

APRIL 2026

SALISBURY

the magazine

MAN *behind the* MUSIC

*Piano professor at Livingstone
is hitting all the right notes*

**Annual Heart Ball
celebrates 58 years**

**Veterans Social Center
provides healing, camaraderie
for those who served**



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On the cover: Livingstone College Professor Dr. Lawrence Quinnett is Chair of the Music and Theatre Art's Department and specializes in music theory and piano performance. (Sean Meyers photo)

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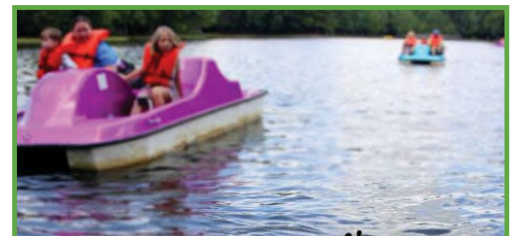
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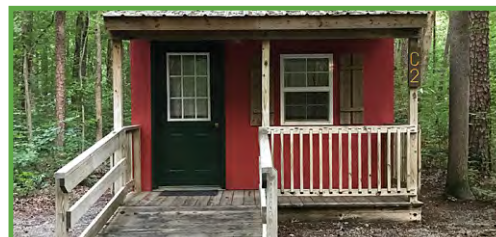
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April arrives

“The sun was warm but the wind was chill.
You know how it is with an April day.

When the sun is out and the wind is still,

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But if you so much as dare to speak,
a cloud come over the sunlit arch,
And wind comes off a frozen peak,

And you're two months back in the middle of March.”

— Robert Frost, *Two Tramps in Mud Time*, 1926

When I was about five years old, my mother gave me a book of children's poetry that included some poems by Robert Frost. It was the beginning of a life-long love of poetry for me that developed into a love of writing. I was writing in journals and typing (very bad) newspapers on my Tom Thumb typewriter at age 5. I wonder if she ever realized the impact that book had on my life. When she passed away, I was still an IT manager so she never got to see me enjoy my first love: writing.

This month, we bring to you three individuals who are doing what they love — as well as the long tradition of the Heart Ball.

Kenny Hardin, a Marine veteran, started the Veteran Center in the Rowan County Community not long after he served on Salisbury City Council. It provides a surprising array of services for veterans. Pete Prunkl, an Army veteran, visited the center and gives you the story.

Lawrence Quinnett serves as department chair and associate professor of piano and music theory at Livingstone College. With a resumé as long as his piano-playing arm, he has won international competitions. Barrie Kirby, a new writer for our magazine, ably wrote the piece.



The Heart Ball. Fifty-eight years of dancing for hearts. Initially, the funds went to the American Heart Association but at some point, the organizers decided to donate the money to local organizations that support heart health. This year, the funds went to the Community Care Clinic. Brenda Zimmerman brings you the story, including all the hard work done by local volunteers who make the Heart Ball happen.

The Rowan Original this month focuses on Todd Spencer, an artist and wood artisan whose studio is located in the former Green Goat Gallery. Spencer served as a stand-in for Nicholas Cage. The experience led to years of working in movies, TV and commercials in Los Angeles. But his first love is art. His work is breathtaking.

Our Bookish by Margaret Basinger is “The Frozen River.” Once again, her review is so good I had to read it. I went online and found it at Rowan Public Library, placed a hold on it, and picked it up hours later. I can't stop reading it. Many thanks to Margaret, a voracious reader who consistently reviews for us.

This month, be sure you don't miss the Though the Lens by Paul Hess. The picture shows what a great opportunity and excellent timing can do for you.

Whether we're in the one month on in the middle of May or two months back in the middle of March, happy April to all.

Maggie

— Maggie Blackwell
Editor, *Salisbury the Magazine*

The Frozen River

It's April in Salisbury and the temperatures are rising. As buds begin to pop out of the trees and dandelions infiltrate the yards, you must use your imagination to read about the frigid landscape of "The Frozen River."

Picture Maine, 1789. The Kennebec River is frozen and a man is found encased in the ice. The ramifications of this discovery provide the framework for Ariel Lawhon's historical fiction thriller. This book has it all: wonderful characters, a memorable plot, a detailed description of the time, the town and its social mores. What's more, it is a good, uncomplicated read. It takes place one winter as Martha Ballard, a midwife and healer, doggedly seeks out the circumstances leading up to the death. Was the man murdered? Was it a suicide?

The real Martha Ballard (1735-1812) kept detailed journals for years in which she would report the weather, the events of the day and the births and deaths in the community. It was these journals that formed the bases for this novel. Martha Ballard's 1,400-page diary, written over 27 years (from 1785 to her death in 1812) and now housed at the Maine State Library in Augusta, was critical to the plot of *The Frozen River*.

