954

EVERY SQUARE MILE OF COLUMBUS COUNTY

Celebrating 10 Years of 954 Magazine | 2013 - 2023

‘Uptown’ builder is ‘small-town girl’

Career in Forestry

Painted barn quilts

Spring & Summer 2023
$5.99

UNC HEALTH Southeastern

Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy Helps Patients Maintain Quality of Life

James Galbreath, 85, of Red Springs, has been dealing with an injury to his foot for more than 15 years. Because he has numbness in his feet due to diabetes, he did not immediately know that a nail pierced through his shoe to puncture a hole in his foot. At that time, he underwent his first round of successful Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy (HBOT) treatment at Southeastern Wound Healing Center, an affiliate of UNC Health Southeastern which is managed by Healogics.

Three months ago, Galbreath re-injured his foot and, because it would not heal due to complications from diabetes, his podiatrist referred him back to Southeastern Wound Healing Center to save his foot and promote healing through the benefits of HBOT.

According to Southeastern Wound Healing Center Medical Director Dr. Karl Moo Young, HBOT treatment has most likely prevented an amputation of Galbreath's foot.

"HBOT allows blood plasma to carry up to 20 times the normal amount of healing oxygen, which increases blood flow to the wound and increases capillary formation on the wound bed," said Dr. Moo Young. "We use HBOT mainly for patients who have diabetic wounds or foot ulcers, radiation injuries, traumatic or acute injuries, progressive skin infections and narrowed blood vessels, which reduce blood flow to the limbs. The typical course of treatment is five days per week for six weeks."

Galbreath continues to visit the center weekly for maintenance care for his foot. His wife, Betty, has been his constant companion for his frequent visits to the center, and they enjoy the friendly and fun-spirted atmosphere that the wound healing team offer to patients.

"I've never seen nurses and staff so good," said James Galbreath. "I like to see people enjoy their job and they are so friendly. I could enjoy them every day!"

Patients may self-refer to Southeastern Wound Healing Center for most services unless a referral is required by their insurance carrier.

UNCHealthSE.org

James Galbreath and his wife, Betty, of Red Springs, credit the care James has received using Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy at Southeastern Wound Healing Center with saving his foot from amputation due to a non-healing wound.

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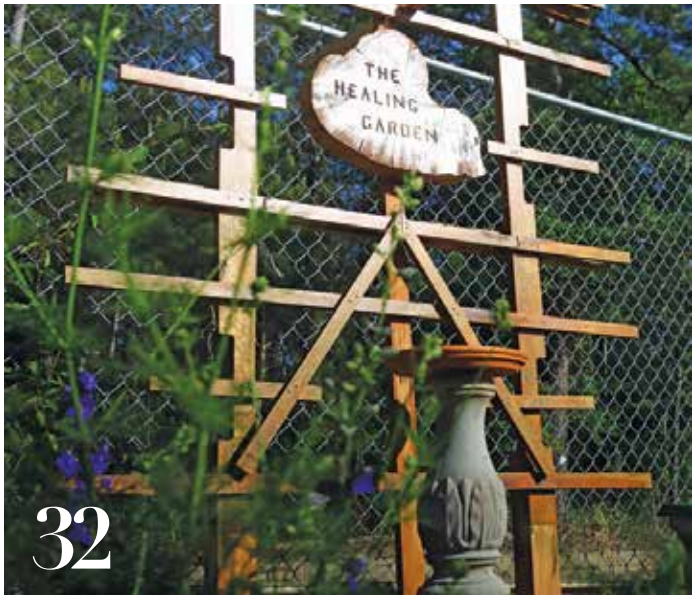

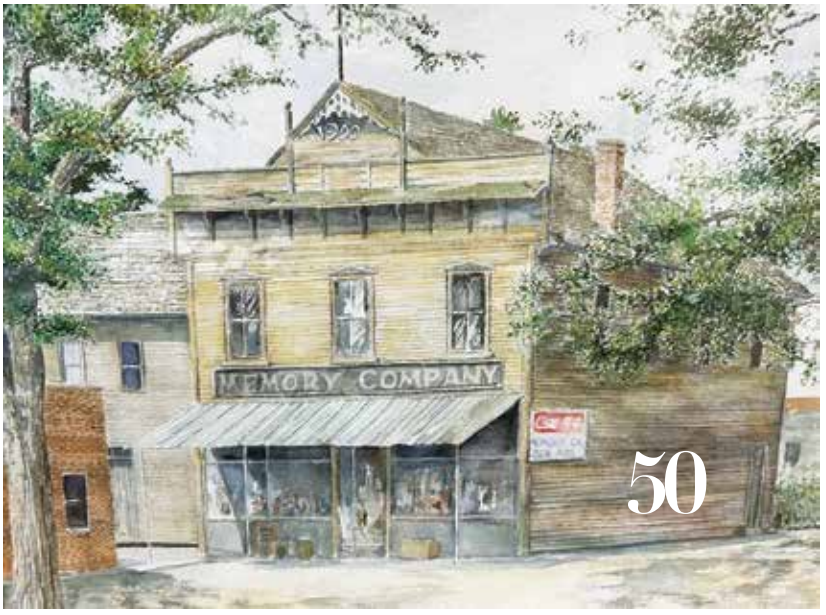

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Celebrating 10 Years of 954 Magazine | 2013 - 2023

KATE CARTER LEE
FAIR BLUFF UPTOWN PROJECT
COVER PHOTO BY GRANT MERRITT

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WHITEVILLE, NC

910.642.4104

954 EDITOR

STUART HIGH ROGERS

LAYOUT & GRAPHIC DESIGN

JANIS CREECH

ADVERTISING

AMELIA SASSER • DEAN LEWIS

TJ ENZOR • JANIS CREECH

CONTRIBUTING EDITORIAL

DIANA MATTHEWS

GRANT MERRITT • STUART ROGERS • IVEY SCHOFIELD

BILL THOMPSON • MARI B. THOMPSON

JOSEPH WILLIAMS

COPY EDITING

DIANA MATTHEWS

954 PHOTOGRAPHERS

GRANT MERRITT

JOSEPH WILLIAMS

'Uptown' builder is 'small-town girl'

story Diana Matthews
photos Grant Merritt

On an April morning in Fair Bluff, carpenters were preparing joists to support the second floor of a new business center across from the town hall and Methodist church. Standing at the high end of Main Street, the eight storefronts of "Uptown" will replace the riverside downtown ruined by flooding after hurricanes Matthew and Florence.

It's taken years to obtain funding and land for the recovery project, but, once shovels went into the ground in October 2022, progress has been steady.

The woman who keeps the materials coming, the bills paid and the crews working is Kate Carter Lee, vice president of Graka Builders in Whiteville. If her company can complete "Uptown" as scheduled, "It will be a nice Christmas present for Fair Bluff," she said.

Lee has managed construction of car washes, a fire station, ABC stores, medical offices and some of the largest churches in the area. She's handled renovations at the N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences at Whiteville, Southeastern Community College and UNC Pembroke.

"No two jobs are alike," she said. For instance, "Uptown" is only her second project with an elevator.

"I go to the job site two or three times a week," Lee said. "If there are any problems," she said, "we try to answer that question in house. If we can't, we take architecture questions to the architect, plumbing questions to the plumbing engineer."

Between site visits, "I stay in constant communication with my superintendent." That's Adrian Merritt, who stays on site all week, overseeing subcontractors. "I ask him, 'How's everything going today?'" Lee said. If supplies don't arrive for a planned step, "I try to make progress somewhere else," she said, and "keep things moving."

Elected officials and representatives from the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration join designers and builders to turn spadefuls of dirt in October 2022 on the site of Fair Bluff's future "Uptown" business district.

Turning an architect's vision into reality takes knowledge of the construction trades and the ability to communicate with designers and subcontractors. Scheduling software helps Lee create a timeline that plots every step from digging footings to installing drywall, plus all the mandatory inspections along the way.

The Fair Bluff project, funded with $6 million in state and federal grants, requires intensive reporting of payroll, billing, sales tax and insurance. It also requires 160,000 bricks.

"There will be five different colors of brick on the front," Lee said. In the weeks before bricklaying would begin, Lee was securing "masonry accessories, ties, flashing, mortar nets — lots of little components. I make sure the mason has what he needs for his job."

'A man's world'

"I'm just a small-town girl," the builder said in an interview with *954 Magazine*. "I'm one of the very few in my class who came back."

After graduating from Whiteville High School in 2001, Kate Carter attended Peace College for a year. Before long she realized she wanted to transfer to East Carolina University to study construction management.

She had missed the freshman level courses in her chosen major, but that summer she took courses at Southeastern Community College; once she was at ECU, she "fast-tracked to catch up," she said. Carter finished her degree in 2005 in the same class she would've started with if she'd gone there in 2001.

Out of more than 400 students in the university's construction management program, "There were only seven girls," she said. Although lacking hands-on construction experience that many of the male students had, the women worked to earn respect in a field that was then, and still is now "a man's world," she said.

When doing class projects, "The male students want-

Carpenters install 2 by 4 nailers atop steel joists to support the upper floor.

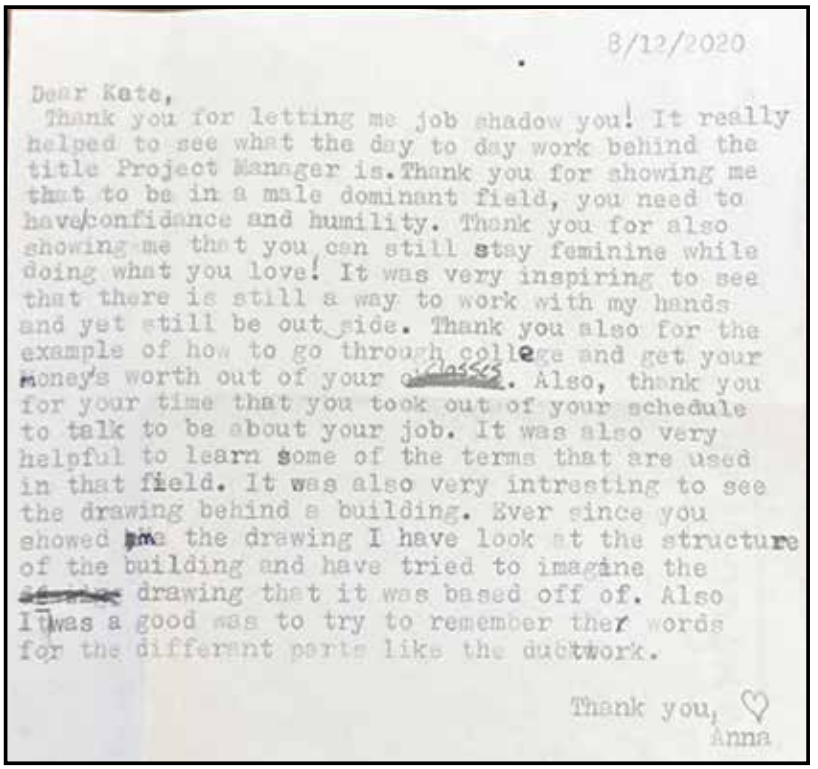
ed a girl on their team," she said. "We worked a little bit harder."

As a student, Carter always wore long pants, never shorts or a skirt, to construction management classes and activities so people would recognize "my brain, not my body," she said. Even in 2023, she said, female construction specialists "work harder to show that we're capable. It will always be like that. It will never change."

During Carter's junior year, her dedication attracted the attention of the nationwide Whiting-Turner Contracting Company. "Their representative had been watching several of us," she said. "He told me, 'Next year I'd like you to do an internship with us.'"

Carter accepted the invitation and spent 10 weeks in a paid internship in Charlotte the summer before her senior year. "I loved the company," she said. "They treated me well," assigning her tasks like the ones she does today at Graka. Whiting-Turner offered Carter "a wonderful opportunity" to work with them after graduation. "If it weren't for the love of this town and the love of my family, I would've stayed

A pair of carpenters use a lift to reach the joists.



8/12/2020

Dear Kate,

Thank you for letting me job shadow you! It really helped to see what the day to day work behind the title Project Manager is. Thank you for showing me that to be in a male dominant field, you need to have confidance and humility. Thank you for also showing me that you can still stay feminine while doing what you love! It was very inspiring to see that there is still a way to work with my hands and yet still be out side. Thank you also for the example of how to go through college and get your money's worth out of your classes. Also, thank you for your time that you took out of your schedule to talk to be about your job. It was also very helpful to learn some of the terms that are used in that field. It was also very intresting to see the drawing behind a building. Ever since you showed me the drawing I have look at the structure of the building and have tried to imagine the drawing that it was based off of. Also It was a good was to try to remember ther words for the different parts like the ductwork.

Thank you, ♡
Anna

Lee received this letter from a teen she had mentored and encouraged.

Every step of construction requires attention to the designer's drawings, Graka superintendent Adrian Merritt, left, said. He and Lee discuss upstairs expansions to "Uptown," which have become necessary because the site has attracted more tenants than can fit into the first floor.

there," she said.

What swayed her was that, "My dad told me, 'I want you in the family business.' How do you say no to that?"

Back home

"My dad's father was A.G. Carter Jr.," Lee said. A general contractor in Whiteville, he built many homes, Whiteville High School's 1961 classroom building and Legion Stadium.

"My dad is A.G. Carter III, but he goes by Buster," she said. Buster Carter broke off from his father's company and started Graka in the mid '80s, naming it after his children Graham and Kate. Buster Carter's brother Jerry Carter worked at Graka for a time, and Genie Carter, Buster Carter's wife, is secretary of the company.

In 2005 Kate Carter managed the rebuilding of Williams Township School after the historic building burned down. "That was my first job out of college," she said. "Man, was it a doozy."

