

FORGING AHEAD Blacksmith Chuck Payne crafts custom knives



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On the cover: Chuck Payne hammers out a piece of hot steel. He is the owner of Labrador Forge and is a self taught blacksmith and bladesmith. (Sean Meyers photo)

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A hot issue for summer

elcome to summer issue! We see you there, reading us in the shade of your widebrimmed hat, you skin glistening with oil that smells like a piña colada. Or maybe that's you on the porch, with your faded shorts and skinny legs, dewy glass of sweet tea beside you. We see you, too, inside, where the AC is set at a steady 68 degrees. You, our magazine and your favorite chair.

Whoever you are, wherever you are, we have put together a sizzling hot magazine for you for this June-July combined issue, starting with Ben White's story about Chuck Payne and Labrador Forge. Chuck makes custom knives from German steel. Our photographers love to capture red-hot sparks and sizzling steam as the pieces are dunked into water or oil to temper. And there were sparks a-plenty at Labrador Forge.

You know how some people are just one-dimensional? Like the funeral director who visits D.C. and spends the whole week at Arlington Cemetery? Well retiring pastor Rev. Thomas D. Lee isn't one of those people. Every time Brenda Zimmerman asked a question, it led to another passion of the good pastor. We chose this story after one of Rev. Lee's parishioners wrote to us about him and said he's retiring after 43 years in the ministry. Turns out, he was full of surprises!

Brenda wrote another article for us, about an innovative program at Rowan Regional Novant Medical Center. There's a shortage of healthcare workers now; it was low before COVID but post-COVID the numbers have really tanked. Novant decided to grow their own and developed a program where high schoolers must compete to get in, offering paid hours to assist in a



rotation of departments, offering help with transportation and finally offering help with college or technical education after high school if they go into a health-related field.

Results have been phenomenal. This is the third year of the program and it doesn't show any signs of slowing down: this year the 15 openings were selected from a field of 150 applications! Read this article to assuage any concerns you may have had about our future.

The Rowan Original this month is John Leatherman. I've known John for years; his State Farm office is adjacent to my neighborhood and he communicates with city council members when something is on his mind. He has bought, developed and sold or rents properties along Jake Alexander Boulevard West and beyond. I only knew him as the feisty and very Republican who owns a lot of properties.

Gathering in his -ahem- somewhat cluttered office, we saw a very different John. His wife had pleaded with him to clean the office before we came but I am glad he did not. The office told so much about him. He has kept his kids' drawings on the wall for years. Trays of impatiens seedlings were growing in the sunny window. Books line shelves and the floor. Pictures of his family are everywhere. Yes, it's a bit of a mess, but it's a sentimental mess and I had never imagined that side of him before. Three dogs cohabitate the office with him and he walks to the nearby bank with one of them on the leash. Of all the things we talked about, politics, insurance, his childhood years, the city where we live, the one theme that recurred over and over was his family. He, like Rev. Lee, isn't one-dimensional at all. His ideas are creative and original.

The Waterworks column is by none other than Salisbury native Lillian Gascoigne. She chose to write about two of Kandinsky's works and brought even this skeptic to understand a bit of the artist. She writes beautifully — we didn't edit a word — and her insights helped even me to understand a bit of Kandinsky. Next month will be our last Waterworks column and I truly hate to see them go. I learn a bit from each one.

Our Bookish this issue is brought to us by a brand-new reviewer, Lovetta Ealy Moore. She was quite excited to join us as we are to have her. She reviewed "Harlem Rhapsody" so positively, I had to get the book to read. For now, it's atop my TBR pile but I will get to it soon.

There you have it! The summer issue in a nutshell. Get another glass of sweet tea and enjoy!



— Maggie Blackwell Editor, Salisbury the Magazine

'Harlem Rhapsody' by Victoria Christopher Murray

BOOKISH

here are several elements which comprise a good read: the plot, the theme, the character, the time period and the ending. "Harlem Rhapsody" written by Victoria Christopher Murray contains all of these elements. Set in Harlem, New York, at the pinnacle of the Harlem Renaissance, the story unfolds as Jessie Redmon Faucet becomes the literary editor of The Crisis. The Crisis, published by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), is one of the most widely read news publications within the African Amer-

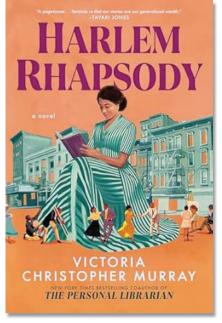


by LOVETTA EALY MOORE ican community during that time; today it is available online only and introduces new and upcoming artists.

Throughout the novel Faucet,

in her literary position, edits articles for publication, writes articles and oversees the daily operations of the magazine. Ms. Christopher Murray spent over one year researching Jessie Redmon Faucet's role at The Crisis, her alleged affair with Dr. W.E.B. DuBois, her quest to complete her first book and her relationships with

numerous Harlem Renaissance artists. The depth of her research is evidenced by including such names as Langston Hughes, Jean Toomer, Countee Cullen, Nella Larsen Imes and numerous other authors, musicians, playwrights and painters. These personalities are woven into Faucet's professional and personal life. The relationships developed with each one adds to the importance of her work at the national magazine as the literary editor. Their relationships are so strong each one credits Faucet with being the driving force behind their discovery as a struggling artist and their rise to literary prominence during and after the Harlem Renaissance.



"Harlem Rhapsody" by Victoria Christopher Murray. Published Feb. 4, 2025, 400 pages

Jessie's dilemma centers on her abiding love for the magazine, DuBois and her quest for recognition as an African-American female editor and author. Jessie loves her job at The Crisis as much as she loves her boss, DuBois, but is eventually forced to choose between the two.