As the book opens, the town's official is examining the corpse and Martha is busy delivering a third daughter to Betsy Clark, wife of the town blacksmith. Martha, a celebrated midwife and healer, is married to Ephraim and is the mother of Hannah, Cyrus, Ephraim Jr. and Daisy. As soon as she successfully finishes

the delivery, she is called to the crime scene at the river. Martha is the town coroner as well as its midwife/healer. Upon examining the body, she sees signs of a struggle and indications of a hanging or strangulation. Accordingly, she pronounces the cause of death to be a homicide. When the young Harvard-educated physician arrives on the scene, however, he declares the death a suicide. The dead man is Joshua Burgess.

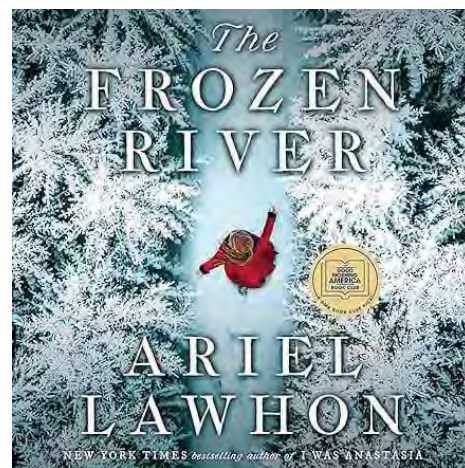


by
**MARGARET
BASINGER**

As soon as she learns the name of the dead man, Martha is reminded of a conversation she had recently with a fellow townswoman, Rebecca Foster, wife of Isaac Foster, a minister who has recently been relieved of his duties. Rebecca had sobbed as she told Martha that one night when her husband was away pursuing a new position, she was raped repeatedly by two of the town's most prominent citizens, Joshua Burgess and Colonel North. Martha, as coroner, knows

that she will need to present this alleged attack before the three-man town council. But before she can, Burgess is found dead. Coincidentally, Colonel North is one of the three judges on the panel. The murder and the rape are the framework of the plot.

Although the page-turning plot is riveting, Lawhon's greatest strength is her description of her characters. Martha Ballard is portrayed as a woman ahead of her time. Her unrelenting pursuit of justice for Rebecca Foster, at any cost to herself or her family, remarkable in an era when women were expected to be seen and not heard. She rides her trusty horse Brutus through the



"The Frozen River" by Ariel Lawhon
Published December 2023
448 pages

snow and icy winds blowing off the Kennebec River for hundreds of miles as she fulfills her duties as the town's only midwife and coroner. All of this while caring for her own family. Her relationship with her husband, Ephraim, is enviable. They support and respect each other as Martha seeks to discredit Colonel North.

The Frozen River will appeal to many readers. If you like historical fiction, books about courageous women, life in post-Revolutionary War America or strong husband-wife relationships, this is a book you will enjoy.

Many folks on Facebook name *The Frozen River* their favorite book of the year. It was tied with *Theo of Golden* by Allen Levi. Other favorites are "The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny" by Kiran Desai, "Stone Yard Devotional" by Charlotte Wood and "The Lion Women of Tehran" by Marjan Kamali.

So many wonderful books, so little time! **S**

THROUGH THE LENS by Paul Hess



Paul Hess captured a northbound Piedmont Amtrak train as it hit a plowed snow bank at E. Council Street on Jan. 30.

To submit a photo for Through the Lens, send a high-resolution photo to andy.mooney@salisburythemagazine.com. Vertical orientation is required.

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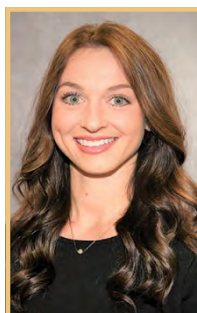
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 **ROWAN ORIGINAL**

Todd Spencer sits in a chair he designed and built, a Sam Maloof-influenced apele chair.

CAREER CRAFTSMAN

From film to furniture, Todd Spencer is a Renaissance man

STORY : MAGGIE BLACKWELL | PHOTOGRAPHY : SEAN MEYERS



Clockwise from left: A vase Todd made rests on the table; Studio 516 in Spencer is Todd's design studio, showcase gallery, and location for One Take Prop Shop prop rentals; an electric guitar Todd built with various parts hangs on the brick wall.

Todd Spencer has had many exciting careers in his life, including being a stand-in and friend for Nicholas Cage but his focus today is on creating art, furniture and being a part of the Spencer Neighborhood Art Walk.

Born and raised in North Carolina, his connection to the film industry began in Wilmington, where he worked on several movie productions, including "Amos and Andrew," starring Cage and Samuel Jackson. When that movie was complete, he went on to Los Angeles to work with Cage on his next project, "Deadfall."

Though it all, though, he kept gravitating to the arts side of the studio where sets were constructed. For 15 years, Spencer worked in movies, TV series, music videos and commercials. Actors with whom he's worked include Tom Cruise, Angelina Jolie, Tom Hanks, Bill Murray, Johnny Depp, Renee Zellweger, Denzel Washington, Gene Hackman, Jack Lemmon, Eddie Murphy, Tupac Shakur and George C. Scott.

