefighters who were digging to find survivors.

The city is building two new fire stations: number 6 on Cedar Springs Road, to be more responsive to anything at the local airport and nearby neighborhoods and number 4 on Statesville Boulevard. Number 4 replaces the 1960s station nearby on West Innes Street, which suffers structural problems due to the foundation sinking.

Chief says the best times are when his people get promoted or recognized for their valor. The department has an unadvertised ceremony every year to recognize firefighters who saved lives, whether it was in the application of CPR, pulling people from vehicles, or any of the myriad ways firefighters save us.

The worst time, of course, was the 2008 fire that took the lives of two firefighters, Justin Monroe and Victor Isler. Even though it's been 17 years, Chief's face is clouded as he goes back to the incident in his mind.

It was an "extraordinary fire," in a very large facility with high ceilings and combustible products. Air, of course, feeds fire so the size and height added fuel along with the wood and finishes in the building.

Chief was the designee to go to the homes to break the news to the families, though he is sure as soon as they saw him at the door, they knew.

The department continues to mark the day every year with a somber recognition at the Fire-fighters' Memorial on South Main Street.

Today as he drives through town, he can remember an accident that was there, that house-fire there.

We ask him about the balance between the adrenaline of a fire and the discipline required to follow protocol. He says it's a major conflicting internal pressure. Firefighters "young and old" want to get in there and do whatever necessary, within their training, as quickly as possible to rescue someone or stop a spreading fire.

Then he goes through a litany of steps that must be followed first: donning personal protective equipment and self-contained breathing apparatus; circling the structure to identify doors, windows, basements, roof loads, exit barriers — referred to as the 360 lap. They report their findings over the radio channel so firefighters on the scene can hear it. Entry teams must have backup teams standing by before they can enter live-fire conditions. The safety team is referred to as the Rapid Intervention Team and is one of the most important task teams on the scene. They are there to save an internal firefighter if he or she gets into trouble or danger.

Then he goes through a number of other measures that must be completed, like charging the fire hose with water, installing roof ladders, opening a vent hole in the structure before water can be applied. And all of this, of course, follows the high-speed trip from the fire station that gets the firefighters to the scene as quickly as possible while avoiding any vehicles along the way.

It's all fascinating stuff and he reels it off like we might say the Pledge of Allegiance. After all, he's been in the department for 40 years, serving as chief for half that time.

"Forty years. Can you believe it's been 40 years? I've got to retire sometime soon. I don't want to. I love the department. I love the city. We'll see how it all works out."











t was a Friday afternoon with a temperature hovering around 40 degrees as a misty cold January rain kept Salisbury's streets virtually quiet. The overcast sky enhanced the smell coming from Hap's Grill, the local icon in business since the spring of 1986. It was a day when the unmistakable aroma of sizzling hamburgers, hot dogs and their secret signature chili offered special comfort against the chill just outside the door.

The tiny building with the red door and a small neon hamburger in the pane glass window has been a vital part of Salisbury's culture for the past 39 years.

"It's fast, it's good and it's been there forever," said Mike Ja-

cobson, a Norfolk Southern railroader who retired in 2011 after 34 years. "I used to go there for the hot dogs, but I've gotten to where I love their hamburgers. You just can't get a meal any fresher. Within a second or two, it's in your hand. We're lucky to have Hap's here in Salisbury."

Owners Jamie and Paula Gobbel are as friendly and genuine as the food they serve. They are local folks fulfilling a livelihood and passion that keeps them close. Very close: usually three feet apart.

"We enjoy being together," Jamie said. "It can be hard work but being together makes it so much more enjoyable. We've done this for so long we make a great team to serve customers







as they come in."

There's a reason for the address of 116½ North Main Street, as the space isn't big enough to have its own full identity. The floorspace is akin to the famed "shotgun houses" unique to New Orleans, only smaller, at roughly eight feet wide and 10 feet in the entryway. The kitchen area behind the counter where the ingredients come together doubles the length. Floor space aside, the measure of happiness customers express as they place their orders is incalculable.

Before the small structure was built in 1927, Hap's was an alley. On the wall behind the counter is a vintage metal Merita Bread sign. To the right is a plain round black clock, a Royal Crown Cola thermometer and a large black and white photo of The Little Rascals from the late 1930s. A Norman Ingle Jewelers clock was rescued from storage upstairs. In the past, Ingle operated his jewelry store from the same location.

Just shy of four decades, customers aged from one year to 98 have frequented the historic venue. There are many regulars who have dogs and burgers unofficially named for them based on what condiments they have requested light or heavy, depending on individual tastes. Gobbel knows the brand new, longtime and very well-established patrons who come in; many he knows by first name. There are two steps to the Hap's experience; get to the door and then inside the door. The fast-paced movement from order to exit is what customers greatly appreciate.

"I guess you could say people's body language says it all," Jamie said. "That tells us whether they are happy or they are not. If you see a grown man walk into the place doing this, (making a dance move) it shows."

When pen and pad in hand, Paula is at the ready to keep the flow moving. Their



Prep cook Henry Thompson adds water as he cooks chili.







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Scott Jeffreys comes from Statesville to enjoy Hap's hot dogs.

hours are 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Friday and 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday, a time frame that works well. Two hours of prep time before the door opens and another day begins.