Murray captured and maintained interest throughout the entire novel. Her usage of names, places and writings are true to the Harlem Renaissance era. She not only gives you a story of unrequited love, a longing for recognition but a history lesson as well. She takes you to places in Harlem where the artists congregated, The Civic Club, the places they worshiped, the Salem Methodist Church and the places they dined, The Hotel Olga as well as the places they were entertained like The Cotton Club. All are factual and actual locations in the city and in history.

Interwoven in the novel is the complex

relationship Jessie has with her stepmother, a Jewish woman who converts and marries an African-American man with children. This complexity causes Jessie and Maman to often have intense and heated arguments. Her siblings, who admonish her repeatedly to end her affair with Will (Dr. DuBois), and her closest friends are afraid Jessie will ruin her personal and professional reputations and her opportunity for future professional promotion.

Proving love is stronger than any force, Jessie is not yet willing, or at times seems unable, to end the extramarital affair. It is at this point that Jessie becomes a woman "too smart to be this stupid." She is the only person who does not recognize that her present status in society as well as her future professional status will be tainted by this one relationship.

Because "Harlem Rhapsody" has all the elements mentioned before, it is "a great read."

Her other novels, "The First Ladies" and "The Personal Librarian" (co-authored with Marie Benedict,) focus on the plight of African American females in American society. They have gained a position on my must-read list.

THROUGH THE LENS by Judy Klusman

Judy Klusman captured a colorful fairy iris in her front yard.

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ROWAN ORIGINAL



FAMILY MAN

John Leatherman has heart for youth

STORY : MAGGIE BLACKWELL | PHOTOGRAPHY : SEAN MEYERS

y wife asked me to clean up the office," he chuckles as we have a seat. Over the hour of interviewing him, it became clear that the

clutter was made of items that mean something to him: photos of his family, drawings from his children and grandchildren, "I Heart Liberty" stickers, books he's read and items with crosses on them. He's a sentimental guy.

Tell me about your growing-up years.

I grew up in Charlotte with three siblings. My mom was a homemaker; my dad worked at a steel company. They made ends meet by having a large garden. We sold vegetables to the neighbor down the street.

I ran track in high school; I majored in chemical engineering at N.C. State and worked for the State of North Carolina. When I graduated, I got offers from the EPA and from State Farm. I chose State Farm because it was a chance to work for myself.

I met my wife at Caswell Baptist Retreat during college. She attended Meredith College. She was down to earth and so pretty. We clicked.

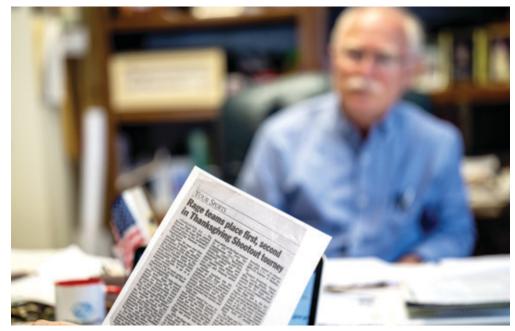
How about your family?

My wife and I will celebrate our 50th anniversary soon. We have two children, a son and a daughter. Both are married and have children of their own.

You're known for owning or having developed much of the land around your office. How did you get started?

A long time ago, I approached Lee Wallace about buying the land on Statesville Boulevard where the newer Dairy Queen is. He told me, "You can't afford it."

I took that as a lesson. I thought if he can do it, I can do it: buy land cheap and hold on to it as it appreciates. We've done well but it is hard on my wife. She is not a risk-taker; I am. It's had its challenges. I knew I needed to finance my retirement and that's how I have done it.





I felt growth would go toward Jake Alexander Boulevard. I bought the vacant land and developed it, then sold it off.

Tell me about your interest in youth.

I taught first-grade Sunday school at First Baptist Church for 30 years. When my mom got dementia, my brother and I took turns caring for her on Sundays when the caregivers were off. So, I had to quit teaching.

I helped start Rowan Rage, a select soccer team at Salisbury Community Park. Sports gives girls competition and prepares them for management. We need to have a community discussion about Boys & Girls Clubs. There is federal money to feed kids before they go home for the day. I'm not interested in how it can't be done. Our community has a need. We could get so much done if only we could talk. There is opportunity for our children and it's being wasted.

About one third of our students are reading at their grade level. We are attracting employers in the lower one third of salaries. There is a connection. When our schools improve, we will attract higher-paying employers.

Have you thought of retirement?

I have not made a commitment yet. I don't want to sit at home. I think I can help the kids of the community if — that's IF — we can get non-profits and government to work together.

How about your political involvement?

I was chair of the Republican party for one term; that's two years. There was a lot of conflict because it was during the Tea Party years. I am a Christian first, American second, Republican down the line.

How do you relax?

I mow the lawn.

What do you hope they say about you at your funeral?

Well, they say, "Do your best and let God do the rest," so I would hope they would say, "Well done." **S**



LIVING RELIGION, not just practicing it

Rev. Thomas D. Lee White will soon retire after more than 40 years as pastor of White Rock AME Zion Church in Granite Quarry

STORY : BRENDA ZIMMERMAN | PHOTOGRAPHY : SEAN MEYERS

"Oh, give thanks unto the Lord: for He is good: His mercy endureth forever." (Psalm.13 6:1)

ev. Thomas D. Lee accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior in 1977. Within 24 hours, he had a dream and heard God's call. He was only 28 years of age. He turned to his pastor and mentor Rev. Joseph N. Torrence of Charlotte for guidance. Within two months, Rev. Lee preached his first sermon. Those few minutes in the pulpit at Rockwell AME Zion Church of Charlotte began a ministry that would last 43 years. White Rock AME Zion, where he currently serves, was built in 1962 by his mentor Rev. Torrence.