He was only 20 when he first stood in for Cage. "I'd never been around the giant cameras and all the people. It was all very exciting. When I got hired to do another film in L.A., I moved to California, where I met set dressers and prop people.

He worked with them and learned from them. Today, he's part of a nation-wide network of craftspeople who get calls when a production needs them. He says the teamwork is incredible. A member of the Screen Actors Guild and the IATSE Affiliate Property Craftspersons Union, he continues to utilize his expertise in set design and production.

After 15 years of working in movies, TV and commercials, he decided to return to North Carolina to work on furniture and refinishing. He moved here and bought a home. He met Dowd Temple, local master carpenter, and gained much valuable experience and knowledge of joinery. His work with longtime friend and builder Greg Emore from Philadelphia, has strengthened his knowledge.

Regular projects include working with Dale





Todd rebuilt the mid-century Philco radio that still picks up local stations.

Earnhardt Jr.'s production company, the Carolina Panthers, John Deere, Red Bull and NASCAR.

He chuckles as he recalls answering a call in his studio. It was from Jan Pascal, a renowned and award-winning decorator with whom he'd worked in LA. She wanted to know if he lived anywhere near the N.C. State Transportation Museum, where they were about to film "Leatherheads" starring George Clooney. "I'm looking at it right now," he replied. While working on that 1920s period piece in N.C., S.C. and Tennessee, he gained more knowledge about refishing antiques. He also developed strong friendships and working relationships that continue to be valuable resources today.

His Studio 516 in Spencer, the former Green Goat Gallery, has part of one set with architectural details you'd expect from an old building. It's made of foam. Spencer says the artisans make many pieces to construct a set and they must all match up when put together.

Observed in his studio are two breathtaking pieces of furniture: a handmade wooden chair, simple in line and striking in design; and a bench Spencer made from two pieces of raw-edge syc-



An old movie projector made into a lamp rests on the table.

amore, joined at intervals by small contrasting Brazilian cherry bowties.

A raw brick wall bears a huge abstract painting by Spencer. "When I do a painting, I'll think, yeah, that's pretty good," he says, "Then a week later, I have to work more on it."

While Spencer highly values the many con-

nections he's made in film and the art world, he is most grateful for his son Spencer, a talented artist in his own right. "He draws better than I do," he ruefully acknowledges.

You can see Todd's work at the Studio 516 gallery. For more, visit Instagram at #Filmbuild and #Art516Studio. **S**



Todd works on a sycamore bench at his shop.

A photo board shows various people and projects Todd has come across over the years of working for the film industry.





The 2026 Salisbury-Rowan Heart Fund Ball Board

58 YEARS OF HEART

Annual ball is the social event of the season

BY BRENDA ZIMMERMAN



Heart Ball attracts over 240 patrons

The 1997 Heart Fund Ball observed its Pearl Anniversary Feb. 8 at the Country Club of Salisbury with 247 people attending.

Patrons who have attended for all 30 years that were honored included: Mr. and Mrs. Norde Wilson, Dr. and Mrs. Alan Scott, Mr. and Mrs. Jerry Barger, Mr. and Mrs. Tom Borland, Mr. and Mrs. R.O. Everett, Mr. and Mrs. Richard Messinger, Mr. and Mrs. Edward T. Taylor, Mrs. Charles Taylor, Dr. and Mrs. Paul Green, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Rutledge III, William Stanback, Dr. and Mrs. Harold H. Newman; Mr. and Mrs. Walter D. Wagoner, Mr. and Mrs. Leo Wallace Jr., Mr. and Mrs. Max Spear, Mrs. Frederick H. Ziprik, Enoch Goodman, Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Owen, Mr. and Mr. R. Randolph Turner III, Mr. and Mrs. Vernon Wilkerson, Mr. and Mrs. Richard Rendleman, Mr. and Mrs. Wilborn Swaim, Mr. and Mrs. Edwin O. Norvell, Mr. and Mrs. Stuart Snider and Mrs. Norris S. Erb.

The Ken Kennedy Band provided dance music.

Mr. and Mrs. John Seymour represented the Rowan County Heart Association which benefits from proceeds from the ball. In 1996, the fund raiser produced \$17,000.

Heart Fund Ball Inc. officers are Donald Clement III, Mrs. William Speir, presidents; Mr. and Mrs. Mark Braswell Perry, vice presidents; Mr. and Mrs. David Rock Jordan, past presidents.



ALL SMILES: Ruth and Robert Cook take a turn on the dance floor during Heart Ball.



Robert and Ruth Cook at the 1997 Heart Ball

The Annual Heart Ball has long been a noteworthy social tradition for this community. In February 2026, the 58th Annual Heart Ball was held at Salisbury's Country Club. A beautiful setting, a sumptuous meal, guests in formal wear spinning to live music create an evening to remember.

