

May/June 2022



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**Alan Fulghum
having fun in
restaurant biz**

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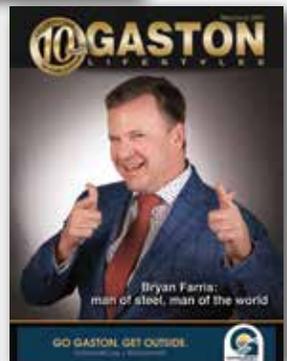
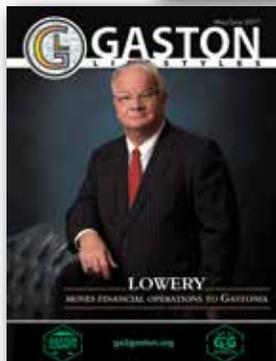
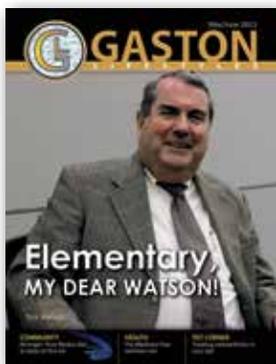
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PRESIDENT/CEO LETTER



Mahamood "Mo" Ally 1941-2022



Desmond Ganpatsingh (London)

"I have known my friend Mahamood for 69 years, and he will be forever ingrained in me. My brother is gone, but his memory remains with me and will be so until my death. There is going to be a great hole in my life, and I will forever try to be the man he was to me. And what a man he was: never angry, never bitter, never hating, always kind, always loving, always generous, always strict, always professional, always forgiving and a man for all seasons. I loved him so much. Goodbye, my brother. Rest in peace."

Keith Clark (South Africa)

"Debs, my heart goes out to you. I have not been this shocked in a long time. Mo was my mentor and best friend. It's so sad to hear of his tragic passing without warning! On behalf of Ellen and me and the Golden Bulls Cricket Club, we send our very best love, sympathies and condolences to you and all your family. RIP, Mo Ally. Legend of all sports and the most generous, loving person, you will never be forgotten."

Deborah Littlejohn Currence (Soul Food Bistro, Gastonia, N.C.)

"Our prayers are with you and your entire family. We're in shock about this news. Mo was just in the restaurant last week, always encouraging Cheryl to continue her work in this community. May God continue to keep His arms wrapped around you in this difficult time."

Harry Solomon (Australia)

"I am shattered! The original Golden Oldies (Cricket) Movement is shattered. What a friend we had in this great human being. Deb, please accept our deepest condolences from everyone in Australia! I loved him like a brother. May you and your family stay strong and blessed."

B.F. Beasley (Gastonia, N.C.)

"Deborah, Mo was a joy to play tennis with. He lived life to the fullest. We will miss him, but we have some wonderful memories of our times with this wonderful gentleman."

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Remembering Mo: beloved husband, friend, leader

Plus: great things to do in Gaston County



Deborah Ally

In this issue, we say farewell to *Gaston Lifestyles* magazine's president and CEO: my husband, Mo Ally.

His sudden absence from my life now leaves a large gap that was once filled by his presence—one of so much love, laughter and support. On Mo's final letter page, we share just a few condolences from friends from around the globe. Later in this issue, there is a fitting poem by Maya Angelou, along with a few memorable photos.

Elsewhere in our pages, you'll read about Alan Fulghum and his Lotus restaurant. Alan is this edition's cover profile, and we think you'll agree that his world-class establishment is worthy of Gastonia, Charlotte and anywhere.

Plus, retired National Guard colonel Jim Bailey has also

ventured into the restaurant business. Jim will tell you about Sammy's in Dallas and share his on-scene reminiscences of Sept. 11, 2001.

And Melissa McCauley of Gaston County Travel and Tourism will tell you about all the great weekend activities available in this county that Mo loved so much. As well, you'll learn how the Little Theatre of Gastonia and the Gaston School of the Arts have more than a century of combined efforts in improving our community's artistic opportunities and excellence.

As ever, many thanks to you, our much-appreciated readers, for making *Gaston Lifestyles* magazine your publication. See you in July! **GL**

President/CEO
Mo Ally

Publisher & Advertising
305-479-2878 (office)
Deborah Ally
dally@gastonlifestyles.com

Editor
Thomas Lark
tlark@gastonlifestyles.com

Art Director
Michele Warren

Digital Media Strategist
Kbiz LLC
admin@gastonlifestyles.com

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P.O. Box 550666 • Gastonia, NC 28055-0666

Contributing Writers
Thomas Lark • Kimberly Blaker
Gaston County Tourism Development
Dr. Mark E. Epstein • Staff reports

Photographers
Howard Smith (cover & Business Center)
Jim Bailey • Crystal Stokes • Joshua Adkins
the Gaston School of the Arts
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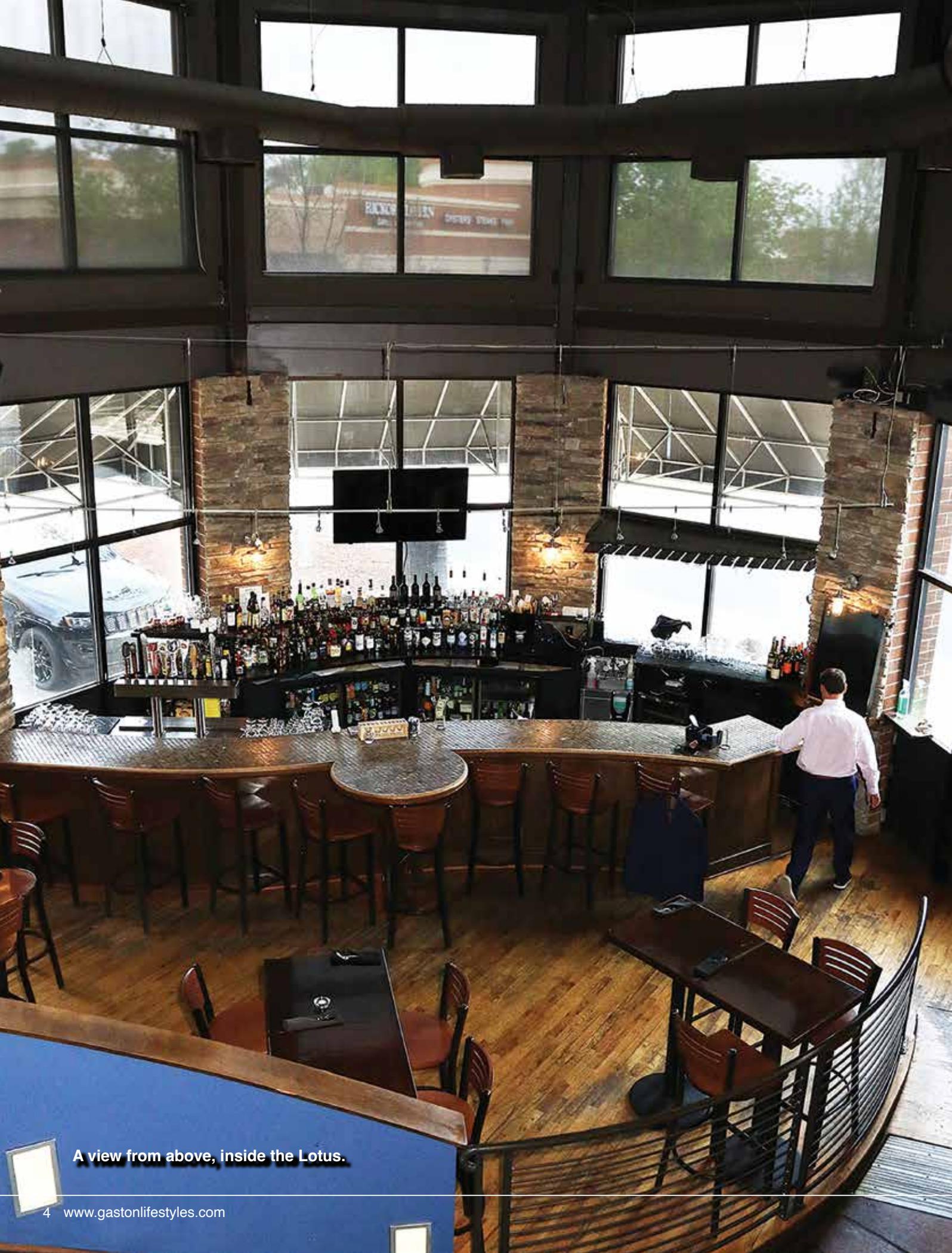
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A view from above, inside the Lotus.

