

MAY 2026

SALISBURY

the magazine

GOLDEN DELICIOUS

*Meals on Wheels of Rowan County
celebrates 50 years*

Two longtime
English teachers at
Salisbury High School
look back

Anthony Johnson
is man of many sides



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On the cover: Meals on Wheels of Rowan County volunteers Steve Jarrett, left, and Celia Jarrett stand with client James Bradshaw. (Sean Meyers photo)

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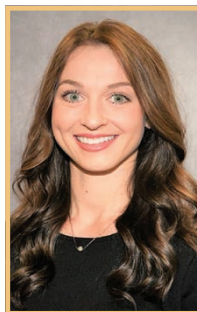
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May brings the happy dance

Have you ever seen the picture of Snoopy dancing? I'm seeing it in my head right now. His ears are flung out, his tail is wagging and his feet are drumming on the ground. His head is lifted so all you can see of his face is a smile.

That's how I feel about May. Most of the bilious green pollen has abated. Perennials and annuals alike are showing their faces. The weather is perfect: warm enough to wear comfy clothing yet not hot and humid as it will be in the real summer.

When I was little, school started in September after Labor Day and ended in May. June, July and August were reserved for summer vacation. That's how it's supposed to be and I'll hold onto that thought — powerlessly — as long as I have breath.

This month, we bring you a plethora of stories. Brenda Zimmerman tells us about Meals on Wheels, celebrating the program's 50th anniversary. She shares the other, lesser-known services MOW provides and recounts the early beginnings when only 15 people were served.

Jennifer Hubbard tells the story of two English teachers. One taught English to the other who, in turn, became an English teacher herself. It's a sweet story centered at Salisbury High.

You may know the name Anthony Johnson for his Mini Funk Factory, a band comprised of elementary students — over 100 of them at the program's height. He taught at Overton and Isenberg elementary schools and still gets calls from former students today. Now, though,



he works for a large company and is focusing his free time on living a healthier life, more in tune with nature. His many hobbies will astound you.

Local attorney John Basinger is known by many around town as the Man to Ask for a great book recommendation. This month, we're mixing up our Bookish column with Basinger's list of Read it/ Liked it and Can't-Wait-to-Read-it

titles.

Our Rowan Original this month is Theresa Pitner. She's tiny but she's mighty. Founder and owner of Understanding Your Dog, LLC, Pitner has helped hundreds of folks learn to live their best human-dog life. Our local dog park is named for her!

Last month, we featured the talented Todd Spencer and I got his son's name wrong. Totally my fault. His name is Augustus. Hey, Augustus, I'm sorry for the error.

There you have it! Kick up your own heels (like Snoopy) and enjoy this month's book.

PS. If you google, "Picture Snoopy Dancing" you'll see the image. But I bet you don't have to.

Maggie

— Maggie Blackwell
Editor, Salisbury the Magazine

The list

When my job gets to be too much, I find solace in a book! Reading calms my mind from racing through the ups and downs of the workday and allows me to escape to another place. Escape allows me to maintain my focus and then, be the best at my job as I can.

I am careful in selecting the books that I do and I discriminate based on what others have said. When a good book is widely hailed as good, I tend to believe that it may be. Sometimes it is and sometimes it is not. There are books which are hailed as wonderful that I despise; there are books that others despise which I enjoy mightily! I do not adhere to the 50-page rule that others like to utilize; books have their own tempo and sometimes get better with time; others just fall apart. I like to “lose myself” in the emotional feeling that a good book allows.

Books from the last little while that I have enjoyed include:

1. “The Gatsby Gambit” by Claire Anderson-Wheeler. Imagine if Jay Gatsby had a sister who comes to the mansion, only to encounter a crime! Includes many of the Gatsby cast and is a wonderful reintroduction to this beloved story.

2. “The Wide Wide Sea” by Hampton Sides. Tells a colorful tale of Captain James Cook encountering the islanders of Hawaii and the positive and negative encounters he saw there prior to invading it.

3. “Murderland” by Caroline Fraser. From a Pulitzer Prize winner, this one is interesting; ties the sudden uptick of serial murders in the 1970s to the proliferation of smelters in the Pacific Northwest.

4. “Tilt” by Emma Pattee. Annie finds herself at IKEA when a Cascadia earthquake hits; imagine how she must feel for herself and her daughter.

5. “A Truce that is not Peace” by Miriam Toews. This author of “All my Puny Sorrows” and “Fight Night” writes her first nonfiction book, trying to explain why she writes and at the same time explain how the suicide of her

father and sister affected her. This one is not my favorite but it does a good job trying to explain her feelings and grief.

Like I said, I am behind! These are some of the books I look forward to in the near future.

FICTION:

1. “The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny” by Kiran

Desai. This author took 20 years to put this book together; it was a Booker prize finalist.

2. “Buckeye” by Patrick Ryan. Barnes and Noble listed this book as its book of 2025.

3. “Beautyland” by Marie-Helene Bertino. Time Magazine listed this as one of its best.

4. “The Land in Winter” by Andrew Miller. Tension between families in 1960s England.

5. “Brawler” by Lauren Groff. This is a series of short stories by the author of Fates and Furies, one of my all-time favorite books.

6. “Seascaper” by Benjamin Wood; this one is highly acclaimed by The Guardian.

7. “Theo of Golden” by Allen Levi; Lots of good reviews on this book; don’t know what to expect!

NONFICTION:

1. “Mother Mary Comes to Me” by Arundhati Roy. A biography of this accomplished author’s mother.

2. “The Light Eaters” by Zoe Schlanger. This nature writer explains heretofore unknown insights about plants.

3. “1929” by Andrew Ross Sorkin. Gives an insight into the Great Depression and the conditions that led to it.