This year's theme was Southern Elegance, exquisitely shown with blue and white porcelain showcasing magnolia leaves, blue hydrangeas and thistles. The blue and white linens framed the gold-rimmed china. Every detail from the live magnolias at the building's entrance to beautifully designed menu card was perfect. Nearly 250 guests were surrounded by true Southern elegance for

the black-tie event.

The menu created by Chef Derrick of the Country Club included a fresh salad followed by braised short ribs, plump gulf shrimp, silky sweet potato puree, and golden skillet-fried grits cakes. The dessert course offered two options: classic Southern chocolate mousse garnished with strawberries and mint or warm bourbon-kissed bread pudding topped with whipped cream and caramel sauce, garnished with blueberries and mint.

The décor, cuisine and formal attire have become legendary at this event, which for 58 years has supported heart disease research and promoted heart-healthy lifestyles.

In a brief history of the organization compiled by Betty Mickle,



Curtis and LaSheka Walker. (Lisa Her photo)



A thank-you note from the director of the Community Care Clinic, Krista Woolly. (Lisa Her photo)

local women in the mid-1960s were very much aware that the American Heart Association (AHA) needed funding if research for the number one health issue in the United States was going to improve. In 1968, the average life expectancy in the United States was 70 years. At that time, nearly one third of deaths nationwide were rooted in some manifestation of heart disease. To help the local branch of the AHA, Frances Lynn Tatum, Mary Messenger and Ann Thom-



Sherry Beck prepares the first of 25 table arrangements. All floral arrangements were arranged by volunteers the morning of the day before the event.

son were the first group to chair the fundraisers that evolved into the Heart Ball. As of 2025, life expectancy in the United States has reached 79.5 years with continued improvements in health care.

Over the years, organizers made the decision to keep the funds raised in the local community instead of contributing to the National Heart Association. All groups receiving money are determined to have an impact on heart health.

In the past, recipients have included Meals on Wheels, YMCA and the Community Care Clinic. Several years ago, portable defibrillators were provided for many local schools. The Heart Ball Committee looks within the community to see where the dollars are most needed for non-profits that support overall health and wellbeing, as well as heart health issues specifically.

Heart Ball Committee members and board members operate in specific cycles of two-year



*BOUNCE! Party Band
of Charlotte provided
music for the event.
(Lisa Her photo)*

terms that provide continuity in the function of the group. While serving on the first tier, members learn what will be expected as they move up through the next tier. This year, the chair was Fran Misner. Next year, it will be Kim Davis. Once asked to serve, members of these groups commit to their leadership roles as the positions rotate. The 150 couples on the roster range in age and skills so that positions are easily filled with capable candidates.

This year, the \$16,000 raised by the Heart Ball goes to the Community Care Clinic (CCC). In the last 10 years, this group has received a total of \$145,000. Clinic Executive Director Krista Woolly states, "We are humbled and blessed by your gifts, as are the more than 20,000 patients who have walked through our doors since this partnership began." CCC provides medical services to individuals with inadequate or no health insurance by providing support for general health care as well as prescriptions.

Sherry Beck was leading the flurry of women decorating the Country Club on Friday morning prior to the Saturday night event. "Following in the footsteps of a long line of great women whom I've known and admired, it has been my pleasure for the past three years to bring the vision together for the chair. It's an incredible, passionate team of women who all do their part to ensure everything goes

Community Care Clinic Director Krista Woolly, left, accepts a check from Kim Davis.



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Students from the Catawba served a parking valets and coat check clerks, are pictured here with Mary Katherine Parr and Nick Means. (Lisa Her photo)

smoothly.” Setting up meant decorating the 25 tables, arranging conversation areas, the entrance and hallways and setting the tables as well as setting out place cards and menus.

Fran Misner shared the source for the magnolia branches used for the floral arrangements. They were procured from Weston Farms near Garner, NC. When the shipment of 400 boughs of magnolias had still not arrived the week of the event, Beck called the company. After some research, it was determined that the original shipment had been lost enroute. With only hours to meet the challenge, employees of Weston Farms recut the order,



Judy and Sandy Goodman enjoying themselves on the dance floor . (Salisbury Post file photo)



Ed and Lib Taylor (Salisbury Post file photo)



(Lisa Her photo)

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got it packaged and met her halfway to hand-deliver them on Wednesday night. Knowing the purpose of the event and the stress the missing shipment had created, they donated the entire shipment. Godley's Garden Center donated the live magnolias decorating the front door.

Many details must come together before the doors open for the Heart Ball. An example is preparing the coordinating stationery used for invitations, menus, place cards and other information. The elegant monogram, artwork and lettering were all designed by Taylor Durham of the Lettered Lily. That process started months before the event. Soft lines and colors complimented the table settings. And what is more elegantly Southern than a heartfelt thank you note from the director of the Community Care Clinic that attendees received as they were seated for dinner?