Alan Fulghum having fun in restaurant biz

Local restaurateur keeps busy with food, flair and flavors

By Thomas Lark

Photograph by Howard Smith and Courtesy of Lotus Eatery

You could say that Alan Fulghum is having a lot of fun.

How? The Raleigh native is a local restaurateur, well known as the owner of the Lotus Bar and Eatery, located at 1941 Hoffman Road in Gastonia. He also owns two

Subway franchise stores and a Pet Supplies Plus franchise. The restaurant business is a good thing to be in these days, as it's rebounding and reasserting itself after months of recent hard times.

Gaston Lifestyles recently caught up with Fulghum, and he told us more about what he's up to nowadays. Running a restaurant may be a lot of hard work. But according to Fulghum, you could sum it up, again, with one word: "fun."

"It still makes for a lot of fun," as this busy businessman put it.

The only child of Mac and Peggy Fulghum attended Millbrook High School and then went on to North Carolina State University, both in Raleigh, where he was born and raised.

His parents, he said, "both still live in the Raleigh area and are enjoying retirement."

And it was at N.C. State that Alan Fulghum met the former Summer Wehrmann of Gastonia. At State, both earned degrees in textile management. Fulghum and his college sweetheart worked in that industry for three or four years, as he recalled. The two moved back to Mrs. Fulghum's hometown in 2000. Mrs. Fulghum started working at Gaston Day School when their kids started school, 16 years ago, and she is still on the GDS staff.

"We started our family here," Mr. Fulghum informed. "Annabelle, our oldest, graduated from Gaston Day and is in her third year at N.C. State University. Our son, Payne, is a senior at Gaston Day and is attending Sewanee (also known as the University of the South; a private liberal arts school, affiliated with the Episcopal Church and located in Sewanee, Tenn.) in the fall."

More about the Lotus Bar and Eatery

The Lotus Bar and Eatery is a popular dining spot. Locals give the establishment a five-star rating, according to its Google reviews.

So how did the Fulghums come to purchase the restaurant? "We decided to buy Lotus during 2020," Mr. Fulghum



“Went there with five others to celebrate a friend’s birthday. Three of us had the sea bass, and it was outstanding. Three of the guests were from Charlotte, and they were impressed to find such a good restaurant here in Gastonia. The restaurant was very crowded on a Friday evening, and the service was better than expected. Definitely will return!”

explained. “We enjoyed the restaurant as customers and discussed the opportunity with the previous owner. The restaurant business was always interesting to me because of the fast pace. Summer and I enjoy seeing a lot of friendly faces at Lotus, which has been a neighborhood favorite since 2005.”

Established 16 years ago, the Lotus enjoys a reputation as Gaston County’s premier location for casual dining and modern American comfort food. It’s known for its locally-sourced, up-scale culinary delights that include fresh-catch specials and hand-cut steaks. It takes its influences and inspirations from a wide-ranging set of sources, including South Carolina (Lowcountry classics) and California and Japan (a full *sushi* bar). The restaurant features a private lounge and an upstairs balcony, with respective seating for some 35 and 70 patrons, thus making it the perfect venue for hosting special events.

Fulghum spoke further about the food.

“We begin with an incredible variety of locally-sourced products and imported fresh ingredients,” he said, “searching far and wide for distinct, local flavors. Here at the crossroads of the Carolinas, outside of Charlotte, we set our sights upon presenting to you, our welcome guest, a time-honored feast that will evoke a long-lost meal, an eye-opening experience or lead you to a mouthwatering favorite that you haven’t even discovered yet.”

Thirsty? Try some of the restaurant’s signature cocktails made fresh from scratch. There are 18 seasonal beers on tap; both domestic and imported beers from micro-breweries; more than 30 wines by the glass; premium *sake*; and rare, small-batch spirits, as Fulghum informed.

“We stock a drink lover’s library to quench your thirst,” he said. “And our *sushi* bar specializes in traditional fare, as well as creative signature rolls, serving only the freshest fish: raw, cooked, vegetarian and everything in between.



And with fresh-catch specials brought in daily from the coastal Carolinas, and everything from prime steaks, all-natural free-range chicken and house-smoked barbecue to jumbo-lump crabcakes, shrimp and grits and homemade pasta, we have something for everyone, regardless of taste, appetite or budget.”

Two stories tall, the Lotus is a sizeable place. Its layout features a main dining floor, and the bar has three 46-inch televisions. The private lounge features an enormous flatscreen TV. The restaurant’s dark wood and soft lighting conspire to bathe the unique *ambience* in a kind of relaxing glow straight out of a Rembrandt painting. It’s the sort of place you want to go and linger for a while.

Can’t get to the Lotus? Let the Lotus come to you. Fulghum noted that the restaurant also does catering, and group delivery and individual take-out options are available as well.

“So whether you’re planning a casual night out, a professional get-together or a private event, such as rehearsal dinners, wedding receptions, company functions and speaker events, we’ve got the right space and a menu custom-fit for you,” he said. “We also cater group luncheons and special dinners, too, so let us know how we can best serve you.”

And the restaurant is serving its patrons very well indeed, if the many glowing reviews are any indication. As one recent customer wrote:

“Great food! Tried it for the first time. Love the combinations of flavors. Great steak! The crabcakes were put together well.”



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Ryan Schrift, AIF

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“The service is always very good. Slightly up-scale. It lets you have a nice, quiet, relaxed adult scene for couples or a small party of four or more.”

Another enthused:

“Went there with five others to celebrate a friend’s birthday. Three of us had the sea bass, and it was outstanding. Three of the guests were from Charlotte, and they were impressed to find such a good restaurant here in Gastonia. The restaurant was very crowded on a Friday evening, and the service was better than expected. Definitely will return!”

And still another patron extolled the Lotus as a great place for Mom and Dad to get away to:

“The service is always very good. Slightly up-scale. It lets you have a nice, quiet, relaxed adult scene for couples or a small party of four or more.”

A special place

The friendly folks at the Lotus enjoy playing host to all and sundry, as Fulghum noted.

“We would be delighted to host your special event, meeting or function,” he said.

Just call (704) 853-1698 and ask to speak to the general manager, Shane Williams, for further assistance and availability.

“We offer special menus—*prix fixe*, *i.e.*, pre-selected items at a fixed price for groups of 15-35 or banquet menus, *i.e.*, a gourmet buffet at a fixed price for groups of 40 or more,” Fulghum informed. “Our group menus feature popular items at the best price points, but we are more than happy to work with you in designing a custom menu to best suit your guests,





your budget and the occasion.”

The upstairs balcony may be partitioned off with sound-dampening, heavy theatre curtains, as Fulghum revealed.

“The public does not have access to or pass by that space,” he explained, “and it is completely separate and private from the lounge.”

He added that for details on this and other restaurant features, patrons may simply call the aforesaid telephone number or contact the restaurant by e-mail using that function available on the Website at www.eatatlotus.com.

Fulghum noted that no two days are ever alike in the restaurant world.

“I wish I could tell you what a typical day looks like in the restaurant business,” he said, “but that doesn’t exist. Something is always changing, from people and suppliers to equipment and so much more. Summer and I get to work together and solve issues and meet new people. We love what we do, and we know you will, too!” **GL**

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Jim Bailey: a life in restaurants, building and service

Retired National Guard colonel looks back on colorful military career

By Thomas Lark

Photographs Courtesy of Jim Bailey

For Jim Bailey, life is about service and doing what's right.

Bailey, 75, recently told *Gaston Lifestyles* about his work as a local contractor. He also talked about his service to his country (he's a retired colonel in the National Guard) and his role as a restaurateur, serving up good food to fine folks at Sammy's in Dallas.