4. “The Mission” by Tim Weiner. The CIA has a long and tangled history and this author has explained it as well as anyone.

5. “The Zorg” by Siddharth Lara. Explained to be an insight into a slave boat and how this excursion led to the abolition of slavery.

Have a good summer!



by
JOHN
BASINGER



Zelia Frick captured a male cardinal courting the female cardinal, feeding her. Soon after, she had lots of cardinal chicks in her backyard.

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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Theresa Pitner with her dog Bessie.

PUPPY LOVE

Theresa Pitner has devoted her life to dog training

STORY : MAGGIE BLACKWELL | PHOTOGRAPHY : SEAN MEYERS

It wasn't always about the dogs. Theresa Pitner, of the eponymous Theresa Pitner Dog Park, worked at Hospice of Cabarrus County for 20 years. Her degree in social work has served her well in both fields.

Today, in addition to being the founder of the dog park, she's a key name for dog support around Salisbury. Her business, Understanding Your Dog, helps owners learn how to manage their four-legged friends. Over the years, she has helped hundreds of humans and dogs learn to live better together.

"Ninety-six percent of dog training is not about the dog; it's about the people. Oftentimes, people get the wrong breed. I get lots of call from dog grandparents who suddenly became the parents when their adult child moved into an apartment," she says. "There are people, though, who have the perfect yard for dogs, get a big dog and work with him outside. They're perfect dog parents."

Pitner says she has always worked with dogs. When husband Andrew and she lived in Tennessee, she volunteered at the animal shelter. In 2007, after moving to Salisbury, she started fostering dogs: corgis, German shepherds and cocker spaniels. Soon, she started volunteering at Faithful Friends Animal Sanctuary. She performed home visits before people adopted a dog; soon she found herself in a teaching position.

"In 2017, I decided if I want to do this and get paid, I needed to certify." No license is required for dog trainers but Pitner wanted the confidence that she was truly educated in the field. She attended animal behavior college for a year, culminating in a 200-question exam held in Charlotte. Today she's a Certified Professional Dog Trainer.

"I learned all the breeds and the actual training concepts behind what I had already been teaching," she smiles.

Every day before or after working at hospice, she had training sessions with dogs and owners. Finally, her hospice job was no longer her priority. In February 2019, she hired a business consultant with a goal to go fulltime with dogs by



Covers of The New Yorker magazine hang on the wall.

November. In November, she left a secure job with health insurance to work with dogs on her own. "But hey," she laughs, "I don't have to get dressed up for work — or even comb my hair!"

Initially, she worked from her home. In 2020, the business moved into a storefront in downtown Salisbury. In 2024, she moved to the current location on South Fulton Street in Salisbury. In addition to the use of a full building, she has fenced in a play yard for dogs to train in.

Oftentimes, customers will start with Pitner's puppy training class but ask for further guidance with trouble areas. Pitner provides this personal training for many clients. In addition to her initial certification, she is also member of the Certified Council of Professional Dog Trainers, a Canine Good Citizen Evaluator, a member of the Association of Professional Dog Trainers and the Pet Professional Guild.

Pitner started raising funds for a local dog park in 2012; it opened in 2017 and in 2019, the city renamed it the Theresa Pitner Dog Park.

"It was so exciting!" she says. "That's when I knew I was quitting hospice."

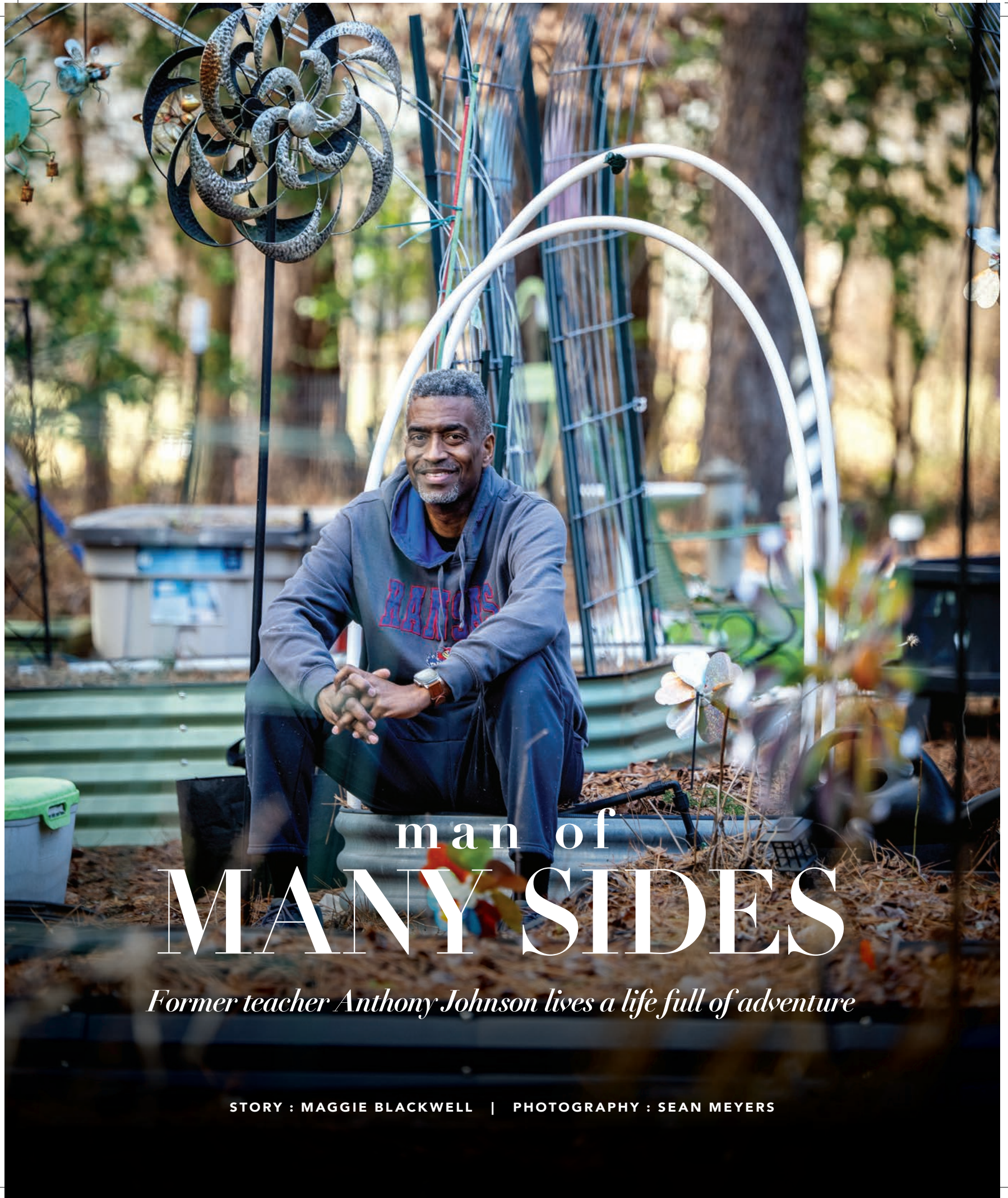
The park is a success, she says. She personally keeps it clean and has funded trees and bench-

