

AUGUST 2026

SALISBURY

the magazine

Karl Lankford has been
a fixture at YMCA for
more than 40 years

Salisbury City Park
hosts Learn to Fish Day

C'EST MAGNIFIQUE!

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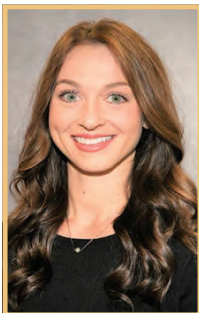
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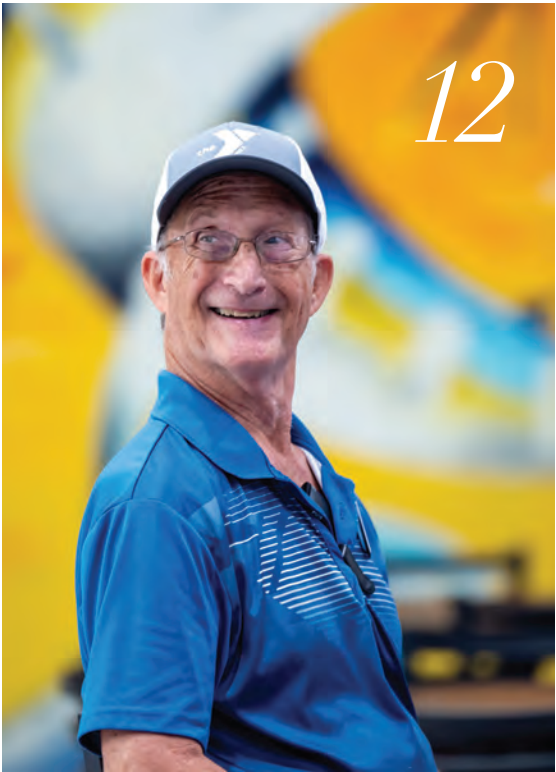
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On the cover: Anna Page
in her wedding dress.
(Pascal Vo photo)

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Here's to Dan

Over the past couple of years, this magazine has featured a woman who makes Christmas wreaths from vintage collections; a man who builds sets in Hollywood and makes custom furniture; a man who designs helmets for NASCAR drivers, the Olympics and more; a local guy who casts original bronze sculptures; paintings by great artists of the 19th and 20th century; a man who builds tractors from castoff's wing machines and more.

What do all these articles have in common? Imagination.

I've been thinking about imagination all day because as I write this, it's the birthday of my friend Dan.

Dan was the most imaginative person I ever knew. He eschewed the idea of a nine-to-five job and instead relied on his imagination.

He lived in a walkup apartment on the historic side of town, across from a 7-Eleven, back in the day before mobile phones. When loud cars idled on the corner as drug dealers used the public phone, their rap music vibrating the apartment windows, Dan always, regardless of the song, said, "That's my favorite song." He once played piano for the Savannah Symphony Orchestra. His favorite composer was Debussy.

He always had a cat and never named them. One cat would pass away and another would show up. He always called them, "Kitty." I figure he had 20 cats, one by one, over the years.

When our co-ed softball team played and Dan was up to bat, he invariably turned to a teammate and said, "Hold my beer."

When funds got low, as they frequently did, Dan had a standing invitation to serve as waiter at a good restaurant downtown. He held the coffee pot two feet above the cup to pour and never spilled a drop. When he served dessert, he dramatically carried it at eye level through the dining room, past every customer, before serving it. Dessert orders significantly increased when Dan worked. As long as he had money for rent, cat food and beer, in that order, he was fine.

He got old (free) machine parts from me-

chanics, cleaned them and welded them into the craziest sculptures you ever saw. He painted paintings. He acted in the local theater. He had a box of poems under his bed that he'd written on Dec. 8, the day John Lennon was killed, every year since 1980.

Dan was quite political, as most of my friends are. In the 1990s, he decided he'd hang out his shingle as a political advisor. He downloaded freeware on his old computer to design ads. He wrote speeches and coached his candidates. His success ratio was surprisingly good.



Every conversation with Dan, whether it was held over coffee or beer, was a fascinating one. He knew facts from the 1300s, the 1800s and last week that none of us knew. I occasionally googled his facts as I was sure he was pulling the wool over our eyes. They were, in fact, true.

Dan died last summer, penniless, and was eulogized by a preacher who'd never known him. Here's to Dan, the most imaginative person I ever knew.

In our issue this month, we bring you a host of stories by our writers, who use their imaginations to prepare them for you. Whether it's the opening sentence, the comparisons made in the story or a sentimental close, our writers use their imaginations to craft their stories for you. They're an underappreciated bunch and I'd like to thank them here.

Susan Shinn Turner writes about every girl's dream: a wedding in Paris! Locals Tommy Page and Mary Willis Page's daughter Anna fell in love with a Frenchman and the rest is histoire! Turner's story is tops but the photographs, oooh-la-la! You'll definitely want to see this one. Thank you to Pascal Vo, the wedding photographer, who granted us permission to use his photos.

Brenda Zimmerman writes about Karl Lankford, who has worked at the J.F. Hurley YMCA for 40 years. Yep — you read that right. 40 years. Karl, Mr. Good Looking and Mr. Popular at West Rowan High School, was in a tragic car accident with a friend. The friend didn't survive. The story of Karl's family and community pro-

viding 24-7 coverage for him for over a year, as about as uplifting as you can get.