"I enjoy working with the customers," Paula said. "We have our regulars who come in and I enjoy talking with them. We might even talk about TV programs that we've seen the night before. We also enjoy talking about other restaurants that we enjoy going to."

The rain made for a slower than usual day. As closing time was approaching, Wilbur Torrence stepped in after the 35-mile trek from Winston-Salem to place his order of specially made hot dogs for his wife as a birthday gift.

"They are great," Torrence said. "I love the flavor, and I like the atmosphere. You can feel the love they put into their food. That's what makes it so special. You can tell they love what they're doing and they treat their customers with respect. When you go to some restaurants, the atmosphere is cold and negative. You come in here, you feel warmth and love. I come for the hotdogs and if my friends in Winston-Salem found out I was coming here, I would have a big order to take back right now.

One woman walked in filled with joy that she had beaten the clock. She placed her order and left beaming with hot dogs in hand and praise, as if she had hit a winning lottery ticket.

"I come here often," she said with a smile. "As far as I'm concerned, there's nowhere else to get a hamburger or hot dog. I love the hot dogs. Sometimes it's a burger but most of the time, I get hot dogs with mustard and that famous chili. I just love this place and the people behind the











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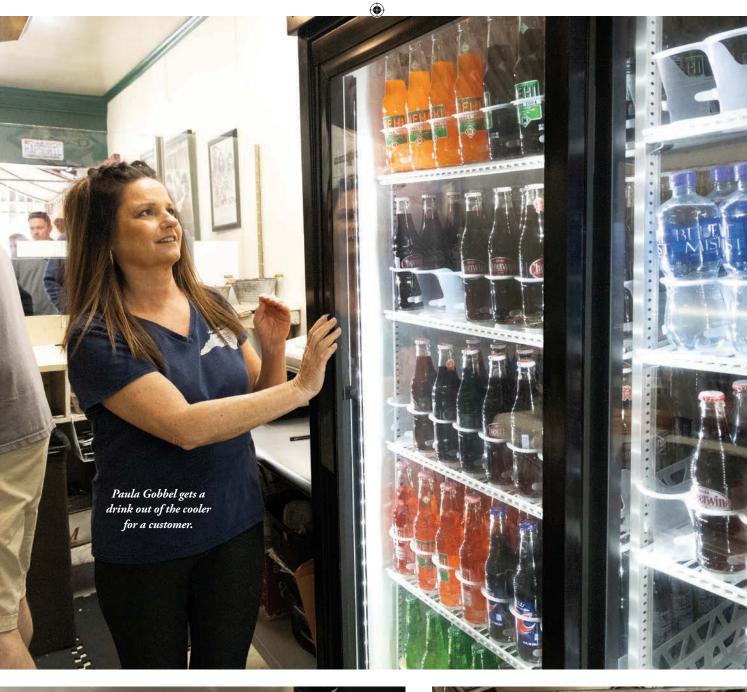
counter."

Many times, the very best restaurants are hole-in-the-wall establishments fueled by word-of-mouth reviews. Some are off the beaten path but everyone knows where Hap's Grill is located, often catering to lines of people that start at the front door and go down the street toward the courthouse and up the street to the stoplight at Innes and Main. If one's taste-meter is set for chicken, barbeque or seafood, there are over 100 great restaurants in Rowan County to meet those needs. Hap's is all about a quick takeout, as there is only a small standup counter to dine inside. Most cozy up to one of three outdoor tables with no complaints.

Hap's foundation of success comes from sticking to one simple menu and doing it to perfection with a few modifications, depending upon what the customer prefers. Only the best ground beef and beef hot dogs are used, a tradition that began from the very beginning. The chili is a signature recipe filled with chopped onions, a closely guarded secret from the day Hap Alexander opened the store. Getting that taste requires many hundreds of pounds of onions per week.

Hap's second owner, Greg Culp, a young employee of Alexander, began making burgers dating back to when Ronald Reagan was president of the United States. Culp began working there under Alexander when he was only 14. He retired to pursue his passion for scuba diving and has enjoyed visiting the Caribbean and Key West, Florida.

Added Torrence, "I was born and raised here (in Salisbury). I remember when they (Culp) started this restaurant. He used to feed some of the homeless from here." Paula Gobbel greets each customer with a pleasant smile and pen in hand. She





**(** 







calls out the order to Jamie standing at the grill to her left. The trick to making the quick turnaround is concentration, as Jamie zeros in on plain, mustard, no mustard, ketchup, chili or no chili. Chips and a customary bottled Cheerwine make the experience complete.

"You have to be thinking ahead all the time," Gobbel said. "And you have to listen to what's being said. "We all three have a job to do or the process doesn't work."

Gobbel's man in the back, doing a lot of the cooking, cutting of onions and making the chili is Henry Thompson. Since August of 2021, he has been a vital part of the streamlined operation and doesn't mind being out of the spotlight while keeping the day moving in the right

direction.

Gobbel, now 53, is a native of Spencer and is the son of former Spencer Mayor Jim Gobbel. He is married to Paula; they have two sons, Drew and Alex and two daughters, Lauren and Megan.

When Culp made the tough decision to step away a few years back, the Granite Quarry native was certain Gobbel was the perfect person to buy the business because he knew it would always be in good hands. Years of working with his protégé put his mind at ease. The third cousins and former graduates of North Rowan High School were, and still are, best friends.