es. People come to the park to meet other people, she says, or for their dogs to socialize with other dogs. Just like any dog park, there is the occasional fight, she acknowledges, and strongly suggests owners walk their dogs around the perimeter to get used to the area — and the smells — before allowing them to enter the fenced section.

Pitner has just begun service dog work, saying if you want your dog to sense when your diabetic child needs sugar, it's imperative to get a puppy of the correct breed. She's in touch with all the service dog organizations and refers clients as needed.

She does have other hobbies for her spare time: She's talented at restoring vintage Barbie dolls; she even roots replacement hair! Pitner has a sizeable collection of vintage Christmas ornaments and taught herself to quilt during COVID. Her 11-year-old granddaughter, Ava, is the apple of her eye. They text often. "And she looks just like me!" she beams.

Understanding Your Dog is located at 1324 South Fulton Street in Salisbury, and the phone is 704-754-2536. You can follow Theresa on Instagram at @theresadognc and Facebook at Understanding Your Dog, LLC. Website is TheresaDogNC.com. **S**



man of
MANY SIDES

Former teacher Anthony Johnson lives a life full of adventure

STORY : MAGGIE BLACKWELL | PHOTOGRAPHY : SEAN MEYERS



By day, Anthony Johnson works with tech for a major corporation. In his spare time, he gardens, plays with his drones, takes astronomy photographs with his telescope and camera, dabbles with EV vehicles, golfs, meets up with his fraternity brothers, works on his YouTube page (where the music is generated by AI), makes serious music, goes camping, kayaking and fishing.

Being good at a bazillion things, though, hasn't gone to his head. Johnson is as quiet and a humble man as you'll meet. His innate curiosity takes him on many adventures.

That curiosity showed itself when he was a kid in New Orleans. His parents provided him with a cheap telescope, an early-days computer and plenty of books. When he was four, his grandmother gave him a drum with paper drumheads; by the time he was seven or eight, his dad got him a real drum set.

He tried baritone horn and tuba and landed on the French horn by the time he was in high school, because

"I couldn't carry a tuba four to six miles for a parade."

Despite his brilliance and curiosity, like Einstein and da Vinci, he did not do well at all in school.

"I was raised in a way that I had good values. I had good, strong parents who did not play," Johnson says he and wife Desireé raised their three girls the same way: to be well-rounded and take chances.

After high school, Johnson had a variety of jobs, including working for the sheriff's department in the Jefferson Parish jail. That didn't last long. "I probably knew half the inmates," he chuckles. "I went to high school with them; they lived in my neighborhood."

He met Desireé as she graduated from LSU medical school and they moved to Columbus, Georgia, for her residency. He buried his mom the day before they moved to Salisbury, where Desireé is a doctor of family medicine. Anthony was a stay-at-home dad. Six years later, his dad died.

Anthony did a lot of soul searching. He realized he

*Anthony Johnson
tends to his
gardens at his
home.*



Johnson is an avid golfer and maintains a putting green at his house.

had done poorly at school because it was so boring. In honor of his parents, Johnson decided to go to school to become a teacher who makes a difference for students. He enrolled in Livingstone and was assigned Isenberg Elementary School for his practice teaching. This cemented his desire to be an elementary education teacher and help kids have a good impression of learning.

Johnson taught for 17 years, integrating his love of technology into the classroom. He also started “Necktie Tuesday,” encouraging young men to wear ties to school. He used social media to ask for castoff ties and received thousands for those boys who did not have one. He sent extra ties to other schools. The school found that on Tuesdays, fewer students were sent to the office for behavioral issues.

He also founded the Mini Funk Factory, initially a drum corps for kids who needed an outlet. When other kids wanted to be included, the program grew. At one point he had almost 100 kids playing drums, horns and wind instruments.

“Growth starts where comfort ends.”

— ANTHONY JOHNSON

They performed in parades and for special school events.

When the corporate world knocked on Johnson’s door, he saw an avenue to help more kids than ever, so ultimately he made the tough decision to leave the classroom.

Desirée started the interest in gardening. They take pride in eating food so fresh it was in the garden moments before. They even have a tea garden and concoct their own tea blends!

His photography of space hearkens back to his childhood days, looking up at the stars and wondering what was out there. He had had books about the solar system and the beginner telescope.