Mary Katherine Parr stated, "My favorite part of participating with the Heart Ball is working with the ladies of the committee. I've loved getting know the wonderful group of women

who bring so much passion and purpose to our community. Coming together to raise funds for heart health right here in Rowan County has been both inspiring and deeply rewarding." When asked about her participation with the Heart Ball, Caroline Weiker expressed similar feelings and noted that as a first time participant, "the experience was more meaningful when I was able to witness the generosity and dedication of everyone involved. It is more than just a beautiful evening: it is a reminder that every conversation, every donation and every volunteer hour helps provide essential healthcare services to fellow community members."

Along with the decorations, many years of scrapbooks were on display. Many years of scrapbooks shared information and photos from as early as 1967. Whether the photos are black and white glossies from the Salisbury Post glued on to old-fashioned brittle pages or sharp looking bound photo books from a local pharmacy photo shop, they have one thing in common. Both showcase a festive evening with plenty of smiles. **S**

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Dr. Frank and Mimi Parrot sharing a moment during the evening at the Heart Ball circa mid-1980s. (Salisbury Post file photo)

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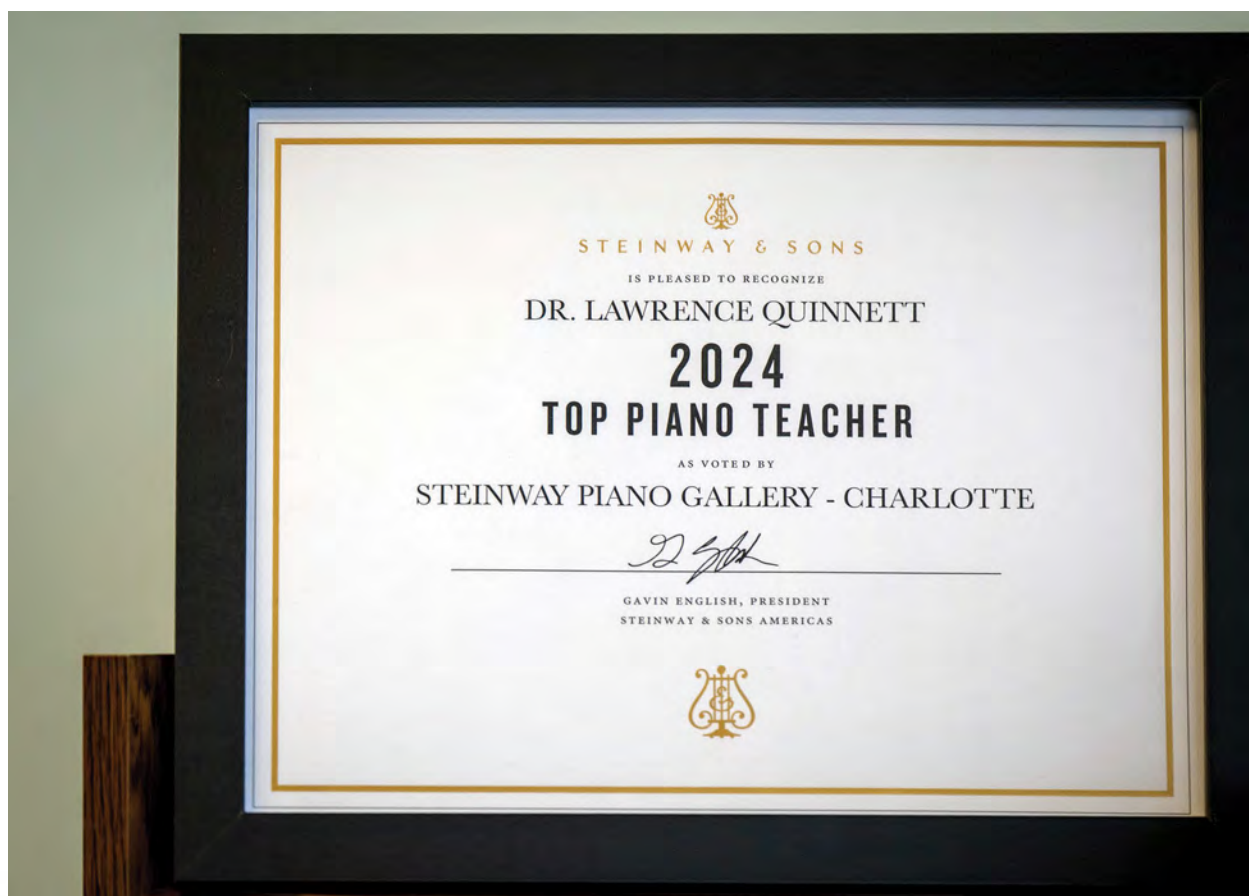


*Livingstone College
Professor Dr. Lawrence
Quinnett is chair of
the Music and Theater
Arts Department and
specializes in music
theory and piano
performance.*

MAN behind the MUSIC

Piano professor at Livingstone is hitting all the right notes

STORY : BARRIE M. KIRBY | PHOTOGRAPHY : SEAN MEYERS



Dr. Lawrence Quinnett's online presence may be intimidating to a student enrolling in the music program at Livingstone College where Quinnett serves as department chair and associate professor of piano and music theory. His website lists a repertoire of more pieces than even he would want to count. His performances date back more than 20 years. Videos of him playing can be viewed on his own YouTube channel as well as on channels of Livingstone College, Bach Around the Clock, Steinway Piano Gallery-Charlotte and Colour of Music Festival. He has won his share of competitions and adjudicated others. Yet if any of his students first encounter Quinnett with a bit of trepidation, his soft-spoken, gentle demeanor will quickly put them at ease.