"Jamie's been the magic the whole time," Culp said in a past Salisbury Post article published in 2017, citing of all the work Gobbel had done for the previous 11 years. "Someone who comes in here and closes his eyes won't know the difference."

"I enjoy coming to work but I also enjoy that fact that I don't have a boss. Every has a job and everybody does it. When Paula came here after 20 years at a desk job, I told her how to do what she does but she has made her own way of doing it. As long as it gets done, that fine with me."

It's a fact that Hap's Grill has sold many, many thousands of hamburgers and hot dogs over the past 39 years. In 2026 when the Gobbels celebrate the restaurant's 40th anniversary, the line will certainly be long. S









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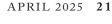
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# CAMP in the CITY

Milford Hills United Methodist hosts popular summer event for kids

STORY: BEN WHITE | PHOTOGRAPHY: VERA SMITH

school children have something to look forward to this summer.

The second annual Camp in the City, held at Milford Hills United Methodist in Salisbury, will feature a weeklong day camp for elementary-aged children from Rowan County and beyond. In the summer of 2024, the church located on Statesville Boulevard partnered with Mount Shepherd Retreat Center of

ith winter at an end and spring in the air, many

Children will participate in sports, recreation, arts, Bible study

and worship during the week, just as they did in 2024. Many will return from last year, while others will attend for the first time.

Thirty-one volunteers from the church and nine employees from Mount Shepherd worked to give campers the very best experience possible. Partnerships with community organizations also played a huge part in planning and implementation. Last year, 57 campers attended for the week. That exceeded the church's goal of 40 children. Campers had plenty to do and see during their daily attendance.

The overall goal for Camp in the City is to provide a fun, safe

Asheboro, N.C. to make it happen.



•



camp week accessible to all children. The plan is to increase the number of campers even higher in 2025 and beyond.

The church partners with local elementary schools and pediatric clinics to identify families in need who may want to send their children. Church members reach out to families who might want their children to go. In 2024, 30 full scholarships were provided, five scholarships were awarded at 75%, and 2 scholarships were provided at 50%. Camp registration costs are kept low for all participants through donations, offering a subsidized rate of \$99 per camper, covering \$76 per camper for the 20 campers who did not receive scholarships.

Reynolds Ministry Funds were used primarily for camp scholarships, staff payments, materials and lunches for the week. In addition to those funds, generous donations from church members, Sunday school classes, and the local Kiwanis Club helped cover other costs including promotional materials, camper gifts, supplies and snacks. These







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contributions totaled \$4,027.85, enabling the church to enhance the camp experience without compromising the budget.

The smiles on the faces of campers offer a joyful story. Some of the most memorable highlights included activities that campers had for the first time.

The Salisbury Fire Department will offer truck tours as part of what's called "Water Day." There will also be classes on tie-dying shirts, as well as some time to with David Whisenant hosting a broadcast skill group. There is a rock-climbing wall for the upper elementary school group. With all activities, everyone on site will feel the spirit of camaraderie and encouragement. There will be home cooked dinners, a poolside BBQ, and an additional lake house cookout.

The theme of the week will be, "Kingdom Builders" to help build disciples of Jesus Christ. Each day, focus will be placed on a different Biblical character during the opening and closing of large group sessions with emphasis on learning about the strengths of each character, and how God steps in and even uses weaknesses to grow stronger.

Each small group will have the opportunity to



enjoy time with Senior Pastor Jim Parsons during one of their activity blocks. It's a time to discuss what's being learned and a variety of questions. Overall, the goal is to help each camper have an enjoyable experience and create a supportive and flexible environment.

Rev. Parsons smiled while thinking back to last year's event.

"Personally, it was great to see some of the kids we know who might not get that experience,"







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Rev. Parsons said. "Their parents can't afford to send them to other camps around. They wouldn't have the chance to do the rock-climbing wall or play in the water when the fire department came out and sprayed the hose in our field or work on a craft or sing a silly song in the sanctuary. It's really kind of nice to see those kids experience that."

"For two years prior, we were a location for WinShape, founded by S. Truett Cathy, founder of Chick-Fil-A. They have day camps all over the United States (serving 30,000 campers). We could never generate the numbers to be a site for them. So, we partnered with Mount Shepherd Retreat Center, which is a United Methodist camp in Asheboro, N.C. We worked it out and they loved it. So, they brought their staff to help. They are college kids who love to entertain children and play fun games and helped organize it. The leadership of the church and the staff there help to plan out what this day camp will look like.

"Every morning, we start out with free play out in the parking lot. Then the campers come



into the main sanctuary for the main lesson with a Vacation Bible School-type feel and concentrate on what the main theme is for that day. Then, they break out into small groups to play Four Square or Gaga Ball or go out to the field to play or do other activities.

"Last year, David (Whisenant) came and showed them how to do a news report and some of the kids did their own report he showed on the final day, kind of lead anchors. He is excited to do it again this year. He is perfect for that."

"It was a lot of fun," Whisenant said. "I had groups of kids, and we created a newscast. I had them volunteer as a news anchor, the sports anchor and meteorologist. They were like reporters, so we did them in segments. Rev. Parsons

















put it together and used a few tricks that he knew about editing that I knew nothing about and made a quick little newscast.