The facility is "bigger than it looks from the road," she said, and she had to work with people on the design end who were skeptical of her qualifications. "My dad was behind me," she said. "I tried to do my very best, but I was so nervous I developed a dental problem from the tension in my jaw. Driving from Whiteville to Williams Township, I would count the light poles and road reflectors with my teeth."

Herman McPherson from Beaverdam was "a wonderful superintendent" on that job. "I couldn't have done it without Herman and my office manager, Ashley Duff," she said.

"If I was ever going to get scared away, that was the job to do it. I hung in and worked to show that I could do this."

Although more confident these days, Lee doesn't pretend to know it all. "There will always be men out there who worked in the field who

The exterior of "Uptown" will use 160,000 bricks in at least five colors to visually separate the individual storefronts. Adams Engineering Company designed the new business center to have a vintage feel similar to the flood-damaged downtown it will replace.

When "Uptown" is completed, bricks will cover the wood seen in the photo above.

"Uptown" will be a 25,000-square-foot shell building with eight separate business units. Tenants can upfit them for restaurant, retail or office space or other business purposes.

know more than I will know. Going to the job site, I learn something every day."

"If [subcontractors] ask me a question I don't know how to answer, I'll say I don't know and I'll go find out," she said.

In 2017 Kate Carter married Chad Lee, a South Columbus graduate she'd known since they met on a church retreat during high school. She took on his name but kept her own: "I had established a name in the business. Everyone knew me as Kate Carter," she said. They have a 5-year-old son, Major, and a 3-year-old daughter, Kimball.

On the job, she calls her father Buster. He retired three years ago but still performs estimates part time and is president of the corporation. It's a competitive field, and, like any contractor, Graka sometimes invests weeks of work estimating a job and preparing a bid on a contract that it doesn't win. "If I don't get it," Lee said, "I hope [our local competitors] do."

Lee said she and her father "don't like to cut corners if we're putting our name on it. Cheaper is not always better."

On the other hand, "We don't turn our noses up at a job because it's messy. I'd love to pick and choose, but I've got to keep a company going."

Lee finds it rewarding to see a project "go from nothing to 'Bam!'" and know it's meeting a need in the community. As a member of Whiteville's First Baptist Church, she worships in a sanctuary put up by her grandfather. Her father built the church's education building, and she helped him restore the steeple.

As far as "Uptown," Lee said at its groundbreaking that she and her team were "honored to be part of a revitalization project such as this, which will provide jobs and work to local subcontractors" at the same time it creates a new home for business in Fair Bluff.

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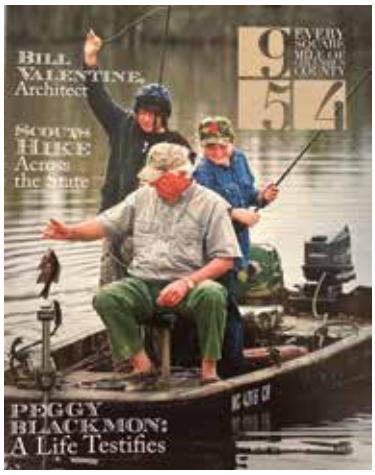
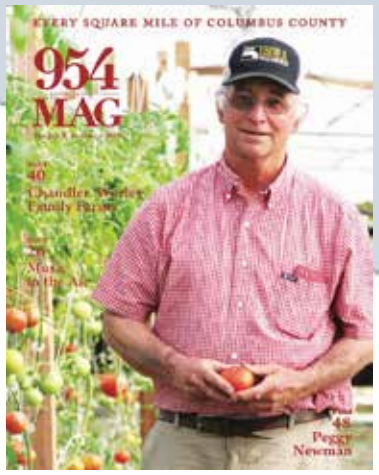
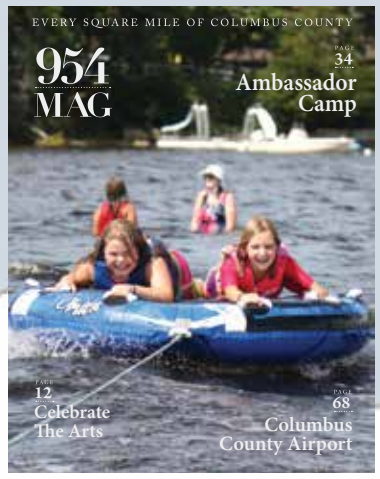
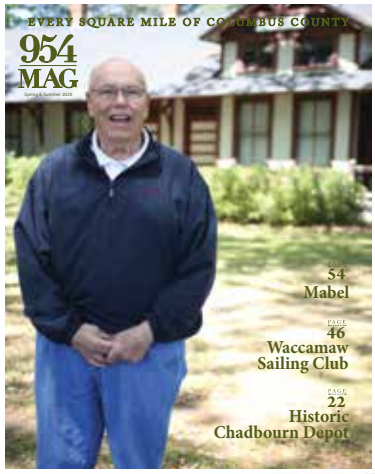


We are proud to celebrate the people, places and history of Columbus County in 954. Thank you to all the contributors and advertisers who have supported this endeavor over the past decade. We are excited about building on the magazine's legacy for years to come.

- Justin Smith, Publisher
The News Reporter







Celebrating 10 Years of 954 Magazine

From left to right: Glenn Williams, Rodney Fowler and Ricky Hughes stand ready with their metal detecting equipment in hand.

This sleigh bell would've been used, Glenn Williams said, to let nighttime passersby know that a horse and carriage was making its way down the road. He and his metal detecting buddies have collected a wide range of artifacts during expeditions around the area.

'Grown people having kid times'

Metal detecting trio bond over shared hobby

STORY Joseph Williams

PHOTOS Joseph Williams & Submitted

After a late morning stop in Whiteville for breakfast to go, Ricky Hughes and Rodney Fowler climbed back into Glenn Williams' truck. Williams pulled out onto U.S. 701 and turned the wheels north towards Bladen County. All three men were eagerly anticipating what they hoped would be some prime hunting grounds. I followed in my Toyota.

But the spot they'd be hunting that day wasn't just any ordinary patch of woods. And their prey was no ordinary prey.

With their metal detectors stowed in the truck bed, you could say they were hunting for history.

That day, the three were headed to Owen Hill, an antebellum plantation once owned by former North Carolina governor John Owen. Albert Shaw, a tree farmer with deep roots in Bladen County, owns the place now with his brother-in-law.

Shaw welcomed us as we arrived.

My little sedan surely couldn't survive the terrain farther into the woods. Thankfully, Shaw allowed me to climb aboard his pickup truck, where I was met with Johnny Cash crooning softly over the radio as we began to bump-bump-bump our way along a winding stretch of road deeper and deeper into the woods.

Williams, Fowler and Hughes followed behind.

En route to our destination, Shaw told me how enamored he was with the property. "It's the most beautiful place I ever laid eyes on," he reckoned.

As lovely as I myself found the forest, however, we weren't here for the wonder around us; we were here for the wonders below us.

What drew Williams, Fowler and Hughes out into the middle of the wilderness a county away was an abandoned cart road on this historic plantation, which Shaw said would have been used to transport goods around the property — and we were arriving there now.

Our convoy parked. The three disembarked and readied their metal detectors.

There's no telling what could be buried just inches beneath our feet.

'Fell into place'

Ironically enough, the only discovery worth mentioning from this unlucky outing was a rusted horseshoe. But, "You never know who was riding that horse," Fowler mused.

Williams seconded the story-telling sentiment. Part of the fun in these metal-detecting adventures, he admitted, was that whatever you find "can be whatever you want it to be."

But mere fanciful speculation doesn't fly with these fellows. These three also do their research.

In addition to consulting a variety of reference materials, they utilize an online forum of metal detecting enthusiasts to help verify their finds.

As for the lackluster day at Shaw's site, the three just shrugged it off. Such a day isn't uncommon in the metal-detecting world, explained Hughes. "For every good target, you'll probably dig a hundred pieces of junk," he told me.

And besides, the three have already amassed quite the collection: from Revolutionary War-era cannon balls to 16th-century Spanish coinage, they've found it all.

Fowler presents a horseshoe he found while on a metal-detecting hunt. Fowler says Ricky Hughes and Glenn Williams, his metal-detecting buddies, dubbed him "Lucky" for his uncanny ability to find things the others can't.

Left: Williams kicks away dirt and dried leaves as he prepares to sink his shovel into the soil to unearth a buried target. Right: After displacing a few shovelfuls of dirt, Hughes pokes and prods through the loose soil with a metal-detecting pinpointer, held in his right hand, to help him find a tiny target with greater precision.

Hughes said he found this early 20th century cameo piece, which he believes would have been attached to a necklace, after an underwater dig.

Williams believes this wax seal stamp to be about 300 years old. He understands that the owner would have used it to seal correspondence.

These iron padlocks, which Williams said dated to either the late 17th or early 18th century, would have been used to keep buildings secure.

"Persistence pays off," said Hughes.

And he would know. He's been metal detecting for a while.

Hughes says he first "got the bug" for the hobby one unforgettable day in sixth grade. A museum with a traveling exhibit had stopped to visit his school. Seeing the historical coins, old uniforms and even a cannonball — all just within reach — left a profound impression on the young Hughes. "It just set me on fire," he said.

But until he was old enough to buy his own metal detector, he would have to bide his time.

In the interim, "I would buy these catalogs," Hughes said, and he would wistfully flip through the pages, gazing at different metal detector models and price tags — until one day he finally earned enough money to purchase one for himself.

He said he would often go metal detecting with his dad.

But when his father passed away, "I got out of it," said Hughes. "He was my hunting buddy." Years passed as dust collected on Hughes' old metal detecting gear. "I didn't hunt for probably 12 or 13 years or better," he said.

That changed about three years ago when Hughes convinced his fishing buddy, Fowler, to join him on a hunt.

At first, Fowler wasn't interested in tiny trinkets, like buttons and other ornamental finds, Hughes said. But nowadays, "He'll about kill you for a button!" Hughes joked.

Then along came Williams, retired after a long career in the N.C. Forest Service, who had, like Hughes, been metal detecting since his teenage years in the Castle Hayne area.

"It all just kind of fell in place," Hughes said, recalling the origins of the trio — and the three have been metal detecting together, nearly every weekend without fail, ever since.

The engraved flower of this translucent red brooch, dated to the mid-19th century, can be seen more easily when exposed directly to a light.

The 'essentials'

No one ever said metal detecting was the leisurely walk through the woods it may appear to be. Problems can come in forms as small as ticks or as big as bears, the three personally attest, and it's important to come prepared.

If you decide to try your hand at the hobby, first things first: Courtesy is a must.

"We never hunt anywhere we don't have permission," began Hughes, who recommends you shouldn't either. And wherever the three go, Williams added, "We leave it like we find it."

As for what quality of metal detector to get, "It's the man behind the machine, not always the machine," cautioned Williams. But "a good pinpointer is a must," said Hughes, for isolating a target after it's been dug.

And after walking around in the woods all day, you're sure to work up an appetite.

On a typical outing, the three may pack a grab bag of goodies consisting of water, Gatorade, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and other ready-to-eat drinks and snacks. However, on special occasions, like birthdays, you might get treated to "a can of Viennas with a candle in it," said Hughes, recalling how Fowler and Williams celebrated his birthday once on a hunt in the woods.

But of all the essentials to bring along with you, it was apparent that you should bring, above all, a friend or two. Following the buddy system isn't just safer than going it alone, but it's also just plain more fun.

"We're grown people having kid times again," said Fowler, with the lot of them "jumping ditches and crawling in and out of holes," Williams interjected.

"We three are good friends," said Hughes, "and we have a blast."

Susan Murray of Dunn, left, commissioned Deanna Shuman to paint this double cardinal barn quilt.

Shuman designs each barn quilt with colors and elements that have special meaning to her customers.

Deanna Shuman's painted 'quilts'

story Stuart Rogers
photos Deanna Shuman

Columbus County native and longtime educator Deanna Shuman found the perfect creative outlet to explore during her retirement in the increasingly popular art of modern barn quilt design and painting.

Shuman is a graduate of Whiteville High School and Campbell University and earned her master's degree in school administration from UNC Wilmington. She has a daughter, Kelsey Shuman, who lives in Carrollton, Georgia. For 20 years she served as principal of Edgewood Elementary and Chadbourn Elementary and spent her last two years prior to retirement at Williams Township serving as assistant principal. While she was working at Williams Township, the art teacher invited her to teach the art of barn quilts. Shuman was able to put her teaching skills to use and developed lessons showing students the ways she uses math every time she draws a pattern. She demonstrated to students the importance of drawing straight lines, discussed the various angles that make up patterns and demonstrated the concept of symmetry in patterns. She said students enjoyed creating their own barn quilts while she was showing them how math is important in everyday tasks.

Barn quilt painting is a precise art. The design is measured out with a yardstick in a grid pattern, then drawn in with a pencil and taped with painter's tape onto a square panel. Shuman explained, "I have used exterior grade plywood as my base, but my favorite material is compressed aluminum that Jonathan Medford, owner of Mr. Postman in Whiteville, special orders for me in 4 feet by 8 feet sheets and cuts to size." Barn quilts are traditionally displayed outside of barns, but they are becoming increasingly popular hung on fences, porches, carports or outdoor buildings, inside homes,

and on business fronts.

Shuman says, "I painted my first barn quilt in 2020 and was hooked." She usually designs and paints quilts that are 2 feet by 2 feet, 3 feet by 3 feet, or 4 feet by 4 feet square. At this time the largest size she has painted is 4 feet by 4 feet, but she says she would welcome the challenge of painting a 6 feet by 6 feet square or even 8 feet by 8 feet. "It takes me three to five days to complete a simple design," she said, "but I have spent as many as 30 hours just taping off a large, more intricate design." Her barn quilt paintings are stunning, with crisp designs that incorporate deep, bright colors and meaningful elements. Each piece is custom-made and tells a story.