The Salisbury Parks & Rec Department held "Learn to Fish Day" earlier this year at City Park Lake and Barrie Kirby was there to walk around the lake, and around, and around, to interview all the fishers, from age 5 to 70. While not everyone caught a fish, they did have one thing in common: they all had a blast. I was there with two of my great-grandsons and in the spirit of the day, I took sodas, soda crackers and Vienna Sausages. The meal was not a hit but the day surely was.

This month's book review is written by Lovetta Ealy Moore. As she admits, the book was not an easy read. It was recently published and has been on many book clubs' reading lists. You can decide for yourself.

Our Rowan Original for September is Alyssa Moore, Urban Design Planner for the City of Salisbury. She has what is probably the most creative job in the city. She, along with the help of the Public Arts Commission, is responsible for the many sculptures you see in Salisbury as you drive around. She's quite petite but don't let her size fool you! She's a powerhouse. From the Sculpture Show to neighborhood beautification grants to the Dixonville Cemetery to crosswalk art to sidewalk poetry to murals on buildings to Blockworks to tree giveaways to citizens — she keeps many balls in the air. Her work will inspire or exhaust you.

Einstein said, "Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world."

Muhammed Ali said, "The man who has no imagination has no wings."

Robin Williams said, "You're only given a little spark of madness. You mustn't lose it."

Here's to imagination — and raise a cup to my friend, Dan.

Maggie

— Maggie Blackwell
Editor, Salisbury the Magazine

THROUGH THE LENS by Gary Odrosky

Gary Odrosky captured blossoms on an Okame Cherry tree at Hurley Park.

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

Heavy are the burdens

Ever carried four bags of groceries all at once, or a 25-pound bag of dog food or even a year-old child on your hip or back? Then you know the strain, the stress and the pressure a body experiences. Now, imagine carrying seven generations of lies, secrets and unanswered questions. That was Tatiana (Tati) Dupree's teenage life.

Even though the book jacket summarizes the book beautifully, the 317 pages contain more explicit details pertaining to the seven generations of Dupree women.

The prologue's first sentence, "They cut off her head because she ran" immediately gives evidence this is not a happily-ever after read. As a matter of fact, it's a tough read

Let's begin at the beginning. The story begins in the summer of 1860 aboard a ship carrying captured Africans headed to the plantation of Zephaniah Foster Dupree. One of the captured Africans is a female. As the "oldest of the young ones," this female is referred to as only "she" or "her" until Dupree names her Sarah. She is the chosen breeder for the Dupree plantation.

I found it intriguing and brilliant that the author, Nikesha Elise Williams, consistently puts a question mark behind the name Sarah denoting this is her assigned name, not the name of a young captured African girl. The fore, in the remainder of the book she is Sarah(?).

Williams strategically does not give the story of Sarah's(?) capture, suffering and plantation life until the last chapters (chapters 22-24). If those had been chapters one through three, I probably would have put the book down, never to return.

Sarah(?) and several male slaves attempt to escape to freedom but are caught and punished. Sarah(?) and her unborn child are returned to

the Dupree plantation where Sarah(?) is murdered by Zephaniah, in front of all the other slaves. It is at this point, Sarah's(?) child, Zephaniah's child, is delivered and named Emma.

The description of the event is graphic. Good thing it was at the end of the book.

Thus begins the calamity, the abuse, the deceit and the lies of the Dupree women.

Emma begets Jubilee (Jubi), who begets Ruby, who begets Gladys, who begets Nadia, who begets Tati.

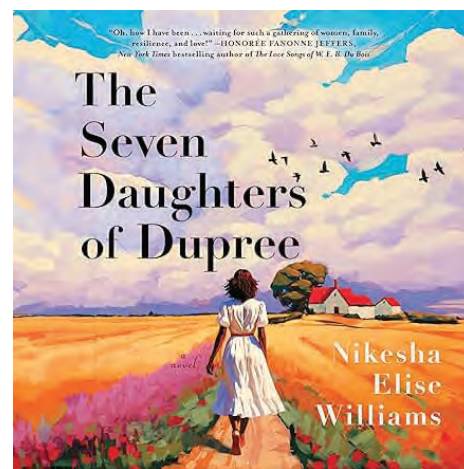
Tati does not understand why there is such conflict and contempt between her mother and grandmother until it is revealed, by Gladys, Tati's father was a married man. His wife was pregnant at the same time as Nadia! Add another 50 pounds to the Dupree women's load.

Each descendant of Zephaniah Dupree is a woman cursed to only bear female children, except for Gladys.

By the time the lies, the secrets and the unanswered questions were dealt with, I was truly tired, exhausted, surprised and angry. There were almost too many characters, too much back and forth in time, too many heartbreaks and far too many nefarious acts of hatred. There were, however, many factual elements. The details of the designs of Sarah's(?) hair braiding, the descriptions of the smells in Nadia's hair salon, the names of the beauty

products and the equipment she used could bring back memories to any African American female who has spent a Saturday evening getting her hair "done" in Mama's kitchen.

The reading contained vocabulary relevant to each time period, references to ancestral practices during childbirth, the significance of treating your hair as sacred and the unspoken relationship between females. There was even the mention of Fashion Fair cosmetics, a brand formulated



"The Seven Daughters of Dupree," by Nikesha Elise Williams; 317 pages; published January 2026

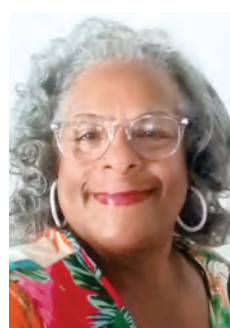
ed especially for African American women. The author recognizes North Carolina A&T State University's Library (Aggie Pride) as the place Tati researches her genealogy. There is the mention of a young male singing group from Charlotte named Jodeci.