During COVID, Johnson bought a smart tele-

scope and a camera. He sometimes stays outside for hours in the night to get the whole picture. When it began to get dark early in November, he would stay out from one or two in the morning until seven.

He installed a putting green in the back yard as just a way to relax. His golfing buddy, Sydney Sessoms, used to beat him all the time. Johnson joked with him that his game has elevated since he started putting at home. Now they have not played in a while. He grins from ear to ear.

Johnson pledged to Kappa Alpha Psi in 2001 at Livingstone College. They recently celebrated 25 years. “It’s a great group of guys I can call at any time.” He says they hold each other accountable to strive for the best in everything they do, whether it’s the job, education or families. All the men are like brothers. Their wives are like sisters. The children call the men “Uncle.” They stay in touch and try to get together when they can.

When Johnson turned 52, he realized he had outlived his mom and dad. He has no video of



Anthony with his 3-D printed companion, Layer.



Above: Johnson created 3-D printed homes destroyed in his home state of Louisiana during Hurricane Katrina. Left: Johnson is also an avid gardener and tends to many different plants in his yard.



them. He started his YouTube channel so his children and one day, his grandchildren, can see who he is and what he has done. He hopes to inspire others to live a full life.

The music accompanying his videos is AI-generated. He puts in the keywords he wants for the theme and the AI generates the music.

Most recently, Johnson has taken up camping. He says friends and family in New Orleans are making fun of him. But, he says, “There’s a certain peace you only get when you go out there. I feel the transformation every time I go out. I sleep the best sleep.”

Johnson 3-D printed a small version of his home.

Anthony wanted to address his fear of water — a fear he’s had his entire life. While camping, he now takes out his new kayak. It’s a different skill than anything he’s ever tried before. He recently got an experienced friend to go out with him to learn the basics.

“I thought I was in good shape from using my rowing machine,” he said. “That kayak was a workout! It’s all part of a healthier lifestyle.”

Anthony had addressed a fear of heights a few

years back by skydiving a few times. He says, “Growth starts where comfort ends.”

The Johnsons’ three daughters are all doing well. Jessica, the oldest, is a teacher. Adanya is in a Ph.D. program at Yale. Kailah is now a nursing assistant.

“I never imagined I’d be living this life,” he says. “From teaching to golfing to camping — everyone wants to know how it happened? and I just say, ‘It’s the Grace of God.’”

To learn more about Anthony Johnson, or just to enjoy videos of the outside, visit his YouTube page: @ordinaryguyNC. **S**

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Former Salisbury High School teachers John Brown and Sandra Sullivan. They both taught English for 34 years.



John Brown and Sandra Sullivan look through an old yearbook.

the LITERARY LIFE

Two longtime English teachers at Salisbury High School have inspired numerous students

STORY : JENNY HUBBARD | PHOTOGRAPHY : SEAN MEYERS





I have a theory about high-school English teachers: you have to have had a good one to become one. For Sandra Sullivan, who taught English at Salisbury High School (SHS) from 1989-2023, that English teacher was John Brown, who taught there from 1963-1997.

I sat in the school's reception area this past March with these two living legends after we'd walked the halls they'd walked so many times. SHS is the same age as the house John lives in — 100 — and as we walked, he pointed out the original architectural features: the crown molding in the auditorium, the elegant lights on either side of the front doors that he convinced a principal to save. Sandra showed him the new wing, and as we passed the trophy cases, John marveled at how many more golden statues are there now.

Sandra and John each logged 34 years in SHS classrooms, and although we're talking about English teachers here, let's do the math. That's five classes each day, and with at least 20 kids per class (though that number was typically higher), that's at least 100 essays to grade every two weeks. And let's not forget the research papers. Imagine the number of red ink pens used up circling an English teacher's cardinal sins: comma splices, dangling modifiers, run-on sentences, sentence fragments, subject-verb disagreement, pronoun-antecedent disagreement, misplaced or missing apostrophes, and — back in the day before spell check — spelling errors.

Sandra winces when she remembers that in John Brown's class, committing any one of the cardinal sins would earn your essay an automatic F. She remembers that she wrote her junior-year research paper on Steinbeck's "The Grapes of Wrath." "We had to choose a Pulitzer-prize-winning novel," she says.

"One young man," John said, "a smart aleck, didn't believe I read all these essays, so in the middle of one of his, he inserted the sentence 'If he reads this, I'm a jack-ass.' Well, the next day, when I handed the essays back, I said, 'This one belongs to the jackass.'" He smiles. "For the first three or four years of my retirement, I still had nightmares about not being able to grade all those papers."

John tells me that Sandra was a good student: "She was willing to learn and had a positive attitude, as well as a genuine interest in what was being studied. She was always cheerful and cooperative."

Sandra laughs. "Good to hear! When I entered his classroom, I entered the world of literature. That's what he created: a world. He would describe his travels to the land of Shakespeare, which helped establish the context of what it was we were studying. And, oh, I remember the red ink!" She laughs again and adds that she always graded in green ink.

"When I came here to teach in 1989," she explains, "John prepped me. I was surprised at how much preparation and aftermath was involved on a daily basis. John encouraged me to get my master's and my AIG certification so that I could teach Advanced Placement courses. Because it was important to him to teach all types of students, not only the most academically successful ones, it became important to me, too. It allows you to see the entire range. We loved our 'regulars' as much as we loved our A students." In his honor, she established the John Brown Excellence in English Scholarship.



Former Salisbury High School teachers John Brown and Sandra Sullivan chat with AP Literature teacher Scott Bosch, center.

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I graduated from SHS in 1983 (a year before Sandra), and John was also my teacher for two years. Very few of us ever earned A's. I wrote my junior-year research paper on *Gone with the Wind*, which received a B+, and I recall a C on my report card one quarter. He was the person who taught me what a thesis statement was, the most essential component of any argument. I asked him what his favorite piece of literature was to teach.