Creating a barn quilt design is a precise art. Several steps in the process include prepping the base with primer, marking the design with tape, and finally painting.

Several of her pieces feature a bright red cardinal that represents a lost family member and refers to the saying that,"When a cardinal appears, an angel is near." Shuman said, "Each state in the U.S. and each national park has its own unique quilt block design, and I get a lot of requests to paint barn quilts featuring the North Carolina Star quilt block painted in red, white and blue."

Barn quilt designs can be painted directly on the exterior of a barn or on panels that are hung inside or outside. Shuman said, "Commercial businesses are taking advantage of the barn quilt popularity by incorporating their logo in the design and hanging it outside as a unique marker for their business."

Colonists brought the idea of barn quilts with them to America almost 300 years ago. Painting an entire barn was too expensive for most colonists, and painting quilt-like squares directly on the barn's exterior was an affordable and decorative way to identify a family farm and serve as a direction marker for travelers. Particular elements used in the design were thought to protect the farm and bring good fortune. At the time, most families had a unique quilt pattern that was passed down from generation to generation.

In 2001, Donna Sue Groves of Manchester, Ohio, painted a barn quilt square on the family barn to honor her mother's love of quilting. Soon thereafter, 20 of Groves' friends painted quilt designs on their own barns, and from there the modern barn quilt trail movement took off. Now there are 46 barn quilt trails in North America, and the number is growing.

North Carolina Star barn quilt

Nearby Sampson County is the self-proclaimed barn quilt capital of North Carolina, and tourists enjoy searching the countryside in search of the 233 barn quilts mapped out on the county's barn quilt trail. Barn quilts on an official "barn trail" are required to be 2 feet by 2 feet or larger and must be outside and visible from the road. Most exterior barn quilts average 6 feet by 6 feet and 8 feet by 8 feet.

Shuman is a patient person, a good listener and a natural teacher. These attributes come in handy when planning and completing a barn quilt project. She explained, "Each piece is custom-made, incorporating the size, design and colors requested by the recipient. My barn quilts are hanging across the country in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, New York, Arkansas, Colorado, California and Illinois."

Completing a barn quilt project is a tedious process. "The steps include cutting the base material to size, sanding it smooth, then wiping the surface clean," Shuman explained. "Once the surface is prepped, I paint it with one or two coats of exterior primer, measure and draw the quilt pattern, then tape the pattern. Finally, the piece is ready to paint with exterior paint with a durable finish."

Shuman is a fan of Talara Parrish from West Jefferson, one of North Carolina's favorite barn quilt artists. Parrish has created over 3,000 quilt designs and has published a series of books for beginner and advanced barn quilt artists called Barn Quilt Addiction. She is an ambassador of the barn quilt movement and is very supportive of new artists. Parrish and Shuman have collaborated on several designs, and Shuman is one of 48 talented artists nationally that Parrish has endorsed as part of her Barn Quilt Headquarters.

Check out Parrish's website, barnquiltheadquarters.com, to see some of her amazing designs. Shuman often refers clients to this resource when they need help selecting a pattern for their barn quilts.

In late May, Shuman is teaching her first barn quilt design class, where students will learn how to draw, tape and paint a pattern themselves. She says, "I never imagined my retirement project would allow me to use my teaching skills. I am excited about the opportunity. "I am interested in fostering the Columbus County Barn Quilt Trail that the late Kip Godwin was working to establish before he died." Godwin passed in 2021 and was well known in the county for his work with nonprofits, fundraising and grant writing.

Shuman is currently working with a group of six barn quilt artists to plan a barn quilt artist retreat that will be held in West Jefferson in July. At the retreat artists will attend sessions on topics such as how to draw a point-based design versus a grid-based design, how to transfer an image to a barn quilt, and how to market their work. Shuman said she's looking forward to meeting other barn quilt artists from across the country and learning new techniques she can add to her painting. Locally, Shuman has been invited to speak and share her barn quilts with Whiteville Rotary Club and the Bladen County Delta Kappa Gamma sorority.

Barn quilts are much more than just intricate designs for display painted in a kaleidoscope of colors; they serve to document the stories of families and businesses for future generations. Shuman's mission is to keep those stories alive in Columbus County as a barn quilt artist and advocate. To see more of Shuman's work visit her Facebook page, Deanna's Delightful Barn Quilt Designs.

Barn quilt designs can include company logos and initials.

Shuman with well-known barn quilt artist Talara Parrish of West Jefferson, North Carolina.

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954 Finds

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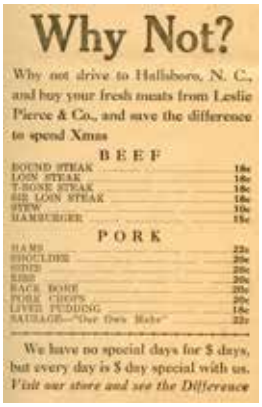

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Waccamaw Siouan tribe elders Sue Jacobs and Darlene Graham explain that the tribe believes all of their healing begins with Jesus and the Cross. Plant beds in the healing garden include a Biblical bed that includes plants such as tarragon, garlic, pomegranate and bee balm. The garden also includes pollinator beds and medicinal plant beds.

The Waccamaw Siouan Healing Green Space
brings back medicines and memories

story Ivey Schofield, Border Belt Independent
photos Grant Merritt

As a child, Darlene Graham would use catnip for stomach aches and tobacco for bee stings. But as an adult, she stopped incorporating the medicinal practices her people, the Waccamaw Siouan Tribe, had been using for centuries.

Then in 2019, Graham got involved with the North Carolina Native American Ethnobotany Project, which works with Indigenous communities across the state to reaffirm relationships with their native plants, which are plants local to Columbus County that the group's ancestors have used for generations. As a result, she and Sue Jacobs, another member of the Waccamaw Siouan Tribe, started the Healing Green Space.

Youth in the tribe volunteer in the Healing Green Space garden and the tribal sharing vegetable garden. Other youth programs include a summer camp; stargazing evenings; cooking over an open fire; and time to listen, learn and share in the Talking Circle located in the garden.

Purse woven from cattails grown on the tribal grounds

The shells in Graham's necklace represent the coastal region. The necklace with the wooden flower medallion represents the tribe's relationship with the woodlands.

Jacobs' daughter made these earrings from saltwater Dentalia shells, beads and tiny mussel shells from Lake Waccamaw.

Waccamaw Siouan tribe members Sue Jacobs and Darlene Graham braid sweet grass grown in the Healing Green Space garden. The two friends started the garden after Graham became involved with the North Carolina Native American Ethnobotany Project.

A tribe member made a sign that says "People of the the Falling Star" and placed it at the foot of a cross in the garden to symbolize healing. The Waccamaw Siouan tribe is known as the "People of the Falling Star," based on a story passed down through generations.

"It was like a gift was stirred up with me," said Graham, who has since discovered that her great-grandfather was a plant doctor for the tribe. Located on the tribal grounds in St. James, the Healing Green Space is home to a variety of herbs, including catnip, elderberry, sassafras and mullein, that are native to the Waccamaw Siouan Tribe and can be used as ailments for soothing a baby's colic, strengthening the immune system or lowering a fever.

"The community members had a lot of interest in revitalization and bringing back some of our medicinal plants," Jacobs said. "We just wanted to start from there and bring in just a few plants. Then it started growing more and more."

The Healing Green Space is also a gathering space, where community members can meditate, feel connected with their spirituality and hear stories about the tribe from their elders.

"This place is not only a [physical] healing place," Jacobs said. "It's a mental and spiritual healing place."

Tammy Patrick, treasurer of the tribal council, visits the green space two to three times a week. As a volunteer, she said she enjoys trimming the herbs, pulling the weeds and getting the space ready for each season.

"It's so refreshing," she said, "and such a pleasure to be there."

Patrick said her mother would give her sassafras tea whenever she was in pain when she was growing up. But as an adult she had lost touch with the medicinal practices – knowledge that she said would've been helpful during her children's ear infections.

"If you can take plants from God and make medicines to heal us, why not do it the natural way?" Patrick said.

Graham's husband, Mike Graham, handles heavy garden maintenance and tractor work, such as preparing the tribal garden for planting. He says, "My wife loves it here. She tells me all the time, 'Mike, can you stop by the garden today?'"

Carrying on the tradition

The key to preserving these medicinal practices is by teaching the next generation about them, tribal members say.

In 2019, the space hosted a six-week summer camp for children to learn about herbs and tribal stories. In 2020, eight tribal youth were hired to help maintain the space and map the surrounding wetlands. This summer, middle and high school students will be able to create a business plan while creating art that comes from the space, like weaving baskets and making pottery.

Shirley Freeman, a member of the Waccamaw Siouan tribe who supports the Healing Green Space, said it has helped bridge the gap between young and old members of the Waccamaw Siouan Tribe, since everyone can go there to plant and talk with one another.

"I think the Great Creator walked us to going to the [ethnobotany] meeting to learn about plants and bringing them back onto tribal grounds, so our children could identify with this and be able to tell the stories that have been passed down from generation to generation," Freeman said.

Tribal members also say they are glad the young children at the daycare next door will grow up around the herbs and traditional practices.

Jacobs helps plant several round "three sisters" garden plots each season. In this companion planting method, the "sister" vegetables help sustain each other. "Sister Corn" is planted first in the center of the round plot, then "Sister Bean" planted around the corn. Beans produce the nitrogen corn needs while the corn supports the climbing bean tendrils. "Sister Squash" is planted around the perimeter of the circle to help preserve ground moisture and control weeds.

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"We hope that if we start our babies off and teach them these things, it will close that gap where a lot of our other children weren't taught," Patrick said.

The tribe is currently working on expanding the daycare to accommodate even more children, Patrick said.

Plans for the future

The tribe also wants to create a greenhouse to grow fruits and vegetables that can feed their community and help supply the food pantry next door.

The Nature Conservancy is helping restore a large natural area so that native plants can return and thrive on the tribal grounds. Sundew (above), swamp sunflowers, indigo and maypop are all plants that have started taking root.

Graham and Jacobs organize educational opportunities for youth in the tribe and the community with help from a grant made by The Louise Oriole Burevitch Endowment managed by The North Carolina Community Foundation. The grant funds leadership education and entrepreneurship skills to help the youth cultivate a renewed sense of power over their future.

Tribe members help plant and harvest a large garden each year. Some of the harvest is shared with seniors within the community. Southeastern Community College, Bladen Community College, the Cooperative Extension agencies, UNC Pembroke Museum of the Southeast American Indian, USDA Farm Service Agency, N.C. State University and the UNC American Indian Center are just a few of the agencies that have offered their expertise and grants to expand the Healing Green Space project.

Ultimately, Graham said she hopes the medicinal herbs, along with freshly grown vegetables and fruits, at the Healing Green Space will better the health of the Waccamaw Siouan Tribe.

Native Americans experience higher rates of diabetes, heart disease and substance misuse disorders than other racial groups, according to the National Congress of American Indians. They also live on average almost six years less than other races.

"That's something we plan to look at," Graham said. "It all comes down to healthy eating."

Freeman said she hopes the herbs from the Healing Green Space will one day be federally approved as safe for all sick people to use.

"Let's grow it to the point that it can be a medicine everyone can have on their shelves," she said.

The green space has already caught the attention of people outside the tribe, Freeman said. The volunteers have been to UNC-Chapel Hill and Whiteville to discuss their findings.

And the tribe continues to discover new plants to add to their collection. Soon they will be able to return the Venus flytrap from Lake Waccamaw to their tribal grounds.

Freeman said she was excited, since her ancestors used to live at the lake.

"[The Healing Space] is bringing back memories," she said," and it's bringing back medicines."

Waccamaw Siouan Tribal Grounds are located at 7239 Old Lake Rd. in the Buckhead community of Bolton. The 2023 Waccamaw Siouan Pow Wow celebrating the culture and traditions of the tribe will be held Friday, Oct. 21, and Saturday, Oct. 22. School Day is Friday, Oct. 20. Visit waccamaw-siouan.org for more information.

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A career in forestry

Deans details life in trapping, reality TV and timber management

story Grant Merritt
photos Grant Merritt & Submitted

Self-described "lifetime outdoorsman" John Deans says he found it "satisfying and rewarding" to raise his family in Whiteville. During more than 20 years of scouting, he instilled a love for being outside in his two sons, Drake and Tim.

Deans' family's recreational pursuits meshed well with the active and hands-on nature of his career in forestry. His 35-plus years as a forester have taught him that balance is key in everything.

Getting started

In 1979, Deans' parents moved their family to Whiteville from Laurens, S.C. John Deans graduated from Whiteville High School the following spring and then attended Southeastern Community College. Under the instruction of Bill Ball and Al Phillips, Deans completed his associate degree in forest management at SCC in 1983.

After discovering that almost none of his SCC credits at that time would transfer to N.C. State University, Deans decided to join the workforce. Deans said he submitted 250 resumes and received replies from three employers. Of those three, he chose to work for Continental Can in McKenney, Va., as a timber buyer for a sawmill for one year.

Deans measures the diameter of the tree to make an assessment to see if it's ready to be harvested.

Deans with a sound technician while filming the Discovery Channel reality show "Swamp Loggers." To the right of Deans is Bobby Goodson, who was featured along with his swamp logging business in the show. (R) Pines are the most widely harvested trees in southeastern North Carolina.

While Deans was working at Continental Can, Georgia Pacific bought out his employer in 1984, and he continued to work for GP for another year.

He says he found his next job "just by word of mouth, by pure coincidence, from people I knew in Virginia who knew people in Wrightsville Beach who knew the Corbett family in Wilmington," Deans explained. "They were looking for a forester. I called Corbett Timber Company in Wilmington, got an interview and they hired me."