Born in Charlotte, James William Bailey grew up in Mount Holly, the oldest of four children born to the late Buford and Ruby Bailey. His siblings, Mike, Johnny and Susan, are gone. But the happy memories of an idyllic childhood remain, as the colonel observed.

"Life in Mount Holly was the best you could ask for," he said, recalling, "a small town where everyone knew each other, and you were told to come home when the streetlights came on. Your friends' parents knew yours, and they let each other know when kids were misbehaving. We were all poor, but none of us knew it."

Bailey was one of some 105 graduates of the old Mount Holly High School. He went on to earn a bachelor of science degree in business administration at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee.

"Western was the perfect place for me," he said. "It was small, and you got to know many of the 5,000 students. I was fortunate enough to join the Pi Kappa Alpha Fraternity. I made close friends with many of those guys. And at most homecoming games at Western, we still get together, and it's as if it has been no time since we were in school. The sad part of this is that now we're all in our 70's, we are losing more of our close friends every year. Such is life. But the great memories and friendships never leave us."

Also during his time at Western, in 1968, Bailey joined the Air National Guard.

"It changed my life," he said. "I was able to return to school after attending basic training and a technical school, so I wasn't delayed long in completing my degree. I was an enlisted guy in personnel and joked that we kept all the regulations and pay charts in our office. As a result, when I finished my degree, I knew what the requirements were to becoming a commissioned

officer. And I set my sights on that, because I knew I loved the military and wanted to make a career of it."

In the Guard, Bailey benefitted from the mentorship roles played by his superior officers, among them cols. Lloyd Miller, Tom Gerock and Pete Peterson, and what he learned from all of them is inestimable. Bailey's 38-year military career took him all over Europe, Central America and parts of South America and Africa.

An eyewitness to Sept. 11

"One of the best jobs I had was being the Department of Defense representative to three Special Olympics World Games," he said. "After my second game in Alaska, I was asked to go to Salt Lake City for the 2002 Winter Olympics. That was quite an experience!"

And it was also the reason that Bailey found himself at the Pentagon on Sept. 11, 2001, when a hijacked plane struck the building.

"The day before, I was developing the budget for those games and was at a desk, finishing up the details, when all Hell broke loose," he remembered. "The office I worked for was the same office that was responsible for supporting civilian authorities in times of emergencies. So, while 25,000 people evacuated the building, about 50 people in our department began filling requests from New York, Washington, D.C. and other places.

"The requests for body bags, hospital ships, military units and radiation-testing units poured in," he continued. "No one had any idea what we were dealing with, so the requests were unbelievably large and complicated. Many sacrifices were made by many that day, as we all know. There's one you may not know of and that thankfully was not required of two F-16 Air National Guard pilots from Andrews Air Force Base."

It's a story that has been seen on the History Channel, and it's available on You-Tube. As Bailey explained:

"The two pilots were going to fly their unarmed aircraft into United Airlines Flight 93 (which crashed in Pennsylvania) to bring it down, if they could not divert it from its potential target. These two pilots were Col. Marc

“I tell people that my job is to eat free, drink free and talk to people. So far this has worked very well.”

“Sass” Sasseville and First Lt. Heather “Lucky” Penny. Their story is the epitome of the things we did that day as a nation. I stayed the week at the Pentagon until they were able to get the regular folks back to work. But it is a week that will live with me forever. Wherever I am, I will do my best to never let us forget. Just so you know, my worst experience that week was when the hospital ship was turned back from New York and replaced with body bags and cadaver dogs.”

Powerful memories

Other memorable military experiences included flying an F-16 and, in some 100 firefighting missions, a C-130, as well as driving an M-1 tank and riding 70 miles in a Toyota SUV across the Iraqi desert. Retiring from military life in 2006, he then began work with a small construction company, given him by his son, fellow contractor and restaurateur John Bailey (also featured in *Gaston Lifestyles*, back in 2018).

“By 2008, he wished he had kept it!” the elder Bailey quipped of the company. “We became vendors for Freddie Mac, and over the next 12 years repaired more than 15,000 foreclosed homes for Freddie, so they could be put back on the market and sold. We became a very successful company from that contract.”

In the wake of a then-recovering economy about six years ago, Jim and John Bailey knew they needed a new venture,

as their work with foreclosures was drying up. It was then that the younger Bailey purchased Sammy’s in Belmont. Col. Bailey built a Sammy’s of his own in Dallas. His son-in-law, Graham Binford, runs it.

“I know absolutely nothing about these things,” the colonel observed, “so I tell people that my job is to eat free, drink free and talk to people. So far this has worked very well. Poor Graham, he does all the work!”

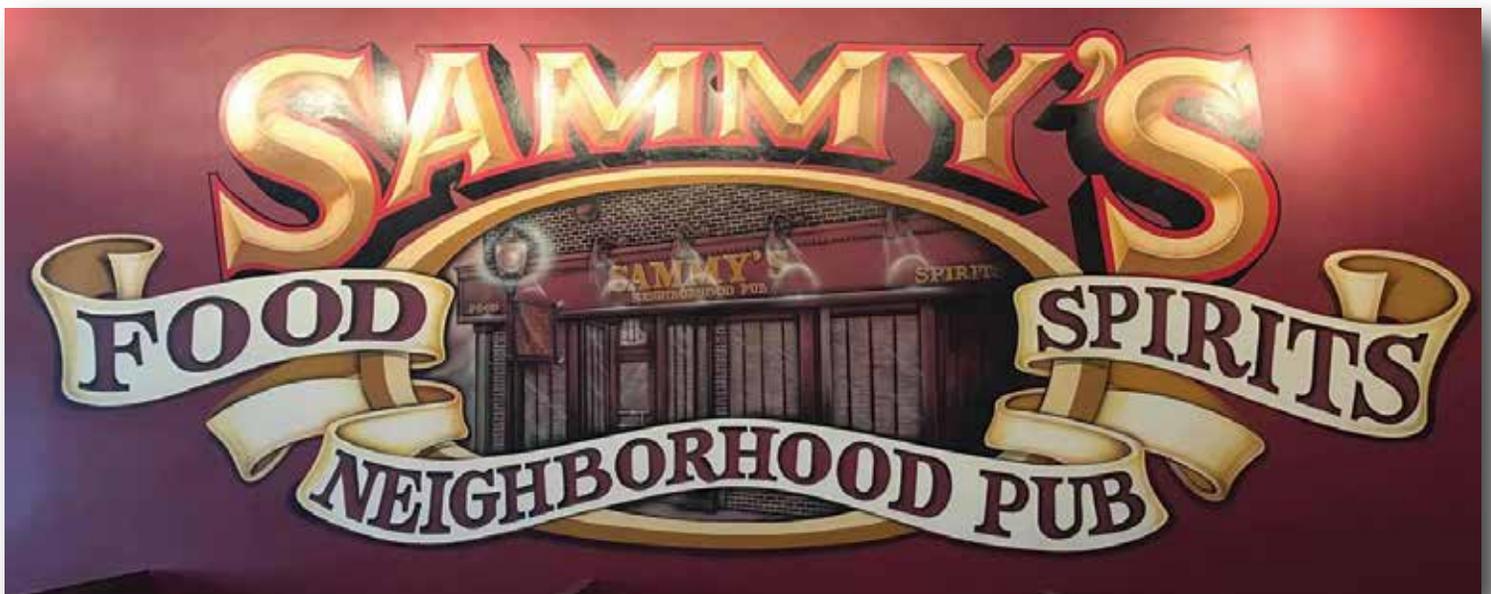
About 12 years ago, Bailey and Ron Foulk, then the principal at Ida Rankin Elementary in Mount Holly, climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro in Tanzania.

“It was one of the most exciting things I’ve ever done,” Bailey remarked. “Go try it.”

He also spoke of his wife, Caroline, “the greatest lady I have ever known.” In high school, they sat together in an American history class.

“And to show you how smart I am, it only took me about 35-plus years to find her and convince her to marry me!” he quipped. “We have four of the best children and three grandchildren that can be imagined. John, who ran the construction company and now owns Sammy’s of Dallas, and Catherine are the two oldest. I don’t know where she got it, but she is one of the most loving people there is. Amelia is the most creative member of the family. She is creative and colorful, as evidenced by her purple hair this week. She’s also an outstanding teacher of dance at the Charlotte School of the Arts. J.P., who was named for his grandfather, J.P. Smith of Mount Holly, is our strong, silent type. He is running the construction company now and is learning more about it every day.