"They genuinely seemed interested in it. We made a fake studio in one of the Sunday School rooms. They did really well. Here was one kid who wanted to be the meteorologist. He would walk to both sides of the screen and was referring to things that weren't on the wall as if he were doing an on-air weather report, referring to the high-pressure system and the rain. In his mind, he created it. It was fun to watch. It made me feel good to know that little kids still watch the news."

"We partnered with another community group that did tie-dye T-shirts and bandannas, the classic camp activity. We had a game room set up with board games. Our director of music taught them some songs. There are also some who were interested in learning drama. We were at around the 55-camper mark but having 80 to 100 campers would be ideal. There would be a ton of kids running around -- which we want!

"Kindergarten needs to be completed first and then first through sixth grades. We don't want preschoolers to come who haven't been away from mom and dad or guardian. They need to be used to being in school all day. Ages are six to 11."

The dates for the 2025 camp are the week of July 28 through Aug. 1. The first four days are full days of 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday is a half day with a celebration at lunchtime. Parents or guardians can come that day to get a feel for what camp was like all week.

"The biggest challenge of that week is that we needed volunteers. The problem is our church has a lot of teachers who like to help us but that's the week they go back to school because Rowan County starts earlier. The reason we have it that week is because it fits into Mount Shepherd's schedule. They are wrapping up their overnight camps so they can send staff in our direction."

"What we want to do is spread the word about

this event," Parsons said. "With the grant that's called the Reynolds Ministry Grant, we can make the price \$99 which includes two snacks and lunch for every child. That also allows us to offer some scholarships to some underserved kids. Working with Salisbury Pediatrics, Communities in Schools over at Isenberg and Overton (elementary) schools connect us with families. We would like to welcome more kids, but transportation is the issue. They need someone to drop them off and pick them up. We don't have the bus or manpower to do that."

As a mission statement, the founders of Camp in the City hope to continue growing the ministry in 2025 and in the years to come. Their vision is to deepen relationships within the community and expand outreach to bring even more underserved children to camp. By building on the lessons learned, they aim to create an even more impactful experience that reflects the love of God and the spirit of summer camp.

Smiles for the summer of 2025 are on the way. Smiles for the summer of 2025 are on the way.











#### MILFORD HILLS METHODIST CHURCH DAY CAMP

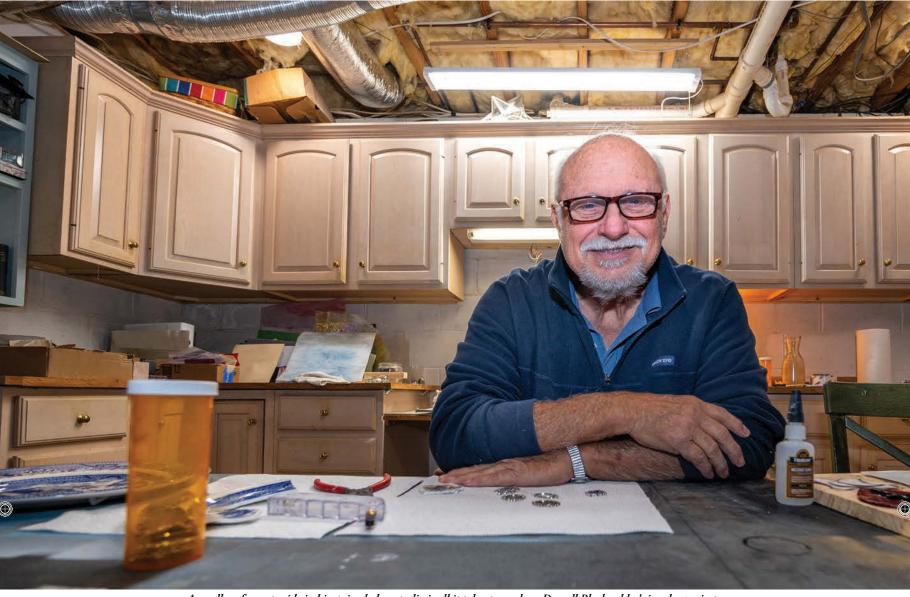
- 1630 Statesville Blvd
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- Friday: 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.

- Registration: March 15 July 21
- Lunch provided
- Scholarships available
- · www.milfordhillsumc.org/camp-in-the-city









A small surface set aside in his stained-glass studio is all it takes to work on Darrell Blackwelder's jewelry projects.

# IVADE IN CHINA

Darrell Blackwelder crafts jewelry from porcelain plates

STORY: BRENDA ZIMMERMAN | PHOTOGRAPHY: SEAN MEYERS







A single Blue Willow plate provides many images from geometric designs to figural pieces. Some of these are from Currier and Ives china images as well as other popular blue and white patterns.



The china tile may need some fine tuning to get it to pop into place on the mount.



ost members of the community recognize Darrell Blackwelder as the Rowan County Extension Director, even though he retired in 2015 after more than 45 years in that position. A man of many talents with his horticulture degrees from Clemson and Wingate, he still writes articles and fields questions regarding local horticulture.

In retirement, Darrell Blackwelder has found a new way to work with flowers. A year or so ago, he and Gerrie, his wife of 38 years, were at the Southern Christmas Show in Charlotte. Gerrie really liked an artist's display of handcrafted jewelry. Small flowers were cut from plates, trimmed and fitted with jewelry mounts to make earrings and bracelets. It was heavy and rather pricey. As he carefully looked at Gerrie's purchase, Darrell decided that he could improve on the process.