In 1986, Deans moved back to Whiteville to work for Corbett Timber Company, and he has been there ever since. At his job, he played two roles: one as a timber buyer and one in forest management. Deans was in charge of distributing timber to Georgia Pacific, Federal Paper Company and International Paper in Columbus County. He helped manage the 60,000 acres of forest land that Corbett Timber Company owned in southeastern North Carolina.

One of Deans' first responsibilities in forest management involved two filing cabinets full of deeds and maps. He was tasked with finding timber tracts ready for harvesting, marking their boundary lines and estimating the timber value of the land.

"So, I was out combing the countryside with these maps and deeds while trying to find all of this land," Deans said. "That took about five years and went all the way from Sampson County down to Brunswick County."

With eight counties to cover in total — Sampson, Onslow, Duplin, Pender, Bladen, New Hanover, Columbus and Brunswick — Deans said his job became nothing but land management after that five-year period. He focused on identifying tracts of timber for logging and transport. After the tracts were cleared, Deans worked to prep the sites to be replanted.

"That's been my main job for the last 30 years," Deans said. "I plan on retiring in either 2028 or 2029. We've hired two new guys now, and one of them will take over what I've been doing."

Reality TV show

The hardwood swamps along the Black and Cape Fear rivers attracted the attention of film production companies involved with Discovery Channel's reality TV show "Swamp Loggers." The show ran from 2009 to 2012. Deans appeared on the show as a forester, and his role was to provide bad news to Bobby Goodson about issues arising from logging the hardwood swamps of Pender County.

"If a hydraulic hose busted, it was like a major deal," Deans explained. "It was like they dramatized it as much as they could, but that show did show some basic principles of forestry."

Deans described seeing himself on TV as "weird." Knowing the show's large viewership and what the show portrayed, Deans said he didn't try to capitalize on it. He didn't want to be a reality TV star because on the show he was labeled as one of "the bad guys who wouldn't let Bobby work."

Becoming a beaver trapper

Another unexpected role Deans took up as a forester was that of beaver trapper. Beavers were introduced to the lands he managed about 25 years ago, he said, and he had no experience in the matter.

Beavers quickly became a nuisance. They would dam up streams, which flooded timber tracts and killed trees, cutting into profits.

To learn how to trap beavers, Deans went to the Carolyn T. High Memorial Library in Whiteville to research the topic.

"They had one book on trapping," Deans said. "Social media was just starting to crank up, and Google was just starting, so there wasn't a lot of information online, especially on something like beaver trapping. So I went the traditional route and went to the

Deans navigates in the woods with a compass.

library."

With only three pages dedicated to beaver trapping in the book, Deans said he had to figure out a lot of the process on his own. He bought the required materials and said that, while developing his skills, he made all the possible mistakes he could make trapping a beaver.

"And beavers are smart once they witness another beaver getting trapped," Deans explained. "If they see the trap, they get educated very quickly and try to avoid the trap altogether. So the learning curve was pretty steep, and it took me a while to get the hang of it."

Eradicating the beaver problem soon became Deans' number one priority among his land management duties. He has caught more than 1,000 beavers in the past 25 years while fighting to keep flood waters from killing the timber.

In addition to trapping beavers, Deans turned his trapping skills into a side business that included otters. He could sell the pelts for almost $100 each. He said the trapping season for fur-bearing animals was from December to February. Deans has become a registered nuisance trapper in North Carolina and traps nuisance animals for other land owners.

"I enjoy doing it because it's hard work, and I wish I could have started when I was a teenager," Deans said.

The profession of forestry

Deans described forestry as a combination of professions including botany, dendrology, civil engineering, marketing, environmental law and ecology.

He said foresters need to know how plants work and function, how to iden-

(L) King snake and (R) cottonmouth. Deans is on the constant lookout for snakes while on the job.

Beaver dams contribute to flooding that can kill timber. Deans traps beavers that build dams like the one seen here.

tify trees, how to construct logging roads, how to identify endangered species and how not to damage the environment.

"You have to know a little bit about each one," Deans said. "Just enough to get you in trouble."

His favorite part of forestry is working outside and not being "tied to an office or factory each day." A typical day for Deans will start with checking beaver traps in the morning. Then he may go to logging or road construction sites in the area to deal with any issues at hand. One day, he may get off work at 2 in the afternoon. Some days, Deans does not get home until 9 at night. He said he works until the job is done.

"I might drive 25 miles this way to check a trap, I might travel 25 miles in that direction to check on a logging job and I might travel 30 miles back this way to check on road work," Deans said. "I do a lot of driving."

Deans explained that pine trees are the predominant commercial tree in southeastern N.C. because they grow fast, grow straight and grow all year long.

"We plant mostly pine trees, and we plan it where you can come back [to harvest them] in 10 or 12 years after we plant them," Deans said. "And we thin them out to where the trees that are left will grow faster."

Encounters with wildlife

While on the job, Deans comes across bears, snakes, deer, birds, foxes, bobcats and many other animals native to southeastern North Carolina. Deans recalled a bear cub encounter at Bladen Lake State Forest near Elizabethtown.

"When I was near a thick area in the block of woods, I saw a bear cub shimmy up a tree about 50 feet away from me," Deans

Dean uses a clinometer to measure tree height using the principle of measurement called triangulation.

said. "I stopped and knew that the mom was around somewhere. Then I heard the mom popping her jaws."

As soon as he heard that sound, he immediately walked away and escaped unharmed.

Another encounter with a different bear ended with a 30-second standoff. Deans had left some food scraps near his truck one day and returned to it to find a bear on its hind legs, staring at him.

"We were probably 50 feet away from each other," Deans said. "He was checking out my food scraps, then he wheeled around and then ran off."

Deans explained that during warmer weather, he sees snakes "fairly often" and that wooded areas are home to many snakes.

Deans said that he has made a living off of growing, cutting and selling timber. He is proud of the forestry industry for helping preserve many forest areas near the Cape Fear, Lumber, Black and Waccamaw rivers. He considers forestry a pro-environmental career because he helps owners make income from their land while preserving it.

Deans loves being outdoors and exploring in his kayak during his free time.

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A Visit With A Few of Columbus County's Oldest Businesses

STORIES & PHOTOS **Submitted**

First, there was the land. Then the land drew people, and the people began to harvest the forest resources, then clear the land, plant it and cultivate it. The farmers needed help to survive and thrive, so other people came and built stores, devised tools and provided services they couldn't provide for themselves. Little communities sprang up in the swamps and sandhills, on the shores of the rivers and lakes.

Not all the people prospered; some dreamed dreams that never came true. Some shifted their goals, and some lost the struggle or decided to move on. But some of them stayed and built a life here in Columbus County. Communities grew up in the midst of the farmland. And when those early people died, other people came not only to live here but to become a part of the life, to care for the dead and grieve with the living. But as each generation passed, they left their progeny to carry on so that today there are families whose roots run deep in the soil of this county, whose lives are still tied to the land and to the people around them who live on it.These are some of their stories as they told them.

- Bill Thompson

(L) Flat Bay Farm family reunion held in 1941. My grandparents Mayon Wright (1870 – 1947) and Lillon Ward Wright (1877 – 1973) built the first portion of the dwelling in 1898. They were the parents of 11 children, and the six bedrooms added to the house are visible in the photo. Mayon was the son of Richard Wright, and the road off of 701 leading from Vinegar Hill to Flat Bay Farm bears his name on the road marker. My father, Ottis Richard Wright Sr., and my mother, Olive Battle Wright, were the third generation to have a house at Flat Bay Farm, and my sister and I were the further generation to be reared in a house on Flat Bay Farm. - Richard Wright

The history of Flat Bay Farm, established 1825
By Richard Wright
Vinegar Hill near Tabor City

Can you tell us a little bit about the founding member(s) of your business?

My great-great-great-grandfather, Isaac Wright, born about 1760, moved from Sampson County when he had depleted the harvesting of naval stores on his property. Beginning in 1803, Isaac purchased about 8,000 acres along the border of Bladen and Brunswick counties, with that area later becoming a portion of Columbus County when it was formed in 1808.

Included in the acreage was what is now known as Flat Bay Farm. Isaac died about 1806, and his will gave his wife, Ann Hathaway Wright, a life estate with a remainder to their children.

In 1825 Ann and the children divided the property and lands deeded to my great-great-grandfather Stephen Wright (1800–1851) that included the property known as Flat Bay Farm. After Stephen's death, his son Isaac Wright II inherited a portion of Flat Bay farm and, by deed dated February 5, 1852, recorded in Book K page 282 Columbus County registry, conveyed 150 acres to his brother Richard Wright (1826-1876). My grandchildren should be the eighth generation to own this land.

Can you share with our readers a unique short story or fun fact about your business?

The farm was first used for the production of naval stores and the manufacturing of barrels. The farm produced livestock and vegetable farming to feed the family. Tobacco was first grown on Flat Bay Farm in the late 1880s and early 1900s when tobacco growing was introduced into Columbus County. There were some clay pits on Flat Bay Farm, which were used to make bricks that were used in the chimneys of the dwellings.

My first cousin once removed, Shan Spivey, has a tobacco contract, and the Spivey family has produced the crops on Flat Bay Farm since 1971. Shan's grandmother was a Wright who grew up there at Flat Bay Farm.

What has sustained your business through time?

The farm includes about 140 acres of managed woodlands and about 110 acres of cropland, and the income from these two endeavors has sustained Flat Bay Farms. An important component of keeping the farm viable has been the managing of the farms by Shan's uncles, Donald and Lavern Spivey, then by his father, Ralph Spivey, who managed the farm until he was about 80, and then Shan took over the management.

How have your products and services changed over time to meet your customers' needs?

The farm has changed from naval stores production to tobacco crops and sweet potatoes, corn, soybeans, vegetables and berries.

What are your plans for the future?

We plan to maintain the selective cutting of timber and continue with the cash crops. My daughters, Elizabeth and Sarah, will be the seventh generation to share ownership, and my two grandchildren, the eighth generation, hopefully, will continue management of the farm.

The history of Memory Company, established 1837
By William "Bill" Memory Jr.
Whiteville

Can you tell us a little bit about the founding member(s) of your business?

The Memory Company was established in 1837 and spans six generations of family ownership by the Memory family. After serving in the War with Mexico, my great-great-great-grandfather, Colonel Thomas Stevens (T.S.) Memory, settled in Whiteville in 1837 on Washington Street near the intersection of Lee Street and soon after opened his general mercantile store, Memory Company, in uptown Whiteville at the courthouse square.

When the American Civil War ended in 1865 and Confederate money had little value, Col. Memory, then known in Whiteville as "the Colonel," almost lost his business to his creditors. On a train ride to New York City to try to work out a new financial agreement, he met the postmaster of Atlanta, who helped him establish a post office that he operated in the Memory Company store. The chance meeting and timely opportunity to profit from the postal business turned out to be a very fortunate day for the Memory family. The Colonel and his wife had 12 children, and the whole family helped run the store.

After a fire burned the Memory Company store in 1899, the Colonel rebuilt but soon decided to sell the store to his clerk, Mr. J.C. Lennon. The Colonel saw a good opportunity in the insurance business, and Memory Company made the change from a mercantile-based business to insurance and also maintained a boarding house and restaurant in uptown Whiteville.

Since the Colonel's bold move to save the company, five generations of the family have carried on recognizing growth and investment opportunities in the community. The Memory Company, now known as Memory Enterprises, still offers insurance and at times has operated a grocery store and gas station near the courthouse. My father, William Edward "Billy" Memory Sr,. developed rental properties and Memory Plaza near the courthouse and Powell Plaza on J.K. Powell Blvd., and now I manage the family business.

Can you share with our readers a unique short story or fun fact about your business?

On the Colonel's train trip to New York to meet his creditors during the Reconstruction period after the American Civil War, he met Colonel Thomas G. Simms, the postmaster of Atlanta. The Colonel shared his basket of ham biscuits with Col. Simms, and they struck up a friendship that lasted a lifetime. Col. Simms was helpful in establishing the Colonel as the uptown Whiteville postmaster, which ultimately saved the Memory Company mercantile business from bankruptcy.

The two men kept in touch and on a later business trip together Col. Simms told the Colonel that he and his wife were expecting a baby. Simms continued that if he had a daughter, he would honor his friend by naming her Memory Simms. The Colonel responded that if he and his wife had a son, they would do the same and honor Simms by naming him Simms Memory. As fate would have it, baby girl Emily Memory Simms (called Memory) was born in Atlanta in 1854. Two years later, the Colonel's family welcomed a baby boy, Simms Memory. As the children grew up, they loved to hear the story of their fathers' friendship and how their birth names were chosen.

Col. Simms died in 1876, and Simms Memory wrote Memory Simms a letter expressing his condolences for her father's passing. The two continued to correspond, fell in love and married in Atlanta. The newlyweds settled in Whiteville, where they lived together for 50 years. Memory played the piano at First Baptist Church, and Simms accompanied her on the fiddle. Today they are laid to rest side by side at Whiteville Cemetery.

What has sustained your business through time?

Memory Company has always catered to the needs of the people in the community. Knowing our customers by name and developing long-lasting relationships have maintained the business for all these years.

How have your products and services changed over time to meet your customers' needs?

Under the Memory Company name, we've gone from a general mercantile store where we sold a little bit of everything to everybody to an insurance and real estate development business. During the lifespan of the company, we have also owned and operated several businesses in the courthouse area, including Memory's Supermarket and the courthouse Esso gas station.

My great aunt, Emily Rose Memory Peal, maintained T.S. Memory Insurance agency into the 1970s. She was a progressive businesswoman and was known to sell hail insurance to farmers while they were working in their fields. My mother, Betty Lou Powell Memory, was co-owner of Memory Enterprises for over 50 years. She served on Whiteville's city council for 12 years and enjoyed giving back to Whiteville.