“My family says that I’m the luckiest guy they know,” Bailey added. “I readily agree. I didn’t earn it. It was a *gift*.” **GL**





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By Gaston County Tourism Development
Photographs by Gaston County Travel and Tourism



Gaston County is a great place to spend the weekend. Whether you love the great outdoors or need a getaway with your family, a great adventure awaits you. Come explore Gaston County.

If you have the gear, from kayaks and paddleboards to mountain bikes and hiking shoes, we have the places to use it. Now is the time to get outdoors and discover a recreation wonderland.

Outdoor adventure

The crown jewel of Gaston County is Crowders Mountain State Park. The views here are spectacular. Outdoor adventurers can enjoy miles of hiking, camping, fishing and more. Countywide, we have more than 80 parks for the enjoyment of visitors, making it easy to encounter nature and explore anywhere your adventure might lead.

And with the help of the Carolina Thread Trail, Gaston

County offers miles of trails, including both greenways for hiking and blueways for paddling, creating a great opportunity to get outside.

Nature lovers

Hop on the trail and enjoy the beauty of nature through these attractions located throughout the county. The Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden is the Carolinas' garden for all seasons. The Stowe Garden provides guests a chance to reconnect with nature and to create lifelong memories. Located on 380 acres along the banks of Lake Wylie, it features spectacular gardens, sparkling fountains, a conservatory of tropical plants and more.

Come learn about science and natural history at the Schiele Museum of Natural History. It offers exceptional educational programs, exhibits and more. It's one of 70 such American museums designated as affiliates of the Smithsonian Institution.

See what's growing on the farm in Gaston County. In



Crowders Mountain State Park



Flatwater

Every day is a good day to be on the water, as the scenic views, public access areas and boat rental options abound. Paddling the calm waters is a super-easy and fun way to pass the time.

the spring, you can step into a strawberry patch. Come summertime, look for vine-ripened tomatoes, squash and blueberries. Fall is a colorful season, as pumpkins turn bright orange. Find our farms, and have some fun!

On the water

Every day is a good day to be on the water, as the scenic views, public access areas and boat rental options abound. Paddling the calm waters is a super-easy and fun way to pass the time. Grab a boat and head to either the Catawba or South Fork rivers, using a sit-on-top kayak with single or tandem options or maybe even a canoe. Check out the 11 Mills Blueway Trail for detailed information on where to launch, dock and make stops along the way.

Maybe paddling just isn't your idea of a good time. That's

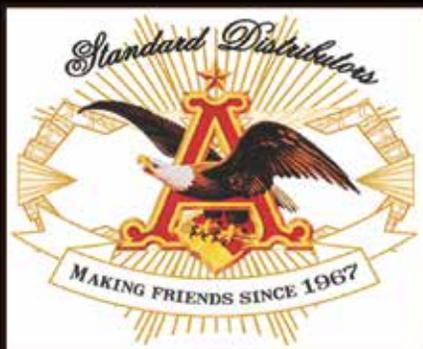
OK! The Catawba River, which leads to Lake Wylie, allows our visitors a chance to enjoy open water. Grab some friends and rent a jet-ski or a pontoon boat at one of our marinas and make your own private party on the water.

The U.S. National Whitewater Center is the world's premier outdoor facility. It features the best adventures for thrill-seekers, including whitewater rafting, zip lines and climbing, creating a great weekend getaway!

Whitewater-rafting is a must at the Whitewater Center. It's in the name, after all. Rapids range from classes II to IV, and experiences vary from beginner to advanced. All options include a professional guide. Experienced paddlers may take on the whitewater course by kayak.

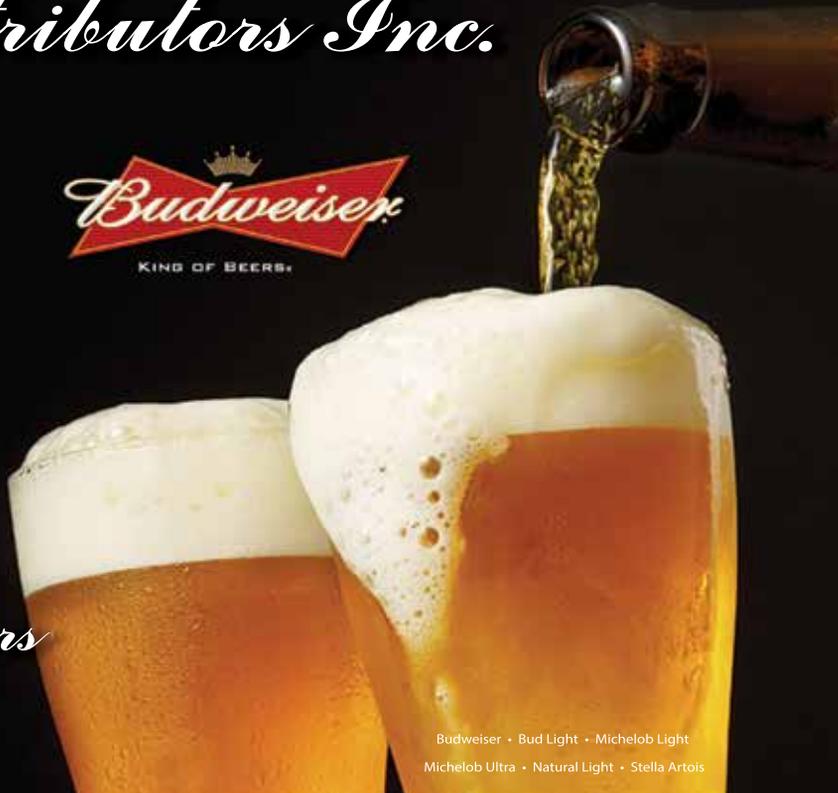
Stretch across the center's campus on a zipline course. Varying from 200 feet to more than 1,000 feet long, ziplines

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carry passengers above the tree canopy and across the whitewater course.

Deepwater solo is a form of rock-climbing that utilizes falling into a deep pool of water instead of traditional climbing protection. The Whitewater Center's Deepwater Solo Complex has five walls, ranging from 20 to 45 feet in height.

Tree canopy ropes is an activity built into the trees or made of utility poles. It incorporates traversing obstacles of varying difficulty. Participants wear harnesses and are attached to safety lines throughout the activity.

Craft Beverages

The Ridgeline Craft Beverage Trail features breweries, distilleries and wineries in and around Gaston County. There are currently 12 locations situated on the trail. Each has its own unique feel and culture. Experienced together on the trail, it makes a great weekend getaway.

Sports fans

In Gaston County, we pack the house as spectators roar with cheers for their teams and favorite athletes.

If you're an athlete at heart, you absolutely must head to the ballfield in Gastonia to witness the fun of the ballgame. The athletes of the Gastonia Honey-Hunters are members of a professional baseball team in the Atlantic League.

Roaring to life with spectacular dirt-track races, the Carolina Speedway is known as "the Action Track." This

If you're an athlete at heart, you absolutely must head to the ballfield in Gastonia to witness the fun of the ballgame.

nearly half-mile oval track hosts different divisions each week. Check the calendar for 700-horsepower engines thundering around the track, and cheer the drivers to the finish line.

Belmont Abbey College's Crusaders play in the NCAA Division II Conference Carolinas, and they currently compete in nearly 36 men's and women's varsity sports. With so many sports, there are home games on campus nearly every night of the week.

And at Gaston College, the Rhinos compete in five sports: baseball, softball, e-sports, beach volleyball and men's basketball in the NJCAA.

Christmas County

When the sun goes down, visitors explore the brightly illuminated town of McAdenville, while carillon bells



Gastonia Honey Hunters

play carols. The tour includes a lake with a 75-foot multi-colored fountain, an historic bell tower and vintage displays. Christmastown, USA was ranked fourth by *USA Today* as the “Best Public Holiday Lights Display” in America.