Lee served in the military and attended college. He had outstanding accomplishments in both. His three-year stint with the U.S. Army included many honors focused on leadership skills. As a graduate of UNC-Charlotte, he furthered his education with training from The IBM Technical Support Center. His career as a pastor and a lead technical support employee for IBM overlapped for 25



years. During this time, he also carved out a fulfilling personal life with his late wife, Helen Huey and their twins Carmen and Darius, and his grandchild. When he retired from IBM in 2007, he was a senior technical support center representative. He also stayed faithful to his calling to preach the Gospel.

He started his ministry as an exhorter, someone leading a church without having been ordained or licensed. He was ordained in



1984. He took on the role of pastor, guiding congregations ranging from 15 to over 130 members. Over the years, he also became a leader in the AME Zion Church of N.C., serving as a prayer coordinator for the Salisbury area as well attending state and district meetings.

His joy in the ministry is inseparable from his day-to-day life. The love and fellowship that exists in his congregation is exhibited in the faithfulness of individual members who form a family. His Granite Quarry congregation exemplifies this with its 55 active members. His greatest challenge in the seven congregations he has served over the years has been to maintain unity while serving in a secular world. Lee views this as both congregation and a global goal.

One challenge in the church at large is the understanding that faith is part of everyday life. "I may get in trouble for

saying this," Lee states, "well no, I can't get in trouble, I'm retiring," he grins. He states that we have western perspective of an eastern religion. "In so many ways, we have homogenized, pasteurized, politicized, sterilized and commercialized the church so that we have taken the spirit out of it. If the Holy Spirit is not there, neither is religion. We are practicing religion but not living it."

He expressed a concern that if you search the internet for "the fastest growing religion today," the answer is Islam. He feels that this is primarily because in all the world religions, this is one that is not influenced by public opinion. Instead of conforming to societal desires and needs, the words and tenets of their faith do not change.

Under his leadership, outreach programs of this family of faith have developed in the community. Programs at White





Above: Rev. Thomas Lee teaches a Bible study class on Wednesdays to an online Facebook group of parishioners.

Above right: The original cornerstone from the 1906 church.

Right: Hand-painted portraits of past leaders of the church line the wall.



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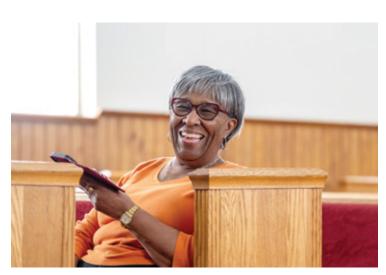


Rock such as Vacation Bible School and Bible study are opened to the entire community, not just their membership. At times when the needs of individuals in the community are discerned, they are offered a hand up. Recently, an entire family dealing with a crisis was assisted with getting back on their feet. Food drives are held. The congregation has currently adopted a Livingstone computer science major from Ghana by giving him a sense of family and assisting him financially. They are God's hands and feet as they serve those in need.

Lee says the congregation struggled with COVID's impact. "We closed our doors from March of 2020 until August of 2021." He continued to lead the family of faith the entire time by using available technology to conduct services, lead Bible study, and maintain personal connections with each member.

Trustee Brenda Alston commented, "Our pastor got us through COVID by praying every day! He was and is right beside us for the crisis as well as the joy. He is there for the deaths and births, the funerals and the baptisms. He is our leader and our pastor, but he is also our friend. We are family."

The current weekly Bible study is done remotely via zoom and Facebook Live. A few members are settled at the front of the sanctuary as Pastor Lee arranges his laptop and phone. Promptly at noon, he begins by greeting those who join remotely, welcoming newcomers and giving shoutouts to familiar names. There are as many as 500 attendees nationwide in addition to the local contingency. He introduces himself, explains the topic for the



Mary Ponds shares a funny moment with the pastor during the Bible study class.

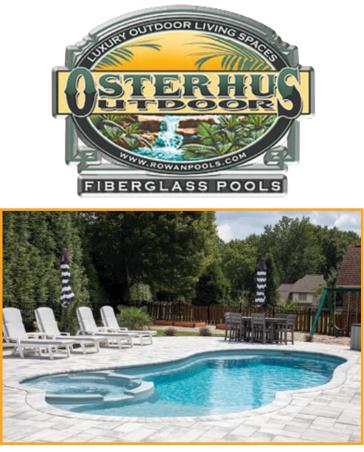
day, and opens with prayer.

This week is a continuation of the review of the First Maccabees. "There was a lot going on in the silent years between the Old and New Testaments." With the skills of a fine storyteller, he begins reading. He reads with passion and inflection, using gestures and a change of voices and volume. He pulls the audience in as he places the scripture in context of the history of the time. With intense asides, he gives facts. "This Cleopatra we are talking about is not your Elizabeth Taylor Cleopatra; she was probably Cleopatra VII. No, I mean Cleopatra III or IV. I'm pulling this off the top of my head and you can see there's not much up there." The balding Lee chuckles and moves back to reading. He punctuates the reading of the description a well-described battle with "Boom Shack Ah Lack Ah!" His animated reading style leaves one wondering if the late Jackie Torrence is still lingering in a pew of her home church.

One accomplishment in his time at White Rock has been nominating and garnering the Order of the Long Leaf Pine for several members of Granite Quarry's African American community: Pete Kennedy, Jean Kennedy, Mary Ponds, Reginald Massey, John L. Rustin. He wanted to honor these individuals for their contributions to the community at large. A greater goal was to give the youth a group of elders from their own neighborhood to look up to and to strive to emulate.

Church members Mary Ponds and Jean Corpening chatted about Lee's strong leadership. They agreed that he knows every single member of the church by name, knows their entire family, remembers their birthday and important life events. He is always attentive to individual needs and relates well to all generations. Corpening states, "He shares resources, support and gives of his very person to help all of us." Mary Ponds noted, "Pastor Lee has never met a stranger. Once he gets to know you, it becomes an ongoing relationship; a comma not a period."