Williams captures the essence of late 19th century southern African American life. She delves into motherhood, childhood, abuse, adultery and broken friendships during the lives of the seven daughters of Dupree. Their stories are each filled with unhappiness, strife, secrets and lies creating an even heavier burden for those who follow. They, however, remain strong, determined and persistent women who, in their own way, want better for their own daughter.

Heavy are the burdens of generational curses. Because of the numerous main and minor characters, the many themes and situations and the extended time period, this was not an easy read but was a captivating one.

...

This novel was a selection of the Reading Squad of Delta Xi Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. and was discussed, analyzed and critiqued as I attempted to compose this review. Thank you, my Sisters. [S]



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If you've ever driven around the city of Salisbury, surely, you've noticed sculptures along your way. Where did that come from, and who makes that happen?

Meet Alyssa Nelson, urban design planner. A 10-year employee at the city, she has a bachelor's degree in fine art and education, a master's in architecture and another master's in urban design. Last year, she certified in landscape design. She taught in China for three years.

Nelson grew up in Connecticut. Although she's diminutive, she's a mighty force.

SCULPTURE SHOW

The Sculpture Show, an annual event, changes each year in the spring with 21 sculptures showing, with 10 being downtown. Staff and contractors remove last year's lot and install the new ones. This is the 18th year for the show. Other locations include Catawba College, Trinity Oaks, Livingstone College and Rowan-Cabarrus Community College.

She's the staff liaison to the Public Art Commission, who arrange for a jury of citizens to select each year's offering from the many entries submitted by artists from as far away as Minnesota. Every year, Nelson tries to reach more artists by scouring the internet for sculpture shows in other cities and tracking down artist contacts; posting on artist websites; sharing info with other sculpture organizations. She uses Art & Soul Rowan, Rowan-Cabarrus Community College Art & Design and Waterworks to help spread the word.

All sculptures are for sale each year. This year, an 80-year-old artist, Richard Pitts, has a sculpture showing at La Cava. The Moscardinis are purchasing the piece. Nelson helps each party negotiate the price, taking care to be fair to both parties. Around 30 sculptures to date have found a permanent home in Salisbury.

Nelson also produces a color photographic booklet of all the pieces, available some time after they are installed. She must photograph



putting things TOGETHER

Salisbury's urban design planner Alyssa Nelson

STORY : **MAGGIE BLACKWELL** | PHOTOGRAPHY : **SEAN MEYERS**



them in their new locations and include the artists' statements. Brochures will soon be available at City Hall, the City Office Building at the corner of North Main and West Council streets, host sites, Waterworks, Fine Frame Gallery, Rowan Museum, the Customer Service Center on MLK Blvd and Parks & Rec buildings.

Those who visit the sculptures can hear the artists' statements in their own voices for each piece by using the app, "Otocast."

Neighborhoods can apply to host a sculpture for the year that it shows.

BLOCKWORK

Blockwork started 10 years ago as a project of the Neighborhood Leaders' Alliance. Neighborhoods in need of a facelift apply for consideration and the winning neighborhood is selected for an intensive, volunteer-driven weekend of painting, yardwork, planting and overall maintenance. The weekend is always the fourth weekend in October. This year it occurs on Friday-Saturday, Oct. 22-23. Neighborhoods and volunteers can sign up by calling Jenni Pfaff at 704-638-6240 or email at blockwork@salisburync.gov. This year, the neighborhood will be the 500 and 600 blocks of West Liberty Street. The Blockwork Salisbury Facebook page shares photos of past results.

MURALS

Alyssa's position has been responsible for many successful murals throughout Salisbury for years. The next mural will be painted in the alley beside Sgt. Pepper's. This project is funded by an Arts Council Grant and a Blanche & Julian Robertson Founda-

tion Grant. Nelson says, "I live vicariously through all the artists I work with."

VANDERFORD BASIN IMPROVEMENT

The basin is located near the intersection of Lloyd and Horah streets. Using the Byrne Criminal Justice Grant, staff has built a walking path, improved lighting throughout the West End, cleaned up the basin, added a camera, removed volunteer trees and planted fruit trees.

"A large part of my job is finding grants for dollars to support these projects," Nelson said. "Our whole team is proud to perform this service for the city's neighborhoods."

CROSSWALK ART AND SIDEWALK POEMS

These projects are completed by local artists under Nelson's direction.

NEIGHBORHOOD BEAUTIFICATION GRANT

This grant of up to \$2,500 is in its third year. Neighborhoods may apply for a specific project within the neighborhood and they are expected, but not required, to contribute in-kind. Sometimes neighborhoods' contribution is in the form of labor for the project.

With all this going on, what does Nelson do in her spare time? She and husband Nick recently participated in the Meet the Artists art show, with Alyssa displaying watercolors and Nick showing pen-and-ink drawings.

The couple recently had a baby, who of course keeps them both hopping.

'Daydreamer in Red'



"'Daydreamer in Red' is the embodiment of the idea that a daydreamer is neither here nor there. The partly transparent body of the figure suggests that her imagination is transporting her somewhere else. Artists are particularly known for daydreaming and I have an affinity for this work because of that."

— *Artist's statement by Jessica Bradsher, sculptor for the piece.*

Bradsher is a contemporary metal artist specializing in outdoor public art. She has art on display in 11 states. The themes found within her work range from contemplative to whimsical.

The piece is on display at the corner of South Fulton and McCubbins streets.