What are your plans for the future?

The future of Memory's in Whiteville? We'll see. We will roll with it. I have a good time doing what I am doing. My brother, Michael Memory, and I are the last generation of our family in Whiteville.

J.A. McNeill Sons and Daughters, established 1875
By Mary McNeill Hooks
Whiteville

Can you tell us a little bit about the founding members of your business?

In the 1870s John A. McNeill of Richmond County opened a drug store in Hope Mills with his brother, Ben. The young men had lost their father after the Civil War, which left them on their own. Both graduated from the Edinburgh School of Medicine in Raeford, operated by their mother's brother, Hector McLean, with additional training at the Medical College of Charleston and Bellevue in New York City.

The earliest records of their Hope Mills business date to 1875. There they grew herbs and plants to make their own powders and liquids for medicinal purposes, such as foxglove for digitalis. Physicians at that time commonly made their own remedies.

In 1886 both got "itchy feet" and decided to move to Shallotte, then a rural community. They arrived in Brunswick County on Aug. 31, 1886. That was the day of the great Charleston earthquake, and shockwaves were felt deep into North Carolina, including Shallotte,

For almost 14 years, the McNeill brothers dispensed patent medicines and their own remedies to the people of the Supply-Shallotte-Ash-Grissettown areas of Brunswick County and nearby sections of Columbus County.

Ben McNeill became involved in politics and was elected to the North Carolina House of Representatives. In 1900 he suffered a heart

attack on the floor of the House in Raleigh and died.

John A. McNeill, by then having a family of his own, including 21-year-old son George Raymond McNeill, felt the Brunswick County area was growing too slowly, so he decided to move to the bustling community of Vineland–Whiteville in December 1900. He purchased the medical practice operated by Dr. W.W. Crowell on the east side of Madison Street in Vineland.

Dr. John then built J.A. McNeill and Son Pharmacy next door for George, who graduated from Page's School of Pharmacy in Raleigh.

George married Lyda Russell, and they had four children: Beulah, John, Charles, and Hector. Ahead of her time, Lyda graduated from Smithdale College in Richmond, Virginia, with a business degree. After marrying George, she kept the books for the drugstore until age 90.

George and Lyda's son John carried on the family tradition and graduated with a degree in pharmacy from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1940. He delayed his pharmacy career to serve as a line officer in the U.S. Navy in the South Pacific during World War II. Upon his safe return, John took over J.A. McNeill and Son Pharmacy.

John married Margaret Powell, and they had six children: John Jr. (Sandy), Ronald (Ronnie), George, Mary, Jim and Jane. Like their father, Sandy and Mary earned pharmacy degrees from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and returned to work at the family pharmacy. In 1981, John proudly changed the name of the pharmacy to J. A. McNeill Sons and Daughters.

As the business grew, the drug store moved from downtown Whiteville to its present location in McNeill Plaza on Jefferson Street near Columbus Regional Healthcare System. The pharmacy name was also shortened to McNeill's Pharmacy.

Can you share with our readers a unique short story or fun fact about your business?

When brothers John and Ben were moving their practice from Brunswick County to Columbus County, they packed up all of their diplomas and pharmacy equipment for shipment by schooner to Wilmington to then transfer to Whiteville by train. Unfortunately, all of their personal belongings, medical diplomas, and drug store fixtures were lost when the schooner sank in a storm at Lockwood Folly. John always said we were the only pharmacy ever lost at sea.

What has sustained your business through time?

Our family has always overcome adversity. We have a steadfast dedication to family, community and comprehensive healthcare. The core values, traditions and trust established by our ancestors continue to be passed down from generation to generation.

How have your products and services changed over time to meet your customers' needs?

From our humble beginnings, McNeill's Pharmacy remains the core of what is now Liberty Healthcare, a family-owned healthcare business recognized nationwide for customer service, quality care, and innovation. McNeill's Pharmacy continues to offer trusted medicine, advice, and care to the people of Columbus County and beyond while Liberty Healthcare has grown from a single nursing home to being a fully integrated post-acute healthcare provider, incorporating a family of companies that provide a full spectrum of care and residential opportunities for older adults.

What are your plans for the future?

Sandy, Ronnie, George, Jim, Jane and I, along with our spouses, our children, and our children's spouses, have worked in the family business and contributed greatly to its success and longevity. Through unwavering dedication to family and community and offering comprehensive healthcare services, the McNeill family continues the course and has not lost sight of the traditions charted nearly 150 years ago.

James Britton, Alec Powell, Red Leauman and Charlie Floyd beside the Columbus Drugstore building owned by J.L. Powell and Co.

The history of J.L. Powell & Co., established 1876

By John Fisher
Whiteville

Can you tell us a little bit about the founding member(s) of your business?

My great-grandfather, J.L. Powell, was born in 1854 and grew up in Western Prong. He established the J.L. Powell & Co. general store in 1876 on Main Street in downtown Whiteville near the railroad track. At the time, this area was called Vineland. All the stores on the block were built with wood and were destroyed in 1915 in a fire. After the fire, merchants rebuilt their stores with brick.

Behind the original J.L. Powell & Co. store is the brick building occupied by Anthony's Italian Restaurant. Anthony's location served as the J. L. Powell storage warehouse. I think this is the oldest commercial building in Whiteville because it's the only building with earthquake rods.

My great-grandfather had four children; Alec; Sue; my grandmother, Jane; and Cal. J.L. Powell died in 1931, and at the time, Alec took over J.L. Powell & Co. He was responsible for really expanding the business. My grandmother married Jesse Fisher Sr., and they lived in Concord. Sue contracted polio, and Cal also had serious health issues, and they were not involved in running the business. Along with managing the general store, Alec added an oil supply business, farming, a Ford dealership and the old Columbus Hotel where Vann Underwood's car dealership stands today.

Alec lived in the Columbus Hotel, and he married Mae Formyduval, of the county. In 1937 they built a home on S. Madison Street. Alec died in 1945, and Mae and Alec's sister, Sue, managed the business until 1961, when my dad, Jesse Caldwell Fisher Jr., moved to Whiteville and began running J.L. Powell & Co.

I came back to Whiteville in 1989, and Dad had all these short-term projects for me, which kept me here. He didn't want me to leave. In February 1990, I started the reclaimed plank wood flooring business. I no longer run the plant here, but I broker the material and have it made in other states. My father passed in 2014, and I continue to manage the J.L. Powell & Co. real estate and storage business.

Can you share with our readers a unique short story or fun fact about your business?

J.L. Powell & Co. was featured in 2009 in three episodes of "Swamp Loggers," the Discovery Channel's popular reality show. I received a phone call from a representative from Corbett Timber Company saying they had discovered some logs buried in the swamp near Canetuck and the Black River. They knew that I

could pay a premium for the logs over sending them to the mill, so they invited me to come out and take a look at them.

I met one of the logging crew at the road leading to the site and followed him about three miles back into the swamp. We got to a huge opening, and there must have been about 3 million dollars' worth of logging equipment in there. Then I saw all these people with video cameras walking around, and I thought, "What are they doing here?" Then a guy from the "Swamp Loggers" production team walked up to my truck and asked, "Would you like to be on the number one show on the Discovery Channel called 'Swamp Loggers'?"

I though about it and said, "Yeah. What the heck." I was wearing my Docksiders, and everyone else was in snake boots, and they made fun of me about that on the show. What I found were beautiful, enormous cypress logs. They had fallen naturally, and the trees were anywhere from 1,500 to 2,000 years old. I ended up buying the logs, and they filmed two episodes of us making paneling from them at the sawmill. We sent the finished paneling all over the country.

What has sustained your business through time?

Having a good relationship with the banks and trying to create new businesses in the area. We are invested in downtown Whiteville and bringing new goods and services to the community.

How have your products and services changed over time to meet your customers' needs?

We started out as a general store offering something for everyone and invested in developing real estate and new businesses as needed for the progress and growth of our community and our company.

What are your plans for the future?

I would like to continue taking some of our older properties and restoring them. New business development is important, and I would really like to restore the 1928 Columbus Theater into a music venue and renovate the 1920s Esso station near Columbus County Arts Council into a unique retail location.

Council Tool Company, established 1886
By Margo Council Wright
Lake Waccamaw

Can you tell us about the founding member(s) of your business?

John Pickett Council was born in 1855 at Council Station in Bladen County, the third son of eight children born to Kinchen Kitchen Council and Catherine Sykes.

Throughout his life, Mr. J.P. was energetic, inquisitive and creative. As a young man, he farmed, owned a general store and also

produced naval stores. Dissatisfied with the tools available, Mr. J.P., by nature a mechanic and innovator, began modifying current tools for harvesting naval stores and then started adding others of his own design.

Realizing there was a good market for these handmade tools, Mr. J.P. started making tools in a log building located by the railroad at Council Station. The company prospered in those early years, and in 1886 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that businesses could be incorporated; therefore Mr. J.P. saw to it that Council Tool was incorporated, keeping company with such venerable organizations as Johnson & Johnson, Ball Brothers Glass, Munsingwear, Valvoline and Bon Ami Company.

As the business grew, around 1902 Mr. J.P. bought considerable land at Lake Waccamaw. He built a large house just off the water and relocated his business about half a mile away. He planted pecan trees on each side of the narrow road between them, still known as Pecan Lane.

Can you share with our readers a unique short story or fun fact about your business?

During World War II, much of the production at Council Tool went to the military and to defense plants. U.S. Defense Department personnel visited the company with an urgent need for a small spanner wrench.

Around-the-clock work was done to fulfill this request. The items were then trucked to the Wilmington airport, where they were picked up by a military plane and immediately flown to Europe. The Council Tool wrench was used to set the explosive timers on artillery shells and was used in the Anzio Beach invasion of Italy.

The U.S. government later questioned the invoice sent to them, complaining of the use of overtime!

What has sustained your business through time?

Council Tool has remained in business by strong leadership from five presidents, all Council men, the current and fifth being John Monroe Council III. Other factors are retaining dedicated workers; producing quality products; and having a reputation for honesty, perseverance, innovation, determination, good will, diversification, strong customer relationships and the ability to do the same thing over and over again and do it well.

An astonishing example: approximately 10 million axes have been shipped from Council Tool since the early 1940s and around eight million hammers since the mid-1960s. That represents an incredible number of blows from the same drop hammer!

How have your products and services changed over time to meet your customers' needs?

The demand for naval store tools slowly faded away generations ago, and the company continued to launch new products to keep production steady. Tools made for the United States Forestry Service have been of great importance to strong production at the tool company. In 2022 the fire tool line was branded Council Fire. Offerings include municipal and wildland fire tools and an ever-expanding line of forcible entry tools, including a halligan bar and a 6-pound forcible entry flathead axe. Council Tool ships all over the United States and to many foreign countries.

What are your plans for the future?

Council Tool is focused on continuing to do the things that have kept the company in business for so long, and always keeping up to date on the changing demand for hand tools. A recent example is the 2019 introduction of the Flying Fox Woodsman Hatchet, a throwing axe that won the World Axe Throwing League Championships in both 2019 and 2020.

McKenzie Mortuary, established 1890
By William "Bill" Powell II
Whiteville

Can you tell us about the founding member(s) of your business?

My great-grandfather, Joseph Thomas McKenzie, came to Columbus County in the 1880s and built a livery stable business on E. Commerce St. in downtown Whiteville. He began selling wooden coffins from the stable, and as businesses in the area prospered, he opened the first undertaking business in Columbus County in 1890. McKenzie later opened J.T. McKenzie Furniture Company on S. Madison Street and operated the mortuary from there.

My grandfather, Thomas Milton McKenzie, and grandmother, Annie Mae White McKenzie, expanded the business in 1940 and built one of the first mortuaries dedicated to funeral services in eastern North Carolina in our current location at 112 Jefferson St. My grandparents ran McKenzie Mortuary together until his death in 1965 and her death in 1989. They had two daughters. My aunt Sarah "Sally" McKenzie married Paul Morgan "Pete" Page, who worked for a time at the mortuary. My mother, Ann McKenzie, married my father, B.A. Powell of Fair Bluff, and did not work at the funeral home. I joined the business as the funeral director in 1973. My wife, Rita Powell, and I purchased the remaining share of the business from Aunt Sally in 2016. My son, William A. Powell III (Andy), became the fifth generation of the McKenzie family in the business when he became a licensed funeral director in 2001.

Can you share with our readers a unique short story or fun fact about your business?

My great-grandfather used a horse-drawn funeral coach until he bought his first motorized funeral coach in 1913. The coach (another term used for a hearse) was built on a Model T chassis with a wooden body built by the Wilson Bus Company. The body is framed in oak with poplar panels carved to represent draperies and separated by columns made of pine.

My great-grandfather used the coach for "house removals," which is when he would gather remains from homes using a large wicker basket. He also used the motorized funeral coach to transport bodies in caskets to their burial. In 1926 he purchased a Dodge Brothers coach to replace the Ford, and it ran until the 1940s. We have stored the two "one of a kind" funeral coaches for nearly 80 years with no plans to sell them because of the connection to my grandfather and great-grandfather.

What has sustained your business through time?

We treat our customers with respect and honesty. We are known throughout Columbus and surrounding counties for our excellent service and commitment to our customers and their funeral needs.

How have your products and services changed over time to meet your customers' needs?

We keep up with current trends in funeral service needs and respect the deceased and the family's wishes within the ethical bounds licensed by our business.

What are your plans for the future?

Whatever the Lord has in mind. My son, Andy Powell, has been in the business with me for nearly 13 years.