As a stained-glass artist since 1985, Darrell's basement workshop is equipped with tools and equipment for that work. Many of them transitioned well to an additional purpose in jewelry making. In the year or so that he has been teaching himself to make jewelry, his previous work with glass has enhanced the learning experience.

His efforts have resulted in pendants, earrings, bracelets and decorated boxes that Gerrie enjoys, as well as special gifts for friends.



Blue Willow is a very popular china pattern to work with.







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Darrell starts a pendant by choosing a portion of the design by sliding an oval stencil over the plate until he locates the bit of the pattern he wants to preserve. He traces it onto the plate, then uses a cutting blade on a Dremel tool to rough cut around that image.

According to Darrell, "There are many qualities of china and porcelain. It depends on the clay used, the glaze and how it was fired. Differences in those elements play into how easy or difficult the piece is to shape; how strong or fragile a finished tile will be." Plates may be new or something found at a yard sale or second-hand shop. Broken family pieces are brought to him to create keepsake items.

In teaching himself how to create his version of the jewelry, one thing he wanted to add to his process was a way to lighten the pieces. Instead of wrapping the piece of china in foil and soldering it, he wanted to place the cut design directly into a mount.

He takes the rough-cut piece to a grinder to smooth edges. This piece is held in a vertical position against the grinding wheel. In an amazing process the small piece of china is thinned out by grinding off as much as <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> of the thickness from the back side. This creates a delicate



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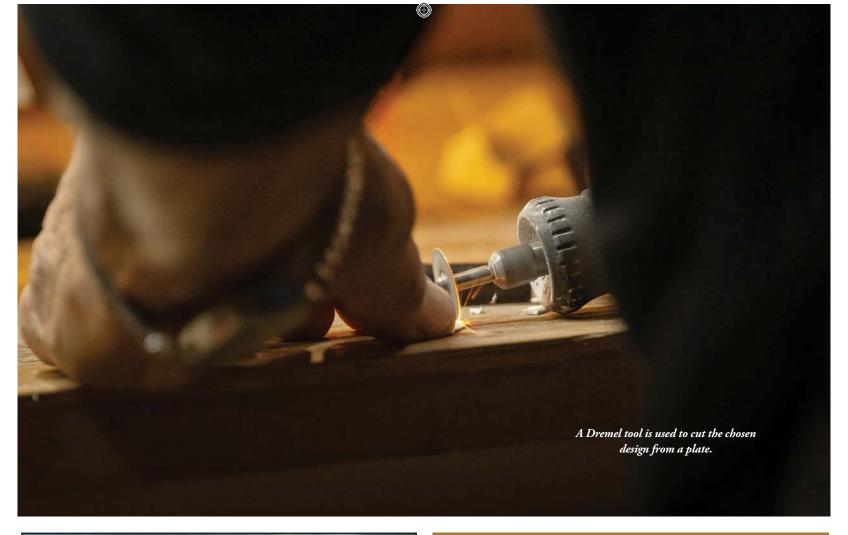
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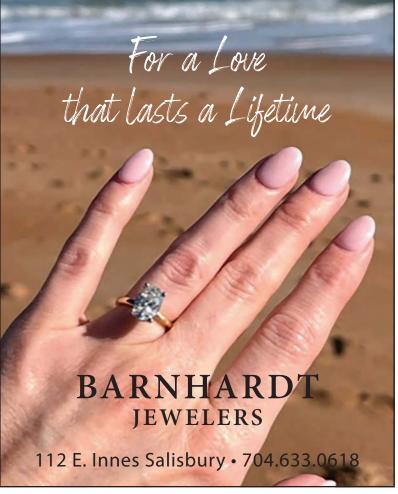
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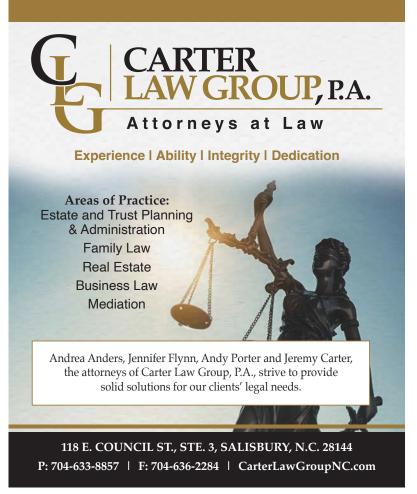
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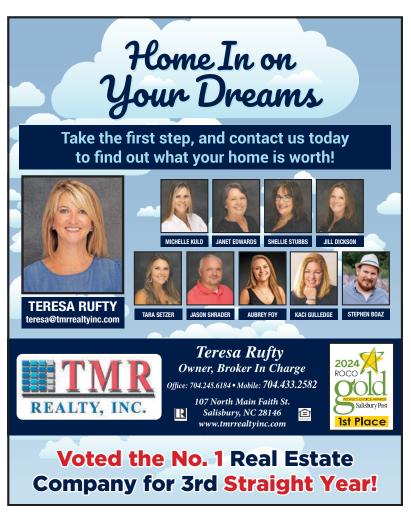