*J.F. Hurley YMCA
employee Karl
Lankford has been
attending and
working for the
YMCA for decades.*



Karl shows off his first Rowan High School football championship ring.

part of the HEART

*Karl Lankford has been a fixture
at the J. F. Hurley Family YMCA for more than 40 years*

STORY : **BRENDA ZIMMERMAN** | PHOTOGRAPHY : **SEAN MEYERS**



Karl gets a fist bump from a friend.

In August of 1981, everything in Karl Lankford's life changed. Everything. A senior at West Rowan High School, he and a friend were in a car accident that left Karl seriously injured. The friend did not survive.

In addition to severe burns requiring extensive plastic surgery, Karl would spend 7 weeks in intensive care with a closed head injury. As he was healing and being cared for, his parents were constantly by his side. Once he came out of the coma, he spent another 17 weeks at Baptist Hospital and Whitaker Rehab Center in Winston-Salem learning to be himself again. After grueling hours of physical, occupational and speech therapy he regained his skills to walk, talk, eat and write on his own again.

Classmate Robin Saine recalls, "He was one of the best-looking and the most popular guys in school. And he was dating one of the most popular girls!" She recalled him as having a great personality and being friendly.

If you are a regular at the J. F. Hurley Family YMCA, you probably already know Karl. He is ready to greet everyone coming in with a fist bump or hello and a smile. He has been a fixture at the Y for more than 40 years. His duties began in concessions sales at the Y in the building on Fulton Street in the early 1980s. He worked in janitorial services for several years. Now he has been promoted to "King Karl" in the current location.

In addition to the physical issues, he was diagnosed with a neurological disorder known as aphasia. Common causes of aphasia include a stroke or, as in Karl's situation, a closed head injury. It can also accompany various disease processes such as tumors or dementia. It affects language and communication skills but has no impact on intelligence. There is no cure for aphasia, but with proper support, therapies and interventions affected individuals can move forward with their lives.

Karl Lankford's senior photo from high school.



Karl Lankford



Handwritten notes kept by his late father describe the extended hospital stay with constant monitoring. Karl was rarely alone during those long weeks. Between his parents, siblings and friends, someone stayed with him most of the time. His church family at Corinth Church of Christ in Needmore kept him on the prayer list. Early on in his recovery process, his father wrote, “We sincerely believe that if it weren’t for family and his friends staying with him night and day...24 hours a day... he would not be where he is today. He would not be as determined as he is to keep improving.”

In the 1980s, home therapies were not readily available. As a retired nurse from the local VA Hospital, Karl’s father knew his son would need more help at home. Karl stated, “My father physical-



Karl Lankford, left, speaks with Richard Reinholz, chief operating officer at the YMC



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ly carried me into the YMCA and got in the pool with me to exercise. He helped me heal.” That first year, Karl worked hard to improve. He attended a vocational workshop and later completed a semester at Rowan-Cabarrus Community College. As time passed, he had jobs with Tommy Hendrix and MAN Truck & Bus Company. Then Coke Clark, CEO of the YMCA, offered him a job selling concessions at the Y. Karl entered a full-time job, gained a new family group of coworkers and found a lifetime of meaning.

Close friend Doug Glasgow said, “Karl felt that the job was an opportunity to give back to the community that had done so much to support him and his family during such a difficult time.” For about 15 years, Doug and Karl have been meeting





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on Monday evenings for dinner at Blue Bay Seafood Restaurant on Statesville Boulevard. They met at the former YMCA on Fulton Street when Karl was working there. “We had an immediate connection. He inspires so many people with his positive outlook on life.”

Doug also shared that Karl is a huge West Rowan High School sports fan, especially football. He attends every game that he can. Students, faculty and families all know what

an enthusiastic fan he is. During a streak when WRHS won three consecutive state championships, he was in the crowd cheering as team members received their state champion rings. When they were finished and the crowd’s applause began to quieten, the person at the microphone called Karl to the stage. He received a ring as an honorary team member. He wears the ring proudly and continues to be the No. 1 Falcon Fan.

Several years ago, Karl was out of work for quite a while. He was taking something upstairs in his mother’s house and fell. While he was healing from the broken ankle, his orthopedist decided that it was a good time to replace his troublesome knee. He was astonished at the immense support offered from staff and members of the YMCA. Karl said they were like family. When he returned, coworkers and staff knew mobility was an issue with his custodial respon-

sibilities. It seemed a logical time to transition to something less physically demanding.

In addition to staff at the front desk, the YMCA has a greeter, someone to welcome everyone to the facility and see if they need directions or information. Karl has become that person. Approximately 8,000 members pass by Karl Lankford in a year. He knows most of them. He asks about their families, mentions the class they are headed to, and chats about the most recent sports events. He is more than a greeter. He is a friend. Children, teens and seniors alike exchange a smile and a fist bump as they go through the turnstile. The women at the desk sometimes encourage him "to slow down on the conversation and concentrate on the traffic flow." Karl says he loves people and his job gives him purpose.

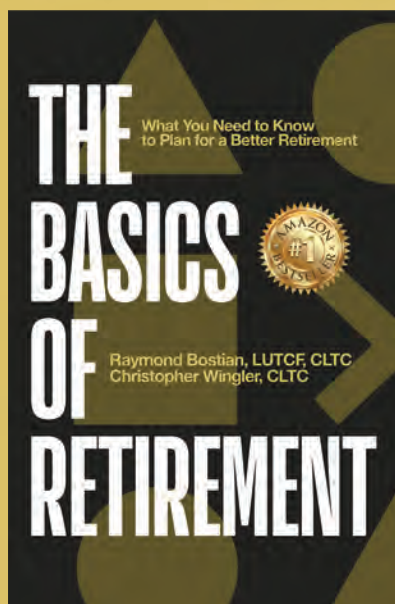
Lori Cressler has worked with Karl for 11 of his nearly 40 years at the Y. She said, "He has great hours. He arrives about 11:15. Then at 11:45 or noon, he breaks for lunch. His favorite lunch stops are Wendy's and Bojangles. After he eats, he parks his gray pickup in the shade, takes a nap. Then he is back on his 'throne' at the front desk from 2:00 until it's time to go home." When Lori was asked if she was his supervisor, she replied, "Karl supervises himself. But we are all a team." Member Marilyn McCombs, who enjoys the daily greetings at the desk, stated, "Karl does not let his physical limitations define who he is. He is always smiling and happy when he greets us at the door."