Ponds also shares that in addition to being a meticulous dresser, often complete with cufflinks and a stylish hat, Lee is an incredible cook! "He loves to cook and try exotic dishes. Not everyone knows that about him."



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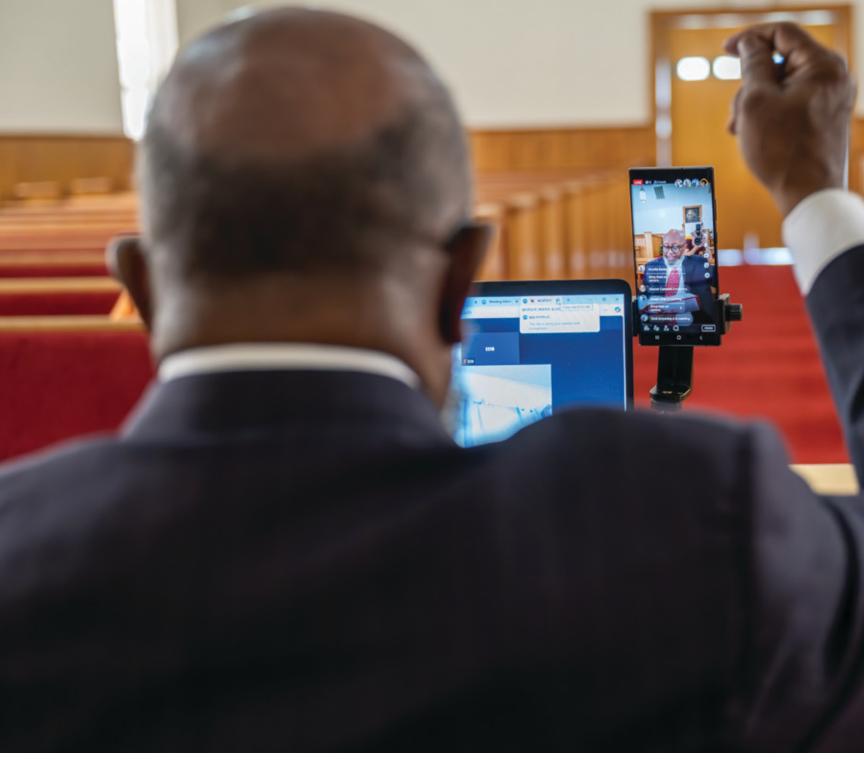
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Ponds smiled as she mentioned his sense of humor. A story he told just before the Bible study got started was evidence of that. He received a nice single-edged razor for his 16th birthday in 1965. "It was such a grown-up gift," he said, "I think I may have had one hair." He pointed to his buffed pate and said, "About what's there now."

Pastor Lee's 42-year career in the ministry will be celebrated at White Rock AME Zion

Church the second Sunday in June when the congregation will hear his last sermon for them and join in a meal and fellowship following the service.

As the AME Zion Synod of N.C. meets in June, they will select a new pastor to lead White Rock. The membership has no input. The incoming pastor may be male or female, fresh from seminary or a seasoned pastor. Not only will this individual develop new programs and take the congregation into the future but will hopefully continue the legacy of Pastor Lee's "living religion instead of practicing religion." **S**

If you are interested in White Rock's VBS in August you can contact the church office at 704-279-5753. You can join the Bible Study either Live (485 White Rock Avenue, Granite Quarry), or via Facebook Live at noon each Wednesday.





Ruth Corpening listens to Rev. Lee teach his Bible study class.



He is there for the deaths and births, the funerals and the baptisms. He is our leader and our pastor, but he is also our friend. We are family."

- TRUSTEE BRENDA ALSTON

Students work on CPR training during a recent class. 1.



Student Jaden Walker 'injects' a mock EpiPen into a fellow student's leg.

the power of OPPORTUNITY

Novant Bridges to Healthcare program gives high school students a chance to explore the career

STORY : BRENDA ZIMMERMAN | PHOTOGRAPHY : SEAN MEYERS





ovant Health Rowan Medical Center is offering area high school students an open door to learn about career opportunities in the medical field. Bridges to Healthcare provides students with hands-on opportunities, experiences and mentorship to guide them toward any

one of a myriad of careers in the medical field. An early goal of the program was to assist area students in making informed decisions about career choices.

Vincia B. Miller is the director of Bridges to Healthcare. The enthusiastic graduate of Livingstone College moved easily into the leadership role for the highly organized program started by Bryan Canavan and Shemeda Conyer in 2022. When she transitioned into her new job, the interns for the third cohort had already been selected. She had to quickly get to know them to be able to assist them in getting into the rotations of the program that would interest and benefit them.

The students are quick to note that Conyer was great to work with and reached out to them about details of their internship. When she needed to step away from the hands-on directions of the program to manage other elements, Miller kept things moving. Students said she got to know them, their interests and their strengths quickly. She was often able to suggest new rotations they may not have considered based



Avery Fisher, left, and Isabelle Goodman prepare to apply CPR techniques.

on what she knew about them. One tool she uses to keep up with each student is a weekly reflection of what they are doing, things that worked, things that didn't and their feelings about the current rotation. This communication between Miller and the students keeps her in the loop for the 12 months of the

program as well as developing cohesion among the students as they share experiences.

Instructor Darnisha Bullock speaks to students

about dealing

with asthma

attacks.

Miller is invested in the students having a positive experience and a strong base for a career. "As the current specialist for Bridges to Healthcare in Rowan County I believe this program is more than a job — it's a calling. I'm passionate about working with high school juniors and seniors, ca-

reer development coordinators and school staff because I believe in the power of opportunity. It's inspiring to help students discover their potential and take real steps toward a career in healthcare. My background as a philanthropy coordinator also allows me to assist in the efforts of sharing about the program and seeking funds for the program to thrive. Every dollar raised, every connection made, helps change a life — and that's why I do what I do."