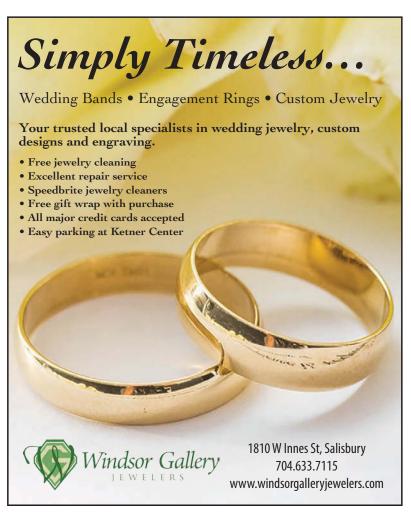






Darrell's stained glass studio area was a perfect space to teach himself how to turn china plates into delicate jewelry. The stained-glass grinder is used to thin and shape small pieces of china into thin tiles.





# CETINSPIRED

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wafer-thin form. The quality of the china being used is most evident at this point in the process. He then re-aligns the stencil to ensure centering the design. Working toward that traced line, the grinder is used to perfect the shape and fit it to one of many available pendant frames.

He roughs up the interior of the frame with sandpaper. Darrell fits the disk into the frame. If adjustments are needed to get it to seat perfectly, a touch up with the grinder may be needed. Then he drops a few drops of a jeweler's glue and drops the tiny flower or other design into place. Voila! – a miniature work of art to wear on a chain.

In addition to the pendants which average in size 1 x 1.25 inches, small half inch square tiles are mounted in individual frames, then linked in sets of five to seven to create delicate bracelets. Certainly, the bracelets are more time-consuming. Each half inch tile can take up half an hour or more to create.

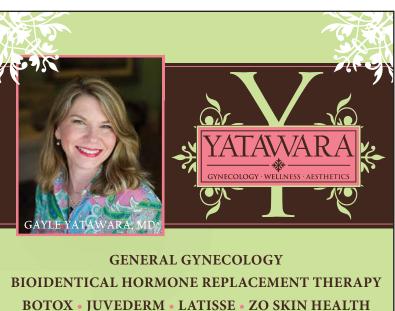
Imagine having only one plate left from great grandma's set of china. There are 5 women in the family would enjoy having such a keepsake. Your child's favorite plate from a childhood set gets broken. Instead of tossing the broken plate, instead of just packing grandma's single plate away, imagine being able to enjoy those things as they take on a new life. Inquiries can be made by contacting him at deblackw@ncsu.edc. S

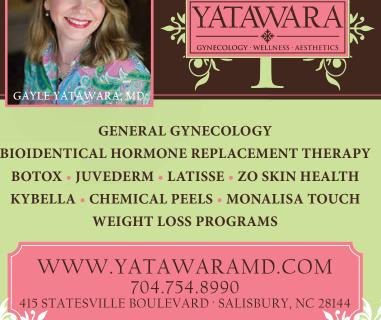


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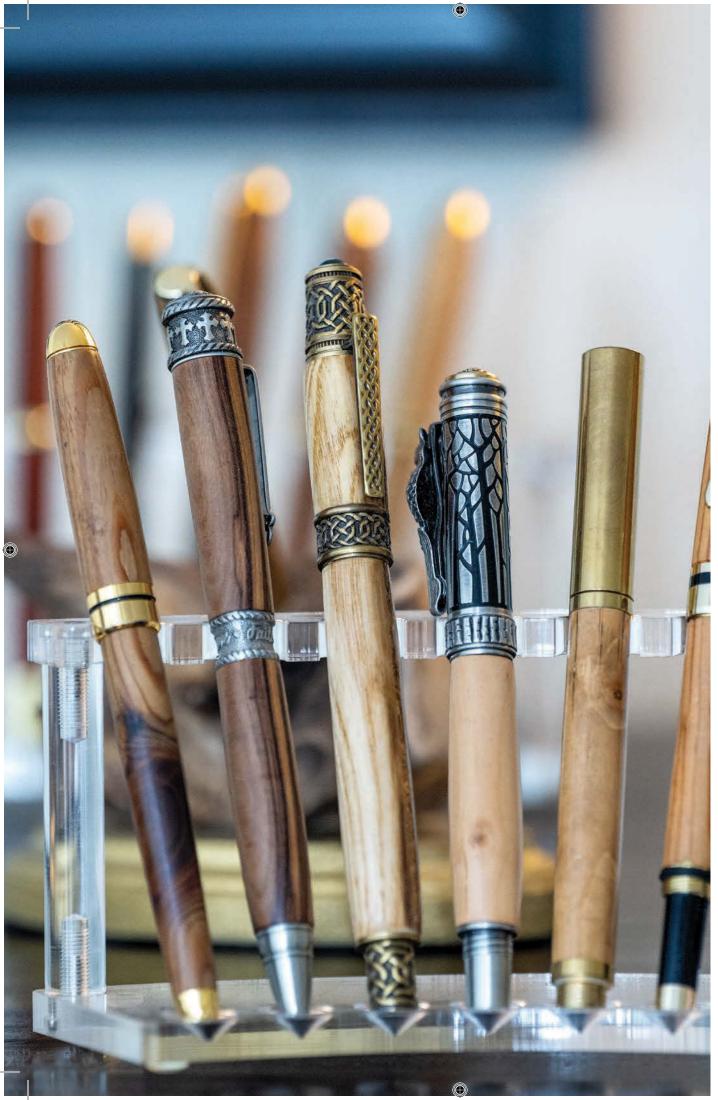