Who is the man behind the music? How did this gem of a musician find his way to Livingstone College in Salisbury?

The journey began on the Caribbean island of Montserrat where Quinnett was born to an American father and Caribbean mother. His mother raised the family with Caribbean culture, discipline and respect. She would often say, "America stops at our doorstep."

When Quinnett was three, the family moved to San Antonio where his dad was stationed with the military. His mother's Caribbean culture came along. Having been educated in a British school system, she wanted her children to start school at the same age she had, which was a year younger than American children. So, she took Quinnett back to Montserrat for a summer where a tutor taught him to read. Upon their return, the San Antonio school system enrolled him in first grade.

Although his parents weren't professional musicians, they appreciated music. His dad had once taken vocal lessons and could play some accordion. His mother had taken piano lessons and played a little guitar. She liked to sing. Classical music was frequently played in the house. All four children took music lessons.

Quinnett's piano lessons began before his eighth birthday.



When one of his teachers at Fort Sam Houston Elementary was playing piano after class, he lingered to listen. The teacher noticed him and said, “If you want lessons, ask your mom.” So, he did. Soon, an old upright piano appeared in the living room. Shortly thereafter, Quinnett and his younger sister started lessons with Miss Caroline Cloud. When the lessons ceased for the summer, Quinnett worked ahead on his own.

After his fourth-grade year, the family moved to Fayetteville, N.C., where Quinnett continued piano lessons with Anne Clemm. He remembers her and Miss Cloud as wonderful teachers. Both were nurturing and fun.

Following high school, Quinnett’s love of piano led him to earn three degrees in piano performance: a bachelor of music from Methodist University, a master of music from Converse College and a doctor of music degree from Florida State University where he graduated in 2014.

A college teaching position did not immediately appear. “I sent out applications to — I think — over 100 places. I got a few interviews, but no offers. So, I stayed (in Tallahassee) for one more year and applied to more places. In the fall (of 2015) I said, ‘I didn’t expect to be here. It looks like I’m going to be in Tallahassee for another year.’ And I was praying, and I asked the



Lord, ‘Like, when am I going to have a job?’ And He said, ‘Next year you will.’”

The Lord was right. In the fall of 2016, Quinnett saw a notice for the position at Livingstone on a job listing site. Salisbury is not far from Dunn, where his mother lives. He thought “Maybe this is it.” He applied but was told the school had already completed their interviews for the position. So, he began the semester teaching as adjunct at Wallace Community College. A week or two later, he got a call from Livingstone saying “The person we chose didn’t work out. Can you have a Zoom interview?” About a week later, Quinnett said goodbye to his church job and his adjunct job, packed his belongings and drove to Salisbury.

Regarding his position at Livingstone, Quinnett says, “I feel really fortunate. The field of mu-

sic professors is competitive — we might even say saturated — and I feel fortunate to have a job, especially one where all the faculty get along well together. And there’s a strong sense of purpose in the institution. And especially recently with our new president (Dr. Anthony J. Davis), I’ve seen Livingstone make huge strides in a short amount of time. It’s really exciting. The enrollment has increased significantly. We are actually the fastest-growing HBCU in the nation.”

Quinnett acknowledges that teaching at an HBCU was a bit of an adjustment. “Caribbean culture is a little different from African American culture,” he says. He is grateful for his mother’s influence. “Of course, we had lots of fun, but she was — is — a strong woman, a matriarch, and she supported me musically in ways that only now can I truly appreciate having taught a lot of



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students and interacted with their parents.”

He goes on to say, “I think the HBCUs are a valuable — maybe even necessary — part of our educational system in America if we want to create the best opportunities for our students and leaders of tomorrow.”

Teaching has its challenges. Some students enter a music program not knowing what the requirements are. They do not all have a strong musical background and the advantage of private lessons that Quinnett had.

“We try to take the students where they are and give as much support as we can, especially at first. Eight years I’ve been here. We’ve had many students who are first generation (to go to college). We’re doing very well academically.”

Quinnett appreciates the leadership of Dr. Davis. “HBCUs tend to struggle with resources, and Livingstone is no exception. But like I said,

we’re on an upward trajectory. Our president has a lot of experience with institutional development, and he’s raised millions of dollars for the campus.”

The Thursday music seminar provides Quinnett with an opportunity to share his heart with the students and prepare them for the educational and musical challenges that they will face. “In the field of education, you want to create an environment where there’s as little friction as possible for learning. ... When it works well, the university college system is really an educational miracle.”