Healthcare is an ever-changing and growing career venue in today's world. Many view healthcare careers as being a doctor or nurse,







Bridges to Healthcare

Inclusion & Pipeline Programs

Novant Health's Vincia B. Miller manages the Bridges to Healthcare program for juniors and seniors in high school interested in healthcare.

a radiologist or a medical records assistant. It also includes, however, such areas as computer technology, pharmaceuticals, radiology, accounting, human resources and safety. Healthcare careers may feel out of reach for many students because of family situations or finances.

Rachel Fisher, a senior at Salisbury High School, is currently in a rotation in labor and delivery. She shared that her internship has made her aware of the many different areas of expertise it takes to run a hospital. "As a business, there is so much more to the day-to-day operations than I realized. This position has really opened my eyes to how many skills are essential. You know that doctors are in the delivery room when a baby is born. But there are probably 30 other individuals with specific skills and duties who work together to achieve the same goal." She also noted that one of the best things about the program was the opportunity for growth through observation as well as hands-on experiences.

Interns selected for Phase I are allowed access to both clinical and non-clinical work-based learning opportunities. It is a paid program designed to assist in closing the skills and wealth gap in healthcare. Local high school counselors help coordinate with Miller to select a total of 15 interns per calendar year. As many as 150 qualifying applicants seek those 15 slots, so competition is fierce. Students must be juniors or seniors in a Title I Salisbury-Rowan high school, carry a 2.5 unweighted GPA, provide a transcript and have two letters of recommendation. All of this is coordinated by the career de-



velopment coordinator at the student's school. Follow-through and completion of the application requirements are the responsibility of the students. Prior to acceptance, students are interviewed by staff and previous participants. Students commit to being in the program for 12 months.

Selected students earn \$17 per hour while participating in the program. Funds are available to assist students with the materials needed. If transportation is an issue, Miller works with schedules and helps coordinate ride sharing. She does whatever she can to assure that students are going to be successful. These extra elements of support often provide the needed encouragement for opportunities to seek first generation higher education. Funds are acquired through a collaboration with the Novant Foundation, which is supported by a variety of philanthropic donors.

The students are set up with rotations lasting up to a month long in different areas. They complete Novant employee orientation as well as orientation for the Bridges program. Preceptors work with them in each department they have selected to let them shadow nurses, doctors and technicians in clinical and non-clinical tasks. Students interact with many levels of staff as well as patients when appropriate.

Justin Chang, a senior at North Rowan High School, enjoyed his time in the emergency room. "There is so much going in the emergency department. The intake process, prioritizing, medical coding, patient care, maintaining the integrity of the space." Chang helped patients with paperwork, wheelchair transport and checking and applying ID bands. Other tasks included learning about the technology, understanding emergency billing and at times even cleaning the area in preparation for incoming patients. "I had no idea how many things were going on for each patient when they were admitted to the ER."

Students carry the knowledge from the program as they apply for and enter college. Having a good intern experience may also give them a jump start for their college curriculum. From the start, they know which area they want to study. Many college freshman spend their first two years in basic courses before focusing on specific track. Fisher noted that even if you weren't interested in healthcare, the experience looks great on your college applications. "It covers community involvement, volunteer hours, a wide range of understanding different healthcare areas, and additional high school credits." Fisher will be attending Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge this fall as a biology major with a medical track. She is already steps ahead of her peers with the Bridges to Healthcare experience. Her favorite aspect of Bridges is that "individuals are encouraged to grow their skill set...to do and see as much as they possibly can."

Chang heard about the program from friends who had participated in previous cohorts of the Bridges program. Learning about options in health seemed to get his attention. His first interest was nursing but through the various rotations that have included everything from clinical work in the emergency room to public safety, his interest is now leaning toward pharmacy. He discovered an area he had not considered. Chang stated, "Generally pharmacy-related personnel do not get into direct patient care unless they interview a patient about allergies or contraindications for medications. There is no denying, however, that the pharmaceutical participation is vital to overall patient care and outcomes. This program has given me a new way to look at a healthcare career that I had not previously considered."

Chang plans to participate in Phase II of the Novant Bridges to Healthcare. He will be entering Rowan-Cabarrus Community College this fall. Phase II will provide him with tuition, books and fees to pursue a degree, diploma or certification in healthcare.

In a recent training session for first aid and CPR, the Styles Quality Services, LLC worked with the entire group. Students arrived to find Lauren Styles and Darnisha Bullock setting up for the day's class. Using a hands-on teaching style supported by a power point program, the two women taught very specific skills such as the correct use and removal of gloves, how to administer an EpiPen and inhaler as well as CPR for adults and infants. Issues like being certain that the surroundings are safe and observing someone's right to refuse care were covered. Every skill was addressed verbally and then demonstrated. One by one the students had to pass the specific skill test. Training sessions are held regularly with group to cover topics that are relevant no

matter what rotation you are in.

Of the 45 graduates of the program, nearly all have centered their career choices in healthcare. The goal, of course, is to have them return to this community to serve. "Novant Health's Bridges to Healthcare internship program is a transformative opportunity to empower local high school students to explore a range of clinical and non-clinical healthcare careers. We aim to give them the invaluable hands-on experience and mentorship they need to pursue a meaningful career," said Gary Blabon, president and chief operating officer of Novant Health Rowan Medical Center. "By investing in these students, we are not only building a workforce pipeline but fostering a culture of care and commitment that will benefit Rowan County for years to come."