YMCA COO, Richard Reinholz stated, "Karl is truly an institution of



Karl Lankford with staff member Chris Tamper.

the Salisbury YMCA. Everyone knows and loves Karl. He is part of our YMCA family. His presence, personality and dedication help create the welcoming spirit that makes the Y feel like home for so many people. Over the years, Karl has become more than just a familiar face; he represents the relationships, care and community that define the Salisbury YMCA. Karl isn't just a part of the Y family; he is part of its heart." S



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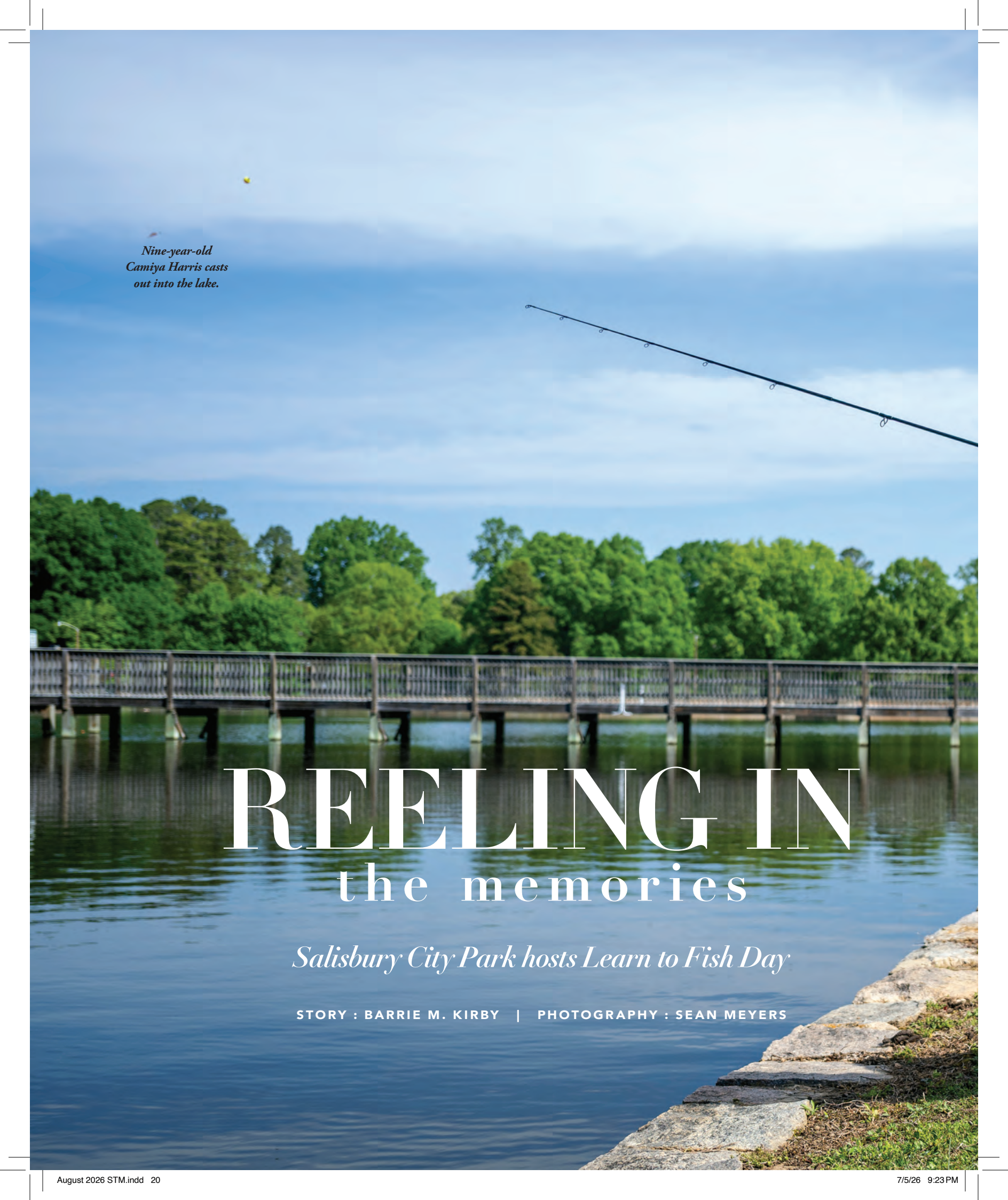
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*Nine-year-old
Camiya Harris casts
out into the lake.*

REELING IN the memories

Salisbury City Park hosts Learn to Fish Day

STORY : BARRIE M. KIRBY | PHOTOGRAPHY : SEAN MEYERS





North Carolina Wildlife Commission's Fisheries biologist Casey Joubert gives instructions to cousins DeMarco Henson Jones, left, and August Urbina.