Enjoy the sights and sounds of Christmas at the Christmastown Five-K, the area’s most popular organized road race (just more than three miles). The lights don’t officially begin until December, but our participants receive a sneak peek for one night only! It’s a great way to kick off your Christmas season.

Celebrate the holidays at the Stowe Garden. Come enjoy a mile of a million lights, twinkling from November through the end of December.

The Whitewater Center creates a 17,000-square-foot ice trail for skating, with an on-ice Airstream serving hot and cold beverages. It’s available November through February.

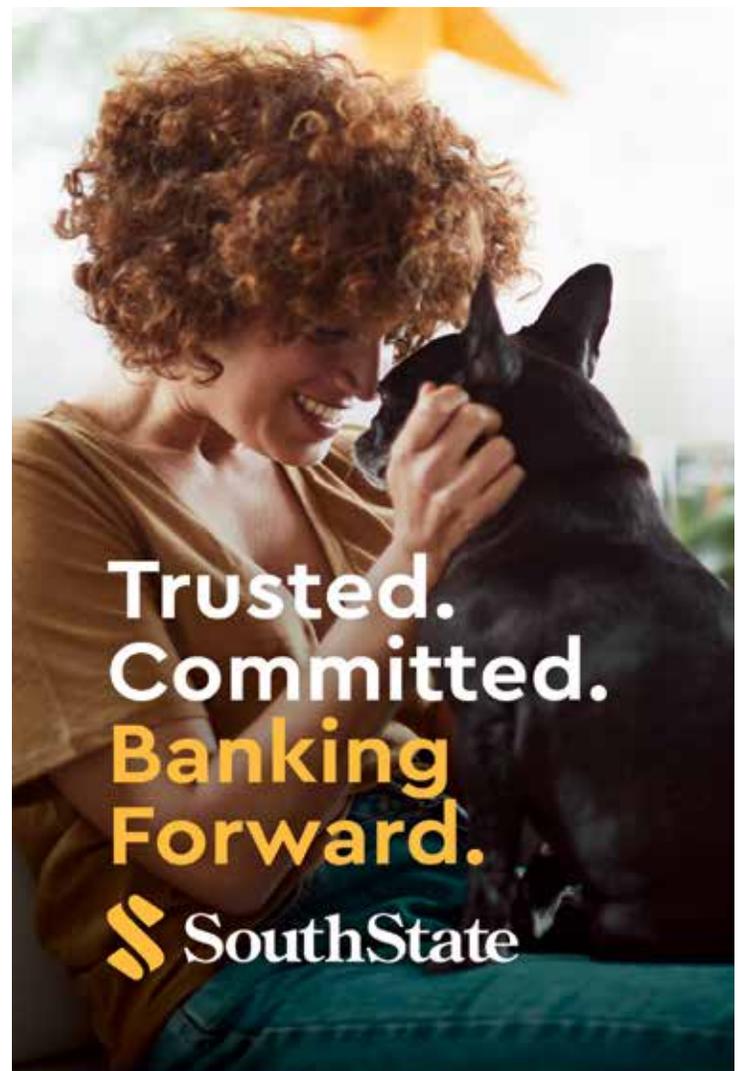
Spend a night of fun with your friends and family on the Chutes. These snowless tubing lanes are at Crowders Camps.

Located just outside of Charlotte, Gaston County offers many things to see and do, making a great weekend getaway. We are only minutes away from Charlotte-Douglas International Airport, and we have great places to stay and numerous unique dining establishments to complete a great weekend away. Come stay with us! GoGastonNC.org 



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IN REMEMBRANCE

When Great Trees Fall

When great trees fall, rocks on distant hills shudder, lions hunker down in tall grasses, and even elephants lumber after safety.

When great trees fall in forests, small things recoil into silence, their senses eroded beyond fear.

When great souls die, the air around us becomes light, rare, sterile. We breathe, briefly. Our eyes, briefly, see with a hurtful clarity. Our memory, suddenly sharpened, examines, gnaws on kind words unsaid, promised walks never taken.

Great souls die and our reality, bound to them, takes leave of us. Our souls, dependent upon their nurture, now shrink, wizened.

Our minds, formed and informed by their radiance, fall away. We are not so much maddened as reduced to the unutterable ignorance of dark, cold caves.

And when great souls die, after a period peace blooms, slowly and always irregularly. Spaces fill with a kind of soothing electric vibration.

Our senses, restored, never to be the same, whisper to us. They existed. They existed.

We can be. Be and be better. For they existed.

— Maya Angelou



PHOTO GALLERY

Community Foundation 2022 Run for the Money



PHOTO GALLERY

Gaston School of the Arts, *Seussical: The Musical*. Photographs by Crystal Stokes



Aliyah Brown was among the performers in *Seussical: The Musical*.



Ellison Cantrell was the Cat in the Hat in *Seussical: The Musical*.



Don't disappoint Yurtle the Turtle!



The Gaston School of the Arts' recent production of *Seussical: The Musical* was a smash.

Photographs courtesy of Joshua Adkins and the Gaston School of the Arts



Kids' pottery classes are a big hit.



Guitar lessons are also available at the GSOA.



Joshua Adkins is joined here by his wife, Lidia.



Ayanna-Moné Arnold is the GSOA's newest music teacher.



Art classes for adults are also popular.



ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Gaston School of the Arts teaching young and old

Generations of artistic fun in Gastonia



From staff reports

Photograph Courtesy of Gaston School of the Arts

The Gaston School of the Arts is contributing to the local arts scene in a variety of important ways.

According to executive director Joshua Adkins, the school, located on Union Road in Gastonia, has been around nearly 40 years now.

Its faculty members are instructing a variety of students, both young and old, in many artistic disciplines, from theatre and music to painting and pottery. Various arts-related classes and programs are available, including a youth orchestra and a summer theatre camp.

The Gaston School of the Arts (or GSOA) has a lofty and uplifting mission. It is to provide high-quality, affordable arts instruction in music, art and theatre for both children and adults in Gaston County and in the surrounding area. A non-profit organization, the GSOA receives funding from the Gaston Arts Council. Amongst its other donors are the Gaston Community Foundation and the Glenn Foundation.

The school's children's theatre, the GSOA Playhouse, was

Various arts-related classes and programs are available, including a youth orchestra and a summer theatre camp.

founded 22 years ago to give local young people performance and educational opportunities in all of the theatrical arts. The group's recent production of *Seussical: The Musical* was a smash hit.

And the school is gearing up now for its summer theatre camp for kids. The younger participants will present *Winnie the Pooh*. The older kids will perform in *High School Musical, Jr.*

Adkins informed that the GSOA is governed by a board of directors. The school employs between 10 and 25 part-time instructors and staffers on an annual basis. All of

Older participants in this summer's kids' theatre camp will present *High School Musical, Jr.*

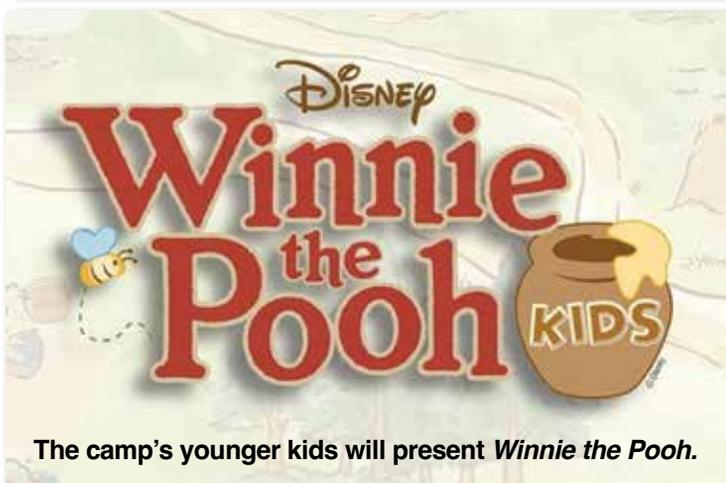
high school
musical JR.

the instructors hold degrees in their teaching areas or the equivalent professional experience in their specialties.

Before coming to the Gaston School of the Arts, Adkins served for 12 years as the worship pastor at the First Baptist Church of Belmont. During that time, he organized and later served as executive director of the Fine Arts Academy of Belmont.