If you know of a local high school senior, scan the following code to get more information on Bridges to Healthcare. **S**

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PHASE 1

Bridges to Healthcare Request Information Form



PHASE 2





Romar Kyle Nanoz looks over a mock EpiPen used for training.



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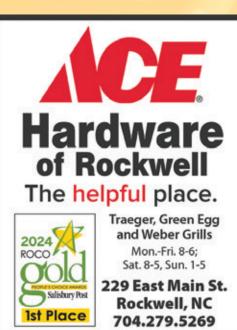
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A piece of blade metal bears the imprint of the Labrador Forge logo.

FORGING AHEAD

Blacksmith Chuck Payne crafts custom knives

STORY : BEN WHITE | PHOTOGRAPHY : SEAN MEYERS







huck Payne, owner and founder of Labrador Forge, smiles easily as he stands at the center of what is known in the old school blacksmithing community as a "smithy." His passion for working metal shows in his soft blue eyes. It's his place, his refuge, his purpose and he loves every minute of his work weeks that often range from 40 to 60 hours.

"I could stand here and sand knife blades for hours and be perfectly fine," Payne says. "A lot of people may not choose to do that but it's a peaceful place for me."

In a world that's all about mass production, blacksmithing or forging is a calculated skillful undertaking, a combination of quiet reflection and quick, bold strikes to create individual custom works of art. Payne is happy to say he has found his calling and loves where he is.

"I don't consider myself an artist in any way," Payne says.

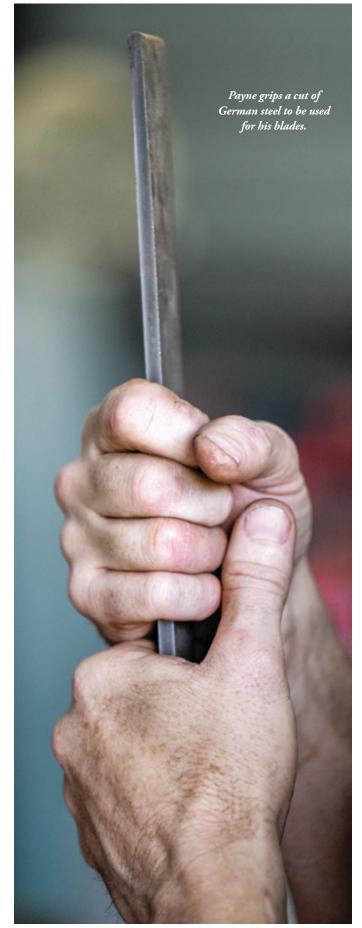
"I consider myself a craftsman. I enjoy the whole process and learning how to improve what I do. I like to look at things and help figure them out. It's hard work. You're sweating. You're hot. Sometimes you're swinging a hammer all day but I also used a power hammer and that helps a whole lot. I enjoy the intricacy of it all."

Blacksmithing has been a prominent part of Rowan County history since the 1700s. Even as the Revolutionary War against British forces was being fought from 1775 to 1783, tools, horseshoes and even weapons were being pounded out and shaped to provide the necessities for survival.

As America looks to celebrate its 250th anniversary of Independence in 2026, blacksmithing still holds great interest and prominence in our society.

The craft requires creativity, patience and imagination. Payne makes a variety of forging tools, including roller mills,





ribbon burner forges and hydraulic forging presses. These tools are designed for use by professional blacksmiths, but they can also be used by hobbyists. He is passionate about his work and takes pride in creating high-quality, handmade items.

To be clear, there are three definitions of the word forge. The first is a place where the work is done. The second is the box where forced heat is brought to the desired temperature before metal is heated to a bright orange. The third is the physical effort to create an object from metal.

A heavy-duty anvil, special handcrafted hammers, tongs, chisels, punches, files and sandpaper are essential for today's blacksmithing efforts. The heat source comes from coal, charcoal or propane. The canvas where the art is created includes certain metal stock, flux and oil for cooling the metal.

From there, imagination transforms into a work of beauty. Shaping begins with pounding to begin the process of creating textures and patterns on the metal when it is soft. Once shaping is complete, the finished product is given



a unique look.

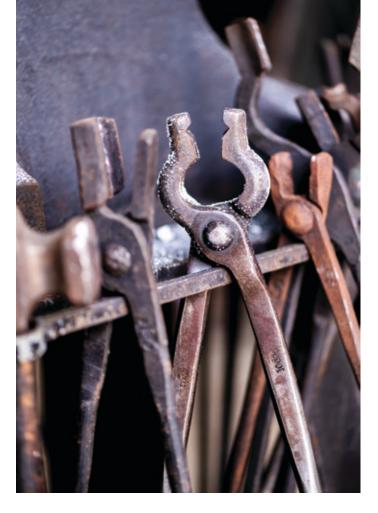
"Typically, most of the knives I make begin with a German-made steel," Payne said. "It's called ADC-R2. It's an inch and a quarter wide and a quarter inch thick. I typically cut these in half so I can work with them more easily. When I work with this type of steel, I'm heating at about 2,000 degrees. When it comes out, I forge a point into it really quick and get the shape I want and then at that point, it's getting down to the thinness of it. After that, I go through a heat treat type process. That usually takes one full day. It goes in the kiln for a while, quenched in oil and goes back into the kiln again. After that comes the grinding. Then it depends on the blade. I'll hand sand them to put a really fine finish on them. Then I install the handles and it's ready to go.

"It's definitely a niche market," Payne said. "It's a luxury item. I luckily sell knives all over the nation. Ninety percent of what I do is word of mouth if someone sees something I've made when it gets shipped out. It's a small market. It is somewhat crowded with the popularity of force and fire. Some will do it for the fun of it and there's not a need to make money. They are willing to do things for prices that I could never come close to. The knives I make range from \$150 to \$1,200, depending on the design asked for by the customer."