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LIBERTY REHABILITATION

Left to right - Amber Robinson COTA/Rehab Director, Tara Birchall PTA, Caitlin Sykes COTA, Evelina Trost OTR, Allison Morin COTA, Navin Kingston DPT

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Nursing & Rehabilitation Center
of Columbus County

http:/libertyhealthcareandrehab.com

1402 Pinckney Street
Whiteville

(910) 642-4245

Tracey G. Jones, Administrator
Caroline Moore, Admissions Director

News Reporter editor Willard Cole in 1953

The history of The News Reporter, established 1896
By Justin Smith
Whiteville

Can you tell us about the founding member(s) of your business?

The birth of *The News Reporter* came in 1896 as *The Trucker's Reporter*. The impetus for the paper was the Sunny South Colony, a group of farmers in the Chadbourn and Whiteville area. The "truckers" portion of the title referred to truck farmers transporting farm fruits and vegetables grown in central Columbus County at the time.

The newspaper merged with *The Columbus News-Times* in 1908 to take on the name *News-Reporter*, then *News Reporter* (no hyphen), then *News-Reporter* (hyphenated) again, and finally, *The News Reporter*. Allen J. Maxwell was the first publisher, followed by J. Mayon Parker and B. Gordon Lewis. For three generations — from 1938 until 2021 — the Thompson/High family owned and operated the newspaper. I was a freelance photographer for *The News Reporter* during high school. I never would have guessed in those days that I would return as editor in 2018 and become the owner and publisher in 2021.

Can you share with our readers a unique short story or fun fact about your business?

The News Reporter is the first community newspaper in the United States, along with the *Tabor City Tribune*, to win the Pulitzer Prize for Meritorious Public Service in the fight against the Ku Klux Klan in 1953. We continue to be recognized as one of the top community newspapers in North Carolina based on awards from the N.C. Press Association and other accolades.

On a more lighthearted note: J. Mayon Parker, who served as editor for several years in the late 1920s, is credited with creating the "Demon Deacons" nickname as sports editor of the Wake Forest College student newspaper.

What has sustained your business through time?

One of the factors that has sustained *The News Reporter* has been our commitment to focusing on news and information about Columbus County. These 954 square miles are the center of our universe. There are plenty of other journalists covering regional, state and national news. But we provide local stories that our readers usually can't find anywhere else.

How have your products and services changed over time to meet your customers' needs?

Since the early 2000s when access to the internet began to change the way people get their news, *The News Reporter* met our customers' changing reader habits by transforming from a traditional print-only publication to a media company offering a combination of print and digital products.

Our digital products such as NRcolumbus.com, the email newsletter featuring daily headlines, and the digital replica of the printed paper allow our reporters to get breaking news to our community 24/7. The weekly print edition of *The News Reporter* and our magazines — *954 Magazine* and *Flourish* — allow for casual reading of in-depth stories and features.

What are your plans for the future?

The last several decades have been a dynamic time for the news industry and our business is no different. *The News Reporter* will continue to innovate to provide our readers with news and information in the formats that they want. However people get their news, we want them to get it from us. I'm especially interested in producing content tailor-made for students. It's very important that we do our part to ensure the next generation understands the importance of local government and civics.

The original Pierce & Co. store in Red Bug

Vintage photo of Pierce & Co. store in Hallsboro

The history of Pierce & Co., established 1898
By Mark Bronski
Hallsboro

Can you tell us about the founding member(s) of your business?

There were three partners in 1898 when Pierce & Co. was established in the Red Bug community about a mile from Hallsboro. The business partners were Henry Wyche, who was the manager of the local Farmers Alliance at the time; Stephen Worth Pierce, a farmer and native of Hallsboro; and Jim E. Thompson, who left the company in 1921 to start his own lumber company.

We are now located in Hallsboro at 4229 Sam Potts Hwy., but you can still see the remains of the original store in Red Bug. Pierce & Co. had its beginnings in Mr. Wyche's role as the managing director of the local Farmers Alliance, which bought and sold fertilizer and supplies for the local community.

When the Farmers Alliance ceased operations, the community kept asking Mr. Wyche to open a store and provide similar services. Mr. S.W. Pierce and J.E. Thompson provided the necessary capital, and Mr. Wyche agreed to open and manage the store. Until the 1990s the store remained actively managed by the Wyche family. Then they sold the business to brothers William and Thomas Jolly, who owned and operated the business until I purchased it in 2021. I think it is amazing that the 125-year-old business has been owned by only three families.

Can you share with our readers a unique short story or fun fact about your business?

At one time, Pierce & Co. had its own lumber sawmill and planing mill. There were several sawmills in operation at the Hallsboro crossroads. The store would ship lumber on the now-removed Atlantic Coast Line railroad to northern markets, and it continued

operations even through the Great Depression. In fact, the steam engine that powered one of the mills is now on display at the Lake Waccamaw Depot Museum. The mills were located across Hallsboro Rd. from the main store and behind the large warehouse where pressure-treated lumber is stored today. We continue to sell lumber, primarily ground contact pressure treated.

What has sustained your business through time?

Extremely loyal employees who take pride in providing outstanding customer service: Doing simple things like greeting customers when they enter the store and constantly adapting our product offering to the current needs of the community. Many of our current employees have family members who worked here in the past. In fact, many locals have at one time worked at Pierce & Co, or at the very least know someone who did. This truly makes the store a family business. It helped us develop a very loyal customer base that we're very thankful for. Also helpful is our location — this helps fuel the curiosity factor that draws passers-by to check out an "old-timey" store.

How have your products and services changed over time to meet your customers' needs?

Pierce and Co. has always strived to offer the items that the local community needs, and our product offerings have evolved over the 125 years we've been in business. Back in 1898, we sold flour and fertilizer in bulk, fabric for sewing clothes, furniture, a wide variety of appliances and a wide variety of clothes. We took payment based on the barter system. Our old ledger books show that some customers would substitute home-grown chickens or even labor to unload freight wagons as payment. We still write out paper receipts and some of our long-term loyal customers charge their purchases to their store account… although now they pay using currency. Also, we try to make it easy to do business with us. Here are a few examples of the evaluation of our product offering:

Customers were asking for a healthy sausage alternative and had dietary restrictions for pork, so we started making turkey sausage. In addition to the classic pork sausage, we offer Polish, jalapeño cheddar, sweet Italian and spicy Italian sausages, as well as other meats such as fresh chicken and a variety of more exotic frozen meats like lamb, bison, elk, duck, rabbit, and even frog legs and alligator filets.

Contractors were searching for modern materials for construction at Lake Waccamaw. We now offer a variety of composite construction materials that can be used from roofing to seawalls. Composite materials offer advantages in strength and durability, are in many cases completely maintenance-free and have lifetime warranties.

Thanks to a family connection, we have a large selection of handmade, mouth-blown glassware from Poland. Items range from decorative vases to wine glasses and even piggy banks.

Where there used to be hitching posts for horses and mules behind the store, we now have charging stations for electric vehicles, a big hit for customers passing through the area heading to the metro areas of Charlotte and Raleigh or the Brunswick/South Carolina beach communities.

What are your plans for the future?

We want to continue the recipe that has served the store so well for the last 125 years: Listening to our customers, adapting our product offering to their needs, and providing excellent customer service.

We will also be good custodians of our 100-year-old building and surrounding warehouses, so they will survive at least another 100 years to serve the community. Ideally, we'd like to renovate the building next to us on Sam Potts Hwy. and put it back into service. It has beautiful woodwork on the ceiling and walls and was once rumored to have been a tavern among its many uses over the course

of history. On Sept. 15 and 16, we'll have a customer appreciation event to thank our community for supporting us over the last 125 years.

Ideally, our children, Henry and Anna — who you'll sometimes see dusting shelves and organizing the nail bin — will develop a love for this store and business and will someday take it over and continue serving the community.

Walter H. Powell Sr. in the North Carolina Senate

Coburn Powell being sworn into the bar in 1985

The history of Powell & Powell, established 1911
By Coburn Powell
Whiteville

Can you tell us about the founding members of your business?

My grandfather was Walter H. Powell Sr. He was admitted to the bar in 1911. He practiced law in Whiteville until his death in 1970. He also served in the State legislature. My great uncle, J. K. Powell, and my grandfather practiced law together for many years. They practiced with Richard M. Lewis, who had a son, Dick Lewis, who recently retired after a highly successful legal career in Fayetteville.

My uncle, Frank M. Powell, joined my grandfather in practice in 1946. My father joined the practice in 1947 after his service in World War II. My Uncle Frank and my father continued as partners in Powell & Powell until my uncle retired in 1982. I joined Powell & Powell in 1985 and practiced with my father until he retired in 1992. I have been a solo practitioner since then.

What has sustained your business through time?

The law firm of Powell & Powell has had many loyal clients throughout the years. Three generations of Powell attorneys have, in many cases, been trusted to serve the legal needs of three or four generations of the same family. We consider each of those relationships a great honor and privilege.

Powell & Powell has had a wonderful staff throughout the years. Each member of it has been a dedicated, dependable, honest and hard-working professional. We could not have had any success without such an outstanding staff.

How have your products and services changed over time to meet your clients' needs?

We have always focused on the individual client — the person. That has not changed over the years. Technology is constantly changing the way we deliver those services, but the one-on-one relationship with the client has not changed. That personal relationship with the client is the best part of the practice of law.

What are your plans for the future?

I am now 63 years old. I plan to retire when I am 67. I have grandchildren I need to spend a lot more time with. I hope to sell my practice to a bright, young attorney who will continue to serve my clients for many years to come.

The history of McArthur Supply, established 1913
By Charles McArthur and Adam Wooten
Chadbourn

Can you tell us about the founding member(s) of your business?

McArthur: Elijah Britt opened Britt Hardware on the rail line running through Chadbourn in 1913. In 1966, my father, W.M. McArthur, purchased Britt Hardware and changed the name to McArthur Hardware. The only inventory Dad changed when he took over the business is that he got rid of seed. It was too hard to sell small batches of seeds. I grew up working here, then went to college and worked in construction five years, then came back to the store in 1976. There have only been three families who have owned the business: the Britts, the McArthurs and now Adam Wooten and his brother, George Wooten.

Can you share with our readers a unique short story or fun fact about your business?

McArthur: There is a "dumb waiter" in the building that was used to haul heavy items up to storage such as barrels of heavy porcelain plates, cups and saucers that arrived at the depot on the train. David and Martin Carter worked here in high school, and they would drive over to pick up deliveries for us.

Adam Wooten: When I was little and visited McArthur's with my granddaddy, I used to go to the revolving nail bin where you bought nails by the pound. I would sort through all the many sized nails. I don't know why, but it was an exciting thing to do.

What has sustained your business through time?

McArthur: I have always said that people do business in a place they are comfortable in. There is always something going on in here, and people like to stop by. I tried to stock as many things as possible that people requested so they could make a purchase here and then find the parts to make repairs. Customer service and providing for customers' specific requests have always been important.

How have your products and services changed over time to meet your customers' needs?

McArthur: We started out as a general store and over the years met the community's needs by expanding our product line to include hardware and then building supplies. We bought property next door to create a building supply storage and sales area so that people in our community could buy those things without having to travel out of town. In the 1980s my wife, Brenda McArthur, owned Brenda's Touch of Class gift and frame store in a connected building.

What are your plans for the future?

Wooten: We would like to build on the solid foundation the McArthurs created. We plan to expand our product lines to meet our customers' requirements and changing needs. We are a hometown hardware and building supply store, and customer service and good pricing will always be priorities.

Ellis Meares, founder
Meares Funeral Home

Meares & Jones Funeral Service, established 1920
By Brenden Jones
Fair Bluff

Can you tell us about the founding member(s) of your buiness?

Meares Funeral Home was founded by Ellis Meares in 1920. The Meares family built a legacy of business ownership in Fair Bluff, which included a clothing department store and hardware store. The funeral home would have naturally been a prosperous investment for the family during this time. In the 1940s, the Meares family hired Mr. John Thomas Kanipe as its funeral director and manager of day-to-day operations. He was employed until the 1980s. For the next few years, the business was managed by several different funeral directors. In 2015, the Meares Family sold the business to an outside group. Soon after, while closely serving the Fair Bluff community as state representative during a time of devastation after hurricane flooding, I became personally vested in the town's future prosperity. Having been a licensed embalmer and funeral director myself for over 25 years at the time, I was honored to purchase the business in 2022, changing its name to Meares and Jones Funeral Service, with hopes of continuing its legacy of service not only to the town of Fair Bluff, but to all the people of Columbus County.

Can you share with our readers a unique short story or fun fact about your business?

Fun Fact: The business of Meares and Jones Funeral Service was built on one of the highest points in Fair Bluff. When the devastating floods came after the hurricanes in 2016 and 2018, it was one of the only buildings to remain intact and without damage in the town. This enabled me, as I was assisting and currenting working part-time for the current owner, to open the doors of the funeral home to the community for church services and town meetings when needed.

What has sustained your business through time?

Death has always been, and will always be, an inevitable part of life. While there will always be a secure market which requires these services, what has sustained Meares and Jones is the quality of personal care offered to grief-stricken families in their time of need. It is my personal philosophy that offering funeral services is just not enough — helping to provide closure for families and assisting them in working through their difficult time is a personal calling. This is what drew me to the profession almost 30 years ago. Providing the highest quality of individualized care to bereaved families will be what continues to draw the community to my business and helps sustain it.

How have your products and services changed over time to meet your customer's needs?

While traditional methods and products of embalming and funeral services have changed little over previous years, innovation is now changing the market and demand for the traditional funeral. The pandemic had a great impact on this as the needs of clientele changed with the realization that the cost and monotony of a traditional burial was not necessary. As the need for more affordable options and the desire for more environmentally conscious burial options rises, the need to offer more innovative, new services is necessary. For example, about 65% of the services we offered last year were cremation services.