An oft-quoted proverb claims that those who teach a man to fish feed him for a lifetime. It may also be said that those who teach a child to fish make memories for a lifetime. On April 11, Learn to Fish Day gave children, teens and adults a chance to make life-long memories at the lake in Salisbury's City Park. Sponsored by the Salisbury's Parks and Recreation Department in conjunction with North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, the event provided a hands-on, outdoor opportunity for young people to learn basic fishing skills while making and sharing memories with the adults who accompanied them.

Although Learn to Fish Day is an annual event, in 2025 it was moved to Salisbury Community Park. An act of vandalism had killed up to 80% of the fish in the City Park lake. Draining the water, removing the fish, adding a new filtering system and restocking the lake was a coordinated effort on the part of

several city departments and Salisbury-Rowan Utilities. Rakeem Brawley, assistant director for Salisbury Parks and Recreation, was excited to bring the activity back to City Park. He could not have wished for a better day.

The weather was perfect — sunny but cool enough for a sweatshirt in the morning and warming to the low 70s by noon. The still air was conducive to casting a line. A flock of Canada geese graced the lake with their beauty and announced their presence with raucous squawks.

Brawley and other representatives from Salisbury's Parks and Recreation Department and NC Wildlife gathered by the lake to set up tables where families checked in, picked up informational literature, grabbed a tub of live fishing worms and borrowed gear. Casey Joubert, biologist with NC Wildlife, helped novices thread lines, tie hooks and bobbers, then add bait. After offering a basic lesson on casting a line and watching bobbers to detect a



nibble, Joubert stood by to address any problems that arose.

Cousins August Urbina and DeMarco Hinson Jones were the first on the scene. Almost 11 years old, the pair came with their Nana for their first fishing venture, and they came prepared. Nana had splurged on a well-stocked tackle box and identical poles marked with different colored tape on the handles to distinguish them. She was content to sit in her camping chair and observe while the boys fished. "They are exploring this entire lake, and they enjoy casting and reeling it in, casting, reeling it in, and as long as they're having fun, I'm happy. I'm happy to sit here and take it all in."

August had greater ambitions for the day. He was hoping to win a prize for biggest fish or largest catch. He quickly mastered casting by throwing from his side instead of overhand. Cousin DeMarco chose to fish from the pier instead of the bank. By midmorning, he had gotten a few nibbles, but the fish had escaped. He had fun

anyway and hoped to come back. It was good hanging out with his cousin and Nana.

Initially, five-year-old Karamé Al-Sharari was more interested in the geese on the surface than the fish beneath the water. "Quack! Quack!" he called. It was Karamé's first time fishing, but his mother Cristal shared memories of fishing with her uncle on his boat when she was young. Her skills are now rusty, so her dad tied the hook on the line for them that morning. "Our hope is to learn so we can come by ourselves and not have to wait around for anybody to come bring us and show us," Cristal said.

Josiah Williams, a kindergartner at Isenberg Elementary, was another first-time angler. Wearing an Incredible Hulk sweatshirt and cowboy boots, he also hoped to catch a fish. Stepdad and Salisbury City Council Member Gemale Black coached him on the proper way to cast a line. When the line got jumbled, Black patiently untangled it.

Sisters Cali and Camiya Harris came to City

Park with their mother Daisia Tatum. Cali, who is eight, had first fished at summer camp. Nine-year-old Camiya was eager to learn a new skill. Knowing how to fish will enable her to survive in the wild, she said. The girls were aware of their mother's fishing expeditions with their Poppy when she was young. "My dad used to take me just around the city, to local lakes," she said. "He's an avid fisher, so he knows all the fishing ponds. Everyone else doesn't know about the good secrets."

Learn to Fish Day was an opportunity for North Rowan Middle School student Aysir Cowan to spend time outdoors with his father Curtis B. Cowan. The event gave the elder Cowan, an East Spencer alderman, the additional benefit of experiencing an activity and engaging with employees of a municipality beyond the one where he lives and serves.

At 15, Angel Pinto was the oldest youth at Learn to Fish Day. He and his mom Yliane had enjoyed participating in the event several years



Aysir Cowan, 12, left, and his dad Curtis B. Cowan spent the morning fishing for blue gill, bass and catfis





ago. Recently while searching the City of Salisbury website for information about pickleball, Yliane saw a notice about this year's event. The two agreed to come out again. Yliane didn't grow up fishing, but her husband did. Angel acquired his appreciation of the sport from his dad.

J.D. Cruz and Catlyn Smith brought their children to Learn to Fish Day to get some sunlight. Smith hadn't been fishing since she was a

child. Cruz grew up in New York City where there are not many fishing spots. Nevertheless, he remembers having a Donald Duck fishing pole, and his sister had one with Goofy on it. Although he hasn't fished much himself, he described their daughter Briella Smith as "a little pro."

It was Briella's second time fishing at City Park, and she knew where the best spot was.

Eight years old, slight of build with blond hair and a splash of freckles across her nose, wearing a pink Pokémon sweatshirt and matching shoes, Briella didn't look like a formidable contender for a fishing prize. Yet the morning was still new, and she had already caught three. Briella immediately identified the fish as bluegills. She had honed her fishing skills with her Pappa in Pennsylvania before her family moved to Salis-



Left: Cristal Al-Sharari and her son Karam cast their fishing rod out into the lake to see what bites.

Above: A pair of Canada geese swim by a family of anglers at City Park Lake.





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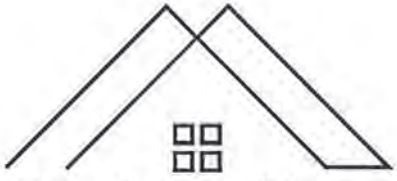


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*Eight-year-old Briella Smith
spent the day with her family
hoping to catch the big one.*



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bury last summer.