Born in Winston-Salem, Payne moved to China Grove in 1989. He and his wife, Angel, were high school sweethearts and have been married for 28 years. Sons Tyler and Ethan played a huge part in the creation of Labrador Forge as far as how it all began and its unique name.

"We homeschooled our kids at the time, so this was 2012," Payne said. "We took a field trip with a small home school association to the Biltmore Estate. They have a working blacksmith shop there on sight.







A piece of molten steel cooks in the burner.

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This type of knife is one of Payne's best sellers.





The firebox shows its age.

"Our youngest son was not the type of person to do things like this but after seeing it done at the Biltmore, said, 'I want a forge. I want an anvil. I want to do this.' He was an inside kid and wasn't one to do a lot outside. So, initially, my wife and I sort of blew that off. Then in 2018, I finally gave in at Christmas of that year. He received a beginner setup and got an anvil and some tools. That's how we got started. That was general blacksmithing and no knives at all at that time. We made fire pokers and things of that nature. Whatever we saw, we tried to make."

Ethan, their younger son, inspired the name after their Labrador retriever, Luke. A local graphic artist designed the logo, and the business was off to a great start.

Even though the business is competitive, Payne takes pride in the fact that the blacksmith community is a close-knit family.

"It's really inspiring to be honest with you," Payne says. "Truly, at the end of the day, we are competitors because we are making the same things. If I have a question, even though it's a signature feature for them, they will tell me. Everyone seems to pull together and help each other a



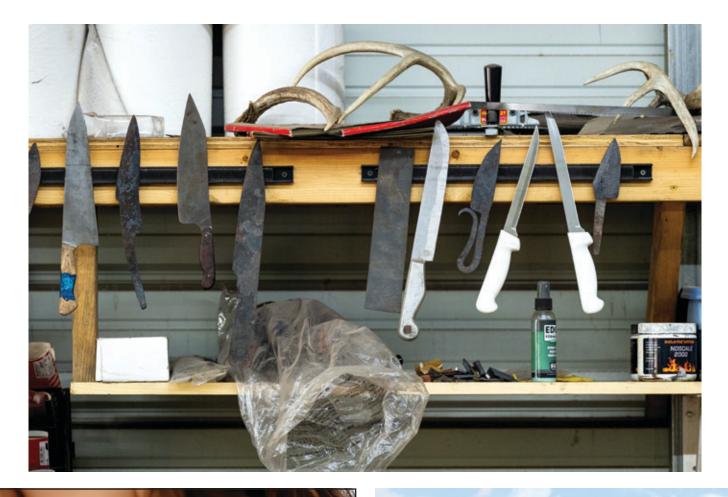
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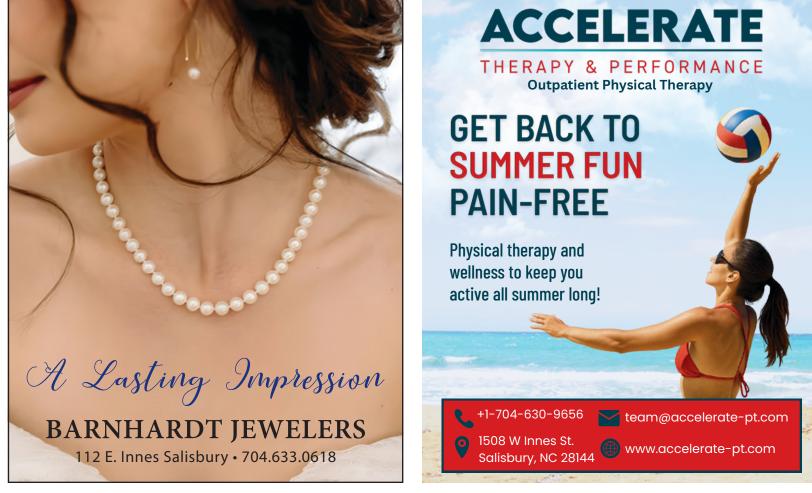
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Chuck pours borax on a hot piece of steel. The borax forms a protective film that absorbs impurities and slag.



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lot. If someone is in need, we will do fundraisers to help them. Some of the things I do to help is to donate maybe 15 knives per year to rescue dogs in Rowan County through Shelter Guardians (to help and place homeless animals). I donate my materials and time to help."

It's easy to see that creating and learning are Payne's passions. He also enjoys teaching the specialized craft to others of all ages.

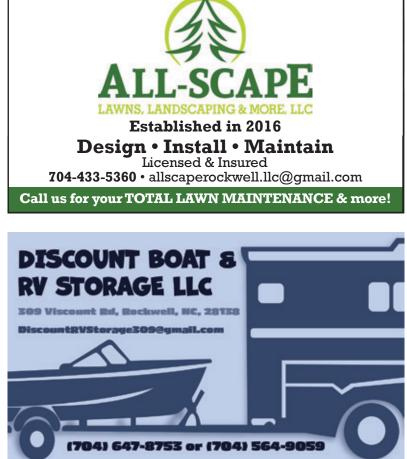
"There is always something you can learn about it. There's always something you can get better at," Payne says. "I enjoy the process. Selling is a bonus. I have to sell, and I need to, but that's not really why I do it. I like to make things, fix things and have always had a lot of hobbies where I do that. I was never passionate about any of them until I got into this. It's the process that I love. Some of it is really tedious. It works with my mentality. I'm able to do it and enjoy it.

"Typically, people refer to their forge as their shop. Some call it a smithy; that's the traditional term. This is where I go to do what I love to do." \boxed{S}



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Wassily Kandinsky: One piece at a time

By Lillian Heitman Gascoigne

assily Kandinsky (1861-1944) traveled on a lifelong pilgrimage toward the spiritual in art. Along his path he created abstract art, an effort to see behind the transitory appearance of physical objects to their essence. Ab-

straction was a new language whose alphabet was made of colors, points, lines and a new idea of space. Its purpose was to "render the invisible, visible." His two paintings in the Robertson Collection at Waterworks Visual Arts Center are different steps on this journey.