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### **PENART**

Another art form that Darrell has been working on for several years is turning pens. A lathe and other woodworking tools reside in a second shop in his basement. The ballpoint or fountain pens are often keepsakes made for others. Most folks pick up a Christmas ornament or a refrigerator magnet as a souvenir from their travels. Darrell prefers large sticks! His display includes pens made of wood from Yellowstone, from Central Park and Ireland. He has done pens from the old wooden organ pipes at St. John's Lutheran Church, the English boxwoods from the Hall House, giant redwoods from California and wood from Alaskan forests as special gifts. Wood salvaged from someone's homeplace, or from a special tree felled in their yard find their way to his lathe to be treasured by the recipients. Gerrie has pens from the wood of a tree that she climbed in the yard of her childhood home and one from the wood of her father's workbench.

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MODERN MASTERPIECES

### Au Théâtre

### Francis Picabia

By Stephen McCullom

hat kind of theatre is Francis
Picabia inviting us to with this
painting? Grotesque? Macabre? Absurd? Improv? It begs
the question: Why are painters given to putting titles to their images? After
all, isn't a picture worth a thousand words?

The two humanesque figures at the center seem to be looking away from us, onto this scene filled with denizens of the deep blue sea—two serpentine in nature and a purple whale-like creature lurking in the back. What about that spotted figure in the center? It has humanoid hands and feet, yet its head is obscured—we can't be sure if it's therianthropic, a shapeshifter, part human, part animal.

While the black figures seem at first to be peering into the deep chimerical underworld, their feet suggest they are, in fact, pointed in our direction. Do they know whether they are coming or going?

These are just a few of the questions and thoughts that might occur when we first encounter Au théâtre.

Picabia was in his mid-fifties when this painting was added to his oeuvre. If we leave the gallery and let the curtain close, that might be all we have—unanswered questions.

Unlike so many little girls and boys whose parents have cautioned about the risks of indulging their artistic impulses at the expense of their real lives, Picabia was born into wealth and his parents encouraged him to pursue art from a very early age.

Historians report that, with such a head start, Picabia tried his hand at almost every artistic movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. "What I like is to invent, to imagine, to make myself a new man every moment, then forget him, forget everything," he wrote in 1923 in the French journal, Litterature

There is much invention and imagination at work in Au théâtre. We haven't even mentioned that ominous black hand curving up and into the frame on the right. And then what about those two somewhat incidental domestic figures in the lower left and righthand corners? One fancies an abstract butterfly; the other a dog maybe. What are two such quotidian creatures doing in this high drama?

This artist who claimed to thrive on invention and imagination wrestled with the challenge of exerting himself within those various artistic movements under whose influence he worked for much of his career—Cubism, Impressionism, Dadaism. Ironically, Picabia was often tagged as appropriating art from these various movements rather than creating something inherently personal and new. His approach to all this might be captured in his statement when he broke away from the Dada movement: "If you want to have clean ideas, change them like shirts."

Let's resist the inclination to forget Picabia, the man who alleged to make himself new and then forget as simply as changing to a clean shirt. That would be so easy while browsing a gallery where Au Théâtre is one among dozens of other visuals tempting our palates. Maybe a paint-

er concedes to put a title onto a visual work to make one additional effort to grab the viewer's attention. What would you title this painting if Picabia hadn't preempted us?

There is one more feature of this scene from Picabia's painting. Look there on the left and sliding along the bottom—that bar of paint strongly suggests a frame within a frame. It calls to mind this from the photographer Diane Arbus: "A picture is a secret about a secret, the more it tells you the less you know."

A picture within a picture. Picabia the Prankster. As a curator of a retrospective of his work at the Museum of Modern Art (2017) explained in a video tour of the exhibition: "He doesn't fit a conventional mold and allows you to narrate an alternative history of what modern art could be. We get to figure it out along with him."

Wouldn't it be wonderful if every time we encountered a new artist, especially one who claims to change his mind like he changes shirts, we could see as much of their work as possible? Would it matter if we came away feeling that instead of being the target of a prank, we could smile with the confidence of being a co-conspirator?

"Our heads are round so our thoughts can change direction."

That's Francis Picabia directing. The stage is set. The curtain opens.

What do you think?