"Macbeth," he says. "Do a search on 'vaulting ambition,' Macbeth's tragic flaw, and see who pops up. I'm not going to name any names. But the play remains relevant to this very day."

We'd had to memorize the "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow" soliloquy and recite in front of the class. I remember the smartest girl, who was painfully shy, refusing to do it and





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gracefully accepting her F. I remember a handful of us hiding his treasured bust of Shakespeare on the roof on April 23, Shakespeare's birthday.

"That was your class?" John exclaimed.

After John retired, Sandra inherited the bust of Shakespeare. Other teaching tools remained in his classroom, including the maps of England he used to roll down over the blackboard. For 34 years, she taught in the room next door to his. "I just wouldn't let anyone clean out his stuff," she says. "They took it to the bookroom and finally cleaned it out when I was not at work one day."

Sandra also inherited many of John's books with his annotations in them. "When sharing literature with a class," she says, "going deeper is better than reading more." For both her and John, it's the quality of the literature, not the quantity, that's important. She learned early on what good literature was, thanks to the librarians at Over-



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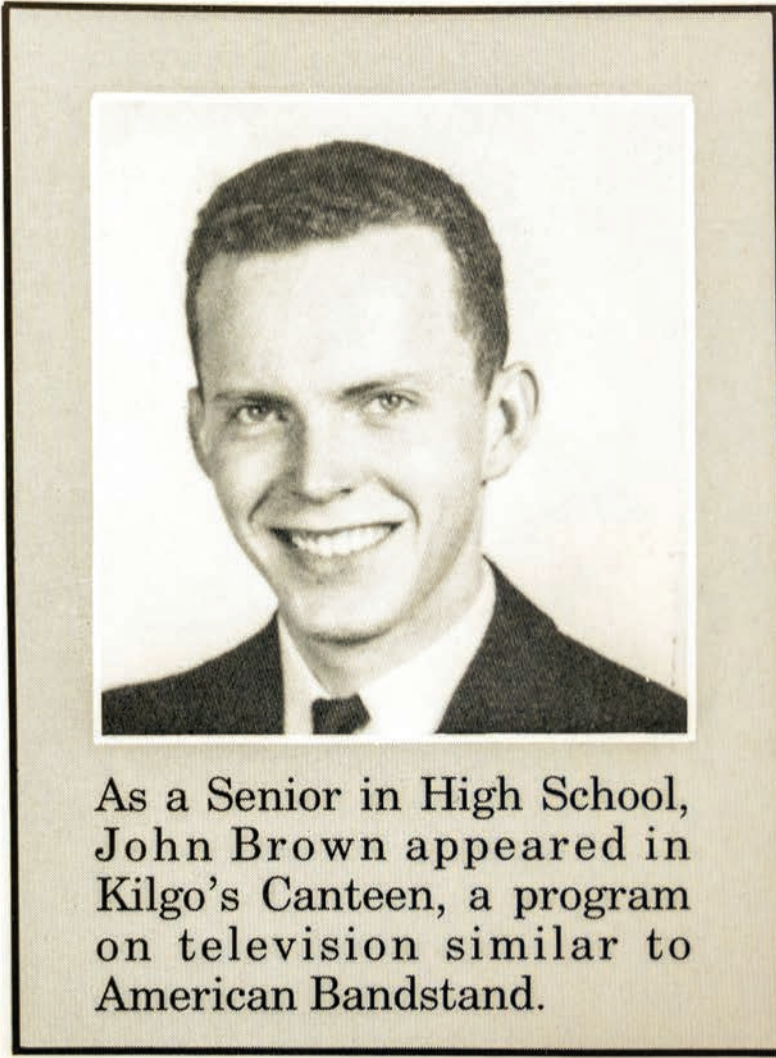
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Maureen Shay
 Ms. Blackmun has
 found fulfillment her
 1st year at SHS.
 Caroline Smithman
 Sandra Sullivan



As a Senior in High School,
 John Brown appeared in
 Kilgo's Canteen, a program
 on television similar to
 American Bandstand.

*Former Salisbury High School teachers John Brown and Sandra Sullivan pictured
 in an old yearbook.*



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John Brown and Sandra Sullivan reminisce with Coach Matt Parrish.





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ton School. Sandra's mother, Corinna Gardner, was the beloved secretary during the time when school secretaries were not only receptionists, but also nurses, financial managers and record keepers. Sandra stayed at school until her mother's workday was done.

"I would always head straight to the library. Both librarians, Betsy Detty and Elda Buxton, set aside books they thought I would like and took time to read with me. As an educator and an adult, I realize now that time is a precious gift, and although they probably didn't have much of it, they still gave it. A young reader mattered to them. Mrs. Detty was the BEST storyteller. I loved it when she would sit down to read a book with me. One of my first favorite books was "Cinnabar the One O'Clock Fox" by Marguerite Henry. I checked that book out so much that Mrs. Buxton finally gave me a copy. I still have it."

I, too, went to Overton and adored Mrs. Detty, who later went on to get her doctorate and become assistant superintendent of the school system. For a moment, we're swept away with memories of Mrs. Detty's engrossing voice and the books that most captured our imaginations.

"Most of my books in my younger life were library books," Sandra says. "To buy a book was special. I still feel that way. My mom would take me with her when she had her hair done with Betty Bunker, and I could



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walk next door to Nathan Bunker's bookstore and get the most recent Nancy Drew. Those and the "Little House on the Prairie" books were my own and my treasures, and yes — I still have every one of them! I also still have a copy of "The Secret Garden," which Mrs. Buxton said I should read. I bought it at the book fair. I did love the book fairs! I have reread it in adulthood and still see the love I had for the characters and story. It's my favorite."