Adkins earned a degree in vocal performance and music education from Appalachian State University. As part of his studies, he pursued music and ballet in Graz, Austria. He has performed in sacred and secular venues throughout the eastern United States, Europe and Syria. He has been a lifetime student of the visual, musical and dramatic arts.

To learn more about the GSOA and its many activities, send your e-mail queries to office@gastonschoolofthearts.org or call Adkins at (704) 866-8882, extension 21. **GI**



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Little Theatre of Gastonia going strong

Preparing now for next show, May 27-29; June 3-5

By Thomas Lark
Photographs courtesy of Little Theatre of Gastonia



“The play’s the thing.” More than 420 years after Shakespeare put that line in the mouth of Hamlet in his immortal play of the same name, it remains true of the ancient art of theatre. And locally, the Little Theatre of Gastonia, now in its 72nd year, remains as vital as ever, according to executive director Lauren Parker.

Talking of the Bard, Parker recently told us the LTG will present *Something Rotten*, a musical satire of Shakespearean plays, May 27-29 and June 3-5. The last Friday and Saturday of this month, nightly performances are at 7 p.m. A *matinée* follows that Sunday at 3 p.m. Plus, that Saturday is a pay-what-you-can night; doors open at 6 p.m. The show continues

the next Friday and Saturday, June 3 and 4, at 7 p.m. nightly, and another *matinée* follows at 3 p.m., Sunday, June 5.

The show is directed by Parker. The music is directed by Michael Sisk. It’s choreographed by Claire Depaoli and Danielle Comeau. Rated PG-13 for some adult content, it’s suggested for audience members 13 and older. Tickets may be purchased *via* the Website at www.littletheatreofgastonia.org or by calling the box office and leaving a message at (704) 865-0160.

When an organization has surpassed seven decades of successful life, it must be doing something right. Parker noted the LTG is a colorful part of the local scene.

“We have made an effort to work with important pieces of the Gastonia community, including the Gaston Public Library,



Chris Smeltzer and Chris Magee as brothers “Nick and Nigel Bottom.” Behind them are Noemi Rabinowitz, Patrick Stepp and Alyssa White, respectively “Bea,” “Shakespeare” and “Portia.”

When an organization has surpassed seven decades of successful life, it must be doing something right.

the Gaston Museum of Art and History and the Gastonia Honey-Hunters,” she said. “We’re always looking for more ways to become involved.

“Art is something I think a lot of people take for granted,” Parker continued. “Art is in everything we do and see. It is a big part of the beauty in the world: the colors, the shapes, the moments and feelings captured in a photograph or expressed in a mural. It is the escape from the mundane and the reprieve from everyday responsibilities. It is both the calm and the storm. I’ve been involved in the arts—specifically the performance arts—since I could form cognitive memories. I have been privileged to see people from every background, every struggle, every time of their lives imaginable come together—for what seems like forever at the time but is just a second in the grand scheme of things—to make truly



Brothers “Nick and Nigel Bottom” are played by Chris Magee and Chris Smeltzer.

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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

“The Little Theatre of Gastonia is a hidden gem in our city that has played a vibrant role in providing live theatre and performing arts experiences to our residents for decades. It offers people a place to be entertained—to laugh, cry, tap their feet, clap their hands or sing along to a favorite song.”

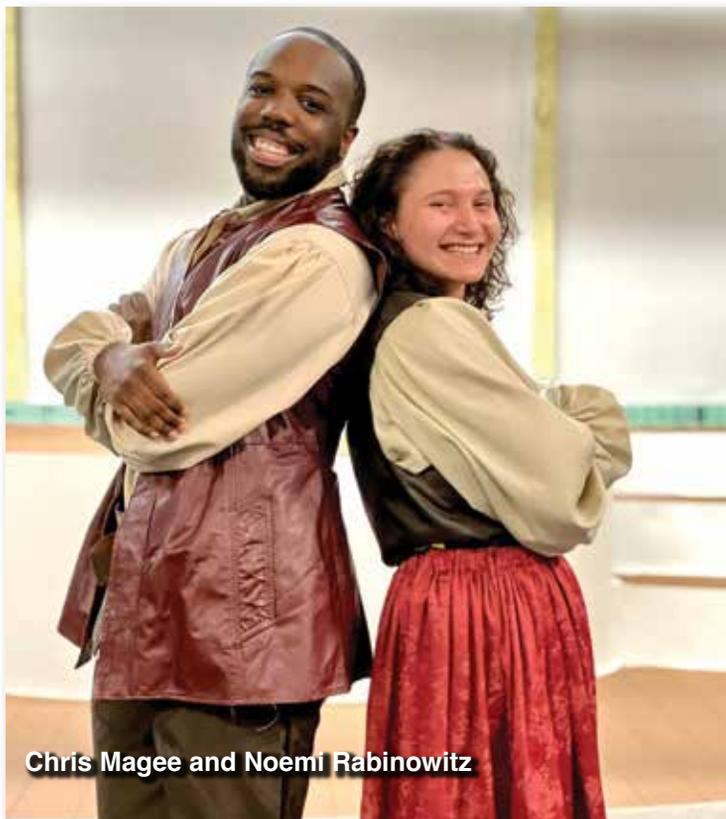
memorable, important things.”

As examples of this, Parker cited parents working with their children and enjoying a hobby they previously didn't understand; best friends enjoying one last show together before going their separate ways to different colleges across the country; a grandparent and a grandchild coming to an audition for the first time and cheering each other on from the stage as they're both cast; and strangers who became bridesmaids or godparents to each other's children years later because of the relationships that started on the stage.

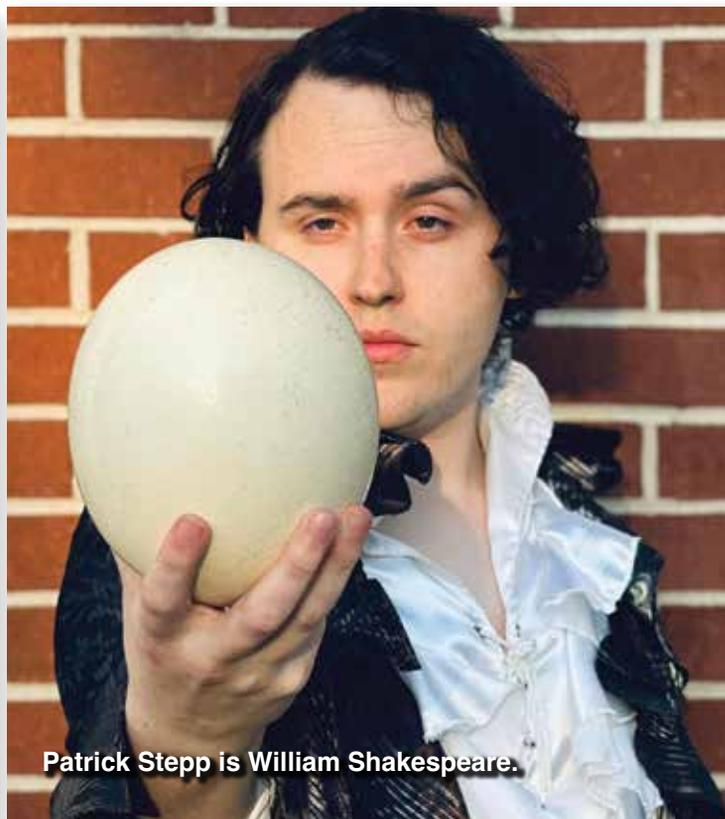
“Performance art is more than just the beautiful stories, dances, music, costumes and sets, though each piece of the proverbial puzzle is important and impressive,” she said. “Performance art is about the people. It is about

individuals who form a community of artists. The board of the Little Theatre of Gastonia and I have spent hours during meetings, as well as in casual conversation, talking about the importance of community and of the people who make up said community. Our goal is to create a safe place where anyone can become part of the LTG family and find a place where they belong here. Our goal is to have accessible arts, with affordable programming and community pay-what-you-can nights for most of our performances. Our goal is to create seasons that have at least one show that appeals to every person within the community. Our goal is to create art.”