Briella's brother Colton Smith, 10, acknowledged that his sister was the better angler of the two. Despite having a broken arm, he was hoping to catch at least one. Later in the morning, he got his wish.

For those who missed Learn to Fish Day, Salisbury provides other occasions for kids to fish. During Rowan County Creek Week this September, the city once again will partner with NC Wildlife to lend fishing gear to kids at both City Park and Salisbury Community Park lakes on Water Wednesday.

New opportunities are in process as well. Brawley says, "Learn to Fish Day is just a tip of the iceberg of what we plan to do." The new City Park Fishing Club will offer workshops and group outings for young people ages 10-15. In conjunction with NC Wildlife, the city is establishing a Tackle Loaner Program so that young people new to the sport can borrow rather than purchase gear.

For families who like to fish on their own, fishing is allowed

year-round at both City Park and Salisbury Community Park lakes. A license is required for anglers ages 16 and up. The cost varies depending on the type of license. They can be purchased from local retailers who sell fishing gear or online at <https://www.gooutdoorsnorthcarolina.com/>.

Brawley wants families to create memories like the ones he made as a child. "I can recall as a youngster my grandfather would take us fishing every Friday." His goal for the Parks and Recreation Department is to get people outdoors and expose them to activities beyond cellphones and other digital technology. "Our park lakes are a treasure for the community, providing a space for recreation, education and connection with nature. We're committed to maintaining these spaces for everyone to enjoy. Whether you're an experienced angler or just looking to try something new, the lakes at City Park and Salisbury Community Park have something to offer."

A day in the park. New memories made. Old memories shared. Time well spent. **S**

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Salisbury City Council
Member Gemale Black and
his five-year-old stepson,
Josiah Williams, get ready
for a day of fishing



C'EST MAGNIFIQUE!

Anna Page, Gregor Bonnell marry in chateau near Paris

STORY : SUSAN SHINN TURNER | PHOTOGRAPHY : PASCAL VO





For nearly nine years, Anna Page worked in the fashion industry in New York City. So, when it came to her wedding, she had “very specific ideas” about her ring, her gown, even her venue.

Fortunately, she already had the perfect groom.

Anna and Gregor Bonnell, a native of France, were married May 9, 2026, at Chateau de Nainville les Roches near Paris.

“It was the blending of two cultures and languages,” her mom says, “the blending of two families, the blending of traditions. It just worked out beautifully.”

Anna is the daughter of Tommy and Mary Willis Page of Salisbury. Tommy is the longtime CFO at Cheerwine, while Mary Willis is a longtime psychologist in private practice. Some two dozen Salisbury friends and neighbors attended the event.

The Rev. Daniel Joyner Miller, senior pastor of St. John’s Lutheran Church, officiate

“I’ve never officiate a wedding quite like that,” Pastor Dan says, “and probably never will again.”

Pastor Dan first got to know Mary Willis as she was a



The rev. Daniel Joyner Miller, senior pastor of St. John’s Lutheran Church. (Photo courtesy of Taylor Hutchins)



From left, Tommy Page, Anna Page, Gregor Bonnell and Mary Willis Page.

member of his call committee.

“Mary Willis and Tommy are very involved in the ministries of St. John’s, which is wonderful,” he says. “I work with them in many capacities.”

Last fall, Mary Willis asked Pastor Dan if he spoke French, by any chance.

Nope.

“Tha’s all right,” Mary Willis said, “we’d still like you to officiate in Anna and Gregor’s wedding.”

Pastor Dan’s immediate answer: “I would be honored.”

Pastor Dan’s wife, the Rev. Kendra Joyner Miller, serves as chaplain at Catawba College. The wedding took place on graduation weekend, so she stayed in Salisbury with the couple’s three children.

After the wedding, Pastor Dan met up with a childhood friend in Paris for a couple of days.

After the wedding, Mary Willis and Tommy, too, also had a chance to relax, exploring Lyon, Avignon, and the French Riviera.

“Everyone is very pleasant and understanding

and kind,” Mary Willis says. “We’ve only had good experiences in France. We look forward to future trips.”

• • •

Paris may be The City of Light, but Anna and Gregor met in The Big Apple.

After the pandemic, Anna started using Cuculi, a social app that helps people gather for meals.

Soon, she was running the Bottomless Brunch group and did so for 17 months.

“She knows a lot of very good restaurants in the city,” Gregor says.

“Our biggest table was 15,” Anna notes.

Anna and Gregor kept seeing each other at events. The two started dating Sept. 30, 2023.

Anna, 31, is a 2013 graduate of the N.C. School of Science and Math. She graduated in 2017 from the N.C. State College of Textiles with a degree in fashion textile management with a concentration in production and design.

Meanwhile, Gregor, 29, went to grad school at Stanford University, graduating in 2022 in math-

ematics, or “maths,” as he calls it. He moved east for a job with Squarepoint Capital, with office in New York City, Houston, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, London, and Paris. He works in the Paris office when he’s there.

The couple became engaged on May 3, 2025 — and the planning began.

Gregor’s family lives in Brittany, about three hours from Paris via train, so the couple thought transportation might be a bit of a challenge. Gregor is the son of Sonja Shillito and René Bonnell. His stepfather is James Huth. He has an older sister, a younger brother and a younger sister, as well as two older half-brothers.

Anna found the chateau through an online site. Their wedding planner, Yoleine Chainon, works with the chateau. Yoleine was their point of contact for everything, and, with the six-hour time difference, was critical in putting all the pieces together for their fairytale day.