When John first began at Salisbury High, his students were well-trained in grammar because at Knox Junior High, they'd had "the teacher of all teachers," Helen Jenkins. When Helen retired, John had to pivot because the students were no longer as well-prepared. He was a stickler, and I owe it to him that I breezed through my fresh-




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man and sophomore English classes at Meredith College, which had a notoriously old-school English department. John also taught us how to analyze and reason, both inductively and deductively. A friend of his who taught in the medical department at UNC-Chapel Hill was aware of how thoroughly John trained his students to think critically and used to tell him, "Send me your good English students, and I'll make good doctors out of them." And John did. Warren Holshouser, who was in my class, is now an esteemed cardiologist.

Sandra teaches part-time at Catawba College now, freshman and sophomore English, which is mostly about "how to construct an argument." John plays the organ on Sundays at Second Presbyterian Church and maintains his century-old house. A few years ago, he was standing in his front yard when a car slowed to the curb. The driver rolled down her window and proudly recited for him the 'Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow' soliloquy from Macbeth. I was not that driver, but I could have been. I became a high-school English teacher, too. Even though I can still recite this

speech from memory, it doesn't apply to these two English teachers. Do the math: Sandra Sullivan and John Brown have made lasting, positive impacts on the lives of thousands.

For extra credit, see how much of the soliloquy you recall:

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
 To the last syllable of recorded time;
 And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
 The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
 Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
 And then is heard no more. It is a tale
 Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
 Signifying nothing.

*Author's note: When I sent a draft of this article to John Brown for fact-checking, he noted that I'd made jack ass two words instead of one. He's still teaching me. **S***

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Clockwise from top: Dr. Tommy Carlton volunteers with the St. John's Lutheran Church Team. He has delivered Route 9 once a month for 5 years. (Sean Meyers photo); a volunteer hands out a meal (submitted photo); Tom Strobl ensures meals are counted and organized into totes for delivery and also runs a courier route. (Sean Meyers photo)



Colin Grubb and Lib Cooper load coolers for a route in 1998. (Submitted photo)

GOLDEN DELICIOUS

Meals on Wheels of Rowan County celebrates 50 years

BY BRENDA ZIMMERMAN



The First Baptist Church team prepares to deliver meals. The group serves all Salisbury area routes on the first and third Fridays of each month. (Sean Meyers photo)

“For 50 years, Meals on Wheels has been powered by people. Our volunteers are the heart of our mission. Their dedication and the support of our donors and community partners ensure that seniors across our community receive the nourishment, care and connection they need,” says Alexandra Fisher, executive director. With two full-time and 13 part-time staff members, volunteers are the core of the hands-on program. Meal delivery is what the community sees, but so much more must happen for that to occur. There is massive record keeping, budgeting, intake for new clients, replying to referrals, follow-ups on individuals, connecting clients to needed services, creating routes for delivery and home visits. The list is long and time consuming.

It all began when Anne Ramsey became aware of the number of older adults living at home in conditions that prevented them from shopping for and preparing meals for them-



Meals on Wheels of Rowan County client, Sharon Livengood. (Sean Meyers photo)



Clockwise from top: Mayor Karen Alexander visits with client Mae Keeter (submitted photo); Maggie Puckett holds her pup Dotty. Maggie has received Meals on Wheels for five years. (Sean Meyers photo); a Salisbury Post photo from Oct. 23, 1978, showing the Meals on Wheels founders. (Submitted photo)



Meal pickup at the main office, 720 Grove Street. Volunteers pick up meals every Monday-Friday and deliver across the entire county, with 32 routes covering 511 miles. (Sean Meyers photo)

selves. This realization started when her own mother began living in an apartment and Ramsey worried that she was not eating properly. Meals were often a heated can of soup or a simple sandwich with little thought about the nutrition needed for a healthy body. There were other folks in the community facing circumstances resulting from poor nutrition. Randomly timed meals of leftovers brought by family, neighbors and friends were always welcome, but insufficient. Loneliness also seemed to be a factor.

She and Sarah (Singer) Kizziah began talking about what could be done. Kizziah says, “We had no idea how bad the need actually was.” Long before “grass roots initiative” was coined to identify community members rising to meet a specific need, they were doing just that. United Way and personal donations provided seed money to get the program running. The initial group of citizens she pulled together included men and women who knew the community and had a variety of skills. The first board included Ramsey, Dr. Frank B. Marsh, Helen A. Tooley, Arlene Crawford, Clyde Fahnstock, Barbara Brown Whitener, Robert Carmichael, Sylvia Feit, Franklin Way and Sarah (Singer) Kizziah. Several local churches joined together to assist with implementing the program. They operated from the kitchen at First Presbyterian



Marilyn Smith, a Spencer route client for six years, relies on Meals on Wheels not only for herself but also through the AniMeals program to help care for her beloved pets. (Sean Meyers photo)

church in Salisbury, with the first meals coming from Beattie’s Kitchen on Fisher Street. Volunteers packaged and delivered the meals. Ramsey and Kizziah looked at similar programs in other communities known as Meals on Wheels (MOW).

The first doorstep delivery of meal service would assist 15 clients from Aug. 30 through Dec. 31 of 1976. Within only two years, that small group of volunteers had grown to 500 volunteers serving 90-100 meals five days a week. The cost of the meal for the client was \$1.30,

During the Dog Days of August, Meals on Wheels sponsors a drive to collect food, pet supplies and financial contributions for clients. Many clients were sharing their own meals with beloved four-legged companions. In response to that, MOW started AniMeals several years ago. Through the program basic wellness checks, vaccines for pets are provided as well as bi-monthly pet food. AniMeals is organized by Executive Director Alexandra Fisher and Kim Hardiman of Hardiman Designs. Debbie Barnhardt of Barnhardt Jewelers, Lorna Medinger and Hughes Plumbing Supplies also assist with the event, lasting the entire month of August. Dropoff sites include Barnhardt Jewelers, Hugh Plumbing Supply, Lazy 5 Vets Small Animal Medicine and Surgery, and Stitchin' Post.