LTG Directors Board President Jennifer Stepp shared Parker's assessment. Stepp extolled the organization for finishing its 72nd season, and she also cited the various efforts



Chris Magee and Noemi Rabinowitz



Patrick Stepp is William Shakespeare.

of its board of directors, including:

- rebranding the theatre as a welcoming place for everyone;
- making the Little Theatre of Gastonia truly a community theatre;
- varying the line-up of its theatrical season and ethnicities of its performers;
- returning kids' summer programming;
- and seeking out various ways of better serving others.

“The Little Theatre of Gastonia is a hidden gem in our city that has played a vibrant role in providing live theatre and performing arts experiences to our residents for decades,” Stepp said. “It offers people a place to be entertained—to laugh, cry, tap their feet, clap their hands or sing along to a favorite song. Audiences get to see and feel life experiences through the various characters of the shows, which can be a very powerful thing. When the house lights go down, and the stage lights come up, people can let their guard down and become a little more vulnerable. This often lends itself to a release of energy and emotion that can at times feel very cleansing. The Little Theatre of Gastonia is a place where audiences can sit back and learn, hear stories, escape and imagine if only for just a little while. The live performances we bring to the stage may tickle your funny bones, tug at your heartstrings, soothe your soul, sharpen your mind and increase your understanding of others, growing us all

as individuals and as a community. It is our goal to firstly entertain you, but at times, we also hope to nurture you, challenge you and inspire you. It is our goal be a place where all feel welcome and a part of something special in our community and to be a place where our audiences leave a performance feeling the couple of hours they spent with us was an enjoyable and valuable experience.”

To learn more about the LTG, opportunities for collaboration and more, send your e-mail queries to Parker at ltgastonia@gmail.com. **GL**



Chris Smeltzer is “Nick,” and Noemi Rabinowitz is “Bea” in *Something Rotten*.



Chris Magee as “Nigel” and Alyssa White as “Portia” rehearse a scene from *Something Rotten*.

An ode to new veterinarians

Looking back, looking ahead

By Dr. Mark E. Epstein, DVM, Dipl ABVP, CVPP, TotalBond Veterinary Hospitals
Photographs courtesy of TotalBond Veterinary Hospitals



Dr. Mark Epstein

I am a 1985 graduate of veterinary school.

It is both yesterday and a generation ago. I have forgotten how little I knew at the time, and there was far less to know then.

Fast-forward to 2022. New veterinarians are technologically much savvier, and they need to be, considering the many advances in medicine and informatics. Yet they also come into practice as wide-eyed as my classmates and I once did. In our growing TotalBond practices, we have several newly-minted DVM's every year. What these new graduates lack in experience, they more than make up for in enthusiasm, eagerness and, arguably more than I have seen in previous years, a love of continued learning. These doctors seem insatiable in their desire to learn fast, learn more and deliver the best possible care to their patients and "pet parents."

Still, their training does not prepare them for all aspects

of life in a veterinary practice. In teaching hospitals, appointments are often hours long. The cases are second-opinion, referral, with a network of specialists at their beck and call, and much of the groundwork has already been laid in the referring DVM's primary-care general practice. Now in a first-opinion setting, what to make of this vomiting dog, that coughing cat, or what if—*Gadzooks!*—Room III has a chinchilla or a bearded dragon?

Nevertheless, while this may feel like a deer-in-the-headlights moment, new doctors are actually better-equipped than they may realize at first. Hopefully, the senior clinicians in the hospital are there to answer questions and give guidance. And if they're very fortunate, the practice has a formal mentorship and training program to accelerate their on-board acclimation.

There's much more to becoming a superior veterinarian than just knowing your medicine, what tests to run, what



Deanna, Amy, Dr. Mark Epstein, Allie, Kendra and Lindsey



Esme, Jen, Meg, Summer, Poppy, Megan, Dr. Sara Toner and Jordan

**“There’s much more to becoming
a superior veterinarian than just
knowing your medicine...”**

medications to give and how to manage anesthesia and perform surgical procedures—though obviously there is all of that. As important as clinical acumen are teamwork, communication, leadership skills, problem-avoidance and resolution. Kind, compassionate and talented as one may be, these “soft skills” must be learned like any other “hard skill,” and they’re critical to both professional and personal success. The practice that does not spend time and attention training in the social, cultural aspects of practice does so at its—and their new DVM’s—peril.

During the course of a day, new DVM’s will face what amount to microcosms of their entire careers: the spectrum of joy and challenge that is the practice of veterinary medicine. A new puppy in Room I? *Yay!* But maybe it’s an end-of-life discussion and humane euthanasia in Room II; an annual wellness exam for two cats in Room III; the itchy dog now in Room I; the cat with weight loss and intermittent vomiting now in Room II; a re-check on a previously hospitalized patient now doing well in Room III (*yay!*); or the hospitalized dog, still not holding down food. What next?

Navigating these ups and downs, emotional and otherwise—while presenting one’s best and full attention to the “pet parent” in front of you while having the other experiences of the day on your mind and in your soul—would test the most seasoned practitioner. It’s especially challenging for the new DVM. In the extreme, compassion-fatigue is a real thing and a risk for all veterinarians. Practice leaders should have a culture that supports new DVM’s in all aspects of veterinary medicine, including emotionally.

Besides the exam room and the long, fulfilling relationships I have been blessed to experience over the course of my career, by now including adult children or even grandchildren (*yikes!*) of clients since 1985, one of the most gratifying experiences I can describe is creating a culture of professional growth for new veterinarians and being their mentor, especially in their first few years of practice. It is truly a joy to watch—and help—them grow into the veterinarians they want to be; maybe even better than they ever thought they’d be.

And it’s always with the hope that they will “pay it forward” to the next generation of veterinarians: their future colleagues. **GL**



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Backpack Weekend Food Program helps kids

Filling the gaps in the war on hunger

By Thomas Lark
Photographs Courtesy of Backpack Weekend Food Program



Leigh Hasty Spach

Hunger doesn't take the weekend off. Everyone knows that students in America's public schools have for generations benefitted from school lunch and breakfast programs. But for many students who are less fortunate, such meals are often the only ones they get all day. And what about the weekends?

Well, for the past 11 years, one local initiative has been making a difference. It's the Backpack Weekend Food Program, Inc. (or BWFP). And according to its new executive director, Leigh Hasty Spach, it was founded by retired nurse and community leader Carolyn Niemeyer as a response to hunger concerns among Gaston County's school-aged children. This grassroots organization evolved quickly. It became a 501 ©3 non-profit, tax-exempt entity in 2013, as Spach recently told *Gaston Lifestyles*.

"Thanks to the outpouring of support from the community, the BWFP continues to meet the nutritional needs of students in the Gaston County Schools who are identified as most

"The greatest personal satisfaction for me is working with a team of staffers and volunteers that believes in and carries out the mission of the BWFP."

likely to experience hunger on the weekend during the school year," she said. "The mission of the BWFP remains strong and sustainable to provide weekend meals to students in need."

Spach added that the program began by serving 387 students. During the 2021-22 school year, it served 746 students.

"The cost to run the program varies, based on the cost of food and how many children are in the program," said Spach.

"For the 2022-23 school year, we are preparing for a nine-percent increase in food costs. We have no federal or state grants currently.

"We serve 43 schools, from elementary school to high school," she continued. "Our 45 partners—made up of churches, companies and a couple of families—support 88 percent of the students.

Twelve percent of the students are unsponsored. These students are supported by the general fund of the BWFP, with funds raised through grants and private donations."

The Backpack Weekend Food Program has 10 members on its board of directors and two advisers. Joining Spach are program co-ordinator



Leadership Gaston 2022, Gaston County's next generation of leaders

Suzanne Jones, program warehouse manager Virgil Welch and program bookkeeper Pat Murphy.

“We have 500-plus volunteers,” said Spach, “which includes all our partners and their volunteers and our warehouse volunteers.”

“The greatest personal satisfaction for me is working with a team of staffers and volunteers that believes in and carries out the mission of the BWFP,” she added. “Our mission is: ‘The BWFP provides nutritionally-balanced, non-perishable weekend meals to students in the Gaston County Schools so they can come to school ready to learn.’ Every child deserves to be given the best chance possible to learn and grow. It breaks my heart to think that some children go home on the weekend and are hungry.”