What are your plans for the future?

Whether it is a traditional burial or a non-traditional death care service, the need to offer families individualized quality care will always remain the central focus of our business. After purchasing the business, we are grateful for the outpouring of support from the community. Many in the county, however, still do not know that the funeral home is under new ownership, and that we are happy to provide services to the surrounding areas, not only to our families in Fair Bluff. Through advertising and integrating our business into the community, it is our hope that all of Columbus County will call on us for any of their bereavement needs. It is also a future goal, If the need and opportunity arises, to expand our business to other areas.

Many others came and made their own unique contributions. The result is a community built on a heritage still tied to the land … and to one another. Our future will be built on the foundation of the past.

Calvin Coolidge once said that the chief business of America was business. Even as technology continues to become a bigger and bigger part of our lives, business is still tied to the land. And to borrow from Benjamin Franklin, another famous American, here in Columbus County we have created a prosperous union … if we can keep it.

- Bill Thompson

A tiny queen bee in the center is surrounded by worker bees who protect and nurture the queen.

Barry and Tracey Chadwick prepare to pull hive frames so they can harvest honey.

Columbus Regional Healthcare System Pediatric Medical Director Dr. Jugta Kahai created the CRHS Community Garden located behind the hospital to promote gardening and healthy eating. Columbus County Beekeepers Association has been a partner in this project.

Educating the community on the importance of protecting honey bees and pollinators is a mission of the Columbus County Beekeepers Association. Bruce Hart shares information about honey bees at their booth at the N.C. Honey Festival in Whiteville.

You need bees - bees need you

Columbus County is becoming more pollinator-wise, beekeepers say

story Stuart Rogers
photos Nikki Walker & Submitted

North Carolina's state insect, the honey bee, is responsible for pollinating 141,080 acres of Columbus County farms that produce nearly $51 million in yearly income, according to a 2021 report from the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. A healthy population of honey bees and other pollinators increases crop yield and keeps family farmers in business.

In addition, the sweet results of the honey bee's labor are honey and beeswax, which beekeepers can sell.

However, honey bees and other pollinators face danger from deadly parasitic mites, the use of pesticides, and the loss of habitat.

Since 1998, the Columbus County Beekeepers Association has been working as hard as the bee colonies its members tend to make sure pollinators survive and, with the community's help, thrive.

The beekeepers

The Columbus County Beekeepers Association is led by Ricky Boswell, club president since 2015; Patrick Dwyer, vice president; Sylvia Whitehead, treasurer; and Nikki Walker, secretary. Visitors are welcome at monthly association meetings, where 30 to 40 people share stories, questions and helpful beekeeping information. Member Luke Elkins, known far and wide as the "bee whisperer," grew up in Columbus County and has been beekeeping for more than 65 years. He has mentored many novice beekeepers. His wife, Dinah Elkins, is also a beekeeper and helps him tend the family's hives.

Elkins got his start in beekeeping when he was 15 and took an interest in backyard beehives belonging to his neighbor he remembers only as "Mr. Horne." One day the gentleman, who was elderly at the time, asked Elkins, "You want some honey? If you will come help me take honey, I'll give you some bees." Mr. Horne gave Elkins three hives of bees, and since then Elkins has maintained as many as 50 hives at a time.

Whiteville is one of 179 "Bee City USA" affiliates located in 46 U.S. states. A committee led by beekeepers association member Steve Smith of Whiteville obtained support from the City of Whiteville to earn that title in October 2016. Each year the "Bee City" committee meets with Whiteville City Council to report on continued honey bee preservation projects and educational efforts.

Association members visit schools and host educational booths at the county fair and local festivals, including the North Carolina Honey Festival, held each September in downtown Whiteville. The

booth usually offers games and hands-on activities for children and the opportunity to see bees at work in a portable observation hive.

In 2018, beekeepers association member Michael Shuman collaborated with Columbus Regional Healthcare System pediatrician Dr. Jugta Kahai to create a vegetable garden and the Healing Garden located at the hospital. A Brunswick Electric Membership Corporation (BEMC) Community Grant funded the project. Hospital staff, patients and the community are invited to visit, enjoy and help maintain the garden areas. The garden now includes pollinator plots, picnic tables and benches.

A local mural artist, Bess Hinson-Taylor, installed a honey bee mural funded by a BEMC Community Grant near the pollinator plots. A shade garden, funded by Columbus County Community Foundation, offers an educational and tranquil space. Local metal artist Tammy McCullum plans to install a piece of her work in the garden.

Boswell says he is encouraged by a growing interest in the county to preserve honey bees and their habitat. He attributes the success partly to the beekeepers association's work to educate the public and support novice beekeepers, along with national publicity about the importance of preserving honey bees and their habitat.

The Bees

Nikki Walker has been beekeeping since 2015, and she sat down with *954* to tell us about what bee life is like in a busy hive and how readers can attract and protect pollinators.

"Honey bees never stop working," Walker says. Each hive has one queen bee, and the other bees in the hive have specific jobs to ensure her survival. Without a queen, the hive fails. The queen lays a staggering 2,000 to 3,000 eggs per day, and she can live three to five years. Her hive mates live an average of 15 to 38 days during the summer and can live up to 150 days in the winter, when hive activity slows down.

Supporting the queen are the male drone bees. They don't have stingers, they can't make honey and their main role in the bee society is to mate with the queen. The queen only has to mate one time, so the drones don't have a lot to do.

The worker bees are females, and they have stingers. Their role in the hive colony is to tend to the queen and drones, ventilate the hive, and defend the hive. Some worker bees serve as nurse bees, taking care of the larvae, and some worker bees serve as undertaker bees whose job is to drag dead bees outside the hive to a ledge that is called the "front porch."

Some worker bees, toward the end of their short lives, serve as forager bees who leave the hive to collect pollen and nectar, which they give to the nurse bees to feed the larvae. Worker bees produce a protein-rich secretion called Royal Jelly, which they use to feed the developing bee larvae and queen bee larvae. In a bad turn for the drones, the worker bees kick them all out of the hive each winter, leading them to a certain death.

Walker says if the worker bees decide they don't like the queen's egg-laying pattern, they will create a new queen. The queens then compete to determine the hive's new queen.

Eventually, as the queen starts to fail or as the hive begins to run out of space, the worker bees create up to 10 new queen larvae cells to make sure at least one new queen survives. In the case of a failing queen, when the new queen larvae emerge, the old and the new queens compete to see who prevails as the new queen.

If the hive is running out of space, the old queen will leave the hive with half of the colony. This is known as swarming. The swarm will pitch camp somewhere close by while worker bees

serving as scouts leave to find a new home. Once the scouts find a new location, they come back to guide the swarm to the new hive.

Swarms usually occur at the end of winter in March and April. Walker says a swarm can be a scary sight to see, but the swarming bees are actually at their most docile state and are laser-focused on protecting the queen and moving safely to their new location.

Fear of a swarm can lead some people to kill the bees by spraying them with poison or a water hose. If you see a swarm, Walker recommends calling a local beekeeper, the N.C. Extension Center in Whiteville or 911. Each of these organizations can find a local beekeeper who will be thrilled to "catch" the swarm to start a new hive, or to pass along to a new beekeeper. It's a win-win for the concerned property owner, the beekeeper and the bees. A new

A bee swarm on Barry Chadwick's farm, Barrywick Apiary, in south Whiteville. Most swarming activity takes place from April through May.

Local honey is available at Columbus County Community Farmers Market and area stores and restaurants.

Luke Elkins, known locally as "the bee whisperer," has been keeping bees for over 65 years.

beekeeper will have to spend up to $180 for a "package" of bees that contains a queen if they cannot find a swarm.

Beekeeping 101

A new beekeeper usually starts out with a five-frame hive box, then graduates to a 10-frame box as the colony grows. Each hive has its own temperament that usually reflects the queen's vibe. Some hives are super docile, and some are agitated and mean.

The beekeepers association offers a beekeeping class each February with a certification test at the end. This year's class was the largest yet with 27 participants. Each new beekeeper is assigned an experienced mentor from the beekeepers association to help them get started. Southeastern Community College offers a beekeeping course each semester, too.

Basic beekeeping equipment includes the recognizable white beekeeping suit and a hive tool to get frames in and out. A smoker helps calm the bees when working around them. A gentle bee brush is used to wipe bees off the frames.

Protect the honey bee

"Pollinators provide every third spoonful of food we eat," Luke Elkins said. What threats do honey bees face?

One big threat, the Varroa mite, came to the U.S. from Asia in the 1980s. Walker explained that the mite eats the bee's body fat and also carries a myriad of viruses. It can cause a whole colony to collapse. Research is trying to find answers to the Varroa mite issue, and recent studies show that bees carrying pollen to their hive from nearby sunflower blooms helps reduce infestation. The sunflower pollen is antiparasitic.

Pesticides effectively manage pests and weeds, but they also kill honey bees and other pollinators and their food sources. Important pollinator-friendly practices include cultivating native plants to serve as nectar and pollen food sources, and either not spraying pesticides or insecticides at all or spraying in the evening when the bees have returned to their hives for the night. "Farmers in Columbus County are trying to help save bees by adjusting their weed control spraying habits," Luke Elkins said.

Some of the first flowers for the bees to feed on after a mostly dormant winter are dandelions. Consider avoiding the use of pesticides to kill flowering weeds so bees have an easily accessible food source as they emerge from the hive.

North Carolina's coastal plain region, which includes Columbus County, is where the most acres of farmland in the state are found.

Honey bee forager bees can pollinate thousands of blooms on each venture from the hive. Columbus County is lucky to have these "busy bees," and the Columbus County Beekeepers Association is dedicated to making sure the honey bee survives the challenges of lost habitat and environmental threats. Each person doing their part to protect pollinators is good for Columbus County and good for the world.

The Columbus County Beekeepers Association meets the second Thursday of each month at 7 p.m. at the Columbus County N.C. Cooperative Extension Center, located in Whiteville at 45 Government Complex Rd., Suite A. The meetings are open to anyone interested in beekeeping. Columbus County Beekeepers Association has a private Facebook page for members and folks interested in beekeeping facebook.com/groups/columbusbeekeepers.

Madison Street Music Festival
Downtown Whiteville
Saturday, May 27

The City of Whiteville's inaugural Madison Street Music Festival is 1 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. Saturday, May 27, in downtown Whiteville. Food trucks, beer and wine will all be available during the event.

Bands scheduled to perform are the Catalinas 1–2:15 p.m., North Tower Band 2:45–4 p.m. and Black Water Band 4:30–6:30 p.m.

Tickets are $25 online and $30 at the gate. Kids 12 and under are free. Purchase tickets online at eventbrite.com and search for Madison Street Music Festival.

Columbus County Community Farmers Market
The market is open each Saturday this summer from 8 a.m.–1 p.m.

Special events at the farmers market this season include:
June 17 – Old Fashioned Farm Day
June 22 – Farm-to-Table Dinner Fundraiser at The Spillway
July 15 -–Watermelon Day
Aug. 22 – Kids' Back to School Fun Day and Family Health Day
Sept. 16 – Honey Day and Car Show
Oct. 21 – Chicken Bog and BBQ Day
Nov. 18 – Collards, Cornbread and Sweet Potato Day
Dec. 9 – Christmas From The Heart Craft Show and Sale

Tee It Up For Veterans
Diamondback Golf Club
Saturday, June 3

The Veterans Memorial Park of America in Whiteville is hosting the Tee It Up For Veterans golf tournament on June 3 at Diamondback Golf Club in Loris, S.C. Cost per team is $240 and hole sponsorships are $50. The event includes food, drinks, prizes and raffles. For more information visit veteransparkofamerica.com or email Angela Norris at veteransmemorialparkofcolco@gmail.com.

Second Annual Juneteenth Festival & Business Expo
June 16, 17 & 19

The Columbus County Juneteenth Festival and Business Expo is Monday, June 19, at the Columbus County Fairgrounds. The day commemorates the historical plight of the American slave and celebrates the arrival of emancipation.

The Juneteenth celebration will begin with a pageant on Friday, June 16, and a parade in downtown Whiteville on Saturday, June 17. The parade will be followed by a family lunch on the lawn at the N.C. Museum of Natural Science in Whiteville. Families are invited to bring a blanket and lunch. Monday, June 19, is the day of the festival. There will be live music, food, vendors, a play zone for children and a cultural museum exhibit.

To register for the parade, the pageant, the farmers market, or a spot as a vendor, visit forms.gle/KCtYepN1sHP8x3LE7. Email questions to rootedcreationsbysb@outlook or call 910- 207-8982.

Independence Day Fireworks
South Columbus High School
Friday, June 30

The annual Columbus County Fireworks Celebration is a free event scheduled for Friday, June 30, at South Columbus High School. Gates open at 6 p.m. Entertainment begins at 7 p.m., and fireworks begin at 9:30 p.m. The event is hosted by Tabor City and organized by the Tabor City Chamber of Commerce. For more information visit, taborcitychamberofcommerce.com, email tccofc@yahoo.com or call 910-377-3012.

Second Saturday Story Time
N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences Whiteville
Second Saturday of each month at 10 a.m.

Visit N.C. Museum of Natural History in Whiteville on the second Saturday of each month for a special story and hands-on exploratory activity. Storytime is a free event and recommended for children in preschool to kindergarten, but all ages are welcome. Groups larger than 10 are asked to call ahead to make a reservation. The museum is located at 415 S. Madison Street in Whiteville. Email whiteville@naturalsciences.org or call 910-788-5100 for more information.