He adds, “There’s so many things that I’m grateful for. ... This is an incredible opportunity for our students, and I’m glad to help nurture their gifts.”

Quinnett takes pride in the students’ accomplishments. In November, the concert choir



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performed the Messiah with the Salisbury Symphony Orchestra. “These are some of the best music majors I’ve seen. They’re hard-working, they’re bright and talented, and they learned a dozen choruses in a semester.”

Although initially planned as a joint project, not as many other choruses participated as Quinnett was expecting. “We really carried the show. . . . We knew the music the best, and Ms. (Teresa Moore) Michell was one of the soloists, and I think it was a proud moment for Livingstone. And those collaborations with the symphony in the past have always been highlights for me.”

Quinnett recites other music the concert choir has performed: Verdi’s Requiem, a tribute to Stephen Sondheim, Holst’s The Planets. He notes that the jazz band has come a long way.

Other highlights for Quinnett include student recitals. “Seeing the fruit of their labors in the course of a semester, their senior recitals — I played for a couple of them — and it’s always bittersweet when you have a student you’ve brought up for four, maybe five years, and then they give their capstone project. Their culminating performance. And I think those are some of the proudest moments.”

Careful not to overlook anyone, he adds, “And the gospel choir! Every time they perform, I’m blown away by the quality of the performance. So, we’re doing great things, and I’m looking forward to more opportunities for the community to see what we’re doing.”

Quinnett’s immediate goals for Livingstone include an upcoming cabaret which will be the theater department’s first big production in at least 10 years. The concert choir will soon have a full-length performance at First Presbyterian Church. The school will continue Bach Around the Clock. This summer the music camp will be in its fourth year.

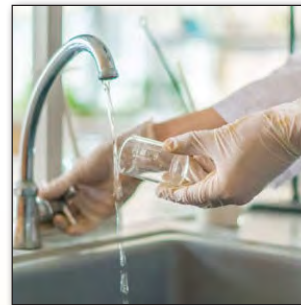
When he’s not busy with his teaching and administrative duties, Quinnett serves on the board of directors for the Salisbury Symphony Orchestra, as festival director for the North Carolina Music Teachers Association and with his church. His personal goals include learning the last Beethoven sonata and playing “a bunch of Bach” at his upcoming concerts. He looks forward to practicing and performing more. When time allows, he enjoys rock climbing and swing dancing.

The man behind the music has come a long way. And he’s still on the go. **S**



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Volunteer Carolyn Logan works on Christmas cards for veterans.

Salisbury's BEST-KEPT SECRET

*Veterans Social Center provides healing, camaraderie
for those who served*

STORY : PETE PRUNKL | PHOTOGRAPHY : SEAN MEYERS



U.S. Air Force veteran Kenny Hardin, right, chats with Marine Claude Hosch.

Every day is Veteran's Day somewhere in Rowan County. For starters, the massive 3,400-employee Bill Hefner Veterans Health Center treats hundreds of veterans from 21 Piedmont counties. Add in two Veteran of Foreign Wars posts, six American Legion posts, the Veterans Treatment Court and the Rowan County Veteran Service Office and veterans here are regularly thanked, honored, helped and remembered.

Four years ago, the Veterans Social Center joined this array of veteran-friendly organizations. What has this non-profit, that was founded by former Salisbury City Councilman Kenny Hardin, added to the mix?

Hardin, who served six years in the United States Air Force, thought that Rowan County needed a place like the barracks or Non-Commissioned Officer Club where veterans could spend time together. All vets, but especially those suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, loneliness and depression, need a friend and a hangout. "I think a lot of veterans get out of the military and feel lost. They feel unwelcome back in society, so this helps with that transition," Hardin said.

With help from donors, his son Bricin (BRY-sin) and the Rowan County Board of Commissioners, Hardin opened the center in West End Plaza in April 2022. Rowan County charges the center rent of \$1 per year for five years ending in 2027. Donations pay to keep the lights on and the



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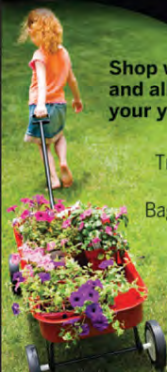


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U.S. Air Force veteran Kenny Hardin received the Elizabeth Duncan Koontz Humanitarian Award in 2025.

water running.

The 2,700-square-foot center with a 40-person capacity fills up for reunions, meetings, monthly bingo games and pool and ping-pong tournaments. Smaller groups of vets and volunteers populate the center for movies, pool and to just shoot the breeze. Some are brought there by family members at a loss as to how to lift clouds of depression from their son or husband. The camaraderie of other vets has worked wonders. The center is open from 1 to 5 p.m., Wednesday through Saturday. There are no membership dues or fees.