Guests lined up outside Barnhardt Jewelers for the first PAWSitively PURRFect Night Out, benefiting August is for AniMEALS. (Sean Meyers photo)

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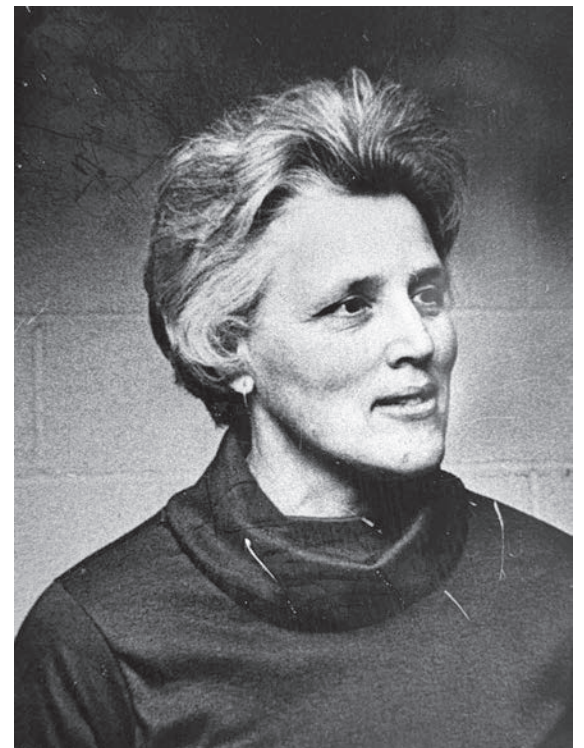
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Volunteer Lisa Misenheimer and staff member Gloria Rankin load meals. (Sean Meyers photo)



Volunteers Annie Bates and Mary Marlin. (Sean Meyers photo)



Jean Anne Ferrier Ramsay. (Submitted photo)



First Baptist Church volunteer Leslie Rich goes over the monthly menu with Charlene Baker. (Sean Meyers photo)

and arrangements were made to accommodate those who could not afford that. Board members, including Kizziah, were concerned that clients needed to invest in the meals. The program would accept as little as 50 cents if that was all the client could afford. At the onset, meals were delivered only within a mile radius beyond the city limits. Today, the program serves the whole county. Kizziah comments, “It shot up so fast!”

Over the last 50 years, the MOW program has shuffled in and out of 18 locations. The most recent change was to their “forever home” on Grove Street. Along with the multiple locations, the program has been served by a variety of food vendors. That list includes, but is not limited to: Catawba College, Rowan Memorial Hospital, Golden Corral and K&W Cafeteria. Today, food is provided by Lynette’s Catering based in Spencer. The cost per meal is \$14, which is \$3,450 annually per participant. All clients pay on a sliding scale based on their circumstances. The average cost clients are paying is less than \$2.50 per meal, with 125 clients receiving free meals. The current program serves 300 homebound seniors five days a week. In a year, 600 or more volunteers will connect with over 550 clients served in some way by MOW.



Lib Cooper and Colin Grubb deliver meals in 1998. (Submitted photo)

*Volunteer James Reynolds loads up the car. James has delivered for five years and delivers multiple routes a week.
(Sean Meyers photo)*



Most referrals to the program come from medical sources: a primary care physician, a home health aide, a hospital discharge planner or a social worker. Family members, neighbors and clients themselves can also make the referral. An on-site visit is made to assess the need and check on the potential client's general health and living circumstances. If the criteria is met, services begin.

Additional services have evolved over the years to assist in specific situations. Hospital discharge meals are offered temporarily for those with limited local support when they return from a hospital stay. This referral comes from the discharge planner at the hospital. Novant recently worked with MOW, both financially and strategically, to set the pilot in motion. Today, the plan is set to continue. One positive result with the program is that none of the participants in the pilot had to return to the hospital during the two weeks their meals were provided. Some of the participants in the post-discharge meals delivery were also flagged as either being food inse-



*Sarah Kizziah, the first board vice president, helped bring Meals on Wheels Rowan to life.
(Sean Meyers photo)*



Shirley Johnson, 2001 president of Meals on Wheels, delivers to Janie Cannon. (Submitted photo)

cure or in need of the meals on a long-term basis. At that point, they were enrolled in the full-time program. Novant also provides medically tailored meals to address medical dietary needs in all programs. These are meals specifically determined by a medical diagnosis.

During COVID, there were many seniors who could not risk going out to shop. Crowds in stores added risks for the frail elderly. During this time, grocery delivery was started for those who were housebound. MOW continues grocery delivery assistance for aging adults who can safely prepare meals, but no longer able walk through the stores, stand in line or drive. There are certainly commercial services that will deliver, but they do not check the general status of the individual. Not all elders have access, or the ability, to shop online. MOW is also able to make referrals to a USDA program that can help with funds for people who are food insecure.

In the winter months, clients are provided with totes of shelf-stable foods to be used when inclement weather prevents

delivery. These totes contain two to three meals of food and snacks that can be used while roads are being cleared.