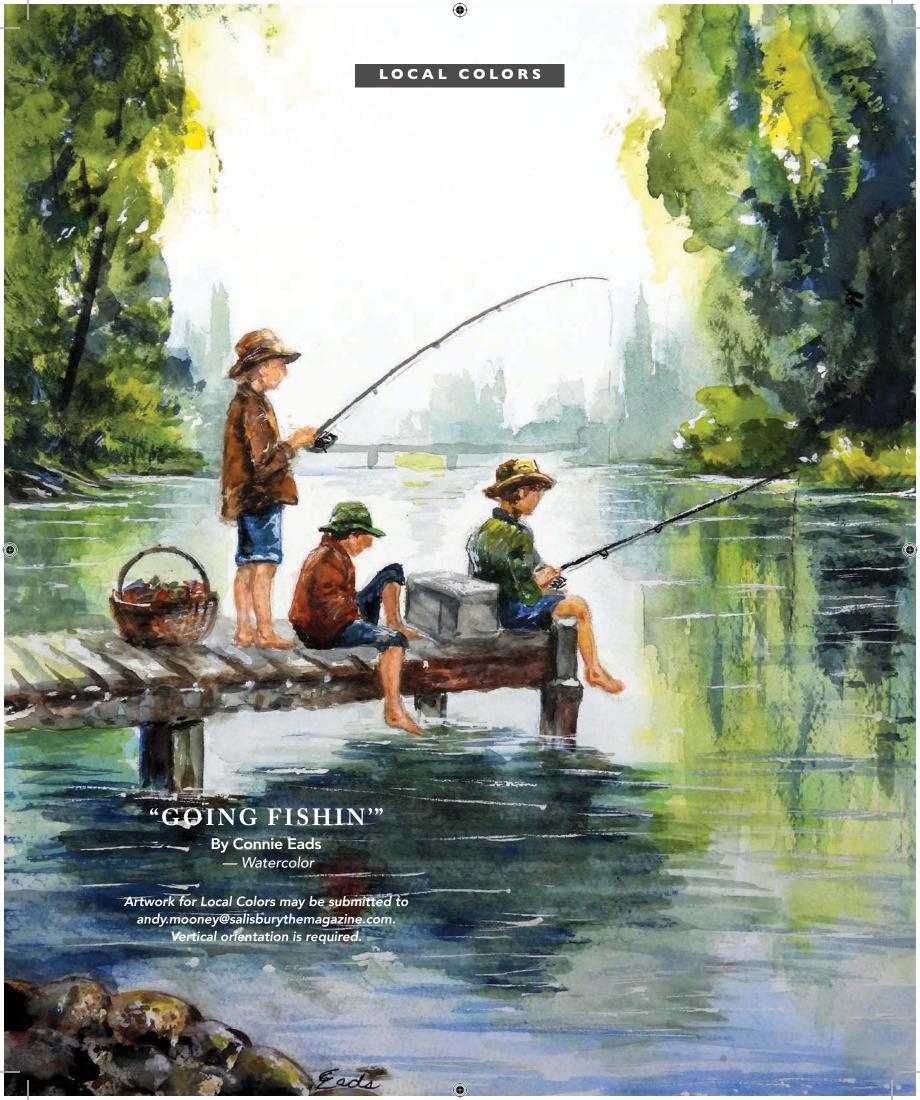
All 25 pieces of art hanging in Stephen McCollum's apartment in Greensboro are originals by artists he has known or met before acquisition. He once interviewed for a job at the Salisbury Post. S

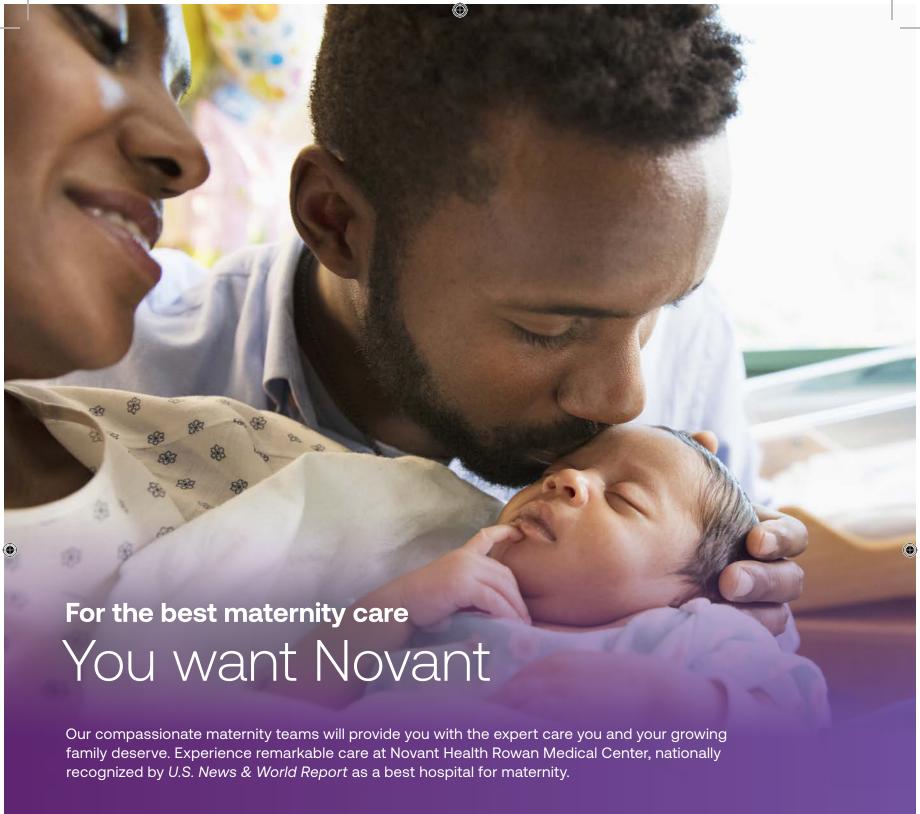






Au Théâtre, Francis Picabia, c. 1935 Oil on Canvas 53.5 xx 42.75 inches





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