Soon after it opened, families of deceased veterans came by with uniforms, scrapbooks, hats, medals, citations, books, helmets, memorabilia and photographs. They asked Hardin to safeguard these treasured, personal items. Those gifts were the beginning of a military museum. Salisbury's M.J. Mee helped grow the museum after finding her late father's Korean War uniform and medals in the family home in Tennessee. Thinking her father's clothing and awards deserved a place better than her closet, M. J. contacted her friend Sandra Kessler-Kidd, a Veterans Social Center volunteer. Sandra said the center would be happy to accept the items. "I had never been there before," said Mee, who visited the center and saw other uniforms decorating the walls. Hardin bought a display case for Jasper W. Mee's uniform and created a fitting memorial for the war veteran. "They did a great job," said M.J.

Sandra Kesler-Kidd became a volunteer in mid-2024 shortly after reaching out to Hardin for help arranging her husband's funeral. Navy Chief Petty Officer Rick Kidd "had friends all over the world who would be coming for the funeral and Kenny arranged for everything," said Sandra. Like Mr. Mee, Chief Kidd has a memorial case at the center. Keller-Kidd had one more request. Her granddaughter Kathryn Murino and Marine Corps Lance Corporal Brandon Curry needed a place for their 2024 wedding. Hardin obtained a preacher and arranged for food and a reception for guests, all at the Veterans Social Center.

Asked for her evaluation of the center, Sandra Kesler-Kidd said, "I think it is wonderful! We do everything to reach out to veterans and give them a place to reminisce. We always have snacks and drinks for them. If someone can't find what they need, Kenny knows so many people, he can reach out and get them pointed in the right direction."

Kessler-Kidd is one of the center's 16 volunteers. These vets, students, teachers and family members of deceased veterans help with paperwork, maintenance, cleanup, equipment repair, calling bingo as well as preparing and serving food. Chief among the volunteers is Carolyn Logan, who handles administrative responsibilities including scheduling volunteers. Logan will handle more of the center's day-to-day operations for the immediate future. Kenny Hardin is stepping back from his central role because of kidney disease. "I'm on the kidney transplant list," he said.

After mentioning his own health issues, Hardin was quick to turn attention to others. One of the center's volunteers, he said, is Tyler Houck, a student at West Rowan High School and a cadet in the school's Junior Reserve Office Training Corps. Houck, who helps with events, plans to join the Army after his 2027 graduation. Hardin taught him how to spit shine his boots in preparation for active duty.

More than 950 individual vets from North Carolina and nine from other states have visited the center since its opening. Two of them, Army veterans Chalmers Branch and James McNear, stopped by for a few



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Army veteran James McNeair, left, shoots pool with Army veteran Chalmers Branch.



Veterans Social Center founder Kenny Hardin taught volunteer Tyler Houck the fine art of shining his boots. Tyler is hoping to join the Army after graduating from West Rowan High School in 2027. (Pete Prunkl photo)



J. W. Mee's uniform, medals, citations and a newspaper article are displayed at The Veterans Social Center. (Pete Prunkl photo)




The wedding photo of Kathryn Murino and Marine Corps Lance Corporal Brandon Curry. The ceremony was held at The Veterans Social Center in 2024. (Submitted photo)



rounds of pool when we visited the center.

Behind the scenes are 138 individuals and businesses that have funded events and furniture, donated gifts-in-kind or offe ed goods and services at a steep discount. Among the center’s Super Stars are Little Cesars Pizza, Woodson Foundation, Penrod Medical Equipment, HTC Sports Apparel, Culvers, Vogue Cleaners, Above the Collar Barbershop, Food Lion, Smoke Pit and Slice’s Diggity Dawgs. Matt Marsh of Th Forum came in for special praise. “If I call Matt and say I have a veteran in need, he has helped with funeral expenses, utility deposits, event sponsorships, televisions, microwaves, gas cards — anything,” said Hardin.

Army veteran Chalmers Branch put down his pool cue and summed up the Veteran Social Center: “I’d come here every day, if I could. I enjoy it.” 

Army veteran and freelance writer Pete Prunkl lives in Salisbury.



Volunteer Pamela Jones straightens up an exhibit at the Social Center.



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From left: James and Nicole Demmel, TJ and Lizzy Roy, Heather and Brad Brady, Brooke and Craig Beasley, and Carol Ann and Cy Young



Mollie Ruf, The esa Aquino-Kessler and JR Ruf

Waterworks' Oyster Roast

The 20th annual Oyster Roast hosted by Waterworks Visual Arts Center was a true testament to community, creativity and camaraderie — bringing together more than 300 art lovers, local fans and supporters on Jan. 24 at the F&M Trolley Barn.

Despite a looming cold front, the sold-out event buzzed with energy as guests indulged in fresh steamed oysters, shrimp, barbecue sliders, sides, signature drinks, and dessert from new local favorite Mayberry Ice Cream.

This year's Oyster Roast also served as a spotlight moment for the center's current exhibition, *The Spark That Drives Us*, featuring works by internationally acclaimed artists.

Proceeds from the event help sustain Waterworks' year-round exhibitions, classes and outreach programs — essential efforts that keep art accessible to people of all ages and backgrounds in Rowan County and beyond.

— Submitted photos



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