The idea of getting nutritious meals to those in need is only part of the mission. “To provide innovative and comprehensive programs to meet the nutritional, emotional and physical needs of homebound older adults in Rowan County” is the MOW mission statement. Many elders living alone deal with isolation and depression. Modern families are mobile and many times, a consistent support system is not available nearby. Volunteers go through extensive one-on-one training before they start working that includes how to be observant of changes in the individual clients as well as changes in their environment. The volunteers from MOW tune in to the clients they see on a regular basis. During deliveries, they stop and chat a few minutes, engage them in conversation and observe changes in abilities. The MOW staff can connect clients with additional services. Interacting with someone five days a week can significantly impact the life of a person living alone. Meals must be handed directly



James Bradshaw, Steve Jarrett and Celia Jarrett. (Sean Meyers photo)

to the client, so if no one comes to the door, protocols are in place to check on the individual. It may be as simple as having an appointment they forgot to tell the office about or as devastating as someone is ill and cannot get to the door.

Volunteers not only provide time and skills, but also their vehicles and gas. There are many tasks in addition to the delivery of the meals. Around 100 coolers at the three pick-up locations have been prepared with hot packs and cold packs to hold the meals. When the day's deliveries are complete, those same coolers must be sanitized and prepared for the next day. Food temperature food is checked daily. Since the program receives funding from the federal Home and Community Care Block Grant, these records are audited at least annually. Phones must be answered, home visits made, referrals reviewed and routes must be set. It truly takes a servant's heart to work in the program. Phones are manned throughout the delivery process in the event a participant doesn't answer the door or a driver gets lost. In the age of GPS, getting lost may sound silly. Drivers prefer handwritten

directions which also provide special instructions for individual homes. The "jumper" who hops out and hands the meal to the client needs to know if they prefer a side door, or if they are hard of hearing, or should watch that a pet doesn't try to get out of the door. Each of the 32 daily routes requires two volunteers to manage the mile to mile-and-a-half route.

Anne Ramsey's daughter Anne Saunders was often recruited to assist with early operations. She recalled that on one of her early delivery routes, she discovered a woman who was the daughter of her family housekeeper when she was a child. "She would even go to the beach with us for two weeks to cook and look after all of the kids." That personal connection was important to the client. The program has come full circle for three generations: her grandmother's need, her mother's grass-roots effort and now Saunders and her husband are participants in the program.

Funding and fundraising have always been critical in maintaining the Meals on Wheels program in Rowan County. Up until 2018, United Way was a strong source. As the program



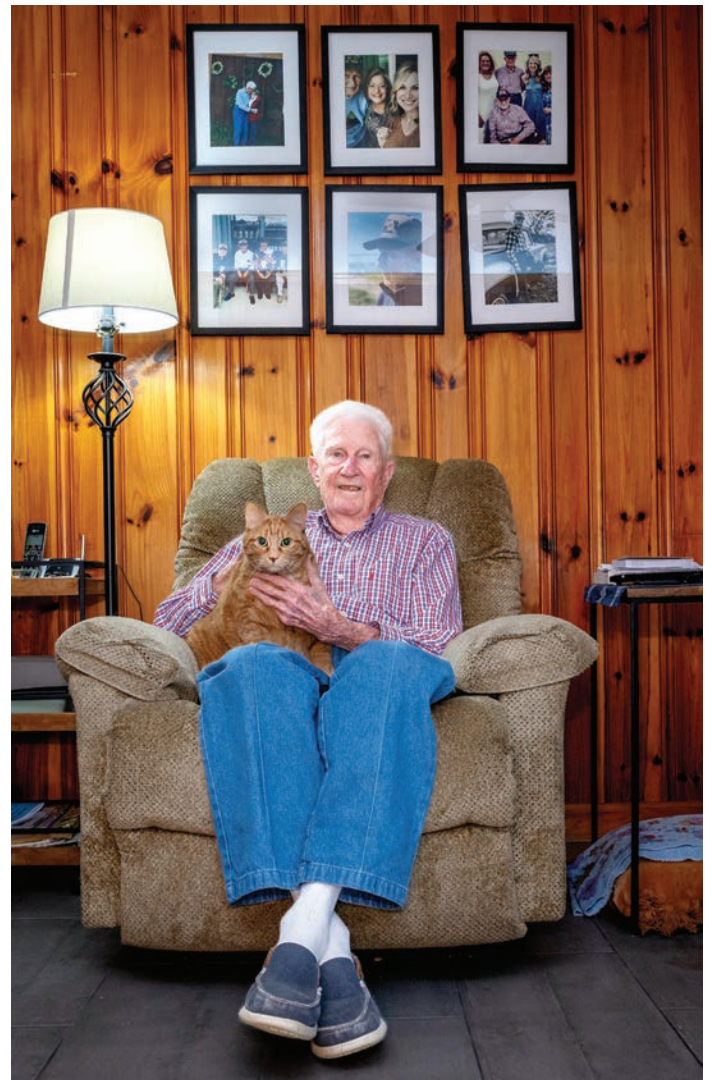
Doris and Steve Plummer review route sheets with Care Coordinator Georgia Simons. (Sean Meyers photo)

grows, more substantial long-term finances are needed. Meals on Wheels is launching the “Forever Meals Fund: Sustaining Meals for the Future” as part of the celebration of their 50th year of operation. This will be an invested fund to support the long-term programs, growth and financial stability of Meals on Wheels Rowan. The Forever Meals Fund will ensure that seniors can receive nutritious meals and essential services for decades to come. The event, with a goal of \$5 million, is being led by Board President Tracy Smith and Executive Director Alexandra Fisher. The 50th Anniversary Task Group includes Susie Ritchie and Amy Vestal.

*Client
Jim Deal.
(Submitted
photo)*

Fisher states, “This five-year, \$5 million effort is about sustainability. It allows Meals on Wheels Rowan to become more self-sustaining and better prepared to navigate rising costs, funding losses and whatever challenges lie ahead. So that no matter what, our focus remains on providing the best possible care for our seniors.”

Setting aside five years from the next 50 to raise \$5 million — that sounds like a nourishing goal for this community’s future seniors. **S**





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