But as Spach reiterated, hunger does not take any time off.

To that end, she added, “the BWFP, in co-ordination with the Gaston County Schools and our partners, will continue to carry out this mission and serve the students in Gaston County. I have believed in and known about the BWFP since its inception in 2011. I could not be happier to now be the new executive director of the BWFP! I look forward to being a part of the program’s success and to help Gaston

County’s school children come to school ready to learn.”

Want to learn more about the Backpack Weekend Food Program? Send your e-mail queries to Spach at leigh@bwfpgc.com. 



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Teens and cell phones, both *pro and contra*

How to set positive limits to help your kids

By Kimberly Blaker



Kimberly Blaker

If there's anything synonymous with adolescence, spending hours on end on the phone certainly tops the list.

Of course, this behavior isn't unique to today's teens. Think back to your teen years. Remember those carefree days of conversing with your friends about such vital matters as what to wear to your brother's (and his cute teammates') baseball game; a secret crush; or the oppressive rules your parents laid down?

In many respects, today's teens are no different. A couple of decades back, a study by the University of Illinois found the average teen spent two to three hours a day on the phone (although only half that time was likely spent in conversation). But at the time, that seemed excessive to many parents.

Psychologists say teens need such opportunities to socialize so they can broaden and strengthen their social networks. This need for constant socializing during the teen years might appear to indicate a lack of responsibility or shortage of other interests. But it's crucial to your teen's sense of identity and social development.

Still, the amount of time teens spent on the phone and

media only 20 years ago pales in comparison to today. Videos, movies, music, video games, books and social media are now always at adolescents' fingertips. A 2019 report by Common Sense Media reveals kids ages 8 to 12 now spend four hours and 44 minutes per day on their phones. Teens average a whopping seven hours and 22 minutes daily.

How widespread the problem has become is evident in that 89 percent of all teens now own cell phones, according to a 2018 study also conducted by Common Sense Media. Interestingly, more than half of teen-owned cell phones are purchased by parents to alleviate their worries about their kids' safety and whereabouts, says *The Detroit News*. The resolution of one problem, however, has created another.

Other problems have also arisen with teen cell phone use. These include high cell phone bills and safety issues when less-experienced drivers talk or send text-messages.

Another issue has also evolved. According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project, 20 percent of teens surveyed say Internet-based correspondence has become their primary means of communication with their peers. This means they're growing more isolated when it comes to real-world socialization.



**Allow your teen's input though,
and try to make some compromises,
so your teen is more willing to
adhere to the rules established.**

Rules and solutions your family can live with

Parents do indeed need to allow their teens to socialize. But teens must earn that privilege by adhering to rules.

To ensure the cell phone doesn't consume an excessive amount of your teen's time, set rules regarding its use. Allow your teen's input though, and try to make some compromises, so your teen is more willing to adhere to the rules established. Here are some suggestions.

Specify what times the cell phone may not be used, such as at mealtime, while doing homework and after a particular hour at night.

If your family members share cell phones, set specific times that each adolescent can use the phone, and ask them to plan their use accordingly.

Require homework and chores to be completed before using the cell phone. Or allow only a short amount of phone time before chores and homework are complete.

Require everyone to put their phones on the chargers at night, which should be some place outside kids' bedrooms, such as the kitchen.

Don't allow teens to take their phones to school. Make them leave their phones on the charging stations where you can see them.

Require your teen to pay a determined portion of the cell phone bill.

Buy prepaid minutes to keep teens from racking up high cell phone bills.

Don't allow your teen to send text-messages or talk on the phone while driving. Parents should also adhere to this to set a good example.

Set the consequences for not abiding by cell phone rules. Loss of cell phone use for a specified period is appropriate. **GL**

Kimberly Blaker is a freelance writer. She also owns an Internet-based bookshop, Sage Rare and Collectible Books, specializing in out-of-print, scarce, signed and first editions, fine bindings, ephemera and more at www.sagerarebooks.com.

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Spurgeon Mackie: focus on what makes you happy

Retired banker looks back on career

By Thomas Lark

Photographs Courtesy of Spurgeon Mackie

You can take it to the bank. Concentrate on what gives you happiness, and you will succeed in the business world. That's the advice of retired banker Spurgeon Mackie. *Gaston Lifestyles* recently caught up with Mackie, and we took a look back at his life and career in the world of finance.

Born in 1950, he was raised in his native Gastonia. His parents were the late H.S. and Kitty Mackie.

"My father was with Textiles, Inc., the last 25 years of his career," the younger Mackie informed, "and my mother was the director of Christian education at First Presbyterian Church (in Gastonia) until they had children."

He has an older sister, Beth, who lives in Atlanta. Mr. Mackie also extolled his wife of 40 years.

"I met my wife, Margaret, on a blind date when we were both working in Charlotte," he revealed. "We played tennis on our first date and have been playing together ever since."

The Mackies have three daughters: Haddon, Anna and Leila.

"Haddon lives in Raleigh and works for Wells Fargo," her proud father noted. "Anna is married to Ben Dineen and has two daughters, Lula, 3, and Beery, 1. Anna was in interior architecture before having children, and she hopes to return to work as the kids grow older. Leila lives in Philadelphia and is married to Kevin Turk. She is a PGA (Professional Golfers



Margaret &
Spurgeon
Mackie

"I met my wife, Margaret, on a blind date when we were both working in Charlotte. We played tennis on our first date and have been playing together ever since."

Association) professional and works for the PGA of America in career development."

Where did it all begin for Spurgeon Mackie? As with many folks hereabouts who are in his lucrative line of work, it started at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, following his days in the Gaston County Schools at Central Elementary, Wray Junior High and the old Ashley High School.

"I was fortunate to earn a Morehead Scholarship and attended UNC," he said, "where I majored in business administration and earned a varsity letter in baseball."

In 1974, Mackie joined the First Union National Bank. This was back when it was exclusive to North Carolina and had about \$1.5 billion in assets.

"Bill Keith was the city executive for First Union in Gastonia," he recalled, "and he was one of my early Sunday School teachers at First Presbyterian Church. He always told me to come see him when I graduated, as he wanted to talk to me about banking. I did, and it led to a 32-year career with First Union/Wachovia. I spent about half of those years in positions working directly with customers and half in risk management or credit administration."

When Keith retired, Mackie relocated from Raleigh, returning to Gastonia and starting in credit in Charlotte, back in '94.



children's hope
— ALLIANCE —

Mackie also serves on the board of the Children's Hope Alliance and serves as the chairman of its endowment committee.

“Since Margaret and the kids were settled in Gastonia, and my mother was still living, we stayed here, and I commuted to downtown Charlotte,” he recalled. “I was fortunate that the bank was growing rapidly through acquisitions, and a lot of my peers were asked to move out of state to new markets. And I was able to stay here and get promoted.”

In 2006, he retired as the chief risk officer for commercial and small business banking. Mackie then spent three years as the executive director for the Community Foundation of Gaston County. But he soon decided to go back into banking.

“A friend from First Union was working for a small bank in Louisiana and asked me to join,” he explained. “I worked for Iberiabank for nine years and the last seven years as their chief credit officer. The bank was about \$8 billion when I joined, and we grew it to \$30 billion through acquisitions. I retired from Iberiabank in 2019, and I have enjoyed the change.”

These days, Mackie is playing some golf and tennis. He enjoys working out at the Warlick Family YMCA and riding a bicycle.

“I also enjoy sailing on Lake Norman when I have time, and the wind and temperature are just right,” he added. “I’m active at First Presbyterian Church, teaching Sunday School occasionally and serving on various committees.”

Mackie also serves on the board of the Children’s Hope Alliance and serves as the chairman of its endowment committee.

Think you’d like to get into the banking industry? Mackie has some guidance for you.

“My advice to young people considering a career in finance would be to first focus on what you enjoy and makes you happy,” he said. “Understanding yourself, your skills and your personality type is a big help. The financial services industry is very complex and still changing rapidly, so I’d suggest starting with broad exposure and narrowing that down to what fits you best, both the job content and the culture of your employer.” 

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