N.C. Watermelon Festival
Downtown Fair Bluff
Saturday, July 29

Fair Bluff hosts the N.C. Watermelon Festival on Saturday, July 29, from 9 a.m.–5 p.m. Events include contests to determine North Carolina's biggest and best-tasting watermelons, live music, festival food, games, a pageant and a parade led by the reigning North Carolina Watermelon Queen. The festival takes place on Riverside Drive beside the Lumber River, where the Rotary Club will host a rubber duck fundraising race. There will be opportunities for tubing and kayaking on the river. Saturday night events include the "Delight and Dance" ticketed event featuring live music. Visit fairbluffwatermelonfestival.org for more information. Vendor and pageant registration forms for 2023 are available online at the Town of Fair Bluff's website at fairbluff.com/events/.

Save the Date - Boys & Girls Homes of N.C. Rodeo
Aug.18, 19, 20

The Boys and Girls Homes of North Carolina will hold the 2023 rodeo at the B&GH Farm and Black's Tire Exhibition Center at Lake Waccamaw. Visit boysandgirlshomes.org closer to the event for more information.

Seventh annual N.C. Honey Festival
Downtown Whiteville
Saturday, Sept. 9

Enjoy buzzworthy fun at N.C. Honey Festival on Saturday, Sept. 9, in downtown Whiteville and at the N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences in Whiteville. The day of family fun includes opportunities to explore children's activities and hands-on exhibits about honey, honey bees, and beekeeping. Visit NCHoneyFestival.com or email nchoneyfestival@yahoo.com for more information.

2023 Trooper Kevin Connor Memorial Run
Downtown Whiteville
Saturday, Oct. 14

The annual 5K and 1-mile fun run in-person and virtual run/walk events are held each year in memory of Trooper Kevin Connor, who lost his life during a traffic stop on Oct. 17, 2018. The race lineup is at First Citizens Bank, 422 S. Madison St., in Whiteville. Registration, start times and complete event information are at runsignup.com/Race/NC/Whiteville/TrooperKevinConnerMemorialRun.

52nd Annual N.C. Yam Festival
Tabor City
Saturday, Oct. 21

"I Yam What I Yam" is the theme for the 52nd annual N.C. Yam Festival, Saturday, Oct. 21, in Tabor City. Festival events kick off with a Yam Spring Planting Day, Tuesday, May 30. A sampling of festival events in October includes the North Carolina Yam Festival Scholarship Pageant, the Taste of Tabor, and the Friday Night Street Dance. On Saturday morning, the Tabor City High School Alumni Reunion will be at The Ritz Center, followed by a parade in downtown Tabor City at 10 a.m. and other festival activities to follow. For a full schedule of events visit, ncyamfestival.com.

51st Annual Waccamaw Siouan Powwow
Waccamaw Siouan Tribal Grounds
Fri., Oct. 20 - Sat., Oct. 21

The Waccamaw Siouan Tribe invites the public to share in their 51st year of celebrating the tribe's culture and traditions during the Waccamaw Siouan Pow Wow. The event will be held on Friday, Oct. 20, and Saturday, Oct. 21 on the Waccamaw Siouan Tribal Grounds in the Buckhead Community of Bolton.

N.C. Pecan Harvest Festival
Friday, Nov. 3, & Saturday, Nov. 4

Save the date for the N.C. Pecan Festival Queen's Luncheon Friday, Nov. 3, from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., followed by a tour of elegant Whiteville homes. The festival kicks off Saturday, Nov. 4, at 10 a.m. in downtown Whiteville with a parade on Madison Street. Festivities to follow. For event information, visit ncpecanfestival.com or email contact@NCPecanFestival.com.

Columbus Regional Healthcare System Foundation

2022 "Back to the Ballroom" Gala

Nov. 19

Whiteville Diamond Club
Inaugural First Pitch Banquet

Jan. 16






Photos courtsey of Savanna Elkins

Fair Bluff Chamber of Commerce
Annual Dinner

March 2




Columbus County Chamber of Commerce & Tourism

Meet & Mingle

Jan. 23

Whiteville Junior Woman's Club

Arctic Alligator Plunge

March 4

SCC Rams on the Run 5K

March 25

The Cotillion Club

March 18

2023 Debutantes and Sons of Cotillion Ball

Celebrate the Arts

March 25

Wolfpack Optimist Sports Association

April 1

Dixie Youth Baseball Opening Day











Hallsboro-Artesia Elementary

April 6

Career Fair Day






Columbus County Department of Aging

April 20

The Real Senior Prom

Letters From Home

by Mari B. Thompson & Bill Thompson

You may move away, but you can never leave home

Dear Daddy,

Mia and I just returned from Florida and a much-needed break. It was a relief to leave the cold, gray weather in Charlotte for the sunny make-believe world of Disney. We've spent many springs in "The Happiest Place on Earth," and we were happy to get a chance to make new memories.

This trip was bittersweet. My sweet girl will graduate from high school in June and may not want to spend her spring breaks with Mama at Disney anymore, so I made the most of this one. The most memorable moment for me came before we ever got on the road. We were planning our trip and were dismayed to learn that in order to make our reservations for our favorite rides we had to be on the Disney app at 7 a.m. every day before we went to the park. Neither of us are early birds. Mia said to me, "Mama, It's your vacation, too. I can do that some days. You don't have to do everything yourself anymore."

And I didn't. We discussed everything. We planned what park we should go to on which day. We prioritized which rides would need a reservation. Mia investigated and approved restaurants based on their low-sodium options for me in the same way that I had researched menus for chicken nuggets when she was little.

My first memory of Mia at Disney was in Cinderella's castle watching the wizards in the Bibbity Bobbity Boutique transform my 4-year-old princess into Disney royalty. Mia's eyes sparkled like the princess gowns hanging in the shop and she carefully considered each, her little hand carefully brushing over the colorful fabrics, before choosing a favorite. As I helped her put on the powder blue Cinderella dress in the fitting room, she turned to look at herself in the mirror and I saw the magic begin. It continued as she sat in the salon and chose the colors for her nails and selected the glitter for her hair. The magic wasn't in the dress, her nails, or her hair. It was her face. It was the way she looked at herself. The way she looked up at me. A light came on inside her as she saw the results of her own choices. It was more than confidence. I think it was the spark of possibility.

That first trip was so different from this one. Then Mia was 4 and I carried her much of the time because she refused to ride in the stroller. The stroller was low to the ground, and Mia wanted to be up higher so she could see where she was going. Now she's 17 and two inches taller than me with a graceful and purposeful stride that will part a crowd. I had to hustle to keep up sometimes. She no longer needs to be coaxed onto a ride while she holds my hand, but prefers the ones that make my stomach flip and dares me to join her. At 4, she only wanted chicken nuggets for every meal. On this trip, she ordered escargot three times and tried things she couldn't pronounce in the different countries of Epcot.

The spring before my graduation from Hallsboro High School, I was 17, too. I don't remember what was on my mind at her age, but now I'm a parent watching my daughter prepare for the end of one phase of her life and the beginning of a new one, just as you and Mama watched me then. It makes me wonder, what was on your mind back then? My daughter will be going out into a very different world than the one you sent yours into.

I wish I could offer Mia the safety of a "Happiest Place on Earth" in which to explore, grow and take chances, but I can't. I wish I could hold her up high again so she could see where she's going, but I can't. The most I can do is share her excitement about the possibilities and cheer her on as she makes her own choices to build her own happy place.

Love,
Nubbin

Dear Nubbin,

I'm glad y'all had a good time at Disney World. Despite living almost next door, I didn't get to go with you and Will and your mama when we lived in New Smyrna Beach. I have been to Carowinds and Busch Gardens in Virginia with y'all and I enjoyed that. But my "happy place"—as far as entertainment goes—is right here. The same week y'all went to Disney World, we had Southern Farm Days at the lake. I missed that and my usual role as emcee at the Cotillion Club Spring Dance and Debutant Ball this year because we attended Currie's wedding in Charlotte. Those two hometown events kinda represent my life—two ends of the spectrum—and I really enjoy them.

Nonetheless, I can certainly appreciate the "maturation moments" that you shared with Mia. It is usually a surprise when those moments just slip up on us and make us suddenly aware that our little ones are growing up. But we don't forget those moments.

I well remember some of those times when you and Will were growing up. The first one I remember was your first dance recital with Louise Barkley's dance group at Waccamaw Academy. That was the beginning of a long series of recitals that I emceed for Louise and I saw you and a lot of other little girls not only become good dancers but young ladies as well. I was made aware of not only the maturation of the young ladies but my own aging process as over the years I introduced the daughters and even some granddaughters of girls who had begun as little dancers on that same stage. I still have a photograph of you in your little tutu, feet pointed and arms raised.

And when Will first walked out on the Dixie Youth baseball field, little did I know that was the first step toward an involvement that would cover the next 20 years of his life: high school, college and recreation league. Despite his age when he "retired," to me he was still that little boy who was so proud to be wearing a baseball uniform.

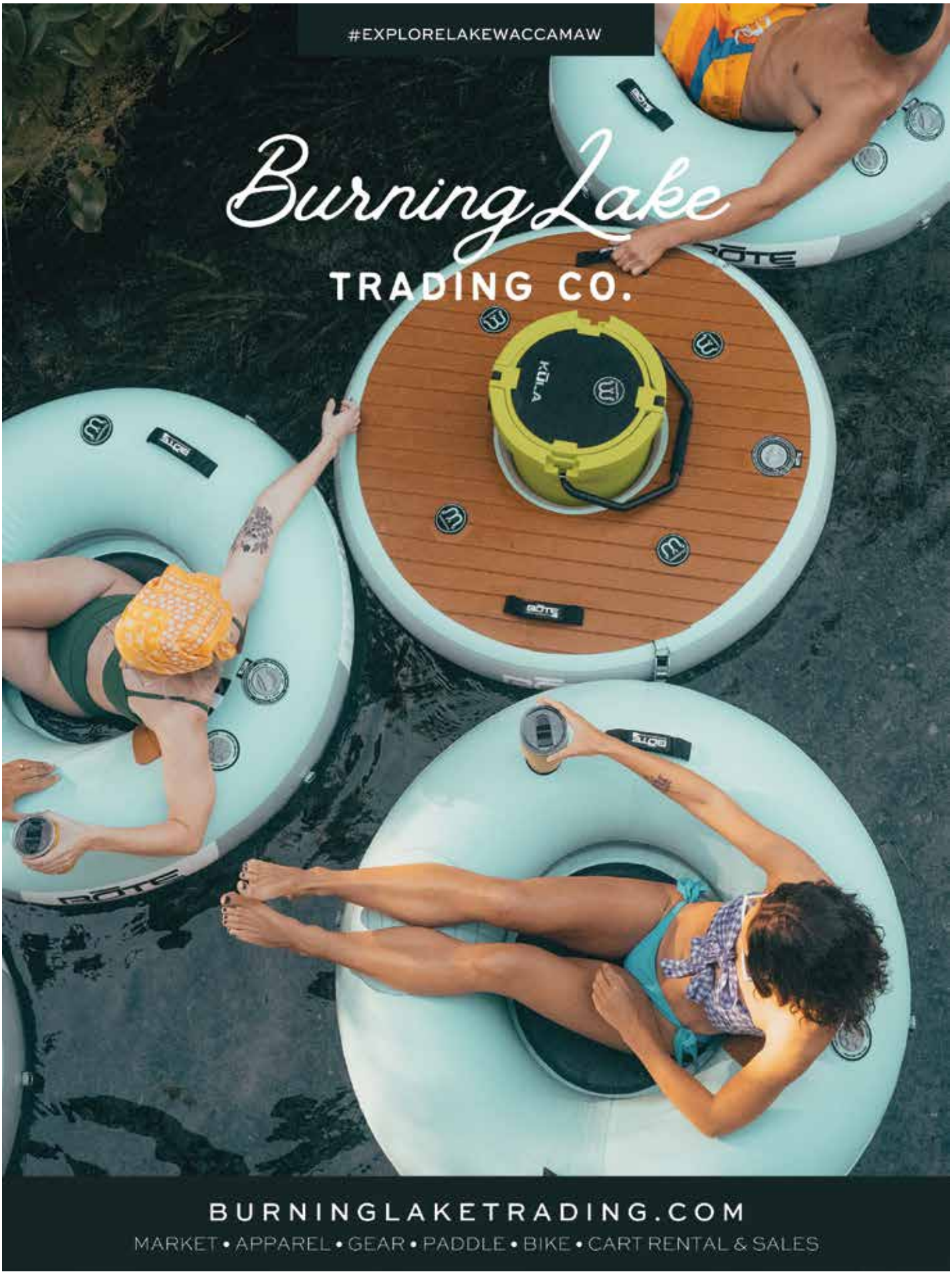
I remember your performance as Dorothy from "The Wizard of Oz" in the talent show at the academy. Again, I was the emcee, so Louise wouldn't let me announce you as the winner; she did it. It was a good thing she did 'cause I was crying anyway. That was just the beginning of so many performances in pageants and events over the years. I saw my little girl go from wearing that little tutu to elegant gowns, from singing "Somewhere over the Rainbow" to performing Broadway songs before large audiences and, eventually, a college music scholarship. Benchmarks of progress, signs of growing up that "snuck up" on me.

Probably the biggest "maturation moments" for me were when you got married and when Will and Jenny got married and my grandchildren were born; then my children had children! I never thought I would be a grandfather!

Everybody has surprises along the way, things that remind us that time is not unmarked. Events remind us of where we are in life and what is important. Some things that we might ordinarily see as unimportant can take on real significance. Just last week when I was with Will in Elizabeth City, we went to pick up Lyla from her school, and the lady handling all the transfers said, "Hello, Mr. Thompson. Lyla is right over there." She wasn't talking to me. My son was now Mr. Thompson.

Of course, no matter how old y'all get, no matter how much you accomplish, you will still be "Daddy's girl" and "Daddy's big boy."

Love ya!
Daddy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