When he painted Landscape with Boats (1908) he was teaching art in "radiant" Munich. He had founded two avant-garde groups, Phalanx and the New Association of Artists. They held exhibitions to promote a newer, less conservative art. Picasso, Derain, Rouault, Signac and Vlaminck (represented in this collection) participated in them.

These were years of serious, frequent travel for Kandinsky through Germany, France, Italy and Tunis. He was often joined by his students, but mainly by his dear friend and fellow Russian, Jawlensky (also represented here). He painted hundreds of landscapes, at least two daily, and developed his ability to perceive spiritual resonances beyond surface appearances and discover new pictorial ways to communicate his perceptions. "Landscape with Boats" grows out of this time and was probably painted in Murnau.

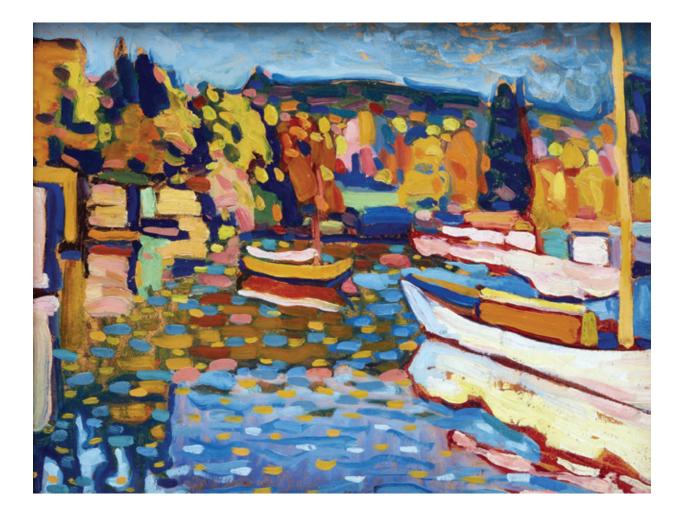
A celestial blue suffuses its autumnal atmosphere. A small blue mountain and cerulean sky crown the composition. The arc of tan buildings with highlights of green and purple is completed and balanced by two yellow, pink and tan sailboats and their reflections. This forms the middle ground. Small squares of reflected color splinter across the lake making a synesthetic grid pattern of dancing energy. After a few minutes of gazing at the balance of colors in each quadrant, the buildings and boats lose much of



their materiality and become purely color interacting and vibrating in this lovely little painting.

Kandinsky's earliest memory, while a toddler at his home in Odessa, was the intensity of a red rose on a white mantle clock belonging to his Baltic grandmother. He describes his exhilaration at age thirteen when he spilled a tube of paint and a river of green flowed from it to form new "worlds of color" with the other paints on his palette. These were early signs of his synesthesia, a condition causing one to hear colors and see sounds. Colors and music triggered different vibrations which resonated deeply within him.

Kandinsky describes the power of physical material color to cause a vibration, a "resonance" in the soul of the true artist. He realized that color is alive and that he could experience a har-



mony with it. In Concerning the Spiritual in Art (1913), he teaches how to juxtapose colors then listen for their dissonances and harmonies. These spiritual exercises strengthen perception and "inner necessity" which compels the artist to create art that will lead others to the vibrant, abstract, spiritual reality behind the world of appearances.

In 1911, he and Franz Marc began publishing the Blue Rider Almanacs containing articles about all fields of art, science, philosophy and ethnology. They hoped to reveal the synthesis of all knowledge and art that exists at the deepest level—endless, pure creativity—the harmony of the spheres.

The idea of all the arts working together to form a total work of art (Gesamkunstwerk) was shared by the Bauhaus (1919-1933), the beacon for the abstract and geometric International Style. Kandinsky joined its faculty in 1922 to teach mural painting. He also wrote and produced plays and designed costumes and sets for orchestral productions. He painted prolifically alongside Paul Klee, his fellow professor, best friend, and next door neighbor. Some of Kandinsky's work here shares Klee's witty, imaginary qualities, others are purely abstract and geometrical. Bindung (1932) seems to combine both. Kandinsky's book, Point and Line to Plane (1926) analyzes the three elements of art in the title, which he calls "creatures" because for him they are living. The point is where all art begins, the circle is an extension (widening) of the point, and the line occurs when the point moves.

The Nazis considered the Bauhaus dangerous, decadent and indecent. Bindung was painted as Hitler was forcing the Bauhaus to close. It is the German word for "binding;" its connotations range from relationships (i.e. love), commitment, and chemical bonds.

When his world was collapsing, Kandinsky created a lively and lyrical abstraction combining panels of black (the color of death and anxiety) and white (pure possibility and creation) that alternate rhythmically across the non-objective space of the canvas. These panels are not regular geometric forms, they are defined by quirky, bent lines which lend them a lightness, even humor. Wide lines of yellow (an embracing color) and purple (a carrier of weariness, illness and sorrow) combine to form the panels' triangles which emerge and recede in a fluid, floating space. The contrasting suggestions of hope and despair create irregular rhythms much like Schoenberg's music.

Other purely geometric forms, intrinsic to the composition, evoke secondary images of objects—a rainbow, an arch, pyramids, the jagged, brown face beneath the prominent red circle or sun around which the composition revolves. The ancient associations of these forms are a reassuring note of continuity in the midst of chaos.

At one of the saddest times of his life, Kandinsky was able through an abstract language to convey love, humor, balance and hope.



"A VIEW AT THE BEACH"

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By Christopher Smith — Oil on canvas —

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