“Yoleine was very responsive and willing to overcome the distance,” Gregor says. “We are very grateful for that.”

“Having a destination wedding in another country is daunting,” Mary Willis admits. “It was so much easier with Yoleine as our wedding planner.”

Mary Willis and Anna communicated daily throughout the planning process.

“She knew what she wanted and she knew the mood she wanted to have,” Mary Willis explains.

Mary Willis, Tommy, Anna and Gregor went to France in September to meet with the chateau’s owners. The home was once owned by a duke and duchess. The duke served as a consultant to Napoleon. While the chateau is used for weddings and photography shoots, parts of it are still being renovated, Mary Willis says.

Anna chose her sister-in-law, Julie, as her matron of honor. Her bridesmaids were Kendall Valan of New York City and Katie Madden of Charlotte.

Gregor’s stepfather was best man. His groomsmen were Louis Francois, Benjamin Dalmazzone, Alessandro Cholet and Victor Bessis.

The bridesmaids wore blue and white toile, while the groomsmen wore traditional black tuxedos.

Anna’s brother, Steven, was scripture reader. He and Julie, who live in Chesapeake, Va., will welcome their first child, Ella Louise, in September.

• • •

Tommy and Mary Willis welcomed the 48 out-of-town guests with a leisurely cruise on the Seine River the night before the nuptials.

The wedding day dawned with perfect weather and temperatures in the 70s. Tommy drove Anna in a vintage Rolls-Royce which belongs to James.

Then it was time to walk down a “very long” aisle, Anna says. “It was surreal. I thought, this is happening! But I was focused on not tripping. I had to walk in a big dress (see sidebar). It was very pouff . I asked my dad to hold on to me so I didn’t trip.”

She didn’t.

The day went off perfectly, thanks to Yoleine’s 12-page timeline.

While the 5 p.m. ceremony took place outside, the guests dined indoors, which is also where the cake ceremony took place.

“The French make a big deal of the cake ceremony,” Anna points out.

The e was a champagne tower and macarons



Group from Salisbury that attended the wedding. (Submitted photo)



Engagement photo in Central Park in New York City.

and dancing — lots of dancing.

The couple made their “fake exit” for photos, and then came back for more dancing until 3 a.m.

The newlyweds returned to Italy on May 28 so that Gregor could serve as best man for Alessandro’s wedding in Capri. He was in Benjamin’s wedding in August 2024 and Victor’s wedding in September 2025.

“We wrapped our honeymoon around his wedding,” Gregor says.

Along with Capri, the couple visited Milan, Florence, Naples and Rome.

Now, Anna and Gregor are getting settled in Houston, where they moved on June 19.

“I cannot go through another New York winter,” Anna says.

“This past winter was punishing,” Gregor adds.

One thing they’ve surely already hung on the wall is an oversized Cheerwine bottle cap sign.

“The first time I went to her place, she had cases of Cheerwine,” Gregor says. “I don’t think we’d be married if I hadn’t liked it.”

...

Gregor asked Tommy and Mary Willis for permission to marry their daughter when he and Anna visited Salisbury in Easter 2025.

“We knew they had looked for a ring and we knew he’d ask us,” Tommy says.

When Anna left the room to take a shower, Gregor seized the moment.

“You know that I love your daughter,” he told them. “I want to ask Anna to marry me. I love her very much and I will take good care of her. I’d like your blessing.”

“I had to have something ready to say, and I had worked on it,” Tommy says. “I got about four words out and then Mary took over!”

All in one sentence.

“We love you so much and would love







Tommy and Anna in Rolls-Royce.



you to be a part of our family and you love her and Anna loves you and let's plan a wedding!"

Tha's exactly what they did.

"We had a budget and then it went out the window," Tommy says. "Anna had her vision."

The e were three things he said no to: fi eworks, a champagne tower — which ended up getting thrown in anyway — and special knives to cut the steak.

"Honey, do I need to cut your steak for you?"

Tommy asked his wife at one point.

No need, Mary Willis says. "It was like butter."

It wouldn't have been a wedding reception without the father-daughter dance. Tommy and Anna chose "Cinderella," by Steven Curtis Chapman — an appropriate choice.

"Anna is my princess," Mary Willis says. She's my girl."





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Say yes to the dress

STORY : SUSAN SHINN TURNER | PHOTOGRAPHY : PASCAL VO

If you live in New York City and work in the fashion industry, the obvious choice for your bridal gown is Kleinfeld's.

The store has been the site of TLC's "Say Yes to the Dress" since 2007.

Last summer, Anna Page said yes to the very first dress she tried on at Kleinfeld's.

The ballgown featured a strapless, cat's eye neckline, Basque waist and lace-up corset back with big bow. The material was floral print-on-print to create a 3-D effect. The long veil was dotted with pearls and extended beyond the train.

The gown is part of Pnina Tornai's "Love Collection" at Kleinfeld's. The Israeli designer is exclusive to the store.

Unlike some brides on the show, Anna took a small contingent with her to the 75-minute appointment: her mom, Mary Willis Page, and her two bridesmaids, Kendall Valan and Katie Madden.

And there was zero drama.

She tried on four gowns and showed the group three.

It didn't take her long to choose.

Then her sales associate asked the three important questions.

"Do you want to try on any more dresses?"

"No."

"Do you see yourself walking down the aisle to your fiancé in this dress?"

"Yes."

"So, Anna, are you saying yes to the dress?"

Anna squealed, "Yes!"

"Then they brought out champagne," Anna says. "It was magical." **[S]**





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